



Rajnath Singh reviews progress of India-China talks on LAC situation  
page 9



'DNA of tolerance' in India and the U.S. disappearing: Rahul  
page 10



Centre initiates process to deport members of Tablighi Jamaat  
page 10



SC objects to salary cuts for govt. and private medical staff  
page 10

PRINTED AT · CHENNAI · COIMBATORE · BENGALURU · HYDERABAD · MADURAI · NOIDA · VISAKHAPATNAM · THIRUVANANTHAPURAM · KOCHI · VIJAYAWADA · MANGALURU · TIRUCHIRAPPALLI · KOLKATA · HUBBALLI · MOHALI · MALAPPURAM · MUMBAI · TIRUPATI · LUCKNOW · CUTTACK · PATNA

No decision to reimpose lockdown: CM

ALOK DESHPANDE  
MUMBAI

Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Friday said reports that a complete lockdown is being reimposed are not true, and broadcasting or forwarding such fake news will be a penal offence. He also urged citizens to continue following distancing and hygiene norms.

"Social media and certain news media outlets are broadcasting reports saying lockdown will be reimposed and shops will be closed once again. The Maharashtra government has taken no such decision," he said in a statement issued by the Chief Minister's Office.

Such reports create confusion, and it is advisable not to broadcast them without verifying. "Broadcasting or forwarding such messages are penal offences and the government will take action," he said.

The CM said the government is trying to revive the economic cycle by restarting businesses in phases. "However, lifting restrictions does not mean crowding at places, coming out of houses at once, or not following sanitation norms." He said people should make wearing masks, using soap and sanitiser to wash hands, and physical distancing part of their lifestyle.

## SC allows firms to negotiate with staff on lockdown wages

No coercive action will be taken for non-payment of full salary, says top court

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday asked factory owners and other private industrial establishments to negotiate terms and enter into settlements with their workers on the payment of wages during the lockdown period.

A Bench, led by Justice Ashok Bhushan, observed that industry cannot survive without its labourers and workers.

The court urged employers and employees to sort out their differences and resume work in a congenial atmosphere.

The court's order came on a batch of petitions filed by industry owners against a March 29 government notification compelling them to pay full wages to workers. The notification was rescinded on May 17, after 54 days.

### Resumption of work

In its order on Friday, the court asked employers to allow their workers to resume their jobs. This is without prejudice to the rights of the employees regarding unpaid wages for these 54 days.

It said that employers whose factories had continued to work during the lockdown, though not to full capacity, may also enter into talks.



Picking up the pieces: Employees get down to work in one of the factories that reopened at G.T. Karnal Road in Delhi after over two months. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

## RBI asked to clarify on moratorium interest

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday asked the Ministry of Finance and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to hold a detailed joint meeting in the next three days to clear the air on whether the deferment of loan interest in place to help borrowers through their financial crisis

during the lockdown will lead to accrual of further interest once the freeze is lifted after August 31.

A Bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan, S.K. Kaul and M.R. Shah said the court was trying to strike a balance between the interests of the banks and the borrowers.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

## Woman killed in Pak. firing along LoC

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
SRINAGAR

A woman was killed and two were injured in heavy exchange of fire and artillery between the Armies of India and Pakistan along the Line of Control (LoC) in Baramulla and Poonch on Friday.

Akther Begum, 40, of Bhatgran in Uri died of splinter injuries, an official said. A 35-year-old woman was among the two injured in Uri.

A Srinagar-based Army spokesman said Pakistan violated the ceasefire without any provocation in the Rampur sector of Baramulla in Kashmir on Friday morning. "The Pakistan Army fired mortars and used other weapons. A befitting response was given," he said.

Silikote, Haji Pir Sector, Churanda, Nambla, Saidpora and Thajal bore the brunt of intermittent firing and shelling.

### Families evacuated

Nearly 20 families were evacuated. People said they hid in shelters and houses.

"Satisfactory arrangements, including supply of essential commodities, have been made for the displaced families. The administration is geared up for any emergency," Sub-Divisional Magistrate Reyaz Ahmad said.

The Army said Pakistan violated the ceasefire in two sectors in Poonch.

"Pakistan initiated unprovoked ceasefire violation by firing with small arms and intense shelling with mortars along the LoC in the Kirni and Qasba sectors around 4.15 p.m. Indian Army is retaliating befittingly," the spokesman said.

An Army jawan was killed in a ceasefire violation in the Pir Panjal's Raouri district on Thursday.

## Prayers amid pandemic



Tradition uninterrupted: Warkaris (devotees) gather at the Saint Tukaram Temple in Pune city on Friday for their annual celebration. Every year, they walk to Pandharpur carrying the padukas (footprints) of saints Dnyaneshwar and Tukaram in an 800-year-old tradition. Though the pilgrimage was scrapped this year due to the pandemic, the Maharashtra government allowed them to carry the padukas by road or air to Pandharpur. ■ JIGNESH MISTRY

## Rising numbers

As of 10.45 p.m. on Friday, India recorded a total of 3,09,361 COVID-19 cases with the toll of 8,890. On Friday, 11,112 new cases and 388 new deaths were recorded in the country



Preparing the ground: A worker prepares a bed inside a makeshift quarantine facility for COVID-19 patients in Mumbai on Friday. ■ AP

State	Doubling time (days)	Average daily cases (June 6 to June 12)	Total cases
Maharashtra	21.4	2,987	1,01,141
Tamil Nadu	13.8	1,715	40,698
Delhi	14.8	1,499	36,824
Gujarat	29.7	492	22,562
U.P.	19.4	412	12,616
Rajasthan	27.2	264	11,930
M.P.	33.3	207	10,443
West Bengal	15.2	420	10,244
Karnataka	19.6	240	6,516
Haryana	9.1	391	6,334
Bihar	17.7	214	6,096
A.P.	17.7	198	5,636

1 Among States with more than 5,000 cases, Haryana's doubling time of 9.1 days was the fastest while Madhya Pradesh's doubling time of 33.3 days was the slowest

2 Between June 6 and 12, India recorded 10,450 new cases on an average every day with Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Delhi contributing the bulk of cases

## Maharashtra crosses one lakh COVID-19 infections

127 more deaths take total fatalities in State to 3,717

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE  
PUNE

Maharashtra's total COVID-19 case tally breached the grim milestone of one lakh on Friday to reach 1,01,141, with the State reporting its second-highest single-day surge of 3,493 new cases. As many as 127 deaths pushed the total fatalities to 3,717.

As per State Health Department figures, only 49,616 are active cases. As many as 1,718 patients were discharged on Friday, taking the total number of recoveries till date to 47,796. State Surveillance Officer Dr. Pradeep Awate said Maharashtra's recovery rate stood at 47.3%. The State's case fatality too had climbed to 3.7%.

**Spike in Mumbai**

With 1,366 new cases on Friday, Mumbai's total case tally

reached 55,451, of whom 27,915 cases were active.

In its second-highest increase so far, as many as 90 deaths were reported from Mumbai city, taking its total to 2,044 fatalities.

Eleven deaths were reported from Thane in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region, taking the district's total fatalities to 180.

Thane reported more than 270 cases taking the district's total tally to 7,273. Navi Mumbai reported a similarly big spike of 162 new cases as its tally surged to 4,288.

As per State health officials, 12 deaths were reported from Pune district, taking the district's tally to 459. However, Pune district authorities said the death toll had already risen to 465. Deaths were also reported from districts like Sangli, Aurangabad.

bad and Amravati.

"Of the total deaths reported on Friday, 50 had occurred in the last couple of days while the remaining fatalities are from the period between May 20 and June 9.

About 70% of the deaths reported had high-risk co-morbidities such as diabetes, hypertension, asthma and heart disease," said Dr. Awate.

1,281 in Pune

Pune district's total tally, as per State figures, has reached 11,281 with the district reporting more than 450 new cases on Friday. Of these, 4,443 were active cases while 6,379 had been discharged thus far.

Solapur reported more than 90 new cases while more than 150 new cases were reported from Aurangabad district.

Nearly 20 families were evacuated. People said they hid in shelters and houses.

"Satisfactory arrangements, including supply of essential commodities, have been made for the displaced families. The administration is geared up for any emergency," Sub-Divisional Magistrate Reyaz Ahmad said.

The Army said Pakistan violated the ceasefire in two sectors in Poonch.

"Pakistan initiated unprovoked ceasefire violation by firing with small arms and intense shelling with mortars along the LoC in the Kirni and Qasba sectors around 4.15 p.m. Indian Army is retaliating befittingly," the spokesman said.

An Army jawan was killed in a ceasefire violation in the Pir Panjal's Raouri district on Thursday.

"Families evacuated

Nearly 20 families were evacuated. People said they hid in shelters and houses.

"Satisfactory arrangements, including supply of essential commodities, have been made for the displaced families. The administration is geared up for any emergency," Sub-Divisional Magistrate Reyaz Ahmad said.

The Army said Pakistan violated the ceasefire in two sectors in Poonch.

"Pakistan initiated unprovoked ceasefire violation by firing with small arms and intense shelling with mortars along the LoC in the Kirni and Qasba sectors around 4.15 p.m. Indian Army is retaliating befittingly," the spokesman said.

An Army jawan was killed in a ceasefire violation in the Pir Panjal's Raouri district on Thursday.

Just three weeks of goods transport services fetches MSRTC ₹21 lakh

AJEEET MAHALE  
MUMBAI

Buoyed by the success of its foray into goods transport three weeks ago, the Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) has now started converting old buses into goods vehicles for its freight business.

The corporation has approved the modification of 330 old buses – 10 from each of its 33 divisions – across the State and has already converted 72 buses, which will be added to its existing fleet of 300 goods transport vehicles. Buses that have travelled 6.5 lakh km or are more than 10 years old have been selected for the modifications, which include removing seats and providing

A bus modified to transport goods. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

freight segment on May 21, when it first transported mangoes from Ratnagiri to Mumbai. Mr. Channe said, "The basic intention of entering this segment was to provide farmers and small business owners transport facilities for their goods. The State found that the lack of transport due to COVID-19 was an issue faced by many."

It could also benefit the corporation in the long term, he said. A spokesperson said that over the last three weeks, the MSRTC has earned ₹21 lakh by transporting 3,000 tonnes of goods. Its goods vehicles have made 543 trips over 90,000 km. It has transported food grains, seeds, fertilisers, vegetables, and

other agricultural produce, as well as items like iron pipes and paint cans across the State.

MSRTC officials said that at present, a person needs to book the entire vehicle, but they are putting in place a system where people can send smaller quantities of goods. "We are trying to develop the system along the lines of the Railways, which has freight as well as parcel traffic. The idea is to develop an alternative revenue stream for the corporation," a senior MSRTC official said.

The government-run corporation ferries passengers across the State and has 250 bus depots. It is currently facing cumulative losses of more than ₹6,000 crore.

MUMBAI  
CITY EDITION  
14 pages • ₹10.00

A B M-BME



## THE WEEK IN FOCUS

The stories that mattered over the last seven days



1	4
2	5
3	

- 1 JUNE 7 | THANE::** Housekeeping staff sanitise the premises of Viviana Mall, where only stores selling essentials, such as Big Bazaar and D Mart, have been functioning. With the State government notifying that shops can be kept open on odd and even dates from June 8, the mall's administration has placed physical distancing stickers on the floor to contain the spread of COVID-19.

- 2 JUNE 11 | GIRGAUM::** A fisherman tries his luck in the waters off Girgaum Chowpatty. The fishing community has suffered heavily during the lockdown and stares at a few more months of no income as there is a ban on fishing during the monsoon months of June and July.

- 3 JUNE 8 | DADAR::** Physical distancing norms do not seem to have spared the gods either, with worshippers at this Hanuman temple getting barely a peek at their favourite deity. Places of worship are

still not allowed to stay open under the government's phase-wise lifting of the lockdown.

■ AADESH CHOURHARI

- 4 JUNE 6 | MARINE DRIVE::** People resume their morning walks and exercise routines along the promenade, after the State government gave physical training activities the go-ahead as part of the phase-wise lifting of the lockdown.

■ EMMANUEL YOGINI

- 5 JUNE 9 | MALAD::** Homeless people, who sell knick-knacks at traffic signals for a living, share a lighter moment. For most such people, the lockdown has meant zero income.

■ ARUNANGSU ROY CHOWDHURY

- 6 JUNE 10 | BHENDI BAZAAR::** A taxi driver uses a plastic sheet to shield himself from being exposed to COVID-19. Taxis and autorickshaws have begun to ply in the city, with the State government allowing offices to function with a minimum of 10% staff.

■ SALMAN ANSARI

## This year, WE will rock online

The global platform will, virtually, bring 150 children from diverse backgrounds together

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI

The eighth edition of WE, a charity rock concert backed by Salaam Bombay Foundation (SBF), goes online this year. The concert, to be streamed live on Facebook on Saturday, will see the participation of 150 students.

It was in December 2013 that Mrinalini Somani, along with her friends from the Cathedral and John Connon School studying in Class VII formed WE, with a belief that all children are created equal - some just lack the opportunity to develop and showcase their talent but also get into dance, theatre and music academies.

This year, the concert will involve young artistes from

universities in the U.K. and U.S., which will be a global platform for hope and optimism - a stage that will, virtually, bring two sets of children from diverse backgrounds together.

Since its inception, the concert has raised over ₹1 crore, enabling more than 1,700 children to not only showcase their talent but also get into dance, theatre and music academies.

The children from SBF - an NGO started in 2002 to



**Ready to rock:** The charity rock concert will be streamed live on Facebook on Saturday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

work with 12 to 17-year-olds growing up in Mumbai's slums where they live in ex-

treme poverty and in an 'at-risk' environment - attend municipal schools that do

not have the resources to give them individual attention, career guidance or access to activities that stimulate the mind.

Ms. Somani said, "This is about bringing people together and this time by having it online we're bringing together 150 students from all over the world. This is about helping kids who are just as old as us but don't have the resources we do. This year, you will see them perform from their homes with the biggest smiles and determination because every single participant really truly

cares about the cause and what we stand for."

Aditi Parikh, vice-president, communication, SBF, said WE 2020 was going online because of the unique circumstances created by COVID-19.

"To date, 2,500 scholarships have been raised through WE and these make world class training in arts available to poor youths growing up in urban slums. This year's focus for fund raising has been slightly different. The funds raised will go towards ensuring essential supplies and dry ration to the children and their fami-

lies. At the same time we want to ensure that there is continuity of their education," Ms. Parikh said.

Kashish Saroj, a student of Salaam Bombay Academy of the Arts, said during lockdown she had been practising at home. "I was very excited when I came to know that the concert will happen this year. Though I faced a few difficulties while recording my dance at home, I didn't give up. Lesser space and community noise was a hindrance to my recording. I had to make multiple recordings to get the best out of me."

## Body of boy who fell into drain found

GAREEMA BANGAD  
MUMBAI

The police on Thursday midnight retrieved the body of five-year-old Husain Sheikh who fell into a drain in Ghatkopar. Suhas Kamble, senior police inspector, Pantnagar police station, said, "The body was found 60 feet away from where he went missing."

NCP corporator Rakhi Jadhav said locals spotted the body floating in the drain and called the police. She said, "The boy was declared dead on arrival at Rajawadi Hospital."



## FILM REVIEW

Shoojit Sircar and Juhi Chaturvedi's latest is both a melancholic lament for a dying culture and a riotous celebration of language

NAMRATA JOSHI

Somewhere in the middle of *Gulabo Sitabo* there is a rather nimble give and take between Baankey Rastogi (Ayushmann Khurrana), one of the tenants of an old, crumbling Lucknow haveli, Fatima Mahal, and Pandeyji (Shri Prakash Bajpai) an old friend of the landlord Mirza Nawab (Amitabh Bachchan). "Aaj bade din baad tapke (You've dropped by after a long time)," observes a catty Baankey. Pandeyji shoots back, at once piercing and dismissive, "Pake to the tapak gaye (I had ripened, so dropped)." It's difficult to translate the humour redolent in Pandeyji's fruity analogy that cuts through Baankey like a knife and leaves him groping for words, but three days after having watched the film I still can't stop chuckling away at the wordplay.

The beauty of *Gulabo Sitabo* rests solidly on its wonderful, wondrous use of a blend of languages – the Hindi-Urdu-Awadhi in which Lucknow talks; and fights. Every situation, every scene, each and every moment in the film is about people bickering incessantly and getting back at each other. It's an all out war, in which words are the weapon and such beautiful ones at that. People might be ignoble and their instincts base, their disputes might be petty and the greed that drives them lowly but their language is dignified even when it demolishes.

The panoramic shots, the bird's eye view of Lucknow as well as grungy close ups of the haveli, its sprawling courtyard and the many rooms along the alleyways, all reiterate an incredible beauty in decline. Shoojit Sircar crafts a rare film that is as much a



**Words worth:** The beauty of *Gulabo Sitabo* rests solidly on its wonderful, wondrous use of language ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

## A biting satire on Lucknow and its people

melancholic lament as it is a biting satire on the place and its people.

Against all of this, in the backdrop, plays out another fading Lakhnavi tradition, that of glove puppetry – called *Gulabo Sitabo*, from which the film derives its name – spun on two warring women, the wife and mistress of a man. Chaturvedi reinvents it as a tale of a landlord and tenant – Mirza and Baankey – sparring over Fatima Mahal even as Mirza waits for his Begum to die to take over its charge formally.

Meanwhile, the archaeological department, a local politician and a builder also have their eyes on it

It's the women who turn the tables on men. Though it might have two top league male stars staring back at us from the posters, and both of them are in great form, they bravely play characters who come through as out and out losers. The women might not be foregrounded in the film but its universe belongs entirely to them, three generations of women in fact.

There is a serial eloper, another who will blithely try to extract an LIG-MIG flat out of a man and yet another who will put a man in his place simply by enquiring about something as banal as organic *atta*. They will have their guilt-free, steamy trysts with men on the sly, be it behind the water tank on the terrace or in a shop in the market place. Together they subvert the conservative institutions from within and emasculate the male ego, in

a delicious fashion. Yet, thankfully, are not judged for that. They have a playful sense of humour and a zest for life. "She is too good," says lawyer Christopher (Brijendra Kala) about Baankey's sister Gudo. So is Srishti Shrivastava who plays the role with such elan and chutzpah that she literally walks away with the entire film.

*Gulabo Sitabo* surprises with how it gives heft to even the minutest of characters. No caricatures here. Every single character is idiosyncratic, be it Gyanesh Shukla (always reliable Vijay Raaz)

from the archeology department or the lawyer Christopher (Brijendra Kala, finally in a role that gives him enough to dig into) or the casting director Jogi Malang himself in the tiny role of the builder Mun Mun. It's a quaint bunch makes *Gulabo Sitabo* an unusual mix of rootedness and a whimsy, which feels more Western than typically Hindi mainstream cinema. The mix would charm and endear itself to a set of viewers much as it could also leave a lot utterly perplexed and bewildered. The middle gets a little too overblown but *Gulabo Sitabo* manages to string all the loose ends well together in the end.

What is unmissable is the overarching romance. Not between two human beings, *Gulabo Sitabo* is all about love and longing not quite found between individuals, all because "haveli ke saath aashiqui" (romancing the mansion) comes in the way. But is that true love? The film's soundtrack says it all. "Kya leke aayo jag mein" and "Aana hai jaana hai, jeevan chalte jaana hai" are the reminders of the futility of covetousness in the face of the transience of life. Eventually, it is all about letting go and moving on.

*Gulabo Sitabo* is streaming on Amazon Prime Video

## The sanity behind the madness of filmmaking



## FILM COLUMN

RAHUL DESAI

The writer critiques cinema, adores sports and tolerates life

Every life is a passage of unrepeatable rhythms. In the future, these rhythms are known as memories. In the present, they are remembered as phases. Some phases of time, like seasons, have a definition to them. School-life, for instance, ends at a specific point. Goodbyes are papered over by new welcomes. College-life, too, with its distinct set of liberations, ends on a specific day. The goodbyes are pronounced, because the mind is developed enough to understand the permanence of them. But some phases, like time itself, slip away through the cracks of evolution. We merely move on from them without knowing they're gone. They simply exist as nostalgic echoes of the past. I spent my childhood playing with friends from my apartment complex. There was a foreverseness about those days: I have vivid recollections of summer holidays in empty swimming pools, winter mornings on cricket fields and monsoon evenings cycling across the neighbourhood. Weekends were spent with my grandparents, featuring old adults feeding my afternoons with food and naps. I rode their giant vacuum cleaner when I ran out of toys.

## Rediscovering art

But when did these phases end? I can't pinpoint the ex-



**Onscreen history:** A still from *Lagaan*. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

act date I "grew up". Was it a slow fadeout or an abrupt collapse of adolescence? I can't recall when I last hung out with the society gang, or the last night I slept in a netted tent on my grandparents' balcony. How wonderful would it have been if we were warned that time was being left behind? I can't even pinpoint the beginning of this pandemic: the precise moment life became about avoiding death. (Was it the day Tom Hanks contracted the virus? Or was it when flights were cancelled?) Caught between phasing out memories of home and memorising phases, I rediscovered *Maddess in the Desert* on Netflix, Satyajit Ray's documentary on the making of Ashutosh Gowariker's Oscar-nominated *Lagaan*. Maybe I was missing the movies, maybe I was missing cricket. Or maybe I just needed a vacant building being converted into living quarters for the 400-strong crew, Gowariker with slip disc direct-

physically collaborating to create a communal experience. But watching it felt different this time.

This film about a fabled film is just as fabled, responsive in its coverage and restrained in its courage. Bhatkal, who quit his law career to work in the production department of *Lagaan*, is the narrator. His letters home to his Mumbai-based wife – written from the endless shoot in the torrid nowhere of Kutch – personalise a journey of visual anecdote. His perspective allows the "making" to emerge in real-time through the luxury of hindsight. The pain and pleasure of a passion project are laid bare: Aamir Khan's first home production, his then-wife Reema as a no-nonsense producer, a brutal schedule, a vacant building being converted into living quarters for the 400-strong crew, Gowariker with slip disc direct-

ing the cricket scenes from a cot, an English actor dislocating his shoulder while diving for his crease, a crowd of 10,000 locals being managed across one day to evoke a "stadium" atmosphere, an ailing AK Hangal braving a hip injury to deliver a line.

But it's Bhatkal's introspective gaze that reveals the inherent insecurities of art. Paul Blackthorne, who plays the villainous Captain Russell, remarks on his last day that irrespective of this once-in-a-lifetime experience, he is likely to never meet his Indian colleagues again. Everyone will soon go their separate ways. They will work with new people and form new equations in new environments. This phase is ending, soon to dissolve into a memory.

## History on screen

Blackthorne's words made me wonder if filmmaking,

not unlike films, is the act of modifying life. The life of a film artist is a nomadic assembly of farewells. They go everywhere without belonging anywhere. The nature of their work requires them to love and let go, connect and forget. Moving on is an integral part of moving forward. Creating art together – and leaving behind one project to start another – is perhaps their way of composing repeatable rhythms. Filmmaking is perhaps one way of defining every phase with the power to say goodbye. Jumping from one crew to another offers them the luxury of absolute beginnings and ends: a tangible chance to control the uncontrollable. This sleeplessness allows them to formalise the slipping away of time.

Most of us tend to remember life through the lens of art. Memories have background scores, drama transpires in high frame rates, wise thoughts reverberate in deep baritones. But filmmakers remember art through the lens of life. The night before the shoot of a crucial sequence, the crew stands in as family for two British colleagues having a Hindu wedding in the set-built temple. After the final shot is canned, this family, after living and waiting for half a year, sheds tears of joy and separation. For a fleeting minute, this documentary's viewers represent a small part of the big group photograph. A few months later, the deadly Gujarat earthquake reminds the artists – and the artists in us – that *Lagaan* was created in Bhuj. Several shattered souls had once combined to tell an unbreakable story. It's time to make history on screen. It's time to become history off it.

## Virtual experiences in lockdown times



## THEATRE COLUMN

VIKRAM PHUKAN  
The author is a stage critic and playwright

In 1971, in New York's SoHo neighborhood, a site-specific dance performance – one in which the 'site' in question encompassed a dozen rooftops over a roughly ten-block area – was staged by the Trisha Brown Dance Company (TBDC), one year into its inception. Considered as a seminal work that is part of founder Trisha Brown's "revelatory early oeuvre", *Roof Piece* could be described as movement in transmission. On a rooftop strewn with standpipes, chimney-tops and fire escapes – so inviting an obstacle course for latter-day traceurs – contemporary dancers in sheer red held fort on terraces and parapets that stretched out into the distance.

When one dancer would execute a sequence of gestures using their head, torso and limbs, another dancer stationed at an adjoining building would follow suit attempting to replicate the move as faithfully as possible, and so on and so forth. Spectators, standing atop buildings or looking up from the ground, could watch the signals shift and undulate from one body to the next. It was like a game of corporeal Chinese whispers.

**Changing mediums**  
In these 'socially distanced' times, communication across several degrees of removal has acquired a newfound urgency. In March this year, TBDC mounted a tribute piece, *Room/Roof Piece*, with dancers – still in red but now safely ensconced in their respective home – transmitting movement from one Zoom window to the next. While *Roof Piece*'s original idea was inventively retained, audiences at home could now observe all nine dancers in a single frame of the now-familiar Zoom interface (a recording of the performance is on Vimeo). This spoke, quite remarkably, of the great intimacy and fresh perspectives offered up by the technology of our times, and very little appeared to have been lost in translation from dancer to dancer in a generation that thrives on digital similitude in which virtual proximity trumping physical distance is nothing else. For those



**Changing times:** *Room/Roof Piece* is one of many 'new' performances for the digital age. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

watching with fresh eyes, the piece doesn't immediately offer a clue to its raison d'être – the relaying of 'movement phrases' and indeed the direction of that transmission is, perhaps for many, happily discovered only during the course of watching it.

The reimagined *Room/Roof Piece* is one of many 'new' performances for the digital age unleashed upon an unsuspecting public during lockdown everywhere. The site of engagement with audiences is usually a streaming platform – for recorded works, both archival and freshly created – but the arena of performance, where actors and collaborators exchange energies, ideas and notes, is now the omniscient video-conferencing application, and it is here where new acts are increasingly being performed live.

It is an environment that has become completely normalized to many, not just to the legions of Work@Home recruits spawned by organisational SOPs, but to freshly minted arts aficionados for whom logging in for a gig comes a shade more easily than dressing-up for the theatre. It is an environment that has become completely normalized to many, not just to the legions of Work@Home recruits spawned by organisational SOPs, but to freshly minted arts aficionados for whom logging in for a gig comes a shade more easily than dressing-up for the theatre.

**Intersection**  
The manner in which the new material is received is also not standardised in the mien of the darkened auditorium of yore. Some might



## THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13360

	1	2	3	4	5
6	7				
8			9		
10				11	
13				12	
16		17			
19		18			20
21					

© GUARDIAN NEWS AND MEDIA LTD., 2016

- Across
  - 1 Completed (9)
  - 8 Move stiffly (5)
  - 9 Express strong disapproval of (7)
  - 10 Plan and follow a route (8)
  - 11 Travels on snow (4)
  - 13 Victor (6)
  - 14 Set in operation (4,2)
  - 16 Mess up – hand warmer (4)
  - 17 Speculated (8)
- Down
  - 19 Confined channel (7)
  - 20 Bequeath (5)
  - 21 Amiability (9)
  - 2 Military uniform worn when doing menial labour (8)
  - 3 Nakedness (6)
  - 4 Move with a long bounding stride (4)
  - 5 Typical activity of a person or company (5-2-5)
  - 6 Unable to decide between alternatives (2,2,3,5)
  - 7 Prime mover (7,5)
  - 12 Scores (8)
  - 15 Light creamy dessert (6)
  - 18 Mail (4)

Solution will appear on June 18, 2020.

Solution No. 13359





# Waiting for a faint signal from a distant tower

As educational institutions across the country switched to online classes following the lockdown, students across large swathes of the Northeast wait in hope for their mobile phone handsets to come alive or catch the signal long enough to keep pace with their more fortunate counterparts, reports **Rahul Karmakar**

**T**here aren't too many cars in Hawai, the headquarters of Anjaw district in Arunachal Pradesh bordering China and Myanmar. Shivumos Chikro is one of the few people to own a car in this thinly populated corner of India. Chikro is from Wakro, about 160 km southwest of Hawai, in the adjoining Lohit district from which Anjaw was carved out in 2004. He teaches history at a college in Itanagar, another 390 km from Wakro. "I left Itanagar in mid-March to spend some time at home in Wakro as the new academic session was yet to start. When the lockdown was announced I drove up to be with my wife, a government employee, and our son in Hawai, where the quality of mobile phone network is poor," says Chikro.

Dagbom Riba, Anjaw's Deputy Commissioner, wasn't surprised by Chikro's application for a vehicle permit as soon as lockdown 1.0, imposed to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus, ended on April 14. Chikro's car has an Itanagar-registered number, not unusual in a remote district. Neither did Riba think much about the reason why Chikro needed the permit – "to proceed to Internet network zone at Hayuliang in his private vehicle" from Hawai for "online classes and/or to provide subject matter study materials online to his students". People in the frontier state along the Eastern Himalayas are used to travelling to "catch a tower" that transmits and receives radio frequency signals from mobile phones and devices.

But the permit for Chikro meant descending 546 metres from Hawai's perch at an altitude of 1,296 metres above sea level and driving for about 60 km on a serpentine single-lane and landslide-prone highway to reach Hayuliang. Granted on April 16, the permit specified the travel time-frame: Set off for Hayuliang on April 17 and return to Hawai by April 21.

Habituated to watching and reading news on his smartphone in Itanagar, Chikro was virtually cut off from the world beyond at Hawai. One of his colleagues broke to him the news during a chance conversation - that he was expected to take online classes for his second semester and sixth semester history students following a notification issued by the Rajiv Gandhi University (RGU). Don Bosco College, where Chikro teaches undergraduate students, is affiliated to RGU situated at Doimukh near Itanagar.

In Hayuliang, Chikro's phone came back to life. It was on hibernation in Hawai, where only BSNL works. But the weak network did not allow him to use Zoom or other interactive apps for connecting with his students, some of whom were unreachable in villages far from Itanagar. He did the next best thing - jot down the notes of medieval Indian history and American history and transmit them to his college as scanned attachments by accessing the basic version of his email. He could manage this only around midnight when there were fewer users to latch on to the available network speed.

It took Chikro seven days to prepare the notes at the house of his nephew, two more than he was permitted to stay away from Hawai. "I was not sure if I could make another trip. So, I wanted to cover as much as I could but was a unit short of completing the history of both the countries when I left Hayuliang after a week," he says.

As luck would have it, he ran into a road blockade on his return to Hawai. Some labourers were removing a heap of earth and rocks from the road, but the progress was slow due to rain. He picked up a stranded tribesman - a stranger who was trekking to his village beyond Hawai - and searched for a place to stay after the contractor engaged in clearing the road said it was impossible to get the job done in a day.

"I remembered a distant relative stayed in Andam, a village of six families near the blocked point. The two of us ended up spending two nights there, taxing their granary under stress due to the lockdown. It was around afternoon on the third day that the road was cleared. I reached Hawai by evening after dropping the stranger at his village," says Chikro. Dropping the man was the second violation of his travel permit after overstaying at Hayuliang. "He shall not carry any other person in his permitted vehicle during his movement," the permit read. But the district authorities saw him more as a victim of circumstances on both occasions.

## Distant learning

Moyir Riba used to get annoyed whenever Mina Kiri called up "once in a blue moon" to enquire about her back paper in Political Science or for some official formalities. That was until she found out, during the second phase of lockdown, that Mina Kiri had to walk seven hours from her village Rapum to use a landline phone from the nearest government office. Rapum is in Shi-Yomi district, also bordering China, and



Students attend online classes during the lockdown period in Bormarjung village in Assam's Karbi Anglong district on June 11, 2020. (Below): With no electricity, a student charges his mobile using solar power in order to attend his online class in Bormarjung village. ■ RITU RAJ KONWAR



about 600 km west of Hawai. It is a village of 18 families.

Kiri would have completed a back paper for her Master's degree had the examination been held in May-June like "normal years". She had enrolled at the Institute of Distant Education (IDE) in the last quarter of 2018. The IDE, based out of RGU, has 14 study centres across Arunachal Pradesh. The nearest to Kiri is the study centre at St Francis de Sales College in Aalo, the headquarters of West Siang district, about 200 km from her village.

"We are supposed to be the pioneers of online education throughout the year since we started out in 2005-06 with a Bachelor's degree in five subjects - Economics, Education, English, History and Political Science," says Riba, an assistant professor of Education at IDE. "We were to have done away with face-to-face classes, but poor or no connectivity made us fall back on the old-school IGNOU [Indira Gandhi National Open University] model."

"Aware of the drawbacks, IDE did not stick to the online mode. We chose to give study material in hard copy to the students. They can come to the nearest study centre to collect them and then sit at home and write assignments. They come for classes once a year, for a 10-15 day crash course in their respective subjects, and appear for their examination at the end of the academic year," she says.

IDE has two examination centres - one at RGU for students from the western half of Arunachal Pradesh and the other at Jawaharlal Nehru College in Pasighat, the headquarters of East Siang district, for students of the State's eastern half. For most students in the far-flung districts, this means changing vehicles several times to cover 400-650 km.

For some students, Riba often has to relay a message via their relatives who in turn provide the information through a relative or acquaintance at the nearest connected place - Mechuka or Tato in the case of Kiri.

"It is difficult to reach my aunt. Unless she tries to where a phone is available, her teachers use my mother's number to communicate," says Dochuk Biru, Kiri's nephew at Aalo.

The focus across the country is on online education to make up for the time millions of students have lost due to the COVID-19 lockdown. But this is far from easy in these areas.

"I have been fighting with my teachers because RGU, to which we are affi-

liated, the Ministry of Human Resources Development and the University Grants Commission want us to conduct online classes. But I really cannot insist on this because of the practical situation on the ground. Almost 90% of our students are from far-flung areas without connectivity, and those who have would rather not sacrifice their limited data pack on online classes that may snap any time," says Father Jose K., the principal of Itanagar's Don Bosco College.

The All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union agrees online classes are not a solution for the State unless the mobile phone or broadband connectivity is made robust. "We do not want schools, colleges and other educational institutions to open until normalcy returns. The COVID-19 crisis is not going away soon. But online classes should not be made mandatory as there are many districts deprived of good telecom communication and electricity," says the union's vice-president, Meje Taku.

## Big plan, no headway

The National e-Governance Conference organised in Meghalaya's capital Shillong in August 2019 ended in the Shillong Declaration that "binds the government to improve connectivity in the north-eastern States by addressing issues of telecommunications connectivity at grass-root level and formulating and implementing a comprehensive telecom development plan".

The focus of the conference was on improving e-governance and enhancing electronic skills across sectors. It was seen as a follow-up of the Comprehensive Telecom Development Plan for North East Region that the Centre had in 2018 said was being finalised through the Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF). Under the plan, a private service provider was entrusted to set up more than 2,000 mobile towers for connecting 2,128 villages in Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura, parts of Assam and the national highways in the region.

BSNL, the Centre said, was installing



2,817 mobile towers to connect 4,119 un-covered villages in other parts of the Northeast, primarily Arunachal Pradesh. Besides, the Union Cabinet had in May 2018 approved the provisioning of 2G and 4G mobile service in 2,173 un-covered villages and along the national highways in Meghalaya.

"Internet is very limited in West Khasi Hills. BSNL is expressing helplessness and other telecom operators are also not up to the mark. Online classes have been a very limited option for a few," the district's Deputy Commissioner, Tableland Lyngwa, says. Nongstoin, the district headquarters, is 90 km from Shillong where the declaration on the e-governance push was announced. Lack of resources is the explanation they give about expanding or improving network, Lyngwa adds.

"USOF was supposed to have rolled out the project of covering the un-covered villages. It has somehow not started this, particularly in three hill districts of Assam. The work will start as soon as the project is given the green signal," says Sandeep Govil, the chief general manager of BSNL's Assam circle. The case is similar for his counterparts in Nagaland's Dimapur (with jurisdiction over Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Manipur) and Shillong (for Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura).

One of the worst-affected districts in Assam is West Karbi Anglong. Mobile phones at Umswai, a village about 60 km from Guwahati as the crow flies, come to life once every 20-22 days, that too for 30 minutes at most.

"Here, poor mobile connectivity is a perpetual handicap. Lately, a teacher attempted to create a Class 10 WhatsApp group to engage with the students in some way. Out of 39 mobile numbers available, only 10 have the app but hardly any connectivity to proceed," says Albert Thyrniang, the principal of Don Bosco School at Umswai. "Even if the network signal shows 'on', data service is cut off. How is online class possible," he asks. Teachers and students of the Don Bosco School at Amkatchi, about

20 km away, and an Assam government school in between face a similar situation. So do three private schools in the vicinity catering primarily to the tribal Tiwa students.

"Online classes sound nice but we know how tough it can be. We have to update the district inspector of schools on the progress of the classes that we have not been able to take at all. The parents of only a few students have smartphones while many don't own a phone. The inability of schools to impart online classes has only widened the gap between more than 2,000 students of the Umswai-Amkatchi area and their counterparts in the more fortunate parts of Assam," says a teacher of the government school.

## One-way communication

But there are also issues in the "more fortunate" areas such as Guwahati, the urban centre that enjoys the best connectivity in the Northeast. "The schools seem to be in a hurry to finish the classes through WhatsApp groups comprising the students of a class and some teachers. But the communication is one way as only the teachers can post as the administrators. If the students are not able to ask questions or say whether they have understood a lesson or not, how can you progress," asks N. Khaund, the father of a Class 7 student of a private school.

"We are not against online class as it appears to be the only alternative now. But not more than 20% of the students have been covered, as most students do not have access to a smartphone and recharging for parents beyond the basic need to talk is taxing on the lower middle class, not to speak of those economically weaker," says Ratul Chandra Goswami, general secretary of the Assam State Primary Teachers' Association.

A survey conducted by the mission-ary schools in most of the other North-eastern States in May showed that about 10% in Arunachal Pradesh, 20% in Manipur, Meghalaya and Tripura and 40% in Nagaland received some sort of online classes.

The lockdown, Goswami feels, and associated difficulties in conducting online classes could be a lesson for the government in terms of adding subsidised smartphones to its beneficiary programmes, particularly for the poor with schoolgoing children as a way of discouraging them from dropping out.

## Poor connectivity

One of the reasons the Northeast suffers is the reluctance of telecom service providers to provide connectivity in areas where the prospective customer base is low, says Arunachal Pradesh MLA Ningong Ering. He represents the Congress in the Pasighat West Assembly constituency in East Siang district. As the party's Lok Sabha member from the Arunachal East constituency, he had

been vocal in Parliament about the poor telecom and Internet connectivity in Arunachal Pradesh, specifically along the 1,26 km-long border with China from Tawang district in the west to Anjaw in the east.

In April 2018, he had written to Cabinet Secretary Pradeep Kumar Sinha, asking if the Centre was serious about spending ₹537 billion for infrastructure and telecommunications projects in the Northeast as had been earmarked in the 2014-15 budget. "It seems that the intention was never to get the project completed on time," he wrote, saying the delay brought the role of the USOF administrator under suspicion. The tender for the project was opened in August 2016 but the USOF, which is under the ambit of the Department of Telecommunications, brought in new norms two months later. More conditions began to be imposed since.

"Nothing has changed today, and the lockdown and economic slowdown could push the project further into the future. It is easy to talk about online classes from Delhi and other well-connected places. For people in Arunachal Pradesh, it is not only about an alternative medium of education. It is also about national security in the border areas where people catch Chinese mobile and radio signals easily," Ering says.

Connectivity is not the only issue in most parts of Arunachal Pradesh. A bigger challenge is to provide electricity for charging phones and gadgets to facilitate online or distant learning, he says. "One has to think beyond profitability to connect the sparsely populated and scattered villages high in the mountains. And the task does not end with providing outdated connectivity where one can barely speak a few words after 'hello'," Ering says.

Individual initiatives, however, have raised hopes in certain areas such as the villages in Mizoram's Lawngtlai district bordering Bangladesh and Myanmar. Shashank Ala, the former Deputy Commissioner of the district, had till May pursued a private operator for providing services to 95 of 105 villages along the border that fell in communication shadow zones. "These towers have been installed in villages and highway patches over the last one year despite roadblocks, river crossings and poor transport network. It was possible because of the involvement of the autonomous council members and village council presidents, who assured protection of the installations," he says.

Saket Kushwaha, the Vice-Chancellor of RGU, would rather focus on the opportunities the connectivity issues have provided. "The Central guidelines for classes during lockdown have been in the form of advisories subject to local conditions. This unforeseen crisis has made us assess our limits and find alternatives for similar or tougher challenges that might come," he says.













