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A.P. HC reinstates State Election Commissioner Ramesh Kumar
page 8



Former Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Ajit Jogi passes away
page 11



U.S. President warns of stern action as unrest spreads in Minneapolis
page 12

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Good news:
8,381 recover
in State; bad
news: 116 die

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE
PUNE

Maharashtra reported yet another big spike of 2,682 COVID-19 cases on Friday, as its case tally reached 62,228. A record fatality count of 116 deaths pushed the death toll to 2,098.

The State also reported its highest single-day recoveries, with 8,381 patients discharged, taking the number of recoveries till date to 26,997. Of the 8,381 recoveries, more than 7,000 were from Mumbai. Civic officials clarified that only 715 patients from Mumbai were discharged on Friday, while the rest had recovered over the past few weeks and the data was updated on Friday.

Mumbai reported 1,447 of the new cases, as its case total rose to 36,932 cases. Of these, 19,745 are active ones. As many as 38 of the deaths reported were from Mumbai. The city's death toll now stands at 1,173.

In the Mumbai Metropolitan Region, Thane reported more than 220 new cases to take the district's tally to 3,986. Navi Mumbai reported 71 new cases, as its tally reached 2,461. Jalgaon district reported 17 deaths, Dhule seven, Pune 13, Navi Mumbai nine, and Aurangabad five.

DETAILS ▶ PAGE 3, 10

GDP growth slows to a 11-year low of 4.2%, Q4 slumps to 3.1%

Agriculture, govt. spending help redeem January-March economic performance

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Economic growth slowed to a 11-year low of 4.2% in 2019-20, according to provisional estimates released by the National Statistical Office on Friday.

The final quarter of the fiscal year, the January-March period, saw the expansion in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) slump to 3.1%, reflecting the impact of the first week of the nationwide COVID-19 lockdown, which began on March 25.

Fourth-quarter growth, while the slowest in 44 quarters, however, was still faster than the 2.2% pace predicted by most economists and ratings analysts.

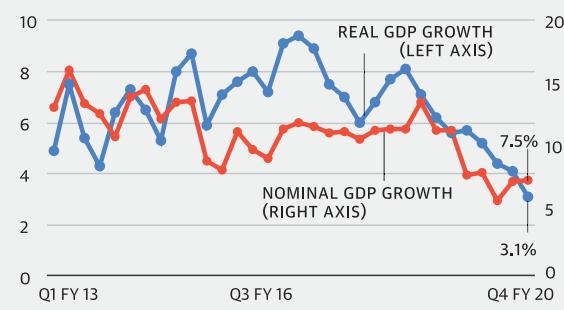
"Agriculture and government expenditure have been the saviours," said Devendra Pant, chief economist at the Fitch Group's India Ratings.

Agricultural output and the mining sector picked up steam in the fourth quarter, growing at rates of 5.9% and 5.2% respectively, even while manufacturing contracted further, with output shrinking by 1.4%. Public administration, defence and other services grew at 10.1%.

Although the budget estimate for GDP growth in 2019-2020 had been pegged at 8.5%, the NSO's previous estimates had pushed the

Downward spiral

India's real GDP growth rate slowed to 3.1% for the fourth quarter of FY 2020. Nominal GDP growth rate, at 7.5%, saw a marginal improvement compared to the previous quarter



projection down to 5%. On Friday, the NSO also revised downward its estimates for the first three quarters, and pegged its growth estimate for the full year at 4.2%. GDP expanded by 6.1% in 2018-19.

Demand weakening "The most disturbing news is that the three components of demand have fallen – consumption demand has slowed, while investments and exports are both in negative territory," said D.K. Srivastava, chief policy advisor for Ernst and Young India and member of the Advisory Council to the 15th Finance Commission.

He also expressed concern about the data from the Controller General of Accounts (CGA) showing that the Centre's fiscal position worsened. "CGA's data indicates that the Centre's gross tax revenues have contracted by 3.4% in 2019-20. This is unprecedented. Fiscal deficit has increased to 4.6% of GDP, well above the revised estimate of 3.8%," he added.

"Please note that this has all happened in the year prior to COVID," remarked Dr. Srivastava. "In the five years before the 2008 crisis, we maintained an 8% GDP growth, so the capacity to endure and recover was stronger. Now we are faced with a weaker economy and much weaker public finances and fiscal capacity."

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Core sector output shrinks 38% in April

The lockdown resulted in core sector output contracting 38% in April 2020 compared to the same month in the previous year, according to Commerce Ministry data released on Friday.

This is the second straight month in negative territory for the index of eight core sector industries, after a 9% fall in March 2020. ▶ PAGE 13

GST Council to meet in mid-June

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council is likely to meet in mid-June after repeated demands from the States anxious for their GST compensation dues pending since December. However, information on GST revenue since March – which may see a sharp fall due to the lockdown – is likely to be withheld at least until July. ▶ PAGE 13

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Lockdown 5.0 to be strictly implemented in 13 cities

In single-day record, country registers 7,707 cases, 263 deaths

VIJAYA SINGH
NEW DELHI

The government is all set to announce Lockdown 5.0 for two weeks, with strict implementation in 13 cities that have recorded 70% of the total COVID-19 cases.

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) will issue revised guidelines soon, a senior government official said.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah met Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday and is learnt to have given him the feedback he received from the Chief Ministers. Mr. Shah called all the Chief Ministers on Thursday, and sought their views on extending the lockdown.

Even as the new guidelines are set to be announced, there were 7,707 new COVID-19 cases and 263 deaths on Friday, the highest on a single day. This takes the total number of cases to 1,73,052 and fatalities to 4,970.

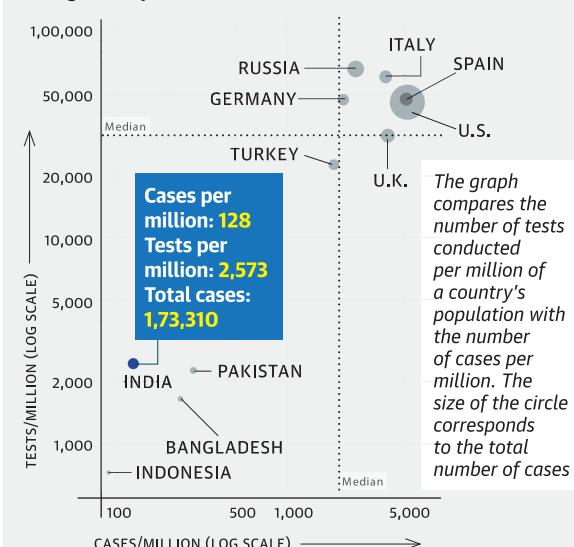
In the new set of relaxations planned, all kinds of religious places will be allowed to open, but malls and restaurants are expected to remain shut.

The lockdown, imposed first in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic on March 24, has been extended four times. The ongoing phase is in force till May 31.

The Centre is not in fa-

In proportion

While India ranks ninth in the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases, the infections as a proportion of its population are much lower compared to countries with the most cases. However, testing rates in India are also very low, ruling out any reason for relief.



Chengalpattu and Thiruvallur (Tamil Nadu).

The State governments will be given more autonomy in implementing the MHA's guidelines issued under the Disaster Management Act, 2005. "States can improvise to make them more stringent, but they cannot dilute the provisions," said the official.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

MORE REPORTS ▶ PAGES 8 & 10

We will decide our present, future, PM tells nation

NISTULA HEBBAR
NEW DELHI

Marking the first anniversary of his second successive full majority government at the Centre, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in a letter addressed to all Indians, reminded them not only of the

bold decisions taken by his government in the last year, but, in a reference to the raging COVID-19 pandemic, exhorted them to "remember that the present and future of 130 crore will never be dictated by an adversity".

"We will decide our pre-

sent and future," Mr. Modi said.

He recapped the many decisions taken by his second successive government in its first year, describing the vote as one for continuity of the work his government had done between 2014-19 and

squarely addressed the way his government was handling the COVID-19 pandemic. Mr. Modi said when the pandemic broke, everyone assumed that India would flounder in its handling.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

At isolation centre, TMH cancer patients find familiar faces

Hospital staff continue to care for patients at another facility

JYOTI SHELAR
MUMBAI

A 26-year-old medical social worker from Tata Memorial Hospital (TMH) has set an example by continuing to care for cancer patients with COVID-19 even after testing positive herself. Instead of being in home isolation, Asmita Salunkhe opted to get admitted to the oncology section in the COVID-19 care facility at Worli's NSCI Dome so that she could assist the cancer patients admitted there.

Severely immunocompromised, cancer patients infected with SARS-CoV-2 face the additional risk of progressing disease. But the staff from TMH has continued to take the responsibility of their patients at NSCI.

"It is different when a nurse wearing PPE interacts with them. Since I am a patient myself, I am wearing only a mask," said Ms. Salunkhe, a resident of Bhandup who tested positive of May 21 and was admitted to the centre at the giant indoor stadium the next day. On Thursday, her repeat test returned positive and isolation period had to be extended.

"I respond to patient queries, ensure they get medicines and watch out if anyone develops severe symptoms. Thanks to the work, I can keep busy and don't feel like a patient," said Ms. Salunkhe, who is asymptomatic.

Dr. Badwe said triage has been crucial for them to continue with regular functioning. "It is in the triage that our health workers screen thoroughly and decide if the patient should go to the fever clinic or to the hospital for routine procedures," he said.

So far, 110 cancer patients

from TMH have tested positive. Those who need treatment were admitted to the hospital, while asymptomatic patients were shifted to NSCI. Cancer patients are at high risk of contracting the virus. Globally, the mortality rate among them due to the infection is said to be high.

"We evaluated the threat to life with COVID-19 and with stopping cancer treatment, and took a conscious decision to continue the cancer treatment," said Dr. Rajendra Badwe, director of the Tata Memorial Centre. In April, for example, the hospital carried out 520 cancer surgeries, some of them on COVID-19 patients.

They are already frightened with the cancer diagnosis. Suddenly, when COVID-19 strikes, it causes them additional trauma due to isolation. But when they see TMH staff, they feel at ease," said Dr. Chaturvedi.

"The nurse has been given a smartphone on which the TMH doctors are carrying out teleconsultations for patients," said Dr. Chaturvedi, who goes for daily rounds at the facility.

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CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8



Staying safe: TMH cancer patients isolated at the COVID-19 care centre at the NSCI Dome. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

₹50 lakh cover for all on COVID-19 duty

Decision taken as Central govt. assistance is only for healthcare workers

ALOK DESHPANDE
MUMBAI

The Maharashtra government will provide a comprehensive personal life cover of ₹50 lakh to all employees who are on active duty in surveying, tracing, tracking, testing, prevention, treatment and relief activities during the novel coronavirus pandemic.

In a government resolution issued on Friday, the State Finance Department said the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, in an order dated March 28, has provided an insurance scheme for health workers and healthcare related staff.

"However, a lot of other staffers (district administration, police, home guards, anganwadi workers, employees of finance and treasury, food and civil supply, water supply and sanitation, and other departments deputed for house-to-house survey work) are also involved in COVID-19 duties.

Patients who test positive continue to be their responsibility, even if they are sent to another centre, he said.

The NSCI centre was set up by bariatric surgeon Dr. Muffazal Lakdawala. It has a capacity of nearly 500 beds and currently has 60-odd cancer patients.

TMH surgeon Dr. Pankaj Chaturvedi, who is overseeing the NSCI's oncology section, said a dedicated staff nurse and coordinator are stationed there.

"The nurse has been given a smartphone on which the TMH doctors are carrying out teleconsultations for patients," said Dr. Chaturvedi, who goes for daily rounds at the facility.

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CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8



The cover is for anyone involved in surveying, tracing, testing, prevention, treatment and relief activities. ■ FILE PHOTO

To support them and their families in the event of their unfortunate loss of life, the government has taken the decision," a Finance Department official said.

The modalities in this regard are being worked out with insurance companies. Till the package is worked out, as an interim measure, all deaths of employees on duty due to COVID-19 will be covered through an ex gratia

assistance of ₹50 lakh, the government resolution said.

To be eligible, the employee should have been on duty within the 14-day period preceding her/his hospitalisation or death. The verification in this regard will be done by district magistrates or designated heads of department.

The medical certification that death is related to COVID-19 will be done on the

basis of reports from government, municipal, ICMR-notified private hospitals or laboratories. Employees covered will also include all contractual, outsourced, daily wages, ad hoc, honorarium-based staff. Similar ex gratia assistance will be provided by all local bodies and public undertakings.

In addition, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Friday announced a hike in the honorarium of doctors serving their bonds in tribal areas will get ₹75,000 instead of ₹60,000. Specialist doctors working in tribal areas will be paid ₹85,000, up from the previous ₹70,000. MBBS doctors in other areas will see their honorarium rise to ₹70,000 from ₹55,000. Specialist doctors in other areas will get an honorarium of ₹80,000 instead of ₹65,000," said Mr. Thackeray.

State to announce relief package soon

Unsure on effectiveness of Centre's ₹20 lakh crore package, says Ajit Pawar

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE
PUNE

Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar on Friday expressed doubts as to whether the Centre's ₹20 lakh crore COVID-19 relief package offers anything concrete for the poor, and said the Maharashtra government will soon announce a financial package to pull the State out of the economic doldrums.

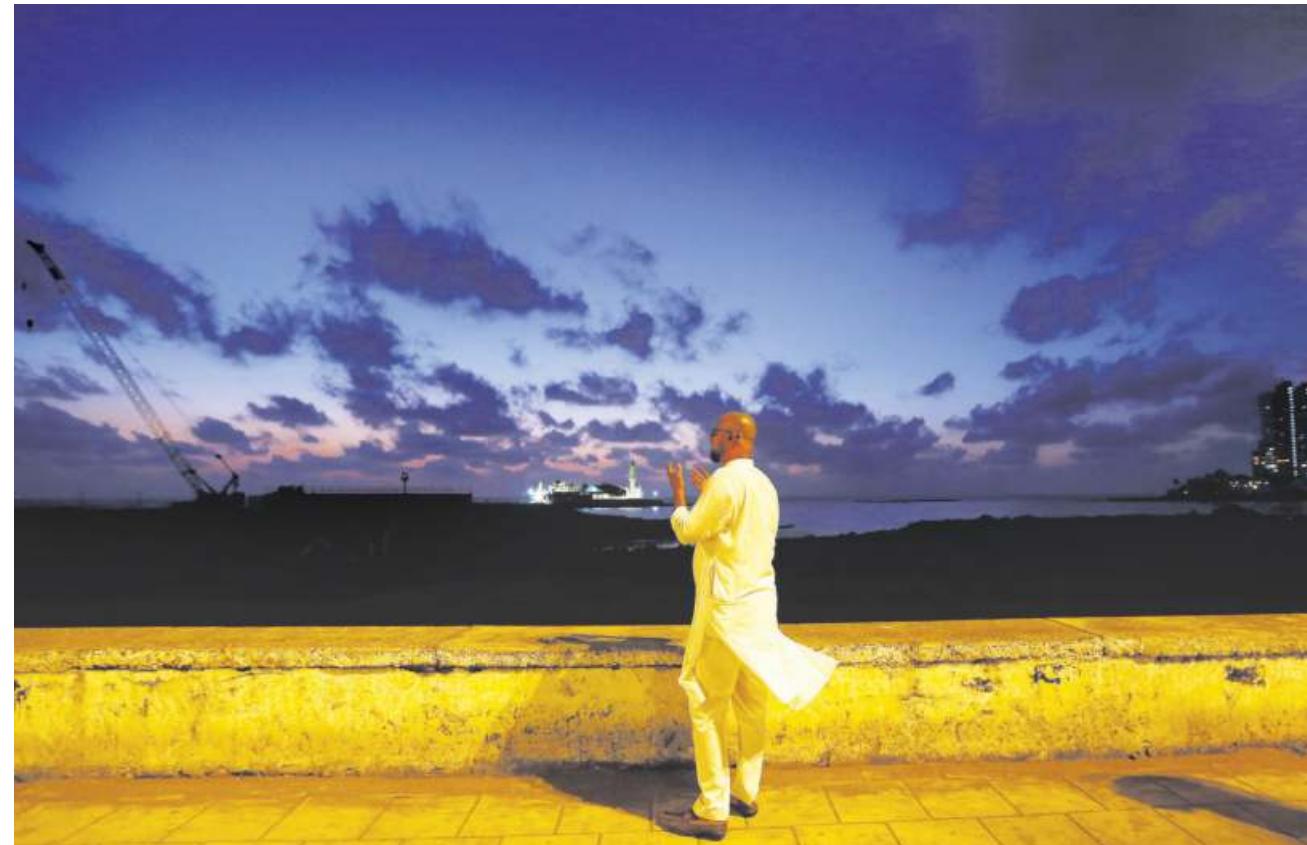
"All economic activity has come to an abrupt standstill because of the lockdown. This has adversely affected businesses, besides resulting in job losses across sectors. It is imperative to find a way out. The State government will soon announce a financial package following discussions in the Cabinet," Mr. Pawar said.

"The Central government



THE WEEK IN FOCUS

The stories that mattered over the last seven days



1	4
2	5
3	6

1 MAY 24 | KARAD: A migrant worker bows in reverence before boarding a State Transport bus to Satara station, seeking blessings for a safe journey back home. The migrants on the bus were due to take the Shramik Special train to their hometown in Bihar.

■ RAJU SANADI

2 MAY 25 | WORLI: Dr. Muffazal Lakdawala supervises various activities on screen at NSCI Dome, the venue for the city's first makeshift COVID-19 hospital. The mammoth facility, with a capacity of 600 beds, will soon have a 40-bed intensive care unit.

■ EMMANUEL YOGINI

3 MAY 23 | CSMT: A family of migrant workers waits to

board the Shramik Special train to their hometown. Lakhs of people working and living in Mumbai have boarded these trains to various destinations in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal, travelling in harrowing conditions amid intense heatwaves.

■ SALMAN ANSARI

4 MAY 26 | HAJI ALI: A believer offers evening prayers on the promenade opposite the Haji Ali dargah a day after Ramadan, commonly known as 'Bassi Eid'. The lockdown and physical distancing norms ensured celebrations were muted this year.

■ SALMAN ANSARI

5 MAY 27 | CUFE PARADE: Children tug at a fishing vessel brought back

to shore with the help of a crane at Badhwar Park. The fishing community, already under severe financial strain due to the lockdown, is set to face a few more months of suffering as fishing is banned during the monsoon.

■ VIVEK BENDRE

6 MAY 28 | CHHATRAPATI SHIVAJI MAHARAJ INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT: Domestic flyers enjoy refreshments at the partially opened food court at Terminal 2 of the airport. Domestic air travel resumed in India on May 25, following a two-month COVID-19-related shutdown. Airport officials expect air traffic to pick up pace in the next six months.

■ PRASHANT NAKWE

'Circle of Love' gathers steam in roti-for-migrants initiative

Informal group of volunteers finds corporate support

GAURI VIJ
MUMBAI

Every night, when Reshma Jain and her small team, who call themselves the Circle of Love, count their stash of roti rolls, they have cause to believe that Mumbai is dooming. With good reason; the rolls collected from all over the city are intended for the migrant workforce that is leaving the city in droves, driven by hunger and fear.

Ms. Jain, her partner Vinod Hemnani and a group of volunteers previously unknown to each other, have fuelled a call to action, largely through word of mouth

and WhatsApp groups. "The idea is simple," she said, "No one should have to go hungry," she said.

The partners were distressed by the news that began unfolding on May 15, that Mumbai's largely hungry and mostly unemployed workforce whose origins lay in Odisha, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar wanted to flee the city. "Hunger doesn't go away in one day," said Ms. Jain.

That is how the idea took shape. Theplas, a Gujarati staple on picnics and holidays, were a logical choice, given they can last on a long journey. The word soon spread: three to four theplas (missi roti or masala rotis) tightly wrapped into a foil roll with some pickle would



Snack pack: The theplas, wrapped in tight rolls in foil, are collected from all over the city and distributed at railway stations, bus depots and on highways. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

ensure a healthy bite for the travellers. By the end of day one, they had 600 volunteers, and 1,800 theplas tightly wrapped into a foil roll with some pickle would

zones of the city, which are part of this effort.

The idea of feeding the hungry who have made Mumbai, is now a burgeoning one. When Ms. Jain, a former editor of *Marwar* magazine, spoke to Sangita Jindal, chairperson of the JSW Foundation, about the roti project, there was an instant connect. "I realised that when one donates something made by one's own hands, it means something else," said Ms. Jindal.

She also decided to widen the scope and rope in the JSW group's Mumbai employees, calling it Project Annapurna. From May 27 to 29, employees of the JSW Group have contributed theplas and rotis. "It's a minuscule attempt, but every drop

counts," said Ms. Jindal, recalling her attempts at making theplas for the project.

The group's employees across the city and from places like Thane, Vasind and Tarapur, have over three days donated 12,500 thepla rolls to the cause. "It has been so satisfying to see how quickly we had volunteers from within the group committing to ensure this activity was a success, from our Ladies Club members in townships contributing up to 1,000 theplas a day to employees based in Mumbai activating neighbours in their apartment complex to contribute to the process," said Ms. Jindal.

What began as an informal initiative is taking shape in ways that Ms. Jain and Mr. Hemnani could not imagine.

Donations on May 29

■ Theplas : 2,03,492
■ Thepla rolls: 50,873
■ Biscuit packets: 30,946
■ Beverages: 26,627
■ Number of homes that participated: 1,430



helping with the logistics of daily collection and storage. She also credits the Shrimad Rajchandra Mission with providing the backbone to the effort, without whom "we would not have been able to manage the impetus for the project or the distribution."

The core group has identified 'thepla makers' across the city to chip in for those who would like to contribute, but cannot make theplas. "It's been magical," Ms. Jain said, recalling the generosity of Mumbai residents who have donated time as well as their cars, and opened their larders and hearts to help those in need.

To contribute to the Circle of Love's efforts, WhatsApp 9136324859

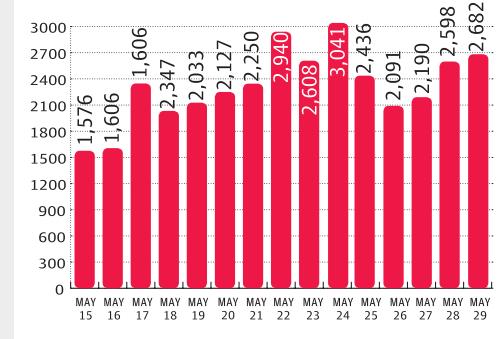
Maharashtra COVID-19 tracker

TOTAL CASES	NEW CASES	ACTIVE CASES	RECOVERED	DEATHS
62,228	2,682	33,124	26,997	2,098

DISTRICTS AFFECTED: 35

DISTRICT	CASES	DEATHS	DISTRICT	CASES	DEATHS
Mumbai	36,932	1,173	Jalna	117	0
Thane	8,638	172	Nanded	108	6
Pune	7,223	314	Latur	108	3
Aurangabad	1,410	65	Sangli	104	1
Nashik	1,070	60	Ahmednagar	96	6
Raigad	999	29	Osmanabad	64	0
Palghar	913	23	Gondia	58	0
Solapur	769	62	Buldhana	56	3
Jalgaon	555	69	Beed	46	0
Akola	537	28	Parbhani	42	1
Nagpur	511	9	Nandurbar	33	3
Satara	459	16	Gadchiroli	31	0
Kolhapur	379	4	Sindhudurg	29	0
Ratnagiri	216	5	Chandrapur	25	0
Amravati	202	16	Bhandara	25	0
Hingoli	143	0	Wardha	11	1
Dhule	135	16	Washim	8	0
Yavatmal	128	0			

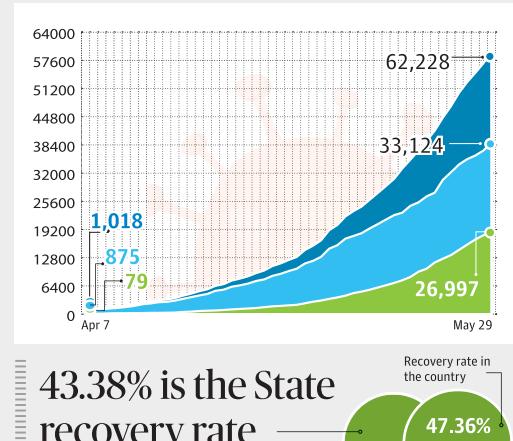
POSITIVE CASES OVER LAST 15 DAYS



1,447 (54%) of Friday's cases are from Mumbai



CASES TREND

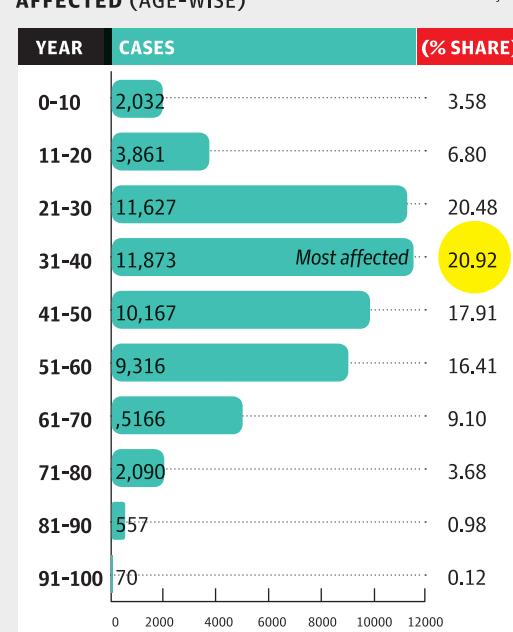


MORTALITY RATE

Maharashtra 3.37%

India 2.87%

AFFECTED (AGE-WISE)



QUARANTINE NUMBERS

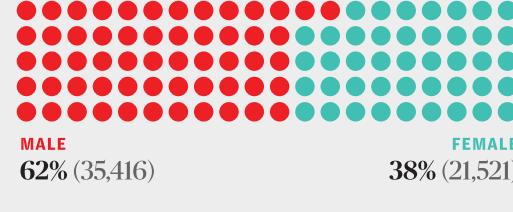
5,35,467 | 35,967



Home quarantine

Institutional quarantine

CASES (GENDER-WISE)



DEATH (GENDER-WISE)



69% 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: 0252 297474

Mumbai suburbs: 022 26556799 / 26556806 Raigad: 02141 222118

Thane: 022 25301740 Ratnagiri: 02352 226248

Sindhudurg: 02362 228847

Source: Public Health Department, Maharashtra, BMC

Backlog effect: Mumbai's recovered cases jump from 8,650 to 16,008

1,447 fresh cases reported, taking city's total COVID-19 cases close to 37,000-mark

JIYOTI SHELAR

MUMBAI

Mumbai recorded 1,447 new COVID-19 cases and 38 deaths on Friday, pushing its tally to 36,932 and the death toll to 1,173. On the positive side, the city's recovered cases zoomed 85% in a single day from 8,650 on Thursday to 16,008 on Friday, thanks to a backlog of recovered patients from recent weeks being updated.

Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) health officials stressed that 715 patients were discharged on Friday, while the rest of the 6,643 patients had already recovered over the past few weeks.

Deputy executive health officer Dr. Daksha Shah said the recovery rate has overall improved due to multiple interventions by the BMC. "Timely oxygen support is helping patients recover by seven days. Besides, we have been giving the tocilizumab injection for patients which also helps in the recovery," she said, adding the Central



Effort intensified: BMC health workers check temperature of residents at Kumbharwada in Dharavi on Friday. ■ VIJAY BATE

guidelines have also reduced the isolation period to 10 days improving the recovery rate further. "If you look at the literature, the patient's infectiousness goes down by eight-nine days. So, this works," Dr. Shah said.

Of the latest deaths, 22 patients were men and 16 were women, and 28 of them had co-morbid conditions like diabetes, hypertension, asthma and heart disease. On an average, Mumbai has lost 30 lives to COVID-19 every day this month. Nearly

81% of the cases have been recorded this month. "We are at a peak right now. Hopefully, we will hit saturation soon," Dr. Shah said.

The city has carried out 1,89,967 COVID-19 tests till date. On Friday, 4,266 tests were conducted.

Dr. Shah said there was a lot of frantic testing being carried out, and many general physicians were prescribing the tests. "We have tried to stop that. We are essentially focussing on testing those with symptoms. The

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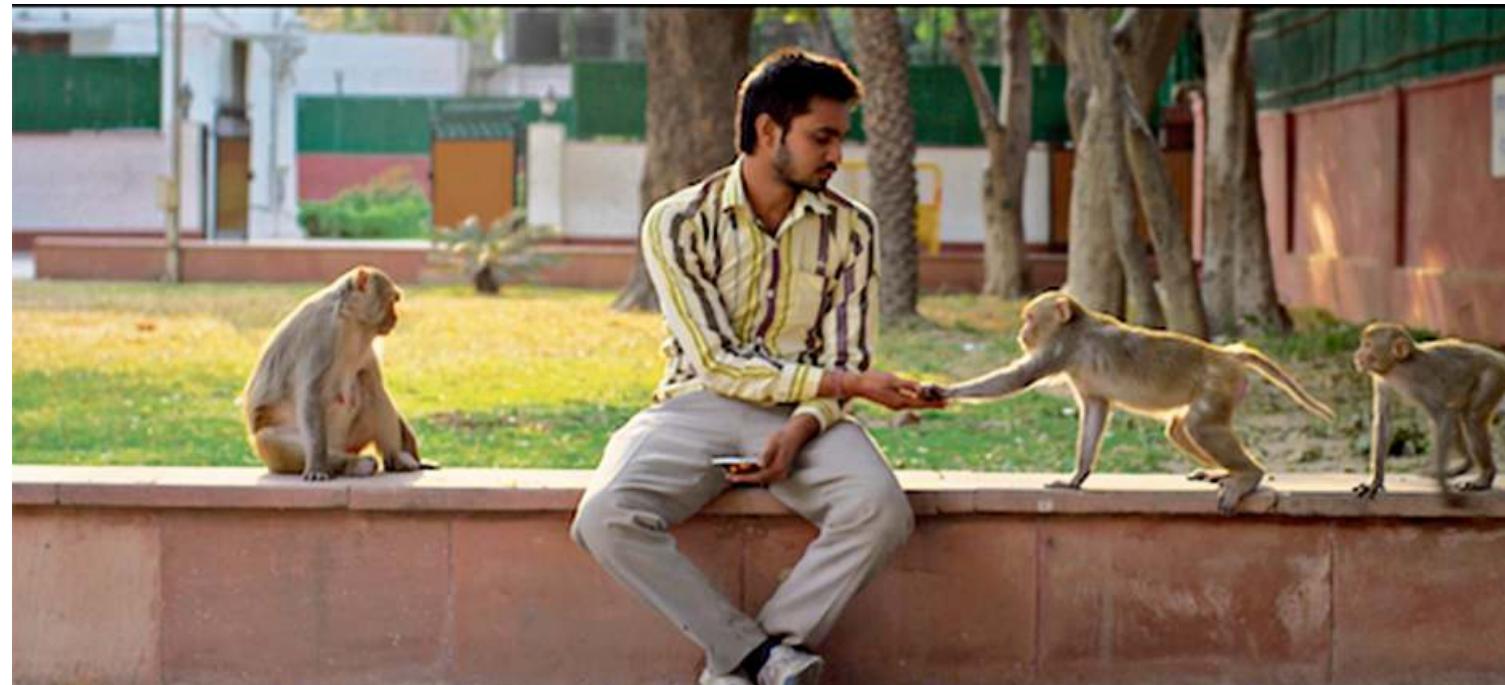
81% of the cases have been recorded this month. "We are at a peak right now. Hopefully, we will hit saturation soon," Dr. Shah said.

The city has carried out 1,89,967 COVID-19 tests till date. On Friday, 4,266 tests were conducted.

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FILM REVIEW



Monkeying around: The film has an overwhelmingly lived-in feel ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Eeb Allay Ooo!: The kingdom of monkeys

Prateek Vats explores politics, nationalism, religiosity, bigotry in a non-judgemental tale about Delhi's primate repelling business

NAMRATA JOSHI

"Kahan narak mein laake phenk diye hain (You have thrown me into hell)." Anjani (Shardul Bharadwaj), the protagonist of *Eeb Allay Ooo!*, tells Mahender (Mahender Nath), his mentor and friend in the unusual monkey repelling business. The phrase sums up what Prateek Vats manages to do in his second feature—he takes the viewers into the veritable *paatal lok*, i.e. netherworld, of the working classes in the sprawling urban jungle of the Indian capital. It's a world where young migrants looking for a job and a secure future, end up facing inner fears, a deep sense of frustration and indescribable humiliation that builds an insane anger and bitterness within. You can see it reflected on the face of Anjani who lands the prized contractual job of

mimicking langurs to drive monkeys away, but somehow can't put his heart and soul into it. He feels robbed of his own dignity, tries to work around it by using some creative ideas but gets chastised for being inventive. Toeing the line is all he can do.

Vats tells the story through a quintessentially Delhi phenomenon—the monkey menace and an entire business that has been built around driving them away, especially in the corridors of power—in Lutyen's Delhi, North and South Block, Rajpath, Nirman, Udyog, Vayu and Vigyan Bhawan. Incidentally, the Animal Welfare Board of India had come down on the illegal deployment of captive langurs under the Wildlife Protection Act, which is when this entirely new job opportunity got created for the humans.

The film starts off as a light-hearted satire, playing on the human-simian divide—the odd ways in which they come together, and how they spar and wage a battle. Gradually the film acquires a darker shade of the absurd and its many unresolved crises, and visual metaphors continue to dazzle and disturb us, much after the film gets over. Even as the

Eeb Allay Ooo!

DIRECTOR: Prateek Vats
CAST: Shardul Bharadwaj, Naina Sareen, Nutan Sinha, Shashi Bhushan, Mahender Nath
STORYLINE: A young migrant gets employed as a contractual monkey repeller in New Delhi.

monkeys assert themselves more and more strongly, the humans get further dehumanised.

The film has an overwhelmingly lived-in feel. It is in the incidental sights and sounds of Delhi. It is in the details of the way the government departments function and in their environment and feel, it's in the ways that even a walk-on character-like the gynaecologist being consulted by Anjani's pregnant sister—feels straight out of reality rather than fiction. Or in the fleeting look of pride on the sister's face when she tells the doctor that Anjani has a "government job", much coveted in the world of the marginalised. The real comes together in the naturalistic performances so much so, that it gets difficult to separate the professional actors playing the roles from the real people Vats has woven in the narrative. For instance, Mahender who plays himself in the film. It's in how Saumya-nanda Sahi's camera winds through the narrow lanes of the blue-collar workers' ghettos as well as flies over the wide expanse of the privileged heart of New Delhi. It is also in how Sahi and Vats capture the monkeys themselves, as the kings of their own world, more human than humans can ever afford to be.

Politics, nationalism, religiosity, bigotry, the talk of gods turning pests, class divides—all are explored by Vats in a matter of fact, non-judgmental way, which makes it even more scathing a commentary on human and social condition. What stands out the most is the all-round exploitation of the labour and working class, how humans are holding humans captive. Be it a *gulel* (slingshot) or a gun, nothing can be empowering, each instrument of power renders them more vulnerable. In the light of the current migrant crises, the film acquires an added note of urgency all its own and reaches out in newer ways in these fractured times. *Eeb Allay Ooo!* will stream on May 30 at 4.30 p.m. for a 24-hour period as part of the free 10-day, 'We are One' digital festival on YouTube

Larry Kramer's visionary crusades



THEATRE COLUMN

VIKRAM PHUKAN

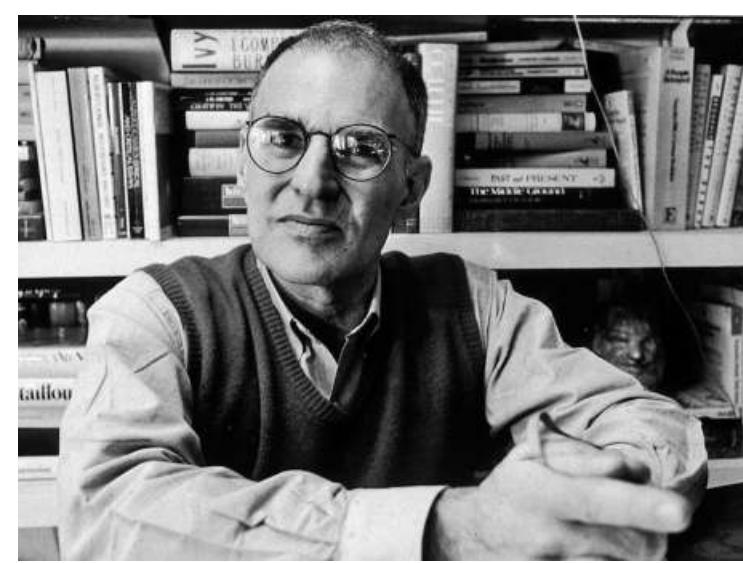
The writer is a playwright stage critic

Playwright and pioneering AIDS activist Larry Kramer passed away on May 27. He was 84. His body of work includes the seminal play, *The Normal Heart*, which opened off-Broadway in 1985 in New York's Public Theatre, and enjoyed a critically acclaimed Broadway revival in 2011 – in whose stirring finale, names of those lost to the AIDS epidemic were gradually projected onto stark white-washed backdrops till they were completely covered. The play was a largely autobiographical excursion into Kramer's tempestuous stint with the Gay Men's Health Crisis, the first-ever AIDS activism organisation, that he co-founded in 1981, when the newly prevalent disease was being appallingly called the 'gay cancer'.

Call to arms

In 1983, Kramer penned *1,112 and Counting*, one of the first essays on the emerging crisis; the number referring to the burgeoning death toll. It was an angst-fuelled but clear-headed call to arms at a time the gay community was in the throes of its greatest-ever turmoil – yet the federal response to it was blatantly muted, because only gay men appeared to be affected. In the essay, he wrote, "If this article doesn't rouse you to anger, fury, rage, and action, gay men may have no future on this earth. Our continued existence depends on just how angry you can get."

The 2014 HBO film adaptation of *The Normal Heart*, directed by Ryan Murphy, can be watched online in India on the Disney+ Hotstar streaming platform. An exception

Act up: Larry Kramer (left) a still from *The Normal Heart* ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

tional Mark Ruffalo plays Ned Weeks, the incendiary alter-ego for Kramer, who wrote the screenplay. Julia Roberts, Taylor Kitsch, Jim Parsons and Matt Bomer step into characters modelled on real-life figures. It's stunning how events from the 1980s acquire a remarkable prescience given the humanitarian disaster the world is currently engulfed in. From epidemiological terms like 'herd immunity', or 'single source' (that sought to 'other' infected gay men, in this case), to the 'bereavement overload' experienced by a gener-

ation, to the egregiously apathetic government that took too long to wake up to the ticking bomb. Ruffalo's Ned is an impassioned if brash crusader, unpopular within the happy-go-lucky gay scene because of his constant calls to self-introspection and course correction – an ultra-activism now vindicated by history. The slow ebbing of his lover, Felix (Bomer), from bronzed specimen to a decrepit body riddled with lesions, exemplified the tragedy of those times in heart-rending fashion.

Influential figure

The gay rights movement in India took off on the back of similar AIDS prevention outreach efforts within one of the country's most deeply cloistered communities. Early trailblazers like the Naz Foundation or the Humsafar Trust stood on the shoulders of brazen international activists like Kramer, who might not have been known much in India outside academic circles, but whose combative ways had a deep impact on the way Indian queer ac-

tivism organised itself, albeit on a turf of contentions and contradictions that Kramer knew only too well. In a 1998 feature, the New York-based *POZ* magazine dubbed Ashok Row Kavi the Larry Kramer of India. The publication was, perhaps glibly, making a link between their similarly pugnacious if polarising personas. Kavi's first exposure to 'militant gay culture' was at the 1989 International AIDS Conference in Montreal. It was a groundbreaking event where Kramer (with his advocacy outfit, ACT UP) was in his element as part of a 'ragtag group of 300 protesters', while also mending bridges with Anthony Fauci, the state spokesperson on AIDS he had earlier called an 'incompetent idiot' owing to the government's delayed response to the AIDS epidemic. Fauci, of course, is now the rational face of the United States' ongoing Covid-19 response. "We loved each other," said Fauci, in a tribute to his great adversary and friend.

Enduring legacy

In an interview with the *New York Times'* John Leland earlier this year, Kramer said he was writing a new play 'for the age of COVID-19', irresistibly titled *An Army of Lovers Must Not Die*. He explained it was about gay people living through three plagues – namely, HIV/AIDS, the current pandemic and the decline of the human body. Early into the lockdown, gay culture icon and four-time Tony Award-winning playwright, Terence McNally, a close friend and neighbor of Kramer, died of coronavirus complications. In that final interview, Kramer spoke of how the AIDS and COVID eras appeared to have merged into each other, calling to mind the line from his opus *The American People, Volume One* – "Show me a plague and I'll show you the world!" HIV positive but thriving since 1988, Kramer finally succumbed to pneumonia, but his outspoken legacy remains resolutely set in stone.

MUSIC REVIEW

Folk for the win

Gulabo Sitabo's ten-track soundtrack is an earthy ear worm through and through

Go-to man: Director Shoojit Sircar entrusts the biggest share of songs from *Gulabo Sitabo* – four out of the ten – to his favourite composer, Shantanu Moitra ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

VIPIN NAIR

Gulabo Sitabo

TOP RECS: 'Do Din Ka Ye Mela', 'Budhau', 'Jootam Phenk'

Studio or Indian Ocean set – incidentally the track is sung by Rahul Ram as well. Top class arrangement once again, especially when the vocals in the first verse segue into a fine classical guitar solo. An alternate version of the song, which differs only in the vocal aspect, is sung by Raina.

The final song, 'Budhau' (also a song about Bachchan's character it would seem – really well written by Pant), also comes in two versions. The reprise variant is very earthy, and rendered earnestly by Bhanvari Devi whom you might remember from Ram Sampath's Coke Studio India Season 3. The main version of the song, however, is a surprising take on the same lines, barring one verse that is slightly modified. Here, the composer takes a Western country music route. Surprisingly, it fits! Mukherjee is once again in top form here, alongside an equally wonderful Robin Fargose on the trumpet – and leading all of them is vocalist Bobby Cash.

Sircar and Ayushmann Khurrana are two names who almost always have great soundtracks attached to their films. But *Gulabo Sitabo* is possibly the best music on their respective resumes.

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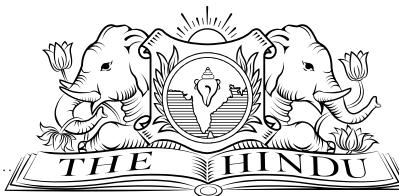
- 4 One who has become powerless (4,4)
- 5 Atone for (7)
- 6 Become beached (3,7)
- 9 Come down (10)
- 12 Turn ripe (anag) – salacious (8)
- 14 Crushing remark (3-4)
- 16 Paris art gallery (6)
- 19 Pianist and composer (often associated with Brahms), d. 1886 (5)
- 20 On a single occasion (4)

Solution will appear on June 4, 2020.

Solution No. 13356

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TM-BM-BE



Awful silence

India must publicly clarify the seriousness of the situation with China along the LAC

Nearly a month after the first skirmishes on the LAC between Indian and Chinese soldiers were reported, the situation on the ground still appears to be tense. While there has been no official explanation of what has happened there since May 5, the day the first clash at Pangong Tso (lake) was reported, there is enough information to conclude that this is the most serious such stand-off India and China have seen in years. As reported by *The Hindu*, sources say that the number of Chinese soldiers, the aggression with which they have dealt with Indian soldiers, as well as the number of points of conflict, indicate strategised action by Chinese commanders. While both governments have been careful to keep the tone of their comments sober, the fact that both sides have repeatedly mentioned that talks are on is also proof of an ongoing situation. A full de-escalation will entail soldiers being able to return to their normal LAC patrols, something military officers say will probably need a high-level political intervention and for the Indian side, an insistence that Chinese soldiers, who appear to have been the aggressors, return to positions they previously held.

In the midst of these sensitive negotiations, the interventions by the U.S. come as inopportune distractions. The first comment, last week, by a then senior State Department official, accusing China of being an aggressor on several fronts and posing a "threat" to its neighbours, was followed by President Donald Trump's offer, this week, to mediate between Delhi and Beijing. Neither comment appears to have been made in consultation with India. India has made it clear that it will not accept Mr. Trump's offer and has denied his claim that he spoke to Prime Minister Modi on the issue. The government's first priority now must be to end the current stand-off, and then for its senior officials to enter serious talks on LAC demarcation. Given all the new infrastructure being built by India, it may also be necessary to negotiate new border management protocols that were last updated in 2013. The government must also investigate how a big build-up of Chinese soldiers was not acted upon earlier. Beyond this, it must make a full assessment of just what China's final aims are: is the summer conflagration meant to deflect attention from Beijing's current problems over the coronavirus pandemic, to deter India from its infrastructural push for roads and bridges to connect its northern frontiers all the way to the Karakoram pass, or to "remind" New Delhi of its geographical vulnerabilities as it contemplates a closer maritime relationship in the Indo-Pacific with the U.S.? In all three scenarios, the first steps for the government would be to publicly clarify the seriousness of the situation at the LAC, and to build consensus around its plans for a firm pushback and an assertion of its position along the disputed line.

Belated, but welcome

After taking note of pandemic-induced crisis, SC must now enforce rights of the vulnerable

It is a matter of relief that the Supreme Court has at last taken cognisance of the plight of millions of inter-State workers looking for transport home and relief from the unrelenting misery unleashed on them by the lockdown. A three-judge Bench has initiated *suo motu* proceedings based on media reports and representations from senior advocates, observing that there have been inadequacies and lapses on the part of the Centre and States in dealing with the crisis faced by workers. It need not have come to this. This could have taken place seven or eight weeks earlier, when petitions were filed before the top court on behalf of those left in the lurch across India after the Centre announced a lockdown, with just four hours' notice. With a kind of self-effacement and self-abnegation not in keeping with its institutional history, the Court had then accepted the government's sweeping claim that there were no migrants on the roads any more, and that the initial exodus of workers from cities to their home States had been set off by "fake news" to the effect that the lockdown would last for months. In an unfortunately limited intervention, the Court merely advised the police to treat the workers on the roads with kindness and directed the media to highlight the Centre's version of the developments.

The Court's reluctance to intervene may have stemmed from a belief in letting the executive handle the fallout of an unprecedented global crisis, but, in the process, it abandoned its primary responsibility of protecting fundamental rights, especially of those most vulnerable. Such was the resultant dismay that retired judges called it out for apparent abdication of its duty. A former High Court judge even said the ghost of ADM *Jabalpur* was lingering, in an unflattering reference to an Emergency-era judgment, now mercifully overruled, that held that personal liberty was not absolute during a state of emergency. Whether it was shamed into taking cognisance of the issue or it felt that the situation is ripe for intervention, one should now expect the Court to take a more critical look at the government's lapses, and emulate the stellar role that High Courts are playing in holding administrations accountable. The top court must now find out if the Centre, which imposed a stringent lockdown to buy time for preparing the health infrastructure, had discharged its responsibilities. It may even lay down guidelines for planning, coordination and establishment of a mechanism to address the economic and humanitarian consequences of such actions in future. The government should also do more than asking its law officers to fulminate against activists, denounce the media and question the patriotism of those critical of its actions. A national tragedy requires a more statesmanlike response.

A moment for civilisational introspection

There is a collective culpability in the social crime during the lockdown — of the dispossession of India's working poor



HARSH MANDER

The traumatic months of the national lockdown lay bare many troubling truths about the profound estrangement of people of privilege from the working poor. They reveal a society in which the privileged are extraordinarily comfortable with inequality, and wanting in elementary empathy and solidarity. They confirm that the veneer of modernity and the progressive, egalitarian values of the Constitution remain — in the prophetic words of Babasaheb Ambedkar — no deeper than a coat of paint.

An exile of the poor

In this writer's book, *Looking Away: Inequality, Prejudice and Indifference in New India*, I described the Indian rich and middle-class to be among the most uncaring in the world, mired still in the cruelties of caste and class, with a singular capacity to look at injustice and suffering and just turn their faces away. I wrote of the exile of the poor from our conscience and our consciousness. The lockdown disclosed precisely how absolute and unforgiving is this exile.

For any young person growing up in middle-class homes, the poor are visible at every turn, but only in their instrumentality as people who exist to service our every need. They never know them as classmates, as colleagues or competitors at work, or as friends in a playground or cinema theatre.

When the COVID-19 infection hit us, we saw the working poor suddenly as dangerous potential spreaders. We wanted them sud-

denly at bay. We ignored that it was not the poor who endangered us, but we who endangered the poor when they came into contact with us. After all, it was people who could afford flight tickets who brought the novel coronavirus into India.

We welcomed the strategy of a lockdown — possibly, the harshest and largest in the world, with the smallest relief package. We felt safe, locked in our homes. Deprived of domestic help, we were inconvenienced, but adjusted willingly for our own safety. We adjusted also to working from home, secure that our salaries and savings would tide us through. With running water on tap, we washed our hands regularly. We were untroubled because our health insurance would pay for treatment in expensive private hospitals. We grappled with boredom and occasional depression, but it was a time also to rebuild our bonds with our families.

We were indifferent that the lockdown fell like a meteor on the lives of millions of the working poor. They had fully functional lives before, mostly without state support. After possibly some years in poorly resourced schools, they travelled far to escape the dead end poverty and caste oppression of the countryside. The cities were uniformly unwelcoming to them. The state made no arrangements for affordable decent housing or to protect their rights as workers. Instead it was consistently hostile to them, rendering illegal and demolishing their slum shanties or roadside vending. Still, millions of them survived and overcame, working hard to build, clean, maintain and sustain the cities, and raise the lives of their families despite an unjust, uncaring state.

The lockdown by design had nothing to offer them except to destroy overnight the lives they



had resiliently built for themselves. After all, the safety of physical distancing and handwashing were impossible for them in their grimy, crowded shanties or rough streets. With their livelihoods bombed out by state policy, in their ruins they were suddenly forced to endure the very hunger they escaped when they had moved to the city. Despite this, we in the middle-classes readily demonstrated our support for the lockdown, cheerily banging utensils or lighting lamps and candles as instructed.

It is sobering to be mindful that most men and women trudging or cycling home in dangerous journeys, dying on railway tracks or of hunger and exhaustion on trains without food and water, are between 15 and 30 years old. But for the accident of their birth, they could instead have been in high school or university, studying online, or working from the safety of their homes, fighting boredom with an overdose of Netflix.

A bias

The brazen class bias of state policies did not trouble us at all. All government servants and most employees in the formal private sector were secure that they would be paid full salaries under the lockdown. The poor had to make do with slim financial handouts not more than two days' wages, an appeal from the Prime Minister to employers to pay wag-

es, and lining up for hours for cooked meals each day. Being thrust into massive deprivation and forced to survive the indignity of occasional charity seemed in the fitness of things for the poor. It seemed also in the fitness of things that while we could quarantine in the comfort of our homes or in hired hotel rooms, the poor were forced into crowded dormitories with clogged bathrooms and inedible food, which they regarded as jails.

But nowhere was the cruelty of the ruling classes on display more than in the treatment of migrant workers who wished to return home. For people stranded overseas, students in hostels, and pilgrims, the state organised special flights and buses. For migrants, there was first a complete sealing of borders and cancellation of trains and buses. As millions began to trudge or cycle hundreds of kilometres with small children in tow, many dying in accidents or of exhaustion on the way, the government finally announced a small number of trains.

Migrants had to pay, until massive outrage forced a reluctant backtrack. But a complicated maze of bureaucratic requirements were thrust in place. One had to apply online, and also get official clearances. Getting a seat was like a lottery and information came online. Workers without smartphones fell back on the very contractors who had let them down to negotiate them through this tangle. Trains were often cancelled, or rerouted, and there was no food and water along the way. People died of dehydration and hunger while travelling.

Buses were little better. Private enterprise and corruption thrived and migrants were charged thousands even to travel on bus rooftops. After perilous journeys on crowded buses or trucks, packed

in ways which could only spread the contagion exponentially, there were instances where several were drenched in unsafe disinfectants. Officials at many checkpoints demanded bribes, and workers sometimes paid more for travel than air tickets. Migrants, until recently providers for family in the village, had to ask them for money to be able to come home, and they mounted vast new debts.

Governments and business did not help them because they did not care, and because they did not want them to move. They did not see them as human beings in their fullness of the agency and humanity, but only as a factor of production, labour which should be obediently available on call whenever they were able to restart their enterprises.

When the Union government finally decided to restore flights, the Minister said that health certificates before travel and quarantine after were not 'practical' (although some State governments insisted on quarantine). But what was deemed not practical for resourceful and networked air travellers was made mandatory for pauperised workers without social capital.

This should be a moment for civilisational introspection. In coming months, as hunger spreads, jobs crumble, children are pulled out of school into labour, and poor people die without hospital beds and ventilators, will we acknowledge our collective culpability in the social crime of the radical dispossessing of our people, in an ultimately vain bid to keep just ourselves safe? Will we recognize the abject collapse of our moral centre? Will we at last learn lessons of solidarity, equality and justice?

Harsh Mander is a human rights worker, writer and teacher

Anchoring ties with Canberra the virtual way

The India-Australia summit next week is not directed only by the turbulent geopolitics of the region



AMITABH MATTO

In August 1950, one of Australia's most celebrated jurists, Sir Owen Dixon (who sought to mediate a settlement on Kashmir) wrote to his daughter, Anne, in Melbourne that Delhi was "a place I hope and trust that I shall never again see." Nearly 70 years later, as the Prime Ministers of India and Australia, Narendra Modi and Scott Morrison, prepare for next week's virtual summit (June 4), it is not because of any such reservation about India's capital. Today, New Delhi ranks extremely high on Australia's diplomatic radar; the new High Commissioner Barry O'Farrell's appointment is reflective of how far we have moved from Sir Owen's time. A former Premier of New South Wales and a celebrated public figure, Mr. O'Farrell has already made his presence felt in India through the increasingly ubiquitous world of webinars in his colourful Indian waistcoats.

Almost all of Australia's recent Prime Ministers, including Julia Gillard, Tony Abbott and Malcolm Turnbull have visited India. Mr. Morrison's visit to India, in January, was postponed because of the devastating bushfires in Australia, and now because of the COVID-19 pandemic. When Mr. Modi tra-

velled to Australia in 2014, 28 years after Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit, in 1986, he electrified the country with his presence, including business leaders from the country in a panel discussion.

It is tempting to view the virtual summit only in the context of the turbulent geopolitics of the region. In reality, New Delhi's relations with Canberra have acquired such spread and depth today that even without the undeniable belligerence of an increasingly inscrutable China, the summit would still have had salience and similar gravitas.

Relations with much potential

The idea of the Australia-India relationship has well and truly arrived; and while Australia's population is roughly the same as the National Capital Region, the potential for a shared partnership extends well beyond Mr. Modi and Mr. Morrison trying to deconstruct the inscrutable mind of China's supreme leader, Xi Jinping, or the manner in which the World Health Organization has acted amid the spread of the pandemic.

Virtual summits are no longer a novelty. Mr. Modi convened a multilateral summit to bring South Asia together to face the pandemic, and he spoke online with G-20 leaders on similar issues. But India's first bilateral summit is with Australia; and it is no longer surprising. The convergence of interests and values has been patently obvious; but the time has also come to translate that potential into reality.

Donald Trump's offer to mediate. It is always wiser to settle the burning issues with China amicably and individually without bringing in an outsider or introducing irritants. It is better to strengthen ties with China with a sobriety of mind (Page 1, "Working with China to resolve LAC issue peacefully, says MEA", May 29).

■ The stand-off is another addition to the long list of border disputes between the great nations, but could be the worst. The decision to continue infrastructure development is welcome news, but the fact that there is a silence on the ground reality is disturbing. If there



The two countries have sought to reconstruct their increasingly turbulent regional geography into the Indo-Pacific and while grudgingly in the past, and often in fits and starts, seen the Quad (with Japan and the United States) as the most potent instrument to promote cooperation; not surprisingly, causing apprehensions in Beijing.

It is expected that the 'Mutual Logistics Support Agreement' will be signed during the summit that should enhance defence cooperation and ease the conduct of large-scale joint military exercises. Last April, Australia and India conducted AUSINDEX, their largest bilateral naval exercise, and there are further developments on the anvil, including Australia's permanent inclusion in the Malabar exercise with Japan. In addition, it may be prudent too for New Delhi and Canberra to elevate the 'two plus two' format for talks from the Secretariat level to the level of Foreign and Defence Ministers.

But beyond the realpolitik of strategy, is the managing of cooperation in areas that matter to the lives of the people of the two nations: health, food and education.

Mr. Morrison has emerged as a statesman (during the COVID-19 pandemic) by bringing in the national opposition and reaching out to state leaders in the most effective and efficient display of cooperative federalism. So much so that the Australian writer Richard Flanagan suggested, in *The New York Times* (May 18, 2020), that polarising ideologies in Australia were killed by the coronavirus given the united national response.

Pandemic control lessons

Australia is one of the few countries that has managed to combat COVID-19 so far through "controlled adaptation" by which the coronavirus has been suppressed to very low levels. Two of the leaders of this great Australia-wide effort are Indian-born scientists. Shitij Kapur, of the University of Melbourne, led a community of academics to produce a path-breaking report, "Roadmap to recovery", while S.S. Vasan is leading efforts to develop a vaccine in a Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) facility in a dangerous pathogens facility in Geelong, near Melbourne. There is much that the two Prime Ministers can share on this front.

In terms of health and safe food as well as the supply chains that facilitate their delivery, there are important lessons to be learnt.

One of Australia's richest businessmen, Anthony Pratt of Pratt Industries, and first patron of the Australia-India Leadership Dialogue, recently described the promise of DTC-

CPG (direct to consumer; consumer packaged goods) which could transform global supply chains. Here too there is much room for collaboration and new thinking.

Higher education

The recovery of Australia's universities, most of which are publicly funded and many rank among the top in the world, is still in question, but they are proving to be resilient and pioneers in distance and online learning. Australian universities could well open earlier than most and emerge as a safer destination for quality education than their European or Ivy league counterparts.

Till a few weeks ago, the prospect of teaching online a course on Contemporary India to Australian Students from the University of Melbourne seemed daunting to this writer. But with slides of Ambedkar, Gandhi and even snippets from the movies of Satyajit Ray, the enormous potential of online learning became obvious; the students were excited intellectually by both the robustness of Indian democracy, and the diversity of its experience as a federation. Although the course was on India, the enormous potential of young Australians and Indians working and building fresh order in a turbulent world became starkly obvious. The virtual summit, in this sense, could not have been better timed.

Amitabh Matto is Chair of the Australia-India Leadership Dialogue and was the founding Director of The Australia India Institute

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have jobs left. Since COVID-19 is likely to stay with us for a while, some changes in our lifestyle are necessary to minimise the chances of getting infected. Masks should be provided or be made easily accessible to all. The 20-second hand washing technique should be inculcated as a habit in everyday life. Also, one should avoid touching one's face as far as possible. These new traits should be ingrained in children since they could become carriers once they go back to school. Such simple measures can go a long way in protecting every person.

AKASHI NARAIN, New Delhi

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.

Border staved off

China is at it again. While it has become its wont to browbeat India, India may not be the India of 1962 just as China may not be what it was that year. There is advice that India should tone down its rhetoric but build up its capabilities steadily and quietly. This is not at all bad advice. War is not a desired option for either India or China and is fraught with danger for both sides. The loss of army personnel and properties is undesirable and every effort must be made to pursue peace.

K.V. SEETHARAMAIAH, Hassan, Karnataka

■ India has done well in not heeding to U.S. President

Donald Trump's offer to mediate. It is always wiser to settle the burning issues with China amicably and individually without bringing in an outsider or introducing irritants. It is better to strengthen ties with China with a sobriety of mind (Page 1, "Working with China to resolve LAC issue peacefully, says MEA", May 29).

■ The stand-off is another addition to the long list of border disputes between the great nations, but could be the worst. The decision to continue infrastructure development is welcome news, but the fact that there is a silence on the ground reality is disturbing. If there

is indeed an attempt to begin negotiations, one can only hope that the dispute will be resolved amicably and a proper demarcation of the LAC done.

AKSHAY KRISHNAN, Thiruvananthapuram

■ India and China must step up dialogue and look for ways and means to de-escalate the growing tensions in areas along the Line of Actual Control, especially in the Galwan Valley in Ladakh. Whether China is attempting to thwart India's border infrastructure construction in a benign stand-off or is making plans to throttle India's new economic aspirations, it has done it the wrong way. An over-ambitious China is constantly

resorting to threat and coercion to enforce its territorial claims on its land and maritime borders with countries across the Indian and Pacific Oceans. China's ambitions may possibly be linked to its belief that the U.S. is going to be weakened by the pandemic. India and China must be level-headed, especially New Delhi, and focus on regional cross-border cooperation. Regional economic integration can be a solution to both territorial disputes and irregular cross-border movements.

VENU G.S., Kalluvathukkai, Kollam, Kerala

Diplomates?
It is amusing that a former diplomat has used the word 'territorial nationalism'

(Editorial page, "For a reset in India-Nepal relations", May 29). One wonders what he means by this. Next he says India should be a "generous partner". Can he please explain these phrases? When one country depicts Indian territory as its own in its map, how can India be expected to be quiet? There is a limit to sharing precious real estate.

R. MURALIDHARAN, Tiruchi, Tamil Nadu

Knocked down by the virus, flattened by the winds

Cyclone Amphan has claimed 98 lives in West Bengal, wiped out thousands of homes, broken embankments and destroyed swathes of agricultural land. **Suvanjit Bagchi and Shiv Sahay Singh** report on the trail of destruction it has caused in a State that is already grappling with the COVID-19 crisis

The doors of the robust sedan started rattling. The windows of the car began rattling too, tugging at the frames that held them. The wind speed was 110 km/hour. All around us, mighty trees swayed violently and some already lay fallen like toothpicks. Branches flew like dangerous missiles in the leafiest neighbourhood in south Kolkata, Southern Avenue. It was 6.20 p.m. on May 20. The storm was brewing.

After we clicked a couple of photographs, the driver sounded a word of caution: "The back wheel is mildly floating in the air." We clambered out and fled the scene. Outside, the sky had changed dramatically. Darkness had descended and the wind howled.

Over the next several hours, super cyclone Amphan went on a rampage. It surged through the city, carelessly sweeping aside trees, lamp posts, vehicles, and even robust brick-and-mortar structures. "It took away my house. But my brother's house across the road was still standing," said Moktar Ali, a fish vendor at Minakhan market in South 24 Parganas.

One of the earliest emergency calls to the Bangla Sanskriti Mancha, a group that works mainly with migrant workers, came from Selima Khatun of Hasnabad village in North 24 Parganas. The phone rang at around 7 p.m. on May 21, a full day after the storm had unleashed its anger. "Save us," she pleaded. "We are about 100 people on the roof of the mosque. As far as I can see, everything is under water. All our houses are inundated. Our pets have been swept away to the sea."

The Mancha received hundreds of such calls after the cyclone. The president of the group, Samirul Islam, said it is impossible to guess the extent of the damage as neither the government nor the media could reach the epicentre of the cyclone, Sagar Island, about 100 km south of Kolkata. He said a man named Vineet called him to say that the islands in Patharpratima in South 24 Parganas had "disappeared". "No news channel could reach there, so no news is coming from there," Vineet told Islam over the phone. "We don't know if Sagar Island exists any more. The jetty at Kachuberia in Sagar has been pulled into the sea. It's been two days, but no outside support has come yet." Subhas Bhandari from Mousuni Island said fog had surrounded the entire island and caused panic among the people. "We could taste salt on our skin," he said.

'We need to rebuild from scratch'
People from all walks of life – a lone man sitting on a sinking island in the Bay of Bengal, a weatherman monitoring the situation from the Regional Meteorological Centre at Alipore in Kolkata, and even Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee – described Cyclone Amphan with the same words: "I have never seen such a cyclone in my life". There is no historical record of a cyclone with a wind speed as high as 185 km/hour making landfall on the coast of Bengal in recent times. It was not only the intensity of the storm that made the event significant but also its duration. The wall cloud stayed for almost five to six hours. The only comparison that the people of coastal Bengal and the authorities could make was with Cyclone Aila which struck in 2009, but with a speed of 120 km/hour. In anticipation of Amphan, 5 lakh people were evacuated to cyclone shelters. Of them, 3 lakh alone were from South 24 Parganas district.

But while destruction caused by the storm has been vast, the number of deaths in West Bengal has been relatively low. Banerjee said 98 people died in the cyclone, of which 19 lost their lives in Kolkata. And in some ecologically fragile places, casualties have been very low. Amphan ripped through Ghoramara, the smallest and most vulnerable island in the Sundarbans, with a population of 5,000 inhabitants, only claiming two goats. They died when a wall collapsed on them.

A few hours after the cyclone, Banerjee sat at the State Secretariat and summed up the scale and nature of the tempest via video conference. South and North 24 Parganas are "finished" and "99% of south Bengal are destroyed," she said, looking at updates on her mobile phone. "We need to rebuild Bengal from scratch."

Acres and acres of agricultural land in the State were flooded. Tarak Ghosh, a small farmer, pulled out wet paddy from a field which, until a week ago, was glowing under the sun. It was just the beginning of the harvest of the Rabi crop. "It is all gone now," he said. West Bengal, the leading State in paddy production, had suffered a great blow. By one estimate, about 1.5 million share-croppers of south Bengal had lost their produce. Vegetables and cash crops like sesame, jute and fruits had simply disappeared. "Farmers are coming to withdraw deposits, not to buy pesticides and fertilizers. This is a bad sign at the peak of the harvesting season," said Liaqat Ali Jangi, a middle-level farmer and manager.



Cyclone Amphan broke embankments in Purbodarogapur village in Lakshminarayanpur gram panchayat in Partharpratima block of South 24 Parganas, West Bengal, causing saline water to gush into fields and destroy crops. (Below): Inundated moong dal fields in the village. ■ RAJEEV BHATT



er of a farmers' cooperative, Dhubulia Krishi Unnayan Samiti, which has about 1,000 members, in Nadia district.

"We voted for Mohua Moitra of the Trinamool Congress. Yet, when we lost our jobs and then after COVID-19 struck, she never visited the area. She is on television talking about big issues but we are dying due to issues like joblessness and crop failure," said Rahim Baksh Mollah of Charmahatpur. The district leaders of Trinamool did not deny that their MLAs and MPs were busy on social media during the lockdown. "They have left the politics to Didi," said a Nadia district leader of the Trinamool, on condition of anonymity.

Battered capital

People in Kolkata also had a harrowing time during the storm as the wind speed peaked between 112 km/hour at 6 p.m. and 133 km/hour at 7.33 p.m. on May 20. Most people remained indoors and held on to the doors and windows of their homes to prevent water from entering inside. All they could hear was the wind and the torrential rain. There was little or no visibility. By evening, as the cyclone became more and more fierce, large parts of the city plunged into darkness. Two iconic structures in the city, Howrah Bridge and Victoria Memorial, were invisible.

After a long night of battling with the cyclone, millions in south Bengal, including Kolkata, woke up to destruction that was of a scale they had never imagined. The city was completely battered. Trees and poles lay uprooted in every lane in every neighbourhood.

Over the next few days, Kolkata had not only the monumental task of restoring essential infrastructure services, but also power and electric supply, disrupted by the storm and the fallen trees. There was an outpouring of anger on the streets. Protests broke out in several neighbourhoods, and the Army was called in.

Six days after Amphan, at the Region-

al Meteorological Centre in Kolkata, Sanjib Bandyopadhyay, the Deputy Director General of Meteorology, was still trying to pull all stops to get the Internet at his office fixed. "We should be your top priority," he told the staff member at the Internet service provider over phone. "The Chief Minister is visiting districts and we cannot provide updates." The staff member retorted, "Like you there are several top priorities for us. In fact, you are priority number 132."

Bandyopadhyay was the man of the hour. He had been issuing all the necessary alerts about the cyclone for several days before it made landfall. On May 20, at about 4 p.m., he told the press that the landfall process of the cyclone had commenced near Sagar Island at 2.30 p.m. and that the cyclone was moving towards the north and north-east.

Bandyopadhyay explained that it was the first time that the India Meteorological Department (IMD) had issued an advisory for people to stay inside their homes. "This was not the COVID-19 advisory," he clarified. "The administration also ensured that the people remained indoors." Weather officials said they gave regular advisories in their bulletin that the damage will be caused by three factors: gale winds, rainfall, and storm surge. The IMD's focus, they said, was on getting the prediction of intensity and track of the cyclone right. The officials said they got it right, just like they did with earlier cyclones such as Bulbul, Fani and Hudhud.

Close to Kolkata, destruction was visible in Howrah district. The 230-year-old Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Indian Botanic Garden, set up by the British to pioneer botanical research in India, had turned into a graveyard of trees. At least a thousand trees, including some notable and rare species, were

destroyed, said Kanad Das, scientist, Botanical Survey of India, and in-charge of the Botanic Garden. A Dutch cemetery, around the same age as the garden, was destroyed in Hooghly-Chinsurah. The impact of the storm was felt as far as in the Bardhaman and Birbhum districts of south Bengal.

Broken embankments

Seven days after the cyclone, drinking water pouches reached Deulbari Debipuri village in Kultali block of South 24 Parganas district. About 3 km of the embankment of the village on the Matla River had been washed away. Thousands of acres of agricultural land stood ravaged by the saline waters. Hundreds of fish had died and innumerable houses had turned into heaps of rubble. "I have nothing left except the gamcha I am wearing," said Jiarul Laskar, whose home had turned into dust.

In the afternoon, just after the high tide, Basanti Naskar risked the waters of the Matla. She swam for several hours in the deep waters surrounding the broken embankments with a fishing net, trying to catch fish spawns. Basanti and her husband Basudev used to have a pond with fish, and grew rice and vegetables. The sale of fish, rice and vegetables was enough to support them. But after the cyclone, the only way to survive was to catch prawn seeds in the water. "For a thousand seeds, we get ₹200," Basanti said.

While gale winds ravaged Deulbari, there was more suffering to follow when the embankments broke and seawater flowed into the villages. The embankments of several villages in Hasnabad, Hingalganj and Minakhan in North 24 Parganas, and Patharpratima, Namkhana, Bansanti, and Gosaba in South 24 Parganas suffered extensive damage. These villages are now getting flooded

everyday in the high tide.

The many woes of the migrants

The cyclone could not have come at a worse time for rural Bengal, which is not only grappling with the spread of COVID-19 but also trying to quarantine thousands of migrant workers who have returned home. On the road to the Achintyapur gram panchayat in Patharpratima block of South 24 Parganas, amidst broken houses and trees lie a pile of boxes and hundreds of bicycles and motorcycles. The boxes, some of them made of aluminium, contain television sets and refrigerators. This luggage belongs to the migrant workers, mostly from Haryana and Delhi, who have returned home for good. The migrants said it was becoming impossible for them to stay in Haryana and Delhi, so they packed their bags and came home – only to face the storm.

Dulal Sith, the panchayat pradhan, said about 3,000 migrants, or about 10% of the gram panchayat, have returned to the village. Along with other officials, he admitted that the cyclone evacuees and those who had been in quarantine had to be kept under one roof as there was no other option on May 20. In many coastal areas and remote islands, cyclone shelters were being used as quarantine shelters. When people had to be evacuated before the cyclone, the authorities brought both categories of people under one roof.

In the adjoining gram panchayat of Lakhjanardanpur, the fate of the farmers has swung between two cyclones, Amphan and Bulbul. This area of the Sundarbans yields a good crop of yellow lentils (moong dal). Sowing was delayed when Cyclone Bulbul struck West Bengal on November 9, 2019. Before the harvest could be reaped, Amphan landed washing away thousands of acres of

plantation. Roopkumar Sardar, a migrant labourer, had taken about two bighas of land on lease paying ₹45,000 for two seasons. A few days after the cyclone, he and his wife Sutapa and mother Phoolmani worked in the fields of Purbadarogapur village. "The lentil pods I have been collecting from the submerged fields can only be fed to the cattle. I will have to go out of the village to work, maybe to Kolkata, maybe somewhere else outside, to repay the ₹45,000," Sardar said. In several parts of south Bengal, migrant workers who returned before the lockdown took land on lease, hoping to cultivate crops for a couple of seasons before the situation improved. Their hopes have been destroyed by the cyclone.

If yellow lentils have been destroyed at Lakhjanardanpur gram panchayat, at Mousuni Island, Amphan has destroyed the alternative livelihood of tourism. Over the past few years, locals on the island have been investing in seaside homes which they called "resorts". Of the 42 homes that came up, not even one stands now. Rebuilding them is going to take a long time. Keshav Maity, a villager of G Plot, said the roofs of houses, made of asbestos and tiles, flew like cardboard pieces when Amphan struck.

Mousuni and G Plot, the areas closer to the sea, also witnessed a unique phenomenon. Trees that did not get uprooted have dried. The leaves have turned yellow. The villagers said this could be because of the saline fog that formed when the cyclone made landfall.

A comprehensive mitigation plan

In almost every village of coastal Bengal, particularly in the Sundarbans, villagers kept making references to Cyclone Aila. "The wind speed was stronger this time but during Aila, there were more embankment breaches," they said.

"Amphan will not be the last cyclone for the Sundarbans," said Tuhin Ghosh, Professor and Director of the School of Oceanographic Studies, Jadavpur University. Data from the IMD show that between 1901 and 2012, the Sundarbans saw 367 depressions, 68 storms and 77 cyclones. Between 1999 and 2019, the number of prominent cyclones in Bay of Bengal was 32.

"The need of the hour should be to formulate a comprehensive policy for mitigation through risk minimisation, resilience-building and preparedness to respond to such events," Professor Ghosh said. West Bengal should follow the example of Odisha, he said, where, after the super cyclone of 1999, the State has been on a learning curve.

Experts believe that historical weather events like Cyclones Aila and Amphan give us an opportunity to evaluate the State's preparedness as well as the fragility of our urban infrastructure. "The suffering of today should bring in some wisdom if not gain for the future," Professor Ghosh said.



Six days after Amphan, at the Region-

FROM PAGE ONE

GDP growth slows to a 11-year low of 4.2%

"Going forward, with private expenditure growth dwindling due to shut down and labour migration; investment demand contracting due to weak consumption demand and stretched corporate balance sheets; government expenditure will again be the growth engine in 2020-21," said Dr. Pant. Although weak commodity prices and import demand would also provide some support to growth, the economy would contract this year for the first time since 1980, he said.

Congress reaction
The Congress on Friday said the low GDP growth in the last quarter of 2019-20 is 'a

Lockdown 5.0 to be strictly implemented in 13 cities

Markets were allowed to open in the fourth phase. Schools, colleges and other educational institutions will continue to remain shut.

"The lockdown has been relaxed considerably in the fourth phase. People will have to internalise that social distancing and personal hygiene are a way of life now. Lockdown will not be imposed ruthlessly like before, but people will be told that is for their safety," said

We will decide our present, future: PM

But, Mr. Modi said the country displayed its unity and resolve in all spheres in dealing with the disease outbreak.

"In a crisis of this magnitude, it can certainly not be claimed that no one suffered any inconvenience or discomfort. Our labourers, migrant workers, artisans and craftsmen in small scale industries, hawkers and such fellow countrymen have undergone tremendous suffering," he wrote.

For the future, the Prime Minister Modi dwelt at length over the economic challenge posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, stating that the spirit of self-reliance or *atmanirbharta* was the only way forward.

"At such a time, there is also a widespread debate on how the economies of various countries, including India's will recover. However, given the way India has surprised the world with its unity and resolve in the fight against coronavirus, there is a firm belief that we will also set an example in economic revival," he said. He added that the initiatives announced by his government as part of the ₹20 lakh crore package will "usher in a new era of opportunities for every Indian, be it our farmers, workers, small entrepreneurs or youth associated with start-ups."

The Prime Minister also took the opportunity to comment on the spirit behind many of the bold decisions that his government had taken or had to react to. "(The dilution of) Article 370 furthered the spirit of national unity and integration. The Ram Mandir judgement, delivered unanimously by the Honourable Supreme Court of India, brought an amicable end to

telling commentary on its economic management' by the BJP government and its misplaced priorities.

In a series of tweets, former Finance Minister P Chidambaram said the GDP numbers do not fully capture the impact of the four stages of lockdown that started on March 25.

"We had forecast that GDP for Q4 will touch a new low at below 4%. It has turned out to be worse at 3.1%. Remember, this is pre-lockdown. Of the 91 days of Q4, lockdown applied to only 7 days. It is a telling commentary on the economic management of the BJP government," Mr. Chidambaram said.

Karnataka cases swell as 248 test positive

Maharashtra impact weighs heavily on case tally in the State; Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh register 1 death each

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala reported another COVID-19 death on Friday, taking the toll to eight. It also recorded 62 positive cases, of which 56 were cases imported from outside the State. A 50-year-old woman from Chickballapur, Karnataka and one individual in Andhra Pradesh also passed away.

Besides the imported cas-

COVID-19

es, the new ones in Kerala included that of two cabin crew of Air India who had come on a flight to Thiruvananthapuram; two remand prisoners at Neyyattinkara special sub-jail; one health-care worker in Palakkad; and one person in Ernakulam who is believed to have acquired the infection through contact with a known/un-



Crowded roads: Normal traffic was observed on the city roads during the lockdown relaxation time in Vijayawada on Friday. ■ V. RAJU

known source.

Kerala's latest COVID-19 death was that of a 65-year-old person from Thiruvalla who had returned from Sharjah and was being treated at

Government Medical College Hospital, Kottayam.

The Chief Minister, Pinarayi Vijayan, said on Friday that the rising case graph should not be a cause for

concern as Kerala had devised its containment strategy, fully aware that there would be an exponential increase in cases when the lockdown was eased.

Of the 62 new positive cases, 33 were expatriates and 23 were from other States.

Palakkad accounted for 14 cases, Kannur 7, Thrissur 6, Pathanamthitta 6, Thiruvananthapuram and Malappuram 5 each, Kasaragod and Ernakulam 4 each, Alappuzha 3, Wayanad and Kollam 2 each, while Kottayam, Idukki, and Kozhikode reported one case each.

Ten people recovered from the disease, and 577 were under treatment in different hospitals. Of the total 1,150 positive cases reported so far, 565 had recovered.

The State had tested 62,746 samples, of which 60,448 were negative. Of 11,468 sentinel surveillance samples, 10,635 were negative.

Karnataka's turn

About 91% of the 248 cases reported on Friday in Karnataka were passengers who

had come from other States.

The new cases – the highest so far for a single day – raised total positive cases in Karnataka to 2,781.

As many as 227 had domestic travel history and a majority had returned from Maharashtra. One patient had an international travel history.

The female patient from Chickballapur was admitted to a Bengaluru hospital on Thursday, tested positive for COVID-19 and died on Friday. The deaths related to COVID-19 in Karnataka stood at 48.

Andhra Pradesh had 3,330 positive cases, including 85 (33 local and 52 migrant) new ones. Patients discharged stood at 2,226 and active cases at 1,044. The death toll was 60 after one person died during the 24-hour period.

(With inputs from Bengaluru & Vijayawada Bureaus)

Karnataka BJP MLAs hold 'dinner meeting'

Discontent in ruling party building up

STAFF REPORTER
BENGALURU

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa is yet again facing rebellion in his ranks. A "dinner meeting" held by a section of MLAs from North Karnataka on Thursday points to simmering discontent in the ruling BJP bubbling up once more.

The impending elections to the Rajya Sabha and the Legislative Council in June seem to be the triggers that have brought the politicking back. The Chief Minister had earlier hinted at Ministerial expansion post elections.

Ministerial aspirants

Over 13 BJP MLAs met at senior MLA and Ministerial aspirant Umesh Katti's Bengaluru residence on Thursday.



B.S. Yediyurappa

Most of those who attended the meeting have also been Ministerial aspirants.

While Mr. Katti and Basanagouda Patil Yatnal, senior MLA, tried to downplay the significance of the meeting and called it a "casual dinner", Mr. Yatnal conceded that he was upset with the Chief Minister, but denied that it was linked to his Ministerial aspiration.

HC asks A.P. govt. to reinstate Ramesh Kumar

Ordinance through which poll panel chief's term was cut short struck down

STAFF REPORTER
VIJAYAWADA

In a setback to Andhra Pradesh government, the High Court on Friday struck down the Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Raj (Second Amendment) Ordinance (No. 5 of 2020) and the consequential GOs 617, 618 and 619 through which it cut short the term of the State Election Commissioner (SEC) from five to three years, resulting in the expulsion of Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar from the post.

A two-judge Bench, comprising Chief Justice J.K. Maheshwari and Justice M. Satyanarayana Murthy, directed the government to reinstate Mr. Ramesh Kumar with immediate effect.

This leads to the exit of V. Kanagaraj, a retired judge of the Madras High Court, who was appointed as SEC soon after Mr. Ramesh Kumar was forced to demit office.



N. Ramesh Kumar

The court found merit in Mr. Ramesh Kumar's argument that the power conferred under Article 213 of the Constitution to promulgate ordinances was not an absolute entrustment, but was conditional on the satisfaction that the circumstances existed for such an action.

The court also agreed with Mr. Ramesh Kumar's view that the impugned ordinance was in violation of Article 243-K, which states that a SEC could not be removed, except in the same manner

as provided for a High Court judge.

The crux of the matter was Mr. Ramesh Kumar's decision to postpone elections to urban and rural local bodies just a few days before polling on the ground that the COVID-19 pandemic would flare up if the elections were held as per schedule.

This prompted YSR Congress Party leaders and Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy himself to attribute motives to the decision. Mr. Ramesh Kumar then approached the High Court.

Opposition hails ruling

The State government is learnt to have decided to challenge the judgment in the Supreme Court. A senior advocate representing the government confirmed it,

suggesting that the grounds on which the ordinance was promulgated were justified.

All Opposition parties –

the TDP, the BJP, the CPI(M), the CPI and the JSP – have welcomed the verdict. TDP Polit Bureau member and Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council Yana-mala Ramakrishnudu said the government should honour the verdict.

BJP Rajya Sabha member G.V.L. Narasimha Rao and State vice-president S. Vishnuvardhan Reddy hailed the verdict. Mr. Rao said the government should realise that hasty decisions would result in humiliation.

CPI(M) State secretary P. Madhu said the government's comments against the SEC were not appropriate. CPI State secretary K. Ramakrishna said the verdict was laudable. The government should start the process of elections to the local bodies afresh, he said.

The JSP said the verdict strengthened people's faith in democracy.

Nascent Arabian Sea cyclone may delay monsoon arrival

A strong system could delay onset over Kerala next week

JACOB KOSHY

NEW DELHI

Uncertainty clouds the monsoon's arrival over Kerala. While the official date this year remains the June 5, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Thursday evening that "conditions were favourable for onset" on June 1.

The uncertainty is primarily due to a prominent weather model that hints at the development of a cyclone in the Arabian Sea after May 31; the strength and trajectory of this weather system could, in the worst case scenario, delay the monsoon's progress.

"One model – of the Euro-

pean Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting – is showing a cyclone as developing in the Arabian Sea. However, our own models are showing that it wouldn't be that intense and would likely become a Deep Depression, at most," said Madhavan Rajeevan, Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences.

"It could mean a few days delay if it's too strong. Once the monsoon season sets in, there's a certain uncertainty too in all weather models," he added.

Three categories

Storms that develop in the sea begin as 'Low Pressures' and graduate to Depres-

sions, Deep Depressions and then onto three categories of cyclone. The most recent being the Super Cyclone Amphan in the Bay of Bengal.

Another depression is likely to form in the Arabian Sea over the weekend but will turn towards Oman and not significantly influence the monsoon.

While such depressions are normal during the advent of monsoon and usually aid the monsoon's advent and progress in India, a particularly strong storm can hinder the monsoon. Last year, cyclone Vayu that formed in the Arabian Sea stalled the monsoon after it entered Kerala on June 8.



A mound erected around the mangrove cover by GMR to deposit the dredged material in Kakinada.

GMR told to stop dredging in Kakinada

Dismantle bund close to mudflat

T. APPALA NAIDU

KAKINADA

The Forest Department has directed GMR Energy Limited to stop dredging activity in the Kumbhabhishekham mudflat with immediate effect. It has also ordered the removal of the bund around the mangrove cover adjacent to the company's 220 MW barge-mounted power plant on the Kakinada coast.

The action comes in response to a report published in these columns on May 22 detailing the threat to the mudflat and the mangrove cover and destruction of the prime habitat of birds – endangered Great knots (*Calidris tenuirostris*), and Indian skimmers (*Rynchops albicollis*), which are listed as a vulnerable species.

Former Union Power Secretary E.A.S. Sarma, wetland expert K. Murthy Rao, and conservation biologist J. Eswar Narayana have documented the destruction of the Kumbhabhishekham mudflat due to the dredging, and sought the intervention of the State and the Ministry of Environment and Forests and Climate Change in the matter.

On the site, a bund has been erected on the mudflat front. The inflow of water and sand being dredged from the mudflat into the mangrove cover has been recorded. The GMR authorities have been directed to stop the dredging activity and remove the bund by June 1," Ms. Salaria said.

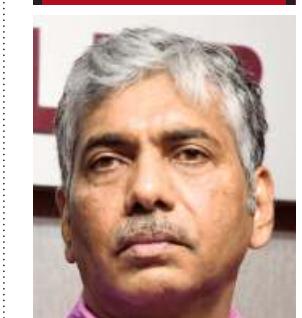
Campaign by activists

"The bund is an immediate threat, impacting the soil topography and salinity on the site being levelled with the dredged material," Ms. Salaria added. Mr. Rama Rao Naidu said the APPCB is investigating the issue.

The dredging was being carried out by GMR Energy Limited to shift existing installations.

On May 27, District Forest Officer (East Godavari-Territorial) Nandani Salaria and Andhra Pradesh Pollution Control Board (APPCB)-Kakinada Executive Engineer A. Rama Rao Naidu conducted a site inspection on

IN BRIEF



HC declines to stay probe against Jacob Thomas

KOCHI

The Kerala High Court on Friday declined to stay further investigation into a corruption case registered by the Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau (VACB) against Jacob Thomas, IPS, in connection with the purchase of 50 acres of farmland in Tamil Nadu in 2001.

Karnataka cancels 53 flights in one day

BENGALURU

A day after the Karnataka government decided to request the Civil Aviation Ministry to reduce the number of flights from high-risk areas to the State, 53 arrivals and departures were cancelled at the Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) as on Friday evening. Twenty-six flights scheduled to land from Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Delhi and other cities were cancelled.

'Take steps to sell ore mined before SC order'

BENGALURU

Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa on Friday directed officials of the Mines and Geology Department to hold discussions with the Comptroller and Auditor General for the sale of 800 million tonnes of iron ore that had been extracted before the Supreme Court ruling on cancellation of the 'C' class mining leases. He also told them to get the Environment Ministry's nod for exploration of iron ore deposits in forest areas of the State.

KCR hints at 'surprise' package for farmers

Telangana CM inaugurates Kondapochammam, the 10th lift reservoir in the Kaleshwaram project

R. AVADHANI
MURKOKU



Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrashekhar Rao at the release of Godavari water in Siddipet district on Friday. ■ MOHD ARIF

Kaleshwaram project an engineering miracle with multi-stage lifting of about 80 tmcft of water.

'Trump did not talk to Modi on China'

Ministry of External Affairs rejects U.S. President's claim that he discussed border tensions with PM

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The government on Friday rejected U.S. President Donald Trump's claim that he had spoken to Prime Minister Narendra Modi about the situation on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China, or that the two leaders spoke at all.

Government sources said India would not accept Mr. Trump's offer to mediate on the stand-off at the LAC, and this was conveyed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to his American counterpart on Friday. "There has been no recent contact between PM Modi and President Trump. The last conversation between them was on April 2020 on Hydroxychloroquine [HCQ]," said sources in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).



Narendra Modi and Donald Trump at a bilateral meeting in New York on September 24, 2019. ■ REUTERS

According to Defence Ministry sources, Mr. Singh, who discussed issues around COVID-19 and the defence partnership with U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper during a telephone call on

Friday, used the occasion to convey India's firm commitment to resolving issues with China bilaterally, "through the established mechanisms that exist between India and China."

Mr. Singh is understood to have also stressed that the resolution of the month-long stand-off at different points along the LAC in Ladakh and Sikkim could "take some time" but that India and China had in the past managed to resolve border issues without mediation by others.

Taken by surprise'

Government officials told *The Hindu* that they were taken by surprise by the U.S. President's comments, particularly his reference to Mr. Modi's "mood" when Mr. Trump claimed to have spoken to him. "I can tell you, I did speak to Prime Minister Modi. He's not - he's not in a good mood about what's going on with China," Mr. Trump told reporters at White House on Thursday (Friday morning India time).

When asked by reporters about his offer of mediation on the "raging border dispute" between India and China, made first in a tweet on Thursday, Mr. Trump said he would be willing to broker talks between the two countries if "it would help".

"I would do that. You know, I would do that. If they, if they thought it would help if I were the mediator or the arbiter, I would do that. So, we'll see," Mr. Trump told a correspondent from *PTI* news agency who asked him about his tweet.

However, the MEA sources reiterated that the Ministry's official spokesperson Anurag Srivastava "made it clear" on Thursday that India was "directly in touch with the Chinese through established mechanisms and diplomatic contacts."

Rahul asks govt. to tell nation what's happening with China

'Silence on border situation is fuelling massive speculation'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Friday asked the government to 'come clean' on the reported border tension with China and inform the nation what exactly is happening.



Rahul Gandhi

dia-China issue, we would like to see some more transparency on what is going on. It becomes very difficult for us to have a position without understanding the facts. I think the Government should make clear to the people of India, what exactly is happening on the border. We are hearing different stories. So, I don't want to go into conjecture but it is important that the Government of India makes it clear what is happening on the border," he had said.

Last Tuesday, Mr. Gandhi said he expected the government to be transparent about the border tensions with China and Nepal but refused to make any specific comment. "I think on the In-

dia and offered to mediate between India and China, something that was both denied and rejected by India.

His tweet came a day after United States President Donald Trump claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was 'not in a good mood' over the border row

Donald Trump's gaffe on call with PM Modi is not a first, but a pattern

While officials acknowledge breach of protocol by the American President, they point out that the India-U.S. relationship remains strong nonetheless

SUHASINI HAIDAR

NEW DELHI

Government officials have dismissed U.S. President Donald Trump's claim that he spoke with Prime Minister Narendra Modi about the situation at the Line of Actual Control with China, as untrue. While this is the first time Mr. Trump has been accused by New Delhi of fabricating a conversation entirely, it is not the first time Mr. Trump has run into controversies by revealing details of conversations with the PM, including their most recent conversation on April 4 on hydroxychloroquine (HCQ), the drug Mr. Trump favours as a cure for COVID-19.

In its readout of the call of

the same day, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) made no mention of hydroxychloroquine, noting instead that the two leaders had spoken about the pandemic, its impact on the global economy, and even on the "significance of practices such as Yoga and Ayurveda" during this time. While this is the first time Mr. Trump has been accused by New Delhi of fabricating a conversation entirely, it is not the first time Mr. Trump has run into controversies by revealing details of conversations with the PM, including their most recent conversation on April 4 on hydroxychloroquine (HCQ), the drug Mr. Trump favours as a cure for COVID-19.

Even as India reconsidered its decision, Mr. Trump spoke again, this time appearing to threaten New

Delhi if it did not release the drug to the U.S.

"If [PM Modi] doesn't allow it [HCQ] to come out, that would be OK, but of course there may be retaliation," Mr. Trump said, adding insult to his earlier indiscretion. Once the government lifted its ban, as it did not just for the U.S., but for more than a hundred other countries, Mr. Trump showered India and PM Modi with praise. The impression he left by revealing his conversation with the PM was that the U.S. had browbeaten the Indian government into threatening HCQ supplies.

The diplomatic dissidence over HCQ resembled Mr. Trump's comments in 2018 about Indian tariffs on

American Harley Davidson bikes, where he even mimicked PM Modi in remarks to the press. "The PM, who I think is a fantastic man, called me the other day. He said we are lowering [tariffs] to 50%," Mr. Trump announced, adding that he still wanted the tariffs to be reduced to "zero". What had made his comments more problematic was that at the time PM Modi had made the call, India had not officially announced the decision to cut tariffs on imported motorcycles, which made Mr. Trump's delivery of the comments even more cause for discomfort.

Just weeks before the HCQ

NEWS ANALYSIS

fracas this year, Mr. Trump had been in India for a bilateral visit, his first as U.S. President. While the country focused on preparations for the unprecedented joint rally planned at the Sardar Patel stadium, Mr. Trump stunned all with his account of another conversation with PM Modi.

"PM Modi said we will have millions and millions of people. He thinks we will have 5-7 million just from the airport to the new stadium," said Mr. Trump, speaking to the press on February 12, a day after the visit was announced. At a rally in Colorado Springs a few days later, Mr. Trump upped his estimate of the

crowd in Ahmedabad to "6-10 million people". The assertion cast a bluntness on Indian officials making arrangements, who explained that given Ahmedabad's entire estimated population was 7 million people, Mr. Trump was unlikely to receive the crowds he imagined. Eventually, however, Mr. Trump said he was very pleased with the more than 1 lakh people who attended the joint rally at the stadium and the "hundreds of thousands of everyday citizens who came out and lined the streets in a stunning display of Indian culture and kindness".

While Mr. Trump has caught the government by surprise with his offer to mediate between India and China

na this year, last year, it was his offer to mediate between India and Pakistan that grabbed the headlines. A few weeks after PM Modi met with President Trump at the G-20 summit in Osaka, Mr. Trump met with Pakistan PM Imran Khan at the White House and announced he would "love to be a mediator" on Kashmir.

Kashmir question
"I was with PM Modi two weeks ago and we talked about this subject and he actually said, 'Would you like to be a mediator or arbitrator?' I said 'where?', he said 'Kashmir', Mr. Trump said then.

India's consistent policy is to resolve issues bilaterally, and it has always pushed

back on offers of mediation, thus Mr. Trump's comments were denied by the government in no uncertain terms after a furore in Parliament. No lasting damage was done by the comment or the denial, however, and less than two months later, Mr. Trump and Mr. Modi stood together at a joint rally in Houston.

MEA officials say they have come to expect the unexpected when Mr. Trump speaks, and acknowledge that his habit of discussing publicly conversations held with a world leader are a breach of protocol. However, they point out that despite the comments, the India-U.S. relationship remains strong, and Mr. Trump and Mr. Modi remain on the best of terms.

+ Tension unlikely to escalate, say former diplomats

'Both nations do not want conflict; trust has been created'

ANANTH KRISHNAN

CHENNAI
The ongoing border tensions with China along several points along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) are unlikely to escalate into a conflict with China, two former senior Indian officials said on Friday.

"The most important thing is to not view every single border skirmish as the beginning of another war," said M.K. Narayanan, former National Security Adviser who has also served as the Special Representative on the boundary talks. "We should be careful in not being driven by, I'm sorry to say, what the media and many people are



M.K. Narayanan, left, and Vijay Gokhale

saying." Mr. Narayanan said the problem with China was because "we have an undefined and undemarcated border" with differing perceptions of the LAC. "Both sides have by and large tried to follow the political parameters and guiding principles we agreed to in 2005. Until such time as the border is finally demarcated, we will face some kind of problem or the other. It is true

once we strengthen infrastructure on the border it may seem to the other side, that we are more or less saying we have demarcated the border without formal concurrence, so therefore this may well be the reason why there is a certain amount of skirmishing."

Vijay Gokhale, who was Foreign Secretary until January 2020 and is a former ambassador to China, said the commu-

nication between the two leaders through the informal summits in Wuhan in 2018 and in Chennai in 2019 had helped build trust. Relations had been strained in 2017 during the Doklam stand-off.

Informal communication
"I have seen media reports which suggest because something is happening on the LAC, there is somehow a breakdown in informal communication that the two leaders have. I beg to differ on this. Whenever leaders talk, the chances of mishaps are minimised," he said. "I believe after 2017, the two summits have created a certain degree of understanding and trust. It doesn't mean we have solved every problem. Two leaders together can't solve every problem in two meetings,

but I believe the trust they have created will prevent a mishap from happening."

Both former officials were speaking at a webinar organised by the Chennai International Centre.

Mr. Narayanan said he was of the view that neither China nor India wanted conflict. "Both sides tend to play, in our case chess and for the Chinese wei-qi [or Go, a strategy game]. And between the two, we are caught in a hotspot in many ways. It is too much to call this a military stand-off. It is true both sides have strengthened their troops. The last thing we want is a conflict and I am fairly certain while China wants the rest of Asia to feel they are superior to India, I do not think it will be through firing guns across the border."

Major Suman Gawani chosen for UN award

She served in peacekeeping mission

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Major Suman Gawani of the Indian Army, who served as a women peacekeeper with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) in 2019, has been selected for the prestigious United Nations Military Gender Advocate of the year Award, the Army said.

Major Gawani received the award from the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres during an online ceremony at the UN Headquarters, New York, on Friday on the occasion of International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers, the Army said in a statement.



Major Suman Gawani

Car used in foiled Pulwama attack was owned by Hizb militant

PEERZADA ASHIQ

SRINAGAR

Police suspect that Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) militant Muhammad Ismail, who had a role in the 2019 Pulwama attack that killed 40 CRPF jawans, played a role in the foiled car attack plan in Pulwama on Thursday. The car owner is a local militant from south Kashmir.

A senior police officer told *The Hindu* that Ismail, also known as Fauji Baba, Lambu and Adnan, "may have provided the expertise to formulate the improvised explosive devices".

"Ismail is an IED expert and his role is under scanner. There are very few hands in the militant ranks to handle such huge quantity of explosives," the officer said.

Inspector General of Police (IGP), Kashmir, Vijay Kumar, said 40 to 45 kg of explosives, hidden in a blue drum and fitted to the hatch of the Santro, "may have been hidden given the impact on the car when the explosives were defused by a special team".

Police sources said the nature of the explosives and where they were ferried from was not known yet.

The explosives-laden vehicle, which the security forces were able to spot in advance, belonged to Hidayatullah Malik, an active Hizb-ul-Mujahideen militant, from Shorain's Sharatpura.

Police sources said Malik joined the militant ranks in July last year.

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH AGRICULTURE & COOPERATION (AGRI.III) DEPARTMENT NOTIFICATION

Dated: 29-05-2020.

Government of Andhra Pradesh invites applications for the post of Vice-Chancellor, Acharya N.G.Ranga Agricultural University, Guntur for placing before the search committee constituted vide G.O.Ms.No.60, dated 28.05.2020 of Agriculture & Cooperation Department. Persons of the highest level of competence, integrity and institutional commitment are to be appointed as Vice-Chancellor. Persons with distinguished academics with a minimum of 10 years of actual working experience as Professor in a University system in Agricultural Sciences (Agriculture, Agricultural Engineering & Technology and Home Science) or 10 years of experience in equivalent position in a reputed research and / or academic administration, may apply. The selection process will involve both public notification talent search. Further details can be seen in www.anagrau.ac.in or www.apscbhe.org.

Application with detailed bio-data highlighting achievements, academic and administrative experience and prescribed proforma as annexed, may be sent within 21 days from the date of notification by registered post to the following address :-

The Special Chief Secretary to Government (Agri), Agriculture and Cooperation (Agri.III) Department, Room No.188, "Ground Floor", "Building No.4", A.P. Secretariat, Velagapudi-522238.

Sd/- Poonam Malakondaiah, I.A.S., Special Chief Secretary to Government Agriculture and Cooperation Department

DIPR 85PP/CL, Dt: 29-05-2020

Interested prospective bidders may visit Govt. of Odisha website portal <https://tendersodisha.gov.in>

A-85:

Not our job to make unnecessary political statements: Nepal Army

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Nepal Army on Friday said it was not its job to make "unnecessary political statements". It was responding to reports that its chief, Gen. P.C. Thapa, had declined to follow the orders of Prime Minister K.P.S. Oli to respond to Indian Army chief Gen. Manoj Naravane's recent comments on the border issue. Gen. Naravane had said Nepal may have raised the issue "at the behest of someone else".

Deputy Director, D.A & P, Bhubaneswar

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR
DATA ARCHIVING & PUBLISHING, HP ADMINISTRATIVE BUILDING,
DELTA SQUARE, UNIT-8, BHUBANESWAR-12
Tel No- 0674-2560826
email-dddapbsr@gmail.com

NOTICE INVITING TENDER
Bid Identification No-NHP/DDDAP BBSR 01/2020-21 dated- 28.05.2020

OPIR-32245/11/0001/2021

BHARATIYA RESERVE BANK NOTE MUDRAN (P) LIMITED
(WHOLLY OWNED SUBSIDIARY OF RESERVE BANK OF INDIA)
Note Mudran Nagar, Mysuru-570 003, Karnataka, India
Tel : +91 821 2582905/15/25, Fax : +91 821 2582099
1. Tender No. 006/MYS/MAINT/U/2020-21 - Operation & Maintenance of Shop Illumination at BRBNMPL, Mysuru.
2. Tender No. 007/MYS/IMU/2020-21 - Supply, Installation, Commissioning, Testing & Training of Document Examination System for BRBNMPL.

Please visit our website www.brbnmpl.co.in to download the tenders and submit the bid on or before 01st July 2020, 14.30 Hrs. Any corrigendum / amendments to these tenders, if issued in future, will be notified on the Company website only.

General Manager

Further details can be seen from the Govt. website www.tendersissa.gov.in / <a

'States show variations in testing contacts'

Kerala tested an average of 40 contacts per confirmed positive case, and Maharashtra only eight

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

States that are grappling with the highest burden of COVID-19 are those that least tested the contacts of persons who were confirmed positive, suggests data from an analysis of nearly 1,00,000 individuals tested for the SARS-CoV2 coronavirus and published by a core group of Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) scientists and independent epidemiologists leading India's COVID-19 testing.

A large proportion of both – those tested and those found positive – were asymptomatic family contacts.

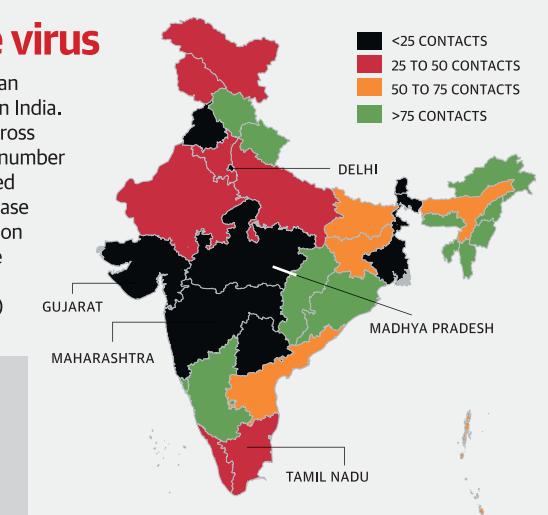
Kerala, which is among the States that have contained the initial surge of the pandemic, tested an average of 40 contacts per confirmed positive case. On the other hand, Maharashtra, which on Friday had 38,948 active cases and 1,982 deaths, had tested only eight contacts per positive case. Gujarat, which had 6,599 cases and 960 deaths, only tested 12 contacts per confirmed positive case.

'Wide variations'

On the trail of the virus

For every confirmed COVID-19 case, an average of 20 contacts were tested in India. However, this figure varied widely across the States. Map depicts the average number of contacts tested for every confirmed case. Among the States with a high case load, Tamil Nadu tested 44 contacts on an average per confirmed case, while Maharashtra (8 contacts), Delhi (9), Gujarat (12) and Madhya Pradesh (12) tested relatively fewer contacts.

Seven States or UTs each traced less than 25 contacts and between 25 and 50 contacts respectively, while five States or UTs traced between 50 and 75 contacts. 12 States/UTs traced more than 75 contacts.



"States demonstrated wide variations in contacts tested per case. It represents the robustness of contact tracing. While exposure to different contacts could vary per case, the reason for this variation needs to be further explored to improve tracing and testing strategies," says the paper, published on Friday in the *Indian Journal for Medical Research*.

According to the paper, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Goa, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand were among

the States that had tested greater than the 75th percentile of contacts.

Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Delhi were among those with less than 50th percentile of the contacts tested.

Testing contacts and isolating suspects is a critical aspect of restricting fatalities and ensuring that infections don't spread rapidly.

For the analysis, the researchers studied individuals who had tested positive between January

22-April 30. Cases in India started to measurably pick up only after March 5, and by March 23, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had declared a lockdown.

Highest proportion

The proportion of positive cases was highest among symptomatic and asymptomatic contacts, two-thirds higher than among those with severe acute respiratory infections, or those with an international travel history, or among healthcare workers.

The attack rate (based on the number of positive cases in a category) per million by age was highest among those aged 50-69 years (63.3%) and was lowest among those under 10 years (6.1%). The attack rate, or fraction of a population testing positive, was higher among males (41.6%) than females (24.3%). The secondary attack rate (based on positive cases among contacts of primary cases) was 6%.

Tests for COVID-19 were conducted in 99% of 736 districts in the country, and 71% of these districts reported positive cases.

Cough and fever

Of the 40,184 positive cases for the State is now 15.7 days from the 11 days in the previous week, while the recovery rate stands at 43.38%, said State Surveillance Officer, Dr. Pradeep Awate.

He clarified that of the 116 deaths reported, 46 had occurred in the last couple of days while the remaining fatalities are from the period between May 16 and May 26.

"About 65% of the deaths reported had high-risk comorbidities such as diabetes, hypertension, asthma,

ma and heart disease," said Dr. Awate.

1,447 cases in Mumbai

Mumbai city alone reported 1,447 of the new cases, as its tally crossed the 36,000 mark to reach 36,932 cases.

Of these, 19,745 were active ones.

As many as 38 of the deaths reported were from Mumbai, to take the city's death toll to 1,173.

Jalgaon district reported 17 deaths, to take its tally to 69. Dhule district reported seven fatalities as its toll climbed to 16, despite the district having only 49 active cases.

Nashik district's death toll has risen to 60, with five deaths being reported from Malegaon, a village hotspot.

"The SC has held that in the judicial commission, the Law Minister is also a member, and therefore, the appointees from that office may not be fair and objective when litigation comes against them... If this is the reason, which it is, then I have serious reservation as a student of law," he said.

"Now, if the mere association of the Law Minister leads to doubts of the objectivity of appointment, then it is a very loaded question... All of us report to the PM as he is the head of the government," he said.

Law Minister rakes up SC's NJAC verdict

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Expressing 'serious reservation' on the 2015 Supreme Court ruling that had quashed the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) in favour of the present Collegium system, Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad on Friday wondered why the government and the PM cannot be trusted "to appoint [a] fair and objective judge if he can be trusted with the country's nuclear button".

"The SC has held that in the judicial commission, the Law Minister is also a member, and therefore, the appointees from that office may not be fair and objective when litigation comes against them... If this is the reason, which it is, then I have serious reservation as a student of law," he said.

"Now, if the mere association of the Law Minister leads to doubts of the objectivity of appointment, then it is a very loaded question... All of us report to the PM as he is the head of the government," he said.

IN BRIEF



Actor now flies Odisha migrants from Kerala

MUMBAI/BHUBANESWAR
Actor Sonu Sood on Friday came to the rescue of 167 migrants stuck in Kerala by arranging a chartered flight. The group, comprising on 147 women and 20 men, were airlifted by an Air Asia flight from Kochi to the Biju Patnaik International Airport in Bhubaneswar. PTI

Two floors of Parliament Annex building sealed

NEW DELHI
A Rajya Sabha Secretariat official tested positive for COVID-19 on Friday, the fourth such case reported in the Parliament complex so far, sources said here. Out of the four, three were found to have contracted the infection after Parliament resumed on May 3. Two floors of the Parliament Annex building have been sealed. PTI

Govt. refuses info to RTI plea on equipment costs

NEW DELHI
The Union Health Ministry has refused to share the amount of money spent on equipment purchase to handle the COVID-19 pandemic in the country, stating that such data does not come under the definition of "information" to be provided under the Right to Information Act. PTI

Migrant worker's body found in train's toilet

LUCKNOW
The body of a migrant worker was found in the toilet of a coach of a Shramik Special train that had returned from Gorakhpur at Jhansi on May 27. The passenger had boarded the train from Jhansi to Gorakhpur on May 23, meaning the train was making the round trip before the body was recovered.

Reports of 'lost' trains fake, says Railways

'Only four of 3,840 trains run since May 1 have taken over three days to reach their destinations'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Railway Board Chairman V.K. Yadav on Friday termed reports of Shramik Special trains "getting lost" as "fake news," and said only four trains of a total of 3,840 run so far since May 1 have taken more than 72 hours to reach their destinations.

He said only 1.8% of all such trains run so far, or 71 trains, were diverted and even that only between May 20 and 24, as 90% of the Shramik Special trains run in the four days were bound for Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and this had led to network congestion.

Among the destination States of the diverted trains were Bihar (51), Uttar Pradesh (16), Jharkhand (2) and Assam and Manipur (1 each).

Among the originating States were Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Rajasthan.

The statement comes amid severe criticism of the Indian Railways for Shramik



Journey begins: A migrant worker, along with his children, before boarding a train at Egmore station. ■ B. VELANKANNI RAJ

Special trains taking longer routes and lack of proper food and drink.

"In normal times, catering is done by IRCTC via contractors," said Mr. Yadav.

"In the beginning, many of them didn't want to distribute food inside the trains due to coronavirus... Initially, we started keeping food packets as per the number of

passengers in the train... some issues came up in sharing the food, which is understandable..." These incidents happened in some 2-3% of the trains. "These are not normal times... whatever lessons we learnt, we used them to improve services."

He stressed that 90% of the trains, in fact, were running at greater speeds than

Mizos give food to Assam flood victims from train

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

A group of Mizos has won hearts after a video showed them distributing food packets to flood victims in Assam on their way to Mizoram by a special train from Bengaluru.

The video went viral after one Emanuel Ralte had posted it on Facebook on

Thursday.

The people they lobbed food packets to are believed to be from western Assam's Goalpara district. Displaced by floods, they have been taking shelter on higher ground along the railway track. The video also drew the attention of Mizoram CM Zoramthanga, who praised them.

the normal Mail Express trains, and there was a delay of about 10% of them.

To a query on the incidents of death on board such trains, Mr. Yadav said the Railways was compiling a list of people who died on the Shramik Special trains from the State governments.

"The set protocol is that

local State police investigate the deaths, including the reason for the death. We have seen reports that people died due to starvation. We have analysed them and there was no shortage of food and drinks on these trains."

Till May 28, Mr. Yadav said, 3,840 Shramik Specials operated ferrying a total of 52 lakh passengers.

Cong. hits out at Solicitor General for remarks in SC

Tushar Mehta's arguments spark a row

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Friday criticised Solicitor General Tushar Mehta's arguments in the Supreme Court in the migrant workers case and questioned the court's 'silence' over the reconstitution of a Bench of the Gujarat High Court that had come down heavily on the State government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The reported spat yesterday between the Solicitor General and a former minister is a new low in the rapidly declining quality of Court room discourse. The Solicitor general has no purpose or right to interrogate a Senior Counsel wishing to assist the court in a matter of overarching public interest as to his contribution to the cause," former Law Minister Ashwani Kumar said in a statement.

"A law officer, as an officer of the Court cannot seek to diminish another officer of the Court in the exercise of his professional rights nor was the Counsel right in dishing out a monetary sum as his contribution, consistent with the finer traditions of charity," he stated.

Decision questioned

Mr. Kumar questioned the top court's decision not to allow Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala to be a petitioner in the case.

"Political parties being integral to the processes of democracy, which is a part of the basic structure of the Constitution, cannot be forced to agitate issues of public importance before a Constitutional Court. In this context ques-

tioning the locus of Ranjeet Surjewala to be heard was wrong and the Court's decision based on the statement of the Solicitor General is clearly questionable," he said.

Mr. Kumar described Mr. Mehta's remarks about the High Court becoming 'parallel governments' as "intemperate, and not expected of a law officer, even as Govt is entitled to question the judgment of the High Court before the apex Court".

Sibal's comment

Congress leader and senior advocate Kapil Sibal, who was one of the lawyers Mr. Mehta argued with, tweeted: "Sad but true. A law officer in the Supreme Court dealing with the plight of migrants epitomized by the images in the public domain said : Journalists are vultures and High Courts are running parallel governments. This is politics not law!"

Mr. Surjewala also targeted the Solicitor General for the arguments made in the court and questioned the court's 'silence' over the reconstitution of a Bench of the Gujarat High Court.

'Avoid travel by train unless it is essential'

Cases of deaths were due to pre-existing medical conditions, says Railway Minister Piyush Goyal

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

In the wake of some deaths on the Shramik Special trains, Railway Minister Piyush Goyal on Friday said the "few unfortunate cases" were related to pre-existing medical conditions.

Mr. Goyal put up a Twitter post appealing to people "suffering from serious ailments, pregnant women and those above 65 years and below 10 years" to travel on Shramik Special trains only if



Piyush Goyal

people who are availing this service have pre-existing medical conditions which ag-

gravates the risk they face during the COVID-19 pandemic," Mr. Goyal's post said.

"...Ministry of Railways makes an appeal that persons with co-morbidities (for example - hypertension, diabetes, cardio-vascular diseases, cancer, immune deficiency conditions), pregnant women, children below the age of 10 years and persons above 65 years of age may avoid travel by rail, except when it is essential," the post said.

As of May 28, the railways had operationalised 3,736 Shramik Specials across the country, transporting around 50 lakh passengers to their home States.

'Rozgar Setu' for skilled workers in M.P.

State is the first to devise such a work plan for returned workers, says CM

STAFF REPORTER
BHOPAL

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has announced the launch of the 'Rozgar Setu' scheme, saying it would help secure employment for skilled workers who have returned.

"The State is the first to devise such a work plan. We are surveying skilled workers who were employed at industries elsewhere, but have now returned," said Mr. Chouhan. "We are identifying the skills they possess."

Stating that the attempt was to provide work to the maximum number of re-



Shivraj Singh Chouhan

tries as well as provide employment to workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, he explained. "A survey of such workers was launched on May 27," he said.

This would fulfil the manpower requirement of indus-

try yojoana' under which rural areas would be surveyed to help prepare land records.

Land ownership records
"The rural population will be given land ownership records as proof of their right over plots of land. This scheme is like a gift for them," he added.

In current financial year, the scheme will cover 10,553 revenue villages of 10 districts, such as Morena, Sheopur and Bhopal, in the first phase. The budgeted expenditure in realising the scheme is ₹97.97 crore in three years.

First State to use flights to help stranded migrants

STAFF REPORTER
BHUBANESWAR

The J

Veerendra Kumar, a man who donned many hats with ease

He was a writer, a media baron and an environmentalist all rolled into one

BIJU GOVIND KOZHIKODE

No leader of contemporary Kerala politics has donned so many roles as did M.P. Veerendra Kumar, Independent MP backed by the CPI(M)-led LDF, who died on Thursday night – he was a writer, orator, media baron and an environmentalist all rolled into one.

He was also the chairman and managing director of the widely circulated Malayalam language newspaper *Mathrubhumi*.

Veerendra Kumar was an



M.P. Veerendra Kumar

affable socialist, whether the parties he represented were with the CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front or the Congress-led United Democratic Front.

From the mofussil town of Kalpetta in Wayanad he worked his way up to make his voice heard in the national capital. He was the first person from the hill district to become a legislator, a member of Parliament and a State and Central Minister.

He was for a while the chief of Janata Dal (Secular) in Kerala, but differences

As MP representing Kozhikode constituency in 1996 and 2004, his detractors, including a section of the CPI (M), may have unfortunately seen him as an under-performer. But he was a man of conviction, as evidenced by his stubborn refusal to compromise with the then CPI (M) State secretary Pinarayi Vijayan when he was denied the Kozhikode seat in 2009, or his quitting the JD(U) when Nitish Kumar joined hands with the BJP in 2017. He later floated the Loktantri Janata Dal.

Veerendra Kumar unsuccessfully contested the Lok Sabha polls from Kozhikode in 1971. But he soon returned with the Left Front over seat-sharing forced him to form his own party, the Socialist Janata (Democratic), which eventually merged with Nitish Kumar's Janata Dal (United), a constituent of the UDF.

to State politics. He became the Forest Minister in the E.K. Nayanar Cabinet to step down within 48 hours after his order that no trees inside forests should be felled rattled party leadership. He was also Minister of State in the I.K. Gujral Cabinet in 1997.

For him, writing came naturally. He was also an environmentalist who fought against the setting up of nuclear power plants and flagged the neglect of the fragile ecosystem of the Himalayas. He was a recipient of the Kendra Sahitya Akademi award for his travelogue *Haimavathabhoovil*. Veerendra Kumar openly

challenged the liberalism of the neo-capitalist, perhaps driven by an ideological trait he acquired from socialist stalwarts Jayaprakash Narayan and Ram Manohar Lohia during his formative days. He was more a Left liberal, though many disliked his esoteric doomsayer's arguments against globalisation.

As a prudent socialist tycoon, he maintained the thin line between politics and business.

His demise comes at a time when the Kerala unit of the Loktantri Janata Dal is facing an existential crisis and preparing to merge with the Janata Dal (Secular).

Ajit Jogi, first CM of Chhattisgarh, dead

He was hospitalised after a heart attack

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI**

Former Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Ajit Jogi, 74, died on Friday after being hospitalised in Raipur following a heart attack. His death was announced on Twitter by his son Amit Jogi.



Ajit Jogi

Throughout his career, Mr. Jogi also faced repeated scrutiny over his claim of being an Adivasi. Several petitions and cases were filed against him and all of them were legally challenged by him.

A seasoned politician

In November 2000, when the new State of Chhattisgarh was created, Mr. Jogi was chosen by Sonia Gandhi to head the State, pipping veterans like Moti Lal Vohra and the late Vidya Charan Shukla.

After losing power to the BJP in the State in 2003, he returned to the 14th Lok Sabha as a member of Marwahi from the Mahasamund seat. But a car crash during the 2004 election campaign left him and wheelchair-bound.

In 2008, he successfully contested the Assembly elections but continued to be one of the tallest leaders of the Congress party until he and his son got embroiled in a controversy over a leaked audio tape towards the end of 2015, amid allegations that they had forced Manturam Pawar to withdraw his nomination as the Congress party's official candidate in a bye-election.

After the controversy, the Jogis formally quit the Congress in 2016 and floated a regional outfit, the Janata Congress Chhattisgarh.

Rajasthan farmers, officials in night-long fight against locusts

In Garh, swarms perched on trees were eliminated

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
JAIPUR**

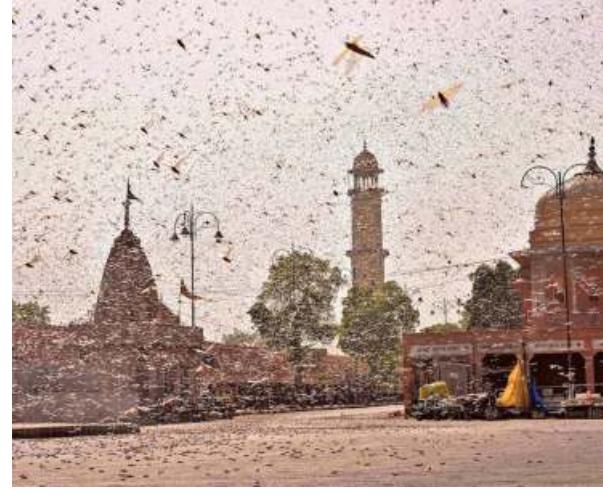
Farmers in Rajasthan are assisting officials of the Agriculture Department in their operations to control locust swarms, which have spread over 20 districts, posing a threat to the vegetation. The officials have been destroying locusts with insecticide, mostly in night-long operations.

Agriculture Minister Lal Chand Kataria had recently asked the officials to alert the farmers and get their "active cooperation" in the anti-locust operations. In a midnight operation in Garh village in Bassi tehsil of Jaipur district, locusts perched on neem and acacia trees. They were almost completely eliminated in a 42-hectare area on Thursday.

Assistant Director (Agriculture) Rekha Chaudhary, who led the operation, told *The Hindu* that a survey was undertaken to determine the affected area. Five teams of tractor-powered sprayers were formed for spraying high-intensity insecticide. "Though the Department's supervisors were present in our team for monitoring the operation, the farmers guided us to the affected areas in the surrounding foothills through their fields," she Cressman.

However, despite the dramatic images of locusts in Jaipur and at the Panna tiger reserve, and the fears of attacks as far as Delhi, Mr. Cressman says the swarms are unlikely to linger in the central Indian States or over large urban centres, and will return to the deserts of Rajasthan with the arrival of monsoon. A changing climate and the recent cyclonic activity have brought the swarms into India earlier than expected and driven them further east than usual, he added.

"Locusts don't like urban areas, they will simply overflow the urban areas. They will make enough of a bother to scare people, [but] they don't attack humans, of course. There's not much to eat in urban areas. They're not good at eating cement and concrete, they really like to eat the natural vegetation," he said on Friday, speaking at a webinar organised by the Centre for Science and Environment.



Grave concerns: Swarms of locusts seen in the walled city of Jaipur, Rajasthan, earlier this week. ■ PTI

Locust surge may turn into global plague: expert

'Swarms won't overrun Central India'

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI**

The current upsurge in desert locust attacks could turn into a full-fledged global plague by the end of the year if it spreads to West Africa and the insects begin breeding there, says the Food and Agriculture Organisation's senior locust forecasting officer Keith Cressman.

However, despite the dramatic images of locusts in Jaipur and at the Panna tiger reserve, and the fears of attacks as far as Delhi, Mr. Cressman says the swarms are unlikely to linger in the central Indian States or over large urban centres, and will return to the deserts of Rajasthan with the arrival of monsoon. A changing climate and the recent cyclonic activity have brought the swarms into India earlier than expected and driven them further east than

usual, he added. "Locusts don't like urban areas, they will simply overflow the urban areas. They will make enough of a bother to scare people, [but] they don't attack humans, of course. There's not much to eat in urban areas. They're not good at eating cement and concrete, they really like to eat the natural vegetation," he said on Friday, speaking at a webinar organised by the Centre for Science and Environment.

"All pilots are also required to share information of locust swarm location if they have sighted any during the flight. As far as possible, it is strongly advised that flights should be avoided through any known locust swarm," the circular said.

Post a flight through a locust swarm, appropriate entry in the pilots defect log should be made giving details of any malfunction experienced, it said.

DGCA warns pilots of risks to flights

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI**

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on Friday issued a circular cautioning all pilots, operators, ground handling agencies and air traffic controllers against the risks posed by locust swarms.

Stating that the country was witnessing an unusually high locust activity this year, the DGCA said there was a need to avoid flying through a swarm.

"As locust swarms fly along the current wind, their path of travel changes with the change in wind direction. Pre-determination of their travel path is difficult to forecast as weather satellites and other satellites used to monitor the environment cannot detect locust swarms," said the circular.

Generally locusts are found at lower levels and therefore, pose a threat to aircraft in the critical landing and take off phase of the flight. Almost all air intake ports of the aircraft will be prone to ingestion if the aircraft flies through a swarm.

"All pilots are also required to share information of locust swarm location if they have sighted any during the flight. As far as possible, it is strongly advised that flights should be avoided through any known locust swarm," the circular said.

Post a flight through a locust swarm, appropriate entry in the pilots defect log should be made giving details of any malfunction experienced, it said.

Temple looted in Palghar, priests attacked

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PALGHAR**

Three unidentified persons allegedly attacked two priests and looted a temple at Balivali in Maharashtra's Palghar district. The incident occurred over a month after the lynching of two sadhus in a village near here, police said on Friday.

The incident took place at around 12.30 a.m. on Thursday when three armed men barged into Jagrut Mahadev Mandir and Ashram at Balivali under Vasai taluka, an official said. The trio attacked the temple's head priest, Sanakaranand Saraswati, and his assistant and decamped with valuables worth ₹6,800, he said. The two priests received minor injuries and managed to escape, he said.

An case has been registered under Section 394 (causing hurt while committing robbery) and other relevant provisions of the IPC, said the police.

Poet Varavara Rao admitted to hospital

He suffers from cardiac ailments

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI**

Well-known poet Varavara Rao, 81, lodged at the Talaja Jail for being accused in the Elgar Parishad case, was admitted to J.J. Hospital on Thursday.

Dean Dr. Ranjit Mankeshwar said Mr. Rao was admitted on May 28 as he was complaining of giddiness and fainted once.

A chest X-ray was taken, which was normal and he is stable.

Mr. Rao has been suffering from piles, cardiac issues and is on medication for ulcer and blood pressure. His three daughters

wrote a letter to Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and the Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court, appealing them to release him on bail as he falls under the high risk category for COVID-19.

Bail plea

On Friday, his wife received a call from the Chikkadpally police station, Hyderabad, who said the Visrambagh Police Station, Pune, had informed them that Mr. Rao was admitted to the hospital.

Mr. Rao has been suffering from piles, cardiac issues and is on medication for ulcer and blood pressure. His three daughters

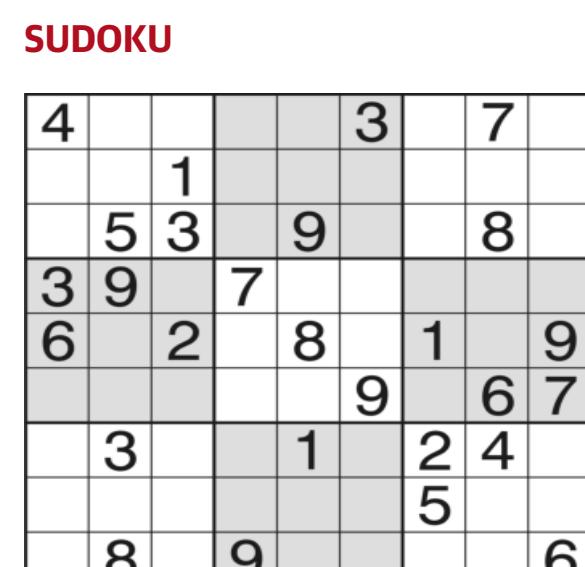
Sudha Bharadwaj's plea rejected

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

An interim medical bail plea filed by Elgar Parishad accused, advocate and trade unionist Sudha Bharadwaj, was on Friday rejected by a special court. Ms. Bharadwaj is lodged in the Byculla jail, where an inmate has tested positive for COVID-19.

Special Public Prosecutor Prakash Shetty, appearing for the NIA, opposed the bail saying Ms. Bharadwaj had been charged with the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. This had not been included by the High Powered Committee for granting bail or parole.

SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★

Solution to puzzle 12949

D	M	O	K	B					
I	V	E	N	O	M	O	U	S	
N	O	T	E	E	O	R	D		
F	A	R	T	E	X	C	R	E	
A	E	S	I	T	K	A	A		
C	A	T	E	U	N	U	S	U	
T	E	E	R	P	P				
P	A	R	E	N					
O	A	E	O	N					
D	P	I	D	L	I	S	S	O	

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

5	2	7	6	9	3	8	1	4	
1	9	3	4	7	8	6	2	5	
6	4	8	2	5	1	3	7	9	
3	9	1	8	5	2	6	7	4	
7	3	2	1	6	9	4	5	8	
6	2	8	1	7	3	5	9	6	
9	5	6	7	4	8	2	3	1	
8	9	1	2	4	5	3	6	7	
3	1	5	4	6	7	8	9	2	
7	4	6	8	9	1	2	3	5	

FAITH

Jnana and karma

Realised souls are illumined seers who have practised the way of discrimination, viveka, and have overcome ignorance, avidya. So, though in embodied state, they are firm in their knowledge of the true swaroopa of Brahman and realise the same Brahman in their atma. Their experience of Brahman as the only eternal Truth gives them clarity of vision regarding the objective world which to them is constituted of Maya. This Advaita doctrine taught by Adi Sankara is explained in great detail by his direct disciple Sureshvara, in the text *Naishkarmya Siddhi*.

In a discourse, Sri Mani Dravid Sastrigal drew attention to the convincing arguments put forth in the text to show how jnana and karma cannot coexist. The two can run on parallel lines only since Tatva jnana automatically dispels karma. This is owing to the fact that karma thrives on the avidya of jivatmas. Avidya has the power to hide the truth and make people believe as true what is not true. So karma and jnana can never be in the same footing even as lion and a goat cannot be together. In reality, there is

Trump order targets social networks

Administration to look into ways of holding social media platforms liable for the content they carry

SRI RAM LAKSHMAN

A day after U.S. President Donald Trump lashed out at Twitter for fact-checking two of his tweets on mail-in ballots, he signed an executive order (EO) asking his administration to look into ways of holding platforms liable for more of the content they carry.

Specifically, the EO asks the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to re-examine how protections granted under a particular statute – Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act (1996) – ought to apply.

Section 230, on the back of which several American tech companies like Facebook and Twitter have grown, allows social media sites to carry third party content without being liable for all of it. There are some exceptions around federal criminal law, sex trafficking and intellectual property. It, therefore, draws a distinction between platforms on the one hand and publishers or speakers on the other.

Significantly, the statute says a platform shall not be



Rage of the oppressed: Protesters gathering in front of a liquor store that was set afire in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on Thursday. ■ AFP

liable for actions taken in "good faith" to restrict material that is, "obscene, lewd, lascivious, filthy, excessively violent, harassing, or otherwise objectionable, whether or not such material is constitutionally protected".

Thursday's order also directs federal government agencies to review the

amount of advertising dollars spent on online platforms. It asks the FCC to take action on "deceptive acts" affecting commerce, such as when sites "restrict speech in ways that do not align with those entities' public representations about those practices". Twitter called Mr.

Trump's approach "politicised".

Reactionary order'
"This EO is a reactionary and politicised approach to a landmark law. #Section230 protects American innovation and freedom of expression, and it's underpinned by democratic values. At-

tempts to unilaterally erode it threaten the future of online speech and Internet freedoms," a statement from Twitter said.

Mr. Trump and other Republicans have said U.S. tech companies have a liberal bias and social media sites tend to censor conservative views. There is support on the other side of the aisle for scaling back or revoking current protections, but for different reasons – such as unmoderated content encouraging misinformation and promoting violence. Presumptive Democratic presidential nominee told the *New York Times* earlier this year Section 230 should be revoked because internet companies, such as Facebook, were not merely tech companies, but propagating falsehoods. Asked by a reporter if he would consider deleting his Twitter account, Mr. Trump said on Thursday that he used social media to refute fake news. "I would do that [delete his Twitter account] in a heartbeat if I had fair – if we had a fair press in this country, I would do that in a heartbeat."

Troops deployed after protests over black man's death

George Floyd died due to alleged police brutality this week

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
REUTERS
MINNEAPOLIS

Hundreds of troops deployed to the streets of Minneapolis and St. Paul early Friday after a third night of rioting over police brutality against African Americans left hundreds of shops damaged and a police station on fire. Black leaders continued to express outrage over the videotaped death of George Floyd, 46, while handcuffed on the ground and in custody of Minneapolis police on Monday. He died after one officer kneeled on his neck for more than five minutes.

"People are angry, they are frustrated because this is not the first police killing they have seen around the country," Al Sharpton, a prominent black rights activist, told MSNBC.

Damage to property
Overnight demonstrators broke through law enforcement barriers to overtake the Minneapolis police station where the four officers blamed for Floyd's death were based. A fire broke out and soon became an inferno that engulfed the structure.

The State's National Guard announced the 500 troops were being deployed on Friday morning for peacekeeping amid signs that the anger was nowhere near dissipating. "Our troops are trained to protect life, preserve property and ensure people's right to peacefully demonstrate," said Major General Jon Jensen of the Minnesota National Guard.

Protests broke out in several cities across the country, including New York, where dozens of protesters were arrested; Phoenix, Memphis, and Denver.



Guarding the streets: Law enforcement officers amassed along a street in Minneapolis early on Friday. ■ AP

said on Thursday they still needed to investigate the case thoroughly.

Reporter held, released

Also, police in Minneapolis released a CNN reporter who was led off in handcuffs while reporting live on television early on Friday following a third night of violent protests in the city over the death of an unarmed black man in police custody.

Officers gave no explanation as they escorted CNN reporter Omar Jimenez and his camera crew away. His crew had just shown a protester being taken into custody

when about half a dozen police officers in gas masks surrounded Mr. Jimenez. The journalists were released about an hour after being arrested.

Pressure mounted on Minnesota officials to arrest the four officers blamed for Floyd's death. A video shows that after being detained on a minor, non-violent charge of using a counterfeit banknote, he was handcuffed, pinned to the ground and one officer held his knee tightly to Floyd's neck for more than five minutes until he went limp.

Floyd's family demanded the officer be arrested for murder, but local and federal law enforcement officials

The striking footage of the arrest could add to racial tensions in the city and across the country over the death of George Floyd. Jimenez is black, while most of the police officers appeared to be white.

Twitter conceals President's tweet for 'glorifying violence'



SRI RAM LAKSHMAN

Hours after U.S. President Donald Trump signed an executive order seeking to bring greater regulation to social media companies, Twitter continued its moderation of Mr. Trump's tweets.

The social media platform, on Friday, covered one of the President's tweets with a notice for vio-

lating its rules about "glorifying violence." The tweet could, however, be viewed on clicking the notice; Twitter felt it was in the public's interest that the tweet be accessible, as per the notice. "These THUGS are honoring the memory of George Floyd, and I won't let that happen. Just spoke to Governor Tim Walz and told him that the Military is with him all the way. Any

difficulty and we will assume control but, when the looting starts, the shooting starts. Thank you!" Mr. Trump's tweet said about riots that had broken out in Minneapolis over the killing of George Floyd, an unarmed African American, by a white police officer.

Twitter separately tweeted a link to its policy on glorification of violence. "This Tweet violates our

policies regarding the glorification of violence based on the historical context of the last line, its connection to violence, and the risk it could inspire similar actions today," the company said.

The White House defended Mr. Trump, saying he did not glorify violence and it retweeted the President's tweet, which Twitter covered with the same notice.

U.K. moots '5G club' to keep out Huawei

'DIO' to consist of democratic nations

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON

Britain said on Friday that it was pushing the U.S. to form a club of 10 nations that could develop its own 5G technology and reduce dependence on Huawei.

Britain has allowed the Chinese global leader in 5G technology to build up to 35% of the infrastructure necessary to roll out its new speedy data network. But Prime Minister Boris Johnson was reported by *The Telegraph* newspaper last week to have instructed officials to draw up plans to cut Huawei out of the network by 2023 as relations with China sour.

The Times newspaper said Britain is proposing a "DIO" club of democratic



A Huawei store in Wuhan, China. ■ AFP

partners that groups the G7 nations with Australia and the Asian technology leaders South Korea and India. It said one of the options involves channelling investments into existing telecommunication companies within the 10 member states.

A Downing Street spokesman confirmed that Britain is reaching out to partners in search for an alternative to Huawei.

The former British colony has been racked by civil unrest amid fears Beijing is curbing the high degree of autonomy it has enjoyed under a "one country, two systems" formula adopted when it returned to Chinese rule in 1997. "Any sanctions are a double-edged sword that will not only harm the interests of Hong Kong but also significantly those of the U.S.," Hong Kong's pro-Beijing government said late on Thursday.

From 2009 to 2018, the

U.S. trade surplus of \$297 billion with Hong Kong was the biggest among all Washington's trading partners, and 1,300 U.S. firms were based in the city, it said.

New law
Beijing says the new legislation, likely to come into force before September, will tackle secession, subversion,

terrorism and foreign interference in the city. It could also see Chinese intelligence agencies set up bases in Hong Kong.

In the latest assertion of Beijing's authority over the territory, China's Ministry of Public Security (MPS) said it would "direct and support Hong Kong police to stop violence and restore order".

The city's police have been independent from China and the MPS has no enforcement powers in the city.

Reacting to U.S. efforts to call a UN Security Council meeting over Hong Kong, China's Foreign Ministry reiterated that Hong Kong was an internal affair and no country had the right to interfere. It said China had lodged solemn representations to countries condemning its plans and was determined to take countermeasures against any U.S. actions.

In Washington, Mr. Trump's top economic adviser, Larry Kudlow, said Hong Kong, which has enjoyed special privileges under U.S. law on the basis of its high degree of autonomy, may now need to be treated like China on trade and other financial matters.

Taiwan President visits dissident publisher

Tsai reiterates support for protesters

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TAIPEI



Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen at Lam Wing-kee's store. ■ AFP

Tsai reiterates support for protesters

"We thank Lam Wing-kee for your insistence on Hong Kong's human rights, freedom and democracy. I welcome you on behalf of the Taiwanese people," Ms. Tsai told the publisher. Mr. Lam and four other Hong Kong booksellers who published salacious titles about China's leadership vanished at the end of 2015, reappearing months later in police custody in mainland China. He fled to self-ruled, demo-

cratic Taiwan last year.

Repeating a pledge that has angered Beijing, Ms. Tsai said her government was working on a "humanitarian assistance action plan" that will provide support for other Hong Kongers who flee to the island.

The Islamic State (IS) group in an audio message blasted Iraq's new Prime Minister, calling him an "American agent," and criticised the closure of Islam's holiest shrine in the Saudi holy city of Mecca to limit the spread of COVID-19.

In the message allegedly read by the group's chief spokesman Abu Hamza al-Qurayshi, released late Thursday, al-Qurayshi asked why mosques are being closed and people being prevented from praying at the Grand Mosque in Mecca.

Iraq's new Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, a former intelligence chief backed by Washington, took office earlier this month after he played a part for years in the war against IS. The group was declared defeated in Iraq in 2017.

Chinese media slam U.S. President over border comments

Washington believes the combined strength of Beijing and New Delhi could impair its interests, says *The Global Times*

ANANTH KRISHNAN

China's State media on Friday said U.S. President Donald Trump was trying to "drive a wedge between China and India" over his offer to mediate amid the ongoing border tensions.

On Friday, Mr. Trump reiterated the offer, first made on Twitter, telling reporters he had spoken to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "They have a big conflict India and China... India is not happy and probably China is not happy," he said. "I can tell you; I did speak to Prime Minister Modi. He is not in a good mood about what is going on with China." India denied there had been a conversation, saying the two leaders last spoke on April 4.

The Global Times, a Communist Party-run newspaper, said in a commentary that "a conflicting China-India relationship serves [U.S.] interests". "Washington believes the combined strength of

Beijing and New Delhi could impair its interests in Asia and beyond. An opportunist U.S. has never given up its attempt to drive a wedge between China and India... the Trump administration emphasises India as a major pillar in its much-touted Indo-Pacific concept."

The newspaper mocked Mr. Trump for his knowledge about India and China. "It seems Trump finally knows that China and India, the two largest Asian powers, share borders. Early this year, A

in the Galwan Valley region". Noting that Doklam was "successfully solved with concerted efforts and wisdom," it said, "the latest dispute can be solved bilaterally by China and India". "The two countries should keep alert on the U.S., which exploits every chance to create waves that jeopardise regional peace and order."

Bilateral discussions
On Thursday, Indian officials said both sides remained "engaged" through diplomatic and military channels in New Delhi and Beijing and at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in order to resolve the situation along the boundaries in Ladakh and Sikkim. Indicating that India would not accept Mr. Trump's offer to mediate, officials said the matter was being discussed bilaterally.

Rising tensions
China-U.S. ties have plunged to a nadir amid rising tensions over a growing number of issues, from China's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and trade ties to Hong

Kong and Taiwan. On Thursday, speaking at the conclusion of the annual National People's Congress (NPC) in Beijing, China's Premier Li Keqiang called on China and the U.S. to manage their differences and "discard a 'Cold War' mentality".

"India probably has found that the U.S. is not a reliable partner," it said. "The self-centered 'America First' policy endorsed by Trump can hardly reconcile with Modi's ambitious 'Make in India' campaign, and a trade deal was elusive even during Trump's high-profile visit to India in February 2020 when the two were locked in trade frictions. India perhaps has been aware of the U.S.'s bad history of mediation in which the U.S. made troubles rather than solved problems, and which turned bilateral disputes into multilateral ones."

Growing tensions
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Joy along border: Children playing cricket by the Pangong Lake, near the India-China border in Ladakh, in July 2011. ■ AP

ELSEWHERE



U.S. vows action against espionage by students

WASHINGTON
The United States will take action to prevent alleged espionage by Chinese students, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said.

Asked about a report in *The New York Times* that Mr. Trump was considering throwing out thousands of graduate students, Pompeo said Thursday that Chinese students "shouldn't be here in our schools spying." ■ AP

25 arrested in Russia over protests
MOSCOW
Police in Moscow and St. Petersburg detained 25 people who came out to protest on Friday, in violation of city coronavirus restrictions, against the arrest of a prominent Russian journalist, a rights group said. An Opposition Moscow city council member was among those detained. ■ AP

Iraq PM is an American agent, says IS

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BAGHDAD

The Islamic State (IS) group in an audio message blasted Iraq's new Prime Minister, calling him an "American agent," and criticised the closure of Islam's holiest shrine in the Saudi holy city of Mecca to limit the spread of COVID-19.

In the message allegedly read by the group's chief spokesman Abu Hamza al-Qurayshi, released late Thursday, al-Qurayshi asked why mosques are being closed and people being prevented from praying at the Grand Mosque in Mecca.

Iraq's new Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, a former intelligence chief backed by Washington, took office earlier this month after he played a part for years in the war against IS. The group was declared defeated in Iraq in 2017.

MARKET WATCH

	PRICE	CHANGE
Sensex	32,424	0.69
US Dollar	75.62	0.18
Brent oil	34.68	-0.06

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	323.80	-8.00
Asian Paints	1683.10	39.50
Axis Bank	384.95	-6.00
Bajaj Auto	2710.50	110.50
Bajaj Finserv	4404.90	118.95
Bajaj Finance	1953.65	5.95
Bharti Airtel	552.60	-10.15
BPCL	342.80	16.35
Britannia Ind	3378.85	55.60
Cipla	648.15	19.80
Coal India	141.30	7.40
Dr Reddys Lab	4071.25	183.50
Eicher Motors	16548.45	311.95
GAIL (India)	92.35	3.25
Grasim Ind	589.20	12.70
HCL Tech	550.25	7.60
HDFC	1658.90	35.20
HDFC Bank	951.65	6.40
Hero MotoCorp	2360.85	62.75
Hindalco	138.85	0.45
Hind Unilever	2057.35	47.40
ICICI Bank	331.95	5.10
IndusInd Bank	393.65	6.80
Bharti Infratech	229.95	6.10
Infosys	691.00	-16.40
Indian Oil Corp	83.20	5.50
ITC	197.35	6.70
JSW Steel	184.20	0.05
Kotak Bank	1224.00	-5.45
L&T	932.25	26.75
M&M	436.35	-4.05
Maruti Suzuki	5610.80	142.45
Nestle India Ltd.	17540.80	551.65
NTPC	97.85	2.15
ONGC	83.20	4.35
PowerGrid Corp	157.55	0.30
Reliance Ind	1464.40	-7.85
State Bank	161.30	3.10
Shree Cement	20857.30	48.40
Sun Pharma	474.25	15.15
Tata Motors	87.00	0.00
Tata Steel	295.20	-0.30
TCS	1972.35	-31.95
Tech Mahindra	530.45	0.75
Titan	890.00	-9.45
UltraTech Cement	3904.85	59.65
UPL	405.85	14.75
Vedanta	92.20	2.25
Wipro	212.80	13.45
Zee Entertainment	183.55	2.85

EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	75.42	75.74
Euro	83.96	84.32
British Pound	92.97	93.37
Japanese Yen (100)	70.34	70.64
Chinese Yuan	10.56	10.61
Swiss Franc	78.41	78.78
Singapore Dollar	53.39	53.63
Canadian Dollar	54.87	55.11
Malaysian Ringgit	17.34	17.43
Australian Dollar	50.22	50.44

Source: Indian Bank

Sundaram HC notice to Franklin Templeton, SEBI PIL filed against closure of 6 schemes

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI

The Madras High Court has issued notices to the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) along with Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund and its top officials after a public interest litigation (PIL) was filed by a Chennai-based group against the abrupt winding up of six debt schemes by the fund house last month.

The court, on May 26, passed an interim order while directing SEBI to file a status report. The PIL has been filed by the Chennai Financial Markets Accountability (CFMA).

CFMA also plans to get more unit holders of the affected schemes through an

online petition, which it then plans to file with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) as the parent entity Franklin Templeton Investments is based in the U.S. The PIL alleged that while the fund house had said that recovery of the money could take around five years, the approximate quantum of loss to the investors would be ₹22,400 crore.

Responding to an email query by *The Hindu*, a spokesperson for Franklin Templeton MF said the fund house is examining the matter and will take appropriate steps as may be required. An email query sent to SEBI remained unanswered till the time of going to press.

Recommends 11-digit mobile numbers, among other things

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India on Friday recommended that a new National Numbering Plan be issued at the earliest so that a uniquely identifiable number can be provided to every subscriber in India.

Some of the options that TRAI has recommended include switching to a 11-digit mobile number, reallocation of mobile numbering resources surrendered by operators who have shut shop and prefixing zero for all mobile calls made from fixed line. The regulator said adequate availability of numbering resources is

threatened because of an increase in the range of services and massive growth in the number of connections, especially in the mobile segment. The ongoing plan implemented in 2003, was developed keeping in mind the projections till the year 2033. The total number of telephone subscribers in India stands at 1,177.02 million with a tele-density of 87.45% at the end of January 2020.

"As a result, we find ourselves in a situation where we need to review the utilisation of the numbering resources and make some policy decisions to ensure that adequate resources are available for sustainable growth of the telecommunication services," said.

TRAI said that some serious problems are anticipated with a change in the mobile number from 10 to 11 digits, and the move should be resorted to only if all the efforts to continue with the 10-digit numbering are exhausted.

Franklin Templeton investors can e-vote to monetise assets

Can authorise trustees or Deloitte from June 9-11

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI

Investors of Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund, whose money is stuck in the six schemes that were wound up last month, can cast their votes between June 9 and June 11 to initiate the process of monetisation of the assets of the schemes.

Through the electronic voting process, investors can either choose the trustees of the fund house or Deloitte as the entity to be entrusted with the work of monetisation of the schemes' assets.

"The e-voting portal will remain open for voting from Tuesday, June 9, 2020 at 09:00 a.m. (IST) and will end on Thursday, June 11, 2020 at 06:00 p.m. (IST)," stated a note from the fund

house. The e-vote will be followed by a virtual meet of the unit holders on June 12.

In the e-vote process, unit holders can choose option one if they want to authorise the trustees to monetise the assets with the assistance of the fund house and Kotak Mahindra Bank as an independent adviser.

If option two is chosen, it will authorise Deloitte to monetise the assets with the assistance of the fund house and Kotak Mahindra Bank will act as an independent advisor to the asset management company (AMC).

Role of trustees Further, the trustee's role will be restricted to distribution of proceeds to unit holders after payment of liabilities and expenses.

"The trustee believes that both Deloitte and Kotak have strong capabilities to discharge their respective roles. Unit holders will have the advantage of professional services from Deloitte and Kotak [as an agent and advisor to the AMC and providing independent advice, wherever required] in option 2. The trustee is equally supportive of both options," stated the note.

The trustees have appointed a scrutiniser who will submit a report to the trustees within three days from the conclusion of the virtual meet and thereafter, the results would be declared. The results would then be communicated to the unit holders.

Bank of India cuts MCLR by 25 bps

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI

State-run lender Bank of India has decided to reduce marginal cost of funds based lending rate (MCLR) by 25 bps across all tenors.

The one-year MCLR of the bank will be now at 7.7% with effect from June 1. The reduction in the lending rate comes after Reserve Bank of India cut the repo rate by 40 bps to 4% earlier this week.

The external benchmark lending rate which is linked to repo rate has also been reduced by 40 bps to 6.85%.

"With this, the bank has passed on the benefit of rate cut announced by RBI on May 22, 2020 to its home, vehicle and MSME customers," the lender said.

'Air passenger demand to plummet 47% in 2020'

Revenues likely to fall \$11 bn: IATA CEO

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI

Air passenger demand is expected to fall 47% in 2020, with revenue reducing by \$11 billion compared to last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, said Alexandre de Juniac, Director General and CEO, IATA at a webinar held by CAPA India on Friday.

He said about 3 million jobs, including those dependent on aviation, such as travel and tourism, are also at risk. "Indian carriers, like many airlines around the world, are in survival mode," he added.

Stating that there should be viable airlines around after this crisis, he said, "It is particularly disappointing that the package of economic relief unveiled earlier this month contained nothing

Fiscal deficit at 4.6% for FY20 as revenue sags

Budget estimate was 3.8%

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI

The country's fiscal deficit widened to 4.6% of the gross domestic product (GDP) in 2019-20 mainly on account of poor revenue realisation, according to official data.

The deficit, which signifies the gap between government revenue and expenditure, is higher than the revised estimate of 3.8% for the fiscal.

According to the Controller General of Accounts (CGA) data, the fiscal deficit for 2019-20 worked out to be 4.59% of the GDP, while the revenue deficit was 3.27%.

The effective revenue deficit was 2.36%, the data showed. The increase in the fiscal deficit has been mainly on account of shortfall in revenue collection during 2019-20.



Revenue receipts during the year worked out to be only 90% of the revised estimate.

In absolute terms, total receipts of the government were ₹17.5 lakh crore against the estimate of ₹19.31 lakh crore.

The data showed the government's total expenditure was ₹26.86 lakh crore, lower than the ₹26.98 lakh crore projected earlier.

Core sector output contracts 38% in April

Cement, steel production plummet

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

in cement production and an 84% contraction in steel sector output. All eight sectors saw shrinkage, although the least affected were fertilisers and crude oil, which showed a decline in production of 4.5% and 6.4% respectively.

Petroleum refinery production, the largest component of the index, shrank 24%, while electricity generation dropped almost 23%. Natural gas production fell almost 20%, while coal production declined 15.5%, from a year earlier.

These eight crucial sectors form 40% of the weight of sectors included in the Index of Industrial Production and may signal a crash in that wider index.



As a result, we find ourselves in a situation where we need to review the utilisation of the numbering resources and make some policy decisions to ensure that adequate resources are available for sustainable growth of the telecommunication services," said.

TRAI said that some serious problems are anticipated with a change in the mobile number from 10 to 11 digits, and the move should be resorted to only if all the efforts to continue with the 10-digit numbering are exhausted.

'Air passenger demand to plummet 47% in 2020'

Revenues likely to fall \$11 bn: IATA CEO

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI

Williams may sell F1 teamREUTERS
LONDON

Williams said on Friday it was considering selling its once-dominant but now struggling Formula One team as part of a strategic review after the Williams Grand Prix Holdings (WGPH) group reported a loss of £13 million for the year ending 2019.

Williams also announced on Friday that it had served notice to terminate its relationship with title partner ROKiT and major sponsor ROK Drinks.

The former champion, who last won a championship in 1997 with Jacques Villeneuve, has not won a race since 2012.

It finished last in 2019 with just one point scored by now-departed Polish driver Robert Kubica.

Badminton junior Worlds postponedRAYAN ROZARIO
COIMBATORE

The World junior badminton championships, scheduled to be held in Auckland in September, has been postponed to January next year.

The rescheduled dates for the world junior mixed team championship are January 11 to 16 followed by the World junior championships (Jan. 18 to 24).

"All things considered, we believe the move is the best option," said Thomas Lund, the BWF general-secretary.

Carlsen and Dubov draw first bloodRAKESH RAO
NEW DELHI

Contrary to expectations of a close match, Magnus Carlsen delivered a crushing 3-0 blow to Hikaru Nakamura in their first mini-match of the best-of-three semifinals in the \$150,000 Lindores Abbey Rapid Challenge on Thursday.

In the other semifinal, Daniil Dubov posted a 2.5-1.5 win over Ding Liren.

The results (semifinals, first mini-match): Magnus Carlsen (Nor) bt Hikaru Nakamura (USA) 3-0; Daniil Dubov (Rus) bt Ding Liren (Chn) 2.5-1.5.

'High risk' of T20 WC being put off, says CA

Also hints at having the India Test series at 'one venue'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MELBOURNE

Cricket Australia on Friday conceded that there is "very high risk" of this year's T20 World Cup being postponed and it is bracing up for huge revenue loss because of that.

Speaking to reporters, CA chief executive Kevin Roberts admitted that the fate of T20 World Cup, to be hosted by Australia in October-November this year, is uncertain because of the global travel restrictions in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We have been hopeful all along that it could be staged in October-November but you would have to say there's a very high risk about the prospect of that happening," Roberts said.

ICC has deferred a decision on the event till June 10, saying it wants to continue exploring contingency plans



Kevin Roberts. ■ FILE PHOTO

for some more time. Roberts said CA is staring at a revenue loss of around AUD 80 million.

Behind closed doors

Even if the tournament goes ahead as per plan, it is likely to be held in empty stadiums because of the social distancing norms and CA is well aware of it.

Roberts, however, is more

confident of hosting the four-Test series against India starting at Brisbane on December 3.

CA has not ruled out the possibility of a change in the schedule for India's tour of the country with the Board still keeping the door open for hosting four Tests at "one venue".

CA had on Thursday announced that India would play the Tests at Brisbane (December 3-7), Adelaide (December 11-15), Melbourne (December 26-30) and Sydney (January 3-7).

Travel restrictions

However, Roberts said the schedule could change depending on travel restrictions.

"There are a lot of variables based on whether we have four venues in four States or as little as one venue in one State," he said.

Roberts, however, is more

Olympics: India could add to shooting quota

ISSF updates qualification system

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The International Olympic Committee has approved the world shooting governing body's updated qualification system for the Tokyo Olympics, which could see India add at least one more to the 15 secured so far. The qualification cycle started with the 2018 World Championship in Korea.

"The allocation of the 12 quota places (one in each individual event) will be done based on the ranking list of March 31, 2020, and points earned at one ISSF World Cup in rifle/pistol and one ISSF World Cup in shotgun to be held in March-April of 2021," the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) said in a statement.

According to a National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) insider, this could help a shooter like Anish Bhanwala secure a quota in the 25m rapid fire pistol, a category in which India won



Anish Bhanwala... in with a chance. ■ FILE PHOTO

a silver through Vijay Kumar at the 2012 London Games.

"Anish was in the top 10 in the March 31 ranking and all the other shooters above him had already secured their quotas. So, he definitely has a chance. His chances will increase if he shoots a good score in the World Cup in March-April 2021," said the NRAI insider.

Though India has not won a quota in trap, Kynan Chenai will have a shot at earning one when the qualification process begins.

The new deadline for Tokyo 2020 qualification in shooting is June 6, 2021, according to the ISSF.



Mathews and Sangakkara. ■ FILE PHOTO: K.R. DEEPAK

Missed Mathews in 2011 WC final

Change in team composition was turning point: Sangakkara

S. DIPAK RAGAV
CHENNAI

Former Sri Lanka captain Kumar Sangakkara says an injury to Angelo Mathews ahead of the 2011 World Cup final against India made a crucial difference to the outcome of the match that India won in Mumbai.

Speaking to India off-spinner R. Ashwin on his Instagram show "Reminisce with Ash," Sangakkara said, "That's the biggest thing I look back [on] and think. You can talk about dropped catches and all that, but the

composition of the side and the fact that we were forced to make the change was, to me, the turning point. He (Mathews) was the guy who allowed us the fifth full bowler and perfect all-rounder, batting at seven."

The wicketkeeper-batsman said Mathews' absence also had a bearing on his decision to bat first instead of chasing. "We had to change the balance of the side and once that happens in a final, you are always averse to taking a gamble with the chase," he said.

Asked about the confusion at the toss, which had to be taken a second time, Sangakkara clarified that the crowd noise meant M.S. Dhoni wasn't sure what had been called.

"I remember calling on the toss and then Mahi wasn't sure and said 'Did you call tails?' and I said 'No, I called heads'. The match referee said I had won the toss. There was a little bit of confusion there and Mahi said 'Let's have another toss' and it came down heads again," he said.

II to introduce grading system for match officialsUTHRA GANESAN
NEW DELHI

To improve umpiring standards and bring more structure to officiating, Hockey India has decided to introduce grading system for all officials, including umpires and technical officials. Tournament officials – technical delegates, umpire managers, technical officials, judges and umpires – will be divided into three grades.

While for Umpires the final score will be based on performance reports from all domestic tournaments, fitness tests and online tests, for technical officials the pa-

rameters will be the same without fitness tests.

The minimum (on a scale of 100 percentage points) for umpires has been set at 60 while it is 50 for technical officials. Umpires scoring above 80 will be included in Grade 1, 71-79 in Grade 2 and 60-70 in Grade 3. For technical officials, grading will be on similar lines except Grade 3 (50-70).

Eligibility criteria include u-25 for umpires (u-35 for rest), minimum two years experience in State and district championships. State units may send in nominations from July 1.

Pro boxer's memorable repayment to hospitalASSOCIATED PRESS
PARIS

Hassan N'Dam, a former middleweight world boxing champion, wanted to repay the French hospital that cared for his father-in-law through his bout with COVID-19.

Perhaps with Champagne? Or chocolate? No, N'Dam thought: "These are things that won't last. I wanted to leave something quite memorable."

It occurred to him that he held the answer in his own hands – or rather, in his fists. He would give the staff



Hassan N'Dam. ■ AP

one's emotions."

"They have seen so many (difficult) things that they came here looking for something," said N'Dam.

"Sometimes they came to laugh, to let off steam. Others came to discover something, others to learn, improve."

Immensely popular
The 36-year-old N'Dam, who represented Cameroon at the 2016 Rio Olympics, has won 37 of 41 pro fights – 21 by knockout. His training sessions have been immensely popular with the staff.

SHORT TAKES**Scorsese makes film on lockdown experience**

LOS ANGELES

Acclaimed Hollywood director Martin Scorsese has shot a short film reflecting upon his lockdown experience in New York. "What I look forward to in the future is carrying with me what I have been forced to learn in these circumstances," said the 77-year-old, who made the self-shot film for the BBC series *Lockdown Culture With Mary Beard*. IANS

**Rajmond Debevec all praise for the Indian shooters**

Slovenian great lauds Gagan Narang for his Gun for Glory Academy

KAMESH SRINIVASAN
NEW DELHI

Rajmond Debevec has won almost everything the world of shooting has to offer. He has a gold and two bronze medals in rifle from eight Olympics, World championship medals and 67 medals in World Cups, including 27 gold.

The 57-year-old Slovenian, who had an Instagram conversation with World and Olympic medalist Gagan Narang, was wholesome in his praise for the young Indian shooters who topped the medals table in four World Cups and the World Cup Finals last year.

Harder

"I think it is harder to make the Indian team than to win an Olympic gold," said Debevec, as he praised Gagan for his Gun for Glory Academy.

"You have a huge number of talented shooters. It is hard to follow them. Am not surprised," said Debevec.

When Gagan asked him about sustaining the motivation for winning his first Olympic medal in his fifth



Gagan and Rajmond show off their Olympic medals. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Olympics and being ready to compete in his ninth, Debevec said that initially the goal was only to compete as he was fascinated reading about the stars

Meghana resumes training, vows to get back to her best

Gymnast makes use of makeshift facility at Gaudium Centre

V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM
HYDERABAD

For 21-year-old gymnast G. Meghana Reddy, it is back to business after a long lull in training. Even if it is in a makeshift facility in a basketball hall at Gaudium Sportopia Centre of Excellence.

The former National Games gold medallist, who is also the only Indian to qualify for the 2018 Commonwealth Games in rhythmic gymnastics, has returned to serious training, thanks to the gesture of Kirithi Reddy, director and founder of Gaudium.

Debevec also recalled his fascinating journey in each Olympics, the wins and the thrilling losses, and side stories of amazing characters such as Matthew Emmons, who missed two successive Olympic medals, with misfired last shots in the finals, after being in the lead.

Fascinating journey

Debevec also recalled his fascinating journey in each Olympics, the wins and the thrilling losses, and side stories of amazing characters such as Matthew Emmons, who missed two successive Olympic medals, with misfired last shots in the finals, after being in the lead.

Shooting gold!

Debevec won his Olympic gold in the rifle 3-position event at Sydney in 2000, with a 4.6-point margin, after having taken a two-point lead in qualification (1177).

"It is never going to be ea-



Meghana Reddy... picking up the pieces. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

College in Amritsar has been training and attending online courses conducted by SAI coach Manoj Rana, who also trains World Cup bronze medallist Aruna Reddy.

Online courses

"I have also been able to organise personal online training courses with some reputed coaches from Russia and UK," she said.

With mother Praveena guiding her, Meghana is gearing up for bigger challenges ahead even as she is disappointed at the Asian championship scheduled to be in Tokyo next month being postponed indefinitely.

Not the same

"It will not be the same when it comes to training abroad, especially in Europe where she worked under Olympian Varvara Filiova, as it will be more expensive now and as we are self-funded it will be all the more difficult," her mother said.

She is hopeful things would be back to normal by the year-end for more serious training-cum-exposure trips.

IN BRIEF**Serie A to resume on June 20**

ROME

Italy's Serie A can resume on June 20 after a three-month absence in a country hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic, sports Minister Vincenzo Spadafora said on Thursday. "The Technical and Scientific Committee gave its agreement on the protocol and the federation assured me that it had a Plan B and a Plan C," Spadafora said after a video conference meeting with Italian football chiefs.

"In light of these considerations, the championship can resume on June 20." AFP

**No Hales and Plunkett in England training group**

LONDON Alex Hales, in pic, and World Cup-winner Liam Plunkett were both left out of a 55-man England training group announced on Friday. But 14 uncapped players were selected as England looks to stage a full Test and limited-overs programme against West Indies, Pakistan, Ireland and Australia. Official squads will be named at a later date, with three Tests against the West Indies, set to be played behind closed doors. AFP

Long-distance runner Kiranjeet banned for four years

NEW DELHI Long-distance runner Kiranjeet Kaur, who won the Tata Steel Kolkata 25K among the Indians last year, has been handed a four-year ban by World Athletics' anti-doping body for returning positive for a banned substance in a test conducted in Doha. Her ban period has begun from December 15, 2019, the date of the in-competition sample collection. PTI

**Olympic champ Rudisha suffers ankle fracture**

NAIROBI Two-time Olympic and World 800m record-holder David Rudisha will be sidelined for 16 weeks after fracturing his left ankle. He twisted his left ankle at his home in Kilgoris on May 19, and examination revealed the fracture. AFP

**British and Australian MotoGPs cancelled**