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Railways to allow booking of tickets for 200 trains from today
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Cabinet nod for a slew of proposals announced by the Finance Minister
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2,250 new cases take State near 40,000 mark

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE
JYOTI SHELAR
KOLKATA/BHUABANESWAR

Maharashtra reported yet another surge of more than 2,000 COVID-19 cases on Wednesday. As many as 2,250 new cases have taken the cumulative tally to 39,297, while 63 new fatalities have pushed the death toll to 1,390. This is the second-highest case surge after the spike of 2,347 cases reported on May 17.

Of the 2,250 new cases, Mumbai accounted for 1,372, the city's third-highest single-day jump, pushing its tally to 24,118 cases. With 41 deaths, the second-highest in a day, the city's death toll rose to 841. Mumbai accounts for nearly 61% cases and 60% of the deaths reported in the State.

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, however, said that Mumbai has not yet reached the stage of community transmission. "The positive cases are mostly coming from the containment zones and quarantine facilities. We are still in the stage of local transmission," additional municipal commissioner Suresh Kakani said.

Of the total number of cases in the city, 17,057 or nearly 71% have been reported this month.

The death toll also saw a sharp rise this month with the city losing an average of 27 people every day to the infection. Of the total cases in Maharashtra, 27,581 are active at the moment, said State Health Department officials. As many as 679 patients were discharged on Wednesday, taking the total number till date to 10,318.

Electricity supply was disrupted in certain coastal areas after electric poles were uprooted by strong

DETAILS ▶ PAGES 3, 11

Nepal's new political map unacceptable, says India

'It is not based on historical facts'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Nepal's new official map is "artificial" and unacceptable to India, the Ministry of External Affairs said on Wednesday after Kathmandu unveiled a new political map that claimed Kalapani, Limpiyadhura and Lipulekh of Uttarakhand as part of its sovereign territory.

"This unilateral act is not based on historical facts and evidence. It is contrary to the bilateral understanding to resolve the outstanding boundary issues through diplomatic dialogue. Such artificial enlargement of territorial claims will not be accepted by India," said official spokesperson Anurag Srivastava, urging Kathmandu to opt for diplomatic dialogue to settle border disputes.



Nepal Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli

Earlier in the day, the new map was launched at a press conference in Kathmandu by Minister of Land Management Padma Kumari Aryal, who said the government of Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli is committed to protecting the territorial integrity of the country.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10

India has to come to terms with inequality

NARAYAN LAKSHMAN
CHENNAI

Both in the battle against COVID-19 and in the broader context of making social investments and reducing inequality, "huge variations" persist across India, according to economist Thomas Piketty.

"India has to come to terms with its problem of inequality," he said in an interview to *The Hindu*, adding that the political mobilisation to bring about a meaningful change could emerge from a crisis such as the pandemic. While inequality between lower castes and the rest of society was large, it had reduced more over time than the gap between African-Americans and the rest of U.S. society has, he said.

FULL INTERVIEW ON ▶ PAGE 12

China accuses India of trespass, LAC heats up

It referred to recent skirmish in Sikkim

SUHASINI HAIDAR
DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI

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In a statement released on Tuesday in Chinese, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Beijing referred to the recent skirmish in Sikkim, claiming that "the Indian Army crossed the line in the western section of the

Sino-Indian border and the Sikkim section to enter Chinese territory".

The statement said the Chinese side had taken up the matter with India, asking it to "immediately withdraw personnel across the line, restore the status quo of the relevant areas, strictly restrict the front line troops, observe the important consensus reached by the leaders of the two countries and the agreements signed by the two sides, and jointly maintain peace and stability in the border areas".

The Ministry of External Affairs declined to respond to the comments by the Chinese Ministry. Official sources said deliberations were on and they were at a "critical stage".

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10

Gear up for June, July case load: Governor to Govt.

CM Uddhav Thackeray skips review meeting with Governor Koshyari; MVA slams BJP histrionics

ALOK DESHPANDE
MUMBAI

With novel coronavirus cases in Maharashtra nearing the 40,000 mark, Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari reviewed the administration's measures to arrest the pandemic with top officials at a meeting that Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray was expected to attend, but skipped at the last moment.

In a clarification sent late

at night, the CM Office said Chief Secretary Ajoy Mehta attended the review meeting as a representative of Mr. Thackeray.

Shiv Sena secretary Milind Narvekar, however, was present at the review, coming a day after the Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led a delegation to the Governor to complain about the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government's 'failure' to curb CO-

VID-19's spread in the State. The BJP has called for a State-wide agitation against the government's handling of the pandemic, and Mr. Thackeray's cold shoulder to the review meeting is being seen as a signal of the MVA's irritation with the constant parleys held by the Opposition at the Governor's office.

MVA alliance partners, the Nationalist Congress Party and Congress, critiqued the

BJP's strategy. "The BJP's agitation against the government at a time when the entire State is fighting against the novel coronavirus, is nothing but an insult to every individual who is part of the battle. This agitation of showing black flags, is not only ill-timed but also inexplicable. How can one even think about protesting at a time like this?" Deputy CM Ajit Pawar asked.

Mooting special measures to deal with containment zones like Dharavi, the Governor asked the government to keep enough medical facilities, doctors, staff and beds ready considering the likely case load in the months of June and July. Mr. Koshyari also urged the government to consider incentivising frontline workers like sanitation workers, police, health workers, and ward boys.

"We are talking about pe-

ople with severe respiratory distress, those who would require constant monitoring of all vitals on a monitor or someone requiring a cardiac shock for revival. If such patients are not in the ICU, they are simply going to succumb," Dr. Parkar said.

Challenge for hospitals

A crucial challenge for hospitals is that patients in ICU require treatment for a longer duration. The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) is now in the process of augmenting ICU beds and it is aiming at the 1,000-mark.

"We have also massively increased the number of beds with oxygen support. Since many COVID-19 patients suffer from oxygen saturation, timely oxygen sup-

port has been helpful as the patient does not deteriorate and does not need to be shifted to the ICU," additional municipal commissioner Suresh Kakani said.

As on Wednesday, he said, 733 COVID-19 patients were critical in the city. This included those in the ICU, on ventilator support or merely on oxygen support.

"At least 25 ICU beds were vacant today (Wednesday)," he said.

The jumbo facilities like the one at MMRDA ground in Bandra-Kurla Complex, which will open for patients on Friday, will also have some mobile ICU beds. The NSCI Dome in Worli will have 40 modular and 30 mobile ICU beds as well.

MORE REPORTS ▶ PAGES 2, 3, 5

Amphan batters West Bengal, Odisha

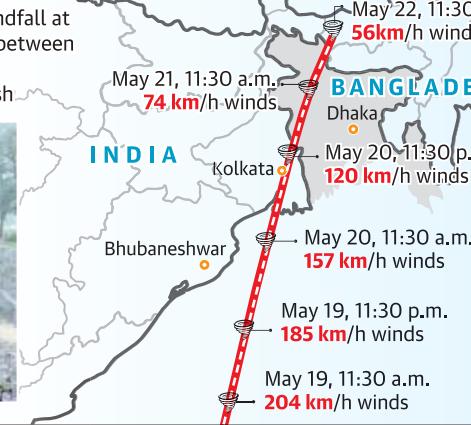
Five persons killed; thousands of houses damaged; trees, electric poles uprooted by strong winds



Rocking the boats: Strong winds hitting Kendrapara, Odisha ahead of the landfall of cyclone Amphan on Wednesday; and (below) NDRF personnel engaged in rescue work at Ramnagar in Purba Medinipur district of West Bengal. ■ ANI, PTI

Tracking the path

Cyclone Amphan made landfall at 2:30 p.m. on Wednesday between Digha in West Bengal and Hatiya island in Bangladesh



- The wind speed caused by the cyclone over Kolkata was over 120 kmph
- Heavy rainfall of over 500mm is forecast in the next five days over parts of Meghalaya and Assam
- The cyclone is forecast to reach Assam on May 22 with a reduced intensity

Domestic flights to resume on May 25

Airports told to be ready, cap on fares

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Domestic flights across the country will resume on May 25 after a two-month ban. The government will also cap airfares for different routes.

"Domestic civil aviation operations will recommence in a calibrated manner from Monday 25 May 2020. All airports and air carriers are being informed to be ready for operations from May 25. SOPs for passenger movement are also being separately issued," Minister for Civil Aviation Hardeep Puri wrote on Twitter.

ary measure," the official added. Airlines will not be required to leave seats empty, but it is learnt that passengers may be required to wear face shields.

The Ministry of Civil Aviation will meet officials of airlines on Thursday to finalise modalities.

Domestic flights have been grounded since March 25 after the government banned air travel to check the spread of COVID-19. A decision on international flights is likely to take time.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10

'Two in five COVID-19 patients have recovered'

5,437 fresh cases, 132 deaths recorded

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

After a gap of nine days, the Union Health Ministry held its daily press briefing on COVID-19 on Wednesday, along with officials of the India Meteorological Department and the National Disaster Response Force, who were briefing on the progress of Cyclone Amphan.

Lav Agrawal, Joint Secretary at the Ministry, said India's recovery rate had climbed to 40%. On May 4, when Lockdown 3.0 commenced, India's recovery rate was 26.59% and on April 15, when Lockdown 2.0 began, it was 11.42%.

According to data from the State Health Departments, 5,437 new cases were recorded on Wednesday, taking the tally to 1,11,862. The number of active cases stood at 65,067. With 132 deaths, the tally rose to 3,436.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10

Mumbai runs low on ICU beds

BMC working to add more beds; 733 patients currently critical



Call of duty: Nurses enter the newly built dedicated COVID-19 health centre for semi-critical novel coronavirus patients at Bandra Kurla Complex in Mumbai on Wednesday. ■ VIJAY BATE

JYOTI SHELAR
MUMBAI

Mumbai has 535 intensive care unit (ICU) beds for COVID-19 patients, too low for the estimated patients who become critical due to the SARS CoV-2 infection. Experts said anywhere between 3% and 5% patients require critical care. Going by this number and the city's currently active cases, 500 to 800 ICU beds are needed to cater to all the patients.

There are nearly 16,800 active cases in Mumbai. Every day, there are accounts from relatives and friends about patients deteriorating or dying after waiting to get ICU beds. "ICU beds are crucial to bring down the mortality rate," said Dr. Jalil Parkar from Lilavati Hospital.

"We are talking about pe-

ople with severe respiratory distress, those who would require constant monitoring of all vitals on a monitor or someone requiring a cardiac shock for revival. If such patients are not in the ICU, they are simply going to succumb," Dr. Parkar said.

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MORE REPORTS ▶ PAGES 2, 3, 5

A B-M-BE

'My father was not given proper PPE, or tested for COVID-19'

TB Hospital ward assistant's daughter narrates ordeal; hospital refutes allegations

TANVI DESHPANDE
MUMBAI

"My father, who was posted in a COVID-19 ward, was neither given proper personal protective equipment (PPE), nor was he tested by Sion hospital despite presenting some symptoms," said Pradnya Kamble, daughter of Sewri TB (tuberculosis) Hospital ward assistant Vilas Jadhav, who died of COVID-19 last week.

Jadhav (54) was denied admission by Sion hospital and eventually admitted to KEM Hospital where he tested positive, was put on ventilator, but died soon after.

The family has lost its only breadwinner, is facing stigma, and has not been approached with any compensation offer so far.

Tale of frontline workers
This is the tale of hundreds of healthcare workers, police staffers, BEST staffers and civic staffers across the city. Many have tested positive for novel coronavirus, and several have also died.

Jadhav was a resident of Govandi, which has emerged as a hotspot, and worked in the MDR-TB ward, which sees advanced-stage patients. The hospital has had 16 COVID-19 patients with suspected TB, of whom two died. Besides, 35 of its staffers have tested positive. Jadhav, the only staffer who succumbed to the virus, worked in the COVID-19 ward.

"My father did not have



Lives at risk: Vilas Jadhav and a colleague wearing PPE suits at Sewri TB Hospital ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT.

any co-morbidities. Even though he was a year short of 55, nobody asked him to not work in a COVID-19 ward. He once sent me a picture of him wearing a PPE. It was a thin piece of plastic. The main kits were not given to the staff, they are still working under fear," Ms. Kamble said.

The family says Jadhav initially took some medicines from a local doctor but when the fever persisted, he went to Sion hospital. "They did not feel the need to admit him nor did they prescribe a COVID-19 test. A few days later, he started complaining of breathlessness, diarrhoea and vomiting, which is when we took him to TB Hospital. But they did not have oxygen

support or ventilators, so we moved him to KEM Hospital. At KEM, my husband had to hold my father's IV bottle while the latter sat on a stool," Ms. Kamble said.

Jadhav was admitted to KEM Hospital on Monday. He tested positive on Wednesday and as his condition deteriorated was put on life support (ventilator). He passed away on Saturday. His death certificate mentions respiratory failure as a result of COVID-19 as the cause of death.

His body was handed over to the family only on Sunday, after completion of formalities, despite a State government rule to dispose of bodies within 12 hours. Jadhav's wife and daughters

could not attend the cremation as they are in institutional quarantine. However, none of them have presented any symptoms.

"We will ensure his family gets the compensation they deserve. As per rules, his daughter will also get a job," said Pradeep Narkar of Municipal Mazdoor Union.

The family has no means of income any more as Jadhav's wife is about the same age as him and also hypertensive. Ms. Kamble, though married, may take up the job to support her mother and 15-year-old sister.

"Our neighbours and relatives want nothing to do with us due to fear of contracting the virus. We have no support," Ms. Kamble said.

We are equipped'

However, Dr. Lalit Anande, medical superintendent of TB hospital refuted all allegations. "We have good quality PPEs available, but the staff doesn't want to use it. Our hospital is equipped to handle COVID-19 cases and I wish the family had kept him here. We have protocols in place for infectious diseases and have been taking precautions since even before this outbreak," he said. "Our ventilators are reserved for TB patients and we do not have permission to use them for non-TB patients," he said.

Dr. Anande also claimed that the staff got infected from their respective residential areas, not the hospital. Pradeep Narkar of the Municipal Mazdoor Union said, "Neither healthcare workers' families nor those of non-health staffers have received any compensation from the government or the BMC respectively. In such cases, most family members are in quarantine and have lost a breadwinner."

The BMC has cited procedural delays as the reason for the compensation being held up. In case of an assessment inspector from G North ward, who died while engaged in food distribution work, officials said his family had been in quarantine for 14 days, which prevented them from processing the application. "We will soon and submit it for approval. He qualifies for ₹10 lakh compensation and his wife will be offered a job," said Sangeeta Hasnale, assistant municipal commissioner (assessment).

The BMC is also yet to pro-

cess the application of the family of a SWM department mukadam from F South ward.

Milind Sawant, deputy municipal commissioner (general administration), said, "I have asked the departments concerned to put up proposals for compensation.

There are some grey areas in the Centre's scheme, such as what qualifies as COVID-19 work. Besides, the death certificate will have to mention cause of death as COVID-19. We can process applications for ₹10 lakh, but if the family is eligible for ₹50 lakh, we will try for that first."

The civic body had a group insurance scheme for its employees several years ago, which deducted a premium from employees' salaries. The scheme was discontinued a few years ago after allegations of employees being fleeced.

16 hospitals get notice for turning away patients

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
AHMEDABAD

The Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) on Wednesday served notices to 16 private hospitals for refusing to admit COVID-19 patients referred to them by the civic body.

In the notices served under the Epidemic Diseases Act, the AMC has alleged that despite its order and an appeal made by Ahmedabad Medical Association, 16 hospitals had refused to cooperate and provide beds.

The civic body had declared 16 hospitals as designated COVID-19 facilities in an order on May 16 and directed them to provide 50% of their beds for patients referred by the AMC, a release stated.

Additional Chief Secretary Rajiv Kumar Gupta, who is overseeing the AMC's COVID-19 operation, confirmed the news. The notices were served to major hospitals including Sterling Hospital, Life Care Hospital, SAL Hospital, Rajasthan Hospital, SFVP Hospital, Global Hospital and Sardar Hospital.

The release said notices were served to these hospitals for "deliberately and willingly disobeying and causing grave prejudice to the safety and security of the public at large".

The civic body has also warned of action "under civil and criminal law, including filing of FIR, against erring hospitals."

Civic unions allege delay in compensation for families

BMC cites procedural delays, 'grey areas' in Centre's scheme

TANVI DESHPANDE
MUMBAI

While the Brihanmumbai Electricity Supply and Transport (BEST) Undertaking has provided jobs to kin of four employees who died of COVID-19, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) is yet to provide similar relief to its staff.

According to municipal unions, at least 12 civic employees engaged in essential work have succumbed to the virus so far, and none of their families have received compensation. The BMC does not have a group insurance scheme for its employees and is merely covering hospitalisation cost up to ₹2 lakh.

Usually, if a civic employee dies on duty, his next of kin is given a job. The Central government in March had announced insurance cover of ₹50 lakh for healthcare workers on COVID-19 duty. The BMC, on April 17, announced compensation of ₹10 lakh per employee on such duty who died of the virus, including contract staff.

So far, the BMC has said the virus has claimed five employees. The Municipal Mazdoor Union, however, puts the figure at 12. The Municipal Engineers' Union has demanded that the BMC release the number of COVID-19 patients and victim among its staff. The BEST and Mumbai Police have been issuing this information, but the BMC has not.

Pradeep Narkar of the



Hazardous job: A BMC worker sprays disinfectant at a government hospital in Antop Hill. ■ FILE PHOTO

Municipal Mazdoor Union said, "Neither healthcare workers' families nor those of non-health staffers have received any compensation from the government or the BMC respectively. In such cases, most family members are in quarantine and have lost a breadwinner."

The BMC has cited procedural delays as the reason for the compensation being held up. In case of an assessment inspector from G North ward, who died while engaged in food distribution work, officials said his family had been in quarantine for 14 days, which prevented them from processing the application. "We will soon and submit it for approval. He qualifies for ₹10 lakh compensation and his wife will be offered a job," said Sangeeta Hasnale, assistant municipal commissioner (assessment).

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The civic body had a group insurance scheme for its employees several years ago, which deducted a premium from employees' salaries. The scheme was discontinued a few years ago after allegations of employees being fleeced.

Police detain activist for helping migrant workers

GAREEMA BANGAD
MUMBAI

Lawyer and activist Afroz Shah on Wednesday claimed that he was detained for almost two hours at Tilak Nagar police station while he was helping migrant labourers on Tuesday night.

Mr. Shah, who is involved in a variety of causes including animal welfare and beach clean up, said the incident occurred around 11.30 p.m. on Tuesday. He said his team has been running kitchens for the poor and underprivileged people, including migrant workers, since March, and also feeding stray dogs during the lockdown period.

"Migrant workers are walking on the Thane-Nasik Highway and I have been going there daily to distribute biscuits, water and other required items. On Tuesday, when I left for home after



Afroz Shah

the day's activities, I met a few migrant labourers in Thane. They were walking barefoot and wanted to go to Byculla, so I gave them a lift. In Byculla, I met a few more migrants who wanted to be dropped to Ghatkopar, so I dropped them as well. Since they were too many of them, I decided to make two to three trips," Mr. Shah said.

He said he was stopped at the Ghatkopar stretch of the Eastern Express Highway by

HC dismisses bail plea of Iqbal Mirchi's aide

SONAM SAIGAL
MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court recently dismissed a bail plea filed by gangster Iqbal Mirchi's close aide Humayun Merchant, who is lodged in Taloja prison, and said it should be decided on merits.

A Division Bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice S.S. Shinde was hearing the plea of Merchant, who was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on August 22, 2019. He allegedly played a crucial role in the deal of three properties – Rabia Mansion, Sea View and Marium Lodge, Worli – while acting on behalf of Mirchi.

The ED also alleged that Merchant had arranged dummy tenants, who were found to be his close relatives, in the said buildings. He also admitted to have received payments of ₹5 crore from Sunblink and transferred the money to the accounts of Juaid Memon, Mirchi's son.

Merchant challenged the decision taken by a high-powered committee, constituted on an order of the Supreme Court to release prisoners. His grievance is that the committee excludes undertrials booked for serious economic offences, bank scams, and offences un-

der special enactments.

Senior advocate Vikram Chaudhari and advocate Sujay Kantawala said Merchant is a septuagenarian, presently in custody for alleged commission of offences under the PMLA. Merchant's two applications for regular bail are pending before the High Court and the sessions court.

Mr. Chaudhari said the court must clarify that the decision of the committee must not deflect the course of justice while the application for regular bail of the petitioner is taken up.

The Bench said, "We have no doubt in our mind that an administrative decision of the nature taken by the committee for a specific purpose – to ensure decongestion in the correctional homes as a result of outbreak of the pandemic – can hardly be seen to have any debilitating effect on a judicial forum when it is approached by an accused under arrest to consider his prayer for bail on settled parameters."

The court said, "Needless to observe, despite the committee by its decision not having conferred any benefit on him, the petitioner's application for bail as of necessity has to be considered on its own merits without being influenced thereby."

Over 14 lakh migrants sent back to their States, says Jayant Patil

NCP leader says 3 lakh more to leave in 200 trains next week

ALOK DESHPANDE
MUMBAI

Over 14 lakh migrant workers have left Maharashtra for their native States since the lockdown began, Cabinet Minister and State Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) chief Jayant Patil said.

Addressing a press conference on Wednesday, Mr. Patil said around 4.26 lakh workers travelled by train. "We used 13,655 buses to transport around 1,65,890 workers till the borders, around two lakh private vehicles left the State with permission carrying around eight lakh people," he said,

adding that 200 more trains will leave next week with three lakh people.

Commenting on the novel coronavirus situation in Mumbai, Mr. Patil said the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has requisitioned 80% beds from private hospitals as well.

"These beds are not only for COVID-19 patients. There will be no dearth of beds for other patients. But, in the case of COVID-19 patients, the treatment will cost the same as in government hospitals," he said.

The room will be run by 10 doctors.

Mr. Patil said 250 new ambulances have been added for Mumbai, taking the total number to 330. The new ambulances also include those converted from BEST buses, Innova and Sumo cars.

"It will ensure that any needy person will get the ambulance within 10 to 15 minutes," he said.

"We do not want to get into a conflict with the Centre, but reality has to be put forward. Maharashtra has much bigger need than Gujarat. Yet, out of 55 trains run by the Western Railways, Union government gave permission for 37 from Gujarat and only 18 from Maharashtra," he said.

Mr. Patil reiterated that the State government paid ₹75 crore from the CM Relief Fund for the train fare.

"Running of a single train costs ₹9 to 10 lakh. We have tickets to show that in the initial trains, passengers had to pay more. Thus, the State has ensured that migrants return home without making payments," he said.



Migrant workers shelter themselves from the heat while waiting outside CSMT on Wednesday. ■ VIVEK BENDRE

The BMC dashboard will start working soon on actual time basis, giving information on oxygen beds, ICU beds and general beds. A central room helpline number, 1916, has been activated to help those in need," he said. The room will be run by 10 doctors.

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As per estimates, 30,000 episodes of television content are produced every year. "The total investment in Hindi television is ₹5,000 crore and in Marathi it is ₹250 crore," the statement quoted the delegation informing Mr. Thackeray.

Draw up plan on limited resumption of film shoots: CM

Uddhav meets representatives of entertainment industry, rules out reopening of cinema halls

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI

Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Wednesday asked the entertainment industry to prepare an action plan on limited resumption of film shooting and post-production activities by adhering to physical distancing norms amidst the lockdown.

Mr. Thackeray, however, ruled out the possibility of reopening cinema halls or theatres any time soon.

Shooting for films and other production activities have remained suspended since mid-March in view of the novel coronavirus pandemic.

"The government will consider an action plan on how shooting and post-pro-

duction activities can be resumed in a limited way by adhering to physical distancing and other norms," the CM told a delegation of representatives of the entertainment industry, especially from the Marathi theatre, television and cinema.

The major demands of the industry included saving single-screen theatres, helping poor music composers, and waiving the Goods and Services Tax on film production.

Mr. Thackeray told the delegation that he didn't believe that clamping of lockdown meant everything coming to a standstill.

"We have allowed industries, trade and shops to open by taking all precau-

tionary measures which have their sets erected in the Film City and supporting folk artists.

Referring to the demand of

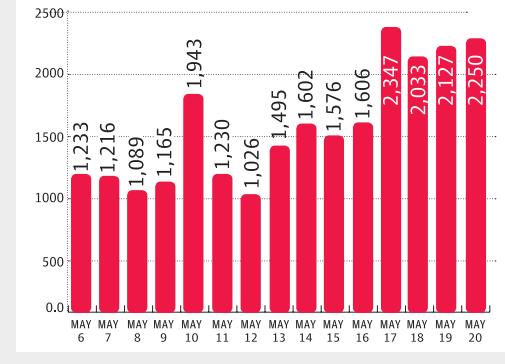
Maharashtra COVID-19 tracker

TOTAL CASES	NEW CASES	ACTIVE CASES	RECOVERED	DEATHS
39,297	2,250	27,581	10,318	1,390

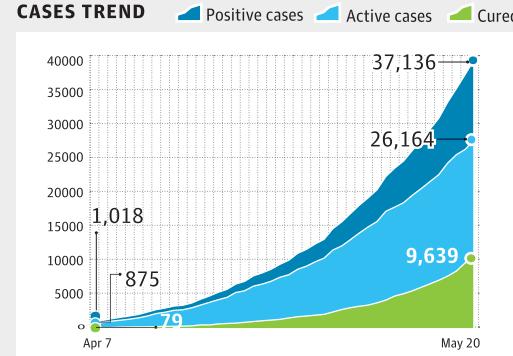
DISTRICTS AFFECTED: 34

DISTRICT	CASES	DEATHS	DISTRICT	CASES	DEATHS
Mumbai	24,118	841	Sangli	57	1
Thane	4,900	79	Nanded	80	4
Pune	4,477	226	Latur	50	2
Nashik	868	36	Buldhana	34	3
Aurangabad	1,082	36	Nandurbar	25	2
Palghar	475	14	Kolhapur	139	1
Raigad	532	16	Ratnagiri	116	3
Nagpur	423	6	Jalna	38	0
Solapur	505	27	Sindhudurg	10	0
Akola	310	17	Chandrapur	5	0
Jalgaon	303	33	Osmanabad	11	0
Satara	170	2	Parbhani	9	1
Yavatmal	102	0	Washim	8	0
Amravati	123	14	Beed	5	0
Ahmednagar	64	5	Bhandara	7	0
Hingoli	107	0	Gondia	3	0
Dhule	84	9	Wardha	3	1

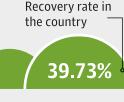
POSITIVE CASES OVER LAST 15 DAYS



1,372 (60.97%) of Wednesday's cases are from Mumbai



25.95% is the State recovery rate

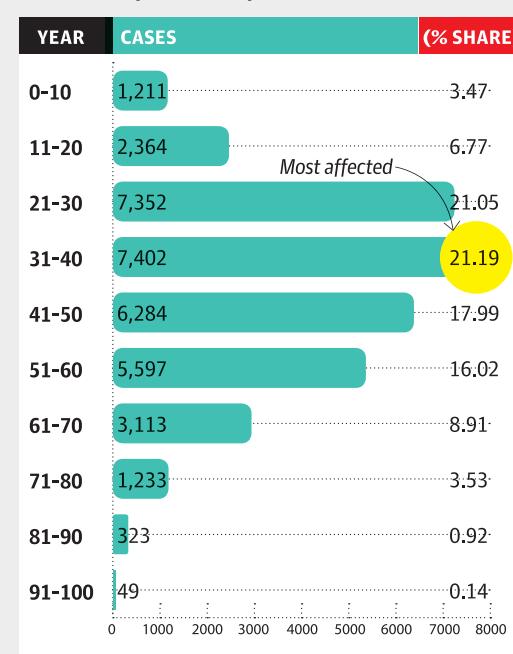


MORTALITY RATE

Maharashtra 3.57%

India 3.09%

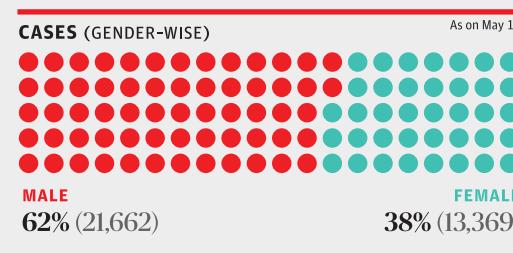
AFFECTED (AGE-WISE)



QUARANTINE NUMBERS

4,04,692 | 26,752

Home quarantine | Institutional quarantine



71% of deaths due to co-morbidities

HELPLINE NUMBERS

Toll free number: 104/1075

Maharashtra: 020-26127394

National: 1075/1800-112-545/011-23978046

State helpline email id: ssumaharashtra@gmail.com

CITY-WISE HELPLINE NUMBERS

Mumbai city: 022 22664232

Palghar: 02525 297474

Mumbai suburbs: 022

Raigad: 02141 222118

26556799 / 26556806

Ratnagiri: 02352 226248

Thane: 022 25301740

Sindhudurg: 02362 228847

Source: Public Health Department, Maharashtra, BMC

Mumbai crosses 24,000 mark with 841 new cases; 41 more die

BMC insists there is no community transmission yet; 71% cases from this month

IYOTI SHELAR

MUMBAI

Mumbai recorded 1,372 cases of COVID-19 on Wednesday, the third-highest jump in a single day, pushing its tally to 24,118. The city also recorded 41 deaths, the second-highest rise, taking the death toll to 841.

The number of cases and deaths have rapidly increased this month. The city now had contributed to nearly 61% of the cases and 60% of the deaths reported in Maharashtra.

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), however, has maintained that Mumbai is not in the stage of community transmission yet. "The positive cases we are recording are mostly coming from containment zones and quarantine facilities. We are still in the stage of local transmission," additional municipal commissioner Suresh Kakani said.

Of the total number of cases in the city, 17,057 – nearly 71% – have been reported this month. The death toll also saw a sharp rise in May, with the city losing an average of 27 people every day to the infection.

Of the deaths reported on Wednesday, 29 patients were men and 12 were women. Of these, 32 patients had co-morbidities.

Besides, 350 patients were discharged from hospitals. A total of 6,466 patients have recovered and gone home so far.

25 positive in Dharavi

Dharavi reported 25 new cases on Wednesday, pushing the total in the area to 1,378. Asia's largest slum now has more cases than many Indian cities.

Most of the new cases were from Matunga labour camp, which is a COVID-19 hotspot. Of the 1,353 cases for which data is available, 525 have been discharged so far, which means Dharavi's recovery rate stands at 39%. With 56 deaths, its death rate is 4.1%. Until recently, M East ward had the highest death rate in Mumbai around 10%, much higher than Dharavi.

Mahim also reported 15



Finishing touches: A worker arranges beds at a new 325-bed quarantine facility set up at Mahalaxmi Race Course. ■ EMMANUEL YOGINI

Virus claims two more policemen

GAUTAM S. MENGLE

MUMBAI

Two more policemen with the Mumbai Police succumbed to COVID-19 on Wednesday, taking the death toll in the police force to 10 in the city and 14 in the State.

According to police officers, the first fatality reported on Wednesday was an assistant sub-inspector of the Mumbai traffic pol-

ice posted in the western suburbs.

The second case was from a police station in eastern Mumbai. The police constable, who was admitted to Sevenhills Hospital, passed away after eight days of treatment. The constable, being 57 years old, had been on leave, but still contracted the infection.

Meanwhile, swab sam-

ples taken from a constable with the Maharashtra Anti Terrorism Squad, who passed away last week, tested positive for COVID-19 on Tuesday, adding him to the list of fallen policemen in the State.

As of Wednesday, 227 policemen, including a deputy commissioner of police, across the State have recovered from COVID-19 and reported back to work.

COVID-19 patients through the government. He said a notification is mostly likely to be issued on Thursday.

43 cases in Navi Mumbai

Navi Mumbai recorded 43 new COVID-19 cases on Wednesday, taking its tally to 1,364. Six deaths were also reported, taking the death toll under the Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation to 45.

Meanwhile, Ulhasnagar Municipal Commissioner Sudhakar Deshmukh was transferred as the Panvel civic chief, replacing Ganesh Deshmukh.

In Panvel, 16 cases were reported, taking its total to 305. Two deaths were reported, taking the toll to 12.

(Inputs from Tanvi Deshpande, Raina Assainar)

14 deaths take Pune's toll to 235

More deaths in Aurangabad, Solapur

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE

PUNE

In its highest single-day surge in deaths, Pune district recorded 14 COVID-19 fatalities on Wednesday. The district also recorded 174 new cases, with four police personnel from Pimpri Chinchwad testing positive.

The district's death toll has now risen to 235 and its total case tally (including deaths and recoveries) stands at 4,544. The 174 new cases were reported between Tuesday night and Wednesday evening, Pune District Health Officer Dr. Bhagwan Pawar said.

The number of active cases has reached 2,133, while 2,184 people have been discharged till date. At least 180 of those in treatment are said to be critical.

Sources said a police inspector was among the four policemen to have tested positive for the virus. Till now, while more than 12 policemen from Pune city had tested positive, their counterparts in Pimpri Chinchwad had remained unscathed.

In Pune division

Elsewhere in Pune division, four deaths were reported from Solapur district, which also saw a rise of 18 cases to take its tally to 461.

The number of cases is rapidly rising in Kolhapur district since the relaxation of curbs on inter-district travel. At least 35 new cases reported on Wednesday took its total to 171.

Kolhapur, which till May 17 only had 35 cases – of whom 24 were active – has witnessed a spike of nearly



Shops partial reopen on Laxmi road in Pune on Wednesday after the civic body eases restrictions. ■ JIGNESH MISTRY

Two more test positive in Goa; tally 41

Coast Guard officer, traveller from Pune are new patients

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

PANAJI

An Indian Coast Guard officer and a woman have tested positive for COVID-19 in Goa, taking the tally of active cases in the State to 41, a Health Department official said on Wednesday.

The Coast Guard officer was part of an 11-member team that came to Goa from Mumbai, he said. Though tests conducted on 10 other members of the team came out negative, they have been sent in quarantine.

Besides, samples of a woman who travelled to Goa from Pune tested positive in a TrueNat (rapid) test, he said, adding that her repeat sample has been sent for confirmation to the virology lab of the State-run Goa Medical College. She travelled to Goa with 21 other people, who have tested negative and are

FILM REVIEW

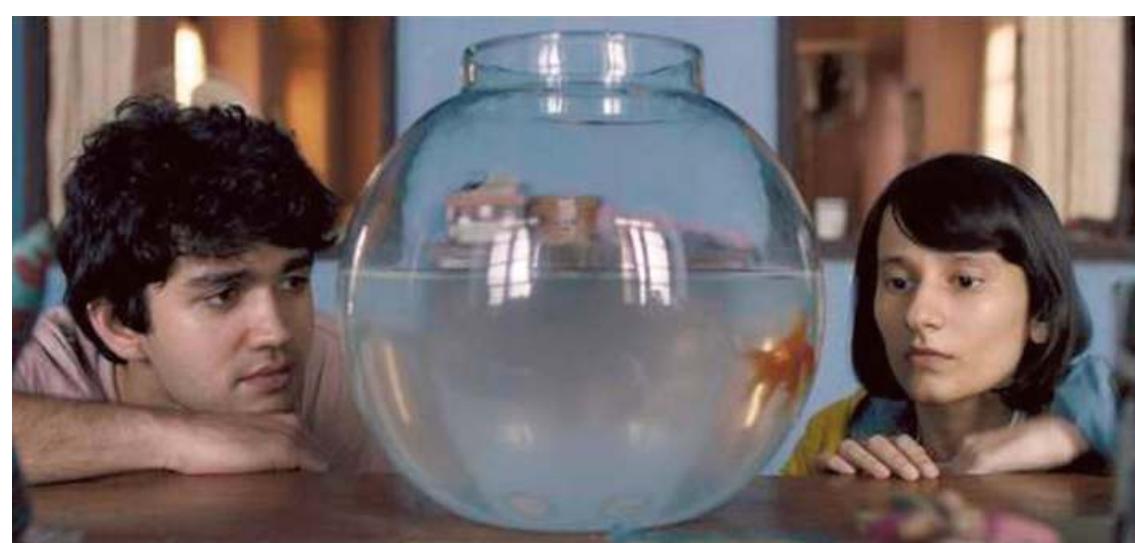
An uptight teen drama

Megha Ramaswamy's *What Are the Odds?* puts whimsy on a pedestal over substance and eccentricity remains an embellishment

KENNETH ROSARIO

Filmmaker Megha Ramaswamy is evidently aiming for whimsy with *What Are the Odds?*, and on paper (or in its intriguing trailer), the film has all the elements of an amusing teen drama. But eccentricity and quirk are rather tricky qualities to achieve, as they require you to rebel against expectations and perceptions, yet without applying a formula to it. The scope for imagination is boundless, and the world you conceive has to appear natural and organic. Ramaswamy's film falls short on many counts as she puts whimsy on a pedestal over substance and eccentricity remains an embellishment, resulting in a film that's mildly enjoyable, let alone memorable once it's over.

It's a pity that several scenes, even the ones with elements of magical realism, evoke a feeling that we've seen this before, not in a way of replication but by intent. One may not find too many reference points in Indian films, but *What Are the Odds?* is reminiscent of movies like *The Breakfast Club* (1985) or perhaps even something as visually eccentric as *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* (2010), in spirit. In these films, gawky teens live inside their heads, and we as 'grown-up' au-



Teen drama: The film's focus is on characters, and they are, at least on paper, rather funny. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

What Are The Odds?

DIRECTOR: Megha Ramaswamy
CAST: Yashaswini Dayama, Karanvir Malhotra, Ananya Melkote, and Abhay Deol

STORYLINE: Two teens navigate a day together after missing their scholarship exam

dience experience what they experience, but as outsiders. One can't, therefore, fully tell fantasy from reality, and that's the whole point. *What Are the Odds?* lacks that energy and naïvete of living inside teen mind. The scenes are written around idiosyncrasies but not much thought is given to a larger picture.

Even these individual scenes would perhaps read better on paper

than what is offered on-screen.

The narrative is contained to a day spent by two teens, who forge an unlikely friendship. A 15-year-old girl, amusingly named, Vivek (Yashaswini Dayama), is as rebellious as a teen would be, who is left to the care of her grandmother and her parents are not closely involved in her life. She drags an 18-year-old school head boy, Ashwin (Karanvir Malhotra) into her misadventures after wriggling out of an exam. The film's focus is on characters, and they are, at least on paper, rather funny. A man named Amol Palakar peeing on a terrace, cuckoo grandma suffering from Alzheimer's disease and a middle-aged man who wants to charm her by finding her lost dentures, a missing dad who might potentially be a queer cross-dresser,

and weird older lovers – all these characters have great potential but none are fleshed out enough to make an impact. It's understandable that not everyone can get lavish screen time but their sporadic appearances and disappearances make you feel like they were forgotten along the way. Dayama and Ananya Melkote, who plays her sidekick, are naturally funny and can pull off teenage grumpiness easily. Malhotra manages to keep up with them, but the effort shows. And Abhay Deol has little to do beyond flashing those dimples.

It makes me lament over the possibility of what this film could have been in a parallel universe, had it let itself completely loose. *What Are The Odds?* is currently streaming on Netflix

In good company Prayag Mehta and Rishab Joshi ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

grow their presence on YouTube. Popular alumnus include Dua Lipa, ROSALÍA, Dave, CUCO, Chloe x Halle, Jacob Collier, and Cavetown, all of whom partnered with the programme to catapult themselves into global stardom.

The class of 2020 will also feature Los Angeles singer-songwriter Adam Melchor, Puerto Rican trap artist Eladio Carrion, Brooklyn experimentalist Gabriel Garzon-Montano, Birmingham grime artist and actor Jaykae, Glasgow R&B singer Joseef, Los Angeles-based corridos trailblazer Nathaniel Cano, and Japanese indie rock band Novelbright among others.

Lost Stories find stardom

DJ/producer duo, Prayag Mehta and Rishab Joshi, is on YouTube's Foundry 2020, a global artist development programme

YouTube has announced DJ/producer duo Prayag Mehta and Rishab Joshi-led Lost Stories as one of its top global picks for Foundry 2020. This makes them the first Indians to be chosen for this programme. Foundry is YouTube Music's artist development programme to promote original acts.

Prayag and Rishab blend Indian folk sounds with electronic music.



In good company Prayag Mehta and Rishab Joshi ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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Shine a light on 'Waterloo'



MUSIC COLUMN

NARENDRA KUSNUR
The author is a freelance music writer

In the mid-1970s, some people stopped using the term 'Waterloo' to describe Napoleon Bonaparte's defeat in the famous 1815 war. Rather, they used it for a song by Swedish pop group ABBA that won the 1974 Eurovision Song Contest.

The success of 'Waterloo' gave ABBA instant worldwide fame, and the quartet produced a series of hits for the rest of the decade. Songs like 'Dancing Queen', 'Knowing Me Knowing You', 'Money Money Money', 'Thank You For The Music', 'Voulez Vous' and 'I Have A Dream' were played all over on the radio, in discotheques and on home stereos. Never mind the Swedish accents.

Back in the news
Suddenly, ABBA is back in the news. Last week, 'Waterloo' was declared the best-ever song among all Eurovision contest winners. Since the regular annual event didn't happen as scheduled in Rotterdam, Holland, owing to the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, it was decided to stream this online contest, featuring 19 past winners. Video recordings by those scheduled to participate this year, along with their messages from home, were also streamed.

The event was subtitled 'Shine A Light', after the song 'Love Shine A Light' by British-American band Katrina & The Waves, which won the Eurovision award in 1997. ABBA's Bjorn Ulvaeus, while saying how Eurovision has always bought joyful memories, joked, 'Very good title, by the way – Shine A Light. Am glad they didn't choose Waterloo.'



Super troupers: Swedish band ABBA, pictured in 1974. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Over 38 years after ABBA released its last album *The Visitors*, it continues to make news at sporadic intervals. Like the Beatles and Michael Jackson, it has been able to sell nostalgia regularly, and people from an earlier generation keep returning to it. The *Mamma Mia!* Stage musical, featuring the group's songs, became a huge theatrical success and the subsequent film version, starring Meryl Streep, led to a revival of their music.

Hall of fame
In 2005, 'Waterloo' was declared the best Eurovision song in an event held to mark 50 years of the contest, and in 2010, the Group was inducted into the Rock n' Roll Hall Of Fame. In 2015, 'Dancing Queen' made it to the Grammy Hall Of Fame. Besides these recognitions, there has been regular talk of the full-fledged reunion of the group members Ulvaeus, Benny Anderson, Anni-Frid Lyngstad and Agnetha Fältskog. In a comeback of sorts, the group also recorded two songs in 2018.

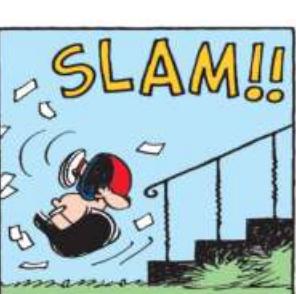
ABBA tribute bands have regularly performed in India, and singer Cher recorded *Dancing Queen*, an album of ABBA covers. Back in the 1970s, a sizeable chunk of young listeners tuned into pop and country music, before turning to rock n' roll. Bands like Boney M, Bee Gees and ABBA became the most popular, with their sheer consistency in churning out hits. The release of *ABBA: The Movie* added to the group's fan following. Thanks to the band, and Volvo cars and tennis champion Bjorn Borg, Sweden was in the papers a lot.

Nostalgia rules
However, when ABBA disbanded in 1982, it wasn't able to retain the attention of the younger generations. This was unlike the Beatles, who kept enticing newer audiences years after their split. Moreover, the Michael Jackson fever soon kicked off, and youngsters tuned in to the newer acts on MTV. Even ABBA's own fans deserted them for newer artists. Yet, despite all that, ABBA keeps bouncing back, even if for short periods. But it doesn't seem like they'll ever meet Waterloo.

POOCHE CAFE



PEANUTS



HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



CALVIN AND HOBBES



TIGER



THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13354



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

7 Astute – lovely (4)

11 Large room, typical of Munich (4,4)

13 Questioned intensely (7)

14 Handbill (7)

16 Robinson Crusoe's creator, d. 1731 (5)

17 Hit on the head (5)

18 Hold back (4)

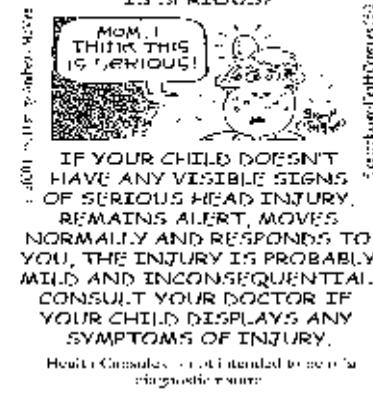
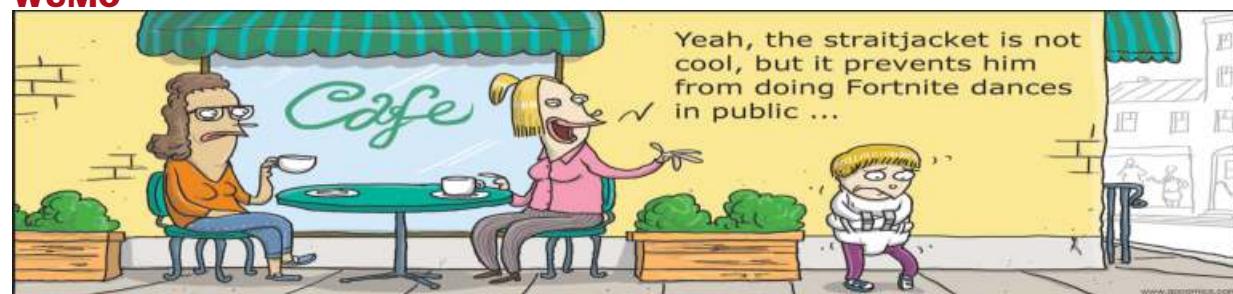
Solution will appear on May 23, 2020.

Solution No. 13353

- Across
- 1 With little advance warning (2,5,6)
- 8 Finishes (could be loose or dead?) (4)
- 9 Weakness (8)
- 10 Philanthropic (10)
- 12 Financial plan (6)
- 14 Male parishioners (6)
- 15 Maize (6,4)
- 19 More than enough (slang) (8)
- 20 By mouth (4)
- 21 By accident (13)
- Down
- 2 Inebriated (slang) (6,2)
- 3 Undue speed (5)
- 4 British soldier in the American War of Independence (7)
- 5 Aristocrat (5)
- 6 Writer of War and Peace, d. 1910 (7)

CM YK

WUMO



PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



A-BM-BE

Only 20% ZP school students have access to internet: study

State govt. keen on promoting online education among students in rural areas

ALOK DESHPANDE
MUMBAI

With the lockdown likely to extend beyond June and delay the start of the new academic year, the State government is trying to promote online education among students across Maharashtra.

However, a recent study has revealed that only 37% of students in zilla parishad schools have access to smartphones and 20% of them have internet connectivity.

The State-wide digital access survey was conducted by the Active Teachers Forum and covered 1,67,687 students across 1,186 schools. The study found that only 45% of parents of students had smartphones and only 27% of them had access to internet. The schools which were part of the survey included those run by zilla parishads, municipal councils, municipal corporations, private-aided and private unaided institutions.

Call for foolproof plan

On Monday, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray held a meeting with the Education Department and directed officials to prepare a foolproof plan to ensure that the schedule for the academic year stays on track even if schools cannot be reopened soon.

Mr. Thackeray also directed the officials to consider options such as online schooling and using the digital medium to teach lessons. He informed officials about the lack of internet connec-



Reduced reach: The State-wide digital access survey was conducted by the Active Teachers Forum and covered 1,67,687 students across 1,186 schools. ■ FILE PHOTO

tivity in rural areas and asked them to start working on increasing access.

ATF convener Bhausaheb Chaskar told *The Hindu* that State government's attempts to provide study material to students during the summer vacation is based on the assumption that they have access to smartphones with internet facility.

The ground reality'

Mr. Chaskar said, "We wanted to check the ground reality and find out exactly how many students in Maharashtra have the facilities to pur-

sue studies online. The survey was also conducted to receive necessary inputs from schools and students on the way ahead in the State in case the lockdown continues after June and schools remain closed."

According to the survey, of 97,794 students in 1,054 zilla parishad schools, 52,558 have television sets and 3,469 have laptops or desktops. The parents of 68,050 students have cell phones, while 2,108 students have their own cell phones. Though the parents of 36,300 students have

smartphones, only 20,422 of them have internet access.

In private-aided schools, of 43,312 students, 22,860 have access to smartphones and 35% of them have internet connectivity. In private unaided schools, 42% parents of students have smartphones with internet access.

Mr. Chaskar said, "Considering the present financial situation, it is difficult to anticipate a growth in the number of smartphones in rural areas. Instead of smartphones, television or radio will be a better medium to educate students."

OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

DEATH

ENTERED INTO GLORY



BISHOP DR. B A JAMES SANTHOSAM
01.07.1948 - 20.05.2020
Founder & President
Prince of Peace Ministries
2 Tim 4:7
"I have fought the fight,
I have finished the race,
I have kept the faith"
PRINCE OF PEACE FAMILY

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Locusts cross Thar desert to invade 16 districts in Rajasthan

Agriculture Minister terms pest attack the biggest threat amid lockdown

MOHAMMED IQBAL

JAIPUR
The invasion of locusts had started from the India-Pakistan border on April 11 and they have now crossed the Thar desert and affected 16 of the 33 districts in Rajasthan, taking advantage of favourable wind conditions with the onset of summer.



Locust invasion in Rajasthan being explained with the help of a map at an official meeting in Jaipur. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Locust swarms have travelled far in search of food because of lack of vegetation in the agricultural fields after the rabi crop harvest.

State Agriculture Minister Lal Chand Kataria described the locust attack as the biggest threat in the midst of the COVID-19 lockdown, at an official meeting here on Wednesday, while giving instructions for controlling the spread of insects with the cooperation of farmers and through effective surveys.

The locust swarms have reached Sikar, Bundi, Bhilwara,

the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare for their sprayers and deployed 70 vehicles for surveys in the fields. While 600 tractor-mounted sprayers were also involved in the control operations, bids had been invited for drones to spray pesticides in the areas inaccessible to vehicles, he said.

The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organisation had recently warned that locusts were breeding in large numbers in Sudan and Eritrea on Africa's

Red Sea Coast as well as in Iran. With very little crops available in the fields, the locusts are settling on babool and khejri trees in the State, while the Agriculture Department has controlled the outbreak on about 40,000 hectares.

The grasshoppers emerged in January 2019 from eastern Africa and travelled through Saudi Arabia and Iran to enter Pakistan, where they invaded the cotton-producing belt of Sindh. The adult locusts then flew in to the Indian side of Thar desert, damaging the crops in western Rajasthan and northern Gujarat.

State Agriculture Commissioner Om Prakash said a provision of ₹5 crore had been made for hiring the vehicles for spraying high-intensity malathion insecticide and ₹10 crore for providing plant protection chemicals to the farmers at 100% subsidy.

Three arrested for 'helping' migrant workers cross Yamuna

Workers were given inflated tubes and charged money

ANUJ KUMAR
GHAZIABAD

After the Uttar Pradesh police increased patrolling on the Haryana border to stop migrant workers from entering the State, the workers have started crossing the Yamuna in Saharanpur.

On Tuesday, three local residents were arrested for helping such migrant workers cross the river, under the charges of breaking lockdown norms and endangering the lives of the workers, the police said. An official release stated that the three persons were arrested under Sections 188, 269 and 270 of the IPC and Section 3 of the Epidemic Act, 1897.

The release said that the arrested persons also named six of their accomplices who, they said, had fled the spot. They helped migrant workers cross the river with the help of inflated rubber tubes and allegedly charged from them.



A grab of a video of the incident. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Images and videos have surfaced in which locals can be seen pushing an inflated tube in the river with at least half-a-dozen people on it.

Local sources said the migration was more rampant in Chiklana area where the water is shallow. Dinesh Kumar P, Senior Superintendent of Police (Saharanpur) told *The Hindu*, "Patrolling has been increased along the 70-km long border that the district shares with Yamuna Nagar district of Haryana... We

have arrested persons who are endangering the lives of workers in the name of helping them. They are using their situation to make money. The migrant workers have been sent to shelter homes. Following the policy of the State government, we are not sending back any migrant worker in distress."

Asked if the district administration could use boats to bring these workers from the Haryana border, Mr. Kumar said only those migrant workers were being received who were sent by the Haryana government through the inter-State border. "There is a process. We are dealing with at least 10,000 migrant workers. We have so far sent at least 70,000 workers to Bihar and U.P. But the spillover is so much that the Haryana government has not been able to put all the migrants in shelter homes or quarantine centres."

G.B. Nagar administration issues Lockdown 4.0 rules

District records 4 new COVID-19 cases

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GHAZIABAD

Gautam Buddh Nagar administration On Wednesday released guidelines for the fourth phase of COVID-19-induced lockdown. The district recorded four fresh cases of COVID-19 on Wednesday, taking the tally of active cases to 81.

Metro services, inter-State buses services and vehicular traffic between Noida and Delhi will remain suspended. The district administration had asked for clarification on the move-

ment of vehicles between Noida and Delhi on Tuesday, but the State government had not responded till Wednesday evening.

Street vendors have been allowed to operate provided they use face masks and gloves and ensure social distancing. Dry cleaners and printing press have been allowed to resume services.

Parks will be open from 7 a.m. to 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. The administration advised the RWAs to balance community hygiene and convenience of residents.

IN BRIEF

Haryana CM, USIBC chief talk investment

NEW DELHI
A large number of opportunities, including promotion of home healthcare, transition of automobile component manufacturing to aerospace machinery manufacturing and use of transformational technology like 5-G, Edge, Artificial Intelligence were identified during a videoconference at Chandigarh on Tuesday. It was jointly chaired by Haryana CM Manohar Lal and United States India Business Council president Nisha Biswal. Mr. Lal assured that the government would facilitate all investment that may come to Haryana as a result of the discussion.



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WANTED FRESH

When push comes to shove



Desperate measures: Passengers helping a child into a bus through the window at the Jubilee bus station in Secunderabad on Wednesday, as the Telangana State Road Transport Corporation resumed services. ■ AFP

Centre will consider plea on virus tests: HC

'SOP framed only after consultations'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

KOCHI
A Division Bench of the Kerala High Court on Wednesday observed that the Central government would consider the request of the State to conduct reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) tests for expatriates before allowing them to board flights to the country.

The Bench, comprising Justice Anu Sivaraman and Justice M.R. Anitha, while closing a public interest litigation, observed it had no doubt that proper procedures would be put in place and revised in a time-bound manner by the Central government after considering the situation and taking note of requests made by individual States, besides exp-

ert medical advice and available data.

The court said the Standard Operating Protocol (SOP) had been framed after proper application of mind and consultation with medical experts. The concerns expressed by the State would be considered by the Centre while formulating and revising the SOP in respect of the required testing.

Petitioner C.R. Neelakandan of Kochi contended that lack of proper testing before allowing expatriates to board flights could pose a danger. If asymptomatic passengers were permitted after an inconclusive temperature test alone, there was every possibility of the virus being transmitted to others during travel.

Bengaluru residents jolted by deafening burst

Fighter plane was on test sortie: IAF

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

BENGALURU

A fighter aircraft on a test sortie, supposedly a Sukhoi-30 MKI at that, flew too fast and perhaps low enough on Wednesday to shatter Bengaluru's midday peace.

At 1.20 p.m., people living in the east and south-eastern parts of Bengaluru, already harried by COVID-19 fears, were jolted by a deafening burst. Residents of almost half of the city reported on social media platforms that they felt tremors and rattling of windowpanes and objects at home for about nine seconds.

Officials of the State disaster monitoring agency KSNDMC quickly dismissed initial fears of an

earthquake.

After hours of confusing information, the mystery was somewhat cleared by the Indian Air Force, around 9.30 p.m. IAF merely said, "A routine IAF Test Flight involving a supersonic profile which took off from Blrur Airport and flew in the allotted airspace well outside City limits. The aircraft was of Aircraft Systems and Testing Establishment (ASTE) [sic]."

The sound was heard as a boom, thunder, blast.

According to multiple unofficial sources, a Sukhoi-30 MKI fighter plane, probably being test flown by ASTE pilots, was flying over the city around the time. It may have gone supersonic — that is, breached the speed of sound (beyond Mach 1 or around 1,200 km per hour).

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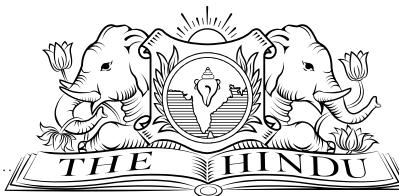
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Working safely

Employers should see the value of reduced attendance and encourage staff protection

Opening up economic production from a lockdown, even partially, when the COVID-19 pandemic has not peaked in the country poses an extraordinary challenge. Countries around the world are focusing on making the workplace safe, and issuing guidelines to help workers return to their jobs. Reducing the number of people present at any given time is a universal principle, either through resort to shifts, or arrangements to enable employees to work from home. The Union Health Ministry has addressed the issue through a manual of preventive measures that covers all types of workplaces and depends heavily on behavioural change, with some additional requirements for confined spaces such as offices. Fortunately, the first line of defence against the novel coronavirus is a set of simple measures that involves little expenditure: physical distancing of at least one metre, mandatory use of face masks or cover, frequent hand washing with soap, respiratory etiquette, sanitising contact surfaces and self-monitoring of health. These requirements have by now become familiar to everyone, and employees need only be nudged into adopting them through persistent communication, free provisioning of masks and sanitising materials, and organising office space suitably. Physical distancing of even one metre, if not the 'do gaz' or six feet that Prime Minister Narendra Modi advocated, does pose difficulties because of the lack of space and density of workers in many places. But employers should see the value of keeping staff attendance at safe levels even within the legally permitted ceiling, which now extends to 50% in specified sectors and even in some government offices. Failure to maintain distancing, more so in a poorly-ventilated, closed environment, gives the virus a free run, as Chennai's wholesale vegetable market showed starkly.

The Centre's protocol for symptomatic cases at the workplace, requiring testing, and, where warranted, quarantining of both the worker and close contacts, and a two-day closure of offices experiencing an outbreak, should underscore to employers the importance of prevention. Responsibility, however, does not devolve entirely on offices and establishments, and it is imperative for other activities, such as public transport used by many workers, to meet COVID-19 requirements. Some institutions are mandating installation of the Aarogya Setu app by employees returning to work, when the legal basis of this monitoring mechanism remains shaky and there are no assured benefits in terms of health care. At this stage of the pandemic, when a gradual resumption of economic activity in multiple sectors ranging from construction to food takeaways is a necessity, the most feasible interventions at the workplace are voluntary and those that cost the least. There may still be occasion to resort to intermittent lockdowns if opening up leads to mounting cases. A prudent course would be to navigate the present with a minimalist approach, as the quest for a medical breakthrough makes progress.

A hole in the whole

Health-care services cannot be allowed to be overwhelmed by the pandemic

Mathematically, the whole is equal to the sum of its parts, neither more nor less. But the COVID-19 pandemic has taken the parts and overwhelmed the whole. The lockdown, as it was conceived originally, was meant to be, at best, a stopgap arrangement that would help nations tide over the crisis caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. But as the days rolled on, and the lockdown moved on from phase to phase, it has caused a paralysis in general health care. As sparse health-care resources in most parts of the country have been channelled towards the COVID-19 effort, the numbers have risen, but normal health-care services have been in suspended animation for just under two months now. Staff running several national health programmes, and State health missions, besides health-care workers from tertiary hospitals down to the primary health centres, have been diverted to buttress public health efforts in the COVID-19 battle. And the epidemic still rages on, with thousands of people testing positive every day and the number of cases crossing past the one lakh mark. Lockdowns have been partially lifted in some areas and in others, a mere semblance of normalcy has returned. As conditional movement has been allowed, people travelling across States bring positive cases to States or districts that have remained case-free for a while now.

But the time has now come for the country to attempt an equipoise of sorts, balance the different requirements of health care, along with efforts to continue to fight COVID-19. While health-care services themselves have been on the backfoot for non-COVID-19 conditions, except in emergencies, access too, for the bulk of the population, has been hampered by the non-availability of public transportation. Recent data culled from the National Health Mission pointed to less than normal coverage in key areas such as immunisation, institutional deliveries; further, delay, or failure, in delivering life-saving drugs to persons with HIV, tuberculosis, or inability to offer support for other chronic conditions have been documented. The usually robust private health system, which caters to various segments of the population, also took a back seat, or played a supportive role. While the Finance Minister's announcement on increase in health allocations as part of the ₹20-lakh crore relief package is welcome, more than money is required to set this right. If life after COVID-19 is not to be worse than life before the pandemic, the governments need to ensure that the country's multi-layered health system is not sacrificed at the altar of one virus; they need to give it their whole attention, now.

China, better prepared for the post-COVID world

There are good reasons why the pandemic is unlikely to end Beijing's ambitious power outreach, a point India must note



M.K. NARAYANAN

Several weeks before the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, India's Minister for External Affairs, S. Jaishankar, had observed (at a lecture) that "what defines power and determines national standing is also no longer the same... Technology, connectivity and trade are at the heart of the new contestations...." The Minister could never have imagined that within a few weeks, his prediction would be overtaken by a tectonic shift in the global situation thanks to a virus and a pandemic.

The Minister did mention a point about "known unknowns", but what he could hardly have anticipated is how radical the changes would be, thanks to the phenomenon of "unknown unknowns". Within the span of a few weeks, following the Minister's dissertation, pronounced unpredictability created an unprecedented situation. Seldom have so many lives been lost across continents in a single tragic event.

Deep economic impact

By now, India has surpassed China with regard to the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases, and has moved past the figure of 100,000 cases. What distinguishes the present pandemic from earlier ones is its economic impact, which is perhaps even more threatening than the human costs involved. In the case of India, all forecasts have had to be shredded. Job losses have been massive, specially in urban areas. India's exports in the month of April, for instance, were the worst in the past 30 years. The harrowing plight of India's migrant workers and the images of hungry, aimless, dispossessed migrant worker families trudging along the highways of the nation

have seared the conscience of the nation. It could well have been equated to China's May Fourth Movement (1919), except that, unlike in the case of China, the event has yet to catalyse the nation.

Well before this, India had been witnessing a persistent economic downward slide. The pandemic could, thus, not have come at a more inopportune moment. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's announcement of a ₹20-lakh crore stimulus package was, hence, timely even though economists now believe that in real terms it amounts to around 2% of GDP rather than 10% as the government makes out. Finding resources for even this stimulus package will, however, not be easy. The Centre's finances are not in the best of health. It has already had to resort to a second tranche of \$1 billion loan from the World Bank to support COVID-19 relief measures. The finances of States are, to say the least, in a perilous state. Questions are, thus, bound to be raised as to whether adequate funds would be forthcoming for relief purposes.

Package is more a mosaic

Following the Prime Minister's announcement, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has provided several details of the stimulus package. Most critics affirm that it has been a financial stimulus at best, and much less likely to provide the much needed stimulus to the economy. Among the more important items are: providing a stimulus to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) through a ₹3-lakh crore loan scheme; helping other stressed business sectors such as non-banking financial companies, or NBFCs, power distribution companies and the real estate industry; provisioning of free food grains to migrant workers for the next two months; provisioning of a ₹1-lakh crore subsidy to agricultural cooperative societies; hiking the allocation for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme,



GIFTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

or MGNREGS, by ₹40,000 crore; extension of credit facilities to street vendors; interest subvention for small businesses, etc.

A valid criticism is that the patchwork of stimulus packages reveals a disjointed mosaic of ideas and thoughts. Also, that these would be more relevant to a Budget discussion than a stimulus package. In the list of items mentioned as part of the stimulus package are aspects such as throwing open of defence production and coal sectors to the private sector, references to opening up of defence and aerospace for private companies, support to budgetary provisions for domestic defence procurement, bringing out a negative import list of weapons and military platforms, etc. Many are, hence, viewing the stimulus package as a panic reaction to an increasingly difficult situation rather than a deliberate plan of action. It is indeed difficult to see how in the absence of a proper and well-designed plan, a patchwork of stimulus packages would enable India to return to growth rates of 7% to 8%.

China's calibrated moves

In the extant circumstances, comparisons with China have, hence, become inevitable. China may not have anticipated the latest COVID-19 pandemic, but since its early recovery, China has followed a calibrated approach – one that stems from a policy of deliberate strategic progression conceived over the years. It may be worthwhile to understand the facts so as to underscore the gap that cur-

rently exists between China and India.

Almost five years ago, China's President, Xi Jinping, had floated the idea of "a Community of Common Destiny of Mankind", in the course of an address to the UN General Assembly (2015). In this, he outlined China's viewpoint on aspects such as economic globalisation and the information technology revolution. The Belt and Road Initiative – which encompasses policy, infrastructure, trade, financial, and people-to-people connectivity, and, implicitly also, security ties – was an adjunct to it. The 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (2017), thereafter, gave its imprimatur, considering it essential to enable China to achieve pre-eminence status within the global order. Ever since, China has embarked on not only attaining economic and technological progress but also in defining how power would be determined in the new globalised era through devising new international norms in many emerging domains such as cyber, space, artificial intelligence, etc. This must not be lost sight of.

Setting the standards

China also set about rewriting international rules, premised not so much on governing where global goods are made, but on setting standards that define production, exchange and consumption. China Standards 2035 plans to set new standards with regard to the Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT) and define next generation information technology and biotechnology infrastructure. China is hoping, thereby, to reap the "early bird" advantage, even as other industrial nations struggle to recover from the devastation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Internationalisation of Chinese standards would provide China a clear advantage by providing it an opportunity to set the standards in emerging industries such as high-end equipment manufacturing, unmanned vehicles, new mate-

rials, cybersecurity and the like. This would enable it gain a dominant position in the global economy.

It is important to understand the implications of all this, when shrill voices are being heard that the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to end China's ambitious power outreach, and that countries such as India would be the beneficiaries. The converse may actually turn out to be true, given that China has, for years, adopted a policy of gaining a strategic advantage not only in military matters but also in economic and technical areas. This must not be lost sight of.

India must plan well

Mounting an effective challenge to China at this time would require a well-conceived and carefully calibrated plan of action by India. As of now, this is not evident. India and China will certainly emerge from the pandemic more diminished than previously, but to varying extents. Each country will, no doubt, suffer an economic setback, but while both nations would be among the very few that would still have a positive growth rate in the near future (1% in the case of China and 1.8% in the case of India, according to the International Monetary Fund) – given the size of China's economy, it does not translate into a massive shift in India's favour.

Admittedly, there is a great deal of talk of companies demitting China at this time, partly due to the pandemic and partly due to other reasons. India would more than welcome some of the entities exiting China, but there are no "green shoots" to suggest that such a shift has, or is, about to take place. Many alternatives are available to these companies and it would be excessively optimistic on our part to hold on to the belief that India is the only alternative choice for most of them.

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

Grasping the defence self-reliance nettle

The government's moves will help address vulnerabilities in crises as well as strategic and national security concerns



P.S. RAGHAVAN

The measures, recently announced by the Finance Minister, to promote self-reliance in defence production, address long-standing strategic and national security concerns about the extent of India's external dependence for its defence preparedness. For most of the past decade, India had the dubious distinction of being the world's largest arms importer, accounting for about 12% of global arms imports. Saudi Arabia jumped to first place in 2018 and 2019, but India still takes over 9% of global imports. This external dependence for weapons, spares and, in some cases, even ammunition creates vulnerabilities during military crises. COVID-19 has, once again, focused minds on the impact of supply chain disruptions on both civil and defence sectors. It is a no-brainer that with its security environment, its great power ambitions and its technological capacities, India should have a robust defence manufacturing capacity.

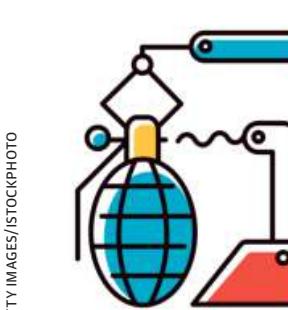
The facts that new Defence Procurement Procedures (DPP) 2020 are under formulation and that we now have a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) tasked with promoting indigenous equipment in the armed

forces, provide a conducive backdrop to this initiative.

An opportune moment

The decision to notify a list of weapons systems for sourcing entirely from Indian manufacturers, the promise to progressively expand this list and a separate Budget provision for domestic capital procurement will encourage our private defence manufacturers, whose research capacities, technological skills and quality commitment are often better appreciated by foreign clients for whom they are subcontractors. There is a range of platforms and subsystems, developed in India and qualified in trials, some of which face hurdles to their induction by our armed forces because of foreign competition. These include missile systems such as Akash and Nag, the Light Combat Aircraft and the Light Combat Helicopter, artillery guns, radars, electronic warfare systems and armoured vehicles.

The government has promised a time-bound defence procurement process, overhauling trial and testing procedures and establishing a professional project management unit. The significance of these measures is underscored by the fact that over the past five years, the Indian government has approved over 200 defence acquisition proposals, valued at over ₹4 trillion, but most are still in relatively early stages of processing. Of course, this delay now provides the opportunity to re-examine them and to prioritise



GIFTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

those with indigenous research and development. The CDS could also examine them from a tri-service angle, to avoid redundancy of capacities across the services.

The decision to corporatise the Ordnance Factory Board is another long overdue reform. Over the decades, our ordnance factories have been the backbone of indigenous supplies to our armed forces, from weapons systems to spares, ammunition and auxiliaries (including uniforms and boots). Their structure, work culture and product range now need to be responsive to technology and quality demands of modern armed forces. Corporatisation, including public listing of some units, ensures a more efficient interface of the manufacturer with the designer and end user. The factories would be better integrated into the larger defence manufacturing ecosystem.

The government has rightly clarified that self-reliance would not be taken to overzealous extremes. The thrust for indigenous research and development will

coexist with the import of cutting-edge military technologies to obviate near-term defence vulnerabilities.

At the same time, our defence planners will frame "realistic" specifications for their desired weapons platforms, based on the requirements of India's defence strategy, rather than on aspirational considerations which, the Finance Minister said, may lead to a single foreign vendor. It is also imperative that when we import weapon systems, we should plan for the ammunitions and spares for them to be eventually manufactured in India so that we are not driven to seek urgent replenishments from abroad during crises. The same goes for repair, maintenance and overhaul facilities and, at the next level, the upgrade of weapons platforms.

FDI impact

The liberalisation of foreign direct investment in defence manufacturing, raising the limit under the automatic route to 74%, should open the door to more joint ventures of foreign and Indian companies for defence manufacturing in India. It would also sustain a beehive of domestic industrial activity in the research, design and manufacture of systems and sub-systems.

Our companies, which have long been sub-contractors to prominent defence manufacturers abroad, would now get the opportunity to directly contribute to Indian defence manufacturing.

The development of a thriving

indigenous defence industry needs an overhaul of existing regulations and practices. A long-term integrated perspective plan of the requirements of the armed forces should give industry a clear picture of future requirements. DPP 2020 should incorporate guidelines to promote forward-looking strategic partnerships between Indian and foreign companies, with a view to achieving indigenisation over a period of time for even sophisticated platforms. Cost evaluation has to evolve from mechanical application of the L1 (lowest financial bid) principle to prioritising indigenous content. The definition of indigenisation itself needs to privilege technology over value or volume. Investment, Indian or foreign, will be viable only if the door to defence exports is opened, with a transparent policy. To give private industry a level playing field for developing defence technologies, conflicts of interest, created by the role of our Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) as the government's sole adviser, developer and evaluator of technologies have to be addressed.

Above all, a radical reset has to overcome resistance to change. Of the key components of any major reform – money, method and mindset – mindset is the most critical and the most intractable. It takes a crisis to change it.

P.S. Raghavan is Chairman, National Security Advisory Board. The views expressed are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

New moorings

The changing face of China's diplomacy is a fact (Editorial page, May 20). Present day Chinese envoys are of a different class, aggressive on social platforms. This is used to attack, intimidate and silence journalists, lawmakers and think tank scholars – essentially, anyone who contradicts China's official narrative of events. India has not been spared either. There has been a lashing out at Indian officials and media outlets when there have been references to COVID-19 as 'Wuhan Virus' or 'Chinese

Virus' initially. Similar exchanges happen with regard to the Dalai Lama or Arunachal Pradesh. Once the current crisis settles, there will be a new world order that will emerge and India should be ready for this transition.

H.N. RAMAKRISHNA,
Bengaluru

■ India needs to understand the direction as well as the strategy of its strongest and largest neighbour's foreign policy in order to have a proper policy of its own. One wonders if sitting on a swing by the banks of the Sabarmati or exchanging of

handicrafts constitutes a policy. There was a time when the Prime Minister himself took personal interest in grooming youngsters joining the cadre which ensured professionalism.

M.K. SUBBIAH,
Bengaluru

■ China's distancing from its soft diplomacy to one that is based on a hardened attitude towards many of its neighbours does not augur well for global diplomacy. It would have been of value had the writer expressed his views on Zhou Enlai's handling of the Indian issue

during the 1962 war.

K. CHAKRAVARTI GONDYALA,
Chittoor, Andhra Pradesh

Target WHO

It is in times of crises that partnerships, relations and unions between nations are tested, and this has been especially true in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the appearance of deep schisms in international organisations such as WHO ('World' page, "Reform or face fund cuts, Trump tells WHO", May 20). It is poignant to note that the (constant and consistent) rhetoric from the U.S. has been to blame China on all

counts, followed by WHO for "lack of transparency". One must be reminded that there is no international organisation better suited to collaborate efforts to combat the virus than WHO, an institution that had won applause for the successful fight against polio, smallpox and Ebola. There is also little doubt that WHO is possibly the only global organisation that can conduct a fair

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:
A sentence in the report headlined "Grasshoppers feast on crops in Wayanad" (May 20, 2020) read: "It was not the desert locust, Schistocerca gregaria, which causes panic in the northeast." It should have been northwest.

The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in

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inquiry into the origins as well as the spread and fight against the virus. In trying times, it is counsel and clarity, collaboration and consideration that can enable us all to tide over this issue. We have no room for discord between the global pulpits.

ABHISHEK SURESH,
Kozhikode, Kerala

How public health boosts an economy

A stronger health system in a country can lead to better outcomes on the economic growth front



K. SRINATH REDDY

When public health sneezes, the economy catches cold. Dire predictions for the post-COVID-19 global economy have come from the International Monetary Fund, which called the present crisis the worst downturn since the Great Depression. Grim forebodings for the Indian economy have been sounded by many distinguished economists and the Governor of the Reserve Bank of India.

Will this lead to higher investment in health to protect the economy from the effects of endangered health? The ₹20 lakh crore package recently announced includes proposals to prevent and respond to future pandemics. These include strengthening of health and wellness centres, establishment of infectious diseases hospital blocks in all districts, expansion of the laboratory network and 'One Health' research on zoonotic diseases under the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). This is a limited response to the threat of infectious outbreaks.

Need for equitable systems

The creation of a well-balanced health system is not the objective of this crisis response, despite the fact that the southern States have shown how efficient and equitable health systems are our best defence against public health emergencies. It is also clear that weak health systems, which do not function well in a steady state, cannot suddenly generate surge capacity when challenged by a public health emergency. Further, a selective investment in some components of infectious disease control will not meet the many other essential demands on the health system. Even during the COVID-19 response, attention has been diverted from maternal and child health, and care for other infectious diseases and non-communicable diseases. Also, where will the additional health workforce needed even for this limited expansion come from, without a planned investment in education, skilling and employment?



What is needed is adequate investment in creating a health system that can withstand any kind of public health emergencies, deliver universal health coverage and other targets of the Sustainable Development Goals, while creating mutually beneficial synergies between health and the economy. The Fifteenth Finance Commission is reportedly examining ways to increase public financing of the health sector, while framing its final recommendations. Given the major role that States have to play in creating strong health systems across the country, the directions and allocations provided by the Finance Commission can become the critical catalyst for transforming the nation's health. Will the Commission invigorate public health and primary care or will it be influenced by the intensive care narrative of COVID-19, which only a fraction of the infected persons need or benefit from? Will it highlight the economic benefits that will accrue from investing in health as a sustained commitment?

Not a 'cost disease'

Ambivalence of economists towards health dominated much of the 20th century. Health systems were mostly seen as unavoidable expenditures, which had to be accommodated as the essential service entourage of a booming economy but not to be placed at the high table of policy priorities. Indeed, one of the most influential economists of the modern era, William Baumol, described healthcare as a 'cost disease' where costs inexorably rise, outpacing the value of services rendered and therefore it is less rewarding than the industrial engines of economic growth.

The rising costs of healthcare in

industrialised countries, especially those without organised universal health coverage, may well invite such a description though the proposition could be debated even there. Public health, which is hidden away in the scullery when economic revelry is in full flow, cannot however be dismissed so easily. The services rendered by public health are far too valuable to be dismissed as a cost disease. Indeed, both population-based public health and individual-centred healthcare are joint accounts in human development that yield rich returns for economic development, if invested wisely.

The evidence-backed proposition that population health and national economic growth have a bi-directional relationship, as do poverty and individual ill health, has made its way into the paradigm of the Sustainable Development Goals. However, investments in health have lagged behind that awareness or have been heavily skewed in favour of advanced clinical care. Public health and primary care were left pleading for more, like a plaintive Oliver Twist, but were disdainfully dismissed.

Robust evidence on correlation

There is robust evidence that investments in public health and primary care pay rich economic dividends. Apart from the WHO Commission on Macroeconomics and Health (2001), two other economists-led reports on

Investing in Health (1993, 2013) concluded that investments in population health will yield rich returns of economic growth. The 2013 report estimated that low- and middle-income countries will realise 9 to 20 fold returns respectively on investments in health. A UN High Level

Commission, headed by the Presidents of France and South Africa, reported in 2016 that investments for augmenting the size and skills of the health workforce yields economic growth through improved population health and productivity, reduced healthcare costs and job creation even in a gloomy global scenario of job loss. The Baumol hypothesis on investments in health was strongly disputed by this report.

India, in particular, stands to gain greatly by investing in health, especially health beyond illness care. Productivity boost promised by a demographically young population can be protected. Education and skilling of a diversified health workforce can uplift health services for health protection at both population and individual levels. When domestic needs are met, this expanded health workforce can also meet global health needs, both as a rapid action force for health emergency response and as a unit taking care of the chronic care needs of aged societies. Innovative health technologies and inexpensive pharmaceutical products can be created at scale, for domestic use and global export.

This calls for stepped up public financing for the health sector. Questions may be posed as to how this can be done at a time of economic downturn. History teaches us that such an investment is especially useful in times of economic adversity. South-East Asian countries invested in health and universal health coverage during and soon after the Asian Financial Crisis of the 1990s. The United Kingdom adopted universal health coverage soon after the Second World War. Japan adopted it in the early 1960s to hasten recovery from the economic injuries inflicted by defeat in that war. All of them recognised that greater investment in health is a winning bet for economic development. India too must choose that path to boost the trajectory of its economic growth.

At the bottom of the Pandora's box lies hope. As COVID-19, which emerged through our indiscretions, exits, its attendant ills which afflict our economic and social life, too can fade away. If we let hope rise, through health.

K. Srinath Reddy is president, Public Health Foundation of India. Views are personal

Keep it retrospective

Incomplete data, too many variables make it difficult to predict the course of the COVID-19 curve



ATANU BISWAS

Plenty of organised data on daily counts of COVID-19 cases are available. Consequently, many statisticians, epidemiologists, data scientists are extrapolating existing data to predict the progression of the disease outbreak, and forecasting the trajectory of the disease over time. No wonder that the numbers are often contradictory in nature. And, no surprise that many of the forecasts have already been proved wrong.

Reliable 'expertise' may be an alien concept for a new and unknown disease. Consequently, although retrospective analysis is alright, the dynamics of any perspective analysis for uncertain and complex events like COVID-19 might be erroneous. Let me explain why.

Various standard epidemiological models, and regression and time series models are generally attempted for modeling cumulative number of cases and deaths data for COVID-19. Can the models depict the complex and unknown trajectory of the disease in the long run? If so, which one? Certainly, I know the common aphorism "all models are wrong but some models are useful". But, any such model relies on strong assumptions about aspects of the disease we haven't thoroughly studied yet. Thus, some assumptions are bound to be violated, and some remain unverified. This is a new disease, at least three varieties have been detected so far, and we are learning new features of the virus everyday. With several blind spots, it is utterly difficult to choose a model.

The key parameters

Once a model is chosen, a few 'parameters' dictate its performance. These key numbers are 'infection rate', 'incubation rate', 'recovery rate', 'birth' and 'death' rates, and also the rate at which recovered individuals return to the susceptible state due to loss of immunity, if at all. Values of most of these parameters are unknown – they are to be estimated from the data of cumulative cases and deaths over time. However, often data quality is questionable – speculations of under-reporting of cases from different parts of the world persist. Sensitivity and specificity of the testing procedures are also known to be high. Again, some models need to assume how people will adhere to government instructions like lockdown.

Also, COVID-19 has 2-14 days of incubation period. And patients may infect others during the incubation period as well. What is more, there are a lot of asymptomatic patients who go on infecting others who, in turn, might not be asymptomatic. This, along with the fact that there is scarcity of test kits in most parts of the world, surely misses many asymptomatic patients in the count of cases. Iceland, for example, managed to test almost 50,000 people of its 3,60,000 population, and found that 0.6% of the population were "silent carriers" of the disease with no symptoms or only a mild cough and runny nose!

According to a survey conducted by the Public Health Authority of Sweden, about 2.5% of Stockholmers had an ongoing COVID-19 infection at the end of March, which was 30 times the number tested positive by then. It became 80 times the number of tested positive cases within three weeks – about 20% Stockholmers were already immune to COVID-19 by that time. Thus, it is clear that the proportion of asymptomatic cases increased at an accelerated rate via a convex path, at least in the case of Sweden. However, Sweden didn't impose any lockdown measure. So, the volume and pattern of asymptomatic patients are likely to differ in countries where lockdown was imposed. But, without a good estimate of the asymptomatic patients – possibly through survey of antibody tests – it's impossible to have a reliable estimate of different unknown parameters of a model.

Testing asymptomatic patients

Again, when somebody is reporting a 3.3% fatality rate for a region, it is based on numbers of deaths and cases. However, there is a huge 'selection bias' in the data due to limited testing capacity – only those more likely to be positive are likely to be tested. If the actual number of undetected asymptomatic patients is 10x the observed cases, the actual fatality rate becomes just 0.3%. Similarly, the predicted trajectory might change significantly with the inclusion of the huge number of "asymptomatic cases" into calculations.

I understand that various policymakers would still need the help of such mathematical models fitted with available case data – to navigate the pandemic as much as possible for taking critical decisions dynamically. However, such contradicting and erroneous predictions from different experts would give rise to either horror or a false sense of relief in common people, both situations being very much undesirable.

Ananu Biswas is a Professor of Statistics at the Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata

Backing the 'angels in white coats'

India's private healthcare system needs more than the ₹15,000 crore aid recently offered

SUNEETA REDDY

On March 24, the Prime Minister announced a nationwide lockdown. Never since the Second World War have we seen the size, scale and human impact of this lockdown. Yet, we have managed and continue to manage the worst health and economic crisis we have seen in our lifetimes. Over 1,01,000 Indians have so far become infected by the novel coronavirus. We are not yet fully able to test and isolate efficiently, we are yet to find a protocol for cure and the vaccine is still in the distant future. Who will protect India?

While we are fighting for survival, the economic impact of this virus is \$8 trillion and growing as fast as the virus – which is why we need to desperately focus on a cure for the economy and a vaccine that protects the Indian healthcare system.

Indian hospitals and 60,000 nursing homes in the private sector have looked after 68% of Indian healthcare needs. In the process, they have evolved into delivering world-class care and continue to attract patients from 145 countries. Even more remarkably – we do it at 1/10th of international costs. Around 1.4 million Indian doctors across the world and even more nurses are leading the fight against COVID-19. While here in India, we clap for our heroes, should we not support the system that created and supports our 'angels in white coats'? The cost of good care, of commitment in the fight against a disease that has no tested clinical protocols calls for flexibility, resources and knowledge. The coronavirus is an imported virus and so are our PPEs, medicines and technology.

Strengthening the supply chain
Till we have a strong Indian supply chain, we continue to import and use the best because every patient is worth it. The government, recognising the role of Indian doctors and frontline workers, has provided a Rs. 50 lakh insurance cover, which is welcome; yet private hospitals who charge 6% of that continue to be misunderstood.

As a sector that is definitely in need of support, we continue to look towards the government for help –

₹15,000 crore will never be enough to bring this sector, small, medium and large nursing homes and corporate hospitals, out of this epidemic. We might survive COVID-19 but we will lose our front line of defence unless we act now.

While we strongly welcome the set of measures announced by the government for healthcare – increasing the viability gap funding from 20% to 30%, setting up infectious disease rooms in every district hospital, setting up laboratory facilities at block level – much more needs to be done.

Make inputs GST-exempt

First, uncomplicate our cost structure by zero-rating GST or exempt all services and goods that are supplied to the hospital. Today we have no input credit because we fall in the negative list. As positive contributors to the economy, we need to change this vital equation. Second, as the essential support system for COVID-19, hospitals need liquidity. Beyond bank borrowings, the government should set up a three-year fund that will enable sustainability of the sector and fortify the system from any such future outbreak and offer subvention of interest.

Third, incentivise rather than penalise the healthcare institutions that have invested in the future, in Tier II hospitals and technology by allowing companies to retain MAT credit as we continue to pay 25% corporate tax.

The government has done a commendable job in handling COVID-19. The statistics show that we are doing far better than even developed countries. This is the time for us to show that we are not here for just this fight alone – we are here for the future, a future where every Indian is unafraid because they are strong and protected by a vibrant healthcare system.

The crisis has underlined the need to nurture healthy individuals and maintain healthy balance sheets. It is with this hope that we will live another day. It is with this hope that we can exhale with confidence and courage, for there is no light brighter than this human spirit.

Suneeta Reddy is Managing Director, Apollo Hospitals



DATA POINT

Lockdown analysis

How to read the table

Part 1 lists average new cases recorded during lockdown intervals. For instance, T.N. recorded 56, 96 and 586 cases during periods L1, L2 and L3 respectively

Part 2 lists average new cases per million population recorded during lockdown intervals. For instance, Delhi recorded 35, 108 and 282 tests per million during periods L1, L2 and L3 respectively

Part 3 lists the change in tests conducted per confirmed case*

between lockdown dates. For instance, Punjab conducted 7 fewer tests per confirmed case on May 4 compared to April 14 and 7 more tests per confirmed case on May 17 compared to May 4

One of the ideas behind locking down a region during COVID-19, is to slow down the disease spread and buy time to improve the "test, trace, isolate and support" cycle. The table looks at how effectively the Indian States were able to increase their testing during lockdown. In the table, L1 indicates March 25 to April 14, L2 indicates April 15 to May 4 and L3 indicates May 5 and May 17. By The Hindu Data Team

State	Part 1: Avg. new cases			Part 2: Avg. new tests			Part 3: Tests/cases		Observations Good
	L1	L2	L3	L1	L2	L3	L2 - L1	L3 - L2	
Chhattisgarh	2	1	1	6	21	43	183	136	
Uttarakhand	2	1	1	4	21	19	64	16	
Kerala	13	6	7	15	16	23	24	7	
Jharkhand	1	5	8	1	1	45	6	39	
Haryana	7	14	32	2	53	99	38	12	
J&K	13	22	34	14	71	253	22	28	
Karnataka	10	19	38	7	37	74	72	10	
A.P.	22	58	46	9	110	166	54	31	
Bihar	3	22	50	3	8	13	-66	-15	
Odisha	3	5	51	6	44	96	130	-133	
Punjab	8	48	62	7	25	59	-7	7	
W.B.	9	39	125	1	9	42	4	12	
U.P.	25	97	138	1	1	12	11	3	
M.P.	36	110	153	1	21	50	6	5	
Rajasthan	46	105	167	17	55	106	10	2	
Delhi	73	157	372	35	108	282	3	1	
Gujarat	29	251	425	5	44	69	-10	-2	
T.N.	56	96	586	5	87	166	28	-17	
Maharashtra	122	542	1267	15	49	71	-5	-4	

*By measuring the number of tests per confirmed case, it is possible to gauge which States are testing enough relative to the size of their outbreaks

FROM PAGE ONE

Amphan batters West Bengal, Odisha

According to a preliminary assessment, 65 33-KV feeders have been affected, impacting 19,38,382 power consumers in Balasore, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Mayurbhanj, Jagatsinghpur and Kendrapara districts. The State government was yet to confirm any death.

As for telecommunication, 90% of the telecom towers were found intact, the Special Relief Commissioner's office said. From the late evening of Tuesday, most coastal districts and some interior areas had started recording heavy rain and strong wind. In the morning, while Dhamra recorded the highest wind

speed of 120 kmph, Paradip followed with 106 kmph. The IMD measured wind speed at 91 kmph in Balasore.

By afternoon, the intensity of rain and wind velocity started to drop. In Kendrapara and Jagatsinghpur, people left for their homes from cyclone shelters. In Balasore district, where the impact continued till evening, people remained in shelters.

Twenty units of the National Disaster Response Force, 16 teams of the Odisha Disaster Rapid Action Force and 231 fire service units were deployed for rescue operation.

(With inputs from Jacob Koshy in New Delhi)

Domestic flights to resume on May 25

Capping of airfares is an unprecedented decision taken by the government, which has often maintained that the cost of an air ticket should be a function of demand and supply.

"Even though temporary, fare capping is an unfortunate decision. CAPA India strongly disapproves of this decision. This is likely to push up airfares, which will affect passengers already struggling to get their refunds," Kapil Kaul, CEO of CAPA India, told *The Hindu*.

Maharashtra Minister Jayant Patil said the State had reservations about re-

sumption of flights. He said precautions were important as Mumbai and Pune had reported a large number of cases.

Goa Health Secretary Nila Mohanan said the State would follow the same protocols as those adopted for anyone entering the State – testing everyone using the Truetest swab test.

In Kerala, the Thiruvananthapuram, Cochin, Kannur and Kozhikode airports are geared up for domestic operations. The State is confident that quarantine facilities for those coming by these flights are adequate.

Two in five COVID-19 patients recovered: govt.

For a pandemic to be under control, those who recover every day must consistently be more than those freshly diagnosed daily.

However, India is among 11 countries that has over a 1,00,000 cases, but has fewer deaths – 3,316 – and only behind Russia's 2,972. Only 2.94% of Indians confirmed positive are on oxygen support, 3% in Intensive Care Units and 0.45% on ventilator support, Mr. Agrawal said.

However, this assessment belies the high variability of case loads and fatality rates within India. Just four States – Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Delhi – account for 70% of India's case load and 64% of fatalities. The re-

covery rate of Maharashtra is only 26%, and Gujarat, with 719 deaths, has a case fatality rate (deaths per confirmed cases) of 6%, which is nearly twice that of India's overall case fatality rate of 3.1%.

On Wednesday, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) resumed its practice of disclosing the number of samples tested per day. This amounted to 1,08,121, and on the whole, its laboratories have tested 25,12,388 samples since the pandemic started.

In absolute numbers, India may have conducted a large number of tests, but as proportion of its population it is among the world's stingiest testers.

Nepal's new map claims territories of India

India said Nepal was aware of the understanding on this issue and asked the government of Mr. Oli to return to dialogue.

Nepali diplomatic sources maintain the region of Kalapani and the contiguous areas to the east of the river Kali and Susta on the Uttar Pradesh-Bihar border are the only parts of the nearly 1,800-km boundary that remain unresolved. The area of Susta near Gorakhpur can also be noted in the new map. Kathmandu says India

has encroached upon this area and wants New Delhi to evacuate its population from the location.

The newly inaugurated Darchula-Lipulekh link road passes through the disputed region and will cut travel time for the Mansarovar pilgrimage.

Nepal claimed the area and Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli said his government was willing to give a road towards Tibet on lease to India without surrendering the region.

China accuses India of trespass, LAC heats up

The statement marked an escalation in the current tensions at the LAC, threatening to bring what India has thus far maintained were "actions by both armies on the ground" into a diplomatic face-off between the countries, the most serious such event since the Doklam face-off in 2017.

Sikkim's Naku La pass is one of four areas that had seen aggressive action between the troops since mid-April this year, according to sources. Similar skirmishes

had been reported along a stretch in eastern Ladakh at the Pangong Tso lake, Demchok and the Galwan river nala. Both sides had rushed more personnel to the area, and more than a dozen new Chinese boats had been observed on the lake, the sources added.

At Demchok, there is a huge accumulation of Chinese troops, two sources independently confirmed.

(With inputs from Ananth Krishnan in Chennai)

Lockdown did little to stem infections'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Wednesday questioned the Central government's strategy of handling the COVID-19 pandemic through lockdown and gave out statistics to argue that it had little impact on containing infections.

At an online press conference, party spokesperson Abhishek Manu Singhvi said COVID-19-positive cases went up from 28,000 to 1 lakh between May 3 and 18 when Lockdown 3.0 was in force.

He slammed a report by an expert of the NITI Aayog that predicted no fresh cases post May 16, based on earlier calculations of the rate of growth of infections.

"India's experience on account of an unplanned, knee-jerk and blanket lockdown has probably been the opposite. Is the government running on autopilot? Is it shamelessly misleading its people without any apology?" he said.

"First chart shall be prepared at least 4 hours before

the scheduled departure and the second chart shall be prepared at least 2 hours [unlike the present practice of 30 minutes] before scheduled departure. Only online current booking shall be permitted in between first and second chart preparation," it added.

All passengers will be compulsorily screened and only asymptomatic passengers are allowed to enter /board the train. They will need to reach the station at least 90 minutes in advance.

The Railways said no catering charges would be in-

Railways to start reservations

Bookings for 200 time-tabled trains to run from June 1 can be done from today



More mobility: The trains are in addition to Shramik Specials.

cluded in the fare. The IRCTC, however, will make provision for limited eatables and packaged drinking water on payment basis in limited trains.

"Passengers are encouraged to carry their own food and drinking water... No linen, blankets and curtains will be provided inside the train. Passengers are advised to carry their own linen for the travel. The temperature inside AC coaches shall be suitably regulated for this purpose," it added.

"All passengers must download and use the Aar-

gya Setu application. Passengers are advised to travel light," it said.

New SOP issued

Meanwhile, the Railway Ministry has decided to detrain all passengers travelling in a coach even if one or more passengers show symptoms of COVID-19.

Acting on reports that some passengers who reached their destinations tested positive, the Railway Board on Wednesday wrote to the General Managers of Zonal Railways to detrain passengers and empty the coach for cleaning. A Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) on disinfecting and sanitising the coach was also issued.

"In the event of a passenger or passengers being found infected or showing symptoms, the train would be stopped at the next major station and all travelling public in that particular coach or coaches would be de-trained," a senior official told *The Hindu*.

(With inputs from S. Vijay Kumar)

Bus row: U.P. Cong. chief, ex-MLA held

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Congress president and MLA Ajay Kumar Lallu and former legislator Vivek Bansal were arrested by the Agra police for protesting against the administration's refusal to allow buses to ply into Uttar Pradesh from Rajasthan.

Mr. Lallu was granted interim bail by a local court, but was arrested again by the Lucknow police in connection with an FIR lodged against him and Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's secretary Sandeep Singh for allegedly sending a faulty list of buses. The two leaders, along with four or five unidentified Congress workers, were booked under the provisions of the Epidemic Diseases Act.

Deputy Chief Minister Dinesh Sharma said the Congress was indulging in a political stunt and claimed that around 460 vehicles submitted in the list were bogus.

Birla orders review of House panels' work

Opposition parties have been pressing for online meetings of the committees

SOBHANA K. NAIR
NEW DELHI



Om Birla

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla has initiated an exercise to assess the effectiveness of the Parliamentary Standing Committees, from taking stock of the rate of attendance at their meetings to the list of recommendations that have not been accepted by the government.

This comes in the backdrop of efforts by both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha secretariats to hold online meetings of the committees, after pressure from the Opposition parties. The Parliament session abruptly ended on March 23. None of the department-related standing committees (DRSCs) have met since then.

The Rajya Sabha secretariat had done a similar analysis. Briefing the House,

cretariat to "follow up intensely" with the members to ensure that they attended meetings of the panels, the sources said.

The Speaker also asked all the committees to give suggestions to improve the rating/ranking of India in global indices.

Govt. orders

In similar orders in March, the government gave blanket instructions to all Ministries to improve Indian's position on various global markers, including the World Press Freedom Index.

The Lok Sabha secretariat, according to the sources, had been asked to prepare a list of cases where a committee's recommendations have not been accepted by the government or where required action is pending

Not the time to play politics, says Priyanka

'Use your banners, but buses must ply'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI



Priyanka Gandhi Vadra

said Ms. Vadra. However, she made the appeal barely half an hour before the 4 p.m. deadline was to expire.

Ms. Vadra said if the issue had not got embroiled in politics, at least 92,000 migrants could have reached home safely. "This is not the time to play politics. I urge every political party to set aside their political ideology and help people instead," she said.

"I want to urge the Chief Minister that our buses will remain parked where they are at the borders [with Rajasthan] till 4 p.m., and it will be 24 hours since they were made available there... If you want, you can paste your posters or banners on them, but kindly allow them to ply so that the migrants can be ferried in them and they reach home safely,"

NSD takes part of its syllabus online

Virtual classes, projects under way

DAMINI NATH
NEW DELHI



Students recording videos of themselves doing yoga poses, making stage lighting plans and practising the Stanislavski method of acting have all become part of the National School of Drama (NSD)'s online learning initiative during the COVID-19 lockdown.

While about 70% of the classes for the NSD's three-year course in dramatic arts required practical training, the remaining syllabus could be adapted to virtual teaching, NSD director-in-charge Suresh Sharma said.

"We can't teach improvisation in acting or model-making for stage online, but certain theoretical aspects can be taught online," he said.

After classes were suspended on March 13 on the directions of the Culture Ministry, online classes started from March 28 and students were given projects to submit by May 15, according to an official.

Various approaches First-year students were asked to record videos doing yoga and explaining their observations of the changes experienced.

For the movement projects, students were asked to work on different exercises they had learnt in class and choreograph a small piece based on that, the official said. Second and third-year students were asked to continue rehearsing for the productions planned before the lockdown.

BJP MPs praise Tsai as sworn in

Meenakshi Lekhi, Rahul Kaswan send congratulatory messages for second term

ANANTH KRISHNAN
CHENNAI



Tsai Ing-wen

As Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen was sworn in on Wednesday for a second term, two MPs from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) were among the dignitaries from 41 countries who sent in messages of congratulation that were played at the inaugural ceremony.

A joint message from BJP MPs Meenakshi Lekhi and Rahul Kaswan praised Taiwan as "a democratic country". Both India and Taiwan are democratic countries, bonded by shared values of freedom, democracy and respect for human rights. Over the past years, India and Taiwan have enhanced bilateral relations enormously.

Webinars for aspirants

In addition to the virtual classes for students, NSD has also launched a "theatre for all" webinar series on topics such as acting, sound and video technology for the stage and festival management for aspiring students and theatre enthusiasts, Mr. Sharma said.

He added that two online workshops of 10 days each – on theatre appreciation and playwriting – would be launched in June. About 30-35 people would be able to register for these, he said.

The Union Culture Minis-



Meenakshi Lekhi

trying to widen the range of areas, especially trade, investment and people exchanges," the two lawmakers said in their message. A separate video message from Ms. Lekhi was also played at the inaugural, in which she wished Ms. Tsai "great success and the continued

strengthening of the comprehensive relations between India and Taiwan".

At Ms. Tsai's last inauguration in 2016, India had at the last minute decided against sending two MPs to attend the event, concerned about the possible fallout on ties with China.

India was represented at the ceremony by Sohang Sen, the acting director general of the India Taipei Association. India does not have a formal mission in Taipei as it is among 179 of the 194 member states of the United Nations that do not maintain diplomatic ties.

In her speech, Ms. Tsai called for Taiwan and China to have dialogue, but ruled out any likelihood of a "one

country, two systems" framework that China has proposed, along the lines of its administration over Hong Kong, which returned to China in 1997.

"We will not accept the Beijing authorities' use of 'one country, two systems' to downplay Taiwan and undermine the cross-strait status," said Ms. Tsai.

Several U.S. dignitaries sent messages of congratulations, including Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, the presumptive Democratic Presidential candidate Joe Biden, Senior Director of the U.S. National Security Council Mike Pottinger, and Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs David Stilwell.

China accuses India of trespass, LAC heats up

had been reported along a stretch in eastern Ladakh at the Pangong Tso lake, Demchok and the Galwan river nala. Both sides had rushed more personnel to the area, and more than a dozen new Chinese boats had been observed on the lake, the sources added.

At Demchok, there is a huge accumulation of Chinese troops, two sources independently confirmed.

(With inputs from Ananth Krishnan in Chennai)

New scheme for Chhattisgarh farmers

They will get up to ₹13,000 an acre a year under a new income support plan

VARGHESE K. GEORGE
NEW DELHI

U.K. trial to test efficacy of five drugs

12,000 patients across 170 hospitals to be involved in the exercise coordinated by University of Oxford

R. PRASAD
CHENNAI

With a range of approved drugs now being tested on COVID-19 patients, there is no clarity on which one will turn out to be more effective in treatment compared with the standard hospital care that all patients receive.

A recovery trial aims to study the effectiveness of four different drugs and anti-inflammatory drug tocilizumab for those with worsening clinical symptoms.

HIV drugs in list
The recovery trial, coordinated by the Nuffield Depart-

ment of Population Health at the University of Oxford, will randomise patients to receive either standard of care or one of the four approved drugs.

The drugs being tested are HIV drugs Lopinavir (400 mg)-Ritonavir (100 mg), anti-inflammatory corticosteroid (dexamethasone), anti-malaria drug hydroxychloroquine and antibiotic azithromycin (500 mg).

Second shot
Patients enrolled in the trial and have progressive COVID-19 with clinical evidence of hypoxia and inflammatory



Dr. Dinesh Saralaya, principal investigator of the trial at the Bradford Institute.

state may undergo a second randomisation to receive either tocilizumab (which

blocks the inflammatory protein called IL-6) or no additional treatment.

"The trial hopes to recruit 12,000 patients in all and will receive one of the four drugs or the standard of care for 10 days or till the date of hospital discharge and a second randomisation to receive tocilizumab or no treatment. The trial will be conducted across 170 hospitals in the U.K., including Bradford Institute for Health Research," said Dr. Dinesh Saralaya, consultant respiratory physician & director for Clinical Research at the Bradford Institute for Health Research

and the principal investigator of the trial at Bradford.

"We have already recruited over 100 patients. The primary objective of the recovery trial is to provide reliable estimates of the effect of study treatments on all-cause mortality within 28 days after randomisation," said Dr. Saralaya.

The secondary outcomes to be evaluated were reduction in hospital stay, number of patients who needed ventilation and the number of days it was required, and the number of patients who needed renal replacement therapy.

Police beat up lawyer for being 'Muslim'

STAFF REPORTER
BHOPAL

The Madhya Pradesh police on Wednesday suspended a sub-inspector for telling a lawyer he was allegedly beaten up by the police as they mistook him for a Muslim.

The lawyer, Deepak Bundele, who is diabetic, was going to the district hospital in Betul on March 23 to seek treatment, with only prohibitory orders in force ahead of the lockdown, when the police reportedly thrashed him.

On May 17, two policemen, including the official now suspended, visited him to take a statement. "Police, whenever there are Hindu-Muslim riots, always sides with the Hindus, even Muslims know it. But this happened, it was a mistake," one of the policemen is heard in an audio clip Mr. Bundele recorded.

"So you are saying they thrashed me thinking I am a Muslim," he asked them, to which one of them replied, "Yes, that is the case, your beard is long too."



A volunteer distributing relief packets to women in Ganjam district of Odisha. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Women walking home get free sanitary pads

'Hygiene takes backseat on long trek'

SIB KUMAR DAS
BERHAMPUR

On the Andhra Pradesh-Odisha border in Odisha's Ganjam district, women and adolescent girls among migrant workers walking on the NH16 to their homes are being given sanitary napkins, along with food and relief material, by NGO Youth for Social Development (YSD) for the past six days.

"It is a small effort to ensure menstrual hygiene for women already burdened by economic and physical woes," said Bibhu Prasad Sahu, director, YSD. Women

Over 300 seafarers fly back to Goa

Return of stranded mariners gathers pace as govt. lets cruiseliners hire flights

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

More than 300 seafarers returned to Goa from Italy on two chartered flights on Wednesday.

This is the first batch of mariners who have been able to return by air, after the Union Home Ministry allowed three flights to be chartered to bring them back.

Italian cruise company Costa Cruise chartered the services of Italian leisure airline, Neos, for this exercise which pressed into service its Boeing 737 aircraft. "The first aircraft landed at 10.40 a.m. with 168 passengers on board, and the second plane landed around 6 p.m. with 167 seafarers," Airport director Gagan Malik said. A third flight was yet to land along with 81 on board at the time of going to print.

Sent to quarantine
The swabs of passengers were taken at the Dabolim International Airport from where they were taken to paid quarantine facilities identified by the Goa govern-



Safe shores: Details of seafarers being collected at the Dabolim International Airport in Goa on Wednesday. ■ TWITTER

ment. The president of Goa Seamen Association of India, Dixon Vaz, told *The Hindu* that he had moved the Goa High Court opposing the demand from the government that seafarers pay for the quarantine facility, following which the court had sought a reply from the State. The Home Ministry had earlier announced that passengers returning from around the world aboard special Air India flights would have to pay for the isolation facilities identified by the States.

While the Shipping Ministry allowed cruise companies to operate flights on May 25, the shipping industry rues the lack of standard operating protocols in procuring permissions which

have delayed many applications. "Without a protocol in place we have to run from pillar to post for permissions. We don't know whether the application process will start in India, or in a foreign country where seafarers are stranded," said a senior executive on condition of anonymity.

15,000 seafarers stranded
There are an estimated 15,000 India seafarers stranded around the world either aboard cruise ships or on foreign soil. The government has also allowed them to avail special Air India flights being operated under the Vande Bharat Mission to return to India.

"Out of the 7,000 seafarers who have registered on the MEA's website, only 350 have been able to return.

These are mostly from the U.K.," said Captain Sanjay Parashar, chairman of the International Maritime Federation.

Two cruiseliners so far have also been able to disembark seafarers at Mumbai port.

398 new cases, 30 deaths in Gujarat

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
AHMEDABAD

Gujarat on Wednesday reported 398 new COVID-19 cases, taking the total to 12,539. With 30 deaths, the fatality count has climbed to 749.

For the last three weeks, the State continues to add 300 plus cases per day while the death count remains above 20 per day.

The total recoveries stand at 5,219 which include 176 patients discharged on Wednesday.

There are now 6,524 active cases, while 47 are surviving on ventilator support. In Ahmedabad, 271 new cases were detected and 26 deaths reported, bringing the total to 9,216 cases and 602 deaths.

Ahmedabad's mortality rate is 6.5%, which is double than the national average.

Meanwhile, the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation has further relaxed the lockdown norms, allowing economic activities with conditions in containment zones as well.

As cases peak, Bihar Health Secretary is transferred

BJP Minister allegedly pressured govt. to remove him

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
PATNA

As the COVID-19 pandemic peaks in Bihar, the State government on Wednesday transferred Principal Health Secretary Sanjay Kumar with immediate effect. Mr. Kumar has been transferred to the State Tourism Department.

He had come out unscathed when the State Health Department was in the eye of a storm last year when an outbreak of encephalitis in Muzaffarpur district killed over 200 children in a month.

VID-19 on Twitter were the prime source of information for many in the State.

Sources told *The Hindu* that Mr. Kumar had been transferred under pressure from a BJP Minister in the State Cabinet.

He had come out unscathed when the State Health Department was in the eye of a storm last year when an outbreak of encephalitis in Muzaffarpur district killed over 200 children in a month.

Mr. Kumar was replaced

with a 1993 batch IAS officer, Uday Singh Kumawat, who was serving as the Secretary of the State Tourism Department.

Mr. Kumawat has also been given additional charges of Bihar Public Administration and the rural development organisation in Patna till further orders.

Meanwhile, COVID-19 cases in Bihar have gone up to 1,607 with 571 recoveries. A total of 53,361 tests have been done so far in the State's seven laboratories.

Maharashtra adds 2,250 cases in a day

Mumbai breaches 24,000-case mark

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

cases to breach the 24,000-case mark as its total case tally soared to 24,118.

As per figures, 41 of the fatalities were reported from Mumbai as the city's death toll shot to 841, while 15 deaths were reported from Pune district (including two from Pimpri-Chinchwad) to take its death toll to 1,390.

This is the second-highest case surge reported after the spike of 2,347 cases reported on May 17. Of the total cases, 27,581 are active, said State Health Department officials. As many as 679 patients were discharged on Wednesday, taking the total number of discharged till date to 10,318.

"About 74% of the deaths on Wednesday had high-risk co-morbidities such as diabetes, hypertension, asthma and heart disease," said State Surveillance Officer, Dr. Pradeep Awate.

THE MARINE PRODUCTS EXPORT DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (MPEDA)

(Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Govt. of India)
MPEDA House, Panampilly Avenue, Kochi - 682 036, Kerala.
Tel:0484- 2311979, website : www.mpeda.gov.in
Email : ho@mpeda.gov.in

DEPUTY DIRECTOR (PERSONNEL) - ON DEPUTATION

MPEDA invites applications for the post of Deputy Director (Personnel) on deputation basis. For details please visit: www.mpeda.gov.in. (NOTIFICATION- OPPORTUNITIES-ANNOUNCEMENT).

Last date of receipt of application : 5 p.m. of 8th June 2020.

(Sd/-)
SECRETARY

National Council For Hotel Management & Catering Technology

An Autonomous body under Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India
A 34, Sector 62, Noida- 201309

Employment Notification No. 01/2020

Applications are invited from eligible candidates for filling up of following posts in NCHMCT on usual deputation terms:

1	Deputy Director	1 Post (unreserved)	Pay Level 11 of 7th CPC (Rs.67700-208700)
2	Executive Officer (Admn. & Fin.)	1 Post (unreserved)	Pay Level 10 of 7th CPC (Rs.67700-208700)

Detailed advertisement and application format are available in Council's website www.nchm.nic.in which may be downloaded. Last date of receipt of the applications in the Council is 19.06.2020.

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH

AP High Grade Steels Limited, APIC Towers, Plot No. 1 IT Park, Mangalagiri, Guntur (Dist), Andhra Pradesh-522503
RFP Notice No.APHSL/2020/PMIC/01, Date: 20-05-2020

NOTICE INVITING RFP For Project Management Consultancy (PMC) for the Development of 3.0 Mt/Year Steel Plant in YSR Kadapa District in the state of Andhra Pradesh AP High Grade Steels Limited (APHSL) under Government of Andhra Pradesh invites Request for Proposal (RFP) from interested parties of international/national repute to enable in discharging its function as Project Management Consultant Request for Proposal (RFP) for the Development of 3.0 Mt/Year Steel Plant in YSR Kadapa District in the state of Andhra Pradesh.

The RFP document providing the term of Reference (TOR), pre-qualification criteria, terms and conditions including corrigendum if any, Bid Submission date and time for bid submission, etc. can be downloaded from the web site www.aphsl.com from 20-05-2020 to 21-06-2020.

All other details including the Proposed Due Date extensions, clarifications, amendments, addenda, corrigenda, etc., will be uploaded only to the aforesaid website and will not be published in newspapers. Hence, Applicants may regularly visit the website www.aphsl.com to keep themselves updated.

For further details and queries please contact by email: cmcdaphsl@gmail.com at Ph:9334973766

Sd/- Managing Director, AP Highgrade Steels Limited

KARNATAKA POWER CORPORATION LIMITED

(BELLARY THERMAL POWER STATION)
CIN : U85110KA1970SGC001919

No. KPCL/2019/PS/WORK_INDENT9688/CALL-3 Date: 19.05.2020

TENDER NOTIFICATION CALL-3

(Two Cover System) (Through e-Procurement portal only)

Tender is invited through e-procurement portal in two parts for "Routine, Breakdown & Annual overhauling maintenance works of I&C systems of Unit#3" for a period of one year 2020-21 at BTPS, Unit#3, Kudathini, Bellary District. Contractors should have experience in execution of similar works and financial turnover as per e-portal PQR. EMD: Rs. 1,12,000/- shall be paid through e-procurement portal. Last date and time for receiving Tender Queries/Clarifications: 21.05.2020 at 11:00Hrs. Pre-Bid meeting date and time: 22.05.2020 at 11:00Hrs. Last date and time for receipt of tender: 28.05.2020 at 16:00Hrs. Date and time for opening of Technical Bid: 29.05.2020 at 16:30Hrs. Date and time for opening of Financial Bid: 30.05.2020 at 10:00Hrs. Details of the bid can be down loaded from e-procurement portal website: www.eproc.karnataka.gov.in. Further information can be had from the office of the Executive Engineer(I&C)-2, BTPS, Kudathini-583 152, Ballari District, Mob: 094482 90738.

Odisha sees 74 new cases, crosses 1,000-mark

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BHUBANESWAR

Odisha crossed the 1,000-mark of COVID-19 cases as 74 more people tested positive on Wednesday, taking the total to 1,052.

According to the State Health & Family Welfare Department, 72 of the 74 new cases were detected in the quarantine centres.

The new cases include 28 in Boudh district, 11 from Puri, nine from Cuttack, seven from Khordha, six each from Ganjam and Jajpur, two in Malkangiri districts. The number of active cases stands at 703. While 343 persons had recovered and six persons died, 36 persons were discharged on Wednesday.

CM YK

A BM-BME

E-Mail Id : se.hdc@rediffmail.com
Government of Odisha
Department Of Water Resources
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, HIRAKUD DAM CIRCLE, BURLA "e"- Procurement Notice No.-HDC/01/2020-21

1. Name of the Work : Road construction Work & Electrical work as per DTCN
2. Total No. of Works : 02 (Two) nos. work
3. Estimated Cost : Rs.311.89 lakhs to 618.60 lakhs (Approximately)
4. Period of Completion : 4 (Four) to 6 (Six) Calendar months.
5. Date & Time of Availability of Bid Document in the Portal : 16.00 hours of Dt.27.05.2020 up to 16.00 hours of Dt.25.06.2020
6. Last Date & Time for Receipt : Up to 16.00 hours of Dt.25.06.2020
7. Date of Opening of Technical Bid : Dt.26.

INTERVIEW | THOMAS PIKETTY

'Nationalism is not going to solve the big challenges of the day'

The basic idea of participatory socialism is where everyone has the power to participate in the economy, says the economist

NARAYAN LAKSHMAN

The seminal work of Thomas Piketty, Professor of Economics at the Paris-based School of Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences and at the Paris School of Economics and Co-Director at the World Inequality Lab and World Inequality Database, is particularly salient at the present moment, when the first wave of the catastrophic human toll of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has been followed by the second wave of its severe economic consequences, including loss of livelihoods, internal displacement and starvation among the poor in India and elsewhere. Edited transcript:

Please explain what you mean by "participatory" socialism, a concept you discuss in your latest book, Capital and Ideology.

■ The basic idea of participatory socialism in my view is where everyone has the power to participate in the economy. This means access to private property – I believe in private property and do not want state property or communism – which re-

quires a more progressive tax system in order to reduce taxation on the poorest groups in society and possibly pay for an endowment that everybody will receive. We say that we believe in equal opportunity, but we live in a world where the bottom 50% of the population does not receive any inherited wealth from the upper rungs, whereas some other people receive millions or billions. The other dimen-

...prosperity comes from equality and education and not from the pursuit of more and more inequality. That is the basic idea of participatory socialism – to use the good aspects of private property and the market forces, but to put them in the service of a much more equal and equitable development model and economic system.

You argue that deliberation over ideology can change the political balance of power and resource allocation system, and that



...prosperity comes from equality and education and not from the pursuit of more and more inequality

impacts inequality. Is this more important than redistributive conflict and property rights in historically driving economic development?

■ Both logics are at work. You have conflict between different interests and

groups, but I also want to stress the dimension of learning, deliberation, and intellectual or ideological dimensions.

Pure class conflict in itself does not determine a unique outcome in terms of institutions, policy and legal systems. Your class position, though it is important, does not fully determine your view of the world about how the property rights, tax and educational and frontier systems should be organised. What kinds of relations should you have with other countries? There is an international and transnational dimension of the inequality regime, which is very important. The pure, class-conflict view of the world does not really allow for this rich set of ideologies to play their full role.

However, if you give a big-

ger role for ideas and intellectual transformation, that means that democracy has a role to play, that indeed you also have a theory of elections and deliberation, and you should pay a lot of attention to how this is organised, how you form political parties, and the role of the media.

We have in recent years seen the tendency towards the ideologies of nationalism, populism, protectionism and nativism, across countries. Do you think that this direction of systemic change, said to be linked to disappointment with Bretton Woods institutions, will be exacerbated or turned back by the COVID-19 pandemic?

■ There is a risk that the pandemic could reinforce pre-

existing trends of nationalism and a return to the frontier and identity of the nation state.

But I think this will not last forever, because in the end, nationalism is not going to solve the big challenges of the day, including global warming, inequality, public lands problems. It will require cooperation, some form of internationalism.

Even in the short run, nationalism will not necessarily win the day if something else is being promoted and proposed by political actors. The problem that starting with the Bretton Woods systems and the rise of neo-liberalism, we have organised globalism, internationalism and the international economy in a way that has been very beneficial for the highest wealth and highest human capital individuals.

But that is forgetting social and redistributive objectives. We have to rebuild internationalism in a different manner.

For instance, you cannot trade or have free capital flow between any two countries, if at the same time you do not have some common regulation and taxation of the most powerful economic actors, or if you do not have some system or targets for carbon emissions, and taxing those who do not respect these targets, or if you do not have social rules about minimum wages.

If we do not move in that direction, then nationalism will win the day because it at least proposes to break with the current system of globalisation with no sort of regulation of any kind, and which people are not convinced by any more.

Board exams exempted from lockdown steps

Home Ministry says students, teachers must compulsorily wear masks; thermal screening should be done at the centres

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Union Home Ministry on Wednesday exempted the pending Class 10 and 12 examinations to be conducted by the State and Central Boards from the lockdown. Students and teachers will have to wear masks compulsorily, and there should be provision for thermal screening and sanitisers at all examination centres.

Home Minister Amit Shah tweeted on Wednesday, "Taking into consideration the academic interest of large number of students, it has been decided to grant exemption from the lockdown measures to conduct Board



Long hiatus: Students were in the middle of the Board exams when the lockdown was imposed. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

examination for classes 10th & 12th, with few conditions like social distancing, face mask etc, for their safety."

Several State Boards and the Central Board of Secondary Education were about to start, or were in the mid-

dle of, the examinations when the lockdown was imposed. The CBSE recently released the date sheet of the remaining 29 papers of Classes 10 and 12 to be held from July 1 to July 15.

Kerala postponement

Earlier this week, the Kerala government postponed the Secondary School Leaving Certificate, higher secondary and vocational higher secondary examinations to be held in the last week of May as the lockdown was extended.

Under the fresh lockdown measures guidelines issued by the Ministry under the Disaster Management Act, 2005 on May 17, opening of

schools has been prohibited. States and the Union Territories for transportation of students to the examination centres."

Admit cards

Asked how the students living in containment zones will be allowed to take the examinations, a senior Ministry official said, "They should be allowed with their admit card. Earlier also students living in curfew-hit areas have been allowed on the basis of admit cards."

The official said that in case a student had high temperature on the day of examination, there were provisions for such students to appear for exams.

muddin and their contacts who tested positive in the State stood at 1,304 on Tuesday, as per the government.

Of the 249 cases reported on Wednesday, 50 were from Barabanki, all of whom were migrants workers who recently returned, according to a Health official in Lucknow. Ayodhya also reported 21 fresh cases, while 15 positive cases were found in Etawah, 12 in Prayagraj, 11 in Pratapgarh and 10 in Ramapur.

The total number of samples collected of inter-State migrants stands at 43,625, while over 5.36 lakh are under surveillance of ASHA workers.

Only 2,132 used AB-PMJAY for COVID-19 treatment

NHA assists in running Health Ministry's COVID helpline

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Only 2,132 people have made use of the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) for COVID-19 treatment. The figure, released by the insurance authorities on Wednesday, comprises those who had recovered and those undergoing treatment out of the one lakh cases reported in the country.

Testing for, and treatment of, COVID-19 is free for the 53 crore beneficiaries of India's cashless and paperless healthcare access service for poor and vulnerable families.

The flagship scheme of the Union government provides a cover of up to ₹5 lakh a family a year for secondary- and tertiary-care hospitalisation.

On Wednesday, it crossed one crore treatments (for various listed diseases, including COVID-19), worth approximately ₹13,412 crore offered.

The programme was



Indu Bhushan

launched in September 2018. "The National Health Authority (NHA), mandated to implement AB-PMJAY, has focused on how to get the private sector more actively involved in offering treatment for both COVID-19 as well as non-COVID-19 health conditions," the AB-PMJAY said.

It added that to increase the number of hospitals providing COVID-19 treatment and to ensure continued treatment such as haemodialysis, cardiovascular procedures, and chemotherapy for non-COVID-19 critical illnesses, the NHA had started an express empanelment

mechanism with less stringent criteria for temporary empanelment of hospitals in March, when COVID-19 cases started rising in the country.

Among the 21,565 hospitals, more than 1,385 have been empanelled since April 1. Of this, 1,310 are through the regular empanelment route and the remaining 75 under express empanelment.

Of the total new hospitals on board, nearly 58% per cent are private ones.

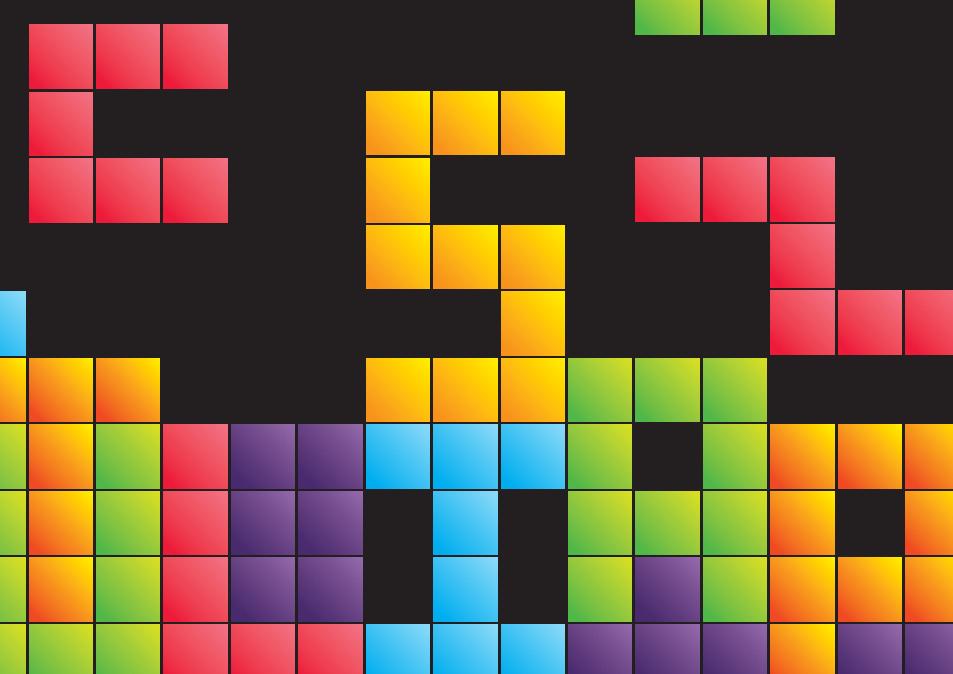
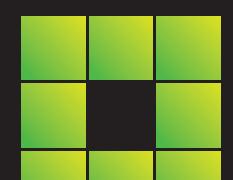
Indu Bhushan, CEO, AB PM-JAY and NHA, said: "We have also supported COVID-19 preparedness and response in the form of managing the national COVID-19 helpline 1075 besides strengthening our network of hospitals and service capabilities to ensure continued service delivery to non-COVID-19 patients under the scheme."

More than 600-700 dedicated agents were answering calls round the clock, he added.

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60% of farmers faced losses, finds survey

Majority say lockdown has hurt their preparations for the coming sowing season

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ
NEW DELHI

Most farmers managed to harvest their crops despite the COVID-19 pandemic, but 60% of them still faced losses, mostly related to the lockdown, according to a new survey in 12 States. A majority of farmers also say the lockdown has hurt their preparations for the upcoming sowing season either because they cannot afford inputs such as seeds and fertilizer or because of labour shortages.

The situation is worse for

wage workers, with four out of five seeing their incomes fall over the last month. On average, wages were 76% lower compared to the same time last year.

These are some of the findings from a telephonic survey of almost 1,500 agricultural households in 200 districts of 12 large States, conducted in the first half of May by researchers from Harvard University's T.H. Chan School of Public Health, in association with the Public Health Foundation of India and the Centre

for Sustainable Agriculture, Hyderabad. This was a baseline survey, and is expected to be repeated in June and July, to track the impact of the pandemic on agriculture and food security.

The survey found that 26% of respondents had harvested a crop in the past month, while 26% said this was not a harvesting season for them. Only 10% were unable to harvest their rabi or winter season crop, due to lockdown-related issues such as low market prices, difficulty in market access,

government curbs and a shortage of labour and machinery.

The situation becomes more complicated when looking at different crops and different States. Wheat is the biggest rabi crop and harvesting rates were especially high in northern States like Punjab (95%) and Haryana (81%) which also have high rates of mechanisation. However, while almost 90% of the wheat harvested in Punjab has already been sold, that figure falls to just above 60% for Haryana.

'Vaccine will be for global public good'

Top U.S. health expert Francis Collins says it has to be quickly shared with the world

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

WASHINGTON

If the United States is the first to develop an effective vaccine against the COVID-19, it has to quickly share it with the world, the head of the National Institutes of Health, Francis Collins, told AFP in an interview.

President Donald Trump's administration has suggested that while it would share its scientific knowhow, it would prioritise the production of doses for the U.S. population from the get-go.

But Mr. Collins said he



Mounting casualties: Relatives of a deceased person during a mass burial of COVID-19 victims at the Parque Taruma cemetery in Manaus, Brazil. ■ GETTY IMAGES

"absolutely" agrees with the French and Chinese leaders that a vaccine should be what they have called a "global public good," and expressed particular concern for countries in Africa.

"Certainly if we had a vaccine that works, I would want to be sure as quickly as possible, it is available there (Africa) and in South America – look at Brazil right now," Mr. Collins said.

"We have a great deal of responsibility. We, as the richest nation in the world, need not to just take care of ourselves. That would be a terrible outcome."

NIH – one of the world's top research centres with a \$42 billion budget – is partnering with private companies in the frantic race to find a vaccine against the deadly virus, which has killed more than 3,20,000 people around the world.

The U.S. administration has set a goal of producing 300 million doses by January – enough to vaccinate the entire population.

But if the U.S. succeeds, should it be required to export some of those doses to vulnerable populations in

Brazil posts its worst toll with third highest cases

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

RIO DE JANEIRO

Brazil has seen a record number of coronavirus deaths as the pandemic that has swept across the world begins to hit Latin America with its full force.

After Asia, Europe and North America, Latin America has seen coronavirus infections surge in recent days and now accounts for about 5,80,000 of the world's nearly five million confirmed cases.

Brazil has been hardest-

hit in the region, rising to the third-highest number of cases in the world, as Peru, Mexico and Chile also see steady increases in infections. Health officials reported 1,179 deaths on Tuesday, the first time the daily toll exceeded 1,000, but far-right President Jair Bolsonaro remains bitterly opposed to lockdowns.

Health Ministry has recommended using chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine to treat even mild cases of COVID-19.

other countries, instead of offering it to otherwise healthy Americans?

Mr. Collins says yes, while cautioning that any forecast is based on "a lot of hope."

"Personally, I would certainly think that should be a matter of greatest attention

and not sometime in 2022," he said.

Tentative hope

"Maybe even as soon as the end of this year when we actually have the ability to do so."

One of the more advanced

Russia reports record high death toll

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

MOSCOW

Russia on Wednesday reported its highest ever COVID-19 death toll of 135, bringing the country's total fatalities to nearly 3,000. Overall infections crossed 3,00,000, but the number of active cases dropped for the first time. Russia has recorded far fewer deaths, but critics have cast doubt on the low official mortality rate and accused authorities of under-reporting.

experimental vaccine projects in the world so far is the one undertaken by U.S. biotech firm Moderna, which is working with the NIH.

The company, which got a government grant of nearly \$500 million, reported promising early results from its

first clinical tests on a small number of volunteers on Monday.

The U.S. government has also signed a contract with Paris-based pharmaceuticals group Sanofi, in order to ensure it gets priority on future vaccine production.

That deal sparked outrage in France, forcing the company to clarify that such priority would only be granted for vaccine doses produced in the group's U.S. factories.

Mr. Collins – a doctor and geneticist who has been the NIH director since 2009, serving under Barack Obama and Mr. Trump – admits that U.S. approach could be seen as "America First."

Global cooperation

But the 70-year-old insists that international cooperation in the scientific community is happening.

"Everybody ought to have a chance to get access to something that may save their lives at a time of a pandemic like this," he said. "And we will do everything we can to work with other agencies and other countries to try to make that happen."

When asked if labs should be able to profit from a product seen as a "global public good" for the world's more than seven billion inhabitants, Collins is equivocal. "I don't think they should make a windfall, that's for sure," he said.

"I do think you have to be clear that companies are going to be spending billions of dollars to produce these vaccines, and you can't expect that they should simply absorb that," he explained.

"There has to be some reasonable compensation but they should not be in a circumstance where this turns into a big boost to their bottom line."

'Border disputes a reminder of the threat posed by China'

U.S. continues to see provocations by Beijing, says top official

SIRIRAM LAKSHMAN

The U.S.'s top diplomat for South and Central Asia, Alice Wells, called the recent tensions between India and China along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) a reminder of the "threat" posed by China. Her comments come at a time when the U.S.-China relationship, already strained due to trade disputes, has further deteriorated over U.S. accusations of China's mismanagement of the coronavirus pandemic.



Alice Wells, U.S. top envoy for South and Central Asia. ■ AFP

fronts as well. China's global infrastructure projects under the Belt Road Initiative (BRI) are a case in point.

In response to the controversy between the ruling Nepal Congress Party and the opposition Nepal Communist Party over the U.S.'s grant assistance of \$500 million via its Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), Ms. Wells said the controversy was "disturbing" and expressed confidence that Nepal wasn't being dictated to by China. Nepal's Parliament will need to ratify the MCC grant before it can take effect. The assistance has been seen as an alternative to China's BRI, which Nepal has signed on to.

"The fact that this grant assistance – not a loan – and the potential of this grant assistance has become a political football is disturbing," Ms. Wells said.

Trade deal with India

On the prospects of India and the U.S. reaching a limited trade deal – the two countries had hoped to conclude it in time for Mr. Trump's visit to India in February – Ms. Wells said the

momentum was "very much present" and the countries were working towards a deal but she could not predict whether a deal would be concluded by the end of this year. She said there were concerns that India still remained a "quite protected market that can be difficult and sometimes not provide a level-playing field for foreign companies."

"I think what we should focus on, again, is this post-pandemic environment, when countries are looking at a little bit of de-globalisation and on-shoring of more of the critical production... at the same time that that's taking place, I think there's a very vigorous effort to diversify supply chains."

Adopting more open and welcoming policies and reducing tariffs would help India make use of an opportunity, Ms. Wells said, highlighting the critically important role that India would play in the treatment and health of the world, with its vaccine, pharmaceutical and generic drug production.

Ms. Wells is due to retire from a decades-long diplomatic career at the end of this month.

Joe Biden wins primary in Oregon

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

Former Vice President Joe Biden won Oregon's Democratic presidential primary, outpacing Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders and Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren, who both suspended their campaigns earlier in the year.

President Donald Trump, who was unopposed, won the Oregon GOP presidential contest.

In the Republican Senate primary, Jo Rae Perkins won. Mr. Perkins will face Democratic incumbent Senator Jeff Merkley.

The mail-in primary was complicated by the coronavirus pandemic, as election workers kept social distancing in county offices while staffing levels were down. Election workers handled ballots with protective equipment.

Committed to deal with U.S.: Taliban

Its leader urges America 'not to waste' the opportunity to end war in Afghanistan

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

KABUL

The leader of the Taliban said on Wednesday that militants were committed to a landmark deal with the U.S., despite being accused of carrying out thousands of attacks in Afghanistan since it was signed.

In a rare message released ahead of the end of the Islamic holy month of Ramzan next week, Haibatullah Akhundzada urged Washington "not to waste" the opportunity offered by the deal to end America's longest war.

"The Islamic Emirate is committed to the agreement... and urges the other side to honour its own commitments and not allow this critical opportunity to go waste," Akhundzada said in a statement, using the name the Taliban called Afghanistan when they were in power.

Akhundzada is a hardline religious scholar and a former head of the Taliban courts



U.S. President Donald Trump's administration has made it a priority to end the war in Afghanistan, and in a bid to pull out foreign forces U.S. officials have been pushing the Taliban and government leaders to hold peace talks.

Under the U.S. accord the Taliban pledged to stop attacking cities and foreign troops, but militants have continued to target Afghan

forces in the provinces.

Emboldened Taliban

Analysts say the Taliban have been emboldened by the deal, and Afghan government officials have reported more than 3,800 attacks since it was signed, killing 420 civilians and wounding 906.

The U.S. official who brokered the deal with the Taliban said last week the militants had kept up their end of the bargain – even if recent violence violated the spirit of it.

"The Taliban have implemented their agreement not to attack the coalition forces," said Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. Special Representative to Afghanistan.

His remarks came after a horrific attack against a maternity hospital in Kabul that left dozens dead – including mothers and infants.

Important for India to be 'close' to Taliban, says U.S.

SUHASINI HAIDAR

NEW DELHI

Hindu during a briefing. Defending the U.S.-Taliban deal signed in February, Ms. Wells, who has worked closely with U.S. special envoy on Afghanistan reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad, said that the agreement was in line with U.S. President Donald Trump's "South Asia Strategy" announced in 2017, which included four core principles: the push for a solution in Afghanistan "via a political dialogue and not on the battlefield", troops pullout decided by the situation on the ground, the condition that Pakistan would take action against militant groups on its soil, and India would remain an "important" player on development assistance.

She also said the U.S. had built "solid cooperation" with Pakistan on bringing the Taliban to the table for talks, and on action against terror groups.

Abbas says Israel's annexation plan has derailed Oslo accord

'PLO, Palestine state are absolved of all deals with Israel, U.S.'

DAVID M. HALBFINGER
ADAM RASGON

JERUSALEM

Raising the stakes over Israel's drive to annex land the Palestinians have long claimed, President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority on Tuesday angrily declared it free of its commitments under the Oslo peace process, including security understandings that have protected Israelis and preserved the authority's political hold over the occupied West Bank.

For a change, several senior Palestinian officials insisted, Mr. Abbas was not making a mere threat.

The Palestine Liberation Organization and the State of Palestine are absolved, as



clude all security agreements.

Mr. Abbas said his move was a response to the new Israeli government's push to annex large portions of the West Bank.

In the recent Israeli election, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu campaigned for right-wing support on a promise to extend Israeli sovereignty over the Jordan Valley and Jewish settlements totalling about 30% of the territory.

Mr. Abbas argued that Israel had "annulled the Oslo agreement" and the ensuing pacts that built upon it. Mr. Abbas, however, did not set out a timetable or mechanisms for withdrawing from the agreements.

Cambridge varsity goes online till 2021

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

LONDON

Cambridge University will have no face-to-face lectures until summer 2021 at the earliest in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a spokesman said on Wednesday.

It is the first U.K. university to set out its plans for the academic year starting in September.

"The university is constantly adapting to changing advice as it emerges during the pandemic," the university said.

"Given that it is likely that social distancing will continue to be required, the university has decided there will be no face-to-face lectures during the next academic year."

Lectures would continue to be available online.

Israel was behind a cyberattack on May 9 that disrupted operations at a major port in Iran, according to high-ranking intelligence officials and experts in West Asia who are kept informed of covert Israeli actions in the region.

The attack on the computer systems at the Shahid Rajae port in the strategically important Strait of Hormuz was limited in scope, creating traffic jams of delivery trucks and some delays in shipments but causing no substantial or lasting damage.

Israel and Iran have recently been engaged in an exchange of attempted and successful cyberattacks, and the purpose of Israel's relatively small-scale effort at the port, according to intelligence officials, was to send a message to Tehran: Don't target Israeli infrastructure.

Officials in Israel initially decided the country should not retaliate for the attack on the water system, according to the intelligence sources, because its effect would have been minor even if it had succeeded.

The hacking of the port's computers came in direct response, those experts familiar with the decision-making process said, to a failed Iranian cyberattack on an Israeli water facility last month. But when the story of the attempted attack was published in Israeli media, government officials, led by



Tit-for-tat move: An Israeli flag placed near Mount Bental in the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights, in this file photo ■ AFP

Natalli Bennett in his last days as Defence Minister, thought Israel should react in the same token by targeting Iranian civilian infrastructure and then leaking that story to international news media.

Israel's responsibility for the cyberattack on the port was first reported by *The Washington Post*.

The incident that prompted the Israeli attack on the port happened April 24, when a pump at a municipal water system in the Sharon region of central Israel stopped working. The facility's computer system resumed pump operation in a short time but also recorded the occurrence as an exceptional event. The attack and its quality were described by an intelligence official as "miserable." ■ NY TIMES

MARKET WATCH

	20-05-2020	% CHANGE
Sensex	30,819	2.06
US Dollar	75.80	-0.19
Brent oil	36.32	4.18

NIFTY 50

PRICE CHANGE

Adani Ports	323.75	4.55
Asian Paints	1500.05	-3.90
Axis Bank	362.50	8.00
Bajaj Auto	2557.75	48.45
Bajaj Finance	4702.05	166.60
Bharti Airtel	2042.80	77.85
BPCL	594.05	-4.75
Britannia Ind	3127.85	23.85
Cipla	620.65	25.70
Coal India	123.25	-0.35
Dr Reddy's Lab	3910.20	210.60
Eicher Motors	13675.10	708.90
GAIL (India)	86.25	4.40
Grasim Ind	536.85	25.00
HCL Tech	526.75	8.50
HDFC	1627.00	87.15
HDFC Bank	857.10	26.45
Hero MotoCorp	2023.60	-49.90
Hindalco	120.80	3.50
Hind Unilever	1990.85	15.30
ICICI Bank	305.65	5.35
IndusInd Bank	357.30	-10.50
Bharti Infratech	200.85	-17.90
Infosys	669.55	0.95
Indian Oil Corp	74.10	2.05
ITC	175.75	5.00
JSW Steel	171.05	1.75
Kotak Bank	1160.10	29.65
L&T	835.00	38.65
M&M	405.05	22.15
Maruti Suzuki	4891.95	86.65
Nestle India Ltd.	16303.40	153.10
NTPC	92.90	1.85
ONGC	78.00	0.85
PowerGrid Corp	158.45	0.40
Reliance Ind	1433.70	24.80
State Bank	153.40	0.60
Shree Cement	19411.65	1070.90
Sun Pharma	455.75	14.05
Tata Motors	83.45	1.65
Tata Steel	283.20	11.20
TCS	1953.60	4.95
Tech Mahindra	519.20	6.60
Titan	848.70	21.90
UltraTech Cement	3528.50	90.35
UPL	356.55	16.90
Vedanta	88.55	-1.45
Wipro	184.95	0.55
Zee Entertainment	153.55	3.30

EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	75.60	75.92
Euro	82.69	83.07
British Pound	92.66	93.09
Japanese Yen (100)	70.16	70.48
Chinese Yuan	10.64	10.69
Swiss Franc	78.16	78.50
Singapore Dollar	53.38	53.61
Canadian Dollar	54.30	54.54
Malaysian Ringgit	17.36	17.45
Australian Dollar	49.62	49.84

Source: Indian Bank

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

The government has issued a draft order proposing a ban on import, manufacturing, sale, transport and distribution of 27 insecticides, a move that is likely to impact agro chemicals firms. These insecticides may have a material impact on the revenues of agrochemical companies like Coromandel International, PI Industries, Dhanuka Agri-tech, Rallies India and UPL. The government has given 45 days to raise objections on the said draft. After 45 days and notification in the official gazette, state governments will have to enforce the same.

Franklin Templeton investors mull action Options for investors include moving the high court, SEBI and even approaching the SEC

Cabinet approves ₹3 lakh crore funding for MSMEs

NCGTC to guarantee credit to MSMEs; ₹3,110 crore foodgrain subsidy for migrant workers among other schemes to receive approval

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI/NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Monday approved additional funding of up to ₹3 lakh crore to micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) that was announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman last week as part of the ₹20 lakh crore economic package.

Under the scheme, 100% guarantee coverage will be provided by National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company Limited (NCGTC) to eligible MSMEs and interested borrowers of the MUDRA scheme, in the form of a Guaranteed Emergency Credit Line (GECL) facility, the government said.

The tenure of loan under this scheme will be four years with a moratorium period of one year on the principal amount. No guarantee fee will be charged by



Interest rates for loans extended by banks will be capped at 9.25% and those by NBFCs at 14%. ■ AP

NCGTC. Interest rates on loans extended by banks and financial institutions will be capped at 9.25%, and 14% for those extended by non-banking financial companies (NBFCs). The scheme would be applicable to all loans sanctioned under GECL till October 31, or till an amount of ₹3 lakh crore is sanc-

tioned, whichever is earlier.

"For this purpose, a corpus of ₹41,600 crore shall be provided by the Government of India, spread over the current and the next three financial years," the government said.

"All MSME borrower accounts with outstanding credit of up to ₹25 crore as on

February 29, 2020, which was less than or equal to 60 days past due as on that date, i.e., regular, SMA 0 and SMA 1 accounts, and with an annual turnover of up to ₹100 crore, would be eligible for GECL funding under the Scheme," the government said.

Bankers unimpressed

However, bankers said that since the government is not giving a direct guarantee, this may not solve the 'risk averse' issue that the lenders are facing.

"It is like the CGTMSE [Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises] scheme. The claims will not be settled unconditionally. Questions will be asked... they may like to see the loan appraisal process once a claim is made when the borrower defaults," an official from a pu-

blic sector bank said.

Since the scheme is not directly guaranteed by the government, banks still have to attach a risk weight of 20% for the loans. And, if the claim is not settled, banks have to make provision in line with the age of default. Bankers said they may approach the Reserve Bank of India to allow them not to attach any risk weight.

"The government would probably issue a letter of comfort and based on that this corporation will issue guarantees and then when guarantees devolve, that is when banks will make a claim, which is likely in the next two to three financial years; so defaults will happen [over] a period of time.

And, the budgetary impact will be spread over a period of time," the chief executive of a government-owned bank said.

Among other proposals approved by the Cabinet on Wednesday was a subsidy of almost ₹3,110 crore for distribution of extra foodgrains to about eight crore migrant workers and their families.

The Cabinet also approved a new centrally-sponsored scheme to support micro food processing units at an outlay of ₹10,000 crore, the expenditure being shared by the Centre and the States on a 60:40 basis.

The scheme will be implemented over a five-year period and will benefit about two lakh self-help groups, farmer producer organisations and other small units through a credit-linked subsidy, providing money for working capital and tools, a marketing grant, skills training and technical upgrade.

It also approved the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana, a scheme announced in the 2020 Budget, to develop the fisheries sector over a five-year period.

Of the total investment of ₹20,050 crore, the Centre will spend ₹9,407 crore, the States ₹4,880 crore while beneficiaries themselves will have to invest about ₹5,763 crore.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs also approved the adoption of a new methodology for the auction of coal and lignite blocks on a revenue-sharing basis. The tenure of coking coal linkage was increased to 30 years.

It will also permit commercial exploitation of coalbed methane in the mining lease area. Rebates in revenue share payments will be given in the event of an early production of coal from the mine. Further rebates will be offered for gasification of coal to encourage environment-friendly actions.

Cabinet okays NBFC liquidity plan

Scheme is a non-starter, says industry body FIDC

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

The Union Cabinet on Monday approved a ₹30,000-crore special liquidity scheme for non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) and housing finance companies aimed at improving the cash position of these entities.

A special purpose vehicle (SPV) would be set up by a public sector bank to manage a Stressed Asset Fund (SAF) whose special securities would be guaranteed by the Government of India and purchased by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) only, the government said.

The proceeds of sale of such securities would be

used by the SPV to acquire short-term debt of NBFCs/HFCs. The scheme will be administered by the Department of Financial Services, which will issue the detailed guidelines.

"The SPV would issue securities as per requirement subject to the total amount of securities outstanding not exceeding ₹30,000 crore to be extended by the amount required as per the need," a statement by the government said.

"The securities issued by the SPV would be purchased by the RBI and the proceeds thereof, would be used by the SPV to acquire the debt of at least investment grade of short duration (residual

maturity of up to three months) of eligible NBFCs / HFCs," it added.

Raman Aggarwal, co-chairman, FIDC, the industry body of NBFCs, termed the scheme a non-starter due to the short tenure of the funds.

"The details of the special liquidity scheme has come as a disappointment," he said.

"The funds will be made available for a tenor of up to three months while a majority of the lending done is for a tenure of 2-3 years.

"In order to prevent any asset-liability mismatch, the expectation was for a tenure of three years," said Mr. Aggarwal.

Ola to lay off 1,400 as virus hits revenues

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Cab aggregator Ola is laying off 1,400 staff from the rides, financial services and food businesses as revenues declined 95% in the last two months due to the COVID-19 pandemic, CEO Bhavish Aggarwal said.

In an e-mail to employees, the CEO said the prognosis ahead for the business was "very unclear and uncertain" and the impact of this crisis is "definitely going to be long-drawn for us." He said this would be a one-time exercise and will be completed by end of this week for the India Mobility business.

their liquidity requirements in their fight against #COVID19 global pandemic," said a Finance Ministry tweet, announcing the fund release.

On Tuesday, the Centre also released ₹5,005 crore to States as the first instalment of a Finance Commission grant for smaller cities.

"This would provide the States with vital financial resources at a critical time," Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman tweeted on Wednesday. The money is intended for "non-million plus" cities or those with a population below one million.

It has been released as a

grant 'in advance' to 28 States, pending the finalisation of operational guidelines. The funds are to be passed on directly to urban local bodies within 10 days, without any deduction by State Finance departments.

In case of a delay beyond 10 days, States will have to pay interest.

These are untied grants, meaning the funds can be used by local bodies for any location-specific needs, but cannot be used to pay salaries or other establishment expenditure.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund, which was forced to wind up six debt schemes with assets worth nearly ₹26,000 crore last month, may well have initiated the process to refund investor money, but investors are mulling their own options to act against the fund house.

According to persons familiar with the development, a few investors are contemplating moving the high court or writing to the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), while some are even planning to make a representation to the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) for the parent entity's alleged lack of supervision. On April 23, Franklin Templeton MF an-

nounced abrupt closure of six debt schemes, attributing the decision to underlying illiquidity in the market for low-rated debt instruments. Thereafter, in a note to investors on May 15, Sanjay Sapre, president, Franklin Templeton Asset Management (India), said while the decision to wind up the schemes was the only "viable way to preserve value", the fund house was "committed to ensuring an orderly and equitable exit for all investors at the earliest possible."

Lawyers specialising in the securities market said investors could drag the fund house to court or write to the SEBI seeking a formal action

against the fund house.

"Investors are likely to approach the high court as well as the Ministry of Finance, in addition to requesting SEBI to ensure their interests [were protected]," said Sumit Agrawal, partner, Regstreet Law Advisors and a former SEBI official.

"Miffed with what a Franklin Templeton global executive said, SEBI issued an advisory, which is neither here nor there in law, as it is neither a circular nor a specific order under section 11/1B which SEBI uses frequently.

"While this unusual advisory is well-intended for investors, it creates more questions than answers. One does not know the implication or consequences of it. There is no procedure or timeline provided; it does not

assuage investors' concern on the redemption value. It is unclear if SEBI is overseeing internal processes of FT and steps forward," added Mr. Agrawal. On May 7, the regulator issued a statement advising Franklin Templeton MF to focus on returning investor money while stressing the point that regulations were not responsible for the closure of the schemes.

"Investors can write to SEBI asking [for] action against Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund," said An

Balaji fears for bowlers with ban on use of saliva

Says he is against legalising ball tampering and feels that a 'trial and error' method should be followed in handling the ball

S. DINAKAR

CHENNAI

Cricket has favoured batsmen since inception. And in the COVID-19 era, where natural body fluids, including saliva, will not be allowed to shine the ball with, the bowlers are likely to be marginalised even more.

Now there are calls for 'ball-tampering' to be legalised to restore a semblance of balance between the bat and the ball.

A feeling of *deja vu* is unavoidable considering the uproar Sandpapergate involving two of Australia's biggest names, Steve Smith and David Warner, caused not too long ago.

Former India paceman and Chennai Super Kings bowling coach L. Balaji fears for the bowlers in these times.

Polished and shiny

Balaji said to *The Hindu*, "From a young age, bowlers are trained to use sweat and



Trade secrets: L. Balaji reveals that Wasim Akram told him that when the ball started swinging, the Pakistani pacers never allowed the fielders to touch a part of the sphere. ■ FILE PHOTO

saliva on the ball to keep one side polished, shiny and lighter while the other side gradually becomes heavier."

Balaji, among the heroes of India's historic Test series triumph in Pakistan in

2004, elaborated, "In fact, the entire team 'works' on the ball to 'maintain' it. And the use of sweat and saliva is mandatory and legal."

The lanky former pace-man observed, "For the pa-

cement to achieve conventional and reverse swing, or seam movement, and even for the spinners to get the ball to drift, the weight of the ball and how one side is maintained is vital."

He added, "Once the ball is looked after, factors such as crosswind, headwind, bowling with the breeze and the cloud cover play a part."

Fascinating conversation

Balaji recalled a fascinating conversation with Pakistani legend Wasim Akram on the subject.

"Akram told me once the ball started doing something, the Pakistani pacemen would not even allow the fielders to touch a part of the ball with their palm."

He elaborated, "Akram revealed the palm would be very sweaty and would make one side very heavy, disturbing the delicate balance needed for reverse swing."

As it is

Balaji said, "You see, the ball only swings conventionally and reverses for a few overs and at that point, when the sphere reaches that state, you have to leave the ball as

it is to inflict maximum damage during those phases."

He added, "The heavy and sweaty palm would alter that delicate balance. It's a science where the weight of the ball is crucial."

What are the options before the cricketing world now? Balaji is against legalising ball tampering.

"When you start tampering, where would you draw the line? How can you say so much tampering is legal and after that it is illegal?"

The ICC has also not allowed external substances such as Vaseline to shine the ball. There have been cases when the ball has swung excessively with Vaseline.

Balaji said, "We have to go by trial and error method. Perhaps a substance such as a sanitiser with which you clean tables and other surfaces can be tried on the ball. But I am not sure."

These are unprecedented times and the answers are complicated.

No resumption of cricket practice

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI

Top cricketers like Rohit Sharma and Ajinkya Rahane will have to wait longer to resume individual training in the city due to its status of being a COVID-19 red zone, which rules out opening of sports facilities here for the time being.

The Maharashtra government has allowed opening of stadiums for individual training in green and orange zones without spectators. This was after the home mi-

nistry offered relaxation in regulations for the fourth phase of the lockdown till May 31.

However, Mumbai and all its neighbouring areas like Thane, Navi Mumbai, Mira Bhayandar, Vasai Virar and Kalyan Dombivli have been declared red zones.

"We will strictly adhere to the norms of the State government with regard to opening of stadiums and sports facilities," a senior MCA official told PTI on Wednesday.

IN BRIEF

Holding alleges CWI of misuse of BCCI donation

LONDON

Fast bowling great Michael Holding has alleged misuse of half a million US dollars that BCCI donated to Cricket West Indies for the benefit of its former players, besides raising serious questions on the financial management of the game's governing body in the island nations. On a YouTube show, Holding displayed the audit report of Pannell Kerr Foster (PKF) on cricket



governance in the Caribbean and raised several red flags. PTI

Carlsen in joint lead with three others

NEW DELHI

World champion Magnus Carlsen, Hikaru Nakamura, Wesley So and Sergey Karjakin shared with lead with three points after four rounds of the \$150,000 Lindores Abbey Rapid Challenge on Tuesday. The results:

Fourth round: Magnus Carlsen (Nor, 3) drew with Hikaru Nakamura (USA, 3); Sergey Karjakin (Rus, 3) bt Jan-Krzysztof Duda (Pol, 1); Alexander Grischuk (Rus, 2)

drew with Wesley So (USA, 3); Levon Aronian (Arm, 2) drew with Ding Liren (Chn, 2.5); Alireza Firouzja (FIDE, 1) drew with Yu Yangyi (Chn, 1.5); Daniil Dubov (Rus, 1) drew with Wei Yi (Chn, 1).

Third round: Liren drew with Carlsen; Nakamura bt Firouzja; Yangyi bt Dubov; Wei lost to So; Duda drew with So; Aronian drew with Grischuk.

Second round: Carlsen bt Aronian; Karjakin bt Yangyi; So bt Wei; Grischuk bt Duda; Dubov drew with Nakamura; Firouzja drew with Liren.



Ashwin begins training

CHENNAI

After nearly two months, R. Ashwin had his first taste of training on Wednesday after the government allowed the opening of stadiums. The India off-spinner, who trained at the Lalaji Omega

International hockey will restart only after a vaccine is developed for COVID-19, FIH said in a statement. It revealed a five-stage process: carefully managed training, regional competitions, travel between neighbouring nations, trans-continental tournaments and a return to competition after a vaccine is found. PTI

Intl. hockey only after vaccine is found: FIH

LAUSANNE

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Neuer extends stay at Bayern Munich

BERLIN

Germany goalkeeper Manuel Neuer signed a new deal with Bayern Munich on Wednesday, tying him to the club until 2023. AFP

Athletes and hockey players in quarantine

Cook at SAI Bengaluru dies of cardiac arrest, tests COVID positive

STAN RAYAN

KOCHI

Just when they were about to resume training, after receiving the green signal from the Ministry of Home Affairs and Sports Ministry, athletes and hockey players preparing for next year's Tokyo Olympics suffered a fresh blow after a cook employed with the Sports Authority of India's South Centre in Bengaluru passed away.

The senior cook, who had not been coming to the SAI campus after the lockdown began but had attended a meeting there on May 15, had died of cardiac arrest in a hospital on Monday. His sample had tested positive for COVID-19 on Tuesday.

The SAI confirmed, through a note, that the meeting was attended by 16 members at the auditorium near the administrative block and that social distancing norms were fol-

lowed. It said that the cook did not interact with any of the players, or the other staff members in the centre.

The SAI release also mentioned that Narinder Batra, Indian Olympic Association president, was fully satisfied with the way the Bengaluru centre has been kept safe and sanitised.

"The SAI administration is doing its best to handle the issue at hand and there is no reason to panic," the note quoted Batra as saying.

"The athletes did not attend that meeting but two or three from the administrative staff had gone for that. They have been quarantined and we too from Tuesday," said Jinson Johnson, Asian Games 1500m champion, from the Bengaluru centre on Wednesday.

About six race walkers and distance runners Gopi and I are here. We also have the Indian men's and women's hockey teams here".

Old Trafford's plans for social-distancing

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MANCHESTER

The Old Trafford cricket ground is spearheading plans in England to try to bring fans back into a sports venue during the coronavirus pandemic.

Lancashire Cricket Club chief executive Daniel Gidney believes social distancing can be applied in its 26,000-seat ground to allow in at least 2,000 fans.

Not only are mass gatherings still banned by the go-

vernment, but sports teams aren't allowed to play or train together. A cricket season that was due to start in April won't begin until July at the earliest.

Hopeful

"I'm hopeful that we can get some domestic cricket away in the back end of August and September, at least behind closed doors, but possibly even with some small crowds," Gidney told The Associated Press.

vernement, but sports teams aren't allowed to play or train together. A cricket season that was due to start in April won't begin until July at the earliest.

"Sometimes you can get into this negative box. And when I'm being positive, I'm not being reckless or saying things that can't happen from a safety perspective."

Gidney's plan for the northwest England cricket ground could form a template that facilitates the return of much-needed revenue from fans attending sports venues. Taiwan is hoping up to 1,000 spectators will be allowed to attend baseball games from July.

Iniyian's initiative an example for everyone: Kramnik

The Indian GM played 271 opponents over 74 hours to raise funds



Iniyian and Kramnik.
■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

CHESS

RAKESH RAO
NEW DELHI

Former World champion Vladimir Kramnik hailed Grandmaster P. Iniyian for his stupendous fund-raising effort to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

Kramnik, in a video message, praised the 17-year-old.

"I thank Iniyian for his efforts. It doesn't actually matter how much money you manage to raise. I think it's a very good initiative and a very important example for everyone," said Kramnik.

Between May 15 and 18, Iniyian's online 'chess marathon' generated more than ₹1.20 lakh. Incredibly, the youngster played 271 opponents spread over 74 hours.

Similar event

"We organised a similar charity event in Russia and managed to collect quite a serious amount of money for various hospitals," said

Kramnik. "With the pandemic all over the world, it is also a harsh but very useful reminder to all of us of some core values which we, in my opinion, forgot a bit, lately: that we are all human beings, we are all one unit in this world and we should be trying to be less individualistic.

"Maybe, we should pay less attention to consumption and try to help each other, especially in these difficult times."

James Anderson, Stuart Broad and Ben Stokes were due to resume training at their respective local county grounds on Wednesday.

According to ESPNCricinfo, "issues in establishing uniform practices that minimise the chances of infection have proved slightly harder to implement than envisaged."

Zavaray Poonawalla, chairman of TAI, said: "I remain positive that we will succeed although a lot of hard work and time will be needed to take our efforts to its logical end."

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