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India must not give Taliban legitimacy until it joins talks: Amar Sinha
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NEARBY

State Cong. comes to the rescue of Kerala workers

MUMBAA
Eldose Chettan from Kerala's Wayanad district worked in a resort at Murud in Raigad district and was desperate to return home to look after his father, who is inflicted with cancer. Similarly, 18 others from the southern State had their own compelling reasons to go back. But with no trains running to the southern States from Maharashtra, their families approached Wayanad MP Rahul Gandhi's office, which in turn asked the local Youth Congress to make arrangements for their travel to Kerala. "The Congress obtained the travel permission for all of us and also arranged a bus. We reached Kerala four days ago by road," Mr. Chettan told *The Hindu* over the phone.

DETAILS ▶ PAGE 2

BMC cancels Wankhede quarantine centre plan

MUMBAA
After local residents opposed the move, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) on Sunday cancelled its plan to turn Wankhede Stadium into a quarantine facility. In a letter issued to the Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) on Friday, the BMC had sought immediate handing over of the stadium for housing asymptomatic high-risk contacts and emergency staff of A' Ward. Mumbai Mayor Kishori Pednekar visited Wankhede on Saturday.

DETAILS ▶ PAGE 3

EDUCATION PLUS ▶ PAGE 11

Lockdown extended; States will take a call on infection zones

Government eases inter-State travel but curbs on malls, religious gatherings stay

VIIJA SINGH
NEW DELHI

The Centre on Sunday extended the nationwide lockdown, first imposed on March 24, for the fourth time till May 31 while giving considerable flexibility to the States in deciding red, green and orange zones of COVID-19 intensity.

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), in its fresh guidelines for Lockdown 4.0, eased restrictions considerably by allowing inter-State movement of buses and cars, opening of all shops, except those in malls and containment zones, and the delivery of non-essential items through online shop-

More relaxations

Here are the list of permitted activities for the fourth phase of the lockdown, as notified by the Ministry of Home Affairs in an order:



- Buses, autorickshaws and cabs
- All shops, except those in malls and containment zones
- Weddings, with not more than 50 guests, and funerals with not more than 20 people
- Barber shops and salons
- Restaurants, only for take-away
- Cap on 33% strength in offices removed, work from home to be encouraged. Social distancing and staggered work hours to be followed
- Inter-State movement of vehicles to be decided by States mutually
- Delivery of essential and non-essential items allowed through online shopping platforms



- Metro, air and rail services, except those allowed with special permits
- Schools, colleges and malls
- Religious and political gatherings
- Night curfew for non-essential services remain in force from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m.
- Vulnerable groups like those above 65 years of age, pregnant women and children below 10 to remain at home
- Wearing of masks compulsory in public places and workplaces
- States can decide the delineation of zones into red, green, orange and containment zones

COVID-19

ping platforms. Barber shops and salons can also open.

The 33% restriction on workforce in offices has also been done away with.

The decision to extend the lockdown was taken after the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) directed the Centre and the State governments to continue the lockdown measures to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus. The National Executive Committee (NEC), chaired by Union

Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla, was directed to modify the lockdown guidelines keeping in view the need to restart economic activities.

While metro systems, domestic and international air travel continue to remain suspended, the new guidelines allow plying of autorickshaws, cab aggregators and private taxis, subject to permission by local authorities. Special train services to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus. The National Directives

for COVID-19 Management said that the practice of work from home should be followed to the extent possible and staggered work hours should be adopted in respect of all offices and other establishments.

"There should be provision for thermal scanning, hand wash and sanitisers at all entry and exit points and common areas; and all work places and other sensitive locations are to be sanitised regularly. In work places, social distancing would also

need to be ensured through adequate distance between workers, adequate gaps between shifts, staggering the lunch break of staff and so on," the guidelines said.

The MHA said the Aarogya Setu mobile app is a powerful tool "to facilitate quick identification of persons infected by COVID-19 or at risk of being infected, thus acting as a shield for individuals and the community."

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Over 5,000 cases recorded on Sunday

Maharashtra's tally goes up by 2,347

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Maharashtra registered its highest single-day increase of 2,347 COVID-19 cases to take its overall tally to 33,053 and 1,198 deaths. With 34 new deaths, Gujarat's toll increased to 659. Tamil Nadu registered 639 more cases, and its death toll rose by four to take the tally to 79.

Reports from the State Health Departments put the nationwide tally at 95,622 cases and the death toll at 3,021. With an increase of 5,034 cases on Sunday, infections are now doubling every 13.8 days if data of past seven days are considered. This is among the fastest in the list of countries with the highest number of infections.

The average number of new cases per day from May 10-16 has risen to 3,989, compared to a daily average of 3,675 from May 8-14.

Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said on Sun-



A migrant worker preparing for his onward journey, in Bhubaneswar on Sunday.
▪ BISWARANJAN ROUT

State yet to spell out new lockdown norms



A new quarantine centre is being readied at the Maharashtra Nature Park in Dharavi on Sunday. ▶ RAVI NADAR

ALOK DESHPANDE
MUMBAI

day that the country's fatality rate had fallen to 3.1% and the recovery rate had improved to 37.5%.

He added that there were

3.1% patients in ICU, 0.45%

on ventilators and 2.7% on

oxygen support. India's testing capacity had increased to 1,00,000 tests per day through 373 government laboratories and 152 private laboratories, the government said.

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SPIKE DISPROVES PREDICTION
OF DECLINE ▶ PAGE 9

be notified in due course.'

Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray had held a meeting with senior ministers from the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government two days ago to discuss the phase four of the lockdown in Maharashtra. After the meeting, it was learnt that relaxations on movement restrictions as well as industry operations will be given in green and orange zones.

As per the Centre's guidelines, the State can decide on rest of the issues following above mentioned instructions.

Migrant who returned from Mumbai dies of 'hunger'

OMAR RASHID
LUCKNOW

A migrant worker who had returned from Mumbai on a truck allegedly died of hunger at Kannauj while he was walking back home to Hardoi district, Uttar Pradesh, officials said.

The migrant worker, Vinod, and 26 others had boarded a truck from Mumbai towards U.P. on May 14. The last time he ate proper food was on May 15, said Shailesh Kumar Singh, SDM, Kannauj, on Sunday.

Early on Saturday, around 3 a.m., the truck carrying 27 passengers reached Kannauj. Seventeen workers belonging to Hardoi got off at the bypass. "They had barely walked for half a km when

Body missing from morgue

RAINA ASSAINAR
NAVI MUMBAI

The body of a migrant labourer from Ulwe, which was along with seven others was travelling to Ahmedabad from Karnataka in a tempo traveller, died in an accident at Kamothe on Sunday after-

noon. Kamrul Mumtazali Islam and his six associates had gone to Karnataka for a religious meet before the lockdown and had been stuck in the State.

"After the Karnataka government lifted travel restrictions, Islam, the group leader, and the other six underwent COVID-19 test. After their results came negative, they applied for the permission to travel," senior police inspector Babasaheb Tupe from Kamothe police station said. Their vehicle rammed into a stationary bus on the Mumbai-Sion Highway. "He was rushed to MGM Hospital where he was declared dead on arrival, Mr. Tupe said. (With inputs from Raina Assainar)

one of them died. He had been lagging behind the others," Mr. Singh said.

The preliminary reason behind the death as per the accounts of the relatives who came with him was hunger, the official said.

Bengal. According to his cousin Abdul Kareem, Shaikh died of cardiac arrest on May 9 and his body was taken to the hospital by the NRI police. Navi Mumbai Commissioner Anmasaheb Misal confirmed the incident.

DETAILS ▶ PAGE 3

Tablighi leader dies
A 67-year-old religious leader of Shura Tablighi Jamat, who along with seven others was travelling to Ahmedabad from Karnataka in a tempo traveller, died in an accident at Kamothe on Sunday after-

HINDU



Over 42,000 undertrials released to de-congest prisons: NALSA report
page 10

Obama says U.S. lacks leadership on combating the virus
page 12

Centre throws open all sectors to private players

MGNREGA gets ₹40,000 crore in FM's fifth tranche

Final dose

The fifth tranche of the economic package under the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan was announced on Sunday

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

The Centre has agreed to demands from States to hike their borrowing limits from 3% to 5% of their GDP in light of the COVID-19 crisis, but on the condition that they implement specific reforms.

The fifth and final tranche of the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan stimulus package, announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday, also included an additional ₹40,000 crore allocation for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), and a new policy welcoming private companies into every sector of industry, while limiting public sector enterprises to strategic sectors only. Corporate enterprises were also offered some relief via changes to the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) and the Companies Act.

The total package amounts to almost ₹21 lakh crore by the Centre's accounting, but is heavy on credit-related measures, including ₹8 lakh crore worth of liquidity enhancing measures by the RBI. Some analysts felt that this amounted to double counting as the credit guarantee schemes to

support small companies and non-banking finance companies would also tap into the RBI's measures.

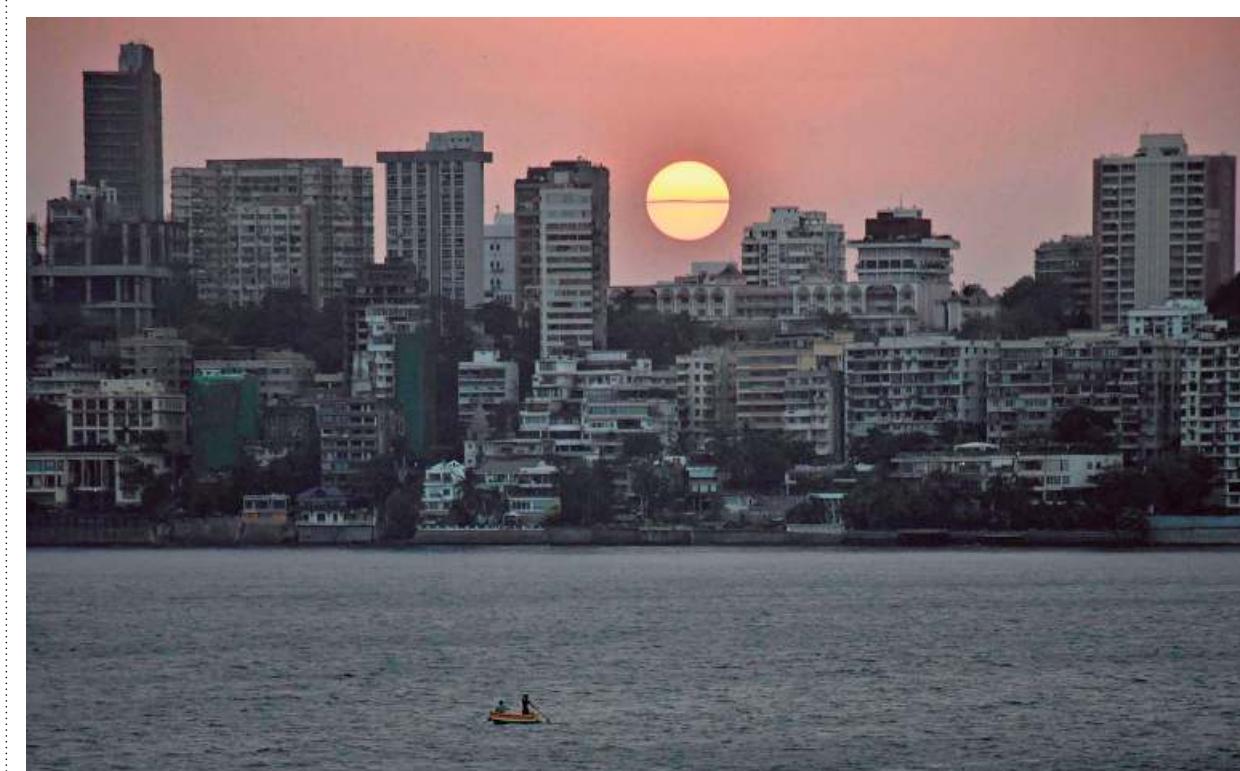
"The final picture shows that of the ₹20.97 lakh crore stimulus package – which amounts to 9.8% of GDP – only ₹2.2 lakh crore can be traced as direct additional budgetary cost to the Central exchequer, while another ₹1.55 lakh crore relates to already budgeted expenditures," said Ernst and Young chief policy adviser D.K. Srivastava, who is also on the Advisory Council for the 15th Finance Commission.

"The remaining 85% comes from the RBI's liquidity announcements, credit guarantee schemes and insurance schemes, apart from the structural reforms which are not really stimulus or relief measures."

The decision to allocate ₹40,000 crore to the MGNREGA scheme in addition to the ₹61,000 crore allocated in the Budget was widely welcomed, as a measure that will support rural livelihoods at a time when returning migrants swell unemployment in the villages.

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Last sundown of third lockdown



Twilight zone: The sun sets over the Arabian Sea, with Mumbai's tony Malabar Hill in the backdrop, on Sunday evening as the city braces for an extended lockdown. ▶ AADESH CHAUDHARY

Worst day for State and Capital yet

2,347 more cases, 63 deaths recorded; Mumbai now has over 20,000 COVID-19 cases

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE
TANVI DESHPANDE
PUNE/MUMBAI

With a record 2,347 fresh COVID-19 cases reported, it was yet another dismal Sunday for Maharashtra as its tally reached 33,053 cases, with 1,198 dead, taking into account 63 fresh fatalities. On May 10, last Sunday, the State had recorded its previous high of 1,943 cases.

Mumbai city recorded a staggering 1,595 of the new cases, the highest in a day for the city as well, to hit 20,150 cases. State health officials said 24,161 cases were active, accounting for over 40% of the country's active cases, with its death toll accounting for a third of overall deaths. Till date, 2,73,239 samples have been

tested in Maharashtra.

Of the 63 fatalities on Sunday, 38 were reported from Mumbai city to take its death toll to 734, while nine deaths were reported from Pune district to take its death toll to 197. "65% of the deaths reported today had high-risk co-morbidities such as diabetes, hypertension, asthma and heart disease," said State Surveillance Officer, Dr. Pradeep Awate.

Kolhapur district, hitherto kept the contagion in check, reported 11 new cases today including that of a medical practitioner. Authorities ascribed the surge to the numbers of people entering the district from Mumbai and the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) following a relaxation of lockdown rules pertaining

to inter-district travel.

In MMR, Thane saw 157 new cases to touch 1,778 cases in all, while Navi Mumbai reported 86 new cases to reach a total 1,368. Aurangabad district reported a sharp spike of 66 new cases as the district's total case tally surged to 939.

Mumbai's figures rose sharply as 590 people tested at private labs between May 10 and May 14, were added to the numbers. The labs update the reports directly on Indian Council of Medical Research's portal.

"This morning, I was told the good news by the NITI Aayog that our doubling rate (number of days taken to double the number of positive cases) is now 14.5 days, which means we are going in the right direction. We are

following the Centre's discharge policy strictly," Mumbai's new Municipal Commissioner I.S. Chahal said. When he took charge a week ago, the city's doubling rate was around 10 days.

Of the 2,801 containment zones in the city earlier, it was found that around 1,500 buildings had single cases. BMC has now created a nomenclature for such buildings, calling them 'sealed buildings.' After these buildings were separated from zones, there are now 661 containment zones in the city.

The State will now be taking over every ICU bed in the city and 80% of general beds, including those in private hospitals.

DETAILS ▶ PAGES 9, 10



THE WEEK IN FOCUS

The stories that mattered over the last seven days



1	2
3	4
5	6

MAY 14 | CHHATRAPATI SHIVAJI MAHARAJ TERMINUS :: Nearly 25 migrant workers take a private bus to Rajasthan. Many migrants are pooling in their savings to leave the city in private buses following approval from the local police station. ■AADESH CHOURHARI

MAY 12 | DAHSAR CHECK NAKA :: A migrant labourer's family stopped by the police on the Surat-Mumbai highway, takes a break. Thousands of workers walking to their respective homes from the city have been stopped at checkpoints.

■ARUNANGSU ROY CHOWDHURY

MAY 11 | NARIMAN POINT :: Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, his wife Rashmi and sons Aditya and Tejas, emerge from Vidhan Bhavan after he filed his nomination for the Legislative Council elections. Mr. Thackeray was required to become a member of either House before May 27. He and eight others were elected unopposed to the Council.

■VIVEK BENDRE

MAY 13 | KALYAN :: Migrant workers and their families are packed into a truck on the Nashik highway, hoping to get to Dhule district on the Maharashtra-Madhya Pradesh border. ■AADESH CHOURHARI

MAY 09 | GIRGAUM :: Artist Ajit Korgaonkar (67) works on Ganesh idols all by himself at his workshop, with his workers not available during the lockdown. He has also not been able to procure clay and Plaster of Paris supplies from Bhavnagar in Gujarat and Pen in Raigad. This time round, he has had to manage with the clay left over from the Navratri season. ■VIVEK BENDRE

MAY 10 | MADANPURA :: A boy offers a prayer at his window after breaking the Ramadan fast.

■SALMAN ANSARI

Timings

MUMBAI		
MONDAY, MAY. 18		
● RISE 06:03 SET 19:07		
TUESDAY, MAY. 19		
● RISE 06:03 SET 19:08		
● RISE 03:56 SET 16:24		
WEDNESDAY, MAY. 20		
● RISE 06:03 SET 19:08		
● RISE 04:30 SET 17:12		

Mumbai Weather	
max	min
Mumbai Airport	34 28
Pune	39 24
Mumbai City	34 28

Mumbai Today	
34°C	A warm and cloudy weather is likely. Night will be uneasy. Short spell of light rain is a chance.
34°C	Spell of rain is likely. The weather will be cloudy and warm. Night will be slight warm.

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THE HINDU

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Flight with 143 stranded Afghan nationals takes off from Pune

It also brought back nine Indians home

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE

patience and cooperate."

Airport authorities said the flight carrying the Afghan nationals departed for Kabul at 1.30 p.m. They said all departing passengers had been thoroughly screened for COVID-19 symptoms and that none had exhibited any. The arriving Indian nationals had been sent to quarantine facilities.

Exchange programmes The Afghan nationals, who had been stranded in the city and other parts of the State, included cadets pursuing courses at the National Defence Academy and officers on exchange programmes at the Military Institute of Technology as well as students pursuing academics at various educational institutes in Pune city.

Tourism industry shocked at exclusion from stimulus package

ADITYA ANAND

The Indian tourism and hospitality industry on Sunday reacted strongly after 10 weeks of constant discussion with the government had come to a naught and they were directionless as no announcements were made in support of tourism.

The Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism and Hospitality (FAITH) said it was looking forward to a deep set of survival measures for tourism from the ₹20 lakh crore package announced over five days, which were not addressed.

The federation had gone into a state of disbelief and shock as its concerns were not addressed. FAITH members said the Indian tourism, travel and hospitality is believed to impact almost 10% of GDP directly or indirectly.

Jai Bhatia, vice president, Travel Agents Association of India, a FAITH member or-

ganisation, said they regret to note that over the last two months not one relief or urgent survival support had been provided to the travel agents and tour operators.

Feeling abandoned' "The feeling is that the government has abandoned our sector, which is one of the largest revenue earners in the country, be it in terms of income tax, GST, or foreign exchange. Ours is a service sector and we promote travel and tourism across the world with a focus on India. Due to the lockdown, we are hit the most with air borders being sealed by India and no foreign or domestic travel being permitted," he said.

Mr. Bhatia said the last two months had been exceedingly difficult and multiple appeals to all ministries of the government were made and well heard. "However, we were only heard out and not

responded too. We have shared with the government our concerns and how we shall be able to recoup, reinvent and redevelop ourselves. The government teams appreciated our suggestions. But what we got from the package of ₹20 lakh crore is nothing," he said.

FAITH said in a statement it had already seen over one quarter of accumulated losses which began from February onwards. "There is no cash inflow expected for many quarters over FY 20-21 as the key segments of the Indian tourism economy will be down," it said.

The international inbound tourists, inbound visiting friends and relatives or VFR and the outbound travel will remain mostly non-performing due to international flight restrictions and tragic impact in most key markets tourism markets of India, FAITH observed.

State Cong. comes to the rescue of Kerala workers

ALOK DESHPANDE

MUMBAI

Eldose Chettan from Kerala's Wayanad district worked in a resort at Murud in Raigad district and was desperate to return home to look after his father, who is inflicted with cancer. Similarly, 18 others from the southern State had their own compelling reasons to go back.

But with no trains running to the southern States from Maharashtra, their families approached Wayanad MP Rahul Gandhi's office, which in turn asked the local Youth Congress to make arrangements for their travel to Kerala.

"The Congress obtained the travel permission for all of us and also arranged a bus. We reached Kerala four days ago by road," Mr. Chettan told *The Hindu* over the phone. This batch of 19 is among the many that have returned to Kerala from Maharashtra, solely through arrangements made by the

State Youth Congress.

Mr. Gandhi's office in Wayanad has become a centre to connect with families of Kerala workers stranded in Maharashtra. Requests for evacuation are being sent directly to the State Youth Congress headquarters or its president Satyajeet Tambe-Patil.

"We are directly in touch with Rahul ji's office in Wayanad. They receive hundreds of requests daily and many of them are from families of workers stuck in Maharashtra. There are no trains running as of now. So we have taken it upon ourselves to help stranded workers," Mr. Tambe-Patil said.

The Maharashtra unit of the Youth Congress has till now sent over 500 people stranded in districts such as Nanded, Buldhana and Raigad to their home towns in Kerala. "We bear the expenses and also provide food and water required for two days," he said.

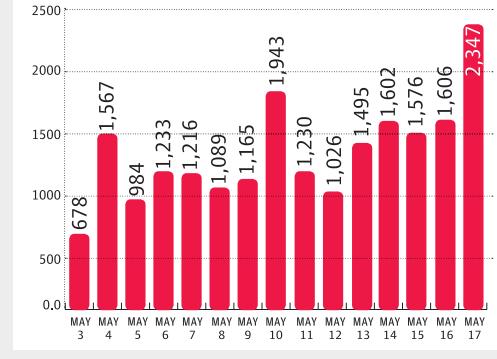
Maharashtra COVID-19 tracker

TOTAL CASES	NEW CASES	ACTIVE CASES	RECOVERED	DEATHS
33,053	2,347	24,161	7,688	1,198

DISTRICTS AFFECTED: 34

DISTRICT	CASES	DEATHS	DISTRICT	CASES	DEATHS
Mumbai	20,150	734	Sangli	50	1
Thane	4,115	48	Nanded	69	4
Pune	3,821	197	Latur	44	2
Nashik	851	35	Buldhana	30	1
Aurangabad	939	31	Nandurbar	23	2
Palghar	420	13	Kolhapur	36	1
Raigad	445	16	Ratnagiri	86	3
Nagpur	357	2	Jalna	28	0
Solapur	373	25	Sindhudurg	10	0
Akola	269	14	Chandrapur	5	0
Jalgaon	266	30	Osmanabad	7	0
Satara	131	2	Parbhani	6	1
Yavatmal	99	0	Washim	3	0
Amravati	110	14	Beed	3	0
Ahmednagar	75	3	Bhandara	3	0
Hingoli	96	0	Gondia	1	0
Dhule	80	8	Wardha	2	1

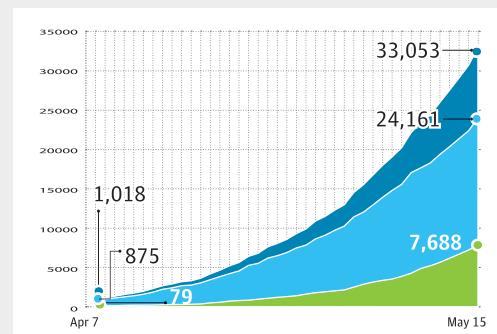
POSITIVE CASES OVER LAST 15 DAYS



1595 (67.96%) of Sunday's cases are from Mumbai



CASES TREND



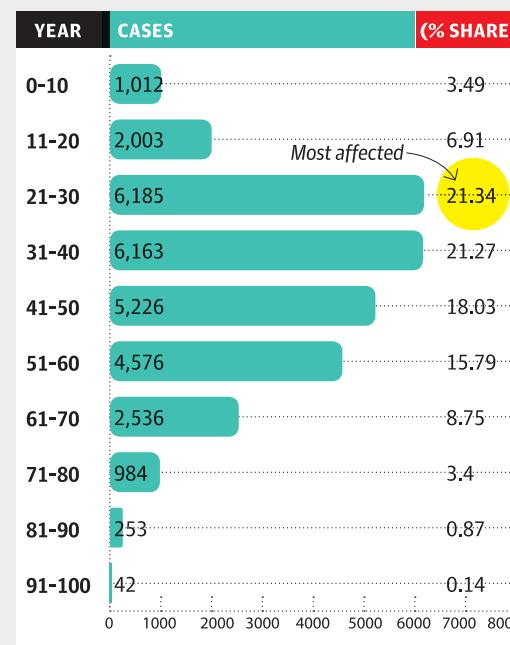
23.08% is the State recovery rate

MORTALITY RATE

Maharashtra 3.70%

India 3.16%

AFFECTED (AGE-WISE)



QUARANTINE NUMBERS

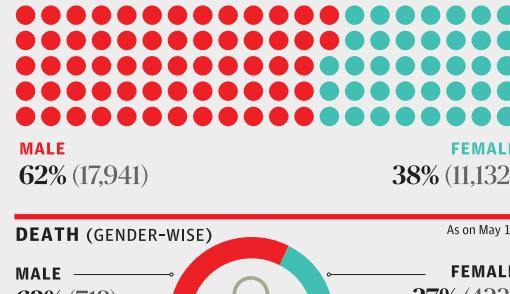
3,48,508 | 17,638



Home quarantine

Institutional quarantine

CASES (GENDER-WISE)



DEATH (GENDER-WISE)



72% of deaths due to co-morbidities

HELPLINE NUMBERS

Toll free number: 104/1075

Maharashtra: 020-26127394

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

State helpline email id: ssumaharashtra@gmail.com

CITY-WISE HELPLINE NUMBERS

Mumbai city: 022 22664232

Palghar: 02525 297474

Mumbai suburbs: 022 26556799 / 26556806

Raigad: 02141 222118

Ratnagiri: 02352 226248

Sindhudurg: 02362 228847

Source: Public Health Department, Maharashtra, BMC

Pune district reports surge of 200-plus cases

People engaged in essential services emerging as major virus-spreaders, say authorities

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE
PUNE

A section of people engaged in dispensing essential services has emerged as major spreaders of the novel coronavirus in Pune city, said authorities as the district recorded 206 new COVID-19 cases on Sunday. The total number of cases has now breached the 4,000-mark to take the tally to 4,001, while two more deaths saw the death toll rise to 199.

The number of active positive cases in Pune district now stands at 1,842, of whom 157 were critical, said officials. The district had recorded its highest single-day surge yet on Saturday, reporting over 220 cases.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Pune Municipal Commissioner Shekhar Gaikwad said following an analysis of the new cases, it was discovered that some people engaged in essential services, who had tested positive, were turning out to be major spreaders of the infection.

Domino effect
“A major wholesale pharmaceutical distributor, who owns an entire building in the city’s Sadashiv Peth area tested positive recently. While his family members tested negative, 38 of his 50 workers have tested positive.



On the go: Pune Police and special police force personnel conduct a route march at Yerwada on Sunday. ■ JIGNESH MISTRY

Likewise, a nurse working at a prominent city hospital, living in Katraj area had infected at least a dozen more persons,” Mr. Gaikwad said. Swab samples of 180 others suspected to have come into contact with the nurse had been sent for testing.

The PMC Commissioner said that while he had been urging the hospital where the nurse works to arrange for temporary quarters to house their staff near the hospital premises, the response from senior officials had not been encouraging.

He further said at least 20% among the new cases were from the ‘non-containment’ zones.

While acknowledging the need for stricter policing to

preclude transmission of the virus from ‘high-risk’ zones to the non-containment areas, Mr. Gaikwad said at the same time, there were at least 15 containment zones within Pune city that had not reported fresh cases for more than a week.

Spike in rural areas
Likewise, the district’s rural areas, where the contagion has been relatively kept in check, witnessed its highest single-day spike of nine new cases on Saturday.

“This rise in cases has been after relaxation of the lockdown rules, with several persons, hitherto stranded in Mumbai city, travelling back from there and the Mumbai Metropolitan Re-

62 new cases in NMMC

Five more deaths also reported

RAINA ASSAINAR
NAVI MUMBAI

The Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation (NMMC) reported 62 new cases and five deaths on Sunday. The total number of positive cases in now 1,900 and the death toll is 31.

The same day, 42 people were discharged, bringing the total number of recovered people to 409.

The Panvel Municipal Corporation (PMC) has

reported 13 new cases, which include four retailers who visit the APMC market regularly. PMC now has 295 positive cases while 115 people have recovered.

With the extension of lockdown, the NMMC has also allowed the sub-registrar and Deputy Regional Transport offices to work with five personnel and 10% clerical strength. This will not be applicable to containment zones.

gion (MMR) to their homes in Pune district. Two positive cases from Indapur yesterday were those who came from the city,” said Ayush Prasad, CEO, Pune zilla parishad.

Mr. Prasad, too, pointed to the pattern of new cases being amongst those engaged in essential services. “Recently, we had a case in Velhe where a fruit seller ventured into Bhavani Peth in Pune city, which is perhaps the most infected area in the district. He caught the infection

there, and came back to attend his mother’s funeral. 10 more cases emerged from those who attended the funeral,” he said, adding that there were 41 active cases in Pune rural.

1,960 discharged
Meanwhile, as per official figures, 1,960 persons in Pune district had been discharged from various hospitals following complete recovery, with more than 400 being discharged over the past 48 hours alone.

Suspected case in Nagpada ATS

GAUTAM S. MENGLE
MUMBAI

A suspected case of COVID-19 has come to light in the Nagpada unit of the Maharashtra Anti Terrorism Squad (ATS), following the sudden demise of a constable posted there.

According to ATS officers, Dilip Patil had been under treatment for typhoid since May 11. Officials said his condition was improving when he suddenly started having breathing problems on Sunday.

“Patil was first taken to Nair hospital in Mumbai Central and then to the Bhatia Hospital where he was declared dead before admission. It is also learned that he was a diabetic,” Deputy Commissioner of Police (ATS) Vikram Deshmukh said.

He said the constable’s samples have been sent for testing to check for COVID-19 infection, and reports are awaited.

As of Sunday, a total of 1,206 Maharashtra Police personnel have tested positive for the novel coronavirus, with 283 of them having recovered so far.

Goa's COVID-19 count reaches 21

Seven patients arrive from New Delhi

ADITYA ANAND
MUMBAI

Goa’s COVID-19 count reached 21 on Sunday with seven passengers of a train from New Delhi, and a worker who entered the State from Karwar in Karnataka, testing positive.

Goa had zero cases on May 12, but reported seven cases on May 13 after people who travelled to the State by road from Mumbai and Vapi tested positive.

On Saturday, the State reported five more cases, including two people who had returned from Kolkata after delivering a barge.

The Health Minister informed that with the induction of the latest Abbott M2000 RTPCR machine, the government was increasing testing facilities at the Goa Medical College and Hospital.

BEST assures transport for essential service workers

Workers’ unions had called for a ‘Stay at home’ stir

AJEET MAHALE
MUMBAI

The Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) on Sunday said all arrangements had been made to ensure that bus services for essential workers of the city will continue unhindered in light of the call made by several BEST workers’ unions for employees to stay at home from Monday.

BEST General Manager Sudhir Rendekar said in a statement, that all necessary arrangements have been made to ensure that bus services ferrying doctors, nurses, police and other essential services remain unaffected.

The BEST Sanyukt Kamgar Kruti Samiti (BSKKS), an umbrella body of BEST workers’ unions, has said that workers would observe a “lockdown” from Monday and stay at home until the administration improves their safety protocols for drivers and conductors.

1,200 ST buses on standby
Sources said 1,200 buses of the Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) are on standby if the need arises. After the suspension of suburban railway services on March 23, BEST buses have been the lifeline of the city ferrying all staff working in essential sectors such as hospitals, the police, and the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation.

Two more BEST workers, who had tested positive, died over the weekend, bringing the total fatalities to eight. In all 120 BEST workers have tested positive and

50 of these have been discharged. However, these figures have been contested by the unions who say as many as 15 employees have died. Senior BEST officials said that in many cases, the death could have been due to causes other than COVID-19 and test results were awaited to confirm the same. “Most of the positive cases are coming from workers living in containment zones,” an official said.

“The administration has provided employees with masks and sanitizers and is adhering to safety protocols. All organisations working in the frontline are having such problems. We have requested workers to not go on such a strike, especially at a time like this,” BEST committee chairman Anil Patankar

ADITYA MANI JHA

If you've never been a podcast person, there's no time like the present to begin. Two developments from earlier this month are enough to tell you why. First, Google rolled out its Podcast Manager tool, giving podcasters data on engagement metrics like play count, geographical location of listeners and so on. Second, and more importantly, Acast, a Swedish platform for the distribution, management and monetisation of podcasts, announced a partnership with JioSaavn, the second-largest audio streaming service in India (at 104 million monthly users, it is exceeded only by Gaana with its eye-popping 150 million). This means that JioSaavn creators will now be able to use Acast's proprietary technology, and listeners will have an all-new range of content (Acast hosts several branded podcasts with *The Guardian*, *Vice*, *CBS*, etc).

Clearly, this is a movement whose time has come, and according to Amarjit Singh Batra, Managing Director at Spotify India, this is just the beginning. "We see a lot of potential in India as a market," he says. "As a culture, we love storytelling. Moreover, people are already used to consuming stories in an audio format, via the radio. There's a dearth of good local content in this space here and that's what we are trying to build."

Going local

Much like Netflix India, Spotify India is also investing in building an exclusive library in the country, one dominated by in-house local content. Creators working in Hindi, Tamil, Bangla and so on, hold the key to capturing the biggest unclaimed market – listeners in tier-two and tier-three cities, who're currently starved of locally-relevant content in a language and format they're comfortable with. Ameya Nagarajan (one half of the *Fat. So?* podcast, alongside Pallavi Nath), who was in charge of *The Indian Express*' podcast division until early 2018, says, "Talk radio in India exists in non-English languages. That's the place where podcasting can go. The problem, however, is that for people who break through into a new space, it is like the non-English part of the country doesn't exist." But Batra reckons breaching this frontier is not far: "We have a lot of wonderful ideas coming in, and in various Indian languages. We just need people who'll execute these ideas well."

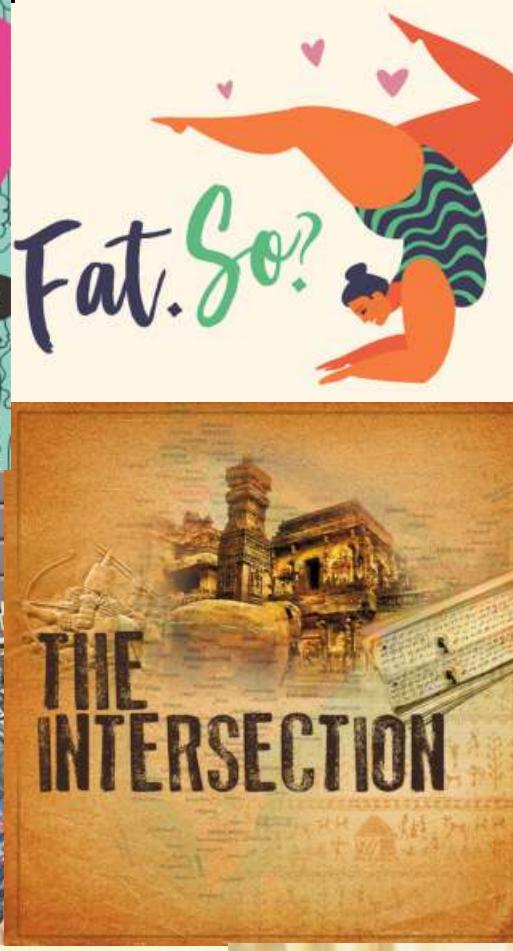
A host of new audio content is in the offing. Over at Audible, spokesperson Shailesh Sawlani says, "We launched an India-first free app called Audible Suno in December, which is home to hundreds of hours of content across various genres and formats. Narrated by India's most famous voices – such as Amitabh Bachchan (*Kali Awaazein*), Katrina Kaif, Karan Johar, Farhan Akhtar (*Picture Ke Peeche*) – these offer everything from horror and thriller to comedy and motivational content. Each show is comprised of short, easy-to-digest episodes." Audible India's plans are quite extensive. Among its noteworthy international collaborations is its "partnership with DC Comics to release the first audiobook adaptation of Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* graphic novels. It has voices such as James McAvoy, Andy Serkis and Riz Ahmed".

Find your voice

Meanwhile, among recent English-language products, *Fat. So?* (on Suno India) is one of the notably well-executed and insightful podcasts around. Nagarajan and Nath wanted to create a space where the concerns of plus-sized Indian women – obscured ever so often in real



Air time (Clockwise from far left) Podcasts *The Lit Pickers*, *She Says She's Fine*, *Cyrus Says*, *Fat. So?*, *The Intersection*, consultant Chhavi Sachdev, Ameya Nagarajan; and Spotify India's MD Amarjit Singh Batra



and the *Unseen*, Samanth Subramanian and Padmaparna Ghosh's *The Intersection*, comedian Cyrus Broacha's *Cyrus Says*, and *Maed in India*, the music podcast hosted and produced by Mae Mariyam Thomas, who is also the founder of the Maed in India production company/consultancy that is behind several Indian podcasts. Thomas knows the costs and challenges of setting up a podcast from scratch better than most. "I always get asked how much it costs. It depends on what kind of a show you're making," she says. "For *The Lit Pickers*, because it is only two hosts and no guests, the production cost was lower than say *She Says She's Fine*, a women's health podcast [hosted by Mumbai-based gynaecologist, Dr Munjaal Kapadia] where we were flying in guests from all over the country. For the production of any podcast you have to consider planning, research, recording, editing/sound design, administration, production, and distribution. And depending on your host, there is also a variable talent cost as well."

Money matters

This is a crucial distinction that Thomas makes – while producing different podcasts as an organisation may involve significant costs (such as studio), indie podcasting (a one-or-two-person operation) has no such constraints. You can record on your phone or on a field recorder, and edit using free software. The other basic equipment, such as microphones,

Any time is podcast time



With Acast partnering with JioSaavn, podcasts are only going to get bigger in India. And regional content is one of the strongest ways to go forward say insiders

life as well as popular culture – can be discussed. "We wanted to speak to young women, especially those between the ages of 10 and 25. It is like we wanted to go back in time and speak to our own younger selves and tell them, 'Don't listen to what society says, you're allowed to be who you are, you're allowed to have the body you have. You are not less than, you are not unworthy!'" says Nagarajan.

Another recent podcast, Supriya Nair and Deepanjana Pal's *The Lit Pickers* (produced by Maed in India), combines in-depth literary conversations

with quicksilver wit and snappy presentation. It has gained a significant following since its first episode in January. "For us, this was an offshoot of the things we're interested in and the way we talk to each other when we're together," says Nair, adding, "I think this style of conversational/interview podcast is the easiest to do, which is why there are so many of them. So the secret sauce, if any, was really that we were heard by producers who liked our work and who went on to give it shape and polish."

Then there are the older podcasts still going strong – Amit Varma's *The Seen*

as brands understand the strengths of this medium, they are slowly advertising on podcasts. Some ways of monetising are through distribution platforms that will help you make money on your content via ad insertion. So, depending on how popular your show is, you can allow for branded content to be advertised or opt for host mentions [which can also provide compensation]

Mae Mariyam Thomas

aren't very expensive – for ₹3,000–₹5,000 you can buy serviceable ones and anything above ₹10,000 will get you high-end products.

The low-cost nature of the enterprise helps independent podcasters, not least because there's not much money in podcasting – for now. Podcasters who've been creating for some years, often crowdfund their expenses; they ask listeners to buy them a cup of coffee or a meal (this is what Amit Varma does, for instance), or donate whatever amount they are comfortable with. But much like Netflix and other streaming giants that are experimenting with various ad placement mechanisms, podcasting firms are also in wait-and-watch mode (with notable exceptions like Acast, whose ad placement technology – targeted based on location, time and personal data – has proven to be a success).

The podcasting boom is just around the corner, by all accounts – you're either all in right now, or you'll be late to the party.

POOCHE CAFE



HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



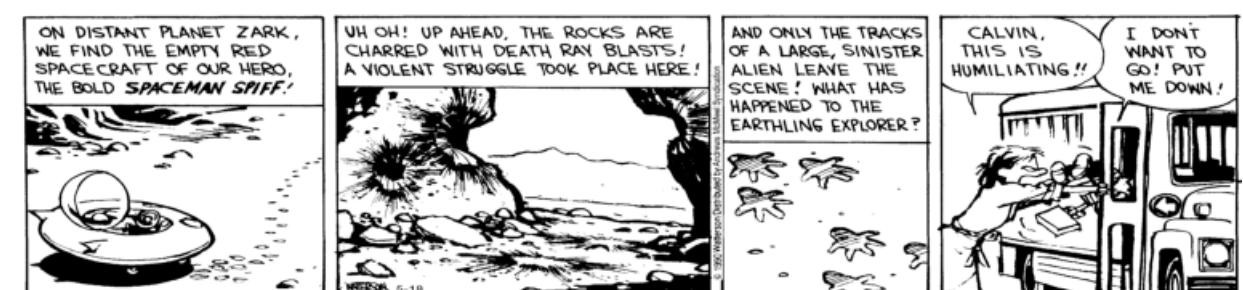
TIGER



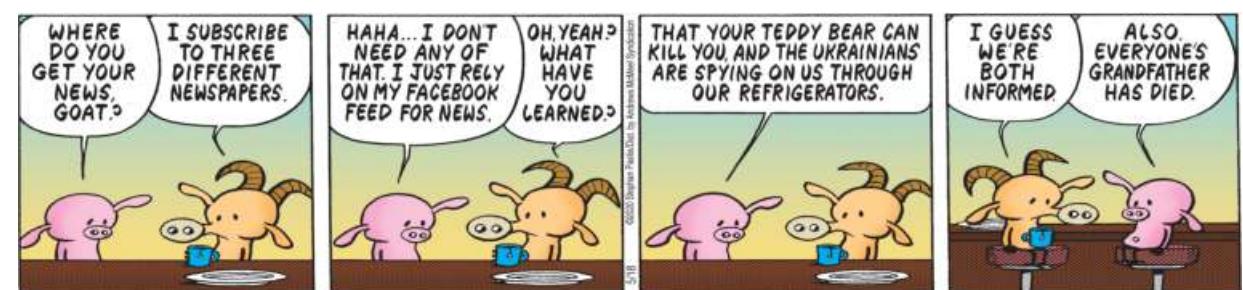
PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBSES



PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



Reach out to migrants, says Jagan

There should not be any dearth of facilities and food to workers, officials told

STAFF REPORTER
VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Sunday asked officials to extend all help to migrant workers on humanitarian grounds.

Speaking to the officials over telephone, the Chief Minister said, "There should not be any dearth of facilities and food to the workers who are walking to their native places. This is the time to show sympathy and help them generously. Don't step back on expenditure involved."

Relief centres

He asked officials to arrange buses for the workers walking on the highway and to shift them to the nearest relief centres.

The officials told Mr. Jagan Mohan Reddy that 4,661 migrant workers were stopped at various checkposts and



In protest: Migrants from West Bengal in Vijayawada seeking transportation to their State. ■ K.V.S. GIRI

shifted to 62 relief centres in the last three days. Of them, 485 were heading to various districts in the State. The remaining were walking towards Odisha, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh.

Chief Secretary Nilam Sawhney spoke to her Odisha counterpart on the issue, following which the neighbouring State agreed to receive the migrant workers

Migrant killed, another injured in road mishap

VIJAYAWADA
A migrant worker, Sk. Minarul, 23, died and another was injured in a road accident on the outskirts of the city on Sunday. The mishap occurred when a private bus carrying migrant workers from Chennai to West Bengal hit a stationary lorry at Gannavaram around 4.30 a.m. The deceased, a native of West Bengal, was working in Tamil Nadu.

to various destinations. Another 22 trains are being planned during this week to ferry 33,000 people. Officials are pursuing the issue of obtaining NoCs from the receiving States.

Officials said checkposts were provided with staff from the Revenue Department to counsel the workers to visit the relief centres with a promise to send them by the special trains.

588 Indians reach Kochi from Maldives

This is the second trip by INS Jalashwa; AI flight evacuates 181 from Gulf

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOCHE

INS Jalashwa arrived at the Kochi port here on Sunday from the Maldives with 588 Indians stranded in the island country following the COVID-19 lockdown.

This is the second trip by INS Jalashwa, which had earlier reached Kochi with 698 Indians from the Maldives on May 10. Naval vessel INS Magar too had evacuated 300 Indians stranded in the Maldives and brought them to Kochi on May 12 as part of the ongoing Samudra Setu mission to evacuate by sea Indians stranded in different parts of the world.

Of the 588 passengers, 487 are from Kerala, said a communication from the Public Relations Department.



Warm welcome: Indians who were stranded in Maldives deboarding INS Jalashwa in Kochi on Sunday. ■ SARATH A.S.

Three persons who showed COVID-19 symptoms were admitted to the Karuveppilly Taluk Hospital. They hail from Kollam, Thiruvananthapuram and Palakkad districts.

Forty-seven others have

been sent to various centres for observation, the communication added.

A communication from the Cochin Port Trust said it had facilitated the safe transit of 1,488 Indian expatriates. The disembarkation

and clearance procedures were coordinated by the Kerala police.

Meanwhile, an evacuation flight (Air India Express IX 434) from Dubai brought 181 Indians from the Gulf on Saturday night. The evacuees comprised 57 men and 124 women. Of them, 32 were children below the age of 10 and 70 of the women were pregnant.

A person with symptoms of COVID-19 and hailing from Thrissur was admitted to the Ernakulam Medical College Hospital. Of the others, 34 had been sent to different COVID-19 care centres, while 146 had been sent to their houses but would be under observation, said a communication from the district administration here.

While ten cases were reported from Kalaburgi, six were from Hassan, four from Dharwad, three each from Yadgiri and Kolar, two each from Dakshina Kannada and Shivamogga and one each from Udupi, Bhaktal in Uttara Kannada and Vijayapura.

The latest death was in Krishna district, which so far registered a toll of 15, the second-highest in the State after Kurnool, with a toll of 19.

A Health Department bulletin said, the toll had risen to 2,380, including 150 migrants, while the toll was 50.

With 103 fresh recoveries, active cases came down to 874. A total of 1,456 patients had recovered, with a recovery rate of 61%, against a mortality rate of 2.1%.

Among cases involving migrants, 23 patients had recovered in Anantapur.

The new cases were in Sri-kakulam (7), Chittoor (4), Guntur (4), Kurnool (3), Prakasam (3), Visakhapatnam

Shadow of Maharashtra cases raises tally in Karnataka

Two die of infection in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka; Kerala records 14 cases

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka reported one COVID-19 death each on Sunday.

In Karnataka, cases linked to Maharashtra continued to surface in several districts. On Sunday, 40 returnees from Mumbai and Kolhapur – 18 of whom were in Mandya and the rest in Hassan, Kalaburgi, Yadgiri and Shivamogga – tested positive.

The fatality in the State

COVID-19

took the toll to 37, and 55 new cases were detected, raising the tally to 1,147. This included 37 COVID-19 deaths, one non-COVID death and 509 discharges.

A 54-year-old male resident of Udupi with cardiac issues was admitted to a private hospital in Udupi District and died due to cardiac arrest on May 14. His samples tested positive for COVID-19 on May 16.

Seventeen of the new cases were women and nine were children.

Also, 22 of the new cases were from Mandya. Of these, except four with a contact history, the remaining 18 had a travel history to Maharashtra.

While ten cases were reported from Kalaburgi, six were from Hassan, four from Dharwad, three each from Yadgiri and Kolar, two each from Dakshina Kannada and Shivamogga and one each from Udupi, Bhaktal in Uttara Kannada and Vijayapura.

The Health Department, which had converted Victoria Hospital into a COVID-19 hospital, was working on an exit plan to resume non-COVID activities there.

Although Chief Minister B. S. Yediyurappa had announced all the 1,200 beds

Act of Kindness

With the imposition of the lockdown across the country, many citizens have come forward to help those affected.



Small steps: A woman in Vijayawada distributing footwear to migrants walking to their native States on Sunday. ■ K.V.S. GIRI

in the hospital would be for COVID-19, but with adequate spacing, 550 beds were available in Victoria, PMSSY and Kurnool were linked to Koyambedu market.

Over a 24-hour period ending Sunday, 9,880 tests were done and a total of 2.38 lakh samples tested in the State, representing 4,780 tests per million.

The district-wise case tally: Kurnool (611), Guntur (417), Krishna (367), Chittoor (177), Nellore (150), Anantapur (122), Kadapa (102), Visakhapatnam (75), West Godavari (70), Prakasam (66), East Godavari (52), Srikakulam (14), Vizianagaram (7) and migrant cases (150).

Telangana witnessed a continued run of COVID-19 infections with 42 more reported on Sunday, taking the total to 1,551. Of the new cases, 37 were from Greater Hyderabad, two from Rangareddy and three were migrants.

Kerala cases rise

COVID-19 cases continued to rise in Kerala, with 14 more testing positive on Sunday.

While 12 of these were imported cases, two cases, in-

874
1,456
50

600
509
38

101
497
3

6,971
4,172
78

525
992
34

cluding that of a health care worker, were picked up from the community.

Malappuram accounted for four cases, Palakkad, Kozhikode and Kannur two cases each, and Kollam, Ernakulam, Thrissur and Kasaragod one case each.

Of new cases, two returned from West Asia, while 10 came from Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra. The case in Kollam was that of a health worker and one in Ernakulam, a Uttar Pradesh native from the Maldives.

Kerala had reported 601 cases of COVID-19, of which 497 had recovered.

Since May 7, when expatriates began to return, Kerala had received 60,612 non-resident Keralites, of whom 3,467 came through various airports, 1,033 through sea ports, 55,086 through border check posts and 1,026 by trains. The number of persons under surveillance rose from 48,825 to 62,529 overnight, 61,855 being quarantined at home.

(With inputs from Vijayawada, Hyderabad and Thiruvananthapuram bureaus)

IN BRIEF



Rahul to give away 1,300 dialysis kits in Wayanad

MALAPPURAM

Congress leader Lok Sabha member from Wayanad Rahul Gandhi will give away 1,300 dialysis kits to kidney and liver patients in his constituency. The kits, containing vital medicines and dialysis components, were being readied for distribution. They would reach the patients across the constituency within a week, said A.P. Anil Kumar, MLA. Mr. Kumar said 1,300 patients were chosen after inviting applications from the needy in the Wayanad Lok Sabha constituency.

TDP slams A.P. govt. for attack on doctor

VIJAYAWADA

The TDP came down on the Andhra Pradesh government for the alleged stripping and beating of Dr. Sudhakar, who is placed under suspension allegedly for pointing out that the government was not supplying N95 masks to doctors, by the Visakhapatnam police. In a series of tweets on Sunday, TDP national president N. Chandrababu Naidu said the Dalit doctor who had asked for an N-95 mask was not a thief and the government should explain why the doctor was being threatened.

T.V. serials to resume production from May 25

BENGALURU

Kannada television serials, presently off air due to the lockdown, are likely to resume from mid-June. After a break of over a month, shooting is set resume from May 25. However, though the Kannada Television Association (KTA) has secured permission from the State government, a section of television producers are wary of the move and are unlikely to resume production anytime soon.

Cong. uses Moideen to target Kerala govt.

He visited a quarantine centre on May 8



G. ANAND
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The public foray of Minister for Local Self-Government A.C. Moideen during the COVID-19 lockdown appeared to have come as an opportunity for the Congress to put the LDF government on the defensive.

The party has attempted to make an issue out of Mr. Moideen's televised appearance at a quarantine centre for Non-Resident Keralites in Thrissur on May 8. It has accused the Minister of having attempted to reap political dividends by giving short shrift to precautions.

Mr. Moideen represents Kunnamkulam in the district from where several of the arrivals hailed. Five of them later tested positive for SARS-CoV-2.

The party's political affairs committee, which met

Operation to trap tiger to begin today

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MYSURU

The Karnataka Forest Department is trying to trap two tigers and tranquillize them to reduce a conflict situation around Bandipur in Chamarajanagar district and in the Virajpet territorial division of Kodagu district.

The operation to trap the elusive tiger in Bandipur will commence on Monday, while the department has been on the tiger's trail in Virajpet since almost a fortnight without much success.

T. Balachandra, Director, Bandipur National Park, said they had secured permission to begin the operation to capture the tiger. Based on pug marks and camera trap images, they had identified the tiger operating in a 1,000-hectare area outside the Kundakere range.

Stating that the focus should be on filling all mi-

Complete Kaleshwaram work on a war-footing

Telangana CM leads marathon meeting

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD

Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao has asked irrigation engineers to take up the works pertaining to the lifting of three tmcft of water from the Kaleshwaram project so that it can be diverted to needy areas during the next flood season itself.

In a marathon meeting with Ministers of districts in the Godavari Basin, officials and engineers of the Irrigation Department, which went on for nearly eight hours on Sunday, the Chief Minister told the engineers to begin impounding lakes and ponds as soon as the projects start receiving fresh water.

For the purpose, the required distributory canals and off-take sluices should be taken up and completed, he said.

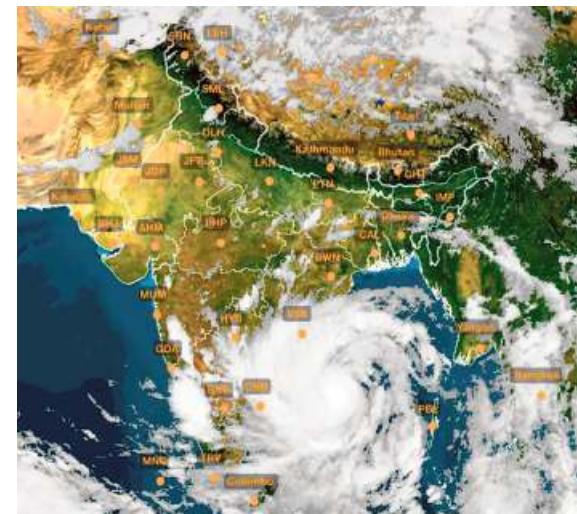
Stating that the focus

nor irrigation tanks, lakes and ponds, the CM said district-wise meetings would be held over the next two to three days so that the hurdles in filling the tanks could be discussed. Before that, irrigation engineers should encourage farmers to take the silt from tank beds voluntarily and dump it in their fields to improve soil fertility, Mr. Rao said.

The Chief Minister instructed the Committee of Engineers-in-Chief to decide whether it was possible to improve the carrying capacity of the canal from the Lower Manair Dam from the existing 6,000 cusecs to 9,000 cusecs, or whether a parallel canal system was needed to take more water to the areas below the project. Officials can reorganise the Irrigation Department based on present and future requirements, he suggested.

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



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

Forecast for Monday: Thunderstorm accompanied by lightning and gusty winds very likely at isolated places over Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, West Bengal, Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, coastal Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, coastal and south interior Karnataka and Kerala and with lightning at isolated places over Jharkhand and Arunachal Pradesh.

CITY **RAIN** **MAX** **MIN** **CITY** **RAIN** **MAX** **MIN**

Agartala -37.0 24.6 Kozhikode -33.2 27.8

Ahmedabad 41.9 28.2 Kurnool -40.3 28.7

Aizawl -28.7 17.9 Lucknow -40.7 24.0

Aligarh -43.1 2



Peaking

Despite the extended lockdown, the steady rise in cases is a cause for worry

In 106 days since the first laboratory-confirmed novel coronavirus case was reported on January 30, India surpassed China's tally of 84,038. As on May 15, India had over 85,500 cases and the death toll stood at 2,752, as against 4,633 in China. There are only 10 other countries that have more cases than India. At the same time, the toll in the U.S. alone went past the total number of cases in China, while the total case load crossed 1.4 million. On March 18, when China reported zero fresh cases, India had just 162 cases and three deaths. Despite the country being under lockdown since almost end-March, the number of fresh cases and deaths reported each day has continued to rise steadily – on average, over 3,600 cases have been reported daily since May 8. This is of serious concern as contrary to the advice of WHO, India has not fully utilised the precious lockdown period to increase manifold the number of tests carried out daily while simultaneously tracing, isolating and treating COVID-19 patients. That even during the lockdown India has witnessed the shortest time, of 13 days, for cases to double compared with 14 other countries that have the most cases reported is testimony to the wide spread of the virus. A reason for this could be that cases in other countries, barring Russia and Brazil, have already peaked or are about to. Unfortunately, even as the number of cases has crossed 94,700, India is yet to begin investigating community transmission despite the strongly suggestive findings of sentinel surveillance among those hospitalised for severe acute respiratory infections. Given the high rate of asymptomatic transmission, high viral resurgence is inevitable when the lockdown is lifted.

With over 11,200 cases, Tamil Nadu has the second highest number of cases next to Maharashtra (over 33,000). But with over 4,000 tests per million, TN is testing nearly two times more than Maharashtra. It is not the States that report more cases that is a cause for concern, but those that have reported fewer. Active case finding and testing of most people with a travel history early during the lockdown could be one reason why Karnataka has reported fewer cases. Similarly, surveillance and case finding of those with a travel history early on have been good in Andhra Pradesh and could be a reason why it has reported fewer than 2,400 cases so far. Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal have reported high case positivity. This could either be due to good surveillance, which is unlikely, or wider spread of the virus in the community, at least in specific regions. If the latter be the case, India can expect huge numbers to be reported in the coming weeks. No State, including Kerala, can thus be complacent.

Farm gate in focus

Move to amend the Essential Commodities Act is fraught with risks

The Centre's objective of using the COVID-19 crisis to usher in an Atmanirbhar Bharat saw Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman focus Friday's tranche of announcements on farm sector reforms. The centrepiece was a ₹1-lakh crore fund to finance agriculture infrastructure projects at the farm gate and produce aggregation points. Given that the lack of adequate cold-storage facilities continues to extract a high price on farmers and the agrarian economy by way of post-harvest losses, especially in perishables, the targeted outlay is a welcome step. The decision to channel the funds to agricultural cooperatives, farmer producer organisations, rural entrepreneurs and start-ups is also encouraging as it lays the onus of creating the appropriate infrastructure or logistics solution largely on the principal beneficiaries, the farmers themselves. The Minister also unveiled a ₹10,000 crore scheme to promote the formalisation of micro food enterprises. Suggesting a cluster approach focused in different regions on signature produce, Ms. Sitharaman said the goal was to assist unorganised enterprises in scaling up food safety standards to earn the products certification and build brand value. The package, though, may be more beneficial in the longer term than providing any immediate relief from the lockdown-exacerbated distress in the rural hinterland.

Crucially, the Minister also announced three reform proposals that are ostensibly aimed at enabling better price realisation for farmers by removing restrictions and facilitating enhanced marketing freedom. These include amendments to the 1955-vintage Essential Commodities Act that would effectively hollow out the legislation by deregulating cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, onions and potato. While the Economic Survey, in January, had recommended jettisoning the "anachronistic" Act, the law has nonetheless remained a vital tool in the government's armoury for protecting consumers from irrational volatility in the prices of essentials by tamping down on black marketeers and hoarders. While the Act's provisions do have scope for an overzealous bureaucracy to harass even an honest exporter, who may have paid a fair price to the farmer and stocked produce for shipment overseas, total deregulation for foodgrains is fraught with the risk of future inflationary food price spikes. The other two proposals are also of concern. While one seeks to bypass the APMC regime through a central law that would allow farmers the freedom to sell across State borders, the other proposes a framework for farmers to enter into pre-sowing contracts that would purportedly help assure them of offtake volumes and prices. Both the changes, once enacted, could privilege market forces without necessarily safeguarding food security. Surely, it would be in no one's interest to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

Getting India back to the Afghan high table

New Delhi's Afghan policy needs changes and must include openly talking to the Taliban and all other political groups



VIVEK KATJU

If India's foreign and security policy planners had anticipated developments in Afghanistan they would have pursued nimble approaches, seeking to establish open connections with all its political groups, including with those perceived to be in Pakistan's pocket. Instead, they continued to rigidly cling to Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani even as his equities diminished with each passing month. This, despite his becoming the winner of the presidential elections held in September last year but whose contested results were declared five months later.

Cut to the quick

Inexplicably, Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated Mr. Ghani for winning the elections, in December 2019. At that stage, the Afghanistan election commission had only announced the preliminary results and most countries maintained a discreet silence. It took the commission two months more to declare Mr. Ghani as President-elect, a result that was rejected by Mr. Ghani's main rival, Abdullah Abdullah. It led to two simultaneous swearing-ins; both Mr. Ghani and Mr. Abdullah took oath as President. It is true that the international community ultimately supported Mr. Ghani but qualified it with an insistence that he enters into a real power-sharing agreement with Mr. Abdullah. That agreement has just been reached. It will inevitably further weaken Mr. Ghani.

How has Mr. Ghani reciprocated

India's such unqualified backing? His clear and public response came last month in a manner. It could only have been disappointing to Indian decision makers. The United Nations Secretariat organised a meeting on Afghanistan where it invited the six current physical neighbours of Afghanistan—China, Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. In addition, invitations were extended to the United States, Russia and the Ghani government. Obviously, Mr. Ghani did not condition his participation on India's inclusion. He should have done so if only for the constructive role New Delhi has played in Afghanistan's reconstruction since the Taliban were ousted from the country in 2001-2002 after 9/11. Also, for consistently supporting him.

If Indian policymakers had adequately pondered on Mr. Ghani's stance they would have recalled his position on India in the immediate aftermath of assuming the leadership of the National Unity Government brokered by the Americans in September 2014. He had then relegated India to the fourth concentric circle of five in importance to Afghan interests. Hence, it is not surprising that he did not bat adequately for India to become part of the meeting called by the UN. Indeed, if all his fine words of India's importance to Afghanistan were actually true, he would have lobbied and ensured India's participation.

Point man's blunt talk

So much for Mr. Ghani. What truly cut India more to the quick was the U.S. going along with India's absence. So much for the personal chemistry of the leaders of the two countries. The day after the meeting, Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. point man on Afghanistan and the architect of the Taliban deal, spoke to India's External Affairs



Minister S. Jaishankar to assuage hurt sentiments. But the balm of good words cannot obscure the basic fact that the U.S. acts to promote its interests in Afghanistan. It obviously expects that if in doing so Indian interests are exposed, India will protect them as best as it can.

The fine diplomate of the Ministry of External Affairs statement of the conversation between Mr. Khalilzad and Mr. Jaishankar and National Security Adviser Ajit Doval in Delhi on May 7 cannot override the blunt message conveyed by the U.S. official in his interview to this newspaper, "India should talk directly to Taliban, discuss terror concerns directly," (*The Hindu*, Inside pages, 'Interview, Zalmay Khalilzad', May 9, 2020). He noted that despite India's contributions to Afghanistan's economic development – and these are undeniably significant covering large parts of the country, and are popular – as well as its long history of contacts with that country, it does not have a place in international diplomacy on Afghanistan. As Mr. Khalilzad put it: "But when it comes to international efforts, India yet does not have a role that it could." He patronisingly added that the U.S. wants India to have a more active role in the peace process.

Clearly, as the most significant power in the region, India should have ensured that it had a place on the table and should have devised

ways to achieve that end. This is especially so because Afghanistan impacts on India's interests, especially its security concerns. The question that India's security and foreign policy decision makers should therefore ask themselves is this: why did the powers not consider India's participation vital to the present peace-making efforts, especially when the U.S.-Taliban deal was concluded leading to a possible new stage in Afghanistan's evolution?

The Taliban and Pakistan

Mr. Khalilzad offered first a clue. He followed it up with what is the obvious reason. He said, "I do think engagement between India and all the key players in Afghanistan, not only in terms of the government but also in terms of the political forces, society and the Afghan body politic is appropriate...." Responding to a question of groups in Afghanistan targeting India he said, "I believe that dialogue between India and the Taliban are important, and it would be important that issues of concerns like this [terrorism] are raised directly." Taking Mr. Khalilzad's views in their entirety, it is clear that he feels that by avoiding open contacts with the Taliban, India has reduced its role in international diplomatic efforts.

That the U.S. is currently crucially dependent on Pakistan for the successful implementation of its Taliban deal aimed at securing as orderly a withdrawal as possible from what is a major strategic reverse for the world's pre-eminent power is not in doubt. Mr. Khalilzad's positive words for Pakistan make it clear. More significant is his comment, "Our strong position is that there shouldn't be [terror] sanctuaries on either side of the Afghan-Pakistan border...." This is in sharp contrast to U.S. President Donald Trump's earlier

focus only on Taliban sanctuaries in Pakistan.

In such a situation, it was essential for India to have maintained its strong links with the Afghan government, built and supported its traditional Afghan allies – perhaps this was discreetly resumed – but also establish open lines of communication with the Taliban. This was especially because they were informally conveying that India should not consider them as Pakistan's puppets and also because they had gained international recognition. Contacts and discussions do not mean acceptance of their ways or that their professions of not being Pakistan's stooges should not have been tested.

Echo from the past

It is sad that despite all that India has done in Afghanistan over the past 18 years since the Taliban were ousted from Kabul in 2001, it finds itself on the margins of international diplomacy on Afghanistan. It is reminiscent of the time in the 1990s when, at Pakistan's insistence, India was considered a problem and kept out of crucial global forums on Afghanistan. It did not matter then because along with Iran and Russia, it kept the resistance to the Taliban going through Ahmed Shah Masood. Mr. Ghani is no Masood and there are no countries on the horizon which are really opposed to the Taliban acquiring a major place in the Afghanistan's formal power structures.

India needs to take corrective diplomatic action even at this late stage, and even in the time of COVID-19. It must begin openly talking to the Taliban and with all political groups in the country. It must realise that its Afghan policy needs changes.

Vivek Katju is a former Indian Ambassador to Afghanistan

Labour rights are in free fall

By suspending labour laws, States are exploiting the unique opportunity provided by the national lockdown



ANAMITRA ROYCHOWDHURY

As India slowly attempts to lift its nationwide lockdown, under compulsion of reviving the economy, labour rights are disappearing at an astonishing pace. Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat, which are States ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party, took the lead in suspending crucial labour laws for varying lengths of time.

Undemocratic introduction
This strategy visualises effecting an economic turnaround through improvement of India's rank in the "ease of doing business" index, thereby attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) and enthusing domestic private capital. Flexible labour and environmental laws are key instruments through which improvement in ranking is sought (incidentally, India's rank jumped from 130 in 2016 to 63 in 2019).

Such thinking forms the core of the 'Make in India' programme; therefore, elements of labour law dilution are already visible in the four labour codes aimed at consolidating 44 central labour laws (these are on wages, industrial relations, social security and occupational safety, health and working conditions). However, what is surprising is the undemocratic manner, by promulgating ordi-

nances and notifying rules, in which labour rights are suspended without tripartite discussion.

The continuity in direction of policy, although more vigorously pursued now, is obvious: for instance, consider the extension of a work day up to 12 hours. It is argued that this would address the problem of labour shortages at a time when social distancing is the norm. Interestingly, draft rules on the Code on Wages, 2019 already proposed extension of a workday by one hour (from eight to nine hours) when the novel coronavirus pandemic was nowhere on the horizon. Further, even though working hours are extended, there is no provision for overtime pay in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat (although such provisions are available in Uttarakhand, Haryana, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh).

Shades of an agenda
Next, take the U.P. ordinance that shockingly exempts employers from complying with the Minimum Wages Act 1948. However, the Code on Wages, 2019 makes a distinction between national minimum wage (calculated on the basis of an objective formula) and national floor wage (without providing a methodology to calculate it). This was done on purpose, for the minimum wage calculated by a government-appointed committee in 2018 was ₹375 per day, whereas, the national floor wage in the same year was a mere ₹176 per day; however, State governments, under the wages code, are directed to set their minimum wages only above the national floor wage. Thus, States, vying for private invest-

ments, would essentially consider the national floor wage, and this in effect would dilute the idea of minimum wage.

Additionally, the U.P. ordinance also exempts employers from complying with the Industrial Disputes Act 1947. Therefore, employers can hire and fire workers at will; however, employers even now are allowed to offer "fixed-term" employment without any restrictions on the number of renewals. Hence, firms hardly face any problem in adjusting their workforce.

Now check the M.P. ordinance which exempted factories employing less than 50 workers from regular inspections and allowed third-party inspections. Again the wages code severely eroded the inspection mechanism by snatching away the power of inspectors to conduct surprise checks. Even when violations in law are detected, they are mandated to advise, provide information and facilitate employers to comply with the law; in fact, they are now called inspector-cum-facilitator.

The M.P. ordinance further states that for new establishments, provisions guiding industrial dispute resolution, strikes/lockouts and trade unions would cease to

operate. This is in line with the Industrial Relations Code, 2019, which proposes to raise the membership threshold of a trade union from 15% to 75% of the workforce in an establishment, for it to be recognised as the negotiating union.

Therefore, it seems the novel coronavirus pandemic simply provided a window to aggressively fulfil the long-term agenda of diluting labour rights. This becomes evident from the length of suspension of these labour rights – which vary from 1,000 days (M.P.) to three years (U.P.). Surely there is no basis to expect that the impact of the lockdown will stretch for so long and it appears that State governments are competing to project themselves to be investor-friendly.

But will such suspension of labour rights, aimed at reducing labour cost, stimulate private investment and ensure recovery? Past experience does not inspire confidence. The Reserve Bank of India, for some time now, has single-mindedly designed policies that reduce the cost of borrowing capital, but this has clearly failed to unleash animal spirits. Further, reductions in corporate tax in September 2019 made no impact in boosting private capital and reviving growth in subsequent quarters. Actually, banking on private investment for economic recovery when the economy is wrapped in acute uncertainty is essentially futile. This is easy to understand: for example, home buyers, once uncertain about completion of a housing project, will never evince interest even if flats are offered at dirt-cheap rates accompanied by

additional benefits. Private agents wait and watch for a predictable environment before committing their money and, therefore, cannot be the principal agent for guiding an economy caught in a downward spiral.

Issue of timing

Finally, consider the timing of labour rights suspension. Although industry associations and government are projecting these changes as necessary for enticing FDI relocating from China, this is only a cover for the unique opportunity provided by the lockdown. In other times, such a violent attack on the fundamental rights of workers would lead to widespread protests and massive strikes. Both instruments are toothless now; protests are prohibited by lockdown rules and strikes are meaningless when production days are lost anyway. However, this exposes the authoritarian nature of the state, and every section of society must come together to protect the rights of workers. This is essential for destroying the rights of one section of society makes the rights of other sections of society vulnerable as well. For example, the plight of migrant workers will now spread to the working class as a whole, and industrial accidents such as the ones in Bhopal and Vishakapatnam could engulf larger sections of society. It is time we see these interconnections and resist united.

Anamitra Roychowdhury teaches at the Jawaharlal Nehru University and is the author of the book, 'Labour Law Reforms in India: All in the Name of Jobs'



REUTERS

men, would essentially consider the national floor wage, and this in effect would dilute the idea of minimum wage.

A 'package' out of sync?
One fails to understand in the immediate situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, how allowing greater private participation in the coal and space sectors will provide relief to Indians, especially the poor (Page 1, "Govt. throws open defence production and coal sectors", May 17). The fourth "tranche of economic stimulus" can at best be classified as long-term reforms and should be done through the legislation route and not through the ordinance route. Moreover, including the fourth tranche in the ₹20-lakh crore package is again odd. Even when the

package was announced, it already took into account half the earlier

expenditure. The need of the hour is to provide short-term relief in the form of cash transfers, loan waivers and compensation to the needy. Is anyone listening? SHABANA PARVEZ, Roorkee, Uttarakhand

The hefty stimulus package announced by the Centre will only dampen the hopes of migrant workers. The huge scheme has largely offered them food grains and nothing more. The mega-package has failed to focus on the plight of those worst affected; they have not only lost their livelihoods but are

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

En route home
In the midst of a national lockdown that seems to be stretching out, the condition of hungry and homesick migrant workers caught between a situation of 'no employment, no earnings' and their dire necessity to sustain themselves has become most heart rending. It becomes an emotive issue if one considers that these workers have to cross a divide of thousands of kilometres in order to get back to some sort of security and the comfort of home (Inside pages, May 17).

In the face of impediments such as language, culture,

the absence of family and the worry of unemployment, to say that they are suffering would be an understatement. How they are keeping themselves alive with no idea of where the next meal will come from is moving. In the lockdown situation, they have hardly anyone to fall back on. And with public transport suspended, their state of physical discomfort and emotional shock increases. In such circumstances, their return home should have been arranged with all stops pulled out. When many of us are silenced and moved to tears by the images of suffering and also

their steel-hearted determination to overcome the odds, one wonders why officials are still dithering over helping them. The stranded migrants must be sent back to their home States by operating more trains and arranging for last-mile connectivity by operating road transport exclusively for them. If elaborate and "branded" arrangements can be made to bring back Indians stranded in foreign countries in similar conditions, why the deafening silence over unfortunate migrant labour?

R. SAMPATH,
Chennai



also losing their lives in their valiant attempts to reunite with their families. The narrative of their arduous journey amidst scarcity of food and the often ruthless behaviour of State officials is saddening. The "smart attempt" to boost the economy by handing out loans, privatisation and space exploration ventures is not going to help this important section of India. A large chunk of the Finance Minister's announcements are applicable and relevant only in a normal, post-pandemic world.

DEEPIKA JAIN,
New Delhi

Where is health in the stimulus package?

A part of the relief funding must be used to improve the country's health infrastructure



A.K. SHIVA KUMAR

India can pause and breathe a sigh of relief in its efforts to contain the spread of the coronavirus. Though the situation varies across States, at the end of the first innings, the country seems to have an advantage.

Our bowlers have done well to limit the COVID-19 score and flatten the curve. Credit for containing the spread of the virus should go to our frontline medical and health workers in government who literally rushed in where angels fear to tread to save people's lives. Putting aside threats to personal safety, family interests, and stigma, selfless government health workers across the country are the ones who are leading the charge.

We shouldn't however forget that the pitch conditions aren't favourable to the Indian players. Even before COVID-19, India was staring at a serious economic slowdown. India's GDP growth for 2019-20 was lowered to 4.1% from 5% projected by several agencies before the outbreak of the virus. Recent reports predict that the impact of COVID-19 might reduce GDP growth rate to 1.1% or even lower in the current financial year. Unemployment has been growing since January 2020 when the first cases of coronavirus emerged. According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, India's unemployment rate at the end of May 16, 2020 was staggeringly high at around 24%.

The second reason why the pitch isn't in India's favour is because our healthcare delivery system in most States is extremely fragile. One wonders, for instance, whether Bihar can handle the consequences if the virus begins to spread with the return of millions of migrant workers back to the State. Many other States also face a similar plight given the poor state of primary healthcare facilities.

Restoring livelihoods
During this innings break, discussions on the strategy to win the match have been focusing on ending the lockdown, reviving economic ac-



"The pandemic has brought into focus India's low spending on public health." Healthcare workers in Mumbai in April. •REUTERS

tivities, restoring livelihoods, addressing concerns of hunger and starvation, stimulating small and medium enterprises, and enhancing farm incomes. The package of ₹20-lakh crore, equivalent to about 10% of India's GDP, announced by the Prime Minister on May 12, is expected to restore the livelihoods of millions of migrants and other workers who have lost their jobs and also enable entrepreneurs and businesses to get re-started.

Some elements of the stimulus package have been announced. Others might follow. While it is too early to comment on the impact of these announcements, one should not forget that the fear factor in reviving employment and business is real. Economic desperation might leave poor workers with no choice but to return to work. But many of them are truly worried about getting infected. Businesses are also genuinely concerned about the collapse of demand and shutting down of retail outlets. Equally disconcerting for them are the difficulties in and consequences of not adhering to conditions set by the government. They are worried about the unpredictability of government's actions and policy revisions. This could well be a reason why, according to recent reports, in the midst of the long-term structural shift from China, companies prefer to relocate manufacturing to countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region, and not India.

In all this, the silence around health is disturbing. While economic stimulus packages are essential, the match cannot be won without urgently and immediately stepping up investments in health.

Strengthening public health

Dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic has brought out the critical importance of the public sector in health provisioning. However, stuck at around 1.15% of GDP for well over a decade, the low level of public spending on health is both a cause and an exacerbating factor accounting for the poor quality, limited reach and insufficient public provisioning of healthcare. Despite this, the public health system has risen to the challenge so far. The Union and State governments seem to have found the financial resources to provide an emergency response to deal with the pandemic. With agility and speed, orders have been placed for PPEs, ventilators, testing kits, and other supplies needed to detect and treat COVID-19 patients. It is possible that resources allocated for other health programmes are being diverted to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. The opportunity cost of such diversion of funds could be high. Media reports point out, for instance, that people's access to routine maternal and child health as well as family planning services in parts of the country has been negatively impacted. Also, many States are simply not in a position to deal with a second

wave of infections. The pandemic has exposed a hard truth: most private healthcare providers seem to be incapable of and unwilling to help even during a national crisis. And India's private sector in health is sizable. According to recent figures, the private sector accounts for 93% of all hospitals, 64% of all hospital beds, and 80-85% of all doctors. Rapidly declining revenues and sharply eroding profits are leading to the closure of many private hospitals. Only a few private providers have come forward to extend support to the government.

Not addressing weaknesses in the public health delivery system can thwart all efforts at reviving the economy. State governments need to be prepared as the worst maybe yet to come.

This is the time then to seize the opportunity and invest in universal health coverage (UHC) by reversing the financial neglect of public healthcare. Nearly every country in the world that has achieved anything like UHC has done it through the public assurance of primary healthcare.

Announcing a new 'health investment plan' (as part of the stimulus package) is the urgent need of the hour. At least 1% of GDP out of the stimulus package should be earmarked for improving the country's health infrastructure and strengthening public health service delivery. And up to 70% of the additional expenditures should be ring-fenced for primary healthcare and further strengthening health and wellness centres, primary health centres and community health centres. Only then can State governments be better prepared to face a second round of the pandemic. Investing in health, apart from improving people's well-being, is also essential for accelerating and sustaining India's economic growth.

If cricket is a game of chance, so is the match against COVID-19. What the immediate future holds for India in terms of the spread of the virus is not known. As is said of matches, 'it ain't over till it's over.' There is only one way to win this match and establish a self-reliant and prosperous India: seize the opportunity and step up investments in public health across the country.

A.K. Shiva Kumar is a Delhi-based development economist

Licensed to beat, abuse and kill

Police brutality, a colonial legacy, has tenaciously clung on to the mantle of law enforcement personnel

M.P. NATHANAEL

On April 16, Mohammed Rizwan, 19, a resident of Chhajapur village, Uttar Pradesh, ventured out of his home to buy biscuits. He was beaten with rifle butts and *lathis* by the police, while other residents purchased their groceries from the shop. In a battered condition, he managed to reach home. After some home remedies did not work, he was admitted to the local hospital where he died in the wee hours of April 18.

There was nothing unusual in this incident or similar acts of brutality committed by the police as migrant workers, taking an arduous inter-State journey, attempted to return to their respective villages. In several places, elderly people were ruthlessly beaten. The high-handedness shown by the police during the various phases of the ongoing lockdown even led to a petition being filed with the State Human Rights Commission of Tamil Nadu. The petition called for the institution of a grievance redressal mechanism to inquire into the excesses committed by law enforcement personnel.

Taking a serious view of police brutality, the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative in March issued a set of guidelines for police, in no uncertain terms prohibiting them from using force on persons violating the lockdown regulations. In this regard, the Bengaluru Police later set an example by divesting the policemen of batons and instead engaging in the use of persuasive methods to seriously implement the lockdown.

Trained to be fierce
A legacy of the British rulers, brutality has been a tenacious characteristic of the Indian police and precious little has been done to eradicate it. Most policemen are made to believe from their very training days that brutality is inherent in the very role to be performed by them, to instil a certain degree of fear in the citizens. This attitude is reinforced by training instructors, who abuse and even manhandle errant trainees. Unfortunately, posting to police training institutions is considered a punishment. Having picked up the traits and

armed with the power to take anyone to task, policemen exercise their unbridled power to beat, abuse and even kill after they have donned the *khakis*.

Application of force is definitely a legal requirement and it is justified by arming policemen with *lathis*, pistols, rifles and other modern weapons. But the mere issue of *lathis* and weapons in no way justifies their indiscriminate use on innocents or even the accused. Prudence demands that these weapons be used in a just manner. Though the subject of human rights is a part of training curriculum in training institutions, no seriousness is attached to it. Those who violate human rights are seldom taken to task. By virtue of being from the same fraternity, most superiors overlook instances of brutality as they consider it an innate demand of the job of policing. True, there are officers who brook no unjustified use of force but their numbers are few.

To make matters worse, seldom are senior officers seen on the spot when their junior-ranking personnel are on duty. Presence of senior officers with their personnel in the field not only will be conducive in building up a spirit of camaraderie with them, it will also serve as an opportunity to brief the personnel and deter them from any wrongdoing.

Difficult working conditions

On the other hand, it is true that long duty hours tend to test the patience of policemen. Working under tremendous pressure without any respite for relaxation, some of them are constantly on a short fuse and tend to vent their ire on innocent victims.

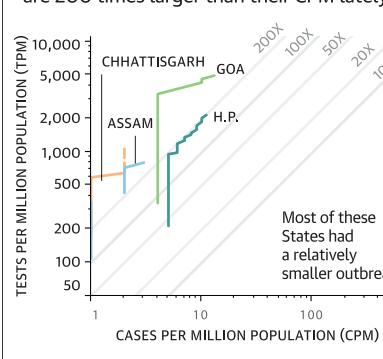
Large vacancies in police forces are also responsible for this state. Against the UN recommendations of 222 police personnel for a population of one lakh, most States in our country have around 100 personnel only. Proper planning in recruitment, training, in-service courses and close supervision by senior officers can go a long way in reducing, if not eradicating, brutality by policemen.

M.P. Nathanael is a retired Inspector General of Police, CRPF

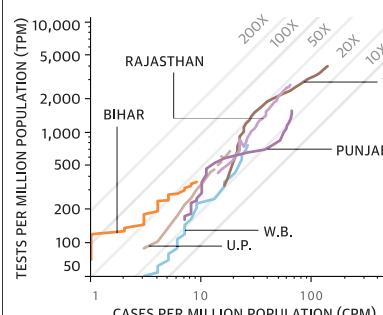
DATA POINT

A test of time | Are Indian States testing enough for COVID-19? While comparing the tests conducted per million population answers this question, it does not consider the size of the outbreak in these States. A method popularised by ourworldindata.org bridges this gap. By measuring the number of tests per confirmed case, it is possible to gauge which States are testing enough relative to the size of their outbreaks. By **The Hindu Data Team**

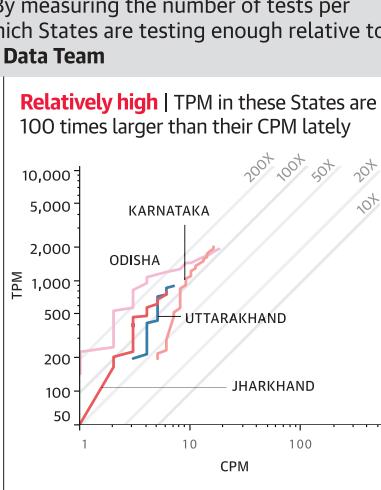
Relatively very high | TPM in these States are 200 times larger than their CPM lately



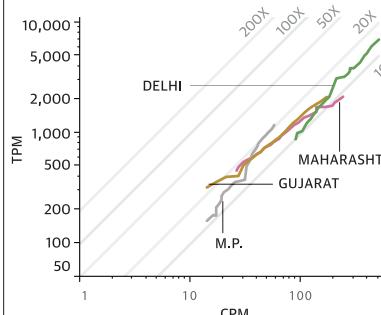
Relatively poor | TPM in these States are 20 times larger than their CPM lately



Relatively high | TPM in these States are 100 times larger than their CPM lately

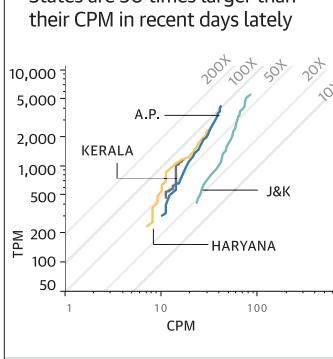


Relatively very poor | TPM in these States are 10 times larger than their CPM lately



How to read the charts | The five charts plot tests per million population (TPM) against cases per million people (CPM) in each State between April 16-May 16. Each line having darker shade traces the no. of tests per confirmed case in a State across this period

Relatively good | TPM in these States are 50 times larger than their CPM in recent days lately



LAST WORD

While testing the entire population is the ideal solution to measure the infection rate in a region, depending on population and the availability of testing kits, this may not be a feasible response. So measuring a region's testing rate in comparison to its outbreak size will help identify those which are not testing enough. In this regard, Maharashtra, Delhi, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh are falling behind

FROM THE READERS' EDITOR

Can Facebook's self-regulation ensure information hygiene?

The tech giant has launched a content oversight board



A.S. PANNEERSELVAN

the harvesting of personal data by Cambridge Analytica and the mindless censoring of the Pulitzer Prize winning photograph of the "Napalm girl" that spoke about the barbarity of war. People from other regions have their own lists of failures of the platform.

Dealing with localised propaganda

Second, there is a huge gap between the magnitude of Facebook's size, reach, linguistic diversity and influence on one hand, and the limitation of the oversight board to look into localised propaganda on the other. As of the first quarter of 2020, Facebook has 2.6 billion monthly active users and the number surpasses 3 billion people a month if one includes the other popular products of the company such as WhatsApp, Instagram and Messenger. It is available in 101 languages.

For instance, how will the oversight board handle a toxic posting in Tamil? I have noticed a growth in bigotry, hate and abuse in Tamil-language postings. These do not reveal their true colour if they are subjected to mechanical translation without providing adequate context. What are the mechanisms to capture the gravity of the polarising content that fills cyberspace? Problematic posts should be removed on a war footing because there is a political dividend for inciting hate.

We must remember that the grim images broadcast by the killer in two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand could not be controlled or moderated by the social media giants despite the conscious and collective decision to take down the offensive video. There seems to be no mechanism to prevent reposting of offensive content, which was taken down. Rebecca MacKinnon, a fellow with the University of California National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement and co-founder of Global Voices, is convinced that the oversight board "cannot stop the exploitative collection and sharing of user data, or stop the company from deploying opaque algorithms that prioritize inflammatory content to maximize engagement." I tend to agree with her. In print and broadcast organisations, there is a shared value system between all the stakeholders which makes self-regulation an effective mechanism. But there is no unifying objective between Mark Zuckerberg, his hand-picked corporate board, Facebook's nearly 2.5 billion users and the oversight board, despite the individual credentials of its members.

readerseditor@thehindu.co.in

The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MAY 18, 1970

'Task Force' for Peace in Cambodia

The 11-nation Asian and Pacific conference on Cambodia ended today (May 17, Jakarta) with the setting up of a "task force" of the Foreign Ministers of Indonesia, Malaysia and Japan to initiate action by the United Nations and other countries for an effective solution to the Cambodian situation. The conference, attended by Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Laos, South Vietnam, the Philippines, South Korea, Japan, Australia and New Zealand, besides Indonesia, urged in a joint communique that "all foreign troops be withdrawn from Cambodia and hostilities be stopped" and also that all parties respect the sovereignty, neutrality and territorial integrity of Cambodia. Towards this end the members of the 1954 Geneva conference and all interested parties were urged to hold talks to convene an early international conference "to find a just, peaceful and effective solution" to the Cambodian situation. The Foreign Ministers who participated in the conference decided to place their views before the United Nations and apprise all UN members of the gravity of the situation.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MAY 18, 1920

The Dyerites.

(From second editorial)

After deep cogitation – and perhaps a little anxious waiting to see which way the wind blows – the *Madras Times* has come to the conclusion that General Dyer's action was perfectly justified. Its reason for this remarkable conclusion is not less remarkable, being based on the analogy of the battlefields. Now, what are the facts? At a time when order had been restored after a period of mob rule, a meeting, the prohibition of which was imperfectly known, was held. It was attended by a large number of country people down for the Baisakhi fair. There were a number of women and children also present. General Dyer heard of the meeting, he proceeded thither to make an example, and immediately on arrival opened fire and continued firing. In his evidence, he has clearly shown that he did not think the meeting was a rebellious one except on the technical ground that it was held in defiance of the prohibition. *Fiat Justicia*, says the *Madras Times*. If the justice of General Dyer is typical of British justice, we should prefer the justice of the Germans in Belgium, the Bulgarians in Macedonia, or the Belgians in the Congo. There is so much less of sickening hypocrisy, less of pharisaical divergence between practice and profession in the latter.

FROM PAGE ONE

States to decide on infection zones

"With a view to ensure safety in offices and work places, employers on best effort basis should ensure that the application is installed by all employees having compatible mobile phones. District authorities have been asked to advise individuals to install the Aarogya Setu application on compatible mobile phones and regularly update their health status on the App. This will facilitate timely provision of medical attention to those individuals who are at risk," MHA said.

The MHA guidelines said inter-State movement of vehicles and buses has been allowed with mutual consent of the concerned States and Union Territories. States could decide on movement of vehicles within its boundaries.

The guidelines said, "local authorities should ensure that shops and markets open with staggered timings, so as to ensure social distancing. All shops shall also have to ensure six feet distance among customers and also not allow more than five persons at one time."

MHA said the fresh guidelines allow States to delineate Red, Green and Orange zones following the parameters set by the

Health Ministry.

MHA said only essential activities shall be allowed in the containment zones.

"Strict perimeter control shall be maintained, and no movement of persons would be allowed across the zones, except for medical emergencies and for maintaining supply of essential goods and services. Buffer zones are areas adjoining the containment zones, where new cases are more likely to appear. In the buffer zones, more caution needs to be exercised," MHA said.

Schools, colleges, educational institutions, hotels, restaurants except canteens at bus depots, railway stations and airports will remain shut.

Places of large public gatherings such as cinemas, shopping malls, gyms, entertainment parks and all kinds of social, political, cultural and religious congregations remain prohibited.

Restaurants will be allowed to operate kitchens for home delivery of food items.

"Sports complexes and stadia will be permitted to open only for sports activities. However, spectators will not be allowed in these complexes," the MHA said.

Govt. hikes borrowing limits for States by 5%

However, given that States account for 40% of MGNREGA expenditure, including most upfront costs, they will also have to be willing to spend on the scheme.

State governments have been given more fiscal room in the current crisis with the hike of their borrowing limits from 3% to 5% of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), which is particularly important as GSDPs are likely to contract, further shrinking possible borrowing at a time when States are at the frontline of containment and relief operations.

However, the hiked limits will be conditional on States implementing reforms related to ration portability, ease of doing business, power distribution, and urban local bodies.

The Finance Minister, said both Central and State finances were stressed, which is why GST compensation has not been paid to any States since December, and estimated that the increase in borrowing limits would make extra resources worth ₹4.28 lakh crore available to States.

While she noted that the States have so far only borrowed 14% of their already authorised limits, analysts pointed out that this limit is meant for the entire year, and nine States have already advanced their borrowing calendars even at a time when the interest on their bonds has shot up to 9%.

"States are paying a high cost for market borrowings, while the Centre's cost is lower at about 6%. It would

have been better for the Centre to borrow from the market and transfer to the States," said economist Probal Sen, who is also a former Chief Statistician of India.

He was also critical of the new Public Sector Enterprise Policy as part of a stimulus package, noting that privatising PSUs would find fewer buyers at a time of global recession, while any potential buyer would be spending money which could have gone into fresh investment on a financial transfer instead, effectively contracting demand.

Announcing far-reaching changes, Ms. Sitharaman had said the new policy will notify specific strategic sectors in which at least one PSU will remain, although private companies will also be allowed.

PSUs in all other sectors will be privatised. Even in the strategic sectors, no more than four PSUs will be allowed, with the rest being privatised, merged or brought under holding companies.

For the health sector, the Finance Minister promised increased public expenditure including infectious disease hospital blocks in every district and public laboratories in every block, without mentioning any specific financial outlay.

The Centre will also roll out the PM e-Vidya programme for multi-mode access to digital education, including e-content for school education, earmarked TV channels for each class from 1 to 12.

Maharashtra cases surge by 2,347

A statement from the Press Information Bureau said cumulatively, 22,79,324 tests have been done so far for COVID-19. India had 916 dedicated COVID-19 hospitals with 1,80,473 beds (with 1,61,169 isolation beds and 19,304 ICU beds) and 2,044 dedicated COVID-19 Health Centres with 1,28,304 beds (1,17,775 isolation beds and 10,529 ICU beds), along with 9,536 quarantine centres. As many as 6,309 COVID Care Centres with 5,64,632 beds are now available to combat COVID-19 in the country.

The Centre has provided 90.22 lakh N95 masks and

53.98 lakh Personal Protective Equipments (PPEs) to the States, Union Territories, and Central Institutions, the release added.

Having crossed China last week, India is only behind Iran in the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases, at 120,198, according to tracking site Worldometer.

Globally, there are now 4.5 million confirmed COVID-19 infections, with the U.S. accounting for nearly a third of them at about 1.5 million. At least 213 countries have been affected by the pandemic, with 3,13,000 patients having succumbed to the disease.

It's a ₹3.22 lakh crore package: Congress

What the Finance Minister has announced does not total up even to 2% of the GDP, says the party

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI



We want to convey that there is a huge difference between what is wage support, income support, financial support and stimulus to the economy as compared to borrowing, credit and additional loan

ANAND SHARMA, CONGRESS LEADER

ments put together add up to a fraction of what the government had promised.

"It all adds up to ₹3.22 lakh crore, beginning from the first announcement of ₹1.76 lakh crore, which is 1.6% of the GDP. This is not a time for political one-upmanship, but, I would like to debate this with the Finance Minister, let her contradict what I am saying that what you have given does not total

up even to 2% of the GDP," Mr. Sharma said.

Loan route
The Congress has been criticising the government of taking the loan route instead of extending immediate help with cash transfers.

"We want to convey that there is a huge difference between what is wage support, income support, financial support and stimulus to

the economy as compared to the borrowing, credit and additional loan," he added.

Because of the extended lockdown, which was extended for the fourth time on Sunday, the country had lost more than 7% of the GDP, which amounted to ₹18 lakh crore, he said. The party also criticised the opening up of sensitive sectors, including nuclear energy, to the private sector.

"Corona pandemic and the National Disaster Management Act have not empowered the government to embark upon a grand clearance sale, as I said yesterday [on Saturday] of India's national assets. These issues will have to be discussed, revisited and corrected," he added.

FM's claim of helping States is misleading'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Opposition parties criticised Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for claiming to have given the State governments adequate help during the lockdown and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Announcing the fifth and the final tranche of the Atmanirbhar stimulus package, Ms. Sitharaman said the Centre has paid States ₹46,038 crore tax dues. She also said the States, while demanding an increase in the borrowing limit, had only borrowed 14% of their existing authorised limit.

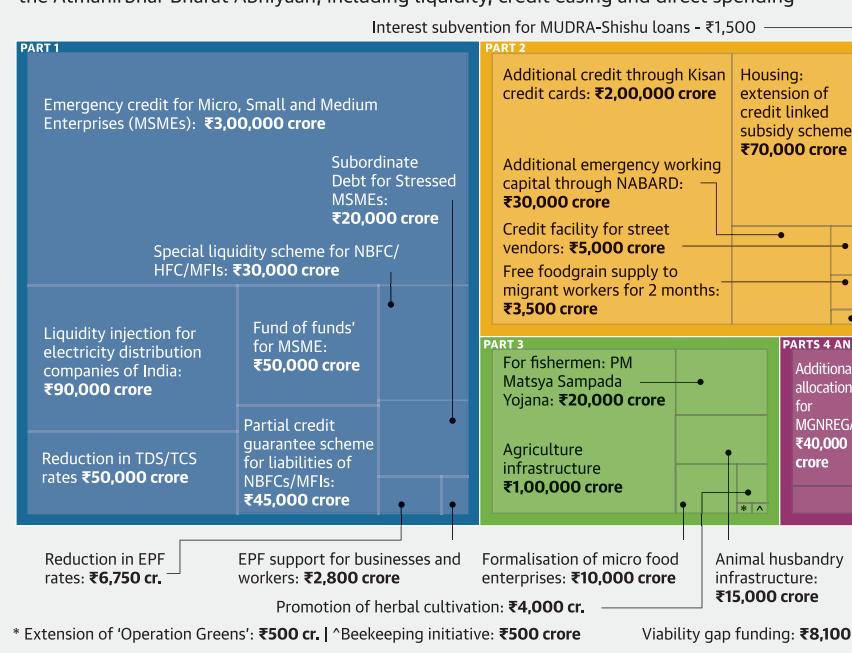
CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury said this is a 'misleading' claim. "All funds that the Centre has to statutorily transfer to the States and the decision of the RBI to increase ways and means advances is now being claimed as Modi government's 'support for the States,'" he said in a tweet.

"FM mocked at States saying they have so far used only 14% of their borrowing entitlement. Why? When they go to the market in the current situation, interest rates rise sharply increasing their debt burden," he said.

RJD MP Manoj K. Jha said Shakespeare's lines from *Macbeth*, "False face must hide what the false heart doth know", aptly describe the five-day-long affair of announcements.

Big picture

A break-up of the ₹20,00,000 crore financial package announced by the government under the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan, including liquidity, credit easing and direct spending



A breakdown of the stimulus package into budgeted/non-budgeted parts:

Date	Tranches	Total amount	Part of FY21 Budget	Additional to FY21 Budget	Other than FY21 Budget
Prior to May 12	RBI measures	8,01,603			8,01,603
	Fiscal relief	1,92,800	1,05,000	80,000	7,800
May 13-17	5 tranches	11,02,650	500	1,22,400	9,79,750
May 13	1st Tranche	5,94,550	--	16,800	5,77,750
May 14	2nd Tranche	3,10,000	500	9,500	3,00,000
May 15	3rd Tranche	1,50,000	--	48,000	1,02,000
May 16	4th Tranche	8,100	--	8,100	--
May 17	5th Tranche	40,000	--	40,000	--
	Fiscal stimulus	12,95,450	1,05,500	2,02,400	9,87,550
	Total Stimulus	20,97,053	1,05,500	2,02,400	17,89,153

Table provided by Ernst and Young | All figures in ₹ cr.

CPI to hold nationwide protest

Modi govt. ignored the plight of the working class, says party

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Communist Party of India (CPI) will hold a nationwide protest on Tuesday against the Narendra Modi government for the "unprecedented hardships imposed on the working class" due to loss of livelihood, lack of food and finance to reach

their homes. The party accused the government of ignoring their plight and miseries.

The CPI has demanded that the government give ₹10,000 to all migrant workers as travel allowance. The party has also demanded an increase in man-days under the MGNREGA.

CPI general secretary D. Raja said the government's stimulus package was a political rhetoric. "Indian economy has been sick and sinking because of the disastrous neo-liberal policies being pursued by the Modi government for the past six years. COVID-19 added to the crisis," he said.

"The States led by the Congress governments should be asking for more trains to send migrants back to their homes," said the Finance Minister.

"I fold my hands in front of Congress president Sonia Gandhi and request her to

strengthening the public health system, to provide sustenance to people and to rebuild the economy, taking up a proposal to redesign the entire Central Vista at a cost of at least ₹20,000 crore, a figure likely to escalate significantly, seems particularly irresponsible. It seems like Nero fiddling while Rome burns," they wrote.

The letter comes as the Central Public Works Department is working on floating the tender for the project and has received key approvals, including from the En-

vironment Ministry and the Central Vista Committee, during the ongoing lockdown.

"This precinct ... acts as the lungs of the city, with its dense mature tree canopies serving as a repository of bio diversity and the vast lawns of the Vista as a watershed for the city between the Ridge and the Yamuna. Constructing a large number of multi-storeyed office buildings, with basements, will... irreversibly change and damage the environment," they wrote.

The Yogi Adityanath-led government had on May 8 passed a notification diluting provisions of the Factories Act of 1948 and increased work timings by providing certain exemptions to factories.

U.P. withdraws order on increased working hours

The decision was challenged in HC

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government has withdrawn its recent order increasing daily work hour shifts in manufacturing units from the existing 8 hours to 12 hours.

The Yogi Adityanath-led government had on May 8 passed a notification diluting provisions of the Factories Act of 1948 and increased work timings by providing certain exemptions to factories.

The matter is listed for May 18.

Inhuman to send bodies by trucks, Soren tells Yogi

STAFF REPORTER
BHUBANESWAR

Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren slammed his Uttar Pradesh counterpart Yogi Adityanath for the "inhuman treatment" meted out to migrant workers who died in an accident in Aurai-

ya on Saturday by transporting their bodies in trucks. Mr. Soren tweeted: "Heartless to see @UPGovt led by @myogiadityanath ji could not even arrange for ambulance..." However, he deleted the tweet later and toned down his criticism.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR
One militant and a soldier were killed in an operation by the security forces in Doda district of Jammu and Kashmir on Sunday. A police spokesman said the militant, identified as

Tahir Ahmed Bhat, was encircled during a search operation launched on Saturday night at Khotra in the Chenab Valley. A police spokesman said Bhat was a close associate of the slain Hizbul Mujahideen commander Riyaz Naikoo.

APPEAL
I am 12 years old suffering from Mediastinal Germ Cell Tumor. I need to undergo Chemotherapy, Surgery & Radiation Therapy which costs Rs. 8,00,000/- at Meenakshi Mission Hospital & Research Centre, Madurai. My family condition is very poor and they cannot afford treatment. Kindly donate and support me. You can send Ch.D.D.F.T Transfer (Syndicate Bank, Nungambakkam Branch, IFSC No. SYNB0006018) favouring WOMEN'S WELFARE SYNDICATE is exempted under 80G IT. Request your email id.

All correspondence is done through WWS Regd. Public Charitable Trust, Flat No.GF-1, Cordel Apartments, Garden Lane, Chennai - 600006. Ph:

IN BRIEF



Mumbai reports highest single-day surge

Maharashtra reported its highest single-day surge yet on Sunday, with 2,347 new COVID-19 cases, as the total breached the 33,000-mark to soar to 33,053 cases. With 63 new fatalities, the death toll shot up to 1,198. Mumbai city, which recorded a staggering 1,595 of these new cases to post its highest day-surge as well, breached the 20,000-case mark to rise to 20,150 cases.

Discharged COVID-19 patient found dead

AHMEDABAD
The body of a 67-year-old COVID-19 patient was found at a bus stand here in Gujarat on Friday, a day after he was discharged from the Civil Hospital. The incident caused outrage prompting Chief Minister Vijay Rupani to order a probe. "He was discharged since he had mild symptoms and was asked to be under home quarantine," said Dr. M.M. Prabhakar, OSD at the hospital.

Migrant worker dies of exhaustion in Odisha

BERHAMPUR
A 28-year-old migrant worker, who had returned from Andhra Pradesh, died in Odisha's Ganjam district on Saturday, just a few hours away from home, owing to exhaustion and summer heat. Bimal Sahu, 28, who hails from Nayagarh district, used to work at a dhaba in A.P. After the lockdown was announced, he initially started walking and then managed to board a truck.

Ahmedabad remains main COVID-19 cluster

AHMEDABAD
Gujarat's COVID-19 curve continues to see a sharp rise with 391 new infections and 34 deaths occurring on Sunday, increasing the State's cumulative figures to 11,380 and 659. Gujarat has the second largest number of fatalities after Maharashtra. Ahmedabad remains the main cluster with 31 deaths and 276 cases on Sunday. The city's tally for both cases and fatalities has climbed — to 8,420 cases and 524 deaths.

Pandemic brings Uttarakhand's 'ghost' hamlets to life

State govt. is hoping to retain migrant workers

ANUJ KUMAR
GHAZIABAD

"*Aapada main avsar (opportunity in disaster)*"— Tribhuvan Oniyal has latched on to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's phrase to turn the pandemic into a possibility to inject life into the ghost villages of Pauri Garhwal in Uttarakhand.

Every day, the social activist and journalist gets calls from people who have left the villages in Pauri Garhwal for a better life in the cities.

"Every day, I get five-six calls from residents who migrated many years back for better prospects. These are not exactly from abandoned villages but those which still

have half a dozen families," says Mr. Oniyal, who lives in Sangaura village with his father Vidyadutt Sharma.

Mr. Sharma incidentally is the protagonist of Nirmal Chander's documentary *Moiti Bagh*, which was nominated for the 92nd Academy Awards and captures life in the hills of Pauri Garhwal, the district with the highest number of abandoned villages in the State.

Harsh life

"I know it won't be easy. Out of 10 families returning, only two or three will stay back. Some of them who settled in western Uttar Pradesh decades back are for a picnic; some will not be able to cope with the harsh life of hills and return once the pandemic subsides," he says.

Rajendra Singh, who was



A family back home in Pauri. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

in a marketing job in Delhi, returned to his village, Thampla, in mid-March to make arrangements for his mother's *barsi* (a ritual performed a year after the death of a person). "After the lockdown, my family somehow

reached here a few days back and are quarantined in our four-room house," Mr. Singh said.

The two months have given him an opportunity to return to farming. "I grew vegetables and *chaulai* (Hima-

layan Amaranth), enough to feed a few families. So hunger will not be an issue. As for education, I can send my daughter to Pauri, 18 km away. If government provides some support, I won't return," he says.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GHAZIABAD

Sharad Singh Negi, vice-chairman, the Uttarakhand Rural and Migration Commission, said there are around 1,750 'ghost villages', about 10% of total revenue villages, in the State.

"Unlike Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, those who are returning to Uttarakhand are not construction labourers; they are largely

blue-collar workers who work in the service industry or factories in different parts of the country. Even before the first lockdown, 60,000 workers had

returned. There were cooks, drivers, waiters, receptionists among them. After the first lockdown, two lakh workers have registered on the State portal and are being brought back," Mr. Negi said.

But returning to abandoned houses is not always a pleasant experience. "In Asnoli village, a family returned after five years to find that their house was not habitable. So we had to quarantine them in a school," says Mohd Mujtaba Khan, district information officer.

A total of 23,423 migrants had reached 1,121 gram panchayats of Pauri till May 16, according to the District Information Office.

Dhiraj Singh, district magistrate, Pauri Garhwal, says many returning workers would be engaged in horticulture, poultry and apiculture activities. "The government wants them to stay back and is making efforts to that end."

Mr. Oniyal says he is trying to train people in the cultivation of cash crops, pisciculture and poultry farming.

Case surge disproves prediction of decline

NITI Aayog member V.K. Paul had said that the number of active cases would dip to zero by May 16

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The number of COVID-19 positive cases in India nearing the six-digit mark has improved an assessment by V.K. Paul, NITI Aayog member and head of a government-empowered committee on medical management.

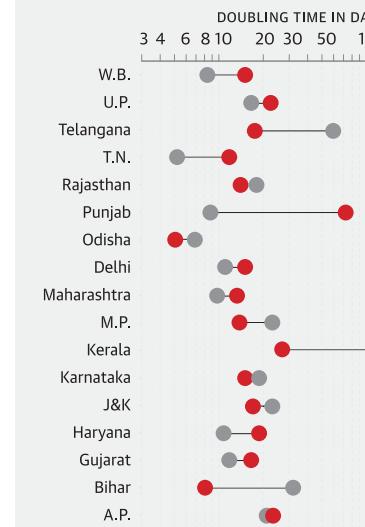
On April 24, Mr. Paul, an internationally acclaimed paediatrician, made a detailed presentation at the daily Health Ministry briefing, detailing how the lockdown helped to curtail the spread of the novel coronavirus. His presentation suggested that the first lockdown had prevented India from seeing a 1,00,000 cases in April. It had also slowed the rate of transmission and increased the doubling time, the period it took for cases to double, to about 10 days.

However, included in this was a PowerPoint slide that projected the benefits from "extending the lockdown" beyond April 15. This had a curve showing the number of active cases plummeting to zero by May 16.

From May 3, India would hit its peak in adding daily new cases at a little above

Case file | Maharashtra leads in infections and deaths with cases continuing to double quicker than in comparison to most other States. Cases are doubling* quicker in Madhya Pradesh (with relatively high infections), Odisha, Bihar and Kerala (with lower numbers)

Fresh cases in Kerala have led to a lowering in doubling time. Chart compares doubling times between this (●) and previous week (○)



*This refers to the estimated time taken for cases to double based on data in the past week (States with >500 cases alone)

State	Cases	Tests per million	Deaths
Maharashtra	33,053	2,147.3	1,198
Gujarat	11,380	2,135.8	659
T.N.	11,224	4,063.9	78
Delhi	9,755	7,073.4	148
Rajasthan	5,083	2,744.6	128
M.P.	4,977	1,188.8	248
U.P.	4,464	691	112
W.B.	2,677	783.4	238
A.P.	2,380	4,291.3	50
Punjab	1,964	1,605.8	35
Telangana	1,551	589.5	34
Bihar	1,251	363.2	8
Karnataka	1,146	2,084.4	37
J&K	1,121	5,657.1	13
Haryana	887	3,019	13
Odisha	828	1,989.1	5
Kerala	601	1,195.7	4

said, there will have to be a flattening in new cases that lasted over two weeks in key States such as Gujarat, Maharashtra and West Bengal that were fuelling the rise in numbers. "So far, there is no such evidence of a decline. So I don't know the basis of that forecast. We are planning, in terms of keeping ventilators, beds, ICU facilities ready on the assumption that this will last much longer," a member had then told *The Hindu*.

Steady increase
Since April 27, there has not been a day when India has posted fewer than 1,500 cases, and the number has steadily increased to over 3,000 a day. On Sunday, India reported nearly 5,000 cases over a 24-hour period. To be sure, doubling time has improved and testing rates, too, have significantly increased, with Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan claiming that India is now testing nearly 1,00,000 samples a day. India's test positivity rate remains at around 4%, meaning 4 of 100 samples are turning up positive. However, this varies within the States.

Alongside the Mumbai-Agra highway, before the ambulance arrived, Mr. Mohammad cushioned his friend's head on his lap and sprinkled water to keep him from sinking.

When his febrile friend was dumped along the highway in Kolaras of Shivpuri district in Madhya Pradesh on Friday by a truck headed for Uttar Pradesh, Mr. Mohammed disembarked, too. "I couldn't leave him alone in that condition. Other workers in the truck felt he carried the coronavirus, but he was my friend. They refused to call for medical help," he recalled.

Mr. Mohammed was alongside the Mumbai-Agra highway, before the ambulance arrived, Mr. Mohammad cushioned his friend's head on his lap and sprinkled water to keep him from sinking.

Mr. Mohammed is now at an isolation facility at the district hospital. Their samples have been collected for COVID-19 test.

On unforgiving road, till death did them part

Truck ditches ill man, friend stays back

STAFF REPORTER
SHIVPURI



Reaching home a couple of days late was all right for Yaqoob Mohammad but not returning to his village alone, without his friend Amrit Ramcharan. "Both our parents are waiting. We had left home together to work in Surat and decided to return together," said Mr. Mohammed.

When his febrile friend was dumped along the highway in Kolaras of Shivpuri district in Madhya Pradesh on Friday by a truck headed for Uttar Pradesh, Mr. Mohammed disembarked, too. "I couldn't leave him alone in that condition. Other workers in the truck felt he carried the coronavirus, but he was my friend. They refused to call for medical help," he recalled.

Alongside the Mumbai-Agra highway, before the ambulance arrived, Mr. Mohammad cushioned his friend's head on his lap and sprinkled water to keep him from sinking.

The same night, Ramcharan's temperature shot up to 105 degrees and he was put

Yaqoob Mohammad trying to help his friend Amrit Ramcharan.

■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

'Commercial sex work may spike cases'

Researchers feel red light areas should remain closed even after lockdown

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

Allowing commercial sex work to commence immediately after lockdown in India's red light areas could lead to a rapid rise in cases that could overwhelm hospitals, says a modelling study from researchers at the Yale School of Medicine and Harvard Medical School. Though these findings have been "shared" with the State governments, these are still being peer-reviewed.

As per the study, if red light areas are kept closed following the lifting of lockdown, there can be a delay in the peak of COVID-19 cases by up to 12 days in Mumbai, 17 days in New Delhi, 29



Workers disinfecting a red light area in Mumbai. ■ VIVEK BENDRE

days in Pune, 30 days in Nagpur, and 36 days in Kolkata.

For the purposes of the study, the lockdown period was considered from March 24 to May 3. The closure can reduce

COVID-19 cases by 21% in Mumbai, 27% in Pune, 31% in New Delhi, 56% in Nagpur, and 66% in Kolkata in a 45-day period, the study finds.

Deaths can be reduced by 63% in India, 28% in Mumbai, 38% in New Delhi, 43% in Pune, 61% in Nagpur and 66% in Kolkata in the first 60 days, it says. These numbers are based on the prevalent reproduction number (RO) of 2.0, meaning that every infected person spreads the disease to two others. Experts say that an epidemic starts to cease when the RO dips below 1.

There are close to 6,37,500 sex workers in India as per the National AIDS Control Organisation (NA-

CO), and over 5 lakh customers visit red light areas.

The study relied on data from Census figures on sex worker populations and interviews in red light areas.

"Our study findings show there is a strong effect of the red light area closures, especially immediately following the lockdown," study co-author Dr. Jeffrey Townsend, Professor of Biostatistics, Yale School of Medicine, said in a statement. The other authors are Alison Galvani, Director, Center for Infectious Disease Modelling & Analysis, Yale University; and Dr. Sudhakar Nuti, Department of Medicine, Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School.

that the curve was only meant to show a "trend", but he has never explained the rationale behind the assessment. He has not responded to repeated requests by *The Hindu* for comment.

For a decline in the national average, experts have



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TENDER FOR HIRING OF MILK TANKERS

Sealed tenders are invited from registered owners of Road Milk tankers for hiring of milk tankers for transportation of Milk from outside State. Bidding document can be downloaded from the website www.milmatrcmu.com and submit along with prescribed EMD. Last date of submission 05.06.2020 at 11 AM.

Managing Director

INTERVIEW | AMAR SINHA

'India must not give Taliban legitimacy until it joins intra-Afghan talks'

With the terrorist organisation not willing to announce a ceasefire even amid the COVID-19 crisis, they mustn't get a 'free pass' from U.S., says former envoy to Kabul

SUHASINI HAIDAR

Saying that the U.S. is trying to salvage its deal with the Taliban, despite rising violence in Afghanistan, National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) member and former envoy to Kabul Amar Sinha stressed it would be pointless for India to engage with the group till it joins the intra-Afghan dialogue.

After a bitter electoral battle, the top leadership in Kabul has reached a settlement that will bring Abdullah Abdullah into the government with President Ghani as the President of the High Council for peace and national reconciliation, expected to lead the intra-Afghan dialogue with the Taliban. How do you see this development?

■ Despite all the fighting and the rival factions, the Afghan leadership has shown once again its ability to come together when that is needed

the most. We saw this in 2009, and again in 2014 after elections brought fractured mandates. And this time, too, it is heartening to see the efforts of Mr. Ghani, Mr. Abdullah, and other leaders to effect a compromise. One shouldn't overlook this development. It is a positive development, certainly.

This week has also seen some of the worst possible attacks in Kabul, including at a hospital maternity ward. Has the situation there worsened since the U.S.-Taliban agreement?

■ Unfortunately, the U.S.-Taliban deal has a tolerance for violence written into it. It contains no commitment to stopping attacks against Afghan forces, only those against American soldiers and NATO forces. According to intelligence reports, the Taliban has decided to not to claim attacks on civilians. Those are left to ISIS-KP.

The U.S. statement also puts the blame for the attacks on ISIS, not Taliban. How should India see this U.S. position?

■ The U.S. is trying to salvage their deal with the Taliban, especially with elections ahead. They must have their own sources, but it is strange to absolve the Taliban of guilt while investigations are still under way.



I think everyone here realises that if the Taliban comes back to power, joins the mainstream, then India will engage with them as we do any political force in Afghanistan

The real question is that if the Taliban says that ISIS-KP is their enemy, should they not join hands with the U.S. and Afghan government to go after ISIS-KP? At the mo-

ment, the Taliban are not even willing to announce a ceasefire, amidst the coronavirus crisis, amidst these brutal attacks, and not even during the month of Ramzan. They mustn't get a 'free pass' from America.

What is your reaction to U.S. special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad's suggestion – in an interview to *The Hindu* – that India should talk directly to the Taliban?

■ I think everyone here realises that if the Taliban comes back to power, joins the mainstream, then India will engage with them as we do any political force in Afghanistan

Why should India give legitimacy to this kind of force in its own neighbourhood?

directly to discuss security concerns. This reminds one of the situation before 2001, before the global war on terror, when each country was on its own.

At present, the Taliban is a destructive force. It will become a political force only when it joins the intra-Afghan talks. Otherwise, at best the Taliban can pretend to be some sort of a government in exile based in Doha, conducting negotiations with other players, but not with people in Afghanistan.

Some have suggested that India's wish list should include commitments on security, safety of minorities, and infrastructure projects... Would you agree?

■ For me there is only one real expectation we should have: that the Taliban should deal with India as an independent entity, as a national

intra-Afghan meet, where regional countries were invited, and Taliban representatives were present. We attended it as a "non-official" presence.

Talking directly to the Taliban is different, and should be done only once we know what we want. It's clear that what the Taliban wants is recognition. India should have a wish list of its own.

■ No doubt, our bilateral ties are very good, and we must be engaged in the regional process for peace in Afghanistan.

We deal with Afghanistan's neighbours at many regional fora: SCO, RIC, SAARC etc. However, we should not feel bad if India is not at every table.

The truth is, when it comes to Afghanistan's future, India cannot be ignored.

POWER SHARING DEAL ▶ PAGE 12

Odisha braces for Amphan impact

The districts where the cyclonic storm is likely to inflict the most damage are COVID-19 red zones

STAFF REPORTER

BHUBANESWAR

Odisha is bracing for heavy rain under the influence of severe cyclonic storm Amphan, which is set to skirt away from the State's northern coast to make landfall between West Bengal and Bangladesh.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) said in its bulletin on Sunday: "The severe cyclonic storm 'AMPHAN' over southeast Bay of Bengal and neighbourhood slightly moved and lay centred over central parts of South Bay of Bengal and neighbourhood about 980 km south of Paradip (Odisha), 1,130 km south-south-west of Digha (West Bengal) and 1,250 km south-south-west of Khepupura (Bangladesh)."

It added: "It is very likely to move nearly northwards slowly during next 24 hours



On high alert: Marine police personnel patrolling a beach to prevent fishermen from venturing into the sea in Puri, Odisha. ■ PTI

and then re-curve north-northeastwards and move fast across northwest Bay of Bengal and cross West Bengal – Bangladesh coasts between Digha (West Bengal) and Hatiya Islands (Bangladesh) during the afternoon or evening of May 20."

Rainfall will commence in Odisha from May 18 with heavy rainfall likely to occur at isolated places over the district of Gajapati, Ganjam, Puri, Jagatsinghpur and Kendrapara.

The IMD has issued an 'orange alert' for May 19 and

20 when heavy to very heavy rainfall is likely to take place in coastal districts.

Twelve districts remain on alert. "We have kept infrastructure ready for people to be evacuated from vulnerable areas. We will issue a clear instruction for evacua-

Multiple conditions on discoms

Centre imposes many riders for States to avail ₹90,000-crore package

T. RAMAKRISHNAN

CHENNAI

The Central authorities have imposed a number of conditions on State governments and their power distribution companies (discoms) to avail themselves of benefits from the ₹90,000-crore package.

Called the 'Special Long Term Transition Loan to Discoms for COVID-19', the financial assistance is meant to help the discoms clear their dues to power producers, both belonging to the Central public sector undertakings (PSUs) and the private sector, and transmission

companies. To be paid in two tranches, the loan will have a tenure of up to 10 years, including moratorium of not more than 3 years.

The conditions have been stipulated at each stage, according to letters sent by the Central agencies, the Power Finance Corporation (PFC) and the Rural Electrification Corporation (REC), on Saturday to heads of the State utilities. The discoms should submit an "unconditional and irrevocable" guarantee from the respective State governments with due approval from the State Finance

Departments before the first disbursement.

Officials of the Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corporation (Tangedco) say they are awaiting information on the State-wise breakup of the overall amount, even though the communication of the REC & PFC refers to the amount outstanding as on March 31, 2020. In respect of the Tangedco, the figure is around ₹16,000 crore, of which approximately three-fourths are due to the Central PSUs.

As part of "pre-commitment conditions," the dis-

coms should have arrangements for self-assessment by end consumers and digital payment of the bills, apart from installation of "smart" or pre-paid meters at the premises of the government departments and attached offices. If a State fails to pay the power bill and subsidy within 60 days of the due date, it will be charged with an additional interest of 0.25% on the outstanding loan amount.

The insistence on "smart" or pre-paid meters is being made so that the discoms get their dues regularly.

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

Legal services institutions have intervened to release 42,529 undertrial prisoners as well as 16,391 convicts on parole to de-congest prisons during the COVID-19 pandemic, a report from the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) said.

The NALSA, a statutory body to provide free legal services to the weaker sections, said 243 undertrial prisoners had been granted bail and 9,558 persons in remand had been given legal representation across the

country. The report was prepared under the aegis of NALSA Executive Chairman and Supreme Court judge N.V. Ramana.

It said the highest number of undertrial prisoners released was 9,977 in Uttar Pradesh, followed by 5,460 in Rajasthan and 4,547 in Tamil Nadu, 3,698 in Punjab and 3,400 in Maharashtra.

The Supreme Court observed in March that physical distancing, an effective measure to check the spread of the novel coronavirus, would be difficult in prisons.

There are 1,339 prisons with

approximately 4,66,084 inmates. The court said the National Crime Records Bureau put the rate of occupancy at Indian prisons at 117.6%.

The court issued guidelines, formed committees and asked the legal services authorities to work together and release undertrial prisoners and those on bail and parole to bring the prison population down.

Legal assistance was provided in 658 cases of domestic violence during the lockdown. A total of 727 cases were reported to State legal services authorities, includ-

ing 144 in Uttarakhand – which is the highest – 79 in Haryana, 63 in Delhi, 48 in Tamil Nadu and 18 in Kerala.

"The NALSA, in coordination with the Ministry of Women and Child Development, has issued directions to the State legal services authorities to collaborate with One Stop Centres (OSCs) established in each State for providing legal assistance to women facing domestic violence. The focus has been to provide legal assistance as well as counselling services to victims and the needy," the report said.

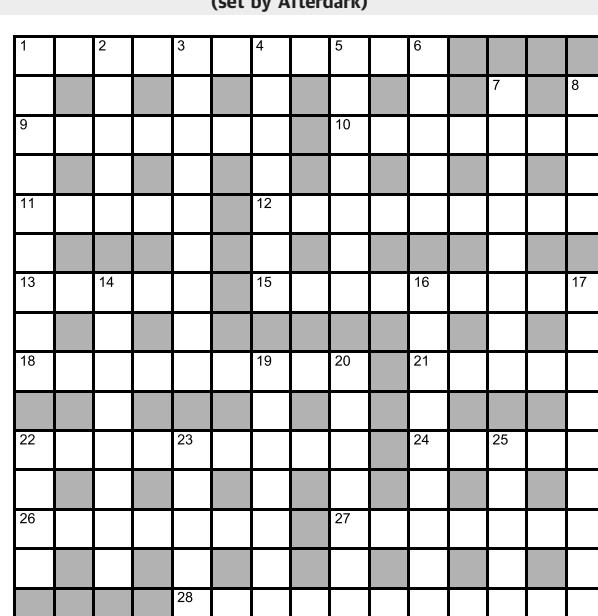
CROSSWORD + 12938

(set by Afterdark)

Are you a cryptic lover or a quick solver? Find out Now!

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SCAN TO PLAY



- 13 Leading Indian dissenter is orchestrating trouble; imbecile (5)
- 15 Pill contains sulphur, aluminium and sodium chloride (5,4)
- 18 Relative has cow, but had beef heartlessly earlier (9)
- 21 Relish found in fajitas tested (5)
- 22 Auctioneer's upset, losing oriental liqueur (9)
- 24 Records copies after end of shoot (5)
- 26 Now that it's destroyed, find other similar things (7)
- 27 Start to blow away (7)
- 28 To mislead class in the absence of leader to pass time reading is antagonism (11)
- DOWN
- 1 Attacking American president (ex) in German capital... (9)
- 2 ... is indecent, cold and impolite (5)
- 3 Concentrated and repaired instrument kept inside (9)
- 4 Ordeal for soldiers in dry surroundings (7)
- 5 Son's upset, wants to be back holding sweetheart in cosmetic surgery (4,3)
- 6 Investigation on custody challenged, company dismissed (5)
- 7 Yes, waged war towards the end (8)
- 8 Pace gets last wicket, dismissal by Thomson primarily (4)
- 14 Almost magic recreated in a landscape, originally resembling a picture (8)
- 16 Automobile seen on Eastern Express causeway corner's reportedly Alfa Romeo (6,3)
- 17 Too much of a dalliance with this will lead to sleeping often (6,3)
- 19 Leftover tuna, reheated with some elder and given to nurse (7)
- 20 Driver is curt, gets drunk on weekend having beer often (7)
- 22 Hood seen at college with a member of parliament (4)
- 23 Cordial subject, donates a penny for society (5)
- 25 Search for pastor's gown (5)

ACROSS

- 1 Workers' presentation submitted earlier to finance professionals... (11)
- 9 ... is a mistake, books left one embarrassed in retrospect (7)
- 10 Shake used milk container (7)
- 11 Rob's son is holding a duck (5)
- 12 Net money distributed, touring Japan for pleasure (9)

SUDOKU

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1			5					

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

FAITH

Brahma Jnana for liberation

Prakarana granthas are aids to help beginners get initiated into Vedanta study which alone can equip one with the drive, means and practices to attain Brahma Jnana, said Sri R. Rajagopal Sarma in a discourse. This is the final goal that liberates one from the cycle of samsara, say the scriptures. They also show the difficulties in knowing/realising/attaining Brahma though He is all pervading, all knowing and all powerful. When caught in this world, the jivatma is mired in ignorance of the true values. Just as it is difficult to try to identify objects in dim light, the jivatma gropes to seek the eternal truth in this immediate world of change and sense perceptions which he considers as the reality. But even in this context, there is no guarantee that his observations and conclusions are true and valid since he has to deal with layers of misconceptions that can easily distort his opinion and judgment.

For instance, it is possible for one to mistake a rope for a snake in inadequate light and then experience fear and confusion about its presence until such time when the help of light only the rope is seen. All along, there was no snake at all. This is the analogy quoted in scriptures to show that this universe and creation is the superimposition on Brahman. Lack of knowledge or partial knowledge makes one think of this world as the reality. But it is Brahman who has created this entire universe and is also present in each and every aspect of it. Brahman supports all of this and is the cause for its dissolution as well. Brahman alone is the eternal Truth and the jagat is a superimposition. The inner self in each being is of the nature of this Brahman. This is the Brahma Jnana that dispels ignorance and thereby gradually leads one into the path of liberation.

Solution to puzzle 12937

C	A	S	T	L	E	C	A	R	D	A	M	O	I	E
Y	P	A	K	R	O	E	I							
L	A	U	N	D	R	E	S	S	B	O	R			
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D	O	I	S	E	T	O	N	R	B	E	L			
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There is no better time than now for Indian educational institutions to experiment and move to remote-learning models. But are they?

■ G SRINIVAS AND SALIL S

The immediate impact of COVID-19 is ubiquitous. Though colleges and universities have shut down, exams postponed, events cancelled, and regular classes suspended, learning is not on hold everywhere. Online learning and offerings of education technology providers get broader and deeper among some sections of society. The pandemic points out our educational capabilities, gaps, and few learning residuals.

Using alternative modes of educational delivery in the coronavirus season can be the most massive experiment in remote-learning Indian education.

Institutional responses

Even if there has been a market drive and regulatory thrust on online learning and educational technologies for long, many institutions do not have the necessary mechanisms in place to meet such emergencies. Some are slow in incorporating the tools and methods. Yet, there are significant efforts from many responsive institutions. We can see four levels of responses in addressing the COVID-19 emergency in the sphere of teaching and learning.

At the bottom, all educational activities have deferred and the downtime period becomes a proxy vacation. At the second, videos are uploaded, mostly on YouTube, and assign-

ments collected through emails, which cannot be equivalent to active remote learning. At the third level, a combination of tools incorporates learning management systems (like Moodle or Google Classroom), conferencing tools (like Skype or Zoom), extensive use of MOOCs (like Swayam, Coursera or Edx) and assessment tools (like Quizlet and peer evaluation tools). At the fourth level, classes are conducted as per the timetable, but in synchronous online mode aided by Learning Management Systems with high levels of functionality of all the tools in the third level.

Tools

Obviously, most of our institutions fall under the first and second categories, and the challenge is to push them to the next levels. It is not hard to do so by selecting the right tools and co-creating with the students. The UGC has circulated more than two dozen resources to the academic community for online learning and self-paced learning.

Digital imbalance

Many national institutions and international schools have shifted entirely to online mode because of their preparedness and pre-existing privileges. Students from affluent backgrounds and premier institutions have a distinct advantage



Online learning and offerings of education technology providers get broader and deeper among some sections of the society. The pandemic points out our educational capabilities, gaps, and few learning residuals.

in learning even during this crisis.

The inequity in real education is reflected in the digital space as well. It may be ironic but true that, to bridge this digital imbalance, the cure may come from technology itself.

Popularisation of low-cost devices like Raspberry and technologies like blockchain may allow the implementation of digital

certificates, validation of educational content, and credentials with better transparency and control. However, more research is required in these areas, with a particular focus on instructional delivery.

The inevitable transition

The emergency transition to remote learning is mostly by force. And there are debates that online learning cannot replace face-to-face learning.

Yet, online learning, being an umbrella term, offers a possibility to shift and extend our understanding and practice from video classes to online interactive exercises. Non-'Google'-able assignments and learning exten-

sions are the new necessary reality of instructional design in the mainstream.

If one of the objectives of higher education is to prepare our students for the future, an emergency is the right time to rise up to the challenges of learning continuity.

Remote learning is not a distant future

Remote work and education are not reserved for emergencies but, in challenging times, the pandemic is a powerful reminder to reassess our modes of delivery and a wake-up call to overcome the vulnerability of academia. If flexible delivery and close social interfaces are the future of higher education,

the period of lock-down is not a short-time to rethink and develop new teaching and learning models.

To make the shift happen, each institution can create a transition schedule in which expectations from tech support and pedagogical spaces are defined.

COVID-19 demands us to imagine a collective educational future, which was unimaginable a few months back. Once the willingness and the basics of the educational change are correct, we can keep calm and carry on.

G Srinivas is the Joint Secretary and Salil S is the Education Officer with the University Grants Commission.

While digital learning platforms are currently substituting for regular learning methods, they can complement the traditional in the future as well

■ KUNCHERIA P ISAAC

The COVID-19 outbreak has led educational institutions to adopt several of the following digital technologies:

Record video lectures of teachers and upload them on YouTube or similar platforms for students to view and listen at their own pace.

Provide notes and content related to the courses to students through email, WhatsApp, and so on.

Lectures delivered on digital platforms at scheduled slots when students join to listen and interact. These are called live lectures or webinars. Ideally, the platform should have the following facilities to achieve the feeling of a face-to-face classroom environment.

- (i) Provision to see each other.
- (ii) Presentation of slides and content.
- (iii) Use of white board.
- (iv) Discussion forum.
- (v) Marking attendance.
- (vi) Conduct of assignment and assessment.

(vii) Conduct of laboratory sessions.

Some concerns

The first and foremost is the non-availability of desktop/laptop to participate in the online lecture. The percentage of students using Android mobile in the online classes is 75%. It is also appropriate for AICTE to think of a shift in the policy of insisting on a minimum number of computers in the institution.

The second concern is transparency in conducting assessments online for which we should go by the "honour-code" way or limit the time for closed book examination or encourage open book examination.

The entire education system in the country is moving to Outcome-Based Education and the Blooms Taxonomy levels of Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyse, Evaluate and Create are applied to learning outcomes.

Several other innovative techniques can be used to assess learning outcomes. The open book examination system of short duration and reports/projects requiring longer duration could make the assessment transparent and improve the knowledge and skills of the learners required by Industry 4.0.

The writer is Vice Chancellor, Hindustan Institute of Technology, Chennai (former Member Secretary, AICTE and founder Vice Chancellor of APJ Abdul Kalam Technological University)

Traditional vs virtual

It is important to shift the focus of the traditional vs online classrooms debate to concentrate on what benefits students

■ ADYA SHARMA

Time and again, a narrative comes up that predicts the end of traditional college degrees. This became more common in the last decade with the entry of massive open online courses. While online courses have become a force to reckon with, the value of the traditional degree is still as strong as ever.

Should we really be comparing the two and predict the success of one at the cost of the failure of another? Shouldn't a comparison be done between two similar objects? This that takes us to the core question: are traditional degrees and online courses competitors or can they complement each other?

A comparison

Traditional classrooms have an advantage when it comes to discipline and motivation. The structured schedule of attending classes and routine face-to-face interactions with instructors helps students develop social skills, discipline and routine. In contrast, an online classroom allows you a flexible schedule as one can study from anywhere.

While an instructor in a traditional classroom can act as your mentor and guide, social interaction in online courses is mainly through discussion boards or video chat. Another crucial difference is the cost with online courses being cheaper than traditional courses.

Individual choices

For a working professional, an online course provides much-needed flexibility. They would like to increase their qualifications to enhance career opportunities but may not find the time to attend regular classes. So, an online class may be more convenient, as it saves time, money, and energy.

Many students studying in traditional classrooms also enrol in online courses to complement their degree. In fact, in many institutes, online courses are a part of the curriculum. If a good course is available online, institutes encourage students to enrol for the same.

One pedagogy that can be used is the flipped classroom or blended learning. Online content can be used for passive learning, which can then be discussed in the classroom to make the interaction more active and engaging. This helps the student understand and grasp difficult topics and, at the same time, clear their concepts with the faculty.

The debate should not be about which is better, as both have their plus and minus points. This debate needs to be seen against a bigger picture of how both can complement each other so that the biggest gainer is the student.

The writer is Director, Symbiosis Centre for Management Studies, Pune

E- LEARNING

The ongoing COVID-19 lockdown has paved the way for several institutions going online to conduct classes. Will this change the course of education?

■ RAJIV AGARWAL

Education institutions have been among the hardest hit by the current COVID-19 lockdown. Overnight, they were forced to consider a new medium, which had been supposedly only an experimental endeavour till then. In the typical higher education model, classes are held in a physical environment, usually through case studies, lectures or group work.

The lecture mode is usually used in highly technical subjects where the professor explains detailed concepts or theory. This is augmented by a Q&A as part of the session, where students can get their queries clarified.

Lecture vs Study
On the other hand, most business schools use the case meth-

Online learning: The medium of tomorrow



od, pioneered at the Harvard Business School, as a teaching method. The richness of a case discussion comes from participants' contributions, and the professor's ability to evoke responses and have discussions guided into the intended areas,

to bring about learning for participants. The basic assumption is that by learning how decisions were made in the past, one can train one's self to evaluate between multiple choices in the given context, usually with limited information. This will help

train the thinking process more than the pursuit of what is the "right" answer.

Now lecture-based sessions have gradually moved online, with some fairly good results. Sure, there are a limited number of courses available online, on various platforms such as Coursera, Udemy, Edx, and so on. But I found a higher focus on IT-related courses.

The online teaching method is not supposed to be conducive for teaching cases. The typical objections were that there is no

personal contact and there can

not be a classroom discussion. This may have been true earlier, but the current tools available largely serve this purpose. Breakout rooms in Zoom allow small-sized groups to be formed, with the instructor being able to visit each of these rooms. Newer tools are being

designed by which the instructor can cold call, even on video conferences, or participants can be invited to contribute. The most important part is to realise that this is a new medium and we are now in the early stages.

Experiments vs learning

The lockdown has forced institutions to go online, without any warning or preparation, and consequently, learn fast.

There is a lot of experimenting going on as there is scarce experience in this area. The faculty have had to learn the medium and then understand how to use it effectively in class.

Juggling between various controls, chat windows, allowing people electronically into the class, watching online videos, or switching between various windows, or drawing on a separate digital pad or on-screen, could become overwhelming for most faculty. But there is really no choice but to learn. Many faculty have stepped up to the task, for this is the medium of tomorrow.

On the other hand, students

are in a familiar and comforta-

ble home environment, but perhaps face challenges that anyone running a home office would face – that of balancing home responsibilities with the rigours of being in a classroom..

However, the online world has the advantage of flexibility, along with reduced commuting time. Additionally, societies and business are moving to a largely online presence. The basic objection that there is less interaction in an online space, is redundant, if one considers the constant attention to WhatsApp chats. These have now been augmented by Zoom, Google or Skype calls for socialising. Once this becomes the accepted norm, online education will become more acceptable.

Institutions will realise that this method allows them to retain their best faculty, offering them better control over their schedules. Faculty will soon get over the learning curve and begin to appreciate the enhanced capabilities of the digital medium. They will be able to reach out to a wider range of students who need not come to campus all the time, and students who were earlier sitting in classes will prefer operating from homes or internet cafes.

In short, things are not going to be the same again. The question is, how prepared are we?

The writer is Professor, Strategy and Family Business, at Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan's S.P.Jain Institute of Management & Research

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personal interview. Qualifying

candidates will be required to

China expert warns of a second wave

The majority of Chinese at the moment are still susceptible to the COVID-19 infection: Zhong Nanshan

REUTERS
BEIJING

Mainland China reported five new confirmed COVID-19 cases for May 16, down from eight the previous day, the National Health Commission (NHC) said in a statement on Sunday.

Two of the five confirmed cases were so-called imported infections, while three were locally transmitted in the northeastern Chinese city of Jilin.

The number of confirmed cases in the mainland now stands at 82,947 and the death toll at 4,634. China does not include people who have been tested and found



Potential risk: Youngsters buying snacks from an eatery on a pedestrian shopping street in Beijing on Saturday. ■ AP

COVID-19

to be asymptomatic carriers in its tally of confirmed cases.

The three domestically-transmitted cases are related to a district in Jilin city called Fengman, which has been classified by Chinese officials as a high-risk area for COVID-19.

Heightened disease control measures in the district include allowing only one person from a family to go out and purchase daily necessities each day, according to the district's official post on WeChat.

'Big challenge'

Zhong Nanshan, the Chinese government's senior medical adviser told CNN on Saturday

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
GENEVA

Spraying disinfectant on the streets, as practised in some countries, does not eliminate the new coronavirus and even poses a health risk, the World Health Organization (WHO) warned on Saturday.

"Spraying or fumigation of outdoor spaces, such as streets or marketplaces, is... not recommended to kill the COVID-19 virus or other

pathogens because disinfectant is inactivated by dirt and debris," said the WHO in a document.

The WHO said that streets and pavements are not considered as "reservoirs of infection" of COVID-19, adding that spraying disinfectants can be "dangerous for human health".

It added that spraying individuals with disinfectants is "not recommended under any circumstances". "This

could be physically and psychologically harmful and would not reduce an infected person's ability to spread the virus," said the document. Spraying chlorine or toxic chemicals on people can cause eye and skin irritation, bronchospasm and gastrointestinal effects.

"If disinfectants are to be applied, this should be done with a cloth or wipe that has been soaked in disinfectant," it said.

day that the danger of a second wave of infections is looming large.

The majority of... Chinese at the moment are still

susceptible to COVID-19 infection because (of) a lack of immunity," Mr. Zhong said as quoted in the CNN report. "We are facing (a) big chal-

lenge, it's not better than the foreign countries I think at the moment."

Mr. Zhong acknowledged that the number of infections

is growing rapidly.

Fengman district said it will tighten the lockdown by closing stores, including department stores, house appliance stores and furniture stores but will keep supermarkets open.

Edition," a two-hour event for students graduating from historically black colleges and universities broadcast on YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. His remarks were unexpectedly political, given the venue, and touched on current events beyond the virus and its social and economic impacts.

"More than anything, this pandemic has fully, finally torn back the curtain on the

a second televised commencement address for high school seniors, Mr. Obama panned "so-called grown-ups, including some with fancy titles and important jobs" who do "what feels good, what's convenient, what's easy."

This is the latest sign that Mr. Obama intends to play an increasingly active role in the coming election. He has generally kept a low profile in the years since he left office, even as Mr. Trump has disparaged him. Mr. Obama told supporters on the call that he would be "spending as much time as necessary and campaigning as hard as I can" for Joe Biden, who served as his Vice-President.

Later on Saturday, during

an interview with the Associated Press, Mr. Obama said he was

idea that so many of the folks in charge know what they're doing," Mr. Obama said. "A lot them aren't even pretending to be in charge."

Later on Saturday, during

"Which is why things are so screwed up," he said.

'Absolute disaster'

Mr. Obama did not name President Donald Trump or any other federal or state officials in either of his appearances. But earlier this

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ASK US

N. SREEKANTH

Q. With reference to the latest Budget, I want a clarification about exemptions to senior citizens. Currently, senior citizens are taxed starting from ₹3 lakh and super senior citizens from ₹5 lakh. They are exempt from paying advance tax quarterly. I want to know if the exemptions continue in new tax regime

PARAMASIVA CHARI

A. If the senior citizen opts for the old regime, the taxability of seniors and super seniors shall continue as mentioned in the query. With effect from April 1, 2020, if a senior citizen opts to pay tax as per rates of the new regime, he/she shall not enjoy the special basic exemption limits as per the old regime.

The senior citizen, based on his income level and sources of income, may choose whichever regime is most beneficial at the time of filing the return. For those assessee having business income, the choice is available only once. Senior citizens having no business income do not have to pay advance tax under the new regime as well.

Q. I had taken an early retirement from a corporate job before attaining 60. The last EPF contribution made by my employer was in August, 2018.

Subsequently, I withdrew the entire corpus of accumulated PF (excluding pension) in April 2019. It included the interest for FY 2018-19 also. How do I compute the tax payable for the period when there was no contribution? There was no TDS on withdrawal.

SANDEEP SAHA

A. It is assumed that your retirement from employment was in August 2018. Withdrawal of the entire corpus of accumulated PF is not taxable if you had completed 5 years of continuous employment, including your period of service with your previous employers, if any. If this condition is not satisfied, then the withdrawal is taxable based on your respective tax slab rates wherein employer's share will be taxed as "Income from Salaries" while employee's share is taxed under "Income from Other Sources".

Interest accrued on the contributions from both employee and employer at the time of employment is tax exempt if withdrawal was done after completion of 5 years of continuous employment, if not, interest will be taxed under the above-mentioned heads of income.

However, if the corpus has not been withdrawn immediately on retirement, the interest accruing post retirement is chargeable to tax. IATR ruling of Bengaluru bench in the case of AGIT V Dilip Ranjrekar, 2017, held that the interest accrued since retirement to complete withdrawal of the entire corpus to be taxable under "Income from Other Sources".

Q. I am a retired senior citizen aged 72. My wife is a home maker aged 69. My tax consultant says interest on SB account is to be divided into two and be shown in each of our IT returns. Also, please clarify if any deduction is allowed for FD interest income.

MARIADoss JOSEPH

A. Interest derived from FD/RD/SB etc. with any bank, co-operative society engaged in banking activities and post office in the hands of senior citizens amounting up to ₹ 50,000 can be claimed as deduction. Hence, ₹50,000 can be claimed as maximum deduction in case interest derived is higher than ₹50,000. For individual bank accounts held separately in the names of yourself and your wife, respective interest credits are to be considered in your respective ITRs and each of you can claim the deduction of up to ₹50,000. In case of joint account maintained only for the purpose of easy operation and the funds relate to only one person, then the SB interest needs to be shown only in the ITR of the person whose money is lying in the SB account.

On the contrary, if the SB account has funds of both the persons, interest derived on such funds is to be divided in the hands of the respective depositors i.e. yourself and your wife. Therefore it is suggested to follow the advise of your consultant as the source of the money into the concerned bank account is known to him.

(The author is partner, GSS Associates, Chartered Accountants, Chennai)

Readers can send in queries on personal finance and investing to moneywise@thehindu.co.in. Our experts who write on personal finance will answer these queries. Moneywise will not give specific recommendations for investment in a particular mutual fund scheme, share or fixed deposit.

MIND YOUR MONEY

Don't borrow TROUBLE

Paying off loans and investing in SIPs will equip one to deal with financial turbulence

GAURAV MASHRUWALA

There was an interview conducted by an anchor on television. She was interviewing a demon. The conversation went something like this...

Anchor: What is the cruellest thing you have done in life?

Demon: (laughs) Doing cruel things is my job. That is what I do always.

Anchor: Tell our viewers something cruel that you would do which would send shivers down their spines.

Demon: I make children orphans, I spread epidemics in which lots of people die, I created world wars; holocaust.

Anchor: Can you tell us something in which you, as demon, takes pride in. Which according to you is a feather in your cap?

Demon: (thinks and later, with a mild smile on

face says) I introduced credit cards.

Credit card as a payment mechanism is not bad if the full bill is settled. However, if the bill is only paid in part, with the rest to be settled over a period of time, the demon will celebrate as it will make one's life miserable.

All kinds of loans cause obstacles in wealth creation. This does not mean we should not borrow. Instead of staying in a rented house and paying rent, it is better to go for a home loan and pay monthly instalments in the form of EMIs. Similarly, if someone is ill in our family and there isn't sufficient health cover, we have to borrow.

Borrowing for funding daughter or son's education is also justifiable, but having borrowed, pay off the loan at the earliest. So many times we ob-

serve people having a fixed deposit in bank which is giving 6% and a home loan on which they are paying 8% interest. This does not make sense.

generated 18% returns.

If the equity market drops by 7%, they would lose 7% plus 12%, which is the interest paid on borrowed funds.

Their gains would be less and losses more than the other investors.

In the year 2008, Radha and Pankaj, a young couple in their early thirties, wrote to me. They had a query.

They had a home loan on which they were paying instalments on time. They had surplus funds which they wanted to invest.

Year 2008 was the year when there was a massive equity market rally and everybody was generating

abnormal returns on their investment.

When I suggested that instead of investing, they should pay back home loan, they did not like my advice.

After a few years, they contacted me again. They had gone through financial turbulence. While I had forgotten about the interaction, they reminded me about the conversation. Instead of paying back the loan in 2008, they invested in equity mutual fund. In 2009, when there was fall in overall economy, Pankaj lost his job for a while and later had to settle for an employment which was pay-

ing less.

The value of their equity mutual fund had dropped substantially while the rate of interest on the housing loan had gone up.

An almost similar situation, or probably even more severe, is being observed right now, except that this time round we are also dealing with a pandemic and an economy in a slowdown mode than what it was in 2009.

If possible, get out of the loan. Trust me, individuals and families without EMI burden will be able to deal with most financial turbulences such as income loss, job loss, pay

cuts, erosion in investment value etc. significantly better vis-a-vis those who have to service EMIs.

The best way is to pay back loan and use the money saved from paying instalments in investing.

Start SIP of an amount equivalent to the instalments. Every instalment we pay has an interest component which is someone else's income.

However, every SIP leads to nourishing our wealth. Therefore, pay off the loan at the earliest and use the amount to nurture your wealth.

(The writer is a financial planner and author of 'Yogic Wealth')

THINK INVESTOR

It pays to continue with SIP in equity

Investors have to navigate their way through various options on the table

VENKATESH BANGARUSWAMY

Your portfolio is down 20% since March 2020. You are concerned whether you can recover the losses in time to achieve your goal three years hence. If this is your story, you are not alone. While it is hardly comforting to know that many like you are suffering from significant portfolio losses, the question remains: What should you do now? In this article, we show why you have limited choices to repair your portfolio. Yet, you do not have to be overly worried about not achieving your life goal!

Suppose you sell your loss-making equity investments now and invest the proceeds in fixed deposits, earning, say, 5% post-tax returns. What if you have to earn 8% to accumulate the money required to achieve your goal? Investing in fixed deposits is a sure way to fail in achieving your objective!

Alternatively, you may be tempted to invest in gold, given the handsome returns it has generated in the recent times. But, gold typically rises when there is world crisis. What if the world economy revives over the next three years and gold underperforms the stock market? Your decision to switch to gold could lead to regret.

There is, of course, another alternative. You can increase your monthly savings



With each investment option having its own positives and negatives, investors can go for equity SIPs. ■ GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

over the next three years, invest in bank deposits and make-up for the existing losses in your equity investments. But can you? Several have lost their jobs, and many have taken a salary cut. During these uncertain times, expecting to increase savings may be difficult.

So, what should you do? Your optimal course of action is to continue your existing systematic investment plan (SIP) in equity. But what if the stock market does not recover in time to achieve your goal?

And, if the market does not recover in time to achieve your goal, you may still find ways to bridge the gap in your portfolio three years hence. Maybe, your income levels will go up then and you can confidently bor-

would feel if you win a lottery a year hence, you will overestimate your future happiness. It is the same for negative events, including failing to achieve goals!

That means, despite what you believe today, you may suffer less regret even if your equity investments do not recover existing losses and generate handsome returns.

But without equity investments, you have small chance of achieving your goal for reasons mentioned earlier.

And, if the market does not recover in time to achieve your goal, you may still find ways to bridge the gap in your portfolio three years hence. Maybe, your income levels will go up then and you can confidently bor-

row to bridge the shortfall. Or, perhaps, you will use your self-occupied house as collateral to raise the required amount.

The more gainfully occupied you are in the present, the less you are likely to be worried about the future.

Therefore, continue your SIPs in equity, unless your income is volatile because of the current economic conditions. If so, invest only in bonds till such time your income becomes stable.

Finally, should you, based on expert opinion, continually switch between equity and bonds in the hope of recovering your existing losses and improving your investment returns? As Neils Bohr said, "Prediction is difficult, especially if it is about the future!" Do not let experts' predictions about the economy, the stock market and gold drive your investment decisions.

Some did correctly predict the 2020 pandemic and the 2008 sub-prime crisis. But were those same individuals successful with all other predictions? It is difficult to consistently, successfully predict market movements and economic events. For your part, continue your existing SIPs in equity.

(The author offers training programmes for individuals to manage their personal investments)

Some did correctly predict the 2020 pandemic and the 2008 sub-prime crisis. But were those same individuals successful with all other predictions? It is difficult to consistently, successfully predict market movements and economic events. For your part, continue your existing SIPs in equity.

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BLACKBOARD - SOVEREIGN GOLD BOND

This really is paper gold

Sovereign gold bonds are issued by the govt.

ASHISH RUKHAIYAR

What is a sovereign gold bond (SGB)?

■ Sovereign gold bond is a substitute for holding physical gold. The bonds are issued by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on behalf of the government and is a bond denominated in gold. The government issues such bonds in tranches at a fixed price that investors can buy through banks, post offices and also in the secondary markets through the stock exchange platform.



The latest tranche, which closed for subscription last week, was priced at ₹4,590 per gram

the India Bullion and Jewellers Association for the last three business days of the week preceding the subscription period. At the time of redemption, cash equivalent to the number of units multiplied by the then prevailing price would be credited to the bank account of the investor.

How was the latest tranche priced?

■ The latest tranche, which closed for subscription last week, was priced at ₹4,590 per gram. Those who apply online were eligible for a discount of ₹50 per gram. Reports suggest that RBI will again issue such bonds in June, July, August and September.

Are there any risks in investing in SGB?

Capital loss is a risk since the bond prices would reflect any change in gold prices. If gold prices fall, the principal investment would fall proportionately.

Bank fixed deposit rates

Bank Name	Highest Slab	1-year tenure	3-year tenure	5-year tenure
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SMALL FINANCE BANKS

Utkarsh Small Finance Bank	9.00	8.20	8.00	8.35
Fincare Small Finance Bank	9.00	7.25	8.50	7.50
Suryoday Small Finance Bank	9.00	7.25	7.50	9.00
Jana Small Finance Bank	8.25	8.00	7.75	8.00
Equitas Small Finance Bank	8.00	7.75	7.55	6.75
North East Small Finance Bank	8.00	7.50	7.00	6.50
Ujjivan Small Finance Bank	7.50	7.50	7.25	6.75
ESAF Small Finance Bank	7.50	7.50	7.00	6.50
AU Small Finance Bank	7.53	6.75	7.53	7.25
Capital Small Finance Bank	7.00	6.60	6.60	6.50

PRIVATE SECTOR BANKS				
RBL Bank	7.50	7.20	7.00	7.15
DCB Bank	7.35	6.75	7.35	7.35
IDFC First Bank	7.25	7.25	7.25	7.25
Lakshmi Vilas Bank	7.25	6.50	6.25	6.25
IndusInd Bank	7.00	7.00	6.75	6.75
Nainital Bank	7.00	6.00	6.10	6.10
Bandhan Bank	6.50	6.50	6.35	6.25
Tamilnad Mercantile Bank	6.40	6.30	6.25	6.25
Dhanlaxmi				

Govt. nod for re-opening sports complexes

However, no spectators will be allowed; doubts remain over resumption of competitive action

UTHRA GANESAN

NEW DELHI

The latest guidelines on the extension of lockdown from the central government have finally opened up the spectre of training for athletes across the country, with caveats. "Sports complexes and stadia will be permitted to open only for sports activities."

"However, spectators will not be allowed," the MHA note on Sunday said.

This would allow athletes – stuck in various Sports Authority of India centres across the country – to resume their practice.

While this would allow non-contact sports to start training almost immediately, those with full or partial contact would be looking for further clarity. "We still need to clarify if all sports complexes are open or only



Back to life: A semblance of normalcy will be restored once the athletes resume training in the now silent stadiums. ■ FILE PHOTO: K. MURALI KUMAR

training centres? The SAI centres are in any case not open to general public but every sport is different, so let us wait a day to know the

details," IOA president Naininder Batra said. The restrictions, however, mean only training facilities are likely to begin at the moment.

There is also uncertainty on the complexes that can be opened up, since a lot of them also belong to various State governments.

However, the MHA guideline also says "all social / political / sports / entertainment / academic / cultural / religious functions / other gatherings and large congregations" are still prohibited, thereby casting a doubt on the resumption of sport.

Meanwhile, the National Sports Federations (NSFs) preferred to wait before deciding on their future course of action.

BCCI reacts

Taking into the account the restrictions on air travel and movement of people till May 31, the BCCI has announced that it will wait before organising a skill-based training camp for its contracted players. It added that it will work in sync with the State Associations to chalk out a programme for skill-based training at a local level.

'My father showed me the right way'

Kohli talks about his biggest influence in a chat with Chhetri

ASHWIN ACHAL

BENGALURU

India's cricket captain Virat Kohli recalled how his late father Prem instilled values and principles in him that have helped shape his successful career.

On the Instagram live chat show *Eleven On Ten* hosted by football star Sunil Chhetri, Kohli reminisced about an incident from his junior cricket days when his father stood tall as a role model.

"In my home State (Delhi), sometimes things happen which are not fair. On one occasion, a certain someone did not play by the rules when it came to selection criteria.

There is merit, but...

"He told my father that while I had the merit to be selected, a little extra (possibly a bribe) was needed to confirm my selection," Kohli



Sunil Chhetri and Virat Kohli.

said. "My father – an honest middle-class man who had worked hard all his life to become a successful lawyer – did not even understand what 'little extra' meant. My father simply said, 'If you want to select Virat, then let it be purely on merit. I will give you nothing extra'."

"I didn't get selected. I cried a lot; I was broken. But that incident taught me a lot. I realised that I had to be ex-

traordinary to become successful, and that I had to achieve this purely through my own effort and hard work. My father showed me the right way, through action and not merely words."

Prem passed away when Kohli was 18.

"In fact, I went and batted in a Ranji Trophy match the day after he died. His death made me realise that I had to make something of my life. I think about how nice it would be if I could have given my father the peaceful retired life that he deserved," Kohli said.

Chhetri said he was a big fan of Sachin Tendulkar and stopped watching cricket after the latter retired. "I started watching cricket again only after Kohli emerged on the scene, hitting century after century. He is the most-loved sports personality in the country," Chhetri said.

There will be hesitancy when sport resumes, says Dravid

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Rahul Dravid reckons there could be "a sense of doubt, hesitancy and fear" initially in the minds of athletes as well as people in general when sport resumes in the post-COVID-19 pandemic world.

Sense of doubt or fear
"For a short period there may be a sense of doubt or fear about certain things, I am sure there will be a certain hesitancy when we get back in, also there will be certain hesitancy in terms of people," said Dravid on Sunday, speaking alongside Olympic champion shooter Abhinav Bindra

and badminton legend Prakash Padukone in the "Staying Ahead of the Curve-The Power of Trust" show on Facebook Live.

Fitness issues

"(Regaining) match fitness, game fitness, I think that will take a little bit of time before people can confidently trust themselves and go all out... and that needs to be factored in, to give athletes enough time to be able to regain match fitness."

Dravid felt players will not forget their skills by the time activities resume and said sportspersons will quickly get their mojo back as they are used to facing challenges.

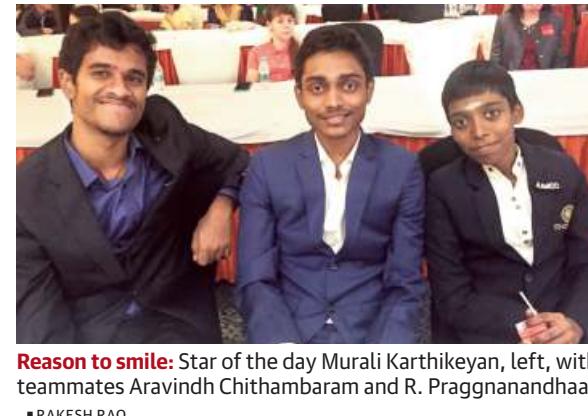
RAKESH RAO

NEW DELHI

Two-time National champion Murali Karthikeyan did the star turn for Chess Gurukul before teammate R. Praggnanandhaa put the finishing touches to a 4-3 triumph against Superkids in the Superfinal of the inaugural Sukoon Resorts Indian Chess.com League on Sunday.

With only a few seconds remaining of his allotted time, Praggnanandhaa defended brilliantly to hold Nihal Sarin and take Chess Gurukul to the title. The draw meant Gurukul's top player Aravindh Chithambaram was not required to play.

Karthikeyan, modest as ever, said, "I'm happy, I could contribute to my



Reason to smile: Star of the day Murali Karthikeyan, left, with teammates Aravindh Chithambaram and R. Praggnanandhaa. ■ RAKESH RAO

team's success. I'm glad I could play some very strong moves."

Gurukul skipper R.B. Ramesh hailed his players for holding their nerve. "We, at Chess Gurukul, enjoy and try to be creative and not go

after results. That's the reason our board order went by ratings, without trying to be clever about it," he said. "Karthikeyan played very well after coming in when we were down by two points," he added.

The results:

Superfinal: Chess Gurukul bt Superkids 4-3 (R. Vaishali lost to Divya Deshmukh; Aditya Mittal lost to Divya; M. Karthikeyan bt Divya; Karthikeyan bt N. Srinath; Karthikeyan bt Raunak Sadhwani; Karthikeyan drew with Arjun Ergaisi; R. Praggnanandhaa drew with Nihal Sarin).

IN BRIEF



Park is first post-virus golf champion

SEOUL

Park Hyun-kyung won the world's first big-purse post-coronavirus golf tournament in Yangju on Sunday. The Korean LPGA Championship – featuring three of the world's top 10 women players – was marked by a ban on spectators and tight safety measures. AFP

Cologne, Mainz in a draw

COLOGNE

Cologne had to sweat to rescue a point in a 2-2 draw with visitors Mainz 05 in the Bundesliga on Sunday. On Saturday, Monchengladbach beat Eintracht Frankfurt 3-1. The results: Cologne 2 (Uth 6-pen, Kainz 53) drew with Mainz 2 (Awoniyi 61, Kunde 72).

Saturday: Frankfurt 1 (Silva 81) lost to Monchengladbach 3 (Plea 1, Thuram 7, Bensebaini 73-pen).

Stefanidi triumphs

PARIS

Olympic pole vault champion Katerina Stefanidi of Greece beat American Katie Nageotte and Canadian Alysha Newman in the 'Ultimate Garden Clash' on Saturday. AFP



Ankita, Divij to be nominated for Arjuna

NEW DELHI

The All India Tennis Association is set to nominate Ankita Raina and Divij Sharan for the Arjuna Award and coach Nandan Bal for the Dhyanchand honour. PTI

+ Saurav Ghosal can enter top six: Palmer

Says talented junior Chotrani is tactically smarter now

K. KEERTHIVASAN

CHENNAI

Former World squash champion David Palmer is a successful coach based in the USA, training the likes of Mohamed Elshorbagy, currently the world's best player, and a host of top juniors.

Palmer was supposed to join the Indian senior team for the Asian Team Championships in Kuala Lumpur in March before the COVID-19 outbreak brought sport to a standstill.

Training Indians

In a video-conference on Saturday, the celebrated coach talked about his experience training Saurav Ghosal, Joshua Chinappa, Harinder Pal Sandhu, and Vikram Malhotra among others. Palmer was confident that Ghosal,



Closing the gap! Saurav Ghosal is ready for the big leap and can win major titles, feels Palmer. ■ FILE PHOTO

now ranked 13, has it in him to break into the top six.

"They bring a lot of energy and joy [to their training]. They have sacrificed a lot to achieve their goals. Harinder was similar to me in some ways and I got him to be more aggressive on-court. I really feel Saurav can enter

the top six, he is closing the gap. He can win major [PSA] titles," said the 43-year-old.

Praise for Chotrani

Praising the talent of India's top junior Veer Chotrani, whom he trains at Cornell University, Palmer said the young player is "fitter, stronger and tactically smarter now".

Secret to success

Revealing his secret to having a long, rewarding career, Palmer, who won 27 PSA titles, said, "What made me successful was that I could win even on a bad day."

Documenting the struggles of women

Assam NGO collects testimonials from lower-income groups in *Her Lockdown Story*

SUVIJIT BAGCHI

KOLKATA

Sulema, a middle-aged mother, has always had a tough life. Her husband died young and her in-laws kept her child but pushed her out to retain ownership of her husband's stake in the family property. She fought an arduous legal battle to retain the three-year-old boy's custody but lost any claim to the land.

"Still, she could hang on as she worked as a housekeeper for a wealthy family in Tezpur," said Asma Khatun, a social activist, who has been in touch with Ms. Sulema.

Since the beginning of the lockdown, Ms. Sulema was unable to go to her workplace. Facing destitution and realising that she could not feed her child, she reached out to the employers she had served for three years.

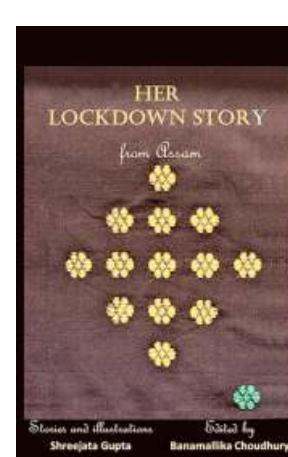
Such testimonials – about 200 in number – from work-

ing women of lower income groups and their distress in surviving the lockdown has been meticulously documented over the last two months by Asma Khatun and 35 of her co-workers at the Women's Leadership Training Centre (WLTC), an Assam-based feminist organisation that also works for cis and transsexual people.

Last Friday, WLTC published a book of short stories – *Her Lockdown Story* – based on these testimonies. Among them is Ms. Sulema's account, titled 'Dust Storm'.

Ms. Sulema walked a distance to reach her employers' house and all along she thought, as she narrates in her story, "They are good people." She was hopeful that her employers would not "rob her off her justified income".

"She could buy vegetables and eggs, lentils...she was so occupied in her thoughts, making a mental-list of hou-



organisation's executive director Banamalika Choudhury, who edited *Her Lockdown Story*.

The stories have been written and illustrated by U.K.-based scientist Shreejita Gupta.

More stories

"The plan now is to make the book more comprehensive, mainly focusing on working women, and to make our workers, like Asma, write the stories in multiple languages, with translation into English. Finally, [we want to] to take it to the government so that some notification is issued to release the salaries," Ms. Choudhury said.

In the next phase, Ms. Khatun and her colleagues will collect stories of working women in tea gardens, factories, households and farms.

"Maybe we will ask Sulema to write for us now," said Ms. Khatun.

WLTC has plans to collect about 1,000 stories, said the



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