



Mallikarjun Kharge will be Cong. nominee for RS from Karnataka

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Ahead of vote for UNSC seat, India launches campaign brochure

page 9



More than 28% of Sunderbans damaged in Cyclone Amphan

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The Taliban movement has changed: Russia's special envoy for Afghanistan

page 12

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NEARBY

City donates to pump up doctors' immunity

MUMBAI

On Friday, a group of citizens donated 2,000 snack boxes containing dry fruits, chikki and kachoris for resident doctors at K.E.M. Hospital. At Nair Hospital, doctors have received high protein bars, powders and ready-to-drink milkshakes. As the young resident doctors battle the contagious virus inside isolation wards, Mumbai's non-profits and philanthropic individuals have ensured they keep getting immunity-boosting snacks every day.

REGION ▶ PAGE 3

139 more dead as State crosses 80,000 cases

PUNE

With 139 COVID-19 related deaths reported on Friday, Maharashtra posted its highest fatality surge yet to take the State's total death toll to 2,849. Another spike of 2,409 new cases saw the State's total case tally breach the 80,000-mark to reach 80,229.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 10

India, China hold talks, agree to resolve differences peacefully

Foreign Ministry-level discussions reviewed bilateral ties, current developments

ANANTH KRISHNAN

India and China on Friday held talks between their Foreign Ministries and agreed to follow a consensus that differences should be handled peacefully and should not become disputes, in the highest-level diplomatic engagement since tensions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) erupted in May.

Both sides agreed "to handle their differences through peaceful discussion bearing in mind the importance of respecting each other's sensitivities, concerns and aspirations and not allow them to become disputes", the Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement.

The MEA said the two sides "reviewed the state of bilateral relations, including

Both sides agreed to handle differences through peaceful discussion bearing in mind the importance of respecting each other's sensitivities, concerns and aspirations and not allow them to become disputes

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

Both sides agreed to implement the consensus that two countries do not constitute a threat to each other and do not let differences rise into disputes

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

the current developments". Military-level talks will be held between two Lieutenant Generals on Saturday

On Friday, Joint Secretary (East Asia) in the Ministry of External Affairs Naveen Srivastava held a videoconference with Wu Jianguo, Director General of the Asia Department at the Chinese

Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The MEA said both sides noted the "consensus reached by the leaders of the two countries, that peaceful, stable and balanced relations between India and China will be a positive factor for stability in the current global situation".

A readout issued by Chi-

China appoints new commander

China has appointed a new Army commander, Lieutenant General Xu Qiling, to oversee the People's Liberation Army Ground Force on the India border, amid the ongoing tensions across the Line of Actual Control. ▶ PAGE 9

na's MFA said both agreed to "implement the consensus that the two countries do not constitute a threat to each other" and "do not let differences rise into disputes". It called for enhancing strategic mutual trust and properly managing differences.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

'Deaths on Shramik trains not due to lack of food, water'

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL

NEW DELHI

The government on Friday told the Supreme Court that not a single migrant worker had died on Shramik Special trains due to lack of food, water or medication. Their deaths were due to "earlier illnesses".

In turn, a three-judge Bench, led by Justice Ashok

Bhushan, asked the government to complete the transportation of migrant workers, whether by rail or road, in the next 15 days.

The Bench said the exodus cannot continue indefinitely.

The court was hearing a *suo motu* case on the migrant workers' crisis. It reserved the case for final or-

ders to be pronounced on June 9.

Explaining reports about the deaths on Shramik Specials, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta briefed the court that "an enquiry found that no deaths were caused by lack of food, water or medication... The people who died had some earlier illnesses. Railways has the details.

People who showed signs of illness were shifted to the nearest hospitals".

No official number

Senior advocate A.M. Singhvi said according to news reports, a total of 80 individuals lost their lives while travelling on the Shramik Specials. However, no official number has been released

till date. Further, media reports said 644 migrant labourers died in the lockdown. "Absence of data on the actual number of migrant labourers aggravates these calamities by leaving the administering agencies under-prepared to deal with the challenges," he argued.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

+ States to decide on reopening of schools

HRD Ministry ready with guidelines

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The State governments will each make their own decisions on when to reopen schools, School Education Secretary Anita Karwal said on Friday, emphasising that the Centre would not intervene in the issue.

However, the Union Ministry of Human Resource Development has prepared guidelines for sanitation, quarantine and physical distancing norms to be followed by schools whenever they reopen, she said.

Ms. Karwal was speaking at a virtual conference on school education and the COVID challenge, hosted by Ashoka University.

Consultations on
"The safe school operation guidelines are actually ready. We are doing some consultation with the States, and there is some kind of rumour going around that these guidelines are actually going to tell the date of

school reopening. No, there is no such thing, I must clarify," she said. "Because school reopening dates are entirely within the purview of the State governments and the Union Territories and they have to decide depending on the local situation. The Centre does not intervene on this. We are only trying to prepare guidelines for sanitation and social distancing and how to do classroom transactions with all these guidelines."

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Massive spike in foreign flows into market

FPIs buy shares worth nearly ₹21,000 cr. in June

ASHISH RUKHAIYAR

MUMBAI

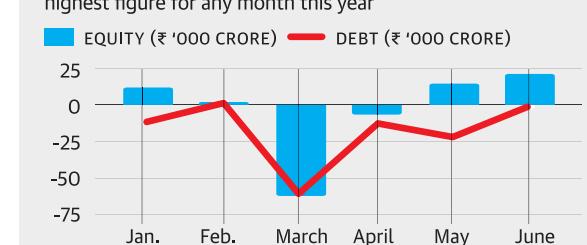
In just under a week in June, the quantum of foreign flows into the equity market has surpassed that of any other month in the current calendar year.

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) bought shares worth ₹20,814 crore in just five trading sessions in the current month. This is the highest in any month of 2020, with the previous high registered in May at ₹14,569 crore.

Market participants are of the view that the sudden

Picking up

Foreign portfolio investors have bought shares worth ₹20,814 crore in just five trading sessions in June. This is the highest figure for any month this year



surge was on account of the rights issue of Reliance Industries Limited (RIL), the stake sale in Kotak Mahindra Bank, and the slight uptick in optimism even as pandemic concerns continue to linger.

"These two corporate events saw major participa-

ty saw a breakout and added over 4.5% since the close on May 29. The current rally has seen money flow into sectors like automobiles, private banks and pharmaceuticals as there is continued hope of the worst being left behind," added Mr. Mahajan.

RIL rights issue

RIL's rights issue – the country's largest at ₹53,124.20 crore – closed on June 3 and was subscribed 1.59 times with many foreign institutional investors putting in significant bids.

On Tuesday, Uday Kotak sold shares worth around ₹6,800 crore of Kotak Mahindra Bank.

"Add to these two events,

the broader benchmark Nifty saw a breakout and added over 4.5% since the close on May 29. The current rally has seen money flow into sectors like automobiles, private banks and pharmaceuticals as there is continued hope of the worst being left behind," added Mr. Mahajan.

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CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Scientists question nod to infra projects in Goa

Forest clearances were given virtually during lockdown without fact-checks

ADITYA ANAND

MUMBAI

A group of 149 scientists, naturalists, conservationists, artists, students and others have expressed serious concerns regarding virtual clearances granted by the Centre for two projects passing through forest areas in Goa, during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.

In a letter to Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar, the signatories pointed to four-laning of a highway and laying of a power transmission line that will result in habitat fragmentation and directly impact wild-

life in Goa's Bhagwan Ma-

hadevi Wildlife Sanctuary and Mollem National Park.

"It is disturbing how projects are cleared by the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) in tiger habitat, using poorly-done biodiversity assessment for the NH4A project or no environmental impact assessment (EIA) of power transmission line. No fact-checking done. What is the point of the EIA process when project proponents are blindly trusted," said Girish Punjabi, a wildlife biologist and signatory to the letter.

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BMC scrambles for hospital beds

98% ICU beds are occupied; civic body plans war rooms in ward offices

TANVI DESHPANDE
JYOTI SHELAR
MUMBAI

Nearly three months have passed since Mumbai reported its first COVID-19 case, but the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has barely enough hospital beds. The BMC now plans to allot beds at the ward level with control rooms in all 24 ward offices, which additional municipal commissioner Suresh Kakani claims will help in decentralisation and faster allocation of beds.

Data released by the BMC shows that 94% of COVID-19 hospital beds, 85% of ventilators and 98% of ICU beds are occupied in Mumbai, due to which people are not able to find a bed. Several private hospitals have still not come around to opening up their premises, while several jumbo facilities are still not activated for housing COVID-19 patients.

BMC targets 1 lakh beds
In May, the BMC increased the capacity of its COVID-19 and ICU beds, including for quarantine and isolation facilities, to 75,000 and aims to take it up to one lakh in June. Of the 43,262 patients admitted for COVID-19 as of now, 989 are critical.

According to data shared by the BMC, Mumbai has 9,092 beds in dedicated COVID-19 hospitals, of which 8,570 or 94% are occupied.

The city has only 1,097 ICU beds, of which 1,080 or 98% are occupied, and 4,650 oxygen-supported beds, of which 74% are occupied. Of the 442 ventilators, 85% are under use.

It comes as no surprise, then, that people are unable to find hospital beds, especially in ICUs.



BJP workers stage a protest outside the Municipal Commissioner's office at the BMC headquarters on Friday. ■ SALMAN ANSARI

Last week, nearly 74 second, third and fourth-year MBBS students were appointed to manage the ward-level war rooms. On Friday, some of them reported to ward offices while many others awaited confirmation about remuneration.

At present, the F South ward office in Parel is the BMC's main war room where calls made on the 1916 helpline are being managed. The disaster control room in the BMC's head office at Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus was sealed last week for the second time after a few staff members tested positive. At F South, the helpline has three medical interns working in three shifts while at least 12 others are managing the calls from home.

Mini war rooms set up
Three others mini war rooms have also been set up at Nair, KEM and Sion Hospital. A doctor said each of the war rooms will have its own updated dashboard. For example, the war room at Nair hospital will have real-time information on its beds and the war room in a particular ward will have the information on beds in the COVID-19 Care Centres under its jurisdiction.

Not everyone is convinced this is the way to go. "We don't know if multiple war rooms will ease things or complicate them further," said a doctor.

There are many accounts of difficulty in getting through the 1916 helpline. Doctors say the authorities have been insisting that callers on 1916 should be allocated beds within 60 minutes, but that has not been possible as yet.

'State, BMC may use private ambulances'

Authorities also exploring other options to help COVID-19 patients, HC told

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI

The Maharashtra government and the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) on Friday told the Bombay High Court it was considering requisitioning privately-operated ambulances in the state during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Advocate General Ashutosh Kumbhakoni, appearing for the State, and BMC counsel Anil Sakhare told the court the authorities are exploring other options to ensure privately-operated ambulances start plying on the roads.

The high court was further told that the Regional Transport Office (RTO) will be directed to publish on its

website the contact numbers of private ambulances operating in a particular area so that public can have easy access to them.

The assurance was given to a Division Bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice Amjad Sayed which was hearing a petition filed by Kirit Somaiya, former Member of Parliament, raising concerns over shortage of ambulances in the city.

The court has posted the plea for further hearing on June 9 after the government sought more time.

As per the petition, the city had 3,000 ambulances, including private ones, until March 20, which reduced to 100 after the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak.

Mr. Somaiya's advocates Gaurav Mehta and Shivani Agarwal said the number of COVID-19 cases in the city was steadily increasing and in such a situation, there was a dearth of ambulances.

'Shocking dip in numbers'

"The government runs '108' ambulance service which has 93 ambulances in Mumbai. There are approximately 3,000 ambulances run by private operators. It is shocking to note there has been a significant decrease in the number of private ambulances during the pandemic," the petition said.

Mr. Somaiya alleged that the State government and the BMC were blatantly ignoring the issue and had not

made any effort to increase the number of ambulances.

"The intent of setting up isolation wards, quarantine centres, high functioning hospitals and efforts of so many medical and health care workers shall be in vain if people who are in need of these services fail to get them in time," the petition stated. Mr. Somaiya sought a direction to concerned authorities to immediately take steps to increase the number of ambulances in the city.

The State government, in a public-private arrangement, has nearly 1,000 ambulances, with 93 of them in Mumbai. Of these, 60 are deployed for COVID-19 patients. The hotline number for these ambulances is 108.

COVID-19 can't spread by touch: panel to HC

Court passes interim order directing airlines to allow passengers to occupy middle seat

SONAM SAIGAL
MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court on Friday passed an interim order directing flight operators to allow passengers to occupy the middle seat.

A Division Bench of Justices S.J. Kathawalla and S.P. Tavade was hearing a petition filed by Air India pilot Deven Kanani. In his plea, Mr. Kanani said the airline was flouting guidelines by not keeping middle seats vacant in special Vande Bharat flights bringing back Indian citizens stranded abroad.

An expert panel of the Ministry of Civil Aviation on Friday submitted a note to the High Court stating that COVID-19 does not spread by mere touch of a person who is a carrier of the novel coronavirus.

The court on Thursday



Taking a break: Air India aircraft at Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport in Mumbai on Friday. ■ PRASHANT NAKWE

had asked the panel to issue a clarification. The note said the novel coronavirus virus can be transmitted by touch only under certain circumstances like when an infected person's droplets from nose or mouth (coughing or sneezing) comes in contact with a surface or clothes and another person comes in

contact with the surface and then touches his or her nose, eyes or mouth.

The note added, "If an infected person merely touches a non-infected person the virus will not be transmitted. Transmission has to take place through droplets carrying the virus and the same reaching mouth, nose or

eyes of the other person."

The note said, "If an infected person is wearing a protective gown and a non-infected person is sitting next to him/her, even if the infected person's clothes have the virus on it, the protective gown would insulate this person and if the neighbouring person inadvertently touches the gown, this person will not be infected as the gown would provide the necessary shield."

The court had asked the Centre to provide data of passengers who tested negative for COVID-19 when they boarded the flights, but tested positive after arriving in India. On Thursday, Air India filed an affidavit that from May 7 to June 1 they undertook 423 flights with 58,867 passengers, of which 248 had tested positive.

Four held in Palghar gold robbery case

Taxis, autos are back on the road

Only up to 30% in operation due to lack of clarity and drivers being fined

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PALGHAR

Four members of a gang that was allegedly involved in looting ₹1.77 crore worth of gold from a firm in September last year were arrested in Palghar district in Maharashtra, police said on Friday.

Six armed men had barged into the office of the gold loan company in Tulunj area in Nasolopara on September 20 last year.

"We arrested four members of the gang from Mumbai on Thursday and seized ornaments, firearms, bullets, a vehicle, totaling ₹39.71 lakh," Superintendent of Police Dattatreya Shinde said.

Timings
MUMBAI

SATURDAY, JUN. 06
RISE 06:01 SET 19:15
RISE 19:58 SET 06:18

SUNDAY, JUN. 07
RISE 06:01 SET 19:15
RISE 20:58 SET 07:15

MONDAY, JUN. 08
RISE 06:01 SET 19:15
RISE 21:54 SET 08:13

Mumbai Weather max min
Mumbai Airport 35 22
Pune 32 20
Mumbai City 35 22

Mumbai Today
32°C A warm and humid weather will prevail. Light to moderate rain and thunder-shower are likely. A partly cloudy sky.

Mumbai Tomorrow
32°C A hazy and windy morning lies ahead. Day will be warm with a partly cloudy sky. Spells of rain and thunder-shower are likely.

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THE HINDU
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Mumbai returnee skips COVID-19 test in Goa

Elderly woman tests positive; CM orders probe

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PANAJI

Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant said he would conduct an inquiry into the incident of a woman skipping the mandatory COVID-19 test upon her arrival from Mumbai and later testing positive for the virus.

Suffers breathlessness
The elderly woman, living in North Goa's Calangute town, tested positive for COVID-19 after she complained of breathlessness on June 4.

Talking to reporters on the Thursday evening, Mr. Sawant admitted that the woman had "skipped the COVID-19 test" upon arrival from Mumbai.

Goa has made it mandatory for everyone entering the State to undergo COVID-19 tests and swab samples are being collected at State borders, railway stations and Dabolim airport.

"It is true that she entered the State without undergoing a test. She was admitted to the dedicated COVID-19 hospital after she tested positive," the Chief Minister said.

An inquiry will be conducted into the case, Mr. Sawant said. "At least 3,000 persons enter the State every day, so it is difficult to know how she skipped the test," he said.

166 cases in State
As on June 4, Goa has recorded 166 cases of COVID-19, of which 109 patients are undergoing treatment, while 57 have recovered from the virus.

The airport is prepared to welcome the functioning of Ola, Uber, Meru, and black-and-yellow taxis with stringent measures

CSMIA STATEMENT

vices by prepaid taxis and local cabs, the airport is prepared to welcome the functioning of Ola, Uber, Meru, and black-and-yellow taxis with stringent measures," the CSMIA said in a statement on Friday.

A separate location has been provided for the prepaid taxis as well as local cabs, away from passengers and the car park, to sanitise and fumigate the vehicle. Drivers will undergo thermal screening on arrival.

Both Ola and Uber have

made all their categories available in adherence to State government rules. Riders will be able to access Uber Go, Premier and Uber Auto for essential travel only and as mandated by the government, will be required to carry suitable documentation as proof of purpose.

Along with Mumbai, Ola will also be offering its services across major cities like Pune and Nashik and people will be able to book both in-city and out-station trips (intra-State only).

Safety zones

"Dedicated 'Ola Suraksha Zones' will also be started across Mumbai and other cities in Maharashtra to fumigate vehicles and screen drivers every 48 hours," a company statement said.

Both Ola and Uber have

JNPT converts training centre in Uran into COVID-19 hospital

Facility equipped with 120 beds and ambulance service

LALATENDU MISHRA
MUMBAI

Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT) has converted its training centre at Bokadivra in Uran into a COVID-19 hospital with 120 beds and an ambulance service.

JNPT has handed over the facility to the State authorities temporarily for treating patients from the local community. JNPT has been carrying out extensive sanitisation drives in nearby villages and distributing thermal scanners to sarpanches.

Sanjay Sethi, chairman, JNPT said, "JNPT is very conscious of its role and responsibility towards the extended JNPT family and is committed towards them.

JNPT has been operational through the lockdown to cater to essential services.

LALATENDU MISHRA

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Port authorities have been following all guidelines to ensure the safety of its workforce. It is also regularly disinfecting buses, providing accommodation to staff at terminals and drivers in the township, conducting check-ups for truck drivers and supplying them with meals.

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Police plan to launch "virtual appointment system" in Pune

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PUNE

The Pune police are planning to launch a "virtual appointment system" for citizens to speak to officers online and get their grievances redressed.

The initiative, to be initially launched at the police commissionerate, has been conceived against the backdrop of an increase in crime cases since relaxations in the lockdown.

In normal course, people with grievances approach the police commissioner's office or the police station concerned. Senior officials then take cognizance of the matter and initiate necessary action. However, this system was halted due to the novel coronavirus outbreak.



Free to roam: The State government circular lifts restrictions on walking pets during the lockdown. ■ FILE PHOTO

instances of the police stopping ambulances and pet taxis from ferrying animals from shelters and taking sick pets to veterinary clinics. The PIL said the police were refusing to issue passes to operate such ambulances and pet

taxis during the lockdown.

Additional Solicitor General Anil Singh said the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWB) issued a similar circular on June 1 directing the local administration to create at least three time slots of 20 minutes each in

all zones so that residents can take their pets out. The circular also mentioned that pet owners have to adhere to the "Board's guideline for pet owners and caregivers to be followed during this period of COVID-19 pandemic 2020".

Mr. Singh on Friday

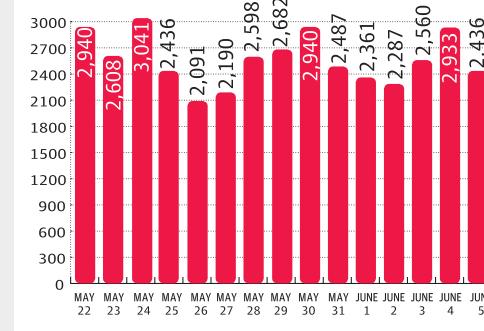
submitted the AWB circular to the court, saying that the Central government's stand was in consonance with it. During the previous hearing on May 10, the court had asked the Centre to make clear its stand on the issue. State Advocate General Ashutosh Kumbhakoni said the Maharashtra government has issued a similar circular directing police and civic officials not to prohibit owners from walking their pets. (With PTI inputs)

Maharashtra COVID-19 tracker

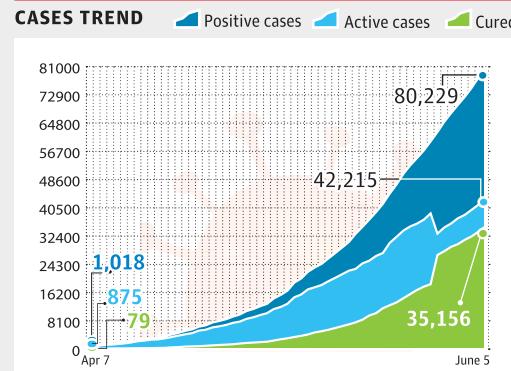
TOTAL CASES	NEW CASES	ACTIVE CASES	RECOVERED	DEATHS
80,229	2,436	42,215	35,156	2,849

DISTRICTS AFFECTED: 35

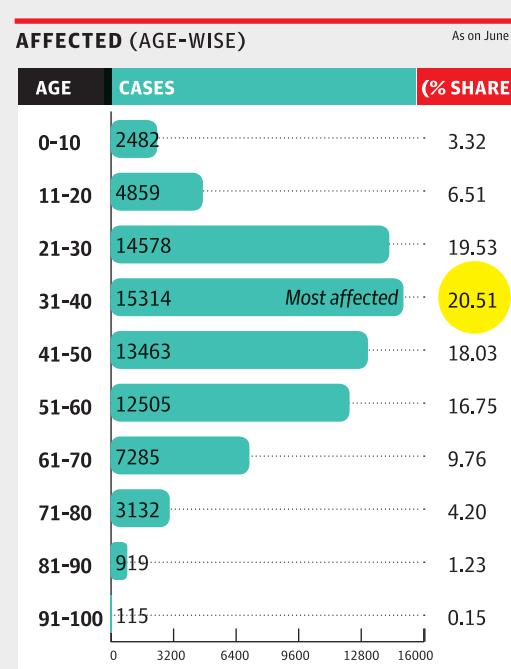
DISTRICT	CASES	DEATHS	DISTRICT	CASES	DEATHS
Mumbai	46,080	1,519	Jalna	170	3
Thane	11,877	292	Yavatmal	160	2
Pune	9,051	390	Nanded	157	7
Aurangabad	1,781	90	Sangli	136	4
Nashik	1,367	81	Latur	132	4
Raigad	1,362	55	Osmanabad	106	3
Palghar	1,285	37	Sindhudurg	105	0
Solapur	1,217	94	Buldhana	82	3
Jalgaon	896	109	Parbhani	77	3
Nagpur	681	11	Gondia	68	0
Akola	679	33	Gadchiroli	51	1
Kolhapur	630	6	Nandurbar	40	4
Satara	587	22	Bhandara	38	0
Ratnagiri	344	10	Chandrapur	30	0
An�ravati	275	16	Wardha	9	1
Hingoli	205	0	Washim	9	2
Dhule	195	21			
Ahmednagar	188	8			

POSITIVE CASES OVER LAST 15 DAYS

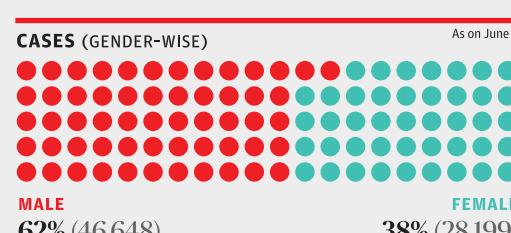
1,149(47%) of Friday's cases are from Mumbai



43.81% is the State recovery rate

**QUARANTINE NUMBERS**

5,45,947 | 30,291



69% of deaths due to co-morbidities



Source: Public Health Department, Maharashtra, BMC

City donates generously to pump up doctors' immunity

Non-profits and individuals donate protein bars, dry fruits, eggs as doctors at civic-run hospitals battle the virus

JYOTI SHELAR
MUMBAI

On Friday, a group of citizens donated 2,000 snack boxes containing dry fruits, chickki and kachoris for resident doctors at the civic-run K.E.M. Hospital. At Nair Hospital, doctors have received high protein bars, powders and ready-to-drink milkshakes among other nutritious donations.

As the young resident doctors battle the contagious virus inside isolation wards, Mumbai's non-profits and philanthropic individuals have ensured they keep getting immunity-boosting snacks every day.

"Our immunity is all we have to be able to fight the virus. All of us ensure that we have a high-protein diet, overall nutritious

**Extra care:** Resident doctors at Nair hospital receive boxes of snacks. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

meals and supplements along with good rest," said Dr. Satish Tandle, a resident doctor from Nair Hospital, which has been converted into an exclusive COVID-19 facility.

Dr. Tandle said they have received generous donations including protein supplements, digestive biscuits, oral rehydration solution, coconut water etc.

The Maharashtra Association of Resident Doctors (MARD) is active in all public hospitals and the doctors divert the donors if they have excess material. For example, doctors in

Sion Hospital on Friday said that they already had snacks boxes and the donors were then directed to K.E.M. and J.J. Hospitals.

snacking in between meals," said Dr. Arun Ghule, a resident doctor at K.E.M. Hospital.

The resident doctors at Nair Hospital are working in a 7/7 shift, which means that they work for seven days and get the next seven days off to quarantine themselves.

Some hospitals have a 9/6 shift. Working in personal protective equipment continuously is tedious for them along with the added risk of contracting the virus. "We were thinking about ways to contribute during the ongoing emergency. All of us narrowed down on offering something healthy to resident doctors in the forefront," said a donor from the group that donated at KEM on Friday.

Mumbai crosses 46,000 cases

For the second time, the city records 54 deaths, the highest in a day

JYOTI SHELAR
MUMBAI

Mumbai recorded 1,149 new cases of COVID-19 on Monday, taking its tally to 46,080. The city also recorded 54 more fatalities, equaling the highest number of deaths in a day, pushing the toll to 1,519. The city had reported 54 deaths on May 30.

Of the latest victims, nearly 47 had co-morbidities. The city's case fatality rate stands at 3.2%. On Friday, nearly 699 patients recovered and returned home. Altogether, 18,797 patients have been discharged, taking the recovery rate to 41%.

Doubling rate improves Civic officials said the doubling time of cases in Mumbai has increased to 20 days. On May 15, the doubling time was 12 days. However, as the lockdown eases, the civic body anticipates a surge in cases.

Additional municipal commissioner Suresh Kakani said people have to be more cautious while moving around. "Be it going to a market or to work, people have to wear masks, practice physical distancing and take measures to protect themselves," said Mr. Kakani. He said efforts to contain the cases will continue but people's participation will also



Healthcare workers check the temperature of a resident of Dharavi on Friday. ■ VIJAY BATE

be important. "We will continue with our testing and screening efforts. The fever clinics will also continue to function," he said.

Till date, the city has carried out 2.15 lakh tests. According to civic officials, six wards in the city – P North, R Central, R North, R South, S and T – have recorded a growth rate of less than 5%. Overall, the growth rate of cases in the city from May 28 to June 3 was 3.6%.

86 more cases in Navi Mumbai

RAINA ASSAINAR
NAVI MUMBAI

Navi Mumbai on Friday recorded 86 new COVID-19 cases, taking its tally to 2,643.

Three deaths were also reported, pushing the toll to 87. Of the new cases, 25 were reported from

Turbhe, 19 in Airoli, 12 in Koparkhairane, eight in Ghangoli, seven each in Vashi and Belapur, and five in Nerul.

Panvel recorded 29 new cases, taking its tally to 637. Panvel Rural reported nine cases, pushing its tally to 392.

Panel to submit report on reducing price of tests

The test costs ₹4,500 in private labs

JYOTI SHELAR
MUMBAI

A four-member committee appointed by the State to lower the cost of COVID-19 tests met on Friday to discuss the possible price caps. The committee will be submitting a report in a few days based on which a new price may be fixed. The current cost of the test in private laboratories is ₹4,500.

"There are various aspects that we are looking into. The cost of testing kits, transportation in the cold chain, PPE kits, etc.," said Dr. Sudhakar Shinde, chief

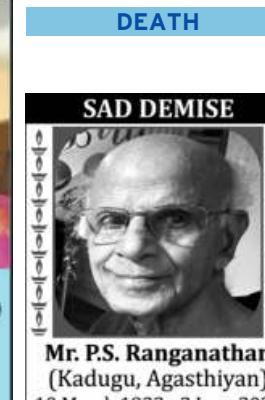
executive officer of the State Health Assurance Society, and member of the panel.

The Indian Council of Medical Research recently informed all States that they could lower the cap on COVID-19 tests as availability of kits is no longer a problem.

While the test is carried out for free at government-run laboratories, its cost has been capped at ₹4,500 in private laboratories.

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation gets the test done for ₹3,500 when it outsources its samples to private labs.

OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

DEATH**S SARASWATHY**
W.O.T.S Swaminathan, (Rtd Railways India Ltd.) passed away on 4/6/2020 at 8:45pm.
Deeply mourned by
T Sundar, Anu, Lakshmi,
Balakrishnan, Sriram,
Srinath, Siddharth and Sanjana,
Family and Friends
Pic: 922116075/944096740/9444979850**DEATH****Mr. P.S. Ranganathan**
(Kadugudi, Agasthyian)
10 March 1932 - 2 June 2020
attained Acharya thiruvadi
at New Jersey USA
Writer, voracious reader,
humorist, Anjaneya-bhakta,
a kind and inspiring friend and
guide to many, beloved husband,
father, grandpa; well-loved,
sincerely emulated and revered!
He is survived by
his wife (Kamala), daughter,
son in law and grand daughter
Whatsapp no. +1 (973) 907-6066

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FILM REVIEWS

Well-etched portrait of Mumbai's middle class

Anurag Kashyap directs a talented cast in a tale about angst and greed in Maximum City, with demonetisation thrown in for bad measure

NAMRATA JOSHI

What is it about women actors from Maharashtra? This is not about indulging in regional politics or any kind of a parochial play. Their undeniable virtuousness has been evident in film after film. And, in *Choked: Paisa Bolta Hai* too, it's the trinity of Saiyami Kher, Amruta Subhash and Rajshri Deshpande (in a smaller role though) that walks away with the plaudits with their effortlessness. Which is not to discount Roshan Mathew, who is just as nuanced in accompaniment.

It's the well-etched characters and finely tuned performances that are the highlights of Anurag Kashyap's new Netflix film, a dark slice of Mumbai's Marathi, lower middle class life that is just as observant of city's essential "melting pot" culture. So, in a fit of frustration, the couple – bank cashier Sarita (Saiyami Kher) and an out-of-job, carrom-playing, wastrel Sushant Pillai (Roshan Mathew) will easily break into their respective mother tongues. There's more to the detailing – the kitty par-



Black money: Once demonetisation is announced, things get chaotic on screen, as they did in real life too ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

ty games, the song-n-dance of the mehndi ceremony or the chipped walls and grungy balconies of the homes.

Sarita and Sushant's marriage story could be that of

any struggling couple in Mumbai. Their past is deliberately kept as a hazy backdrop. What we see are the results – shattered dreams, thwarted ambitions, un-

realised material needs, future responsibilities, Sushant's unsteady job, growing debt, the woman who rightly wears the pants in the house, a love that is steadily

slipping away and life becoming a burden, constantly weighing them down. Will a secret source of unlimited cash keep them going?

So far, so smart. Kashyap sets the tone with a marked cheekiness, whether it's the bank cashier getting back at a customer when he teases her about counting notes, or Sarita being the recipient of barbs from the *sabziwala* and plumber. Kashyap is characteristically insolent when it comes to Modi, magical mushroom or the Himalayan sojourn.

There some standout vignettes. Sarita's chats with her neighbour played by Amruta Subhash, that are as much about unbundling and seeking comfort and sympathy as about squaring up to the nosiness. Most so the heated arguments and confrontations of the couple – whether it's over a sleeping child on the bed or by the wash basin in the morning while she is on her way to work. Kher and Mathew are in sync right down to him being mostly at the receiving end and her telling him in the morning rush- "Baad mein ladte hain (Let's fight later)". Kher comes across as a real surprise in the way she becomes a Marathi *mulgi* – it's in the kind of saris she wears, the way she holds them slightly up

Choked: Paisa Bolta Hai

DIRECTOR: Anurag Kashyap
CAST: Saiyami Kher, Roshan Mathew, Amruta Subhash, Rajshri Deshpande

STORYLINE: Shattered dreams, thwarted ambitions, unrealised aspirations, future responsibilities, unsteady job prospects, debt and a love that is steadily slipping away. Will a secret source of unlimited cash keep the couple going?

and how she clutches on to her purse in the local. The body language is on point, as are the fleeting expressions of vulnerability, resentment and weariness with all Sarita's wants.

The lead-up to demonetisation is set-up well. But it's once demonetisation is announced, that things get chaotic on screen, as they did, ironically, in real life too. Micro-chip in currency notes, Jio, PayTm, *achhe din* – *Choked* hits at all the obvious targets, which is most welcome, but it does so in an obvious way as though showily scoring sly points. Demonetisation

Out of space and out of minds

Space Force tries hard but falls short of being the successful workplace comedy it yearns to be

DEBORAH CORNELIOUS

Though wildly popular, an understatement if at all, *The Office* actually began on very shaky footing. The first six episodes of the first season stumbled about before finding a strong focus in its sophomore return to television. The same happened to *Parks and Recreation*. But those were different times, audiences were slightly more forgiving before writing off shows entirely. In 2020, a single misstep could cost an earnest effort its all.

After their spectacular partnership on *The Office*, creator Greg Daniels once again collaborates with comedy maven Steve Carell in *Space Force*. The ten-part Netflix series explores America's aggressive need to dominate outer space before other countries. Ironically, the US actually has a real military faction, of the same name, with a logo that's eerily reminiscent of *Star Wars* aesthetics. Hopefully, the real-life project won't encounter half



Blah affair: A still from *Space Force* ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

as many capers as Daniels' and Carell's show presents. Even if *Space Force* does joke fun at real situations.

It's a tried-and-tested formula - like in *The Office* - to revel in the monkey business at work with outlandish characters.

Space Force is similarly helmed by Mark Naird (Carell) who is tasked with heading a new section of the armed forces that earns him a seat at the Chief of Staff's table. His unyielding belief in Space Force's projects often clashes with logic and even more so with the personal situation at home. A wife - Lisa Kudrow - is in prison, convicted of mysterious wrong-

doings. A daughter - Diana Silvers - is perpetually bickering teenage angst. At work, Naird is forever at loggerheads with civil scientist Adrian Mallory (John Malkovich) and his team.

Space Force has been highly anticipated, courtesy its cast and creator. But try as it might, and it does, the show keeps swinging and continuously missing. It enthusiastically oscillates in any and every direction that could possibly result in success. Yet, the show doesn't stick around long enough for its audience to settle comfortably. Even resolutions arrive too easily and with little

inconvenience.

Though comedy is at the core of *Space Force*, it's not cohesive enough to carry forward into the next frame. Ridiculous situations abound, but they're never pushed to the limit, a virtue Daniels and Carell are known for. Well-defined characters with their own kooks exist. But their place in the narrative falls short of engaging with an audience. In spite of a steady onslaught, the comedy only bubbles forth in fits and spurts.

The show could find a stronger ground to stand on in season two. But by then – since it won't be available for at least a year - the damage will only embed itself deeper. In the case of *Space Force*, it's a step into outer space but a giant leap out of our minds. *Space Force* is currently streaming on Netflix

Life is not so beautiful

Though well-intended, *Chintu Ka Birthday* doesn't rise above being a facile take against war

NAMRATA JOSHI

The lasting impression one gets from *Chintu Ka Birthday*, is that it's way too static. Agreed that it's a small budget film, with Iraq recreated in India, where action is confined to the interiors of a home and the conflict outside brought in through sounds and voices, not seen but heard, but there could have been some dynamism in the characters and their equations and movement in this shut-in world. Even stage performances and teleplays have some propulsion that keeps you in their grip. Unfortunately, any sense of urgency is entirely missing in *Chintu Ka Birthday*.

It's 2004, and Chintu and his family are stuck in Iraq at the time of Saddam Hussein's fall in 2003. It's his sixth birthday and he wants to celebrate it with his friends, but things don't quite go as planned. Each of the characters here is flat and cardboard than fleshed-out, more a "type" than rounded or whole. This



Stale fare: *Chintu Ka Birthday* lacks freshness, vision and artistic leap ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Chintu Ka Birthday

DIRECTOR: Devanshu Kumar and Satyanshu Singh
CAST: Vinay Pathak, Tillotama Shome, Seema Pahwa, Bisha Chaturvedi, Vedant Chibber

STORYLINE: It's 2004 and Chintu and his family are stuck in Iraq at the time of Saddam Hussain's fall.

same applies, for their relationships and interactions. Whether it's the goodie-gooe Indian family or their nice Iraqi landlord or the Hollywood-derived American soldiers. The one element on point, to some ex-

tent is the lingo and the accent. The film has fine actors filling in, in each of these roles – Vinay Pathak, Tillotama Shome and Seema Pahwa – yet there seems to be no spark or vitality. Neither individually, nor in their give and take with each other. The actor who stands out is Bisha Chaturvedi as the older daughter, who, even in a small role, shows more fluidity than the otherwise staccato, wooden scenario.

An anti-war stand is noble alright, so too the portrayal of the effect of war on an ordinary family but how you bring it alive on screen is just as significant. *Chintu Ka Birthday* is streaming on Zee5

lacks the freshness and vision or artistic leap and is way too facile an exploration of war or the attendant issues. Whether it's the American soldiers forgotten by their own country or their friendship with the local kids, it's a film that doesn't dig deep enough. It might be well intended but the film is also acutely aware of its own noble intent. Righteousness can be a big downer and it leaps out from every other frame. Rather than speak to its audience, *Chintu Ka Birthday* left me entirely not invested and very disinterested.

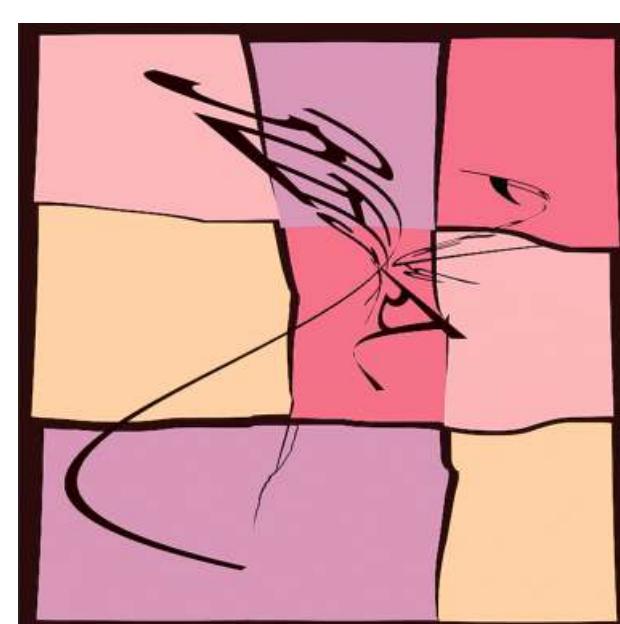
Chintu Ka Birthday is streaming on Zee5

No longer the punchline

Scottish songwriter Kapil Seshasayee's track 'The Pink Mirror', releasing today, is a critique of LGBTQ representation and censorship in Indian films

SWETA AKUNDI

For the past year, Tamil-native Scottish art rocker Kapil Seshasayee has taken it upon himself to critique representation in Bollywood cinema, through his album *Laal*. After speaking up about hyped-up nationalism in 'The Gharial', and objectification in 'The Item Girl', Seshasayee is set to release his third single, 'The Pink Mirror', in support of better, nuanced LGBTQ narratives in Indian films. In 2003, a camp-comedy Hindi film by queer filmmaker Sridhar Ran-



Desi queer: (left) Kapil Seshasayee ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

the first movie of a certain genre that you see, and for me, *The Pink Mirror* was my gateway to LGBTQ representation on film," says Seshasayee, over a call from Glasgow, adding that he started reading up and watching more queer cinema. "We see cis-het actors portraying queer characters as caricatures, or trans characters as

antagonists who try to seduce the hero away from the heroine, to comedic effect, and these movies are still greenlit. Yet, you don't allow queer filmmakers to tell their own stories!"

As a bystander – as someone who does not belong to the queer community, he confirms that these portrayals heavily influence our society's behaviour

The Pink Mirror released on Bandcamp on June 6, 2020

THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13359

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- Across
 - 1 Former chief magistrate of Venice (4)
 - 3 State of total disorder (8)
 - 9 Electioneer (7)
 - 10 Well-suited position (5)
 - 11 Cosy secluded retreats (5)
 - 12 Gullet (6)
 - 14 Detail added to a story to make it more interesting (13)
 - 17 Illegally seize control of (6)
 - 19 Compilation of recordings (5)
 - 22 A levy of one tenth (5)
 - 23 Bird of prey (7)
 - 24 Giving way (8)
 - 25 Put into service (4)
- Down
 - 1 Ornamental bottle for dispensing wine (8)
 - 2 Biological group

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

containing one or more species (5)

- 4 Is insensitive to criticism (3,1,5,4)
- 5 Underground worker (5)
- 6 Secret milk (7)
- 7 Place obliquely (4)
- 8 Maiden (poetic) (6)
- 13 Lost one's footing (8)
- 15 Stiff hair (7)
- 16 Vehicle for the last trip? (6)
- 18 In the lead (5)
- 20 Cremates – Scottish poet, d.1796 (5)
- 21 Remain (4)

The solution will appear on June 13, 2020.

Solution No. 13358

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A BM-BME

CM declares ₹100 crore relief for Raigad district

Uddhav assures additional manpower for restoration work



NDRF personnel struggle to remove a century-old banyan tree uprooted in the cyclonic wind at Vihor village in Murud taluka of Raigad district, on Thursday. ■ PRASHANT NAKWE

RAINA ASSAINAR
NAVI MUMBAI

Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Friday announced an immediate relief of ₹100 crore for Raigad district that has been ravaged by cyclone Nisarga.

Mr. Thackeray, who visited the district by boat from Bhaucha Dhakka to Alibaug, also said the actual relief package would be announced after an assessment of the damage. He was accompanied by ministers Aaditya Thackeray and Aslam Shaikh, additional chief secretary A.K. Singh, and other senior officials.

The CM said additional manpower would be sent to Raigad for restoration work. He also said while clearing the trees, there is a possibility of having some animal beneath, and hence, one should be careful.

Energy Minister Nitin Raut, who had visited the district on Thursday, had said that during restoration work, priority would be given to hospitals, water supply, and communication channels. "There is a need for erecting electricity poles, setting up transformers, and fixing transmission lines for which necessary manpower will be provided from Bhandup zone, Nerul

As the internal roads are being cleared, we are getting to know of more deaths caused by the cyclone

PADMASHRI BAINADE
Resident deputy collector, Raigad

and other neighbouring divisions. Restoration of the distribution system is the biggest challenge," he said.

Mr. Raut further said considering the COVID-19 pandemic, everyone needs to work cautiously and complete the task expeditiously. "In this, local public representatives and citizens should chip in."

With a wind speed of up to 120 km per hour, the cyclone made a landfall at Murud on June 3, causing widespread damage in Alibaug, Shrivardhan, Uran and nearby places in the district. On Friday, the national and State highways were cleared, while electricity was restored in Alibaug.

Electricity of 11,000 consumers from Alibaug and 17,000 from Pen were restored on Friday, while for other areas, Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Company Limited officers are working on war footing,

its chief PRO Anil Kamble said.

BSNL resumed its network on Thursday.

Murud and Shrivardhan are still in the dark, Padmashri Bainade, resident deputy collector, Raigad, said. "As the internal roads are being cleared, we are getting to know of more deaths caused by the cyclone. Besides the two deaths reported on Wednesday, two more have been recorded from Mangaon. A 41-year-old woman was crushed in a wall collapse, while a 25-year-old man died after an electricity pole fell on him," Ms. Bainade said.

The Konkani Doctors Association (KDA) has deployed teams in each tehsil of the district to provide emergency service.

Nida Khatib from Kuwait, who had not been able to speak to her aged parents in Murud since Wednesday, was worried. She then messaged Dr. Wasim Peshimam from Murud, who is associated with KDA, on Thursday night.

On Friday morning, Dr. Peshimam reached her parents' house and made a video call to Ms. Khatib. "I was overwhelmed to see my parents. I would never forget what KDA did for me," Ms. Khatib said.

Bodies of 2 Mira Road hotel staffers found in water tank

Search on for a missing employee who stayed with the duo

GAUTAM S. MENGLE
MUMBAI

The bodies of two employees with a hotel in Mira Road were found in the hotel's water tank late on Thursday night. The police, based on the injuries on the bodies, have registered a case of murder, while an employee of the same hotel, who is missing, is a suspect.

The deceased have been identified as Naresh Pandit (58) and Harsh Shetty (42). The police said Pandit was a cleaner at Shabari Hotel, which is fairly popular in the area, while Shetty worked as a manager. The duo were staying in the hotel along with another staff member, while the rest of the staffers had gone to their home towns following the lockdown.

"The matter came to

light after the hotel owner received a call late on Thursday night. The person at the other end only said that there was a body in the water tank of the hotel before hanging up. The owner found both the bodies in the tank in a severely decomposed state, after which he informed us," an officer at Mira Road police station said.

The bodies were taken to a hospital, where a preliminary examination confirmed injuries to their heads, and stab wounds. Based on the medical reports, the police have registered a case of murder against unknown persons under the Indian Penal Code.

The officer said they had information about a third staffer who also used to stay at the hotel, but had gone

missing since the bodies were discovered. "Repeated attempts by the owner to contact him failed and we are trying to apprehend him. He had mentioned to the owner earlier that he was going to leave for his home town on June 1, and it is possible that he left as per his plans. However, the level of decomposition of the bodies places the time of death around the same date. Hence, we need to make inquiries with him to confirm or eliminate him as a suspect," the officer said.

Based on circumstantial evidence, the police believe that at least one of the deceased was killed in his sleep and that there could be more than one perpetrator involved. The police are scanning footage of CCTV cameras near the hotel.

No demand for special trains to take migrants home: govt. to HC

PILs say labourers stay in unhygienic shelters without food

SONAM SAIGAL
MUMBAI

The Maharashtra government told the Bombay High Court on Friday that there is no demand from migrant workers to take special trains to go back to their home towns.

A Division Bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and justice A.A. Sayed was hearing a bunch of public interest litigations (PIL) filed by the Centre of Indian Trade Unions and others.

The PILs raised concerns about the migrant workers who have submitted applications for leaving the State by Shramik Special trains and buses during the lockdown, but have been left in the dark about the status of their applications. The PILs further said that till such time they can board trains and buses to leave for their native places, they have been made to live in cramped and unhygienic shelters, without being provided food and other essential commodities.

In the last hearing, the HC had directed the State to file a report listing the whole procedure that a migrant worker is required to follow in order to be eligible for leaving for their home town. Advocate General Ashutosh Kumbhakoni filed an affidavit on Friday, stating that up to June 1, as many as 822 trains had departed carrying over 11.87 lakh mi-

grant labourers to their home States. He said currently, there is no demand from migrant workers to board Shramik Special trains to go back home.

Additional solicitor general Anil Singh also said whenever there will be a demand from migrants to travel back, the Railways will arrange trains. The court adjourned the matter till July 9.

Migrant workers from Karnataka waiting in front of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus in Mumbai to board a special train. ■ FILE PHOTO

It's now Department of Environment & Climate Change

Maharashtra government aligns environment ministry's goals with climate change mitigation efforts

ALOK DESHPANDE
MUMBAI

On World Environment Day on Friday, the State Environment Department rechristened itself as the Department of Environment & Climate Change.

Environment Minister Aaditya Thackeray said along with the change in name, the ministry's goals have evolved to the urgent requirement of climate change mitigation.

In consonance with 'Time for Nature', the United Nations Environment Programme theme for World En-

vironment Day, 2020, the Department of Environment & Climate Change has drawn up plans to work with relevant departments, committing ₹100 crore to the effort.

The department will explore the five elements of nature: earth, wind, water, fire and ether.

Explaining the department's renewed goals in line with each element, Mr. Thackeray said, in case of earth, the department will focus on afforestation, conservation of forests, solid waste management, prevention of land degradation, etc.

With wind, interpreted as air, the department will focus on assisting the Department of Industry and Transport, and other relevant departments to reduce air

pollution and improve the State's air quality index.

The plan for water includes some of the ongoing work to rejuvenate rivers, besides a focus on marine biodiversity, safeguarding and cleaning water bodies and coastal fronts like beaches.

Interpreting fire as a form of energy, the department will work in sync with other departments to promote the efficient use of energy, reduce its wastage, and produce renewable energy through innovative means.

The department has inter-

preted ether as space and light, extending it to a "change in human nature".

"This element will include awareness campaigns and educational programmes," said the minister.

Without aligning with all the elements of nature, we cannot live in sync with it; neither can biodiversity survive or thrive, he said.

The department also clarified the intent of partnering with other Union and State governments, departments within Maharashtra, NGOs, environmentalists and every citizen of the State.



Aaditya Thackeray

Decision on medical exams taken after consultations'

Medical Education Minister Amit Deshmukh says three alternatives are available for safe conduct of exams

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE
PUNE

The decision to hold undergraduate and postgraduate examinations of the Maharashtra University of Health Sciences (MUHS) was taken only after detailed discussions with apex medical bodies, State Medical Education Minister Amit Deshmukh said on Friday.

He said a detailed programme would be issued soon and assured that adequate arrangements would be made in every district to ensure that students do not have to travel far to appear for these exams.

Mr. Deshmukh, who was in Pune to review the COVID-19 situation, said he met with Governor Bhagat Singh

Higer Education Ministry had earlier decided not to conduct the exams.

Mr. Deshmukh, however,

clarified that there was no

hitch in the functioning of

the government despite the

contradictory stance on the

conduct of the exams by the two ministries.

"The curricula of both min-

istries – Technical and Higher Education, and Medi-

cal Education – are differ-

ent as are their central

councils and universities.

They are following their own

guidelines, while we are ad-

hering to ours," Mr. Deshmukh said.

In an earlier letter to the

Governor, Mr. Deshmukh

had said that MUHS has un-

animously decided to con-

duct all its summer examina-

tions as per three alternative

plans, depending on the sit-

uation, from July 15.

The theory examinations

would be held between July

15 and August 15 in a stag-

gered manner if the situa-

tion was conducive. In case

exams cannot be held as per

the first plan, they would be

conducted between August

16 and September 15.

If the exams cannot be

held as per above plans, the

MUHS will take guidance

from the Central Medical

Council on how to conduct

the examinations, including

through the online medium.

Meanwhile, Mr. Deshmukh

, who met with senior

district administration auth-

orities, said there was a de-

cline in the number of active positive cases in Mumbai, Pune and other cities.

He said while the situa-

tion in Pune was under con-

trol, Mumbai, despite rising

cases, was faring better than

most other cities in the

world.

"Around 80 labs are oper-

ating in the State for testing

samples at present. More

labs are being added. We are

trying to standardise proto-

cols and SOPs (standard op-

erating procedures) across

hospitals in the State," he

said, adding that he was of

the opinion that some form

of rating should be given to

each hospital so that pa-

tients are aware if their in-

frastructure was up to the

mark or not.

Koshyari, who is the Chan-

cellor of all universities in

the State, after the Nashik-

based MUHS submitted a de-

tailed report on the feasi-

bility of holding the exams af-

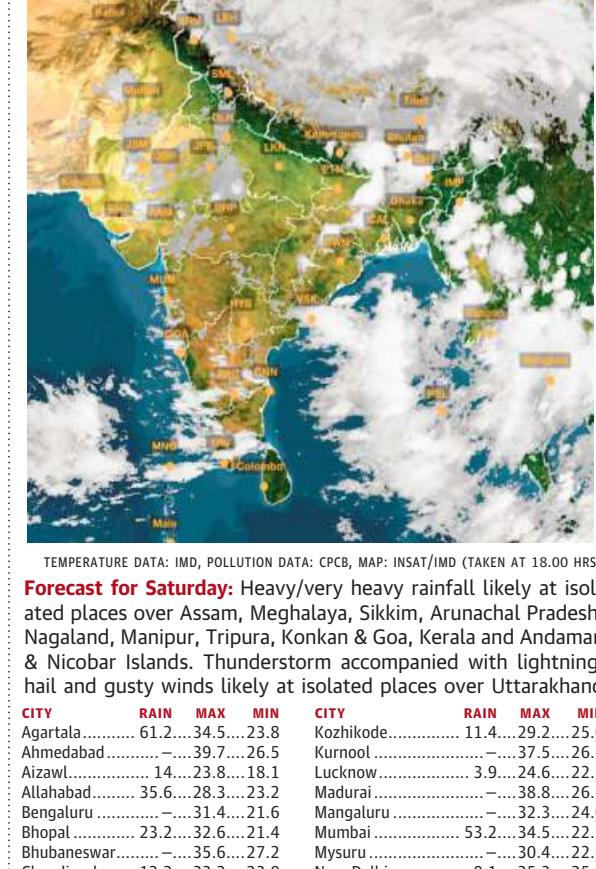
ter July 15.

Incidentally, the State gov-

ernment's Technical and

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



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

Forecast for Saturday: Heavy/heavy rainfall likely at isolated places over Assam, Meghalaya, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Konkan & Goa, Kerala and Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning, and gusty winds likely at isolated places over Uttarakhand



Shine a light

The scientific process must be protected from those seeking power and riches

Two weeks ago, a study in *The Lancet*, perhaps the most influential medical journal in the world, found no benefit from the use of hydroxychloroquine (HCQ), a well-known antimalarial, to treat sick COVID-19 patients. Today, that study stands retracted. As it had relied on a huge dataset of about 96,000 patients sourced from 671 hospitals in six continents, the World Health Organization, citing a 'do no harm' principle, suspended drug trials pending a safety review. This led to some countries in Europe withdrawing the drug from their own trials. Another study involving some of the same authors and relying on the same data published in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, which sought to answer questions on the associations between cardiovascular disease, COVID-19 and drugs that target the enzymes that play a role in facilitating the virus in attacking a host, has also been retracted. *The Lancet* study triggered a backlash from scientists who found problems with the methodology and, more importantly, the dataset. It emerged that mortality attributed to the disease in Australia did not match with the country's own estimates; there was no way to tally patient records and the hospitals they were sourced from; and there were problems with the statistics deployed and the conclusions about the potential risk from the drug.

The bigger concern was that the data was supplied by Surgisphere Corporation, which had a handful of employees with limited scientific expertise, and claimed to have aggregated its numbers by compiling electronic health records in less than two months. Experienced clinical trial specialists said this was a labour-intensive process. Moreover, when aspersions about the data started to swirl, the company, citing client confidentiality, said it was unable to share its data sources for independent assessment. In their retractions, the journals have blamed Surgisphere for being opaque with its primary data. So far, neither journal has introspected on the peer-review process that led to these studies being published in the first place. In hindsight it seems obvious that a disinterested analysis would have raised eyebrows regarding data sourcing, but the post-COVID world is a panic-driven one that has left no institution or appraisal process untouched. The average peer-review takes weeks and the clinical trial process months, but now the expectation is that science delivers its results like magic. For years now, questions have been raised on the effectiveness of the traditional, time-consuming peer-review process and this has launched a welcome culture of papers being uploaded as preprints for review. In the present instance of the HCQ imbroglio, it is the independent effort by external scientists that brought the blight to light. The key lesson is that it is a mistake to assume the scientific process as one divorced from the influence of power, privilege, finance and politics. The means and methods to a scientific result matter more than results – only achieved through global scrutiny. Openness, more than blame game, is what the post-COVID world needs now.

Winning formula

The best way to revive sport activities is to make a cautious, slow, low-key start

Just as the various global sporting leagues slowly revive, Formula One will do so too following the announcement of an eight-race revised calendar starting with a double-header in Austria during July. Earlier, the season-opening Australian Grand Prix in March was cancelled at the eleventh hour after the whole contingent gathered at Melbourne when a member of the McLaren Formula One team tested positive for COVID-19. Since then, the sport has witnessed its first 10 rounds of the 22-race calendar either being cancelled or postponed. Recently the German football league, Bundesliga, restarted its season, while the Premier League is scheduled to commence later this month. However, unlike football or other domestic leagues that are localised and can be played in a controlled environment, F1 faces unique challenges due to its global footprint that hops across five continents through the year. It also requires a huge amount of personnel and cargo movements to run an event. With travel curbs across the world, the sport has restricted the initial eight races to its spiritual home of Europe, with Austria and Britain hosting multiple events. F1 has now adopted a set of operating procedures to get the show back on track, with every participant to be tested before and during the race weekend. Apart from there being no spectators, only 80 members per team will be allowed at the race track while the broadcast crew will be a mere 60.

The reworked F1 will have 1,200 essential staff, previously close to 5,000. More importantly, with even a small-sized team employing nearly 300 to 400, from engineers to mechanics, the sport needs a start to keep the teams afloat not just this year but beyond as well. The F1 Group has already pledged to pay 100% of prize money to the teams, and for that it needs the show to go on. A minimum of eight races is needed to constitute a world championship and it is understood 15-18 races are required in a year to maximise the TV rights revenues especially at a time when the race-hosting fees, a major component of the F1 group's revenue, is unlikely to be paid by the various countries. With jobs at stake, Formula One has made the right call to make its best attempt at starting the season. At the same time, the sport needs to be nimble to make quick decisions in case of unexpected scenarios, and the lessons learnt from Australia should hold the organisers in good stead. If F1 can demonstrate a good restart, it will inspire the rest of the sporting industry to get back on its feet.

Beyond the legal counsel's predicament

The 'vulture' remark is only a distillation of cultivated impatience with structures of accountability



HARISH KHARE

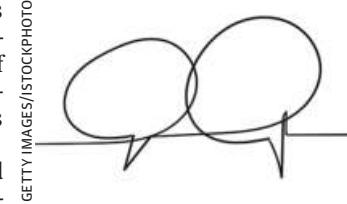
aggressive or needlessly arrogant; after all, he is only reflecting his client's temperament, his impulses and inclinations to the best of his ability. He is simply an instrument, a sharp and sometimes blunt instrument.

Many have indignantly found Tushar Mehta's invocation of 'vulture' metaphor as particularly unacceptable and offensive slur on the entire journalistic fraternity. It did perhaps border on blasphemy because it was uttered in the nation's highest judicial forum. Mr. Mehta has subsequently tried to clarify [in an interview with *The Times of India* of June 1, 2020] that his 'vulture' imprecation was not directed at journalists; he is entitled to a benefit of the doubt. And though it can be no consolation, it is sobering to recall that equally invidious insults and innuendoes have been hurled at the media by the ruling establishment. Mr. Mehta's aspersion pales in comparison to Gen. (retd) V.K. Singh's 'presstitute' disparagement. Yet, again, it is not the personal inclination of a law officer or a cabinet minister that should detain us for too long; rather, it is the collective sentiment of the regime he represents that needs to be scrutinised by every democratic soul.

Let there be no mistake. A cultivated mindset is at work. It seeks legitimacy for itself from the paraphernalia of an elective democracy but uses the democratic mandate to chisel away at the core of democratic arrangement. It is simply loathe to give answers or explanations of any kind to anyone.

Blunted institutions

It is hardly a secret that these last six years, the Modi regime has quietly but diligently and systematically made dysfunctional –



without dismantling – all the established institutions designed to prevent abuse of authority. Offices such as the Central Vigilance Commission, the Lokpal, the Central Information Commission, the National Human Rights Commission, India, the Election Commission of India, etc. have been rendered less than paper tigers. With considerable finesse and with admirable street-smarts, the regime has seen to it that no Vinod Rai would be allowed to strike out on his/her own.

The Modi crowd believes, sincerely and righteously, in the correctness of its chosen path; it mesmerises itself with the notions of integrity and commitment of its personnel and leaders and their infinite wisdom. It resents democratic opposition. Not surprisingly, such a regime sees no need to lend an ear to the 'vultures' in the media or the non-governmental organisations.

The migrant issue

In its determined preference to strike continuously a pose of decisiveness and bold leadership, the incumbent regime not only failed to anticipate the consequences of its sudden, abrupt and panicky lockdown decision; it also refused to see the millions of half-starved citizens trekking back to the safety and security of their villages. It was perhaps with a clear conscience that the Solicitor General could tell the top court that the government had the migrant issue

well under its competent hands.

Here is a law officer who had secured from the apex court a kind of *carte blanche* for his client to carry on with its confused nostrums. Perhaps the Court had felt that given the enormity of the COVID-19 challenge, the government was entitled to make its mistakes and blunders as also to its insensitivity and cynicism. Thanks to persuasive arguments from the Solicitor General, the Hon'ble judges probably felt that it was not their business to take note of immense hardship inflicted on millions of our own citizens. Mr. Mehta had secured for his client a free hand to carry on with its hit and trial experiments.

A tragedy could easily be foretold. A regime which has chosen to deprive itself of genuine sources of information finds itself left high and dry when human misery on an unprecedented scale grips vast swathes of our citizens. Because the regime has developed a considered contempt for the free and independent media, it simply refuses to see the images of millions and millions of hapless citizens migrating back to their villages.

Confronted with an unexpected crisis of unknown dimensions, the regime righteously resented anyone who pointed out the limits of its sloganised approach to governance.

When the Court acted

Then, much to the regime's consternation, suddenly the Supreme Court had allowed itself to be goaded to seek answers from the government for its bureaucratic insensitivity, for its political arrogance, for its policy confusion and its administrative clumsiness. It was this *volte-face* that probably produced the Solicitor General's famous outburst. It is possible to

suggest that Mr. Mehta's anger was directed not so much against the vultures among the journalists as it was an expression of impatience with the highest court.

Unspoken resentment was that the Supreme Court was seeking an explanation from the government after lending its ear to those who have no knowledge of the 'ground situation'. But the government would not share information about the 'ground' with anyone. The other day, three professional associations of epidemiologists, public health practitioners and social medicine experts have called out the clumsy and confused decision-making practised by the Leader-driven power structure. Millions have paid a heavy price for the regime's arrogance and incompetence.

Yet, the government would not countenance any discussion of its mistakes and missteps. Over the years the regime has used a heavy-handed approach to put its critics in their place. It has brought to bear overwhelming resources, power, prestige and skills to fix its critics, however small or scattered. Neither Sudha Bhardwaj nor the Pujra Tod activists in northeast Delhi will be allowed to mobilise dissent and disagreement against the regime.

It is this groupthink of intolerance and impatience that was on display in the Supreme Court on May 26. Unlike in the vastly popular Hindi TV-serial, 'Taarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashmah', Solicitor General Mehta can be very much said to be using a custom-made pair of spectacles, prescribed by the regime's in-house optometrists.

Harish Khare is a senior journalist based in Delhi

A right time to shift pharma gears

As a workable idea, a Health Impact Fund can become an alternative track for pharmaceutical innovators



FELICITAS HOLZER & THOMAS POGGE

Could the rules and practices organising health care around the world have been better suited to this COVID-19 outbreak? Consider the Health Impact Fund as a plausible institutional reform of the current regime for developing and marketing new pharmaceuticals.

Medicines are among humanity's greatest achievements. The global market for pharmaceuticals is currently worth ₹110 lakh crore annually, 1.7% of the gross world product. Roughly, 55% of this global pharmaceutical spending, ₹60 lakh crore, is for brand-name products, which are typically under patent.

Commercial pharmaceutical research and development (R&D) efforts are encouraged and rewarded through the earnings that innovators derive from sales of their branded products. These earnings largely depend on the 20-year product patents they are entitled to obtain in World Trade Organization member states. Such patents give them a temporary monopoly, enabling them to sell their new products without competition at a price far above manufacture and distribution costs, while still maintaining a substantial sales volume. In the United States, thousand-fold (100,000%) markups over production costs are not atypical. In India, the profit-maximising monopoly price of a new medicine is much lower, but similarly unaffordable for most citizens.

To be sure, before such huge markups can yield any pro-

fits, commercial pharmaceutical innovators must first cover their large R&D costs, currently ₹14 lakh crore a year, including the cost of clinical trials needed to demonstrate safety and efficacy, the cost of capital tied up during the long development process, and the cost of any research efforts that fail somewhere along the way.

R&D and concerns

While we should evidently continue funding pharmaceutical R&D, it is worth asking whether our current way of doing so is optimal. There are three main concerns. First, innovators motivated by the prospect of large markups tend to neglect diseases suffered mainly by poor people, who cannot afford expensive medicines. The 20

World Health Organization-listed neglected tropical diseases together afflict over one billion people but attract only 0.35% of the pharmaceutical industry's R&D. Merely 0.12% of this R&D spending is devoted to tuberculosis and malaria, which kill 1.7 lakh people each year.

Second, thanks to a large number of affluent or well-insured patients, the profit-maximising price of a new medicine tends to be quite high. Consequently, most people cannot afford advanced medicines that are still under patent.

This is especially vexing because manufacturing costs are generally quite low.

Third, rewards for developing and then providing pharmaceutical products are poorly correlated with therapeutic value. Firms earn billions by developing duplicative drugs that add little to our pharmaceutical toolbox – and billions more by cleverly marketing their drugs for patients who will not benefit.

To address these problems, we propose a complement to the present regime: the Health Impact



Fund as an alternative track on which pharmaceutical innovators may choose to be rewarded. Any new medicine registered with the Fund would have to be sold at or below the cost of manufacture and distribution, but would earn ten annual reward payments based on the health gains achieved with it.

On funding

The Fund could start with as little as ₹20,000 crore per annum and might then attract some 10-12 medicines, with one entering and one exiting in a typical year. Registered products would then earn some ₹17,000-₹20,000 crore, on average, during their first 10 years.

Of course, some would earn more than others by having greater therapeutic value or by benefiting more people.

Long-term funding for the Fund might come from willing governments – contributing in proportion to their gross national incomes – or from an international tax, perhaps on greenhouse gas emissions or speculative financial transactions.

Non-contributing affluent countries would forgo the benefits: the pricing constraint on registered products would not apply to them. This gives innovators more reason to register (they can still sell their product at high prices in some affluent countries) and affluent countries reason to join.

The Fund would get pharmaceutical firms interested in certain R&D projects that are unprofitable under the current regime – espe-

cially ones expected to produce large health gains among mostly poor people. Such projects would predominantly address communicable diseases. With the Fund in place, there would be much deeper and broader knowledge about such diseases, a richer arsenal of effective interventions and greater capacities for developing additional, more targeted responses quickly.

The Fund would make an important difference also by rewarding for health outcomes rather than sales.

For achieving health gains with their product, innovators need new strategies. They need to deliberate holistically about how their drug can work in the context of, or in synergy with, other factors relevant to treatment outcomes; think about therapies and diagnostics together, in order to identify and reach the patients who can benefit most; monitor results in real time to recognise and address possible impediments to uptake or therapeutic success; ensure that high-value patients have affordable access to the drug and are properly instructed and motivated to make optimal use of it with the drug still in prime condition. A reward mechanism oriented towards health gains rather than high-markup sales would lead to a sustainable research-and-marketing system.

Issue of state risk

Participation of commercial pharmaceutical firms is crucial for tackling global pandemics. They are best suited to develop and scale up provision of new vaccines and medications fast. At present such firms do, however, face discouraging business risks from governments which may as some have done use compulsory licences to divest them of their monopoly rewards. Health Impact Fund registration would remove this risk as

states would have no reason to interfere with innovators whose profit lies in giving real and rapid at-cost access to their new product to all who may need it.

Nowhere is this focus on results, which the Health Impact Fund would encourage in innovators, more important than in the domain of communicable diseases. Collaborating with national health systems, international agencies and NGOs, such a firm would seek to build a strong public-health strategy around its product. Its highest goal would be complete eradication. If it succeeds in year seven, it can enjoy the world's gratitude and collect three additional handsome reward payments for investment in its other research projects.

Applying this point to a new disease such as COVID-19 is complicated by the fact that we lack here a well-established baseline representing the harm the disease would have done in the absence of the new medicine to be assessed.

Still, despite the roughness of such a modelled baseline, the Fund would give innovators the right incentives. It would guide them to ask not: how can we develop an effective product and then deploy it so as to help reduce the overall disease burden as effectively as possible? The pandemic should make us stop and think: which of these two questions should be guiding our pharmaceutical innovators?

Felicitas Holzer is a researcher in the Bioethics Center and Bioethics Network of the World Health Organization at the social science faculty of FLACSO in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Thomas Pogge is Leitner Professor of Philosophy and International Affairs and Founding Director of the Global Justice Program at Yale



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.

Death of an elephant

There can be no second thought that no animal deserves to die a barbaric death (Editorial, "Killing Gajah", June 5). But, we should also get the circumstantial facts right. Being an elephant lover, I was stunned by the sheer brutality of the incident. But more objective now, I feel this is what ought to have been done. In parts of Kerala, more so in the place of the incident, it is customary to keep wild pigs away from crops. The

any means possible, and in order to protect the source of livelihood. One such primitive method is by stuffing pineapples with crackers near crop fields.

This method was not intended for the poor elephant. This should not have been resorted to. Tranquillisation would have been better. Some parts of the social media frenzy are inappropriate. It must be remembered that the livelihoods of farmers need to be protected; so too the lives of wild animals. The

forest authorities need to take the right steps and study animal relocation in a proper manner.

BEJOY SEBASTIAN, Kochi, Kerala

Giving any incident a political shade has become a habit of political parties in India (Inside pages, "BJP giving communal colour to killing of elephant in Kerala", June 5). It is unfortunate that some political parties are trying to introduce their vile ideas and ideologies. This is an

endeavour that should not bear fruit.

G. PRAVEENA, Vizianagaram, Andhra Pradesh

The COVID-19 situation should stir one's conscience and realisation of the pain one endures when confined within the four walls of a house; it ought to change our approach towards helpless animals. Animals have been vectors for viruses and the novel coronavirus pandemic should be a compelling and cogent reason to minimise human-animal interaction.

This can be realised only if the integrity and conservation of habitats are conserved by humans.

DEEPAK SINGHAL, Chennai

Basu Chatterjee's films, just like R.K. Narayan's stories, always portrayed the extraordinary ordinariness of human lives. The instant recognition of characters in his parallel cinema, sans an 'artificialness' and exaggeration is what made an entire generation a fan of

his films. His oeuvre touched everyday facets of life – bus stops, canteens, simple clothing, daily anxieties and struggles, finding joy in ordinary things, making peace with everything, and the guilt and stigmas. Never preachy but a matter-of-fact portrayal of characters. That is the *Khatta Meetha* life many of us know but he knew it better. A rare director indeed.

M. ANAND RAM SESHU, Bengaluru

In Vizag, transgressions and toxic fumes

A gas leak from the LG Polymers plant in Visakhapatnam, which was operating without environmental clearance for over two decades, killed 12 people and sickened hundreds on May 7. **Sumit Bhattacharjee** reports on how gross human negligence and violations of rules and the law led to the deadly disaster

A little past 3 a.m. on May 7, Naveen (name changed) woke up smelling something different in the air. Feeling unsettled and a little afraid, he promptly woke up the elders in his family. "My uncle woke up in a daze," Naveen recalled. "He was very disoriented and began stumbling around. We were at the door shouting for him to come out of the house with us. We ran for our lives, hoping he would follow us. But that was the last we saw of him."

Naveen's uncle, C. Gangaraju, only in his mid-thirties, was among the 12 people who died after inhaling the poisonous styrene monomer vapour that leaked from the LG Polymers plant in their village that night. His body was later found floating in a well in the backyard of their house. Gangaraju's family said he may have lost his eyesight in the gas leak and stumbled into the well while trying to escape to safety.

Annepu Chandramouli, 19, a medical student and son of a police constable, had gone to bed late that night after studying. Minutes later, he was jolted out of sleep by the vapour. "His eyes were watering and he was unable to breathe. He was disoriented and ran towards the balcony. He toppled over the railing and fell to his death from our apartment on the second floor," his relative said.

Chaos, confusion and fear reigned that night in R.R. Venkatapuram village, located in Pendurthi Mandal in Visakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh. Within hours of the leak, which began at 2.50 a.m., 12 people had died and over 580 were hospitalised. Over 2,000 people were evacuated between 5 a.m. and 9 a.m. from the villages surrounding the chemical plant within a radius of 1.5-3 km. These villages include R.R. Venkatapuram, SC/BC Colony, Nandamuri Nagar, Kamparapalem and Padmanabhanagar, which together have more than 20,000 households.

The death toll could have been much higher if an alert resident hadn't woken up to see a thick cloud of gas enveloping houses in the area. He quickly woke up the residents of the village and told them to run for their lives. Soon, word about a gas leak spread like wildfire, and hundreds of residents poured out of their homes, carrying their children in their arms, and into the darkness.

But as people began running, they started inhaling more and more of the toxic fumes. Styrene monomer is a colourless and inflammable gas. Inhalation for a short period of time causes irritation in the eye, respiratory problems, nausea, unsteady gait, loss of consciousness and gastrointestinal effects. Many who ran out collapsed on the ground. A few young men hopped on their motorcycles in desperation to drive away, but they were too disoriented to ride for more than a few hundred metres, recalled Pydapa Naidu, station house officer of the Gopalapatnam police station. Naidu was among the first to reach the scene on a rescue mission.

A long night

The police control room, around 10-12 km from the plant in the city, received the first distress call at around 3.26 a.m. It immediately alerted the Gopalapatnam police station, under whose jurisdiction the area falls. A police team of eight men, including Naidu, Sub-Inspector Satyanarayana and Inspector Bhagwan, reached R.R. Venkatapuram at 3.45 a.m. The Deputy Commissioner of Police of Zone-II, Uday Bhaskar, was alerted by the Commissioner of Police, Rajiv Kumar Meena, at 4 a.m. Bhaskar reached the spot by 4.30 a.m. and found the Gopalapatnam team in the area. The Commissioner reached the spot 15 minutes later, and both the officers led the team of 15 men on the rescue operation. Their initial two attempts to enter the core area from the national highway side failed as the wind blew the toxic fumes in their direction. "We realised that it would be futile to enter through the main entrance, so we took a detour and entered the core area from behind the chemical plant," Meena said.

Protocols that were in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19 were suspended by the police team. The police entered the area with just wet towels wrapped around their faces. That is when they realised the gravity of the situation. "We saw people lying unconscious on the road. We had a tough time picking them up from the road and getting them into our vehicles. The lanes were narrow and our vehicles could not enter them," Bhaskar said. "We shifted them to hospitals ourselves as ambulances had not arrived yet."

It was only around 6 a.m. that ambulances and Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation (APSRTC) buses reached the area. Around 10 police vehicles, 20 ambulances and 10 APSRTC buses were used to ferry the victims to government hospitals.

Many policemen, including Naidu and Satyanarayana, said they suffered bouts of vomiting during the rescue operation. The entire 15-member team was hospitalised later and a few of them are yet to recover fully, said police officials. At 6.45 a.m., a National Disaster



Victims being rushed to hospital following the gas leak from the LG Polymers plant in Visakhapatnam on May 7, 2020. ■ K.R. DEEPAK



Response Force 10th Battalion team arrived at the spot. By 7 a.m. they swung into action, wearing gas masks and carrying oxygen cylinders on their backs. "In many houses, the residents were trapped inside or were lying unconscious," said Commandant Zahid Khan, who led the team. "We had to forcibly enter several houses. We rescued about 300 people trapped inside."

History of the plant

The LG Polymers plant, owned by the South Korean firm LG Chem, has changed hands several times since its inception. It was first established by the Mumbai-based Shriram Group in 1961, under the name Hindustan Polymers, to convert alcohol from molasses in order to produce styrene. Styrene is mostly used in the production of polystyrene, which is used to make the parts of appliances, electronics and automotive; and also in food packaging. The Andhra Pradesh government then sold 216 acres of endowment land belonging to Simhachalam Devasthanam in the sparsely populated R.R. Venkatapuram village to the Shriram Group. In 1971-72, the management expanded its operations and began manufacturing polystyrene.

In 1978, the plant was taken over by McDowell and Company Limited of the United Breweries (UB) Group, owned by Vittal Mallya and Vijay Mallya. The UB Group began to manufacture expanded polystyrene. In the early 1980s, the manufacture of styrene was stopped when the UB Group found it less expensive to import styrene from countries such as Saudi Arabia and Singapore.

LG Chem purchased the plant in 1997. It dismantled the old styrene plant and began storing imported styrene in a few tanks, one of which malfunctioned on the fateful night of May 7. The tank had a capacity of 2,400 mt. On the night of the incident, it contained about 1,800 tonnes of styrene monomer, company officials said. But LG Polymers, which is facing flak for what appears to be sheer negligence and lack of oversight by the company, refused to take questions despite repeated attempts during that period. It shipped about 13,000 tonnes of styrene from the plant to South Korea immediately after the incident.

Findings of the NGT committee
Following the incident, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) took up the case suo motu and constituted a five-member joint monitoring committee to conduct a probe. The committee, comprising a former High Court judge, a principal of a college, a professor of

chemical engineering, and two scientists, investigated the incident and found several glaring lapses at the plant. The NGT imposed a fine of ₹50 crore on the plant under the liability clause.

The committee said that the vapour leak occurred due to self-polymerisation of styrene monomer. P.P. Jagannadha Rao, professor of chemical engineering and member of the NGT's joint monitoring committee, said styrene needs to be circulated constantly to keep its temperature under control. However, with operations at the plant coming to a grinding halt due to the nationwide lockdown, the stock of 1,800 tonnes of styrene monomer remained stagnant. This could have led to a Diels-Alder reaction resulting in self-polymerisation, he said. "As there was no apparatus to record the change in temperature in the upper part of the tank, the styrene reached its onset temperature, which is 66°C, over a period of time. Once it reached the onset temperature, it took 15-20 minutes to reach boiling point, which is 145°C. According to our findings, this is how the vapour formed and leaked out of the goose-neck and dip hatch of the storage tank."

In its report, the committee also pointed out that the company did not have enough tertiary butyl catechol (TBC), which is used as an inhibitor to avoid self-polymerisation and which lowers the temperature inside the plant. The ideal temperature for storing styrene is 15-18°C and at no point can it be allowed to exceed 25°C. "Since there was no stock of TBC, it is possible that the styrene monomer reacted inside the storage tank, triggering a polymerisation reaction which resulted in the formation of vapour, due to a rise in temperature inside the tank," Rao said.

The experts also pointed out that there was no system to monitor dissolved oxygen in the vapour space. As a result, the level of oxygen might have fallen below 6%, they said. "If the oxygen level falls below 6%, that is a clear indication of self-polymerisation. There was no mechanism in place to detect this and prevent it from happening. The plant was in lockdown for over 45 days. The reaction would have started at least a week or 10 days ago," Rao said.

The tank from which the vapour leaked was an old one. Its upper and middle parts did not have a temperature monitoring apparatus. It only had a sensor in the lower part. The experts said refrigeration for styrene storage

should run round the clock, but according to the NGT report, the refrigeration system had not been operated 24 hours prior to the incident. The NGT report also stated that the person in-charge of the plant and the maintenance personnel of the storage tank were negligent.

LG Polymers had also been operating without the requisite environment clearances. In an affidavit dated May 10, 2019, in response to a query from the State Environment Impact Assessment Authority, the company admitted that it had been operating the plant from 1997 to 2019 without obtaining the necessary environment clearances. The affidavit read: "The unit did not have environment clearance substantiating the produced quantity issued by the competent authority for continuing operations and was operating based on consent given by the Andhra Pradesh Pollution Control Board (APPCB)."

Former Secretary to the Union government and social activist E.A.S. Sarma, who filed a plea before the NGT regarding the damage caused to public health and the environment due to the leak, sought to know how the APPCB had granted consent for establishment and consent for operation in the beginning of 2019 for the unit's expansion and how the company had continued to function without obtaining environmental clearance from the Union Environment Ministry.

Concerns over health, livelihood

While the short-term effects of inhaling styrene monomer are clear, there is no detailed study on the long-term effects. Endocrinologist G.R. Sridhar said most chemicals are carcinogenic. Styrene is dangerous; studies have shown it produces lung cancer in rodents, he said.

"However, experimental and clinical evidence show that humans are not at increased risk of developing lung cancer (if they inhale styrene). Biochemical, genetic and clinical studies over 20 years do not show chronic exposure to styrene to be associated with the risk of developing lung cancer," Sridhar said. However, he added that this incident could be a case study for the future. The health condition of the affected should be monitored over the next two generations, he said. In the last three weeks, Y. Kanakaraju, 45, and P. Venkayamma, 72, have died from exposure to the gas. They were reportedly affected by the May 7 gas leak, admitted to hospital and discharged, only to be readmitted with

some illness. However, the Superintendent of King George Hospital, G. Arjuna, said the cause of their deaths can be ascertained only after a post-mortem.

Drawing parallels between the LG Polymers incident and the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy, social activist and founder of Sambhavna Trust Satinath Sarangi said that the NGT report neither mentioned styrene oxide (produced when styrene mixes with oxygen in the air), which is extremely toxic, nor the impacts of exposure to styrene on foetuses and genetic formation. "Most importantly, the NGT report entrusts LG Polymers to carry out a risk assessment disaster management study. The company has been asked to conduct a health monitoring programme for at least five years. This is somewhat like sending the fox to guard the hen house," said Sarangi.

The social activist is also critical of the Andhra Pradesh government's decision to pay ex gratia of ₹1 crore to the next of kin of the deceased as well as compensation to survivors. "Like in Bhopal, public money is being used by the government to provide compensation to the victims' families and to the survivors. Why should the public pay for a crime committed by a corporate company? According to the report of the NGT committee, around 800 tonnes of styrene may have escaped into the atmosphere on May 7. If 90% of this got deposited within a 1.5 km range of the plant, the per capita dosage of the deposit is of an exceedingly high level. This aspect must be examined thoroughly. A comprehensive health impact study, both short term and long term, should be undertaken on people living up to at least 5 km from the plant," he said.

After hearing the NGT report, a Bench headed by the chairperson of the NGT, Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel, held on June 1 that LG Polymers India has absolute liability for the loss of life and the impact on health and environment caused by the leakage of styrene monomer vapour. The NGT directed the constitution of a committee comprising representatives from the Union Environment Ministry, the Central Pollution Control Board and the State government to prepare a restoration plan within two months. Taking cognisance of the fact that the company did not get proper environment clearances from the Union Environment Ministry but was functioning with permission only from the Andhra Pradesh Pollution Control Board, the NGT has directed the Andhra Pradesh Chief Secretary to take action against the persons responsible for allowing the factory to operate without the requisite environmental clearance. With rights groups demanding the closure of LG Polymers, Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has asked a high-powered committee, set up independently of the NGT to probe the incident, to submit a report with its recommendations. He has said that the plant will either be closed down or shifted elsewhere depending on the committee's suggestions. He has also asked the committee to conduct a study of the hazardous industries in the State and recommend suggestions for a new industrial policy.

Meanwhile, fear continues to grip R.R. Venkatapuram. "I have cleaned my house with sodium hypochlorite, but my clothes and all the things in my house still smell of the vapour," said P. Devudu, a resident. "It looks as if the May 7 incident will continue to haunt us for a long, long time."



Lack of proper urban planning

In 1961, when Hindustan Polymers was set up, the plant was located outside the city. Only the sparsely populated village of R.R. Venkatapuram was in its vicinity.

FROM PAGE ONE

India, China agree to resolve differences

The MEA statement also said both sides exchanged views on the challenge posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and cooperation in multilateral forums.

The Chinese readout said both sides "will resolutely safeguard and promote multilateralism, oppose unilateralism, protectionism and hegemonism, jointly safeguard international fairness and justice, and safeguard the common interests of developing countries."

A boat ride home finally ends in a longing to return

But the sea threw up troubles very soon.

"Near Kakinada, one of the engines seized and around same time, we faced a nor'wester mid sea. Strong winds almost turned our boat upside down. For four hours, we kept praying for a miracle. When it was all over, we screamed with joy," recalled Mr. Dilesh.

The group faced another nor'wester off Srikakulam coast in Andhra Pradesh, barely over 100 km from their village. The wind was so strong that they had to sail in the opposite direction for 20 km. They finally reached their coastal village on April 27. And then came the quarantine till May 12.

States to decide on reopening of schools

Rigorous health screening and quarantine protocols, hygiene measures, and students coming to class in shifts while others study from home are some of the measures that have reportedly been suggested.

25 crore students

India has almost 25 crore school students from Classes 1 to 12, all of whom have been affected by the shutdown of educational institutions for the past two-and-a-half months due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

They study in 15.5 lakh schools, of which 70% are run by the Central and State governments. School boards in some States are yet to complete classes and examinations for the 2019-20 school year, while the others are yet to determine

politicising the epidemic situation" and "support the World Health Organization". This was not mentioned in the MEA's readout.

The Chinese readout also said both sides "will resolutely safeguard and promote multilateralism, oppose unilateralism, protectionism and hegemonism, jointly safeguard international fairness and justice, and safeguard the common interests of developing countries."

It mentioned: "the two countries should oppose

Soon enough, inspired by their daring sea voyage, another group of 42 fishermen too made it back to Odisha in a boat in the first week of May. "We anyway had to return home," said Nanda Dinabandhu of Mar-kandi village, matter-of-factly.

Their return may not be all that smooth as Pugazhendhi, an owner of two trawlers in Chennai, is unwilling to employ rookie fishermen. "I will only accept seasoned and experienced fishermen. A larger fish catch would compensate for the loss I incurred during the lockdown," Mr. Pugazhendhi said by telephone from Chennai.

when to begin the 2020-2021 academic session.

Ms. Karwal noted that the post-COVID education experience will be different from life before the pandemic, even where schools are able to reopen. "The way learning happens in classrooms is going to change because of the various safety and social distancing norms. There are going to be a lot of adjustments for students and teachers, which cannot happen overnight and may take longer for some learners," she said. "There will be a lot of home schooling for some time and there is the possibility of blended schooling also: a bit at home and a bit at school. So we need to prepare a framework for that."

Ms. Karwal slammed the way many schools have approached online learning.

'Shramik train deaths not due to lack of food, water'

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal said the government has not yet revealed the "minimum standards" of hygiene, food and water quality it had mandated in relief camps, etc.

But Mr. Mehta said the "substantial part of the ordeal is over". Approximately a crore of migrant workers have "reached their destinations", he said.

"Now we will provide trains to any State who wants them," Mr. Mehta assured the court.

The Centre has been running the Shramik trains

from May 1 to transport stranded migrant workers during the national lockdown amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Railways have run 4,228 trains to transport stranded migrant workers till June 3. He said the Railways ran an average 250 trains a day for the workers.

A three-judge Bench led by Justice Ashok Bhushan said the transportation of migrant workers back to their villages should be over in the next 15 days. It reserved final orders in the suo motu case for June 9.

Massive spike in foreign flows into market

The shares were bought by FPIs like the Government of Singapore Investment Corporation, T. Rowe Price, Aberdeen Asset Management, Canada Pension Plan Investment Board and Oppenheimer Developing Market Fund, among others.

The cumulative foreign flows in equities this year, however, is still negative at ₹19,531 crore, since March and April saw huge outflows.

Incidentally, March witnessed a record outflow of ₹61,973 crore, which was followed by selling worth ₹6,884 crore in April.

According to Mr. Mahajan, while the current rally is based on optimism, investors need to be cautious and can even look at booking some profits and wait for better entry levels amidst the coronavirus pandemic.

The Bench of Justice K. Ramakrishnan and expert lawyer Saibal Dasgupta said the case was being taken up in an effort to avoid such incidents and to pro-

Rapid community spread possible: Kerala CM

Telangana and Andhra Pradesh report 10 fatalities; Karnataka cases soar as 515 more test positive in a day

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Telangana reported eight deaths on Friday, raising its total fatalities to 113. The State had a total of 3,290 cases, of which 1,550 were active. Andhra Pradesh reported two more fatalities.

Sounding a note of warning, Kerala Chief Minister, Pinarayi Vijayan, said on Friday that COVID-19 could spread rapidly in the com-

COVID-19

munity, as fresh cases in the State touched 111.

As more cases of local disease transmission through contacts got reported, people should ask themselves if they were exercising the high vigil and caution as in the early containment stages, now that lock down concessions were made more generous, he said.

"With over a lakh more people slated to return to the State from abroad this month, lock down relaxations are likely to lead to higher disease transmission.

Their return may not be all that smooth as Pugazhendhi, an owner of two trawlers in Chennai, is unwilling to employ rookie fishermen. "I will only accept seasoned and experienced fishermen. A larger fish catch would compensate for the loss I incurred during the lockdown," Mr. Pugazhendhi said by telephone from Chennai.

NGT issues notice to KTR on farmhouse

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) issued notices to the Telangana government and IT Minister K.T. Rama Rao on the construction of a farmhouse at Janwada on the outskirts of the city, allegedly in violation of the Government Order 111 that bans construction in the catchment area of the Himayathsagar and Osman-sagar reservoirs, according to Congress leaders.

The notices were issued on a petition filed by the Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee working president and Parliament member from the Malkajgiri constituency A. Revanth Reddy, who alleged that a farmhouse in the area was constructed by the Minister in violation of the Government Order.

After hearing a *habeas corpus* petition filed by his mother, Kaveri Bai, a Division Bench, consisting of Justices A.V. Sesha Sai and Justice K. Lalitha Kumari, observed that since Dr. Sudhakar was not in the custody of either the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) or the police, he could go to any hospital for better treatment if he so de-

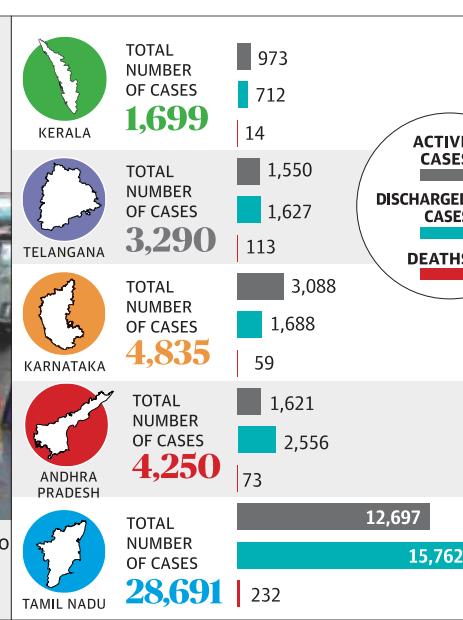
Big step

Giving permission to restaurants to open is one of the major relaxations announced by the Telangana government



Gearing up: A popular eatery is getting ready to operate from June 8, in Hyderabad on Friday.

■ NAGARA GOPAL



It is time that our people understand the gravity of the situation.

This is a war against COVID-19 and unless every individual becomes a warrior and practises social distancing, universal mask use and hand sanitisation at public places, workplaces and in public transport systems, the situation could go out of control," Mr. Vijayan warned.

The State had 973 active cases. With 22 more recover-

ies, the number of those who had recovered stood at 712. Till date the State counted 1,697 cases and 14 deaths.

Mr. Vijayan said only a small proportion of those who had returned to the State after May 7 from abroad and other States were positive for COVID-19. Of the 1,77,033 persons who had come, just 680 were diag-

nosed with the disease, with 343 having come from abroad and 337 from other States.

Kerala had tested over one lakh samples, at 1,04,045.

Five new hot spots were declared on Friday, in Wayanad, Kozhikode and Kannur districts. There were 128 hotspots in the State.

Friday's daily coronavirus count in Andhra Pradesh was 138 cases, taking the tally of COVID-19 to 4,250.

Of these, 2,556 (35 new cases) had recovered, 1,621 were 'active' and, with two new deaths, there were 73 fatalities.

Of the 138 fresh cases, 50 were identified as local individuals, four foreign returnees and the remaining either migrant returnees or people from other states.

In Telangana, 143 new cases were recorded on Friday, raising the total to 3,290.

Of these, 116 cases were in Greater Hyderabad, followed by eight cases in Rangareddy, five in Mahabubnagar, and three in Warangal districts. Khammam, Adilabad, Medchal, Sangareddy and Karim-

nagar districts recorded two cases each, and Mancherial recorded one.

Karnataka on Friday recorded a whopping 515 cases, 482 of which were inter-State travellers. With Friday's figures, the total number of positive cases shot up to 4,835. They included 57 COVID-19 deaths, two non-COVID deaths, and 1,688 discharges. Of the 83 people discharged on Friday, the highest recoveries – 32 – were from Hassan.

The number of active cases crossed 3,000 on Friday which was 63.86% of the total cases. Friday's numbers pushed Karnataka to the 10th position in the country from 12th.

Among new cases, Udupi recorded the highest at 204, for the second consecutive day. All new cases were returnees from Maharashtra.

Udupi now has the highest number of cases in Karnataka. While 768 cases were reported from this district, it had 685 active cases now. (With inputs from Vijaya-wada, Hyderabad and Bengaluru bureaus)

Mallikarjun Kharge nominated for RS

NAGESH PRABHU
SANDEEP PHUKAN
BENGALURU/NEW DELHI

Congress general secretary M. Mallikarjun Kharge on Friday was announced as the party's official candidate from Karnataka for the Rajya Sabha elections.

The elections to four RS seats from Karnataka have been scheduled for June 19, as the terms of M.V. Rajeev Gowda, B.K. Hariprasad (Congress), Prabhakar Kore (BJP), and D. Kupendra Reddy (JD-S) will end on June 25. Of the four seats, the Opposition can win two and the ruling party two.

The RS elections assume significance in Karnataka as it could bring old allies, the Congress and the JD(S), together again.

With 44 first-preference



votes required to elect Mr. Kharge, the Congress will be left with 24 surplus votes in the elections.

The Congress' choice of nominee will also change the internal dynamic of the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee, which will now be headed by D.K. Shivakumar.

With a RS berth, Mr. Kharge will make a return to national politics.

Case against Maneka Gandhi for remarks on Malappuram

BJP MP had tweeted about district in elephant death case

STAFF REPORTER

MALAPPURAM

The police registered a case against BJP MP Maneka Gandhi following a series of complaints against her after she made inciting remarks about Malappuram and its people in connection with the death of an elephant in Palakkad district.

An FIR was registered in Malappuram on Friday under Section 153 of the IPC for "wantonly giving provocation with intent to cause riot".

Among those who had complained against her were the Indian Union Muslim League, the Youth Congress, the Democratic Youth Federation of India, the Solidarity Youth Movement and Supreme Court lawyer K.R.

Maneka Gandhi

Subhash Chandran.

While responding to the elephant death in the Mannarkkad forest division of Palakkad on May 27, Ms. Gandhi tweeted against Malappuram, describing it as the most violent district in the country.

P.V. Abdul Wahab, MP, invited Ms. Gandhi to visit Malappuram to "see and experience the land" which she described as the most vio-

lent district. "If you want to see an excellent model of communal harmony and peaceful coexistence, please pay a short visit," he said.

The official website of People for Animals (PFA), an NGO founded by Ms. Gandhi, was hacked by a Facebook group called Kerala Cyber Warriors, which called it an "operation against communal hatred". The page was reinstated later in the evening.

The Forest Department has arrested one person in connection with the death of the elephant. Forest officers said Wilson, a plantation worker, had admitted to placing an explosive trap to hunt wild boar. He reportedly admitted that he stuffed the explosive in a coconut and set the bait for a boar.

According to the police, the victim's husband took her and their two sons from his house in Pothencode to Puthukurichy beach around 4 p.m. on Thursday. He later took them to Rajan's house nearby, where they forced the victim with liquor.

"As far as we are concerned, the husband left the house with the younger son and the others. After some time, some of them returned and began to misbehave with the victim. Sensing something amiss, the woman tried to leave the house with her elder son. However, they were prevented from doing so by the gang, which misled her into believing that her husband was involved in a scuffle nearby," a police officer said.

The gang took the victim and her son to a deserted location in Channankara, where the woman was allegedly sexually assaulted. They also manhandled the five-year-old child.

The victim, however, managed to escape the gang's clutches after she offered to return to the place after dropping her child home. The duo was rescued by a group of youth who safely transported her to her house near Kaniyapuram.

Learning of her ordeal, the group also alerted the police, following which the victim was taken to the Chirayinkeezhu taluk hospital.

Despite her husband pur-

T.K. ROHIT

CHENNAI

The Southern Bench of the National Green Tribunal on Friday took *suo motu* cognisance of the death of a pregnant elephant in Kerala and appointed a joint committee to ascertain the facts and to recommend the steps to be taken to prevent man-animal conflict in the future.

The Bench of Justice K. Ramakrishnan and expert lawyer Saibal Dasgupta said the case was being taken up in an effort to avoid such incidents and to pro-

vide a long-term strategy to reduce man-animal conflict in wildlife areas or fringe villages adjoining the forests.

The Bench directed that a joint committee, comprising a senior officer not below the rank of Chief Conservator of Forests, Chief Wildlife Warden, Kerala, a senior officer from the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau, Southern Zone, Wildlife Warden, Silent Valley division and Divisional Forest Officer of Mannarkkad and Punalur, and the District Collector, Palakkad, to look into the issue

and submit a factual and action taken report, including a long-term management plan. "If there is already any such scheme, what is the stage of implementation and how effectively is it being done, and

China appoints new Army commander for India border

Lt. Gen. Xu Qiling will report to the head of the Western Theater Command

ANANTH KRISHNAN
CHENNAI

China has appointed a new Army commander to oversee the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Ground Force on the India border, amid ongoing tensions across the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

The appointment was first publicly confirmed on June 1 in a Chinese media report that identified Lieutenant General Xu Qiling as the new commander of the Western Theater Command Ground Force. It is unclear when the appointment was made.

Indian and Chinese forces have been in stand-offs along the LAC since early May.

Lt. Gen. Xu will report to General Zhao Zongqi, who is the commander of the Western Theater Command and oversees all forces there, including the Ground Force, the Air Force and the Rocket Force. The command is responsible for the India border and is the biggest of five theater commands. Theater commands are usually headed by generals.

Gen. Zhao was the Western Theater commander during the 2017 Doklam stand-off. In October 2017, he was appointed to the Communist Party's 19th Central Committee. Gen. Zhao's counterpart in the Eastern Theater Command, General He Weidong, was in charge of the Ground Force in the west, before his promotion in January to head the entire Eastern Theater Command.



On the edge: In this July 2017 photo, Army patrol teams in the Sub Sector North along the LAC. ■ DINAKAR PERI

Lt. Gen. Xu's appointment can be thought of a lateral move, as he previously held the same position in the Eastern Theater Command.

China doesn't usually comment on military appointments. While the appointment may have been routine – it isn't clear if the PLA had filled the post after Gen He's promotion in January – the timing coincides with rising border tensions.

Two former Indian Generals said on Wednesday that the current stand-offs were different from past incidents, which were generally localised. The scale of the stand-offs in at least four different spots on the LAC and in two sectors suggested a higher level of planning, they said.

Planning tasks

The responsibility for planning generally lies with the Western Theater Command, which is also the point of responsibility for managing the border situation. Lt Gen Xu and Gen Zhao are key figures in decision-making.

Only in January, then Northern Commander Lt. Gen. Ranbir Singh headed a

delegation to China, and met Gen. Zhao at the command's headquarters in Chengdu in a visit aimed at improving communication between the militaries.

In an editorial on Friday, the Communist Party-run *Global Times* said Saturday's meeting "has brought hope for the two countries to further ease tensions on border issues." It noted that "Chinese and Indian officials have kept a low profile on the border frictions."

"The China-India border line and the LAC are still unclear. In the past, the two militaries had few chances to encounter during patrols. But as both militaries are increasing their modernisation level, their infrastructures are also extending to the border areas, leading to more disputes," the editorial said.

"China does not want to fall foul of India...We have no reason to make India our enemy," the newspaper said. "But China will not give up any inch of territory. Once India makes a strategic misjudgment and nibbles away at China's territory, China will never condone it. China is bound to make strong countermeasures."

India would want restoration of status quo ante before May 5 and China would not accept it immediately, the former Northern Army Commander added.

On Saturday, in the first ever ground level talks at the level of Lieutenant Generals, the Army's 14 Corps Commander will lead the Indian delegation for talks with his Chinese equivalent to be held at the Chushul-Moldo border meeting point on the

Resolution of border issues needs diplomatic intervention too, they say

DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI

Ahead of the crucial talks between military commanders of India and China to resolve the month-long stand-off on the border, experts have expressed caution on the outcome of the discussions, saying it would take some hard negotiations to get China move back to its previous positions and require a diplomatic intervention as well.

"These military to military talks will ensure that there is no escalation on the ground between the two sides. But resolution is not going to happen from military talks alone. It will take some long, hard negotiations and would require diplomatic intervention as well," Lt. Gen. (retd.) D.S. Hooda told *The Hindu*.

Push and pull

India would want restoration of status quo ante before May 5 and China would not accept it immediately, the former Northern Army Commander added.

"Since the meeting is at a higher level and the first time such talks are taking between the top military commanders, some positive movement is expected," he stated and added total resolution was tough.

The stand-off began a month back with scuffles on the night of May 5 at Pangong Tso, resulting in serious injuries on both sides. There was another scuffle on May 9 at Naku La in Sikkim. Beginning then, China has systematically brought in large number of troops inside Indian territory at various points at Pangong Tso, Galwan and Hot Springs in Ladakh.

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Strategic level

Another former Northern Army Commander, Lt. Gen. HS Panag (retd.) said meetings between military commanders would be appropriate to resolve a localised incident like in the past.

"This is not a small incident. The decision is at the strategic level. And would have been taken politically at the highest levels in the Chinese government."

"The backdrop of the push by China is to reassess its hegemony in the light of other developments... Military commanders can at best spell out the expectations on both sides, what they can do to diffuse the situation. Then the ball will get thrown to the political level

LT. GEN. H.S. PANAG (RETD.)

infrastructure development and so the resolution of this problem has to be at that level", he stated.

"Military commanders can at best spell out the expectations on both sides, what they can do to diffuse the situation. Then the ball will get thrown to the political level"

Negotiating a pullback by China from Pangong Tso and Galwan would be tricky, he said.

On Pangong Tso, the Indian side should negotiate to restore status quo before May and urge China to move back from Finger 4 with a promise of not developing infrastructure beyond the point. On Hot Springs, he said, there shouldn't be any problem as it was a minor incursion. Galwan had not been an area of contention in the past and "that will be a tough one," he added.

Chinese response

MFA spokesperson Geng Shuang said in Beijing that the current situation in the boundary region was "over-all stable and controllable."

"We have full-fledged border-related mechanisms and we maintain close communications through military and diplomatic channels. We are committed to properly resolve the relevant issue," he stated.

that included both China and Pakistan, in June 2019.

However, given rising tensions in relations with both those countries since then, as well as criticism from countries such as Turkey and Malaysia and other groupings like the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation) over the government's decision on Article 370 last August as well as the Citizenship Amendment Act,

+ that plan for the UNSC seat as far back as 2013, officials said, with a keen eye on 2021, the year that will mark its 75th year of Independence.

"We were asked to identify an uncontested spot, which was a problem as the first such slot would only come available in 2026," Asoke Mukherji who was the U.N. Permanent Representative in 2013 told *The Hindu*. "To our good fortune, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan agreed, in a gesture to our friendship, to step aside for the 2021-22 seat. They cleared the decision in their

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IN BRIEF



Use toll-free number 1075: Health Ministry

NEW DELHI
The country registered 9,851 new cases and 297 deaths in the last 24 hours. The total number of COVID-19 cases in the country stood at 2,36,047 with 1,16,258 active cases on Friday. The recovery rate is 47.93%. The Union Health Ministry has said that in case of symptoms like fever, cough or difficulty in breathing, citizens should call 1075 (toll free) and seek immediate help.

Gujarat reports 510 new cases, 35 deaths

AHMEDABAD
Gujarat on Friday recorded its steepest increase in COVID-19 infection, with 510 fresh cases and 35 deaths, taking the tally to 19,119 cases and 1,190 deaths. Since Monday, the State has been reporting over 400 fresh cases a day. On Friday, 344 patients were discharged. The number of those discharged now stands at 13,011. Experts say the State's infection curve is likely to rise sharply.

ED official, 2 contract workers test positive

NEW DELHI
Two contractual workers and an official posted at the Enforcement Directorate headquarters have tested positive for COVID-19. Over 20 officials, including those of the rank of Assistant Enforcement Officer, Assistant Director, had reportedly come in contact with one of the persons in the past two weeks.

Another Congress MLA quits party in Gujarat

AHMEDABAD
The exodus of Congress MLAs in Gujarat continues ahead of the June 19 Rajya Sabha election to four seats, with one more legislator resigning on Friday. Brijesh Mehta resigned as MLA as well as from the primary member of the Congress. On Thursday, Congress MLAs Akshay Patel and Jitu Chaudhary tendered their resignation.

Rising infections among pregnant in J&K

181 women testing positive points to community spread, says health official

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

Jammu and Kashmir has recorded a spark spike in pregnant women testing positive for COVID-19, with 70 such cases in just the first four days of June. The total number of pregnant women infected as on Friday is 181.

Experts suggest that the growing numbers are a stark indicator of the community spread of the disease in pockets of Kashmir, just days ahead of the scheduled re-opening of many sectors.

Mandatory testing

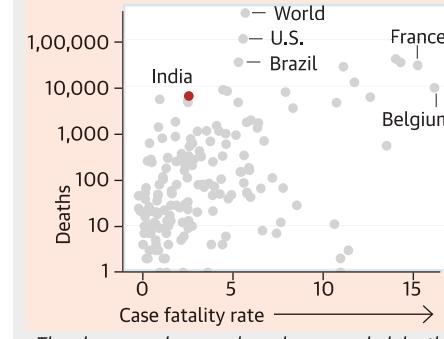
Indicating a rising trend, June 1 saw 10 pregnant women testing positive, June 2 recorded 14, June 3 at least

How India fares in COVID-19 deaths

India's COVID-19 case fatality rate (CFR) has been hovering around the 3% mark in the past three months. The rate is on the lower side compared to many high case load countries and the world average (5.9%). However, the absolute number of deaths is on the rise and India as of June 4 was the country with 12th largest number of deaths. Wide variations exist across States in both absolute deaths and the case fatality rates. As of June 4, Gujarat had the highest case fatality rate in India and Maharashtra the highest number of deaths

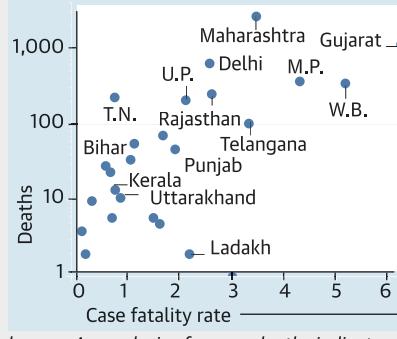
1. COMPARISON OF COUNTRIES

The graph depicts the number of deaths across countries as of June 4 and the CFR (deaths/cases). India recorded 6,350 deaths and a CFR of 2.8%



2. COMPARISON OF STATES

The graph shows the number of deaths across States as of June 4 and the case fatality rate. Tamil Nadu had relatively high number of deaths but a low CFR



The above numbers are based on recorded deaths and cases. An analysis of excess deaths indicates that many countries including India may be undercounting the deaths. More on this: bit.ly/3dDHbx4

Maharashtra reports highest fatality surge with 139 deaths

Mumbai's case tally reaches 46,080, with 1149 new infections

STAFF REPORTER
PUNE

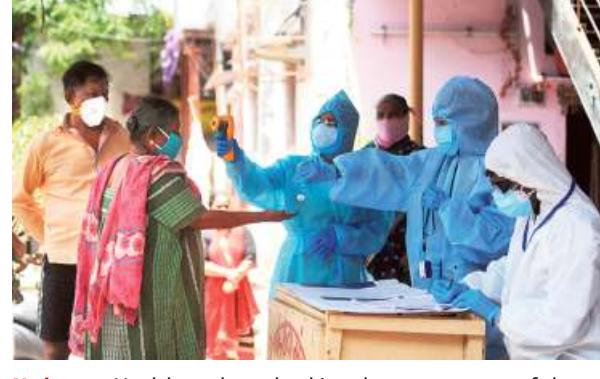
With 139 COVID-19 related deaths reported on Friday, Maharashtra posted its highest fatality surge yet to take the State's total death toll to 2,849. Another spike of 2,436 new cases saw the State's total case tally breach the 80,000-mark to reach 80,229.

Of the total case tally, only 42,215 are active positive ones, said State Health Department officials. As many as 1,475 patients were discharged on Friday, taking the total number till date to 35,156.

Recovery rate

"The State's recovery rate currently stands at 43.81% while its case fatality rate is 3.55%", said State Surveillance Officer Pradeep Awate.

Mumbai's total case tally reached 46,080, with the city reporting 1,149 new cases. Of these, 25,768 are active cases. With 54 new fatalities,



No let-up: Health workers checking the temperature of slum dwellers at Koliwada in Mumbai on Thursday. ■ VIJAY BATE

Mumbai's total death toll has risen to 1,519. As many as 30 deaths were reported from Thane district to take the district's toll to 131.

Fourteen deaths were reported from Pune district to take the district's toll to 390.

However, Pune district authorities said the death toll had already risen to 393. The total tally, as per State Health department figures, has reached 9,051, with the district reporting more than

200 new cases on Friday. After a period of relative calm, Malegaon - a major virus hotspot in Nashik - reported eight fatalities to take its total to 66.

Ratnagiri district in the Konkan reported five deaths to take its total count to ten. The district, which has witnessed a significant spurt in new cases in the past fortnight, now has reported a total of 344 cases, 205 of them active.

The Commission on June 3 was responding to a petition filed by New Delhi-based advocate Brajesh Singh, and asked the SP to inform him of the action taken in the matter.

In a video that went viral on the social media, a policeman is seen thrashing the man, who they claim was drunk, with a baton till he collapses to the ground, where he endures another set of blows and a kick. Then, he is lifted and taken inside a police van.

The police have so far suspended two personnel reportedly involved in the incident, and an inquiry is pending. "This incident is very brutal, therefore the intervention of the commission is much more warranted," Mr. Singh said.

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At the largest land port in the country, no signs yet of unlocking trade

Goods transport to and from Bangladesh have come to a halt in Petrapole, despite the Centre's green light

SHIV SAHAY SINGH
PETRAPOLE (NORTH 24 PARGANAS)

On the first day of Unlock 1.0, Jessore Road in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas returned to life with people and vehicles emerging after two months. The road culminates in India's largest Customs port, Petrapole, on the India-Bangladesh border. It accounts for a majority of bilateral trade. Even after trade activities started, the largest international land port wore a deserted look. The Indian and Bangladesh flags stood still. Custom clearing agents and a handful of traders from both sides stood around the pole and spoke in a high pitch.

"In the past two-and-a-half months, we have written

several letters to the authorities in the State and at the Centre, including the Prime Minister's Office, for resumption of trade, but the issue is far from being resolved," said Kartik Chakraborty, secretary of the Petrapole Clearing Agents' Staff Welfare Association. Mr. Chakraborty and other Customs clearing agents go so far as the zero point, talk to Bangladesh traders about the resumption of trade and leave.

A kilometre away from the international checkpoint is a large shed surrounded by trucks. This is the area where trucks from India cross to Bangladesh and vice versa. BSF officer Pradip Singh said two companies of soldiers were deployed round the

clock to check the trucks passing from both sides. He said that on an average, 500-600 trucks passed through the checkpoint daily. Bilateral trade was suspended in the last week of March. It resumed at the intervention of the Union government on April 30. But only a few trucks plied as the locals protested and alleged that the resumption of trade would help in the spread of COVID-19.

The district authorities expressed their inability to resume the trade. According to the clearing agents, a handful of people were protesting, demanding that the drivers returning from Bangladesh be quarantined for 14 days. While the BSF re-



A long lull: Trucks lined up at the Petrapole port along the India-Bangladesh border. ■ DEBASISH BHADURI

moved the protesters from near the checkpoint, trade could not be resumed. The State government was upset at the resumption of trade. Chief Secretary Rajiva Sinha said on April 30 that the State should have the final word on such matters.

District officials are tight-lipped about the resumption of trade. "We have nothing to say about export and import," North 24 Parganas District Magistrate Chaitali Chakrabarti said. Asked whether the district administration had any objection,

she said, "We do not have any objection. It has to start at zero point." The BSF said it was fully prepared to facilitate trade. "We are ready with our Standard Operating Procedure and the protocol to deal with COVID-19," said S.S. Guleria, DIG, Public Relations, South Bengal Frontier of the BSF.

While there is no official figure on trade losses, Mr. Chakraborty, the secretary of the Customs clearing agent association, said it could be around ₹2,000 crore.

Rising uncertainty
Until a few weeks ago, 2,000 trucks were lined on the road leading to the checkpoint. Not knowing when the trade would resume, many drivers had parked their trucks and left. At the BSF shed, there are several trucks from Ban-

gladesh awaiting clearance and hundreds of trucks from India. Drivers are waiting for the trade to start so that they can unload the goods and return.

Binod Kumar is a truck driver from Rajasthan and Pratap Singh is from Haryana. They have been waiting with their trucks full of cotton since early March. "It took us seven days from our States to reach here. We have been waiting for three months," they said.

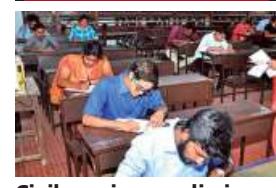
Jamsed Ali Mondal, an Indian trader, says his truck carrying machine parts has been stuck in Bangladesh since March 18.

The trade through Petrapole (India) and Benapole (Bangladesh) has been a bone of contention between the Union government and the State government during the pandemic. On May 5, Un-

ion Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla wrote to the Chief Secretary that an "unilateral action on the part of the Government of West Bengal to stop cross-land border movement of essential goods would have larger implications for the Indian government with regard to its legally binding international commitments." Mr. Bhalla said letters were issued on April 24 to allow transport of goods through the India-Nepal, India-Bhutan and India-Bangladesh borders.

On May 9, the West Bengal government suggested an alternative route. Home Secretary Alapan Bandyopadhyay said there was an "emotive issue" among the locals who feared the spread of the contagion if the trade resumed and suggested a railway route from Gede (Nadia) to Darsana (Bangladesh).

IN BRIEF



Civil services preliminary exam on October 4

NEW DELHI
The civil services preliminary examination, postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, will be held on October 4, the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) announced on Friday. It said personality tests of candidates selected through last year's preliminary and main examinations will resume from July 20. PTI

Students who need scribe can skip exams: CBSE

NEW DELHI
Children with special needs availing scribe facility can choose not to appear for the pending class 10 and 12 board examinations, due to be conducted from July 1 to 15, as it will be difficult to comply with social distancing norms, said the CBSE. Their results will be declared as per an alternative assessment scheme. PTI

Good rainfall activity expected next week: IMD

NEW DELHI
Rainfall activity in central and south India is likely to pick up pace next week due to a cyclonic circulation, which is likely to form over the Bay of Bengal and aid in the progress of the monsoon, the India Meteorological Department said on Friday. PTI

285 fresh cases push Assam tally past 2,000

GUWAHATI
The biggest daily surge of 285 cases on Thursday saw Assam's COVID-19 positive count double in less than a week to 2,153. Of these, 1,687 were active cases, 459 discharged while four had died and three migrated to other States. The count had crossed the 1,000 mark on May 29 and more than doubled by noon on Thursday.

Close to 28% of Sunderbans damaged in Cyclone Amphan

1,200 sq. km of forests destroyed, says Mamata

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

About 28% of the Sunderbans have been damaged by Cyclone Amphan, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said on Friday at the launch of a drive for planting mangroves and trees to mark World Environment Day.

She said 1,200 sq km of the 4,263 sq km forests had been "destroyed". The Indian Sunderbans, an area south of the Damper Hodges line, is spread over 9,630 sq km, of which the mangrove forest accounts for 4,263 sq km.

Principal Chief Conservator of Forest Ravi Kanta Sinha said the damage was



Heavy destruction: A strip of damaged land seen at Sunderbans after the cyclone receded. ■ AP

mostly in the Patharpratima and Kultali areas of South 24 Parganas. "The damage has been much more on the Indian side and not on the Bangladeshi side," he said.

On trees turning yellow and red after the cyclone, he said the phenomenon was

mostly due to salinity. "The trees that turned yellow were not mangrove trees, it was mostly due to the dense fog of saline water. We are not sure whether the trees will survive. Maybe if the salinity of the soil comes down, some trees can sur-

vive," he said.

Despite the massive plantation drives, it may take years to restore the mangroves, officials said. Experts say the mangroves not only reduce wind speed but also break the waves during a cyclone.

The Chief Minister said the Forest Department should be prepared to plant 3.5 crore mangrove trees by July 14, World Forest Day.

Ms. Banerjee said 16,000 trees were damaged in Kolkata. About ₹100 crore would be spent on plantation drives in Kolkata and adjoining areas. Trees had been lost not only on the streets but also in parks and gardens.

The Chief Minister wrote on Twitter, "We must all work together to restore the greenery in our State."

Amphan leaves Bengal's book trade in tatters

From publishers to porters, the industry employs at least 5 lakh people

SUVIJIT BAGCHI
KOLKATA

A couple of days after the super cyclone Amphan hit Kolkata, a tall, dark man was seen in College Street, the city's gigantic book bazaar, drying books on the road in front of a shop, 'Dhyabinandu', a serious publisher. Abhik Bandyopadhyay, who owns the publishing house, said: "Boi ar bikri kora jabe na [it would be difficult to run book business]." The cyclone damaged the books at his workstation-cum-shop and the desktop, erasing manuscripts, a half-constructed e-catalogue and accounting files.

"There are so many workers ... who are not skilled in any particular way, and they



The State's book trade is a labour-intensive industry.

are out of work," she added.

Bengal's book trade, with an annual turnover of about ₹1,000 crore, is labour intensive. It employs not less than 5 lakh people, from publishers to porters, according to an estimate of the Publishers and Booksellers Guild.

The Guild has donated a seed fund of ₹5 lakh, seeking

donations. "The Guild is inviting applications from June 3 till June 30 from publishers, with an estimate of their losses..." said the Guild's president, Tridib Chatterjee. The support is only for publishers from College Street, where the damage is to the tune of ₹5 crore, he said. Other estimates pegged the damage from ₹15 crore-₹20 crore.

Meanwhile, Indrani Mitra Roy, owner of 87-year-old publishing house Mitra and Ghosh, had raised about ₹15 lakh till Friday afternoon, a funding platform. A tweet from politician Shashi Tharoor helped her, she said.

Wallil Islam, a consultant surgeon, shared on his Facebook page on Thursday a post about the patient who

Dalit settlement gets its own water source after a long wait

Authorities dig a borewell after an RTI query

SIDHARTH YADAV
BHOPAL

Taunts, casteist slurs and borewell motor being turned off at whim by upper-caste households have haunted members of a Dalit settle-

ment at a village in Rewa district for 20 years. But a Right to Information (RTI) query has got them a borewell dug – a water source they can finally call their own.

At the Nevaria settlement in Gangeo block, around 100 members of Dalit families took turns, mostly girls and women, to fetch water from handpumps and private borewells controlled by upper caste Mahajans more than a kilometre away.

"The only route passed through their fields and you can't cross them half the year as they are ploughed and crops cultivated," said Krishna Saket, 21, a resident of the settlement. Since 2017, the group has been demanding the government provide for a separate water

source, closer to them.

"We even approached the local MLA ... he is a messiah of only seeking votes from us. Shivinand bhai is our real messiah as he sent some papers over WhatsApp to some official and got the job done," said Mr. Saket.

Shivinand Dwivedi, a social worker, sent to the district Public Health Engineering Department an RTI query, seeking information on the action taken to dig a borewell in the settlement.

As the matter pertained to the life and liberty of persons, he contended authorities had to provide the information within 48 hours under section 7(I) of the RTI Act, 2005.

Phone charger cord extracted from man's urinary bladder

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

A doctor in Guwahati extracted a mobile phone charger cord from the urinary bladder of a 30-year-old man, but not before the patient "misled" them into operating on his stomach.

"He came to me complaining about severe abdominal pain. X-ray revealed there was something in his lower abdomen and an endoscopy confirmed a cord. But I found nothing in his gastrointestinal tract after

surgery a few days ago," Dr. Islam said. An X-ray in the operation theatre showed the mobile phone charger cord in his urinary bladder.

"The cord was removed successfully... But the surgery could have been avoided had he told the truth. The cord could have been extracted via the penile urethra through which he had inserted [it]," he said.

TH CROSSWORD + 12955
(set by Gridman)

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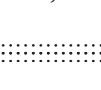
ACROSS

- Account by clergyman is truthful (8)
- Scot heartily provided nun's cap (4)
- Chess player – another chess player leaves a second in trouble (6)
- Spun nonsense with a young boy (7)
- North Arcot sightseers have no love for those with no cover (9)

DOWN

- If this property changes hands, there will be talk (7)
- Judge and you heard politician's anger (6)
- A handicap involving Victor is to be recommended (9)
- Sure about collecting old coins... (5)
- Running around constantly, some won the goal (2,3,2)
- Marks under instruments? Nonsense! (12)
- Almost stumble through useless stuff (6)
- How you may buy water and fall – furious (12)
- Complaining – question on loss of capital by Peru almost bad (9)
- Weeks wasted with democrat? That's biased (6)
- Work with union leader fast becoming rich (7)
- Where's coal stored? Proceed hurriedly! (7)
- Alcoholic concoction, say – not one going bad (6)
- Sing your first poem with learner (5)

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



SUDOKU

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to puzzle 12954

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Trump hits out at Republican Senator over Mattis comments

President says he will campaign against Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN

As protests across the U.S. continued in the aftermath of last week's police killing of George Floyd, an unarmed black man, visible rifts have emerged between U.S. President Donald Trump and some of his current and former Republican colleagues over the President's handling of the protests.

On Thursday, the President lashed out at Republican Senator from Alaska Lisa Murkowski, who had voiced her support for Trump critic and former Defense Secretary Jim Mattis.

"Few people know where they'll be in two years from now, but I do, in the great state of Alaska... campaigning against Senator Lisa Murkowski," Mr. Trump tweeted, with reference to Ms. Murkowski's 2022 re-election campaign to the Senate.

"Get any candidate ready, good or bad, I don't care, I'm endorsing. If you have a pulse, I'm with you!" Mr. Trump said, reacting to Ms. Murkowski's comments from Thursday.

"When I saw General Mattis's comments yesterday, I felt like perhaps we're getting to the point where we can be more honest with the concerns that we might hold internally and have the courage of our own convictions to speak up," Ms. Murkowski had said.

Writing in *The Atlantic*, the former Defense Secretary had said Mr. Trump was trying to divide the country which had not, for years, had "mature leadership."

"I thought General Mattis's words were true and honest and necessary and



Cry for justice and equality: Demonstrators protesting near the White House over the death of George Floyd, on Thursday. ■ AP

overdue," Ms. Murkowski told journalists.

"I am still struggling with it, I have struggled with it for a long time," Ms. Murkowski said when asked by reporters if she would be supporting Mr. Trump in the November general election. The Senator has been known to break ranks with the GOP in her voting decisions, but decided to vote to acquit Mr. Trump earlier this year, after he was impeached by the House of Representatives.

'I fired Mattis'

Mr. Trump also continued to insist on Thursday that he had fired Mr. Mattis (he had made this claim on Wednesday as well).

"The problem with asking for someone to give you a letter of resignation, which you do as a courtesy to help them save face, is that it is then harder to say you fired them. I did fire James Mattis.

He was no good for Obama, who fired him also, and was no good for me!" Mr. Trump wrote.

Former White House Chief of Staff John Kelly, however, denied this was the situation.

"The President did not fire him. He did not ask for his resignation," Mr. Kelly told the *Washington Post* in an interview.

Mr. Trump tweeted on Thursday that he had not told Mr. Kelly of Mr. Mattis's firing, as Mr. Kelly was not in his inner circle.

"John Kelly didn't know I was going to fire James Mattis, nor did he have any knowledge of my asking for a letter of resignation. Why would I tell him, he was not in my inner-circle, was totally exhausted by the job, and in the end just slinked away into obscurity. They all want to come back for a piece of the limelight!"

NASA generally allows use of its images and video but prohibits the use of its insignia and photographs of its astronauts in advertisements.

Trump team pulls ad video

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump's re-election campaign has pulled a video featuring the SpaceX launch and astronauts which appeared to violate NASA's media regulations, reports said. The "Make Space Great Again" YouTube ad posted on YouTube showed footage from the Apollo programme, as well as video of the landmark SpaceX Demo-2 mission and NASA astronauts Bob Behnken and Doug Hurley, the SpaceNews.com website said.

NASA generally allows use of its images and video but prohibits the use of its insignia and photographs of its astronauts in advertisements.

Vaccine programme gets \$8.8 billion funding

More than 50 nations take part in meet

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON

Governments around the world on Thursday pledged \$8.8 billion for global vaccines alliance Gavi to help immunisation programmes disrupted by coronavirus, prompting calls for global cooperation to ensure a potential COVID-19 vaccine is available to all. The meeting beat a target to raise \$7.4 billion to provide vaccines at a much reduced cost to 300 million children worldwide.

Since emerging in China late last year, the virus has infected at least 6.6 million people, killed more than 3,90,000 and wreaked havoc on the global economy by forcing millions to stay inside their homes.

Brazil reported a new 24-

\$1.6 billion. Gavi also launched a new initiative to purchase potential COVID-19 vaccines, scale-up production and support delivery to developing nations, which raised \$567 million in seed money. "Together, we rise to fulfil the greatest shared endeavour of our lifetimes – the triumph of humanity over disease," said British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who hosted the online summit.

Scientists are racing to develop and test a coronavirus vaccine and United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres said it must be available to everyone.



Crisis moment: A patient with symptoms related to COVID-19 being brought to a hospital in Rio de Janeiro on Thursday. ■ AP

hour record death toll, bringing the total number killed to more than 34,000. That is behind only the United States, with more than 1,08,000 deaths, and Britain, with nearly 40,000.

President Jair Bolsonaro has fiercely criticised coro-

'Get your knee off our necks'

Activist Sharpton says it is time to speak up against brutality

REUTERS
MINNEAPOLIS

U.S. civil rights activist the Rev. Al Sharpton told mourners that George Floyd's death in police custody and the nationwide protests it ignited marked a reckoning for America over race and justice, demanding, "Get your knee off our necks."

Memorial tributes to Floyd in Minneapolis, where he was killed on May 25, and in the New York borough of Brooklyn, a major flashpoint for demonstrations, came as protesters returned to the streets of several cities for a 10th straight day on Thursday, including Atlanta, Washington, Denver, Detroit and Los Angeles. The largely peaceful protests waned into Friday morning and emergency curfews in many cities were lifted.

Delivering the eulogy at a memorial service at a university chapel in Minneapolis, Rev. Sharpton said



Rev. Al Sharpton in Minneapolis. ■ REUTERS

Floyd's death at the hands of police, pinned to the ground under the knee of a white officer, symbolised a universal experience of police brutality for African Americans.

"George Floyd should not be among the deceased. He did not die of common health conditions. He died of a common American criminal justice malfunction," Mr. Sharpton said. "It's time for us to stand up in George's name and say, 'Get your

knee off our necks'."

Mr. Sharpton led mourners in eight minutes and 46 seconds of silence, the amount of time Floyd lay on a Minneapolis street with the officer's knee pressed into his neck. A string of memorial services are expected to stretch across six days and three States. A funeral is planned for Tuesday.

The nationwide protests were for the most part orderly on Thursday, in contrast to several previous nights punctuated by sporadic arson, looting and clashes between protesters and police and the mobilisation of the National Guard in several States.

The change in mood reflected a determination voiced by many protesters and organisers in recent days to transform outrage over Floyd's death into a renewed civil rights movement, seeking reforms to America's justice system.

U.S. launches strikes against Taliban again

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KABUL

The U.S. launched its first air strikes against the Taliban since a rare ceasefire between the insurgents and Afghan forces ended more than a week ago, the U.S. military said on Friday.

The two assaults took place on Thursday and Friday in separate provinces in Afghanistan. U.S. forces spokesman Sonny Leggett said on Twitter. "These were the 1st U.S. airstrikes against (the Taliban) since the start of the Eid ceasefire," he wrote. "We reiterate: All sides must reduce violence to allow the peace process to take hold," he added. Ten members of the Afghan forces were killed on Friday in a separate attack targeting a Humvee vehicle, the Interior Ministry said, blaming the assault on the Taliban.

U.S. seeks 'full accounting' of Tiananmen massacre

China calls it hypocrisy, asks Washington to 'put its own house in order'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

The White House said on Thursday that China's "slaughter" of protesters in Tiananmen Square in 1989 has not been forgotten, urging Beijing to give its first accurate accounting of the bloodshed.

"The Chinese Communist Party's slaughter of unarmed Chinese civilians was a tragedy that will not be forgotten," President Donald Trump's Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany said in a statement. "The United States calls on China to honour the memory of those who lost their lives and to

provide a full accounting of those who were killed, detained, or remain missing in connection with the events surrounding the Tiananmen Square massacre on June 4, 1989." Beijing's city government claimed weeks after the crackdown that around 200 people had died, the vast majority soldiers, with only 36 university students killed. China's Central government has never released a full official toll, but estimates have put the figure between several hundred to over 1,000.

Open discussion of the brutal suppression is forbidden in mainland China. In Hong Kong, where Beijing is tightening its central rule, a mass vigil to mark the anniversary was banned, though tens of thousands of people defied the decision.

Every year, the U.S. issues a statement demanding Chi-

na be held accountable. On Wednesday, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met with survivors, including Wang Dan, perhaps the most prominent of the student leaders from the protest.

China on Friday accused the U.S. of hypocrisy. "The U.S. has always boasted about so-called democracy and human rights, but the facts repeatedly show that the U.S. record in this area is full of stains," Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said at a regular briefing. He said Washington should "put its own house in order" and defended China's political system.

Sri Lanka to probe police assault on autistic teen

They mistook him to be a drug addict

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
COLOMBO

Sri Lanka on Friday launched an investigation into a police assault against an autistic teenager after CCTV footage shared on social media triggered protests calling it a racially-motivated attack.

The 14-year-old boy from the Muslim community had been stopped at a checkpoint at the southern town of Aluthgama where police allegedly beat him up for violating a curfew last week.

Policemen admitted they used force to "control the suspect as he tried to escape" but denied assaulting him. Police said on Friday that they initially suspected Ahamed, who was later tied to a post near the checkpoint until his father turned up, Mr. Moulana said.

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Putin seeks clean-up after Arctic spill

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MOSCOW

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday said he expected metals giant Norilsk Nickel to fully restore the environment after an unprecedented Arctic fuel spill, as responders said they had managed to stop the slick from spreading further. A national-level state of emergency was announced after 21,000 tonnes of diesel fuel spilled from a reservoir that collapsed last Friday outside Norilsk, polluting huge stretches of river in remote tundra.

The metals giant, which owns the reservoir through a subsidiary, tried to contain the damage on its own for two days before specialists were called in from companies and agencies across Russia.

Speaking with officials at the site by video call, Mr. Putin told Norilsk Nickel chief Vladimir Potanin he expected the company to pay for a comprehensive clean-up.

INTERVIEW | ZAMIR KABULOV

The Taliban movement has changed'

Russian Presidential envoy for Afghanistan says India's policy of avoiding any engagement with the militants has had its day

ATUL ANEJA

Russia is nudging India to engage with the Taliban in view of the upcoming launch of intra-Afghan talks". In an interview, Zamir Kabulov, Russia's special presidential envoy for Afghanistan, and head of the second Asia department in the Russian Foreign Ministry, said the "Taliban movement had changed" over the years, and the recent feelings that it had sent to open communication channels with India were a likely reflection of the Taliban's "strategic vision" rather than a "tactical manoeuvre": Edited excerpts:

Afghanistan appears to have reached another turning point, with the impending withdrawal of U.S. forces along with the likelihood of an intra-Afghan reconciliation dialogue. In your view, are there any grounds for optimism about Afghanistan's future?

There are grounds for optimism about the future for sure. We commend the signing of an agreement between the U.S. and the Taliban movement that took place in Doha on February 29, 2020, and are convinced that it paves the way for finding a lasting settlement of the situation in Afghanistan. We see that both sides – the U.S.

and the Taliban – are interested in fulfilling this agreement and launching intra-Afghan peace talks as soon as possible.

Much will depend, however, on Kabul, namely, on how quickly the authorities of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan will be able to complete the prisoner exchange with the Taliban by releasing 5,000 Taliban detainees for 1,000 soldiers and establish a negotiating team by Kabul. It is possible that once the negotiating process is launched, new difficulties will emerge. The dialogue between the warring parties will not be easy, but with a firm mutual commitment to reaching an agreement, the success will be achieved sooner or later.

Has the Taliban changed? Is it different from the Taliban of the mid-1990s? If so, what are the grounds for that change?

The Taliban movement has changed. There are multiple reasons for that. First and foremost, the Taliban has had enough time to learn from its

mistakes. As we can see, it has abandoned some radical and jihadist principles. For instance, the Taliban now underlines that it is interested in maintaining constructive and good neighbourhood relations with all regional countries. The recent statement by the Taliban spokesman about non-interference in the internal affairs of other States issued with respect to the fake publications about the Taliban supporting Pakistan's position on Kashmir is a good example.

The U.S., your country, Iran and China, at some point, started talking to the Taliban. Do you think India missed a trick by not engaging with the Taliban?

I believe that New Delhi's policy of avoiding any engagement with the Taliban has had its day, especially in view of the upcoming launch

of intra-Afghan talks and eventual transformation of the Taliban movement into an influential legal political force in Afghanistan.

We have maintained and keep maintaining contacts with the Taliban to fulfil two tasks: ensure safety of Russian citizens in Afghanistan and encourage the Taliban to engage in a dialogue with the Afghan authorities and other political forces with a view to achieving lasting peace in the country. Our dialogue partner is the Taliban's Political Office in Doha that is, as far as we know, mandated by the Taliban leadership to carry out external relations.

The Taliban is sending feelers that they want to open a channel of communication with India, and even signalled that they are willing to accept Kashmir as India's internal affair. Is this a strategic decision or a tactical manoeuvre?

I believe that all these facts fall within the policy of good neighbourhood relations proclaimed by the Taliban. I doubt that it is a tactical manoeuvre; rather, it is a strategic vision.

In this regard, I would like to note that the Taliban leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada, clearly indicated in his message on the occasion of the Muslim holiday of Eid-ul-Fitr the Taliban's willingness to strengthen constructive relations with all regional countries."

ELSEWHERE



Haftar's forces retreat from Libyan capital

Forces loyal to Libya's internationally recognised government captured the last major stronghold of eastern commander Khalifa Haftar near Tripoli on Friday, capping the sudden collapse of his 14-month offensive on the capital. Military sources in Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) said their forces had withdrawn from the town of Tarhouna. ■ REUTERS

Singapore to introduce wearable tracing device

Singapore plans to give a wearable device that will identify people who had interacted with carriers of coronavirus to each of its 5.7 million residents, in what could become one of the most comprehensive contact-tracing efforts globally. Testing of the small devices follows limited take-up of a smartphone-based system. ■ REUTERS

MARKET WATCH

	05-06-2020	% CHANGE
Sensex	34,287	0.90
US Dollar	75.58	0.00
Brent oil	42.05	6.60

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	341.15	1.95
Asian Paints	1638.55	4.80
Axisc Bank	405.30	10.95
Bajaj Auto	2776.30	-40.95
Bajaj Finserv	5236.40	99.60
Bajaj Finance	2390.35	77.30
Bharti Airtel	584.35	11.90
BPCL	369.60	12.35
Britannia Ind	3466.70	16.35
Cipla	650.90	-9.65
Coal India	144.85	4.60
Dr Reddys Lab	4024.90	26.00
Eicher Motors	17495.35	222.40
GAIL (India)	97.85	0.60
Grasim Ind	627.15	22.05
HCL Tech	575.95	-3.00
HDFC	1766.60	2.30
HDFC Bank	1033.35	31.65
Hero MotoCorp	2340.65	11.40
Hindalco	149.25	6.60
Hind Unilever	2087.60	-33.00
ICICI Bank	357.20	9.35
IndusInd Bank	422.35	7.30
Bharti Infratel	236.25	17.35
Infosys	703.55	-4.20
Indian Oil Corp	89.40	3.50
ITC	200.00	-0.15
JSW Steel	197.05	5.05
Kotak Bank	1337.80	3.40
L&T	955.25	24.55
M&M	484.20	5.75
Maurti Suzuki	5746.20	56.00
Nestle India Ltd.	17096.85	-99.75
NTPC	97.95	2.80
ONGC	86.95	2.05
PowerGrid Corp	171.45	2.20
Reliance Ind	1581.70	1.90
State Bank	187.80	13.75
Shree Cement	22089.60	692.95
Sun Pharma	494.25	-0.60
Tata Motors	110.75	12.25
Tata Steel	338.95	19.00
TCS	2048.25	-43.30
Tech Mahindra	579.85	-2.25
Titan	990.95	19.70
UltraTech Cement	3869.55	65.65
UPL	439.40	17.35
Vedanta	105.30	0.90
Wipro	218.75	2.50
Zee Entertainment	206.20	6.60

EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	75.38	75.70
Euro	85.37	85.73
British Pound	95.20	95.60
Japanese Yen (100)	69.00	69.29
Chinese Yuan	10.63	10.68
Swiss Franc	78.71	79.05
Singapore Dollar	54.07	54.31
Canadian Dollar	55.87	56.11
Malaysian Ringgit	17.66	17.75
Australian Dollar	52.54	52.81

Source: Indian Bank

IN BRIEF



Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw is EY World Entrepreneur
BENGALURU
Biocon Ltd. announced that its executive chairperson Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw has been named the EY World Entrepreneur of the Year 2020 (WEYO) at a virtual award ceremony held late on Thursday. She has been honoured with the title from among a distinguished list of 46 EOY country award winners from 41 countries and territories, the Bengaluru-headquartered biopharmaceuticals company said in a statement.

GST Council to meet on June 12

NEW DELHI
The GST Council is scheduled to meet on June 12 and likely to discuss the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on tax revenues, sources said. The 40th meeting of the GST Council, headed by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and comprising state counterparts, will be held via video-conferencing. The meeting would discuss the impact of the pandemic on revenues of the Centre and states and ways to bridge the revenue gap. The Council will also discuss ways to garner funds to compensate states for the revenue loss due to GST implementation.

IL&FS Transportation incurs ₹17,000 cr. loss

NEW DELHI
IL&FS Transportation Networks, a group company of the troubled IL&FS Group, on Friday reported a standalone loss of ₹17,000.32 crore for fiscal year 2019-20, amid COVID-19 disruptions. The company had clocked a standalone profit of ₹251.76 crore during the fiscal 2018-19, it said in a regulatory filing. However, the company did not provide figures for the fourth quarter of the fiscal 2019-20 and the consolidated figures for the quarter and year ended March 31, 2020.

SBI profit surges on one-time income

Lower provisions, stake sale in payment services arm add to bottomline, interest income remains flat

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

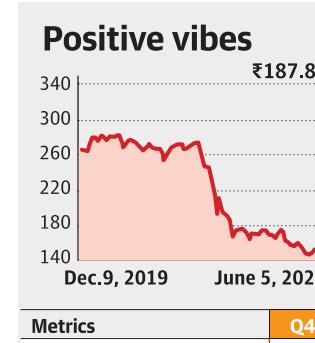
Lower provisions for bad loans and sale of stake in one of the subsidiaries enabled State Bank of India (SBI) – the country's largest lender – to report a 327% year-on-year increase in net profit to ₹3,581 crore for the January-March quarter.

While net interest income growth was flat at ₹22,767 crore, non-interest income rose by almost 27% year-on-year to ₹16,077 crore with profit on sale of investment surging to ₹3,237 crore compared with the ₹534 crore reported during the same period of the previous year.

This is because SBI sold a part of its stake in SBI Cards during the initial public offering.

Loan loss provisions also came down 31.4% to ₹11,894 crore in the fourth quarter.

Slippages to bad loans saw an increase of 8% year-on-



Today, we serve 49 crore customers which is more than the population of Latin America, continental Europe or U.S. We have the capability to serve the entire subcontinent

RAJNISH KUMAR,
Chairman SBI

Metrics	Q4FY20	Q4FY19	% rise
Net interest income (₹ cr.)	22,767	22,954	(0.81)
Profit after tax (₹ cr.)	3,581	838	327.10
Net NPA (%)	2.23	3.01	-
Capital adequacy ratio (%)	13.06	12.72	-

year to ₹8,150 crore during the fourth quarter, though it was almost half of the previous quarter.

"Consistently, quarter-after-quarter we have been able to improve our asset quality and provision coverage ratio (PCR)," SBI chairman Rajnish Kumar said in the post earnings interaction with the media. "The PCR is

at an all-time high. On the corporate book, the bank holds PCR of almost 78%", he said. SBI's PCR was at 83.62%, including advances under collection accounts (AUCA).

The gross NPAs declined 14% year-on-year (YoY) to about ₹4.49 lakh crore while net NPAs declined 21.3% to ₹51,871 crore. As on March

31, the gross NPA ratio was at 6.15% while net NPA ratio was at 2.23%.

"We have not taken regulatory dispensation on provision of standstill accounts. We have provided as if fresh slippage of ₹6,250 crore has happened," Mr. Kumar said.

The SBI said the loan moratorium was availed of by about 21.8% of the customers, which came to about 23% of term loans. The bank said there would be lower stress on the retail book due to COVID-19-related disruptions as they have a higher proportion of government and quasi-government sector customers.

However, there could be pressure on core other income which is driven by recoveries and fee income. Recoveries are expected to be impacted, it said. The bank has sanctioned ₹17,116 crore loans related to COVID-19; however, disbursements are

expected to pick up once the lockdown ends. The bank saw deposit growth of 11.34% year-on-year in FY20 while advances grew by 5.64%.

Home loans rise

"Home loans, which constitute 22% of the bank's domestic advances, have grown by 13.86% YoY," SBI said. Loan growth is expected to be about 7.8% in the current financial year.

Mr. Kumar said the bank had created a capability to serve the entire Indian subcontinent. "Today, we serve 49 crore customers which is more than the population of Latin America and continental Europe or the U.S."

"Believe me, we have the capability of serving the entire Indian subcontinent. That is the digital capability that the bank has created," he said. "On a single day, on March 31, over 25 crore transactions were handled."



of Mubadala's work in diversifying and globally connecting the UAE's knowledge-based economy. We look forward to benefiting from Mubadala's experience."

Jio Platforms has made significant investments in technologies spanning broadband, smart devices, cloud and edge computing, big data, artificial intelligence, Internet of Things and blockchain.

Khaldoon Al Mubarak, managing director and group CEO, Mubadala Investment Company, said: "With Jio's network of investors and partners, we believe that the platform company will further the development of the digital economy."

Mubadala investments are aimed at advancing Abu Dhabi's diversified, globally integrated economy across sectors that are driving growth and addressing critical challenges.

Established in 2017, Mubadala's ventures business manages several funds in the U.S., Europe and West Asia. Its portfolio spans advanced manufacturing, semiconductors, metals and mining and pharmaceutical and medical technology, among others.

L&T net drops, revenue inches up

Defers guidance on order inflow; banks on govt. orders

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Engineering and construction major Larsen and Toubro (L&T) reported a 6% drop in its fourth quarter net profit to ₹3,197 crore (including profit from discontinued operations) even as the company bagged more orders during the quarter amid COVID-19 pandemic.

The fall in profit was reported on a marginal 2% increase in revenue to ₹44,245 crore during the quarter due to challenges faced in a period characterised by economic volatility and a work-from-home/lockdown environment in the last fortnight of the financial year.



S.N. Subrahmanyam

The company received orders worth ₹57,785 crore, registering a growth of 5% over the year-earlier period, with significant orders received in the infrastructure segment.

The consolidated order book of the group stood at ₹3,03,857 crore as at March 31, 2020, registering a

growth of 4% over March, 2019. The company has deferred its order inflow guidance and is banking on State and Central government orders for this fiscal.

L&T's MD and CEO S.N. Subrahmanyam said, "I don't see a private sector investment revival in the near term. We expect some major orders from the State governments. Many of them are going through financial shortage and it may not be as it was last year."

On guidance, he said, "We had a budget, which is not valid now and we need to rework the budget. So, we will defer the guidance till we get some more clarity."

The trial will be conducted across 12 centres in India in 210 patients, the company said in a statement.

For patients, the duration of treatment will be 10 days

and the results of the trial are expected by October 2020.

"Human safety study of AQCH has already been completed and the drug has been found safe at the recommended dose for phase II study," Sun Pharma said.

Dilip Shanghi, MD, Sun Pharma, said, "This is the first phytopharmaceutical drug approved for conducting the phase II clinical trial in India this year."

The trial will be conducted across 12 centres in India in 210 patients, the company said in a statement.

For patients, the duration of treatment will be 10 days

to the essential.

"In fact, my view is that the damage is so deep and extensive that India's potential output has been pushed down, and it will take years to repair... In the deliberations of the MPC, my view is that the threats to growth have to be addressed frontally and aggressively, or risk a dire outlook," Mr. Patra said.

He said the MPC has decided to remain accommodative as long as it is necessary to revive growth and mitigate the fallout of COVID-19 and monetary policy can inspire confidence among households and businesses to break the vortex of public preference for deposits over spending and banks' aversion to lend and invest.

Michael Debabrata Patra, the Deputy Governor in charge of monetary policy, pointed out that though private consumption is 'tenuously holding on to positive territory,' spending patterns have altered drastically away

Players have to be very cautious: Axelsen

Give careful consideration before committing to tournaments, advises All England champion

RAKESH RAO

NEW DELHI

Viktor Axelsen won this year's All England title in March, just before the pandemic-driven lockdowns stalled on-court action. Obviously, he had neither the time nor the opportunity to celebrate the triumph the way he wanted.

sen told news channel WION, "I'm really delighted to be back on the court. We are fortunate in Denmark that the situation improved considerably, so we returned to practice."

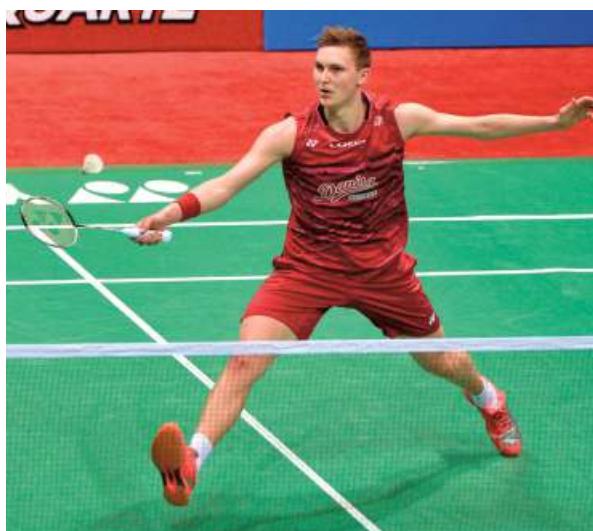
"We're not back to full throttle yet and only a limited number of players are back. It's definitely better than nothing."

Really special

"It doesn't take anything away from my victory. It's really special to have the All England triumph on my CV," comes the response from the former World Champion and World No. 1.

Unlike Indian players, this lanky Dane is back on court to prepare for the events announced for the year.

On his return to the court after the forced lay-off, Axelsen



Preparing for action: With the situation in Denmark improving, Axelsen is back on court. ■ FILE PHOTO: SANDEEP SAXENA

planned to play, Axelsen said, "It's an extremely am-

bitious plan, 22 tournaments have been planned in such a short span of time. Players

will have to be very cautious since the risk of injury will be high.

"I hope players put a lot of thought before planning their schedule, because playing too many back-to-back tournaments is really tough on the body. I don't know what the right thing to do is, but I have to be very careful."

Axelsen did not see it possible for the players to undergo two weeks of quarantine upon arrival for tournaments.

Restrictions

"Hopefully, by September, some of the international travel restrictions will be relaxed. If that isn't the case then it's going to be very difficult for players to travel for events all over the world."

"We have to wait and see what happens, I'm just keeping my fingers crossed," he said.

Following new ICC guidelines will be a challenge: Sangakkara

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MUMBAI

Sri Lankan great Kumar Sangakkara says it will be interesting to see how players cope with the new ICC guidelines when cricket resumes after the COVID-19 hiatus.

With government restrictions easing, the ICC has come out with guidelines for safe resumption. Keeping social distancing norms on and off the field and 'safe' ball management are among the dos and don'ts listed. The Cricket Committee also recommended a ban on use of saliva to shine the ball.

"For fast bowlers or spinners, shining the ball, is an instinctive thing, they have done it over so many years



Kumar Sangakkara. ■ GETTY IMAGES

since they were kids," Sangakkara, the President of Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC), said on Star Sports show 'Cricket Connected'

"Cricket is a social game, most of the time you spend in the dressing room – you talk, you chat. This will be a

The England and Wales Cricket Board has announced its schedule for a proposed three-Test series at home against the West Indies starting July 8, which is likely to be the first series to happen after the coronavirus break.

Now, Earth will make moves against Space

P.K. AJITH KUMAR

KOZHIKODE

"Four days left," tweeted Sergey Karjakin on Friday. It is no ordinary match the former World rapid and blitz chess champion looking forward to.

In the match on June 9, Karjakin, who had challenged Magnus Carlsen unsuccessfully for the 2016 World championship (classical), is representing Earth which will take on Space. That day will mark the 50th anniversary of the first-ever chess game between Earth and Space.

Space is being represented by the two Russian cosmonauts, Anatoly Ivanishin and Ivan Vagner. They will make their moves from the International Space Station

(ISS), which is some 408 km away from the surface of the Earth.

Karjakin will be seated at the Memorial Museum of Cosmonautics, Moscow, during the game which will be streamed live by the Russian Chess Federation.

In the first match between Earth and Space, in 1970, Andrian Nikolayev and Vitaly Sevastyanov matched wits against Viktor Gorbakto and Nikolai Kamanin. The game was drawn.

In 2008-09, NASA and the US Chess Federation had organised a match between Earth and Space. Nobody would have imagined then that another match like that would take place at a time when the entire world is locked down by a virus.

IN BRIEF



No tennis until it's completely safe: Nadal

BEIJING

Rafael Nadal has insisted that tennis "cannot resume until the situation is completely safe", adding that he would not have taken part in the US Open if the COVID-19 pandemic still casts huge doubts over the tennis calendar which has been suspended since mid-March. IANS

India to host 2022 AFC Women's Asian Cup

NEW DELHI

The Asian Football Confederation has awarded the hosting rights of the 2022 Women's Asian Cup to India for the first time since 1979. It is likely to be held in the second half of the year. The decision was taken at the AFC Women's Football Committee meeting. In 1979, India had finished runner-up. PTI



Ronaldo becomes football's first billionaire

TURIN

Cristiano Ronaldo, who earned \$105 million before taxes and fees in the past year, became the first footballer in history to earn \$1 billion in his playing career, according to Forbes. He is only the third athlete to hit the mark while still playing, after golfer Tiger Woods and boxer Floyd Mayweather. IANS

Premier League confirms fixtures for restart

LONDON

Manchester United is set to return to Premier League action at Tottenham Hotspur on June 19 after the opening dates for the resumption of the top flight were announced on Friday. The Premier League, which was suspended in March due to the outbreak of the coronavirus, will resume after a 100-day hiatus on June 17 with Aston Villa taking on Sheffield United, followed by the game between Manchester City and Arsenal the same evening. IANS

Taufiq Umar recovers from COVID-19

KARACHI

Former Pakistan opener Taufiq Umar, who has recovered from COVID-19, has advised people to take the virus seriously and build up their immune systems. "I would urge everyone to take care of themselves and take this COVID-19 seriously. Social distancing and safety measures are a must for everyone," he said. PTI

World 400m champion Naser suspended

MONACO

Women's 400m World Champion Salwa Eid Naser was provisionally suspended on Friday for not making herself available for doping tests. The Athletics Integrity Unit said it has charged the sprinter from Bahrain with whereabouts violations. Naser could miss next year's Olympics if the case is proven. Naser won the world title in October, finishing in 48.14s – the fastest time by a woman since 1985. AP



Kohli in list of top-earning athletes through Instagram posts

LONDON

Virat Kohli emerged as the only cricketer in the top-10 list of highest-earning athletes through sponsored Instagram posts during the lockdown. Kohli, who ranked sixth, earned a total of £379,294 through his posts. Cristiano Ronaldo (£1.8 million) topped the list. PTI

Qatar completes third World Cup stadium

DOHA

Qatar announced the completion of its third stadium – Education City ground – for the 2022 World Cup, state media reported late on Thursday. AFP

AIFF invites bids for new I-League clubs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

The All India Football Federation (AIFF) on Friday invited bids for new clubs which would take part in the Hero I-League from 2020-21.

The bids have been invited from non-Hero I-League cities and includes names of several cities like New Delhi, Ranchi, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Bhopal, Lucknow and Ahmedabad, amongst others, according to an AIFF media release.

Prospective owners will be able to purchase the invitation to tender from the Football House in Delhi between June 10 and June 20 upon payment of ₹4 lakh.

"As per the invitation to tender, the entity that wins the bid will be granted the right to own and operate a new football club from 2020 onwards. The aforementioned club will have the opportunity (if applicable) and subject to qualification) to also compete in the AFC club competitions," the release said.

The success stories of three Olympic champions

Aldeehani, Hancock and Wilson talk about their journeys

KAMESH SRINIVASAN

NEW DELHI

When three Olympic champions, Fehaid Aldeehani, Vincent Hancock and Peter Wilson, engaged in conversation, navigated by Commonwealth Games champion Moraad Ali Khan, it was a spell-binding experience.

It was not just a talk about success stories. It gave an insight into how they pursued their golden dream and offered a glimpse of the non-sporting aspects of their lives.

Happy Times

It was the concept of 'Happy Times', initiated by Amit Bhalla, vice-president, Manav Rachna Educational Institutions, that brought the champions together on the video platform, from Kuwait, Britain and the US, connecting them to a worldwide audience. "I feel the odd man out here. We have two truly incredible champions. I have looked up to them. These guys have been to multiple



Vincent Hancock... two-time Olympic gold medallist and four-time World Champion.

Games and won multiple medals," said Wilson, in awe of the other two.

Hancock is just 31 years of age and has already won gold at both the Beijing and London Olympics in skeet. He has won four World Championship gold and 12 World Cup gold medals.

In contrast, the 53-year-old Aldeehani won his first Olympic medal in 2000 in double trap and came back

to claim the gold in the Rio Games in 2016. He had won the trap bronze in London.

Not easy

"Winning an Olympic medal is not easy. I have been shooting for 30 years and gained experience – both positive and negative. I have believed in myself," said Aldeehani.

"My mindset has changed over the years. It was an incredible year in 2005. I was winning everything. That set the stage for the Beijing Games," said Hancock.

"Having had such success early, I believed that I could accomplish anything if I put my mind to it."

Before the Olympic final at home in London, Wilson, who had a three-point lead, was nervous.

"I was petrified. My coach, Shaikh Ahmed Almaktoum, said that it was ok to be nervous. I am not allowed to divulge some points. He broke the final into specific targets. He was an amazing guy," recalled Wilson.

Barca confident Messi will be fit against Mallorca



Hopeful: Barcelona is optimistic that Lionel Messi will make the cut for the LaLiga leader's first match, after resumption, on June 13. ■ GETTY IMAGES

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

MADRID

Lionel Messi has sustained a "minor" thigh injury, but Barcelona remained confident he will be fit for the team's first game back against Mallorca on June 13, the club said on Friday.

Messi has not trained with the rest of the squad since Tuesday after working separately in the gym on both Wednesday and Friday, while on Thursday all the players were given the day off.

"Leo Messi has a minor right quadriceps injury and trained in isolation, doing specific exercises to avoid unnecessary risks with just

eight days remaining before Barca finally get back to playing matches," a club statement read. "He should be able to rejoin his team-mates in a few days' time."

Messi has endured an injury-interrupted season. The 32-year-old was out for six weeks between August and September with a calf injury and then at the end of September missed another week with a problem in his left thigh. But after regaining fitness, Messi quickly found form, scoring 24 goals in 31 appearances so far this term to help Barcelona sit two points clear at the top of LaLiga.

Lancet and NEJM retract controversial studies on COVID-19

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

BOSTON/ NEW DELHI

Authors of two controversial studies published in *The Lancet* journal and the *New England Journal of Medicine* (NEJM) have retracted their research on COVID-19 as they could not vouch for the veracity of the data, sourced from a private company, for their analysis.

The scientists, including Mandeep Mehra from Harvard Medical School, who was one of the common co-authors in the two studies, retracted the research papers stating that the members of the teams were not granted access to the underlying data for their research.

Both the studies relied on data from a private company based in Illinois, U.S. called Surgisphere Corporation, with its CEO Sapan Desai and Mehra being common authors in the two research papers.

The Lancet study published on May 22, claimed to have assessed data from more than 96,000 hospitalised COVID-19 patients from

six continents and reported substantially increased deaths and incidences of heartbeat rhythm changes associated with the use of hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) and closely related drug chloroquine.

The NEJM report on May 1, suggested that any underlying heart disease in patients hospitalised for COVID-19 treatment is associated with an increased risk of death.

However, in two open letters written to the editors of both the journals on May 31, more than a hundred scientists from across the world flagged major discrepancies in the quality of the data used in two studies.

The letters noted that the HCQ research was based on a database from Surgisphere, which according to the scientists, hosts COVID-19 patient data from hospitals around the world.

The letters flagged several points of concern about the validity of this data, and the kind of analysis done in the study with it.

How archaeologists continued digging from home during the current lockdown

Equipped with airborne survey data, a team of volunteers in the United Kingdom analysed thousands of images derived from LiDAR data

ASWATHI PACHA

CHENNAI

The coronavirus pandemic has stopped archaeologists from going to dig at sites, but not a UK-based team from continuing its research. Equipped with airborne survey data, a team of volunteers, locked down in their homes, sat and analysed thousands of images derived from Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) data.

University of Exeter.

According to a release from the university, the team has found parts of two Roman roads, around 30 prehistoric or Roman large embanked settlement enclosures, locate about 20 prehistoric burial mounds, remains of hundreds of medieval farms, and a few quarries.

"The images are usually taken during aerial surveys and the maps are very detailed. One can remove the vegetation and buildings from the map and take a closer look at the land surfaces," Dr. Smart told *The Hindu*. "The images are derived from two sources of data – a large Roman fort at a place called Calstock," added Dr. Smart. The team has planned to extend the study to other areas like Bodmin Moor and Dartmoor, Ply-

mouth and Barnstaple – about