



Chinese envoy Sun Weidong praises India's COVID-19 response

page 9



India should withdraw from Kalapani: Nepal Minister Gyawali

page 9



U.S. strips Hong Kong of special trading status ahead of key vote

page 12

## NEARBY



### MVA allies question BJP's claims on Central aid

MUMBAI  
The allies in the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in the State — Shiv Sena, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and Congress — launched an attack on the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the ruling coalition at the Centre for not providing financial aid to Maharashtra to tackle the crisis in the wake of the novel coronavirus pandemic. The allies, in a first joint press conference on Wednesday since the crisis, also debunked speculations of political instability.

REGION ▶ PAGE 5

### Hospitals turned their backs on us, say nurses

MUMBAI  
As the city's healthcare system reels under the burden of the COVID-19 pandemic, several of its frontline staff who have contracted the virus — mainly nurses — have complained of apathy from their employers. Staff nurses from Lilavati Hospital, JJ Hospital and other facilities in the city have complained of unhygienic isolation facilities where they have been kept, lack of medical attention from their employers, and inadequate PPE provided to those on the frontline.

REGION ▶ PAGE 3

## Now, Trump offers to mediate between India and China

Beijing says situation is 'stable' and both sides will resolve the standoff bilaterally



High stakes: An Army truck crossing Chang La near Pangong Tso in Ladakh region in this file photo. ■ AP

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Wednesday that he had offered to help New Delhi and Beijing resolve their tensions at the Line of Actual Control (LAC). The offer came as a surprise on a day the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs appeared to soften its line on the standoff, suggesting the situation was "stable and controllable" now.

"We have informed both India and China that the United States is ready, willing and able to mediate or arbitrate their now raging border dispute. Thank you!" Mr. Trump tweeted.

Indian and Chinese troops have faced off at least four points along the LAC, including Pangong Tso (lake), Demchok and Galwan Valley in Ladakh and Naku La in Sikkim, where PLA soldiers are reported to have occupied tracts patrolled by Indian troops, pitching tents and building trenches.

Mr. Trump did not elaborate on his offer, which came as a surprise for several reasons. While the U.S. has offered to mediate between India and Pakistan on multiple occasions in the past, this is the first time an American official has offered to be the

third party between India and China publicly.

#### China is a threat: Wells

His comments also appear to be at variance with the stand taken by senior U.S. State Department official Alice Wells, who squarely blamed China for the border tensions and called it a "threat" to all its neighbours.

Moreover, Mr. Trump's offer comes at a time when the U.S. and China themselves have tensions between them on several fronts. In addition to an uneasy trade situation, the U.S. has accused China of not being transparent with information in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. And just recently, U.S. National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien

said the U.S. could impose sanctions on both Beijing and Hong Kong, if China were to go ahead and impose a national security law on Hong Kong.

Neither the Ministry of External Affairs nor China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded to Mr. Trump's statement. India has, in the past, rejected all offers of third party mediation.

A senior Indian official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said neither side would take the offer "seriously", although given the "optics", China would view it less favourably. Earlier on Wednesday, China said both sides would resolve the standoff bilaterally.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

## Amid impasse, commanders' meet begins

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The continuing tensions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) are likely to top the agenda as the biannual Army Commanders Conference (ACC) began on Wednesday, with discussions led by the Army chief and the seven commanders, with a specific session devoted to each command over three days.

The sessions by the Northern and Eastern Commands would be of particular interest as they cover the border with China. The ACC was originally scheduled for April, but was postponed owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, and is now scheduled to be held in two phases.

Several military officers say the issue has to be resolved at the diplomatic and political level as the two Armies are entrenched on the ground and the talks between the local commanders haven't made any headway.

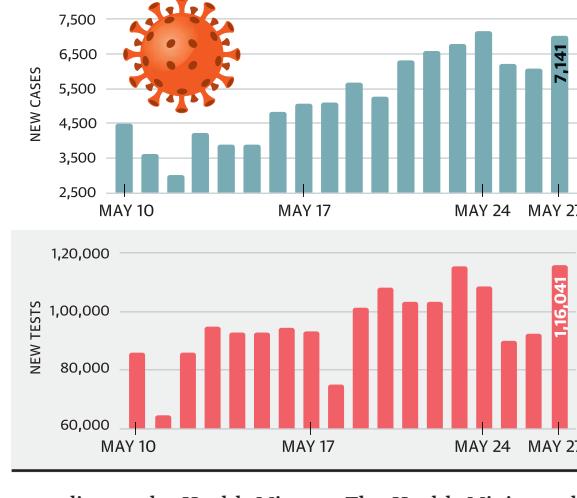
CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

## Govt. removes ₹4,500 ceiling on COVID-19 test

States can negotiate with approved labs and fix the price

### Mixed trend

The number of new COVID-19 cases witnessed a drop on Monday and Tuesday, before surging on Wednesday. In tandem with this trend, the number of tests conducted were also significantly lower on Monday and Tuesday, and increased on Wednesday



not be applicable now and, therefore, all State governments/Union Territory administrations are advised to negotiate with private labs and fix a mutually agreeable price for samples being sent by the government for private individuals desirous of testing," it said.

The direction came on Wednesday when India reported 6,387 new cases and 187 deaths were reported on Wednesday. The total number of cases stands at 1,51,767, including 83,004 active cases, 64,425 discharged and 4,337 deaths,

The Health Ministry also said critical services for women, children and adolescents should be provided irrespective of their COVID-19 status, and under no circumstances should they be denied essential services.

India records over 2.5 crore pregnancies every year and has the largest adolescent and youth population. Hence, it is vital to continue the essential services to the vulnerable sections.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8  
MORE REPORTS ▶ PAGES 6, 8 & 10

## Adding firepower



New recruits: Two Light Combat Aircraft Tejas Mk-1 do a flypast to mark their induction into Squadron 18 of the IAF at the Sulur base, near Coimbatore, on Wednesday. The combat aircraft was manufactured by HAL, Bengaluru. ■ M. PERIASAMY

## State death toll rises to 1,897 after deadliest day yet claims 105 lives

2,190 new cases take COVID-19 tally near 57,000-mark

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE

Maharashtra reported its highest single-day surge in COVID-19 deaths till date on Wednesday, with 105 fatalities taking the toll so far to 1,897, while another big spike of 2,190 cases saw its case tally rise to 56,948.

The number of active cases in the State has gone up to 37,125, with 964 patients being discharged to take the total to 17,918, State Health Department officials said.

Mumbai city alone reported 1,044 cases, as its tally reached 34,018 cases. As many as 32 of the deaths reported on Wednesday were from Mumbai, taking its toll to 1,097.

The surge in fresh cases in

count to 57.

Nashik reported three deaths to take its toll to 52 while fatalities were also reported from Solapur, Ahmednagar and Nagpur districts.

"Of the deaths reported [in the State] on Wednesday, 39 occurred in the last couple of days while the remaining 66 are from April 21 to May 24. And 63% of them had high-risk co-morbidities such as diabetes, hypertension, asthma and heart disease," said State Surveillance Officer, Dr. Pradeep Awate.

He said the patient doubling rate figure, which was 11.5 days in the last week, had improved to 14.7 days, while Maharashtra's recovery rate stood at 31.5%.

It advises State against acquiring former CM's Poes Garden residence

MOHAMMED IMRANULLAH S.

CHENNAI

Ending the uncertainty over inheritance of vast properties left behind by former Chief Minister Jayalalithaa, the Madras High Court on Wednesday declared her nephew J. Deepak and niece J. Deepa as Class II legal heirs entitled to all the properties left behind by their aunt.

The former AIADMK leader, who faced a disproportionate assets case, died in testate on December 5, 2016.

The court made it clear that the State government could not acquire any of the properties without issuing notice to the legal heirs and paying them adequate compensation.

Justices N. Kirubakaran and Abdul Quddose allowed an application filed by Mr. Deepak and granted a Letter of Administration in favour of him and his sister. They also recorded the siblings' undertaking that a few properties, to be selected as per their discretion, would be allotted to create a public trust named after Jayalalithaa for welfare activities. Such a trust should be created within eight weeks of the date of receipt of the judgment, the judges said.

They rejected another case filed by AIADMK functionaries K. Pugazhenthi and P. Janakiraman for appointing them as administrators of the properties left behind by their departed leader.

The Bench agreed with advocate S.L. Sudarsanam, representing Mr. Deepak, that rank outsiders could not be given Letters of Administration.

Recently the State promul-



Veda Nilayam, the residence of the former Tamil Nadu CM, Jayalalithaa, at Poes Garden in Chennai. ■ B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

gated an ordinance to take over the bungalow temporarily.

**'Use money judiciously'**  
"Instead of acquiring the said property and paying a heavy compensation, the said amount could be utilised for development purposes... When there are so many essential amenities which are yet to be provided by the welfare state, public

money cannot be wasted on memorials," the court said.

It cautioned that if Jayalalithaa's residence was converted into a memorial, every other party that would come to power in the State might use public money to convert the residences of their leaders into memorials.

On the other hand, if the government persisted with its plan to acquire the Poes Garden bungalow by burning a hole in the exchequer, either the entire property or at least a part of it could be used as the official residence-cum-home office of the Chief Minister and the rest could be converted into a memorial, the court said. The judges directed the government to provide round-the-clock security to Mr. Deepak and Ms. Deepa. Ordering them to bear the costs, they said any one of their aunt's properties could be liquidated to pay the cost.

## Jaya's nephew, niece entitled to her assets: HC

It advises State against acquiring former CM's Poes Garden residence

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**'Use money judiciously'**  
"Instead of acquiring the said property and paying a heavy compensation, the said amount could be utilised for development purposes... When there are so many essential amenities which are yet to be provided by the welfare state, public

# Two die after waiting in vain for ambulances to arrive

BMC Commissioner said on Tuesday number of ambulances has been increased

TANVI DESHPANDE  
MUMBAI

At a time when the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) claims to have increased the number of ambulances to 455, Mumbai-kars continue to suffer due to lack of such vehicles at their times of need.

On Tuesday night, an autorickshaw driver from Goregaon, waited for five hours for an ambulance for his wife, who complained of breathlessness. She finally died without getting one. In another incident on Wednesday, a woman from Sutar Pakhadi, who complained of weakness, also did not get an ambulance in time and passed away.

These two cases are a grim reminder of the present situation in the city.

Municipal Commissioner IS Chahal on Tuesday said that the number of ambulances in Mumbai had gone up from 100 to 455 and they were deployed by the Disaster Management Control Room at the headquarters.

Babbar Yadav, an autorickshaw driver from Goregaon (East), could not get an ambulance for his wife Manbhadevi Yadav (63). She had been suffering from breathlessness since 9.30 p.m. on Tuesday. She was supposed to be taken to Shatabdi Hospital where corporator Vinod Mishra had spoken to the on-duty doctor to look into the case.

"My wife had some health issues. We had run a chest X-ray one week ago where the



A BMC ambulance leaving Kasturba Hospital. ■ FILE PHOTO

## St. George Hospital nurse dies in freak lift accident

GAUTAM MENGLE  
MUMBAI

A 43-year-old nurse with St. George Hospital died in what seems to have been a freak accident on the hospital premises on Wednesday. According to the MRA Marg police, the deceased, identified as Geeta Waghela, was a resident of Mira Road and was on duty when the incident occurred around 10.30 a.m.

"Waghela was on her way from the ground floor to the second floor when she peeped out of a gap in the plywood of the lift and hit her head on an iron rod as a result. She was declared dead at the same hospital at 11.15 a.m.," an officer with the MRA Marg police said.

The officer said a probe has been initiated to find out more about the maintenance of the lift and to explore legal grounds to register a case of causing death due to negligence.

"An accidental death report has been registered in connection with the incident," Mumbai Police spokesperson DCP Pranaya Ashok said.

doctor suspected TB and she was to undergo further tests. She started suffering from breathlessness around 9.30

p.m. and the ambulance driver kept telling me he would be coming in some time. Finally, when he called

me at 2.30 a.m., I told him there was no need to come anymore as my wife had died at 11.30 p.m.," said Mr. Yadav on Wednesday, who had just returned from his wife's funeral.

"It was only my wife and I in our family. How will I live alone anymore? I want to go back to my village now," he said desolately.

Mr. Mishra said, "I myself kept trying for an ambulance for Mr. Yadav till 1.30 a.m. Neither the 108 ambulances nor private ones were available. Patients continue to die due to lack of hospital beds and ambulances. The situation is dire."

Similarly, Bhikhi Pandey's sister Devi Jagan Pandey, who lived in Sutar Pakhadi, could not get an ambulance in time and passed away on Wednesday.

"My sister had weakness, so we took her to a local doctor but the doctor did not even examine her properly. He gave some medicines. Then her health deteriorated and she could not breathe. We did not get an ambulance despite several attempts. When we tried 108, we were told that no ambulance was available.

We even tried private ambulances, but there was no result after several calls. She died on Wednesday noon," Mr. Pandey said.

Mahesh Narvekar, chief officer of disaster management cell that looks after the daily deployment through 1916 helpline, could not be reached for comment.

## ESIC Hospital in Kandivali to become 300-bed dedicated COVID-19 facility

JYOTI SHELAR  
MUMBAI

Kandivali's ESIC Hospital is all set to be converted into a dedicated COVID-19 facility with 300 beds. In a circular issued by the management on Wednesday, the employees were informed about this decision taken in a meeting with the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation.

The city currently has five dedicated COVID-19 hospitals: Nair, SevenHills, Kasturba, St. George and GT. Except for SevenHills, which is in Marol, all the other hospitals are in south Mumbai. A dedicated facility in the western suburbs will thus prove helpful. Other big civic hospitals like Sion and KEM are working on a hybrid model, taking both COVID-19 and non COVID-19 patients.



ESIC Hospital at Kandivali in Mumbai. ■ FILE PHOTO

The ESIC Hospital currently has a 60-bed COVID-19 ward. In its circular, the management asked the administrative staff working in the hospital building to shift to their Marol office.

Healthcare staff working in the hospital, however, objected to moving the administrative staff. "The healthcare

staff does not have any purchasing powers. By moving the administrative staff, getting PPEs and other things to work safely in the COVID-19 ward will be extremely difficult," said a doctor. "The administrative staff was working on a different floor. There was no reason for them to move," the doctor said.

## CISF unit at Mazagon Dock reports cases

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) reported 22 fresh cases of COVID-19 on Wednesday, with the maximum 13 coming from its unit that guards the warship building Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd (MDL) in Mumbai. The total active CISF cases at MDL are 14 now.

MDL is one of the country's leading defence public sector undertaking shipyard that constructs warships and submarines.

This is the second defence PSU where the CISF has reported coronavirus infection after its unit deployed to provide counter-terrorist cover to warship building facility, Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers Ltd, in Kolkata.

# Extend work-from-home facility for young mothers: IT forum to Centre

"There will be restricted access to crèches even if lockdown is eased after June 1"

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE  
PUNE

As new COVID-19 positive cases continue to mount in Pune, the Forum for IT Employees (F.I.T.E) has appealed to authorities to extend the work-from-home (WFH) facility for young mothers in the IT sector.

In a letter sent recently to Union Minister of Communications and Information Technology Ravi Shankar Prasad, representatives of the F.I.T.E. have urged the Centre to come up with guidelines so as to give relief to a huge IT workforce comprising young, working mothers, among others.

### Summon to employees

A number of IT firms in Pune have begun summoning their employees to work following relaxation of lockdown rules, which permit firms to function with 33% of their employee capacity, said Pavanji Mane, State representative, F.I.T.E.

"Thus far, the WFH model has worked fine with minimum impact on the company's business. Given that this sector has 30%-40% female employees of whom many are in the 22-38 age group, there is a significant risk for professionals, especially young mothers, as fresh COVID-19 cases are rising in the city's 'non-containment' zones as well," he said.

Padmaja Pawar, F.I.T.E.'s Maharashtra coordinator, said there will be restricted access to crèche facilities and day-care centres even if the lockdown is considerably eased after June 1.

"Furthermore, maids may not be allowed in residential societies in the post-lockdown scenario. So, these young mothers will face additional problems of managing their children besides shouldering work responsibilities," Ms. Pawar said.

### Physical distancing

Mr. Mane said extension of the WFH model is not only the best physical distancing option to check the spread of the contagion in Pune's sprawling IT parks, but will also help the district administration reduce the burden of screening possible COVID-19 cases.

"Despite humanitarian gestures by big IT firms, the ground reality is different as employees often come under pressure to appear physically at workplaces. As the lockdown gradually eases, IT firms are intent on proving to clients that they are back on track and as a result, managers eagerly summon employees who travel at great risk to physical locations," he said.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Mumbai-based lawyer Alif Fazlebhoy, senior partner, ALMT Legal, said IT companies need to gear up for more WFH facilities by securing for their employees the necessary equipment and internet



Graffiti put up by the Pune Municipal Corporation to create awareness of COVID-19 precautions at Lullanagar on Wednesday. ■ JIGNESH MISTRY

## Pune death toll nudges 300 while fatalities spike in Solapur, Satara

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE  
PUNE

Six more deaths and more than 120 new cases were reported from Pune district on Wednesday, to take its death toll to 295 and its cumulative case tally to 6,604.

"As many as 124 new cases were reported between Tuesday evening and Wednesday evening," said Pune district health officer Bhagwan Pawar.

Solapur district in Pune division witnessed an alarming rise in the number of deaths, reporting nine fatalities on Wednesday, to push the district's toll to 64, while Satara district reported five deaths, to take its toll to 13.

The death toll in Pune division – which consists of the districts of Satara, Sangli, Kolhapur and Solapur along with Pune – has now surged to 377. Pune Divisional Commissioner Deepak Mhaisekar said only 2,954 cases are active in Pune district, while 3,355 people have been discharged thus far. As many as 26 of the new cases were recorded

from Pimpri-Chinchwad.

Mr. Mhaisekar said a special task force has been deputed in Solapur in the wake of increasing deaths and cases. He said the division's total cases currently stand at 8,122, of which 3,841 have been discharged, while

as many as 124 new cases were reported between Tuesday evening and Wednesday evening," said Pune district health officer Bhagwan Pawar.

Satara witnessed a spike in cases, reporting 59 new cases since Tuesday evening while Kolhapur, which had been seeing a steady rise in new cases since the past week, recorded only five new cases on Wednesday.

The number of deaths and new cases has shot up in Satara in the last eight days, with many of the fatalities said to be senior citizens with co-morbidities, who had just returned from 'highly infected' areas like Mumbai. "At present, Satara has 394 cases, of which 259

are active. Kolhapur has 383, of which 360 are active. Solapur reported 32 new cases to take its tally to 653 with 292 active cases. Sangli reported six new cases to take its total tally to 88, of which only 39 are active," Mr. Mhaisekar said.

He further said the samples of 77,117 people have been tested across the division so far, of which results of 72,747 have been received, while the rest are awaited. "Of these, 64,516 samples have returned negative, while 8,122 have tested positive," he said.

On Tuesday, Pune city authorities took a record 2,044 swab test samples, the highest number of tests in a single day. Pune district, including Pimpri-Chinchwad and Pune rural, had reported 327 new cases on Tuesday.

The fresh cases had included 14 personnel from the State Reserve Police Force. On Monday, the district had reported its highest single-day surge of more than 450 cases.

ployees do not have. On the terminations, pay cuts and other issues, many companies do not have enough work to keep everyone occupied," Mr. Fazlebhoy said.

As COVID-19 has turned out to be a force majeure event, he said, there is a fine line to be walked by IT firms between ensuring that employees are not subjected to more than absolutely necessary hardship, while at the same time keeping their businesses afloat.

## Creating health infrastructure in slums crucial in rebuilding Mumbai: Awhad

Minister asks BDA to share list of concessions required for facilitating redevelopment

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI

Housing Minister Jitendra Awhad on Wednesday said creating health infrastructure in slum pockets will be a priority in rebuilding Mumbai once the pandemic subsides. The minister was infected with COVID-19 and has since recovered.

Mr. Awhad, who was addressing a webinar organised by the Brihanmumbai Developers Association (BDA), said the healthcare infrastructure will be created through slum redevelopment, that has been on the cards for a while.

**Restoring city** "We need to work on restoring an ailing Mumbai. The city's health infrastructure has collapsed. Unless we develop slums, where 10 to 15 people live in a single room, along with the health infras-

tructure, we will not be doing justice to the people. Dharavi redevelopment is the need of the hour as much as it is in areas like Govandi and Kamathipura," he said.

Inviting architects to join the initiative for the well-being of Mumbai, where 35% of land comprises slums and 60% of the population live in them, Mr. Awhad said the health infrastructure in slum pockets had collapsed.

**Perspiration pays** "Labourers have returned to their home towns but once industry starts, those people will be back. Everybody will work hard. Mumbai is a city where perspiration pays. From that effort, we will have victory," he said.

The minister said Mumbai will survive only if businesses do. "The housing industry will give life to the Mumbai Metropolitan Region. The government will do everything that is essential. We will have to cut premiums, some policy of major help has to be given to build-

ers," he said. Self-certification has begun, and will be promoted further, while premium concessions that were decided earlier will be given immediately, Mr. Awhad said.

### Loss in lockdown

"We have lost 70 days due to the lockdown. We will have to maintain physical distancing, wear masks and work. I will see to it that the Slum Rehabilitation Authority is online in eight days," he said.

Asking the BDA to share a formal list of concessions and other requirements for facilitating the redevelopment process, Mr. Awhad said the government will respond within 15 days. "The government will do everything that is essential. We will have to cut premiums, some policy of major help has to be given to build-

## 6 contract workers at TISS lose jobs; union calls it immoral

Lease of 2 off-campus hostels where they were employed ends

AJEEV MAHALE  
MUMBAI

Six people, who were working on the two off-campus hostels of Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) in Mumbai, have been terminated from their jobs.

The two hostels in question are a private building called Surjog near Ghatl and a building belonging to Rashtriya Chemicals and Fertilisers (RCF), both of which have been taken on lease by the institute to provide accommodation for students.

### Union cries foul

Workers' union members, however, have cried foul, stating that under the current circumstances, the dismissal from the service is immoral. "With a lockdown in place, where will these people find new sources of employment? Many of them are sole earners in their families," said Deepak Bhalerao, general secretary, Sarva Shramik Sangh. The six employees were served termination notices earlier this month and were told that May 31 would be their last day at work.

The lack of clarity with regards to when students will be able to return. The six employees were attached to these two hostels only," he said, adding contract staff were hired for specific jobs and roles.

### Legal issue

Mr. Bhalerao said four of the six who have been removed from the service were working on the main campus until a few months ago. "There is also a legal case revolving around the status of these workers, many of whom have been with the institute under different contractors. Given that the case is under way, it is incorrect for TISS to take such an action," he pointed out.

The union has also approached the labour commissioner regarding the matter, who has sought a response from the institute.

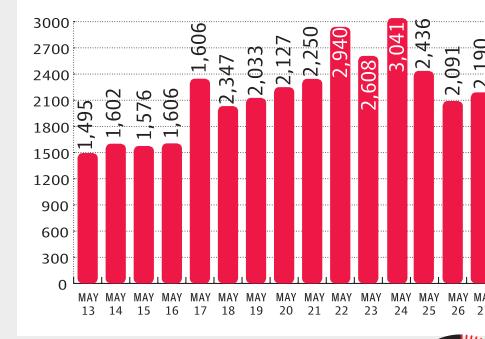
## Maharashtra COVID-19 tracker

TOTAL CASES	NEW CASES	ACTIVE CASES	RECOVERED	DEATHS
56,948	2,190	37,125	17,918	1,897

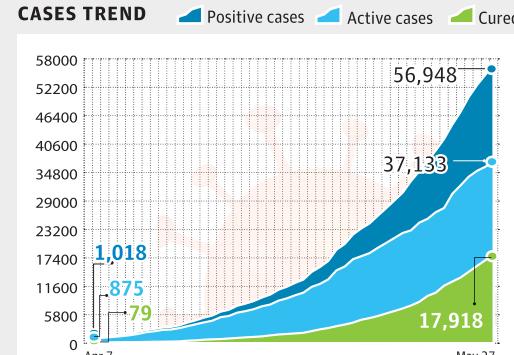
## DISTRICTS AFFECTED: 35

DISTRICT	CASES	DEATHS	DISTRICT	CASES	DEATHS
Mumbai	34,018	1,097	Nanded	105	5
Thane	7,781	149	Sangli	94	1
Pune	6,614	291	Ahmednagar	87	6
Aurangabad	1,335	57	Latur	94	3
Nashik	1,012	52	Jalgaon	79	0
Raigad	896	25	Buldhana	53	3
Palghar	771	19	Gondia	48	0
Solapur	679	52	Osmanabad	45	0
Nagpur	484	9	Nandurbar	32	3
Jalgaon	505	51	Beed	40	0
Akola	487	17	Gadchiroli	26	0
Kolhapur	346	1	Parbhani	25	1
Satara	395	7	Chandrapur	25	0
Amravati	194	14	Sindhudurg	19	0
Ratnagiri	192	5	Bhandara	19	0
Hingoli	133	0	Washim	8	0
Dhule	129	9	Wardha	10	1
Yavatmal	115	0			

## POSITIVE CASES OVER LAST 15 DAYS



1,044 (48%) of Wednesday's cases are from Mumbai



31.46% is the State recovery rate

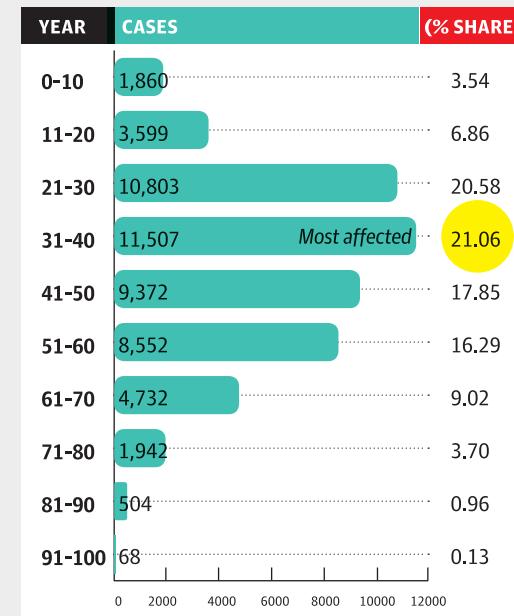


## MORTALITY RATE

Maharashtra 3.33%

India 2.84%

## AFFECTED (AGE-WISE)



## QUARANTINE NUMBERS

5,82,701

37,761



Home quarantine

Institutional quarantine

## CASES (GENDER-WISE)



## DEATH (GENDER-WISE)



71% 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: ssuumarashtra@gmail.com

## CITY-WISE HELPLINE NUMBERS

Mumbai city: 022 22664232

Palghar: 0252 297474

Mumbai suburbs: 022

Raigad: 02141 222118

26556799 / 26556806

Sindhudurg: 02362 228848

Thane: 022 25301740

Source: Public Health Department, Maharashtra, BMC

## Hospitals turned their backs on us, say nurses with COVID-19

Staffers complain of unhygienic isolation facilities, lack of medical attention from employers, inadequate PPE

JYOTI SHELAR  
MUMBAI

As the city's healthcare system reels under the burden of the COVID-19 pandemic, several of its frontline staff who have contracted the virus – mainly nurses – have complained of apathy from their employers.

Last week, staff nurses from Lilavati Hospital who were infected with the SARS-CoV-2 complained about the unhygienic conditions inside the civic-run COVID Care Centre at Mahatma Gandhi Seva Mandir in Bandra. Men and women were forced to share the same washroom, the nurses alleged. Soon, they were moved to another facility next to the hospital building. In the new facility too, the nurses said there is no adequate health assessment and nutrition given to them.

"Many of us have been coughing. When patients are normally admitted un-

der us, we are told to carry out their X-rays routinely. But here, none of the nurses have undergone a single X-ray so far," said a staff nurse, alleging that they have not been checked on by Lilavati doctors either.

"We are not even getting nutritious meals or multivitamins necessary to boost our immunity," said another nurse. The group has approached the United Nurses Association with their complaints.

The nurses also alleged double standards when it came to treating healthcare staff. They said doctors who have been infected are being treated in-house, while nurses have been accommodated outside.

According to the hospital management, nearly 40 staff members have tested positive and more than 35 of their contacts, such as parents and spouses, have also contracted the infection.



On the frontline: Nurses arrive at a hospital in Mumbai to report for duty. ■ FILE PHOTO, PICTURE FOR REPRESENTATION ONLY

Some doctors have also tested positive, including two senior consultants who have been practising for over 20 years. "We have accommodated as many staff members as possible. But what does one do when the ward overflows?" Dr. V. Ravishankar, COO of Lilavati Hospital, said.

He rubbishied allegations that doctors have not visited

the staff. "Our doctors are checking on them. They are getting the same food that we get in the hospital," he said. He said all employees have been given protective gear, and it is unlikely they picked up the infection on duty. "Many of the staff come from areas which are hotspots," he said.

Nurses from the State-run JJ Hospital have raised

similar grievances, saying that some of them have been accommodated at the isolation facility at Richardson and Cruddas warehouse in Byculla, where the conditions are extremely unhygienic and just a few toilets are being shared by many patients.

"The facility was filthy. There was no one to check my health condition. I had no choice but to move out of there to ensure that my health improves," said one staff nurse from JJ Hospital, who moved to a private hospital for treatment.

Nurses from the hospital also alleged that they were not given adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) and there was no dedicated area to put on and remove the PPE, which may have led to the chain of infection among the staff.

JJ Hospital's dean, Dr. Ranjit Mankeshwar, said 10 staff nurses have tested positive.

## Mumbai records 1,044 cases; 32 die

City part of ICMR sero-surveillance study

JYOTI SHELAR  
MUMBAI

Mumbai recorded 1,044 COVID-19 cases on Wednesday, pushing its tally to 34,108. The city also recorded 32 more fatalities, taking the death toll to 1,097.

Of the latest victims, 19 were men and 13 were women, and as many as 15 patients had co-morbidities like diabetes, hypertension and asthma.

**Lowest tally in Dharavi** Dharavi, meanwhile, reported one of its lowest case increases in a single day so far, reporting 18 new cases. The area has reported 1,639 cases so far. The area had posted its lowest increase of 16 cases on April 18.

Mumbai has been shortlisted as one of the sites for the sero-surveillance study by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) to gauge the spread of the infection within the community. The ICMR is carrying out the study in 60 districts, including 10 cities which are hotspots.

Five clusters in Mumbai, including Kandivali (East), Kandivali (West), Deonar, Dharavi and Kurla-Sakinaka, have been selected for the study. Medical officers will randomly select households and after taking the consent and necessary details, samples of blood will be collected from participants above the age of 18. Antibody tests will be carried out on the blood samples to look for Immunoglobulin G (IgG), the presence of which indicates an old infection. A total of 500 individuals will be included in the survey from the five clusters.

"The objective is to estimate and monitor the trend of sero-prevalence for SARS-CoV-2 infection in high burdened areas," said Dr. Narkar.

"The objective is to estimate and monitor the trend of sero-prevalence for SARS-CoV-2 infection in high burdened areas," said Dr. Narkar.

(Inputs from Tanvi Dandapani, Raina Assainade)

Another death in Mumbai Police ranks; toll now 13

GAUTAM S. MENGLE

MUMBAI

A 54-year-old head constable posted in central Mumbai became the 13th COVID-19 fatality in the Mumbai Police on Tuesday.

The head constable, who was just a few months short of falling in the high-risk age group, was assigned patrol duty in an area that has witnessed a large spike in novel coronavirus cases over the last few weeks.

His colleagues said he was part of a mobile patrolling unit in a containment zone and was tested on May 20 after he started presenting symptoms. He tested positive on May 22 and was admitted to a police quarantine facility in Marol the same day. He was later shifted to the National Sports Club of India and then to the BYL Nair Hospital.

"He was shifted to the intensive care unit on Tuesday, where he died in the evening. He used to stay with his family in Thane," said a colleague.

The head constable's demise takes the toll in the Mumbai Police to 13. The Mumbai Police have sent personnel above the age of 55 on leave. So far, 1,150 Mumbai Police personnel have tested positive.



Testing on wheels: Health workers of a mobile COVID-19 lab collect swab samples at Antonio Dsilva High School in Dadar on Wednesday. ■ VIJAY BATE

## Morgue attendant dies hours after mother

Nine KEM mortuary staffers have tested positive for COVID-19

mother had passed away too. "We had not informed him about his mother's death. But since he was an employee of the hospital, everyone knew him and someone must have broken the news to him," said the son.

The deceased was a resident of Kurla. He is survived by three children and his wife. The hospital's dean, Dr. Ramesh Bharmal, said the patient had many co-morbidities.

"We kept telling him not to go to work, but he said many of his colleagues were not reporting for duty," said his 22-year-old son. While the mortuary staff member was admitted to Sion hospital on May 21, his mother had been admitted two days before.

"He was fine, moving around in the ward. But his condition suddenly deteriorated on the evening

## FILM REVIEWS



## The many faces of domestic abuse

Nandita Das' short film brings out the patriarchy, mental and physical violence, and gender roles of parenting, experienced during the lockdown

KENNETH ROSARIO

'Shadow pandemic' is a term often used for the rise in domestic abuse cases world over, as women and children are forced to stay indoors along with abusive husbands and fathers, in the ongoing lockdown. This pandemic, growing in the dark, away from the spotlight of coronavirus, is often lost in numbers, helplines and statistics. Filmmaker and actor Nandita Das has given a face to this

shadow pandemic by making a short film, *Listen to Her*, in the confines of her home, illustrating the case of one such woman, who is facing violence.

The film, supported by various UN agencies like the UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women and the South Asia Foundation (Madanjeet Singh Foundation), opens with a working mother, played by Das, who is juggling an office meeting on a video call with her colleagues, taking

care of her son and fulfilling the demands of her husband. In this already tense atmosphere, where her attention is divided, she gets a call from a woman who is being abused by her husband. The short film, in a matter of minutes, chronicles the inner turmoil of Das, bringing out the various layers in which women, who are confined at home during the lockdown, are dealing with patriarchy, mental and physical violence, and gender roles of parenting. Whether it is making coffee for a lazy husband in a privileged household or dealing with domestic violence, the film drives home a pertinent point.

Made with limited re-

sources and cloistered in an apartment, Das sticks to the basics of storytelling, in both visuals and narrative, and cleverly portrays violence, solely through audio. In the ordinariness and banality of the circumstances, Das' short film finds its universality. The purpose of the film, which ultimately links you to a helpline, is to spread awareness and bolster women to speak up about issues, ranging from violence to everyday sexism. As we follow the situations of the two women, who come from two distinct socio-economic backgrounds, the film successfully highlights the fact that sexism and patriarchy know no class confines. *Listen to Her* is on Nandita Das' YouTube channel.

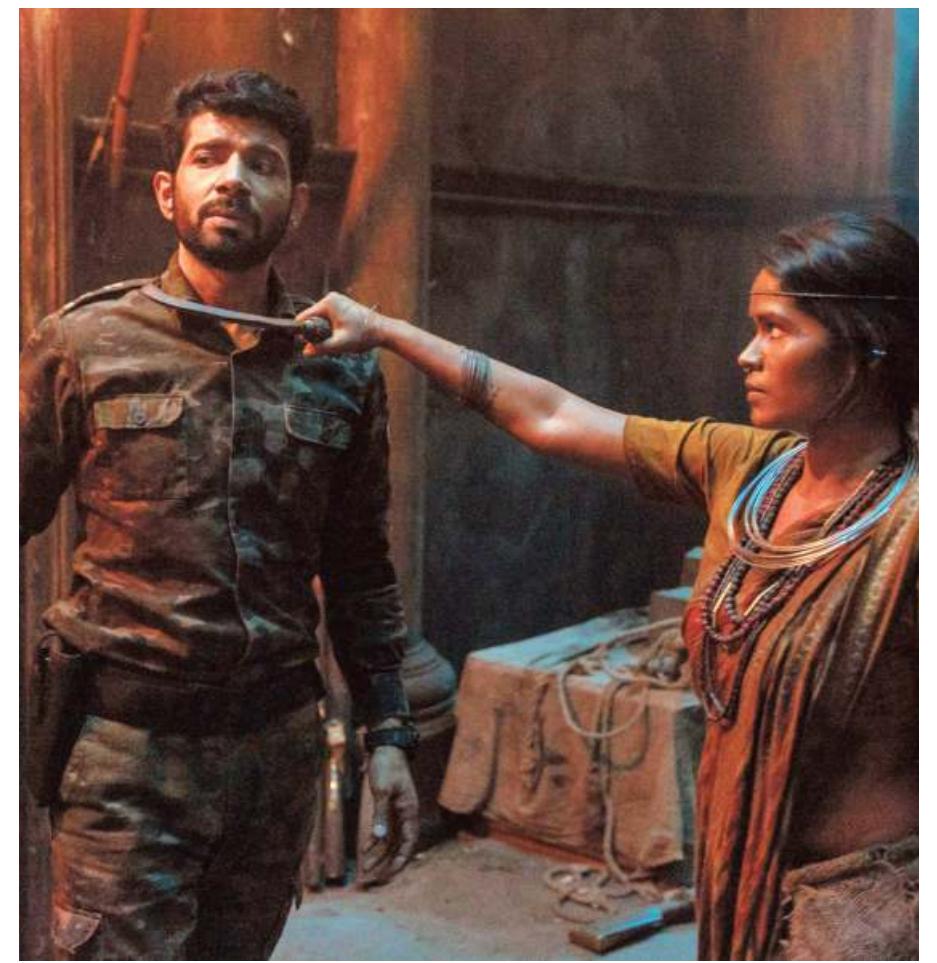
**Silent voices:** Filmmaker and actor Nandita Das has given a face to domestic violence in *Listen to Her*.  
■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

For any film or television venture into the paranormal to resonate widely, there requires a certain suspension of belief. This rings true in the case of *Betaal*, Netflix's latest four-part horror show. Created by Patrick Graham, who also made *Ghoul*, the series attempts to reinvent the zombie genre with an army of British Redcoats who return from the dead to victimise a village of tribals. Simultaneously, the unfortunate villagers are also slandered as naxals by corrupt industrialists hungry to further their own nefarious agendas.

DEBORAH CORNELIOUS

The premise is original with enough heft to carry forward its zombie central theme, especially in its treatment of adapting the story of *Vikram Aur Betaal* into a contemporary setting. Graham's zombies are part vampires with the powers of hypnosis and a chilling blood thirst that ticks off all the right horror boxes. As promised, the directors, Graham with Nikhil Mahajan slowly build the fear factor introducing the 'Betaal' curse that could wipe out humanity.

For the first three episodes, *Betaal* comes along nicely, even if it doesn't reinvent the horror wheel.



**Living dead:** *Betaal* could have been a worthy contribution to Indian horror.

■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

### Betaal

**DIRECTOR:** Patrick Graham and Nikhil Mahajan.  
**CAST:** Vineet Kumar Singh, Aahana Kumra, Jatin Goswami, Suchitra Pillai, Siddharth Menon, Manjiri Pupal

**STORYLINE:** A tunnel in a tribal village holds a secret that will unleash zombie Redcoats

scene involving the repair of an ancient cannon (in mere minutes with magically procured tools) is jaw dropping. Not in the good way. Other realisations come into focus: zombies awake after centuries with fetid faces and rank hair have pristine red coats and boots. At some point, they drag themselves as if in a stupor. Other times, they're faster than quicksilver. A child (Syna Anand) - the object of boss zombie, Colonel Lynedoch's (Richard Dillane) sacrificial desires - continues to gnaw on nerves with her inability to contribute to saving her own life.

As far as performances

go, the actors have played their parts with what has been offered to them: perfectly adequate. With above par production value, *Betaal* at least looks and feels the part of a grim zombie escapade. But its shaky narrative, which violently falls apart, wrecks what could have been a worthy contribution to the oft-wronged genre. It's unfortunate because the show is not only backed by Shah Rukh Khan but horror behemoth Blumhouse Productions too. To put it succinctly, *Betaal* tried to deliver the chills but spectacularly froze instead. *Betaal* is currently streaming on Netflix

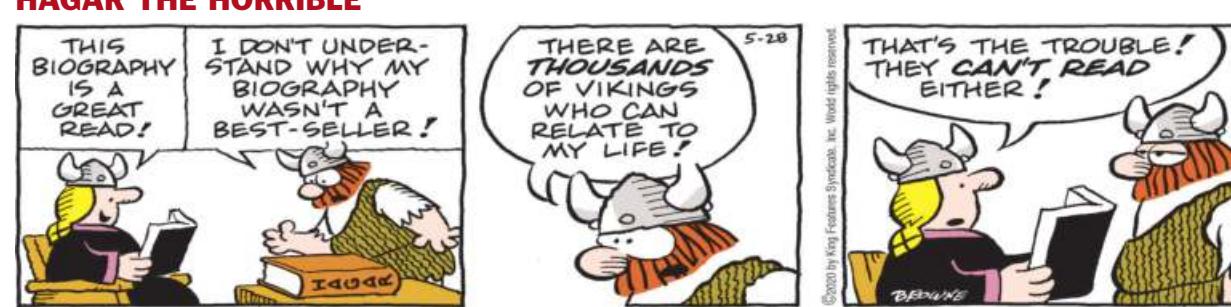
### POOCH CAFE



### PEANUTS



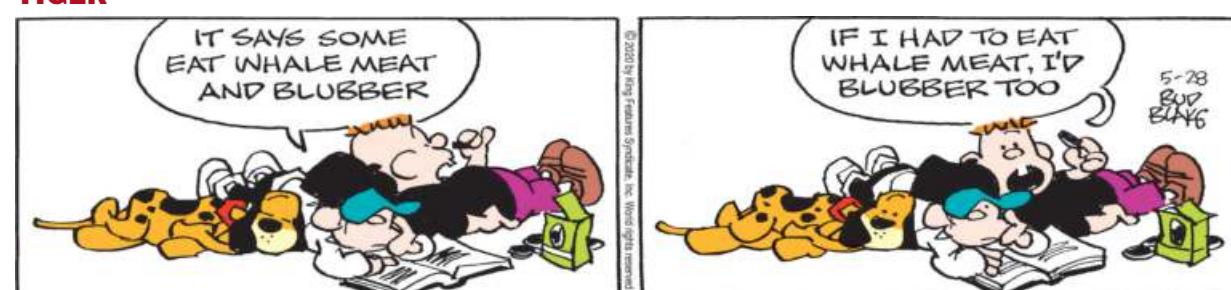
### HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



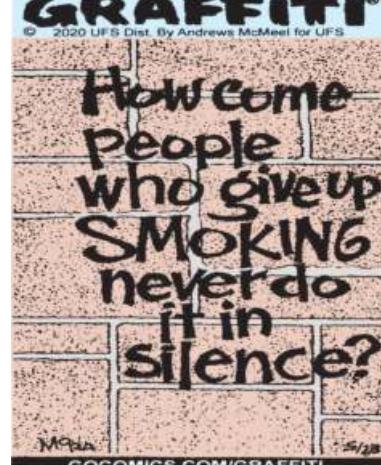
### CALVIN AND HOBBES



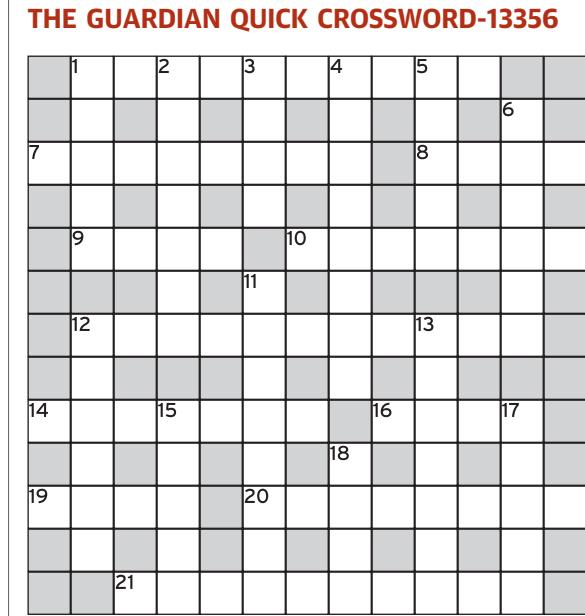
### TIGER



### GRAFFITI



### THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13356



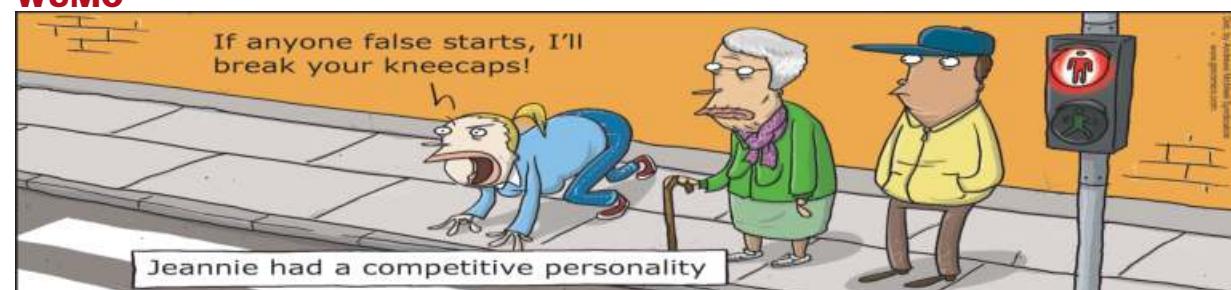
To play The Guardian Quick Crossword, The Hindu Cryptic crossword, Sudoku & other puzzles online, scan the QR code.

- 11 Conversation (8)  
12 Don (6)  
13 Feast (7)  
15 Make broader (5)  
17 Indulged to the full (5)  
18 Food fish (4)

Solution will appear on May 30, 2020.

Solution No. 13356

### WUMO



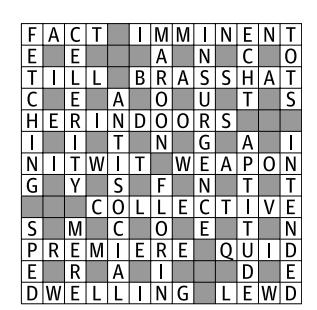
### HEALTH CAPSULES



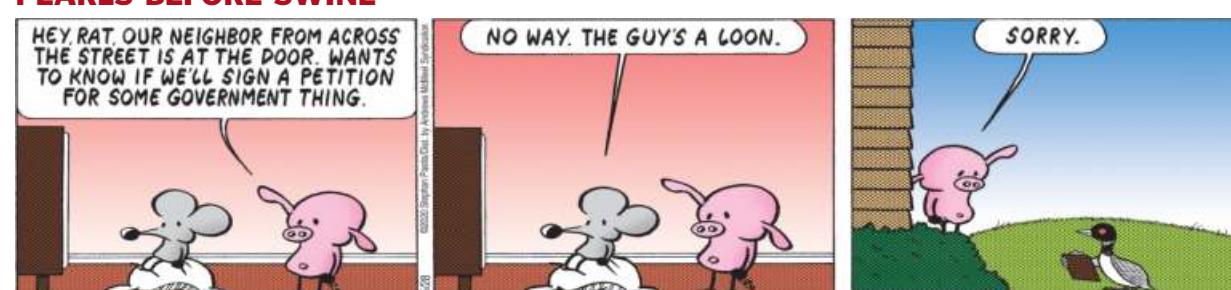
### THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13356



- Across  
1 Campanologist (4,6)  
7 Prophecy (8)  
8 Cleans – bottle (4)  
9 Sunk fence (2-2)  
10 Container for coal (7)  
12 Modish (11)  
14 Bluebottle (7)  
16 Drinking places (frequented by barristers?) (4)  
19 Viral infection (4)
- Down  
21 Showing curiosity (10)  
2 Market stall – Lincoln's assassin (5)  
2 Bloodsuckers (7)  
3 Wander (4)  
4 Becoming aware of (8)  
5 Fungal disease of cereals (5)  
6 Labour prime minister, d. 1967 (6)  
20 Tip (8)  
21 Imminent (10)



### PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



# MVA allies dismiss BJP claims on aid from Centre to State

Shiv Sena, NCP, Congress debunk claims of political instability

ALOK DESHPANDE  
MUMBAI

The allies in the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in the State – Shiv Sena, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and Congress – launching an attack on the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the ruling coalition at the Centre, for not providing financial aid to Maharashtra to tackle the crisis in the wake of the novel coronavirus pandemic.

Maharashtra Congress president and Revenue Minister Balasaheb Thorat, Shiv Sena leader and Transport Minister Anil Parab, and State unit president of the Nationalist Congress Party and Irrigation Minister Jayant Patil held a joint press conference demanding that BJP leader and the Leader of Opposition Devendra Fadnavis justify his claims that the Centre till now provided aid of ₹28,104 crore and the Union government's COVID-19 package would give ₹78,500 crore to Maharashtra.



Together, always: Senior Congress leader Balasaheb Thorat (left), Anil Parab (Shiv Sena) and NCP's Jayant Patil at a press conference on Wednesday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The leaders also debunked speculations of political instability at their first joint press conference after rumours of instability in the State government and the possibility of President's Rule began to emerge.

#### GST dues

In a point-by-point rebuttal to the claims of the BJP leader, Mr. Parab said, "The Centre is yet to clear the GST dues of over ₹18,000 crore from 2019-20. We have not

received anything new. Whatever the Centre has given is through ongoing schemes. Maharashtra has not received anything special. Where is the money that Mr. Fadnavis is talking about?"

Asked about bodies being kept in hospital corridors, Mr. Parab said he had gone into the details of such photos. "As per the prescribed procedure, a process involving police and hospital authorities has to be completed after any death related to corona

rona takes place in a hospital. This takes 45 to 50 minutes. During the period, photos of bodies kept in a corridor were taken. We are working to reduce the time and the results will be seen soon," he said.

#### 'Nothing concrete'

Mr. Patil said Mr. Fadnavis's statements raised doubts over whether he was a friend or foe of Maharashtra. Providing data on actual aid received from the Centre, Mr. Patil said the Modi government had not given a single PPE kit or ventilator to Maharashtra despite demands.

Mr. Thorat clarified that former Congress president Rahul Gandhi's statement was not only twisted but also his actual statement congratulating the Maharashtra government in its performance to tackle corona was ignored. "This government is like a fist. The Opposition is creating unrest. They may try and do so but we are together," he said.

## Undertrial found dead in Taloja jail

RAINA ASSAINAR  
NAVI MUMBAI

An undertrial at Taloja jail was found dead in the toilet attached to his cell on Wednesday. Balu Gadsinge (33) was in the jail since 2019 in connection with four separate cases.

He was arrested for two murder cases by the Beed police and was in Kalyan jail till last year.

"He had created some trouble in the jail and was booked twice under Section 353 of the IPC (assault or criminal force to deter public servant from discharge of his duty). There were a total of four cases against Gadsinge. Since he was a trouble maker, he was lodged in a separate cell. On Wednesday morning when our guard went for regular rounds, he did not find Gadsinge and started looking for him and found the body in the toilet," said Kaustubh Kurlekar, Superintendent of Taloja jail.

The jail personnel informed Kharhgar police who registered a case of ac-

#### Helplines

BMC mental health helpline:  
022 24131212 (24x7)

Vandrevala Foundation:  
18602662345/  
18002333330 (24x7)

I Call:  
022-25521111  
(8 a.m. to 10 p.m.  
Monday to Saturday)

The Samaritans Mumbai:  
8422984528/  
8422984529/  
8422984530  
(5 p.m.- 8 p.m. all days)

cidental death and the body handed over to JJ Hospital. "The reason behind his step is not clear. It could be because his family members, including his wife, had broken of ties with him. He must have been tense because of the murder cases," an officer from Kharhgar police station said.

His relative who stays in Kalyan has been informed.

## News of Army deployment in Mumbai a rumour

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
MUMBAI

A rumour about deployment of Army in novel coronavirus hotspots of Mumbai and Pune is being "deliberately" spread on social media, Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh said on Wednesday and added that strict action will be taken against all such rumour-mongers.

"Rumour is deliberately being spread through WhatsApp and other social

media that the Army will be deployed in Mumbai and Pune. This is completely false. @MahaCyber has initiated action against those spreading such rumours," Mr. Deshmukh tweeted. He also stressed that the State government has zero tolerance for rumours.

Earlier this month, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray too had dismissed similar speculations on Army deployment in Mumbai.

## Govt modifies law on forest rights

+ Tribals now have the right to appeal

ALOK DESHPANDE  
MUMBAI

Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari has modified the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, allowing rightful claimants of forest rights to appeal against decisions of the district level committee (DLC).

Activists, however, are concerned that this will lead to further delays in implementation of forest laws.

A notification issued on May 18, 2020, said the Governor has modified Section 6 of the Act, in its application to Scheduled Area of the State of Maharashtra, in exercise of the powers conferred on him by Schedule V of the Constitution.

The Governor's office said the notification is important to provide justice to tribals whose 'individual or community forest right' has been rejected by the DLC, constituted under the Forest Rights Act (FRA).

The notification applies to areas covered in the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act in the State and allows appeal provision against the DLC's decision.

## Pay daily allowance to contractual workers: HC

NMMC told it was unfair to differentiate them from regular employees

SONAM SAIGAL  
MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court on Wednesday directed the Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation (NMMC) to extend the regular employees' daily allowance of ₹300 to contractual workers who were also at the forefront of the COVID-19 battle.

Justice S.J. Kathawalla, who was hearing a petition by the workers' union, Samaj Samata Kamgar Sangh, on behalf of 6,277 people employed with the NMMC, said it would "extremely be unfair and unjust" to differentiate between contractual and regular workers who were

risking their lives.

The petition said the corporation was extending a special daily allowance of ₹300 to its employees and officers but had refused to extend the benefit to contractual workers as they were employed by contractors, and not directly by NMMC.

The union informed the court that 3,261 contractual workers were involved in solid waste management, including day-to-day road cleaning and transportation of garbage, 693 workers were employed in the health department, which included duties at four civic-run hospitals and 23 urban health

posts across Navi Mumbai. It also stated that 65 workers were employed to clean cemeteries, and all the workers were doing their duty by risking their lives.

The petition sought extension of daily allowance and Central insurance scheme to the contractual workers.

The NMMC argued that the workers were employed by contractors to carry out the work and that they were not entitled to the benefits of officers or workers employed by the corporation.

The court, however, said the risk taken by the workers in carrying out COVID-19-related duties for the corpora-

tion cannot be differentiated. "The corporation is seen to be making a tacit statement that the workers, though discharging their duties as the corporation's own employees, are either not 'risking their lives', or despite doing so, need to be paid differently only due to their employer being the contractor and not the corporation.

To say the least, this would be an extremely unfair and unjust yardstick to use, to value human lives differently," the court said.

It ordered NMMC to pay certified workers the special allowance and adjourned the hearing to June 12.



Back in business: Mumbai airport operated its full quota of 50 flights on Wednesday. ■ VIJAY BATE

## Flights to Kolkata from Mumbai to begin today

No flight to Chennai, Goa till May 31

ADITYA ANAND  
MUMBAI

To meet the demand of travellers, Mumbai airport will start operating flights to Kolkata from Thursday as West Bengal opens its airports. IndiGo and SpiceJet will operate one flight each in both directions.

On Wednesday, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA) handled 4,993 passengers – 3,592 at departures and 1,401 at arrivals. The highest passenger load factor was seen on the Delhi route.

Six airlines – Air India, Air Asia India, Alliance Air, IndiGo, SpiceJet and Vistara – connected Mumbai to 14 sectors. Under the temporary domestic flight schedule being followed by all airlines, CSMIA is connected to a set of airports, one or two of which keep getting added or subtracted.

The first flight (Air India) on Wednesday departed for Ahmedabad at 6.15 a.m. while the first to arrive (IndiGo) was from Lucknow at 8.20 a.m.

As per the flight schedules announced till May 31 by the GVK-led Mumbai International Airport Ltd (MIAL), while IndiGo and SpiceJet are adding the flight to Kolkata, there will be none to Chennai or Goa.

Air Asia India will stick to flying to Delhi and Kochi. Air India will operate a flight to Bengaluru instead of Ahmedabad on Thursday. It will however continue its one flight to Delhi.

Vistara will fly three flights to Delhi instead of the two it operated on Wednesday.

Late in the evening, Union Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Singh Puri tweeted, "People who were stranded in different parts of the country are now able to fly to be with their loved ones. Till 5 p.m. on day 3 today, there have already been 354 departures and 288 arrivals with a total of 47,917 people at various airports. The numbers continue to grow."

#### Special flight

On Wednesday, KLM operated a special flight from Schiphol airport in Amsterdam to Mumbai with 276 fliers, including passengers from Netherlands (168), Mexico (52), Peru (47) and Portugal (8). Indian ambassador Venu Rajamony saw off the passengers at the airport. "There were tears of joy and heartfelt gratitude as the individuals thanked the Embassy for coming to their aid," the Indian mission said in a statement.

#### WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD; POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP, INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 17.30 HRS)

Forecast for Thursday: Heavy to very heavy rainfall likely at isolated places over Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, south interior Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Kerala, sub-Himalayan West Bengal

CITY RAIN MAX MIN CITY RAIN MAX MIN

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	79.8	28.0	27.0	Kozhikode	—	36.4	28.8
Ahmedabad	—	43.8	28.2	Kurnool	—	43.3	31.4
Aizawl	38	25.3	19.3	Lucknow	—	42.6	27.9
Allahabad	0.8	46.6	30.6	Madurai	—	40.2	28.2
Bengaluru	17.6	32.6	20.9	Mangaluru	—	36.0	28.4
Bhopal	—	44.0	29.9	Mumbai	—	34.8	27.5
Bhubaneswar	—	36.3	28.1	Mysuru	3.2	33.0	22.8
Chandigarh	—	42.9	25.7	New Delhi	—	46.7	28.2
Chennai	—	37.7	29.2	Patna	—	32.4	28.5
Coimbatore	—	36.0	26.5	Port Blair	0.1	30.0	26.5
Dehradun	—	40.1	21.2	Puducherry	—	36.0	29.0
Gangtok	0.5	19.0	14.9	Pune	—	37.8	24.2
Goa	—	35.3	27.9	Raipur	—	45.6	31.0
Guwahati	67.6	29.8	20.3	Ranchi	—	32.6	28.5
Hubballi	—	37.0	24.0	Shillong	25.9	22.2	—
Hyderabad	—	42.3	30.6	Shimla	—	33.0	22.3
Imphal	23.6	22.5	17.4	Srinagar	—	30.8	10.4
Jaipur	—	44.8	33.6	Tiruvananthapuram	1.1	32.6	24.4
Kochi	0.6	32.6	26.8	Tiruchi	—	39.1	29.6
Kohima	63.8	24.2	14.4	Vijayawada	—	40.0	28.6
Kolkata	—	34.0	29	Visakhapatnam	—	34.0	29.6

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO <sub>2</sub>	NO <sub>x</sub>	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	—	28	22	...57	...83	■■■■■
Bengaluru	.7	33	39	—	128	■■■■■
Chennai	.4	23	94	...64	—	■■■■■
Delhi	10	90	26	...78	201	■■■■■
Hyderabad</						



## The swarm

The locusts in western parts add a new dimension to other disasters facing India

Just last week, eastern India was battered by one of the most powerful cyclones in decades and now, even as hundreds of lives are lost every day to the coronavirus, another danger lurks on the nation's west. A burgeoning locust swarm in Rajasthan, Gujarat and even parts of Madhya Pradesh threatens to amplify into an agrarian disaster. The desert locust, as a species, is the bane of agriculture. Monitoring and tackling periodic outbreaks of the marauding insects are among the objectives of the Locust Warning Organization (LWO) in Jodhpur. There were 13 locust upsurges from 1964 to 1997, and after 2010 there was "no large scale breeding" reported. Once a significant outbreak starts, it lasts for about two years, and then there is a quietus for about eight years. LWO officials say that the swarm building up is potentially the "worst in decades".

It is a testimony to its devastating potential that an arcane piece of legislation, The East Punjab Agricultural Pests, Diseases and Noxious Weeds Act, 1949, has a provision whereby a District Collector can "...call upon any male person not below the age of 14 years resident in the district to render all possible assistance ..." and there is potential imprisonment for failure to abide by the law. Antiquated as it may sound, it is a reminder that humanity's oldest blights – plague, pestilence – will never truly be eliminated. The breeding locusts which threaten farming are an indirect fallout of the warming Indian Ocean, as some meteorologists suggest. Last year, there were fears that the monsoon may fall short because of an El Niño, or warming of the Equatorial Pacific. However there was an extreme flip. By July it was evident that a positive Indian Ocean Dipole, or relatively higher temperature in the western Indian Ocean, was in the works. This led to record-breaking rainfall in India – then a cause for cheer – as well as in eastern Africa. But moist African deserts precipitated locust breeding and favourable rain-bearing winds aided their transport towards India. On the other hand, coronavirus quarantines meant that routine coordination activities involving India, Pakistan and Afghanistan regarding spraying pesticides were halted. While it is some comfort that there is now limited standing crop in India, forecasts are for good rains in Rajasthan, and, paradoxically, conducive conditions for locust breeding during the sowing season. A less highlighted aspect of global warming is that it may link disparate disasters – floods, pandemics and pestilence – amplifying the potency of each. Improved science and technology is only making it clearer that man's follies transcend borders. This makes it necessary to abandon any territorial blame game and focus on policies that will ensure an equitable, sustainable future.

## Rising tide

China's effort to tighten grip on Hong Kong with tough laws may not help its cause

Protests and violence returned to Hong Kong on May 24. In scenes that became all-too-familiar through much of last year, police used water cannons, tear gas, and pepper spray, as a protest march descended into clashes between protesters and riot police. The weekend's march had originally been planned ahead of a debate in Hong Kong's Legislative Council (LegCo) on a new national anthem bill, which would punish anyone who insulted China's anthem with up to three years in prison. The protest assumed significance when two days before the march, China's central government stunned Hong Kong's pro-democracy parties by tabling a new national security bill, as the National People's Congress met in Beijing. The bill, expected to be passed when the NPC's annual session ends on Thursday, urges Hong Kong's legislature to pass national security laws "as soon as possible". Else, the bill leaves open the possibility that Beijing could bypass LegCo, declaring that the NPC is "authorized to draft laws" on security for Hong Kong. What has concerned pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong is a new provision for China's national security organs to "set up institutions" in the Special Administrative Region.

Under the Basic Law that has governed Hong Kong since 1997, the SAR has a high degree of autonomy "to enjoy executive, legislative and independent judicial power, including that of final adjudication"; only defence and foreign affairs are to be handled by Beijing. Article 23 of the law requires Hong Kong to pass national security legislation, but the law makes clear it is Hong Kong's legislature that enjoys the power to make and repeal laws – the bedrock of the "one country, two systems" model. In 2003, a national security bill allowing the shutting down of seditious newspapers and carrying out warrantless searches was withdrawn after protests. Beijing now argues that last year's protests, blamed on "external forces", underlined the need for a new law to curb "acts of secession and subversion". The timing of the move may reveal its motivations. Hong Kong's legislative elections are in September and the pro-Beijing camp fears losing control of LegCo, even if its unusual rules have stacked it with pro-Beijing lawmakers. Only half of the 70 seats are directly elected; the rest are nominated. Yet such is the rising tide of support for pro-democracy parties that Beijing worries it could lose the two-thirds majority needed for any amendments to the Basic Law. The pro-democracy camp swept November's district council elections, seen as a referendum on the youth-driven protests. A record 70% turnout won the pro-democracy candidates 390 of 452 seats. The elections demonstrated that public support for full democracy is growing. The new piece of legislation is aimed at tightening Beijing's grip over Hong Kong, but it may well end up having the opposite effect. Hong Kong cannot be won without its people.

# A moment to trust the teacher

The novel coronavirus crisis is the right time to create the energy for examination reform



KRISHNA KUMAR

**A** public examination in the middle of the novel coronavirus pandemic is hard to imagine. That is what the government of Tamil Nadu has decided. It will conduct the Grade X board examination from June 15. The announcement carries the usual reassurance that all arrangements have been made. Indeed, special arrangements have been made. These include sparse seating to meet the medical requirement of physical distancing between candidates. No more than 10 will sit in a room. To enable this to happen, the number of exam centres has been radically increased from over 3,000 to 12,690.

### A ritual

Nothing in the above paragraph can remind the reader that we are referring to 15-year-old children. In the discourse of public exams, children mutate into "candidates"; their names are replaced by roll numbers, schools become exam centres and teachers turn into invigilators. Every child knows how to behave in the examination hall. All examinations follow a strict ritual that has remained unchanged for over a century. A board exam has little to do with education or learning. The values it encourages children to imbibe are all negative. The prominent ones are fear of failing, sacrifice of joy and selfish competitiveness and submission to an opaque sys-

tem. The urgency felt by the Tamil Nadu government to take the Class X examination in the middle of a health emergency can only be understood as the expression of a mindset rather than reasoning. The annual exam is seen as the culmination of the academic calendar. The set pattern it follows ensures that the exam questions will have no intellectual substance. They all require rote memory. If there is any real purpose these exams can serve, it is to select a few who can proceed further and eliminate the rest. This objective is attained by dividing students into "pass"- "fail" categories and into divisions based on marks. .

### A middle path to consider

This standard argument does not fit the State of Tamil Nadu. The Class X result last year placed more than 95% of the total number of students who took the exam in the "pass" category. In several districts, the pass percentage was close to 99%. So, the exam does not fulfil the structural purpose that other States, especially the northern States, might have, such as reducing the numbers so that the limited infrastructure for the higher secondary or +2 stage proves sufficient. In Tamil Nadu, most children are likely to move on to Grade XI in the same school. This is the main ground for the recommendation made in the National Curriculum Framework (2005) for making the Grade X exam voluntary. This is a middle path that the Tamil Nadu government can consider this summer. Whenever schools reopen, children who want to take the board exam can do so. Others can carry on in the next grade.



All that the matriculate exam might achieve in Tamil Nadu is to sort students, on the basis of their marks, into different subject streams. This is hardly a worthwhile reason to risk the spread of the virus or to harass the young.

It is a matter of belief that marks attained in the Grade X Board exam are a reasonable basis for judging who should study what. One

might consider this as a valid argument if the exam papers and marking scheme of the Grade X exam had some substance. The questions are so uniformly inane, and quite a few so mechanically silly, that a good or bad score shows little more than preparedness for facing the exam. That is all that the exam judges: Here is a question asked in an earlier exam: "Why is world peace an essential one?" There is a fixed answer to it and the teacher's job is to ensure that the child gives just that answer rather than say that the question is poorly worded and is, in fact, a bit of nonsense.

### The meaning of 'refresh'

It is the job of teachers to ensure that every child is all set for the kind of questions that are asked. Teachers are rightly complaining that the notice period given for the June exam is much too short to "refresh" the children. By "refresh" they mean activate children's rote memory into perfor-

mance mode. Classes had to be suspended just when teachers had completed winding up the rote memory key. Three months later, the key has shed its tension. If you want the toy to dance out the programmed steps on the required date and time, give more time: that is what the teachers are saying. Considering their highly compromised professional and intellectual role, they are right. Had they enjoyed some real autonomy in teaching and assessment, they would have told the government not to worry about using exam scores to sort children into subject streams.

If you visit the website of Tamil Nadu's Directorate of Examinations and study last year's Class X results, you will come across this interesting statement. "The highest pass percentage was recorded in Tirupur district at 98.53 percent, followed by Ramanathapuram with 98.48 percent and Namakkal with 98.45 percent". When I read this statement, I wondered wherein lay its meaning or significance. The pass percentage of the three districts was almost identical. Moreover, it was so high that the small difference cannot be suspected to carry or convey a message that exam results often carry. No one can convincingly argue that the children and teachers of Namakkal are not as good as Ramanathapuram because the pass percentage of the latter is .03% more. The obvious fact is that all three districts have done well.

So, what exactly is the board asking us to notice by highlighting the micro difference in their pass percentages? A similar point can be made about the tag line claiming that "girls outshine boys" just because the girls' pass percentage

is slightly higher.

### Crisis and change

Some disasters teach lessons; the experience of going through a crisis can create the desire for reform. But it is hard to imagine that the novel coronavirus crisis will create energy for examination reform. A system so well-established as the board exam does not easily yield to pressure for improvement. The board system has successfully resisted the criticism and recommendations articulated by countless committees and individuals. Even a minor improvement in the exam system will demand an effort sustained over several years during which a regime may change and the officer-in-charge may get shifted or retire. If we do not wish to feel cynical, a good starting point for change is to think of an alternative name for the certificate a child gets after passing the Class X Board exam: "school leaving certificate". Once upon a time, the matriculate examination carried a lot of weight and only a handful proceeded towards further education. Today, the overwhelming majority of children do not want to leave the school after Class X. Tamil Nadu is among very few States left where the term 'school leaving certificate' is used. Ironically, these are the States with the highest rate of transition from Class X to XI. Let us hope a virulent virus will impel these States to drop an obsolete title. The next step will be to start trusting the teacher and nurture the growth of a school-based system of evaluation.

Krishna Kumar is a former Director of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT)

# The echo of migrant footfalls and the silence on policy

There are four things that need to be done in the country in the wake of the pandemic crisis



SANJOY HAZARIKA

**W**hen we hear the word migration, we think of Kerala and West Asia, or the United States and the West. However, the number of Indians who have migrated over the past decades to these geographies is minuscule compared to the vastness of the movement within the country. A few years ago, I came across an estimate of over 300 million for the scale of internal migration in India. This is nearly three times the official figures which are being cited now. The number is high because migration also takes place within a State, not just between States or across international borders. The estimate for China at the time was similar.

Across the world, every year, people migrate for work, livelihoods, marriage, seeking refuge, business and even peace of mind.

### A number that is growing

Last December, an economist provided figures, based on the 2011 national census, showing that the number of internal migrants had grown by another 100 million. Or that a third of India's population – one in every three Indians – are migrants. The figures are even more daunting when one realises that many of them are from the poorer States of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha although Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana send substantial numbers while there are smaller groups from the

### Northeast.

Most of them are unskilled, semi-skilled labour or skilled labour.

Apart from anecdotal social and political science, the scale of the movement across India, within States, not just across inter-State borders is breathtaking.

According to World Bank economist, Supriyo De, "The number of internal migrants in India was 450 million as per the most recent 2011 Census. This is an increase of 45% over the 309 million recorded in 2001. This far exceeds the population growth rate of 18% across 2001-2011. Internal migrants as percentage of population increased from 30% in 2001 to 37% in 2011." The figure 450 million is more than double the population of Bangladesh, it is under half the population of Europe and more than that of the U.S. These are the people who with their blood, sweat, hands and tears, build this nation. And the central government, many State governments and many of us have let them down horribly.

They are the people who were given a four-hour warning of the first lockdown, which has been followed by successive extensions by the Centre. When they found no transport – train and bus – they chose to walk. They walked by day on the highways and they walked by night, they walked on broken roads to avoid police beatings and barricades, they tried to hitch rides on empty trucks and even cement dumpers. They rested by night, under the stars, sometimes on railway tracks. So fearful were they of sarkar and harm that would come to them and their loved ones if they were caught. That is the fear of and loathing for authority that ordinary people nourish in this country. But the



love of home was greater than both. Ultimately this desperate longing for home killed a number of them, one group of 14 most violently and tragically on a railway track. Frugal meals of rotis, some vegetables and fruit lay scattered after the dance of death along with their many sandals and clothes after being mowed down by a goods train as they slept the sleep of the exhausted and then the dead.

### Use of the military

It is important to dwell on this because of some extraordinary, publicly expressed opinions by some who have advocated the use of the armed forces to tackle such situations. The idea has been that the military should open up its sprawling and efficient networks, processes and personnel. Such views were being aired even as stand-offs were continuing to take place, and still continue, between Indian and Chinese troops in Sikkim and Ladakh, thousands of kilometres apart, underlining the core tasks of an army.

A former Navy chief, advocating the idea the armed forces should be at the heart of a massive relief operation, said that "the armed forces have tremendous resources, they have the organisation and can jump in blind folded and render instant succour." This is a laudable wish but spoken with casualness for the value of human life. It is not an issue of whether Army

personnel have personal protective equipment or not – if they do, and these may be to handle biological attacks, should the Army reveal its strategic arsenal and also expose itself to huge risks?

Such remarks reveal the usual knee jerk response to the use of the military during crises, as a first resort and not the last. Not only that it underlines a complete lack of comprehension of the complex dynamics of migration and why people leave or return. As the economist cited earlier, Sudipto De, said, "Internal migration, the movement of people within a country, results in a more efficient allocation of human resources to sectors and regions where they are better utilized."

We have seen too often, and for too long, the cynical use of the Army for dealing with issues arising out of political failure to engage early on in ethnic strife, leading to bloody confrontations and the loss of life of civilians, soldiers as well as armed non-state rebels. We are familiar with the painful history of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act and the way it has been used to tackle insurrections in the Northeast.

This is a time to decentralise political power and arm the States with greater decision-making capacity. India lives in the States, not in Delhi or State capitals. Our States need to be provided more funds; the Centre needs to sustain, support, emulate and reward/award those like Kerala which have done remarkably well in this crisis. It is not a time to concentrate more powers in an already hugely centralised and arbitrary dispensation.

There are four things which need to be done, as the flight home, the flight from nowhere,

has shown to a waiting, distressed country.

One, relearn sustainable economics at the feet of Mahatma Gandhi not the NITI Ayog or the Reserve Bank of India – India still lives in villages and small towns not cities.

Second: rebuild the rural economy based on building the household. That is the key and the target. Use the Swachh Bharat network to strengthen cottage industries which have been killed by huge industry (which cannot work at more than nominal capacity); give the latter incentives to buy from rural manufacturers and thus generate rural employment, not migration or distress, so that farm incomes are supplemented. Equip and empower artisans with better skills, design, capacity and technology, access to capital and markets.

### Have a plan

Three: formalise Work from Home and design a Migration Plan – support people to work in their States or near their cluster of villages so that they are not far from home especially after this wrenching experience where employers have dismissed and disowned them, governments have failed them and, for the most, non-governmental organisations and relief workers have come to their rescue

Four: Move funding from current planning which benefits corporates to States, panchayats and municipalities; in addition, increase allocation on health, women, children and education to 20% of the national Budget and release these funds to the States.

Sanjoy Hazarika is International Director, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI). The views expressed are personal

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

### Nehruvian ideology

As a tribute to Jawaharlal Nehru on his death anniversary, the article, "Continue India's tryst with Nehruvian ideology" (Editorial page, May 27) has showered lavish praise on independent India's first Prime Minister. While agreeing with many of his observations about Nehru's commitment to secularism, one finds that the writer's insinuation about Patel's secularist credentials seems unwarranted. Hindu nationalism was an essential component of the Independence movement. The nation has paid a heavy price for Nehru's failure to accommodate the

legitimate aspirations and concerns of Hindu nationalist leaders in the party who cooperated in the drafting of a secularist constitution. Blinded by ideological puritanism, and ignoring India's cultural history, Nehru erred in conflating Hindu nationalism as communalism, a folly that successive Congress regimes perpetuated. Treating secularism as an ideology and as a political slogan to woo certain constituencies, the Congress overstretched its meaning to gain anti-majority undertones. It may appear as counter-intuitive, Nehru's failure to

invest secularism with a broader and fair vision that treated all faiths equally sowed the seeds for the BJP's spectacular rise to power.

V.N. MUKUNDARAJAN,  
Thiruvananthapuram

While appreciating and acknowledging his calibre, charisma and administrative capabilities, it is a harsh and bitter reality that Nehru treated the Congress party as his personal fiefdom, stifled inner-party democracy and created a coterie around him. The resulting casualty has been the lack of transparency and inner-party democracy in the Grand Old Party of India.

which continues to be its perennial bane to this day. The former Prime Minister cannot absolve himself from the responsibility of finding an amicable solution to the Kashmir imbroglio at a time when India maintained cordial relations with the United States and the USSR. It is rather strange that the Congress which deviated from the Nehruvian ideology in terms of economic policy more than two decades back, swears by his legacy for political gains.

B. SURESH KUMAR,  
Coimbatore

Court steps in

That the Supreme Court of India has finally turned its

### CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

A sentence in the Editorial page article titled "Continue India's tryst with Nehruvian ideology" (May 27, 2020) read: "It is also important to note that Nehru was in the U.S. at this time [1947] and Patel was at the helm in India." It should have read: "It is also important to note that Nehru was in the U.S. and Patel was at the helm in India on October 17, 1949 when Article 370 was eventually adopted by the Constituent Assembly of India."

The first Editorial "For farms and farmers" (May 25, 2020) said: "Besides the Centre's PM-KISAN scheme that provides ₹6,000 to farm families owning less than five acres of land, Telangana, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh have similar cash transfer programmes for farmers." As rightly pointed out by a reader, the PM-KISAN scheme originally started out for small farm families owning less than two hectares of land. However, after the Lok Sabha polls, it was expanded to all land-owning farm households (with some exceptions) irrespective

# Enjoying the fruits of their labour

Farmers deserve the freedom to market their produce at a place of their choice



M. VENKAIAH NAIDU



"Farmers are the cornerstone of food security of our country." Farmers harvest rice in a field on the outskirts of Bhubaneswar. ■ AP

Today, India is a leading producer of a variety of agricultural and allied produce and exporter of some of them. This is due to the relentless hard work and efforts of our farmers against the odds. They are the epitome of the *Nishkam Karma* philosophy taught by Krishna to Arjuna during the Kurukshetra War: "Karmany Vadhikaraste Ma Phaleshu Kada Chana" (Do your duty without expecting the fruits of your labour). Farmers toil day and night, through winter and summer, whether or not they get adequate returns. But they are not the masters of the price of their toil. As the son of a farmer, I have been witness to the trials and tribulations of farmers.

If any class of economic agents of our country has been denied the constitutional right of freedom of trade, it is farmers. They don't have the freedom of selling their produce even in their neighbourhood. Remunerative price is still a mirage for them. Their farm incomes are at the mercy of markets, middlemen and money lenders. For every rupee that a farmer makes, others in the supply chain get much more. Both farmers and consumers are the sufferers of the exploitative procurement and marketing of farm produce. Despite increasing public investments in irrigation and other infrastructure, the steadily rising institutional credit given to farmers, and minimum support price due to the efforts of various governments over the years, farmers are shackled when it comes to selling their produce.

#### Restrictions on farmers

This exploitation has its roots in the Bengal famine of 1943, World War II, and the droughts and food shortages of the 1960s. The Essential Commodities Act, 1955, and the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) Acts of the States are the principle sources of violation of the rights of farmers to sell their produce at a price of their choice. These two laws severely restrict the options of farm-

ers to sell their produce. Farmers continue to be the victims of a buyers' market. This is the principal cause of their exploitation. Renowned farm scientist M.S. Swaminathan has for long argued for the right of farmers to sell their produce as they deem fit.

The country is still far from ensuring efficient value chains for farm produce for want of required infrastructure like cold storage, stocking facilities, and transport of perishable commodities. Often, farmers are forced to dump their produce on the roads or offer it to cattle.

Farmers are the cornerstone of food security of our country. We have come a long way from the ship-to-mouth existence under the PL480 programme of the U.S. to being the leading producer of many kinds of farm produce. But farmers have not got their due. All that they have been getting are platitudes on ceremonial occasions and in the legislatures during the customary debates on their plight. Farmers were assured that restrictions on the freedom of marketing would be removed, but that assurance was never kept. Despite that, farmers never stopped work and continued to feed the nation.

Given the economic disparities in the country, the interests of consumers need to be protected. But should that be at the cost of the producers of the very commodities that the consumers need? For various reasons, a balance in this regard could not be struck. The restrictive trade and marketing policies being practised with

respect to agricultural prices have substantially eroded the incomes of farmers. A study on agricultural policies in India by the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations-Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2018), co-authored by the renowned farm economist Ashok Gulati, was published with startling revelations. It concluded that the restrictions on agricultural marketing amounted to 'implicit taxation' on farmers to the tune of ₹45 lakh crore from 2000-01 to 2016-17. This comes to ₹2.56 lakh crore per year. No other country does this.

#### Much-awaited freedom

While all and sundry have reiterated over the years that something must be done for farmers, the first formal actionable announcement on doing away with restrictions on the marketing freedom of farmers came only now. Further to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's announcement of a ₹20 lakh crore stimulus to rev up the economy, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman unveiled the details of a package for the agriculture and allied sectors.

Apart from the approximately ₹4 lakh crore support package for farming and allied sectors, aimed at improving infrastructure and enhancing credit support, the most welcome feature of this package is the firm commitment to rewriting the Essential Commodities Act and the APMC laws. The revision of these restrictive laws is long overdue and

will remove the hurdles that farmers face in getting a remunerative price for their produce by giving them more options to sell. This long-awaited revision needs to be undertaken with care and responsibility so that no space or scope is left for farmers to be exploited yet again. And this rewrite should be done at the earliest. While allowing several buyers to directly access the produce from the farmers, a strong and effective network of Farm Producers' Organisations should be created to enhance the bargaining power of farmers. This will ensure that individual farmers are not exploited. An effective law on contract farming is also the need of the hour, to secure incomes of farmers besides enabling private investments. Dr. Gulati, in a recent article, termed this announcement as "a 1991 moment for agriculture". I can't agree more with him. It is a major reform.

Yet another unique feature of this package has been its comprehensiveness towards improving the incomes of farmers through a range of activities. A study by the National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management has revealed that of the 3,500 farmers' suicides examined, there was no farmer who had supplementary incomes from dairy or poultry. The huge support to animal husbandry and fisheries in the stimulus package underlines the need for diversifying the income sources of farmers.

I recall that in 1977, the entire country was declared as one food zone. This benefited both farmers and consumers. It is time to allow our farmers to sell their produce anywhere for their benefit. All stakeholders should be taken on board while revising restrictive agri-marketing laws.

During the pandemic, many are working from home. But farmers have no such option as they have to work in their fields. Despite the lockdown, they continue to sow wheat, paddy, pulses, etc. In fact, farm output is greater than what it was last year. Our farmers, the pride of our country, deserve the long-awaited freedom to market their produce at a place of their choice. It should become a reality at the earliest.

M. Venkaiah Naidu is the Vice-President of India

# Helping supply chains recover

Not a fiscal stimulus, but cutting government expenditure, removing price controls, and opening up trade will help



VIPIN P. VEETIL & KUMAR ANAND

supply chain must adapt. Firms may, for instance, choose to source inputs from suppliers in their geographical proximity to minimise the risk of future disruptions. This involves building productive capacity at new locations, all of which requires investments fuelled by savings. Furthermore, the investments must be guided by price signals. Within a market economy, the movement of prices provides the incentive and information needed to adapt and grow. As economist Ronald Coase put it, prices are bundles of information wrapped in an incentive. As the prices of some inputs rise, the buyers of these inputs look for alternate suppliers, and firms which did not hitherto produce the good have an incentive to do so. The key to economic recovery lies in millions of such adjustments through which firms locate new providers of inputs, new buyers of their output, and build factories at new locations.

#### Why stimulus packages won't help

Unfortunately, market adjustment processes are likely to be disrupted by government stimulus packages. Governments spend by printing money, raising debt, or increasing taxes. Irrespective of the way in which the expenditure is funded, resources are transferred from private entrepreneurs to government bureaucrats. When governments print money, they draw resources through inflation. Bureaucrats tend to be less efficient than profit-motivated firms in allocating scarce resources. Bureaucrats have little incentive or information to bring about the granular supply chain adjustments necessary to revive growth. As the stimulus package kicks in, economic efficiency is likely to decline and so are the chances of a timely recovery of output.

So what can the government do? The experience of West Germany after World War II has a useful lesson. Beginning mid-1944, Allied bombing disrupted the German supply chain by targeting bottleneck sectors like electric power generation. This destruction of the supply chain devastated the German economy. Per person food production fell to about half of its pre-war level. Two years later, this changed after Chancellor Ludwig Erhard lifted price controls and cut taxes. West German entrepreneurs re-established a thriving supply chain through which goods went from upstream sectors to final consumers. By 1950, per capita income in West Germany had reached its pre-war level.

The recent supply chain disruptions are likely to last long. The path to recovery lies in cutting government expenditure, removing price controls, and opening up trade.

Vipin P. Veetil is Assistant Professor at IIT-Madras and Kumar Anand is an economist based in Delhi

# Of firms and nations

In the post-COVID world, the relevance of Williamson's and Alesina's work will only deepen

CHIRANTAN CHATTERJEE

Within just a few days, economics has lost two leading lights. Oliver Williamson, the Nobel Laureate from the University of California, Berkeley, died at 87 on May 21. This was soon followed by the sudden demise of Alberto Alesina, Harvard political economist, aged 63. I didn't have the opportunity to be taught by either of them or to do research with them, but in the little work I do, in understanding how regulation impacts firm behaviour and competitive advantage, and how non-market factors here influence this relationship, Williamson and Alesina keep coming back with their influential work.

#### The optimal size

Both Williamson and Alesina moved out of the shadows of their advisers over time to carve out their own niche. While this is a noteworthy point in following the scholarly trajectory of both, the other is how between them they spanned two key tenets of an economy. One examined the optimal size of a firm, and the other, the optimal size of a nation. Williamson, in fact, focused his entire body of work on a new unit of analysis. He posited that to understand the optimal size of firms, one needs to focus on transactions and contracts as the unit of analysis. These, he argued, ultimately influences how large or vertically integrated firms became.

Meanwhile, Alesina dealt with the question of what is the optimal size of nations. In his book, *The Size of Nations*, with his co-author Enrico Spolaore, Alesina argued that the optimal size of a country is determined by a trade-off between the benefits of size and the costs of heterogeneity. In a large country, per capita costs may be low, but the heterogeneous preferences of a large population make it hard to deliver services and formulate policy. Smaller countries may find it easier to respond to citizen preferences in a democratic way.

In a world where there is, both within and among nations, a heterogeneous quality of responses in dealing with COVID-19, and where we have examples from smaller nations like Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore

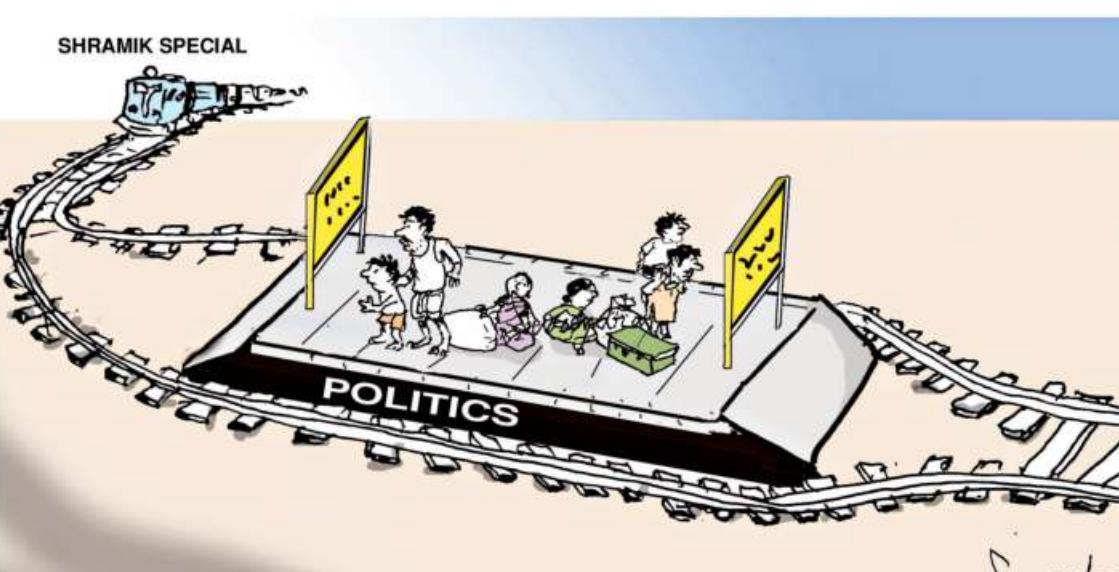
vis-à-vis larger ones like the U.S., Brazil or India, Alesina's work rings a bell. Williamson's thoughts, meanwhile, should also resonate with reshaping of bargaining contracts that employees will now strike with employers in the new 'work from home' future that firms are venturing into.

**Family ties, trust, communism**  
Both Williamson and Alesina were much more than just about the size of firms and nations. Alesina, for example, in a 2010 article titled "The Power of the Family" examined the role of family ties on economic behaviour. He also ventured into whether Americans and Europeans differ in the relationship between inequality and happiness.

Economies today grapple with rising populism and misinformation. In 2002, Alesina examined who trusts others and found that recent traumatic experiences, past discrimination, economic success and racial mixing impacted trust. In another 2007 paper titled "Goodbye Lenin (Or not?)", Alesina examined the role of communism on people's preferences and found that in Germany after reunification, East Germans were more in favour of state intervention than West Germans. East Germans' preferences converged towards those of West Germans over two generations. Williamson, meanwhile, deliberated on calculativeness, trust and economic organisation that ultimately related to his pioneering the field of new institutional economics which examines how social and legal norms and rules underlie economic activity and firm organisation.

In a world where globalisation, inequality and technology were impacting, till recently, how nations and firms evolve, Alesina and Williamson left indelible imprints in advancing the fields of political economy and new institutional economics. Our current lives with a pandemic shock are going to further reshape firms and nations tomorrow, and the relevance of Williamson and Alesina tomorrow will only deepen.

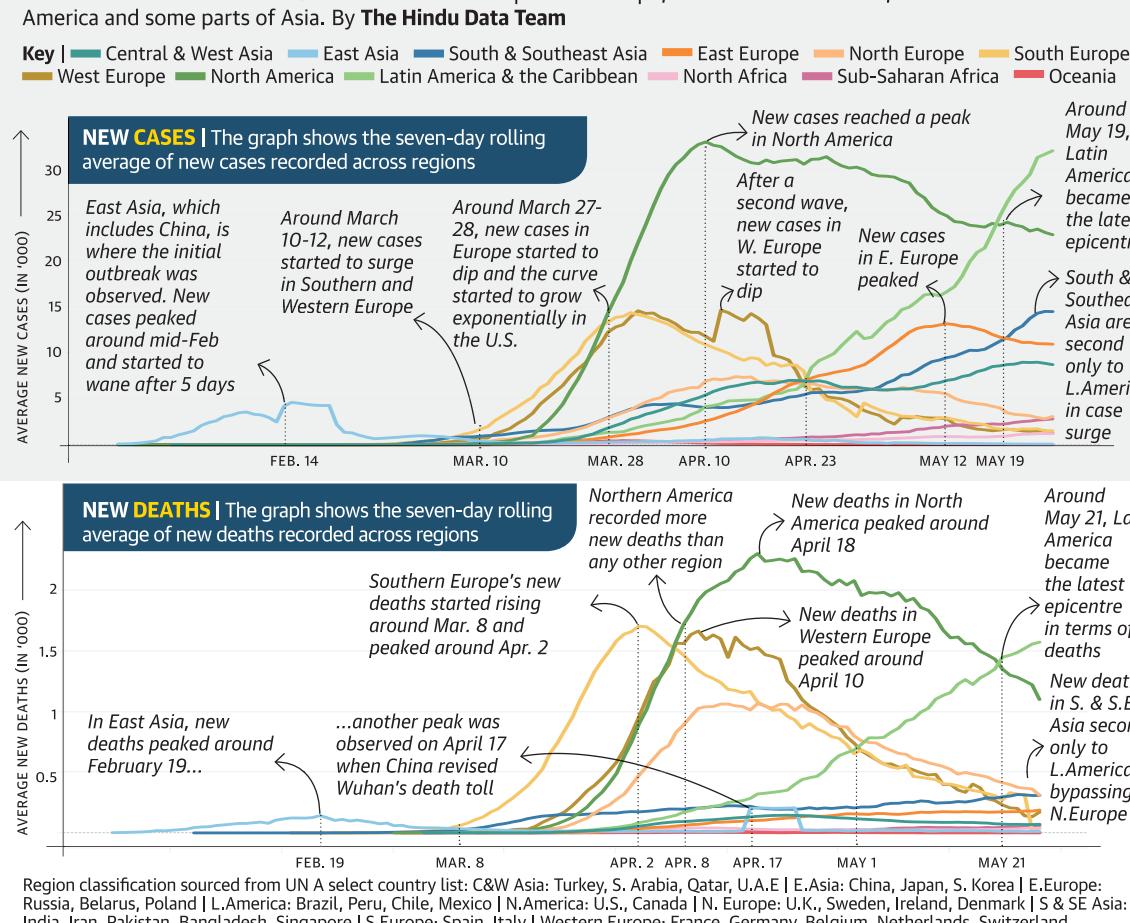
Chirantan Chatterjee is a faculty member at IIM Ahmedabad and Visiting Fellow at Hoover Institution, Stanford University



#### DATA POINT

## Continental shifts

Since its emergence in January, the COVID-19 outbreak's epicentre has gone through three major shifts. First, it moved from East Asia to the Southern and Western parts of Europe, then to North America, and then to Latin America and some parts of Asia. By The Hindu Data Team



#### The Hindu

#### FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MAY 28, 1970

Peaceful polling in Ceylon

Polling in the whole of Ceylon to day (May 27), backed up by light security arrangements and an alerted Army, went off peacefully with no major incident reported from anywhere in the island. A record 85 per cent of the island's five and a half million voters were reported to have exercised their franchise in a highly disciplined manner in the keen tussle between Prime Minister Mr. Dudley Senanayake and the opposition leader Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike, to head the government for the next five years. It was officially stated about 50 young persons were put behind the bars during the last one month. They were believed to have connection with an alleged plot by "Che Guevara" type revolutionaries to disrupt the poll by sporadic terrorist raids on polling booths and police stations. Ruling Front and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party-led Opposition circles concede that it is a neck-and-neck race between them.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MAY 28, 1920

A scape-goat - of sorts  
(From an editorial)

If the majority report of the Hunter Committee is viewed in India with feelings of mingled indignation and despair, those feelings are not mitigated by the opinions expressed by the authoritative voices of the European community. One despairs of any harmonious co-operation in the future between the two races when on so vital a matter, with issues so clearly defined, the ordinary standards of judgment are cast to the winds and the worst passions of racial prejudice are called into play. An India which was led to believe that there is no half-way house between right and wrong has now to learn that circumstances alter cases, that what was sauce for the German goose is not necessarily sauce for the British gander. The prevailing opinion among the European community appears to be that General Dyer was butchered to make a seditionists' holiday. Their hearts, we are assured, go out to him in this hour of travail. An honest, conscientious soldier who did his duty and was cruel to be kind has been sacrificed to appease the clamor of Indian politicians. This view is echoed, as will be seen from a cable appearing elsewhere, by an expounder of the doctrines of the Prince of Peace who claims that General Dyer saved not only the Punjab but the whole of India. He protests against making of such a man a scape-goat.

## FROM PAGE ONE

## Trump offers to mediate between India and China

"At present, the situation in the border areas between China and India is generally stable and controllable," China's MoFA spokesperson Zhao Lijian said at a briefing.

"Between the two countries, we have good border related mechanism and communication channels. We are capable of resolving related issues properly through dialogue and consultation," he added.

"China and India communicate through established border-related mechanisms and diplomatic channels, including communication between local border troops, diplomatic departments and embassies of the two countries," he remarked, in responses at the briefing that appeared to signal a détente in the month-long standoff between the two armies.

Mr. Trump's comments were also surprising as the Centre has so far not said that the situation at the LAC was serious in any way, and (With inputs from Ananth Krishnan)

has stressed that "established mechanisms" were being applied to resolve the issue. In the only official statement made to date on the LAC tensions, the MEA spokesperson had accused Chinese troops of "hindering normal patrol patterns", although sources on the ground have said that PLA troops have moved in, in considerable numbers.

Attacking the government for not providing enough information on the situation along the LAC, the Congress party called the "stand-off" a matter of "serious national concern".

"The differing accounts in national and international media of escalation and continuing stalemate has caused anxiety among the people of India," said the opposition party's senior spokesperson Anand Sharma, even as he urged the government to "take the nation into confidence" on the issue.

(With inputs from Ananth Krishnan)

## Commanders' meet begins amid standoff

"The Army has matched Chinese ingress on the ground and we are prepared to sit there longer, if needed. It is now for diplomacy and political leadership to reach an understanding to sort out the issue," one officer said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Sources say deliberations are going on daily between the local commanders at different levels up to the rank of Major-General, but there has been no breakthrough. Given this, several officers say it is for diplomacy to work. The extent of the standoff across eastern Ladakh is unlike in the past, so it has to be taken up at the highest level, according to another officer.

Separately, in the first comments by a senior Minister, Minister of State for Road Transport and High-

ways and former Army chief Gen. V.K. Singh said China was trying to change the LAC to suit its claims.

Gen. Singh said there was no need to be worried about the situation, because "at present China is in the dock with the whole world, and it is trying to deflect attention from these problems". "So these tensions it is creating at the LAC are a part of that effort by China. The Army is handling the situation on the ground and the government is in discussions about it and PM [Narendra] Modi will guide us in the right direction," he said.

He added that the current situation would not affect road construction on the border, India's troop deployment or anything else. "Everything has to be dealt with in a very normal and graduated manner."

Former Chief Ministers H.D. Kumaraswamy and Sid-

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
BENGALURU

The invitation extended by the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) for inauguration of the Yelahanka flyover sparked off a political controversy on Wednesday with the initial intimation indicating that it would be named after Hindutva ideologue V.D. Savarkar.

As opposition leaders, in-

cluding two former Chief

Ministers, took to Twitter to

strongly criticise the move,

the civic body was quick to

re-issue another invitation.

This time, the invitation

mentioned just the inaugu-

ration of the flyover without

mentioning it.

Former Chief Ministers

H.D. Kumaraswamy and Sid-

daramaiah took to social

media platforms to express

their opposition to the move

soon after the first intimation came. They demanded that the State government

rescind its decision and

name the flyover after a

freedom fighter from Karnata-

ka. BBMP Commissioner

B.H. Anil Kumar told *The*

*Hindu* that though the civic

body's council had passed a

resolution naming the flyover

after V.D. Savarkar, the

government was yet to ap-

prove of the same.

K.A. Muneendra Kumar,

BBMP's ruling party leader,

claimed that he was confi-

dent of the government ap-

proving the council resolution.

Oppn. against naming it after Savarkar

## Row over naming of flyover in Bengaluru

Norms like social distancing will also be applicable to them'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
BENGALURU

A day after the Karnataka go-  
vernment decided to reopen  
nearly 35,000 Muzrai temples  
from June 1, Karnataka  
Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa  
on Wednesday said  
churches and mosques  
too would be allowed  
to reopen from that date.

Speaking to reporters, the Chief Minister said the norms applicable to temples such as social distancing would also be applicable to churches and mosques.

"Once we say temples can open, churches and mosques should also open. There will be no restrictions



on them. But the State go-

vernment has been awaiting

the Union government's per-

mission for reopening," he

said. "We want permission

from Delhi. I have written a

letter. The expectation is

that mostly we will get per-

mission."

On Tuesday, Muzrai

Minister Kota Srinivas

Poojary held a meet-

ing with the Chief Mi-

nister and had an-

nounced that

government-owned

temples, which were closed

for over two months owing

to COVID-19 lockdown,

would be reopened from

June 1. Asked about the

opening of hotels and res-

taurants, he said he had

written to the Prime Minister on that issue too.

Meanwhile, the High

Court of Karnataka has is-

sued Standard Operating

Procedure for the High

Court and the district courts

for resuming partial func-

tioning across the State from

June 1. While the HC will

hear urgent cases through

videoconferencing in three

forenoon sessions between

10.30 a.m. and 1.30 p.m., the

final hearing cases will be ta-

ken up in the physical courts

in the afternoon session

from 2.30 p.m. to 4.45 p.m.

Only eight courts, two Di-

vision Benches and six Sin-

gle Benches will be made

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# 'Differences mustn't shade ties'

India and China have kept in close touch since COVID-19 outbreak, says envoy

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

India and China have kept up "close communication and cooperation" since the COVID-19 outbreak, said China's Ambassador to India Sun Weidong, adding that he was "impressed" by India's handling of the pandemic thus far.

While he made no direct reference to the ongoing stand-off between the two Armies at the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh and Sikkim, Mr. Sun said that India and China should "never let the differences shadow the overall situation of bilateral cooperation", referring to the two countries as the "Dragon and Elephant dancing together".

"Our two leaders President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Narendra Modi have exchanged letters, and our foreign ministers made phone calls twice to strengthen our anti-epidemic cooperation," Sun Weidong, Chinese Ambassador to India said.

Our two leaders, President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, have exchanged letters, and our Foreign Ministers made phone calls twice to strengthen our anti-epidemic cooperation



cooperation," said Mr. Sun, speaking at an Internet seminar or webinar for "Indian Youth" on Wednesday.

He added that Indian companies had helped with supplies on 45 Indian cargo flights to China, while Chinese companies like Alibaba, Fosun, SANY Group had assisted India with masks, protective suits, medical gloves and ventilators.

#### 'Swift action'

When asked what he thought of India's response to the pandemic, Mr. Sun said he had been "impressed with several things", includ-

ing what he called "swift action" in placing a lockdown across the country on March 25, when confirmed cases of the infection were not very high.

Praising the "solidarity" and "cooperation" with which Indians had responded to lockdown restrictions, the Ambassador remarked that a "majority of the Indian people follow government instructions and advice to stay at home, and the overall social order has been stable since the lockdown".

Referring to the resolution by more than 100 countries at the World Health Assem-

bly this month that called for a full enquiry into the origins of the novel coronavirus, Mr. Sun said all countries should be "vigilant" about what he called "conspiracy theories" that China had concealed the pandemic or that the virus had originated from the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

India, which had backed the resolution at the World Health Assembly, has refused any public comment on the issue of the origin of the virus, stating that these issues must be dealt with only after the threat from the disease recedes.

"We did not cover up anything, and did not delay any efforts. Identifying the source of the virus is a serious and complex issue of science, which should be studied and explored by scientists and medical experts," Mr. Sun asserted, while addressing students on the webinar.

# 'India should pull out forces from Kalapani'

The 2019 map is a breach of the understanding reached in 1997, says Nepalese Foreign Minister

KALLO BHATTACHERJEE

NEW DELHI

India should withdraw security forces from the Kalapani region and restore status quo, Nepalese Foreign Minister Pradeep Kumar Gyawali said on Wednesday.

He said a solution to the border dispute should be found urgently, even as Indian sources confirmed that they were closely monitoring the debates in Nepal's Parliament to provide a constitutional guarantee to the new map that shows the disputed region as part of Nepal's sovereign territory.



Pradeep Kumar Gyawali

"We want India to honour the letter and spirit of the [Sugauli] Treaty. The most appropriate way of doing this would be to withdraw security forces from Kalapani and hand over the above territories back to Nepal. We

merely reiterated that unilateral acts like road construction in Nepal's territory should not have been done, and the issue should be resolved through talks at the earliest," Mr. Gyawali said in an interview to *The Hindu*.

Mr. Gyawali said Nepal appreciated the ties it shares with India but was disappointed with the November 2019 political map of India that brought the issue back to the table. "The map is a breach of the 1997 understanding that both sides had reached during the Kathmandu visit of Prime Minis-

ter I.K. Gujral," he said. The comments from the senior Minister of the government of Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli came as the Nepalese government gave more time to the main Opposition Nepali Congress to discuss a proposed amendment to the Constitution. The move is being interpreted as a window of opportunity for diplomacy. However, Mr. Gyawali said the amendment was on track and expected to be fast-tracked in the coming days.

India has taken note of the parliamentary debates, with informed sources saying the South Block is "carefully following" the developments in Nepal. South Block's concerns about the Kalapani region is of particular significance as the Lipulekh pass in the region connects India with Tibet.

"Border issues are sensitive and require trust and confidence to be resolved to the mutual satisfaction," said a source, indicating a change in thinking. Earlier, officials had said India would consider discussion on the Kalapani issue after the COVID-19 pandemic was dealt with.

# Standing Committee on Home Affairs to meet on June 3

Lockdown and movement of migrants likely to be discussed

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Standing Committee on Home Affairs is scheduled to meet on June 3, the first time since Parliament was abruptly adjourned on March 23 followed by an extended lockdown.

The meeting has been convened by Chairman of the Standing Committee on Home Affairs Anand Sharma. Mr. Sharma has also written to the Rajya Sabha Chairman on Wednesday asking the House to provide for an alternate option of video conferencing for the members who are not able to join the meeting.

"I have written to Rajya Sabha Chairman Mr. Ven-



This is the first meeting of the panel since Parliament was adjourned on March 23.

kaiah Naidu that the members who are unable to reach Delhi because of various restrictions or other reasons should be allowed to join the meeting via video conference..." Mr. Sharma told *The Hindu*.

Mr. Sharma did not reveal

the agenda of the meeting but said key officials of the Home Ministry would be asked to join the deliberations since the extended lockdown, the inter-State movement, the movement of migrant workers and other guidelines are all issued by it.

With the resumption of air and rail transport, Presiding officers of both Houses of Parliament, Venkaiah Naidu and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, had met to review the facilities in the Parliament House to allow for the meeting of the standing committees. Nine such rooms have been identified in the Parliament House complex.

# SC tells Centre, PCI to respond to Jamiat plea

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday asked the Centre, the National Broadcasters Association (NBA) and the Press Council of India (PCI) to respond to a petition filed by Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, which alleged that certain sections of the media communalised the Tablighi Jamat congregation by linking it to a spike in the spread of the COVID-19 infection.

A Bench led by Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde implored the NBA. It asked what action could be taken against the media channels under Sections 19 and 20 of the Cable Television Networks Act, 1995. The court scheduled the case for hearing after two weeks.

# Key witness who had identified Kasab and braved bullets, dies

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Harishchandra Shrivardhankar, a key witness who had identified terrorist Ajmal Kasab during the case trial, died at his house in Kalyan, his family members said on Wednesday. He was 70.

Shrivardhankar was hit by two bullets on the night of November 26, 2011, near Cama Hospital in south Mumbai when 10 Pakistani terrorists attacked Mumbai.

He had also hit Kasab's accomplice Abu Ismail with his office bag. "He died on Tuesday night," his family members said.

Shrivardhankar was the first key witness to identify Kasab before the special court and also testified against him. Kasab, the only terrorist among the 10 who was captured live by the police, was hanged in Pune's Yerwada jail in secret on November 21, 2012 after a court trial.

A few days back, Shrivardhankar was found lying on a footpath in Kalyan. His family members reportedly could not afford his medical treatment.

Former chief minister Devendra Fadnavis had checked on his condition and announced that the BJP would provide ₹10 lakh to help the family.

He is survived by his wife, two sons and daughters-in-law.

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**C&M CIRCLE, VILLUPURAM**

# Centre, States doing their best: Prasad

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

A day after the Supreme Court took cognisance of the "unfortunate and miserable" plight of migrant workers, Union Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad on Wednesday said the Centre and States were doing their "best" in these very challenging times, and if "there is scope for improvement we are open for that."

He was addressing a press conference over video link. "I can only state with all humility that all the governments are doing their best. In the given situation, best possible efforts are being done and will continue to be done," he said.

The Centre and States would inform the court about the steps taken, he said. His position as Law Minister precluded him from commenting further on the court's comments.

# Supreme Court gets stinging letter from senior lawyers

Advocates slam SC's 'deference' to Central govt.

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL

NEW DELHI

Hours before taking *suo motu* cognisance of "certain lapses" in government measures in dealing with migrant workers, the Supreme Court received a stinging letter from 10 senior lawyers each from Delhi and Mumbai that was critical of its "self-effacing deference" to the government, "unwillingness" and "apparent indifference" in the face of the "enormous humanitarian crisis".

The senior lawyers, who include P. Chidambaram, Kapil Sibal, Prashant Bhushan, A. Indira Jaising, Vikas Singh, Iqbal Chavla and Navroz Seervai, said the way the Supreme Court chose to trust the "bland assertions and patently incorrect statements" made by the Centre reminded them of how it functioned during the Emergency era, "when detainees were left to the tender mercy of the executive with 'Diamond bright, Diamond hard hope' that something would be done".

The lawyers also include Anand Grover, Mohan Katarki, Siddharth Luthra, Santosh Paul, Mahalaxmi Pavani, C.U. Singh, Aspi Chimoy, Mihir Desai, Janak Dwarakadas, Rajani Iyer, Yusuf Muchhal, Rajiv Patil, Gayatri Singh and Sanjay Singhvi.

Sources said the court received the letter late on Monday. The decision to take *suo motu* cognisance of the "miseries and problems" of migrant workers was made on Tuesday. The court order admitted there were "inade-

quacies and certain lapses" in government measures. The court is scheduled to hear the case on Thursday.

The lawyers' letter referred to how the court on March 31 "expressed satisfaction" immediately after the Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta stated that "no migrant person was walking on the roads in an attempt to reach his/her hometown/village". The court had even gone to the extent of saying that the migrants' exodus was due to panic created by fake news.

"The migrant workers' issues are not a 'policy issue'. They raise constitutional issues... This Court has the power under Article 142 to undertake any measure to do complete justice. The show of helplessness does not do justice to the court's motto of *Yato dharmastato jaya*," the letter said.

The Congress leader said the government needs to work with the grassroots administrative mechanism to create lists to accurately identify stranded workers. The Centre should set up reception centres for receiving them and facilitating their further travel to their native places, he added.

The Congress leader said the government needs to work with the grassroots administrative mechanism to create lists to accurately identify stranded workers. The Centre should set up reception centres for receiving them and facilitating their further travel to their native places, he added.

The Supreme Court again failed to intervene in mid-May when millions of migrant workers commenced travelling home on foot or by trucks.

The letter said the court could not look the other way by blankly saying these were "policy issues" best left to the government.

"The migrant workers' issues are not a 'policy issue'. They raise constitutional issues... This Court has the power under Article 142 to undertake any measure to do complete justice. The show of helplessness does not do justice to the court's motto of *Yato dharmastato jaya*," the letter said.

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# 5 persons on Shramik Special trains die in U.P.

Reasons for the fatalities are not clear, according to police

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

LUCKNOW

Five migrant workers travelling back to their native districts on Shramik Special trains allegedly died of unspecified causes near Kanpur and Varanasi over the last 24 hours during their journey, the police said on Wednesday.

Ram Avadh Chauhan's body was deboarded at the Kanpur Central station on Tuesday, along with that of another unidentified passenger on the same train from Maharashtra, carrying migrant workers to Gorakhpur.

A third body was recovered at the Kanpur station from another train on Wednesday, said a Railway police inspector.

Two persons arrived dead at the Manduadith station in Varanasi on a train from Mumbai's LTT on Wednesday. The Superintendent of Police, Government Railway Police, Prayagraj, said Dasrath Prajapati, 30, of Jaunpur and Ram Ratan Goud, 63, of Azamgarh were found dead on the train. The bodies were sent for post-mortem examination.

## 'Due to the heat'

According to his family, Ram Avadh Chauhan's health had started deteriorating due to the heat. "He had taken off his clothes because his body had become very hot," said Kanhaiya Chauhan, his son.

Working as a mason in Maharashtra's Kalyan city, Ram Avadh, 45, with his two sons, wife, daughter and mother-in-law, travelled to Jhansi by bus. In Jhansi, they boarded a Gorakhpur-



Final journey: Officials carrying the body of one of the passengers found dead on a special train in Varanasi. ■ PTI

## NHRC notice to U.P. over man's death

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The National Human Rights Commission on Wednesday issued a notice to the Uttar Pradesh government over the death of a migrant worker due to starvation in Saharanpur while he was walking from Ludhiana to his home in Harnoi. The 19-year-old, Vipin Kumar, died after walking for six days, covering 350 km.

bound special train on Tuesday to their native place Azamgarh. During the journey, Ram Avadh, a diabetic, started feeling uneasy. Mr. Kanhaiya, a science student, said his father wanted the train to stop. The family members claim they pulled the chain, but the train did not stop. They also dialled the Railway helpline number, but allegedly got no help.

At the Kanpur station, the family, travelling in the S13 coach, got off. His father died 10 minutes after Mr. Kanhaiya went in search of help, he said. "He was frothing at the mouth and bleeding from the nose," Mr. Kanhaiya told *The Hindu* over the phone.

## No food provided

Mr. Kanhaiya alleged that while they received *puri sabzi* and a pouch of water each on the train from Jhansi, from 1 a.m. on Tuesday, when they had arrived in Jhansi on a bus, till around 11 a.m. on Wednesday, they were not served anything to eat at the Jhansi Paramedical College, where they spent the night. The last proper meal they had was on Monday evening at Guna in Madhya Pradesh.

"He [father] had not taken his medicine for diabetes since two days as he was not getting regular food," said Mr. Kanhaiya.

The other migrant worker who died on the same train was yet to be identified but a police inspector said he was in his fifties, while the third person who died on Wednesday was also unidentified and aged about 35.

# Video of baby with dead mother goes viral

In another incident, the body of a woman was deboarded at Mansi station

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

PATNA

Amid several videos showing the woes of migrant workers returning to Bihar these days, a chilling video went viral on social media on Wednesday. A baby is seen playfully tugging at a sheet partially covering his dead mother at the Muzaffarpur railway station in Bihar. The woman, said to be Arvina Khatun, 35, is seen lying dead on the platform, with two bags stuffed with her belongings kept away from her.

An older child, with a water bottle in hand, too, appears for a moment in the video. "The woman had reached the Muzaffarpur railway station on May 25 along with her two children,



The video of the child went viral on social media. ■ PTI

sister and brother-in-law. She was from Katihar district. Only the doctor can say how she died," Government Railway Police official Rama Kant Upadhyay told presspersons.

A local journalist in Mu-

zaffarpur told *The Hindu* that the woman and her two small children had arrived by a Shramik Special train on May 25 from Ahmedabad. She collapsed immediately upon reaching the station, possibly due to extreme heat, hunger and dehydration. The woman is said to have boarded the train on May 23.

Sharing the video on his Twitter handle, Sanjay Yadav, political adviser to Bihar's Leader of Opposition in the Assembly Tejaswi Yadav, said, "The little child does not know that the cloth he is playing with is the shroud of his dead mother. She died because she did not have food and water for four days. Who is responsible for

such deaths in trains? The Opposition should ask the hard questions or not?"

In another incident, the body of a woman was deboarded at the Mansi railway station in the State on Wednesday.

"Some people took out the dead body of a woman on platform number 3 of Mansi railway station from a train coming from Surat in Gujarat to Purnia in Bihar. Her name is Uresh Khatun and she was from Katihar district. The relatives of the dead woman said the woman was suffering from a heart ailment and had surgery on March 22, 2020," the Sonepur division of East Central Railway said in a statement.

# Migrants jump off trains to flee isolation

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

PATNA

Migrant workers returning to Bihar are jumping from trains to escape the 14-day mandatory quarantine.

On Tuesday, 350 migrants returning from Delhi and Patiala pulled the alarm chain at two different places and jumped off the Shramik Special trains. Railway Protection Force (RPF) personnel and local villagers, however, caught 180 of them.

"They are jumping ahead of their destination. We convince those we manage to detain that it is necessary not only for themselves but also for their family members," said an RPF official at the Danapur railway station, near Patna.

A large number of migrants returning to Bihar are jumping from trains to escape the 14-day mandatory quarantine. On Tuesday, 350 migrants returning from Delhi's Anand Vihar to Purnia in northeast Bihar deboarded near the Ranibagh railway crossing. While around 150 managed to escape, around 250 migrants were caught by the local villagers who then informed the RPF personnel. They were taken to quarantine centres, but some more managed to flee.

In another incident, migrant workers stopped the Shramik Special from Chandigarh to Gaya district somewhere in Sarasam district and 24 are believed to have escaped, said an official.

Lakhs of migrant workers returning home are refusing to be quarantined near their homes. "How can we be away from our family for 14 days after all the trouble we went through?" asked Mahendra Sahni from Muzaffarpur.

# Mamata apprehensive of return of migrants to State

Around 25% of them have tested positive, says CM

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said that she is worried about the return of migrant workers to the State as many of them have tested positive for COVID-19.

"There is no need to panic or to worry. But I am worried. Many of those who are coming now are COVID positive," Ms. Banerjee said. She also blamed the Railways for planning without consulting the State.

"We came up with a plan by which everyone would have come back in a few days in a phased manner. But, we got to know many



trains were coming from Maharashtra. I spoke to the Maharashtra government [and] they said they were informed at 2 a.m. the previous night. If the Railway Ministry had consulted us then it would have been better. We are hearing reports of 2-3 people sharing one seat in trains and not following social distancing," she said.

According to her, around 25% of those returning have tested positive.

"As many as 36 trains will enter the State ... Railways has no responsibility," she said. Since everyone cannot be quarantined institutionally, Ms. Banerjee asked the District Magistrates to create a block-wise task force for every district. While people returning from Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra will be institutionally quarantined in local schools, people without symptoms coming from other States can be on self-quarantine.

## GOVERNMENT OF TAMILNADU HIGHWAYS DEPARTMENT TENDER NOTICE

T.N. No. 02/2020-21/HDO, dated 26.05.2020

For and on behalf of the Governor of Tamil Nadu Percentage tender through online only will be received upto 02.07.2020, 13.30 hours by the Superintending Engineer (H) C&M, Villupuram Circle for CRIDP 2020-21 Works, (Package No.17 to 20) pertaining to Perambalur (H) C&M Division.

Details of works, approximate value of works, EMD, availability of tender documents and all other details are available from 29.05.2020 onwards in the Government website <https://tntenders.gov.in>. If any changes / corrections in the tender, it will be published in the above Government website only.

SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER (H) C&M CIRCLE, VILLUPURAM

## GOVERNMENT OF TAMILNADU HIGHWAYS DEPARTMENT TENDER NOTICE

T.N. No. 02/2020-21/HDO, dated 26.05.2020

For and on behalf of the Governor of Tamil Nadu Percentage tender through online only will be received upto 03.07.2020, 15.00 hours by the Superintending Engineer (H) C&M, Tirupur Circle for CRIDP 2020-21 Works, (Package No.21 to 37) pertaining to Dharapuram (H) C&M Division.

Details of works, approximate value of works, EMD, availability of tender documents and all other details are available from 01.06.2020 onwards in the Government website <https://tntenders.gov.in>. If any Changes/Corrections in the tender, it will be published in the above Government website only.

Superintending Engineer (H), C&M, Circle, Tirupur.

## TAMIL NADU HOUSING BOARD - CHENNAI CIRCLE

493, Anna Salai, Nandanam, Chennai-35. Phone No. 044 - 24322070

Tender Notice No: CC/1/2020-21 Dated: 27.05.2020

Sealed tenders with Pre-Qualification system duly subscribed on the covers with name of work, reference No, due date and name of tenderers are invited for the following works so as to reach the office of the Superintending Engineer (Chennai Circle), Tamil Nadu Housing Board, Chennai-600 035 up to 11.00 A.M (as per office clock) on the due dates mentioned below. The tenders will be opened by the undersigned at his office at 11.30 A.M on the same day in the presence of the tenderer or their agent who choose to be present.

Sl. No.	Description of work	Approximate value (Rs. In Crores)	EMD (in Rupees)
1	Construction of New division office building (Stilt+1 floor) at Sathuvachari village in S.F.544 and 547 part, Vellore District.	7.00	3,60,000/-

Last date & time for receipt & Opening of tender on 19.06.2020 up to 11.00 AM & 11.30 AM respectively. Period for sale upto 18.06.2020. Cost of tender document is Rs 15.750/- The tender document can be downloaded [www.tender.tn.gov.in](http://www.tender.tn.gov.in) at free of cost. The tender notice & other Conditions details can be had from Superintending Engineer /Chennai Circle, Anna Salai, Nandanam, Chennai - 35.

Superintending Engineer, Chennai Circle.

## GOVERNMENT OF TAMILNADU HIGHWAYS DEPARTMENT

Trichy Highways (Construction and Maintenance) Circle

TENDER NOTICE

T.N. No.03/2020-21/HDO / Dated: 22.05.2020

For and on behalf of Governor of Tamil Nadu Percentage tender through online only will be received upto 30.06.2020, 15.00 hours by the Superintending Engineer (H) C&M, Trichy Circle, TVS Tollgate, Pudukkottai Road, Trichy - 20 for CRIDP 2020-21 works (Package No.23 to 24) pertaining Trichy (H) C&M Division.

Details of works, approximate value of works, EMD, availability of tender documents and all other details are available from 01.06.2020 onwards in the Government website <https://tntenders.gov.in>. If any changes / corrections in the tender, it will be published in the above Government website only.

Superintending Engineer (H), C&M Circle, Trichy - 20

## GOVERNMENT OF TAMILNADU HIGHWAYS DEPARTMENT

Trichy Highways (Construction and Maintenance) Circle

TENDER NOTICE

T.N. No.01/2020-21/HDO / Dated: 20.05.2020

For and on behalf of Governor of Tamil Nadu Percentage tender through online only will be received upto 30.06.2020, 15.00 hours by the Superintending Engineer (H) C&M, Trichy Circle, TVS Tollgate, Pudukkottai Road, Trichy - 20 for CRIDP 2020-21 works (Package No.1 to 15) pertaining Trichy (H) C&M Division.

Details of works, approximate value of works, EMD, availability of tender documents and all other details are available from 01.06.2020 onwards in the Government website <https://tntenders.gov.in>. If any changes / corrections in the tender, it will be published in the above Government website only.

Superintending Engineer (H), C&M Circle, Trichy - 20

## GOVERNMENT OF TAMILNADU HIGHWAYS DEPARTMENT

Trichy Highways (Construction and Maintenance) Circle

TENDER NOTICE

T.N. No.01/2020-21/HDO / Dated: 20.05.2020

For and on behalf of Governor of Tamil Nadu Percentage tender through online only will be received upto 30.06.2020, 15.00 hours by the Superintending Engineer (H) C&M, Trichy Circle, TVS Tollgate, Pudukkottai Road, Trichy - 20 for CRIDP 2020-21 works (Package No.1 to 15) pertaining Trichy (H) C&M Division.

Details of works, approximate value of works, EMD, availability of tender documents and all other details are available from 01.06.2020 onwards in the Government website <https://tntenders.gov.in>. If any changes / corrections in the tender, it will be published in the above Government website only.

Superintending Engineer (H), C&M Circle, Trichy - 20

## TAMIL NADU HOUSING BOARD : SALEM CIRCLE @ COIMBATORE

Cowly Brown Road, R.S.Puram, Coimbatore-2 Phone: 0422 - 2456606

Tender Notice No: CC/1/2020-21 Dated: 27.05.2020

Sealed tenders with name of work, reference No, due date and the name of tenderer duly subscribed on the cover (under Pre-qualification system) are invited for the following works, so as to reach the Office of the Superintending Engineer, Salem Circle, Cowly Brown Road, R.S.Puram, Coimbatore-2 upto 11.00 A.M (as per office clock) on the date mentioned below. The tenders will be opened by the undersigned at his office at 11.15 A.M on the same day in the presence of the tenderer or their agent who choose to be present.

Sl. No.	Description of Work:	Approximate value (Rs.)	EMD (Rs)
</tbl\_info

# Despite lockdown, wheat procurement on target

While it is progressing swiftly in States like Punjab and Haryana, U.P. is lagging behind; Madhya Pradesh crosses target

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

On the back of a record wheat harvest of more than 1,071 lakh tonnes, procurement of the grain – currently at 342.6 lakh tonnes – has also crossed last year's levels despite the lockdown, and is well on the way to reaching this year's target of 407 lakh tonnes.

However, the progress on procurement is uneven, with States such as Punjab and Haryana racing towards their targets despite a late start, while Uttar Pradesh lags behind, having reached less than 40% of its target.

Madhya Pradesh has already crossed its target.

## Record production

The late excess rainfall during last year's monsoon followed by a long winter provided the climatic conditions needed for wheat production to hit a record high for

## Golden grain

Harvest and procurement of wheat have seen record highs this season, despite challenges arising from the COVID-19 lockdown. State Agriculture Marketing Boards made special arrangements for the safety of labourers and to overcome the shortage in machinery and jute sacks.



Labourers working in a grain market in Amritsar. • PTI

## Bountiful harvest

**Total harvest:** 1,071 lakh tonnes (36 lakh tonnes higher than previous year)

**Current procurement:** 342.6 lakh tonnes (target is at 407 lakh tonnes)

**Last year's procurement:** 341 lakh tonnes

## Procurement highs

**Madhya Pradesh:** Target crossed

**Punjab:** 93%

**Haryana:** 75%

**Uttar Pradesh:** 36%

SOURCE: FOOD CORPORATION OF INDIA DATA

the fourth straight year.

According to the Agriculture Ministry's third advance estimates, the country's production amounts to 1,071 lakh tonnes of wheat this year, almost 36 lakh tonnes higher than previous year's

and 110 lakh tonnes higher than the average harvest.

A little over a third of the crop is procured by the Food Corporation of India (FCI) at the minimum support price set by the Centre each year, to go into the central pool for

subsidiised distribution under the National Food Security Act.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown had led to initial fears that procurement would be disrupted this year.

When the lockdown began, harvesting was already under way in western and central States like Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. In the northern States, harvesting was delayed both by the long winter, as well as the challenges caused by the pandemic, including labour shortage and machinery that was yet to return from being rented to farmers further south.

In Punjab, where procurement usually begins in the first week of April, it was pushed till April 15, immediately after the first phase of the lockdown. In Haryana, procurement was further delayed until April 20.

## Various concerns

Once procurement started, concerns included a shortage of labour at markets, fears of infection spread and a shortage of jute gunny bags due to production being disrupted at West Bengal's jute

mills. The Food Ministry said it had permitted the use of plastic bags as well as used and cleaned jute bags to overcome this hurdle, and it offered specific time slots for farmers, as well as safety equipment for labourers.

According to FCI data, 342.6 lakh tonnes of wheat have been procured so far in this 2020-21 marketing season, from 10 wheat producing States. This is higher than the 341 lakh tonnes procured last year.

In Madhya Pradesh, procurement has touched 113 lakh tonnes as against a target of 100 lakh tonnes. In Punjab, 93% of procurement is complete, with 126 lakh tonnes purchased against a 135 lakh tonne target, while Haryana has reached almost 75% of its target. In Uttar Pradesh however, only 20 lakh tonnes have been procured, as against a target of 55 lakh tonnes.

## Locust threat is bigger this year, warns monitor

A huge challenge is likely to emerge when the swarms flying over 20 districts in Rajasthan start breeding

## MOHAMMED IQBAL

JAIPUR

The threat of locusts, which have invaded vast swathes of land in Rajasthan and entered neighbouring Madhya Pradesh, is bigger this year in comparison with the damage caused to standing crops in a limited area in 2019. The tropical grasshoppers have been crossing over to India via Pakistan's Sindh province since April 11.

The Union Agriculture Ministry's Locust Warning Organisation (LWO), headquartered in Jodhpur, said on Wednesday that the locusts that came last year, after a gap of 26 years, were mature and had affected 12 districts of the State. "This time, the locusts are immature and



**Winged menace:** The locusts are immature and have crossed the India-Pakistan border soon after their birth. • ROHIT JAIN PARAS

have crossed the India-Pakistan border soon after their birth," LWO Deputy Director K.L. Gurjar told *The Hindu*. Immature locusts, which are not fully grown, have the capacity to cause more harm as they have a longer life-

pan. Dr. Gurjar said the breeding grounds in Balochistan were responsible for the movement of 10 to 12-day-old locusts towards the Thar desert, from where they were flying huge distances in search of food. The

grasshoppers, which flew out from Sudan and Eritrea on Africa's Red Sea Coast after excess rains, were earlier breeding in Iran.

## Pak. measures ineffective

"Though Pakistan has claimed that it is taking action to eliminate the breeding grounds of insects, their control measures do not seem to be effective," Dr. Gurjar said. While Pakistan's National Disaster Management Authority has arranged aircraft and helicopters for the aerial spray of insecticides, locusts have destroyed crop in the cotton-producing belt of Sindh.

Dr. Gurjar said Pakistan was unable to control the locust population because of

their sheer number. The anti-locust spraying in the deserts of Thar and Cholistan has also proved to be ineffective, and huge swarms, aided by high-speed winds, have flown in to the Indian side of the Thar desert.

A bigger challenge is likely to emerge when the swarms flying over 20 districts in Rajasthan start breeding. The locusts will start laying eggs after the onset of monsoon and continue breeding for two more months, with new insects being born during the growth phase of the kharif crops.

The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organisation has warned of more attacks of locusts along both sides of the India-Pakistan border.

## CBSE students can shift exam venues

They can write the Class 10 & 12 exams in their current district, says HRD Minister



Students have been told to get in touch with their schools.

their schools for further information.

## 13,000 centres

The CBSE had earlier expanded its list of examination centres from 3,000 to 13,000 to allow students a wider choice of venues, and also make it easier to implement social distancing norms.

The move comes as a relief to students who had been studying in coaching centres or residential schools and had initially selected examination centres in these locations. During the lockdown, these students returned to their

home districts, including those from Navodaya and Kendriya Vidyalayas run by the HRD Ministry. Other students have also been forced to shift from the cities they studied in to their villages, often in other States, during the exodus of migrant workers.

The CBSE board examinations were on when schools closed in March, and 29 pending papers have now been rescheduled to be held in the first two weeks of July. Class 12 students have pending papers, along with Class 10 students whose examinations were disrupted by the Delhi riots in February.

## SC declines to modify order letting AI assign middle seats

It had allowed the carrier fill the seats till June 6

## LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday refused to further intervene or modify its May 25 order permitting Air India (AI) to assign middle seats to passengers in non-scheduled flights bringing back citizens stranded abroad.

The court had allowed the public carrier to fill up the middle seats on these flights till June 6, after which AI would have to comply with whatever orders passed by the Bombay High Court in this regard. The case was, in the previous hearing on Monday, remanded back to the High Court, which had

already scheduled a hearing on June 2.



**No relief:** The court asked the applicants to raise their concerns about social distancing norms before the High Court.

On Wednesday, the Bench led by Chief Justice Sharad A. Bobde refused to entertain an intervention application in the case. It asked the applicants to raise their concerns about safety protocol and social distancing norms in these flights before the High Court.

The Central government, on the other hand, assured the court that public health and safety was of paramount concern in the flights.

## Resume physical hearings from June 1, Bar Council urges CJI

## LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Bar Council of India (BCI) has written to Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde, requesting that physical court hearings be resumed from June 1.

BCI chairperson and senior advocate Manan Kumar Mishra said that only a handful of privileged class of advocates are the beneficiaries of the virtual court system.

"Not all requests for list-

ing of cases even in this [urgent] category are adequately entertained. We are told that only two percent of this category succeed in getting the matter listed for virtual court hearing. Only a handful of privileged class of advocates are the beneficiaries of the virtual court system," the BCI said.

The letter said lawyers felt that "access to justice remains a dream for more than 95% of litigants... This is the harsh truth".

The BCI said lawyers were largely struggling to make ends meet. "Ninety-five percent of the advocates are without any court work and court appearances."

"The cases of only a few fortunate persons are being fixed, the kith and kin of only a few have earned a huge money during this lockdown in almost all High Courts. Such messages are pouring regularly in the BCI... This has caused a great loss to common advocates," it said.

## FAITH

## Life, a sacrifice

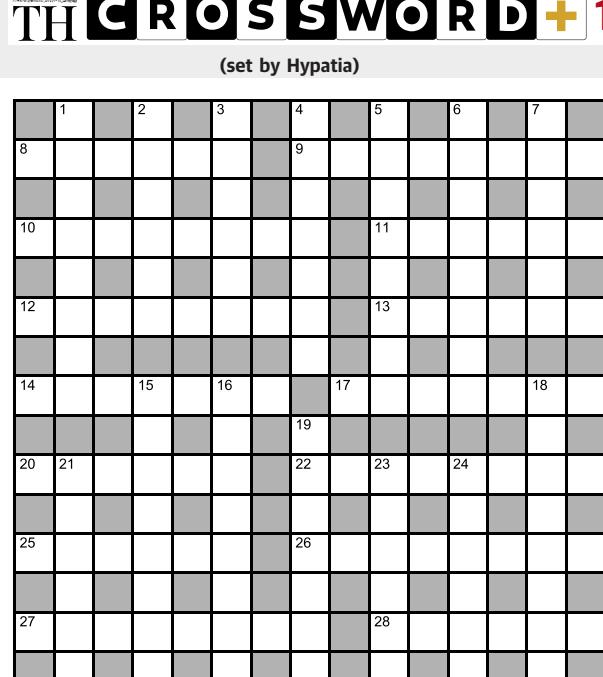
The Isa Vasya captures the ideal way of life an individual should adopt during his tenure in this world and adds that such a person may be content to live a hundred years and attain Brahman. 'He is indeed blessed when he lives life without attachments and does his duty in earnest without desire and without yearning for its fruits.' This kind of orientation towards perceiving life as a sacrifice, meaning, living an austere life with the aim to get liberated eventually is central to the teaching in the Upanishads, pointed out Sri R. Krishnamurthy Sastrigal in a discourse. They also teach many powerful mantras that can be meditated with faith and practised with dedication to attain goals, worldly and spiritual.

In the Chandogya Upanishad (III-16), for instance, there is a mantra that prays for one's own long life when there is a likelihood of it being cut short owing to sudden sickness or disease. This prayer is connected with the Gayatri mantra, a powerful mantra which is capable of protecting everything existing in this universe. "The Gayatri is what the earth is, for, on it everything here that has come to be, is established." The idea is that the spiritual aspirant wishes to complete the rituals and duties and seeks protection from untimely death that might overtake him. He is engaged in the performance of the morning, midday and evening libations with the Gayatri hymn. The verse says that in the event of any sickness overtaking him during the three periods of his libations, which metaphorically is taken to be his life span of a hundred and sixteen years, he prays to the respective deities to grant him extension of time to complete the rituals successfully. The symbolic implication is that this mantra has the power to ward off premature death and to grant one long life so that he can strive to get liberated.

### TH CROSSWORD + 12947

(set by Hypatia)

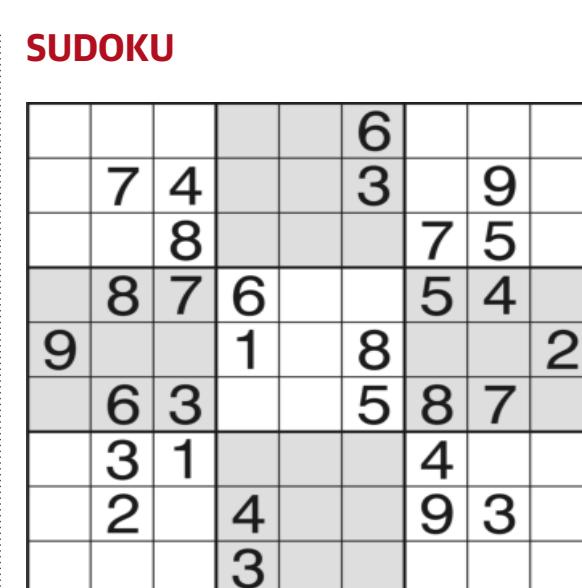
De-stress at home with some fun brain teasers. Try out at never-before prices at <https://crossword.thehindu.com>



## ■ ACROSS

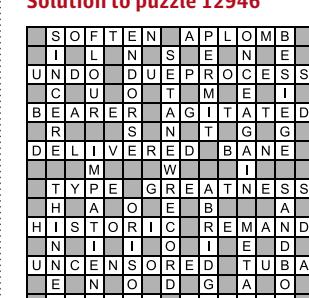
- 8 Carry bag in Savile Row (6)
- 9 Hint from local University before grant's cut (8)
- 10 Spoooner's European spirit for bar frequently hit by players (8)
- 11 A small amount of altitude, while cycling (6)
- 12 Push back, relax and shower (8)

## SUDOKU

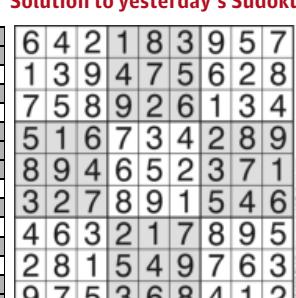


DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

## Solution to puzzle 12946



## Solution to yesterday's Sudoku



Nehru put India on path of self-reliance: Priyanka

Cong. leaders pay tribute to first PM

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

On the 56th death anniversary of India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra recalled him as the first proponent of a self-reliant India.



Priyanka Gandhi Vadra

"Pandit Nehru played a vital role in shaping our democracy. He preached and practised self-reliance long before others realised it," senior Congress leader and Rajya Sabha member Ahmed Patel said in a tweet.

Former Congress President Rahul Gandhi said that his legacy had stood the test of time. "A visionary, he is immortalised in the world-class institutions he inspired, that have stood the test of time," he said.

# After Twitter fact-check, Trump threatens to shut social media

President says Twitter is interfering in the 2020 election and stifling free speech

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN

U.S. President Donald Trump threatened to "strongly regulate" or "shut down" social media platforms after Twitter identified two of his tweets as making unsubstantiated claims.

"Republicans feel that Social Media Platforms totally silence conservatives voices. We will strongly regulate, or close them down, before we can ever allow this to happen. We saw what they attempted to do, and failed, in 2016. We can't let a more sophisticated version of that happen again. Just like we can't let large scale Mail-In Ballots take root in our Country. It would be a free for all on cheating, forgery and the theft of Ballots. Whoever cheated the most would win. Likewise, Social Media. Clean up your act, NOW!!" Mr. Trump wrote on Wednesday.

In a first, Twitter, on Tuesday, had posted a fact check below two of Mr. Trump's tweets about mail-in ballots. Twitter's action has potentially large ramifications given the U.S. is months away from a general election and Mr. Trump uses the site several times a day to communicate with his more than 80 million followers.

"There is NO WAY (ZERO!) that Mail-In Ballots will be anything less than substantially fraudulent. Mail boxes will be robbed, ballots will be forged & even illegally printed out & fraudulently signed," Mr. Trump tweeted, singling out the Governor of California [Gavin Newsom].

"The Governor of California is sending Ballots to millions of people, anyone liv-



**Talking tough:** U.S. President Donald Trump during an event in the Rose Garden at the White House on Tuesday. ■ REUTERS

ing in the state, no matter who they are or how they got there, will get one. That will be followed up with professionals telling all of these people, many of whom have never even thought of voting before, how, and for whom, to vote. This will be a Rigged Election. No way!" Mr. Trump wrote on Wednesday.

Twitter reacted with a link that said, "Get the facts about mail-in ballots" that linked to a page titled, "Trump makes unsubstantiated claim that mail-in ballots will lead to voter fraud." The page included details on the President's false claims and links to articles from publications, including the *Washington Post* and CNN.

Twitter had announced last year that it would, in some cases, tag notices onto tweets from the verified accounts of government offi-

cials, elected representatives and those running for office who had more than 10,000 followers. Mr. Trump has repeatedly made baseless claims on voting by mail and had threatened, earlier in May, to cut federal funding to some states over the issue. On Sunday, several Republican groups had sued California after Mr. Newsom said everyone eligible to vote would be sent an absentee ballot to encourage mail voting due to the pandemic.

#### Political bias'

Mr. Trump, reacted by saying Twitter was "interfering" in the 2020 election and "completely stifling free speech" and that as President, he would "not allow it to happen".

His campaign manager, Brad Parscale, accused Twitter of political bias and said the company was trying to interfere with Mr. Trump's

outreach to voters. "We always knew that Silicon Valley would pull out all the stops to obstruct and interfere with President Trump getting his message through to voters. Partnering with the biased fake news media 'fact checkers' is only a smoke screen Twitter is using to try to lend their obvious political tactics some false credibility. There are many reasons the Trump campaign pulled all our advertising from Twitter months ago, and their clear political bias is one of them," Mr. Parscale said in a statement.

However, Twitter had said

last year that it was not permitting political ads and that "political message reach should be earned, not bought."

Also on Tuesday, Mr. Trump tweeted unsubstantiated claims about television show host and former Republican politician Joe Scarborough, suggesting Mr. Scarborough had a role in the 2001 death of a former employee, Lori Klausutis.

Klausutis's death was caused by a cardiac condition and did not involve foul play, as per the authorities at the time. In a May 21 letter published by the *New York Times*, Klausutis's widow, Timothy Klausutis, had requested Twitter CEO Josh Dorsey to take down similar tweets from Mr. Trump from April and May this year.

A Twitter spokesperson said the company was "deeply sorry" about the "pain" caused by the statements but said the tweets would remain, as per several U.S. news outlets who reported the reaction.

# 'Hong Kong body will play an advisory role'

The city's government will retain enforcement powers, says key Chinese official

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
BEIJING

A proposed security law could allow Chinese mainland authorities to set up shop in Hong Kong, but their powers would likely be restricted to intelligence gathering and an advisory role, a member of China's top political advisory body said Wednesday.

China's rubber-stamp Parliament is expected to approve on Thursday a proposal to draft a national security law for the semi-autonomous city, which has sparked fresh protests over fears the financial hub will lose its unique freedoms.

#### British-era agency

Daniel Fung, Hong Kong member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, said the idea is to establish a security agency similar to one that existed when the city was a British colony. "I would expect the powers and duties of this



**On high alert:** Riot police standing guard as a woman tries to cross the street in Hong Kong on Wednesday. ■ AP

agency to be restricted to intelligence gathering, and playing an advisory role," Mr. Fung said, while noting its exact functions will have to be set out under the legislation that will be passed at a later date.

Enforcement of laws, he added, should remain with the Hong Kong government under the proposal, which would ban secession, subversion, terrorism and foreign interfe-

rence. Hong Kong has its own legal system and a degree of autonomy through the "One Country, Two Systems" arrangement under which Britain handed Hong Kong back to China in 1997.

Under the city's mini-constitution, local police are responsible for law enforcement but mainland police officials are allowed to operate within the territory. Activists fear the new proposals

will end this firewall.

Last year's mass unrest against the government was triggered by a now-scraped proposal to allow extraditions to the mainland, which many worried would leave Hong Kong citizens at the mercy of China's opaque justice system.

#### No transfer of suspects

Mr. Fung, however, said he did not see that happening under the new proposal.

"We do not expect the transfer of suspects to the mainland for trial," he said.

Mainland Chinese authorities could join Hong Kong police to investigate criminal suspects under the planned security law, pro-Beijing politician Maria Tam had earlier said. But according to Ms. Tam, who advises China's Parliament on Hong Kong's Constitution, police from outside the city would need approval from local authorities to conduct investigations.

## France to stop use of HCQ for COVID-19 treatment

REUTERS  
PARIS

France, Italy and Belgium acted to halt the use of hydroxychloroquine to treat patients suffering from COVID-19, amid questions about the safety of the generic anti-malaria drug.

France on Wednesday cancelled a decree allowing hospital doctors to dispense the medicine, while the Italian Medicine Agency (AIFA) suspended authorisation to use hydroxychloroquine for COVID-19 outside clinical trials.

Belgium's medicine agency warned against using the drug to treat the virus any

more except within ongoing clinical registered trials. It said trials aiming to evaluate the drug should also take potential risks into consideration.

The moves by three of the countries hardest hit by coronavirus infections and deaths follow a World Health Organization decision on Monday to pause a large trial of hydroxychloroquine due to safety concerns.

France's cancellation, which effectively bans the drug for COVID-19, was confirmed by the Health Ministry. It did not refer to the WHO suspension.

## U.S. strips Hong Kong of special trading status

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
WASHINGTON

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo declared on Wednesday that Hong Kong no longer enjoys the autonomy promised by Beijing, stripping the financial hub of its special status under U.S. law.

Hours before Beijing will hold a key vote on a controversial new security law on Hong Kong, Mr. Pompeo sent a notice to Congress that China was not living up to obligations from before it regained control of the territory from Britain in 1997. "I certified to Congress today that Hong Kong does not

continue to warrant treatment under United States laws in the same manner as U.S. laws were applied to Hong Kong before July 1997," Mr. Pompeo said in a statement. "No reasonable person can assert today that Hong Kong maintains a high degree of autonomy from China, given facts on the ground."

Under a law passed last year by Congress aimed at supporting Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement, the administration has to certify that the territory is still autonomous to enjoy its separate status with the U.S. for trading purposes.

## EU unveils €750 billion economy rescue plan

Bloc will borrow funds from the market and disburse them in loans and grants

REUTERS  
BRUSSELS

The European Union (EU)'s executive unveiled a €750 billion plan on Wednesday to prop up economies hammered by the coronavirus crisis, hoping to end months of squabbling over how to fund a recovery that has exposed fault-lines across the 27-nation bloc.

But fiscally conservative northern countries have resisted pressure from a "Club Med" group to take on mutual debt to protect the EU's single market of 450 million people from being splintered by divergent economic growth and wealth levels.

"We either all go it alone, leaving countries, regions and people behind and accepting a union of haves and have-nots, or we walk that road together..." said European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

The euro rose as she laid out in the European Parliament details of the Commission's plan, entitled "Europe's Moment: Repair and Prepare for the Next Generation".

The grants, although controversial, are needed because Italy, Spain, Greece, France and Portugal already have high debt and rely heavily on tourism, which was halted by the pandemic.

The recovery fund package comes in addition to the EU's long-term budget for 2021-27, which the Commission proposed should be set



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. ■ AP

at €1.100 trillion (\$1.21 trillion).

#### Germany welcomes plan

The 500 billion euros in grants is in line with the wishes of the EU's two biggest economies, France and Germany, which came up with a grants-only proposal last week. France, Germany, Italy and others welcomed the Commission plan.

The more frugal nations would rather see the recovery package comprise only loans, and the Netherlands – among the most resistant to mutualised debt and grants – responded cautiously to the proposals. The plan has to be approved by all 27 member states and the European Parliament.

The borrowing will ultimately have to be repaid, meaning higher national contributions to the EU budget in the future or new taxes assigned to the bloc.

## Rajapaksa's office responds to report

Responding to the report 'Sri Lanka will not tolerate targeting of war heroes: Gotabaya Rajapaksa' published on May 20 in *The Hindu*, the office of the President of Sri Lanka, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, has said the article did not reflect "the real situation".

On the reference to Mr. Rajapaksa recently pardoning a soldier convicted for the murder of eight Tamil civilians, the statement said, the President had used his powers according to the Constitution. "After taking 13 years to sentence Ratnayake, the court still held reasonable doubts. Sri Lanka pardoned, without trial, 14,500 arrested or surrendered LTTE cadres. Amongst them were those who too had committed similar or worse acts as the one Ratnayake was embroiled. Therefore, for Sri Lanka to pardon Ratnayake also is not unreasonable or unethical," said the statement.

The reference in the report to Sri Lanka's Army Commander as "a general accused of war crimes" is "very unfair", the statement said, noting that the allegations are "unsubstantiated and arbitrary". The National Ranaviru [War heroes] Day "is not just a day to salute the fallen soldier, but to celebrate the peace that their supreme sacrifice ushered into the country". Pointing to the report's description of the LTTE as a "rebel" outfit, the statement said it was a "terrorist" group. Further, contesting the reference to an estimated 40,000 casualties during the final phase of the war, the statement said the figure, cited in past UN reports, was a "guess" and "not an estimate".

Denying that militarisation was "a lingering concern in post-war Sri Lanka" as mentioned in the news report, the statement said there were "a number of instances where closely bonded relations between the security forces and people in the area had surfaced."

#### ELSEWHERE



**Worst-case scenario in Moscow averted: Putin**  
MOSCOW  
President Vladimir Putin said on Wednesday that Moscow, the epicentre of Russia's COVID-19 outbreak, had succeeded in preventing what he called the worst-case scenario as the city looked to easing tough lockdown measures. ■ REUTERS

**S. Africa HIV researcher wins top French award**  
PARIS  
Quarraisha Abdool Karim, a South African HIV researcher who found that a topical gel could stop many women catching the virus has been awarded one of France's top science prizes. Ms. Karim won the half a million-euro Christophe Mérieux Prize for her work for the Durban-based Centre for the AIDS Programme of Research in South Africa. ■ AFP

#### INTERVIEW | M. TAYLOR FRAVEL

## 'Changing balance across the LAC is the trigger for stand-off'

Even though road construction activity lies on the Indian side, China likely views it as challenging its position, says expert on defence and military strategy

ANANTH KRISHNAN

The spark for the current stand-off with China, with ongoing face-off situations in the Galwan River valley, Pangong Lake and other areas, is the increasing infrastructure competition along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), says M. Taylor Fravel, a leading expert on the Chinese military and defence strategy, who is Professor of Political Science and Director of the MIT Security Studies Program. He is the author of *Active Defense: China's Military Strategy Since 1949* (2019) and *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Conflict and Cooperation in China's Territorial Disputes* (2008). While construction activity near Galwan river and Pangong lake lies on the India side of the LAC, China is likely responding to what it sees as a challenge to its position. Edited excerpts:

On May 26 at the National People's Congress, Xi Jinping called on the People's Liberation Army to be battle-ready. Is this unusual?

■ Xi Jinping's use of the phrase "battle-readiness" (*beizhan*) is not unusual. It is

perhaps better rendered in English as 'combat readiness'. The phrase is commonly used along with the characters for training (*xunlian*) to the phrase 'training and combat readiness', which was the phrase Xi used at this year's National People's Congress, as well as last year's. 'Training and

combat readiness' frequently appear in the PLA's official newspaper, the *Liberation Army Daily*, with more than 1,100 mentions in 2019 and 1,300 in 2018. Moreover, it is natural for any commander in chief – Indian, American, or Chinese – to call on his or her armed forces to be combat-ready, as that is the basic requirement for any military to judge a military operation for its action," the statement said, adding that no official documentation had "proven allegations" of war crimes" is "very unfair", the statement said, noting that the allegations are "unsubstantiated and arbitrary". The National Ranaviru [War heroes] Day "is not just a day to salute the fallen soldier, but to celebrate the peace that their supreme sacrifice ushered into the country". Pointing to the report's description of the LTTE as a "rebel" outfit, the statement said it was a "terrorist" group. Further, contesting the reference to an estimated 40,000 casualties during the final phase of the war, the statement said the figure, cited in past UN reports, was a "guess" and "not an estimate".

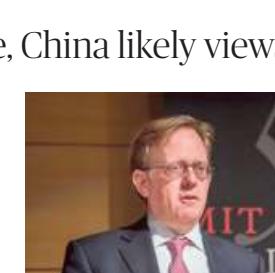
Are the current stand-offs to the competitive dynamic along the LAC, broader strategic issues, or both?

■ In my view, the trigger or spark for the current stand-off is the competition along the LAC in the western sector. This is more similar to the 2013 and 2014 border stand-offs between China and India. Perhaps paradoxically, fewer and less vocal or public statements allow China to use troop movements and posture to signal its opposition to Indian activities on the LAC while leaving flexibility for a resolution that would likely entail Chinese troops returning to their original positions. By contrast, in Doklam, China is very publicly 'tied its hands' in a way

that it is not doing today – at least so far. Shocks. This is true not only regarding the border with India today, but also Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the South China Sea.

Are such incidents likely to recur as India plays catch-up on infrastructure? Would resuming the LAC clarification process help?

■ The lack of a formal agreement regarding the location of the LAC will ensure that future incidents and crises are bound to recur. Thus, reaching such a formal agreement – even if the underlying territorial dispute cannot be resolved – is more necessary than ever before. Narendra Modi and Xi Jinping are both strong leaders who should have the capacity to reach such an agreement.



Lack of a formal agreement regarding the location of the LAC will cause incidents to recur

## MARKET WATCH

	27-05-2020	% CHANGE
Sensex	31,605	3.25
US Dollar	75.71	-0.07
Brent oil	34.37	-3.94

## NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	326.65	11.05
Asian Paints	1619.45	-10.40
Axis Bank	387.00	45.70
Bajaj Auto	2580.55	15.70
Bajaj Finserv	4258.05	160.80
Bajaj Finance	1936.45	107.45
Bharti Airtel	563.10	3.85
BPLC	329.45	16.30
Britannia Ind	3220.30	56.45
Cipla	633.05	5.35
Coal India	130.80	3.55
Dr Reddys Lab	3883.00	18.70
Eicher Motors	14966.95	161.85
GAIL (India)	88.60	0.45
Grasim Ind	566.65	34.00
HCL Tech	530.95	6.95
HDFC	1570.40	68.25
HDFC Bank	903.65	51.25
Hero MotoCorp	2175.65	62.00
Hindalco	133.30	4.20
Hind Unilever	1998.10	20.30
ICICI Bank	318.85	26.15
IndusInd Bank	368.95	20.75
Bharti Infralet	216.70	8.55
Infosys	705.45	24.90
Indian Oil Corp	573.95	0.40
ITC	192.15	0.45
JSW Steel	184.80	8.55
Kotak Bank	1217.55	64.35
L&T	850.85	25.30
M&M	432.50	3.35
Maruti Suzuki	5244.40	-1.75
Nestle India Ltd.	16716.50	61.35
NTPC	94.70	1.70
ONGC	77.95	0.95
PowerGrid Corp	157.15	-0.20
Reliance Ind	1445.55	21.50
State Bank	158.60	7.20
Shree Cement	20477.55	-189.75
Sun Pharma	450.90	-8.25
Tata Motors	84.55	1.45
Tata Steel	287.95	7.50
TCS	2005.30	62.30
Tech Mahindra	523.75	3.30
Titan	885.85	-6.90
UltraTech Cement	3727.40	-58.60
UPL	387.80	20.75
Vedanta	87.90	0.00
Wipro	201.25	12.45
Zee Entertainment	164.45	-0.75

## EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	75.52	75.83
Euro	83.10	83.45
British Pound	93.91	93.50
Japanese Yen (100)	70.14	70.44
Chinese Yuan	10.56	10.60
Swiss Franc	77.92	78.25
Singapore Dollar	53.34	53.57
Canadian Dollar	54.94	55.20
Malaysian Ringgit	17.36	17.45
Australian Dollar	50.35	50.57

Source: Indian Bank

## Profit of Tube Investments at ₹74 crore

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI

Tube Investments of India Ltd. (TIIL) has posted a standalone net profit after tax of ₹74 crore for the fourth quarter ended March 2020, including an exceptional item of ₹22 crore.

TII had recorded a net profit of ₹55 crore in the year-earlier period.

Total revenue from operations slipped to ₹935 crore from ₹1,224 crore due to a contraction in the auto industry.

For the year ended March 2020, higher profitability and lower capital employed enabled the sustainability of return on capital employed to 23%.

During the quarter, TIIL implemented a voluntary retirement scheme at a cost of ₹22 crore and the same was considered as an exceptional item resulting in profit before tax (after exceptional items) of ₹86 crore.

The board has planned to raise ₹200 crore by way of issue of privately placed, secured non-convertible debentures.

## Tata Power plans to add 700 MW in renewable energy

Enhances renewables portfolio by 7% to 3,833 MW

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI

Tata Power has enhanced its renewable portfolio by 7% to 3,883 mega watts (MW) and plans to add 700 MW in the near future to take the capacity to 4,600 MW.

More than a third of Tata Power's portfolio comes from clean energy. Of the 3,383 MW, 932 MW comes from wind and 1,705 MW comes from solar alone.

"The company's renewable energy portfolio stands at 3,883 MW, a 7% increase from the corresponding quarter last year," said a company statement.

"We, at Tata Power, have constantly strived to proliferate the company's renewable energy portfolio with

## Loans to MSMEs may get 'risk-free' tag

On FinMin nudge to RBI, banks may not need to set aside capital; Centre expecting less than 15% NPAs

MANOJ SAHA  
MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is likely to allow banks to assign zero risk weight for loans that will be extended to the micro, medium and small enterprises (MSMEs) under the ₹20 lakh crore economic package announced by the government earlier this month.

The Finance Ministry had requested the central bank to make these loans risk free, following an interaction with banks.

As a part of the package, a ₹3 lakh crore loan for the MSME sector was announced. This will be guaranteed by the National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company Limited (NCGTC) in the form of a Guaranteed Emergency Credit Line (GECLine).

However, such loans would attract a risk weight of



The move is aimed at nudging lenders to extend credit as they have turned risk averse and are reluctant to lend. ■REUTERS

a minimum 20% since these don't come with direct government guarantee. This facility is similar to the loans that are guaranteed by the Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE).

After banks highlighted the issue with the government, the Finance Ministry

asked the RBI to waive the requirement of assigning a risk weight to the loans, sources said.

"The RBI is likely to waive the requirement of risk weight," a source said. "The Finance Ministry is expected to issue detailed guidelines on this credit guarantee loan issue," the source added.

Sources also said that the government had factored in less than 15% non-performing assets from this ₹3 lakh crore of loans.

"The government has said that it has made [available] a corpus of ₹41,600 crore for the scheme, which is spread over the next few years. This means the government is factoring in less than 15% non-performing assets, as of now," said an official of a public sector bank.

Other small borrowers Though primarily meant for the MSME sector, other small borrowers including non-banking financial companies can also avail themselves of the scheme, sources said.

The scheme will be applicable till October 31, or till an amount of ₹3 lakh crore is sanctioned, whichever is earlier.

Zero risk would mean that

banks will not have to set aside additional capital for these loans. The move is aimed at encouraging lenders to extend credit, as banks have turned risk averse and have been reluctant to lend.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, who met chief executives of public sector banks last week, said banks had been asked to extend loans automatically to eligible borrowers without fear of the '3Cs' – CBI, CVC and CAG.

The tenure of loan under this scheme will be four years, with a moratorium period of one year on the principal amount. The NCGTC will not charge any guarantee fee.

The interest rate under the scheme is 9.25% if the loan is extended by banks and financial institutions, and 14% if by NBFCs.

## Sensex rises 1,000 points as banking stocks shine

Axis Bank leads pack with 13.46% gain

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI

Indian equity benchmarks rose over 3% on Wednesday, with the benchmark Sensex gaining more than 1,000 points during intraday trade, as banking and financial stocks witnessed huge buying interest ahead of the derivatives expiry on Thursday.

The 30-share Sensex gained 995.92 points, or 3.25%, to close at 31,605.22. During the day, it touched a high of 31,660.60, up 1,051 points, over the previous day's close of 30,609.30.

Incidentally, the top eight gainers in the Sensex pack were all lender entities, with Axis Bank heading the pack with a gain of 13.46%.

It was followed by ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank, IndusInd Bank, Bajaj Finance, Kotak Mahindra Bank, State Bank

of India and HDFC.

The broader Nifty settled the day at 9,314.95, up 285.90 points or 3.17%. The India VIX index fell nearly 1% to trade around 31 levels; it was trading around 40 a month ago.

A positive trend in most leading Asian markets also acted as catalyst even as investor sentiment received a boost with foreign entities turning net buyers in the current month after two consecutive months of selling.

While provisional data showed that foreign portfolio investors were net sellers at ₹335 crore on Wednesday, they have been net buyers at ₹12,741 crore in the current month – a sharp upswing compared to the cumulative selling of nearly ₹69,000 crore in the previous two months.

## NTPC eyes majority stake in Delhi distribution cos.

Plans to enter distribution business

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

Power giant NTPC has evinced interest in buying 51% stake in Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group's (ADAG) two utilities in Delhi, BSES Rajdhani Power Ltd. (BRPL) and BSES Yamuna Power Ltd. (BYPL).

In a letter written to Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (DERC) on May 26, 2020, the power giant said, "NTPC has decided to foray into power distribution sector and is keen on acquiring the distribution assets (BRPL and BYPL), which are on sale, provided that the equity sale is done through a transparent process".



stake in BRPL and BYPL." "NTPC is keen to explore the opportunities for acquiring 51 per cent stake in BRPL and BYPL, which are on sale, provided that the equity sale is done through a transparent process".

## SBI customers to SMS 'yes' for moratorium

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI

State Bank of India's (SBI's) customers will be able to avail loan repayment moratorium facility by simply responding to an SMS from the bank, the lender said.

The bank will send an SMS to customers, who have given standing instructions, to which they have to respond with a 'yes' within five days of the communication if they want to avail the facility.

The bank also said it would extend the moratorium by another three months for all 85 lakh eligible customers without waiting for their request.

## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI

The Competition Commission of India (CCI) is looking into allegations that Alphabet Inc's Google is abusing its market position to unfairly promote its mobile payments app in the country, five sources familiar with the case told Reuters.

The complaint was filed in February and the CCI has kept the identity of the complainant confidential, the first source with direct knowledge of the case said.

The complaint alleges the U.S. tech giant more prominently showcases its Google Pay app inside its Android app store in India, giving it an unfair advantage over



apps of competitors, which hurts consumers, the source added.

Google did not respond to a request for comment. Two of the sources said the watchdog informed Google about the case being filed a few days ago and the company

is expected to respond in due course.

**Allegation under review** A source said the case filing is currently being reviewed by senior CCI members. Typically, in such cases, Google will appear before the watchdog, which will then decide on the way forward.

The CCI can direct its investigations unit to conduct a wider probe into the allegations, or dismiss the case if it finds no merit in it.

"It is at a consideration stage," the source said.

The Commission did not respond to a request for comment.

This is Google's third major antitrust challenge in India.

In 2018, the CCI fined Google \$21 million for "search bias", but a company appeal against that is pending. Last year, the CCI also started probing Google for allegedly misusing its dominant position to reduce the ability of smartphone manufacturers to opt for alternate versions of its Android mobile operating system.

Google Pay allows users in India to do inter-bank fund transfers and bill payments. It competes with apps such as Softbank-backed Paytm and Walmart's PhonePe in India's crowded digital payments market, where Facebook's WhatsApp is also planning a

Mirabai Chanu recommended for Khel Ratna



Mirabai Chanu. ■ FILE PHOTO

Y.B. SARANGI

KOLKATA  
The Indian Weightlifting Federation (IWF) has nominated former World champion S. Mirabai Chanu for the Arjuna Award.

Mirabai, who won the World title in 2017, is one of the rare athletes who bagged the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award in 2018 even before getting the Arjuna Award.

After winning the 2018 CWG gold, she claimed gold medals in three Olympic qualifying events – EGAT Cup, Commonwealth championships and Qatar Cup – last year.

The IWF has also recommended the names of 2018 Commonwealth Games gold medallists R.V. Rahul and Punam Yadav for the Arjuna Award.

#### IN BRIEF



Batra is Olympic Channel Commission member

NEW DELHI

The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) president Narinder Batra has been appointed as a member of the Olympic Channel Commission. In a letter to International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach, Batra, who became an IOC member in June last year, expressed his gratitude after being selected for the role.

#### Serie A's meeting with Italian Government today

MILAN

Serie A's hopes of following Germany and Spain back onto the pitch will be decided on Thursday during a meeting with the Italian government which will determine the fate of the season in football-mad Italy. Sports Minister Vincenzo Spadafora will tell Italian football federation and Lega Serie A bosses if the health conditions are right to return after nearly three months. AFP



Favre backtracks on Dortmund exit

BERLIN

Swiss coach Lucien Favre on Wednesday back-tracked on comments he made hinting he would leave Borussia Dortmund at the end of the season after defeat by Bayern Munich left his team seven points adrift of the champions in the Bundesliga title race with six games left. "I am not thinking of giving up at all," Favre, who is under contract until 2021, insisted on Wednesday. AFP

#### Premier League to resume contact training

LONDON

Premier League clubs voted unanimously on Wednesday to resume contact training as the English top-flight took a significant step towards a possible restart in June. Clubs returned to training in small and socially distanced groups last week but they have now moved to stage two of the "return to training protocol".

#### IOA forms grant and affiliation committee

NEW DELHI

The Indian Olympic Association on Wednesday constituted an 11-member committee, led by Athletics Federation of India president Adil Sumariwala, to monitor annual grant and affiliation fee of its members for the 2020-2021 cycle. PTI

# Fate of T20 World Cup uncertain

ICC likely to delay decision on event; push for postponement from some quarters

AMOL KARHADKAR

MUMBAI

The International Cricket Council (ICC) Board is likely to adopt a wait-and-watch approach when discussing the fate of the T20 World Cup, scheduled to be played in Australia in October-November.

The COVID-19 outbreak has thrown sports calendars into disarray, and cricket is no exception. The future of the marquee event – set to feature 16 teams – hangs in the balance. There have been murmurs of a postponement, either to 2021 or 2022, but the ICC was quick to clarify on Wednesday that it is going ahead with preparations.

#### Clarification

"The ICC has not taken a decision to postpone the T20 World Cup and preparations are ongoing for the event in Australia this year as per plan. The topic is on the agenda for the ICC Board meeting [on Thursday] and a decision will be made in due course," stated an ICC spokesperson.



No clarity: The wait for the West Indies, which won the World T20 title in 2016, and other teams continues as no decision has been taken on this year's edition. ■ FILE PHOTO: K.R. DEEPAK

*The Hindu* understands that despite a few constituents of the 18-member Board pushing for rescheduling the event, the ICC is likely to wait for a while, considering multiple factors.

With the National Rugby League in Australia likely to receive the go-ahead, with limited spectators in the stands, the ICC would like to

monitor developments and delay its decision till the last minute.

Besides, the fact that the ICC is set to have a new chief in the annual meeting in the next couple of months also means that outgoing chairman Shashank Manohar would be hesitant to impose his decisions on the new regime.

Should Cricket Australia express its inability on Thursday to conduct the event, the ICC will have to schedule it in either 2021 or 2022. India is set to host next year's T20 World Cup, but is involved in a conflict with the ICC over securing tax benefits from the government. The ICC does not have an event scheduled in 2022.

## Also on the agenda

The other important issues that will come up for discussion when the ICC Board meets on Thursday:

#### Chairman election

The procedure and timelines for electing Shashank Manohar's successor as ICC chairman will be formalised.

At the moment, England's Colin Graves and Singapore's Imran Khawaja are the contenders, with BCCI president Sourav Ganguly a rank outsider.

#### Standoff with BCCI

The ICC had set a deadline of May 18 for the BCCI to obtain an assurance from the Central government on tax exemptions for the 2021 T20 World Cup.

The BCCI has sought an extension, citing the pandemic; it will be interesting to see if the ICC takes the event away from the BCCI.

# India's Australia Test series from Dec. 3'

Plan does not include any quarantine hub for the visitors: host media reports

cond Test in Adelaide will be a day/night affair as BCCI president Sourav Ganguly had committed earlier.

SMH reported: "Perth is scheduled to kick off the Australian Test summer with a pink-ball match against Afghanistan but Brisbane has won the right to host world powerhouse India in the season's marquee series."

According to SMH, "CA will, on Friday, announce the international schedule for the 2020-21 season, which will feature as many as five international men's sides, though this will be subject to change due to the global health crisis."

The 7news.com.au report stated: "With Australia's coronavirus situation easing, the series looks certain to go ahead without the need for a quarantine hub."

"The entire tour taking place in one city had been a possibility but the biggest question is whether – or how many – fans will be allowed to attend matches."

## Carlsen meets Nakamura in semifinals

RAKESH RAO  
NEW DELHI

For the second time in three days, Magnus Carlsen dismissed Wesley So's challenge 2.5-0.5 and set up a semifinal-clash with Hikaru Nakamura in the \$150,000 Lindores Abbey Rapid Challenge.

Carlsen won both games with black and, in between, drew with white, in the second of the best-of-four mini-matches.

Later, Sergey Karjakin rallied from 1-2 to win 3-2 over Russian teammate Daniil Dubov and draw level after two mini-matches.

Much like the all-China encounter involving Ling Diren and Wu Yangyi, the Karjakin-Dubov match will also be decided following a third mini-match.

The results: Quarterfinal (second mini-match): Carlsen (Nor) bt So (USA) 2.5-0.5; Karjakin (Rus) bt Dubov (Rus) 3-2.

# Bayern zooms seven clear after Der Klassiker win at Dortmund

Kimmich's smart strike before half-time seals the deal

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
BERLIN

Joshua Kimmich described his winning goal as "brutally important" after Bayern Munich took a huge step towards an eighth straight Bundesliga title with a 1-0 win at Borussia Dortmund to leave it seven points clear at the top with just six games left.

Kimmich's brilliant effort came just before half-time behind closed doors at Signal Iduna Park as host Dortmund missed the chance to turn up the heat on the Bavarians without the backing of its huge support.

**Important**  
"It was brutally important: I looked around to see if everyone understood how important it was," Kimmich said of his deft chip. Kimmich's captain Ma-



Telling contribution: Bayern skipper Neuer acknowledged the importance of Kimmich's goal vis-a-vis the league title. ■ AFP

nuel Neuer echoed the defensive midfielder's thoughts.

"That was a very important sign," said Neuer.

Bayern was in control, and Kimmich grabbed what proved to be the winner two minutes before half-time when he chipped Burki from 20 yards.

**The results:** Borussia Dortmund 0 lost to Bayern Munich 1 (Kimmich 43); Bayer Leverkusen 0 lost to Wolfsburg 4 (Pongracic 43, 75, Arnold 64, Steffen 68).

Eintracht Frankfurt 3 (Silva 35, Kamada 79, Chandler 82) drew with Freiburg 3 (Gribo 28, Petersen 67, Holer 69); Werder Bremen 0 drew with Borussia M'Gladbach 0.

# Usha's son Vignesh forges new path

A doctor, he now has an IOC certification in sports medicine

STAN RAYAN  
KOCHE

Hockey legend Dhyan Chand's son Ashok Kumar picked up his dad's sport and won an Olympic bronze in Munich, 1972. And athletics great Milkha Singh's son Jeev went on to become one of India's finest golfers.

Many years ago, when P.T. Usha saw her little son Vignesh Ujjwal running around with a nice spring, she felt that he would turn out to be a good athlete. Ujjwal showed early promise, winning 100 and 200m golds in school, but he was never serious about track and field.

"When we made him run and conducted tests, he did very well. But he didn't show

much interest in athletics then. I would have loved if he had taken up athletics but we didn't want to push him," revealed Usha in a chat with *The Hindu*.

There is an important advice for parents here. Despite being one of the India's greatest athletes, Usha felt that pushing her son into her sport was not proper.

#### The football link

"He showed that he could be good at football. When he joined medical college, he was a striker. Only then, we realised how much he loved the game," said Usha.

Ujjwal, 27, is a doctor and it's clear that he will not reach the highs his mother

# SAI opens training at Patiala and Bengaluru

Equipment to be self sanitised after use

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Olympic-bound athletes cloistered at the National Institute of Sports, Patiala and the Centre of Excellence, Bengaluru finally got the go-ahead to resume training starting Wednesday evening.

Equipments would be self-sanitised by athletes after use, maintain social distancing and follow the staggered schedule provided for training.

The athletes have been stuck indoors for almost two months with nationwide lockdown amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

While Patiala has athletes and weightlifters, Bengaluru has the men's and



Happy family: Vignesh Ujjwal with his parents V. Sreenivasan and P.T. Usha. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Users should stay alert to messages and calls that seem suspect. ■ AFP

folded into folders, was being offered for a mere \$1000 (about ₹76,000).

A spokesperson from the company said on Wednesday, "There has been no breach of our database and all our user information is se-

cure. We take the privacy of our users and the integrity of our services extremely seriously and we are continuously monitoring for suspicious activities.

"We were informed about a similar sale of data in May 2019. What they have here is likely the same dataset as before. It's easy for bad actors to compile multiple phone number databases and put a Truecaller stamp on it. By doing that, it lends some credibility to the data and makes it easier for them to sell. We urge the public and users not to fall prey to such bad actors whose primary motive is to swindle the people of their money."

The Truecaller data, which is of users from all over the country and is classi-

Cyble founder Beenu Arora said that it was confirmed that the data was a subset of the 2019 leak.

**Cyber threat**  
The 600 million other data sets posted for sale belongs to Chinese and Taiwanese companies as well as individuals.

The data has been put up by TooGod, the same entity responsible for the Truecaller data posting.

"The Truecaller leak, in contrast, is minor in nature considering that the actor has now leaked over 600 million records, including from China, Taiwan etc. TooGod is not the biggest worry

from my perspective, as the actor is just another wholesaler in the dark web market. There are other active groups, who are continually targeting large organisations as well as growing start-ups," Mr. Arora said.

He added that the average user is advised to stay alert to suspicious text messages, phone calls and emails, regularly monitor banking transactions for any potential anomalies or suspicious activities, use complex passwords and multi-factor authentication where possible and opt for data breach monitoring and notification services that tell users if their information is exposed.

**SHORT TAKES**  
Ram Gopal Varma makes 'Coronavirus'

MUMBAI

Filmmaker Ram Gopal Varma on Wednesday took to Twitter to unveil the trailer of *Coronavirus*, based on the pandemic, which he shot during the lockdown while following all precautions and guidelines. "When the rest of film people were sweeping floors, cooking food, washing utensils, drying clothes etc., I made a film," wrote Varma. PTI



A B-M-BE