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Har Pal Aapke Saath

# The importance of 'contact tracing'

From the second phase, when local transmission takes place, it is an integral part of fighting the epidemic on the ground

RAMYA KANNAN  
CHENNAI

With the Hyderabad techie reportedly spreading his infection to a large number of people that he came into contact with, the issue of tracing contacts becomes very crucial.

Beginning from the second phase of the epidemic – local transmission – which Indian Council of Medical Research Director-General (ICMR) Balram Bargava claims the nation is currently couched in, contact tracing is an integral part of fighting the epidemic on the ground.

Properly done, contact tracing and follow-up health interventions will ensure that the infection spread is limited and retard or stop the pace of the epidemic to the third stage – community transmission.

**What is contact tracing?**  
Contract tracing is the process of identifying, assessing, and managing people who have been exposed to a disease to prevent transmission. As per ICMR guidelines, which are also directions that have sound public health sense behind them, people who may have been exposed to the virus are to be followed for 28 days from the date of the probable last exposure/arrival from af-

## Hunting down the virus

### WHO ARE "CONTACTS"?

Index patient who tests positive

- Family
- Health workers
- Room-mates
- Visitors
- Close physical contacts
- Partners
- Schoolmates
- Colleagues

### WHAT IS THE DATA THE HEALTH WORKERS ARE SUPPOSED TO COLLECT IN THE FIRST 48 HOURS

- Health worker should visit the contact
- Identify the contact, monitor for 2-8 days
- Collect demographic details, date of exposure with the patient
- Date of onset of symptoms, if any

### IF THE CONTACTS ARE...

#### ...symptomatic

- Refer for isolation
- Perform tests
- Initiate medical management
- If tested positive, move contact to a health facility

#### ...asymptomatic

- Place under home quarantine for 28 days
- Watch for symptoms
- Maintain a daily list of contacts

A traveller being scanned at the Ernakulam railway station on Wednesday.  
THULASI KAKKAT



fected countries.

Any person who has had contact with the index patient under investigation/treatment for suspected, probable or confirmed case of SARS-CoV-2, should be monitored for the appearance of symptoms.

### Who is a contact?

Anyone who provided care for the suspect or confirmed case, including a health care worker (including those involved in cleaning, waste management, laboratory technicians, doctors) or family member, or any one

who had close physical contact; anyone who stayed at the same place (lived with, or visited) while the index patient was symptomatic.

If symptoms appear within the first 28 days following the contact, the individual should be considered a 'probable' case and reported through the Integrated Diseases Surveillance Programme network to the National Centre for Disease Control.

### Tracing contacts

As soon as the single event (confirmed SARS-CoV-2) is

detected, contact tracing must be aggressively implemented, and preferably to be completed within 48 hours.

The contact tracing shall preferably be done by visiting the local residence of the contact(s) by a member of the health services team. In certain circumstances or for follow-up, phone calls may be made too, as per the rules.

On meeting the 'contact person', the visiting health worker should explain the purpose of contact tracing and collect data in a prescribed format. It is im-

portant to identify the social networks of the first patient and travel history during the 28 days after the onset of illness.

The patient, his or her family members, colleagues, school or college mates are sources of information about the contacts, as are others with knowledge of the patient's recent travel and activities.

Contacts should be traced and monitored for at least 28 days after the last exposure to the case patient for evidence of COVID-19 symptoms to emerge. Case-wise line listing of all exposed contacts will be maintained, with the following information: demographic information, date of last exposure or date of contact with the case patient, and date of onset of fever or other symptoms, if any.

### Symptomatic contacts

Persons who have fever and cough and a history of contact with a confirmed case within the last 28 days should be referred for isolation for strict infection control.

Samples must be collected and sent to the designated laboratory for testing, and appropriate medical management must begin. If contacts show symptoms, they

may be isolated at a health care facility or at home until the results come in. Once confirmed as positive for SARS-CoV-2, they must be shifted to a proper health facility.

### Asymptomatic contacts

They must remain at home (home quarantine) for at least 28 days after the last exposure with the patient. The contacts should start monitoring their health and watch for symptoms of fever and cough, within 28 days of the last exposure to the patient, and maintain a list of people they are in contact with, on a daily basis.

If he or she develops symptoms, as defined, the contact must wear a mask, self-isolate at home, and inform the local health authority. For 28 days after this, health officials will do an active monitoring of these people.

### Health workers

The rules also require the health officials to follow certain precautions while they meet contacts. They are required to maintain a distance of at least two metres from the contact, wear masks, and maintain standard infection prevention and control measures, especially hand-washing.



Clinical trials have been halted to ensure the safety of patients. ■ AP

meetings to discuss therapies for sickle cell diseases and cystic fibrosis.

"Trials that are fully recruited and those involving the critically ill seem likely to go on without too much disruption," UBS analyst Laura Sutcliffe said in a client note. "The situation is less clear for other trials, and several companies told us it is too early to tell if there will be any impact."

Drugmakers are making the switch. Catalyst Pharmaceuticals Inc told Reuters that it was implementing a virtual approach with doctors and company representatives to ensure patients had continued access to its rare neuromuscular disorder drug Firdapse, and remained on track to report results from its ongoing late-stage trial in the second quarter.

# FDA urges virtual patient visits

Coronavirus disrupts clinical trials

REUTERS

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration on Wednesday recommended switching to virtual patient visits instead of in-person monitoring for clinical studies, as signs emerge that the rapid spread of the coronavirus outbreak is disrupting trials.

U.S.-based Iveric bio, Inc delayed enrolment in a trial of its eye disease drug on Wednesday, two days after Provention Bio paused a study of its diabetes drug but allowed trial patients to complete their course.

The companies said these measures were taken to ensure the safety of the patients being tested and the medical staff.

The FDA said the outbreak may impact clinical trials of products including drugs and devices, as travel limitations and other considerations cause protocol deviations.

The restrictions have begun to disrupt the global pharmaceutical industry, as companies cancel public meetings.

The Boston-based research group Institute for Clinical and Economic Review said on Wednesday it was postponing two public

## Are diabetics more prone to COVID-19?

Precautions a must as they have immuno-compromised state



DR. V. MOHAN  
Senior diabetologist

### COVID-19

If blood sugar levels are found to be very high, consult your doctor and bring your sugar levels under good control as quickly as possible

ketoacidosis (DKA) develop, it is not necessary to get admitted to hospital.

Follow all the usual precautions like washing your hands with soap and water regularly and 'social distancing', i.e., keeping a distance from people who are likely to be infected.

Although spreading of the infection through a needle used for blood glucose testing or insulin injections is highly unlikely, it is better not to share your blood testing lancet or insulin needles with anybody else.

To summarise, all people with diabetes should be aware of the COVID-19 infection and avoid coming into contact with an infected person. If by chance, you have already developed the infection, please see that you keep yourself isolated and don't infect other family members or people whom you may be in contact with. Most importantly, keep your diabetes under good control and seek medical attention as soon as possible.

Unless you have type 1 diabetes or severe insulin-requiring type 2 diabetes, wherein the sugar levels tend to go very high and signs of ketosis or diabetic

## Pandemic could make another 25 million jobless

It will slash incomes, says UN

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
GENEVA

The COVID-19 pandemic will significantly increase global unemployment, leaving up to 25 million more people out of work, and will dramatically slash workers' incomes, the United Nations said Wednesday.

The International Labour Organization warned that the economic and labour crisis sparked by the coronavirus will have "far-reaching impacts on labour market outcomes". "This is no longer a global health crisis, it is also a major labour market and economic crisis that is having a huge impact on

people," ILO chief Guy Ryder said in a statement.

The UN agency's study suggested the world should prepare to see a "significant rise in unemployment and underemployment in the wake of the virus". Presenting different scenarios depending on how quickly and with what level of coordination governments react, it found that even in the best-case scenario, 5.3 million more people will be pushed into unemployment. At the high end meanwhile, 24.7 million more will become jobless, on top of the 188 million registered as unemployed in 2019.

## On the surface of it

A research paper published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* on Tuesday said that the SARS-CoV-2 (virus responsible for COVID-19) can linger on some surfaces for hours, though the risk of getting infected reduced every passing minute

	HOURS TAKEN FOR VIABLE VIRUS TO...	
Surfaces	... reduce to half of its initial value	... completely disintegrate
Aerosols (such as saliva droplets)	1.09	3
Plastic	6.81	72
Stainless steel	5.63	72
Copper	0.774	4
Cardboard	3.46	24

### According to the World Health Organization:

- It is not certain how long the virus that causes COVID-19 survives on surfaces but it seems to behave like other coronaviruses.
- Studies suggest that coronaviruses may persist on surfaces for a few hours or up to several days. This may vary under different conditions - type of surface, temperature or humidity of the environment



Saving lives: Corporation workers spraying disinfectant in T.Nagar, Chennai on Wednesday as part of a drive to prevent the spread of COVID-19. ■ K. PICHUMANI

## Virus deals a death blow to U.S. economic expansion

The vast changes required to defeat the outbreak have brought daily business to a halt

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
WASHINGTON

No one knows how long it will last or how much it will hurt. But the U.S. economy is either sliding into a recession for the first time since 2009 or is already in one – a sudden victim of the coronavirus outbreak.

The vast changes deemed necessary to defeat the virus – people and companies no longer engaging with each other – are bringing everyday business to a halt and

likely delivering a death blow to the longest economic expansion on record.

The interplay between the outbreak and the steps meant to vanquish it reveals a cruel paradox: The faster and more painfully that ordinary economic life shuts down, the faster the health crisis can be solved and the faster people and businesses may gain the confidence to return to normal life.

Conversely, a prolonged period of fighting the virus

would delay an economic rebound and imperil many small businesses.

Much, too, will depend on how swiftly and aggressively the Federal Reserve, Congress and the Trump administration deliver financial aid to tens of millions of economic victims – from hourly workers with no more income to suddenly furloughed employees to businesses with loans to pay but no customers.

Solving the health crisis

by shutting down the economy, though, will have to come first.

Financial markets sank again Wednesday on fears about the economic damage. The Dow Jones Industrial Average was down nearly 1,000 points in mid-morning trading. In another sign that the outbreak is severely disrupting business, Honda said it would shut down its North America plants for a week starting Monday.

Experts say the economy

has deteriorated with stunning speed. And the United States is hardly alone: By all estimations, Europe is enduring its own recession, accelerated by the coronavirus' epicentre in Italy.

In the U.S., waves of layoffs seem inevitable, especially in industries most vulnerable to an economic standstill: Travel, entertainment, hotels, restaurants, retail stores – the heart of the service sector, which makes up most of the economy.

## FAQ

## Main prevention method is to frequently wash your hands and not shake other people's hands

### Will wearing masks prevent the spreading of COVID-19?

If you are travelling to places where the probability of catching the infection is high, say hospitals, you need to wear masks. If you are using public transport system, where you cannot know if somebody will sneeze or cough, you can use a mask. But the main prevention mechanism is to frequently wash your hands and refrain from shaking other people's hands or hugging them. Follow cough etiquette when you are travelling or outside.

Dr. P. Kuganathan, founder-chairman, Indian Public Health Foundation, and former Chennai City Health Officer

Should people avoid

### eating meat-based food to prevent transmission?

Coronavirus has nothing to do with food or pet animals or eating chicken and mutton. People can eat whatever they want and how much ever they want.

Dr. V. Ramasubramanian, consultant, Infectious Diseases, Apollo Hospitals

### How soon can a vaccine be developed?

New viruses happen due to reassortment. They remain for a short period and mutate depending on factors like geography. A vaccine for COVID-19 is likely to be developed in another three to six months because the trials are on at the moment. Like H1N1, a vaccine can be developed for COVID-19 too.

Dr. P. Kuganathan, founder-chairman, Indian Public Health Foundation, and former Chennai City Health Officer

### Is there a link between a person's immunity and COVID-19 transmission?

Coronavirus is one of the weakest family of viruses. People affected so far could have been ones with less immunity like children or the elderly. It does not affect everybody. Yes, 100% immuno-



70 years is 8% and 80 and above is 15%. Generally, if the immunity is good, you can tolerate any viral infection but there is no specific evidence as it pertains to COVID-19.

Dr. K.K. Aggarwal



Lok Sabha passes  
Budgetary proposals  
for J&K, Ladakh  
page 12



No scheme to shut  
down BSNL, says  
Ravi Shankar Prasad  
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Biden's win in 3 States  
puts him on track for  
Democratic nomination  
page 14



Bach says IOC will keep  
acting in a responsible  
way in athletes' interest  
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## NEARBY



### SC strips Manipur Minister of his office

NEW DELHI  
In an extraordinary display of its constitutional powers, the Supreme Court on Wednesday stripped Manipur Minister T. Shyamkumar, who is facing disqualification proceedings for defection, of his office and banned him from entering the Assembly with immediate effect.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 12

### Nation needs NRC, Centre tells SC

NEW DELHI  
Over a month after the Centre informed the Lok Sabha that no decision had been taken to prepare the NRC, the Union Home Ministry filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court stating that preparation of NRC is a "necessary exercise for any sovereign country".

NEWS ▶ PAGE 13

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## 276 Indians infected with virus abroad

Total cases of COVID-19 in India touch 162, including 25 foreigners; global figure crosses 2,00,000

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

With 255 Indians testing positive for the novel coronavirus in Iran and another 21 in other countries, the total number of Indian nationals afflicted with the pandemic rose to 413.

The cases within the country touched 162, including 25 foreigners, on Wednesday.

Globally, the number of cases crossed 2,00,000.

The Ministry of External Affairs confirmed in the Lok Sabha that 255 pilgrims visiting Iran from Kashmir and Ladakh had been affected.

### COVID-19

A third batch of 195 Indians from Iran were brought to Jaisalmer by an Air India aircraft on Wednesday evening.

### Cases in India

According to reports from the States, 19 new COVID-19 cases were reported within the country, while 14 persons had been discharged. The number of active cases is now 145. Over 5,700 people, who had come in contact

### Count rises

Tamil Nadu registered its second COVID-19 case on Wednesday evening and Maharashtra's count went up to 44, taking the total number of active cases to 145 in the country.



**Safety first:** Staff at the Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences in Thiruvananthapuram screening a visitor for COVID-19. ■ S.GOPAKUMAR

with positive cases, continue to be under surveillance, the government said.

Karnataka reported three fresh cases on Wednesday, taking the number of infections to 14. The number of cases in Maharashtra rose to 45, including three foreigners, while in Ladakh it rose

to eight, in J&K to four and in Tamil Nadu to two.

Telangana has reported six cases, which include two foreigners. Rajasthan reported seven cases, including two foreigners. Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Uttarakhand and Punjab reported one case each.



### PM to address nation today

Prime Minister Narendra Modi chaired a high-level meeting to review the ongoing efforts to tackle COVID-19. "Ways to strengthen India's preparedness were discussed. This includes further enhancing testing facilities," noted a release issued by the government. Mr. Modi is scheduled to address the nation on Thursday at 8 p.m.

### Section 144 in Rajasthan

The Rajasthan government on Wednesday imposed prohibitory orders (Section 144) across the State, restricting assembly of people at public places till March 31, to contain the spread of COVID-19. The decision was taken after three new COVID-19 positive cases were detected in Jhunjhunu district. ■ PAGE 5

### Digvijaya held in Bengaluru

Senior Congress leader Digvijaya Singh was taken into preventive custody in Bengaluru on Wednesday while trying to meet the rebel Congress MLAs from Madhya Pradesh staying in a resort. The Karnataka High Court rejected his plea for a directive to the police chief not to stop him from meeting the MLAs. ■ PAGE 12

the court said it cannot decide cases from what was aired on TV.

The court said it was anxious to avoid horse-trading in Madhya Pradesh but senior advocate A.M. Singhvi, for the Speaker, said the "horses are already in captivity".

At one point, the court suggested Mr. Singhvi to consult the Speaker by March 19 on how soon he could decide on the resignations of the 16 rebel MLAs.

DUTY TO PEOPLE ▶ PAGE 12

## Gurugram closes malls, weekly markets

Public gatherings in the district capped at 50 people

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT GURUGRAM

All shopping malls, except pharmacies, grocery stores and supermarkets running inside the premises, and weekly markets in Gurugram have been directed to suspend their operations till March 31, in directions issued by the district administration on Wednesday. Also, gatherings at all social, political and religious functions and marriages in the district have

been restricted to 50 people amid COVID-19 scare.

Exercising the "The Haryana Epidemic Disease, COVID-19 Regulations, 2020", Gurugram Deputy Commissioner Amit Khatri, in a single-page order, directed that all shopping malls and weekly markets should be shut down immediately and the operations of all gyms, swimming pools, spas, nightclubs, lounges and bars, theatres and multiplexes sus-

pended till the month-end.

The number of people at all gatherings in the district has been restricted to 50 against 200 for the rest of the State. The order said that public dealing at all government offices should be "minimized" without impacting essential services.

The district administration clarified that COVID-19 samples were not being collected from homes, but at 17 hospitals across the district.

## Man jumps to death from Delhi hospital

### STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

A 23-year-old man, who was shifted to the Safdarjung Hospital from the IGI Airport after he was suspected of having been exposed to COVID-19, jumped off the hospital building.

A police team reached the spot and shifted the body to the mortuary. "The nodal officer informed that the man was admitted on Wednesday at 9 p.m. as a suspected coronavirus patient," said an officer. He was a resident of Punjab.

*Suicide prevention helpline: Sanjivni, Society for Mental Health; telephone: 011-4076 9002, Monday-Saturday, 10 a.m. -7.30 p.m.*

of Home Affairs (MHA) informed the Lok Sabha that it was in discussion with the States that had expressed concerns over the controversial additional questions in the NPR form. There has, however, been no further clarification since then.

On February 18, the MHA informed a parliamentary panel that "during the updation of NPR 2020, it is proposed to collect data on some additional items like place of last residence, mother tongue, Aadhaar number (voluntary), mobile number, passport (Indian passport holder), voter ID card, driving licence number, date and place of birth

of father and mother".

The Centre hasn't as yet officially published a pro forma for the NPR.

"The Centre has said it is not mandatory, but hasn't dropped the questions," West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee observed earlier this month. "Now, if you don't provide these documents, they won't ask for it. They will simply mark you as a D (doubtful) voter," asserted Ms. Banerjee, who spoke before Mr. Shah's statement last week that nobody would be marked 'D' for their inability to provide such documents.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 12

## When will you release Omar, SC asks Centre

### LEGAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has asked the Centre and the J&K administration to clarify within a week whether it proposes to release former Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, who is in detention since August 19.

"If you are releasing him, then release him soon or we will hear the matter on merits," a Bench led by Justice Arun Mishra told the lawyers on the government side on Wednesday.

The observation came after counsel for the Centre and the J&K administration said Solicitor General Tushar Mehta was arguing in another court.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 12

## With two weeks to Census start, uncertainty clouds NPR

At least 13 States and Delhi have opposed the new format

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

At least 13 States, and Delhi, covering almost 60% of the total population of India, are opposed to the National Population Register (NPR) being updated in the format being prepared by the Centre, even as the nationwide exercise is scheduled to kick off on April 1.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah told Parliament last week that people could choose to not respond to questions, but Chief Ministers and activists have said that this is no guarantee that they would not face any problems in the future.

On March 3, the Ministry

of Home Affairs (MHA) informed the Lok Sabha that it was in discussion with the States that had expressed concerns over the controversial additional questions in the NPR form. There has, however, been no further clarification since then.

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CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 12

## Uttar Pradesh ordinance arbitrary: Allahabad HC

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT LUCKNOW

The Allahabad High Court on Wednesday asked the Uttar Pradesh government to file a reply by March 25 on the recovery of damages ordinance brought by it last week.

The court was hearing a public interest litigation petition challenging the Uttar Pradesh Recovery of Damages to Public and Private Property Ordinance, 2020, notified by the government on Sunday.

In its order, a Division

Bench of Chief Justice Govind Mathur and Justice Sumit Goyal, while issuing notice to the government, said the "ordinance is arbitrary in its very nature".

The Bench said it is also emphasised that the intention of the ordinance is only to frustrate and overrule the law laid down by a Bench, which recently asked the State to remove hoardings erected by it displaying the personal information of those accused in the violence during the protests against the CAA.

Almost five months after winning its legal battle in the Supreme Court against the telecom majors for the payment of AGR dues, the Centre recently did a virtual u-turn by filing an urgent application in the court to give the companies a 20-year window to pay the money.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 12

## Court slams Centre, telcos on AGR issue

### LEGAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday slammed the government and the telecom majors for doing "self-assessment or reassessment" of the Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) dues worth lakhs of crores of rupees as determined by the top court in its verdict of October 24.

"How can there be self assessment or reassessment of payable dues? Who has per-

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## Gurugram reports second COVID-19 case

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
GURUGRAM

A 44-year-old man, with a travel history to London, tested positive for COVID-19 in Gurugram on Wednesday. He is the second resident of Gurugram to test positive.

Confirming the second case from the State, the daily health bulletin issued by the Haryana Health Department said that the patient had been admitted to Safdarjung Hospital since March 9. His samples were taken at Delhi. "All the surveillance measures have been taken as per the protocol. Eight samples [of his family and contacts] have been taken for lab confirmation," said the bulletin.

The man, a resident of Nirvana Country, had returned from London on March 7 and gone to Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital for tests two days later, said Gurugram Chief Medical Officer J.S. Punia. Earlier, a 29-year-old woman had tested positive after she returned from a personal visit to Malaysia.

In Haryana, a total of 91 samples have been sent for examination till date and 68 of them are found negative. While one sample has been found positive, the results for 22 are awaited.

# Workers in Manesar labour under shadow of COVID-19

Auto and garment workers at Industrial Model Township demand paid leave

ASHOK KUMAR  
MANESAR

Hurriedly finishing his lunch close to his workplace in the Industrial Model Township here on Wednesday, Ravi Kishan, 28, does not want to talk about COVID-19.

Working as a checker at Richa Global, a garments firm, Ravi said messages on social media and the news of deaths across the globe has frightened him out of his wits. "Not just me, but most of the workers here are living under fear. Not very far away from here, a company was apparently locked down two days ago after a suspected COVID-19 case was detected. I would prefer to go back home in Bihar, but I need to work as well to earn my living. I have little choice," said Ravi, echoing the predominant sentiment of the workers class here.

The company's record keeper Ajay said that only 280 operators (tailors) had reported back to work out of the 365, as many chose to stay back in view of the virus scare. Ajay said there were rumours of shut down, but there has been no confirmation. He, though, claimed that the company had taken



Workers take a break at Industrial Model Township in Manesar on Wednesday. ■ ASHOK KUMAR

several preventive measures such as installation of sanitizers, checking body temperature of the workers and distributing masks.

Mohammad Ali, 40, a worker, however, said masks were distributed only a day ago and were not of satisfactory quality.

### Biometric attendance

Assistant Merchandiser, Richa and Company, Pradeep, said the workers travelled from across NCR, mostly taking public transport. "This makes me feel unsafe coming to work. The workers in our company still mark their attendance through biometrics," he said.

Wasim, hailing from Bihar, said the workers were

not subjected to body temperature check-ups, and the leave was not granted even in case of illness.

Working at Denso International India Private Limited, an auto parts company, Narresh Kumar said that around 20%-30% employees, mostly in management, in the company were from Japan and around 4,000 workers stood at very close distance to work. "We at factories are at greater risk than schools and colleges. It is crowded everywhere inside the premises," he said.

His colleague, Ramprakash said that a vast majority of the workers in IMT was contractual and could not afford to stay at home for long without earning and the fact

tory owners were not likely to grant them paid leaves. "We know we are at risk, but have no choice but to work," said Ramprakash.

Bellsonica Auto Component India Private Limited employees union vice-president Ajit Saini demanded that all factories should be shut and the workers granted paid leaves. "When the colleges, schools and cinema halls have been shut to prevent mass gatherings, the same logic applies to the factories as well," he said, adding that a large number of foreigners frequented the firms in IMT and are allowed to enter without any check-ups.

Deputy Commissioner Amit Khatri, said the manufacturing industries were told to adhere to social distancing norms as per the directives of Union and State governments. He said the advisory issued to companies to allow their staff to work from home "also applied to manufacturing industries".

On some firms still allowing biometric attendance, Mr. Khatri said the administration would reach out to them to ensure required measures were taken.

# 'Gurugram domestic workers being ignored'

Union seeks expanded health facilities

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
GURUGRAM

The Gharelu Kamgar Union (GKU) has alleged that the district administration had ignored the security and health concerns of domestic workers in its efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19.

GKU convener Maya John, in a press statement, said there was a serious lack of adequate action by the district administration of Gurugram with respect to enforcing precautionary measures to ensure the virus containment.

"Though advisories on travel have been followed by closure of public institutions, domestic workers have been ignored and their security and health concerns discarded," said the statement by the GKU.

"Domestic workers in Gurugram have been discussing the unfolding scenario in upscale housing societies

and are extremely worried about the growing risk that they are compelled to take. The union points out the lack of any safety measures by the district administration in addressing the concerns of the scores of domestic workers whose nature of manual work in homes actually exposes them to high risk of picking up the infection," said Dr. John.

### COVID-19

She added that the workers were also wary of the fact that in many cases their employers had a history of foreign travel.

The GKU is thus pressing for some proper regulatory measures and expanded health facilities by the district administration that cater specifically to the scores of informal workers, said the press statement.

# Noida reports one more case; total now four

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NOIDA

A Noida resident who recently returned from Indonesia has tested positive for COVID-19, taking the total number of cases here to four, Gautam Buddha Nagar health officials said on Wednesday.

In an effort to curb the virus outbreak, the Noida police has invoked Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code to prohibit mass gatherings till April 5.

"The sample of the infected person, who lives in Sector 41, was taken four days ago and he has tested positive for COVID-19. He has been admitted to the Government Institute of Medical Sciences in Greater Noida for treatment," said Chief Medical Officer Anurag Bhargava. He said that the infected person's house and nearby areas are being sanitised and suspected persons are being put under surveillance.

## INTERVIEW | DR. BALVINDER SINGH

# 'Prepared to tackle virus menace'

Safdarjung Hospital's medical superintendent says coordinated effort has helped keep numbers low



Balvinder Singh

patients. They are completely cut-off from the rest of the patients, staff and hospital. Our super-speciality wing has been pressed into service where eight floors are dedicated for COVID-19. We have a state-of-the-art ICU with nine beds and floors 3, 4 in the building are currently hosting cases. Each patient is allocated a single room as we currently have patients who are COVID-19 positive and those who are negative but have travel history or contact with a positive person.

Ram Manohar Lohia is sending its COVID-19 positive patients to us. The wards have been prepared (ventilation and sanitation) as per World Health Organization guidelines.

What is the staff strength that has been diverted for COVID-19 and is there a back-up staff team that has been made ready?

We have a dedicated team of eight specialities, 60 senior and junior resident doctors and 100 nurses. We have also specially hired 100 sanitation staff. We have a back-up staff team. The staff is provided with all safety equipment. Two stores (general and surgical items) are opened round-the-clock to cater to any needs for any hospital items.

What is the patient load that Safdarjung has on Wednesday and what are the facilities that are in place to treat COVID-19 patients?

Safdarjung Hospital currently has 32 persons in its COVID-19 facility. This includes 14 positive cases, three negative cases and 15 whose reports are awaited.

What we have done is created a city within a city or even a pocket within a pocket to keep the COVID-19

time is restricted. Now that we are at home all throughout the day, we needed new games that we could try. Our parents suggested that we try out hopscotch and that's why we have made the numbered boxes in our lanes. Earlier, badminton in winters was the only outdoor activity we had," said 12-year-old Shalini Mathur.

Shishir Deo, a parent who has been working from home said, "We have taken to playing board games with our daughters. They are loving it as it is quality family time together."

Delhi has so far seen a small number of COVID-19 cases. Are we heading towards a sudden rise in numbers? What is your advice to the public?

■ India had the advantage of an early warning unlike China where situation escalated rapidly. We also closed our international borders well in time. The coordinated efforts of the government, medical staff and public has contributed in keeping the numbers low till now.

The coming few days, however, are critical and we have to give it our best to delay or even prevent community transmission. Our hospital is prepared for a rise in numbers. While we are offering 75 beds now, we

are containing the COVID-19

## L-G, CM discuss COVID-19 measures

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Containing the COVID-19 outbreak in the Capital dominated deliberations at a weekly meeting between Lieutenant-Governor Anil Baijal and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal here on Wednesday.

After discussing measures which may be put in place at government offices, both the leaders scheduled another meeting for Thursday.

Another meeting will be held with the Chief Minister and senior officers to review the status of steps taken, the office of the L-G said.

# Consumers avoiding visiting markets: CAIT

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

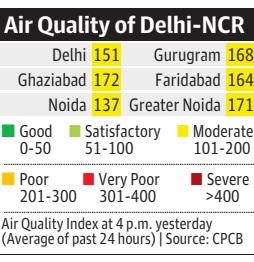
The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) on Wednesday said that footfall at businesses was reducing daily in the wake of COVID-19 outbreak.

"Delhi is the largest centre for distribution of trade in the country. About five lakh traders from other States visit Delhi daily for procurement of their stores. This number has gone down to about one lakh as consumers are avoiding visiting markets," the traders' body said.

As per an estimate, business to the tune of 30% is so far affected, it added.

Most traders, however, had buffer stocks to last 45-60 days and the supply chain was fully geared with material for the next 15-20 days, it added.

The CAIT said that domestic manufacturers were doing their best to meet requirements of the supply chain.



## DELHI TODAY

**Exhibition:** "Women Passing Act II", a solo exhibition by Delhi-based French artist Stephanie Arpels at 1AQ, Mehrauli, 11 a.m. - 6 p.m.

**Exhibition:** "Queen Seven", a solo exhibition of paintings by Shivani Soni at Triveni Gallery, Triveni Kal Sangam, 205, Tansen Marg, 11 a.m. - 8 p.m. (The publication of DELHI TODAY is being suspended due to the cancellation of events because of the COVID-19 pandemic from Friday. We will resume publication as soon as possible)

HIMACHAL PRADESH PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT					
e-Procurement Notice					
INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)					
1. The Executive Engineer HPPWD Karsog Distt Mandi H.P on behalf of Governor of H.P invites the online bids on item rate, in electronic tendering system, in 2 Cover System for the under mentioned work from the eligible and approved contractors/Firms registered with HPPWD Department.					
Sr. No.	Name of Work		Estimated Cost	EMD	Time
1.	Construction of Mini Secretariat Building at Karsog Distt. mandi HP (SH- Site Development, Civil works, WS&SI, rain water harvesting tank)		14,54,93,052/-	14,87,500	Three Year
2.	Periodical maintenance on Kelodhar DPF Garjoo road VR 0001 (SH- Providing and laying 30mm bituminous concrete including profile correction, thermoplastic paint and V-shape drain in Km. 0/0 to 3/0)		29,47,668/-	51,700/-	Two Months
3.	Periodical maintenance on Kandi to Bagail VR-003 (SH- Providing and laying 30mm bituminous concrete including profile correction, thermoplastic paint and V-shape drain in Km. 0/0 to 4/300)		42,24,908/-	70,900/-	Two Months
4.	Periodical maintenance on Balindi Kanda road VR 0130 (SH- Providing and laying 30mm bituminous concrete including profile correction, thermoplastic paint and V-shape drain in Km. 0/0 to 2/0)		19,65,083	37,000/-	Two Months
5.	Periodical maintenance on Kheel Pangha road VR 0075 (SH- Providing and laying 30mm bituminous concrete including profile correction, thermoplastic paint and V-shape drain in Km. 0/0 to 2/0)		19,65,083	37,000/-	Two Months

**Availability of Bid Document and mode of submission:** The Bid document is available online and bid should be submitted in online mode on website <https://hpptenders.gov.in>.

Bidders will be required to register in the web-site which is free of cost. For submission of bids, the bidder is required to have Digital Signature Certificate (DSC) from one of the authorized Certifying Authorities (CA).

"Aspiring bidders who have not obtained the user ID and from authorized CAs can use the same in this tender

3. Key Dates:

1. Date of Online Publication	13.04.2020 10.30HRS*
2. Document Download Start and End Date	13.04.2020 10.30HRS upto 20.04.2020 10.00 HRS
3. Bid Submission Start and End Date	13.04.2020 10.30 HRS upto 20.04.2020 10.00 HRS
4. Physical Submission of EMD and Cost of Tender Document	21.04.2020 upto 12.00 HRS
5. Date of Technical Bid Opening, Evaluation of Technical Bid followed by Opening of Financial Bid	22.04.2020 upto 2.00 HRS

4. TENDER DETAILS: The Tender Documents shall be uploaded online in 2 Cover:

i) Cover 1 shall contain scanned copies of all "Technical Documents/Eligibility Information".

ii) Cover 2 shall contain "BOF/Financial Bid", where contractor will quote his offer for each item

5. SUBMISSION OF ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS: The bidders are required to submit (a) original demand draft towards the cost of bid document and (b) original security/Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) and other Technical in O/o Executive Engineer Karsog Division HPPWD K

# It's business as usual at hotels providing quarantine facilities

Delhi govt. has asked three hotels to set aside rooms to battle COVID-19 outbreak

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

At 1.30 p.m. on Wednesday, around 15 people were eating at a restaurant located on the ground floor of the ibis Hotel in Aerocity, while several guests in the lobby tried to check-in or out.

There were no signs that the hotel is providing paid quarantine facility.

On Monday, the government had announced that people who are unsatisfied with government quarantine facilities could pay a capped rate to stay at either ibis Hotel, or Lemon Tree Premier, or Red Fox – all located near the airport. The hotels have earmarked separate entries and lifts for the quarantined.

They are being accommodated on dedicated floors and a separate set of employees is looking after their needs. The guests cannot step out of their rooms or use any other facility in the hotels. Food is also given to them in disposable plates and cutlery, and it is delivered outside their



The ibis Hotel in Aerocity on Wednesday. ■ V.V. KRISHNAN

rooms to avoid contact.

"The waste from these rooms is treated as biomedical waste and is disposed of by a company hired by the Delhi government. We have ensured that the quarantined will not come in contact with other guests," said Additional district magistrate (south) D. Karthikeyan.

At ibis Hotel, the quarantined guests are not being offered laundry facilities due to safety concerns, but the hotel said it is working on solving the issue. "Ibis has not become a hotel completely for quarantine, but a fully func-

tional hotel providing quarantine facility," said an employee of the hotel.

According to the Delhi government, 92 rooms on the sixth floor of the ibis hotel have been isolated for quarantine facilities.

"Ibis DIAL is providing full assistance to the Delhi government with regards to medical care and observation for guests returning from abroad... we are closely following the strictest hygiene and sanitation procedures and government requirements," the hotel said in a statement.

Five are Indians, two are Chinese nationals and one is a United Nations Diplomat, Mr. Karthikeyan said.

"There is medical team here, and they check them for any symptoms at least two times a day," he added.

At 3.30 p.m., security staff outside Lemon Tree Premier said that there was no one quarantined at the hotel.

"On Monday night, a bus with 20 people had come, but no one went inside or stayed at the hotel. They left after preliminary checks by the doctors," an employee said. According to the government, 54 rooms on the fifth floor of the hotel have been reserved for quarantine facilities.

"Ibis DIAL is providing full assistance to the Delhi government with regards to medical care and observation for guests returning from abroad... we are closely following the strictest hygiene and sanitation procedures and government requirements," the hotel said in a statement.

## Videos of people stuck at airport old, says DIAL

People coming to India have to undergo two medical check-ups at IGI Airport

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

With several videos surfacing on social media showing frustrated flyers waiting at the Delhi airport in the wake of COVID-19 outbreak, the Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL) on Wednesday said that the videos were old and that normal operations had resumed.

"The videos being circulated are old. Currently, all immigration-related processes have been stream-

lined and operations are normal. We continue to work in close coordination with all stakeholders to minimise any inconvenience to passengers," the DIAL said in a tweet. In the videos, passengers can be heard complaining that they have been waiting at the airport for a long time.

People coming to India have to undergo two medical check-ups at the airport. The first test is done by airport authorities for visi-

ble symptoms. After initial thermal screening, symptomatic passengers are isolated and moved to designated hospitals.

Asymptomatic passengers are allowed to move to designated immigration counters with passports and a copy of the self-reporting form, said officials.

After clearance of immigration, the passports of the passengers are retained by the Immigration officials. In batches of 30, the pas-

engers are taken by an escort team to a designated triage area run by Delhi government officials.

The passengers are screened again and those without any risk factors are sent for home quarantine, and handed over their passports. High-risk passengers identified for quarantine are asked to opt for either a paid hotel quarantine facility or a government quarantine facility, and then shifted to the location.

## Got mild symptoms? Stay home

Private doctors are advising people to self-quarantine

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

Private practitioners in the city are advising patients who have mild flu-like conditions to take symptomatic treatment and not get worried. As per current government guidelines, only patients with a history of travel to certain countries and contact with individuals affected by COVID-19 should be recommended for screening, said doctors.

Given that the virus leads to symptoms similar to regular flu, including sore throat, cough, mucus build-up etc., doctors said that many patients were anxious about their condition.

Rajat Agarwal, head of critical care at Fortis Escorts, said: "There are two reasons why we advise patients with such conditions to not come to the hospital. One, if they are in fact carrying the virus they could pass it on to others at the hospital. Two, if they do not have the virus, they might catch it from someone else in the hospital."

"Instead, such patients, especially those who have recently travelled to Europe, the Middle East, and China, are advised to self quarantine and take certain precautions. These include staying in a single room with an attached bathroom, have clothes washed separately, and wear a mask," he said.

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



are advised to self quarantine and take certain precautions. These include staying in a single room with an attached bathroom, have clothes washed separately, and wear a mask," he said.

grey area. Over the phone, we are simply relaying ICMR advisory," said a doctor requesting anonymity.

At government hospitals, however, individuals presenting even mild flu-like symptoms are being recommended for screening, said Shivaji Dev Barman, president of the Residents' Doctors' Association. "This is being done to slow down the progress of the virus to stage three: community transmission," he added.

**'Do not panic'**  
R.S. Mihra, a general practitioner in Saket, also advised people with mild flu symptoms to not panic.

"There is no need for unnecessary visits to the doctor. The steps taken by the government to combat COVID-19 are assuring, and there is awareness among the public," added Dr. Mihra.

While providing diagnosis over the telephone is not allowed in India, some doctors said they were asking patients, who called for an appointment, to stay at home in case of mild symptoms.

"Telephonic diagnosis is a

Temporary hike in price of platform ticket

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Northern Railway has temporarily increased the price of platform tickets from ₹10 to ₹50 in an attempt to regulate crowds at stations, keeping in mind the COVID-19 outbreak. Similar step has been taken by other railway zones.

On Tuesday, Northern Railway had announced temporary cancellation of five trains, including Delhi Bhatinda Shatabdi, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus-Nizamuddin Rajdhani and Ambala Cant-Shri Ganganagar intercity express.

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**THE HINDU**  
India's National Newspaper

## Close Delhi govt. offices for a week: employees

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

personnel are employed with the government and a majority of them are engaged in public dealing.

The association stated that precautions taken by the Maharashtra government and demanded closure of all government offices for a week in the wake of COVID-19 outbreak.

"We have given a list of 86 departments which can be fully closed while 68 government offices can be allowed to function on alternate days," Mr. Batra added.

BEFORE DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL - III, DELHI 4TH FLOOR JEEVAN TARA BUILDING PARLIAMENT STREET, NEW DELHI: 110 001	
Notice under Section 19(4) of the Recovery of Debts Due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act, 1993 read with Rule 12 & 13 of the Debts Recovery Tribunal (Procedure Rules) 1993. In the matter of <b>OA 563/2018 SIDI Applicant To</b>	
D-8	SH. MEHUL JAGDISH MAROO, (DIRECTOR) SMS PARYAVARAN LTD., SH-2, VARDHAMAN GRAND PLAZA, PLOT-7, MANGALAM PLACE, SECTOR-3, ROHINI, NEW DELHI-110085.
D-9	SH. RAJIV KUMAR JAIS (DIRECTOR) SMS PARYAVARAN LTD., SH-2, VARDHAMAN GRAND PLAZA, PLOT-7, MANGALAM PLACE, SECTOR-3, ROHINI, NEW DELHI-110085.
D-10	SH. MAYANT PATHAK (DIRECTOR) SMS PARYAVARAN LTD., SH-2, VARDHAMAN GRAND PLAZA, PLOT-7, MANGALAM PLACE, SECTOR-3, ROHINI, NEW DELHI-110085.

Whereas the above named applicant has instituted a case against you and whereas it has been shown to the satisfaction of the Tribunal that it is not possible to serve you in ordinary way. Therefore, this notice is given by advertisement directing you to make appearance in this Tribunal **22.04.2020 at 10.30 A.M.**  
Take notice that in case of your failure to appear on the above mentioned day before this Tribunal the case will be heard and decided in your absence.  
Given under my hand and seal of this Tribunal on this the 15 day of Feb 2020.

By Order of the Tribunal  
5d/- Assistant Registrar,  
DRT-III, New Delhi

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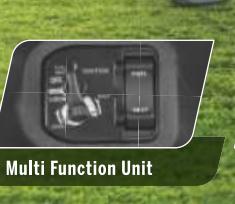
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Product shown in the picture may vary from actual product available in the market. Accessories shown in the picture are not part of standard equipment. \*Mileage has increased by 10% for Activa 6G BS-VI Deluxe variant as compared to the Activa 5G BS-IV Deluxe variant. \*\*Conditions apply. All features may not be part of all variants.

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**Honda Exclusive Authorized Dealerships:** **DEHLI: SOUTH DELHI:** Malwa Honda (Lajpat Nagar) - 011-29840622/28, 9266802221; (Saheen Bagh Jamia) - 011-26950016/17, 9266802221; (Yume Honda) - 011-26043443/46, 9266802217; Pragya Honda (Okhla) - 011-40581600, 9818695993; (Puri Pehlajpur Badarpur) - 011-26366952, 9650028777; (Jatpur Badarpur) - 9818556993; Absolut Honda (Mahipalpur, NH-8) - 011-40470000, 9871600730, 981625333, 9152462887; (RK Puram Sector 1) - 011-26713841, 9871600734, 9069145268; Uday Honda (Adchini) - 011-26519381/82/83, 9212355512, 9122355516; (Aya Nagar) - 011-4026278, 9266135550, 9266155517; **WEST DELHI:** One Honda (Meenakshi Garden) - 9121004000; Excel Honda (Raja Garden) - 981109667, 01145528400 / 8500; Shuban Sai Honda (Najafgarh) - 9212385581/82, 8505699934/35; (Vikaspuri) - 9212345747, 813089556, 8506999938/39; (Kakrola Mod) - 9212385537, 9212385537, 9212385537; (Rohini) - 9212385537, 9212385537, 9212385537; (Sector 3) - 9212385537, 9212385537, 9212385537; (Sector 4) - 9212385537, 9212385537, 9212385537; (Sector 5) - 9212385537, 9212385537, 9212385537; (Sector 6) - 9212385537, 9212385537, 9212385537; (Sector 7) - 9212385537, 9212385537, 9212385537; (Sector 8) - 9212385537, 9212385537, 9212385537; (Sector 9) - 9212385537, 9212385537, 9212385537; (Sector 10) - 9212385537, 9212385537, 9212385537; (Sector 11) - 9212385537, 9212385537, 9212385537; (Sector 12) - 9212385537, 9212385537, 9212385537; (Sector 13) - 9212385537, 9212385537, 9212385537; (Sector 14) - 9212385537, 9212385537, 9212385537; (Sector 15) - 9212385537, 9212385537, 9212385537; (Sector 16) - 9212385537, 9212385537, 9212385537; (Sector 17) - 9212385537, 9212385537, 9212385537; (Sector 18) - 9212385537, 9212385537, 9212385537; (Sector 19) - 9212385537, 9212385537, 9212385537;

## IN BRIEF



Ajoy Kumar is AAP's Jharkhand in-charge

NEW DELHI  
Former Jharkhand Congress chief and ex-IPS officer Ajoy Kumar, who had joined the Aam Aadmi Party last year, was appointed as the party's Jharkhand in-charge on Wednesday. After the Assembly election victory in Delhi in February, AAP has been focusing more on other States and senior party leader and Delhi Minister Gopal Rai had said that they will fight all local body elections across the country, where the party has a unit.

## LoP hits out at AAP govt. over question hour

NEW DELHI  
Accusing the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government of being "anti-democratic", Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Legislative Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri on Wednesday wrote to the Speaker criticising it for not making a provision for the question hour in the upcoming budget session. Mr. Bidhuri said that the absence of provision of a question hour in the five-day budget session of the Legislative Assembly, starting from March 23, is "proof that the government is trying to strangle democracy" by taking away from legislators their right to ask questions.

## New Delhi Cong. chief takes charge

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI  
Newly appointed president of the Delhi Congress Ch. Anil Kumar took charge at the Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee office on Wednesday.

Mr. Kumar expressed his gratitude to Congress president Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi for appointing him as the DPCC president and said that he would spare no effort in strengthening the party in Delhi at the grass-root level to fulfil the faith reposed on him by the party leadership. "I will take the senior leaders and all shades of opinion into consideration to strengthen the party across Delhi," he said.

Mr. Kumar said that he took charge at a simple ceremony due to Corona virus scare.

On his plans ahead, he said that the Congress workers will function unitedly to strengthen the party at the booth-level. He will interact with the workers separately and according to the competence and capacity of each worker, party responsibilities would be entrusted to them.

## Civic bodies on guard to combat virus

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

Various measures, including awareness campaigns, provision of medical staff and others are being undertaken by the municipal corporations to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, civic bodies said on Wednesday.

Up to 10,000 patients have been screened at hospitals and dispensaries of the SDMC, the civic body said. Apart from this, meetings are being undertaken with hotel staff, Resident Welfare Associations and Market Associations to ensure mass awareness. The North Corporation said that public awareness campaigns would be carried out through RWAs.

Meanwhile, holy mass at all churches under the Archdiocese of Delhi have been suspended until further notice, said Archbishop of Delhi Anil Cutto.

## Speed up DNA test of body recovered during riots: HC

Petitioner has been waiting for the results for 14 days

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday directed the government to expedite the process of DNA test of a charred body recovered from the side of Khajuri Pushta Road following the Delhi riots, to ascertain the identity.

Justice Navin Chawla ordered the government to complete the test within 15 days and to communicate the result with the petitioner, whose 20-year-old son went missing on February 25 during the riots.

Sajid Ali, in his petition, claimed that his son, Mohsin Ali, had left their shop in Noida's Sector 5, on February 25 towards Green Gardens on Khajuri Pushta Road, around 5 p.m. in the evening and has not returned since then.

"Khajuri Pushta Road is en-route Green Gardens. However, upon receiving news of continued violence in that area, Mohsin's family started



calling him to enquire about his safety and well-being, but could not reach him," the plea said.

The family members went to the Sector 20 police station for filing a missing complaint the next morning. They were returned and asked to file the complaint at Khajuri Khas Police Station since the area fell within its jurisdiction.

When the uncle and brother of Mohsin went to West Karawal Nagar looking for Mohsin, they were informed by the police personnel and security forces managing the area that a car of their description has been

burnt on Khajuri Pushta Road. The brother and uncle reached the spot and identified the car. However, Mohsin or his body was not found, the plea said.

Later, they were informed by the police that a burnt body was found next to the car.

## Refused to give body

The police informed the family members that since the body is in a charred condition and no conclusive identification is possible without a DNA test, the body could be handed over only after confirming its identity through a DNA profiling and identification test.

The petition stated that it has been almost 22 days since Mohsin went missing. And, it has been more than 14 days since the DNA samples were sent for examination and results.

The delay caused by the respondent no. 2 [forensic laboratory] is contributing to agony and duress of the family, the plea said.

## Number of victims at Idgah camp touches 870

'Headcount goes up as they leave for home for a brief period and then return'

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

Over three weeks after riots broke out in the Capital, the number of victims currently residing at the Idgah relief camp in Mustafabad has touched 870, said Delhi Waqf Board, who had set up the camp.

"By the first week of March, we started the process of writing down names and details of those residing in the camp. Initially, the number was around 550 and by Tuesday night, it went up to 870," said Mohammed Imran, media coordinator [Idgah relief camp] and Nodal Officer of Delhi Waqf Board.

While many who owned houses in riot-affected areas have started to return, Mr. Imran is of the view that the number of people residing in the camp is high because people only leave for a brief period and are returning. "People who had returned to their homes are coming back saying that they'll finally leave the camp once their burnt or vandalised houses are in order," he said.

"People are coming back



Victims of communal clash collecting medicines from a medical team at Idgah relief camp in Mustafabad on Wednesday. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

saying that they were staying at relatives' houses," he said.

## Relief measures planned

The Board, he said, has planned to give ration for three months, ₹1 lakh to owners whose houses have been burnt and vandalised and ₹60,000 to tenants.

When asked about the ra-

tion distribution, Mr. Imran said that the Board has taken the addresses of those who own houses and the ration will be given when they go back to their houses. Those on rent are also sharing their address. "In case, they shift to another place, they have been asked to share the new address," he said.

The plan is to ensure everyone leaves the camp feeling safe and secure, he said. "An Assistant Sub Inspector rank officer had visited the camp on Wednesday and spoke to the victims. He told the victims that they should start returning and police will ensure that they are safe," he said.

## Riding to safety



Youngsters wearing protective masks in the wake of COVID-19 outbreak as they ride through Rajpath in the city on Wednesday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

## JNU condemns 'violent prevention' of CCTV installation on campus

Varsity appeals to students to refrain from disrupting work

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Jawaharlal Nehru University on Wednesday condemned the "violent prevention" of installation of CCTVs at critical points on the campus. The university, however, did not specify the nature of the "violent prevention."

The university administration appealed to the students to cooperate and refrain from disrupting the installation of CCTVs in public places, including hostel gates, to improve safety on the campus.

In an appeal, the university said: "In view of several instances, it has become imperative to install CCTVs at public places, including hos-



Provost Committee meeting held on January 8 recommended that CCTV cameras should be installed at the earliest at the main gates of each hostel, hostel mess and corridors.

## Cites virus outbreak

"Keeping in mind the threat to life posed by COVID-19 pandemic, it is all the more necessary to guard against unauthorised outsiders entering the campus, including hostel premises," the university said.

The students' union of the JNU has repeatedly opposed the installation of CCTV cameras outside hostels saying that it infringes on the students' right to privacy and free movement.

The university said that a

## Two caught red-handed while robbing phone

Victim sustained gunshot injuries

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

Two men were caught red-handed while they were allegedly robbing a man of his phone, officials said on Wednesday.

The accused have been identified as Imran alias Model, a resident of New Mustafabad, and Imran, a resident of Nehru Vihar, they said.

On Tuesday, police got information that a man suffered gunshot injury in Yamuna Vihar. By the time a police team reached the spot, assistant sub-inspector Ravinder had caught one of the accused. The other was caught by the man who was being robbed, police said.

A pistol and three live

cartridges were seized from them, said the police.

In his statement, Assistant Sub-Inspector Ravinder said that when he was returning home after meeting a relative, he saw three persons entangling each other. Suddenly, he heard two rounds of firing following which one of them shouted for help. Ravinder stopped his bike and caught Model. The other accused was nabbed by the victim on the spot, they said.

The victim sustained gunshot injury near his abdomen. A case under relevant Sections was registered at Bhajanpura police station and the accused were arrested, they added.

The victim sustained

## Woman, lover held for killing her husband

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

A woman and her lover were arrested for allegedly killing her husband in south Delhi's Maidan Garhi, police said on Wednesday.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (South) Atul Kumar Thakur said that the accused Prema and Bikesh had allegedly strangled Kuldeep on March 13.

Police said that a PCR call was received on March 14 stating that a body was lying in a drain in Asola village. "When the officers reached the spot, the body was found with injury marks all over. The deceased was identified as Kuldeep, who used to live in a rented accommodation with his wife Prema, cousin Bikesh and a 12-year-old son. He ran an eatery in Chhatarpur. Prema was found ab-

scended after the recovery of the body," police said.

With the help of technical and local intelligence, Prema and Bikesh were arrested.

During interrogation, it was revealed that Prema and Bikesh were in a relationship and Kuldeep got to know about it after which a quarrel broke out on March 13. The duo strangled the victim and threw the body in the drain, police said.

## NGO urges Delhi govt. to safeguard homeless

'They are at high risk of contracting virus'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Arguing that the homeless population was at "high risk" of contracting COVID-19 due to cohabiting in close proximity, the Centre for Holistic Development (CHD) on Wednesday urged the Delhi government to follow an action plan to safeguard them.

The homeless live in proximity to each other at shelters run by the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB) and are at a high risk of contracting the virus.

"There must be immediate testing of all individuals inside shelters. Recovery vans must be used to transport individuals to the nearest hospitals. Doctors from closest public hospitals can visit shelter facilities to conduct tests," the CHD said.

Caretakers deployed around such facilities must wash their hands regularly and avoid touching their face, it said.

"The DUSIB must provide disinfectants for sanitising living and toilet facilities at shelters," it added.

## 7,877 public service vehicles disinfected so far: govt.

Drive started on Tuesday to fight COVID-19

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

Under a disinfection drive started by the Delhi government, 7,877 public service vehicles, including 5,951 autorickshaws, have been disinfected till Wednesday afternoon, according to the Delhi government.

The drive was started on Tuesday in the wake of COVID-19 outbreak.

"We advise the owners/operators of public service vehicles to act responsibly and get their vehicles disinfected on a daily basis so that we can overcome the crisis of virus outbreak. We are providing this facility free of cost to everyone," Transport Minister Kailash Ghai said.

The service is available at all DTC and cluster bus depots in two shifts. The first shift is from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., whereas the second shift is from 4.30 p.m. to 6.30 p.m. The government is also issuing a "Certificate of Disinfection" for every sanitised vehicle.

Justice Navin Chawla was informed by the Centre that 119 Indians students, who were stuck in Iran and had moved the court through their parents, were tested for COVID-19 and that one stu-

## Court satisfied with Centre over students' evacuation from Iran

One student who tested positive is being treated in Tehran

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday expressed satisfaction over the steps taken by the Central government in ensuring the safety of Indian students stranded in Iran in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic.

Justice Navin Chawla was informed by the Centre that 119 Indians students, who were stuck in Iran and had moved the court through their parents, were tested for COVID-19 and that one stu-

dent was found infected and is undergoing treatment there.

## COVID-19

The government told the court that out of those 119 students, 110 have returned to India and while five did not go for sampling, four have tested negative for the virus and are in Iran.

The HC said it was satisfied after perusing the status report filed by the government. It also noted that auth-

orities have done more than what was expected.

The court was hearing a plea moved by the parents of the Indian students, who were stranded in Iran due to travel restrictions following the COVID-19 outbreak, seeking directions to the Centre to evacuate them. The advocate appearing for the parents, said the parents have been able to contact several students in Iran. They will inform the authorities as and when they will get in touch with other students.

The homeles live in proximity to each other at shelters run by the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB) and are at a high risk of contracting the virus.

**Timings**

**DELHI**

THURSDAY, MAR. 19	
RISE 06:26	SET 18:32
RISE 03:30	SET 14:08
FRIDAY, MAR. 20	
RISE 06:25	SET 18:33
RISE 04:14	SET 15:04
SATURDAY, MAR. 21	
RISE 06:24	SET 18:33
RISE 04:53	SET 15:58

<b>Delhi Weather</b>	max min
Delhi City	30 13
Safdarjung	30 13
Palam	30 14

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

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

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## Prohibitory orders in Rajasthan after 3 new cases test positive

Govt. to increase capacity of diagnostic facility in Jaipur

**MOHAMMED IQBAL**

JAIPUR The Rajasthan government on Wednesday imposed prohibitory orders across the State, restricting assembly of people at public places till March 31, to contain the spread of COVID-19.

The decision was taken after three new COVID-19 positive cases were detected in Jhunjhunu district.

Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot authorised the District Magistrates and Sub-Divisional Officers to issue orders under Section 144 of Criminal Procedure Code to enforce the ban on gatherings.

### Emergency meeting

Mr. Gehlot addressing an emergency review meeting here, said that public announcements on loudspeakers would be made urging

people not to assemble in groups.

### Returned from Italy

A couple and their three-year-old daughter, who returned from Italy to Jhunjhunu on March 8, tested positive for COVID-19 on Wednesday.

Mr. Gehlot gave instructions for clamping curfew in a one-km radius area around the family's house for the next two days to check the spread of infection.

The three patients were taken to Sawai Man Singh Government Hospital in Jaipur for their treatment.

A rapid response team,

accompanied by a representative of the World Health Organization (WHO), left for Jhunjhunu for surveillance to trace the people who came in contact with the fa-

mily during the last 10 days. The man, 33, his wife, 30, and their daughter were earlier placed under observation and admitted to the government hospital in Jhunjhunu on Tuesday where they showed symptoms of the virus.

Their samples were taken on Tuesday and sent to S.M.S. Hospital in Jaipur for testing.

### New laboratories

Mr. Gehlot said new testing laboratories would be established in Jhunjhunu, Ajmer, Kota, Bharatpur and other towns and the capacity of diagnostic facility in Jaipur would be doubled.

All passengers reaching Jaipur by foreign flights would be screened and kept in home isolation for 14 days if the symptoms of infection were found in them.

## Municipal polls deferred in Rajasthan

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
JAIPUR

The Rajasthan High Court on Wednesday deferred elections for the six newly-formed municipal corporations in the State for six weeks on grounds of COVID-19 outbreak.

A Jaipur Bench of the High Court deferred the poll saying that the virus outbreak has been declared a pandemic by the Central government and the State resources should be put to contain it.

A Division Bench of Justices Sangeet Lodha and Manoj Kumar Vyas deferred on the elections on a plea by the State government.

The elections for councillors in 560 wards of six new municipal corporations of Jaipur Heritage, Jaipur, Jodhpur North, Jodhpur South, Kota North and Kota South were scheduled to be held on April 5.

## Rajasthan SHRC recommends meditation to fight COVID-19

Chairman made infamous peahen pregnancy remarks in 2017



Rajasthan human rights panel chief M.C. Sharma

**MOHAMMED IQBAL**  
JAIPUR The Rajasthan State Human Rights Commission on Wednesday recommended "meditation in solitude" to fight COVID-19 which has infected over 150 persons across the country.

The Commission took up the matter suo motu, taking cognisance of the pandemic, and advised the affected persons to live in isolation.

"While those suspecting infection should immediately report to the nearest health centre and be sent to isolation for 14 days as per the World Health Organisation's guidelines, the Commission recommends that all people should meditate in solitude," SHRC chairperson Justice Mahesh Chandra Sharma said in his two-page order.

Justice Sharma praised the

## NDRF puts contingency plans in place

Over 5,000 personnel stationed in different States kept on standby, says D-G

**DEVEESH K. PANDEY**  
NEW DELHI

The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) has trained more than 15,000 staff deployed at the air and land ports across the country on the protocols to be followed in view of the COVID-19 outbreak.

NDRF Director-General S.N. Pradhan told *The Hindu* that as part of the awareness and acclimatisation drive, the personnel of the Central Industrial Security Force and the Bureau of Immigration posted at these ports have also been sensitised.

Mr. Pradhan said over 5,000 personnel of the NDRF, stationed in different States, have been kept on standby. The units are in regular contact with the State and District Disaster Manage-

ment Authority officials. It is learnt that the NDRF officials have also been provided with personal protection kits.

India is currently at the second stage of the virus outbreak. At the national level, a government official said, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has been coordinating with the State and District authorities for implementing measures on a war footing to check the spread.

**Strategy meetings** The National Crisis Management Committee headed by the Cabinet Secretary, which is devising the strategy to deal with the outbreak, has held over half-a-dozen meetings. Concerns and suggestions of Chief Secretaries

from the States are being taken into consideration for devising the action plan.

The NDMA's National Executive Committee (NEC), which ensures implementation of the policies on disaster management, has been constantly monitoring the situation.

The NEC is headed by the Union Home Secretary. It comprises Secretary-level officials in all the key Ministries or Departments, and the Chief of the Integrated Defence Staff of the Chiefs of Staff Committee. In the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, the Union Health Secretary is coordinating the meetings with the stakeholders.

It is learnt that the Textiles Ministry has been roped in to ensure mass production of protective clothing. The go-

vernment has also placed an order for about 1 million nasal swab pins from Germany. Taking into account a possible proliferation of the infection which impacts the respiratory system, the authorities are also preparing to make adequate arrangement for ventilators.

On the health front, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) is monitoring the developments pertaining to testing labs. Apart from 72 ICMR labs, 49 others in government institutions will become functional this week. The ICMR, which is coordinating with the World Health Organisation, the Indian Medical Association, Council is also in touch with over 50 private accredited labs for facilitating free-of-cost testing.

## Maternity benefits for second child in Rajasthan

Scheme announced by CM Gehlot in the Assembly will cover four districts for now

**JAGRITI CHANDRA**  
NEW DELHI

The Rajasthan government has announced a maternity benefit scheme for four districts in the State on a pilot basis under which it will offer ₹6,000 for the birth of the second child.

The scheme will be implemented in Udaipur, Pratapgarh, Banswara and Dungarpur, where nutrition indicators among children and anaemia levels among mothers are worse than the average for the State.

The government aims to reach out to 75,000 beneficiaries annually. It estimates



CM Ashok Gehlot  
an expenditure of ₹45 crore per year. The State scheme will complement the Central government's Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana which offers ₹5,000 for the

birth of the first child.

The Rajasthan government scheme is called Indira Gandhi Matritva Poshan Yojana, and was announced by Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot last week in the State Assembly.

"The scheme is covered under this year's budgetary allocation. The State government plans to implement it within this financial year. While the government has prepared an estimate for an initial period of 5 years, it may be extended and even be implemented in more districts in the State," Secretary for Women and Child Deve-

lopment Department of Rajasthan, K.K. Pathak said.

"The government feels that the second child doesn't receive as much attention as the first child and, therefore, it is important to extend this cash benefit to ensure adequate nutrition for the second child," Mr. Pathak explained.

Beneficiaries will receive cash in three or five instalments upon meeting certain conditions. However, unlike the Central scheme they will not have to submit an Aadhaar card for the State scheme and the money will be transferred directly to their bank accounts.

## 13 asked to pay ₹21.76 lakh or face confiscation of property

They are among the 57 who were put on 'name and shame' posters in U.P.

**OMAR RASHID**  
LUCKNOW

The Lucknow administration has issued fresh notices to 13 persons, accused in the vandalism during the protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act last December, to pay a fine of ₹21.76 lakh within a week of face confiscation of their property or even arrest.

The 13 are among the 57 persons whose names, photographs and residential addresses were put up on hoardings by the administration across the Uttar Pradesh capital.

The court of Additional City Magistrate in Lucknow had last month issued notices to recover ₹21.76 lakh from the 13 persons accused or damaging public and private property in the vandalism and arson that took place during



A 'name and shame' poster in Lucknow. ■ FILE PHOTO: AFP

protests under the Hasanganj police station area.

Fixing culpability of the 13 persons, ADM Trans-Gomti Vishwa Bhushan Mishra had given them 30 days to deposit the penalty amount, either collectively or by a single person.

Now, the Tehsildar (Sadar) has issued 'demand notices' and recovery certificates to the 13 accused asking them to

deposit the amount ₹21.76 lakh within seven days or explain in presence why punitive action should not be taken against them under the U.P. Revenue Code, 2006.

"This includes your arrest and the confiscation or auction of your movable and immovable property," said the orders.

Tehsildar Shambhu told *The Hindu* that the accused

would also "have to pay 10% collection charge" along with the amount issued as per the notice.

In the particular case, the district administration had issued notices to 20 persons to recover damages to property, but charges were fixed only against 13.

### Seven exonerated

The remaining seven were exonerated from paying the damages as the police could not provide evidence that they were present at the protest site in Khadra locality with "common object" on December 19, the notice issued by the ADM Trans-Gomti.

"This includes your arrest and the confiscation or auction of your movable and immovable property," said the orders.

Tehsildar Shambhu told *The Hindu* that the accused

to stop the disease from spreading further. Strict monitoring is being done of all those arriving from high-risk countries and so far, 116 suspected cases had been tested," he said.

Earlier, Punjab Congress chief Sunil Jakhar had written to the Chief Minister urging the government machinery about intensifying the drive to tackle the COVID-19 threat.

In a letter to the Chief Minister, Mr. Jakhar said there have been reports that garbage dumps had piled up in some towns and cities due to strike by sanitation staff or other reasons.



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## PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT

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## PUBLIC NOTICE

Indraprastha Gas Limited ("IGL") has issued a Letters of Intent for setting up of CNG Station at the site located at following location and to be operated by following operator having received such application from the Operator, and conducting due diligence and following due process.

Name of Applicant - Mr. Praveen Kumar

Address of proposed station - Khasa No. 61/2, Min situated in the revenue estate of village Sabhapur, Illoka Shahdra, Delhi-110094

However, if any person has any objection or claim regarding the setting up of CNG Station at the said site, kindly contact us within 7 days from the publication of this notice, with the relevant and appropriate proof to substantiate the objection/claim, failing which, it shall be deemed that there is no objection/claim for the setting of CNG Station at the said site.

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cngproject@igl.co.in

## PUBLIC NOTICE

To be known to all that I, AJAY MALIK S/o SH. SUNEAL MALIK R/o Flat No. 2040, Sector C, Pocket-2, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi-110070 am the owner of Second Floor at J-02, DLF Phasell, Gurgaon. My original documents viz. DLF Plot Buyer Agreement of J-02, DLF Phasell, Gurgaon have been misplaced/Lost. An Information Report of the effect has been lodged in Police Station, Crime Branch, Delhi vide L.P. No. 269214/2020 on 17/03/2020. Any person(s) claiming any right, Interest having any objection or found in Possession of the said original Documents may Write/Contact with above named person at above address/ phone no. 981005430 within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice.

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# Dip in poultry sales: State warns rumour-mongers of stern action

No threat of contracting COVID-19 from consuming poultry products: Minister

ALOK DESHPANDE  
MUMBAI

Animal Husbandry Minister Sunil Kedar on Wednesday said the State government is constantly monitoring people who spread disinformation on social media that consumption of poultry products increases the chances of contracting the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

Mr. Kedar clarified that there is no threat of contracting COVID-19 from eating chicken or other poultry products and strict action will be taken against individuals who spread such fake messages on social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter.

"These claims are unscientific and baseless. Farmers involved in poultry production are severely affected because of rumours that the coronavirus spreads through poultry," he said.

A man in Andhra Pradesh and another person from Uttar Pradesh have been arrested for spreading false information related to COVID-19, Mr. Kedar said, adding that authorities are



**Humble request:** Shiv Sena MPs, including Arvind Sawant (second from left), meet Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to demand financial assistance for poultry farmers. ■TWITTER

cracking down on rumour-mongers and they will be dealt with sternly.

Prices of poultry products have crashed following misinformation on social media that eating chicken or other meat can spread COVID-19.

Earlier this month, the Food Safety and Standards

Authority of India (FSSAI) had asserted that there is no scientific evidence to show that the coronavirus spreads through eating chicken, mutton and seafood.

On Tuesday, Shiv Sena MPs met Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to discuss the crisis in the poul-

try sector amid the novel coronavirus crisis. According to Lok Sabha MP Arvind Sawant, they discussed the reduction in demand for poultry products. They also requested the Centre to provide immediate financial assistance to poultry farmers in the State.

Senior officials said hoarding of hand sanitisers and face masks is prohibited as the items have been notified under the Essential Com-

## Social media info false, no COVID-19 case on defence campus, says MoD

Educational tours, outdoor hikes of NDA cadets cancelled

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE  
PUNE

Defence authorities on Wednesday said the information circulating on social media about a member of the campus housing the Defence Institute of Advanced Technology (DIAT) allegedly having been afflicted with COVID-19 was "false" and "hearsay".

The DIAT is the country's deemed university specialising in training officers of the armed forces and paramilitary forces. It was bifurcated to form the Military Institute of Technology (MILIT) at Pune's Girinagar locality, next to Khadakwasla dam and close to another premier defence training institution, the National Defence Academy (NDA).

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) in a release said, "Information on social media about a member of MILIT/DIAT campus having been affected by the novel corona-

virus is false and hearsay. No symptoms associated with the coronavirus have been detected in any personnel of MILIT/DIAT. All necessary arrangements are in place to regulate screening of individuals reporting with cough, cold and fever in conjunction with medical authority."

**Entry barred**  
As a precautionary measure against the outbreak, the authorities have cancelled all educational tours and outdoor hikes scheduled for the cadets of the NDA till further orders, while visitors, be they parents of the cadets or the general populace, would not be permitted entry into the campus.

The release said, "All cadets and personnel in the National Defence Academy are being briefed, sensitised about the causes and symptoms of COVID-19 by the Commanding Officer of Mili-

tary Hospital. They are also being advised to ensure personal hygiene at individual level. All large public gatherings, celebrations, mass activities, visit to crowded places, guest lectures, movies have been suspended till further orders."

It said cadets had been advised to refrain from visiting crowded places and all non-essential mass gatherings have been suspended. The release stated, "The cadets are being closely monitored for any symptoms of COVID-19 by their divisional officers, seniors, and civilian instructors. Any person showing signs of flu, cough, cold is advised to report immediately and be screened and treated separately. In case of doubt, they will be shifted to the Armed Force Medical Services hospital. Measures are being taken to scan outsiders visiting NDA for work purposes."

'Norwegian in Goa did not test positive'

Poor facilities at quarantine centres: HC to State  
Notice issued to secretary of Health Department, hospitals seeking their response

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NAGPUR

Goa Health Minister Vishwajit Rane on Wednesday retracted his statement that a Norwegian national in the State tested positive for the novel coronavirus. The Minister said his earlier statement was based on a hoax call received by nodal officer Dr. Edwin of Goa Medical College.

The Minister said the man who made the hoax call told the nodal officer that he was calling from a laboratory where the samples of the Norwegian national had been sent for testing. "We are yet to confirm the first positive case for the novel coronavirus in Goa," Mr. Rane said.

The Norwegian had travelled to Delhi, Agra, Assam and Meghalaya after leaving his country on February 6. Mr. Rane said, "The man came to Goa on February 20. He was having fever since March 10 and was isolated as a suspect in hospital in Panaji."

The Minister termed the hoax call a mischief aimed at creating panic in the State. He said, "Any information on this issue would be given through Dr. Utkarsh Betkai [a virologist] as per protocol. We are trying to locate from where the call made to Dr. Edwin emanated."



Home Minister Anil Deshmukh wears a mask while signing a document at his home in Nagpur on Wednesday. ■ SUDARSHAN

tals seeking their response, and posted the matter for further hearing on March 23.

Citing a newspaper report, the court said some of the patients had admitted themselves to quarantine

centres as a precautionary measure, but are not able to complete their office work as no internet connectivity is available at the hospitals.

In the past, several directions were given over the is-

sheets found by the roadside were yet to be evaluated. The Education Minister has ordered a probe into the case. "The soiled and damaged answer sheets were found lying scattered by the roadside near Virpur town in Gandol taluka," an official said.

The GSHSEB suspects that the incident could be due to the negligence of the officials responsible for carrying the answer sheets to the centralised evaluation centre. The board officials said action will be taken against those responsible after the probe.

Education Minister Bhupendrasinh Chudasama assured action against those responsible for the incident. He said, "I have directed the officials to carry out an urgent and thorough investigation to find out whether any more answer sheets are still missing. Whether this happened in a natural course or was done deliberately will be found out during the probe. Strong action will be taken

against those found responsible for this."

A.J. Shah, chairman of the board, said the bundles have been sent to a nearby school in Virpur. He said, "Those who were carrying them did not do their job and action will be taken against them."

Meanwhile, the Congress attacked the GSHSEB for its "irresponsible functioning", saying that it is playing with the future of students and the education department is the epicentre of corruption.

## Crackdown on illegal sale of masks, sanitisers

Goods worth ₹21 lakh seized from 21 locations in past seven days

SHARAD VYAS  
MUMBAI

In the wake of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, the State government has cracked down on the illegal sale of masks and hand sanitiser, and seized goods worth ₹21 lakh.

State Minister for Food and Drugs Administration (FDA) Rajendra Shingne carried out multiple raids across the city on Wednesday along with his staff, and identified pharmacies and medical shops hoarding sanitiser or selling them at more than the maximum retail price (MRP).

A senior official of the department said, "In the last seven days, we have taken action at 21 locations across the State. We have found people who have been bringing poor quality hand sanitiser from Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh and selling them in Mumbai and Pune. Goods worth a total of ₹21 lakh have been seized."

Senior officials said hoarding of hand sanitiser and face masks is prohibited as the items have been notified under the Essential Com-



**On their toes:** Minister for Food and Drug Administration Rajendra Shingne (second from right) conducting a surprise check at a pharmacy in Colaba on Wednesday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

modities Act. The notification is valid up to June 30 to ensure the availability of these items in the market at the right price in view of the COVID-19 outbreak.

FDA officials said they received information about widespread hoarding taking place at some locations and carried out searches on Tuesday and Wednesday. The raids were conducted under the statutory rules and regulations that prohibit hoarding and illegal sale of essential commodities.

The Minister made surprise checks at two pharmacies in Colaba and also inspected shops outside

Bombay Hospital and the Medical Research Centre in Marine Lines. Mr. Shingne warned shopkeepers against hoarding sanitiser and masks and informed them that the number of complaints about illegal sale of the items has been growing.

He conducted his final inspection at Worli, where he went through the billing records at two shops.

Mr. Shingne said, "We have recovered fake masks and sanitiser from locations in Pune and Mumbai. In its notification last week, the FDA had declared sanitiser, surgical masks and N95 masks as essential commodities and warned of action against people hoarding these articles.

## Nagpur shuts liquor shops, paan kiosks

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NAGPUR

All restaurants, bars, liquor shops and paan kiosks in Nagpur district have been shut till March 31 in view of the novel coronavirus outbreak in the State, a senior official said on Wednesday.

District Collector Ravindra Thakre said the order is being issued to ensure that everyone practises social distancing to prevent the spread of the virus. The order came into effect at 5 p.m. on Wednesday.

"All beer shops, wine shops, permit rooms, bars and restaurants, clubs, country liquor shops, all restaurants and paan kiosks will remain closed from March 18 to March 31" under the provisions of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, the District Collector's order said.

Four confirmed cases of the virus have been reported in the district so far.

## Proceeding with caution



**On the go:** Holidaymakers heading to Matheran board the toy train at Aman Lodge station on Wednesday. ■ SANDEEP RASAL

## Bhima-Koregaon probe: Pawar to appear before panel on April 4

Commission to submit investigation report on April 8

ALOK DESHPANDE  
MUMBAI

Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) chief spokesperson and Minority Affairs Minister Nawab Malik on Wednesday said party president Sharad Pawar will appear before the Bhima-Koregaon Commission of Inquiry in Mumbai on April 4 after the Parliament session ends.

Mr. Malik said, "The commission had asked Mr. Pawar for a convenient date for appearing before it. Accordingly, he will appear before the panel on April 4 as the Parliament session would be over by then." The sittings of the panel have been shifted from Pune to Mumbai in view of the rise in novel coronavirus cases in Pune.

"We have been maintaining from day one that the violence was pre-planned. Mr. Pawar will put forth his stand before the commission," Mr. Malik said.

The NCP chief had filed an affidavit before the panel headed by former Bombay High Court Chief Justice J.N. Patel on October 8, 2018.

Last month, Sagar Shinde, a member of Vivek Vichar Manch, had filed an application before the commission seeking to serve a summons on Mr. Pawar over certain statements made by him in the media on the Ja-



NCP president Sharad Pawar

We have been maintaining from day one that the violence was pre-planned. Mr. Pawar will put forth his stand before the commission

NAWAB MALIK  
NCP spokesperson

nuary 2018 violence in Bhima-Koregaon.

In his plea, the applicant had cited a press conference Mr. Pawar had held on February 18. As per his application, at the press meet, Mr. Pawar alleged that right-wing activists Milind Ekbole and Sambhaji Bhide had created a charged atmosphere in Bhima-Koregaon.

Last month, the Maha Vikas Aghadi government gave the commission a final extension till April 8 to submit its investigation report.

## Gujarat: Class X answer sheets found by roadside

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
AHMEDABAD

Three bundles of answer sheets of the Class X science exam conducted recently by the Gujarat education board were found by the roadside near Virpur town in Rajkot district on Wednesday.

The Class X examination of the Gujarat Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Board (GSHSEB) is in progress in the State. The science exam was held on March 7 and the answer

sheets found by the roadside were yet to be evaluated. The Education Minister has ordered a probe into the case.

"The soiled and damaged answer sheets were found lying scattered by the roadside near Virpur town in Gandol taluka," an official said.

The GSHSEB suspects that the incident could be due to the negligence of the officials responsible for carrying the answer sheets to the centralised evaluation centre. The board officials said action

will be taken against those responsible after the probe.

Education Minister Bhupendrasinh Chudasama assured action against those responsible for the incident. He said, "I have directed the officials to carry out an urgent and thorough investigation to find out whether any more answer sheets are still missing. Whether this happened in a natural course or was done deliberately will be found out during the probe. Strong action will be taken

against those found responsible for this."

A.J. Shah, chairman of the board, said the bundles have been sent to a nearby school in Virpur. He said, "Those who were carrying them did not do their job and action will be taken against them."

Meanwhile, the Congress attacked the GSHSEB for its "irresponsible functioning", saying that it is playing with the future of students and the education department is the epicentre of corruption.

## SC upholds plan to defer A.P. polls

Govt. also gets relief as its appeal to lift model code of conduct is granted

**STAFF REPORTER**  
VIJAYAWADA

The Supreme Court on Wednesday upheld the Andhra Pradesh State Election Commission (SEC)'s decision to postpone the local body elections by six weeks, but gave the government a reprieve by exempting it from enforcing the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) and allowed the implementation of existing development programmes till the resumption of the election process.

Hearing a writ petition filed by the government for striking down the SEC's order to put on hold the elections to municipal bodies

and ZPTCs and MPTCs due to the coronavirus scare, a three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice S.A. Bobde and Justices B.R. Gavai and Surya Kant refused to intervene at this juncture and directed the SEC to announce a fresh schedule later in consultation with the government.

**'Kept in the dark'**  
Presenting the government's arguments, Additional Solicitor General A.N.S. Nadkarni and A.P. Advocate-General S. Sriram raised an objection to the continuation of the MCC during the six-week period and alleged that the SEC kept

the government in the dark about its consideration of postponement of the polls.

### COVID-19

The SEC's advocate claimed to have followed the procedures and said it had no political motives. The SEC was concerned about the COVID threat and hence believed that the government would be in a better position to check its spread if the polls are suspended.

The court also ordered that the government should be allowed to take necessary steps for curbing the menace

of coronavirus and that it should take permission from the SEC if it intended to undertake fresh developmental activities.

It may be noted that State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar postponed the elections citing the COVID threat on March 15. It evoked a strong reaction from Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, who made serious allegations against the commission. Besides, the government challenged the SEC order, saying the postponement would scuttle its efforts to mobilise funds due from the 14th Finance Commission.

### IN BRIEF

#### 3,125 persons isolated in one district of Kerala

**PATHANAMTHITA**  
A total of 3,125 persons, of whom 1,894 had come from abroad, have been quarantined at their homes in Kerala's Pathanamthitta district as on Wednesday evening, a medical bulletin said. Of these, 1,254 are the primary or secondary contacts of the infected persons from Aythala in Ranni. All the five under isolation at the General Hospital here tested positive for the infection on Tuesday too, a top health official said.

#### 550 persons under watch in two A.P. districts

**NELLORE/ONGOLE**  
As many as 550 persons with foreign travel history were put under house quarantine in SPRSP Nellore and Prakasam districts in Andhra Pradesh. Nellore District Collector V. Vinod Kumar said 293 persons who had foreign travel history were confined to their houses. Their condition was being monitored closely. In Prakasam, 257 persons were put under house quarantine, District Medical and Health Officer K. Padmavati said.

## Eight more test positive for COVID-19 in Telangana

Seven Indonesians, one Scotland-returnee in latest list

**K. SHIVA SHANKAR  
V. GEETANATH**  
HYDERABAD

Eight more COVID-19 positive cases were reported by the Telangana Health and Family Welfare Department on Wednesday. This takes the total number of cases in Telangana to 13.

The eight new cases include seven people from Indonesia. The eighth case, unrelated to the seven Indonesians, is a 22-year-old man who returned to Hyderabad from Scotland in the early hours of March 16.

The seven Indonesians who tested positive for COVID-19 were part of a 10-member team who travelled from New Delhi to Ramagundam on AP Sampark Kranti Express (Train No. 12708) on March 13 and reached Ramagundam in the early hours of March 14. A total of 82 peo-



A bus conductor pouring sanitiser on the hands of a passenger in Hyderabad on Wednesday. ■ NAGARA GOPAL

ple travelled in the non-air conditioned sleeper coach.

The first Indonesian who tested positive was a 58-year-old man. Telangana Health Minister Eatala Rajender said the 10-member team had stayed in a Karimnagar mosque for two days. The 58-year-old man and the oth-

ers were isolated at government hospital on Monday and their samples collected for tests.

The Health department has not announced the results of two more Indonesians who were part of the team. The Health Minister said that officials have identified the rail passengers who had travelled with the Indonesians. They will be isolated or quarantined soon.

Earlier in the day, a 22-year-old man who returned to Hyderabad from Scotland, the U.K., on March 16 tested positive for the virus.

He spent the entire day at home with three family members and developed cough, fever the next day. The youth got admitted to Gandhi Hospital on Tuesday.

Of the 13 cases from the State, the index (first) case was discharged last week.

## + Volunteers to help tourists in Kerala

They are being denied hotel rooms

**S. ANIL RADHAKRISHNAN**  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Volunteer groups are in place in 12 key tourist destinations in Kerala to provide assistance to domestic and foreign tourists and to help the government check the spread of COVID-19 infection.

Twelve groups, comprising entrepreneurs in the tourism sector and representatives of hotels, resorts, travel agents, tour operators, and house boat operators will arrange accommodation for vacationers in the State and ensure their safe return back home.

The groups will work with the health authorities and the district administration.

The decision to form the groups comes close on the heels of reports of tourists being denied rooms in ho-

tels, access to restaurants and rest rooms, and singled out and harassed by the public, branding them as carriers of virus. Reports of two French and Italian nationals going without food for four days in Kannur had also expedited the move.

Set up under the Kerala Travel Mart Society that organises the Kerala Travel Mart (KTM), the groups have the cooperation of the government, the Confederation of Kerala Tourism Industry (CKTI) and various associations in the tourism industry.

The volunteer groups have started working in Thiruvananthapuram, Kovalam, Varkala, Kollam, Marari, Kumarakom, Kochi, Munmar, Thikkad, Wayanad, Bekal, and Neelamperoor, said CKTI president E.M. Najeeb.

## New Bill halves terms of presidents of local bodies

Karnataka govt. reduces them from five years to 30 months

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
BENGALURU

In an attempt to bring about major changes in the functioning of the rural local bodies in Karnataka, the government on Wednesday tabled a new Bill to reduce the term of the offices of presidents and vice-presidents of gram panchayats, taluk panchayats and zilla panchayats from five years to 30 months.

The Karnataka Gram Swaraj and Panchayat Raj (Amendment) Bill, 2020, tabled in the Assembly by Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister K.S. Eshwarappa said no-confidence motion could not be

moved against the presidents and vice-presidents of all three-tiers of local bodies before 15 months from the date of election.

The Bill is aimed at amending the 1993 Act. At present, no-confidence motion can be moved within 30 months from the date of election.

**No-confidence motion**  
The Deputy Commissioner would preside over the meeting while no-confidence motion is considered in taluk panchayat and the regional commissioner would preside in the case of ZP. In case the no-confidence motion is defeated,

then no such motion is to be moved again in the next six months.

The Bill envisages some electoral reforms and that included closing of liquor shops 48 hours before the polling of panchayats.

**On tax collection**  
The Bill has rationalised property tax collection that GPs can do with respect to industries and vacant land. It has proposed no tax on vacant land in airport or industrial area or industrial areas where plantations are grown. It proposes to levy 0.10% tax on the capital value of the property on the runway area of an airport.

## Telangana releases ₹1,210 cr. for loan waiver

5.84 lakh farmers likely to be benefited

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
HYDERABAD

The Telangana government has given administrative sanction for the release of ₹1,210 crore for implementing the first phase of crop loan waiver scheme – to repay the debt of farmers up to ₹25,000, including the principal amount and interest per family.

In his budget speech, Minister for Finance T. Harish Rao announced in the Legislative Assembly on March 8 that the State government had already made a provision to release ₹1,198 crore towards writing off the debt of farmers up to ₹25,000 during the month of March itself. Accordingly, the Finance Department issued a

## Kerala's temple festivals go lean, cut down on celebrations

Precautionary measures followed despite adverse impact on their revenues

**N.J. NAIR**  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Temple festivals in Kerala have assumed a sombre note. The characteristic gaiety and razzmatazz that mark such celebrations have given way to abiding caution for containing the COVID-19 outbreak.

The Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB), which manages about 1,200 temples, has taken the lead in observing the protocol set by the government. The Board has issued a circular to the temple advisory committees, comprising mostly residents in each location, to



Cutting back: A board at the Palkulangara Sree Bhagavathy Temple to caution devotees. ■ S. MAHINSHA

commence on Thursday. The temple advisory committee has announced its decision to suspend all cultural programmes and mass feasts held as part of the festivals, till normalcy returned.

The best example in this score is the notice put up by Palkulangara Sree Bhagavathy Temple here, where the annual festival is set to

devotees reaching the temple.

**'Positive effect'**  
TDB president N. Vasu said that the circular issued by the Board soon after the government insisted on raising preparedness has had the desired impact.

## Tirumala 'pushkarini' closed

**G.P. SHUKLA**  
TIRUMALA

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), in a rare move on Wednesday, announced the closure of pushkarini (temple tank) for the public in view of the COVID-19 threat. Following this, no pilgrim will be allowed to take bath in the pushkarini.

According to sources, about one-third of the pilgrims, numbering anywhere between 20,000 and 25,000, take a dip in the temple tank every day.

Respecting the sentiment attached to the practice of taking bath in the temple tank during their pilgrimage



Alert mode: Close to 25,000 pilgrims usually take a dip in the temple tank at Tirumala every day.

to the holy town, the TTD has set up 18 showers on the upper banks that will pump the tank water.

Speaking to the media, TTD Additional EO A.V. Dharmar Reddy said: "The

restriction is temporary."

He said the TTD had already taken several precautions like regulating the darshan queue, cancellation of certain sevas and periodic spraying of disinfectants.

## Infosys begins evacuating trainees

Staff will learn from home, it says

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
MYSURU

IT major Infosys began evacuating trainees from its Global Education Centre in Mysuru on Wednesday in view of the scare over COVID-19.

Infosys said they had advised the trainees to return home as soon as possible. The Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) said 434 trainees had left for different destinations in 20 buses.

The centre can accommodate 14,000 trainees at any given time.

Though Infosys did not specify the number of trainees to be evacuated, sources in the KSRTC said about 10,000 trainees are scheduled to leave over the next one week.

"We are enabling more of our employees and trainees to work and learn from

home. We are also limiting the number of people at Infosys campuses. Therefore, Infosys has advised trainees residing at its Global Education Centre in Mysuru to return home as soon as possible," said a statement.

"We are facilitating the logistics and are also ensuring that their training continues via Lex, our digital learning and talent transformation platform," the statement added.

KSRTC's Chief Traffic Manager B.T. Prabhakar Reddy said the corporation would operate premium buses from the Infosys campus, besides its Flybus service to the Kempegowda International Airport Limited (KIAL).

City buses would also be deployed to ferry the trainees to the City railway station.

Govt. also gets relief as its appeal to lift model code of conduct is granted

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
BENGALURU

The Karnataka govt. on Wednesday tabled a new Bill to reduce the term of the offices of presidents and vice-presidents of gram panchayats, taluk panchayats and zilla panchayats from five years to 30 months.

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Students who were stranded in Kuala Lumpur after the COVID-19 outbreak arrived at the Visakhapatnam airport on Wednesday. The students, hailing from Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, left for their hometowns by special buses. ■ K.R. DEEPAK

## TRS' Kavitha files nomination for MLC post in Nizamabad

BJP fields Laxminarayana; Congress yet to name candidate

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NIZAMABAD

Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) president and Chief Minister K. Chandrashekhar Rao has finalised the candidature of his daughter and former MP Kalvakuntla Kavitha, as the party's nominee for the MLC seat under the Nizamabad Local Bodies category.

Ms. Kavitha filed the nomination for the MLC post on Wednesday. Accompanied by the Minister for Roads and Buildings V. Prashanth Reddy, MLAs and MLCs hailing from the integrated old district, Ms. Kavitha submitted two sets of papers to the Collector and Returning Officer.



Kalvakuntla Kavitha

ficer C. Narayana Reddy. At one stage, it was believed that Ms. Kavitha would be selected for the remaining term of former MLC R. Bhupathi Reddy, who forfeited his membership following his defection to the Congress.

Given the strength of the TRS in the local bodies in the constituency comprising the integrated old district, her election could be a proverbial cakewalk.

Out of a total of 824 voters, the TRS alone has 532 members, registering 64.5%, while Congress has 140, and the BJP 85.

Ms. Kavitha will have a 22-month term as MLC and is likely to be renominated after her term ends in January 2022. She is now contesting for the remaining term of former MLC R. Bhupathi Reddy, who forfeited his membership following his defection to the Congress.

# GoAir staff left in the lurch after contracts end

Termination letters go viral on social media

ADITYA ANAND  
MUMBAI

A day after GoAir suspended international operations alongside putting its employees on a rotational leave-without-pay programme, letters terminating employee contracts, mostly those of expatriate pilots, went viral on social media.

## COVID-19

A spokesperson for the airline said that as India had temporarily banned travel to and from a host of countries, with airlines across the world taking drastic measures to handle the extraordinary situation, GoAir had been forced to terminate the contracts of its expatriate pilots in line with its reduced international capacity.



**Hard times:** Passengers at the Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi on Wednesday. ■ V.V. KRISHNAN

On Tuesday, GoAir had temporarily suspended all international flights from March 17 to April 15.

"No sooner than the situation improves, GoAir will reinstate these flights and operate them at the earliest opportunity," an airline spokesperson said.

"Knowing that this will put a financial burden on the affected employees and having studied what companies have done in other countries to help guide our plans, this

decision was not taken lightly," a spokesperson said referring to the two decisions.

### Drastic steps

GoAir said the airline had to take these drastic steps as India had temporarily banned all passengers coming from a host of countries and vice-versa.

This restriction will come into effect from 12:00 hrs GMT on March 18, at the port of first departure, and shall remain till March 31.

## 'Airlines may have to shut shop by May'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Several airlines may be forced to shut down by May or June in the absence of government aid as private carriers stare at a loss of \$500-600 million due to COVID-19, warns aviation consultancy CAPA.

"All Indian airlines will report significant losses in Q1, even with oil prices at around \$30/barrel," said CAPA in its report on the impact of COVID-19 on India. "At an industry level, consolidated losses are estimated to be in the range of \$500-600 million for the quarter [excluding Air India]. However, these are very preliminary estimates," the aviation consultancy said.

## Air India pares perks for crew in cost cutting bid

'Need felt amid global developments'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI

Air India has announced a slew of cost-cutting measures aimed at the crew and officials including a cut in entertainment allowance – of \$50 per flight – to executive pilots. For cabin crew, the layover or subsistence allowance for both permanent and contractual crew rostered from April 1 would be revised to \$100 for 30 hours – down from \$75 a day or \$150 for anything beyond 24 but under 48 hours – and thereafter \$4 for every additional hour in excess of 30 hours. For ultra-long range flights, \$140 (down from \$150) would be paid for the first 30 hours and \$6 for every additional hour in excess of 30 hours.

that had forced several airlines worldwide to adopt very aggressive measures.

Air India would, with immediate effect, withdraw the executive entertainment allowance – of \$50 per flight – to executive pilots. For cabin crew, the layover or subsistence allowance for both permanent and contractual crew rostered from April 1 would be revised to \$100 for 30 hours – down from \$75 a day or \$150 for anything beyond 24 but under 48 hours – and thereafter \$4 for every additional hour in excess of 30 hours. For ultra-long range flights, \$140 (down from \$150) would be paid for the first 30 hours and \$6 for every additional hour in excess of 30 hours.

## 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 Thursday:** Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning, hail and gusty wind very likely at isolated places over Odisha; with lightning, hail and gusty wind at isolated places over east Madhya Pradesh, Vidarbha and Chhattisgarh and heat wave conditions very likely at isolated places over Kerala and Mahe.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	—	33.6	17.8	Kozhikode	—	35.8	26.4
Ahmedabad	—	37.2	21.0	Kurnool	—	39.5	24.6
Aizawl	—	25.4	—	Lucknow	—	29.9	15.4
Allahabad	—	30.9	14.6	Madurai	—	36.8	24.2
Bengaluru	—	35.2	19.4	Mangaluru	—	37.0	24.7
Bhopal	—	31.7	19.0	Mysuru	—	35.0	22.5
Bhubaneswar	—	36.0	22.0	New Delhi	—	35.0	21.0
Chennai	—	33.7	25.7	Patna	—	29.9	14.1
Chandigarh	—	26.4	14.2	Port Blair	—	33.6	25.0
Coimbatore	—	34.2	22.6	Puducherry	—	33.4	24.4
Dehradun	—	27.7	9.9	Pune	—	37.4	21.3
Gangtok	—	15.7	9.9	Raipur	—	32.5	23.6
Goa	—	33.6	25.4	Ranchi	—	28.6	14.2
Guwahati	0.00	0.00	0.00	Shillong	—	21.0	14.4
Hubballi	—	35.0	22.0	Shimla	—	17.7	7.2
Hyderabad	—	36.2	22.7	Srinagar	—	20.6	5.0
Imphal	—	26.7	11.1	Thiruvananthapuram	—	35.9	25.8
Jaipur	—	30.1	17.0	Tiruchi	—	37.1	23.7
Kochi	—	33.2	26.2	Vijayawada	—	36.4	23.2
Kohima	—	21.1	—	Visakhapatnam	—	32.5	25.6
Kolkata	—	32.5	22.9				

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

### Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO <sub>2</sub>	NO <sub>x</sub>	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	51	52	16	123	—	■
Bengaluru	13	63	88	—	136	■
Chennai	06	20	37	107	20	■
Delhi	28	72	08	216	243	■
Hyderabad	02	48	25	63	78	■
Kolkata	18	54	15	214	153	■
Lucknow	05	35	49	246	35	■
Mumbai	30	74	32	135	227	■
Pune	52	19	95	80	78	■
Visakhapatnam	10	58	43	62	96	■

Yesterday

In observation made at 6.00 p.m., Vapi, Gujarat recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 277 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Ramaganga, Karnataka recorded a healthy AQI score of 37

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

**SO<sub>2</sub>:** Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

**NO<sub>x</sub>:** Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

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

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

# No medical care, say Indians in Iran

They want New Delhi to intervene

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

As many as 255 pilgrims visiting Iran from Kashmir and Ladakh had been affected by the coronavirus, the Ministry of External Affairs told the Lok Sabha on Wednesday.

The Iranian government sent officials for inspection of the hotels where the Indian nationals were staying without maintaining quarantine conditions, Asghar Ali, one of the group leaders in Qom, told *The Hindu*.

**'Will be shifted'**  
"More people with COVID-19 positive status will be shifted but the hotel cannot accommodate all the patients," said Mr. Ali over phone.

"Many patients have been unwell over the last eight

days and have had no arrangement for necessary medical care," he added.

Nadeem Bhat, a group leader from Kashmir, calling on the Centre to intervene, said, "We will have no option but to sit on the road as the hotels will have to be evacuated and we have nowhere to go."

**Moved to Jaisalmer**  
Meanwhile, a third batch of 195 Indians from Iran were brought to Jaisalmer by an Air India aircraft on Wednesday evening.

After being screened at the airport, they were shifted to the Army facility at the Jaisalmer military station, defence officials said. It was not immediately clear from which Iranian city these Indians had been airlifted to Jaisalmer.

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI**  
Rajya Sabha Chairman M. Venkaiyah Naidu on Monday asked Trinamool Congress members to remove the masks they were wearing in the House, prompting members to demand deferring of the Parliament session because of COVID-19.

Minutes after the House convened after the obituary references were read out, Mr. Naidu directed the MPs to remove the black masks as House rules did not allow wearing them.

While the Trinamool members kept silent, Congress member Rajeev Gowda said that though the government was advising everyone to practise social distancing, Parliament continued to function.

**Naidu asks for removal but later concedes to request**



"I would urge upon the government to set aside other issues and focus on whether the Parliament sittings can be postponed or the session can be adjourned," Mr. Gowda said.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi said the fight against COVID-19 was humanitarian and not political. MPs (With inputs from IANS)

should not spread panic.

Mr. Naidu once again appealed to the members to remove the masks. Congress member P. Chidambaram said the matter should be left to the judgment of the individual members, whether he felt vulnerable or not.

Mr. Naidu agreed to his submission, saying that if the members feel vulnerable, they could make preventive arrangements.

**Thermal scanning**  
Ministers and MPs had to go through thermal scanning before entering Parliament premises on Wednesday for the first time to contain the spread of COVID-19.

The screening began as the government decided to continue the House.

(With inputs from IANS)

# Not enough numbers for WHO trials: ICMR

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN  
NEW DELHI

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has said that India will not participate in the World Health Organization's (WHO) clinical trials for COVID-19 as of now because the country has a very small sample size.

"The numbers that we can offer WHO is extremely limited as India is still witnessing local transmission. There is nothing stopping us from joining the trial later on, if there is a rise in COVID-19 numbers," said Dr. R. Gangakhedkar, head, Epidemiology and Communicable Diseases-I.

# Lucknow resident doctor tests positive

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
LUCKNOW

A 25-year-old junior resident doctor of the King George Medical University here has tested positive for COVID-19 after coming in contact with two patients undergoing treatment for the disease at its premises, a hospital spokesperson said on Wednesday.

The KGMU subsequently, in a statement, announced suspension of all undergraduate academic classes and examinations till April 2 as a preventive measure to stem the spread of COVID-19. The doctor has been kept in an isolation ward and is undergoing treatment. A woman from Canada and one of her relatives, who came in contact with her, are too undergoing treatment.

# Southern Railway cancels nine services

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI

The Southern Railway has cancelled nine trains being operated to the southern parts of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Secunderabad due to low occupancy. The services will be cancelled from March 19 to April 1. Among them is the Duronto Bi-Weekly Express from Chennai Central to Madurai.

Train service between Ernakulam Junction and Velankanni on March 21, and the return service, scheduled on March 22, too remains cancelled.

## WATER CORPORATION OF ODISHA

### OFFICE OF THE MANAGING DIRECTOR, WATCO

Ground Floor, Unnati Bhawan

Near Satyanagar Fly Over Bridge, Bhubaneswar-751001, Odisha, India.

Telefax : +91-674-2391444; E Mail: mail@watcoodisha.in, md@watcoodisha.in

**EOI Identification No MD, WATCO-01/19/20 Dated:17.03.2020**

### EXPRESSION OF INTEREST (EOI)

The MANAGING Director, WATCO, Bhubaneswar on behalf of the Governor of Odisha invites Expression of Interest (EOI) in conformity with the detailed EOI document, from reputed and eligible manufacturers of consumer water meters for selection of types and technical specifications of meters for using the same in the next level of bidding process. The EOI can be downloaded



# An SC verdict violative of minority rights

The recent decision by a two-judge bench takes away autonomy of *madrasas* in W. Bengal



FAIZAN MUSTAFA



Children at a madrasa in Agartala in 2018. ■ GETTY IMAGES

Protection of minorities is the hallmark of a civilisation. Lord Acton added another dimension to this when he said: "The most certain test by which we judge whether a country is really free is the amount of security enjoyed by minorities." The minorities in general, and Muslims in particular, accepted the pledge of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel that "our mission is to satisfy every interest and safeguard the interests of all the minorities to their satisfaction". Accordingly, special safeguards were guaranteed to the minorities and incorporated under Article 30 with a view to instil in them a sense of confidence and security. However, due to recent developments in Delhi and elsewhere, this confidence stands eroded even though, in the *Kesavanda Bharati* case (1973), minority rights were held to be the part of basic structure of the Constitution.

In the last one year, a new trend has emerged in the Supreme Court. Smaller benches now do not hesitate to overrule larger benches' decisions. Increasingly, judicial discipline is losing its charm. In the latest judgment on minority rights, a two-judge bench of Justice U.U. Lalit and Justice Arun Mishra upheld the West Bengal Board of Madrasah Education Act, 1994, and the West Bengal Madrasah Service Commission Act, 2008, both of which take away the autonomy of *madrasas* in the State. The appointment of teachers in these theological institutions shall now be made by a board nominated by the government.

#### Rights under Article 30

What is the importance of minority rights? Why is the judgment *per incuriam*, i.e. contrary to law?

As per Section 10 of the West Bengal Madrasah Service Commission Act, 2008, all appointments of teachers to the religious schools are to be recommended by the commission and the management committee shall be bound by such recommendations. Section 11 says that anyone

## Faith can't override public health

The U.P. govt's move to proceed with the Ayodhya 'mela' defies WHO guidelines and its own advisory

#### R. PRASAD

That mass gatherings, especially in enclosed spaces, provide the perfect conditions for novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) to easily spread became amply clear early on during the COVID-19 outbreak. The number of cases reported from the *Diamond Princess* cruise ship kept increasing before reaching 712; half-a-dozen jails in China reported over 500 cases. Both in Singapore and South Korea, large clusters of cases have had their origin in churches.

Countries across the world, from China to Italy, have been taking the World Health Organization (WHO)'s advice of quarantining and social distancing seriously to contain the spread of the virus. Taking a cue from these, many sporting events, from Formula 1 racing events to tennis, basketball, football and cricket championships, including the Indian Premier League, have been put off or cancelled.

#### Government advisory

On March 6, when the number of cases crossed 1,00,000 globally and stood at 31 in India, the Union government advised all States to avoid or postpone mass gatherings till the COVID-19 outbreak was contained. It wanted States to take precautions in case mass gatherings were held. Earlier, taking the advice of experts to avoid mass gatherings to cut the transmission chain, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced that he was not going to celebrate Holi. Making a similar announcement, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath also appealed to people of his State to "refrain from attending social functions". Soon after the March 6 advisory, educational institutions, malls, theatres, to name a few, were shut in many States. Mumbai ordered private companies to work with 50% staff capacity.

But, just a couple of weeks later, at a time when even mass gatherings involving a few hundred people are being discouraged, the U.P. government has said that the Ayodhya Ram Navami Mela will be held as planned from March 25 to April 2. The *mela*, which attracts lakhs of tourists every year, will be of special significance this

time as it will be the first such function after the apex court's Ayodhya verdict. At a time when the virus seems to have gained renewed vigour and is marching across countries, infecting thousands and killing hundreds each day, a congregation of such magnitude could have serious consequences and shift the trajectory of the outbreak in India.

Tradition cannot be allowed to override public health, especially when it cannot be guaranteed that the number of people congregating can be reduced or precautions instituted. More so when the virus in question is highly infectious, while India's healthcare system is weak and cannot take a frontal assault by the virus if hundreds of people manifest serious symptoms. There have been several recent instances when large gatherings have had disastrous consequences.

On International Women's Day on March 8, over 1,20,000 people marched through Madrid. The same day, over 60,000 fans gathered at the city's largest stadium and 9,000 supporters of Vox party assembled inside a sports centre. Less than a week later, the number of cases shot up from a few hundred to 4,200. Today, with more than 13,700 cases, Spain has the third highest number of cases outside China.

**Examples of Malaysia and Iran**  
In Malaysia, over 16,000 people gathered in late-February in a mosque complex in the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur for a four-day meeting. Of the 790+ cases in Malaysia so far, nearly two-thirds are linked to the event. The city of Qom in Iran, where the first case and death were reported, is full of holy sites that people touch and kiss. Qom soon turned into a hotspot and played a role in the virus's spread to the rest of Iran. While in South Korea, a day after cases soared by 833 in a single day, the church halted masses at more than 1,700 locations across the country.

It is time we learn from the experiences of other countries and act wisely and not allow religious fervour cloud our discretion.

prasad.ravindranath@thehindu.co.in

judgments on the right to choose teachers such as *Rev. Father W. Proost* (1969), where a five-judge bench had struck down Section 48-A of Bihar State Universities Act, 1960 that had provided that no appointment, dismissal or reduction in the rank of any teacher could be made by any governing body of a minority institution without the recommendation of University Service Commission. Similarly, in *Very Rev. Mother Provincial* (1969), appointment of a principal was held to be a component of a minority group's right to administer the institution.

In *Ahmedabad St. Xaviers* (1974), Section 33A(I)(b) of Gujarat University Act, 1949 that required that a nominee of the affiliating university must be part of the selection committee of principal and teachers was also struck down. A nine-judge bench of the Supreme Court explicitly held that minority institutions have the right to choose their teachers. In *T.M.A. Pai* (2003), an 11-judge bench reiterated that the management of minority institutions should have freedom in day-to-day affairs of the institutions, for example, in appointment of teaching and non-teaching staff and administrative control. However, minimum qualifications, experience and other conditions may be fixed by the government.

Justice Lalit, who authored the latest judgment, did refer to the *Kerala Education Bill* case (1957) of the Supreme Court but he overlooked the fact that a seven-judge bench headed by Chief Justice S.R. Das had held that "the dominant word in Article 30 is 'choice' and the content of the right under that Article is as wide as the choice of a particular minority community will make it." Every minority community can thus make a choice in respect of its relationship with the government, the courses taught and the day today administration, including the right to select its teachers. The government, under reasonable restrictions, can certainly prescribe the minimum qualifications. Thus UGC regulations prescribing qualifications and experience are very much applicable. But the government cannot impose its own selection of teachers on the minority institutions.

Justice Lalit himself noted several

Faizan Mustafa is an expert on constitutional law. Views are personal

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## Over the cliff

The next U.S. President must take cues from Sanders's Green New Deal while formulating climate policy



SUJATHA BYRAVAN & SUDHIR CHELLA RAJAN

The next U.S. President will decide whether the planet goes over the climate cliff or pulls back from the brink. The gravity of this moment is not reflected sufficiently in most public conversations on who should be the Democratic Party nominee.

Within the next decade, the world must reduce its annual greenhouse gas emissions by 55% to have a chance at curbing warming to within 1.5°C, or by 25% to have a chance at staying below 2°C, compared with average pre-industrial temperatures. Both these temperature guardrails have implications for adverse effects from warming, though the stricter threshold is expected to cause less harm.

Currently, we do not exactly know where the planet is headed with regard to rising temperatures, as greenhouse gas emissions are still rising annually at around 1%-3%, and financial pledges lie unfulfilled. The Paris Agreement commitments made in 2015, even if achieved, are inadequate to attain climate stability.

#### The Obama years

The last Democratic Presidency (2008-2016) was during a time when the second commitment period of the Kyoto Agreement began and the Copenhagen Accord was forged. Neither the Kyoto nor Copenhagen pledges were fulfilled by the U.S. The world's biggest contributor to anthropogenic greenhouse gases accumulated in the atmosphere made weak promises and did not keep them.

And, as if to thumb its nose at the world even more, under President Donald Trump, the U.S. withdrew from the Paris Agreement and its voluntary commitment to reduce emissions.

Currently, the second biggest emitter after China, the U.S. is responsible for between one-third to one-fourth of all the anthropogenic carbon dioxide that was discharged into the atmosphere from 1750 to the present. It is doing the least in leading the way, although some of its rich potential is being harnessed through State and local action. Yet, it must, and can, do much more and provide finance and leadership along with deep decarbonisation domestically, while making technological and financial reparations to the rest of the world.

The role of the U.S. in sharply reducing its

emissions, accepting responsibility and leadership, and persuading other countries to follow suit is indeed vital. The next President, even if he is Democratic, cannot go back to old habits on global climate change policy. Far more is urgently needed for the planet even to have a chance at survival, and the U.S. is directly positioned to act as a planetary steward for climate action.

Efforts merely intended to improve the efficiency of transport or some other common practice, without demanding personal consideration and public discussion of choices in consumption patterns, will lead to window-dressing rather than deep cuts in emissions. Transformations that call for fundamental changes in energy use, lifestyles, transport, housing and values are pivotal. The Democratic nominee and future President cannot take the world back to the old ways of addressing the climate crisis, but needs to be a galvanising force within the country and then use that moral leadership to spur change elsewhere.

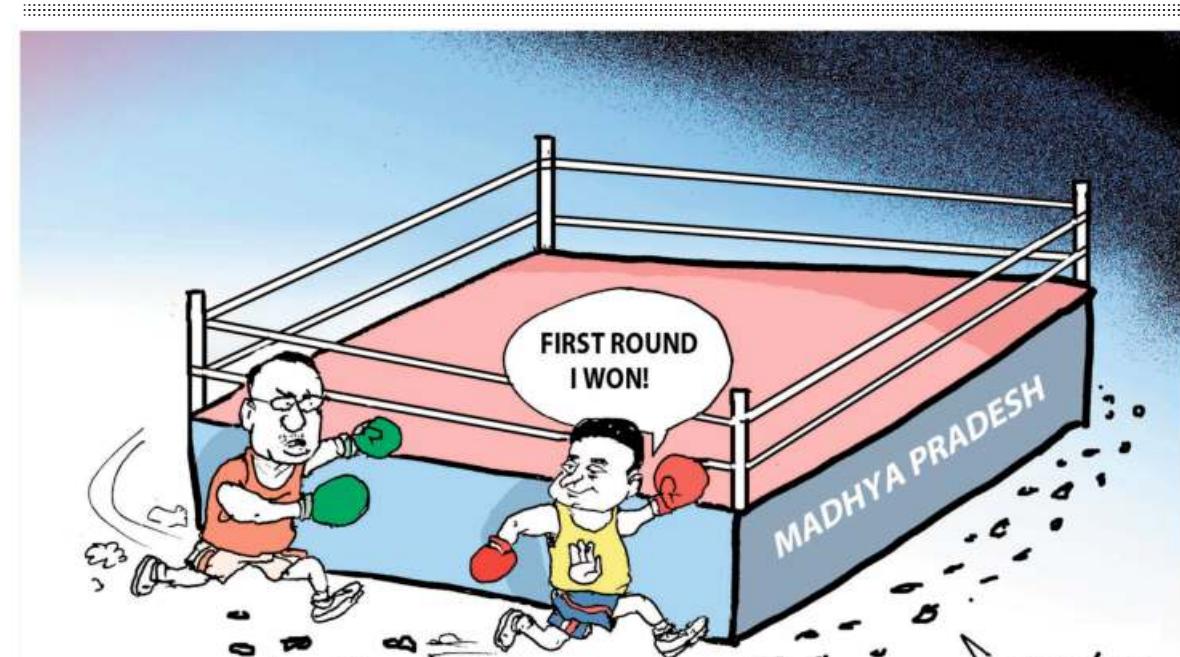
#### Going beyond Paris

The 'Green New Deal' is a good beginning for measures within the U.S., but details have to be spelt out on what kind of support will be given to the poorest countries, which have emitted almost zero greenhouse gases but will suffer the most. Even the fulfillment of national pledges in the Paris Agreement relies on support from the U.S. and Europe. Unfortunately, since the atmosphere is one of the largest shared commons, countries do not have a choice but to work together. What each one of us does affects everyone.

The bold ideas proposed by Senator Bernie Sanders and his team are especially promising in this regard. They call for transformative changes within the country and collaborative, responsible action with the rest of the world. His rival and current leader in the race to the Democratic Convention in July, Joe Biden, is nowhere close to having as sensible a climate call to action, but it is at least incremental. The faint hope is that he and his team can be persuaded to take full moral accountability for lost time and inaction and engage in swift effort for a sustainable planet.

The American and world public must speak loudly. Unless the next President can build on an ambitious platform, a planetary cataclysm is imminent. The current debates within the Democratic Party are no longer just domestic quarrels; they have potentially harmful global consequences.

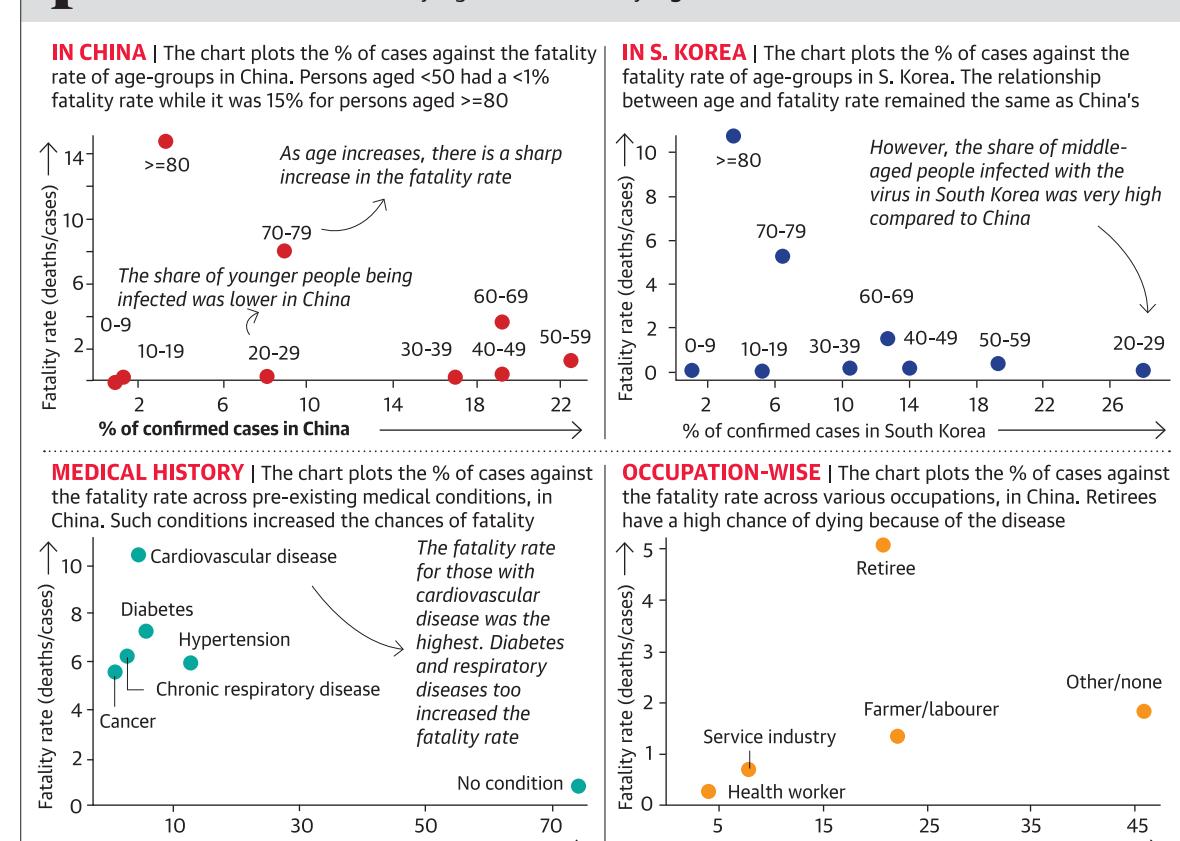
Sujatha Byravan is an independent scholar in Chennai; Sudhir Chella Rajan is Professor, Indian Institute of Technology-Madras



#### DATA POINT

## Victim profile

People aged 80 and above are at a highest risk of dying due to COVID-19, according to case records analysed by the Disease Control and Prevention Centers in China and South Korea. Victims of the virus with pre-existing medical conditions such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes have a higher fatality rate than others. Also the rate of fatalities was relatively higher for retirees. By Vignesh Radhakrishnan and Sumanth Sen



#### The Hindu

#### FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MARCH 19, 1970

First veto by U.S. in UNSC

For the first time in its 25 year history, the United Nations last night [March 17] witnessed the unprecedented event of the United States exercising its privilege of veto to prevent the passage of an Afro-Asian resolution aimed at the white minority Government of Rhodesia. The resolution would have condemned Britain for not using force to overthrow the breakaway rebel Government of Mr. Ian Smith which declared itself a Republic recently. It would also have required all member governments to isolate Rhodesia completely, and sever all remaining links with it. The motion, sponsored by the Afro-Asian members (and supported by Russia and China), had overwhelming support – it received nine affirmative votes (the number needed for passage in the 15-member Council) with two against and four abstentions (including that of France). The U.S. could have maintained its veto-free record by also abstaining, because the negative vote cast by Britain (its fourth) alone was enough to defeat the motion. But the Nixon administration apparently felt that it had to show more positive support for Britain with which it has always had a "special relationship." All the other four permanent members of the Council have exercised their veto more than once in the past, the Soviet Union holding the record with 105 negative votes.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MARCH 18, 1920.

The Horniman Affair.

THERE WAS NO ISSUE ON MARCH 19, 1920 DUE TO KHLIFAT DAY (FROM AN EDITORIAL)

Replying in the Imperial Council to the Hon'ble Mr. Patel, Sir Vincent said: "His Excellency the Governor-General does not propose to cancel the order of deportation from India passed against Mr. Horniman in April 1919..." We are not surprised at the nature of the answer. It has long ago been made clear that the King-Emperor's appeal for harmony has made about as much impression on the bureaucracy as water on a duck's back. The only change we can see in its attitude is on occasional willingness to speak softly and to overflow with cheap sentiment on every occasion where sentiment does not imply any corresponding action. That, we believe, is what in the dictionary of certain of our leaders is spelt "co-operation." It has at any rate sufficed to hugely delight certain of the Imperial Councillors to whom a little gentle tickling in the ribs from bureaucratic fingers is the most convincing of all arguments. So lost are they in the ecstatic enjoyment of this idyll that they are too often inclined to forget that they are there to serve their country.</p

FROM PAGE ONE

## 2 weeks to Census start, uncertainty clouds NPR

The NPR exercise is meant to be part of the first phase of the Census – the house listing – that is set to take place from April 1 to September 30. The second phase is population enumeration, which will be from February 9 to February 28, 2021, throughout the country simultaneously.

Activists such as Yogendra Yadav and Harsh Mander have since pointed out that as the law stands, not providing information for the NPR can be an offence and the NPR could be used for identifying genuine citizens and doubtful ones. The Centre has shown no inclination to change the form or the existing rules to give legal backing to Mr. Shah's statement that this will not be a basis for identifying citizens.

West Bengal was the first State to announce that it would not canvass the NPR form during the census operations, followed by Kerala. Both States have put the NPR exercise on hold. The NPR updation is meant to be part of the first phase of the census – the house listing – that is set to take place from April 1 to September 30. The second phase is population enumeration, which will be from February 9 to February 28, 2021, throughout the country simultaneously.

### Bihar stand

Among the 13 States that are opposed to the NPR in its current form are Bihar, where the BJP is a partner in the Nitish Kumar-led government, and Tamil Nadu, where the ruling AIADMK is its ally. Mr. Kumar has said nobody would be asked to furnish information like their parents' birth place in the form, as his government has sent a letter to the Centre seeking omission of contentious clauses from the NPR form. In Jharkhand, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha-led government is yet to take an official decision on NPR, but CM Hemant Soren is said to be against the NPR exercise in the State. States where the Congress is in power are all opposed to the NPR in its current form, and some such as Chhattisgarh have said they would use the 2010 format for data collection.

The State, however, seems to have accepted the Centre's clarification that the question would be optional, not mandatory.

Andhra Pradesh, which is keeping the NPR exercise in abeyance, is closely watching the steps its southern neighbour Tamil Nadu takes.

## SC poser to Centre on Omar Abdullah's release

The court was hearing a plea by Sara Abdullah Pilot, sister of Mr. Abdullah, challenging his continued detention under the Public Safety Act.

Mr. Abdullah was already under detention – from August 5 last year when the Centre removed the special rights of the Kashmiri people under Article 370 – when the PSA was slapped on him on February 5, 2020.

Ms. Pilot said Mr. Abdullah's detention from August

seven contiguous north-eastern States are ruled by the BJP on its own or in alliance with regional parties or, in the case of Mizoram, by the Mizo National Front, which is a member of a BJP-fronted development forum. The Mizoram government has remained silent, while the other States have started or are in the process of training officials for the exercise. Although the Centre has exempted Assam as it had conducted the National Register of Citizens, the State government had in February appealed to the Registrar General of India for conducting the NPR contending that the exercise "will come in handy while detailing welfare schemes".

### Training on

"We are training about 11,000 enumerators for collecting the NPR data from May 16 to June 29," said Tripura's Census Department Director Pradip Kumar Chakraborty. "We are trying to spread awareness among the public on the process and benefits of the register," said Manipur Chief Minister Nongthombam Biren. "We are well prepared for the exercise that will be conducted without segregation of any community," asserted Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma, adding: "We are focusing on the accuracy of data, as there have been gaps in the execution in the past."

The BJD government in Odisha appears to be taking the Centre's assurance on the NPR at face value. Trainers have been asked to devote two days on the NPR in a five-day-long district level training beginning from March 16. The NPR format, which seeks answers on date and place of birth of patients in the I3(ii) column, is being used for training purposes. While the Naveen Patnaik government has not spoken about the contentious NPR format publicly, the State government had expressed reservations on the NPR form's I3(ii) column.

The Governor wrote in the letter: "You and I are continuously receiving letters from the allegedly missing MLAs. In any of the letters, wherever they are now, they have not stated any problem..." Mr. Tandon reminded the

## Panels on homoeopathy, Indian system

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

Two Bills to set up national commissions for the Indian system of medicine and homoeopathy were passed by the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday, with the government assuring the House that similar legislation for yoga and naturopathy would be brought as well.

The National Commission for Indian System of Medicine Bill, 2019 and the National Commission for Homoeopathy Bill, 2019 had been introduced in the Rajya Sabha in January 2019, after which they were sent to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare.

## SC strips Manipur Minister of his office

Bans him from entering the Assembly

### KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL NEW DELHI

In an extraordinary display of its constitutional powers, the Supreme Court on Wednesday stripped Manipur Cabinet Minister T. Shyamkumar, who is facing disqualification proceedings for defection, of his office and banned him from entering the Assembly with immediate effect.

"These dues are public money that were not paid for 20 years. Government had fought tooth and nail," the court observed.

A document annexed to the application shows that the total demand of the DoT as in October 2019 was ₹1,69,048.65 crore from 16 major telecom service providers (TSPs). The payments received till March 6 from these companies is ₹25,901.56 crore. Dues in excess of ₹43,000 crore are still outstanding.

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT BENGALURU

Senior Congress leader Digvijaya Singh was taken into preventive custody here on Wednesday while trying to meet the rebel Congress MLAs from Madhya Pradesh staying in a resort.

The Karnataka High Court rejected his plea for a directive to the police chief not to stop him from meeting the MLAs.

Mr. Singh, along with other Congress leaders, was held at the Amruthahalli police station where Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee president D.K. Shivakumar arrived.

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Kamal Nath termed "dictatorial" the detention of Mr. Singh, and said he would go to Bengaluru if needed.

Mr. Singh plans to meet Chief Minister B.S. Yediyappa and request that he be allowed to meet the MLAs.

Mr. Singh flew down to the city earlier in the day with a few Ministers and senior

Congress MLAs from Madhya Pradesh.

As he tried to enter Rama Deva Resort near Yelhanka, the police stopped him. He started a sit-in on the street.

"I am a candidate for the upcoming Rajya Sabha election, and my voters are inside the resort. Please let me in alone. I will appeal to my voters and come back," Mr. Singh was seen appealing to

police officers. However, they refused permission, citing a letter from the MLAs in which they said they did not want to meet anyone and they also perceived a threat from Congress leaders.

Speaking to presspersons, Mr. Singh alleged that the Congress MLAs were kept captive in the resort.

"Not just these MLAs, even those outside have

been offered ₹25 crore to ₹30 crore by the BJP to switch sides. These MLAs were brought in a chartered flight, paid for by the BJP, and BJP leaders accompanied them, proving this is a conspiracy by the BJP to unseat an elected government," the Congress leader said.

As Mr. Singh refused to leave without meeting the MLAs, the police took him

into preventive custody along with other leaders, including Krishna Byre Gowda and N.A. Haris of Karnataka.

The court said the police action, stopping Mr. Singh from meeting the MLAs, "cannot be termed [an act of] high-handedness or violation of the rule of law" because the rebel MLAs had written a letter to the Director-General and Inspector-General of Police (DG&IGP) with a request not to allow any Congress leaders to meet them.

### Court stand

Justice R. Devdas also noticed that the MLAs staying in the resort had written a letter to the DG&IGP to ensure that no one met them.

The court said the police action could not be termed illegal. On the allegation that Mr. Singh was illegally detained, the court asked the State to file its statement of objection and adjourned further hearing till March 26.

Chief Minister Kamal Nath, represented by senior advocate Kapil Sibal, insisted on the court allowing him to meet the MLAs.

"I am a member of the Congress party. I am the Chief Minister. I want to meet them," But Justice Chandrachud responded that "there is a problem with your plea for access, this is not like the custody of a child." The BJP, represented by senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, said "the MLAs have already made it amply clear to the Congress that 'we do not want to go with you to Bhopal or even look at you'." It said a floor test should be held immediately.

The hearing will resume on March 19.

Duty of an MLA is to the people: Cong.

### LEGAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court, which heard the arguments of the BJP and the Congress in the Madhya Pradesh floor test case on Wednesday, said it was anxious to avoid horse-trading.

Senior advocate Dushyant Dave, for the Congress, informed the court that senior party leader Digvijaya Singh was detained by the Karnataka police when he tried to meet the legislators.

"The duty of an MLA, as per his own oath, is not to run away when somebody promises him a chartered flight and a beautiful hotel stay. His duty is to the people," Mr. Dave submitted. He said stable governance should become a part of the Basic Structure of the Constitution.

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The hearing will resume on March 19.

**Child welfare schemes must continue: SC**

### LEGAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday ordered States to come out with a uniform policy to ensure that while preventing the spread of COVID-19, schemes providing nutritional food to children, nursing and lactating mothers are not adversely affected.

"Non-supply of nutritional food to children as well as lactating and nursing mothers may lead to large-scale malnourishment. Particularly, children and lactating and nursing mothers in rural as well as tribal areas are prone to such malnourishment," a three-judge Bench led by Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde ordered.

The court issued notice to the Union, States and Union Territories to respond by March 27. "While dealing with one crisis, the situation may not lead to creation of another crisis," the court observed in its order after taking *suo motu* cognisance.

Governor dismisses concern expressed by Speaker that the legislators are being kept under duress

Speaker that the responsibility for the security of all citizens in a State rests with the executive, and not with him. "So, your letter seems to have been forwarded to me by mistake."

Mr. Prajapati informed the Governor that the MLAs had written their resignation letters under duress because neither they nor their families appeared before him when the letters were handed in.

Responding to the questions, Mr. Tandon wrote, "The expectation of answers must certainly be under some rules, and you must have perused them. Kindly take the trouble of forward-

ing me the rules concerned." Although 22 MLAs had tendered their resignation letters, which were submitted to the Speaker by BJP leaders, the resignation of only six of them has been accepted.

Obliquely prodding the Speaker to accept the resignation of the rest, Mr. Tandon wrote: "I appreciate

Minister says corruption has ended; Opposition seeks release of former CMs

### SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Wednesday told the Lok Sabha that corruption had ended and things had become more transparent in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) after the region's special status under Article 370 was diluted on August 5 last year.

Responding to the debate on budgetary proposals and the demand for grants for the Union Territories (UTs) of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, she listed the positive developments, including a rise in exports, and informed that soon the Centre would hold a specialclave on start-ups.

In a discussion that went

on for close to seven hours, most Opposition members attacked the Modi government for the political detentions in J&K and demanded the immediate release of former Chief Ministers Omar Abdullah (National Conference) and Mehbooba Mufti (Peoples Democratic Party).

Opposition members also asserted that the Budget for J&K should be discussed in its Assembly and not in Parliament.

**Past precedent**  
Ms. Sitharaman pointed to several past instances between 1991 and 1996, when Parliament passed the J&K Budget with the then State being under Central rule.

Minister of State in the

Prime Minister's Office Jitendra Singh said J&K had not seen a more peaceful eight-month period in the militancy-hit region than since August 6, when its special status under Article 370 was abrogated.

Nirmala Sitharaman in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday.

"New dreams, new hopes and new aspirations have taken birth there under the leadership of Modi," he said, while stating that Prime Minister Narendra Modi would be going to Ladakh to celebrate International Yoga Day on June 21.

Dr. Singh hit back at the Opposition by saying that while they [the Opposition] were concerned "about two or three families", they were not worried about the over 40,000 people who had lost their lives in the past 30 years of militancy in J&K.

National Conference MP Hasnain Masoodi said the picture being presented was different from the reality and asked the government to examine J&K afresh.

## Budgetary proposals for J&K passed

BJP members ask what was done to sanitise AC coaches

### SOBHANA K. NAIR NEW DELHI

A petition filed in the Supreme Court on Wednesday conveyed the "widespread disquiet and unease" triggered by the nomination of the former Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi to the Rajya Sabha and sought the court's intervention for extending the post-retirement restrictions imposed on the office of the Lokpal to former judges as well.

However, despite the judgment, the Speaker had returned to the apex court seeking eight weeks to take a decision.

On March 18, the Speaker asked for 10 days' time and said the decision on the disqualification would come on March 28. However, the apex court refused the plea and issued the order.

Manan Kumar Mishra, chairperson of the Bar Council of India, said the nomination was a "novel initiative".

According to sources, the ruling BJP members asked Mr. Yadav as to what the Railways was doing to sanitise the air conditioning facility in trains. He was unable to answer, the sources said. He reiterated the announcement made by the Railways to remove blankets and curtains from coaches because they were not washed frequently. Rail members told Mr. Yadav that the Railways

which recently got a payout from LIC worth ₹60,000 crore was accountable to the taxpayer.

The parliamentary panel on transport, tourism and culture held a meeting to assess the impact of coronavirus on the sector. The meeting was scheduled after

Trinamool Congress leader in the Rajya Sabha Derek O'Brien wrote to the chairman of the standing committee T.G. Venkatesh on the issue.

Presentations were made by Air India Chairman and Managing Director Rajiv Bansal, Tourism Secretary Yogendra Tripathi and Civil Aviation Secretary Pradeep Singh Kharola. Mr. Yadav was pulled up for not being able to answer most of the questions posed by the members, the sources said.

When an assembly of more than 50 persons is banned in Delhi, the meeting was attended by 75 persons, including parliamentarians and government officials who made the presentation.

### LEGAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

In an extraordinary display of its constitutional powers, the Supreme Court on Wednesday stripped Manipur Cabinet Minister T. Shyamkumar, who is facing disqualification proceedings for defection, of his office and banned him from entering the Assembly with immediate effect.

The court agreed to take up the case again on March 30.

On January 21, the Bench had given the Speaker a month's time to decide on the disqualification of Mr. Shyamkumar under the anti-defection law for switching sides to the BJP after contesting on Congress ticket.

However, despite the judgment, the Speaker had returned to the apex court seeking eight weeks to take a decision.

On March 18, the Speaker asked for 10 days' time and said the decision on the disqualification would come on March 28. However, the apex court refused the plea and issued the order.

Given the extraordinary facts in the present case, we are constrained to use our powers under Article 142 of the Constitution. Respondent No. 3 [Mr. Shyamkumar] is restrained from entering the Legislative Assembly till further orders of this Court. Needless to add, he will cease to be a Minister of the Cabinet immediately," a Bench led by Justice

Rohinton Nariman ordered.

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Cong. slams  
'infringement  
of privacy'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Seeking call data records (CDR) of phone subscribers is an infringement of the Right to Privacy, the Congress said on Wednesday in response to reports that the Department of Telecommunication (DoT) had sought CDR for specific days on specific routes.

The party moved an adjournment motion in the Lok Sabha on the issue, but the Chair did not allow it.

However, party MP Manish Tewari addressed a press conference, in which he said seeking CDR this way "is contrary to the top court's judgment, that held Right to Privacy as a fundamental right."

## 'Call data being used to improve quality'

Amid surveillance concerns, DoT clarifies that the records sought do not include any personal details

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

details from the licensees on regular basis in contravention" of the standard operating procedure for providing CDRs to law enforcement agencies.

In a statement, the DoT said that given the numerous complaints about quality of service on the country's telecommunications networks, including call drops, echo, cross connections, incomplete or poor caller experience, the DoT had developed a software tool to analyse big data.

"For this purpose, data on calls made from mobiles in any tower coverage area is analysed to ascertain calls terminated within 30 seconds and made again," the department said. "DoT will



be better equipped to take up such cases and areas with the telecom service providers based on actual data. For this purpose, total data of calls made during any particular time period from the identified cell phone tower locations from where the complaints are received is

collected to enable analysis," it added.

The government stressed that this data was anonymous. "There is no infringement of privacy of any person. No personal details are collected. There is no tracking of any phone number," the DoT asserted.

The letter added, "...neither the intended purpose for requirement of CDRs is mentioned nor the identity of the subscriber(s)... Further CDRs sought for specific routes/areas may lead to allegations of surveillance, especially in a State like Delhi having numerous VVIP zones having offices and residences of Ministers, MPs, Judges etc."

Observing that the govern-

ment was already empowered under Rule 419 of the Indian Telegraph Rules, 1951, to access such anonymous data, the DoT asserted: "Moreover, DoT has also put in place an in-house standard operating procedure so that any authorisation of such access to call drop data can be approved only by very senior officers."

In a statement, Mr. Mathews said the department had discussed the issue with COAI in the wake of the letter and explained the reasons for seeking the data. "Being satisfied, we have cooperated with the DoT to source the information sought by DoT to improve network quality and address call drops," he added.

## HC sets aside order expelling Polish student

He was part of an anti-CAA protest

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
KOLKATA

the petitioner "ought to have been given a right of hearing prior to curtailing his valuable rights". "In the present case, a 'hearing' was alleged to have been given to the petitioner after his expulsion order was issued, which makes such 'hearing' merely a lip-service and an eyewash," the order read.

The FRRO, Kolkata had issued a "Leave India" notice after he allegedly participated in protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

Kamil Siedcynski, a student of Masters at Jadavpur University has been studying in India since 2016. He was likely to complete his course by August 2020.

## Nation needs NRC, Centre tells SC

'It is a necessary exercise to identify the citizens from the non-citizens'

VIJAYA SINGH  
NEW DELHI

More than a month after the Centre informed the Lok Sabha that no decision had been taken to prepare the National Register of Citizens (NRC), the Union Home Ministry filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court on Tuesday stating that preparation of NRC is a "necessary exercise for any sovereign country for mere identification of citizens from non-citizens."

The Ministry submitted before the court that it was the responsibility entrusted with the Central government "to identify/detect illegal migrants and thereafter, follow the due process of law".

**Unfettered discretion**  
The affidavit added that the Foreigners Act, 1946, conferred upon the government the power to expel foreigners from India.

It vests the Central government with absolute and unfettered discretion, and as there is no provision fettering this discretion in the



**Long process:** People standing in a queue in Assam to check their names on the final NRC in August 2019. ■ FILE PHOTO/AFP

Constitution, an unrestricted right to expel remains," the affidavit said.

### Vociferous opposition

More than a dozen States have vociferously opposed the updating of National Population Register (NPR), slated to begin on April 1 along with the house listing phase of the Census. According to Citizenship Rules 2003, NPR is the first step towards the compilation of the NRC.

The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 passed by Parliament on December 11, allows citizenship on the basis of religion to six undocumented communities from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, who entered India on or before December 31, 2014.

The exact number of people the CAA will benefit are not known, but Home Minister Amit Shah had told the Rajya Sabha on December 11 that "lakhs and crores" will benefit. For the first time, the MHA, through the affidavit in Supreme Court, has indicated what these numbers could be like. In the affidavit, the Ministry submitted a re-

port by the then Ministry of Rehabilitation for the year 1964-65 on the "new influx of members of minority communities from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) into West Bengal, Assam and Tripura which began in January 1964" and "assumed formidable proportions in the months of March, April and May, 1964."

The report states that the number of persons who migrated from erstwhile East Pakistan till 31 January, 1965 was 8,94,137. "Out of the said persons, 2,61,899 came with migration certificates, while 1,76,602 came with Pakistani passport and Indian visas. Approximately 4,55,636 persons came without any travel documents," the affidavit said.

There are fears that the CAA, followed by a country-wide NRC, will benefit non-Muslims excluded from the citizens' register, while excluded Muslims will have to prove their citizenship. The government has denied that CAA and NRC are linked.

## 'Centre is committed to revival of BSNL'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Telecom Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad on Wednesday said the Centre was committed to the revival of the BSNL, but it was not possible to retain all its employees.

Speaking during the Question Hour, he said the government had taken a conscious decision to revive the BSNL because they do public service during floods, earthquake etc.

"As of now, nearly a lakh employees have sought the VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme) and we are giving them packages," said Mr. Prasad. The VRS was a part of the government's revival efforts. "We strongly believe in the existence of a Public Sector Undertaking like the BSNL and it is important both for public service and also fairness in the entire system of communication. The BSNL has seen some bad times but during 2014-15, 2015-16 it became a bit positive," he said.

## Nod for 83 LCA Tejas Mk-1A

These are in addition to the 40 jets already ordered by IAF

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Wednesday accorded approval for the procurement of 83 indigenous Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas Mk-1A from the Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. (HAL) by "finalising the contractual and other issues". The deal is expected to cost around ₹39,000 crore, official sources said.

"The proposal will now be placed for consideration of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS)," the Ministry of Defence (MoD) said in a statement.

The DAC had given initial

clearance for the 83 aircraft in November 2016 and the IAF issued the Request For Proposal in December, 2017. "This would lead to better coordination and faster processing of cases with the Acquisition wing being in the overall charge of the capital acquisition process," it said.

The DAC also accorded approval for acquisition of indigenous equipment for about ₹1,300 crore. In an effort to bring in transparency in costs and compress the timelines for the negotiation of the contracts, the DAC also approved an amendment to the Defence Procurement Procedure, 2016 to enable review of bids by a Costing Committee.

## 337 Indian prisoners in Pak.: Minister

## BJP calls for suspension of dharnas

Party had earlier asked its MPs to avoid mass agitations amid the COVID-19 scare



J.P. Nadda

they refrain from launching any mass agitation till April 15.

"Prime Minister Modi had, yesterday, in the parlia-

mentary party meeting, desired that we should avoid any type of agitation, dharna, demonstration. Keeping that in view, the BJP has decided that for the next one month the party won't participate in any agitation, demonstration," Mr. Nadda said.

He said four to five office-bearers of the party would submit memoranda to the authorities concerned, whenever necessary, to avoid "conglomeration of people".

"All party units have been asked to spread awareness and they must discuss the dos and don'ts in small

groups. While on one hand, we have to see to it that we keep ourselves clean, we also need to make sure that we do not panic. As Prime Minister Modi said while addressing the SAARC nations, that while we don't panic, we have to ensure that the virus does not take on pandemic proportions," said Mr. Nadda.

Mr. Modi had, however, also made it clear that the ongoing Budget Session would not be curtailed as lawmakers should be "seen doing their work at a time when a health concern stares at the masses."

**Delhi HC dismisses Nirbhaya convict's plea**  
He challenged a trial court order in his petition

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday dismissed the plea of Mukesh Singh, one of the four death-row convicts in the December 16, 2012 gangrape and murder case, that challenged a trial court order which rejected his claim that he was not in Delhi when the crime took place.

Justice Brijesh Sethi said there were no grounds to interfere in the detailed and reasoned order of the trial court.

"There is nothing on record to suggest that trial stands vitiated because material evidence was concealed," the High Court said.

Singh, in his plea, had claimed that he was arrested from Rajasthan and brought to Delhi on December 17, 2012, and was not present in the city on December 16, when the crime took place. The plea also alleged that Singh was tortured inside Tihar jail.

During the day, the counsel for

the four death row convicts moved a local court seeking stay on their death penalty, on the ground that the second mercy plea of one of them is still pending. Additional sessions judge Dharmendra Rana issued notices to the Tihar jail authorities and the police on the plea and said he will hear it on Thursday.

On March 5, a trial court issued fresh warrants with March 20, 5.30 am, as the date for the execution of convicts Mukesh Singh, Pawan Gupta, Vinay Sharma and Akshay Kumar Singh.

## Enact law for protection of journalists: Congress MP

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

There is an urgent need to enact a law for the protection of journalists, Congress MP Rajeev Gowda said on Wednesday in the Rajya Sabha, claiming that India was one of the most dangerous countries to be a journalist.

He said the law must be drafted on the basis

of the 2015 report of the Press Council of India that found that 80 journalists had been killed since 1990. He was speaking during the Zero Hour, when the members are allowed to raise issues of public importance.

Urging the government to ensure that freedom of press stays alive, Mr. Gowda said,

"We have all heard of tragic cases of murders of journalists. Threats, intimidation and violence against journalists are also major problems... In the absence of legal protection and mechanisms to create a safe environment for journalists and media persons, the public domain and discourse suffer the most."

**GOVERNMENT OF TAMILNADU HIGHWAYS DEPARTMENT**  
Trichy (H) NABARD & Rural Roads Circle  
TENDER NOTICE (Online only)  
Tender Notice No.46/2019-20 / SDO / Dated: 13.03.2020.  
For and on behalf of Governor of Tamilnadu Percentage Tender (Two Cover System) will be received by the Superintending Engineer (H) NABARD & Rural Roads Circle, Trichy for the work under NABARD RIDF - XXIV/2018-1979 BRIDGE WORKS loan Assistance scheme for Reconstruction of High level bridge at Km. 1/8 of Keelankulottai-Ustilampatti road work in respect of Pudukkottai (H) NABARD & Rural Roads Division upto 14.00 hours on 22.04.2020 through online only.  
Details of works, approximate value of works, EMD, availability of tender documents and all other details are available from 24.03.2020 onwards in the Government web site <http://tenders.gov.in>. If any changes/Corrections etc in the tender, it will be published on the above website only.

Superintending Engineer (H)  
NABARD and Rural Roads Circle, Trichy.

**TWO COVER TENDER**  
Drilling of borewells surrounding area in Ward No. 05, Byatarayanapura Sub Division. (Category: Others) 100.00 2,00,000/-  
**Calendar of Events :** (1) The Tender Document can be downloaded from the GOK e-Procurement Website : <https://eproc.karnataka.gov.in>. (2) Pre bid meeting will be held on 24.03.2020 at 3:00 p.m. in the Office of the Executive Engineer, Byatarayanapura Division, No. 2152/20, Defence Colony, BWSSB Tank Road, Sahakaranagar, BBMP Office, Byatarayanapura, Bengaluru-560092. (3) Last date for uploading the filled tender document is 27.03.2020 upto 4:00 p.m. (4) Technical Bids will be opened on the website <https://eproc.karnataka.gov.in> in the office of the Executive Engineer on : 30.03.2020 at 4:05 p.m. if possible. (5) Date of opening of Financial bid is on : 31.03.2020 at 11:00 a.m. if possible. Further details may be obtained from the above office, during office hours or website <https://eproc.karnataka.gov.in>.  
Sd/- Executive Engineer, Byatarayanapura Division, BBMP  
"Pay Development Charges, Help to Develop Bengaluru"

# World grapples with 'once-in-100-year' virulence

COVID-19 has now infected more than 2,00,000 people in 164 nations; Australian PM warns crisis could last six months

REUTERS  
SYDNEY/BEIJING

Hundreds of millions of people worldwide were adjusting on Wednesday to once-in-a-generation measures to battle the COVID-19 pandemic that is not only killing the old and vulnerable but also threatening prolonged economic misery.

The disease that jumped from animals to humans in China has now infected more than 2,00,000 people and caused nearly 8,500 deaths in 164 nations, triggering emergency lockdowns and injections of cash unseen since Second World War.

"This is a once-in-a-hundred-year type event," said Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, warning the crisis could last six months as his nation became the latest to restrict gatherings and overseas travel.

"Life is changing in Australia, as it is changing all around the world," he added, as his government prepared for a potentially exponential rise after only six deaths so far.

## Alarm in Italy

There was particular alarm in Italy, which has reported 2,978 deaths.

Around the world, rich and poor alike saw lives turned upside-down as events were cancelled, shops stripped, workplaces emptied, streets deserted.

The crisis has created a wave of solidarity in some countries, with neighbours, families and colleagues coming together to look after the most needy, including dropping supplies at the doors of those forced to stay indoors.

## COVID-19

Spooked by a seemingly inevitable global recession, rich nations are unleashing billions of dollars in stimulus to economies, aid to health services, loans to tottering businesses, and help for individuals fearful for mortgages and other routine payments.

"We have never lived through anything like this. And our society, which had

## In the grip of fear

Since the new coronavirus first emerged in late December, more than 8,000 people have died around the world as countries are battling to contain its spread

Turkey, Bangladesh, Moldova and Burkina Faso report their first deaths



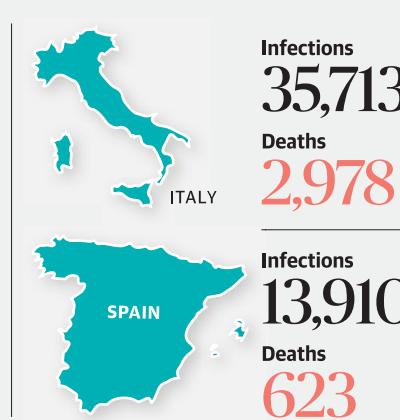
### HARDEST HIT

Total number of infections: 2,14,010



Source: Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center

Deaths: 8,727



### HERE ARE THE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN THE CRISIS

#### ENTRY BAN

- Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission, admits political leaders in the EU "underestimated" the magnitude of the danger posed by the coronavirus
- EU leaders agree to impose an entry ban on travellers from outside the bloc for 30 days

#### STRICT LOCKDOWN

- France follows Italy and Spain in imposing general lockdown for at least 15 days
- Belgium orders its citizens to stay at home until at least April 5
- Germany orders its population to stay at home while Israel and the U.S. call on citizens to avoid all non-essential travel
- In Russia, where borders are closed to foreigners, schools will close from March 23 to April 12, and flights to Britain, the U.S. and the UAE will be suspended from March 20
- In Pakistan, Prime Minister Imran Khan says the country cannot afford the large-scale lockdowns undertaken in the West, fearing this could devastate

#### ECONOMIC CONCERN

- German carmaker BMW says it will close European and South African factories
- The Trump administration and the U.S. central bank announce massive financial assistance to the most affected businesses

#### STATE OF EMERGENCY

- Switzerland, Armenia, Moldova and Kazakhstan and two regions in Ukraine and one in Kyrgyzstan declare a state of emergency

#### CRUISE SHIP STRANDED

- More than 1,700 people are stranded on a cruise ship off the South African coast over fears that some are infected

## Virus can persist in air for hours

REUTERS

The novel coronavirus can remain viable and infectious in droplets in the air for hours and on surfaces up to days, says a new study by scientists from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. The study was published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* on Tuesday.

## Trump calls for national unity against COVID-19

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump on Tuesday called for a unified national response to the COVID-19 threat, after coming under fire for downplaying the pandemic and allowing states to go their own way.

Mr. Trump's call came as Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said the White House was presenting a

massive stimulus plan to Congress and was looking at sending direct payments to all Americans, as well as aid to embattled airlines.

In a White House appearance, Mr. Trump said, "We are looking to save the maximum number of lives. Everything else is going to come back, but a life is not going to come back." The outbreak has spread to all 50 U.S. States.

## 103-year-old Iran woman survives

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
TEHRAN

A 103-year-old woman in Iran has recovered from COVID-19, state media reported, despite overwhelming evidence the elderly are most at risk from the disease. The woman was the second elderly patient in Iran to have survived after a 91-year-old man fought off the coronavirus.

# Bernie Sanders to 'assess' campaign

Joe Biden sweeps Tuesday's primaries in Florida, Illinois and Arizona

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
WASHINGTON

Leftist Bernie Sanders was under fresh pressure on Wednesday to bow out of the race for the Democratic White House nomination after losing the three latest primaries in contests hobbled by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Political moderate Joe Biden swept all three of Tuesday's contests, building a solid lead in delegates to the party's July nominating convention as Democratic voters appeared to coalesce around him as the best chance to defeat President Donald Trump in November.

Mr. Sanders, once the race's frontrunner, was considering his options as more states postponed their primary votes amid a national



**Big blow:** Joe Biden, left, and Bernie Sanders during the Democratic presidential debate on Sunday. ■ AP

shutdown for the COVID-19 emergency.

"The next primary contest is at least three weeks away," said Mr. Sanders' campaign manager Faiz Shakir in a statement. "Senator Sanders is going to be having conversations with supporters to assess his campaign."

Mr. Biden handily trounced Mr. Sanders in each of Tuesday's battlegrounds.

In the biggest prize of Florida, the 77-year-old former Vice-President grabbed 62% of the vote against 23% for 78-year-old Mr. Sanders.

In Illinois, Mr. Biden

topped 59% to Mr. Sanders' 36%, and in Arizona, Mr. Biden came in with more than 43% to Mr. Sanders' nearly 32%, while former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who has already withdrawn from the race, came in a distant third.

Mr. Biden has now won 19 of the 24 contests, with just over half to be held.

The victories underscored Mr. Biden's position as the party's frontrunner and the eagerness of Democratic leaders and party rank and file to come together around a moderate flag bearer, to challenge Mr. Trump.

According to a count by RealClearPolitics, Mr. Biden has racked up 1,147 delegates to Mr. Sanders' 861, with 1,991 needed to capture the nomination.

In Illinois, Mr. Biden

## Iraq's Shia parties line up to oppose new PM-designate

They say President should have consulted them

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
BAGHDAD

Iraq's typically divided Shi'ite political parties lined up on Wednesday to signal their opposition to premier-designate Adnan al-Zurfi, less than 24 hours after his nomination.

The 54-year-old lawmaker and former Najaf Governor was nominated on Tuesday to be Iraq's new Prime Minister, the second attempt to replace outgoing premier Adel Mahdi this year.

But several Shia blocs have already signalled their displeasure.

On Wednesday, the State of Law coalition, led by ex-PM Nuri al-Maliki, and lawmakers linked to the rela-

tively moderate cleric Ammar al-Hakim said they opposed the President's unilateral selection of the Prime Minister.

President Barham Saleh, they insisted, should have referred to Parliament's largest bloc to select a nominee.

nee. The powerful Fatah bloc had also slammed Mr. Zurfi's nomination as unconstitutional.

Along with smaller parties, those opposed could add up to more than 100 lawmakers voting against a Cabinet led by Mr. Zurfi.



**Unpopular move:** People passing by a defaced poster of Prime Minister-designate Adnan Al-Zurfi in Baghdad. ■ AP

# IMF rejects Venezuela's \$5 bn virus aid request

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
CARACAS

The International Monetary Fund on Tuesday rejected economically devastated Venezuela's request for a \$5 billion loan to help it cope with the onslaught of COVID-19 on the country that an aid agency warned is as prepared as war-torn Syria.

President Nicolás Maduro made the request earlier on Tuesday but, in a statement hours later, the Washington-based institution indirectly cited a dispute over Mr. Maduro's leadership in denying his petition.

In a letter to IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva, Mr. Maduro said a \$5 billion

loan from the IMF "will contribute significantly to strengthening our detection and response systems."

It was the country's first loan request to the IMF since 2001. "Unfortunately, the Fund is not in a position to consider this request," because there is "no clarity" on international recognition of the country's government, the IMF said.

"IMF engagement with member countries is predicated on official government recognition by the international community, as reflected in the IMF's membership. There is no clarity on recognition at this time," the statement said.

The Chinese government cast its expulsion of the journalists from *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Post* as necessary to defend Beijing against what it perceived as an ideological campaign by the U.S. to impose its va-

lues on China. Around a dozen reporters could be required to leave, in a move that Beijing said was reciprocal for the U.S. forcing out

likes and dislikes to judge the media of other countries, let alone suppress the Chinese media unreasonably," Geng Shuang, a Foreign Ministry spokesman, said at a news conference in Beijing on Wednesday.

**Rising tensions**  
The expulsions, not seen to such an extent in recent history, point to the governing Communist Party's growing resolve to strike back in all aspects of what is quickly becoming a bare-knuckled competition with the U.S. Over the past year, tensions have escalated over issues ranging from trade deficits to

technological capacity and military dominance, with bruising effect on U.S. and Chinese companies, business executives, and even university students and academics.

The dispute over media access underlines how this new era of great power rivalry has extended into the marketplace of ideas. It not only signals a more muscular approach to foreign policy in China but also accords with the party's tightening grip over information under Xi Jinping, the country's authoritarian leader.

In recent weeks, as the coronavirus spread through

China, the government has cracked down on domestic and foreign reporting, muzzling medical professionals and censoring and removing reports and commentaries online that have challenged the official narrative.

On Tuesday, China went even further, requiring all U.S. journalists for the three newspapers, whose credentials expire by the end of the year, to turn in their press cards within 10 days. It said they cannot continue working as journalists in China. It also said the Americans were forbidden from working as journalists in Macao or Hong Kong. ■ NY TIMES

## Italy reports 475 new COVID-19 deaths

Highest one-day rise for any nation

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
ROME

Italy on Wednesday reported 475 new deaths from COVID-19, the highest one-day official toll of any nation since the first case was detected in China late last year.

Total deaths in Italy have reached 2,978, more than half of all the cases recorded outside China, while the number of infections stood at 35,713.

The previous record high of 368 deaths was also recorded in Italy, on Sunday.

The nation of 60 million has now recorded 34.2% of all the deaths officially attributed to COVID-19 across the world.

With the death rate still climbing despite the Mediterranean country entering a second week under effective lockdown, officials urged Italians to have faith and stay strong.

"They main thing is, do not give up," Italian National Institute of Health chief Silvio Brusafetro said in a televised press conference.

"It will take a few days before we see the benefits" of containment measures, said Mr. Brusafetro.

"We must maintain these measures to see their effect, and above all to protect the most vulnerable."

Imposed nationally on March 12, the shutdown of most Italian businesses and a ban on public gatherings are due to expire on March 25.

But school closures and other measures, such as a ban on attendance at sporting events, are due to run on until April 3.

A top government Minister hinted on Wednesday that the school closure would be extended well into next month, if not longer.

The rates within Italy itself remained stable, with two-thirds of the deaths – 1,959 in all – reported in the northern Lombardy region around Milan, the Italian financial capital. Emilia-Romagna region suffered 458 fatalities, and Piedmont region had 154 deaths.

## China to extend \$500 mn 'assistance' to Sri Lanka

50 cases have been recorded so far

MEERA SRINIVASAN  
COLOMBO

Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said on Wednesday that he will self-isolate for five days after his recent trip to China. COVID-19 has infected 249 people in the country.

Mr. Qureshi visited China to seek cooperation, especially in controlling the disease in Pakistan.

government and supported by the Chinese side, under current financial situation in Sri Lanka and the background of fighting COVID-19 pandemic with all-out efforts," the Chinese Embassy's statement said.

The maturity period of 10 years, the statement said, is the "longest tenure" of financing facility for Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka and China enjoy strong ties, including development cooperation in key infrastructure projects in the island.

In February, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa gifted a consignment of Ceylon Tea to the Chinese Embassy, to be sent to those affected by COVID-19 in China.

## ELSEWHERE



**Probability experts win Abel prize in Mathematics**

The Abel Prize for Mathematics was on Wednesday awarded to Israeli-American Hillel Furstenberg and Russian-born Gregory Margulis, both probability experts, the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters said. ■ AP

MARKET WATCH

	18-03-2020	% CHANGE
Sensex	28,870	-5.59
US Dollar	74.26	-0.03
Gold	40241	0.78
Brent oil	26.15	-12.13

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	260.40	-6.75
Asian Paints	1618.20	-113.40
Axis Bank	473.45	-14.90
Bajaj Auto	2169.00	-101.45
Bajaj Finserv	6310.20	-707.30
Bajaj Finance	3061.35	-383.50
Bharti Airtel	425.55	-29.15
BPCL	332.55	-24.65
Britannia Ind	2501.95	-184.05
Cipla	386.00	-15.75
Coal India	145.05	-0.85
Dr Reddys Lab	2668.45	-112.75
Eicher Motors	15954.15	-1106.95
GAIL (India)	70.85	-3.80
Grasim Ind	527.05	-28.60
HCL Tech	434.25	-16.40
HDFC	1622.55	-133.25
HDFC Bank	876.90	-98.20
Hero MotoCorp	1681.15	-160.00
Hindalco	109.20	-10.20
Hind Unilever	1923.80	-80.25
ICICI Bank	355.05	-12.20
IndusInd Bank	460.80	-143.35
Bharti Infratel	149.90	-44.50
Infosys	534.30	-20.65
Indian Oil Corp	87.60	-1.80
ITC	150.70	1.55
JSW Steel	164.35	-12.10
Kotak Bank	1171.95	-150.75
L&T	904.55	-52.20
M&M	346.40	-27.00
Maruti Suzuki	5352.65	-251.30
Nestle India Ltd.	13536.80	-1004.20
NTPC	80.55	-7.55
ONGC	68.15	8.15
PowerGrid Corp	144.15	-17.85
Reliance Ind	968.50	-39.50
State Bank	215.20	0.05
Sun Pharma	362.75	-7.40
Tata Motors	75.50	-2.45
Tata Steel	280.85	-1.90
TCS	1654.40	-3.60
Tech Mahindra	579.65	-15.80
Titan	930.75	-70.25
UltraTech Cement	3303.55	-166.90
UPL	321.85	-29.00
Vedanta	72.95	-2.05
Wipro	169.95	-3.15
YES Bank	60.45	1.80
Zee Entertainment	164.10	-31.00

# As virus digs in its heels, stocks plunge to lowest in three years

BSE drops 5.6%, banking majors lead fall on fear of more loans turning bad

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

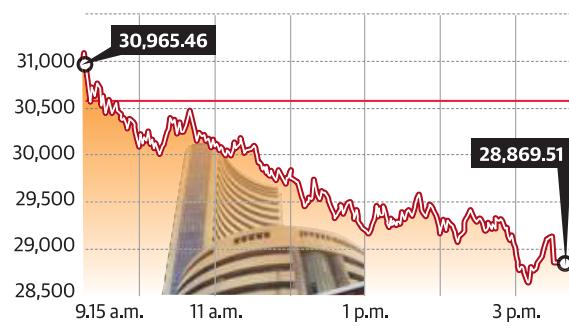
Indian benchmark equity indices fell to their lowest level in three years on Wednesday as stocks continued to reel under selling pressure on account of concerns regarding increasing threat to global growth due to COVID-19.

The 30-share Sensex, that managed to stay in positive territory only for a few minutes after opening, continued to slide as the session progressed to close at 28,869.51, down 1,709.58 points or 5.59%. This is the lowest close for the benchmark since March 2017.

**Lowest since Jan. 2017**  
The broader Nifty ended the day at 8,468.80, shedding 498.25 points or 5.56% – its lowest close since January

## No end in sight

FPIs continued to press the 'sell' button with the net sales quantum pegged at over ₹5,000 crore on Wednesday



in 2017. The fall was primarily led by banking majors as the increasing number of COVID-19 cases has made investors jittery about corporate health that could lead to higher quantum of bad loans for the banking sector.

The biggest losers among the Sensex pack were IndusInd Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Bajaj Finance and HDFC Bank, among others.

Incidentally, the sectoral indices, representing banking and financial services,

## Oil slides, global stocks in free fall, gold loses sheen

Trading halted in Wall Street again

REUTERS

NEW YORK/LONDON

Oil prices plunged on Wednesday, with U.S. crude futures hitting an 18-year low and Brent a 16-year low as Goldman Sachs said lockdowns to counter the COVID-19 raised prospect of the steepest-ever annual fall in oil demand.

With governments worldwide urging residents to limit gatherings and isolate themselves, global oil demand by the end of March could fall as much as 8 to 9 million barrels per day, Goldman Sachs said.

The yearly fall could be up to 1.1 million bpd, which, it said, would be a record.

Goldman Sachs also forecast a fall in Brent prices to as low as \$20 in the second quarter.

Brent crude was trading down \$2.68, or 9.3%, at \$26.05 a barrel after dropping as low as \$26.65, its weakest since late 2003. U.S. crude was down \$4, or 15%, at \$22.95 a barrel.

Japan's Nikkei dipped 1.7%.

resumed a steep slide on Wednesday while bond markets rushed to price-in the sheer scale of government support programmes and handouts announced over the past 24 hours, all aimed at softening the economic shock of COVID-19.

The S&P 500 index tumbled 7% on Wednesday, triggering a 15-minute trading halt of Wall Street's main indexes for the second time this week. Dire trading conditions continued to make two-way trading difficult. Even the usual safe-haven assets such as gold got caught in the rout.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 1,048.69 points or nearly 5% at the open to 20,188.69.

The Nasdaq Composite dropped 432.47 points or almost 6%. They follow sharp tumbles in Europe. In Asia, the MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan dropped 4% to lows last seen in summer 2016.

Japan's Nikkei dipped 1.7%.

## Vodafone falls 35% after SC observation

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Shares of Vodafone Idea tanked as much as 40% intraday on Wednesday, after the Supreme Court ruled that self-assessment of adjusted gross revenue (AGR) dues was a violation of its order.

Shares of Vodafone Idea closed 34.85% lower at ₹31.16 on the BSE on Wednesday, valuing the company at ₹9,080 crore.

Vodafone Idea recently computed its AGR dues at ₹21,533 crore, well below the over ₹58,000 crore arrived at by DoT.

"Given the fact that the SC is going to hear the government's rescue plan after two weeks, we believe there remains hope for VIL (if the court agrees to the govt's plan). From Bharti's perspective, they have to pay higher than initial expectation on AGR dues. We think even in this environment, Bharti should be able to manage it," BofA Securities said in a research note to its clients.

The promoter has sought RBI approval to increase shareholding to 26% and they await further guidance from the regulator," the bank said.

The promoter has informed the exchanges about the simultaneous release of non-disposal undertaking with the creation of a pledge in relation to 23.8 million shares of the bank.

"No new borrowing was undertaken and was merely a formalisation of a three-year old arrangement. The

**Sectoral indices for banking, financial services plunged over 7% each**

were the worst hit on Wednesday, plunging over 7% each.

Meanwhile, foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) continued to press the 'sell' button with the quantum of net sales pegged at more than ₹5,000 crore on Wednesday.

Most of the Asian indices also closed in the red on Wednesday with the Hang Seng plunging more than 900 points.

All European markets were also trading deep in the red at the time of going to press.

## Yes Bank back in business, extends hours

Senior citizens get dedicated slot

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

The moratorium on Yes Bank, which came into effect from March 5 with cash withdrawals capped at ₹50,000, was lifted at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, allowing the lender to resume all operations including digital payment channels such as Immediate Payment Service (IMPS) and National Electronic Funds Transfer (NEFT), among others.

"Our banking services are now operational. You can now experience the full suite of our services. Thank you for your patience and co-operation," the private sector lender said.

In order to handle the rush of customers to withdraw cash, the bank has decided to extend the branch banking hours for the next three days.

"To serve you better, our



branches will open one hour earlier at 0830 hours from March 19 to 21, 2020. We have also extended banking hours across branches for our senior citizen customers, from March 19 to March 27, 2020, 16:30 hours to 17:30 hours," the bank said.

Following the moratorium, RBI announced a reconstruction scheme under which State Bank of India picked up 48% in the bank.

## Feb. domestic air passenger traffic up 9%

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Domestic passenger traffic saw a growth of 9% in February with a total of 12.3 crore passengers taking to the skies last month compared with 11.3 crore in the same period last year, according to the DGCA's monthly report.

Among the airlines, AirAsia India was the most punctual with 83.4% of its flights either arriving or departing as per schedule. IndiGo was at the second spot with 81.6% of its flights being punctual, while GoAir was at the third place with 78.6% of its flights being on time.

While airlines like IndiGo have reported a fall of at least 15% in seat occupancy in the first week of March due to concerns among passengers over COVID-19, they remained unaffected last month.

## RBI to infuse ₹10,000 crore via OMO

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has decided to infuse ₹10,000 crore liquidity in the banking system by buying government securities through open market operations (OMO).

The central bank will conduct open market operations on March 20, 2020 to purchase ₹10,000 crore of government securities through a multi-security auction using the multiple price method.

"With the heightening of COVID-19 pandemic risks, certain financial market segments have been experiencing a tightening of financial conditions as reflected in the hardening of yields and widening of spreads," the RBI said.

"It is important to ensure that all market segments remain liquid and stable, and function normally," the Reserve Bank said, amid heightened volatility in the financial markets due to the spread of the COVID-19.

## ALL to buy 19% more in NBFC arm

COVID-19: govt., RBI mull easing bad loan rules

NEW DELHI

The Centre and the RBI are considering giving relief to banking, aviation and hospitality sectors hit by the COVID-19 by relaxing bad loan classification rules, a source said. REUTERS



While the bank is eyeing higher sales, the move has not gone down well with the staff union.

■ SHANKER CHAKRABORTY

rance campaign', which is very disappointing. To give a push to the campaign, it is decided to observe a dedicated four days (March 18-21, 2020) drive for health insurance," the communication said. "Looking at the risk of the pandemic COVID-19, awareness and demand for

health insurance have increased. This is the time for us to use this as a business opportunity and help our customers by offering suitable health insurance products," the circular reads.

The Pune-based bank acts as an agent for insurance companies such as United

India Insurance, Future Generali and ManipalCigna.

However, the directive

has not gone down well with its staff.

"It is shocking to ob-

serve that when the entire

nation is struggling with this

medical emergency as a na-

tional disaster, Bank of Mah-



**Time for action**  
Kay Kay Menon  
■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

# Captain Courageous

Kay Kay Menon on playing RAW officer Himmat Singh in the recently-released web series *Special Ops*

DEEPA ALEXANDER

Tense SUV rides through the subcontinent's crowded old cities, photographs of dead men who stare back from cork boards in operation rooms, War Room briefings, the hunt for the mastermind... spy dramas are tumbling out of the web series shelf like never before.

The latest is Hotstar Special and Friday Storytellers' *Special Ops* – the story of a 19-year hunt for the man behind the biggest terror attacks on India – co-directed by Neeraj Pandey and Shivam Nair.

The eight-episode series spans 12 countries, six agents and the terrorist behind the 2001 attack on Parliament, the 26/11 attacks in Mumbai, and various other blasts in Kashmir.

Pandey says for the first time in the history of Indian entertainment, the Parlia-

ment attack has been recreated on celluloid, a sequence with a relentless drumbeat of tension with which the web series opened on March 17.

The manhunt is mounted on a large scale and was shot across numerous countries – Turkey, Azerbaijan, Jordan and India – and is showcased through an ensemble cast, including Kay Kay Menon, Divya Dutta, Vinay Pathak, Karan Tacker, Sajjad Delafrooz, Sana Khaan, Sayami Kher, Mehler Vij, Vipul Gupta and Muzammil Ibrahim.

## To the rescue

But the weight of the mission to nail India's Public Enemy No.1 falls on Himmat Singh, senior analyst and logistics head at the Research and Analysis Wing, portrayed by the lean and dapper Kay Kay Menon. The 53-year-old film, stage and television veteran known for his stellar roles in *Sarkar*, *Ha-*

*zaaron Khaishein Aisi, Baby, Black Friday* and *Shaurya*, shot close to two months for the web series.

In answer to how he prepared for a role that is lived out in the shadows of the modern world, Menon, in a telephone interview, says, "I invest a lot in the text and discussions with the writer and director as it is ultimately their vision. And then I work within the parameters instead of bringing in external research. What I deliver becomes an intensely distilled product. There are finite roles, but people are infinite. I play the person and not the role. I'm interested in *Himmat Singh* and not the RAW agent he is. Cinema is to do with people and their inter-relationships on screen."

## Behind the scenes

Written by Pananey, Deepak Kingrani and Benazir Ali Fida, the storyline is a result of years of research on the ways of Indian intelligence agencies.

"As the demographic is different, I did not watch the glut of series on the CIA or KGB. I'm sceptical about meeting people whose work may have inspired the story. I rather have a third person's point of view. Neeraj has met many of them. I prefer to go with his take, to avoid what I call, mannequin marketing which can be stifling. Unless, it's a historical plot which calls for some research, I believe all cinema is necessarily fiction," says Menon.

"Undercover agents are the unsung heroes of our time," adds Menon. "They appear to lead normal lives but are constantly protecting the nation from threats. *Special Ops* tries to bring forth the lives of these agents." The web series, available in seven languages, follows the now-familiar style of contemporary action thrillers that tells you in which timeline and where in the world the story is unfolding.

Menon's character is situated in India but he deploys a team of remarkably skilled agents, men and women, across the globe. *Himmat Singh* has brains, brawn and, at most times, a Scout's moral code but the action is left to the agents on the field.

"I love action because I'm a sportsperson, but my role is one of a serious man at the helm. It comes through my emotional valency. The actor in me had to look at that... although I would've loved to jump off a cliff," says Menon. "It's 60 days of my life that'll never return, so it needs to be engaging. After it's done, I'm dispassionate about it."

On having traversed the theatre-television-film format before arriving at the web series door, Menon says, "I don't act less because it's television or more because it's cinema. The web series genre lies comfortably in the middle; allows enough time to juice out the character. All tools are sacrosanct; it depends on who is using it. I blank myself as far as the media is concerned. The medium for me is the camera."

*Special Ops* is currently streaming on Hotstar VIP

**The survivalist**  
(From right) The Chamrod fruit, and flower  
■ VIJAY DHASMANA



ABHISHEK GULSHAN

With the onset of spring, the birds and other animals are delighted at the smorgasbord of delicious fruits, making their breeding season a walk in the park, quite literally!

Pradip Krishen's *Trees of Delhi* tells us that it is a part of our native flora and has the capability to brave extreme drought conditions, making it an impressive survivalist in the dry deciduous forests of Northern India, like the Shivalik and lower Himalayas, particularly

nearly always crooked, with a yellowish or grey smooth bark. The leaves are broad with either blunt or pointy tips, and quite smooth and shiny on the surface.

One large bush that sometimes grows to a medium-sized tree standing anywhere from 9 m to 12 m, is Chamrod, also called desi papdi, chambal, geen, darar, sakar, datranga. It is deciduous, and

common in the Aravalli range. Unlike most trees from the Aravalli landscape though, the Chamrod is thornless.

Its genus *Ehretia* is dedicated to the German botanist, illustrator, and fellow of the Royal Society, Georg Dionysius Ehret (1708-1770) and the species *laevis* has been derived from the Latin word *levis* meaning 'smooth' or 'delicate', referring to the wood of the tree. Surprisingly, this tree has not been given an English name and is often called out by its

scientific name, *Ehretia laevis*, outside of the Indian Subcontinent, but it may have a few other local names, depending on the country.

Seasons play an extremely important role in the life of flora. The leaves on the tree shed late in January and the tree sees new leaves beginning March. "The Chamrod fascinates me with its remarkable ability to flower every time it rains. You have a shower any time of the year, and you cannot miss it smiling

with flowers within a week," says Vijay Dhasmana, a friend and curator of the Aravalli Biodiversity Park, Gurugram.

It blooms with small clusters of fragrant white, star-shaped flowers that tend to fall fast and form a pleasant mat of white on the ground. Soon, small berry-like fruits are seen in bunches. They are green, and turn orange later usually towards the end of March and April, with a sweet taste to them. Several birds like Bulbuls, the Indian Robin, and ani-

## IN OUR BACKYARD

# The star of DELHI

The Chamrod is a native shrub that is in bloom right now



mals like squirrels relish them and help in the shrub's pollination across the landscape. The fast-growing nature of the tree does compliment the efforts of these animals.

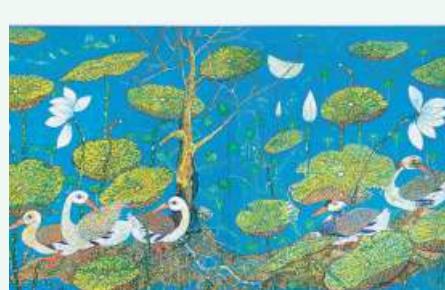
"Ecologically, it is a pioneer species and colonises wastelands and degraded lands very happily. In the Aravalli Biodiversity Park, we are seeing some fabulous recruitment of its young saplings dispersed especially by birds," says Dhasmana.

The bark is often chewed by people like pan and thus stains their teeth red, which gives it its other popular common name 'Datranga' (dat - teeth; ranga - colouring). Even though the Latin term *Levis* points to its bark being smooth and fine-textured, the tree does not hold much timber value, and only contributes towards making brush-bodies and matchsticks.

These trees were never planted along avenues in the city, but one may see them in large numbers in areas like Delhi Golf Course, Buddha Jayanti Park, Lodhi Gardens, apart from the Aravalli Biodiversity Park. They are also fairly common on the Ridge with several specimens in areas of North Delhi like Civil Lines, where backyards are lined with several of these.

The writer is the founder of NINOX - Owl About Nature, a nature-awareness initiative. He is the Delhi-NCR reviewer for Ebird, a Cornell University initiative, monitoring rare sightings of birds. He formerly led a programme of WWF India.

## 5 EVENTS WORTH YOUR WHILE



**PAINTINGS**

**Group show**  
Sanchar Art has organised a group exhibition comprising 14 renowned artists which include Pares Maity, Satish Gujral, Manoj Dutta, K. Laxma Goud and Neeraj Goswami. On till 20th March, the show aims to explore different materials that artists engage with, to understand their subjectivity.  
**VENUE:** 156 DLF South Court Mall, Saket  
**TIME:** 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.



**F&B**

**Vietnamese special**  
Ping's Café Orient, a restaurant that specialises in Asian and Oriental food, is offering Bia Hoi, a pop-up menu for the entire month of March. In addition to their signature dishes, such as Mushroom Stewed Rice, Mock Duck Bao, Ramen and Dim Sums, the menu has a choice of a daily brewed Vietnamese beer.  
**VENUE:** Main Market, Lodhi Colony  
**TIME:** 12 noon - 11 p.m.



**GIG**

**Blues**  
Hauz Khas Social is hosting Delhi-based bands Zokova and Noknok live tonight. Zokova is an instrumental post rock outfit, started by Ritwik De. Noknok, an Indie music band, with Sumant Balakrishnan on the vocals and guitar, promises a fresh perspective on the blues, rock, and contemporary music.  
**VENUE:** Hauz Khas Fort Road, near Deer Park  
**TIME:** 9 p.m. onwards



**FOOD**

**Pot wonder**  
Fast-food eatery Café Delhi Heights has added a special khichdi into their menu, until 31st March. Apart from their regular veg and non-veg dishes, the new menu, a one pot meal, is cooked with Indian lentils, Italian Arborio rice, fresh Indian herbs and spices, and served with chilled curd and achaar.  
**VENUE:** Khan Market, Rabindra Nagar  
**TIME:** 11 a.m. - 12 midnight



**EXHIBITION**

**Oil on canvas**  
A retrospective by French contemporary artist Gérard Garouste, titled *The Other Side* is on display at the National Gallery of Modern Art. On view until 29th March, the show exhibits complex works, much of it on oil on canvas, combining Christian and Hebrew cultures, myths, and legends.  
**VENUE:** Jaipur House, India Gate  
**TIME:** 11 a.m. - 6:30 p.m.

DIVYA KALA BHAVANI

Over the last month, the aviation industry's carbon emissions seem to be dropping but not for the reasons you think: because what activism on climate change could not do, the Coronavirus outbreak has, unintentionally... not to say the world requires a pandemic to be proactive about the environment.

While it may be cumbersome to push the industry to adopt green methods, regional or intra-continental airlines are taking the extra step to kick off a revolution. More than 10 million travellers using Skyscanner selected the lowest-CO2-emission flight option over the last 12 months, according to the 2019 'Sustainable Travel Report' by Booking.com. Last year, Portuguese airline Hi Fly operated the first single-use plastic-free flights, saving 200 pounds of plastic per flight. The company's CEO Paulo Mirpuri says they want to be carbon neutral by 2021. "Travellers understand that the \$1 to \$1.50 hike in ticket fares is a small price to pay for the massive contribution to green behaviour in the travel industry," he adds.

With the restrictions imposed on travel, over the past week, major airlines have issued statements about huge dips in demand. On March 17, Qantas announced that international and domestic travel have been cut by 90% and 60% respectively until end of May. Virgin Australia, additionally, is predicting a 7.7% first-half cut. According to Clean

# The domino effect

There is an unlikely beneficiary of Coronavirus: our planet. To match the changing expectations of social distancing, the tourism industry is now leaving a considerably smaller carbon footprint

Energy Regulator, these two airlines combined accounted for seven million tonnes of CO2 in 2018-19.

Earlier this month, Flightradar24 announced that there was a 4.3% dip in flights taken in February, shortly after the first few cases were reported. An interactive line graph on their website reveals that from March 11 till March 15, the number of flights taken dropped by 27,820.

Plus, in a March 17 op-ed for *The Conversation*, Glen Peters from the Centre for International Climate and Environment Research, Oslo, hypothesises that the airline industry – which covers 2.6% of the global CO2 emissions – is in freefall. "It may take

months, if not years, for people to return to air travel, given that Coronavirus may linger for several months."

That said, there are blue skies aplenty in China and in northern Italy. According to China's Ministry of Ecology and Environment, the average number of 'good quality air days' increased 21.5% in February, compared to the same period last year. The European Space Agency (ESA) observed a particularly marked decline in emissions of nitrogen dioxide, a noxious gas emitted by power plants, cars, planes and factories, over the Po Valley region in northern Italy. "Although there could

be slight variations in the data due to cloud cover and changing weather, we are very confident that the reduction in emissions that we can see coincides with the lockdown in Italy, causing less traffic and industrial activities," says Claus Zehner, who manages the agency's Copernicus Sentinel-5P satellite mission, in a statement.

**Existing green ventures**  
While cancelled flight routes and social distancing are the talk of the travel industry, more dialogue around carbon neutral tourism has circulated. Carbon neutral tourism involves actively taking out as much car-

**KEY WORD**  
According to Google Trends, the term 'eco-friendly travel' was searched at an average of just over 100 times a day in 2019, globally. India was one of the major epicentres for this search.

bon dioxide from the atmosphere as is being put in. From airline carriers to the individual traveller, such measures can include the reduction of energy consumption and emissions-producing activities, improving energy efficiency, technological innovation in low carbon and consumption of renewable electricity. A wise move, considering the global energy-related CO2 emission level (according to International Energy Agency)

was a record 33.3 billion tonnes in 2019.

Enter electric vehicles: a small player in the big picture of 'responsible tourism' but a favourite in ecotourism for the cost-effective appeal it holds for investors and the comfort it offers travellers. These have been a favourite since 2014 for guests at the Chobe Game Lodge, Botswana. Guests can wander along the Chobe river that borders Namibia and Botswana in electric safari boats. According to a report by Responsible Travel – the Brighton-based online travel firm customising environmental-friendly travel plans – Chobe Game Lodge estimates that the electric boats have saved over 25,000 kilograms of CO2 emissions and nearly 10,000 litres of diesel since its launch. Plus, its solar safari boats have saved a further 12,749 kilograms of CO2 emissions.

Carbon neutral since 2009,

East Africa-based Asilia Adventures claims to have offset a total of 1,505 tonnes of carbon waste. The company also has an electric safari option which kicked off at the Ol Pejeta Bush Camp in Kenya last October. Its electric car has no manual gear-box, meaning there are no jerky gear changes and no vibrations from the engine, making photography and videography smoother as the car is more stable. "A typical combustion engine runs at roughly 20-30% of its total efficiency, while electric vehicles run at 94-96% efficiency, providing a significant improvement in the performance of the vehicle itself. The lifespan of an electric vehicle is also more than that of a regular vehicle; the battery packs can easily travel more than 2,00,000 kilometres in their lifetime," says Britta Foulis, content marketing manager at Asilia Adventures, on its website.

The travel-hungry are also awaiting the opening of the world's first energy-positive hotel in 2022. Situated on a fjord beneath the Svartisen Glacier in northern Norway, the Svart Hotel claims to use 85% less energy than contemporary hotels in its market range. The conception, development and execution of this futuristic ring hotel is the result of combined efforts of real estate company MIRIS AS, design firm Snøhetta and energy company Powerhouse.

This year truly challenges the notion of the responsible traveller, whether one chooses to not travel at all or to take heed of the planet-conscious movements – and not leave it up to a viral outbreak to off-set everyone's carbon guilt.



Going greener The Svart Hotel in Norway; Qantas airlines at bay in Sydney; Asilia Adventures' electric safaris in Kenya; electric safari boats at Chobe Game Lodge in Botswana • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT, GETTY IMAGES



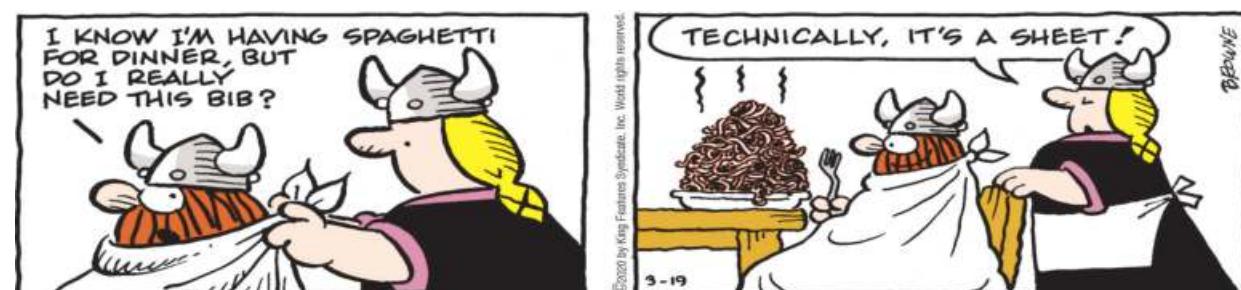
## POOCH CAFE



## PEANUTS



## HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



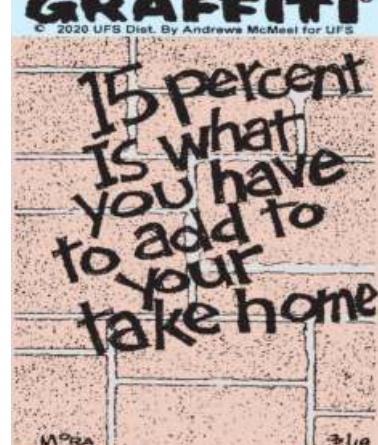
## CALVIN AND HOBBES



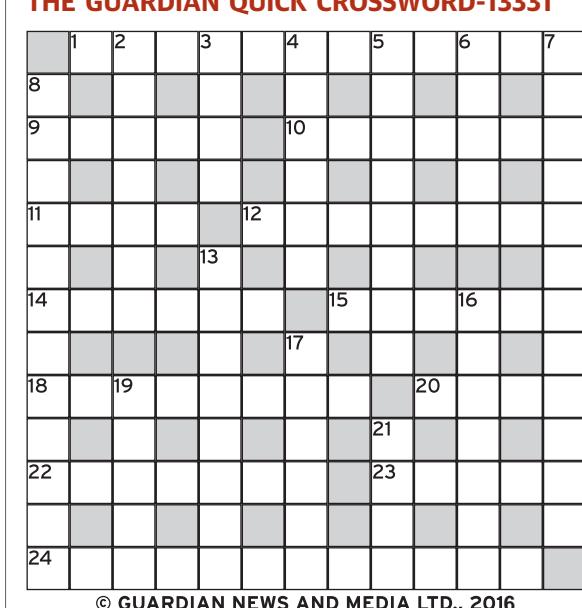
## TIGER



## GRAFFITI



## THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13331



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

tactics (12)

13 Liqueur made with eggs, sugar and brandy (8)

16 Subcutaneous fat (7)

17 One with a mate who struts his stuff? (6)

19 On it, you're dry! (5)

21 Master of a Hindu spiritual and ascetic discipline (4)

The solution will appear on March 20, 2020.

Solution No. 13330

## WUMO



- Across
  - 20 Dark purple (4)
  - 22 Tosh (7)
  - 23 Well! (2,3)
  - 24 US nick (12)
- Down
  - 9 So far (2,3)
  - 10 Is an indication of (7)
  - 11 American TV award (4)
  - 12 Medium-sized chilli pepper (8)
  - 14 Air (6)
  - 15 Tolkien's small, hairy-footed person (6)
  - 18 Recent arrival (8)

P	L	A	I	D	S	G	L	O	B	A	O
I	F	R	A	R	G	O	C	N	I	C	N
F	E	G	T	I	D	T	I	D	A	T	A
E	P	R	O	M	I	S	C	U	O	U	O
B	A	P	N	N	I	A	E	A	E	T	E
R	E	F	U	S	A	E	T	E	N	U	U
I	F	T	I	A	H	C	I	H	C	C	C
G	U	I	L	E	T	O	R	P	R	T	T
H	S	E	S	T	T	R	T	T	R	T	R
T	S	H	I	R	T	H	W	A	C	K	K

## PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



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# IOC moves to ease fears

Japan insists on going ahead even as many athletes voice concerns

## TOKYO 2020

**REUTERS**  
LAUSANNE

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Thomas Bach moved on Wednesday to ease fears after complaints by athletes as Japan insisted it was not preparing for a postponement of the Tokyo Olympics.

With the Olympic flame about to be handed by Greece to Japan, Bach said the IOC heard the athletes' concerns on health and preparations as the virus, which has infected over 200,000 and killed more than 8,000 worldwide, continues to spread.

"Everybody realised that we have still more than four months to go and we will address this action, and we will keep acting in a responsible way in the interest of the athletes," Bach said after a conference call with 220 athletes' representatives.

Meanwhile, Japan is still planning to host the Olympics as scheduled from July 24-Aug. 9.

### No adjustments

"We're not making any adjustments to postpone the Games," the government's top spokesman, chief cabinet secretary Yoshihide Suga, told parliament when asked by a lawmaker whether the government was making plans to cancel or postpone the event.

Many sports events, some



**Suspense continues:** The picturesque setting notwithstanding, the uncertainty over the Summer Games looms large. ■ CLIVE ROSE/GETTY IMAGES

scheduled as far ahead as early June, have been cancelled or postponed, raising concerns among athletes.

Several, including reigning Olympic pole vault champion Katerina Stefanidi, said the IOC decision was putting athletes' health at risk, urging them to train as normal when entire countries have shut down to contain the virus spread.

**Risking it**  
"There is no postponement, no cancellation. But it (the

IOC) is putting us at risk," Stefanidi said in an interview with Reuters.

**Modified qualifiers**  
Tokyo is set to host about 11,000 athletes and 57% have earned their spots at the Games. The remaining 43% will clinch their places through modified qualifiers, or previous performances based on ranking.

The lead-up to the Tokyo Olympics has already been disrupted as little-known retired swimmer Naoko Imoto

will be a last-minute stand-in to receive the Olympic flame during a scaled back handover in Athens on Thursday.

Due to travel restrictions in Europe, Tokyo 2020 announced on Tuesday it would not be sending a delegation to Athens to receive the Olympic flame, as is customary for a host city.

The Japanese ambassador to Greece will instead receive the flame on behalf of Tokyo 2020 during a ceremony set to take place in an empty stadium.

IOC is putting us at risk," Stefanidi said in an interview with Reuters.

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The Japanese ambassador to Greece will instead receive the flame on behalf of Tokyo 2020 during a ceremony set to take place in an empty stadium.

Many sports events, some

are still planning to go ahead even as the uncertainty over the Summer Games looms large. ■ CLIVE ROSE/GETTY IMAGES

From Arun Lal to Wasim Jaffer, Abhinav Mukund to VIKRAM RATHOUR, SHIV SUNDR DAS to Surendra Bhave, opening batsmen have emerged as run-machines in the Ranji Trophy over the years. But the recently-concluded edition threw up a startling fact – not a single opener featured in the top-20 run-getters.

In fact, the highest tally by an opener came from Goa's Sumiran Amonkar (24th with 646 runs), who played in Plate Group, the lowest rung. Each of the last 20 editions of the tournament has seen at least one opener in the top-five run-getters.

So what has led to the drastic change in the openers' numbers? Jaffer believes a delayed start to the tournament is a "major reason".

**Aiding the bowlers**

"Since the tournament started in December this time around, the conditions were in favour of pace bowlers. Earlier we used to start in October and the conditions would be even," Jaffer, the former India opener who retired recently as the highest run-getter in Ranji history, tells *The Hindu*.

"Now it's a one-way traffic for pacers. Even if the wicket has a little bit of help, because of the weather, the bowlers are always on top. Not just in the north, but a

smen go out, getting replacements becomes a problem."

Jaffer concludes by pointing out the lack of time to prepare ahead of the tournament after a prolonged white-ball season.

**No breather**

For the last couple of years, the inter-State domestic season has started with the Vijay Hazare Trophy and moved to Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, leaving barely a week for the players to prepare with the red ball.

"After playing one-dayers and T20s, if you start Ranji Trophy in eight or 10 days, you are bound to struggle. Even the best find it difficult to cope with the change in the formats and suddenly if you enter Ranji Trophy in that kind of weather, it's bound to be challenging for the openers."

# Meagre returns for openers in Ranji Trophy

Wasim Jaffer attributes it to delayed start and lack of adaptation time

## CRICKET

### AMOL KARHADKAR

MUMBAI

From Arun Lal to Wasim Jaffer, Abhinav Mukund to VIKRAM RATHOUR, SHIV SUNDR DAS to Surendra Bhave, opening batsmen have emerged as run-machines in the Ranji Trophy over the years. But the recently-concluded edition threw up a startling fact – not a single opener featured in the top-20 run-getters.

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**India-A players struggle**

Vijay Dahiyai, the former India wicketkeeper-batsman who also coached Delhi to its last Ranji title in 2007-08, doesn't see the late start as a factor, but is worried about the lack of runs from the likes of Priyank Panchal and Abhimanyu Easwaran.

The duo, a regular with India-A for the last couple of seasons, had a miserable season.

While Panchal, who plays for Gujarat, tallied 457 runs from 17 innings at 28.57, Abhimanyu, who led Bengal to the final, scored just 258 runs from the same number of innings at 17.20.

"We had issues because of that. Once the senior bat-



**Wise reasoning:** Wasim Jaffer feels that the top-order batsmen struggled this season because of the moving ball and no lead time between change in formats. ■ FILE PHOTO: SHIV KUMAR PUSHAKAR

majority of places are so cold that it works against batsmen, especially openers.

Add to that the SG ball that aids bowlers and has made life difficult for openers."

**TN coach's take**

D. Vasu, Tamil Nadu's coach, feels the absence of established batsmen in a few games has also played a role in the low returns.

"Senior players in a few sides were coming in and going out. Even for Tamil Nadu, we struggled to get an opener. Murali Vijay went out and then Abhinav Mukund didn't play a few games," Vasu says.

"We had issues because of that. Once the senior bat-

"A worrying trend is that some of the regular openers who have been playing for India-A haven't been able to score runs in the Ranji Trophy. I am not sure on what basis will they be persisted with the next time an India-A or Rest of India squad is picked," says Dahiyai, a regular in commentary crew for domestic cricket.

**Bangar says no to BCB offer**

## Bangar says no to BCB offer

### PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Former India batting coach Sanjay Bangar has decided against taking up the Bangladesh Cricket Board's offer to become its Test team's consultant, citing personal and professional commitments.

Bangar was asked to coach Bangladesh in red-ball cricket eight weeks ago, but he could not take up the offer as he had signed a two-year contract with Star Sports in the interim.

"They offered me the post eight weeks ago. I had finalised my contract with Star, giving me the opportunity to balance out my personal and professional commitments. However, I look forward to working with BCB in the future," said Bangar.



Bangar. ■ FILE PHOTO: AP

# Janani and Vrinda in International Panel of ICC Development Umpires

### SPORTS REPORTER

CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu's Janani Narayanan and Vrinda Rathi of Mumbai were named in the International Panel of ICC Development Umpires on Wednesday. The announcement comes soon after the launch of 100% Cricket, a 12-month campaign to build on the momentum of the ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2020.

A software engineer, Janani wrote her umpiring exams in 2015 before officiating in the TNCA league.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, she said, "I have not played cricket but always wanted to be associated with the game. I could write my exams only in 2015 because women were not allowed before that."

The 34-year-old said she idolises the late David Shepherd of England and retired India umpire S. Venkatakrishnan. Janani has been umpiring in Indian domestic tournaments since 2018.

"It feels great to know that Vrinda and I have been inducted into the ICC's development panel. This gives me the chance to learn from seniors on the circuit and improve in the years to come. Cricket has become part of my daily routine since the 90s, and I look forward to being associated with the sport at a higher level."

New Zealand at the Women's World Cup 2013.

"I feel privileged to be named in ICC's development panel as this opens new avenues for me. I am sure I will get to learn a lot from other members of the panel and look forward to future assignments," said Vrinda.

"Having played cricket and also been a scorer, this was a natural progression for me and I am happy at the way things unfolded."



**Recognition:** Vrinda, left, and Janani look forward to being associated with the sport at a higher level.

## Vihari for county cricket

### V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM

HYDERABAD

Indian Test cricketer Hanuma Vihari will play for a leading team in the English county championship in August.

The 26-year-old Vihari, who has played nine Tests so far, scoring 552 runs with a century and four fifties, hoped it would be a "great experience."

"It is obviously exciting to play for the first time in English county which is said to be a rewarding experience. I hope to keep improving, which is the key for longevity at the highest level," Vihari said in a chat with *The Hindu* on Wednesday.

Returning from the just-concluded TNCA first division league in Chennai, where he turned out for Nelson Sports Club, Vihari said he will be playing only the final four games for the County side in view of the coronavirus threat and the precautionary measures that are in place.



Hanuma Vihari. ■ FILE PHOTO

## Hao stuns Liren

### CANDIDATES CHESS

#### SPORTS BUREAU

YEKATERINBURG

Wang Hao stunned fellow-Chinese Ding Liren in the opening round of the Candidates Chess tournament. Liren was playing with white pieces.

The day's only other decisive result also went in favour of black, as Anish Giri went down to Ian Nepomniachtchi (Rus) 1; Anish Giri (Ned) 0 lost to Ian Nepomniachtchi (Rus) 1; Alexander Grischuk (Rus) 0.5 drew with Kirill Alekseenko (Rus) 0.5.

The game between the two Russians, Alexander



**Good start:** Wang Hao, right, got the better of Ding Liren in the opening round. ■ FILE PHOTO

# PGA Championship, Le Mans postponed

## AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

LOS ANGELES

The US PGA golf Championship, scheduled to be held from May 14 to 17 at the Harding Park in San Francisco, has been postponed.

It is the second 2020 Major golf championship, after the Augusta Masters, to be derailed by the coronavirus

pandemic.

### Date to be finalised

The PGA of America said on Tuesday it hoped to reschedule the event at Harding Park later in the year.

Shortly after the PGA Championship was postponed, the US PGA Tour announced it was extending

its own tournament moratorium.

The Le Mans 24-hour endurance race, one of the traditional highlights of the motor racing calendar, has been postponed from June to September 19-20.

The race serves as the finale of the FIA's World Endurance Championship.



Sourav Ganguly. ■ INSTAGRAM/SOURAVGANGULY

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son Sports Club, Vihari

# Sense of urgency among athletes

Race to make Tokyo cut; Sreeshankar plans assault on national record

STAN RAYAN  
KOCHE

A lot of things could have been running in M. Sreeshankar's mind as he took his flight from Coimbatore for the Indian track and field season-opener, the Indian Grand Prix-I which begins in Patiala on Friday.

With things changing at a very fast pace owing to the coronavirus crisis, there is a sense of urgency among athletes to make the cut for this July's Olympics. Federations have been cancelling or postponing major events, which mean the faster one books the Tokyo ticket, the better will one's blood pressure be during the next few months.

Sreeshankar, the long jump national record holder, is one of the athletes who is keen to make the Tokyo cut (entry standard 8.22m) in the season-opener in Patiala.

## Mistakes rectified

"I'm planning to go all out and qualify in the first competition itself. I'm feeling really good, everything is going as per plan," the 20-year-old said in a chat with *The Hindu*.

"I've rectified all the mistakes I had made last season, everything is looking solid. I

just need to get the right jump at the right moment."

There is a lot of doubt whether the Tokyo Olympics would happen this year and that is another thing that could be tormenting athletes.

## Biggest jumps

While Sreeshankar is plotting an assault on his long jump national record of 8.20m, triple jumper U. Karthik is tuning himself to produce the biggest jumps of his life.

"I'm looking at 17.20m, that's the target. I'm doing close to 17m in training," said the 26-year-old, the National Open and South Asian Games champion, from Patiala.

"Yes, there is a sense of urgency and that's why the goal is to get the Olympic qualification standard of 17.14m in the first competition itself."

## Personal best

Last year was Karthik's best ever, he had a personal best of 16.80m in Lucknow in August and he even shocked Asian Games champion Arpinder Singh in a Grand Prix leg in Patiala in September.

The 26-year-old, who is

coached by Romanian Bedros Bedrosian, feels this season will be better.

"My speed has improved and I feel I've become more explosive. And I used to have a problem getting my balance right during the jump phase... that has been set right," he said.

Meanwhile Arpinder plans to open his season with the Federation Cup in April.

## Main focus

"But my main focus will be the inter-State Nationals in June because I've made some changes in my technique. I need a little more time," said Arpinder who trains under P.B. Jaikumar in Thiruvananthapuram.

But there is talk doing the rounds that the third leg of the Indian GP in New Delhi on March 29 and even the Federation Cup (April 10-13 in Patiala) could be postponed or cancelled. Of course, that will depend on how deadly the coronavirus situation is during that period.

But Arpinder is not worried.

"I don't think the Federation Cup will be postponed, I think it will happen on time."



**Aiming high:** M. Sreeshankar, the long jump national record holder, is keen to make the entry standard in the season-opener in Patiala. ■ FILE PHOTO: SHAJI MULLOKKARAN

# Saurabh chalks up his best in air pistol

Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar on top in 50m rifle 3-position

## SHOOTING

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Saurabh Chaudhary asserted his class as he topped the 10m air pistol event with a score of 588 in the Olympic shooting selection trials at the Dr. Karni Singh Range here on Wednesday.

This was the best score for the 17-year-old, who had won the Asian Games gold in 2018 and had followed that up with two individual gold medals and four mixed team gold medals with Manu Bhaker in the World Cups last year.

Abhishek Verma, who was equally impressive winning two gold medals in World Cups last year, was second with 585.

## Good numbers

In the scores that are counted for the Olympic selection prior to the current trials, Saurabh has had an impressive string of 585, 581, 587, 580, 586, 584 and 583.

The National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) has decided that it would consider the scores in the Asian Games, World Championship, World Cups and the Asian championship while finalising the team for the Tokyo Olympics.

Since the World Cup in Delhi has been postponed this season, the national federation opted to have a trial to fill the scores.



**On target:** Teenager Saurabh Chaudhary, who has been a revelation in air pistol, had a day to remember at the Olympic shooting selection trials on Wednesday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

With only a handful of shooters in each event, it was decided not to have the finals in any of the events.

air rifle Olympic quota with a silver in the World Championship, is eligible to shoot the rifle 3-position event as well in Olympics.

**The results: Men: 10m air pistol:** 1. Saurabh Chaudhary 588, 2. Abhishek Verma 585, 3. Dharmendra Singh 579, 4. Om Prakash Mitharval 577, 5. Gaurav Rana 576.

**50m rifle 3-position:** 1. Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar 1178, 2. Sanjeev Rajput 1169, 3. Chain Singh 1169, 4. Swapnil Kusale 1169.

**Women: 10m air pistol:** 1. Annu Raj Singh 579, 2. Esha Singh 578, 3. Manu Bhaker 574, 4. Yashaswini Deswal 570.

**50m rifle 3-position:** 1. Anjum Moudgil 1174, 2. Tejaswini Sawant 1170, 3. Ayushi Podder 1168, 4. Sunidhi Chauhan 1163, 5. Gaayathri Nithyanandam 1158.

Anjum, who had won the

# Angad Bajwa, Mairaj assess scenario

KAMESH SRINIVASAN

NEW DELHI

Angad Vir Singh Bajwa and Mairaj Ahmad Khan had won the Olympic quota in dramatic fashion by crawling their way from the uncertainty of a long shoot-off to make the final and clinch the gold and silver medals, respectively, at the Asian Championship in Doha.

In the current uncertainty triggered by the coronavirus pandemic, Angad and Mairaj responded in different ways in the final selection trials for Tokyo Olympics. The 24-year-old Angad kept his composure to shoot 121 out of 125, while the 44-year-old Mairaj slipped to 115. There was no danger of the two losing their Olympic quota to anyone else.

"When all the plans like the Cyprus Grand Prix, the Cyprus World Cup and the Delhi World Cup get mixed around, it was hard to shoot one's best," said Mairaj. **'Hard to focus'**

Angad also felt the same, but was able to muster sufficient energy to be close to his best. "It is hard to focus on training and trials, as there was cancellation of the two World Cups. To reset and go for the Olympic trials in such short notice was hard, as it does take a toll on you. Overall, I am happy with the result, having topped it with quite a margin, despite feeling very

burnt out after a hectic month of shooting," observed Angad.

With not much at stake, it was tough for Mairaj to goad himself to be at his competitive best. "It is not important to perform now. The bigger event is still waiting. I am in the middle of a lot of things, working on particular stations and those same stations I missed only in this trial," said Mairaj, as he viewed the fresh challenge of tuning into the new machines installed at the range.

**'Relieved'**

Angad, who trains regularly with coach Tore Brovold, the Beijing Olympics silver medallist from Norway, said he would rest and recover before making fresh plans in consultation with the coach. "All plans have gone waste due to the coronavirus. My coach has told me to take full rest for next week, before starting again. For the moment, I am relieved to have topped the Olympic quota points table in seek," said Angad.

It was a different situation for Prithviraj Tondaiman, who topped the trap event with a score of 120, even when there was no Olympic quota, to stake his claim.

He stayed away from trouble by having hot water with raw turmeric, cinnamon, ginger and thulasi green tea.

# Federation Cup may be cancelled or postponed

AFI president says priority is the well-being of the athletes

STAN RAYAN

KOCHI

The second Indian Grand Prix in Patiala is just a week away and the crucial Federation Cup is about 20 days away but the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) is still not sure whether non-National campers will be allowed in these meets.

"I can't tell you what will happen in the future. Today, the whole situation is so fluid, we are not only taking it day-to-day but hour-to-hour," Adille Sumariwalla, the AFI president, told *The Hindu* on Wednesday. "At this point, nobody can tell you what is going to happen 15 days from now."

**No non-campers**

Sumariwalla made it clear that the AFI had to stop non-campers from the Indian GP-I as the Government put a ban on them at the SAI's National camp centres. The first two Indian GP meets will be held at the SAI-NIS centre in Patiala on March 20 and 25.

He said that the AFI can't even ask the Government whether non-campers would be permitted in the Federation Cup which begins in Patiala on April 10.

"They will not give it today, it will depend on which phase the coronavirus crisis has reached in India at that point," said the Olympian.

With that being the situation, can't the AFI hold ma-



**Making an exception:** Tejaswin Shankar may get to take part even though he is a non-camper. ■ FILE PHOTO: SANDEEP SAXENA

jor National meets like the Federation Cup in non-SAI venues where non-campers would be allowed?

stands as it is. As we come closer, we will see if things need to be restricted, if things need to be cancelled, if things need to be rescheduled, that can only happen closer to the date," he said. "So athletes will have to wait and watch."

The AFI's first priority is to keep the athletes safe.

"Our first aim is to keep our Olympic qualifiers as safe as possible...and all athletes. Even today, the IOC says that we (the Olympics) are on schedule. In that case, we will have to look at the best interest of those who will qualify. The interest of everything else immediately becomes secondary."

Special cases, like high jumper Tejaswin Shankar who trains in the US, will be considered separately, he said. Shankar has a personal best which is four centimetres behind the Olympic entry standard of 2.33m.

# Roger Mayweather passes away



Roger Mayweather. ■ REUTERS

# Joshua's title defence may be delayed: Hearn

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

LONDON

Anthony Joshua's world heavyweight title defence against Kubrat Pulev could be delayed until July due to the chaos caused by the coronavirus, promoter Eddie Hearn said on Tuesday.

Joshua is due to fight Pulev at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium on June 20.

But the British star could be forced to give up that date if Tottenham need the ground for a potential extension of the Premier League campaign.

All top flight football matches have been suspended until early April at the earliest due to the pandemic, causing speculation that the season will be finished in the summer.

Euro 2020 has been pushed back a year to 2021, which has opened up room in the schedule to play domestic matches in June and July if possible.

Roger Mayweather, who had struggled with diabetes, won world titles in super featherweight and super lightweight.



Anthony Joshua. ■ FILE PHOTO: AFP

sed the prospect of any of his major bouts being staged behind closed doors.

Referring to Joshua's June 20 date, Hearn told *Sky Sports News*: "At the moment it's still in place.

"Obviously with the news of the Euros being cancelled and the possible extension of the Premier League season, Spurs may need that stadium in June.

"We do have an option to run that fight in July as well at the same stadium. Everything now is really a case-by-case situation and a day-by-day situation of trying to think on your feet."

## SUDOKU

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