



Four local terrorists killed in encounter in south Kashmir

page 9



New Zealand declares it is free of COVID-19, retains border controls

page 12



Indian economy will contract this fiscal year, says World Bank report

page 13



L-G overrules Kejriwal govt's decision to restrict treatment to residents

page 10



## NEARBY



'Maharashtra being run by circus not sarkar'

MUMBAI  
Maharashtra is witnessing a circus and not a sarkar (government), Union Defence Minister and senior BJP leader Rajnath Singh said on Monday. He was addressing a virtual Jan Samvad rally of party workers in the State. While stating that the Centre would extend all possible help to the State, Mr. Singh wondered how a government guided by NCP chief Sharad Pawar could be so directionless.

REGION ▶ PAGE 5

Unlock: long wait greets office-goers at bus stops

MUMBAI  
Long queues were seen at bus stops in many parts of the city on Monday, as private office employees were allowed to travel on buses run by the BEST Undertaking and the MSRTC after two months. With more lockdown restrictions lifted on Monday as part of the State's Mission Begin Again, several Mumbaikars stepped out to work. But in the absence of trains, commuters complained of poor frequency of buses and said they had to wait for long and change buses once or twice to reach their destination.

REGION ▶ PAGE 2

## MSME revival package yet to take off

Banks still await RBI guidelines on ₹20,000-crore equity support scheme

MANOJIT SAHA  
MUMBAI

Almost one month after Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a revival package for stressed micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), the scheme is yet to see the light of the day.

The scheme, which was to provide ₹20,000-crore equity support to stressed MSMEs and those categorised as non-performing assets, was approved by the Union Cabinet on June 1.

**Aimed at 2 lakh units**  
Under the scheme, banks were expected to provide subordinate debt to promoters of stressed MSMEs, up to 15% of their existing stake in the unit subject to a maximum of ₹75 lakh. This would have helped two lakh



**Rough winds:** An MSME unit in Chennai. The pandemic has hit such enterprises hard. ■ BIJOY GHOSH

stressed enterprises. However, the scheme has not taken off as the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is yet to issue the guidelines for it.

"This is also a kind of debt restructuring scheme which

would mean making higher provision. So, the RBI's approval is required for relaxing the higher provision requirement," a banker said.

On January 1, the RBI allowed banks to recast debt of

MSMEs which are still standard accounts on the books of the bank. Initially, the scheme was allowed till March 31 but later extended till December 31.

"I think the RBI will get involved in issuance of the guidelines. Because, ultimately you are talking about restructuring. RBI will have to come out with a detailed set of guidelines to the banks on how it could be implemented on ground," said Anil Bhardwaj, secretary-general, Federation of Indian MSMEs (FISMES).

MSME players said the move to revive the units through the subordinate debt scheme was an unique one and was a much-needed measure.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8  
'STIMULUS DIDN'T HELP' ▶ PAGE 13

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8  
'STIMULUS DIDN'T HELP' ▶ PAGE 13

MORE REPORTS ▶ PAGES 8 & 10

## Saving a heart in the midst of the lockdown

Doctors, ambulance crews raced to save a baby with rare cardiac conditions

JYOTI SHELAR  
MUMBAI

Rohit Chavan is celebrating one month of a medical miracle. At this time a month ago, doctors from two districts in Maharashtra – Sangli and Mumbai – and the State-run 108 ambulance service were working overtime to ensure that this baby born with a rare heart condition got emergency surgery.

On May 7, the baby was raced from Sangli to SRCC Children's Hospital in Mumbai in six ambulances across 380 km in 10 hours. The next morning, the infant underwent an eight-hour-long procedure to repair the complex heart defect. Today, he is recuperating well at home. The tiny patient was first diagnosed with transposition of great arteries – where the two



**Success story:** The child recovering from the complex surgery at home in Sangli, Maharashtra. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

main arteries come out from a different heart chamber or are reversed and the body doesn't get oxygenated blood. But there was a further shock: a scan revealed another severe heart condition – infracardiac total anomalous pulmonary venous connection (TAPVC). Here,

Born on March 16, Mr. Chavan's child seemed healthy at first. A few weeks later, he began turning blue. The parents rushed him to Sangli civil hospital where the first defect was diagnosed. Due to lack of facilities there, sending the baby to an advanced centre was the only option.

Dr. Laxmikant Magdum, a medical officer in Sangli said, "Sending them to Mumbai was a challenge due to the lockdown." The 108 ambulance stepped in. After negative COVID-19 tests, the parents and infant left for Mumbai.

At SRCC Hospital the baby's oxygen level was just 40%. Such cases must be operated in two weeks but this baby was near two months. "Doctors said it was nothing but a miracle," said Mr. Chavan (31), a farmer in Sangli's Karoli village.

the vessels carrying purified blood from the lungs drain through the liver. "There is only one reported case in South America with a combination of these two conditions who survived post-surgery," said cardiac surgeon Dr. Pradeep Kaushik, who operated on the baby.

## Morbid Monday for Mumbai: 64 more die as cases cross 50,000

Average of 53 deaths being reported in city every day

JYOTI SHELAR  
TANVI DESHPANDE  
MUMBAI

Mumbai on Monday recorded 64 fatalities, its highest single-day spike yet, pushing its death toll to 1,702. With 1,311 new cases, the city also crossed a grim milestone of 50,000 COVID-19 cases, taking its tally to 50,085.

The city is losing an average of 53 lives to the virus every day. Of the latest victims, 44 were men and 20 were women, while 43 had comorbidities. While the city's case fatality rate stands at 3.3%, its case growth rate has dropped to 6.4%.

Dr. Haravji reported just 12 cases, pushing its case load to 1,924. As on June 7, K East ward (Andheri East) has become the third ward to cross 3,000 cases, surpassing L ward (Kurla). Its case load

stands at 3,094. G North ward (Dadar, Mahim and Dharavi) has the highest number of cases in the city with its tally touching 3,456.

The other wards inching

close to the 3,000 mark are

F North (Matunga, Wadala) and E (Byculla). G South ward (Worli), which had the

highest cases till last month, has slipped to the 10th spot.

N ward (Ghatkopar) overtaken it with 2,437 cases. P North ward continues to record the highest case growth rate at 6.4%.

A BMC official said, "Doc-

tors will guide patients. Healthcare workers will visit moderate to highly symptomatic patients, examine them and help them get admitted to hospitals."

The official added that beds will be allocated at the

nearest facilities.

**₹50 lakh compensation**

The BMC has decided to provide ₹50 lakh as compensation to the kin of employees

who succumb to COVID-19

on duty.

The scheme will come into force retrospectively from

March 1 and will be in effect

up to September 30. It cov-

ers contractual staff and those receiving honorarium.

BMC has said the employee should have been on duty at least two weeks before being admitted to hospital for treatment.

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**

MUMBAI

The country's largest lender, State Bank of India (SBI), has reduced the marginal cost of fund-based lending rate (MCLR) by 25 bps across all tenors. The one-year MCLR will fall to 7% from 7.25% with effect from June 10.

"This is the 13th consecutive reduction in bank's MCLR," the SBI said.

The external benchmark-linked (EBR) lending rate will now be 6.65% from July 1, as compared to 7.05% now. The Repo-linked lending rate (RLLR) was reduced to 6.25% from 6.65% from June 1. "Consequently, EMIs on eligible home loan accounts linked to MCLR will get cheaper by approximately ₹421 and those linked to EBR/RLLR will get cheaper by around ₹660, for a 30-year loan of ₹25 lakh," the SBI said.

## To market



**Inter-State commerce:** People of West Khasi Hill district in Meghalaya crossing a hanging bridge across the Sri river to a market in Kamrup (Rural) district of Assam. The market, which reopened on Monday, is a lifeline for people from remote villages. ■ RITU RAJ KONWAR

Home loans get cheaper as SBI cuts rates

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**

MUMBAI

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# On day 1 of commute, long wait greets office-goers at bus stops

BEST increase frequency of buses after more than anticipated demand; physical distancing norms ignored as passengers scramble to grab limited seats

AJEEET MAHALE

MUMBAI

Long queues were seen at bus stops in many parts of the city on Monday, as private office employees were allowed to travel on buses run by the Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) Undertaking and the Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) after two months.

With more lockdown restrictions lifted on Monday as part of the State government's Mission Begin Again, several Mumbaiites stepped out to work. But commuters complained of poor frequency of buses and said they had to wait at least 30 minutes for a ride. Many had to change buses once or twice to reach their destination.

Umesh Bhagatkar, who works in a bank at Nariman Point, said he needed to change buses at Goregaon during his commute from Bhayandar. "The waiting time today was a lot more and there was also more traffic. At Goregaon, I had to wait for nearly an hour before a bus came. It took nearly three hours to reach office," he said.

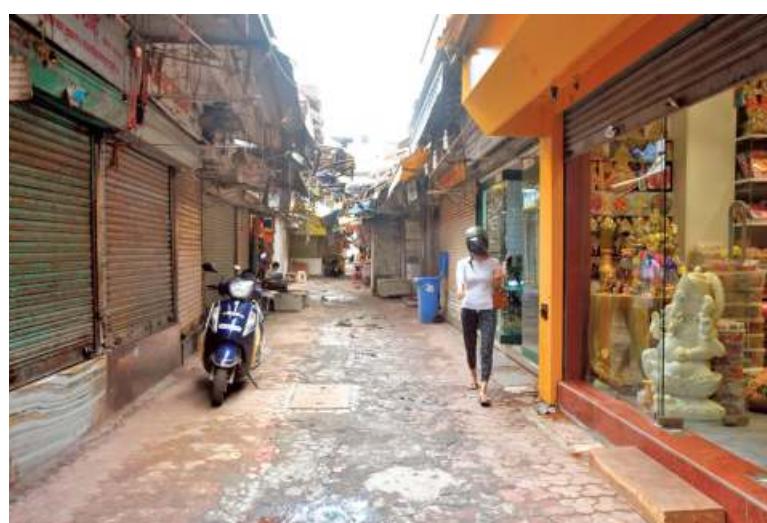
BEST officials said they increased the frequency of buses as soon as they realised the demand was more than they had anticipated.

As of 8 a.m. the BEST had sent out 1,778 buses as against the pre-lockdown schedule of 2,514 buses. By 10 a.m., as many as 2,132 buses were put into operation, however the number dropped to 1,711 by 6 p.m.

#### Staff shortage at BEST

Sources said the BEST is facing a staff crunch and has issued a circular stating that 100% attendance is expected from Tuesday.

The BEST had added around 250 trips to key long



**The new normal:** (Clockwise from top left) Commuters rush to board BEST and MSRTC buses outside Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus on Monday; housekeeping staff sanitise the premises of Viviana Mall in Thane, where only essential shops like Big Bazaar and DMart were open; Shops open on one side of the road at Natraj Market at Malad (West) and in Bhuleshwar in south Mumbai. ■ EMMANUEL YOGINI ■ VIBHAW BIRWATKAR ■ ARUNANGSU ROY CHOWDHURY ■ VIVEK BENDRE

routes to compensate for the Mumbai suburban train operations being closed. However, this failed to mitigate the issues faced by travellers.

In many areas, passengers jostled for the limited number of seats available. "The responsibility of maintaining physical distancing falls on us, and commuters often

fight with us when we ask them to get down," a BEST conductor said on condition of anonymity. He said there was often no option but to ferry more people than was stipulated as commuters would not relent.

The BEST has stipulated only one person on each seat and five passengers to be

standing. Passengers who couldn't board from originating stops had to wait even longer, as buses running with full seating and standing capacity did not stop unless a passenger wished to get down.

Gatakala Bhanya, who works at Grant Road, said it took her two hours in the

morning to reach from Lower Parel to Opera House. "They should just start the trains if the passengers have increased," she said.

#### Chaos, confusion

At 5 p.m., there was a large crowd outside the Mantralaya bus stop as employees from the Secretariat scram-

bled to get a seat in the first bus to leave. One employee said since the buses were for far-off areas like Shahpur and Nallasopara, everyone tried to get into the first bus so as to reach faster.

Most buses did not bear the destination names, leaving commuters searching frantically for the right bus.

like crockery, toys, hardware, electrical fittings, kitchenware, rain wear, items for newborn babies, and house repair articles, besides groceries.

#### Travel troubles

Mr. Shah said many staff members couldn't turn up on day one because of issues with public transport. Shops opened in a confused manner — many opened on both sides of the road, and the police and Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation had to send their personnel to ensure the alternate days formula was followed.

He demanded that guidelines for shops be revised to extend business hours. "They said full day, but timing given was 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., except on representation by Dadar traders where the Dadar West G North ward office gave them permission to function till 8 p.m. We would like to operate between 11 a.m. and 8 p.m. as it will help business grow," he said.

The markets of Bhuleshwar, Zaveri Bazaar and around Crawford Market in south Mumbai, Natraj Market in Malad, and markets in Andheri and Borivali, were all open, despite confusion over the norms of opening stores only on one side of the road.

#### COVID-19 precautions

"Around 3.5 lakh shops in Mumbai and 15 lakh shops all over Maharashtra were open on Monday after duly sanitising the premises over the weekend," said Viren Shah, president of the Federation of Retail Traders Welfare Association (FRTWA).

Retailers said customers came in only for purchase of day-to-day necessities

Mantralaya and other government offices reported a 15% staff turnout. Temples, mosques, churches and other places of worship remained shut across the State, along with malls and multiplexes. Restaurants around office complexes were open for takeaways, though most people preferred to carry their own food.

## Outfit destroys Chinese products

### Three arrested for shooting dead civil contractor in Ghansoli

One of them had a business rivalry with victim, say police

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

PUNE

Amid the Sino-India border stand-off, members of the Akhil Bhartiya Brahman Mahasangh on Monday destroyed Chinese products in Pune and called for a ban on import of items from the neighbouring country. Members of gathered at the Savarkar Smarak on Karve Road and destroyed smartphones and other items presumably manufactured by Chinese companies by banging them on the road. They also threw the Chinese flag on the ground.

#### Timings MUMBAI

TUESDAY, JUN. 09	
RISE 06:01	SET 19:16
RISE 22:45	SET 09:11
WEDNESDAY, JUN. 10	
RISE 06:01	SET 19:16
RISE 23:30	SET 10:07
THURSDAY, JUN. 11	
RISE 06:01	SET 19:16
RISE 00:00	SET 11:02

RAINA ASSAINAR  
NAVI MUMBAI

The Rabale police arrested three people on Monday for the murder of a civil contractor in Ghansoli last week.

Jayesh Lalchand Patil (37) from Ghansoli, Santosh Rajendra Dora alias Guddu (22) from Odisha, and Devendra Hiraman Mali (22) from Dhule allegedly shot dead Praveen Tayade (35) at point blank range on June 4.

"Mr. Patil had a business rivalry with Tayade. Both supplied construction material and took civil contracts in the area. Lately, Tayade was getting more contracts," Deputy Commissioner of Police, Zone I, Pankaj Dahané said.

**The crime**  
On June 4, Tayade and his friend Dattatreya Joggand (35) were heading home on Tayade's bike from a construction site near Gao Devi

temple in Ghansoli. Mr. Dora and Mr. Mali reached there and fired shots at them.

While Mr. Dora hit Tayade from a point blank range, the round shot by Mr. Mali did not hurt anyone. Mr. Joggand fell on the road as the bike skidded. Mr. Patil, who was waiting nearby in a car, drove to the spot to pick up his accomplices. He tried to run over Mr. Joggand, who fractured his hand as a result. The trio fled the spot.

**On the run**  
The next day, the car was found abandoned at Koparkhairane. "The car belonged to Mr. Patil's brother, but was used by Mr. Patil," senior police inspector Yogesh Gawade from Rabale police station said.

The accused fled to Thane and then to Kalyan, till they exhausted the money they had with them. The police learnt that they were to

come near National Institute of Fashion Technology in Kharhgar to get money from someone early on Monday, and laid a trap there.

**Nabbed**  
"When Mr. Patil and Mr. Dora reached there on a bike, we nabbed them. During interrogation, they revealed the name of their third accomplice, following which he too was arrested," police inspector (crime) Giridhar Gore said.

Mr. Dora and Mr. Mali work as office boys and the police suspect Mr. Patil hired them as contract killers. The police are also investigating who gave them the tip about where to find Tayade and from where they got the firearms. The police have seized the car, the bike, two 7.65 mm pistols, and six live cartridges from the accused. The trio has been remanded in police custody till June 15.

"With a curtailed staff and constant inquiries by passengers

## Airport tackles 12,000 calls in two months

Team members work round the clock, some even from home, to help passengers

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI

When will the pandemic come to an end? Can air passengers travel with a newborn baby? Will the Mumbai airport staff be able to identify if passengers are senior citizens and will they be stopped from travelling? These were some of the unusual queries raised by passengers during 12,000 phone calls to the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA) over the last two months.

As a fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, staff at the airport handled several questions from anxious passengers fearing for their safety. The most commonly asked questions were about information related to flights, quarantine rules for domestic and international passengers, e-pass requirements, refunds from airlines and resumption of international operations.

"With a curtailed staff and constant inquiries by passengers



**Safe travel:** Airline staff guide domestic passengers at Terminal 2 of Mumbai airport. ■ FILE PHOTO

on defusing tension and making passengers feel more secure about their journey. The team devised a plan to address the incoming queries on topics like flight operations, safety of passengers, COVID-19-related queries, and details of medical help offered by the airport, the spokesperson said.

The ACC team members were trained to adapt to the circumstances and address queries with patience and optimism. They were guided

on defusing tension and making passengers feel more secure about their journey. The team devised a plan to address the incoming queries on topics like flight operations, safety of passengers, COVID-19-related queries, and details of medical help offered by the airport, the spokesperson said.

The team prepared a roster to ensure round-the-clock availability for passengers, with each member attending calls for six hours

across various time bands. Incoming calls were even transferred to the ACC personnel working from home. Necessary data and a set of frequently asked questions were provided to these team members.

"The team also worked closely with all stakeholders of the airport to stay constantly updated on the latest news, particularly data related to flight operations around repatriation and cargo flights," the spokesperson said. The ACC teams catered to calls from across India, and not only from passengers, but also from municipal authorities and activists.

The team used various scripts for public announcements in English, Hindi and Marathi through their cellular devices from home. These scripts were devised to have a warm and friendly tone to make wary passengers, who were travelling for the first time after flight operations resumed, feel comfortable and safe.

## Rainy week likely for Mumbai, neighbouring areas as monsoon approaches

In Pune district, no visitors permitted near dams this rainy season

TANVI DESHPANDE  
SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE  
MUMBAI/PUNE

Conditions have become favourable for the onset of monsoon in south Konkan in the next two days, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has said. The department has forecast rain and thundershowers in Mumbai, Thane, Palghar and Raigad from Wednesday to Friday.

Monsoon has advanced into more parts of the country, and is likely to arrive in Mumbai on June 11. On Monday,

IMD Mumbai said: "Conditions are becoming favourable for the further onset of monsoon into some parts of Konkan in next two days." This means monsoon will most likely reach south Konkan, which consists of Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg, by June 10. Mumbai falls in the north Konkan region.

The IMD has forecast rain for most parts of the State this week. It has issued a yellow alert for Palghar, Thane, Raigad and Mumbai from Wednesday to Friday. These four districts are likely to get "thunderstorm accompanied with lightning and gusty winds with speed reaching 30-40 kmph at isolated places," during this period.

There is an orange alert



**Looming low:** Rain clouds gather over Mumbai's skyline on Monday. ■ VIVEK BENDRE

(very heavy rain) for Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg for Friday.

Private forecaster Skymet Weather has said onset of monsoon in Mumbai will be around June 14. As the rains approach,

degrees Celsius, five degrees below normal.

**Staying safe**  
In Pune district, as a precautionary measure in wake of the approaching monsoon and the COVID-19 pandemic, the district administration has prohibited entry of visitors and tourists to dams and other scenic spots.

Issuing a directive in this regard on Monday, District Collector Naval Kishore Ram warned that an FIR would be lodged under Section 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) of the Indian Penal Code against any person found violating this order.

Stating that a number of people have drowned in dam

waters at popular spots like Bhushi dam in Lonavala in recent years, Mr. Ram said the order is aimed at deterring reckless visitors congregating for monsoon picnics at these places.

"Entry has been restricted to the Bhushi dam in Maval taluka, Mulshi dam and Tamhini ghat [in Mulshi taluka], Malshej ghat in Junnar tehsil, Bhimashankar in Ambegaon, Panshet dam in Velhe and other areas in the district," Mr. Ram said.

These areas receive extremely heavy rainfall during the monsoon every year, with people flocking to these spots every weekend.

"Given incessant showers during the rainy season in the dam area, the water level

rises suddenly owing to discharge of excess water. However, many tourists, oblivious to any danger, continue to gather in these places. There have been a number of unfortunate accidents in the past and hence we have prohibited any visitors to these spots this year," the District Collector said.

He said the prevalence of the novel coronavirus was another factor in issuing the directive as there was the danger of a sudden rush of people gathering to these places once lockdown regulations are relaxed.

These restrictions, however, are only for tourists. "There is no restriction on people visiting these tehsils for work purposes," he said.

**Mumbai Weather** max min  
Mumbai Airport 32 22  
Pune 31 22  
Mumbai City 32 22

**Mumbai Today**  
34°C Rain is expected to occur over many parts of the city. A cloudy sky is expected. Gusty breeze would prevail.

**Mumbai Tomorrow**  
33°C Day will be warm with a cloudy sky. Moderate spells or rain and thundershower to continue with some breeze.

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**THE HINDU**  
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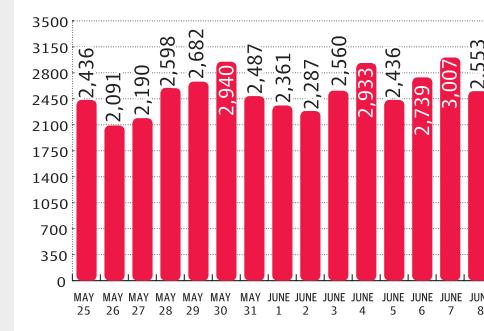
**Maharashtra COVID-19 tracker**

TOTAL CASES	NEW CASES	ACTIVE CASES	RECOVERED	DEATHS
88,528	2,553	44,374	40,975	3,169

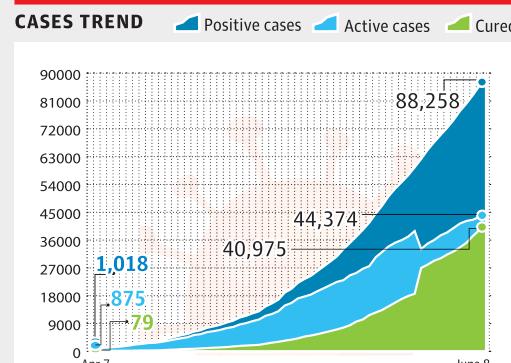
**DISTRICTS AFFECTED: 35**

DISTRICT	CASES	DEATHS	DISTRICT	CASES	DEATHS
Mumbai	50,085	1,702	Jalna	208	5
Thane	13,528	336	Yavatmal	163	2
Pune	9,877	413	Nanded	170	8
Aurangabad	2,036	100	Sangli	170	4
Nashik	1,592	91	Latur	138	4
Raigad	1,461	55	Osmanabad	125	3
Palghar	1,567	41	Sindhudurg	113	0
Solapur	1,419	110	Buldhana	95	3
Jalgaon	1,081	115	Parbhani	78	3
Nagpur	761	11	Gondia	68	0
Akola	834	36	Beed	56	1
Kolhapur	648	8	Gadchiroli	44	0
Satara	640	27	Nandurbar	40	4
Ratnagiri	371	13	Bhandara	41	0
Anravati	299	18	Chandrapur	42	0
Hingoli	214	0	Wardha	11	1
Dhule	261	25	Washim	10	2
Ahmednagar	208	9			

**POSITIVE CASES OVER LAST 15 DAYS**

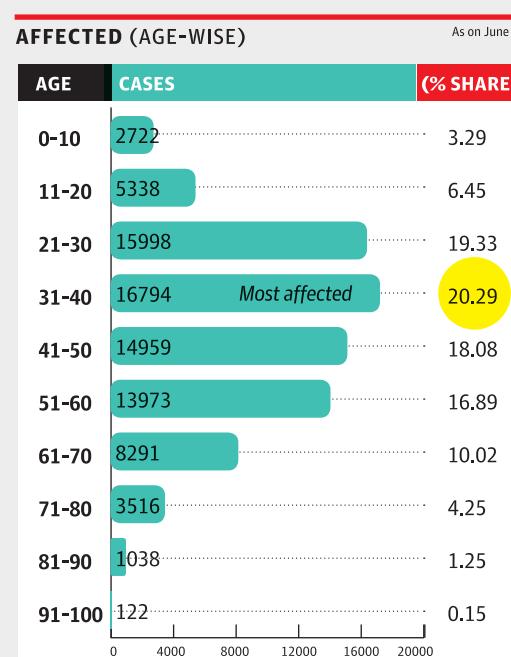


1,311 (51.35%) of Monday's cases are from Mumbai



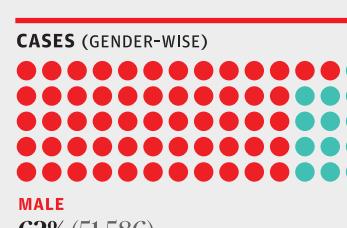
**MORTALITY RATE**

Maharashtra 3.59%  
India 2.79%



**QUARANTINE NUMBERS**

5,64,736 | 26,760



69% of deaths due to co-morbidities

**HELPLINE NUMBERS**

Toll free number: 104/1075  
Maharashtra: 020-26127394  
National: 1075/1800-112-545/011-23978046  
State helpline email id: ssu@maharashtra@gmail.com

**CITY-WISE HELPLINE NUMBERS**

Mumbai city: 022 22664232 | Palghar: 0252 297474  
Mumbai suburbs: 022 26556799 / 26556806 | Raigad: 02141 222118  
Thane: 022 25301740 | Ratnagiri: 02352 226248  
Sindhudurg: 02362 228847

Source: Public Health Department, Maharashtra, BMC

# State tally nears 90,000 mark

109 more fatalities push death toll to 3,169; number of recoveries rises to 40,975

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE  
PUNE

There was no let-up in Maharashtra's COVID-19 cases as the State reported another big surge of 2,553 cases on Monday, taking its tally to 88,528. The State also reported 109 more fatalities, pushing its death toll to 3,169.

As per the State Health Department figures, only 44,374 of the total cases are active. As many as 1,661 patients were discharged on Monday, taking the number of recoveries to 40,975.

**Recovery rate improves**

State Surveillance Officer Dr. Pradeep Awate said the State's recovery rate has increased to 46.28%, while its case fatality rate stands at 3.57%. Eight deaths were from reported from Aurangabad in the Marathwada region, taking the district's death count to 100. Seven deaths were reported from Pune, pushing the district's toll to 413. However, Pune district authorities said the toll had already risen to 420.

Similarly, Solapur district in Pune division reported six deaths to take its total toll to 110, while Pune Divisional authorities said the district's toll had already climbed to 115. Jalgaon, which along



**Safety check:** Healthcare workers check the temperature of an elderly woman at V.K. Wadi in Dharavi, which reported 12 new cases on Monday. ■ VIJAY BATE

with Nashik is turning out to be another hotspot in north Maharashtra, reported six deaths, pushing its toll to 115.

**'72.5% had co-morbidities'**

Deaths were also reported from other districts like Nanded, Nashik and Ratnagiri. Dr. Awate said, "Of the total deaths reported on Monday, 32 occurred in the last couple of days, while the remaining took place between May 3 and June 5. 72.5% of the victims had high-risk co-

morbidities such as diabetes, hypertension, and asthma."

Pune district's tally, as per the State Health department figures, has reached 9,877, with the district reporting a spike of over 180 new cases. The surge in cases in Thane in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region continued, with 209 new cases taking the district's case load to 6,257.

Navi Mumbai also reported a spike of more than 106 cases as its cumulative cases reached 3,590. "Till date, of

a total of 5,64,331 laboratory samples, 88,528 (15.68%) have tested positive, with almost 13,000 samples across the State being tested on Monday," Dr. Awate said.

**3,510 containment zones**

He said, at present, 5,64,736 people across the State are in home quarantine, while 26,760 are in institutional quarantine facilities. Currently, there are 3,510 active containment zones in the State, Dr. Awate said.

114 new cases in Pune; death toll rises to 420

Closure of grocery, medical stores leads to unrest in Pimpri-Chinchwad

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE  
PUNE

Pune district recorded 114 new cases of COVID-19 on Monday, pushing its tally to 9,651. The district also recorded five more fatalities, taking its death toll to 420. Authorities said the latest cases were reported from across the district, including Pimpri-Chinchwad and Pune Rural.

Unrest prevailed briefly in Pimpri-Chinchwad's Anandnagar slum cluster, a containment zone, with angry residents complaining of not being able to move out and denied access to essentials. The residents started pelting stones at police personnel, prompting a mild lathi charge.

Authorities relented and permitted the opening of four grocery stores and one medical shop. The authorities had shut down grocery shops and medical stores to prevent mass gatherings after Pimpri-Chinchwad recorded 50 new cases on Sunday. Though over 1,500 food packets are being distributed daily, residents alleged that they had no access to foodgrains.

Pune Divisional Commissioner Dr. Deepak Mhaisekar said there are only 3,178 active ones, and 6,053 patients have been discharged so far, taking the district's recovery rate to 62.72%.

Dr. Mhaisekar said the total death toll in Pune divisional stands at six.

As many as 7,566 patients in these five districts have been discharged

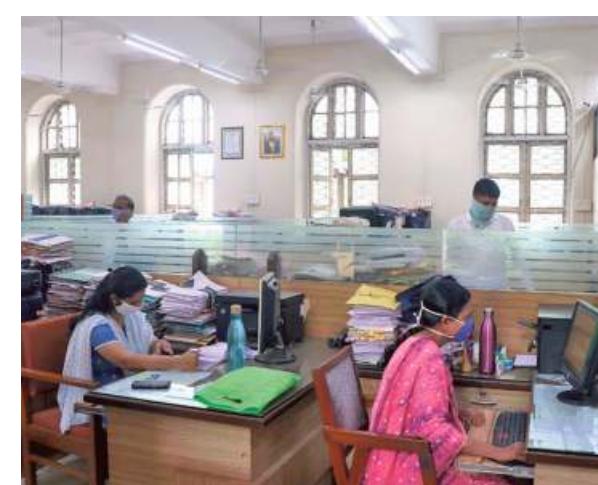
DR. DEEPAK MHAISEKAR  
PUNE DIVISIONAL COMMISSIONER

Dr. Mhaisekar said, "Of Solapur's total cases, 514 are active, while 666 patients have been discharged. Satara, however, reported two deaths, taking its death toll to 28. Ten new cases were reported, pushing the district's tally to 631. Of them, 272 are active, while 331 patients have recovered."

Kolhapur district reported 15 new cases, pushing its case load to 680. The district's active cases stand at 245, while 426 patients have recovered from the virus. The district has reported eight deaths so far.

**Surge in Sangli**

Sangli, which has not been reporting a significant rise in cases, saw a surge of 19 cases on Monday, pushing its tally to 161. Of them, 65 are active, while 90 patients have been discharged so far. The death toll in the district stands at six.



**Back to work:** Offices resumed operations in Pune on Monday with 10% of staff reporting for duty. ■ JIGNESH MISTRY

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# Maharashtra seeing a circus, not a sarkaar: Rajnath Singh

Defence Minister says U.P., Karnataka fared better in fight against COVID-19

ALOK DESHPANDE  
MUMBAI

Maharashtra is witnessing a circus and not a sarkaar (government), Union Defence Minister and senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Rajnath Singh said on Monday. He was addressing a virtual Jan Samvad rally of party workers in the State.

While stating that the Centre would extend all possible help to the State in its fight against COVID-19 and relief measures to recover from cyclone Nisarga, Mr. Singh wondered how could a government guided by Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) chief Sharad Pawar be so directionless.

"Maharashtra, and in that Mumbai, is among the worst affected due to COVID-19. I watch news about non-availability of ambulances to patients, bodies in hospital and such. Some-



Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh attends the 'Maharashtra Jan Samvad' rally via videoconferencing, in New Delhi on Monday. ■ PTI

taka higher than Maharashtra in their fight against COVID-19, Mr. Singh said the States had still managed to control the spread of the virus. Mr. Singh also pointed out that the ruling party was instead criticising people like actor Sonu Sood, who has been helping migrant workers.

"It seems Maharashtra has circus in the name of sarkaar (government). It has no vision for development," said the Union Minister, launching an attack on the BJP's former ally, Shiv Sena.

"The Sena fought the election with the BJP and betrayed us after the polls because of its greed for power. People wanted Devendra Fadnavis as CM but the Sena's selfish motives overpowered people's will. Is this the party late Balasaheb Thackeray founded?" he asked. Mr. Singh finally said

despite all this, the Central government led by the BJP would help the State.

The minister also attacked the Congress, saying power without responsibility was a nature of the party. "How can Rahul Gandhi say that his party has no say in decisions? They should run the government in coordination at least in difficult times. The Congress is so directionless that it could not even become main opposition party in the Lok Sabha in 2019," he taunted.

Earlier in his speech, Mr. Singh claimed that India's economy in 2019 stands improved as compared to that in 2013. "Under the UPA government, the country's economy stood at ninth position and today we are fifth in the world. We are the world's fastest growing economy and the world accepts it."

times I feel there is no government in the State. What is happening?" he asked.

The Defence Minister expressed disbelief over the fact that a government comprising three parties, with a former CM in the Cabinet, is so directionless.

Ranking U.P. and Karna-

ataka

deep R. Pasbola, member of the Bar Council of Maharashtra and Goa.

#### Personal safety

Mr. Pasbola had to request the principal judge to come down and take stock of the situation. The judge asked the advocates not to create a rush, saying it is in their interest and personal safety to not do so. The advocates were also informed that only urgent matters would be taken up, and all other matters on board would be automatically adjourned.

Bar associations ex-

pressed apprehension at advocates appearing for hearings.

"The current circular of opening of the honourable courts for physical appearance of advocates has come as a shock to most of them," read a letter to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate from Dilip Gundecha, president of the Esplanade CMM Bar Association. "Many of the advocates are afraid of risking their lives and in principle are not inclined to attend the physical courts in the present period of the COVID-19 pandemic."

In case it is decided to reopen the courts, a suitable direction should be issued so that advocates who may not want to appear are not forced to do so, either by way of coercive action, passing of an adverse order either *suo moto* or at the instance of the other side, the letter said.

Many lawyers said they would not go to court at least till the end of this month.

"With cramped spaces in courts that are already short on infrastructure, it would be implausible to follow physical distancing guidelines," said advocate Harsh-

## Cyclone impact: all roads cleared in Raigad district

One of injured succumbs, taking toll to 5

RAINA ASSAINAR  
NAVI MUMBAI

mainly from Shrivardhan, Murud, Mhasla, Mangaon, Tala and Alibaug talukas."

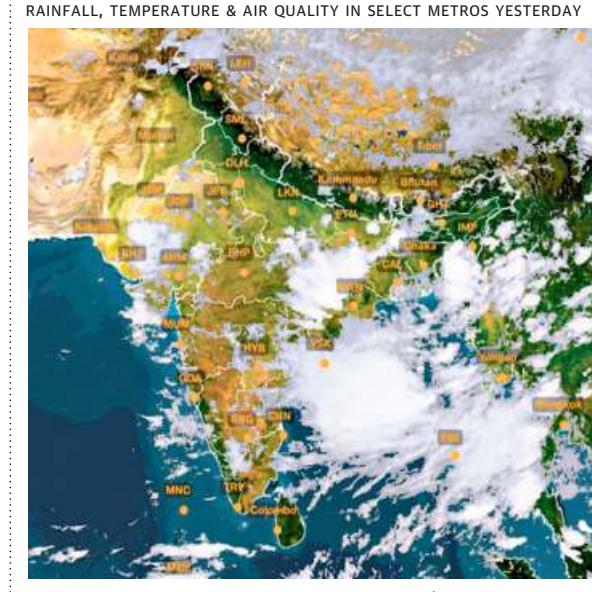
Vehicle-mounted generators are being sent to the villages which are still in the dark. "The generators are being used to pump water and also to charge inverters at residences," the Collector said. Trees have fallen onto wadis and residential compounds causing extensive damage, Ms. Choudhari said, urging people to be alert as many trees would have become weak and might collapse.

Meanwhile, the number of deaths has increased to five after one of the six injured succumbed during treatment. The latest victim, a man from Pen, had come beneath an electrical pole and received head injuries.

"The roads connecting all the 1,905 villages have been cleared and the National Disaster Response Force teams have been withdrawn. By Sunday, we could travel to all the villages without any hurdle. However, work is under way in small gallis in some of the villages," Ms. Choudhari told *The Hindu*.

Electricity to 785 villages has been restored till now, she said. "The villages where power is yet to return are

#### WEATHER WATCH



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

**Forecast for Tuesday:** Heavy rainfall likely at isolated places over Odisha, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, coastal Andhra Pradesh, Yanam, Mahe, Kerala, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	8.4	30.0	23.2	Kozhikode	14.2	33.8	23.0
Ahmedabad	19.8	36.8	22.6	Kurnool	—	37.0	27.4
Aizawl	—	24.3	18.8	Lucknow	—	38.4	25.6
Allahabad	—	39.9	27.5	Madurai	—	39.2	27.5
Bengaluru	0.7	36.0	24.0	Mangaluru	3.1	32.0	22.9
Bhopal	—	36.0	26.4	Mumbai	73.2	31.8	23.1
Chandigarh	—	35.7	23.8	Mysuru	5.1	31.0	22.0
Chennai	—	39.7	29.0	New Delhi	5.6	37.6	25.2
Coimbatore	—	33.6	22.8	Patna	—	36.8	26.4
Dehradun	29.9	34.2	22.1	Port Blair	17.7	29.0	24.0
Gangtok	0.2	23.2	16.3	Puducherry	—	40.4	28.2
Goa	20	32.4	22.0	Pune	—	32.7	23.4
Guwahati	0.1	35.5	25.0	Raipur	6.8	38.8	23.6
Hubballi	—	31.0	22.8	Ranchi	1	35.2	24.3
Hyderabad	—	37.5	26.6	Shillong	0.2	22.8	—
Imphal	0.2	30.8	20.4	Shimla	—	27.0	18.0
Jaipur	10.1	39.0	25.0	Srinagar	—	29.0	14.0
Kochi	4.8	31.2	24.8	Thiruvananthapuram	11.6	31.9	24.4
Kohima	—	24.2	14.7	Tiruchi	—	38.1	27.2
Kolkata	69.5	36.3	25.4	Vijayawada	0.3	39.0	29.4
Visakhapatnam	—	35.3	25.4	Visakhapatnam	—	33.0	28.8

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

#### Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO <sub>2</sub>	NO <sub>2</sub>	CO	PM <sub>2.5</sub>	PM <sub>10</sub>	CODE
Ahmedabad	14	36	23	.39	.70	...
Bengaluru	.6	13	47	.26	.59	...
Chennai	.3	34	94	.52	—	...
Delhi	.4	41	94	.198	.128	...
Hyderabad	29	.20	.9	.44	.96	...
Kolkata	.3	7	17	.24	.49	...
Lucknow	.4	22	49	.105	—	...
Mumbai	11	31	.50	.15	.31	...
Pune	15	.5	61	.18	.18	...
Visakhapatnam	.8	.53	35	.56	.120	...

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

**SO<sub>2</sub>:** Sulphur Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

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

**PM<sub>2.5</sub> & PM<sub>10</sub>:** Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

**Uddhav calls toddler chided by parents over physical distancing**



Uddhav Thackeray

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
MUMBAI

Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray spoke to a three-year-old girl whose parents had playfully chided her for 'violating' physical distancing norms.

Mr. Thackeray called up the father of Anshika Shinde, whose video expressing apology for inadvertently touching currency notes while handing them to the milk vendor went viral on social media.

The Shinde family, living at Vishrantwadi in Pune, was in for a pleasant surprise when the Chief Minister called and spoke to Anshika, telling her to contact him if her parents scolded her again. In the video, Anshika's mother is heard telling her that she will inform 'Uddhav uncle' about her act of touching the currency notes while handing them to the milk vendor.

Mr. Thackeray, who was apprised of the viral video, rang up the girl's father and asked him not to trouble a Shiv Sainik (Shiv Sena worker). "I came to know that you are scolding Anshika using my name," a jovial Thackeray is heard saying in the call recording.

The girl's father told the CM that she loved him very much, to which Mr. Thackeray responded, "Anshika, tell your parents that you are a good girl and will listen to them. But if they scold you again, then inform me."

#### Homecoming preparations



**In full swing:** Artists applying finishing touches to idols of Ganesha at a workshop ahead of Vinayak Chaturthi, in Karad on Monday. According to the artists, the demand for the idols is very less compared to last year. ■ RAJU SANADI

## Delhi couple on bail longs to see 'adopted' child

The boy, linked to a human trafficking racket by the police, is lodged at a Mumbai welfare home

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
MUMBAI

minute video call with their son in a day.

"I have an 18-year-old daughter and I adopted the boy through one Pawan Sharma in November 2016," the boy's adoptive father told PTI.

He said Mr. Sharma assured proper documentation of the adoption and in January 2017, he provided the child's birth certificate, saying it was the "final document".

"In 2018, Mr. Sharma also helped one of my relatives get a child in Delhi. However, all of a sudden, in July 2019, Mumbai Crime Branch officials landed at my sister's place and claimed that I adopted the child illegally," he said.

Before the lockdown, the three-and-a-half-year old boy's parents came here from Delhi and used to meet him daily at the Chembur-based children's welfare home.

But after the lockdown came into force in March, the couple flew back to Delhi and is now only able to have a 10-



■ SURAJIT PATRO

relative, who had also taken a child from Mr. Sharma, reached Mumbai and appeared before the Crime Branch to take custody of both the children. However, our sons were sent to the child-

dren's home and we were arrested," he said.

The man said he was able to secure bail after a few months and approached the Bombay High Court along with his relative and four other Mumbai-based parents, who were arrested for similar offences.

In November 2019, the Bombay High Court issued an order to check the credentials of all the six parents and they were allowed to meet the children at the welfare home every day from noon to 4 p.m., he said.

"On that basis, we kept meeting our children from October last year till March 21. We also filed for legal adoption in a sessions court while a petition to quash the police FIR is pending before the

High Court," he said.

The man said he was able to secure bail after a few months and approached the Bombay High Court along with his relative and four other Mumbai-based parents, who were arrested for similar offences.

In November 2019, the Bombay High Court issued an order to check the credentials of all the six parents and they were allowed to meet the children at the welfare home every day from noon to 4



## Step by step

Talks will not find an immediate resolution to the LAC stand-off, but a start has been made

With official talks getting under way over the weekend, the month-long stand-off between Indian and Chinese soldiers along the LAC in Ladakh and Sikkim has entered a more considered phase. There was little expectation that the videoconference on Friday, held between External Affairs Ministry officials in Delhi and their Ministry of Foreign Affairs counterparts in Beijing, and talks between the Leh Corps Commander with the South Xinjiang Military Region Commander, held in the Chushul-Moldo region on China's side of the LAC on Saturday, would bear fruit immediately. However, statements from both sides that the talks will continue indicate a desire to resolve the situation. The MEA and the MFA have also reiterated their commitment to abide by agreements between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping, which came after the last big stand-off, at Doklam in 2017, to not allow "differences to escalate into disputes". During the Doklam incident, even after a meeting between the leaders on the sidelines of a G-20 summit, it had taken several high-level engagements to ensure a drawdown to the 73-day stand-off.

Given the differences between the situation now and previous incidents, it would be naive to assume that this stand-off can be resolved quickly through talks. The stand-off is at more than one location, including the Finger areas of the Pangong Tso, Galwan Valley and Gogra post in Ladakh and the Naku La pass in Sikkim, and it will require careful study to decide how to de-induct soldiers. Furthermore, a "status quo ante" will require that Chinese soldiers vacate areas where they have dug in for weeks now. Nothing short of their full withdrawal should satisfy India, which means that more than talks on the ground and by diplomats, there is a need for strong political direction from Beijing to the PLA to do that. Otherwise, India must prepare for a long-drawn stand-off, and manoeuvres aimed at ensuring China's pull back. In addition, even as the government tries to analyse the reasons for China's aggressive action, it must introspect on signals it misread and warnings that went unheeded across its strategic command. If such skirmishes normally follow the melting of snowlines, for example, then why was the LAC not adequately manned in April-May? Serious notice should have been taken of China's protests on the redrawing of the Jammu-Kashmir and Ladakh maps, as well as the impact of the Home Minister's vow in Parliament to "take back" Aksai Chin. The Defence Minister has said that Chinese troops arrived in "heavy numbers" and therefore the government must also study what intelligence was received ahead of such movement, and when action was taken upon it. Finally, why has the stand-off emerged at all, after the intense summit-level conversations in Wuhan and Mamallapuram to discuss building trust at the LAC? Given the government's silence on events thus far, it is unlikely that it will put out answers to these questions publicly, but in any event, they must be sought.

## Selling space

SpaceX's mission carrying humans to space marks a new age in commercial space flight

For the United States to send American astronauts to space from American soil after a gap of nine years is a milestone in itself. That this took place at the time of one of the biggest civil rights upsurges since the 1960s makes it almost like an escape to fantasy, riding on the wings of a public-private partnership between NASA and Elon Musk's SpaceX. The less expensive journey is a clear financial advantage as the U.S. has been paying the Russians \$80 million to put one astronaut into space ever since they stopped NASA's human space launch programme. Thus, SpaceX comes in to provide advantages in costs, innovation and safety. In the 2000s, when Mr. Musk showed off his rockets and lobbied in Washington DC, he was mostly ignored, yet now, NASA wants him to find customers for space flights. This can expand the power of U.S. commerce exponentially. Japanese billionaire Yusaku Maezawa has already signed up as a potential traveller to the moon and back. With this partnership, Americans have taken yet another leap of faith in creating commerce in space. If his plans get realised, Mr. Musk could make space flights as common as domestic flights. Technologically, it is a remarkable feat. The collaboration brings in a 'willingness to fail' which has kept SpaceX alive. This is coupled to the propensity to 'qualify every component', which has been NASA's strength.

NASA has partially outsourced its work of innovating, testing and building new technology to market players such as SpaceX. It has made clear its desire to invite more such innovative space companies to participate. India under Prime Minister Modi has also opened up the space sector including ISRO facilities to private players. The emergence of successful partnerships here will likely depend on how well they stand up against the American example of allowing for failure. 'Fly, test, fail, fix' has been the rubric followed by SpaceX. India has not witnessed such huge experiments in space except by the state-led ISRO, its most recently celebrated one being the Mars Orbiter Mission at the cost of ₹7 per km, which is cheaper than autorickshaw travel as cited by Mr. Modi himself, famously. ISRO already has a competitive edge in the global market for space technology. The opening up of space technologies could harbour many an innovation of this kind; however, it calls for a high degree of accountability coupled with a non-partisan approach on the part of all players. The state's role as a just arbiter in finding a delicate balance between entrepreneurial adventure and vested interests is a prerequisite to compete in space with the superpowers.

# Who's afraid of monetisation of the deficit?

The shrill clamour against it is based on misconceptions; fears of inflation lack substance



T.T. RAM MOHAN

As the government began to wrestle with the severe downturn caused by the novel coronavirus pandemic, some economic pundits urged the government to go out and spend without worrying about the increase in public debt. They said the rating agencies would understand that these are unusual times. If they did not and chose to downgrade India, we should not lose too much sleep over it.

### Rating and fundamentals

Well, the decision of the rating agency, Moody's, to downgrade India from Baa2 to Baa3 should come as a rude awakening. The present rating is just one notch above the 'junk' category. Moody's has also retained its negative outlook on India, which suggests that a further downgrade is more likely than an upgrade.

The rationale given by Moody's should especially make people sit up. The downgrade, Moody's says, has not factored in the economic impact of the pandemic. It has to do with India's fundamentals before the onset of the pandemic and the extended lockdown with which India responded. The message should be clear enough. Any further deterioration in the fundamentals from now on will push India into 'junk' status.

We should not lose sleep over a further downgrade and simply borrow our way out of trouble? Anybody who thinks so is living in cloud cuckoo land. Whatever the failings of the agencies, in the imperfect world of global finance that we live in, their ratings do car-

ry weight. Institutional investors are largely bound by covenants that require them to exit an economy that falls below investment grade.

If India is downgraded to junk status, foreign institutional investors, or FIIs, will flee in droves. The stock and bond markets will take a severe beating. The rupee will depreciate hugely and the central bank will have its hands full trying to stave off a foreign exchange crisis. That is the last thing we need at the moment.

### Work towards an upgrade

We have to put our best foot forward now to prevent a downgrade and bring about an upgrade instead. To do so, we need to note the key concerns that Moody's has cited in effecting the present downgrade to our rating: slowing growth, rising debt and financial sector weakness. These concerns are legitimate.

Many economists as also the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) expect India's economy to shrink in FY 2020-21. The combined fiscal deficit of the Centre and the States is expected to be in the region of 12% of GDP. Moody's expects India's public debt to GDP ratio to rise from 72% of GDP to 84% of GDP in 2020-21. The banking sector had non-performing assets of over 9% of advances before the onset of the pandemic. Weak growth and rising bankruptcies will increase stress in the banking sector.

The government's focus thus far has been on reassuring the financial markets that the fisc will not spin out of control. It has kept the 'discretionary fiscal stimulus' down to 1% of GDP, a figure that is most modest in relation to that of many other economies, especially developed economies. ('Discretionary fiscal stimulus' refers to an increase in the fiscal deficit caused by government policy as distinct

GETTY IMAGES/STOCKPHOTO



from an increase caused by slowing growth, the latter being called an 'automatic stabiliser').

Keeping the fiscal deficit on a leash addresses the concerns of rating agencies about a rise in the public debt to GDP ratio. But it does little to address their concerns about growth. The debt to GDP ratio will worsen and financial stress will accentuate if growth fails to recover quickly enough. The government's stimulus package relies heavily on the banking system to shore up growth. But there is only so much banks can do. More government spending is required, especially for infrastructure.

### Clearing misconceptions

We need to increase the discretionary fiscal stimulus without increasing public debt. The answer is monetisation of the deficit, that is, the central bank providing funds to the government. Mention 'monetisation of deficit' and many economic pundits will cower in terror. These fears are based on misconceptions about monetisation of the deficit and its effects.

A common misconception is that it involves 'printing notes'. One image that leaps to mind is the printing presses of central banks cranking out notes with abandon. But that is not how central banks fund the government. The central bank typically funds

the government by buying Treasury bills. As proponents of what is called Modern Monetary Theory point out, even that is not required. The central bank could simply credit the Treasury's account with itself through an electronic accounting entry.

When the government spends the extra funds that have come into its account, there is an increase in 'Base money', that is, currency plus banks' reserves. So, yes, monetisation results in an expansion of money supply. But that is not the same as printing currency notes.

What could be the objection to such an expansion in money supply? It could be that the expansion is inflationary. This objection has little substance in a situation where aggregate demand has fallen sharply and there is an increase in unemployment. In such a situation, monetisation of the deficit is more likely to raise actual output closer to potential output without any great increase in inflation.

Exponents of the MMT make a more striking point. They say there is nothing particularly virtuous about the government incurring expenditure and issuing bonds to banks instead of issuing these to the central bank. The expansion in base money and hence in money supply is the same in either route. (The precise sequence of central bank transactions in these two cases and the identity in outcomes is shown in *Macroeconomics* by Mitchell, Wray and Watts, three economists who are among the leading exponents of MMT). The preference for private debt is voluntary. MMT proponents say it has more to do with an ideological preference for limiting government expenditure. But that is a debate for another day.

Central banks worldwide have resorted to massive purchases of

government bonds in the secondary market in recent years, with the RBI joining the party of late. These are carried out under Open Market Operations (OMO). The impact on money supply is the same whether the central bank acquires government bonds in the secondary market or directly from the Treasury. So why the shrill clamour against monetisation of public debt?

### About inflation control

OMO is said to be a lesser evil than direct monetisation because the former is a 'temporary' expansion in the central bank's balance sheet whereas the latter is 'permanent'. But we know that even so-called 'temporary' expansions can last for long periods with identical effects on inflation. What matters, therefore, is not whether the central bank's balance sheet expansion is temporary or permanent but how it impacts inflation. As long as inflation is kept under control, it is hard to argue against monetisation of the deficit in a situation such as the one we are now confronted with.

We now have a way out of the constraints imposed by sovereign ratings. The government must confine itself to the additional borrowing of ₹4.2 trillion which it has announced. Further discretionary fiscal stimulus must happen through monetisation of the deficit. That way, the debt to GDP ratio can be kept under control while also addressing concerns about growth. The rating agencies should be worrying not about monetisation per se but about its impact on inflation. As long as inflation is kept under control, they should not have concerns – and we need not lose sleep over a possible downgrade.

T.T. Ram Mohan is a professor at IIM Ahmedabad. E-mail: ttr@iima.ac.in

## The critical role of decentralised responses

Strategies in tackling the COVID-19 crisis must include local governments being equipped and fiscally empowered



M.A. OOMMEN

The novel coronavirus pandemic has brought home the critical role of local governments and decentralised responses. In terms of information, monitoring and immediate action, local governments are at an advantage, and eminently, to meet any disaster such as COVID-19. While imposing restrictive conditionalities on States availing themselves of the enhanced borrowing limits (3.5% to 5% of Gross State Domestic Product, or GSDP) for 2020-21 is unwarranted, the recognition that local governments should be fiscally empowered immediately is a valid signal for the future of local governance. This article makes some suggestions to improve local finance and argues that the extant fiscal illusion is a great deterrent to mobilisation.

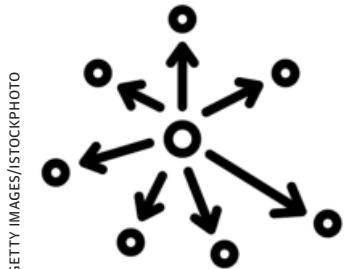
### Core issues

COVID-19 has raised home four major challenges: economic, health, welfare/livelihood and resource mobilisation. These challenges have to be addressed by all tiers of government in the federal polity, jointly and severally. Own revenue is the critical lever of local government empowerment. Of course the several lacunae that continue to bedevil local governance have to be simultaneously

addressed. One, the new normal demands a paradigm shift in the delivery of health care at the cutting edge level. Two, the parallel bodies that have come up after the 73rd/74th Constitutional Amendments have considerably distorted the functions-fund flow matrix at the lower level of governance. Three, there is yet no clarity in the assignment of functions, functionaries and financial responsibilities to local governments. Functional mapping and responsibilities continue to be ambiguous in many States. Instructively, Kerala attempted even responsibility mapping besides activity mapping. Four, the critical role of local governments will have to be recognised by all. A few suggestions for resource mobilisation are given under three heads: local finance, Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme, or MPLADS, and the Fifteenth Finance Commission (FFC).

### Local finance

Property tax collection with appropriate exemptions should be a compulsory levy and preferably must cover land. The Economic Survey 2017-18 points out that urban local governments, or ULGs, generate about 44% of their revenue from own sources as against only 5% by rural local governments, or RLGs. Per capita own revenue collected by ULGs is about 3% of urban per capita income while the corresponding figure is only 0.1% for RLGs. There is a yawning gap between tax potential and actual collection, resulting in colossal underperformance.



When they are not taxed, people remain indifferent, LGs, States and people seem to labour under a fiscal illusion. In States such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand, local tax collection at the panchayat level is next to nil. Property tax forms the major source of local revenue throughout the world. All States should take steps to enhance and rationalise property tax regime. A recent study by Professor O.P. Mathur shows that the share of property tax in GDP has been declining since 2002-03. This portends a wrong signal. The share of property tax in India in 2017-18 is only 0.14% of GDP as against 2.1% in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. If property tax covers land, that will hugely enhance the yield from this source even without any increase in rates.

Land monetisation and betterment levy may be tried in the context of COVID-19 in India. To be sure, land values have to be unbundled for socially relevant purposes. Municipalities and even suburban panchayats can issue a corona containment bond for a period of say 10 years, on a coupon rate be-

low market rate but significantly above the reverse repo rate to attract banks. We are appealing to the patriotic sentiments of non-resident Indians and rich citizens. Needless to say, credit rating is not to be the weighing consideration. That the Resurgent India Bond of 1998 could mobilise over \$4 billion in a few days encourages us to try this option.

### MP fund scheme

The suspension of MPLADS by the Union government for two years is a welcome measure. The annual budget was around ₹4,000 crore. The Union government has appropriated the entire allocation along with the huge non-lapseable arrears. MPLADS, which was avowedly earmarked for local area development, must be assigned to local governments, preferably to panchayats on the basis of well-defined criteria.

A special COVID-19 containment grant to the LGs by the FFC to be distributed on the basis of SFC-laid criteria is the need of the hour. The commission may do well to consider this. The local government grant of ₹90,000 crore for 2020-2021 by the FFC is only 3% higher than that recommended by the Fourteenth Finance Commission. For panchayats there is only an increase of ₹63 crore. The commission's claim that the grant works out to 4.31% of the divisible pool and that it is higher than the 3.54% of the FC-XIV is obviously because the size of the denominator is smaller. Building health infrastructure and disease control strategies at the lo-

cal level find no mention in the five tranches of the packages announced by the Union Finance Minister. The claim for a higher award to LGs is loud and clear.

The ratio of basic to tied grant is fixed at 50:50 by the commission. In the context of the crisis under way, all grants must be untied for freely evolving proper COVID-19 containment strategies locally. Further the 13th Finance Commission's recommendation to tie local grants to the union divisible pool of taxes to ensure a buoyant and predictable source of revenue to LGs (accepted by the then Union government) must be restored by the commission.

Flood, drought, and earthquakes are taken care of by the Disaster Management Act 2005 which does not recognise epidemics, although several parts of India experienced several bouts of various flus in the past. The new pandemic is a public health challenge of an unprecedented nature along with livelihood and welfare challenges. The first Report speaks of mitigation funds and even prepared a disaster risk index, to map out vulnerable areas. These are redundant in the present context. The 2005 Act may have to be modified to accommodate the emerging situation.

COVID-19 has woken us up to the reality that local governments must be equipped and empowered. Relevant action is the critical need.

M.A. Oommen is an Honorary Fellow, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram

## 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.

### The state of politics

The fact that the Bharatiya Janata Party has effortlessly managed the numbers required for the smooth passage of crucial and controversial Bills in the Rajya Sabha despite its inadequate strength makes a strong case for checks on its humongous manipulative power and the Opposition's easy susceptibility to be poached (Editorial, "Upper hand", June 8). Seemingly, sheer political opportunism and the absence of ideological commitment among political parties and leaders have become the bane of the present political discourse. The political rhetoric contains an

overdose of ideological coating where the actions reflect the colour of caustic politics. The party in power swears by the legacy of its political stalwarts but explores all dubious ways to implement its agenda. The million dollar question is not about whether or not the BJP and its allies consolidate their numbers in the Rajya Sabha but about whether or not Indian polity is cleansed of the ever increasing menace of political defections, ideological bankruptcy, tendencies to dent national unity and ugly manifestations of the personality cult.

N. RAVEENDRA BABU,  
Hyderabad

### Private care

Allegations of price gouging are flying thick and fast against private hospitals across India. In the pre-pandemic period too, they have not covered themselves in glory; so milking the present situation is true to their form. Though a few State governments have capped COVID-19 treatment prices in such hospitals, the prohibitive prices are beyond the reach of the middle class (Editorial, "Profit, not profiteering", June 8). In the face of an exponential surge in positive cases the health infrastructure is bursting at its seams and, in all probability, will lean

DEEPAK SINGHAL,  
Chennai

towards only people with deep pockets. For the common man, prevention is better than no cure. It is better if this message is disseminated loud and clear and people are given no false hopes.

DEEPAK SINGHAL,  
Chennai

■ An area which has got out of control in terms of governmental intervention is the monitoring of private health-care facilities; it would be no exaggeration to say when one thinks of private care, one can only think of sharks out to get money from the common man's pocket. State governments should issue clear guidelines to follow

during this crisis. It is a dire necessity that all States are in sync on this matter.

MADHUSREE GUHA,  
Kolkata

### Article of hate

There can be no second opinion that the NYT article "Send in the troops", is nothing but an outburst of communal hatred (From the Readers' Editor, "Some lines are sacrosanct", June 8). When the world has witnessed with great anguish and unfathomable pain what happened to a hapless, unarmed and handcuffed person, Tom Cotton has advocated an extreme line, pawning his conscience. The last paragraph of the RE's

column should serve as reminder to some readers who propagate obtuse views.

# Resume dialogue with Nepal now

India should take the lead in ending a deadlock that goes against the interest of bilateral ties with Nepal



YASHWANT SINHA & ATUL K. THAKUR



"India should not shy away from a dialogue even during the COVID-19 crisis." Students protest against the Indian government in Kathmandu, Nepal. ■AP

The time of a pandemic is not the time to have a hostile neighbourhood. At this moment, India should ideally lead in creating momentum for deeper regional and sub-regional cooperation in South Asia. Ironically, the recent developments with Nepal have been the opposite of that. India and Nepal have reached a new low in bilateral relations when both countries are facing a humanitarian crisis.

#### Official statements

On May 8, the Defence Minister of India tweeted: "Delighted to inaugurate the Link Road to Mansarovar Yatra today. The BRO achieved road connectivity from Dharchula to Lipulekh (China Border) known as Kailash-Mansarovar Yatra Route. Also flagged off a convoy of vehicles from Pithoragarh to Gunji through video conferencing." The announcement and its timing surprised even the keen observers of India-Nepal relations. No one thought that a road project in this territory would get inaugurated so urgently and through video conferencing. The announcement immediately put the Nepal government, the people and political players there on high alert. The Oli government's sharp reaction was unexpected – the road was being built for years, so for it to pretend that it was unaware of this development and therefore surprised at its inauguration defies logic.

In a statement, the Nepalese Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed regret at India's move. It said, "As per the Sugauli Treaty (1816), all the territories east of Kali (Mahakali) River, including Lipulekh, Kalapani and Lipulekh, belong to Nepal. This was reiterated by the Government of Nepal several times in the past and most recently through a diplomatic note addressed to the Government of India dated 20 November 2019 in response to the new political map issued by the latter." It cautioned the Indian government against carrying out "any activity inside the territory of Nepal". It stated that "Nepal had expressed its disagreement in 2015

through separate diplomatic notes addressed to the governments of both India and China when the two sides agreed to include Lipulekh Pass as a bilateral trade route without Nepal's consent in the Joint Statement issued on 15 May 2015 during the official visit of the Prime Minister of India to China." Nepal said it believed in resolving the pending boundary issues through diplomatic means. It said that Kathmandu had proposed twice the dates for holding the Foreign Secretary-level meeting between the two countries.

There was a long-awaited response to this from the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). Without giving any specific date, the MEA assured Nepal that talks would begin after the lockdown was lifted. The delay is not understandable. Why can't discussions take place over video conferencing? India's response to Nepal's note said: "The recently inaugurated road section in Pithoragarh district in the State of Uttarakhand lies completely within the territory of India. The road follows the pre-existing route used by the pilgrims of the Kailash-Mansarovar Yatra. India and Nepal have established mechanism to deal with all boundary matters. The boundary delineation exercise with Nepal is ongoing. India is committed to resolving outstanding boundary issues through diplomatic dialogue and in the spirit of our close and friendly bilateral relations with Nepal." Nepal's Foreign Minister Pradeep Kumar Gyawali asked why talks on this important matter could not take place under lockdown when the 'inauguration' of the road could take place during the COVID-19 crisis. We also believe that it should take place

without wasting even a day. The strain in ties also reflects the tensions in Nepal's politics. Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli stepped out of diplomatic nicety when he indulged in reactionary nationalism and termed the "Indian virus" as more damaging than the "Chinese virus". He also questioned India's faith in 'Satyameva Jayate'.

On India's part, the problem lies in overlooking the past realities of Lipulekh region. The Army Chief's statement that "there is reason to believe" that Nepal's recent objection was "at the behest of someone else", hinting at China's possible role, was eminently avoidable. This too drew sharp reactions from Nepal.

#### A unique relationship

India and Nepal enjoy a unique relationship that goes beyond diplomacy and the governments of the day. Both countries are interdependent through shared social, cultural, economic and other civilisational links. Here, the ties are not between the governments alone. Over three million Nepalese live in India and lakhs of Indians live in Nepal. The Gurkha Rifles, known for the best in warfare, are incomplete without the Nepalese. They fight to keep India secure, so where is the scope for conflict? The people of Nepal fought for India's independence. B.P. Koirala and many more Nepalese made enormous sacrifices during the freedom struggle. Both countries have open borders and unique ties. This reminds us that both countries have shared interests while respecting each other's sovereignty. There is no place for a 'big brother' attitude. The regimes in New Delhi and Kathmandu

have to exercise caution and restraint. The boundary controversy on Lipulekh, Kalapani and Limpiyadhura should be seen in retrospect. It must be admitted that Nepal's kings had neglected this territory for decades. The area attained prominence only with Nepal's tryst with parliamentary democracy beginning in 1990. The consistent neglect for the area is evident in the fact that the last official record of any government work that happened there was in 1953. A census was conducted in this area by the royal regime of Nepal and the land records from there were archived at the Darchula district office.

Article 8 of the India-Nepal Friendship Treaty, 1950 says, "So far as matters dealt with herein are concerned, this Treaty cancels all previous Treaties, agreements and engagements entered into on behalf of India between the British Government and the Government of Nepal", though the treaty does not define the India-Nepal boundary. On the issue of defining the boundary, the Treaty of Sugauli (1816) and the 1960 agreement between India and Nepal on the four Terai districts prevail. The Sugauli Treaty outlines the east of Mahakali River as Nepal's territory, and the west of it as India's territory. The dispute today is with regard to the origin of the Kali River. Nepal claims that the origin is in the higher reaches of this hilly territory which would establish its claim on Kalapani and Lipulekh. The Boundary Committee constituted in the year 2000 failed to resolve the issue. There is a need to renew it to end the cartographic tussle between the two countries.

It is time to repose faith in constructive dialogue with empathy to resolve any matter that disturbs the calm between the two countries. In good and bad times, India and Nepal have to live together. Diplomatic dialogue should be resumed at the earliest possible. Embassies on both sides should be allowed to function freely. Nothing of the sort that happened in 2015 should be repeated now. India should not shy away from a dialogue even during the COVID-19 crisis. The MEA's latest statement should materialise in action and restore trust and confidence through constructive dialogue.

*Yashwant Sinha is former Minister of Finance and Minister of External Affairs; Atul K. Thakur is a policy professional and columnist*

# Fighting sea blindness

Forgoing a third aircraft carrier due to budgetary constraints could be counterproductive



D.K. SHARMA

mied this plan, Pakistan was hopeful of a "stalemate" followed by international intervention. Almost a lakh Pakistani soldiers would possibly not have surrendered unless they had lost their "will to fight". The Indian Navy, using its lone carrier, ensured that no reinforcements or supplies were forthcoming and no escape route was possible.

Indian Naval history (*Transition to Triumph*) also records that "by themselves the ships of the Eastern Fleet were too few and too slow to enforce contraband control and help would be needed from Vikrant's aircraft. But the extraordinary extent to which Vikrant's aircraft actually succeeded in assisting ships in contraband control and apprehending merchant ships, over and above their air strikes against East Pakistan, came to be fully realised only after the war."

The contemporary argument that a carrier's utility in "future war scenarios will be short and swift" is interesting. Pakistan Navy history laments "vague concepts" such as "a short, sharp war" leading to it being accorded a lower inter-service priority. This rendered it incapable of "providing protection to the sea lines of communication between the two wings" and led to the 1971 debacle.

Another shibboleth that needs discarding is the claimed ability of any air force providing effective air cover at sea. In 1971, for example, carrier-borne aircraft repeatedly attacked Chittagong and Cox's Bazar airfields on the request of the Air Force.

#### Impact of parochialism

There are other counterpoints to the article too. First, stating that China went in for a carrier only after building its army is a narrow interpretation. This may have been Hobson's choice. Aircraft carrier operations take years to master even if a ship is available. Further, China's 2015 defence white paper states that "the traditional mentality that land outweighs sea must be abandoned". Even as China is reducing its land forces to focus on the sea, 'sources' are propounding that India

do the exact opposite. Second, forgoing a carrier due to budgetary constraints is counterproductive. An indigenously constructed carrier can galvanise the economy given the large number of industries and MSMEs involved in the supply chain. Third, carriers being required only for global powers is debatable. India had initiated procurement of INS Vikrant within a few years of independence. Carriers cannot be built overnight. Planning for the future requires foresight. Parochialism and sea blindness in an era of COVID-19 budget cuts can have a long-term impact on comprehensive national power.

*Captain D.K. Sharma, a retired Naval Officer, was the Spokesperson, Indian Navy, at the Ministry of Defence*

# The e-diplomacy experiment

Cyber security and productivity are concerns but e-summits must go on as diplomacy must go on

#### SREERAM SUNDAR CHAULIA

The first India-Australia virtual leaders' summit on June 4 had a lot on the menu, ranging from military interoperability to jointly tackling COVID-19. The two countries upgraded their relations to a 'comprehensive strategic partnership'. The summit was noteworthy for its novel modus operandi.

#### Adapting to the times

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Indian delegation were on a video conference call with Prime Minister Scott Morrison and the Australian delegation. The dangers posed by COVID-19 have compelled the traditionally glad-handing, backslapping and tourism-promoting art of summit diplomacy to adapt. Just as corporations and educational institutions have migrated to online mediums, nation states are left with no choice but to do the same. E-summits are physically safer for leaders and also time-saving and economising events where costly physical journeys with entourages can be avoided.

Mr. Modi has engaged in a few multilateral 'e-diplomacy' rounds since the COVID-19 outbreak. He convened the SAARC leaders' video conference on March 15, joined the Extraordinary G20 Leaders' Summit via video link on March 26, and made his maiden appearance at the Non-Aligned Movement virtual summit on May 4. These were all single-issue focused and brief affairs. But the bilateral summit with Australia was elaborate and involved the exchange of multiple agreements.

It has been a maxim in diplomacy that face-to-face interactions at the highest level mark the zenith of foreign relations. The British scholar Ernest Satow dubbed summits "a permanent feature of diplomatic topography". The formal negotiations during summits, the closed-door restricted sessions, the fireside chats, the walks in the woods, the photo-ops and the outreach to live audiences in the host and home countries are all part of the package. But now without all the protocols and structured dialogues in cozy settings, it is doubtful if major breakthroughs or deals requiring direct intervention of lead-

ers can happen. There is a danger that 'e-diplomacy' will become less productive in terms of deliverables, especially where crucial sticking points need ironing out. While the backroom legwork and minutiae of agreements can be hashed out by lower-level bureaucrats communicating remotely, online summits will simply not satisfy the broader political goals and bigger objectives that heads of state carry with them.

#### Threat to cyber security

Another threat to virtual summits comes from cyber insecurity. In pre-COVID-19 times, summit venues used to be thoroughly sanitised and debugged to prevent sensitive foreign policy content from being spied upon or leaked. E-diplomacy is riskier and could be subject to hacking of classified content, making the leaders warier. This could reduce the spontaneity and candour of their conversations. It is arguable whether new ideas or proposals which entail geo-strategic alignments can emanate out of e-summits.

Yet, having some summit is better than no summit at all. However artificial and unsatisfying the video conferencing medium is, key partners like India and Australia have to get on with it and hold high-level meetings as part of their strategic signalling. With Australia and India trying to forge coalitions of middle powers in sustaining the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific, gaps in diplomatic summits can convey weakening of collective resolve.

For those missing the drama and the trappings of a 'real' summit, social media-savvy politicians might generate visuals to cherish in spite of the limits of virtual diplomacy. In a build-up to the India-Australia e-summit, Mr. Morrison offered vegetarian samosas via Twitter and Mr. Modi replied that he wanted to enjoy them together "once we achieve a decisive victory against COVID-19".

In-person summits will restart one day. But the online interlude has to go on because diplomacy has to go on.

*Sreeram Sundar Chaulia is Dean at the Jindal School of International Affairs*

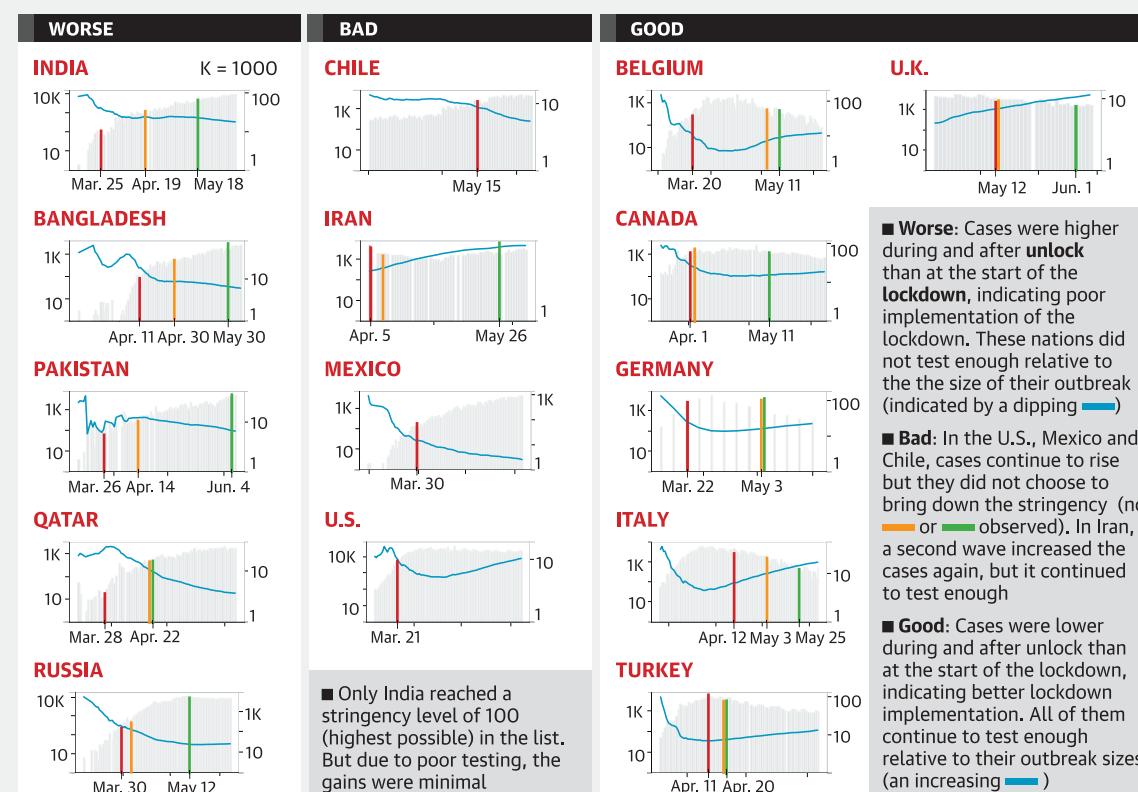


#### DATA POINT

## Lost in lockdown

Despite a long and stringent lockdown, cases in India continue to surge. Is poor testing a reason? By **The Hindu Data Team**

The graphs show the no. of daily cases (■, left axis) & the cumulative no. of tests conducted per confirmed case (■, right axis) for select countries with >50,000 cases. The reference lines indicate how stringent a nation's lockdown was on a particular date. ■ indicates when peak lockdown stringency was reached; ■ indicates when it was relaxed (the govt. was preparing to unlock); ■ indicates when the lowest stringency was recorded after the peak (further lifting of curbs). Stringency is calculated by the Oxford Univ. based on 17 indicators such as school closures and restrictions in movement



#### The Hindu

#### FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 09, 1970

#### Grave Mistake

(From an editorial)

A long-term strategy seems to be contemplated by the Tamil Nadu Government in its campaign against the use of the English language in school and college. Recently, a Government order was issued restricting the entry of children into the English medium sections of middle and high schools unless they had had their primary education in English or were the children of Central Government servants or of persons whose mother tongue was not Tamil. This order has been strongly criticised at a public meeting when it was pointed out that it was highly discriminatory. Since pupils are now studying English from the third class, it is quite possible for many children to enter English-medium sections in the higher classes. Further, it is not the children of Central Government servants alone who are likely to move from State to State. This happens to many other classes of professional people and businessmen. As one correspondent pointed out, the proper way to avoid this kind of discrimination would be to open at least one English medium section in every school controlled or recognised by the Government.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 9, 1920

Indian medical professionals (From an editorial)

The agitation in Britain against the admission of Indians in the Indian Medical Service in larger numbers has not yet died out. The Morning Post laments that the Indian Medical Service has been ruined almost beyond repair by the excessive admission of Indians. "The ruin," says the apostle of Junkerdom, "has gone so far that no Englishman with any prospect of succeeding in England will care to go over to India." It is a stale theory that English doctors of the I.M.S. have come forward at the sacrifice of prodigious prospects at home and no amount of warming up will alter the fact that the majority of them have had only a Hobson's choice – to pick up in India what they are unable to earn in England. The best of them have chosen service here on a balance of benefits and as these benefits still remain fat as ever, there is no reason why they should not continue to come. Our contemporary argues with more chagrin than logic that the diminution of English doctors reacts on other departments on account of the emphatic prejudice against placing his wife and children under an Indian's treatment.

## FROM PAGE ONE

## Malls, cafes reopen to a new normal

On its part, Kerala permitted the opening up of places of worship and government offices in a restricted manner. The grim shadow cast by the outbreak prompted social organisations cutting across the religious spectrum to declare almost unanimously that a majority of the temples, mosques and churches would remain shuttered. However, there were some exceptions. The government said temples owned by the Travancore, Kochi and Malabar Devaswom Boards would admit devotees in limited manner. Sabarimala would open for pilgrimage on June 14. The Guruvayoor temple would allow devotees from Tuesday. Attendance in Kerala government offices showed an upswing. Most hotels in the State announced that they would not allow dine-in facilities.

In Kolkata, shopping malls and restaurants opened with strict health

protocols. Masks were a must, so was thermal screening and use of sanitizers. Surprisingly, many people turned up during lunch hour.

"We did not expect so many of our regular customers on day one," said Tanmoy Manna, a south Kolkata cafe manager. Well known Park Street restaurant Peter Cat had many waiting outside during lunch hour as seating capacity had been halved. Government offices opened too and people were out in large numbers. But getting public transport was a challenge.

In Andhra Pradesh, the hill temple of Lord Venkateswara at Tirumala was opened for *darshan* but was restricted to temple employees and their family members for the first two days. Senior citizens and children are not permitted to visit the temple. The general public will be allowed in from June 11.

## Military-level talks positive, says Rajnath

At the virtual rally, the Minister flayed Opposition parties, saying he did not need lessons from them on how to deal with these things.

"Congress leaders are raising questions on the India-China border situation. I want to assure the people of the country that I will respond in detail in Parliament," he said. The meeting with the CDS comes two days after the talks between senior military commanders to defuse the month-long stand-off. The government has so far not said anything on the ground situation in the month-long stand-offs at various points along the Line of Actual Control in eastern Ladakh.

Mr. Singh had been holding regular consultations with CDS Gen Bipin Rawat and Army Chief Gen Manoj Naravane on the border situation and this was part of

the routine review.

While there was still no clarity on the next round of senior level talks, the sources said the dialogue between local commanders on the ground would continue. At Saturday's talks, which was the highest military dialogue so far to address the issue, India firmly conveyed to the other side that it wanted restoration of status quo ante of April before the stand-off began and that China must pull back troops close to the LAC. More meetings were scheduled to be held both, military and diplomatic, to end the impasse.

In Beijing, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the situation along the border was "stable and controllable" and the two sides were ready to engage in consultations to "properly solve the relevant issues."

## MSME revival package yet to take off

"This is a much needed great move as firms that are reviving but currently NPA were hoping that the measure will be speedily implemented which would have increased the chance of revival drastically," said the promoter of a mid-sized

enterprise.

"As an additional measure, as not all banks may have appetite for this scheme, portability of such accounts to banks that have the appetite would ensure greater impact and help off-court resolutions," he said.

## HC asks Manipur Speaker to keep 7 Cong. MLAs out

After hearing disqualification petitions against them, the court also directed the Speaker to ensure compliance of the order by all concerned.

The seven MLAs are Sanam Bir Singh, Giusnau, Onam Lukhoo Singh, Ngamthang Haokip, Yengkham Surchandra Singh, Kshetrimayam Bir Singh and Paonam Brojen Singh.

Congress leader Kapil Sibal and other senior advocates represented the petitioners from the Congress.

**RS impact**  
The court said the Speaker had failed to decide the petitions filed by the petitioners from the Congress party within a reasonable time. It said the Speaker had not disposed of the petitions despite the petitions having been filed on November 8, 2018.

After hearing a similar disqualification petition filed in March by Manipur Congress MLA Keisham Meghachandra, the Supreme Court stripped Minister Thounaojam Shyamkumar of his office and banned his entry into the Assembly. The Speaker had later disqualified him as a member of the Assembly.

Mr. Shyamkumar was

elected in the 2017 elections on a Congress ticket but switched to the BJP even before being sworn in as an MLA. Post-disqualification, he was made an advisor to Chief Minister Nongthombam Biren Singh.

Congress leader Kapil Sibal and other senior advocates represented the petitioners from the Congress.

**Petitions pending**  
The court said the Speaker had failed to decide the petitions filed by the petitioners from the Congress party within a reasonable time. It said the Speaker had not disposed of the petitions despite the petitions having been filed on November 8, 2018.

The seven MLAs, as well as Mr. Shyamkumar, will not be able to take part in the voting for the State's lone Rajya Sabha seat because of the court orders. The BJP is fielding the titular king Leishemba Sanajaoba while former MLA T. Mangababu is the Congress candidate for the seat.

(With inputs from Iboyaima Laithangbam)

## Travel-linked cases spike in southern States

On day one of Unlock 1, Karnataka reports three deaths, focuses on non-urban infection spread; Kerala records one fatality

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
BENGALURU

Three months after the first COVID-19 case was reported in Bengaluru, Karnataka's tally touched 5,760 on Monday, with 308 new cases in 24 hours. Bengaluru currently records 501 cases.

Monday also saw three deaths in the Karnataka, taking the total number to 64, besides two deaths of COVID-19 patients from non-COVID causes.

Kerala also reported one

## COVID-19

death, with a 41-year-old man who had returned from the Maldives succumbing to the disease.

The Central government praised Karnataka's efforts and the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike's protocols for containment, even though there was an escalation in numbers in some districts with influx of returnees

from other States. Six States and 47 cities had followed the same approach.

Hephisia Rani Korlapati, Special Officer, BBMP COVID-19 War Room, said that BBMP's preparedness and the approach of leaving no case untraced, and micro-level planning and effective implementation helped the city keep numbers low.

Of the 308 new cases, 277 passengers had a travel history to other States, while one had travelled to Maharashtra. The largest number of cases, 99, were in Kalaburagi, followed by Yadagiri with 66. All three deaths reported on Monday were in Bengaluru Urban. One patient who passed away was a 67-year-old man with Influenza-like Illnesses and Ischemic heart disease and ventricular dysfunction. He was admitted on June 4 and died on June 8. A 48-year-old woman who passed away also had a history of ILI. She had fever and breathlessness and was ad-



**Sit and dine:** With the government relaxing the lockdown norms, hotels began serving dine-in customers from Monday. Customers having breakfast at a hotel in Vijayawada. ■ K.V.S. GIRI

mitted to a private hospital on June 4 and died on June 5.

The third was a 65-year-old patient with a history of Severe Acute Respiratory Illness and breathlessness. She was also admitted on June 4 to a

private hospital and died on June 5.

Positive cases in Andhra Pradesh rose to 4,813 including 154 cases on Monday.

Of the new cases, 125 were local, 28 from other States or

migrant returnees and one from a foreign country.

A total of 2,711 were discharged; 51 were sent home during the past day, the Medical, Health and Family Welfare Department said. Total

active cases were 2,027 and the death toll 75.

There were 91 fresh cases in Kerala, and in line with the trend over one month now, all but three were imported cases among people coming from abroad or other States.

Three persons, including two health workers in Thrissur, were believed to have contracted the infection through local transmission.

The fatality was that of a 41-year-old man who had returned from the Maldives, at the Government Medical College Hospital, Thrissur. The Health Department said he had renal disease and respiratory distress.

The death toll was 16. Though an 87-year-old who died on Sunday night at Thrissur MCH had suspected COVID-19, the Health Department did not add it to official figures and was re-confirming it.

(With inputs from Vijayawada and Thiruvananthapuram bureaus)

## Decision to reopen temples triggers political row in Kerala

**Sangh Parivar organisations oppose the move**

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Kerala government's decision to reopen temples from Tuesday has triggered a row with Sangh Parivar organisations opposing the move and the Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) and other Devaswoms going ahead with the preparations to permit the entry of devotees as per the COVID-19 protocol.

The Kerala Kshetra Samrakshana Samiti and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, having about 600 temples under their ambit, mostly in northern Kerala, cited the spurt in COVID-19 cases and the failure of the government to take Hindu organisations into confidence

**Sree Padmanabhaswamy temple not to open today**

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM**

The Sree Padmanabhaswamy temple authorities here have reversed their decision to allow devotees to worship at the temple from June 9. The administration committee that met on Monday in the wake of the concerns raised over the opening of places of worship in view of the spurt in COVID-19 cases in Kerala, decided to reverse the decision. As per the new decision, devotees will not be allowed entry till June 30.

as reasons for their objection.

TDB president N. Vasu said entry to the 1,248 temples under the board would be as per the COVID-19 protocol. The Padmanabhaswamy temple in the State capital would be reopened only after June 30.

**Churches in Kerala not to open in haste**

**PATHANAMTHITTA**

Metropolitan of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar Joseph Mar Thoma said its churches would not be opened in haste from Tuesday. The Church would continue with the online worship system until the crisis eased. Meanwhile, the Jacobite Syrian Church on Monday decided to open its churches under the dioceses of Kollam and Niram for liturgical services only after June 30.

Hindu Aikya Vedi State president R.V. Babu said if the reopening would lead to a virus spread, even routine rituals and pujas would be affected forcing a total closure of the temples.

"Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan did not invite Hindu organisations for consultations," Mr. Babu said.

TTD staff, their families to be allowed during first two days

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
TIRUMALA

The Lord Venkateswara temple in Tirumala was on Monday opened for trial run of darshan for the public.

Though the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) did not compromise on the performance of day-to-day rituals, the temple was kept out of bounds for devotees since March 20 due to COVID-19 lockdown and reopened after an interval of 80 days.

The TTD has imposed several restrictions on the darshan.

It will allow its employees and their families during the first two days of the trial run, followed by local denizens on the third day, to plug deficiencies, if any, before allowing the general public from June 11.

Devotees offering prayers outside Lord Venkateswara temple on Monday. ■ PTI

Devotees above 65 years and children below 10 years

would not be allowed. Besides making face masks and social distancing mandatory, devotees would be barred from visiting sub-temples within the main temple complex and strictly urged to use herbal sanitiser

before and after making offerings into the 'hundi' and refrain themselves from touching it. Employees who are likely to come into direct contact with devotees, including the temple annadana staff, volunteers and barbers were provided with PPEs.

TTD Chairman Y.V. Subba Reddy, who supervised the trial run, expressed satisfaction at the arrangements. He felt that there was scope for allowing more number of devotees with minor modifications.

Speaking to media, he said the intention behind the trial run was to get a first-hand report at the ground level.

After taking stock of the three-day trial run, a decision whether or not to increase the number of devotees would be taken.

## IN BRIEF



## Panel to probe change in design of LG Polymers

VISAKHAPATNAM  
The high-power committee probing into the gas leak incident at LG Polymers in Visakhapatnam on Monday said that the experts had brought to its notice that the design of tank in which styrene monomer was stored had been changed and a detailed investigation would be done in this regard.

## Kerala local body poll voters' list by June 17

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM  
The final voters' list for the local body elections will be published on June 17, Kerala Election Commissioner V. Bhaskaran said. Mr. Bhaskaran said in a release here on Monday that the list of voters in 941 gram panchayats, 152 block panchayats, 14 district panchayats, 86 municipalities, and six Corporations that go to the polls this year will be published.

## Kerala student's death spurs controversy

KOTTAYAM  
The Kerala police on Monday retrieved the body of a 20-year-old from the Meenachil river near Cherpalung in Kottayam district. Anju P. Shaji, a final year B.Com. student, is believed to have jumped into the waterbody on Saturday, allegedly after being reprimanded for cheating during an examination. The incident has triggered a controversy with relatives of the victim accusing the college authorities of harassing her.

Party chooses less-known, old-time workers Eranna Kadadi and Ashok Gasthi as candidates



**Deve Gowda to file nomination papers today**

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
BENGALURU

Former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda will be filing his nomination papers on Tuesday to contest the Rajya Sabha elections scheduled for June 19.

Clearing the air on the

suspense over Mr. Gowda contesting the election, which prevailed for nearly a fortnight, former Chief Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy on Monday took to Twitter to announce Mr. Gowda's candidature.

Rajya Sabha," a party functionary said.

This is also being seen as a clear and stern message to Mr. Yediyurappa as the high command has rejected the candidature of both Mr. Kore and Mr. Shetty who are said to be very close to him.

## No Secondary School Certificate exams in Telangana this year

Students to be promoted to next higher level automatically



A release said Mr. Rao decided to dispense with the rescheduled Secondary School Certificate (SSC) exams after students took

three papers and the remaining exams were postponed due to the lockdown.

## Nod for film shooting

The State government also decided to permit film and TV shootings while continuing to keep the cinema halls closed in view of spread of coronavirus.

The file allowing film and TV shootings was signed by Mr. Rao on Monday in the wake of leaders of film industry giving a representation to him in this regard recently.

## Follow orders or face contempt, HC tells govt.

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
HYDERABAD

The Telangana High Court on Monday said it would be compelled to initiate contempt proceedings against officials of the State government if its directions in COVID-19-related pleas were not complied with.

Its directions like conducting autopsy on persons who died in hospitals while undergoing treatment for different ailments were not being followed, the HC said. It would hold Principal Secretary of Medical and Health and Director of Medical and Health

responsible. They would have to face contempt of court proceedings, the Bench said.

It took serious note of its order to conduct random public testing for coronavirus not being executed. Pointing out that 37 doctors working in government hospitals had contracted COVID-19, the Bench said it had earlier instructed that protective gear be provided to all doctors and para-medical staff. The fact that so many doctors were infected suggested that the required protective gear was not arranged, the bench said.

This was the outcome of an official meeting convened by Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao on Monday.

three papers and the

## India better placed in virus fight, says Shah

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

BHU BANESWAR

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday took a pot shot at the Congress, saying it had done nothing to fight the COVID-19 pandemic apart from conducting interviews.

While addressing a Janmashtami "virtual rally" for Odisha, Mr. Shah said, "I am here to tell you what the Narendra Modi government has done. When the crisis of coronavirus surfaced, the government announced a ₹1.7 lakh crore package for 60 crore people."

"Some Opposition leaders are questioning us on how we handled the pandemic. We may have faulted somewhere and may be short of expectations but we never lacked sincerity. People are discussing about India's fight against coronavirus in Sweden and America," he said.

"India is comparatively at a better position for the steps taken by it," he said.

## SC asks J&K to respond to plea against Soz detention

Former Union Minister has been under detention since 2019

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday asked the Jammu and Kashmir government to respond to a petition challenging the house arrest/detention of senior Congress leader and former Union Minister Saifuddin Soz for the past 10 months.

The *habeas corpus* petition, filed by his wife Mumtazunisa Soz, sought to know his whereabouts.

A virtual court Bench led by Justice Arun Mishra listed the case for July second week.

Mr. Soz has been detained since August 5 last, when the special rights given to Kashmiri people under Article 370 was abrogated and the State of Jammu and Kashmir was reorganised into the Un-

## Four local terrorists killed in Shopian

As many as 22 terrorists have been killed in the Valley in the past two weeks, says J&K police chief

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Four local terrorists were killed in an encounter with security forces in south Kashmir's Shopian on Monday after a four-hour operation. A day earlier, five terrorists were killed in the same area.

According to Jammu and Kashmir police chief Dilbag Singh, as many as 22 terrorists have been killed in the past two weeks.

At a press conference in Awantipore, Lt. Gen. B.S. Raju of the XV Corps said that after the revocation of Article 370 in J&K last year, the people of Kashmir took the decision in a "positive manner" as there was relative peace for a long time.

He asked people not to "consume Pakistani media as they peddled only misinformation".

### Relative peace'

Lt. Gen. Raju said normalcy was almost back in the Valley till another lockdown had to be imposed due to the CO-



**Grim reminder:** Residents inspecting a damaged house after an encounter between security personnel and militants in Pinjora area of Shopian district on Monday. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

VID-19 pandemic.

"We saw relative peace for a fairly long period of time...by February things had opened up. January-February people had begun to move around, schools opened with 100% attendan-

ce...winter tourism had commenced in Gulmarg, so we were seeing all kinds of normalcy before the issue of COVID came in and we had to get in another round of lockdown," he said.

He said that Pakistan was

not happy with the peaceful situation in the Valley.

### Pakistan unhappy'

"Pakistan is unhappy because it is in its larger plan to keep the pot boiling in the Valley. That is how the rele-

vance of the Pakistan Army remains within Pakistan. As far as Pakistan's contribution to violence here is concerned, it is a combination of two things – on the physical front inducing weapons along the Line of Control and, the second is, the information warfare Pakistan intends to fight."

"I would say that 120 crore of the country's population have a role to play in demolishing false narratives, which are coming from Pakistan."

General Officer Commanding of Army's South Kashmir-based Victor Force Major General A. Sengupta said the encounter took place in a congested area at Pinjora in Shopian.

"The terrorists were harassing civilians and were known to cause excesses to the civil population. They were involved in abducting policemen, causing injury to truck drivers last year...in four-hour operation four local terrorists were killed, arms and war like stores were recovered," he said.

## Rajnath, Rahul in social media spat

Cong. leader had taken a dig at Shah

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi were on Monday engaged in a social media battle after the latter took a dig at Home Minister Amit Shah for his comment that India is strong in protecting its borders.

"Everyone knows the reality of the 'borders,' but the thought is good to keep one's heart happy," Mr. Gandhi tweeted, tweaking a famous Urdu couplet from Mirza Ghalib. "If there is pain in your hands, apply medicine. But when hands itself become the source of pain, then what do you do?"

Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala then joined the fight. "Dear Rajnathji, when we pose a question, then questions are asked... Use the force in your hands as we are India. We demand answers against those who show us red eyes."



China on the Ladakh border.

Replying to Mr. Gandhi, the Defence Minister tweeted another couplet from Mirza Ghalib. "If there is pain in your hands, apply medicine. But when hands itself become the source of pain, then what do you do?"

Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala then joined the fight. "Dear Rajnathji, when we pose a question, then questions are asked... Use the force in your hands as we are India. We demand answers against those who show us red eyes."

## HC notice to Delhi police on Tharoor's plea

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Monday issued a notice to the Delhi police on Congress MP Shashi Tharoor's plea seeking a direction to Twitter India to preserve the account and tweets made by his deceased wife Sunanda Pushkar.

The Thiruvananthapuram MP, against whom the police have filed a chargesheet in a local court here for abetment to suicide and cruelty, said in his petition that the Twitter timeline and tweets of Pushkar were of utmost importance in the case.

Senior advocate Vikas Pahwa and advocate Gaurav Gupta, appearing for Mr. Tharoor, argued that the perusal of the tweets of Pushkar would reflect her actual frame of mind which is contrary to the prosecution case.

## Maximum traffic



**Chaos returns:** A jam on the Western Express Highway in Mumbai, as restrictions were eased on Monday. ■ AADESHCHOURDHARI

## Plea in SC against Hindi use in courts

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court asked a group of lawyers to approach the Punjab and Haryana High Court with their grievance against a Haryana law, which makes Hindi the official language in subordinate courts.

Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde, leading a three-judge Bench, however remarked orally that there was nothing wrong in using Hindi as the official language in courts in certain States, considering that a majority of lawyers were well-versed in the language there and found English a challenge. The apex court finally asked the lawyers to approach the High Court.

The petition contended that the Haryana Official Language (Amendment) Act of 2020 had unconstitutionally and arbitrarily imposed Hindi as the sole official language to be used in lower courts across the State.

Advocates Sameer Jain, Sandeep Bajaj, Angad Sandhu, Suvigya Awasthi and Anant Gupta jointly challenged the new Section 3A incorporated into the Act.

The lawyers argued that English was widely used by advocates and the subordinate judiciary in lower courts in justice administration work. The imposition of Hindi as the sole language would result in an unreasonable classification between lawyers who were fluent in Hindi and those who are not.

## Cong. moves its Gujarat MLAs to Rajasthan

Move aimed at preventing poaching by BJP; polls to four Rajya Sabha seats scheduled for June 19

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

JAIPUR

The Gujarat Congress on Monday decided to shift all its legislators to party-ruled Rajasthan, in a bid to prevent alleged attempts at poaching by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party ahead of the June 19 elections for four Rajya Sabha seats from Gujarat.

It had earlier sent about 20 MLAs to a private resort in Rajasthan's Abu Road town.

Abu Road, on the foothills of popular tourist destination Mount Abu, is situated adjacent to the Gujarat-Rajasthan border in Sirohi dis-



**Preparing game plan:** A June 4 photo of Congress MLAs and leaders attending a meeting in Ahmedabad. ■ PTI

trict. Following the resignation of three MLAs last week, the Congress had moved its legislators to different plac-

es, alleging that the BJP was indulging in horse-trading.

The strength of the Oppo-

nition Congress in the 182-

member Gujarat Assembly has been reduced to 65 after the three legislators re-

signed. According to the par-

ty sources, the shifting of

MLAs to a single place will fa-

cilitate finalisation of strate-

gies by senior leaders for the

Rajya Sabha polls.

The MLAs are likely to stay in Abu Road until just before the elections on June 19. Earlier, the Congress MLAs were taken to a resort near Jaipur in March this year when five legislators resigned. The

March 26 Rajya Sabha elec-

tions were subsequently

postponed because of the

COVID-19 lockdown.

The BJP has questioned the

Congress's move, alleg-

ing that the party had violat-

ed the guidelines on reopen-

ing of hotels and shopping

malls.

"Why was the resort

opened 48 hours before the

lockdown relaxations and

how was the gathering of le-

gislatives allowed?" asked Ra-

jendra Rathore, Deputy

Leader of the Opposition in

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The BJP's Sirohi district

unit has lodged a complaint

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11 Labour  
officials test  
positiveSPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Eleven officials, including a joint secretary, of the Union Labour and Employment Ministry have tested positive for COVID-19, Ministry sources said on Monday.

The officials work in the offices at Shram Shakti Bhawan here and they were closed for sanitising on June 4 and 5, a source said. Another source stated that the floor of Shram Shakti Bhawan that has the offices was closed on June 4 and June 5, and the whole area had been "deeply sanitised" by the staff of the Employees' State Insurance Corporation, which comes under the Labour Ministry.

Since some of the officials who tested positive were working in Labour and Employment Secretary Heeralal Samariya's office, he was also tested and was found negative, the source said.

## Centre seeks district-level plans

Health Ministry directs States to make prospective blueprint to tackle COVID-19

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Union Health Ministry, on Monday, directed States to make district-wise prospective plans for the coming months to tackle COVID-19.

Health Secretary Preeti Sudan, along with senior Health Ministry officials, held a review with District Collectors, municipal commissioners, chief medical officers, superintendents of district hospitals and principals of medical colleges from 45 municipalities and municipal corporations across 38 districts in 10 States that are witnessing a surge in COVID-19 cases.

Districts officials from Maharashtra, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Haryana, Gujarat, Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, Uttarakhand and Madhya Pradesh participated in the discussion.

"Main issues discussed included widespread infection in densely populated urban areas, with areas that shared public amenities; impor-



**Further action:** A healthcare worker conducting a temperature screening at Dharavi in Mumbai on Monday. ■ VIJAY BATE

tance of house-to-house surveys; prompt testing followed by prompt isolation and clinical management of cases and containment strategy to be implemented," a release issued by the Ministry said.

**'Initiate measures'**

The Health Minister has directed State officials to initiate measures in containment zones for case management and buffer zones surveillance activities, and the promotion of CO-

VID-appropriate behaviour.

"To reduce the case fatality rate, the officials were briefed on measures to be taken like prioritising the high-risk segments like elderly people and people with comorbidities while contact-tracing to prevent deaths; active surveillance measures, adequate testing and promoting health seeking behaviour for timely detection of cases; ensuring timely shifting of patients without escalating the symptoms," said a senior health official.

He added that States had been also advised that adequate planning for health infrastructure should be taken up; adequate number of surveillance teams must be provided and a system should be put in place for bed availability management.

**Constant attention**

The Health Ministry has said areas that need constant attention included active house-to-house survey for timely detection, augmentation of the survey teams, efficient ambulance management, efficient triaging of patients at the hospitals and bed management and clinical management of the hospitalised cases.

Dismissing claims that wearing a mask leads to carbon dioxide retention, as far as lung capacity is concerned, All India Institute of Medical Sciences director Randeep Guleria said with a mask even pre-symptomatic persons may be saved from spreading the infection.

## NHRC seeks report on deaths by police action

Panel asks for reports from seven States where 15 died following police brutality during the lockdown

DAMINI NATH  
NEW DELHI

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has asked for action taken reports from the authorities of seven States, where 15 people died following police action in the first month or so of the lockdown, according to the proceedings in the cases.

The NHRC acted on a May 16 complaint by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), which stated that the 15 men – five in Andhra Pradesh, three in Uttar Pradesh, two each in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, and one each in Tamil Nadu, Punjab and West Bengal – died after police ac-



**Brute force:** Police guarding an area in Mumbai. The panel is acting on a May 16 complaint by CHRI. ■ VIVEK BENDRE

tion or in custody from March 25 to April 30.

The CHRI complaint cited media reports that said 12 of the 15 deaths occurred after police action such as beatings, allegedly as "punishment" for violating the lockdown imposed to control the

spread of COVID-19, and three in police custody. Nine of the 12 died of their injuries and the remaining by suicide, the complaint said.

"Given the COVID-19 lockdown, restrictions on movement and limited access to courts, the families have ve-

ry limited recourse to seek justice," the complaint by CHRI researcher Raja Bagga stated.

The Commission took up three cases of alleged custodial death on June 4 and asked the police commissioners or superintendent of police of the respective districts to submit detailed reports by July 26.

The alleged custodial deaths include the death of Kalapala Krupkar on March 28, allegedly at the Gudivada police station in Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh. He was arrested with five others for allegedly running a gambling racket.

The death of Raju Velu Devendra on March 30, alleged-

ly in the Juhu police station in Mumbai, was due to beatings by police, his family said. The police, however, denied the charge, saying he was lynched while trying to commit a robbery.

The third case was of Muniappappa alias Muni Kulla, who was accused of stealing liquor in Hoskote in Karnataka. According to his wife, he was taken by the police for questioning on April 7, assaulted and his body dumped in a well near his house on April 10.

In the other 12 cases, the NHRC took cognisance of the matters on June 1 and gave the district magistrates and police chiefs time till July 11 to submit their reports.

INS Shardul  
evacuates 233  
from IranSPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Navy's INS *Shardul* departed from the port of Bandar Abbas in Iran on Monday evening with 233 Indian nationals who are being evacuated under Operation Samudra Setu.

The ship is expected to reach Porbandar in Gujarat on June 11, the Navy said. The Indian Mission in Iran had prepared the list of Indian citizens to be evacuated and also facilitated their embarkation after requisite medical screening.

The Indian Navy had launched Operation Samudra Setu commencing on May 8 to repatriate Indian citizens stuck abroad due to the COVID-19 pandemic and since then *INS Jalashwa* and *INS Magar* have evacuated 2,874 individuals from the Maldives and Sri Lanka to the ports of Kochi and Thoothukudi.

The Navy said in a statement that social distancing norms have been ensured onboard *INS Shardul* and it has been specially provisioned for evacuation, including embarkation of additional medical staff, doctors, hygienists, nutritionists, medical stores, rations, personal protective equipment, face-masks and lifesaving gear.

Priyanka helped 1,600  
labourers reach U.P.

Train left Mumbai on May 31: Congress

STAFF REPORTER  
MUMBAI

Priyanka Gandhi

des and catering to their needs, be it of ration or of travel," said Suraj Singh Thakur, State vice-president of the Indian Youth Congress (IYC).

Around 1,600 migrant workers from Uttar Pradesh were in contact with Ms. Gandhi's office and had expressed their wish to return to their hometowns.

"She may have faced some problems in arranging buses, but she ensured that the workers reached U.P." Mr. Thakur said.

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KAC-4 - Construction of Viaduct from S.N. Junction to Thirupunithura including one Elevated Stations i.e. Thirupunithura Terminal for Phase 1 Extension of Kochi Metro Rail Project excluding Architectural and Building Service works of station.  
E Tender ID: 2020\_KMLR\_357575\_1  
Last Date of Submission: 10.07.2020  
Tender documents can be downloaded from [www.tenders.kerala.gov.in](http://www.tenders.kerala.gov.in) / [www.kochimetrol.org](http://www.kochimetrol.org)  
Further corrigendum / addendum will be published only on websites

**The Odisha State Co-operative Milk Producers' Federation Limited**  
D-2, Sahidnagar, Bhubaneswar - 751007  
Ph. No.: 0674-2546030, 2540273, 2540417,  
Fax No: 0674-2540974, Email ID : [omfed@yahoo.com](mailto:omfed@yahoo.com)

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3. OMfed invites tender for hiring of refrigerated vans for transportation of dairy products. For details please visit OMfed website: [www.omfed.com](http://www.omfed.com). Any further addendum, corrigendum etc. to this Advertisement will be published only on the website. The Management reserves the right to accept or reject any or all the Tenders at any stage without assigning any reason thereof.

Managing Director

OIPR-06063/11/0010/2021

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2020_ICMR_563612_1	Deep Freezer (-20°C)	29.06.2020
2020_ICMR_563634_1	Refridgerator	29.06.2020
2020_ICMR_563653_1	HPLC D10 System (Bio-Rad)	29.06.2020
2020_ICMR_563655_1	Hematology Analyzer (5 Part)	29.06.2020
2020_ICMR_563657_1	AC Repairs and works	29.06.2020
2020_ICMR_563689_1	BP Monitors	29.06.2020
2020_ICMR_563660_1	Building & Electrical Maintenance Contract	29.06.2020
2020_ICMR_563661_1	Contract for engagement of Central Lab Services for Vaccine trial	29.06.2020

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Phone :044-26136262

DIRECTOR

OIPR-06063/11/0010/2021

Tender Notice No. CL/773/2020/821

Date: 04.06.2020

**INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)**

**INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING FOR CAAQMS**

1. Bihar State Pollution Control Board (BSPCB), invites e-tender from eligible bidders for supply, installation, commissioning and comprehensive operation & Maintenance services of Continuous Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Stations (CAAQMS) within Bihar and related services as specified in the bid document. Manual bids shall not be accepted.
2. Prospective bidders may visit websites: [https://www.eproc.bihar.gov.in](http://www.eproc.bihar.gov.in) or <http://bspcb.bih.nic.in/Tenders.html> for details of terms and conditions of e-tender, eligibility of bidder, scope of work, bidding procedure, bidding document etc.
3. Tender processing fee, bid document fee, earnest money deposit shall be submitted through e-Payment mode (i.e. NEFT/RTGS, Credit/Debit Card & Net Banking) only through <https://www.eproc.bihar.gov.in>.
4. The schedule of bidding is hereunder:-

Date of Publishing of Tender	09.06.2020; 1700 hrs
Bid Document Download Start Date	09.06.2020; 1800 hrs
Pre Bid Meeting	18.06.2020; 1200 hrs
Minutes of Pre-Bid Meeting to be uploaded	22.06.2020; 1500 hrs
Bid Submission START Date	22.06.2020; 1500 hrs
Bid Submission END Date	15.07.2020; 1500 hrs
Technical Bid Opening Date	16.07.2020; 1500 hrs

Member Secretary

# Final guidelines to reopen schools awaiting approval

Safety of students, teachers is top priority, says Minister



Ramesh Pokhriyal

safety and security of students and teachers," he added, after the meeting. "The suggestions received will be examined and sent to the [Ministry of Health and Family Welfare] and Ministry of Home Affairs for appropriate actions regarding framing guidelines for the education sector during COVID-19 times."

**Final decision**

On Friday, Ms. Karwal convened a meeting of all State Education Secretaries on Monday "to discuss the health and safety of students, hygiene measures in schools, and issues regarding online/digital learning in their States", according to Mr. Nishank's tweet.

Guidelines are likely to include rigorous health screening and quarantine protocols, hygiene measures, and staggered attendance for students allowing for blended learning from classrooms and home.

# L-G overrules Delhi govt. order to restrict treatment

ICMR guidelines must be followed without deviation: Baijal

JATIN ANAND  
NIKHIL M. BABU  
NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant-Governor

Anil Baijal, on the eve of a crucial meeting to reassess the capital's strategy to tackle COVID-19 with representatives from the Delhi government, on Monday overturned two significant orders issued by it in the face of surging coronavirus cases in the city.

The meeting of the Delhi

Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) headed by the L-G scheduled for Tuesday was to have Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in attendance; however Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia will be filling in for the Chief Minister who will undergo a COVID test.

Mr. Baijal, in his capacity

as the Chairperson of the DDMA, overruled the Delhi government's decision to restrict treatment at both

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## INTERVIEW | SANJAY AGARWAL

# 'Farmers are strong, not vulnerable; they need to be given choices'

Option for direct marketing during the lockdown period has reduced government procurement of wheat in some States, says Agriculture Secretary

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ

*The disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic led to at least 12 States allowing direct marketing of agriculture produce, which offered greater options to farmers during the lockdown, Agriculture Secretary Sanjay Agarwal says. The two new ordinances pushing agricultural marketing reform will widen choices for small farmers, he adds.*

Despite the lockdown, this year's wheat harvest hit record highs, and government procurement at minimum support prices (MSP) is also higher than last year. However, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh have fallen short of procurement targets. What is the reason?

■ I was looking at a video of ITC. This year, because direct marketing was allowed for farmers to sell their produce during the lockdown, they had a line of over two

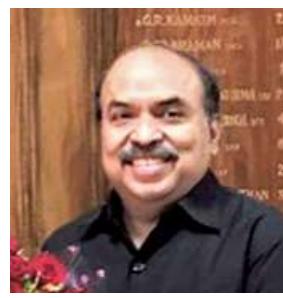
km of tractors outside their purchasing centres. If as a farmer, you are faced with the cost of transport to an MSP centre, and if you are getting the same price at the village level, what will you do? In fact, this year, procurement centres were two and a half times more in comparison to last year. But because direct marketing was allowed and a corporate purchaser was available, that gave the farmer a choice and that changes everything. And that becomes the logic

of bringing the trade and commerce ordinance this year, where direct marketing takes place.

Speaking of these two ordinances to reform agriculture marketing and facilitate contract farming, how will they help small farmers?

■ Both ordinances will be most beneficial to small and marginal farmers. A farmer's produce is unregulated at time of production, but there are restrictions on where to sell and whom to sell, which is not there for any other commodity globally or in India. The Farm Trade ordinance will open up this ecosystem.

Right now, the farmer can only sell produce to a licensed trader in one of four



**The farm trade and contract farming ordinances are most beneficial to small & marginal farmers**

physical locations: mandis operated by marketing committees, very few private mandis, cold storage warehouses declared as deemed markets, or direct licensees which have to notify a space with certain facilities. Mandi secretaries say most big

farmers bring a truckload of produce; they know the officials there, they have access to knowledge about prices and they get the right price. But a small farmer may produce just two quintals. So an aggregator at the village level will take it to the mandi with the understanding that he will take a set percentage of the sale price, and give the rest to the farmer. But in more than 50% of cases, farmers are being cheated by aggregators who get a receipt for a lower price.

Number two, the contract farming ordinance. If I'm a large farmer who grows a large quantity of high quality organic potatoes and sells to a big retail chain dependent on me, I can negotiate my terms. But if I'm a small marginal farmer who wants to grow a high value crop like

which doesn't have that much demand in mandis, or if I add value in terms of processing, then I have to take the total risk in terms of production and then go find a buyer in the industry.

This ordinance allows the small farmer to benefit from a high value product by transferring the risk to the corporate purchaser, who will buy the produce at a fixed rate. The industry can also provide technology inputs and get seeds and pesticides at wholesale prices, which will translate into higher production, higher value, higher incomes. There is also a unique provision for production agreements, where the farmer is simply paid for agricultural services rendered, and this is very useful in poultry and livestock sector.

Will the safety net of MSP continue to remain effective under the new direct marketing regime?

■ This provides a different option to farmers. MSP is a support system for the farmer, where he knows he can sell at a certain place for that price. There is a clear assurance that MSP shall continue. But going to the MSP centre also has a cost, so now the farmer has an option to choose direct marketing instead.

Why do you think that the farmer will not understand if the price offered in the village is not the right price? He is aware of the mandi price and the MSP rate. There is also an important provision to develop a price information and market research system under the Act. So he can

make an informed choice.

We are also creating the right ecosystem through Kisan Credit Cards, farmer producer organisations which will provide marketing and legal support, and creation of ₹1 lakh crore financing facility for post harvest management.

If you consider a child as weak, and always handhold that child, try to protect that child, the child will never grow. Our farmers are strong, they have knowledge and competence and have brought India to this stage of surplus foodgrain. Considering farmers as vulnerable, thinking people will take them for a ride in everything, limiting their choices, restricting them – that is not helpful. Every provision in this Act is in farmers' interest.

## NGO moves SC on protection of children

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday took serious note of a petition filed by Bachpan Bachao Andolan, an NGO headed by Nobel Prize laureate Kailash Satyarthi, alerting that the period of opening up after the national lockdown will see a considerable spike in child trafficking for labour and prostitution.

A Bench led by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde asked Solicitor General Tushar Mehta to enquire into the issue and report back to the court in two weeks.

"The opening of the lockdown would see a massive spurt in the cases of child trafficking... The pandemic, the lockdown and its aftermath would have a dauntingly adverse impact on children," the NGO said.

### Formation of panel

The lockdown spelt catastrophe for the poor. The economic crisis, increased insecurity, poverty and marginalisation would see the poorest try to clutch on to the last straws for their survival. They may be forced to push their children into the hands of traffickers. The most affected would be agricultural families considering the crisis seen in the sector, it stated.

The court suggested forming an expert committee to frame a policy to prevent and protect children from private contractors who are part of the mafia. It urged the NGO with its wide experience of with child issues, to also suggest a protective mechanism to the court.

## Scale up MGNREGA works: Cong.

The party urges Centre to raise employment days to 200 under the scheme

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Congress on Monday said that 2.19 crore households had found work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), and asked the Centre to scale up and make the Act open-ended to help people during COVID-19 pandemic.

The party's formal demand came after its chief Sonia Gandhi wrote an article in a newspaper on Monday, in which she asked the Modi government to shun politics over the scheme and "use the powerful mechanism at hand."

At an online press conference, Rajya Sabha member and senior party spokesperson Abhishek Singhvi said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's comment that the



**Daily grind:** Women labourers working at a site under the MGNREGA on the outskirts of Ajmer, Rajasthan. ■ PTI

MGNREGA was 'a living monument of the Congress's failure' had come back to haunt the BJP as their government was now heavily relying on it to provide relief and increase its allocation by ₹40,000 crore.

Prime Minister Modi famously criticised MGNREGA on the floor of Parliament in 2014, calling it 'a living monu-

ment of the INC's failure'. Today, he must live with that short-sighted assessment, as MGNREGA has come to the nation's aid in combating growing poverty. Even programmes like Swacch Bharat and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana are being merged to leverage its utility, reach and value. As on March 31, 2020, over 12 crore people cumula-

tively had benefited from the programme," Mr. Singhvi said.

### Beginning of exodus

The party said 8 crore migrants were expected to relocate due to COVID-19. In the Supreme Court, the government has stated that 91 lakh migrants have been moved by Shramik Special trains. This number was only the start of an exodus that was taking place across the country.

"Since the PM is compelled to fall back on a UPA scheme, it is only appropriate that we, as its authors, provide him with additional guidance for the next steps," Mr. Singhvi said. Ten per cent advance should be paid to MGNREGA workers and 200 days of work in a year to the needy people, he added.

Trinamool backs demand for expansion of MGNREGA

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Joining forces with the other Opposition parties, the Trinamool Congress on Monday demanded an expansion of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. The party also called for an increase in the wage rate, which, it said, is lower than the minimum wages of at least 31 States.

Trinamool leader Derek O'Brien, addressing an online press conference, accused the Narendra Modi government of doing everything in its capacity to "weaken and dismantle" the MNGREGA, with Mr. Modi himself ridiculing the scheme and calling it "a living monument of failure".



Derek O'Brien

"The Centre must act now; it is absolutely critical that all registered workers get 100 days of work. Currently they get only 40-50 days. The current wages of ₹202 per day also needs revision as it is lower than minimum wage in 31 States," the Rajya Sabha MP said.

He added that the wages must be linked to the rural

consumer price index. In the current scenario with reverse migration to the villages, the MNGREGA has assumed a huge importance. "It is equally critical that all the dues are paid to the workers within 15 days," he said.

**Plea for dole**  
The party has also demanded that the unemployment allowance of 15 days that is guaranteed in the law should be further extended.

He said that by January this year, 95% of the allocation for 2019-20 was spent and the Ministry of Rural Development sought additional ₹20,000 crore. But the Finance Ministry gave only ₹5,000 crore, he added.

## 'Gas leak not cause of 4 deaths'

Team from Singapore working on capping the well in Assam

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GUWAHATI



A magisterial inquiry is on to ascertain the cause of the death of four persons. ■ PTI

five residents of villages in the Baghjan area died due to gas emission. It was found that two of the people who died, including a woman, had not been to their village

in recent times," the district information office said.

While a man from the Baghjan area suffering from tuberculosis died on June 4 at a hospital in Dibrugarh, a woman from Natun Rangaragh village died at her in-laws' place, also in Dibrugarh district. Another person died of a liver ailment while a fourth person, with a history of epilepsy, reportedly expired on June 3 due to drowning."

Tinsukia's Deputy Commissioner Bhaskar Pegu, however, said a magisterial inquiry had been ordered to ascertain the exact cause of the death of these people.

## ED searches tour operator in Mumbai

5 locations in Mumbai searched in money laundering probe involving Yes Bank

DEVESHE K. PANDEY

NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Monday conducted searches at five locations linked to Cox & Kings in Mumbai, in connection with a money laundering probe involving Yes Bank and its former director-promoter Rana Kapoor, the probe agency said.

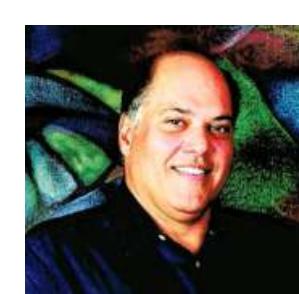
The ED said that in the bank fraud case involving ₹3,642 crore, the premises of Ajay Ajit Peter Kerkar, Pesi Patel, Abhishek Goenka, Anil Khandelwal and Naresh Jain, the promoter, directors, chief financial officer

and auditor of the group, were searched.

Cox & Kings Ltd. (CKL), India, had an outstanding of ₹563 crore; ₹1,012 crore due against Ezeego One travel & Tours Ltd.; ₹422 crore against Cox & Kings Financial Services Ltd.; ₹1,152 crore against Prometheon Enterprise Ltd. (U.K.); and ₹493 crore against Malvern Travel Ltd. (U.K.).

The ED probe is based on a case registered by the CBI on March 7, against Mr. Kapoor and others. It pertains to about ₹3,700 crore in loans extended to Dewan Housing Finance Corporation Ltd (DHFL), allegedly in lieu of ₹600 crore.

During the probe following the arrest of Mr. Kapoor, the ED noticed irregularities in the loans sanctioned to the Cox & Kings group. It had



Ajay Ajit Peter Kerkar

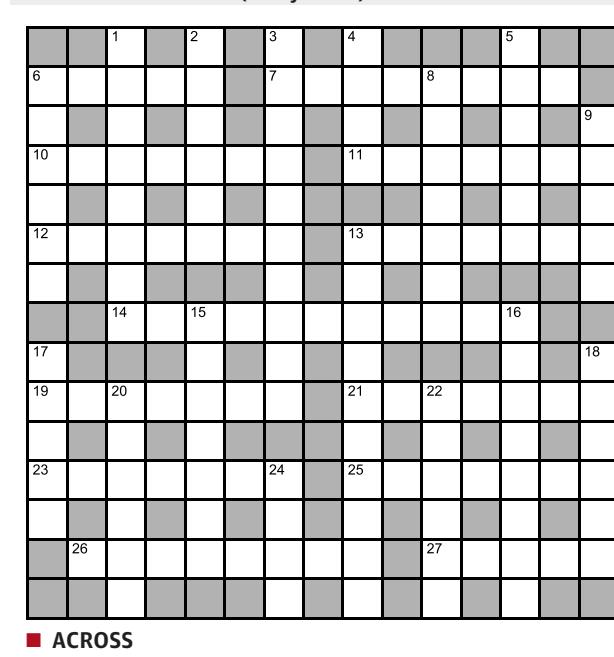
allegedly diverted funds via multiple layers of onshore and offshore subsidiaries.

CKL forged balance sheets of its overseas subsidiaries. It was reported to the Bombay Stock Exchange and the National Stock Exchange by the resolution professional, it said.

After default by CKL, the lenders appointed PwC for forensic audit, but the management did not cooperate. Based on the available data, PwC confirmed falsification of accounts, overstating sales figures, understating debt figures and other irregularities.

## CROSSWORD

(set by Arden)



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



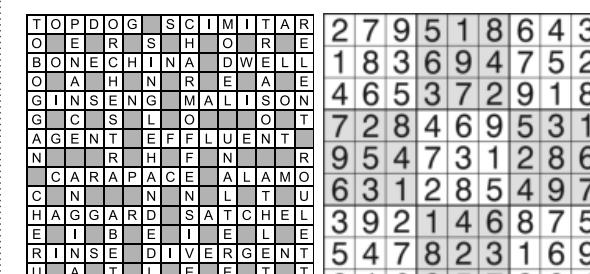
- 13 Artists recreated 'Artemis' (7)  
14 Part of trailer-coach enters, collects, leaves (3-8)  
19 Harry sat near a star (7)  
21 Rejects, love handles cheese cloth (7)  
23 Scientist gets a day in a month (7)  
25 Group in front made a move (7)  
26 Became a bit taller, did you say? That's terrible! (8)  
27 Birds from head to toe by a famous collage artist (5)
- DOWN
- 1 Saint's support for say, Krishna the artist (8)  
2 Man approaches court, or is it to harass (6)  
3 Propagates growth, after election could be in seat (10)  
4 Forty five? Voter turnout is doubtful (4)  
5 Works without interest, is easily influenced (6)  
6 Safeguard businesses which are running (6)  
8 Egg breaks, issue for a theatre person (7)  
9 Manoeuvre, after midnight there is scope (5)  
13 Lunch coupon provides sustenance (4,6)  
15 Minimize a game (7)  
16 Spreading lies, stop, call for some wine (8)  
17 One inside the shed is a child (5)  
18 Group sex – one's upto no good (6)  
20 Boy has money, Bill goes for sound quality (6)  
21 Gun supports, nothing to secure (6)  
24 One on one, there is some infusion of gas (4)
- ACROSS
- 6 Lead factor (5)  
7 Foolishly treated, as if holy (8)  
10 Talk about lease of property (7)  
11 A short way to stop army at sea – it's on a ship (7)  
12 Character in comics – wrong to expose innards (7)

## SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★

Solution to puzzle 12956



Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

## FAITH

### The ideal guru

The Mundaka Upanishad describes the ideal guru as one who is a Brahma Jnani who is also well-versed in the scriptures and is by nature tranquil and self-controlled. Such a guru is aware of the needs of students with differing tastes and capabilities and orients his teaching to equip each one of them to overcome the likely hurdles that may arise in the learning process, pointed out Sri R. Rajagopal Sarma in a discourse. The guru impresses on the student the value of the learning practices, sravana, listening, manana, recalling the teaching, and nidhidhyasa, continuous introspection of what is taught. He draws from scriptures that anticipate the doubts that can be raised when learning esoteric truths and explain with apt examples to allay the misunderstanding.

For instance, suppose one is trying hard to imbibe the Advaita bhavana. How can one forget the body or not respond to hunger and thirst, one may ask. Is it not clear that the three entities, Brahman, the atma and the jagat are distinct? How can anyone accept the jiva and Brahman as one? It is shown that when a jiva can conjure impossible objects and possibilities in dream state, what is not possible for the omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient Brahman? One has to accept that in each state of waking, dream, etc, there are different levels of truth pertaining to that state. Examples such as those of the rope and serpent can clear the doubts.

Still another hurdle remains in the form of inherent avyaya vasana that keeps one chained to wrong notions. This can also be dispelled by nidhidhyasa, when one engages in deep reflection and meditation on the idea of "Aham Brahmasmi." Just as cycle balance is gained by sheer practice, this conviction will also get assimilated by constant exposure to Vedanta.

# New Zealand is free of COVID-19

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern thanks citizens as nation lifts restrictions after 75 days

REUTERS

WELLINGTON  
New Zealand lifted all social and economic restrictions except border controls after declaring on Monday it was free of COVID-19, one of the first countries in the world to return to pre-pandemic normality. Public and private events, the retail and hospitality industries and all public transport were allowed to resume without the distancing rules still in place across much of the world.

"While the job is not done, there is no denying this is a milestone... Thank you, New Zealand," Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern told a news conference, saying she had danced for joy at the news.

"We are confident we have eliminated transmission of the virus in New Zealand for now, but elimination is not a point in time, it is a sustained effort."

New Zealand's five million people are emerging from the pandemic while big economies such as Brazil, Britain, India and the United States continue to grapple with the spread of the virus.

## 7 weeks of lockdown

Its 75 days of restrictions included about seven weeks of a strict lockdown in which most businesses were shut and everyone except essential workers had to stay home. "Today, 75 days later, we are ready," Ms. Ardern said, announcing that social distancing restrictions would end at midnight. Ms. Ardern said she had done a "little dance" when she was told there were no more active COVID-19 cases in New Zealand, surprising her two-year-old daughter, Neve. "She was caught a little by surprise and she joined it having absolutely no idea



**Moment of relief:** Commuters waiting for transport at a bus interchange in Christchurch, New Zealand, on Monday; right, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern speaking at a press conference. •AP



**Moment of relief:** Commuters waiting for transport at a bus interchange in Christchurch, New Zealand, on Monday; right, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern speaking at a press conference. •AP

why I was dancing around the lounge."

## Eliminating the virus

New Zealand has reported 1,154 infections and 22 deaths from COVID-19 since the virus arrived in late February. Ms. Ardern had vowed to eliminate, not merely contain, the virus, which meant stopping transmission for two weeks after the last known case was cleared. For now, everyone entering the country will continue to be tested and quarantined.

There have been no new infections for 17 days and, until Monday, just one active case for more than a week. Details of the final patient were not released for privacy reasons but it is believed to be a woman aged in her 50s who was linked to a cluster at an Auckland nursing home.

Ms. Ardern was quickly trending on Twitter, and many said they wanted to move to New Zealand. "Such news really brightens up your day! There is hope and this too

shall pass for the entire world," one user tweeted.

Former Prime Minister Helen Clark tweeted: "Clear leadership and an engaged public have produced this result."

Ms. Ardern, 39, has won global praise for her leadership during the pandemic.

Her popularity at home has soared and recent surveys suggest she is well placed to win a second term in September's election. Even so, the government will need to show it can revive the economy, which is expected to sink into recession.

Opposition parties have criticised Ms. Ardern's decision to maintain restrictions for so long.

Ms. Ardern did not comment on a timeline for a quarantine-free 'travel bubble' with Australia to facilitate tourism that the industries in both countries have been pushing for. "We will need to move cautiously here. No one wants to jeopardise the gains New Zealand has made," she said.

## 'Lockdowns averted 3 million deaths in Europe'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
PARIS

Lockdowns prevented around 3.1 million deaths in 11 European countries, according to a new modelling study published on Monday, as most nations tiptoe out of the strict measures to halt the spread of the new coronavirus.

Research by Imperial College London, whose scientists are advising the British government on the virus, found that restrictions such as stay-at-home orders had worked to bring the epidemic under control. Using European Centre of Disease Control data on deaths in 11 nations in the period up to May 4, the authors said in the study, published in *Nature Research*.

The researchers estimated that cumulatively between 12 and 15 million people had been infected in the period – or between 3.2 and 4% of the population of the 11 nations.

imposed. They estimated that approximately 3.1 million deaths had been averted by the policies.

Researchers also calculated that the interventions had caused the reproduction number – how many people someone with the virus infects – to drop by an average of 82%, to below 1.0. "Our results show that major non-pharmaceutical interventions, and lockdown in particular, have had a large effect on reducing transmission," the authors said in the study, published in *Nature Research*.

The researchers estimated that cumulatively between 12 and 15 million people had been infected in the period – or between 3.2 and 4% of the population of the 11 nations.

## ELSEWHERE



### 'Hong Kong needs to behave to keep status'

HONG KONG

In rare comments on Hong Kong's long-term future, Zhang Xiaoming, deputy director of China's Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, indicated that how Hong Kong's people behaved now in regard to the political situation would affect its post-2047 status. •REUTERS

### Trial of MH17 crash suspects resumes

BADHOEVENDORP

Lawyers for a Russian suspect in the trial of four men accused of downing flight MH17 in 2014 said COVID-19 has hampered efforts to prepare a defence. The trial resumed at a high-security courthouse outside Amsterdam's Schiphol airport on Monday. •AFP



Workers at a factory in Shanghai, China, in January. •REUTERS

## China to train 14 million migrant workers in 2 years

Unemployment numbers reached 33 million-40 million in May, after lockdowns were lifted

### ANANTH KRISHNAN

China on Monday outlined plans to train 14 million migrant workers in vocational programmes over the next two years, as it combats an unprecedented jobs crisis in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

At least seven million rural migrant workers will be trained in the coming year, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security said, in an initiative that "will target rural migrant workers including those with a job or without, and those who newly resettled in cities or returned to their hometowns, as well as poor labourers", State media reported.

**290 million workers**  
The pandemic has severely impacted China's 290 million migrant worker population, many of whom were left stuck in their hometowns in January and subsequently

found no jobs to return to after the gradual lifting of lockdowns by April. The outbreak hit during the annual new year holiday, by when most factories were closed and much of the migrant population had already returned home.

China's unemployment peaked at around 80 million in March, according to estimates, although official figures were much lower. According to UBS, the number of people not working reached 70 to 80 million in March, subsequently falling to between 33 million and 40 million in May, the *Wall Street Journal* reported.

The new plan calls on rural areas that have seen a large number of unemployed migrant workers return to lead in training, aimed at helping them find jobs locally or start businesses. Local governments have been asked to target specific industries that can absorb laid off workers, including

construction, machinery, catering and logistics.

### Limited support

For an officially Communist Party-run state, the Chinese government provides limited financial support for unemployed workers, which does not generally cover the migrant population.

In an effort to support laid off workers, China's Premier Li Keqiang in a visit to Shandong province last week called for unleashing what is being called the "street vendor economy", referring to allowing people to start street-side small businesses, in a marked shift from past crackdowns on unlicensed retailing in cities. "They are part of China's vitality," he said, referring to the opening of China's economy in the late 1970s when the government for the first time allowed self-employed businesses to open after the

Maoist era. "Self-employed businesses must survive and thrive," he said, highlighting the example of the city of Chengdu in Sichuan province, which created one lakh jobs by supporting 36,000 street stalls, the *South China Morning Post* reported.

The shift in policy on street-selling has generated heated debate in China over the past week, given the harsh approach in the past to informal street-selling, which is regulated by an urban management authority called "Chengguan" that is widely reviled in China for heavy-handed enforcement. "Who would have thought the day would come when family planning officials would beg people to have a second child," read one comment on WeChat reported by the Post, "and Chengguan would invite vendors to go out onto the street?"

## Intra-Afghan talks to begin soon: Abdullah

Khalilzad is talking to Taliban delegates'

SUHASINI HAIDAR  
NEW DELHI

The Afghanistan government is preparing for the first round of intra-Afghan talks with the Taliban "soon", said Abdullah Abdullah, the recently appointed chief of the High Council for National Reconciliation, on Monday.

The talks are expected to be held in Qatar, Mr. Abdullah said, while other countries that have offered to facilitate the talks, including Germany, may host future rounds.

"Khalilzad [has been] in Doha talking to Taliban delegates there in order to finalise the details, before the start of intra-Afghan negotiations," said Mr. Abdullah, referring to the U.S. Special Envoy on Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad's visit to Qatar, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

At this week, Mr. Abdullah was speaking to a group of international experts at a "Track-2" dialogue organised by the Kabul-based Heart of Asia Society (HAS).

The intra-Afghan dialogue will also see more calls for the Narendra Modi government to engage the Taliban. In the past few weeks, both Mr. Khalilzad and Russian Special Envoy for Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov, have said in separate interviews to *The Hindu* that they feel it is time for India to give up its opposition to talks with the Taliban which New Delhi has thus far seen as a terror group allied to Pakistan.

At least two senior Afghan officials also told *The Hindu* that they expected New Delhi to soften its stand on the Taliban once the intra-Afghan talks begin.

## Married couple to share the role of Germany's Slovenia Ambassador

Berlin's Foreign Ministry gives approval to their proposal

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
BERLIN

The Foreign Ministry in Berlin appointed a married couple to share the Ambassador's job in Slovenia, an unprecedented arrangement for Germany that allows them to balance work and family life.

Natalie Kauther, 45, and Adrian Pollmann, 43, said they will share the post in the capital Ljubljana for four years from August.

They have both been working for the Ministry since 2005 and foreign assignments are part of the job, but have three children, aged seven, eight and 10, and were keen to find a family-friendly arrangement. They came up with the idea of a job share and put it to Foreign Minister Heiko



Natalie Kauther and Adrian Pollmann.

Maas, who agreed to give it a try. Mr. Pollmann will be Ambassador for the first eight months and Ms. Kauther will then take over for eight months in a rotating system. They have already done a job share once before: as joint Deputy Ambassadors to Sarajevo.

The couple admit having very different personalities,

according to a report by ARD broadcaster, but hope this won't cause any diplomatic spats. "We see most things pretty similarly," Mr. Pollmann said.

Switzerland named a couple as joint Ambassadors to Thailand in 2009 and France also nominated a husband-and-wife team to Zagreb between 2016-2019.

The couple admit having very different personalities,

## Iran scientist returns after prisoner swap

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
TEHRAN

An Iranian scientist returned home on Monday after his release from a U.S. jail in what the Islamic republic said was a prisoner exchange it hopes can be repeated between the countries.

Majid Taheri – an Iranian-American who had been working at a clinic in Tampa, Florida – had been detained in the United States for 16 months. He was freed last Thursday as Iran released U.S. Navy veteran Michael White, who had been detained in the country since his arrest in July 2018.

Upon his arrival at Tehran's Imam Khomeini International Airport in 2009 and France also nominated a husband-and-wife team to Zagreb between 2016-2019.

The couple admit having very different personalities,

## Notre-Dame workers start removing scaffolding

Around 40,000 tubes were fused into a tangled mass during the 2019 fire



**A complex operation:** Workers taking part in the dismantling operation at the Notre-Dame Cathedral on Monday. •AFP

the spire that was being carried out when the fire erupted on the evening of April 15, 2019. Millions of people around the world watched as the fire tore through the church's roof, causing its steeple to collapse and sending billowing fumes containing toxic molten lead into the air. Workers first had to install a new lattice of scaffolding to encompass the roughly 40 tonnes of molten metal and stabilise it as well as the fire-scarred walls of the 13th-century masterpiece. Two teams of five will take turns cutting away the tubes one by one while hanging from rope harnesses.

Marking the first anniversary of the disaster in April, President Emmanuel Macron reiterated his goal of restoring Notre-Dame to its former glory by 2024. But the renovation has been slowed by a series of delays.

charity that is overseeing the collection of donations for the cathedral. "Pieces of the scaffolding could fall and weaken parts of the walls," he said, describing the work as "very complicated, with a sizable degree of risk."

A telescopic lift carried workers into the middle of the structure for a last evaluation, and a towering crane

installed at the site brought up equipment.

### Sawing it apart

Later this week, workers will be suspended by ropes to start sawing apart the scaffolding, an operation expected to last through the summer, Mr. Rousselot said.

The scaffolding had been installed for a renovation of

the cathedral. "When all this is taken care of, we'll be extremely relieved because the cathedral will have been saved," said Christophe Rousselot, director general of the Fondation Notre-Dame, the

charity that is overseeing the collection of donations for the cathedral. "Pieces of the scaffolding could fall and weaken parts of the walls," he said, describing the work as "very complicated, with a sizable degree of risk."

A telescopic lift carried workers into the middle of the structure for a last evaluation, and a towering crane

## Minneapolis council votes to dismantle police after protests

It calls for a 'new model of public safety' amidst outrage

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
WASHINGTON

The council of the U.S. city of Minneapolis voted late on Sunday to dismantle and rebuild the police department, after the death in custody of George Floyd sparked nationwide protests about racism in law enforcement, pushing the issue onto the national political agenda.

Floyd was killed on May 25 when white Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin pressed his knee on the unarmed black man's neck for nearly nine minutes. Chauvin has been charged with second-degree murder and was to appear in court on Monday.

"We committed to dismantling policing as we know it in the city of Minneapolis and to rebuild with our community a new model of public safety that actually keeps our community safe," Council President Lisa Bender told CNN.

Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey, however, is against getting rid of the department.

### Call for police reform

On Sunday, protesters in cities including Washington, New York and Winter Park, Florida, began focusing their outrage over the death of the unarmed Floyd into demands for police reform and social justice.

Former Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Colin Powell joined them on Sunday, saying Mr. Trump had "drifted away" from the Constitution.

Mr. Powell, a Republican moderate, said Mr. Trump had weakened America's position around the world and that in November's presidential election he would support Democrat Joe Biden.

Condoleezza Rice, who succeeded Mr. Powell as Secretary of State under President George W. Bush, told CBS she would "absolutely" oppose using the military against peaceful protesters, adding, "This isn't a battlefield."

Although Mr. Romney has been a rare Republican voice of opposition to Mr. Trump, he was joined last week by



## MARKET WATCH

	08-06-2020	% CHANGE
Sensex	34,371	0.24
US Dollar	75.55	0.04
Gold	46,959	--
Brent oil	41.01	-2.47

## NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	343.30	2.15
Asian Paints	1634.25	-4.30
Axis Bank	430.25	24.95
Bajaj Auto	2801.05	24.75
Bajaj Finserv	5440.95	204.55
Bajaj Finance	2507.25	116.90
Bharti Airtel	585.15	0.80
BPLC	394.10	24.50
Britannia Ind	3426.80	-39.90
Cipla	635.10	-15.80
Coal India	146.70	1.85
Dr Reddys Lab	3967.60	-57.30
Eicher Motors	16894.85	-600.50
GAIL (India)	104.75	6.90
Grasim Ind	617.15	-10.00
HCL Tech	578.25	2.30
HDFC	1760.80	-5.80
HDFC Bank	1015.90	-17.45
Hero MotoCorp	2384.30	43.65
Hindalco	146.35	-2.90
Hind Unilever	2111.70	24.10
ICICI Bank	359.80	2.60
IndusInd Bank	451.60	29.25
Bharti Infratel	230.20	-6.05
Infosys	720.85	17.30
Indian Oil Corp	93.10	3.70
ITC	197.65	-2.35
JSW Steel	194.95	-2.10
Kotak Bank	1336.75	-1.05
L&T	961.35	6.10
MMB	470.85	-13.35
Maruti Suzuki	5734.80	-11.40
Nestle India Ltd.	16836.20	-260.65
NTPC	98.55	0.60
ONGC	90.95	4.00
PowerGrid Corp	172.35	0.90
Reliance Ind	1569.50	-12.20
State Bank	186.80	-1.00
Shree Cement	21180.90	-908.70
Sun Pharma	489.10	-5.25
Tata Motors	115.45	4.70
Tata Steel	333.60	-5.35
TCS	2071.75	23.50
Tech Mahindra	590.00	10.15
Titan	1025.00	34.05
UltraTech Cement	3778.20	-91.35
UPL	436.80	-2.60
Vedanta	105.10	-0.20
Wipro	226.45	7.70
Zee Entertainment	197.05	-9.15

## Economy to contract 3.2% in FY21: WB

Shrinkage in India GDP attributed to COVID-19, curbs, says World Bank; forecasts 3.1% growth in FY22

## SRIRAM LAKSHMAN

The Indian economy is expected to contract by 3.2% in this fiscal year as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated restrictions, the World Bank said in its Global Economic Prospects (GEP) June 2020 report released on Monday. Growth is forecast at 3.1% next year.

The world economy, as a whole, is set to witness its deepest recession since World War II, with a forecasted contraction of 5.2% this year – some 60 million could be pushed into extreme poverty, World Bank Group President David Malpass had warned last week.

With updated data now available, this number could be 70-100 million, a Bank economist told reporters on a briefing call on Monday.

Emerging market and de-



Up to 100 mn may be pushed into extreme poverty; this is up from the 60 mn estimated earlier by David Malpass. — AFP

veloping economies (EMDEs) are expected to contract by 2.5% this year, and economic activity in advanced economies is forecast to shrink by 7%, as domestic supply and demand, finance and trade have been disrupted due to the pan-

demic. Countries most reliant on global trade, tourism, external financing and commodity exports are likely to hit the hardest.

This is a deeply sobering outlook, with the crisis likely to leave long-lasting scars and pose major global chal-

lenges,” said World Bank economist Ceyla Pazarbasioglu.

In the baseline scenario, global growth is set to rebound at 4.2% in 2021, with EMDEs growing at 4.6% and advanced economies growing at 3.9%.

This, however, is the baseline forecast and assumes that pandemic-induced domestic restrictions will be lifted by mid-year in advanced economies and a bit later in EMDEs.

The downside scenario is more severe – the global economy could shrink this year by as much as 8% (5% for EMDEs), followed by weak recovery at just above 1% growth next year.

Spillover effects from weak global growth and balance sheet stress are also weighing down on economic activity, as per the report. India is forecast to see some recovery next year and grow at 3.1%.

2019-20 (year ended March 31, 2020). Output is expected to contract by 3.2% (so growth is -3.2%) in FY2020-21, as the impact of the pandemic (the restrictions on activity) will largely fall in this year, despite the fiscal and monetary stimulus.

## Balance sheet stress

The growth forecast for this fiscal year is 9 percentage points lower than the GEP forecasts from January 2020, when the forecast for this fiscal was a (positive) 5.8% – the world was not yet in the grip of the pandemic.

Flows into debt funds saw an increase at ₹63,665 crore compared with the previous month's ₹43,431 crore.

“On the debt side, investors taking advantage of the conducive reducing interest rates trend and shifting towards high quality AAA-rated paper has resulted in a steady rise in net flows,” said N. S. Venkatesh, CEO, AMFI, adding credit risk concerns had ebbed as redemptions reduced following regulatory support.

Credit risk funds, which have been in the news for the quality of paper they hold, saw net outflows of ₹5,173 crore in May, much lower than the previous month's ₹19,239 crore.

Among exchange traded funds (ETFs), gold funds also registered a rise in net inflows at ₹815 crore (₹731 crore in April) as many market participants were seen recommending the yellow metal as a hedge against volatility among most other asset classes.

## Mirroring markets?

Despite MFs witnessing a dip in equity scheme inflows, the number of SIP accounts registered a small gain in May

Category	Net Flows (₹ crore)	
	May 2020	April 2020
Open ended schemes	63,665.54	43,431.55
Debt oriented schemes	5,256.52	6,212.96
Equity oriented schemes	8,652.04	4,204.78
Hybrid schemes	97.12	82.97
Solution oriented schemes	815.03	730.93
Gold ETFs	562.58	634.84
Index ETFs	(9,110.07)	(9,119.14)
Close ended schemes	(210.99)	(104.67)

SOURCE: AMFI

## Mutual funds see dip in equity scheme inflows

Gold ETFs shimmer, debt funds surge

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

Mutual funds (MFs) saw a dip in equity scheme inflows in May compared with the previous month as net flows through systematic investment plans (SIPs) also contracted marginally.

The number of SIP accounts, however, registered a small gain in May as overall assets under management of the MF industry rose to ₹24.55 lakh crore in May from the ₹23.94 lakh crore in April, data from Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI) showed.

As per the latest data, equity schemes witnessed net inflows of ₹5,256.52 crore in May, lower than the previous month's ₹6,212.96 crore. Further, the flows through SIPs continued to decline at ₹8,123.03 crore in May from April's ₹8,376.11 crore.

This crisis is unprecedented and so will its economic fallout be – such as lower capex demand and lower discretionary spends – slowing down credit offset significantly in the current fiscal,” said Krishnan Sitaraman, senior director, Crisil Ratings.

The SIP flow in March was pegged at ₹8,641.20

## Facing labour shortage, says L&amp;T

‘Confident that 1 lakh workers, now in their home States, will return by June end’

## PIYUSH PANDEY

MUMBAI

Even as Larsen and Toubro (L&T) is looking to re-start work at its construction sites with the easing of the lockdown, India's largest engineering and construction firm is facing acute shortage of labour as over one lakh workers – almost half its labour – have gone to their homes in U.P., Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Orissa during the lockdown.

The company has restarted most of its factories and about 90% of the 1,000-odd project sites with almost half of the labourers, but execution remains a challenge.

When asked for comments about the migrant labours crisis, S N Subrahmanyam



S.N. Subrahmanyam

MD and CEO, L&T, told *The Hindu*, “We had 2.25 lakh labourers working with us pre-Covid; now we have 1.2 lakh people with us. We need to get back one lakh people to resume operations.”

L&T is also banking on on-

boarding a large number of

labourers coming from the Gulf region who have been laid off due to the significant fall in the oil prices.

“We expect most of the labourers to come back by the end of this month. Our project teams are tapping labourers returning to India from the Middle East due to job losses there,” he said.

When asked about the U.P. government assuring jobs to most migrant workers returning and the possibility of their staying back, Mr. Subrahmanyam said, “All this will happen; it's a psychological issue more than anything else. Labourers will ultimately come back to organisations that have treated them well, taken care of them with good facilities.”

L&T's infrastructure division, which accounts for a majority of revenues, is facing challenges due to half of work in multiple projects across Andhra Pradesh on the State government's directions to review all projects ordered by the previous government; stoppage of all construction work in the NCR region by the Supreme Court during winter for environmental reasons; lower fund allocation in some States; and, execution challenges in the last few weeks of the year on account of the pandemic, among others.

According to Mr. Subrahmanyam, workers generally return to their home States during Holi or the harvest season and return after that. According to Mr. Agarwal, India has lost over ₹40,000 crore due to closure of this plant, of which ₹1.2 billion was lost in foreign exchange alone.

Citing media reports in Pakistan, Mr. Agarwal said in his letter that Islamabad's copper shipments to China had increased 400% in the last three years to ₹550 million last year, boosting Pakistan's local economy even as Chinese firms were vying to capture India's copper market.

“My care and concern is that the closure has impacted our country in multiple ways; country has become, for the first time in the last two decades, a net importer rather than an exporter of copper resulting in a heavy import bill,” Mr. Agarwal said in his letter, a copy of which was reviewed by *The Hindu*.

Due to the closure of the plant, thousands of workers had been rendered jobless, aggravating the unemployment situation and adding to the exodus of the migrants.

“The closure has led to idling and rusting of precious machinery and materials and loss of revenue to the exchequer of both the Centre and the Government of Tamil Nadu in the form of taxes, cess, etc,” Mr. Agarwal said in the letter.

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## IN BRIEF



## Mayer wins decathletes' garden clash

PARIS World record-holder Kevin Mayer of France came out on top as three of the world's top decathletes – Mayer, German Niklas Kaul and Estonian Maicel Uibo – competed in the innovative live-streamed event under the 'Ultimate Garden Clash' banner. The constraints ruled out several disciplines. **AFP**

## CAS begins hearing into Manchester City's appeal

LAUSANNE Manchester City's appeal against a two-year ban from European competition opened before the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) on Monday by videoconference. City is accused of overstating sponsorship revenue to hide its failure to comply with UEFA's financial fair-play (FFP) rules between 2012 and 2016. City was also fined €30 million. **AFP**



## COVID-free NZ: Neesham congratulates citizens

WELLINGTON New Zealand cricketer James Neesham on Monday congratulated the citizens of his country as the last COVID-19 case recovered and now the nation has no active cases. "Coronavirus free NZ! Congratulations everyone. Once again those great kiwi attributes: planning, determination and teamwork do the job," Neesham said in a tweet. — **IANS**

## Serie A could finish without a champion

MILAN The Italian soccer season could finish without a champion if Serie A is stopped again because of the coronavirus pandemic. The Italian federation on Monday approved plans for a playoff or use of an algorithm if the season cannot be finished. **AP**



## Nacho injured, doubtful for Real's Eibar game

MADRID Real Madrid defender Nacho Fernandez is likely to miss the match against Eibar on Sunday due to a thigh injury. He is the first Real player to suffer an injury after the club returned to full training at the start of the month. Real lies two points behind Barcelona in the LaLiga race. **AFP**



## 'Order of Australia' honour for Clarke

SYDNEY Australia's World Cup-winning (2015) former captain Michael Clarke was on Monday appointed an officer in the Order of Australia. Other captains who have been similarly honoured include Ricky Ponting, Mark Taylor, Steve Waugh, Allan Border and Bob Simpson. **PTI**



## Captaincy will put extra pressure on Stokes: KP

LONDON Kevin Pietersen thinks Ben Stokes should not captain England if Joe Root is forced to miss a game against the West Indies because it would heap too much pressure on him. "Do I want to see Stokes change from who he is and the current player he is? Probably not. Entertainers and the guys that have to carry the mantle in the team sometimes aren't the best captains and struggle with extra pressure." **AFP**

## Gomathi handed four-year ban

Will lose Asian 800m gold; insists she didn't take any prohibited substances

K. KEERTHIVASAN  
CHENNAI

Gomathi Marimuthu, the 2019 Asian athletics championship 800m gold medalist, has been stripped of her medal and banned for four years by the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) after her 'B' sample also returned positive for anabolic steroid nandrolone.

All of Gomathi's competition results between March 18 and May 17, 2019, stand annulled.

The Tamil Nadu athlete's medals, titles, ranking points and prize and appearance money are to be forfeited as well.

Gomathi, who was provisionally suspended in May last year when her 'A' sample returned positive, has also been ordered to pay the AIU, within 28 days, £1,000 towards legal and other expenses.

AFI president Adille Sumariwalla said: "AFI will not



**Paying the price!** Gomathi's moment of glory last year will no longer find a place in the record books. **REUTERS**

be involved in the case, it has zero tolerance towards doping. We are doing 1,500 tests every year. And we are also working to make doping a criminal offence."

Gomathi still has the option of approaching the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), he said.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Gomathi said: "I am going to appeal. I need the help of the

State Government. I am confident that I didn't take any prohibited substances. It could have possibly been in the non-vegetarian food that I had had."

Had NADA intimated her that she had been found positive in the domestic meets before her departure to Doha, Gomathi said she would have been able to investigate and know the truth. "NADA

said I tested positive in the Federation Cup and the selection trials for the Asian championship. If they had informed me earlier, and not after the Asian championships, I would have had the time and not suffered the embarrassment in Doha."

She revealed that only her lawyer was consulted by the AIU in April as her doctor was on COVID duty.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Gomathi said: "I am going to appeal. I need the help of the

## Strict norms in place for resumption of LaLiga

110 matches set to be completed in six weeks

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The action in LaLiga is all set to resume on June 11.

Addressing the Indian media through video conference, the managing director of LaLiga India, Jose Cachaza, announced that 110 matches were scheduled to be completed at 20 grounds in a six-week period, in what he termed "difficult way of finishing the season."

The matches will be held at 5.30 p.m., 8.30 p.m., 11 p.m. and 1.30 a.m. IST.

## Limited presence

It was announced that the health of players, officials and support staff would be constantly monitored and only 250 people, including players and television crew, would be allowed in the stadiums, which will not have spectators.

While the action on the pitch will not be any different from the past, except for a semblance of social distancing, the bench will have an extension and the players



**Ready to roll:** Lionel Messi and his Barcelona mates would be back in action this weekend. **GETTY IMAGES**

would sport masks.

For the TV audience, and especially for the millions in Asia following the matches on Facebook Live, there will be digitisation to engage the viewers.

"The important message is, we can sort of take control of our lives. A few fans in the stadium would have

been good, but we need to keep our guard up against the virus," said Cachaza.

Cachaza also hoped that Indian cricketers would be hitting the ball soon.

Defending champion Barcelona is leading the table with 58 points from 27 matches, two ahead of Real Madrid.

## Messi back in training

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
MADRID

Lionel Messi trained again with his teammates on Monday to give Barcelona a massive boost ahead of its LaLiga return against Mallorca on Saturday.

Messi has been suffering from tightness in his right thigh and had not trained fully since last Tuesday. He sat out sessions on Wednesday and Friday before working alone at Camp Nou on Saturday.

But Barcelona said in a statement its captain has re-joined "the rest of the team in the week of the return to competition in the Spanish league".

Picks it above being the Davis Cup captain again

KAMESH SRINIVASAN  
NEW DELHI

Leander Paes may be keen to play in a record eighth Olympics in Tokyo. However, he was compelled to say 'no' when Purav Raja queried whether he would compete in the 2024 edition if Tokyo got cancelled.

It was a heady climax for the Sunday Instagram show, *Chai with Raja*, as special guest Lara Dutta teased the host by saying that the show should be named 'Rum with Raja', possibly as a means to celebrate husband Mahesh Bhupathi's birthday.

**Frosty**  
The former Miss Universe joked that Bhupathi had become "one year older, [but] I don't know whether he has turned wiser". She also equated the love-hate relationship of Paes and Bhupathi to the one between Shah Rukh Khan and Salman Khan.

Paes was thrilled to talk about his film *Rajdhani Express*, but said that his successful business ventures

needs to be imbibed in training sessions first. Hopefully, we will have some alternative in place," said Kuldeep.

For the 25-year-old, the biggest concern is controlling the habit of using saliva.

"Since childhood, we have this habit of applying saliva on the ball to keep the shine. With new rules in place, I am trying to get rid of the habit. I believe it



**Hot and cold:** The relationship between Leander Paes and Mahesh Bhupathi has seen ups and downs. **PTI**

were "Olympics, Grand Slam doubles and mixed doubles". He opted to mentor the boys, rather than become the Davis Cup captain again.

Rahul Dravid, happy to see him "fight in the trenches", Paes picked Sourav Ganguly for his fascinating career and predicted an ICC position for the former India cricket captain and the current BCCI president.

**Magic wand**  
When asked what he did not have, Paes said, "a magic wand to eradicate poverty."

Beyond Bhupathi's backhand return and Bopanna's serve, Paes picked the latter, saying, "it is one hell of a serve".

## Bedia extends stay at FC Goa

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
PANJIM

Indian Super League (ISL) franchise FC Goa, on Monday, announced that Spaniard Edu Bedia has signed a new deal with the club, which will keep him here till 2022.

Bedia was roped in at the start of the 2017-18 ISL season from Real Zaragoza, and has featured in 51 matches for the Goan club in the ISL, bagging nine goals and nine assists, said a media release issued by the club.



Lovlina Borgohain.

## Boxer Lovlina Borgohain keen on getting better

World championships bronze medallist feels postponement of Olympics has given her more time

Y.B. SARANGI  
KOLKATA

One of the most well-known faces of the 627 people of Bara Mukhia village in Golaghat district of Assam, Lovlina Borgohain, is not yet satisfied with her achievements. The two-time World championships bronze medallist boxer seeks to further excel in her sport.

Understandably, the 22-year-old, who has secured an Olympic quota place in 69kg, is disappointed to miss out on the National camp.

"Earlier, there was a problem (to train at home) due to the lack of equipment.

"Since I am part of TOPS, I asked for the equipment and got a punching bag and strength and conditioning equipment. It has benefited me. However, I am missing out on the camp as I cannot do proper training at home," Lovlina told *The Hindu*.

## Memorable

Nevertheless, Lovlina – who wholeheartedly helped fellow villagers by distributing

food packets in the early phase of the lockdown – has spent some memorable time while being at home.

"Some time back, our financial condition was not good. We used to wonder what we would eat next. So, I know the condition of people in our area very well. There are people who don't get to eat if they don't work. A few weeks back, the situation was really bad. I did whatever I could to help people.

"Spending so much time

with the family is relaxing. I also get time to watch videos of some fights and learn a few things.

"I can apply those only when I get back in the ring," said Lovlina, who is in contention for this year's Arjuna Award.

The postponement of the Olympics has been welcome sign for Lovlina, who is also an Asian championships bronze medallist.

"I have got more time to hone my skills. I may have got some medals, but I am

not satisfied with my performance. I end up with a bronze medal. I want to work on my game and make it better.

"For me, the most important thing is the psychological aspect – how to handle different situations. The more we spend time on sparring, the more confident we become.

"For example, two opponents can use the same technique differently. One can figure out how to tackle both only in the ring."

## Role of microRNA in growth and spread of tongue cancer cells

IIT-M research could help develop therapeutics

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI

Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology Madras have identified a specific microRNA (miRNAs) called 'miR-155' that is over-expressed in tongue cancer. The research team has shown that knocking out miR-155 causes death of cancer cells, arrests the cell cycle and regresses tumour size in animal models and reduces cell viability and colony formation in bench top assays.

The finding could help develop molecular strategies to manipulate miR-155 expression to develop therapeutics for tongue cancer.

The miRNAs affect cancer growth through inhibiting or

found to play important roles in many cancers, in carcinogenesis (start of cancer), malignant transformation and metastasis – the development of secondary cancer. The miRNAs associated with cancer are called 'Oncomirs'.

Many of the Oncomirs affect cancer by suppressing the performance of tumour-suppressing agents. Some of them can prevent the growth and spread of cancer cells and yet others prevent tumour growth itself, he said.

miRNA manipulation is being combined with conventional cancer treatment methods such as chemotherapy, radiotherapy and immunotherapy.

## Affordable shoe sole sanitiser developed

ITI Berhampur's innovation mitigates threat of transmission at hospitals

SIB KUMAR DAS  
BERHAMPUR

An affordable ultraviolet-C (UVC) shoe sole sanitiser, developed by the Industrial Training Institute (ITI) in Odisha's Berhampur was formally launched via video conference on Monday, and its first unit was handed over to a COVID-19 hospital at Sitalapalli on the outskirts of the city.

Threat of transmission of pathogenic viruses and microbes through the soles of footwear is extremely high at hospitals and public places like schools, offices, airports, railway stations, shopping malls and hotels. "As fear of COVID-19 is going to be a part of our life in the coming months, we decided to innovate existing technology to develop this affordable UVC sole sanitiser," said Rajat Kumar Panigrahy, Principal,

ITI-Berhampur. The innovation costs ₹6,000-₹7,000. Similar sole sanitisers are marketed at a price of USD 5,000 in America, and some private companies in India are selling such devices at ₹50,000, Mr. Panigrahy said.

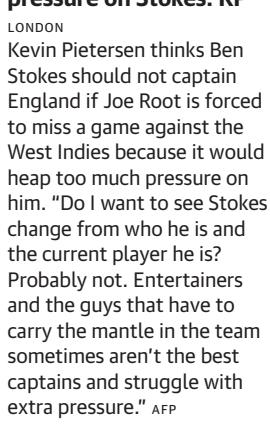
The device includes a covered portable platform with a shoe sole receiving surface. When a person stands on it and places his or her shoe soles on the surface, a timer unit lights up the UVC lamps underneath, which direct UVC rays for eight seconds to eradicate micro-organisms on the soles.

Out of three types of UV radiations named UVA, UVB and UVC, short wavelength UVC damages and alters DNA of all potentially harmful microbes, including viruses, making them incapable of replication. To avoid leakage of UVC harmful to human eyes, the device has a leak-proof cover over the chamber where the footwear is placed. Prototypes of this sole sanitiser were virtually inaugurated by the chairman of the Odisha Skill Development Authority (OSDA), Subroto Bagchi.

The standard device can disinfect the soles of both shoes at a go. A cheaper, single chamber unit has also been developed, in which soles can be disinfected one after the other. Its affordability ensures the device can be used in shops and homes as well.

## Captaincy will put extra pressure on Stokes: KP

LONDON Kevin Pietersen thinks Ben Stokes should not captain England if Joe Root is forced to miss a game against the West Indies because it would heap too much pressure on him. "Do I want to see Stokes change from who he is and the current player he is? Probably not. Entertainers and the guys that have to carry the mantle in the team sometimes aren't the best captains and struggle with extra pressure." **AFP**



Curb the instinct to apply saliva: