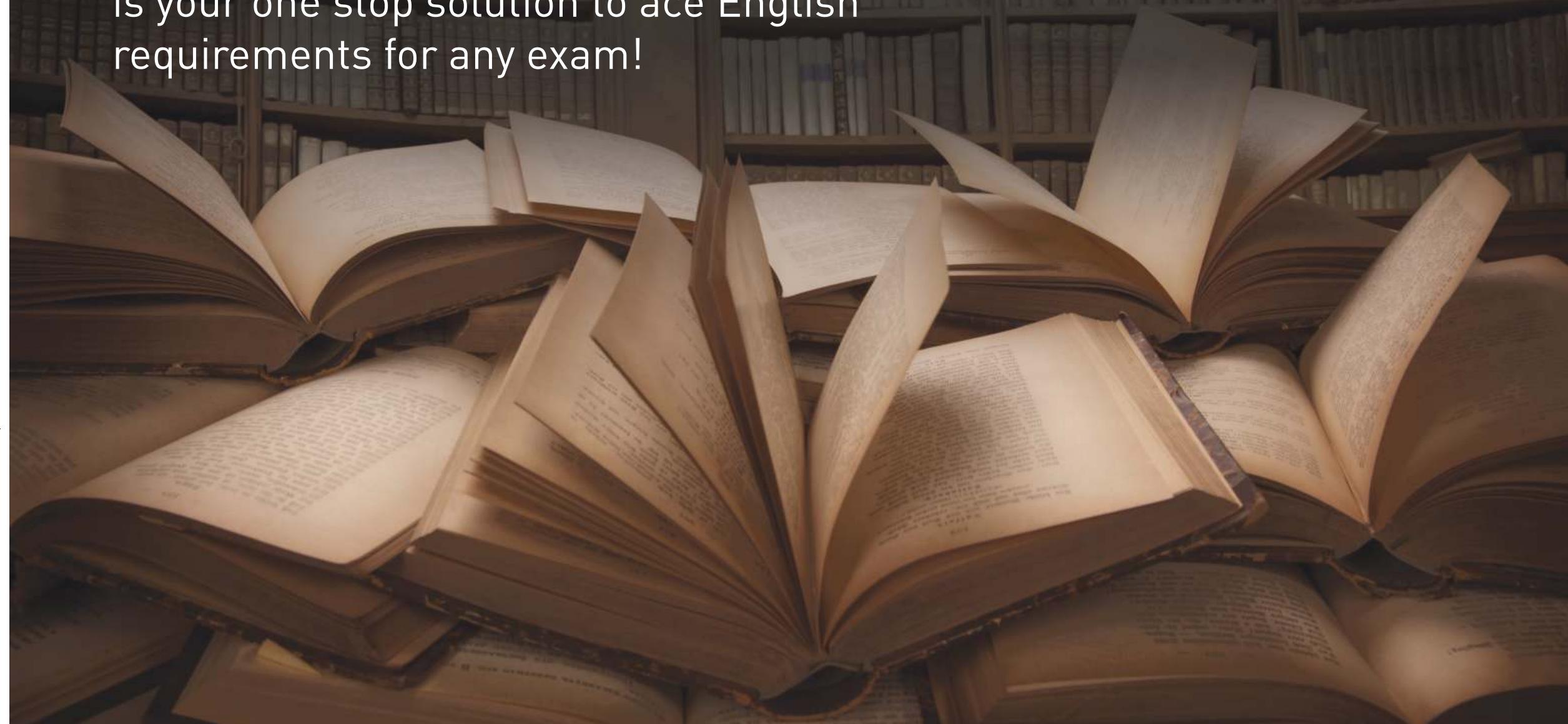




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India set to be elected unopposed for UNSC non-permanent seat
page 11



78 terrorists killed in Kashmir after Article 370 was revoked
page 9



Amid tensions, North Korea blows up liaison office with south
page 12



Gujarat model has been exposed, says Rahul after COVID-19 deaths
page 10

Backlog effect: State COVID-19 death toll crosses 5,500

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE
PUNE

While Maharashtra reported 81 more COVID-19 deaths on Tuesday, the State Health Department's data reconciliation exercise saw 1,328 'backlog' fatalities being added to its toll, taking its toll to 5,537.

The State also recorded 2,701 new cases, taking its tally to 11,345, of which 50,044 are active ones. As many as 1,802 patients were discharged on Tuesday, taking the tally of recoveries to 57,851.

With 935 new cases, Mumbai's case load touched 60,228, of which 26,012 are active. With 55 more deaths being reported, and 862 deaths recorded as backlog fatalities, the city's toll has climbed to 3,167. Of the 1,328 backlog deaths, 462 other deaths, excluding Mumbai's fatalities, were recorded across the State. These include 55 deaths in Thane, 35 in Navi Mumbai and 19 in Kalyan-Dombivli: all three areas are part of the Mumbai Metropolitan Region.

The backlog deaths also include 85 from Pune district, including Pimpri-Chinchwad, and 45 from Solapur. Pune's death toll has surged to 588, while Solapur's death count has risen to 184. The State's recovery rate now stands at 50.99% and the case fatality has increased to 4.8%.

MORE REPORTS ▶ PAGES 2 & 3

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20 Indian soldiers killed in face-off at Galwan

■ No firing during confrontation; Colonel among the dead

■ Indian patrol team attacked by much larger Chinese group

■ Indian Army crossed Line of Actual Control, says PLA

■ Defence Minister meets CDS, service chiefs, EAM Jaishankar

DINAKAR PERI
ANANTH KRISHNAN
NEW DELHI

Twenty Indian personnel, including a Colonel, were killed in violent clashes with Chinese troops on Monday along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh, in what is possibly the worst incident between the two countries in decades. The clashes came amid a "de-escalation" process in the Galwan area that was started last week, after a month long stand-off between troops at several points along the LAC in Ladakh and Sikkim.

Indian and Chinese troops have disengaged at the Galwan area where they had earlier clashed on the night of June 15/16. Seventeen Indian troops who were critically injured in the line of duty at the stand-off location and exposed to sub-zero temperatures in the high altitude terrain have succumbed to their injuries, taking the total that were killed in action to 20," the Army said in a late-night statement.

Casualties on both sides
The violent face-off took place during the de-escalation process under way in the Galwan Valley and resulted in "casualties on both sides", the Army stated. The Indian Army is firmly committed to protecting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the nation, it added. However, Army sources said there was no firing during the face-off.

Three of the personnel killed have been identified as Colonel B. Santosh Babu from Telangana, Havildar Pa-



Theatre of conflict: Indian Army vehicles moving towards Leh in a recent photo. ▶ ANI

lani from Tamil Nadu and Sepoy K.K. Ojha from Jharkhand.

During the day, talks were held at the Major General-level in the Galwan area at Patrolling Point 14 to defuse the tensions.

As news of the brutal clash, which, according to sources, included the use of iron clubs and rocks by the Chinese troops, emerged, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh reviewed the operational situation in eastern Ladakh along with the Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) and

the three service Chiefs, and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar.

In a statement, the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) accused India of "going back on its word" and "violating" commitments reached by both sides at the Corps Commander-level talks on June 6.

The Indian Army "violated its commitment and crossed the Line of Actual Control (LAC) again, illegally and deliberately launched provocative attacks, triggered fierce physical confrontation between the two sides, resulting in casual-

ties," said PLA Western Theatre Command spokesperson Zhang Shuili, making the claim that "the sovereignty of the Galwan Valley region has always belonged to [China]", something India has always contested.

The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) spokesman Zhao Lijian said China has "lodged strong protest and representation with the Indian side".

It is understood this was conveyed in meetings on Tuesday held between Indian Ambassador to China Vikram Misri and Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister Luo Zhaozhu. Neither the PLA nor the MFA gave details of casualties on the Chinese side.

Pressure on govt.

The casualties in combat action have increased pressure on the government to make a full statement on the month-long stand-off, as demanded

by Opposition parties.

Last Saturday, in the first acknowledgement of the ongoing stand-offs, the Chief of the Army Staff, Gen. Manoj Naravane, had stated that troops of India and China were "disengaging" in a phased manner from the stand-off areas along the border following a series of ground talks. He said a "lot of disengagement" had happened in the Galwan river area. Neither the Army nor the External Affairs Ministry gave further details of the clash on Monday night in the Galwan valley. Sources said an Indian Army patrol had set out to check on positions of the Chinese troops to ensure they had retreated. The troops were attacked by a much larger group of Chinese soldiers, said the sources, who did not wish to be identified.

The stand-off had begun with a scuffle in the Pangong Tso area on the intervening night of May 5 and 6, resulting in serious injuries on both sides. Around 76 Indian personnel were injured including a Commanding Officer, who had to be airlifted to Delhi. There was a second scuffle on May 9 at Naku La in North Sikkim.

While face-offs and stand-offs keep occurring on the LAC and even stone throwing and fist-fights between troops due to differences in perception on the alignment, there has been no instance of firing on the 3,488 km long LAC since 1975.

The last incident of firing and fatalities on the border with China occurred in October 20, 1975 when a patrol team of the Assam Rifles was ambushed by the Chinese troops at Tulung La in Arunachal Pradesh resulting in the death of four personnel.

Tell us what is happening: Opposition

The Opposition has asked the Modi government to tell the nation what the "actual situation" along the LAC is. Describing the death of soldiers as "deeply shocking and horrifying", the Congress questioned the Centre's silence. ▶ PAGE 9

China trying to change status quo: MEA

Accusing the Chinese troops of "attempting to unilaterally change the status quo", the MEA said

the casualties "could have been avoided" had agreements made by military commanders been followed by the Chinese side. ▶ PAGE 9

Our borders will remain intact: BJP

The borders of India "will remain intact" and "are intact" under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP president J.P. Nadda said. "During the de-escalation process in the Galwan Valley in Ladakh, a violent face-off took place with the Chinese Army. The Indian Army gave a befitting reply. I pay my humble tributes to the Army. We now have the political will to give a befitting reply," he said. ▶ PAGE 9

Cheap drug shows results in COVID patients: study

Dexamethasone helps those on ventilator recover

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

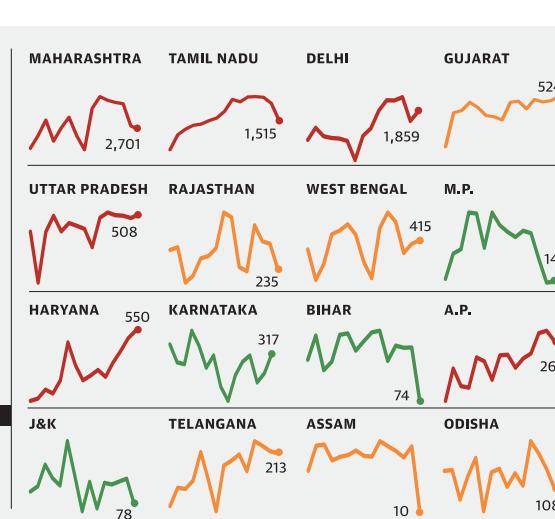
Indian doctors have said the reported success of dexamethasone – an inexpensive steroid that retails for less than ₹10 for 10 ml and is made by several Indian manufacturers – in saving the lives of COVID-19 patients on ventilators is good news for the country.

Scientists administering the WHO-administered RECOVERY trial, the largest global clinical trial that is checking the ability of several repurposed drugs to treat COVID-19, reported on Tuesday that dexamethasone reduced deaths by one-third in ventilated patients and by one-fifth in other patients re-

Fatality surge

With Maharashtra adding 1,328 deaths, including those previously classified as not being COVID-19 related, India's toll surged to 11,921 on Tuesday. Cases too went up following an increase in tests conducted after a sharp fall on Monday. The graphs depict the new cases in the last 14 days in select States. If average cases in the latest seven days are much higher than the previous seven days, then the cases are rising; if it is lower, then dropping; if it is similar, then flattening.

NEW CASES AND DEATHS IN INDIA
CASES 10,803
DEATHS 2,004
7 DAY-CHANGE -0.1%
+461.3%



ceiving oxygen only. There was no benefit among those patients who did not require respiratory support.

"If the claims bear out in the published study, then this is great news," Able Law-

rence, Professor of Clinical Immunology and Rheumatology at the Sanjay Gandhi Postgraduate Institute of Medical Sciences, told *The Hindu*. "It is a cheaper option than tocilizumab."

Based on these results, one death would be prevented by treatment of around eight ventilated patients or around 25 patients requiring oxygen alone, scientists said. A scientific study with de-

tails on how the study was conducted and evaluations made isn't yet available and the preliminary results were communicated via a press statement.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

which in turn will notify patients. However, a COVID-19 negative report can be shared with the patient.

"The objective is to prevent panic, as people immediately start looking for a hospital bed, even if they may not need one. In this case, our staff will notify the person and at the same time, guide them as to whether they need to be admitted to a facility or be home quarantined," said a civic official.

DETAILS ON ▶ PAGES 2 & 3

ICSE students in two minds over exam

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Many Class 10 and 12 students feel the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE) has given them a tough choice. The Council has asked students to decide whether they want to write their pending Board exams in July or be graded based on the internal assessment and pre-Board exams.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

State adds 862 deaths to Mumbai's COVID-19 toll

City toll now 3,167; government officials blame staff shortage for data gap

were found to be related to COVID-19, but not part of the city's official death toll of 2,250 reported till June 15. The final toll is now 3,167. Another 466 deaths have been added to the State's toll, taking the total to 5,537.

The fatalities in the financial capital were scrutinised by the civic body's Death Audit Committee and there was no attempt to suppress the numbers, officials said.

The scrutiny of over 1,300 deaths was done as per the universally-approved

ICD-10-CM (coding and reporting) guidelines of U.S.-based Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the National Center for Health Statistics.

Change in testing protocol

Yet again, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has changed its testing protocols, prohibiting laboratories from sharing COVID-19 positive reports directly with patients.

Reports will now have to be shared with the BMC,

which in turn will notify patients. However, a COVID-19 negative report can be shared with the patient.

"The objective is to prevent panic, as people immediately start looking for a hospital bed, even if they may not need one. In this case, our staff will notify the person and at the same time, guide them as to whether they need to be admitted to a facility or be home quarantined," said a civic official.

DETAILS ON ▶ PAGES 2 & 3

Three lakh samples to be tested daily

India has ramped up capacity to test up to three lakh samples per day for novel coronavirus infection, the Health Ministry said on Tuesday. The total number of samples tested so far is 59,21,069 with 1,54,935 samples tested in the last 24 hours. "A network of 907 labs has been created in the country as on date," noted a Ministry release. ▶ PAGE 10

tails on how the study was conducted and evaluations made isn't yet available and the preliminary results were communicated via a press statement.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

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Hundreds of COVID-19 patients untraceable in city, admits BMC

Incorrect phone numbers, addresses make it difficult to track them

TANVI DESHPANDE
MUMBAI

It is not just the dead who are missing in the city. While the government reconciles anomalies in deaths recorded in the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's (BMC) COVID-19 data, as many as 1,000-2,000 of the city's reported coronavirus patients are currently untraceable.

These patients are neither admitted to hospitals or COVID-19 care centres, nor are they dead. In many cases, their contact numbers or addresses on record are incorrect.

As of Monday, Mumbai had reported 59,293 COVID-19 cases. When a person tests positive, the lab uploads results directly to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) portal, based on which the BMC updates its data. The civic epidemiology cell then alerts the wards concerned.

In Mumbai, since most cases are asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic, the patients are advised home quarantine. Currently, three lakh people are in home quarantine. However, 1,000-2,000 such patients are not traceable.



Health workers sanitise a stretcher before moving a suspected COVID-19 patient to Kasturba Hospital from Shahi Nagar, Dharavi. ■ FILE PHOTO

Ward mismatch

Additional municipal commissioner Ashwin Bhide, in charge of the COVID-19 war room, said, "In some incidents, the case is actually from one ward but has been shown against another ward on the ICMR list. But some patients actually cannot be traced – the person is neither admitted to hospital or a

care centre, nor have they died. We particularly look at cases that are shown as active for more than 30 days but cannot be traced."

In some cases, patients who do not live in the city have given addresses of local relatives or acquaintances.

"We are trying our best to get them (untraceable cases) reconciled. Some are done,

some are ongoing. We send the list to each ward every week and ask for updates. When we find such cases, we assign teachers to make calls and try to trace these patients," Ms. Bhide said.

The BMC had reviewed its data and reconciled around 32,000 cases on May 25. "But it's a very overwhelming exercise for wards to give accurate information. There are anomalies every time we take information," she said.

Listed as recoveries

F North ward has around 80 untraceable cases, while H East ward has around 35. Many wards have even added these untraceable patients to the list of recoveries. "We are aware that wards are showing them as recoveries," Ms. Bhide said.

Joint municipal commissioner Ashutosh Salil said they are attempting to contact all the untraceables.

"But many people have given incorrect contact numbers and addresses. We have a team of teachers making calls, but half the numbers are not available or are wrong. We may have to ask the police for help. We will take a call on that."

Youth lynched on suspicion of theft; 3 held

Victim, a drug addict, is suspected to have wandered into construction site: police

GAUTAM S. MENGLE
MUMBAI

A 24-year-old youth was allegedly tied up and lynched on the suspicion of being a thief in Saki Naka on Monday morning. The police have arrested three people in connection with the crime and are looking for one more person.

The incident occurred at a construction site in Mohili village of Chandivali. According to the police, the four accused are construction workers, who have been staying at the site since the lockdown started.

Early on Monday, the four woke up to find the victim, later identified as Satish Rajbhar (24), entering a tin shed at the construction site.

They pounced on him and tied him up with a rope, accusing him of being a thief. Then they began to beat him up with plastic pipes and their bare hands," senior police inspector Kishore Sawant, Saki Naka police station, said.

When they realised Rajbhar was dead, all the four left him and fled the scene. Three of them made their way to Andheri railway station, hoping to catch the first available train to their home towns in Bihar.

However, by this time, some other residents of the area, who had heard the commotion, went over to investigate. They found Rajbhar lying lifeless and called Saki Naka police station. He

They pounced on him and tied him up with a rope, accusing him of being a thief. Then they began to beat him up with plastic pipes and their bare hands

SENIOR POLICE INSPECTOR KISHORE
SAWANT
Saki Naka police station

was rushed to a nearby hospital, where he was declared dead before admission.

"We started investigations and found out the details of the accused with the help of local informants. Simultaneously, we sent teams to nearby railway stations and one of our teams picked up the

three accused from Andheri," Mr. Sawant said. The trio were taken to the police station and, after preliminary inquiries, arrested and charged with murder under the Indian Penal Code. The police are trying to apprehend the fourth accused. Inquiries are under way with all his known friends and associates, and railway police stations have also been instructed to keep an eye out for him.

Meanwhile, inquiries in the area have established that Rajbhar, a local resident, was a drug addict. The police suspect that he wandered into the construction site while under the influence of narcotics, and was taken for a thief by the accused.

WESTERN RAILWAY

CONTRACT FOR HOUSEKEEPING AND MAINTENANCE

Sr. No.1: Executive : Sr.DOM-BCT, E-Tender Notice No. & Date : E-Tender No. S 234/1965/R/Housekeeping-RR Date : 16.06.2020, Work & Location : Contract for housekeeping and Maintenance of Running Rooms at Churchgate, Mumbai Central (Carshed) and Bandra for a period of two years. Approx. Cost of Work in Rs. : 9132809.31/-, EMD in Rs. : Rs. 182700.00, Date & Time of submission : 09.07.2020 till 15.00 hrs. Date & Time of opening : 09.07.2020 till 15.30 hrs. The tender can be viewed at web site <http://www.ireps.gov.in>. ■ 08

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WESTERN RAILWAY

PROVISION OF IP BASED INTERCOM TELEPHONES

Tender No. : WR-MMC10507(STES)/5/2020 dated : 15.06.2020, Department : Signal & Telecomm., Executive : Sr.DSTE(Co.)/BCT, Name of Work : Provision of IP based Intercom Telephones in GM's Camp office, Zonal office at Churchgate & Divisional office at Mumbai Central, Approx. Cost of Work : Rs.30,10,499/-, Cost of Tender Form : Rs. 3000/-, Particular office where E-tender open : Senior Divisional Signal & Telecom Engineer(Co.), 2nd Floor, Divisional Railway Manager's Office, Mumbai Central, Mumbai-400 008, Earnest Money Deposit : Rs. 60,000/-, Completion Period : 4 Months, Validity of Offers : 45 Days, from the date of opening, Type of E-Tender : Open E-Tender, Time & Date for closure for submission of E-Tender Documents : At 15.00 hrs. on 20.07.2020, Time & Date for opening of E-Tender : After 15.30 hrs. on 20.07.2020, The tender can be viewed at web site <http://www.ireps.gov.in>. ■ 06

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Timings		
MUMBAI		
WEDNESDAY, JUN. 17		
RISE 06:02 SET 19:18		
RISE 03:04	SET 15:55	
THURSDAY, JUN. 18		
RISE 06:02	SET 19:18	
RISE 03:41	SET 16:46	
FRIDAY, JUN. 19		
RISE 06:02	SET 19:18	
RISE 04:21	SET 17:39	

Mumbai Weather	max	min
Mumbai Airport	32	26
Pune	30	23
Mumbai City	32	26

Mumbai Today
32°C Heavy rain and thunderstorms are expected over the city. Day will be warm with a cloudy sky. A pleasant night.

Mumbai Tomorrow
32°C Moderate rain and thunderstorms are expected over the city. The sky will remain cloudy.

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S/SPL/06/2020 DATE 16/06/2020		
S.N.	Description of material	Quantity
1	Traction Motor Complete with Pinion	8 Nos
2	Vertical Damper for Secondary Air Spring	434 Nos
3	Disposable Surgical Inner Gown	30000 Nos
4	PPH Kit for COVID - 19	21000 Set

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Day 2: fewer commuters than expected

Trains halting only at fast stops and fear of catching infection keeps people away

AJEEТ MAHALE

MUMBAI

Suburban train services remained largely smooth on Tuesday with fewer than expected people commuting on the second day of operations. Around 70,000 people travelled on Mumbai's suburban network, a marginal rise from Monday's 60,000.

The Railways had scheduled 362 services in anticipation of nearly 1.25 lakh passengers from different parts of the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR). On Monday, when Western Railway (WR) and Central (CR) started services for employees engaged in essential services, around 60,000 people travelled on local trains. The muted response was said to have been due to a lack of awareness as the decision to run the trains had been taken late on Sunday night. "We expected more people on Tuesday and were prepared for it," a senior railway official said.

However, on Tuesday morning, WR saw 8,700 people come to their ticket counters during the morning shift, while Central Railway sold around 7,800 tickets between 8 a.m. and 12 p.m. For a short period there were queues outside Virar, Nalasopara and Thane. According to a senior WR official, many trains saw barely 400 travellers as against their capacity of 700.

During the evening peak

hours, there were queues outside Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (CSTM), which Lata Argade, secretary, Suburban Railway Passengers Association, said was due to an issue with scheduling as two Thane-bound trains ran after a Karjat local at 5.30 p.m. Several people living in areas like Dombivali had to wait and eventually take a Karjat fast at 6.53 p.m. "The system will take time to settle down. There should be more Karjat-bound trains. Even passengers should have patience," she said.

Ms. Argade added that there wasn't much rush in

the morning as people typically leave at different times, while all offices shut at the same time. In all, CR and WR each carried around 35,000 people on 200 and 162 services respectively.

Pradeep Narkar, secretary, Municipal Mazdoor Union, said trains were only halting at fast stops, one of the reason for the low numbers among hospital staff as major hospitals such as KEM and Kasturba are walking distance from Parel and Chinchpokli, respectively, both slow stops, as was Sion Hospital. "If the train must only halt at fast stops, then they should provide enough

buses at these stations. A similar arrangement should be made for people who live close to slow stops so that they can take the train from Ghatkopar or Thane," he said. The Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) Undertaking ran 2,654 buses on Tuesday and ferried around 5.5 lakh passengers.

However, Subhash Gupta, president of the Rail Yatri Parishad, said fear was the biggest reason why fewer than expected people turned up on Tuesday. "People were still afraid of catching the infection and consider buses to be safer," he said.

Suburban train services which resumed on the Central, Western and Harbour Lines from June 15 are not yet allowing bank and postal employees despite requests from various quarters.

"Currently, mails are being delivered as per essentials, medical equipment and medicines. I have instructed the use of vehicles by our staff. No postmen or postwomen are walking on the streets, can't endanger their lives," said Swati Pandey, Postmaster General, Mumbai.

Ms. Pandey said that during the lockdown period, 2,500 kg of medicines, personal protective equipment

State adds 862 deaths to city's COVID-19 tally

Final death toll at 3,167 as on June 16 and overall State toll too higher at 5,537

SHARAD VYAS
JYOTI SHELAR
MUMBAI

The Maharashtra government has added 862 deaths to its Mumbai COVID-19 toll database following the completion of a reconciliation drive on Tuesday, in a move that could lend fuel to the Opposition's allegations of data jugglery.

Senior State government officials, however, attribute the data gap to a manpower shortage.

Of the over 1,300 cases of deaths scrutinised during the exercise announced by Chief Secretary Ajay Mehta recently, 862 have been found to be related to COVID-19 that were not added to the city's official death toll. The final tally is now 3,167 as on Tuesday. Another 466 deaths have been added to the State fatalities, taking the overall toll to 5,537 as on Tuesday (see box).



A BMC nurse giving an immunisation vaccine to a child at Pila Bunglow in Dharavi on Tuesday. ■ AADESH CHAUDHARI

AFTER RECONCILIATION

Mumbai adds	862 DEATHS
Death toll in Mumbai jumps to	3,167
Rest of Maharashtra adds	466 DEATHS
Death toll in the State jumps to	

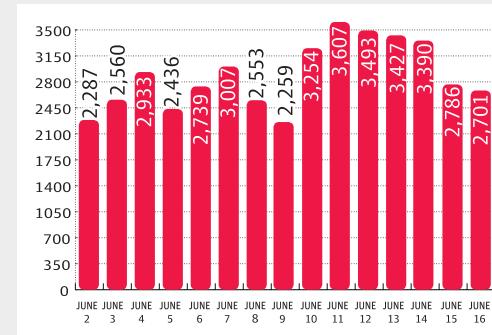
Maharashtra COVID-19 tracker

TOTAL CASES	NEW CASES	ACTIVE CASES	RECOVERED	DEATHS
1,13,445	2,701	50,044	57,851	5,537

DISTRICTS AFFECTED: 35

DISTRICT	CASES	DEATHS	DISTRICT	CASES	DEATHS
Mumbai	60,228	3,167	Hingoli	242	1
Thane	19,328	641	Sangli	255	11
Pune	12,888	588	Nanded	241	12
Aurangabad	2,857	168	Yavatmal	190	4
Nashik	2,101	132	Latur	188	11
Palghar	2,593	82	Osmanabad	151	8
Raigad	1,972	86	Sindhudurg	156	3
Solapur	1,955	184	Buldhana	138	5
Jalgaon	1,881	169	Parbhani	82	4
Akola	1,050	56	Gondia	85	0
Nagpur	1,110	12	Beed	77	2
Satara	760	34	Gadchiroli	49	1
Kolhapur	733	8	Chandrapur	51	0
Ratnagiri	445	18	Nandurbar	72	4
Dhule	448	51	Bhandardara	51	0
Anravati	365	27	Wardha	14	1
Jalna	295	12	Washim	53	3
Ahmednagar	248	12			

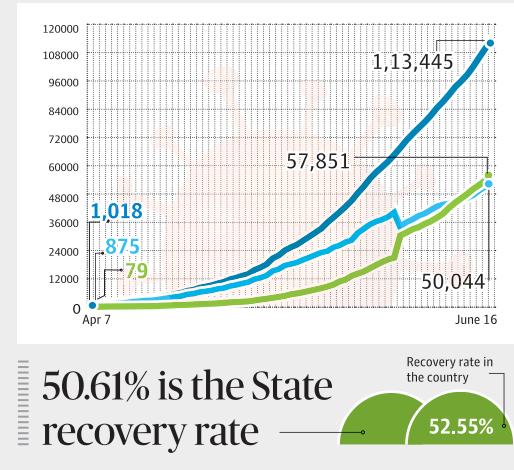
POSITIVE CASES OVER LAST 15 DAYS



935 (34.61%) of Tuesday's cases are from Mumbai



CASES TREND



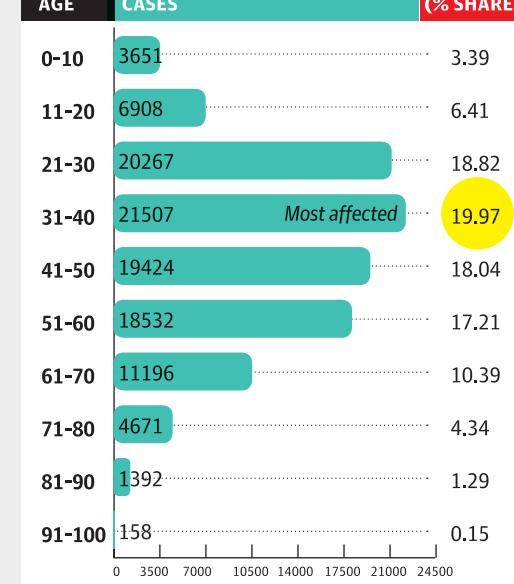
50.61% is the State recovery rate

MORTALITY RATE

Maharashtra: 3.73%

India: 2.89%

AFFECTED (AGE-WISE)



QUARANTINE NUMBERS

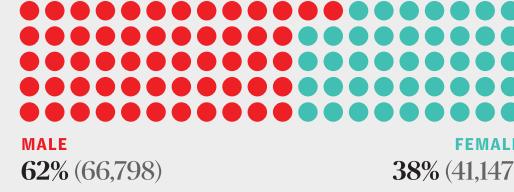
5,86,686 | 27,242



Home quarantine

Institutional quarantine

CASES (GENDER-WISE)



DEATH (GENDER-WISE)



70% 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: ssumarashtra@gmail.com

CITY-WISE HELPLINE NUMBERS

Mumbai city: 022 22664232 | Palghar: 02525 297474

Mumbai suburbs: 022 26556799 / 26556806 | Raigad: 02141 222118

Ratnagiri: 02352 226248 | Hingoli: 02362 228847

Thane: 022 25301740 | Sangli: 02361 222218

Satara: 02362 222218 | Kolhapur: 02351 222218

Jalgaon: 02362 222218 | Nanded: 02361 222218

Source: Public Health Department, Maharashtra, BMC

BMC stops labs from sharing 'positive' reports with patients

Move aimed at preventing panic; a 'negative' report can be shared directly

TANVI DESHPANDE
JYOTI SHELAR
MUMBAI

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has changed its testing protocols yet again, prohibiting laboratories from sharing COVID-19-positive reports directly with patients. Reports will now have to be shared with the corporation, which in turn will notify patients. However, a COVID-19 negative report can be shared with the patient.

"The objective is to prevent panic, as people immediately start looking for a hospital bed, even if they may not need one. In this case, our staff will notify the person and at the same time, guide them as to whether they need to be admitted to a facility or be home quarantined," said a civic official.

The BMC has come under fire for changing its testing protocol often. On assuming charge, Municipal Commissioner I.S. Chahal had said the BMC will come up with a comprehensive testing policy based on Indian Council for Medical Research guidelines, and formed a new policy on May 12.

The policy requested laboratories not to notify patients without informing the



Plan change: Till now, the BMC's policy requested laboratories not to notify patients of test results without informing the municipal corporation. ■ FILE PHOTO

BMC, "as patients are to be made aware of precautions, isolation and quarantine requirements."

On June 13, the BMC amended this policy, prohibiting laboratories from sending a positive report directly to patients. The guidelines apply to home testing too. In case of samples sent by hospitals, laboratories will have to share patients' positive reports with the BMC, while

negative reports can be shared with the hospital.

A senior doctor from a city-based hospital, which has its own laboratory, said in the past they would communicate the reports to patients and the BMC simultaneously. "But with the new notification, we will now be sending only the positive reports to the BMC," he said. This applies mainly to patients who walk into the hos-

pital just for testing, he said.

Another doctor said while the BMC's aim is to reduce panic, as patients start looking for hospital beds as soon as they get a positive report, any delay in knowing the COVID-19 status also causes anxiety. "It is only fair on patients if the BMC communicates the status immediately and guides them thoroughly at every step," said the doctor.

PCMC stares at 1,000 active cases by June-end

Tally soars from double digits in May, after lockdown relaxation

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE
PUNE

Till mid-May, the number of active COVID-19 cases in the Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal Corporation (PCMC) limits was in double digits. However, with lockdown restrictions eased since then, the township has seen a precipitate rise in cases in its slum clusters, with its active case tally now at 510.

The township currently has a total 1,256 cases.

Municipal Commissioner Shrawan Hardikar told *The Hindu*, "With our present case doubling rate of 15 days, we expect the cumulative tally to touch the 3,000 mark [by June-end] with 1,000-1,200 active cases. A multiplicity of factors is responsible for this spike, not

A multiplicity of factors is responsible for this spike, not least of which is the influx of people from Mumbai and ease of movement between PCMC and Pune

SHRAVAN HARDIKAR
Pimpri Chinchwad Municipal Commissioner

least of which is the influx of people from Mumbai since the easing of lockdown regulations, and the ease of movement between PCMC and Pune municipal limits."

Till May 10, the civic body's total case tally stood at a little over 170 cases, with only half of them being active. In contrast, Pune was witnessing daily surges of more than 200 cases. However, ov-

er the next month, the PCMC's case tally shot up to 1,000, with nearly 400 active cases by June 10.

"The first case in the Anandnagar slum cluster was detected on May 17 after a person from there visited a liquor vendor in a containment zone in Yerwada in Pune. Since then, this cluster has reported more than 100 cases till May-end," Mr. Hardikar said.

The virus has so far claimed 33 lives in the township. Matters have been somewhat offset with more than 700 recoveries and a recovery rate of nearly 60%.

"The Anandnagar and Baba Nagar slum clusters have emerged as hotspots. Several cases have been found in Ajintha Nagar as

well. Personnel in two banks have tested positive as well, and a number of policemen," the civic chief said.

Fortunately, there have been no significant rise in cases in the PCMC's industrial units – the lifeline of the township – with only stray cases being reported.

Mr. Hardikar said a software-based tracking system was being used to monitor people with co-morbidities, and senior citizens.

"We also propose to increase our present sample testing capacity from 300 to 500 and then take it to 1,000 in the coming weeks," he said. A dedicated sample testing facility is to come up soon at the civic-run Yashwantrao Chavan Memorial Hospital, he said.

Pune policeman succumbs as cases mount in district

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE
PUNE

A 56-year-old assistant sub-inspector attached to the Special Branch of the Pune Police succumbed to the novel coronavirus while undergoing treatment at a private hospital in Hadapsar late on Monday.

According to authorities, the official, who was diabetic and had high blood pressure, became the third police personnel in the city to die due to COVID-19.

Sources said he had been on sick leave for the past few months after an accident. He is said to have tested positive for COVID-19 a fortnight ago, following which his family members were quarantined.

Last month, a 57-year-old assistant sub-inspector attached to the Farashkhan police station and a 42-year-old traffic constable had succumbed to the disease.

Till date, more than 70 police personnel in the city have tested positive, of whom 46 have recovered.

Meanwhile, Pune district reported 145 new cases on Tuesday as its cumulative case tally, including deaths and recoveries, rose to 12,389. With four deaths, the toll has climbed to 515, authorities said.

Pune Divisional Commissioner Dr. Deepak Mhaisekar said only 3,952 cases are active, while 7,922 people have been discharged so far. The district's recovery rate has increased to 63.94%. The number of active cases in Pune has come down since Monday's tally of 4,057.

In a record single-day high, authorities said more than 230 people had been discharged in the district in the last 24 hours.

Sayani Gupta on tolerance, racism and the need for gender representation in entertainment

DEBORAH CORNELIOUS

Sayani Gupta eats fish like a cat: bones, head, et al much to horror of people dining with her. The disagreement on food choices and practices is a minuscule example of the existing prejudices everyone carries despite how 'woke' they claim to be. "We all feel like we are the ones who's right," says the 34-year-old actor. "There's this constant debate about us and them, whether it's Hindu-Muslim; Brahmin-Dalit; or even black-white. I don't know why people are constantly trying to divide us, we're all ultimately going to die," she laughs. The solution then, according to Gupta, is to consciously operate from a place of respect and empathy. Easier said than done, of course.

Authentic representation

The actor is delving into the subject of intolerance while talking to *The Hindu* because of her latest role in Nicholas Kharkongor's *Axone*. She plays Upasana, a young Nepali woman in Delhi, part of a gang of friends who happen to be North Eastern migrants. The group of youngsters are clutching onto their roots while trying to assimilate in the Capital's North Indian culture. At the same time, love, camaraderie and life's other struggles plague their daily existence. "It's a very simple film, not at all rocket science," says Gupta. "It might underline something we might choose to ignore but all of us understand these things." In the film, a group of friends are trying their hardest to prepare axone – pronounced akuney – pork made with fermented soybean paste. An acquired



Cooking up a feast: In *Axone*, Sayani Gupta plays Upasana, a young Nepali woman in Delhi • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

'Axone' shines a torch on how diverse culture is'

taste, the dish has been described as pungent enough to curl nose hairs. But like a character in the film says, the protagonists have a right to make their own food. In turn, the people they live around can refuse to tolerate its aroma. Using the politics of food, director Kharkongor highlights racism, that is felt by North Eastern migrants and in turn their own prejudices as well. "That's one of the reasons I jumped on this film," explains the actor. "For the first time, I came across a script that was so authentic in its representation of people from the North East. It shines a torch on how diverse the culture is."

Important messages

Made on a shoe-string budget, the film was shot in Delhi during the infernally hot

month of July; a time when most locals flee for better climates. In addition to cruel natural elements, most of the shoot was conducted in basements and cramped houses without air conditioning. "The shoot was misery," guffaws Gupta adding that almost every member of the cast was hospitalised because of dehydration, food poisoning or consuming bad water.

A particularly moving scene with the stars of the film walking hand in hand towards their destination clad in the finest of traditional attire had a darker backstory. "I must have spent the previous night preparing 35 bottles of ORS," reveals the actor. "We had to hold up [Asenla] Jamir who plays Minam] or she would have fallen otherwise." Despite the trials, though, Gupta says the sheer expe-

rience of making *Axone* far outweighed whatever they had to endure. To be able to present this light-hearted story that had a much deeper and important message just beneath the surface. The cast and crew today heartily laugh over the misery they suffered.

The character of Upasana is an opportunity for Gupta to portray a woman with agency, an utterly important criterion when it comes to project selection. From playing a blind lesbian activist in *Margarita with a Straw* (2015) to Dalit woman Gaura in *Article 15*

(2019) and the investigative journalist Damini Rizvi-Roy in *Four More Shots Please*. In spite of leaps in craft and filmmaking, Gupta believes diversity and gender representation on screen in India has a long way to go. "I know for a fact that *Four More Shots* and content about women with control of their lives made a section of people, mostly men, disturbed," reveals Gupta adding that there needs to be more stories about women instead of them being accessories in someone else's life.

Axone is currently streaming on Netflix

For the first time, I came across a script that was so authentic in its representation of people from the North East.

SAYANI GUPTA

Sounds of a pandemic: indie style



MUSIC COLUMN

NARENDR A KUSNUR
The author is a freelance music writer



In tune: Mumbai-based Protocol, a six-piece progressive rock band • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

EMI Music release *Easy*.

If Thermal And A Quarter and Menwhopause are established acts with a dedicated following, the other albums were released by relatively new outfits. Mumbai-based Protocol, a six-piece progressive rock band fronted by Shweta Venkataramani, has a clear winner in *Frid's Lantern*. Venkataramani seems influenced by Amy Lee of Evanescence and Alanis Morissette, and the band's sound appears inspired by progressive acts, Porcupine Tree and Opeth, and some 1990s thrash metal. It's a good combination, and the songs 'An Honest Conversation', 'Swipe Left' and 'Perfection' prove their mettle. Guitarists Desikan Gopalan and Sandesh Rao, keyboardist Rahul Kannan, drummer Nachiket Karakar and bassist Vivian D'Souza (now replaced by Rajiv Menon) shine.

Established acts

On March 15, just a few days before the lockdown began, Bengaluru band Thermal And A Quarter released its latest album *A World Gone Mad*. Fronted by popular artiste Bruce Lee Mani, this had the group's trademark sound and smooth guitar lines, with cool tracks like 'Where Do We Gotta Go Now', 'Distance' and 'Unbelong'. More recently, Delhi band Menwhopause put out the seven-track set *Binge Walking*. Vocalist Sarabjit Chadha, who had quit in the interim, returns to sing beauties like 'Little Lies', 'Off-Kilter' and 'Mellow Breeze'. Good songwriting, an atmospheric vibe, intense guitars and classy production add to the charm, and the album is as listenable as their successful 2011

the earlier single 'Gloria's Kitchen', and have come up with a coherent six-song set. The band, which features Chinmay Patkar, Soumitra Vichare, Parth Malhotra and Swanand Thakur, uses a lot of synths and samples, besides guitar and bass. The songs 'Porcelain People' and 'Shapes' have strong doses of psychedelia. Finally, one must mention *Beyond: Life* by Pune guitarist Mradul Singh, who was killed in a motorcycle accident in March. Released posthumously, this stays away from his characteristic metal sound and falls in the chill-out, ambient zone, as his acoustic guitar is in conversation with the fretless bass of Brazilian musician Samuel Chacon.

All this proves that there is good talent in the independent English music space, with artistes ready to record original material. The fact that they are releasing well-approached albums, instead of singles, proves their dedication. A bit of push from the recording labels will do wonders. But barring a few bands, not many have got the necessary industry backing.

Talent and rhythm

Also from Mumbai, electro-rockers Corner Cafe Chronicles have released their debut album *Renaissance Part 1*, going in for reverse crowd funding. They are known for



Not so mundane Picture of Batman and Joker in a fight; Joker falling off a building made using dumbbells and icetrays; (below) Terminators in a jello lake • ARJUN MENON

Arjun says that post-lockdown, he will continue to shoot for the series. "The thrill of creating something visually

pleasing with abstract props is always a challenge. I love to learn and train myself to think differently."

Ordinary objects, extraordinary art

Buildings made of dumbbells, lava made of jello: this Mumbai-based photographer is creating scenes from superhero movies using household items

• AISHWARYA UPADHYE

In the photograph Joker (of *Batman* fame) falls off a building, his evil grin intact. You may be forgiven for thinking it is a still from the film. Look closer and you will see the Joker is but an action figure and the buildings behind him are made of AC vents, bluetooth speakers, keyboards and dumbbells. The street lamps you see in the picture are actually rice and candle LEDs.

The photograph is a result of Mumbai-based photographer Arjun Menon's boredom. It was frustrating being in lockdown because just before it, he had shot a series of

pictures with the Indian Army in action with tanks, guns and helicopters.

He began looking for creative ways to keep his photography going and looking around found some interesting ideas. "I have always loved my old action figures, so featuring them was an obvious choice. I started looking for things within my house that would help me create a background. And suddenly, a whole new world opened up. I realised that ordinary objects, clicked from a certain angle, can create an illusion. These could be anything from a cheese grater to an oven, or even a computer ca-

binet," he says. What started as a one-time thing has turned into a series of 12 images. His other pictures include Batman in a fight with Joker with Gotham city burning behind them, Wolverine cornered by his enemies, and Predator and Terminator locking horns.

He says, "I have been a professional photographer for nine years, but this project has been a completely new learning process. With each image, I seem to have a better idea of how to compose a frame and what camera angles to use so that the image looks more realistic. This series has taught me so much

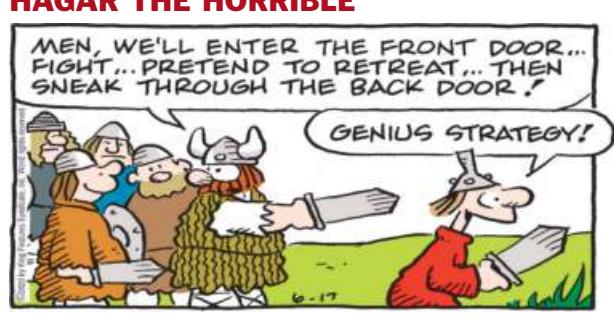
POOCH CAFE



PEANUTS



HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



CALVIN AND HOBBES



TIGER



PEARLS BEFORE SWINE





Closed again

Another strict lockdown can be meaningful only with a plan to curb infections in Chennai

The Tamil Nadu government's decision to impose a complete lockdown in Chennai and parts of neighbouring Chengalpattu, Kancheepuram and Thiruvallur for 12 days from June 19 is a response to rising apprehension that the coronavirus pandemic has spun out of control. When such a measure was resorted to earlier, for four days from April 26, the cumulative cases in the State were 1,821, but they have snowballed to just over 46,500 cases on June 15. Mortality has also risen in spite of many curbs from the earlier lockdown being retained during the 'Unlock 1' phase, such as the absence of bus transport. The AIADMK government has done well to learn some lessons from the previous full lockdown episode, which led to crowding for the purchase of essentials – it has allowed three days for the city and neighbouring districts to prepare. Yet, it is the preventable ballooning of cases that has necessitated a fresh lockdown now, highlighting the desultory approaches to infection prevention. With some determination, and steps such as free distribution of masks, the public could have been nudged into healthy behaviour. But such leadership was absent, and rising case numbers led to pressure for another strict lockdown, including from some retail traders. The State government appeared to be confused, initially denying any such plan and even informing the High Court to that effect.

The national experience with a lockdown makes it clear that it is a blunt weapon, useful only for a brief period, and to support a clear plan of action. Some studies point to heightened impact of an activity freeze on the urban poor, who have to cope with such pressures by liquidating their savings, and may be worse off than their rural counterparts. In Chennai, the pressure due to the lockdown has been prolonged, although the State has tried to ameliorate the impact with free supply of essentials. It has now promised ₹1,000 to ration card holders, and the disabled. But the effects of a full lockdown run deeper, and relief measures for the disadvantaged must be augmented. Now that some air and rail services are on, passengers with tickets must be helped to use these facilities. There is also a case to allow door delivery of all materials by e-commerce sites, barring in containment zones. Tamil Nadu's latest measure seems to have caught some sections of industry, such as the automotive sector that depends on a stable supply chain, by surprise. The economy today is complex and a more transparent and consultative approach is necessary to plan for the future. During the full lockdown phase, the government must cohere to make up for lost time: distribute masks to all, bring about compliance in mask-wearing and physical distancing, help densely populated areas, and make testing universally available.

A quota case

Affirmative action must go beyond the search for short-term political dividends

Quota politics is back in play to favour, this time, students from government higher secondary schools in Tamil Nadu. The Cabinet's nod on Monday, for an ordinance to create a horizontal 7.5% reservation of the State's quota of seats in medical colleges, is a well-intentioned move to address the problem of poor representation from government schools in MBBS/BDS courses which has been in existence even prior to the introduction of NEET for admission. The issue of inequity has come in for criticism against NEET which came into operation in Tamil Nadu in 2017. Since then, there has been a high-decibel campaign, against NEET and the AIADMK government, led by Edappadi K. Palaniswami, on the ground that the design and form of the test are loaded against students of rural areas, government schools, Backward and Most Backward Classes, and Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes. Like in the case of other professional course entrance tests, most candidates clearing NEET in Tamil Nadu are invariably those who undergo private coaching. It was also in the last three years that the AIADMK regime veered closer towards the BJP-led government at the Centre. Despite the authorities asserting that NEET is neither against communal reservation nor weaker sections, the campaign appears to have had an impact during the 2019 Lok Sabha polls as the DMK-led front won 38 out of 39 seats. The State's latest decision comes in the backdrop of this factor and also of next year's Assembly election.

It is unclear whether the horizontal reservation will pass legal scrutiny. In February 2002, the Madras High Court quashed the horizontal quota of 25% in professional courses for higher secondary students from schools in village panchayats. This time, the State has acted on a panel recommendation, which concluded that there was a "cognitive gap" among students of government schools, given the perception that those from the CBSE stream enjoy greater advantage in NEET than students of the State board. Those backing the latest quota cite special reservation for the differently-abled and an arrangement in Karnataka, of 15% of seats being set apart for rural students seeking professional courses. Apparently, there is nothing in NEET's rules against States providing "special reservation" out of their quota of seats, a position articulated, in 2017, by former Union Health Minister and BJP president, J.P. Nadda, in favour of rural students. The trend of horizontal reservation is happening with respect to national law universities for students from the host States. It is debatable whether the test of backwardness can be stretched to any extent although the equity principle is important. While poor representation in professional courses from the vulnerable sections is a symptom, the causes are deep-rooted. A holistic and sustained approach to improve school education will alone pave the way for a lasting solution.

Nepal ties and the Benaras to Bengaluru spectrum

India needs a new prism to view its relationship with its Himalayan neighbour, keeping in mind the past and the future



MANJEET S. PURI

Benaras was a keystone of India-Nepal ties for centuries. B.P. Koirala, the doyen of democratic politics in Nepal, was a resident of the city; so too was Pushpal Shrestha, one of the founders of the Communist Party of Nepal. Many in bureaucracy and politics had studied at Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, and Nepal's intellectual software was largely coded there. Till the 1980s, an easy and affordable way to reach Kathmandu was to fly from Benaras.

Then the flights stopped as tackers became insufficient. Today, one of the most profitable sectors for Nepal Airlines is Kathmandu-Bengaluru. Here, a burgeoning colony of Nepali programmers work for storied Indian tech companies, creating software for the world.

The changed equation symbolises both a changing India and a changing Nepal.

A changing Nepal

The obvious change in Nepal is that it is now a democratic republic after nearly 250 years of being a monarchy. The Nepali Congress and Maoist leader, Prachanda, claim democracy (1990) and the abolition of monarchy (2008) as their legacies.

More pervasive is the societal change from Nepal's exposure to globalisation. Geography, too, stands to change, with the Chinese now having the potential to bore through the Himalayas and exhibiting their presence in Kathmandu in economics and politics.

The constant in Nepal is a nationalism which is really a mask

for anti-India sentiment. Politicians use it for personal gain, and it is deeply ingrained in the bureaucracy, academia and the media.

Today, Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli is cementing his legacy as a nationalist by extending Nepal's map into Indian territory. The cartographic aggression and the embedding of the new map in the country's national emblem and Constitution are untenable and should have been avoided under all circumstances.

But this is not the first time Nepal has thumbed its nose at India, even at the cost of its people's well-being. In 2015, the Nepali Congress government adopted the new Constitution, ignoring India's concerns.

This instinct to cut off the nose to spite the face is visible in the lack of progress on the game-changing 5,000 MW Pancheshwar hydroelectric project. Nepal's viable hydro-electricity potential is 40,000 MW; the country generates only 1,000 MW and must import 600 MW from India.

Identity politics with India is also visible within the country where Nepali citizens from the Terai (Madhes) feel discriminated as being "Indian".

To Nepal, their attitudes reflect the angst of a small state. To India, Nepal appears incorrigible.

Shift with globalisation

After democracy was restored in 1990, passports were more liberally issued, and Nepalis began looking for work opportunities globally, beyond just India. West Asia and South-East Asia specifically became major destinations for labour migration.

Security uncertainties with the Maoist insurgency at home also propelled the trend of migration. Students and skilled personnel began moving to Europe, the United States, Australia, Thailand and



REUTERS

even to Japan and South Korea.

As of 2019, nearly a fifth of Nepal's population, from all parts of the country, were reportedly overseas. At an estimated \$8 billion, global remittances account for nearly 30% of Nepal's nominal GDP, making it one of the most remittance-dependent countries in the world.

Leftist ideology and the prominent presence of international non-governmental organisations – ostensibly there to resolve conflict and alleviate poverty – have not studied in India. This lack of common collegiate roots removes a natural bond of previous generations that had provided for better understanding and even empathy.

Underreported is the presence of Christian missionaries who entered Nepal during and in the aftermath of the Maoist insurgency. "Faith Houses", as churches are euphemistically called in Nepal, can be found in villages and towns across the country, including the Terai, and represent not only European and American organisations but Korean too.

Moreover, posters advertising education opportunities in Australia, the United States, Canada and South-East Asia adorn Nepal.

Nepal's 2011 Census shows that over 80% of its 28 million-strong population were Hindus, and since 1962, it had formally been a Hindu kingdom. The new Constitution in 2015 makes Nepal a secular country.

The proliferation of communication technology has also spread

a certain cosmopolitanism but without the accompanying metropolitanism.

A link despite diversification

Kathmandu has continued its long-standing efforts to spread Nepal's options beyond India. Multilateral development banks are by far the biggest lenders and players in the country's development efforts. And in fact, one of Nepal's largest aid donors is the European Union.

India and China are not the only players for big projects either. A long-delayed project to pipe water into Kathmandu was with an Italian company, major investments in the telecom sector are coming from Malaysia, and the largest international carrier in Nepal is Qatar Airways.

The outward movement of students, along with the growth of institutions of higher learning at home, has meant that most young people in Nepal, including emerging contemporary leaders in politics, business or academics, have not studied in India. This lack of common collegiate roots removes a natural bond of previous generations that had provided for better understanding and even empathy.

Today, while most Nepalis understand Hindi, because of the popularity of Bollywood, articulation is quite another matter.

But despite Nepal's efforts to diversify its options globally, its linkages with India remain robust. Nepal's trade with India has grown in absolute terms and continues to account for more than two-thirds of Nepal's external trade of around \$12 billion annually. This clearly reflects the advantages of geography, both physical and societal.

India continues to be the largest aggregate investor in Nepal. The massive under-construction Arun-III 900 MW hydro-electric project is slated to singly produce as much power, when completed in five

years, as Nepal produces today. Moreover, the peg with the Indian Rupee provides unique stability to the Nepali Rupee.

Nepal's per-capita income is just above \$1,000. While the huge remittance economy has brought a semblance of well-being, the country has a long way to go in reaching prosperity.

The relationship with India, with open borders and Nepalis being allowed to live and work freely, provides Nepal a unique advantage and an economic cushion. The latter is particularly important today with COVID-19-caused global contraction positioned to pop the remittance bubble. Neither the Chinese nor any others are likely to write blank cheques.

Focus areas

India for its part should also focus on developing its border areas with Nepal, with better roads and amenities of interest (such as shopping malls) to the burgeoning Nepali middle class. This would have economic pluses for both sides and keep ties strong at the people's level. It would also be an image makeover.

Given the cultural and ethnic commonalities, it befriends and draws anger in India when things go wrong in ties with Nepal. Those responsible for bringing things to such an impasse must be held to account, but it is important that we update the prism through which we view our relationship with our Himalayan neighbour.

We must not forget the past nor turn away from it but, instead, must be mindful of the realities of a changing India and a changing Nepal. Benaras will always be a keystone, but contemporary reality makes it imperative to look at Bengaluru.

Manjeet S. Puri is a former Ambassador of India to Nepal. The views expressed are personal

Rural India, the new viral flash point

While the lockdown affected the country in one go, the town and country waves of the pandemic are asynchronous



M.S. SESHADEVI & T. JACOB JOHN

The initial misplaced optimism that India is somehow protected from the COVID-19 pandemic has proved to be illusory, with rapidly escalating numbers of cases and deaths in urban India. The urban blight is so intense as to occupy the entire attention of the health-care workforce, planners and policy makers. The medical services in these urban areas – Mumbai, Delhi and Chennai to cite the three major epicentres of the epidemic – have been overwhelmed, judging from the reports available every day in the public domain.

Clearly unprepared

We are now facing only the fury of the urban wave of this epidemic in India. Remember, 65% of the country's population is rural. They have been relatively underexposed, with very few cases and deaths. Thus, the large, vulnerable majority in rural India is yet to feel the heat of this epidemic.

There is a pervasive and false confidence among the general public that, somehow, rural India will escape with minimal casualty. The

recent (limited) restoration of public transport and a relaxation of restrictions on the movement of people are developments that have set the stage for the inevitable and even more dangerous wave of this epidemic. Just as importations from other countries through air traffic set the stage for the urban blight, importations from urban to rural India will set the stage for the rural wave. We need to remind ourselves that rural India is clearly unprepared to face this epidemic.

Contrasts in health care

There has always been an urban-rural divide in India in health care and education, two vital indices of human development. This deficiency has been very costly not only in terms of rural lives and livelihoods but also overall national wealth creation. If the first urban wave of the COVID-19 tsunami is overwhelming our relatively better urban health-care resources, one can imagine the predicament of rural India with its already deficient health-care resources when it faces the rural epidemic tidal wave.

The lockdown of the entire country led to a paralysis of urban and rural life synchronously while the urban and rural waves of this epidemic are clearly asynchronous. The rural wave is just beginning while the urban wave is about to peak. When rural areas were

hardly affected we had the lockdown but now that the rural wave is just beginning, paradoxically, we find that rural people are going about without masks or physical distancing, congregating in marketplaces and places of worship. This portends an imminent catastrophe, yet unrecognised and therefore inadequately anticipated for risk-mitigation.

Administrator the social vaccine

Now is the right time to implement the social vaccine, a prophylaxis before the rural spread of the epidemic. A decentralised approach with participation of all stakeholders in each village, taluk and district is the need and potential of the day. The most important step would be to educate rural people with all the tools at our disposal – print, radio, the electronic media, and messages through mobile phones. We need to give them accurate information in simple language to make them clearly understand

that their self-protection and the protection of their families are entirely in their hands.

Two behavioural changes are critical – every man, woman and child must wear a cotton cloth mask when out of the home, and observe strict hand hygiene. All elders and any person with a comorbidity should be cocooned (by reverse quarantine) – all wearing masks when interacting with others even inside homes. It is mortality that we must prevent in this unfair disease for the vulnerable.

Proceeding step by step

At the State and district levels, we need a systematic approach; it must entail blocking urban-rural importations, quarantining those who move from red zone to green, diagnosing and managing clinical COVID-19 syndrome with or without positive PCR test results, and providing field hospitals exclusively for isolating and managing COVID-19 cases (manned by younger, and therefore less vulnerable, medical and nursing teams). Simple clinical diagnostic criteria are available with the writers of this article.

At the same time, we need to protect and sustain existing hospitals and primary health centres not to be frequented by COVID-19 patients, but for providing care for all other medical, surgical and obstetric emergencies.

Mildly and moderately sympto-

matic COVID-19 patients should be managed by home isolation, delivering essential and medical supplies at home, and home monitoring of oxygen saturation by readily available portable finger pulse oximeters. Each such patient should be followed up daily by a designated medical professional, who should call over the phone and identify those who need hospitalisation for life-threatening pneumonia.

Non-communicable diseases and other common diseases should be handled on a tele-medicine platform manned by experienced and older (age more than 55 years) medical personnel; there should be a follow-up over the mobile phone. This approach will minimise the loss of medical manpower due to COVID-19 at the time when we need them the most.

If we are caught napping at this crucial hour, it will be a monumental error for which we can never forgive ourselves. State health administrators and the medical fraternity have the knowledge and skills to tackle the rural wave with courage and wisdom.

M.S. Seshadri is retired Professor of Medical Endocrinology, Christian Medical College (CMC), Vellore and now Medical Director, Thirumalai Mission Hospital, Ranipet, Tamil Nadu. T. Jacob John is retired Professor of Clinical Virology, CMC, Vellore and past President of the Indian Academy of Pediatrics

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.

At sixes and sevens

This is perhaps the first time India is facing trouble from all sides of its main border – with Nepal, China and even Pakistan. Nepal, a neighbour which was once friendly and much smaller geographically, is staging a quarrel with India, perhaps punching above its weight. How India handles the sudden and caustic development needs to be seen. And has the Defence Minister's statement (Inside pages, "India, Nepal share close ties: Rajnath", June 16) come too late? We then have Pakistan and its pinpricks in the strange episode of the staff of the Indian mission in that country disappearing for a while. All is not well on that part of the border too (Editorial, June 16).

On top of all these episodes, China is clearly haunting us by opening up many lines along the long boundary. What is the government planning to do? What is the Opposition doing? The media should play a pivotal role in awakening the government. RAGHAVENDRA A. CHOURHARI, Hubballi, Karnataka

ICMR stance
The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has not covered itself in glory in these difficult COVID-19 times (Inside pages, "ICMR distances itself from study", June 16). The latest modelling study – which it has now distanced itself from – indicates that cases might peak as late as January 2021. The study also calculates a whopping 6.2%

GDP, as overall economic health system cost of the pandemic. This is not the first time the ICMR has shied away from adopting a stand during the pandemic, even though many prominent scientists from within and outside the country have maintained that "community transmission" is well under way. It is time that the country's leading medical research body leads from the front in this moment of crisis.

Ds. THOMAS PALOCAREN, Vellore, Tamil Nadu

Going online
While the pros and cons of e-learning have been repeatedly scrutinised in terms of the glaring digital divide in the country and the means to, albeit temporarily, bypass the

problem of access is being discussed, it is refreshing to see some space being given in print to the other factors that make classroom education superior to e-learning (Editorial page, "Streamed education is diluted education", June 13). We must let go of the new age, uber-ideology of tech-centrism that prompts us to automatically assume that "if it's high-tech, it's better", taking away even the possibility of discussing the trade-offs involved in the new

Of gods and governments

Natural calamities and lockdowns are examples of force majeure, but the status of COVID-19 is moot



RAM SINGH & UTKARSH LEO

The COVID-19 pandemic is unleashing a flurry of contractual disputes. Due to the lockdowns, a large number of companies and individually owned enterprises find their contractual obligations impossible to meet or economically ruinous, especially in the aviation, automobile, construction, hospitality and entertainment, retail, and insurance sectors. Consequently, they have refused the promised employment and suspended supplies of goods or services, triggering legal claims of compensation from the counterparties.

Reducing scope of dispute

Many parties have invoked COVID-19 as force majeure (FM) – an event that is beyond the control of the parties and renders contractual performance impossible. Most contracts contain a FM clause to catalogue events like wars, riots or strikes in which the parties would prefer to terminate the contract or put it on hold. Acts of the government (such as lockdowns) and acts of god (such as floods, cyclones) are typically listed under a FM clause.

This provision reduces the scope of dispute between parties in case a FM event occurs. Plus, it helps them allocate contract risks efficiently. The problem is, many a times the clause contains ambiguous and catch-all phrases like, 'events including but not limited to the ones listed herein'. Such ambiguities are being exploited by many contracting parties. They are seeking termination or suspension of business deals by claiming that COVID-19 is a FM event. Moreover, ambivalent statements by government agencies regarding the pandemic have added to the confusion.

How the courts and the regulators adjudicate contractual disputes will determine the distribution of losses among the disputants and, more importantly, the quantum of economic cost of the pandemic. Delayed or ambiguous rulings will aggravate the economic costs of the disease by disrupting supply chains beyond the



"How the courts and the regulators adjudicate contractual disputes will determine the distribution of losses among the disputants and the quantum of economic cost of the pandemic." File photo of a construction site in Delhi. —AP

lockdown period. By contrast, clear and consistent judgments will discourage opportunistic behaviour and encourage pre-trial negotiations thereby avoiding unnecessary litigation and attendant social costs. Issues of individual welfare are better addressed through public policy and not court rulings.

As the status of COVID-19 or the lockdowns as FM, courts should interpret ambiguous or catch-all terms on the principle of *ejusdem generis* – when general words follow an enumeration of things, they apply to things of the same general kind specifically mentioned.'

COVID-19 is not FM per se. It is the lockdowns, not the virus, that has made it impossible for the airlines, hotels and caterers to deliver as promised and contractors to complete projects on schedule. Under such contexts, it is justified to use the lockdowns as FM for non-performance or delayed performance, as the case may be.

In other contexts, however, the clause has been used for dubious reasons. Discoms have invoked it under power purchase agreements. They have withheld monthly payments and have asked some power producers to stop the project. True, due to lockdown of industries and commercial establishments the demand for electricity has fallen. However, the virus and the lockdowns have not affected the generation-capacity of power producers, nor have they rendered it impossible for discoms to off-take electricity, an essential service. In any case, a reduced demand or the agreement becoming commercially onerous does not qualify as a FM event.

If the contract does not have a FM clause, parties can seek termination of the contract on grounds of frustration. Section 56 of the Indian Contract Act, 1872, along with its interpretations by the Supreme Court (*Satyabrata Ghose v. Mugneeram Bangur*) renders a contract void if a subsequent event makes performance impossible or useless for one or the other party. Accordingly, claims by wedding caterers regarding frustration of contract can hold ground for events that were pre-scheduled but could not take place during the lockdown.

Lockdown as force majeure

A justifiable use of COVID-19-induced lockdown as FM or an event causing frustration of contract is subject to context and facts. In *Standard Retail Pvt. Ltd. v. G.S. Global Corp. & Ors.* (2020), the Bombay High Court rejected the claims of the petitioner, who argued that the lockdowns had led to frustration of his contract for supply of steel by the respondent G.S. Global Corp. The Court aptly observed that the lockdowns did not apply to the steel sector, an essential item as per the government notification. Moreover, the relief under FM was applicable only to the seller (if supply became impossible). But the seller had already dispatched the supplies.

Moreover, restitution goes hand-in-hand with the use of FM and frustration of purpose to terminate the contract. A seller seeking to terminate the contract should return the payment received for the yet-to-be-fulfilled part of the promise. This principle has been grossly violated by the airlines. Thousands of prior

bookings had to be cancelled due to ban of flights during the lockdown (a FM event in this case). What is troublesome is that rather than refunding the cancelled tickets, airlines have sought to convert them into credit shells usable only for buying future tickets from the same carrier. This is an opportunistic move.

Riskiness of returns is an integral part of most business and commercial activities. The Supreme Court in *Naihati Jute Mills Ltd v. Hyaliram Jagannath* (1967) held that a contractual obligation becoming economically arduous is not a ground for absolving a party of its commitment. Therefore, OYO's decision to suspend payments to client hotels citing commercial unprofitability is not a ground for frustration of contract.

Similarly, the demands of multiplexes, retailers and restaurants are untenable. They are seeking rental waivers from premise owners citing the lockdowns as FM. Government notifications declaring COVID-19 as FM has encouraged such demands. Lease agreements typically allow rental waivers only if a FM event causes physical damage to the property rendering it unfit for commercial use. This is not the case with COVID-19. Besides, lessee cannot claim frustration of contracts as the lockdowns and concomitant losses are temporary.

Insurance contracts are intricate. Property insurance claims require physical damage to the property. As the lockdown has caused no physical harm, claims for loss of business income are not tenable. Moreover, courts should realise that the losses on account of the lockdown are quite different from those meant to be covered by individual policies. Business losses caused by epidemics and lockdowns tend to be numerous and highly correlated. That is why standard insurance policies do not allow compensation for such losses. Allowing a single claim will set a precedent for all, potentially bankrupting the insurance industry.

Courts and regulators should encourage litigants to go for negotiations or mediation to settle disputes. In most cases, a middle ground exists within the contract letter.

Ram Singh is Professor, Delhi School of Economics, and Utkarsh Leo is Assistant Professor, NALSAR University of Law

For better conditions of work

Migrant workers who have returned to their villages from India's cities can form cooperatives and unions



DEVAKI JAIN

of India, and labour unions can intervene, especially since many workers have said they do not have work in the village but they also do not want to move elsewhere.

The AMUL project is a model of one kind, but there are other, lesser-known models which are not as sophisticated and fair in terms of wages and other terms as AMUL but still offer ideas for today. India has examples of putting-out work in several industries. I once found that the parts of dry iron boxes were being produced by a group of women from their homes. It was a deeply exploitative system where the women on contractual work had poor salaries and no benefits. Cooperatives, on the other hand, can get the same process done without the middle man.

MGNREGA has been offered as a way of alleviating migrant workers' distress but this is not only a short term but also vulnerable wage-earning occupation. Sites cannot be opened during the monsoon season. Also, at any given area, there may not be enough sites to engage many people. So another possibility is to give MGNREGA better shape so that MGNREGA funds can be used to enable women or artisans to market their products.

A pyramid of group economic activity

This is a valuable opportunity for the state to build new kinds of economic structures in India, a pyramid of group economic activity going from the rural areas through collective marketing to fill the demand from the cities. What has been lacking so far in this dispersed production model is lack of concern for the fair treatment of the workers. In Mangaluru, a beedi worker said beedis are rolled by women in their own homes. The leaf, the thread and the tobacco are given to them by middlemen. The woman said she takes back packets of 1,000 rolled bidis and is paid for them. But she would be denied wages if she didn't submit to the sexual demands of the contractor. This said, beedi workers have been unionised in many areas now, so dispersed production can be a way forward. Successful unionisation of workers can protect them from exploitation. It is possible to have dispersed production, home-based or small-unit based, to start a supply chain to markets, whether local markets or capital cities or export markets.

This is an opportunity to rebuild economic production through different institutional arrangements. Arrangements that can provide an optimal solution to the workers as well as contribute to the GDP must be made. It will also rebuild an India where cities are not congested and where the standard of living in rural areas will improve.

Devaki Jain is a Delhi-based economist

In defence of MPLADS

It engaged MPs, catered to the aspirations of local people and ironed out regional imbalances

RAJMOHAN UNNITHAN

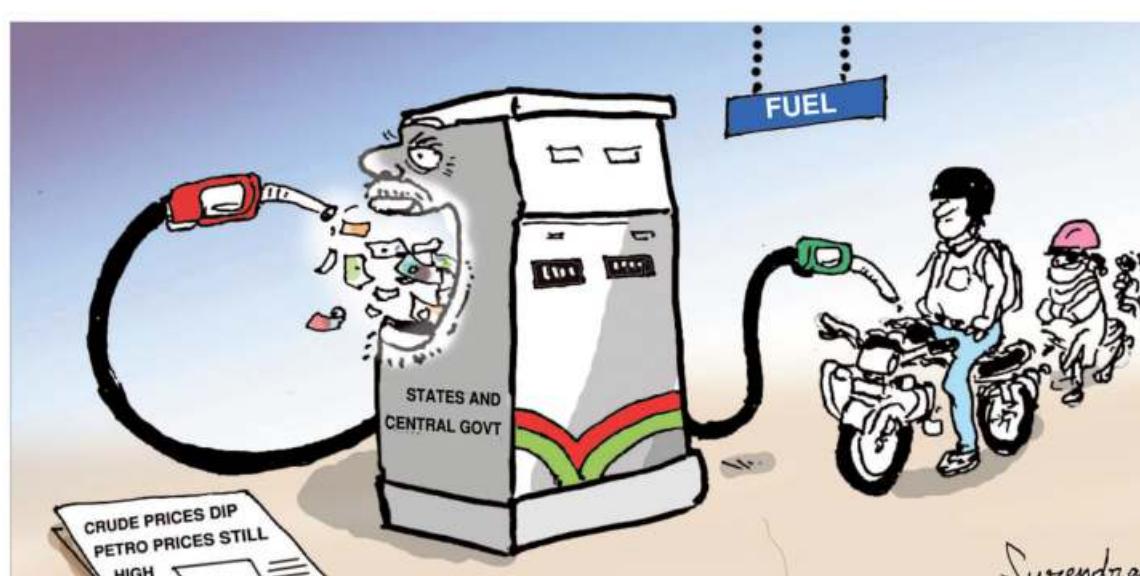
The Indian Parliament is the nucleus of the republic. It has a legion of functions to perform. Subhash Kashyap, in *Our Parliament*, has enumerated the multiple functions of Parliament. It includes political and financial control, supervision of administration, elicitation and dissemination of information on the government of the day, grievance ventilation, national integration, legislative and constituent functions and furnishing leadership to the nation. The functions are non-exhaustive and incremental.

The pork barrel policy of State and Union Governments often leads to skewed development and regional imbalance. The ruling party channels public money to particular constituencies based on political considerations, at the expense of broader public interests. The elected opposition legislators of those constituencies fall victim to this pork barrel politics. MPLADS has been an antidote to this favouritism. The Scheme provided opposition MPs some chance to cater to the developmental needs of their constituency. The suspension of the Scheme has snatched away this limited opportunity.

Aspirations of the marginalised
Of the MPLADS corpus, 15% has been earmarked for the development of Scheduled Castes and 7.5% for the Scheduled Tribes. Around 320 lakh of the MPLADS fund per annum has been allotted for the welfare of differently abled people. Suspension of the MPLADS undermines the developmental aspirations of these marginalised segments.

In Kerala there are handsome funds at the disposal of MLAs. In 2012, Kerala announced the launching of the Legislative Assembly Constituency Asset Development Fund. This aims at creating durable assets for which each MLA will be allocated ₹5 crore during a particular financial year for undertaking capital works in his/her constituency so as to improve infrastructural facilities. The corpus has subsequently been enhanced to ₹6 crore per annum. The suspension of the MPLADS undermines the prestige of MPs vis-à-vis MLAs. A scheme that catered to the developmental aspirations of local people, ironed out the regional imbalances and made MPs engaged should be restored as early as possible.

Rajmohan Unnithan is MP in the Lok Sabha from Kasaragod

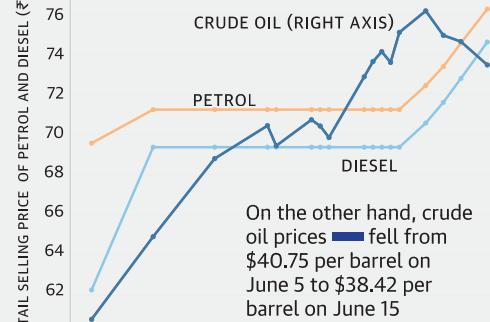


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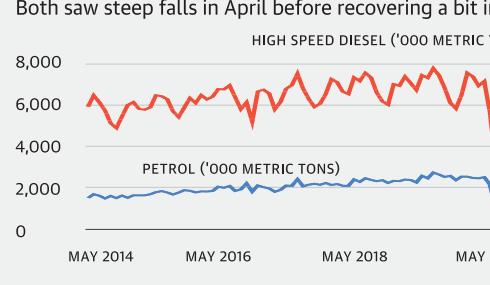
Fuel woes

Fuel prices were hiked for the 10th consecutive day on Tuesday even as crude prices remained low. The hike came after many sharp increases in the Centre's excise duty component in 2020. This could be to offset the loss in govt. revenue which missed targets by a wide margin in FY20. However, gains are unlikely as fuel consumption dropped steeply due to the COVID-19 lockdown.

1. RISE AMID FALL | The price of petrol in Delhi increased from ₹71.26/litre on June 5 to ₹76.73/litre on Tuesday, while the price of diesel increased from ₹69.39/litre to ₹75.19/litre in the same period

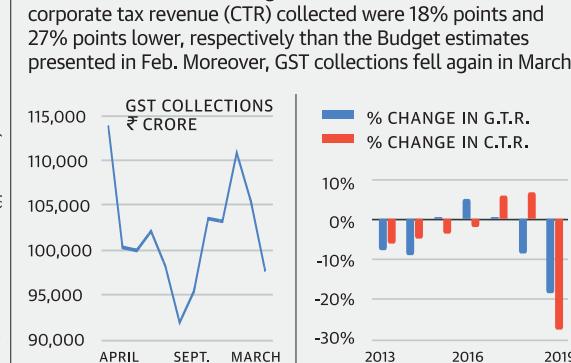


3. CONSUMPTION FALLS | The chart shows petrol and high speed diesel consumption from May '14 to May '20. Both saw steep falls in April before recovering a bit in May

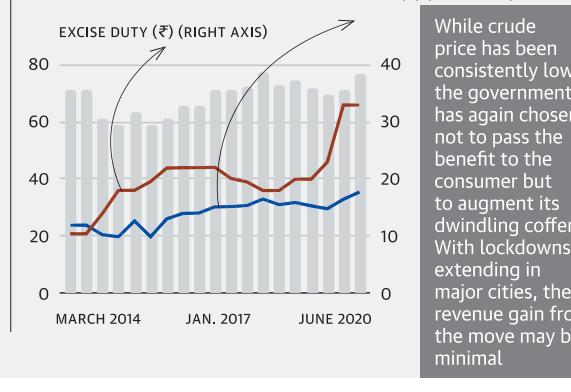


SOURCE: PETROLEUM PLANNING AND ANALYTICS CELL

2. REVENUE DOWN | The gross tax revenue (GTR) and corporate tax revenue (CTR) collected were 18% points and 27% points lower, respectively than the Budget estimates presented in Feb. Moreover, GST collections fell again in March



4. STEEP HIKE | The chart shows the retail price of petrol in Delhi (grey bar, left axis), the excise duty and value added tax levied for every litre



While crude price has been consistently low, the government has again chosen not to pass the benefit to the consumer but to augment its dwindling coffers. With lockdowns extending in major cities, the revenue gain from the move may be minimal

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 17, 1970

Pressures on ruling Cong. leaders

The AICC session of the Ruling Congress which ended yesterday [June 15] provided an interesting case-study of how the young radicals with a firm foothold in the Working Committee were able to exert subtle political pressures on the party leadership and influence policy formulations in the name of putting more teeth into the resolutions to refurbish its socialist image. After the Congress split, the more immediate objective of these radicals was to impress on all concerned that they were no longer petty pressure groups seeking self-expression by simply tilting at the windmills of power, but part and parcel of the ruling hierarchy with a duty to ensure that the party leadership adhered to the path of democratic socialism. The new technique adopted by them before the AICC session was to plead for a more radical stance by the Ruling Congress on the ground that the party position on any major policy issue should be a little ahead of the Government position – to put more punch into the processes of implementation of the pledged objectives. But this approach met with some resistance from the party elders.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 17, 1920

Temperance and reforms
(From an editorial)

Under the Reform Act, the control of Excise policy and administration will, in future, be vested in the elected representatives of the people and the Ministers responsible to them. It was at one time apprehended that the transfer of the Excise Department to the control of Indian Ministers would not be complete and later developments have shown clearly that resolutions passed by the Legislative Council dealing with the questions relating to temperance reform as a transferred subject should be respected by the Government. In connection with the financial provisions of the Bill the Government of India had suggested the desirability of devising what was known as the "separate purse scheme", one of the results of which would have been the preservation of the revenue derived from liquor if "threatened by temperance policy." The Finance Member made no secret of the intention of the Government of India when he deposited before the Joint Committee that a separate purse "would be a tremendous stimulant to each half of the Government to develop its own resources, for otherwise, if money were transferred, there would be a suggestion for prohibition with loss of revenues."

FROM PAGE ONE

Cheap drug shows results in COVID patients

Dexamethasone is the first drug to be shown to improve survival in COVID-19. This is an extremely welcome result. The survival benefit is clear and large in those patients who are sick enough to require oxygen treatment, so dexamethasone should now become standard of care in these patients. Dexamethasone is inexpensive, on the shelf, and can be used immediately to save lives worldwide," Peter Horby, Professor of Emerging Infectious Diseases in the Nuffield Department of Medicine, University of Oxford, and one of the Chief Investigators for the trial, said in a statement.

Tocilizumab is also being tested as part of the RECOVERY trial and is an injectable. Dexamethasone and tocilizumab are not anti-virals but work to modulate the immune response of the body when confronted by a vi-

ral infection such as COVID-19.

Revised protocol

Last week, the Indian Council for Medical Research revised the protocol for clinical management of COVID-19 and allowed the use of remdesivir, tocilizumab and convalescent plasma therapy (CPT) on certain groups of patients.

Remdesivir, a patented drug by U.S.-based Gilead Life Sciences, reduced hospital stays for very sick COVID patients but has not been shown to improve recovery itself.

Physician and epidemiologist, Dr. Giridhar Babu, told *The Hindu* that dexamethasone's ostensible benefit is "positive news" for those with severe disease. "This is cheap and widely available; however being a steroid, its abuse can lead to several adverse reactions."

ICSE students in two minds over exam



A file photo of students writing ICSE Class 10 examination in Mangaluru.

The Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE) conducts the ICSE and ISC exams.

Students have been asked to communicate their decision to schools by June 22, according to a statement issued on Monday. An ongoing case in the Bombay High Court will have its next hearing on Wednesday. About 2.8 lakh students are writing the Class 10 and 12 examinations.

First option

Students at several ICSE schools across the country said they were being coerced to choose the first option. They shared screenshots with *The Hindu*, showing messages from schools in Lucknow, Allahabad, Jamshedpur, Kanpur and Kolkata directing them to sign letters with specific phrasing, giving their consent to write the board examinations. The Council's chief executive, Gerry Arathoon, did not respond to *The Hindu*'s request for comment on the actions of these schools.

Mumbai-based advocate Arvind Tiwari, father of a boy in Class 10, had filed a public interest litigation petition, asking for the examinations be cancelled due to the rising number of COVID cases, and suggested that the 20% of board exam marks that come from internal assessment be used to grade students instead.

In its response on Monday, the Council offered another solution. Stating that its paramount interest was to "protect the safety, wellbeing and academic endeavours of students," and contending that its safety protocol would adequately protect students and staff participating in the examination process, the CISCE gave students two choices.

If they did not wish to write the exams in July, they would have to abide by a grading methodology to be determined by the Council based on internal assessment, pre-board scores and performance in the already concluded board papers.

If the exams could not be held in July for any reason, the Council reserved the right to cancel them and invoke its methodology instead, it added. Students

cannot make a subject-wise choice. A number of parents have filed interventions in the case, slamming the Council. "While on the outset it appears to be pragmatic and an act of benevolence, the said proposal is nothing more than an act of coercion," said the intervention filed by Raju Tanwani, who has a son in Class 10.

"The proposal of having the remaining exams being held in July especially when the rate of cases are increasing on a daily basis or having to compute examination results based on preliminary examinations is akin to making the already stressed students choose between the devil and the deep sea."

"Majority of students don't want to give exams nor do they want to be judged for remaining papers on basis of preboards as they are tougher than boards. Many don't take it seriously and work their heart out for boards," said Umang Goswami, a student whose email to the court is being treated as an intervention. "Also, preboards level of difficulty and checking varies from school to school, so it's non-uniform for all students. So in fear of losing marks, many students have to risk their life unwillingly."

Risk of infection

Ten parents jointly filed an intervention saying that even if all precautions were taken at the examination centre, many students and invigilators would travel by public transport to the Centre, increasing the risk of infection. They also pointed out that many families had senior citizens with co-morbidities at home, who would be vulnerable to any infection contracted by the children.

"In mid-March, when the number of cases were relatively low and we were willing to send our children to write the exams, the Council insisted on putting everything on hold. At that time, they said health and well-being of the child was most important," said Mr. Tiwari, pointing out that cases had exponentially increased since then.

"This is my question to them: is that not important anymore?"

Bengaluru asked to keep 20,000 beds ready

Asymptomatic infected patients to be managed through special care centres; 7 die in the State and 2 in Andhra Pradesh

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Karnataka reported seven more fatalities from COVID-19 on Tuesday, while Andhra Pradesh recorded two deaths and 264 new cases.

In Kerala, 79 new COVID-19 cases and 60 recoveries were reported, keeping active number of cases at 1,366. All except six of the new ones were imported cases.

Remdesivir, a patented drug by U.S.-based Gilead Life Sciences, reduced hospital stays for very sick COVID patients but has not been shown to improve recovery itself.

Physician and epidemiologist, Dr. Giridhar Babu, told *The Hindu* that dexamethasone's ostensible benefit is "positive news" for those with severe disease. "This is cheap and widely available; however being a steroid, its abuse can lead to several adverse reactions."

One region in Thiruvananthapuram district newly entered the hotspot list on Tuesday, while 16 regions got dropped from the list.

Six cases of local transmission were reported, one of them a health care worker in Pathanamthitta district.

A total of 2,622 persons had tested positive and 1,234 persons had recovered till date. The State had 1,22,143 persons under surveillance in various districts, of whom, except 1,986 isolated in hos-

pitals with mild symptoms, the rest were on home or institutional quarantine.

On Tuesday, 210 persons were admitted in hospitals.

An official release said 4,003 samples were taken in a 24-hour period until Tuesday. Samples of 1,18,893 persons were tested in all. This was in addition to 32,534 samples tested from high risk or priority groups in the community.

One region in Thiruvananthapuram district newly entered the hotspot list on Tuesday, while 16 regions got dropped from the list.

The daily bulletin in Andhra Pradesh said that of 264 new cases, 193 were of local residents and 44 of migrant workers or people from other States and 27 were foreign returnees.

The State tally rose to 6,720 and 3,513 had recovered, including 128 on Tuesday. There were 3,119 active cases under treatment. The two new deaths occurred in Chittoor and Prakasam

districts.

The worst-hit districts of Kurnool, Krishna and Guntur continued to report a large number of new local cases. Kurnool had 56 cases while Krishna reported 34, Guntur 29. Anantapur 28, East Godavari 12, Nellore 11, West Godavari 10, Kadapa five, Chittoor four, Visakhapatnam three and Vizianagaram one case. Prakasam and Srikakulam reported no new cases.

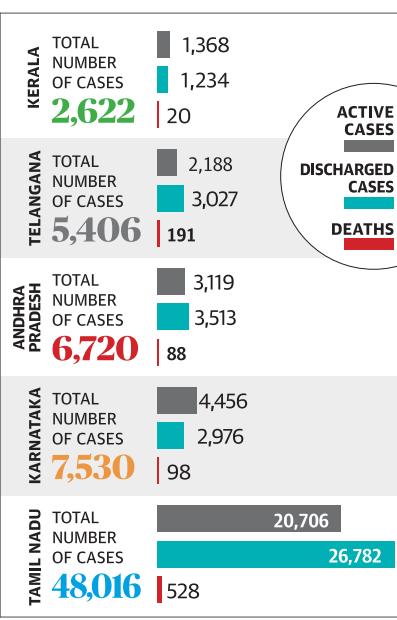
Deaths in Kurnool and Krishna districts alone accounted for 65% of total

Fighting the pandemic

With the spike in COVID-19 cases, many States are turning their focus on conducting more tests



Testing times: A healthcare worker collecting swab sample of a toddler for COVID-19 test in Vijayawada on Tuesday. ■ PTI



up COVID-19 Care Centres to monitor and treat asymptomatic infected persons, said Medical Education Minister K. Sudhakar on Tuesday.

He told the media that the decision was taken as the number of cases was on the rise in the last two weeks.

"An expert committee has been formed to advise on the type of treatment. The BBMP Commissioner has been directed to ensure that 20,000 beds are available in COVID Care Centres in Bengaluru," the Minister said.

Calling upon private hospitals to act with responsibility, the Minister warned of strict action against hospitals that refuse to treat COVID patients. With seven deaths, the toll in Karnataka touched 94. The deaths included five from Bengaluru Urban and one each from Ramanagara and Bidar. The day also saw 317 new cases being added.

(With inputs from Vijayawada & Bengaluru bureaus)

Will request PM for more relaxations: Karnataka CM

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa on Tuesday said the State had no plans to extend the COVID-19 lockdown. He said he would request Prime Minister Narendra Modi for more relaxations during their meeting on Wednesday.

"Lockdown is not necessary for Karnataka. We will request for more relaxations," he said to a question on videoconferencing with Mr. Modi.

While some service activities have now opened up, several others, including metro rail, gyms, swimming pools, and cinemas, have remained shut since the lockdown was introduced on March 25. KARNATAKA

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

With the number of tests conducted per day reducing after the new testing protocol was issued 10 days ago, the Karnataka government has decided to conduct randomised testing on a large scale across the State.

C.N. Manjunath, Director of Sri Jayadeva Institute of

Cardiovascular Sciences, said, "Our target is to ensure that at least 50,000 random tests are done in three weeks."

K. Sudhakar, Medical Education Minister, said that 15,000 to 25,000 tests should be done every day. "It needs to be done on a random basis to check for community transmission," he said.

granted permission to resume activities as their businesses were hit severely during the past three months.

"I will request him [Mr. Modi] to make way for people to lead a normal life and for improvements in the economic situation," Mr. Yediyurappa

said. Mr. Yediyurappa insisted that the maximum number of cases in the State were because of people coming from other States and their primary contacts.

He said the government had been making all efforts to control spread of the disease by monitoring people travelling to the State.

With restrictions on travelling in the domestic and international sector continuing in view of the pandemic, Kerala Tourism has come to the conclusion that revival of the tourism sector is possible only through af-

Kerala Tourism plans to promote short-haul tours

Target is those in tier-II cities in South

S. ANIL RADHAKRISHNAN
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Tourism is set to launch an aggressive campaign to promote short-haul tours among domestic tourists of tier-II cities in the south as part of reviving the virus-hit tourism sector.

The campaign to reboot the tourism economy will be through websites of leading media houses, social media platforms, over-the-top media, FM radio, music streaming channels, and bloggers.

It will project domestic travel as the best bet to break the lockdown fatigue among citizens.

With restrictions on travelling in the domestic and international sector continuing in view of the pandemic, Kerala Tourism has come to the conclusion that revival of the tourism sector is possible only through af-

fordable short-haul tours.

"The target is to rope in those from tier-II cities in the south. Those from Bengaluru, Mangaluru, Mysuru, Coimbatore and Madurai, and natives are the focus. They will be lured to tourist places for two to three days," official sources told *The Hindu*.

The working group on tourism chaired by Secretary, Tourism, Rani George on Tuesday cleared the campaign.

Officials of Kerala Tourism and the stakeholders of the industry are of the view that the situation is 'pathetic' and that the claims of tourist inflow are not correct.

Some hotels that had closed due to the lockdown have opened and are being used for quarantining those coming from outside the State.

A.P. presents ₹2.24 lakh cr. budget, outlay cut by 1.4%



Finance Minister Buggana Rajendranath Reddy arriving for the presentation of the budget on Tuesday.

Spending on human capital is key: Buggana

G.V.R. SUBBA RAO
VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government on Tuesday presented the annual budget for the financial year 2020-21 with a total outlay of ₹2.24 lakh crore, which is 1.40% less than the last year's outlay of ₹2.27 lakh crore.

The government has estimated revenue receipts at ₹1.61 lakh crore against last fiscal's revised estimate of (2019-20) ₹1.10 lakh crore. The revenue expenditure is estimated at ₹1.80 lakh crore for the current fiscal compared with ₹1.37 lakh crore in the financial year 2019-20.

Presenting the budget in the Assembly, Finance Minister Buggana Rajendranath Reddy said the capital expenditure, including loan repayments and other disbursements, was estimated at ₹44,396.54 crore. "I would urge this House to revisit our definition of capital expenditure. Consider the fact that every single paisa spent on enhancing the capacity of our citizenry to improve their opportunities in life, is

Decentralisation behind three-capital concept'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA

Decentralisation of administration is the key principle based on which legislation is in process to have three capitals, Andhra Pradesh Governor Biswa Bhusan Harichandan said on Tuesday.

Addressing the

Legislature via video link from the Raj Bhavan to mark the beginning of the Budget session of the Assembly, the Governor said that under the three-capital concept, Amaravati would be the Legislative capital, Visakhapatnam the Executive capital and Kurnool the Judicial capital.

a spending on human capital – the central theme of this budget and the core philosophy of the manifesto," he said.

The Minister said the bud-

get estimates entail an overall decrease of 1.4% over the 2019-20 estimates due to major economic slowdown during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The revenue deficit would be around ₹18,434 crore while the fiscal deficit would be around ₹48,295 crore, he said.

Test NORKs in Vande Bharat Mission flights'

Move to ensure others are not affected

STAFF REPORTER
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Kerala government has requested the Central government that COVID-19 tests should be conducted on non-resident Keralites (NORKs) travelling back home in Vande Bharat Mission flights as well as in chartered flights, Industries Minister E.P. Jayarajan has said.

He said this was to ensure that the rest of the passengers did not get affected, as the positive passengers could be arranged to return in a separate flight.

The Minister was speaking after releasing the Bamboo Corporation's environment-friendly office stationery products.

Additional flights to operate from the U.S.

Vande Bharat Mission continues despite concerns over returnees testing positive

The Vande Bharat Mission launched in May to repatriate Indians stranded abroad following the COVID-19-induced air travel restrictions will be intensified in the coming days even as some States, especially Kerala, have raised concerns over the number of positive cases among returnees.

Sources say Air India will

operate over 70 flights to various destinations in the ongoing third phase of the mission that began on June 11. The third phase will be crucial as the mission plans to eva-

<p

IN BRIEF



SC notice on insurance cover for mental illness

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday asked the government to respond to a plea challenging the exclusion of mental illness from insurance coverage. A Bench led by Justice R.F. Nariman issued notice to the Centre and the Insurance Regulatory Development Authority (IRDA) on a petition by advocate Gaurav Kumar Bansal, who argued that the exclusion violated the fundamental right to equality and non-discrimination.

CPI(M) holds nationwide protest, raises 4 demands

NEW DELHI

The CPI (M) held a nationwide protest on Tuesday, raising four demands – immediate cash transfer, free distribution of food, enhanced scope of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme and a halt to dilution of labour laws. "We can't have hunger deaths and a self-reliant India at the same time," said party general secretary Sitaram Yechury, adding that over 15 crore people had lost their jobs during the extended lockdown.

EC to refer false affidavit plaints to probe agencies

NEW DELHI

The Election Commission (EC) on Tuesday decided that it would take cognisance of complaints of false affidavits submitted by candidates and refer them to probe agencies concerned on a case-to-case basis. The decision was taken at a meeting of the Commission, comprising Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora, two Election Commissioners Ashok Lavasa and Sushil Chandra, and other senior officials.

SC issues notice to Goa Assembly Speaker

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday asked the Goa Assembly Speaker to respond to a plea filed by the opposition Congress party to decide on the disqualification proceedings against 10 legislators who joined the ruling BJP in July last year. A Bench led by Chief Justice of India S.A. Bobde issued a formal notice to the Speaker's office and the ten MLAs and asked them to reply in four weeks.

Borders of India will remain intact: Nadda

BJP chief says there is political will to give befitting reply

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

BJP president J.P. Nadda on Tuesday asserted that the borders of India "will remain intact" and "are intact" under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi. He was addressing a virtual rally for party workers in Kerala on Tuesday while making this reference to the India-China face-off in eastern Ladakh which saw casualties for the first time in over four decades.

"During the de-escalation process that was under way in the Galwan Valley in Ladakh, a violent face-off took place with the Chinese Army. The Indian Army gave a befitting reply. I pay my humble tributes to them. We now have the political will to give a befitting reply," he said.

'Unprecedented'
Other leaders of the party described the face-off as unprecedented but noted that the "picture on the Chinese side" was yet to emerge.

Party general secretary in charge of organisation B.L.



(Clockwise from top)

Havildar Palani, Sepoy K.K. Ojha and Col B. Santosh Babu killed in the face-off.

Santhosh tweeted, "The Indian forces have engaged in an unprecedented face-off with Chinese troops in Galwan Valley and Pangong Tso in Leh region. Indian efforts at building infrastructure in a never before scale increased Chinese worries. Our forces are resolute in

forcing Chinese troops to retreat. In the process yesterday, we have lost brave deshbhaktas [patriots]. Veer Sadgati to the departed souls. The picture on the Chinese side is yet to emerge. It is still more huge."

He added that "now the efforts are on to diffuse the situation holding onto our stand and continuing our road building efforts. As a country its time to stand with our forces and government. Rest everything can wait."

Other party leaders, like Rajya Sabha member Rajeev Chandrasekhar, too tweeted that it was time to stand with the armed forces in such a crisis.

Time to stand up to Chinese incursions'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Tuesday called for a strong response from the Union government to the repeated violations of Indian territory by the Chinese.

"Our soldiers are not fair game that every few days officers and men should be killed or injured defending our borders... It is time now for India to stand up to these repeated incursions that are a blatant violation of our territorial rights," he said. The Chinese actions were in violation of the treaties signed between the two countries and a brazen assault on Indian integrity, he said, urging the government to take suitable steps to send out a strong message.

India says Chinese troops tried to change status quo

Casualties 'could have been avoided' had pacts been followed, says MEA

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

ment, the talks on June 6, had been "productive" and meetings had been held "to implement the consensus reached at a higher level" on de-escalation and de-induction of troops.

Five points
At least five points in Ladakh including the Galwan Valley patrolling points, Hostings area and Pangong Tso (lake) have been identified as flash-points, and India's demands had included a return to *status quo ante*, and the retreat of Chinese troops occupying Indian patrol areas, along with tents, vehicles and equipment. "While it was our expectation that this would unfold smoothly, the Chinese side departed from the consensus to respect the Line of Actual Control (LAC)

May 5/6: Indian and Chinese troops scuffle at Pangong Tso in Ladakh resulting in injuries in large numbers on both sides. Over 70 Army personnel including a Commanding Officer injured

May 9: Clash between troops at Naku La in North Sikkim resulting in injuries on both sides

May 18: China accuses India of "trespass", building "illegal" infrastructure on LAC

May 21: MEA says Chinese troops "hindering normal patrols"

May 27: China says border situation "stable and controllable"

June 2: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh says Chinese troops present at LAC "in large numbers"

June 6: Military commanders talk on Chinese side of LAC. Identify five areas of conflict, Pangong Tso, Patrolling Point 14, 15 and 17A and Chushul

June 15/16: Twenty killed after violent face-off with PLA troops in Galwan during the "de-escalation" process

Lives and livelihoods our priority, says Modi

'Green shoots visible in Unlock 1.0'

VIJAYA SINGH
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said saving lives and reviving livelihoods should go together in India's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a pointer that opening up the economy would continue apace after weeks of the lockdown.

In the first part of his two-part videoconference with Chief Ministers (he had an interaction with 21 Chief Ministers and Lt. Governors on Tuesday), he emphasised that while green shoots were visible in the weeks since "Unlock 1.0" kicked in, strict adherence to the discipline of fighting COVID-19 by wearing masks, observing social distancing, frequent hand-washing and maintaining hygiene was important and couldn't be allowed to flag "even for a minute".

"Every life is important to us and we mourn all whom we have lost to the disease. The world has, however, also taken note of the fact that India, despite its size and complexity, has managed to keep its casualties low," he said. In the two weeks that 'Unlock 1.0' was on, certain green shoots in the economy had emerged, including increased power consumption, June figures of exports being nearly pre-COVID-19 levels, fertilizer sales being up, and a 12-13% hike in the



Narendra Modi

areas sown under kharif crops.

"In many States, where the share of horticulture, agriculture and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) is high as per their economy, there have been several decisions taken under the Aatmanirbharata [self-reliance] campaign to boost such sectors. I would ask the State government to come up with policies to handhold small enterprises and also to work with banks so that credit, available under the Aatmanirbharata campaign is available to entrepreneurs and industry," he noted.

Pinarayi Vijayan's plea
Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said the Indian embassies should facilitate COVID-19 tests for those returning to India, and the Centre should make test kits available for NRIs.

The second set of meetings will happen on Wednesday.

78 terrorists killed in J&K this year

The number belies Centre's claim that diluting Article 370 helped end terrorism



On guard: Security personnel on a patrol at the Nowgam Railway Station in Srinagar in November 2019. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

3 militants slain in Shopian

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR

Two counter-insurgency experts have expressed concern over the spurt in killings and the continued recruitment of locals in terrorist ranks.

Another official said a coherent strategy was required post Article 370. The euphoria over the number of terrorists killed would not win over the people of Kashmir, he noted.

Low recruitment
J&K Director General of Police Dilbag Singh, however, said that the number of new recruits joining terrorist ranks had been at a record low this year and the police were engaging with families and communities to wean them away from militancy.

The officer said the recent increase in encounters and operations by security forces

Opposition calls for clarity on crisis

Congress, Left parties ask how Centre proposes to meet the challenge

SANDEEP PHUKAN
NEW DELHI

Opposition parties on Tuesday asked the Narendra Modi government to tell the nation what the "actual situation" along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) was, and how it proposed to meet the challenging situation after Indian soldiers were killed on Tuesday in a violent face-off with Chinese troops on the Ladakh border.

Describing the incident as "deeply shocking, horrifying and unacceptable", the Congress questioned the government's silence.

The Left parties said the government must explain what had happened on the border, even as it advocated talks and de-escalation of the conflict.

"The nation is waiting for an official statement from the Ministry of Defence or Army HQ. Will it come tonight? The PM has maintained a worrying silence since May 5. Can you imagine any other Head of Government not saying a word for 7 weeks since the intrusion of foreign troops into a country?" asked former Union Minister P. Chidambaram in a series of tweets.



High stakes: Army personnel at a makeshift transit camp near Baltal as they prepare to head to Ladakh on Tuesday. ■ REUTERS

In a statement, Congress's chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh should break their silence on the issue.

"In the last five decades, not a single casualty or martyrdom of our soldiers has occurred or happened on Indo-China Border, that is the LAC... Will the PM and Raksha Mantri take the Nation into confidence as to how could our officer and soldiers be killed as the Chinese were reportedly withdrawing from our territory in the Galwan Valley?" Mr. Surjewala asked.

"Will the Prime Minister tell the Nation as to how the government proposes to

meet this challenging situation which has serious ramifications for India's 'National Security and Territorial Integrity'?" Mr. Surjewala added.

"We feel that both the sides have to intensify their efforts keeping in mind their core interest in achieving a mutually acceptable solution to the India-China boundary question as soon as possible," Mr. Raja said.

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Twitter said that his father and former Defence Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav had on many occasions warned the government of the "dangers and challenges from the Chinese side but it was met with indifference". "When will the government respond to this [Ladakh incident]?" he asked.

Talks imperative
"The Government of India should come out with an authoritative statement as to

area of the Galwan valley clash to defuse tensions on Tuesdays, it is unclear if further diplomatic talks are planned in the aftermath of the violent incident, where the casualty figures are expected to rise. While External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar is due to attend a meeting of Foreign Ministers of Russia, India and China (RIC grouping) on Monday, MEA officials would not confirm if the meeting will go ahead.

Speaking about talks, the MEA said India remains "firmly convinced of the need for the maintenance of peace and tranquility in the border areas and the resolution of differences through dialogue." "At the same time, we are also strongly committed to ensuring India's sovereignty and territorial integrity," the Ministry added.

by the Chinese side," it added. The MEA also said that all Indian activities were on its side of the LAC, and it expected "the same of China." While talks were held at the

MEW also said that the agreement at the higher level been scrupulously followed

unilaterally change the *status quo* there. Both sides suffered casualties that could have been avoided had the agreement at the higher level been scrupulously followed

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India ramps up testing capacity for virus

Capacity now at three lakh samples per day; ICMR nod for Rapid Antigen Detection Test in hotspots

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

India has ramped up capacity to test up to three lakh samples per day for the novel coronavirus infection, the Health Ministry said on Tuesday. The total number of samples tested so far is 59,21,069 with 1,54,935 samples tested in the last 24 hours, according to data released by the Ministry.

"A network of 907 labs has been created in the country as on date. This includes 659 labs in the government sector and 248 in the private sector," noted a Ministry release.

Advisory issued

The Health Ministry also explained that to make COVID-19 testing more affordable and increase the volume of testing without losing reliability, sensitivity and specificity, the Indian Council of Medical Research has issued



Unpleasant sensation: A woman reacts after her nasal swab was collected in New Delhi. ■ AP

an advisory on point-of-care Rapid Antigen Detection Test.

"The Rapid Antigen test may be used in containment zones and hospital settings under strict medical supervision. The Standard Q COVID-19 Ag detection kit takes 15 minutes to show results and therefore, will help in early detection of the disease. The antigen test can be

conducted at the site of sample collection in the healthcare setting within one hour of sample collection. Domestic manufacturing capacity of antigen test kits in the country currently is around 10 million in a month," the Ministry said.

To help States easily procure the Rapid Antigen test kits, the Centre is ensuring that the domestic manufac-

turers are onboarded to the Government E-Marketplace (GEM) portal, the Ministry said.

It added that in order to enhance the testing capacity in Delhi, each of the 11 districts shall now have assigned labs for exclusively testing the samples from the respective districts. "The samples from each district are being sent to these labs

to ensure timely testing and getting the results without any delay. Currently, there are 42 labs in Delhi with per day testing capacity of approx. 17,000," the Ministry said.

For frontline workers

It said that the ELISA and CLIA antibody tests can be used for asymptomatic frontline workers, doctors, paramedics etc., and for those working in COVID-19 care to boost their confidence.

Meanwhile, the Ministry in its release said Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Telangana, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh have

already started engaging with private healthcare providers to facilitate enhanced bed availability and critical care health facilities to ensure fair and transparent charges for services provided.

This comes in response to a Central Information Commission (CIC) order dated June 5, after the Ministry failed to provide the information to a Right to Information applicant.

Health Ministry Deputy Secretary Saranga Dhar Nayak has been appointed as the nodal officer to "compile, collate and consolidate" the information sought and make it available online within 15 days of the receipt of the CIC order, according to an order issued by the Ministry's RTI Cell on June 15.

There have been multiple reports of COVID-19 patients being turned away from hospital after hospital, while patients suffering from other health emergencies have been refused treatment at COVID-19 centres.

"Officers from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Directorate General of Health Services and the Indian Council of Medical Research who ought to be the concerned Public Authorities having the consolidated data appeared totally clueless and tossed the responsibility of record keeping in the present instance from one Public Authority to another," observed Chief In-

District-wise data of COVID hospitals to be put online

Move comes in response to a CIC order dated June 5

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ

NEW DELHI

How many COVID-19 hospitals are there in the country? Where are they located, what facilities do they have, and how can they be contacted? At a time when many patients have reported running from pillar to post to find a hospital which will treat and admit them, the Health Ministry has finally appointed a nodal officer to collect district-wise details and make it available online.



Guiding light: Medical staff seen directing a patient outside a COVID ward at the LNJP hospital in New Delhi. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

formation Commissioner Bimal Julta in his order.

RTI activist Venkatesh Nayak had requested district-wise details of the hospitals and healthcare facilities designated as COVID-19 treatment centres, including addresses and phone numbers, suggesting that the data could be mapped onto Google Maps to make it more user-friendly, similar to the initiative taken for COVID-19 testing centres. He also asked what was the criteria for designating them as COVID-19 treatment centres and details about the hospitals whose status as treatment centres had been withdrawn.

then where did they come from," he asked. "During the hearing, it transpired that the representatives of public authorities had no information about the source of this data that Ministers were presenting to the public and in their discussions with state governments".

"It was observed by the Commission that important decisions are being made by the Governments involving huge interventions in the healthcare and daily lives of billions of people as they seek to secure social, economic and cultural well-being of its population and uphold the rule of law," said the CIC order. "It is essential that the decisions themselves and the senior decision makers involved are thoroughly documented in order for the Governments to remain accountable both during and after the crisis for future generations to be able to learn from these actions".

U.P. Congress chief gets bail in buses case

Gujarat model exposed: Rahul

Congress leader targets the State government over high COVID mortality rate



Rahul Gandhi

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday targeted the BJP government in Gujarat over the high COVID-19 mortality rate in the State and said that the "Gujarat model has been exposed".

"Covid-19 mortality rate: Gujarat: 6.25 per cent, Maharashtra: 3.73 per cent, Rajasthan: 2.32 per cent, Punjab: 2.17 per cent, Puducherry: 1.98 per cent, Jharkhand: 0.5 per cent, Chhattisgarh: 0.35 per cent. Gujarat Model exposed," Mr. Gandhi tweeted, comparing the mortality rate of Gujarat with Con-

gress-ruled States or States where the party is part of the ruling alliance.

The Congress also tagged a news report that analysed the high death rate in Gujarat. With 24,055 positive COVID-19 cases and 1,505 deaths until June 15, the State now has the fourth highest rate of

infections in the country.

Mr. Gandhi has been attacking the BJP over the handling of the COVID pandemic and quoted renowned physicist Albert Einstein to say that "the only thing more dangerous than ignorance is arrogance". He also shared a graph that showed how the four phases of lockdown have flattened the curve of the economy instead of COVID-19 deaths.

Separately, senior Congress leader Ahmed Patel accused the Gujarat government of "drastically reducing" its healthcare expenditure over the years. "In

20 years, Gujarat is one of

the handful of States where immunisation coverage has declined. Before 2000, Gujarat was spending 4.3 per cent of its expenditure on healthcare, in 2018 it was roughly 0.72 per cent. The entire State is paying a price for a flawed model," Mr. Patel tweeted with data published in a leading think tank. The data claims that Gujarat ranks 33rd out of total 36 States and UTs in achieving full immunisation.

Earlier, Mr. Patel had questioned the higher COVID-19 testing charges of private laboratories in Ahmedabad compared with Mumbai.

BJP shifts MLAs to Jaipur hotel

They were taken for a training session'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

JAIPUR

After the ruling Congress in Rajasthan shifted its MLAs to a hotel here with allegations of attempts at poaching, the Opposition BJP sent all its legislators to another luxury hotel near Sanganer, on the outskirts of Jaipur on Tuesday, three days ahead of the Rajya Sabha elections.

The court would simply caution that the outbreak of COVID-19 calls for a unified efforts by all to curb the sufferings of people instead of ragging up issues to serve none," Justice Masoodi said.

Mr. Lallu was arrested on May 20 in Agra for protesting against the local administration's refusal to allow buses arranged by the Congress from Rajasthan to ply into U.P. to transport stranded migrant workers home.

Though he was granted interim bail by an Agra court, he was soon arrested again by the Lucknow police on charges of allegedly sending a faulty list of buses to the U.P. government and alleged forgery of documents.

party meeting and stay at the hotel had been decided much in advance. "All of us will be staying in the hotel for two days to understand the legislative subjects related to Rajya Sabha. Our stay will involve training and monitoring of progress".

The three MLAs of the BJP's alliance partner, Rashtriya Loktantrik Party, will also join the camp, while former Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje is likely to reach Jaipur a day before the Rajya Sabha polls. A rehearsal on the voting pattern will be held at the training programme.

Mr. Poonia alleged that the Congress had forcibly kept independent legislators at its camp and was putting pressure on them to vote for its candidates.

Hooda slams BJP for rallies in Haryana

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHANDIGARH

Congress leader Deepender Singh Hooda on Tuesday said the State BJP is busy celebrating the NDA government's "so called" accomplishments on the completion of one year in office while leaving people to fend for themselves.

OFFICE OF CHIEF ENGINEER (URBAN & NRW), PUBLIC HEALTH ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT, JAL BHAWAN, 2-CIVIL LINES JAIPUR, RAJASTHAN

BID NOTICE

On behalf of the governor of Rajasthan, PHED invites bids online in electronic format on website <http://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in>, from manufacturers for Procurement of ISI Marked Deep well Hand pump components conforming to IS 15500:2004 (Amended/Revised upto date) & Procurement of ISI Marked Sluice Valve conforming to IS 14846:2000 (Amended/Revised upto date) due on 01.07.2020. For details please visit website www.sppp.rajasthan.gov.in & <http://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in>.

**NIB Code: PHE2021A1146
UBN: PHE2021GLRC02072
PHE2021GLRC02073**

Contact No. : +91-9716883001

DIPR/C/4173

SOUTHERN RAILWAY

E-TENDER NOTICE NO.02-DCE-CN-IV-MDU-2020-OT

For and on behalf of The President of India, The Deputy Chief Engineer, Construction/IV/Southern Railway, Arasuradi, Madurai - 625 016 invites e-tender for the following works as per Notice Inviting Tender (NIT) in our portal www.reps.gov.in. The Tenderers/Contractors intending to apply for the tender needs to get enrolled in the portal www.reps.gov.in and only online tenders will be accepted. The Cost of the tender form and the Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) should be made through the online payment gateway available in the website by way of multiple bank's net-banking, Debit Card and Credit Card.

Name of Work: Construction of Limited use walkways in lieu of existing level crossing No.494 at km 608/000-100 between Sattirakudi and Rameswaram station, Lc No.515 at km 632/100-200 between Ramanathapuram and Uchipuli stations in MNM/RMM section and Lc No.66 at km 73/200-300 in between Ambasamudram and Kilakadavayam stations in TEN-TSI section (Balance works) vide pink book item No.231 of 2019-2020 as part of Elimination of Level crossings in Madurai Division.

Approximate Cash Value in (₹)	Earliest Money Deposit (₹)	Cost of Tender Form (₹)	Period of Completion in Months	Closing Date & Hours
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
2,06,06,983.73	2,53,000	11,200	SIX MONTHS	07.07.2020 @ 11.00 Hrs

Deputy Chief Engineer, Construction-IV, Madurai-16

SANJAY GANDHI INSTITUTE OF TRAUMA AND ORTHOPAEDICS

(Government of Karnataka Autonomous Institute)

Byrasandra, Jayanagar East, Bengaluru - 560 011 Ph: 080-26564516, 26562500 Grams: SITO Fax: 26565222 E-mail: sitodirector@gmail.com

No. SGITO-e-Tender/Indian Implants/01/2020-21 Date: 15.06.2020

TENDER NOTIFICATION (e- Procurement)

Sanjay Gandhi Institute of Trauma & Orthopaedics, Byrasandra, Jayanagar East, Bangalore - 11 invites tender from the eligible tenderers through the e-procurement portal of GOK for:

(1) INDIAN IMPLANTS

(1) The Tenderers can download the documents from: <https://eproc.karnataka.gov.in> on or after 17.06.2020 and the last date for submission of completed tenders through e-portal is 16.07.2020 upto 4.00 PM.

(2) The Tender Accepting Authority reserves the right to accept / reject or cancel tender without assigning any reason thereof.

Sd/-

Chief Administrative Officer I/c, Tender Inviting Authority

DIPR/306/2020-21

Bruhat Bangalore Mahanagara Palike

Office of the Executive Engineer, Hebbal Division, Bengaluru.

No.EE/HBL/TEND/PR/12/2020-21 Dated: 16-06-2020

INVITATION FOR SHORT TERM TENDERS (IFT)

(Two Cover System), (Through GOK e-Procurement Portal Only)

Tender for the following works on item rate basis are invited as Standard Bid Documents KW-4 by the Executive Engineer, Hebbal Division on behalf of the Commissioner, BBMP from the registered contractors of Bruhat Bangalore Mahanagara Palike or equivalent registration with CPWD/KPWD/Railways/MES or any State Govt. Organizations.

Sl. No.	Name of the work	Estimate cost (in Rs.)	EMD (in Rs.)
1.	Construction of Dialysis Centre Building above Ganganagar Maternity Home and Health Centre in Ward No.20, Ganganagar.	12400000.00	200000.00

Calendar of Events: 1). Tender Documents may be downloaded from the e-procurement portal of GOK from 18-06-2020. 2). Pre bid meeting will be held on 22-06-2020 at 3:00 p.m.. 3). Last date for uploading the filled tender documents is: 30-06-2020 upto 16:00 hrs. 4). Technical bids will be opened on: 01-07-2020 at 4:30 p.m. if possible. 5). Date of Opening of Financial bid is: 02-07-2020 at 11:00 a.m. if Possible. Further particulars can be obtained from the above office during working hours on working days or from website: <https://eproc.karnataka.gov.in>.

Sd/-, Executive Engineer, Hebbal Division, BBMP.

"Pay development charges, help to develop Bengaluru"

COVID-19

India pledges support to Nepal temple

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KATHMANDU

India has pledged to construct a ₹2.33 crore sanitation facility at the Pashupatinath temple complex here to improve the infrastructure in the holy shrine for pilgrims, according to an official statement.

The project would be constructed under the Nepal-Bharat Maitri: Development Partnership as a high impact community development scheme by India.

A Memorandum of Understanding was signed on Monday between the Indian Embassy, Nepal's Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration and the Kathmandu Metropolitan City for the construction of the facility at the Pashupatinath temple, which is a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Nepal curbs on foreign channels

News channels to lose transmission rights if they can't beam ad-free content

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE
NEW DELHI

Change in ties: A June 13 photo of people celebrating the Parliament's nod to the new map in Kathmandu. ■ AFP

Foreign news channels, including those from India, may not receive permission to air in Nepal if they fail to produce advertisement-free content.

This is part of the "clean feed" policy for foreign TV networks that the government of Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli began to activate on Monday.

The policy stems from the Advertisement (Regulation) Act-2019 endorsed by the Nepalese Parliament last winter and an official order was issued by the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology of Nepal.

Foreign TV channels will have to air content without commercial advertisements or promotional materials and campaigns. The law aims at generating more ad-

vertisements for the local channels and help domestic media and advertisement industry. Violations will attract tough penalty.

International broadcasters that refuse to produce "clean feed" content are likely to lose viewers. It is understood that the policy, which will make telecasting of foreign channels more expen-

sive, is aimed at giving greater control over them, especially those from India that are in Kathmandu's focus because of the coverage of the Kalapani territorial dispute.

'Not aimed at India'
Sources in Kathmandu insisted that the policy is not a reaction to the coverage by

Indian TV channels as Nepal has been deliberating it since 2016 but the recent acrimonious exchanges on air between Nepalese and Indian commentators is also likely to have played a role in tightening the government's control over foreign channels. Indian channels that are at present allowed to telecast into Nepal without interference will be asked to go "advertisement free" which is likely to expose them to a financial setback.

Nepalese viewers often prefer foreign news channels because of the better content, but in recent years there has been a spurt in media enterprise in the Himalayan country and the government of Mr. Oli feels that

this policy will give them access to the much-needed advertisement revenue and ta-

No rise in domestic violence cases, says NCW chairperson

"There has been only a rise in reporting of such crimes"

JAGRITI CHANDRA
NEW DELHI

Chairperson of the National Commission for Women (NCW) Rekha Sharma denied on Tuesday that there was a spurt in domestic violence in the country.

Ms. Sharma said that there was only a rise in reporting of such crimes.

Her response was to a report in *The Hindu* on a 2.5 times increase in domestic violence complaints registered by the NCW between March 25 and May 31.

'No new cases'

"The increase in domestic violence complaints shows a spike in reporting, not necessarily a rise in such incidents or crimes. We started a new WhatsApp helpline



Rekha Sharma

by the NCW were "not new cases". "Many survivors who have approached us say they have been experiencing violence at home for past several years. These are not new cases."

1,477 complaints

Between March 25 and May 31, the NCW received 1,477 complaints of domestic violence.

Nearly 727 of them were received on its WhatsApp helpline (+917217735372) set up in April to ensure women, who couldn't access emails or send complaints by post, could receive help.

The total complaints during the 68-day period were 2.5 times of the 607 of complaints received between March and May last year.

India expects to sail through UN Security Council vote

Country stands unopposed as nominee for Asia-Pacific seat; tussle between Canada, Ireland and Norway for Western group

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

India expects to sail through as the 193-member United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) votes on Wednesday for contenders to five non-permanent seats at the UN Security Council for 2021-22. India is standing unopposed as the nominee for the Asia-Pacific seat and needs two-thirds of UNGA members, or 129 votes, to be confirmed. Mexico is also unopposed in its bid for the Latin American and Caribbean seat, while there is a straight contest between Kenya and late entrant Djibouti for the African seat.

All eyes are, however, on the contest between Canada, Ireland and Norway, who are vying for the two seats allotted to the Western European and Others Group (WEOG),

with each making a pitch for India's vote.

'Not complacent'

On Friday, Norwegian Foreign Minister Ine Eriksen Soreide held a videoconference with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar. Eliciting votes for the UNSC was "one of the topics discussed" said Norwegian Ambassador Hans Jacob Frydenlund. "We count on support from a number of friendly countries. We are confident, but not complacent of securing the seat at the UNSC," he told *The Hindu* when asked if India had assured Norway its support.

Irish Ambassador to India Brendan Ward would not comment on whether India had specifically offered support. Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to his Irish



A file photo of External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar launching a brochure outlining India's priorities for the UNSC seat campaign.

counterpart Leo Varadkar on April 22, and had also met him on the sidelines of the UNGA in New York last September.

"Both Ireland and India have the advantage that neither is a member of a military alliance," Mr. Ward told

The Hindu. "India has led the Non Aligned Movement (NAM), while Ireland has a unique position as a member of the European Union that is not a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) alliance," he added, also alluding to the other

"common bond" that Mr. Varadkar is of Indian origin.

Canada in fray

While Ireland announced its candidature in 2005, and Norway in 2007, Canada has been a relatively new entrant in the fray, with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announcing its bid for the UNSC in 2016, shortly after being elected to power.

Mr. Trudeau has pitched Canada's campaign as a push for multilateralism in the post COVID-19 global recovery, and has reached out personally to many countries, including in a call with Mr. Modi on April 29, to win the vote.

In its own campaign brochure, India had highlighted its commitment to multilateralism, demand for transparency in mandates for UN peacekeeping missions, push for the Indian-led Comprehensive Convention for International Terrorism (CCIT) and joint efforts for UN reform and the expansion of the UNSC.

As a result, some have suggested that Canada's membership of the "United for Consensus" grouping that includes Pakistan, who oppose the expansion of the permanent members of the UNSC and push for more non-permanent or "elected seats", could hamper its chances of securing India's votes.

However, former UN envoy Asoke Mukerji says that the decision for India and other countries will be made by balancing "favours" each country does for others within the UN system, and not as much on ideological differences.

huge resistance, but 27 enemy tanks were destroyed under his able command, the officials said. The MVC, which Vohra received in 1972, is the country's second highest gallantry award.

In his long and illustrious career, he tenanted many prestigious appointments, including GOC-in-C Eastern Command and GOC 31 Armoured Division, the officials said.

Born in 1932 in Shimla, the veteran officer was from the pioneer course of the National Defence Academy, and was commissioned into the 14 Horse in December 1952. An alumnus of the Defence Services Staff College, Wellington, the officer fought in the Punjab sector during the Indo-Pak War of 1965, the officials said.

Shortage of banking facilities crippling Odisha's rural areas

STAFF REPORTER
BHUBANESWAR

The video of a 60-year-old woman in Odisha dragging her bedridden centenarian mother on a cot, which went viral on Sunday, highlights the problem that villagers face in accessing banks.

It has also touched upon another issue – the reluctance of many banks to open branches in rural areas and inadequate staff in the existing ones to handle rising banking demands of the villagers.

"The commercial banks are mostly urban oriented.

Except the SBI, UCO Bank, Union Bank of India, Indian Overseas Bank and Bank of India, other banks do not have sizeable presence in the rural areas," says the State Focus Paper 2020-21 of National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD).

The Regional Rural Banks, which have a good number of branches, are not in robust financial health. There were two Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) with a network of 987 branches (786 rural, 156 semi-urban and 45 urban branches.) "During

Climate report predicts hotter, rainier days

Forecasting model from IITM, Pune, says heat waves likely to be three or four times higher

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

India's first ever national forecast on the impact of global warming on the subcontinent in the coming century, expects annual rainfall to increase, along with more severe cyclones and – paradoxically – more droughts.

These projections, based on a climate forecasting model developed at the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), Pune, will be part of the next report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), expected to be ready in 2022.

From 1986-2015, the hot-



Warning bell: The forecast warns of increasing stress on natural ecosystems, agricultural output, and fresh water resources.

test day and coldest night have warmed 0.63°C and 0.4°C, respectively. By the end of the 21st century, the

report says, these temperatures are projected to rise by approximately 4.7°C and 5.5°C, respectively, relative

to the corresponding temperatures in 1976-2005. This under a hypothetical scenario where no steps are taken to curb global greenhouse gas emissions or the RCP8.5 as it is called.

Currently countries have signed an agreement to reduce emissions to restrict global temperature rise by the end of the century to less than 2°C.

The frequencies of future warm days and warm nights are projected to increase by 55% and 70%, respectively, relative to the reference period of 1976-2005. Summer heat waves over India are

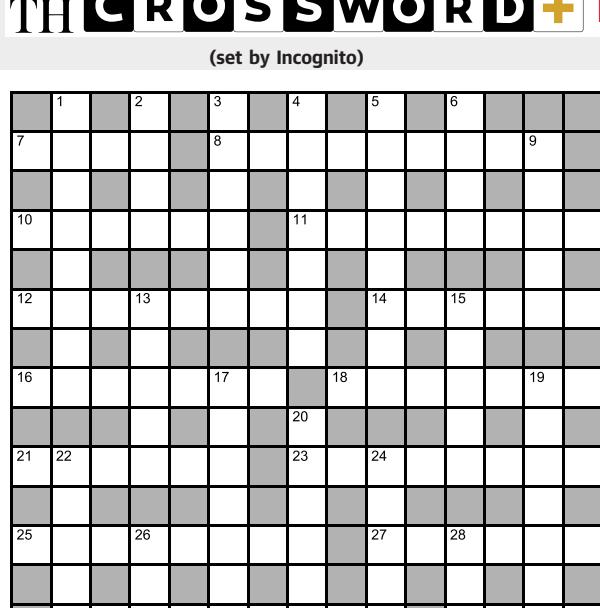
projected to be three to four times higher by the end of the 21st century.

The projected rapid changes in India's climate will place increasing stress on the country's natural ecosystems, agricultural output, and fresh water resources, the report says.

Rox Mathew Koll, Scientist at the IITM and associated with IPCC scientific report, said in a statement that an observed change of 0.7°C in average temperatures over India, had already registered a spike in extreme weather events over the region.

TH CROSSWORD + 12964
(set by Incognito)

Feeling down in lockdown?
Get across to our Crossword site.
@ <https://crossword.thehindu.com>

**ACROSS**

- 7 State: "Hello! Wearing goggles?" (4)
- 8 A lady endlessly following old teacher with energy results in a jam (9)
- 10 Old city man's pressing (6)
- 11 Dogs' conveniences? (8)
- 12 Spies valley (northern) first in Spanish city (8)

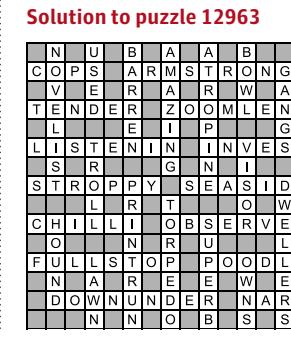
CM YK

SUDOKU

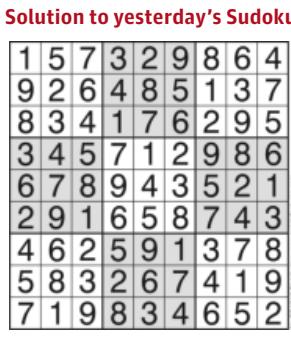


DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

Solution to puzzle 12963



Solution to yesterday's Sudoku



FAITH

Azhvars' coming foretold

Karabhanjana was one of the nava yogiswars, who answered King Nimi's questions. This conversation between Nimi and Karabhanjana finds a place in Srimad Bhagavatam, said P.T. Seshadri in a discourse. Karabhanjana describes Vishnu's forms in different yugas and explains how He was worshipped in the many yugas. Karabhanjana says that in Kali yuga, Vishnu is worshipped through nama sankirtana. Many sages who lived in Krita Yuga want to be born in Kali Yuga as Vishnu bhaktas, so that they can sing the praises of Vishnu. Nimi asks Karabhanjana, where these bhaktas will be born.

Karabhanjana says that they will be born in Dravida desa, on the banks of the Tamraparani, on the banks of the Vaigai, on the banks of the Palar and on the banks of west flowing rivers. Here it is clear that Karabhanjana was predicting the birth of the Azhvars. Periyazhvar and Andal appeared on the banks of the Vaigai; Nammazhvar and Madhurakavi on the banks of the Tamraparani; Tondaradipodi Azhvar, Tirumangai Azhvar and Thiruppanazhvar on the banks of the Cauvery; Poigai Azhvar, Bhootatazhvar, Peyazhvar and Thirumazhsai Azhvar on the banks of the Palar and Kulasekara Azhvar in the South Western region - Kerala. Thus, the appearance of the Azhvars in Tamil Nadu and Kerala was predicted in the Bhagavata Purana, and as foreseen, the Azhvars appeared on the banks of the rivers mentioned in the Purana. Karabhanjana also predicts that these devotees would not desire anything but His mercy. Every individual is born with three debts - debts to devas, rishis and one's ancestors. Hari bhaktas are released from these three debts, says Srimad Bhagavatam. King Nimi learned about Bhagavata dharma and about the worship of Vishnu from the nava yogiswars. After they advised Nimi, the nine yogis disappeared.

N. Korea blows up liaison office with South

Kim Jong-un's sister had warned that the 'useless office', opened in Sept 2018, would be taken down

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
SEOUL

North Korea blew up an inter-Korean liaison office on its side of the border on Tuesday, the South's Unification Ministry said, after days of increasingly virulent rhetoric from Pyongyang.

"North Korea blows up Kaesong Liaison Office at 14:49," the Ministry, which handles inter-Korean relations, said in a one-line alert sent to reporters.

The statement came minutes after an explosion was heard and smoke seen rising from the long-shuttered joint industrial zone in Kaesong, where the liaison office was set up less than two years ago, Yonhap news agency reported citing unspecified sources.

Its destruction came after Kim Yo-jong, the powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, said at the weekend: "Before long, a tragic scene of the useless north-south joint liaison office completely collapsed would be seen."

Analysts say Pyongyang



Tension spikes: South and North Korean officials at the opening ceremony of a joint liaison office in Kaesong on September 14, 2018; smoke rising, right, after the blast in Kaesong. ■ AFP



Tension spikes: South and North Korean officials at the opening ceremony of a joint liaison office in Kaesong on September 14, 2018; smoke rising, right, after the blast in Kaesong. ■ AFP

may be seeking to manufacture a crisis to increase pressure on Seoul while nuclear negotiations with Washington are at a standstill.

Earlier on Tuesday, North Korean state media quoted the military as saying it had been studying an "action plan" to re-enter zones that had been demilitarised under the 2018 inter-Korean pact and "turn the front line into a fortress".

South Korea's Defence Ministry called for North Korea

to abide by the 2018 agreement, under which both sides vowed to cease "all hostile acts" and dismantled a number of structures along the heavily fortified Demilitarized Zone between the countries.

Since early June, North Korea has issued a series of vitriolic condemnations of the South over activists sending anti-Pyongyang leaflets over the border – something defectors do on a regular basis.

"North Korea is frustrated that the South has failed to offer an alternative plan to revive the U.S.-North talks, let alone create a right atmosphere for the revival,"

said Cheong Seong-chang, a director of the Sejong Institute's Center for North Korean Studies. "It has concluded the South has failed as a mediator in the process."

The liaison office was opened in September 2018, days before the South's President Moon Jae-in flew to Pyongyang for his third summit with Kim.

Relations soured

Officials from both sides were stationed at the office during subsequent months, but inter-Korean relations soured following the collapse of the Hanoi summit between Mr. Kim and U.S. President Donald Trump in February last year.

Its operations were suspended in January because of the pandemic.

Since North Korea condemned the leaflet launches, Seoul's Unification Ministry has filed a police complaint against two defector groups and warned of a "thorough crackdown" against the activists. (With Reuters input)

Taiwan jets 'drive away' Chinese fighter plane

In third intrusion this week, a J-10 fighter briefly ventured into Taiwan's defence identification zone

REUTERS
TAIPEI

Taiwan Air Force jets "drove away" a Chinese fighter plane that briefly entered Taiwan's air defence identification zone on Tuesday, the Defence Ministry said, reporting the third intrusion in a week.

The single J-10 fighter aircraft was given radio warnings to leave before the Taiwanese Air Force jets ushered the intruder out of the airspace southwest of the

island, the Ministry said.

On Tuesday last week, the Ministry said several Su-30 fighters, some of China's most advanced jets, crossed into the same airspace and were also warned to leave.

On Friday, the Ministry said a Chinese Y-8, a propeller aircraft based on a Soviet-era design some of which have been retrofitted as surveillance aircraft, was warned too by Taiwan's Air Force to leave the air space, again in the southwest.

The Y-8 flight came a few hours after Taiwan said it had carried out missile tests off its eastern coast.

Military activities

Taiwan has complained that China, which claims the democratic island as its own, has stepped up military activities in recent months, menacing Taiwan even as the world deals with the coronavirus pandemic.

China has not commented publicly on the last week of

Chinese air force activity near Taiwan. Beijing routinely says such exercises are nothing unusual and are designed to show the country's determination to defend its sovereignty.

China has never renounced the use of force to bring Taiwan under its control. One of China's most senior generals last month said China would attack if there was no other way of stopping Taiwan becoming independent.

China is deeply suspicious of Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen, whom it accuses of being a separatist intent on declaring formal independence.

Ms. Tsai believes Taiwan is already an independent country called the Republic of China, its official name.

The United States has stepped up its military activities near the island too, with semi-regular naval voyages through the narrow Taiwan Strait.

+ Sri Lanka CID seizes journalist's laptop over Swiss kidnap claim

Dharisha Bastians says officials raided her house

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

A Sri Lankan journalist attached to the *The New York Times* has said police recently raided her home and seized her laptop, in connection with the alleged abduction of a Swiss Embassy staffer in Colombo last November.

On Monday, Dharisha Bastians, a correspondent for *The New York Times* and a former editor of the State-run *Sunday Observer*, tweeted a statement, saying the CID raided her home on June 9.

"Five CID officials arrived at my residence in Colombo with a warrant to search the house. The officers searched the entire house, including bedrooms, my desk and my workspace... My computer was found, seized and sealed," she said, adding

that earlier, the CID obtained her telephone call records without a court order. "As a journalist, I was horrified at the public exposure of my telephone records, which could seriously endanger and compromise my sources and contacts, then, now and in the future," she said.

In November 2019, a Swiss Embassy staffer said she was abducted, sexually harassed and threatened by unidentified men. The allegation, backed by the Swiss Embassy, sparked a diplomatic row between Bern and Colombo, with both making contradictory claims over the said incident that Sri Lanka's Human Rights Commission termed "deeply concerning".

Police earlier accused Ms. Bastians of having communicated with the Embassy staffer, who was arrested and subsequently granted bail, following the government's allegations that she had "fabricated" the abduction claim.

The journalist left the country following the November 2019 elections, in which President Gotabaya secured a resounding mandate.

In December last year, President Rajapaksa told media that the Embassy staffer must have been "compelled by some interested parties" to bring "disrepute" to him and his government.

On Tuesday, the Colombo City Magistrate ordered government analysts to examine whether any alterations had been made to Ms. Bastians's seized laptop, after her lawyers made an application to court.

The U.S. Supreme Court delivered a landmark victory for the gay and transgender communities on Monday when it ruled that employers cannot discriminate against workers because of their sexual orientation.

In a blow to the administration of President Donald Trump, the court ruled by six votes to three that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlaws discrimination against employees because of a person's sex, also covers sexual orientation and transgender status.

'Answer is clear'

"Today we must decide whether someone can be fired simply for being homosexual or transgender," the court said. "The answer is clear."

Gerald Bostock, one of the plaintiffs, said he was in "shock." "But trust me when

I say my heart is just full, I am so happy," he said.

"No one has to be fearful going to work, fearful that they could lose their job because of who they are, who they love or how they identify," Mr. Bostock said, though he noted there was still "a lot of work to be done."

Mr. Trump's administration had effectively thrown in its lot with employers, but the President later Monday

1 in 5 people globally at risk of severe COVID-19: study

11 categories of underlying conditions may increase risk

KATHERINE J. WU

In just six months, nearly 8 million people worldwide have been stricken with confirmed cases of COVID-19, and at least 4,34,000 have died. But those deaths have not been distributed evenly; among the most vulnerable are people with underlying health conditions, such as diabetes and diseases that affect the heart and lungs.

According to a new modelling study, roughly 1.7 billion people around the world – 22% of the global population – fall into that category.

The estimate, published Monday in *The Lancet Global Health*, excluded healthy older individuals without underlying health conditions, a group also known to be at risk because of their age.

Since North Korea condemned the leaflet launches, Seoul's Unification Ministry has filed a police complaint against two defector groups and warned of a "thorough crackdown" against the activists. (With Reuters input)



Emergency response: A COVID-19 patient being treated at a medical facility in Chicago, U.S. ■ NYT

Beijing in critical situation, 27 new cases from cluster

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BEIJING

Beijing's coronavirus situation is "extremely severe", a city official warned on Tuesday, as 27 new infections were reported in the Chinese capital from a cluster that has sparked a huge trace-and-test programme.

The coronavirus

resurgence – believed to have started at the city's sprawling Xinfadi wholesale food market – has prompted alarm. The new cases took the number of infections in Beijing over the past five days to 106, as authorities locked down almost 30 communities in the city and tested thousands of people.

zation – using information from the World Health Organization and health agencies in the United States and Britain.

The list includes patients who regularly take immunosuppressive drugs, such as those with autoimmune disorders, or are undergoing immunity-weakening treatments like chemotherapy.

Not all conditions have been well studied in the context of COVID-19, cautioned Dr. Loma Mody, an epidemiologist at the University of Michigan. Little is known, for instance, about the risks for people with HIV, listed in the study as a potential complicating factor.

The researchers mined data from the *Global Burden of Disease Study*, a comprehensive worldwide epidemiological survey last updated in 2017, to identify the number of individuals worldwide with at least one of these high-risk conditions. Nearly 200 countries were included in the final tally. In total, the analysis found, more than one-fifth of the world's population may be at increased risk of more severe disease.

The study also estimated that about 4% of the world's population, around 349 million people, would require hospitalisation if they became infected. ■ NYT

U.S. top court ruling backs LGBT workers

It says employers cannot discriminate against staff over their sexual orientation

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

The U.S. Supreme Court delivered a landmark victory for the gay and transgender communities on Monday when it ruled that employers cannot discriminate against workers because of their sexual orientation.

In a blow to the administration of President Donald Trump, the court ruled by six votes to three that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlaws discrimination against employees because of a person's sex, also covers sexual orientation and transgender status.

'Answer is clear'

"Today we must decide whether someone can be fired simply for being homosexual or transgender," the court said. "The answer is clear."

Gerald Bostock, one of the plaintiffs, said he was in "shock." "But trust me when



A step forward: A man waving a rainbow flag as he rides by the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington on Monday. ■ AFP

I say my heart is just full, I am so happy," he said.

"No one has to be fearful going to work, fearful that they could lose their job because of who they are, who they love or how they identify," Mr. Bostock said, though he noted there was still "a lot of work to be done."

Mr. Trump's administration had effectively thrown in its lot with employers, but the President later Monday

called the ruling "very powerful."

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights activists, as well as Democratic politicians and several major businesses, had been demanding that the court spell out that the community was protected by the law.

Protected by law

"This is a huge victory for LGBTQ equality," said James

Esseks, director of the American Civil Liberties Union's LGBTQ & HIV Project.

Joe Biden, the Democratic nominee for President, hailed the decision as "a momentous step forward for our country."

Mr. Biden was Vice-President when the court made its historic ruling in favour of same sex marriage in 2015.

Rights activists had feared that Mr. Trump's appointment of two new conservative judges to the top court could hinder further wins for their cause.

Yet it was one of them, Neil Gorsuch, who wrote the majority decision, joining with the court's four progressive-leaning judges and Chief Justice John Roberts.

The Alliance Defending Freedom, a Christian religious freedom group, said the court's decision was "truly troubling" and encroached on the religious beliefs of employers.

Israeli forces entered Ramallah before dawn," Interior Ministry spokesman Ghassan Nimir said, noting that "three houses were searched" in the city but no arrests made.

The PA is headquartered in Ramallah and the city is nominally under full Palestinian control, but the Israeli army has carried out numerous raids there.

A security source said Israeli soldiers arrested a 20-year-old man. The incursion sparked clashes between residents and Israeli soldiers, who responded to stone-throwing with tear gas, the source added.

education system is free, but coronavirus is creating a situation where only those of us who have money can continue learning," he said.

Even students with access to gadgets and a good internet connection have other problems – from the strain of reading textbooks on smart phones, to managing with fewer digital textbooks in Sinhala and Tamil, as compared to English, teachers noted.

At times, the process is very stressful for teachers and students, according to David Suren, who teaches A-level [correspondents to class 12] students at a school in central Matale city in Sri Lanka's Central Province. About half of the parents of children in his school are employed in the tea estates, braving low wages and strenuous working conditions.

Sri Lankan educators fear virus might bring about new divides

While education is free, access to technology is uneven, they worry

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

Forced to shift to online platforms due to the coronavirus pandemic, Sri Lankan educators fear that the uneven access to gadgets and internet connection among students might bring new divides in the country's free education system.

Ever since Sri Lanka reported its first local case of COVID-19 on March 10, public health authorities have been on high alert. With frontline health workers and the military leading the fight against the virus, the country went into curfew for nearly two months, simultaneously shutting its airports and ports to visitors.

English. "Most students have gone home. Many have poor or irregular signal coverage in their areas," she told *The Hindu*.

According to the Department of Census and Statistics, over 4.2 million children are in Sri Lanka's school system, while over 100,000 are in the national universities, as per UGC data. The public education system, which a majority of students goes to, does not charge a fee up to university. There is no official data on students' access to smartphones or other devices, but educators estimate it to be significantly lower compared to overall smartphone penetration.

Mobile broadband connections, often linked to smartphone usage, was over 5 million in early 2018, Sri Lankan news website Econo-

my Next reported. However, 4G coverage is not even in all parts of the country, particularly in the central hill country and smaller towns. Further, data charges are lesser during the night and early morning, compared to rates during the day.

Some students requested Mahendran Thiruvarangan, who teaches at the Department of Linguistics & English at the University of Jaffna, to hold online classes early in the morning, when mobile data is cheaper. "We may upload the readings, but students need good internet coverage to access them and attend an online class."

Poor signal</

MARKET WATCH

	16-06-2020	% CHANGE
Sensex	33,605	1.13
US Dollar	76.20	-0.22
Gold	48,414	1.07
Brent oil	40.36	4.59

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	340.80	1.05
Asian Paints	1621.70	3.50
Axis Bank	381.55	-8.05
Bajaj Auto	2718.45	-10.10
Bajaj Finserv	5128.30	24.70
Bajaj Finance	2365.00	13.60
Bharti Airtel	544.90	-5.80
BPCL	359.75	-1.25
Britannia Ind	3345.35	-11.85
Cipla	637.80	-5.85
Coal India	131.15	-0.95
Dr Reddys Lab	4005.45	-6.85
Eicher Motors	16709.05	227.10
GAIL (India)	97.50	-2.15
Grasim Ind	589.10	7.20
HCL Tech	580.90	1.95
HDFC	1821.90	70.25
HDFC Bank	990.40	40.55
Hero MotoCorp	2395.95	47.80
Hindalco	150.10	4.30
Hind Unilever	2076.35	-7.95
ICICI Bank	342.95	11.85
IndusInd Bank	481.80	-8.75
Bharti Infratech	216.00	-6.90
Infosys	701.20	13.65
Indian Oil Corp	84.85	-1.35
ITC	185.00	-2.20
JSW Steel	190.05	6.30
Kotak Bank	1276.80	27.90
L&T	895.05	-4.85
M&M	506.75	-1.40
Maruti Suzuki	5502.20	26.45
Nestle India Ltd.	16342.10	-58.20
NTPC	92.80	-0.40
ONGC	83.90	-0.20
PowerGrid Corp	167.20	-0.55
Reliance Ind	1617.70	3.15
State Bank	172.90	-0.80
Shree Cement	22111.30	-5.95
Sun Pharma	483.40	-2.40
Tata Motors	94.75	-5.75
Tata Steel	308.95	2.75
TCS	2045.80	15.90
Tech Mahindra	533.30	-15.50
Titan	958.05	9.65
UltraTech Cement	3779.95	35.15
UPL	414.25	9.25
Vedanta	103.85	1.45
Wipro	212.40	-1.40
Zee Entertainment	163.90	-1.60

EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	76.01	76.33
Euro	86.10	86.47
British Pound	96.11	96.54
Japanese Yen (100)	70.78	71.08
Chinese Yuan	10.74	10.78
Swiss Franc	80.22	80.56
Singapore Dollar	54.65	54.89
Canadian Dollar	56.04	56.28
Malaysian Ringgit	17.76	17.85
Australian Dollar	52.43	52.65

Source: Indian Bank

IN BRIEF

Hyundai gets 30,000 bookings for new Creta

CHENNAI
Hyundai Motor India Ltd. has received more than 30,000 bookings for its all new Creta since its unveiling. Diesel constituted 55% of the bookings, said the company in a statement. "We are confident that Creta will continue to lead the way back towards normalcy in automobile sales with its immense success," said Tarun Garg, director (sales, marketing and service), HMIL.

Fuel demand reaches 80-85% of pre-COVID-19 levels: Pradhan

Recovery seen following the easing of lockdown restrictions in early May

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Fuel demand has reached 80-85% of pre-COVID-19 levels in the first half of June, but returning to a 5% growth trajectory may take up to two years, Oil Minister Dharmendra Pradhan and industry leaders said on Tuesday.

Fuel sales in the world's third biggest oil consuming nation had fallen to the lowest since 2007 as the government imposed a nationwide lockdown to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

The demand, which had fallen by as much as 70%, has since recovered after restrictions were eased beginning early May.

"When compared with June 2019, petroleum product demand during the first fortnight of June rose to 80-85% of pre-COVID-19 levels," Mr. Pradhan said during a webinar. Fuel consumption



Tanking up: Fuel consumption in May was 47.4% higher than April, but 23.3% lower than a year earlier ■ K. MURALI KUMAR

at 14.65 million tonnes in May was 47.4% higher than April, but 23.3% lower than a year earlier. Diesel, the most consumed fuel, was down about 29.4% in May, while petrol sales fell 35.3%.

Between June 1 and 15, diesel demand recovered further. At 2.67 million tonnes, it was 15% lower than a year earlier, industry data showed.

Petrol sales at 930,000

tonnes was 18% lower.

ATF, whose sales slumped to almost nil as airlines suspended operations, was 73% lower in the first half of June. LPG sales were up 7% at 960,000 tonnes.

Sanjiv Singh, Chairman of Indian Oil Corp., said at the webinar that the return of growth trajectory in fuel demand would take 2 years. Prior to losing momentum in 2019-20 due to sluggish eco-

Indices rise on global cues amid border tension

Sensex, Nifty close with 1% gain each

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Equity benchmarks witnessed a volatile session on Tuesday – mirroring a strong rally in the global markets and turning jittery as the border tension between India and China escalated – before closing with gains of over 1% each.

The 30-share Sensex, which gained nearly 800 points to touch a high of 34,022 during intra-day trade, closed at 33,605.22, an increase of 376.42 points, or 1.13%.

Soon after reports came in about casualties amid Indo-China tension near the Line of Actual Control (LAC), the benchmark dipped in the red to touch a low of 32,953.30.

The broader Nifty gained 100.30 points, or 1.02%, to close at 9,914.

"Domestic market in the early trade was driven by positive global cues after U.S. Federal Reserve

ICICI Bank cuts FD rates by 15-75 bps

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Private sector lender ICICI Bank has reduced retail term deposit rates by 15 to 75 basis points (bps) across various maturities, with effect from Tuesday.

The new rate for deposits (with premature withdrawal facility) with tenure of one year to 389 days will be 5.15% for amounts less than ₹5 crore, the Mumbai-based lender said.

The deposit rate for tenure of 18 months and 1 day to two years will be 5.35%. A similar rate is offered for deposits of 2 years and 1 day to 3 years.

The rate for deposits with maturities of 3 years one day to 5 years will be 5.5%.

Senior citizens will be offered 50 bps more than the card rate, the bank said.

Most banks have been dropping deposit rates after the Reserve Bank of India cut the repo rate by 40 bps at the end of May.

Mobile, card payments topped ATM withdrawals in 2019

Mobile channel will gain more usage in pandemic, S&P says

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

said, adding that India ranked favourably among countries that built instant payment schemes, processing at least five times more transactions than the second-largest market based on an analysis of real-time payment volumes.

High growth unlikely

"High growth rates in cashless payments seen in recent years are unlikely to repeat amid an economic slowdown due to the novel coronavirus pandemic," said Sampath Sharma Nariyanur, fintech analyst at S&P Global Market Intelligence.

"However, we expect mobile payments to be more resilient and will gain a bigger lead over card payments, as their uptake will accelerate due to ongoing social distancing measures and concerns over usage of cash and plastic." The report estimated that card purchases and

ATF dearer by 16%; petrol, diesel costlier

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

'Retail fuel prices aligned with international prices'

HPCL Q4 net plummets 99% to ₹27 cr.

logical. We didn't revise the fuel prices during lockdown so now we have aligned our product prices with global product prices."

The average gross refining margins (GRMs) for the quarter stood at a negative \$1.23 per barrel, compared with \$4.51 per barrel a year earlier.

"The lockdown to contain the spread of the pandemic in India led to significant demand contraction in the last part of March 2020 necessitating regulated refinery operations," said Mr. Surana.

To enhance its overseas footprint, HPCL had tied up with State Trade Corporation of Bhutan Limited for setting up of retail outlets and supply of motor fuels in Bhutan. "HPCL also achieved highest export of lubes in current financial year," he said.

For 2019-20, HPCL has proposed a final dividend of ₹9.75 per share.

'Highest smartphone usage in India'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

India remains the region with the highest monthly data usage per smartphone, according to the Ericsson Mobility Report released on Tuesday. The total mobile data traffic is projected to triple to 21 EB (1 exabyte = 1,000 petabytes) per month in 2025.

Average monthly mobile data usage per smartphone continued to show robust growth, boosted by the rapid adoption of 4G.

"The spread of COVID-19 has prompted people all over the world to change their daily lives and, in many cases, work or study from home," Frederik Jejdling, executive vice-president and head of Networks at Ericsson, said in the report. "This has led to a rapid shift of network traffic from business to residential areas," he added.

Total mobile broadband subscriptions are set to top 1 billion by 2025.

Govt. banks disburse ₹16,031 crore to MSMEs

Disbursal part of ₹3 lakh-cr. ECLGS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The Finance Ministry on Tuesday said public sector banks have disbursed ₹16,031.39 crore till June 12, under the ₹3-lakh crore Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) for the MSME sector, adversely affected following COVID-19.

Public sector banks (PSBs) have sanctioned loans worth ₹32,049.86 crore under the 100% ECLGS for the Micro, Small & Medium Enterprise (MSME) sector beginning June 1.

The scheme is the biggest fiscal component of the ₹20-lakh crore Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan package announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman last month.

"As of 12 June 2020, #PSBs have sanctioned loans worth ₹32,049.86 crore under the 100% Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme, out of which ₹16,031.39 crore has already been disbursed," Ms. Sitharaman tweeted.

On May 21, the Cabinet had approved an additional funding of up to ₹3 lakh crore at a concessional rate of 9.25% through the ECLGS for the MSME sector.

100% guarantee

Under the scheme, 100% guarantee coverage will be provided by the National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company (NCGTC) for an

Tax dispute settlement dents NMDC's Q4 profit

Iron ore producer's net declines 76%

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD

NMDC has posted a consolidated net profit of ₹347 crore for the quarter ended March 31, 2020.

A decline of 76% compared to ₹1,451.81 crore in the year earlier period, the profit was impacted as the public sector mining major had opted to settle a dispute relating to Direct Tax under the Vivad Se Vishwas Scheme. Accordingly, ₹795 crore was paid as part of the settlement in the quarter, reducing the PAT, the company said in a statement on Tuesday. Revenue from op-

erations of the country's largest iron ore producer for the quarter was ₹3,187.34 crore, or 3

IN BRIEF



US Open can go ahead sans fans: NY Governor

The US Open will be held without fans, from August 31 to September 13, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo said on Tuesday. Cuomo said on Twitter that the United States Tennis Association will take "extraordinary precautions" to protect players and staff at the Grand Slam, including robust testing, additional cleaning and extra locker-room space. **REUTERS**

BCCI ethics officer Jain gets an extension

NEW DELHI
Former Supreme Court judge D.K. Jain will continue as BCCI's ethics officer and ombudsman after getting a one-year extension. "I resumed office last week and it is another one-year term as ethics officer and ombudsman. Considering the COVID-19 situation, I will be conducting hearings virtually," said Jain. **PTI**



Carlos' own goal helps Levante hold Sevilla

MADRID
Sevilla suffered a setback in its bid to qualify for next season's Champions League group stage as a late own goal by Diego Carlos allowed visiting Levante to grab a 1-1 draw on Monday. Julian Lopetegui's side, which sits third in LaLiga, holds a five-point lead over fifth-placed Getafe, although most of its closest rivals still have to play in this round of matches. **The results:** Levante 1 (Diego Carlos 87-0g) drew with Sevilla 1 (De Jong 46); Real Betis 2 (Canales 85-p, Tello 88) drew with Granada 2 (Carlos Fernandez 29, Soldado 90+1).

Lisbon likely to host CL final phase

GENEVA
The Champions League final is heading to Lisbon, with UEFA planning an August 23 final to cap seven broadcast nights in a 12-day span of elite European teams playing knockout soccer. The semifinals will be shared by the Stadium of Light and the nearby home stadium of Sporting Lisbon on August 18 and 19. Four quarterfinals are planned on consecutive nights from August 12 to 15. **AP**

PGA Championship to go ahead without fans

DOHA
The PGA Championship will be held in August but without fans, after California health officials on Monday gave the green light to the first major championship of 2020, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported. The tournament, scheduled for August 6-9 in San Francisco, had hoped to attract up to 40,000 fans a day at Harding Park golf course but that was before the USPGA Tour was shutdown because of the coronavirus outbreak. The PGA Championship, which is run by the PGA of America, was originally scheduled to take place in May. **AFP**

Fans told to stay away

Premier League resumes today with two games

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON

Premier League chief executive Richard Masters has warned fans to stay away from stadiums once top-flight football returns behind closed doors on Wednesday.

The Premier League resumes after a three-month hiatus with Aston Villa's home game against Sheffield United and Arsenal's trip to Manchester City.

A full programme of matches follows over the weekend, including Liverpool's potential title-clincher at Merseyside rival Everton.

There are fears some supporters will ignore social-distancing rules by congregating outside the grounds where their teams are playing.

But after talks between the league's key stakeholders and police, it was agreed not to move any of



Ready to restart: Arrangements in place at Villa Park stadium for the first match after more than three months. **AP**

the remaining 92 matches to neutral venues at present.

Aware of the scrutiny the league will be under, Masters has issued a plea to fans not to gather around stadiums during matches.

"Please stay away and en-

joy the matches at home. By turning up to the game you are putting things at jeopardy," Masters told the BBC on Tuesday.

There will be no fans allowed into any Premier League games this term.

Lending support to the hockey family

OGQ and GoSports aim to raise ₹20,00,000 via donations

NANDAKUMAR MARAR
MUMBAI

Olympic Gold Quest (OGQ) and GoSports Foundation, two non-government not-for-profit organisations working to support Olympic and Paralympic hopefuls, have teamed up to launch an initiative to raise funds for 200 most vulnerable people impacted by COVID-19 pandemic at the Indian hockey grassroots – groundstaff, coaches and young players – across the country.

Called LetsStickTogether, the aim is to raise ₹20,00,000 via donations to support people at the bottom of the hockey pyramid whose lives have been torn



Viren Rasquinha. **FILE PHOTO**

their sole source of income. For others, all other sources of family income have dried up. Sport is their only hope and that hope must be protected and kept alive."

Viren Rasquinha, OGQ CEO, said: "The aim is to raise money by July 15. Funds for first 100 beneficiaries have been collected from donors, hockey and sports followers. The disbursements have started, we need your support to help the next 100."

"COVID-19 has hurt the people at the grassroots in hockey. #LetsStickTogether is an effort by OGQ and GoSports to keep the hockey fire burning against all odds."

apart in recent months.

A statement released by the two organisations said:

"The sport involves numerous participants both on and off the field who contribute to a team's success. For many of these people, their involvement with hockey is

All England win crucial in my coaching journey: Gopi Chand

Feels that the triumph helped people trust him

S. DIPAK RAGAV
CHENNAI

National badminton coach P. Gopi Chand, in a conversation with India off-spinner R. Ashwin on the show 'DRS with Ash', gave an insight into how seamlessly he transformed from a player to coach.

"After winning the All England title, I knew what it took to triumph at the international level," Gopi Chand said.

"But I had a few injuries in 2002. I knew the formula needed to win but couldn't use it on myself. So the only way to do it was to find other kids as I didn't have the body to use it."

Trust factor

The National coach added that the All England win helped him earn the trust of the kids when he began his second innings in the sport. "The win helped people trust me. Had I not won, it would have taken time. Especially in those initial years, it was critical. Whatever I said they believed."

He explained further: "When you finish as a player,



Gopi Chand.
FILE PHOTO: VIVEK BENDRE



R. Ashwin.
FILE PHOTO: K. PICHUMANI

I knew the formula needed to win but couldn't use it on myself. So I had to find other kids

you are almost like hanging off a cliff. You need to decide how to fall. If you decide to jump off when you have the energy, you can bounce back and use that in your next career. I jumped into coaching and that gave me the energy moving forward."

Gopi Chand also highlighted the role of coaches at

different levels.

He recalled how Hamid Hussain helped him fall in love with the game when he was starting, how S.M. Arif sir brought in a sense of discipline when he was at the intermediate level, and how Prakash Padukone served as an inspiration and role model at the elite level.

With 334 species, Guwahati redefining concept of urban jungle

Assorted creatures, both big and small, share space with an estimated one million humans in Assam's principal city

RAHUL KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI

What is common to the Chinese pangolin, Nepal cricket frog, Bengal monitor lizard, Assamese cat snake, Eurasian moorhen, Asian elephant, Terai cricket frog and Ganges river dolphin?

They share space with an estimated one million humans in Guwahati, Assam's principal city and the largest in the northeast, along with 326 other species of fauna recorded so far. Very few of them are caged in the Assam State zoo that occupies 30

hectares of the 620-hectare Hengrabari Reserve Forest referred to as the city's lungs.

According to city-based wildlife biologist Jayaditya Purkayastha, Guwahati redefines the term "urban jungle" with 334 and counting free-ranging faunal species living in the green spaces within concrete structures.

The 328-sq km city and its outskirts have 18 hills, eight reserve forests, and a Ramsar site (Deepor Beel) besides the Brahmaputra flowing past its northern edge. This stretch

of the river has a few Ganges river dolphin, which has the status of 'city animal'.

"There have been reports of animals exploring human habitations during the COVID-19 lockdown. This has never been the case with Guwahati where people have co-existed with arguably the widest range of fauna despite human-animal conflicts such as the lynching of a leopard a few days ago," Mr. Purkayastha told *The Hindu*.

His specialisation in herpetology triggered the initiative of documenting urban wildlife rather than 'convention-

T20 WC plans unrealistic: CA

Eddings admits that the tournament is unlikely to go ahead

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
SYDNEY

Staging the Twenty20 World Cup in Australia this year in the midst of COVID-19 is "unrealistic", Cricket Australia (CA) chairman Earl Eddings admitted on Tuesday.

The tournament is scheduled to take place from October 18 to November 15. But with many global borders still shut, Eddings conceded that it is looking increasingly unlikely that the showpiece will go ahead.

"While it hasn't been formally called off this year, or postponed, trying to get 16 countries into Australia in the current world, where most countries are still going through COVID spiking, I think it's unrealistic, or it's going to be very, very difficult," he said.

Roberts resigns

Meanwhile, CA chief executive Kevin Roberts resigned on Tuesday after the board



Earl Eddings, CA chairman.
FILE PHOTO: V.V. KRISHNAN

an interim basis.

Roberts alone is not responsible for CA's financial woes and the culpability of the Board also needs to be fixed, said former Australian skipper Allan Border.

Border's view

"You can't just lump it all on Kevin Roberts. Surely there are other people, particularly the directors of the Australian cricket board. Where's their culpability in all of this?" asked Border.

"It was only a couple of years ago we had a couple hundred million dollars in the bank, then all of a sudden we're broke by August this year? I just can't quite work it out."

"We're in off-season, and all of a sudden we're losing money hand over fist from a very strong position just a couple of years ago."

"I just can't work out where all the money's gone," Border said.

Eight KISCEs coming up

UTHRA GANESAN
NEW DELHI

Following up on its efforts to push for greater grassroots development of sports and infrastructure, the Sports Ministry has now decided to set up Kheleo India State Centres of Excellence (KISCE) under Kheleo India.

While KISCE would be identified in every State, the first phase of the scheme will see eight State-owned facilities available in priority sports, infrastructure and past champions.

The eight centres: Sanjeev Lhadan SA (Itanagar); Jaiprakash Narayan National Youth Centre (Bengaluru); GV Raja Sr. Sec. Sports School (Thiruvananthapuram); Khuman Lampak Sports Complex (Imphal); Rajiv Gandhi Stadium (Aizawl); State Sports Academy (Kohima); Kalenga Stadium (Bhubaneshwar); Regional Sports School (Hakimpet).

94-year-old monarch wrote.

"It is so often a chance for friends, families and colleagues to gather together and enjoy a shared passion. I am sure however, that with the valiant efforts of the organisers, owners, trainers and stable staff it will remain one of Britain's finest sporting occasions and a highlight of the racing calendar."

Live telecast

The five-day event is being telecast on the Eurosport channel, between 6 p.m. and 9.30 p.m., till June 20. Eurosport is available on Tata Sky (495), Airtel (304) and Hathaway (184).

Third-time lucky for Battaash in King's Stand Stakes

ROYAL ASCOT

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON

Top sprinter Battaash (Jim Crowley astride) added one major title missing from his trophy cabinet, after finishing second in the past two editions, by winning the King's Stand Stakes, one of the two Group One races at the Royal Ascot, which got underway in crowd-free conditions on Tuesday.

Circus Maximus (Ryan Moore up) claimed the honours in the Queen Anne Stakes, the other Group One race on the opening day of the prestigious horse-racing event of the English



Champion: Jim Crowley steering Battaash to victory. **AFP**

summer. A total of 36 races have been scheduled in the programme.

Queen hails organisers

Earlier, Queen Elizabeth II, who is missing the event for

the first time in her 68-year reign, said Royal Ascot would "remain one of Britain's finest sporting occasions".

"This year Ascot will feel different for many," the

Sport needed now for a measure of normalcy



BETWEEN WICKETS

SURESH MENON

From mid-May to mid-June, India has seen a four-fold increase in the number of COVID-19 cases, and a similar rise in the number of deaths. That might be a strange way to begin a column on sport, but no discussion on any field of human endeavour now can start anywhere else. What we have learnt in the past weeks and months is this: We don't know much. Future plans are balanced precariously on this non-knowledge.

To talk of cricket at a time like this might be offensive, even blasphemous, but sport is a measure of normalcy around the world, and we must get it right. If India remain among the top COVID-19 countries, it is unlikely their players will be welcome for a cricket series.

Behind all these 'return to normal' plans, pulling the levers of sport, is television.

The West Indies team is already in England, in quarantine, getting ready to play three Tests in three weeks before empty stadiums. It is a team of 14 players and 11 reserves. England are staring at a loss of nearly \$300 million if there is no cricket this season.

Such is the keenness of the England Cricket Board to have both the West Indies and Pakistan tour that they are paying for the chartered flights on which these teams arrive. The tour fees for the reserve players too will be paid by them.

The extra players are in the team in case a substitution has to be made at short notice. The International Cricket Council has already ruled that a 'Covid substitute' may be used if a player tests positive during a match.

The IPL question

It is looking increasingly likely that the IPL will be taken out of the country – as happened in 2009 owing to Lok Sabha elections at that time – with the UAE the most likely venue. There is talk of a shorter, more focused tournament, but

ultimately COVID-19 will decide.

Not surprisingly, most people associated with the IPL, from the millionaire team owners and players to the cottage industry around the tournament (groundsmen, cobblers, souvenirs) feel confident the tournament will go ahead. Again hope, rather than realism, is the cause for this optimism.

The purely domestic scene seems to inspire less hope. How many and what tournaments are to be curtailed or dropped is a decision that can be taken only as the situation clarifies. Is it better to play a full season of the Ranji Trophy, which is the national championship, rather than a series of truncated tournaments? And that's only for our senior cricketers.

At the age-group levels, it is probably best to cancel the season. There is too the question of payment to the domestic players, for many of whom cricket is their livelihood. The BCCI treasurer said a couple of months ago that there would be no pay cuts, but will he be of the same mind a couple of months later?