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Manohar Lal
Chief Minister, Haryana

Information, Public Relations & Languages Department, Haryana | www.prharyana.gov.in

Health Department, Haryana

NEARBY



Migrants in Haryana worry about rent, wages

KASAN Migrant workers from Bihar living in Kasan village, which abuts the Manesar industrial township in Haryana, are living in fear of losing their jobs. Most of them have already seen pay cuts due to the lockdown. "It is better if the government sends us to our villages," said Ramesh, 47. Their future is locked in with the lockdown.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 11

22 new cases in city, 9 from Nizamuddin centre

NEW DELHI Twenty-two new COVID-19 cases were reported in Delhi on Monday, taking the total number to 525. Of the new cases, nine are from the centre run by the Tablighi Jamaat in Nizamuddin. A total of 329 people from the centre have tested positive for COVID-19 in Delhi so far. Seven people have died of the infection, 19 have been discharged, and 498 are still in hospitals in the city.

CITY ▶ PAGE 2

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'Karnataka refused to lift blockade'

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

Kerala on Monday informed the Supreme Court that Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yeddyurappa had "openly declared" that the blockade imposed by his government on the inter-State border will not be removed in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Kerala, in an affidavit, said the CM's declaration came despite a SC order on April 3 to the two States and the Centre to formulate a mechanism by which patients from Kerala, in dire need of medical care, and flow of essential food and medicines are not blocked at the border by the Karnataka authorities. A Bench led by Justice L. Nageswara Rao is scheduled to hear the issue via video conferencing on April 7.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Modi seeks Ministers' views on calibrated exit from lockdown

PM also sought ideas from them on steps to bolster domestic manufacture

NISTULA HEBBAR
NEW DELHI

After an interaction with Chief Ministers via a video-conference last week, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday sought suggestions from his Council of Ministers for a calibrated exit from the 21-day lockdown, imposed from March 25 to contain the COVID-19 outbreak.

He also sought measures to bolster domestic manufacturing as the pandemic had brought home the fact that essential goods manufacture within the country is very important.

Mr. Modi asked the Ministers to coordinate with the district authorities for not just harvesting and procuring agricultural produce but also preparing business continuity plans to address the

COVID-19

economic situation once the containment ends.

At a meeting of the Council of Ministers, just before a first-ever Cabinet meeting via videoconference, he asked for the suggestions, leaving no doubt in anyone's mind that any rollback of the lockdown on April 14 will be in a very calibrated manner.

"Prime Minister Modi

Charting the way forward

A look at some of the ideas discussed by the PM and Council of Ministers:

- Promote **Make in India**, as COVID-19 has shown the importance of domestic manufacture
- Co-ordination between Ministers and district authorities to come up with **micro-level plans** for harvest and procurement of farm produce
- Promote ideas such as **"truck aggregation"**, similar to cab aggregation in urban areas, to transport farm produce to markets



Looking ahead: Prime Minister Modi interacting with Union Ministers in New Delhi on Monday. ■ ANI

- Formulation of various **business continuity plans** for ministries in readiness for lifting of lockdown
- Encourage people to download the **Aarogya Setu app** devised by the government to track and disburse information on COVID-19

asked all of us for suggestions, including after speaking to district-level officials and stakeholders on how the rollback of the lockdown could be effected without a huge impact on positive cases," said a minister who was at the meeting.

"Actually, the calculations of our peak cases and its timing are now awry as they have to factor in the Tablighi Jamaat cases, which are still being followed up," he added.

"The peak, which was supposed to have manifested itself this week has now been pushed to the next week or more because we

are still tracking the contact chain of the Tablighi Jamaat cases," the source said but pointed out that the PM did not mention these issues.

"We were asked to think in terms of micro plans for districts and specifically focus on the harvest season now on as well as how best procurement can be done from farmers. He spoke about coming up with innovative ideas for getting the harvest to the mandis for sale, like starting a "truck aggregator" system just like a cab aggregator system in urban areas," the source said.

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MPLADS suspended; PM, MPs to take 30% salary cut

The saved amount will go to fund to combat COVID-19

DAMINI NATH
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Monday approved a 30% cut in the salaries of all Members of Parliament and a two-year suspension of the MP Local Area Development (MPLAD) scheme so that the amount saved can go to the Consolidated Fund of India to fight COVID-19, Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar said on Monday.

Addressing a press conference after a Cabinet meeting, Mr. Javadekar said the Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved an ordinance to amend the Salaries, Allowances and Pension of Members of Parliament Act, 1954, to cut the salaries of MPs by 30%.

He said all MPs, including the Prime Minister and his Council of Ministers, would take the salary cut for financial year 2020-2021. In addition, the Cabinet had decided to suspend the MPLAD funds for 2020-2021 and 2021-2022. Many MPs had already pledged to use their MPLAD funds, ₹5 crore a year, for efforts to combat the coronavirus pandemic.

"All MPs were feeling that charity begins at home. Therefore, we have decided on an ordinance... Many MPs

All MPs were feeling that charity begins at home. Therefore, we have decided on an ordinance... Many MPs had contributed their MPLAD funds for COVID-19-related measures. So, instead of piecemeal efforts, a comprehensive decision was taken to suspend MPLADS for two years

PRAKASH JAVADEKAR, Information and Broadcasting Minister

had contributed their MPLAD funds for COVID-19 related measures. So, instead of piecemeal efforts, a comprehensive decision was taken to suspend MPLADS for two years," he said, adding that the amount saved from the scheme would be ₹7,900 crore.

Mr. Javadekar said President Ram Nath Kovind and Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu, as well as all Governors, had decided of their own volition to take a 30% salary cut. All the amount saved would go to the Consolidated Fund of India.

When asked about how much would be saved from the MPs' salary cut, he said: "It's not about the amount, it's about the message it sends to the country about the will of MPs."

Later, government spokesperson K.S. Dhatwalia clarified via a tweet that only the MPs' salaries would be cut, not allowances or the

pensions of ex- MPs. According to the Act, as amended in April 2018, MPs are entitled to a monthly salary of ₹1 lakh, apart from various allowances.

Congress reaction Reacting to the Cabinet decisions, Congress spokesperson Randeep Singh Surjewala said in a tweet that the Congress supported the salary cut for MPs. However, suspending the MPLAD scheme would undermine the role of MPs, he observed.

"Dear PM, INC supports the salary cut for MPs! Please note that MPLAD is meant to execute developmental works in the constituency. Suspending it is a huge disservice to the constituents & will undermine the role & functions of MP," he tweeted.

OPPN. SLAMS SUSPENSION OF MPLAD SCHEME ▶ PAGE 8

Telangana CM for extension

Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrababhan Naidu appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to extend the lockdown beyond April 14, saying it was essential to save lives. Mr. Naidu said it would be difficult to contain the spread of the virus in view of the country's "poor health infrastructure".

"We can recover from the economic problem but we cannot recover lives," he said.

47% of patients below 40, says govt.

Maharashtra reports 21 deaths in past 24 hours; 704 new cases nationwide

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN
NEW DELHI

India has registered the largest single-day rise in COVID-19 cases and deaths in the past 24 hours with 704 new cases and over 30 deaths reported. The tally on Monday stood at 4,281 confirmed cases and 111 deaths, according to the Union Health Ministry.

According to reports from State Health Departments, the number of confirmed cases nationwide was 4,664, with 4,164 active cases.

The death toll rose to 141 since Sunday, while 359 persons had been discharged after recovery. The highest number of active cases were reported from Maharashtra at 868, with 52 deaths – 21 in the past 24 hours.

Andhra Pradesh reported two more deaths, while Punjab, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh reported one fatality each.



Fear factor: A painting to raise awareness about COVID-19 on Cuddalore Road in Puducherry. ■ S.S. KUMAR

Giving a break up of the data so far at the daily press briefing, Joint Secretary in the Union Health Ministry Lav Agarwal said, 76% of the confirmed cases were male and 24% female; 47% were below 40 years of age, 34% between 40 to 60 years and 19% above 60 years.

In terms of fatalities, 73% of the victims were male, Mr. Agarwal said. In terms of age, 63% were above the age of 60, 30% between 40 and 60 years and 7% below 40 years.

The official added that as of now, 86% of those who succumbed to the disease ex-

hibited pre-existing health problems, including diabetes, chronic kidney issues and heart related problems.

"With 19% confirmed cases among the elderly, and 63% deaths observed among them, elderly people form a high risk population, Mr. Agarwal pointed out.

"Further, with 37% deaths reported from people below 60 years, approximately 86% of deaths amongst people with co-morbidities indicate that young people with co-morbidities are also at high risk," he said.

Meanwhile, 52 staff members of a private hospital in Mumbai, including nurses, doctors and others, tested positive for the disease on Monday.

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MORE REPORTS ON ▶ PAGES 5, 8, 9, 10 & 11
U.S., U.K. FACE HARD TIME AS DEATHS SPIKE ▶ PAGE 12

Pench tiger death raises COVID-19 fears

NTCA mulls test after a big cat tested positive for the virus in a U.S. zoo

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

The spectre of COVID-19 has made its appearance in one of India's most storied tiger reserves. The death of a 10-year-old ailing male tiger, in the Pench Tiger Reserve (PTR) – the country's most significant reserve – that succumbed to a "respiratory illness" last Saturday would have been a routine affair.

But a report of a confirmed COVID-19 infection in a tiger at the Bronx Zoo, in New York, United States and advisories by divisions of the Environment Ministry that deal



The tiger succumbed to a 'respiratory illness'. ■ /REPRESENTATIONAL PHOTO

with the protection of the cats in zoos, as well as in Tiger Reserves has officials in the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) – the

organisation that manages the protection of India's 3,000-odd tigers – puzzling on whether the tiger should be tested for the novel coronavirus disease.

The people who handled the dead tiger and were involved in its post-mortem would be tested for the infection, PTR Field Director, Vikram Singh Parihar told *The Hindu*. The viscera samples collected as part of the standard protocol have been preserved and will be sent to the veterinary research college in Jabalpur as well as the Indian Veterinary Research Insti-

tute, Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh. "The animal came to the pond frequently for water possibly because it was running a high fever. We gave him antibiotics on Friday but that didn't show much improvement. Finally, it died on Saturday morning. We still don't have a confirmed cause of death," he said.

Swabs from the throat and nose to test for rhinotracheitis, a viral infection that affects cats and causes respiratory illness were collected, an official at NTCA, Delhi, said.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Rumours fuel attacks on minority community

COVID-19 fear, anger behind attack on family in Gurugram, man in Bawana

ASHOK KUMAR
SAURABH TRIVEDI
GURUGRAM/NEW DELHI

In two separate incidents, a Muslim family was attacked by some youths in Gurugram minutes after the 9 p.m. lights-out on Sunday, while a 30-year-old man from the community was thrashed by a group of men in Harewali village in Bawana in outer-north Delhi over suspicion that he was part of a "conspiracy" to spread COVID-19.

Atif Warsi, the complainant from Gurugram, alleged that around 9.15 p.m., four persons, including his neigh-

bours Sonu and Bhutta, climbed up the stairs to his house and accused his family of shooting a video of them. They allegedly abused Mr. Warsi's mother and threatened them to leave the locality. A little later, Sonu returned and allegedly hit Mr. Warsi and his cousin Mubeen Khan with bricks. Mr. Warsi's father then made a PCR call and rushed the two to Civil Hospital in Sector 10.

A case has been registered on charges of promoting enmity on grounds of religion and criminal intimidation and six persons have been ar-

rested, said the police.

In Harewali village, three residents – Naveen, Prashant and Pramod – have been arrested and sent to judicial custody for allegedly beating up a man, Shamsad Ali, who had returned home after spending 45 days at a religious gathering in Raikwad district, Madhya Pradesh.

Mr. Ali tried to reach the village by hiding inside a truck transporting vegetables. The truck was inspected at Azadpur market and he was detained. Mr. Ali was released after a medical screening. "When Ali reached the

village, some miscreants spread a rumour that he was a part of a group planning to spread COVID-19 in the village. He was held by some youths and taken to a farm on the outskirts and thrashed," a police officer said.

The incident took place on Sunday afternoon and was recorded by one of the accused on his mobile phone.

In yet another incident, four persons were arrested in Gurugram for allegedly opening fire outside Jama Masjid in Dhankot village.

MORE REPORTS ON ▶ PAGES 2 & 3

Timings

DELHI

TUESDAY, APR. 07

RISE 06:05 SET 18:43

RISE 17:59 SET 05:42

WEDNESDAY, APR. 08

RISE 06:03 SET 18:43

RISE 19:08 SET 06:21

THURSDAY, APR. 09

RISE 06:02 SET 18:44

RISE 20:16 SET 07:01

Delhi Weather

| max | min |
|---------------|-----|
| Delhi City 36 | 18 |
| Safdarjung 36 | 18 |
| Palam 37 | 19 |

Delhi Palam Today
35°C A spell of duststorm and thundershower with gusty winds is expected.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
33°C A pleasant morning turns warm day with partly cloudy sky.

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THE HINDU
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IN BRIEF

LG Electronics to sponsor meals to workers

NEW DELHI
In the wake of the outbreak of COVID-19, LG Electronics has partnered with Akshaya Patra Foundation to serve meals to migrant labourers and daily-wage workers who have been affected by the lockdown. The company said it will sponsor over 10 lakh meals. Additionally, LG India will donate water purifiers, air conditioners, refrigerators and televisions to 50 State and district hospitals having quarantine or isolation wards.

Ashoka University to stream live seminars

NEW DELHI
To make higher education more accessible during the lockdown, Ashoka University has launched an interactive virtual seminar series, 'Beyond The Classroom'. The university will host live interviews, lectures and firesides with its scholars, teachers, experts and thought leaders. "The curated series will go live with its episodes using Zoom twice a week on Wednesday and Saturday at 8.30 p.m.".

Kejriwal, Gambhir in spat over protective gear

NEW DELHI
A war of words erupted between Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and East Delhi MP Gautam Gambhir when the former cricketer announced he had decided to pledge ₹50 lakh to the Delhi government for the procurement of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Mr. Kejriwal retorted by saying that while the move was appreciated, funds were not the issue but the availability of such kits was.

Tiwari observes BJP's 40th Foundation Day

NEW DELHI
Delhi BJP chief Manoj Tiwari on Monday laid a wreath on the portrait of Bharat Mata, Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee and Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay to mark the party's 40th Foundation Day at its State headquarters here. Mr. Tiwari said the event was marked by workers hoisting the BJP flag on their houses, sacrificing a meal and expressing sympathy to people suffering during the ongoing lockdown.

EASTERN RAILWAY

CORRIGENDUM-1 to the following both tenders published earlier by Dy. Chief Signal & Telecom Engineer, Railway Electrification, Block No. 25, 11 Convent Lane, Beliaghata, Kolkata-700015. In **Tender Notice No. RE-KKK-SIG-RPH-GRH-OT-48**, dated: 08.03.2020 the tender closing date & time should be read as **21.04.2020 at 14.00 hrs.** In **Tender Notice No. RE-KKK-TELE-GR344-OT-50**, dated: 21.03.2020 the tender closing date & time should be read as **21.04.2020 at 15.00 hrs.** All terms and conditions will remain unchanged. The detailed corrigendum has been uploaded in **IREPS** website. (MISC-03/2020-21)

22 new cases in city, nine from Nizamuddin centre

10 lakh more to get free ration from today, says Kejriwal

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI**

Twenty-two new COVID-19 cases were reported in Delhi on Monday, taking the total number to 525. Of the 22 new cases on Monday, nine are people from a centre run by the Tablighi Jamaat in Nizamuddin. A total of 329 people from the centre have tested positive for COVID-19 so far in Delhi.



Arvind Kejriwal

Out of the total COVID-19 cases reported so far, seven people have died, 19 have been discharged, and 498 are still in hospitals.

Earlier in the day, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced that the Delhi government will start providing free ration to those who have applied for ration cards online from Tuesday.

The free supplies will be distributed from 421 schools. The scheme will initially cater to around 10 lakh people. The beneficiaries will get four kg of wheat and one kg of rice each.

He added that the Delhi government has ordered one lakh testing kits to increase testing capacity in Delhi to 1,000 people per day. The CM also thanked the Centre for providing 27,000 PPE kits, which he said is a great step towards ensuring the safety of doctors in the State. "We expect the kits to arrive by Tuesday," he added.

Mr. Kejriwal said there has been a sudden rise in COVID-19 cases over the last few days. The spike is partly due to cases from the Tablighi Jamaat centre in Niz-

muddin, and increase in testing capacity, said the Chief Minister.

"Our testing capacity around March 25 was 100-125 people per day, which increased to 500 people per day after April 1... it is now reaching a capacity of 1,000 tests per day. We expect the one lakh testing kits to arrive by Friday," he added.

"On Sunday, our community kitchens served lunch to around 6,90,000 people and dinner to around 6,94,000 people. I want to assure you that we will not let anyone in Delhi suffer from hunger. I want to thank the people, NGOs and Civil Society organisations who are distributing food packets," said Mr. Kejriwal.

Hospital staff

Meanwhile, a Delhi government spokesperson said that two more doctors and 16 nursing staff of the Delhi State Cancer Institute have tested positive for COVID-19.

Shelters see total occupancy of less than 12%

'This means facilities are satisfactory from the point of view of those lodged'

**JATIN ANAND
NEW DELHI**

Over a 100 shelter homes set up by the Delhi government for migrant workers in the Capital have a combined occupancy of less than 12%, according to official data, even as no new cases or instances of such workers seeking to travel back home have come to light.

A senior government official said that this meant that the facilities at these shelters - which are monitored on a daily basis by the district authorities and reviewed by Chief Secretary Vijay Dev, who is also the Chairman of the State Executive Committee - were satisfactory from the point of those lodged in them.

"Adequate care is being taken to extend all possible amenities to the inmates. That is why there are no fresh instances of such workers reaching the sealed State borders in a bid to go home," said the official.

After the nationwide lockdown to contain the spread of the COVID-19, announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, came into force on



Daily-wage workers and their children at a shelter home at Sarai Kale Khan. • BIBEK CHETTRI

March 24 midnight, thousands of such workers sought to migrate to their home States necessitating their identification as a target group for special facilities.

The Delhi government set up 111 shelter homes specifically for such workers rendered homeless due to the lockdown evenly spread over its 11 districts under the supervision of the respective District Magistrate.

Till Sunday, the government said, 4,788 such migrant workers, were housed in such facilities which have a combined capacity to accommodate 40,000 persons - an occupancy rate of 11.97%. These shelters are in addition to 223 permanent shelters managed by the Delhi Urban

Shelter Improvement Board and 10 more such night shelters for the homeless.

"All occupants are provided free food which includes breakfast, lunch and dinner. General items for daily use are also provided in addition to special attention to the overall health and sanitation of the inmates. Medical assistance is provided by doctors assigned to the centre," the government said in a statement.

"In case of symptomatic persons housed in these shelter homes, people are quarantined as per protocol. Only one person has been hospitalised till date since the shelter homes were earmarked. Due to pro-active steps taken by the Delhi go-

In case of symptomatic persons housed in these shelter homes, people are quarantined as per protocol. Only one person has been hospitalised till date...no fresh movement of migrant labourers has been reported in Delhi

DELHI GOVERNMENT STATEMENT

vernment, no fresh movement of migrant labourers has been reported in Delhi," the statement added.

Besides, the Delhi government said, officials and policemen concerned have been directed to honour e-passes issued by other State governments to individuals and vehicles engaged in the movement of essential goods within the boundaries of the Capital.

This, the government said, was in line with a directive issued by Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla on April 3 conveyed to the Chief Secretaries of all States and Union Territories.

'Private firm behind many cases in U.P. district'

Administration plans a door-to-door awareness, information gathering campaign

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GHAZIABAD**

The main reason for the spread of COVID-19 in Gautam Buddha Nagar, a hotspot for the virus in Uttar Pradesh, is a private fire safety company, which is directly or indirectly responsible for at least 39 out of 58 cases, officials said on Monday.

No fresh case was reported in Noida or Greater Noida for a second day in a row on Monday, with the administration now planning a door-to-door awareness and information gathering campaign. The company has 162 employees out of which 83 live in Uttar Pradesh.

Apart from spreading the virus to neighbouring districts, the company is also



Police check a vehicle on the sealed Delhi-U.P. border. •

being held responsible for taking the infection to villages adjoining the urban areas of Greater Noida and at least one of the slums in Noida.

Nine people, directly or indirectly connected to the firm, living in rural areas have tested positive for COVID-19 while four have tested positive in a slum cluster in Sector 5.

The domestic help of an

employee of the firm lives in the slum and she infected three of her family members, said officials.

The source of the infection was an auditor from the U.K. who stayed in Noida from March 14-16 and met a number of officials of the company, stated the Health Department.

Later, it was discovered that the managing director of the firm also returned from the U.K. on March 1 and took a long time to get tested as he was asymptomatic. Later, he tested positive for the virus.

Source of infection

Health officials, however, referred to the British auditor as the primary source of the

infection, describing him as a carrier.

U.P. Chief Minister Adityanath transferred the District Magistrate and incumbent DM Suhas L.Y. and sealed the firm on March 31. The Health Department registered an FIR against the company for hiding information under the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897.

A senior police officer who is closely monitoring the situation told *The Hindu*: "All 162 employees were asked to go into self-quarantine after one person tested positive. But the nature of the disease is such that some people remain carriers without showing symptoms. So far, the cases are mostly limited to families"

FSL staff who went to Nizamuddin centre told to self-quarantine

'Decision made by director for safety of officials, other staff'

**STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI**

Five persons from Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL), including four officials and a driver, have been asked to quarantine themselves after they visited the Nizamuddin centre for crime inspection on Sunday.

An official, on condition of anonymity, said that a team of four FSL officials, including a Biology, Chemistry, Computer and Photography expert had visited the centre along with Crime Branch officers to inspect the spot and lift exhibits for further investigation.

"As a precautionary mea-

| HELPLINE NUMBERS | |
|------------------|---|
| COMMON HELPLINE | +91-11-23978046 |
| DELHI | 011-22307145 |
| HAZIABAD | 0120 4186453 |
| NOIDA | 8076623612/6396776904 |
| GURUGRAM | 108/ 0124-2322412/ 9911519296/ 7015523417/ 9654231756 |

sure, FSL Director Deepa Verma has asked them to quarantine themselves for 14 days because it was a sensitive area. It is a decision made by the director for the safety of the officials and other staff," the official said.

Families of the five officials have also been informed and asked to keep

the persons in isolation and in separate rooms as precaution.

"They all wore hazmat suits and took all necessary precautions when they were inside the centre but they dealt with the evidence very closely which is why they have been asked to quarantine themselves," he said.

247 FIRs lodged for violation of home quarantine norms

Violators charged under IPC and Epidemic Diseases Act

**STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI**

A total of 247 FIRs have been registered against people found violating home quarantine guidelines, the Delhi police said on Monday.

The violators have been charged under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code and Section 3 of the Epidemic Diseases Act.

While 81 FIRs were lodged after physical verification, 160 were registered after technical surveillance and six were filed on the complaints

of neighbours.

The Delhi government has shared over 25,000 numbers with the police to track the movement of people who have been placed under home quarantine, a Delhi police official said.

COVID-19

Between 2 p.m. on April 5 and 2 p.m. on April 6, a total of 855 calls were received by the Delhi police on its 24-hour helpline number (23469526) launched to re-

solve queries related to lockdown, officials said on Monday. Forty-six calls were received related to scarcity of food and money, which were forwarded to NGOs for direct relief at their addresses. Twenty-four calls received were regarding medical issues.

The food delivery network established in all 15 districts facilitated by the Delhi police has led to provision of meals at more than 250 locations and dry ration kits to 1,837 people.

Health workers go door-to-door in Nizamuddin

They are screening people in houses around Tabligh centre for symptoms

**NIKHIL M BABU
NEW DELHI**

Though Delhi at present has two identified COVID-19 hotspots - Nizamuddin and Dilshad Garden - the government is currently concentrating on Nizamuddin, as there has been "hardly any new cases" from the latter, said officials.

"We have turned Nizamuddin into a containment zone and health workers are going door to door and screening people to identify ones with symptoms in houses around the markaz for the past couple of days," a Delhi government official told *The*

Hindu.

In an operation which concluded in the wee hours of April 1, a total of 2,346 people were evacuated from a Tablighi Jamaat centre in west Nizamuddin and 536 of them were sent to hospitals and 1,810 were sent to quarantine facilities, the Delhi government said.

The Tablighi centre had held a religious congregation in mid-March and since the evacuation, 329 people from the centre have tested positive for COVID-19 so far just in Delhi alone.

People at the hospitals have been tested and most of

the results have arrived, while the government is waiting for results of the 1,810 people in quarantine facilities.

Apart from this, around 500 people from different mosques in the city, who had visited the centre in March, have been evacuated and they have been moved to hospitals and quarantine facilities. "Only a few of them are in hospitals and they are yet to be tested," the official said.

On the other hand, Dilshad Garden was declared a hotspot after a 38-year-old woman, who travelled to India from Saudi Arabia, infected multiple people with the

virus, before she tested positive.

"What we are doing right now in Nizamuddin was done at different blocks of Dilshad Garden earlier," the official said.

The woman, who was Delhi's case 10, infected a mohalla clinic doctor (case 28), when she consulted him at a private clinic in March. Later the doctor's wife, who is also a mohalla clinic doctor, and their daughter tested positive for COVID-19. "Since they were mohalla clinic doctors, around 7,600 people were screened in the area," the official said.

To beat lockdown, RWAs launch campaigns urging people to stay in touch

Some associations enforce rules, including house helps changing clothes once they enter a house; street vendors with ID proof allowed in colonies

**HEMANI BHANDARI
NEW DELHI**

Nearly two weeks since Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the nationwide lockdown curbing movement of people, the Resident Welfare Associations across the Capital have taken several measures, including calling campaigns to stay in touch and ensuring change of clothes for house helps. People are encouraged not to step out and if they do, they are asked to go back, the RWAs said.

In East Delhi, a campaign has been launched by the RWA in an attempt to ensure that people talk to each other even as they are at home. B.S. Vohra, resident of Krishna Nagar and president of East Delhi RWA

Joint Front Federation, said that they have named the campaign #LockDownCallNow. "It's Lockdown all over due to COVID-19. We can't meet each other but can at least talk with our friends and relatives over phone. Don't stop interacting. Pick your phone and call now," read a WhatsApp message sent to everyone on several RWA groups here.

Mental health

Talking about the campaign, Mr. Vohra said that it has been initiated to ensure people don't feel low. "If this continues and people don't step out and don't interact, one can go into depression also. Therefore, taking care of mental health, we are running this



A municipal worker sanitises a residential colony in the Capital during the nationwide lockdown. • FILE PHOTO: R.V. MOORTHY

campaign. I, too, call my neighbours and relatives everyday," he said.

Mr. Vohra also said that all the street vendors who come to their colony are allowed only with identity proof. "All the security guards have been asked to check the identity of those entering and also where

they're coming from," he said. Meanwhile, a South Delhi locality's RWA has come up with strict rules during lockdown, including house helps changing clothes once they enter a house.

Sangita Thukral, president of Chittaranjan Park's (M&P Blocks) RWA, said that while house helps who are not permanently staying in the house are prohibited from coming in, only those who work at the residence of senior citizens are allowed and that too, on alternative days. "They have been asked to keep a change of clothes at the residence. They come, take shower, change, do the work, change again and then leave," she said.

Apart from this, Ms. Thukral said that only authorised street vendors are allowed to enter the colonies and are provided with hand sanitisers, gloves and masks in case they don't have already. "They can come in from 8 a.m.-11 a.m.," she said. In addition, the main gates of the colonies are opened only

between 8.15 a.m. and 10.15 a.m. for people to step out for milk and daily groceries, she said.

Movement passes

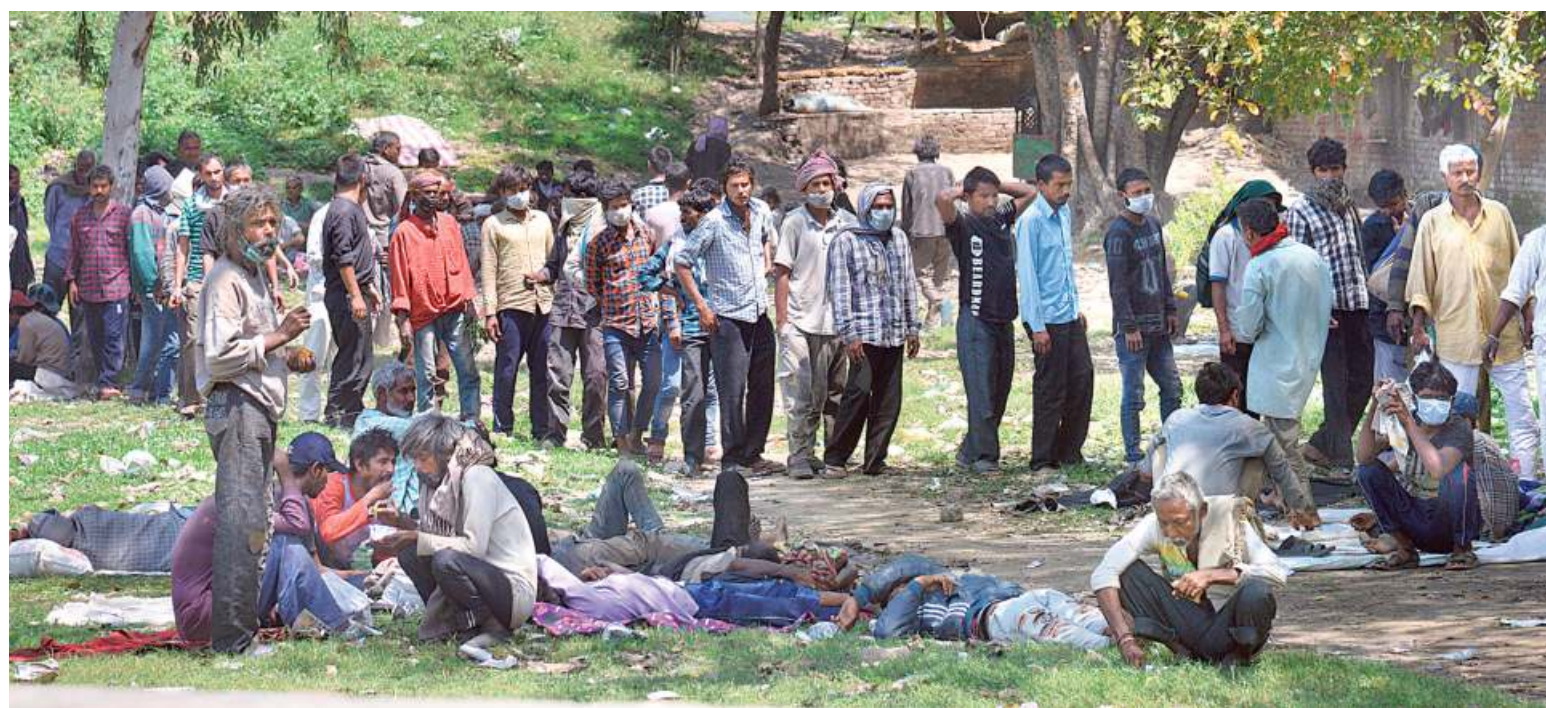
In a locality in central Delhi's Jama Masjid area, the RWA is of the opinion that movement passes should have been issued to members of the association to let them help the people in need. Mohammed Sabir, Dujana House RWA president, said, "The government and NGOs are ensuring that they are all fed. But if someone has an emergency, we are unable to help them with movement. They should have provided RWA members with movement passes." All RWAs said that

situation has "eased up" as compared to the initial days of the lockdown and while they didn't get newspapers in the beginning, they have now started getting them delivered.

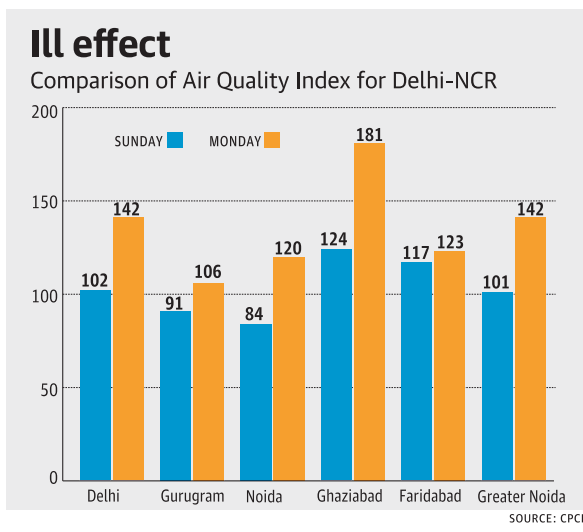
Talking about how the situation has changed "a little bit" in the last few days, Sanjeev Baruah, resident of South Delhi Alakanda, said that food delivery has begun now. "The delivery boys, however, are stopped at the gate and one has to go fetch the parcel," he said. In west Delhi's Rajouri Garden, newspapers started after initial hiccups and also, vegetable vendors who were earlier not allowed to come are now being allowed, said Jatin Gandhi, an RWA member.



Lock, stock and barrel



A city under lockdown: (Clockwise from top) Trains parked at a metro depot in Timarpur; a policeman puts up a barricade; homeless persons wait for food near ISBT in Delhi on Monday.
*SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA; R.V. MOORTHY; SANDEEP SAXENA



City's air quality worsens, light rain expected today

Fireworks lent to AQI spike: Met Dept.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI
The air quality index (AQI) in Delhi-NCR, which has been ranging in the 'good' to 'satisfactory' categories due to reduced emissions during the nationwide lockdown, saw a marginal rise on Monday. The AQI in Delhi went up from 102 at 4 p.m. on Sunday to 142 at the same time on Monday.
Sources at the Met department said that bursting of crackers on Sunday night may have caused the spike but the key factor was lowering of wind speed.
In response to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call of '9 p.m., 9 minutes' to express resolve against COVID-19, Delhiites lit candles and diyas on Sunday, but some also burst crackers.
In Gurugram and Noida, where AQI was in the 'satisfactory' category on Sunday, the numbers went up to the

HC plea urges for safe return of Indians in U.S.

STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI
A plea moved before the Delhi High Court on Monday has urged for the safe return of all Indians employed in the United States of America (USA), who are now stranded there without jobs in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic.
An HC Bench, which

heard the petition through videoconferencing, directed it be listed on Tuesday so that a copy of the plea can be served to the central government. The petition has been moved by a couple whose daughter is stranded jobless in the U.S. after her employer asked her to resign on March 20 in the wake of COVID-19.

Lab experiments with 'drive-through testing'

Facility is at Punjabi Bagh; people can register for test online

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI
The sole sign of activity in Punjabi Bagh's Central Market on Monday was at the collection centre of Dr. Dangs Laboratory (DDL), which is among the few Indian Council of Medical Research-approved laboratories authorised to test for COVID-19.

On Monday, the company experimented with a new service: drive-through testing. After paying a fee of ₹4,500, a person can be screened for COVID-19 while still sitting in the car. The results are ready in a day.

Arjun Dang, a pathologist and chief executive officer of DDL, told *The Hindu* that a few patients were screened in the morning. The identities of the patients were withheld to protect privacy.

Unlike in South Korea, which pioneered drive-through testing as part of its mission to test a large pool of patients who had flu-like symptoms, DDL's service is for people who are apprehensive of being screened at their homes as it may invite



Technicians demonstrate collection of oral samples from a mock patient in a car to test for COVID-19, in New Delhi on Monday.
*SHIV KUMAR PUSHKAR



unwarranted attention from neighbours. Many people also fear that laboratory personnel entering their house may bring in the infection despite being donned in protective gear.

For the media demonstration on Monday, a mock patient drove his car to the rear of the lab's collection centre. A person can register for the test online by uploading a government ID and the doctor's prescription.

The patient will also have to share the vehicle number

in which he intends to reach the lab.

Traffic cones connected with a metal chain regulated the entry of cars to the designated testing spot – a white rectangle chalked out on the road. A booth located next to the spot was manned by a lab personnel clad in full protective gear.

The process
The staff gestured the driver to roll down the window – only the two windows on the right are allowed to be rolled down depending on where the patient is seated.

A long probe is inserted into the nose of the patients and the contents are sealed. Another swab is collected from the throat and separately sealed. The patient then drives away. The process takes 8-9 minutes.

Every half hour, the samples are taken to the DDL's testing lab at Aurobindo Marg. The samples are analysed by the RT-realtime polymerase chain reaction method and the results are mailed within a day.

Traders condemn e-tailers for suspending operations

Firms must assume responsibility: CAIT

STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI
The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) on Monday lambasted e-commerce companies that had suspended operations during the lockdown in the wake of COVID-19 outbreak, terming the act condemnable.

In the current situation, where "all stakeholders should actually assume responsibility and come forward to help the country, they have chosen to step back and sit on the fence because doing business during crisis hours does not seem profitable to them" the traders' body said.

CAIT hails offline traders
While hailing the role played by offline traders, the union said that nearly 1.25 crore traders of essential goods only around 25% were able to operate on ground due to various restrictions. The CAIT also said that with stores shut everywhere, retail business in the country was losing ₹15 crores (approx.) daily.

Four men arrested for firing outside mosque

They had gone to check for virus cases

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT GURUGRAM

Four persons have been arrested for allegedly opening fire outside Jama Masjid in Dhankot village here on Sunday, the police said on Monday.

The accused – Vinod, Pawan, Alam Khan and Harkesh – said they had gone to ensure that there was no person infected with COVID-19 inside the shrine and opened fire after the door was not opened. Vinod and Pawan, both 40 years old, are residents of Basai village while 39-year-old Alam Khan stays in Devi Lal Colony. Eighteen-year-old Harkesh is from Uttar Pradesh.

The four men were arrested by the Crime Unit of the Gurugram Police near the flyover on Basai road on Sunday.

Social media message

The accused purportedly told the police that they would often discuss the COVID-19 situation and were perturbed over the increasing number of cases after many Jamaat workers in Nizamuddin were found in-

fectured.

They said they had recently come across a message on a social media platform about six infected persons having been traced to Dhankot Jama Masjid.

The miscreants got into a Sports Utility Vehicle owned by Pawan in the early hours of Sunday and reached the village.

When no one responded to their repeated knocks at the door of the mosque, Vinod opened a fire at the building and another in the opposite direction. The four then left the spot. The matter came to light the next morning when locals informed Imam Shahid that they had heard the sound of "firecrackers" at night.

An empty cartridge was then found near the mosque and a hole was spotted in the building.

A case has been registered in the matter at Rajindra Park police station.

Weapons seized

The pistol and the weapon used in the commission of crime have been seized, the police added.

DDA to give 300 more flats to govt. for quarantine use

SHINJINI GHOSH NEW DELHI

The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) is set to hand over around 300 vacant flats in Narela to the Delhi government over the next couple of days for use as quarantine facilities.

The flats are in addition to the 1,400 already handed over to the State government by the urban body to lodge those meant to be quarantined following the COVID-19 outbreak.

Senior DDA officials said over 4,500 vacant flats were available in Narela, all newly constructed but not offered under any previous housing schemes due to lack of certain infrastructure.

DDA vice-chairman Tarun Kapoor said, "Around 200-300 flats are being prepared and are likely to be handed over in the next 2-3 days. These flats were lying vacant as earlier there was an issue with the approach road among other things. But the road was constructed a few months ago."

"The particular pocket where the flats are located in an in a secluded area and the full pocket is isolated," Mr. Kapoor added.

Another senior DDA official said the flats are IBHK Low Income Group housing ones. The flats being offered are in pockets G-2 and G-6, the official added.

Delhi zoo on alert after tiger tests positive for COVID-19 in the U.S.

Staffers constantly monitoring all animals, says zoo director

STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

Following a letter from the Central Zoo Authority (CZA) in New York confirming that a tiger has been tested positive for COVID-19, an official from the National Zoological Park (NZP) in Delhi said they are on high alert.

Suneesh Buxy, director of the Delhi zoo, said they are constantly monitoring all the animals at the zoo. Notably, the zoo has been shut since mid-March following the COVID-19 outbreak.

In a letter, the CZA, said: "United States Department of Agriculture's National Veterinary Services Laboratories, in a statement dated

April 5, 2020, has confirmed SARS-CoV-2 [COVID-19] in a tiger housed in the Bronx Zoo, New York. Zoos in the country are, therefore, advised to remain on highest alertness, watch animals on 24x7 basis using CCTV for any abnormal behaviour/symptoms, keepers/handlers not be allowed in the vicinity without safety gear preferably PPE [Personal Protective Equipment], isolate and quarantine sick animals, and have least contact while providing feed to animals."

Meanwhile, Mr. Buxy said, "Our handlers have been using masks and gloves as it was made part of the

protocol after a bird flu outbreak three-four years ago. Also, we are spraying anti-viral chemicals as prescribed by the municipal corporation and we also carry out fogging."

The director said there was "no need for panic". He added, "We have been monitoring our animals through CCTV cameras. A number of our staff stay inside the zoo premises and we keep a close watch on the animals." He also said the animals are relaxed since the lockdown. "There has been no case of animals falling ill after the virus outbreak and there has been no need to test any animals so far," Mr. Buxy said.

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THE HINDU
India's National Newspaper

Gehlot again requests PM for package

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
JAIPUR

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on Monday once again requested Prime Minister Narendra Modi to take urgent steps to empower the State governments to deal with the situation arising out of the nationwide lockdown enforced to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.

He also sought announcement of an economic package, including a grant of ₹1 lakh crore, for the States without any further delay.

"I would like to reiterate that our State's financial condition is rapidly deteriorating due to decline in revenues and the State government was forced to partially defer the salaries of [its] employees for this month," Mr. Gehlot said in a letter addressed to Mr. Modi.

U.P. lockdown may be extended

'Rising number of COVID-19 cases in the State, including those linked to Tablighi'

OMAR RASHID
LUCKNOW

The lockdown in Uttar Pradesh may be extended beyond April 14, a senior government official said on Monday, citing the rising number of COVID-19 positive cases in the State including those linked to the Tablighi Jamaat.

The number of cases in U.P. touched 305, including 159 linked to the Jamaat, the government said.

Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Awanish Awasthi said there was little possibility of lifting the lockdown on April 15, two days after Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath sought suggestions from legislators on resuming normal life on the said date in phases.

The "sensitivity" of COVID-19 cases in U.P. has increased after the fresh rise in numbers, most of them linked to the Tablighi Jamaat,



People maintain social distancing as they wait to receive essential goods in Mathura on Monday. •PTI

he said at a press briefing.

'Load has increased'

It was "premature to say" at this point if the lockdown would end on April 14, said Mr. Awasthi adding that the government wanted to "ensure a corona-free State" before lifting the restrictions. However, the COVID-19 "load

has increased" in the State due to the Tablighi Jamaat cases, he said.

The senior official's statement came two days after Mr. Adityanath himself said that the lockdown in U.P. will come to an end on April 15 but would be implemented in phases.

"15 April se lockdown sa-

mapt hone wala hai (The lockdown will come to an end on April 15)," Mr. Adityanath said while interacting with MLAs in the State through videoconference on Saturday.

'Efforts will be wasted'

"On April 15, once we end the lockdown, if crowds gather at once, then all the efforts will go down in drain," he said on Saturday.

According to government figures, COVID-19 positive cases have been reported in 35 out of the 75 districts in U.P.

Of the 35, 28 have cases linked to the Tablighi Jamaat, with the highest numbers in Agra (29), Ghaziabad (14), Shamli (13), Meerut (13), Saharanpur (13) and Lucknow (12). Overall, Noida has the highest number of cases with 61. U.P. has so far reported three deaths, one each in Basti, Meerut and Varanasi.

'Self-declare or face charges'

Assam govt. deadline for elusive Tablighi Jamaat attendees

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

The Assam government has set a deadline for the elusive Tablighi Jamaat attendees who have returned home to come for screening voluntarily or face charges under the Disaster Management Act.

Of the 26 people who tested positive for the COVID-19 pandemic, 25 have been associated with the Jamaat's event at Nizamuddin in Delhi last month.

"We have been appealing since the first Nizamuddin-linked positive case was detected in Assam. Various mosque committees have also coordinated with us and sent out appeals, but attendees are yet to come out for the mandatory screening," State Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Monday.

He added that the elusive attendees have time till Monday midnight to self-care.



A car being disinfected in Guwahati on Monday. •PTI

"Those who declare or are made to undergo screening from tomorrow (Tuesday) will be given medical care but charges under the Act will be filed against them," he said.

The Centre, Mr Sarma said, had provided a list of 556 names of people from Assam who attended the Nizamuddin event while 275 more names were sourced locally. "Samples of 128 people remain to be collected. We hope they will emerge on

their own and get tested before the deadline," he said.

Some of those who attended the Nizamuddin event have appealed to the elusive men to "give up for your own good". They included former film actor Mirel Qudus who released a video highlighting the positives of getting screened and quarantined.

The Health Minister also said the State government was considering starting a permit system for people willing to enter Assam after the COVID-19 lockdown period ends. Permanent residents of the State may also have to seek permits in advance for travelling outside, he added.

Till Monday afternoon, 75,981 people were in quarantine in Assam, most of them at home. They will be allowed to move out of quarantine centres from April 10 in regulated batches after a health test the day before.

FIR against woman BJP leader for firing in the air

Manju Tiwari later apologised for her 'carelessness'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW

A BJP woman leader in Uttar Pradesh's Balrampur, Manju Tiwari, courted controversy when she allegedly fired a shot in the air with a revolver on Sunday evening when people across the country switched off their lights and lit lamps and candles at the call of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

A video of the alleged celebratory firing was widely shared on social media.

An FIR was registered against Ms. Tiwari under Section 286 (negligent con-

duct with respect to explosive substance) of the IPC and Section 30 of the Arms Act, 1959.

Ms. Tiwari, who is the district president of the party's women's wing, was seen in the video pointing a revolver towards the sky before firing a shot. A man from her family could be heard cheering afterwards.

While talking to a Hindi news channel, Ms. Tiwari apologised for her "carelessness" and said she got carried away by the "Diwali-like" atmosphere when people lit lamps and burst crackers. "When I came out I saw the entire city decorated with earthen lamps and candles. I felt excitement like it was Diwali."

Curbs: Punjab cow shelters stare at fodder shortage

Those running gaushalas say they would be forced to let them graze outside rather than starve

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH/JAIPUR

The nationwide three-week lockdown in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak has posed a grave threat of fodder shortage for several gaushalas (cow shelters) in the State.

Several persons running gaushalas rued that in the absence of proper arrangements they are already facing a shortage of fodder for the cows and if necessary steps to ensure regular supply was not made soon, they would be forced to let cows out of shelters.

"There are around 500 gaushalas in the State; out of these, around 480 are run or managed privately by NGOs or cooperatives, the rest by the government. At least 400

gaushalas are staring at fodder shortage," said Joginder Pal, president, Gauvansh Seva Sadan in Mandi Gobindgarh.

"We have been demanding that either fodder as an essential commodity should be kept out of lockdown or the government should make arrangements to provide it. If the government doesn't step in immediately we will be forced to move cows out of shelters for grazing, otherwise they will starve. We have no choice," he said.

Rajinder Kaplesh, who manages a cow shelter in Sirhind housing around 325 cows, said since the lockdown there has been considerable drop in people who visited the shelter, resulting in a sharp decline of funds. "We



There are around 500 cow shelters in Punjab. •FILE PHOTO

run the shelter on donations... hardly anyone is visiting the gaushala these days. This has resulted in financial crunch for us. Also people used to bring green fodder with them to feed cows," he said.

"Labour shortage is another problem that we are facing. Four men, who were working

at my shelter as daily wagers, have gone back to their native places," he said.

Ravi Garg, who runs Keshav Gaushala in Kharar, near Chandigarh, said limited curfew passes are being issued, resulting in erratic movement of fodder supply. "The government should ensure that vehicles ferrying fodder should not be stopped. Also, in the area surrounding Chandigarh, Panchkula and Mohali fodder is supplied mostly by private traders. There are no sale points of government agencies, resulting in a price spiral," he said.

The Punjab Chief Minister had recently empowered Urban Local Bodies in the State to buy medicines and food for urban daily wagers, labourers

and poor, as well as fodder for gaushalas, out of the municipal funds at their disposal.

Rajasthan situation
The situation in Rajasthan is not as bad, with farmers helping out those running animal shelters in the remote areas by supplying sufficient quantities of fodder for bovine animals during the present harvesting season.

Radha Gopal, operations coordinator at Hingonia Gaushala near Jaipur, the State's biggest animal shelter, said there was no shortage of resources at the facility. "We have been distributing 8 to 10 tonnes of fodder every day since the lockdown brought daily life to a standstill," he said.

Odisha CM warns against disharmony

PRAFULLA DAS
BHUBANESWAR

In the wake of detection of some Tablighi Jamaat returnees as COVID-19 positive in Odisha, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Monday warned people not to communalise the situation.

Reviewing the law and order situation in the context of COVID-19, Mr. Patnaik directed the police to be vigilant and take stringent action against those who were trying to communalise the pandemic. He warned of zero tolerance to mischief mongers.

The review meeting was attended by top State government officials and the Director General of Police.

ENTERPRISE CONNECT

North Eastern Railway

During complete lockdown in a fight against COVID-19, North Eastern Railway administration has decided to run Parcel Special Train for transportation of essential commodities like - food items, fruits, vegetables, medicines, healthcare products, medical equipments, mask, sanitizers, salt, sugar, edible oil etc. At present North Eastern Railway is already transporting coal, foodgrain, salt, fertilizer, perishables like- onions and potato through freight train. For transportation in small quantity it has been decided to run parcel special train.

All interested parties may contact nearest parcel office or divisional office for registering their demand. E-Commerce companies may also contact in case of any requirement.

Contact details are as under :-

- Izzatnagar Division - 9760541588
- Lucknow Division - 9794846963
- Varanasi Division - 9794843966
- Commercial Head Quarter, Gorakhpur - 9794845955

Industrial houses, companies, interested groups, NGOs, individuals are requested to kindly avail this facility by registering their demand and join us with India fights against COVID-19.

North Central Railway employees in fight against Covid-19.



North Central Railway Scouts & Guides joining hands to help poor & needy during lockdown. On 03.04.20 NCR inhouse production of mask more than 15000 and sanitizer cose to 700 litres. GM Sri Rajiv Chaudhry stressed that safety in train operation must remain our prime focus area. He said that it is important that we ensure disruption free service to continue good work done by Railways.

DLW, Varanasi made medical equipment for better healthcare

Medical equipment such as I.V drip stand, bed side bowl stand, patient food table, medicine table for DLW, Railway Hospital in order to prepare to defeat Covid-19 in Diesel Locomotive Works, Varanasi, Tool Room and provide quick better health facilities. Has been drawn and prepared. Earlier number 8 has been given to I.V Stand, NER, Manduwadih. At the same time, the first RPF barrack has been established at DLW by creating a handwash kiosk operated by number three Unique Legs for its employees under the Break the Chain campaign. Apart from this, two more handwash kiosks have also been prepared and there are plans to install them at different locations of DLW. This work is being carried out under the direction and guidance given by the higher officials. The work of designing the above equipment was done by the Plant and Tool Design Office and its construction work was done in very short time by the working staff of the Tool room.

SIDBI commits Rs. 15 crore to PM CARES Fund to fight Coronavirus

Being responsive to national resolve, Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI), the principal financial institution engaged in the promotion, financing and development of Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs), has committed Rs. 15 crore to PM CARES Fund. The fund has been created by our Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi to fight the novel coronavirus. This small step comes after launching of S A F E (SIDBI Assistance to Facilitate Emergency response against corona virus) loan scheme @ 5% in 48 hours. Under SAFE, SID-

BI extends direct financing to any MSME who are manufacturing any products or providing any services related to fighting Corona Virus, such as permitted drugs, sanitizers, masks, body suits, overalls, gloves, shoes covers, ventilators, testing labs, etc. Shri Mohammad Mustafa, IAS, Chairman and Managing Director of SIDBI said, "Our Hon'ble Prime Minister has taken proactive measures to break the chain of the COVID infection. We shall make all efforts to remain proactively responsive, all along"

NFL contributes Rs. 1.52 crore towards PM CARES Fund

National Fertilizers Limited (NFL), the leading fertilizer major has contributed Rs. 1.52 Crore towards PM CARES Fund to support fight against COVID-19. Out of this, NFL's employees have contributed one day's salary amounting to Rs. 88 Lakh and remaining Rs. 63.94 Lakh have been contributed from company's CSR fund. Sh. Manoj Mishra, C&MD, NFL said that the company is fully committed to contribute in every possible way to fight the pandemic.

Even in such difficult situation, the company is ensuring smooth and sufficient supply of Fertilizers, the essential farming ingredient to farmers. Moreover, NFL is also working towards creating awareness in and around its operational areas.

Bharat Oman Refineries Limited

BORI is intensively implementing various CSR initiatives from many years to improve the socio-economic condition and has always been frontrunner in supporting noble causes and also in matter of National concern. The Corona Virus Disease-19 (Covid-19) had been declared as a public health emergency of International Concern by WHO. The current situation in India and across world is of grave concern and needs immediate attention. BORI continue their pledge to protect and empower all affected communities, in this endeavor BORI has Contributed Rs. 10 Crores in Prime Minister's Citizen Assistances and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund (PM CARES FUND), to support the initiatives taken by the Government to tackle the COVID-19 outbreak and the wellbeing of the countrymen.

The spread of this pandemic has been posing severe health and economic ramifications for our country. Government have been working tirelessly to ensure that the disease is contained and that the affected patients get the care they need. This pandemic has created a burden on the health system of the country. Though the Government has earmarked funds for tackling the issue at hand, the need is much greater. To join the fight with Government, BORI had contributed for the cause, which is the need of the hour

ONGC rises to the occasion to combat Covid-19 national crisis

The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in India and the across the world is a matter of great concern for the entire human race. While the entire nation is fighting against the spread of this fatal Corona virus by staying at home, maintaining social distancing, ONGC and its energy soldiers are functioning 24*7 to ensure production and delivery of oil and gas, one of the most essential need to the citizens of the country.

ONGC as India's National Oil company, is the energy anchor of the country and has always in the past risen to the needs of the hour. This time the need of the nation is much greater as it concerns the health,

safety and lives of our citizens.

In these exceptionally challenging times for the entire nation, the energy soldiers of ONGC has once again pledged to support the nation through their leadership and commitment by contributing Rs. 300 Crore from CSR fund and employees contributing two days of their salary amounting to around Rs. 16 Crore, to the PM CARES fund created to combat Corona virus.

The entire workforce of ONGC is working to ensure that our operations go unhindered. Employees are working from home through video conferencing to provide necessary support to the employees who are performing their duties on extended stay in the field.

NHPC sets example of harmony

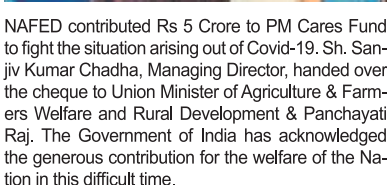
NHPC has set an example of harmony amid lockdown to fight COVID-19 by arranging food, medical check-up facilities and medicines for hundreds of Nepalese citizens stranded in Dharochula, District-Pithoragarh (Uttarakhand) due to sealing of Indo-Nepal international border. NHPC's Dhauliganga Power Station located near Dharochula has arranged all three daily meals for the stranded Nepalese nationals at Dharochula Stadium and relief camps set up at Nigalpani from 3rd April 2020. During this, NHPC doctors have also conducted health check-up and provided free medicines. NHPC management has deputed its employees to ensure timely supply of food and other basic needs to all the stranded Nepalese citizens, which include children, women and elderly people. Problems of each person are being addressed immediately.

National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd

NAFED contributed Rs 5 Crore to PM Cares Fund to fight the situation arising out of Covid-19. Sh. Sanjiv Kumar Chaudha, Managing Director, handed over the cheque to Union Minister of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare and Rural Development & Panchayati Raj. The Government of India has acknowledged the generous contribution for the welfare of the Nation in this difficult time.

NTPC contributes INR 257.5 crore to PM CARES Fund

NTPC Ltd, India's largest power producer, contributed INR 257.5 Crore to the PM CARES Fund to support the government in the fight against COVID-19. While INR 250 crore have been given by the company, NTPC employees have also contributed INR 7.5 crore towards the PM CARES Fund as their one day salary. NTPC feels honoured to be a part of the contribution from the Public Sector undertakings of the Ministry of Power which has contributed INR 925 Cr to the PM CARES Fund. INR 11 crore is being spent additionally by NTPC for protective measures at various locations as on 31st March 2020 towards awareness and health camps for people in the vicinity.



SAFETY: The spread of this pandemic has been posing severe health and economic ramifications for our country. Government have been working tirelessly to ensure that the disease is contained and that the affected patients get the care they need. This pandemic has created a burden on the health system of the country. Though the Government has earmarked funds for tackling the issue at hand, the need is much greater. To join the fight with Government, BORI had contributed for the cause, which is the need of the hour

INTERVIEW | SURESH KUMAR

'Next six weeks pose a big challenge'

Govt. will procure every grain of wheat, says Chief Principal Secretary to Punjab CM

As Punjab continues its fight to curb the COVID-19 pandemic, Suresh Kumar, Chief Principal Secretary to the Punjab Chief Minister, in an exclusive interview to The Hindu's Vikas Vasudeva, said his biggest concern was apprehended community spread during harvesting and procurement of wheat, and religious gatherings. Excerpts:

How prepared is Punjab to deal with COVID-19? What is your biggest concern right now and what is the strategy to deal with it?

■ Punjab is fully prepared to manage and contain COVID-19, though it is a war against an unknown invisible enemy of mankind. Not much is known about this disease, but based on the experience of other countries and guidance from health professionals in the country and State, we are taking every possible measure to prepare and update our health systems by providing requisite men, material and other resources.

The IEC (Information, Education and Communication) campaign has been going on for over a month now to create awareness and apprise people of the desired precautions to prevent COVID-19. Our biggest concern is apprehended community spread during harvesting and procurement of wheat, and at religious gatherings. All gatherings, including religious gatherings, are prohibited in the State.

How imminent is the fear that Punjab will slip into the community transmission phase of the disease as COVID-19 cases continue to rise?

■ The apprehension of community spread is always there, though we have so far been able to prevent it. We

have not had as big a problem as apprehended during the 'Hola Mohalla' festival in the second week of March. Baldev Singh, the State's first COVID-19 patient, who lost his life, had attended the 'Hola Mohalla'. Thereafter, we have taken every possible measure to check the spread of this disease, even though we had to isolate about 15 villages. We were also the first to announce lockdown and later to impose curfew in the State, which will continue till April 14.

The next six weeks of harvesting and procurement of wheat, and the Baisakhi festival, pose a serious challenge to the State administration. The government is making all possible arrangements to procure every grain of wheat produced in the State to save the farmers from any financial catastrophe, with full COVID-19-proof preparations, by increasing the number of purchase centres by 3,000 and staggering the procurement to six weeks instead of the normal three weeks.

Do you see the situation deteriorating fast and beyond control in the coming days?

■ It is difficult to say, but if all of us in the government, and the common man, remain disciplined and dedicated to our duties and responsibilities, and follow suggested preventive measures, including social distancing and adhering to norms of lockdown and curfew, it can surely be controlled effectively.

Considerable numbers of the State's NRI population have returned over the past one month. Have all of them been traced? If not, how serious could be the consequences?

■ Most of the NRIs who came from other countries after February 15, 2020 have been



traced and placed under home quarantine or isolation as per the protocol advised by the ICMR (Indian Council of Medical Research) and the guidelines issued by the State government. The government has also initiated the process to procure rapid testing kits as permitted now by the ICMR.

Many people from Punjab participated in the Tablighi Jamaat event in Nizamuddin. Has this derailed the State government's efforts to contain the pandemic?

■ It has not derailed the arrangements as such, but it has certainly put unforeseen stress on the State's resources and caused some avoidable damage in the country. It was clearly avoidable. Still, if all those who participated in this event could come forward and declare their travel details and contacts, the State government can very well trace, test and treat them. This will help to prevent spread of COVID-19.

At a few hospitals, nurses and paramedical staff have protested that they have not been provided personal protective equipment (PPE). Please comment.

■ It can not be denied that health professionals and workers are performing their onerous duties very diligently, even at risk to their lives. The State Health Department has continuously made all efforts to procure required kits, masks and other equipment to fully secure their sa-

fety. Insurance cover of ₹50 lakh has also been arranged for them, but there always remain some inadequacies, which make some of these dedicated workers feeling insecure and threatened, as a result of which such situations do arise. The State government is, however, fully conscious and committed to protect and secure all its employees and officials, more importantly the health and sanitation workers, the police and other district-level officers of the departments of revenue, rural development, and food and civil supplies, who are doing a tremendous job in these trying times.

Wheat harvesting is all set to commence and farmers are worried on account of restrictions due to curfew,..... labour shortage, etc. What is the roadmap to help them out?

■ The harvesting of wheat is likely to begin shortly and procurement, though difficult, will be ensured under all circumstances. It may take a little longer than normal times. It has been decided to start the procurement from April 14 to May 31. It will be arranged in about 5,000 purchase centres, by appointment for every farmer on given days. Purchase centres will be provided with all arrangements required to prevent the spread of COVID-19, with full facilities for food, water, shelter and healthcare.

The farmers' anxiety can be well understood but the State government is committed to ensuring that every grain produced by them is procured at the price announced by the Centre. We are also hoping that the Government of India will take some measures to incentivise staggered procurement, and minimise the losses, if any, of the farmers.



NO DISTANCE: Customers crowding a bank entrance in Adilabad town of Telangana on Monday; employees of the Chennai Corporation travelling to their work place; women queuing up to collect foodgrains and fruits distributed by the Dharwad Rural District Congress Committee in Hubballi, Karnataka; Aspirants submitting applications for posts in paramedical services in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh.



A.P. COVID-19 tally up with 51 new cases

Kurnool remains a hotspot with 21 people testing positive, Kasaragod records 13 cases

STAFF REPORTER
VIJAYAWADA/ BENGALURU/
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The spike in COVID-19 cases in Andhra Pradesh continued with 51 more persons testing positive for the virus in the 24-hour period ending Monday evening. The total count went up to 303 cases, with three casualties, a Health Department bulletin said.

Over 92% (280) of the cases were reported during the last one week when testing of persons who returned from the Jamaat meeting in New Delhi and their contacts began.

During the two weeks since the first positive case was reported on March 12, only 23 cases were reported.

The number grew exponentially later. One hotspot, Kurnool, reported 21 new positives, after 49 on Sunday.

Nellore had eight new cases. West Godavari recorded six, Visakhapatnam five, Kadapa four, Anantapur three, Guntur two and Krishna and Prakasam one new case each on Monday.

So far, Kurnool district with the most number of Delhi returnees, has reported 74 cases and Nellore 42 cases.

The battle is on

The southern States continue to report more positive cases. A look at the numbers reported on Monday.



UNITED FIGHT: Corporation workers disinfecting a stretch in Thiruvananthapuram on Monday.

| State | Total number of cases | Active cases | Number of those cured | Deaths |
|----------------|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------------|--------|
| Andhra Pradesh | 303 | 294 | 6 | 3 |
| Karnataka | 163 | 147 | 20 | 4 |
| Kerala | 327 | 269 | 59 | 2 |
| Tamil Nadu | 621 | 607 | 8 | 6 |
| Telangana | 364 | 308 | 43 | 11 |

Telangana has 30 cases

There was a spike in COVID-19 cases across Telangana on Monday too, with 30 new cases. The number of positive cases touched 364.

So far, 308 cases were active and 12 were discharged. No new deaths were reported and the toll stood at 11.

Of the total positive cases,

at four, while 20 had been discharged.

The new cases include one Jamaat congregation participant from Bengaluru Rural, seven from Mysuru, two from Bagalkot and another from Bengaluru Urban, the son of a patient who had earlier tested positive.

Among cases in Mysuru, one is an employee of the pharma company in Nanjangud and three travelled to Delhi. However, officials said they came from Delhi in January and an investigation on how they contracted the infection is on.

In Bagalkot, the wife and brother of the 75-year-old person who succumbed to the infection tested positive. A resident of Kerala, who had travelled to Germany and was a contact of two patients who tested positive earlier, also tested positive on Monday. Out of the 163 positive cases in Karnataka, nine are transit passengers of Kerala.

Kasaragod has more

In Kerala, 13 new positive cases of COVID-19 were reported on Monday, including three linked to Nizamuddin. Of the 13 new cases, nine were from Kasaragod, and

Malappuram reported two, while Kollam and Pathanamthitta reported one each.

Six of those found positive in Kasaragod are those who returned to the State from abroad, while three are contacts of imported cases. Pathanamthitta had one positive case, of a person with a history of foreign travel. The two cases in Malappuram and one in Kollam involve people who travelled to the meeting at Nizamuddin. The total number of COVID-19 cases in the State linked to the event rose to 13.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said on Monday that Kerala had contained disease transmission extremely well so far.

However, even as the State was maintaining vigil, reports of the death of several non-resident Keralites following COVID-19 coming from across the world were very disturbing, he said.

The Chief Minister told the media that 18 Keralites residing outside the State had died of COVID-19.

The State had identified over 1.25 lakh isolation beds in public and private sector hospitals. The Health Department had drawn up a three-tier plan for COVID-19.

PM repeating the mistake of note ban, says Kamal Haasan

'Ill-planned lockdown leading to loss of life and livelihood'

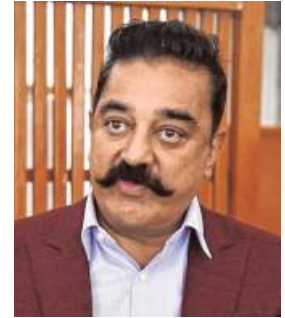
STAFF REPORTER
CHENNAI

In a sharp attack on India's response to COVID-19 pandemic, Makkal Neethi Maiaam founder Kamal Haasan on Monday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi was making the "same mistake of demonetisation" albeit at a much larger scale by imposing an ill-planned 21-day lockdown.

Writing an open letter to Mr. Modi, Mr. Haasan compared the adverse effects of the current lockdown to that of demonetisation in terms of its impact on the poor.

"My biggest fear is that the same mistake of demonetisation is being repeated albeit at a much bigger scale. While demonetisation led to loss of savings and livelihood of the poorest, this ill-planned lockdown is leading us to a fatal combination of loss of both life and livelihood," said Mr. Haasan.

Mr. Haasan slammed Mr. Modi for "ordering an entire nation of 1.4 billion people to shutdown within 4 hours, despite having four months' notice as India's first case was reported on January 30.



Kamal Haasan

Criticising the Prime Minister's last address to the nation, he said that while people were lighting lamps in balconies, poor were left without enough oil for their next rotis.

'Spectacle of lights'

"On one hand you are asking the more privileged people to put up a spectacle of lights while on the other hand the poor man's plight is itself becoming a shameful spectacle. While your world lit up oil diyas in their balconies, the poor are struggling to gather enough oil to bake their next rotis," said Mr. Haasan, adding, "These psychotherapy techniques can address the first world an-

xiety problems of the 'haves' who have a balcony to cheer. But what about those who don't even have a roof on their heads?"

Mr. Haasan added, "I am sure you don't want to be a balcony government only for the balcony people by completely ignoring the poor who are biggest constituent of our society, our support system and the foundation on which the middle-class, the well-to-do and the rich build their lives.

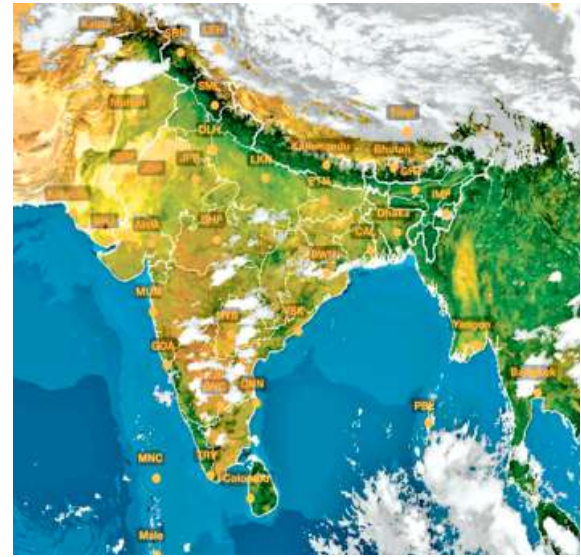
He said Mr. Modi was often sliding into his 'comfort zone of unleashing a spirited election-style campaign idea' when there was an opportunity to arrest the slide and underlined that 'compliance must not be confused as our subjugation.'

"It seems you are comfortable outsourcing responsible behaviour to the common people and transparency to the State governments," said Mr. Haasan.

He also termed the Prime Minister's response to the crisis as focussing only on warm campaigning, ignoring ground reality.

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 17:00 HRS)

Forecast for Tuesday: Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning and squall (speed reaching 40-50 kmph) likely at isolated places over Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura.

| CITY | RAIN | MAX | MIN | CITY | RAIN | MAX | MIN |
|-------------|-------|------|--------|--------------------|-------|-------|--------|
| Agartala | | 37.0 | ..21.6 | Kozhikode | ..... | 0.9 | ..36.0 |
| Ahmedabad | | 40.4 | ..22.2 | Kurnool | ..... | 40.4 | ..28.9 |
| Aizawl | | 30.2 | ..... | Lucknow | ..... | 37.4 | ..19.4 |
| Allahabad | | 40.4 | ..18.6 | Madurai | ..... | 36.2 | ..25.1 |
| Bangaluru | | 36.4 | ..23.6 | Mangaluru | ..... | 36.7 | ..26.0 |
| Bhopal | | 20.2 | ..... | Mumbai | ..... | 33.0 | ..24.8 |
| Bhubaneswar | | 35.1 | ..25.4 | Mysuru | ..... | 4.0 | ..35.9 |
| Chandigarh | | 16.3 | ..... | New Delhi | ..... | 34.6 | ..18.6 |
| Chennai | | 34.5 | ..28.7 | Patna | ..... | 37.7 | ..20.2 |
| Coimbatore | | 37.7 | ..24.6 | Port Blair | ..... | 33.4 | ..24.9 |
| Delhradun | | 30.1 | ..14.5 | Puducherry | ..... | 34.5 | ..27.8 |
| Gangtok | | 19.4 | ..12.2 | Pune | ..... | 38.4 | ..21.8 |
| Goa | | 33.7 | ..27.8 | Rajpur | ..... | 35.6 | ..22.5 |
| Guwahati | | 34.8 | ..16.4 | Ranchi | ..... | 34.6 | ..17.5 |
| Hubballi | | 34.0 | ..23.0 | Shillong | ..... | 24.2 | ..17.5 |
| Hyderabad | | 36.7 | ..26.6 | Shimla | ..... | 19.4 | ..8.6 |
| Imphal | | 29.8 | ..15.1 | Srinagar | ..... | 17.5 | ..7.4 |
| Jaipur | | 38.0 | ..24.2 | Thiruvananthapuram | ..... | 33.5 | ..22.6 |
| Kochi | | 5.6 | ..32.8 | Tiruchi | ..... | 38.5 | ..27.4 |
| Kohima | | 24.2 | ..12.7 | Vijayawada | ..... | ..... | ..... |
| Kolkata | | 1.4 | ..36.3 | Visakhapatnam | ..... | 33.4 | ..27.2 |

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

| CITY | SO ₂ | NO ₂ | CO | PM _{2.5} | PM ₁₀ | CODE | Yesterday |
|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|------|-------------------|------------------|-------|-----------|
| Ahmedabad | | 30 | ..38 | ..18 | ..80 | ..89 | ..... |
| Bangaluru | | 06 | ..03 | ..42 | ..40 | ..93 | ..... |
| Chennai | | 04 | ..17 | ..46 | ..41 | ..... | ..... |
| Delhi | | 49 | ..87 | ..193 | ..123 | ..... | ..... |
| Hyderabad | | 04 | ..07 | ..25 | ..51 | ..63 | ..... |
| Kolkata | | 16 | ..28 | ..09 | ..94 | ..89 | ..... |
| Lucknow | | 06 | ..21 | ..55 | ..137 | ..... | ..... |
| Mumbai | | 03 | ..11 | ..07 | ..42 | ..71 | ..... |
| Pune | | 28 | ..10 | ..51 | ..36 | ..34 | ..... |
| Visakhapatnam | | 37 | ..06 | ..37 | ..31 | ..45 | ..... |

S0₂: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO₂: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

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

PM_{2.5} & PM₁₀: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease.

Telangana CM favours extension of lockdown

We have no other weapon, says KCR

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
HYDERABAD

Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao on Monday appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to extend the 21-day national lockdown to check COVID-19 beyond April 15, saying it was essential to save lives.

The Telangana Rashtra Samithi supremo said it would be difficult to contain the spread of the virus in view of the country's "poor health infrastructure".

'Consult all CMs'

"I am for the lockdown of the country furthermore after April 15. Because we can recover from the economic problem but we cannot recover lives. We cannot recover the lives of the people," he told reporters here. "I appeal to the honou-



K. Chandrasekhar Rao

ble Prime Minister, to the Government of India, please extend the lockdown without any hesitation," he said.

Mr. Rao further said: "Consult everybody, consult every Chief Minister, have a video conference with entire country, but take a conscious decision. Because, we have no other weapon in India to contain this dreadful virus."

22 arrested for attack bid in mosques

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BELAVAGI

The police have arrested 22 people on the charge of trying to attack persons in two mosques here in Karnataka, alleging that they did not turn off the lights on Sunday night, as advised by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

A group entered a mosque in Yamakamaradi and allegedly heckled the mosque muezzin, who was cleaning the mosque by keeping the lights on between 9 and 9.09 p.m., they alleged. Nine persons have been arrested. In Sadalaga, some persons entered a mosque and argued with the persons inside that they were deliberately not switching off the lights. Here, 13 people were held.

Safety measures in place in Karnataka zoos

Alarm after tiger tests positive for COVID-19 in U.S.

STAFF REPORTER
MYSURU

While the Central Zoo Authority (CZA) sent an advisory to all zoological gardens on Monday to take precautions in the wake of a tiger testing positive for the novel coronavirus at the Bronx Zoo in New York City, authorities in Karnataka have been on alert for over a fortnight now.

All zoos in the State have had biosafety measures in place ever since reports emerged from Hong Kong of a pet animal testing positive in March.

Exclusive COVID-19 hospital at Kasaragod fully functional

Up to 300 patients can be accommodated in the facility

STAFF REPORTER
KASARAGOD

A 27-member medical team from Thiruvananthapuram has expressed satisfaction with the facilities at the Kasaragod Government Medical College Hospital (MCH), which has been converted to a COVID-19 care hospital.

The team, consisting of 13 doctors, 10 nurses, and four assistant nurses, arrived in the district on Sunday night. They visited the MCH by 10 a.m. on Monday.

Given the shortage of health professionals in Kasaragod, the medical team from the capital city had volunteered to strengthen the COVID-19 care efforts in the district. The team would coordinate the activities at the hospital, train staff and treat patients, said Santhosh



Beds arranged for COVID-19 patients at the Kasaragod Medical College Hospital in Kerala. *SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Kumar S.S., the team leader. Dr. Santhosh Kumar told mediapersons that they were satisfied with the arrangements. "There are separate wards for men and women, a lab, 10 intensive care units, and enough beds. In the event of an emergency, at least 200 patients can be

accommodated. About 100 more beds and 10 more ICU beds can be arranged." He said the wards were fully operational. Hitherto, COVID-19 patients were being treated at the Kasaragod general hospital, the Kanhangad district hospital, and a few private hospitals.

IN BRIEF



Music composer M.K. Arjunan passes away

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM
Veteran music composer M K Arjunan passed away in Kochi on Monday at the age of 84. He was the last of the master composers from the golden period of Malayalam cinema. He was suffering from age-related ailments. In a career spanning over five decades, Arjunan master, as he was popularly known, tuned about 700 songs, many of them among the biggest hits of all time such as *Yadukula rathidevanevide...* (Rest House), *Kasthoori manakunnallo kaatte* (Picnic) and *Nin maniyarayile* (CID Nazir).

Karnataka now has 10 COVID testing labs

BENGALURU
With the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) approving two more testing centres at Ballari and Mangaluru in Karnataka, the demand for COVID-19 testing facilities in North Karnataka and Dakshina Kannada has now been fulfilled. With this, the State has 10 government testing centres and this is the third highest in the country. While Maharashtra has 15 and Tamil Nadu has 11 centres, Karnataka and Kerala have 10 each. Approval of another facility in Hubballi is pending.

'Salary challenge' for Kerala PSU staff too

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM
Kerala Finance Minister T.M. Thomas Isaac has called for a 'Salary Challenge' among employees of public sector undertakings (PSUs) too. As per the challenge proposed on Monday, the modalities for donating their one-month salary (to mobilise funds for COVID-19 containment measures) will be the same as in the case of government employees. They could donate either as a lumpsum or in instalments. The government had earlier come up with a similar challenge after the 2018 floods.



Mind the gap

India must focus on what needs to be done, not on whom to blame for the virus spread

For millennia, people travelled for reasons of religion and trade, and in recent decades increasingly for pleasure too. The germs that these travellers carried globalised many contagions. In the history of humankind, no pestilence has spread as fast and as far as the novel coronavirus, for the singular reason that China, its source, is at the centre of world trade and economy. China is the biggest trading partner for at least 120 countries and regions, much of Europe and the U.S. included. Until recently, it was India's too. At least 430,000 people travelled from China to the U.S. after the outbreak of the disease. The whirlwind of global travel, goaded by an intense human hunger for new economic opportunities and pleasure, has taken the virus to at least 180 countries on last count. In the year ending March 2019, 6.9 crore international passengers arrived in India. Such context has been obfuscated deliberately by sections trying to reinforce social prejudices, justify xenophobia and advance perilous political agendas by blaming particular social groups for the growing tragedy. People of Asian origin have been targeted in the U.S. as a result; within India, people from its northeastern region have come under attack. After a March congregation of Tablighi Jamaat faithful in Delhi turned out to be the epicentre of the biggest cluster of COVID-19 infections in India, Muslims in general are facing renewed hostility in some parts of the country. On Monday, a 30-year-old man was brutally thrashed by a group of locals who accused him of spreading the disease in the Outer-North district of Delhi. The man had arrived home after attending a religious gathering.

The Centre's briefers have been volunteering daily updates on the number of cases linked to the Tablighi event, as if it were relevant to the pandemic response. Indeed, there must be a discussion on what went wrong, and how and why the disease spread in India. There are questions about the arrival of so many religious activists from international hotspots of the disease. Why were they given visas and allowed entry? However, right now, all efforts and attention of the government must be on containment and mitigation. All sections must feel protected and cared for by the state. In some instances, the Tablighi leaders have been defiantly non-cooperative in contact tracing even after their unconscionable folly triggered such an avalanche of cases. While legal and police action against those who are not cooperating with the official measures is essential, care must be taken against adding fuel to the fire of communalism. The common threat of the virus should have doused the smouldering embers of religious tensions. In any case, the battle against the virus must not deepen existing social fissures.

Do no harm

The safety of health-care workers on COVID-19 duty is paramount

Primum non nocere is the primary, guiding principle of bioethics. Every health-care worker is oriented on the principle of 'First, do no harm' during their training. All medical training is based on this idea, but very little in what they learn prepares them for the reverse: When harm is inflicted upon them. Over the past week, chilling stories of assaults on health-care workers, on COVID-19 duty, have been reported. Visuals beamed in of angry locals who threw stones at doctors, health-care workers and civic officials who went to screen people in Indore, Madhya Pradesh. Two women doctors were injured. Earlier, there were reports of locals in Ranipura allegedly spitting at officials as they took up screening. Last week, doctors at Hyderabad's Gandhi Hospital were attacked after a patient with multiple co-morbidities died of COVID-19. Doctors there even sought police protection. ASHA workers were reportedly attacked in Bengaluru, Karnataka, when they went to collect data on COVID-19 symptoms. Locals grabbed their bags and cellphones, and the police finally had to rescue them. In Mumbai's Dhavani, police personnel who went to ensure that lockdown conditions were being followed – after a person tested positive in the locality – were assaulted by local youth. A case has been registered at Kayathar police station in Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu, after 12 people allegedly assaulted a health inspector and his team when they went there to isolate the family of a patient who had attended the Nizamuddin conclave.

These attacks are a result of paranoia and are completely uncharacteristic of the many risks health-care workers take on, merely doing their work in a pandemic situation such as this. In Wockhardt, doctors and workers have tested positive while treating patients. If these helpers are looked upon as the enemy, it only allows the true foe – the virus – to gather strength. WHO too has developed guidelines for addressing workplace violence in the health sector to support the development of violence prevention policies in non-emergency settings. Their applicability in this situation must be examined. Baskut Tuncak, UN Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes, hailed health-care workers as heroes who must be protected. Stating that the tireless work and self-sacrifice of these workers show the best of humanity, he also went on to emphasise that unacceptable shortages in critical protective equipment that can stop them from being infected, continue to plague nearly all nations battling COVID-19. The responsibility of restoring order and ensuring the safety of all health workers, whether with personal protective equipment, or against attacks from the public ultimately rests with the government, and in equal measure, the people.

Democracy should not permit a trade-off

Measures taken during emergencies cannot come at the cost of institutional checks and balances



NEERA CHANDHOKE

Independent India inherited a legal system which was designed to control the colonised. Caught in the relentless grip of COVID-19, several State governments have invoked the Epidemic Diseases Act, first drafted to deal with bubonic plague that swept Maharashtra in 1897. The Act prohibited public gatherings, and regulated travel, routine screening, segregation, and quarantine. The government was given enormous powers to control public opinion. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, described as the 'father of Indian unrest' by Valentine Chirol of *The Times* (London) was imprisoned for 18 months. His newspaper, *Kesari*, had criticised measures adopted by the government to tackle the epidemic. The law was stark. It did not establish the right of affected populations to medical treatment, or to care and consideration in times of great stress, anxiety and panic.

Silence on these crucial issues bore expected results. In June 1897, the brothers, Damodar Hari Chapekar and Balkrishna Hari Chapekar, assassinated W.C. Rand, the plague commissioner of Poona, and Lieutenant Charles Egeron Ayer, an officer of the administration. Both were considered guilty of invading private spaces, and disregarding taboos on entry into the inner domain of households. The two brothers were hanged in the summer of 1899. The assassination heralded a storm of revolutionary violence that shook the country at the turn of the twentieth century.

Today our world should have been different. The government could have paid attention to mi-

grant labour when it declared a lockdown on economic activities, roads, public spaces, transport, neighbourhoods and zones in which the unorganised working class ekes out bare subsistence. The result of this slip-up was tragic. Thousands of workers and their families were forced to exit the city, and begin an onerous trek to their villages. The unnerving spectacle of a mass of people trudging across State borders carrying pitiful bundles on their heads and little babies in their arms, without food or money, shocked the conscience of humankind. The neglect of workers upon whose shoulders the Indian economy rests, exposed the class bias of regulations. Confronted with the unexpected sight of people defying the lockdown, State governments and the Central government rushed to announce remedial measures. The afterthought came too late and gave too little.

Dispensing with rights

On March 31, at a hearing of the Supreme Court of India on two petitions relating to the welfare of migrants, the Central government demanded that the Court should allow the imposition of censorship over media reports on measures adopted by the state. The government claimed that panic over the migration of thousands of barefooted people was based on fake news, and that the scale of migration was over-estimated. Therefore, the Court should support rules that no news will be published or telecast without checking with the Central government. The plea was rejected, and the Court suggested that responsible journalism should rely on daily official bulletins. Witness the irony. The government is concerned about reports of involuntary migrations. It is not concerned with the reason why people were forced to walk out of the city in the first place.



SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

The issue at hand is not the lockdown or other measures taken by the government. We recognise with great unease that governments easily dispense with basic human rights in the name of managing pandemics. We bear witness to the fact that a group of helpless workers were hosed down with chemical solutions in Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh. The decision to close down an entire country without simultaneously recognising the specificities of Indian society has resulted in brutality and violence. Consider scenes of the police swinging their lathis indiscriminately to punish individuals who are forced to defy the lockdown.

'Overreach' of power

There is another cause for unease. Admittedly in emergencies governments have to adopt extraordinary measures. Yet, reports of authoritarian leaders across the world, giving to themselves unprecedented power at the expense of legislatures, judiciaries, the media, civil society, and civil liberties have set off ripples of doubt. When the disease has run its course, will these leaders abdicate the power they have amassed in the time of the coronavirus? Will they restore institutions that inspire public confidence, because they act as brakes on the exercise of unbridled power?

The prospect seems remote. If democratic India continues to invoke draconian colonial laws that

were drafted in another time and for another purpose, why should we expect anything different in the future?

On March 16, United Nations human rights experts issued a statement expressing deep concern with the way leaders were amassing power ostensibly for dealing with the pandemic. The statement urged governments to avoid an 'overreach' of security measures when they respond to the coronavirus outbreak. Emergency powers, the experts insisted, should not be used to quash dissent. More significantly, these measures have to be proportionate, necessary and non-discriminatory. Some states and security institutions, continued the statement, will find the use of emergency powers attractive because it offers shortcuts. There is need to ensure that excessive powers are not hardwired into legal and political systems. Care should be taken to see that restrictions are narrowly tailored. Governments should deploy the least intrusive method to protect public health. "We encourage States," concluded the statement, "to remain steadfast in maintaining a human rights-based approach to regulating this pandemic, in order to facilitate the emergence of healthy societies with rule of law and human rights protections."

The rights experts have good reasons to issue this warning. Around the world, we witness the sorry spectacle of leaders – not precisely known for their commitment to democracy or human rights – steadily unravelling every check on the use of unmitigated power by the executive. In Israel, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is facing court cases for corruption and breach of trust, has closed the judiciary and postponed his own trial. The government has been given immense powers of surveillance. And a newly constituted Parliament, or Knes-

et, is not allowed to meet.

In Hungary, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, notorious for his anti-migrant tirades, has personalised immense power. He now rules by decree. Existing laws and parliamentary oversight have been suspended. In the Philippines, President Rodrigo Duterte has appropriated broad emergency powers in order to take effective decisions to tackle the virus. Again, he is not known for his commitment to civil liberties or to the Constitution. In Chile, the declaration of a 'state of catastrophe' has repressed anti-government dissent that has been raging on the streets since last year.

No counter-balancing steps

States are the product of history, composed of layers of meaning some of which have been fashioned for another time. The nature of the state is historically specific. Yet modern states share a common determination; a ruthless ambition to control the minds and bodies of citizens. Epidemics provide an opportunity to accomplish precisely this, to do away with inconvenient checks and balances institutionalised in the media, the judiciary, and civil society. The dismantling of constitutions and institutions will have a major impact on societies. Do decisions to control the pandemic have to be at the expense of human rights and democracy? On March 6, Michelle Bachelet, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, advised governments to ensure that the measures they adopt to control the virus do not adversely impact people's lives. "The most vulnerable and neglected people in society," she recommended, "must be protected both medically and economically." She gave sage advice, democracy does not permit trade-offs.

Neera Chandhoke is a former professor of Political Science at Delhi University

Cash less Indians, the new normal, and survival

Remonetisation could save millions of the poorest Indians possibly running out of money at lockdown end and after



APPU ESTHOSE SURESH

On April 15, when the 21-day national lockdown imposed by the government ends, it is very likely that the bottom 47 percentile of India's population will run out of cash. Estimates are based on the World Bank's poverty line of \$3.2 a day for a lower middle-income country such as India, assuming people are spending just to survive. It is also likely that the population between the 47th percentile and up to 87th percentile will have only half the cash they had before the lockdown began.

What this means, in real terms, is that the poorest 500 million Indians would be out of cash reserves completely by April 15 and another 500 million will be left with just half their reserves. These findings are part of my ongoing research on mapping inequality in India using demonetisation data.

How bad is it?

My findings reveal that the top 1% in India held 62% of all the currency in circulation, whereas the top 0.1% held 33%, a third of ₹17-lakh crore in circulation at the time of demonetisation.

In order to estimate cash inequality, I have created a model combining demonetisation and National Sample Survey Office

(NSSO) data to which a generalised Pareto interpolation technique was applied to arrive at the cash held by each population group.

Many Indians have managed to deal with political and social inequality with their ability to negotiate their freedom using money. For poor Indians, having cash to pay back money lenders or landlords has meant having the choice between freedom and slavery. Money gives them choice; the freedom not to have their labour exploited.

Inequality of cash, a basic economic instrument, gives us a picture of how unequal our society is. The Gini coefficient, a common measure of inequality, of cash holding in India is as high as 0.71, where 0 indicates perfect equality and 1 indicates perfect inequality. Other measurements of inequality such as the Atkinson Index [A(I) = 0.624] and the Generalised Entropy Index [GE(I) = 3.108] also show a very high inequality of cash holding. This means that in India, cash is heavily concentrated at the top.

Even inter-district and intra-district cash inequality is very high. The top 10% districts held 764 times more currency than the bottom 10% districts. It is unsurprising then that the districts at the top are situated in Tier 1 and II cities. In fact, the bottom 60 districts, mostly comprising hill and tribal districts, held only 0.2% of all the cash.

Also, 60% of all districts analysed, i.e. 359 out of 607 districts in India, reported a Gini coefficient greater than or equal to 0.7,



M. PERIASAMY

which means that even within districts, cash is concentrated very unequally. In absolute numbers, there are 10.9 million cash-rich Indians in the top 1%, that is almost equal to the population of Belgium.

Currently, a humanitarian crisis is unfolding in India, where the poorest Indians have been returning to their homes by foot, in packed vehicles, hungry and cashless. However, due to the great inequality of cash, it will not be long before workers are forced to migrate back to cash-rich centres again, despite lockdowns and fears of a deadly virus.

Remonetise India

When India begins to pick its pieces together, it will be looking at a grim situation where roughly a whopping one billion people of a population of 1.3 billion will be starting with zero or near zero cash. Much of this population is engaged in the informal economy; along with cash, they will also lose agency to negotiate for fair wages, decent working conditions, and basic human rights. Even for the struggling corporate sector, there

is no good news. When their operations restart, nearly 50% of consumers will have no money to spend. The Indian economy is very likely to experience multidimensional pressures.

Given the dire economic situation, what I would like to propose is this: a social and economic argument to remonetise India. This would mean a direct cash transfer of ₹2.5-lakh crore just to replenish people's exhausted cash coffers.

Previous research has established that up to the 77th percentile population, Indians just consume what they earn. This also coincides with the findings in the 2016 Economic Survey (which also introduced the concept of Universal Basic Income) that population up to the 77th percentile does not have access to formal loans.

The ₹1.7-lakh crore stimulus package announced in India by the Finance Minister is well intentioned but poorly thought out. The increased entitlements of ration and the supply of free gas cylinders will help to bolster food security. However, if we consider the cash components such as the increase of ₹20 in Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act wages or the transfer of ₹1,500 over three months via Jan Dhan accounts, it will barely compensate for the forced loss of jobs. The stimulus package then in no way addresses the imminent liquidity crisis forced upon one billion people.

Why remonetise?

Inequality reproduces more inequality. If a majority of Indians

lose their cash reserves, they will fall into income traps where real wages will diminish and lost wages can only be recovered by longer working hours. Economist Joseph Stiglitz has argued that it is not the differences in saving that cause the difference in income but the other way around, where incomes cause the difference in saving.

A targeted ₹2.5-lakh crore cash transfer will put money directly in the pockets and purses of the population up to the 87th percentile; ₹1.34 lakh crore will be for the poorest 500 million Indians, whereas ₹1.2-lakh crore will replenish the reduced cash reserves of the rest of the population up till the 87th percentile.

Now is the right time for the government to remonetise and make cash available through banks, automated teller machines and treasuries.

The government has to overlook its focus on cashless payments because the need of the hour is to allay people's anxieties. It should remember that in India, we still rely heavily on physical transactions and not cashless payments. As political philosopher G.A. Cohen said, "Lack of money induces lack of freedom, even if accept the identification of freedom with the absence of interference...money provides freedom because it extinguishes interference with access to goods and services."

Appu Esthose Suresh is Senior Fellow, Atlantic Fellows for Social and Economic Equity, London School of Economics

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.

Hate containment

Ever since the announcement of the 21-day national lockdown, the country has come to a grinding halt amid fears of the novel coronavirus spreading far and wide despite strict directives on ensuring social isolation and physical distancing. At a time when the country is hoping for control over the situation, there has been a jarring incident – the detection of the Tablighi Jamaat Nizamuddin COVID-19 cluster. Understandably, this case has raised serious concerns and indignation that the 'jamatees' have been careless. Strict action

according to the law needs to be taken against the event's organisers. But what is happening now in the backdrop of the incident is far more dangerous than the microbe's threat. This incident seems to have come as some sort of manna from heaven for hate-mongers to defame a particular community, and create more fissures in Indian society. With a sinister intent of spreading hatred, a number of fake videos are in circulation that portray a particular community in very poor light. It is disheartening that terms such as "corona jihad" are being used.

Certain media outlets too seem to be playing a part in this unfortunate campaign. It is sad that this is happening at a time when the Prime Minister has appealed to every Indian to remain united. Those eager to exploit the Nizamuddin incident as a great opportunity to malign a particular community are actually doing great and irreparable damage to the unity and integrity of this great nation. I only pray to god that better sense prevails at this critical juncture and let my great country overcome this enormous crisis soon.

SHAFAR,
Hyderabad

Needed, an action plan

Following the Prime Minister's national appeal in the fight against COVID-19, people switched off lights in their homes and lit candles and diyas on Sunday night (Page 1, "PM lights lamp as nation joins hands against virus", April 6). Unfortunately some resorted to setting off crackers little knowing that India's toll has surged past 100. Earlier too, on March 22, people hit the streets to celebrate the janata curfew to thank the nation's essential services providers. The nation needs to be seriously ponder over as to whether the danger of COVID-19 has decreased by

banding utensils merrily; rather the event has violated "social distancing". The need of the hour is better resource management to minimise the hardships of the poor, to augment medical capacity and to provide

protective gear to our frontline soldiers who have been crying themselves hoarse about shortages of these protective measures.

S.K. KHOSLA,
Chandigarh

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

Error on front page: This is regarding a story on women attendees at the Tablighi meet (April 6, 2020). The headline and the text erroneously indicated that women from Tamil Nadu attended the meet. The story should be corrected to say that women who had attended the Tablighi Jamaat congregation in Delhi travelled to and stayed at homes in Tamil Nadu. The headline should have been "Coronavirus: alert issued on women who attended Tablighi meet" instead of what was published.

Print versions of the story titled "Coronavirus lockdown lifts Delhi's March air quality to 5-year high" (April 4, 2020, many editions) erroneously gave pollutant PM_{2.5}'s concentration in g/m³. It should have been µg/m³.

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Farmers are at their wits' end

As global trade falls and supply disruptions persist, a prolonged lockdown will adversely affect food security



R. RAMAKUMAR

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to global concerns on the state of agriculture and food security. On the one hand, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has warned of a "food crisis" if countries do not protect vulnerable people from hunger and malnutrition. On the other, farmers face a stalemate as they are unable to work on their land, earn remunerative prices and gain access to markets. We can try to understand the impact of COVID-19 on agriculture with three questions. One, does the world have enough food to feed its people? Two, is food available at affordable prices? Three, how are farmers coping with the lockdown?

Food stocks and prices

According to the FAO, as on April 2, 2020, the total stock of cereals in the world was about 861 million tonnes. This translates to a stocks-to-use ratio (SUR) – i.e., proportion of consumption available as stocks – of 30.7%. The FAO considers this "comfortable". The SURs for wheat, rice and coarse grains were 35.3%, 35.1% and 26.9%, respectively. But world stocks are different from national stocks. About 52% of the global wheat stocks is held by China, and about 20% of the global rice stocks is held by India. If the major holders of global stocks decide to turn precautionary and stop exporting, and if the lockdown is prolonged, countries dependent on rice imports will suffer.

Kazakhstan, a major wheat exporter, has banned exports. Russia, the largest wheat exporter, is expected to restrict its exports. Vietnam, the third largest rice exporter, has stopped its exports, which will reduce the global rice exports by 15%. If India and Thailand too ban exports, world supply of rice will sharply fall. In March 2020, the Philippines and the European Union, major rice importers, had inventories of rice enough to feed their populations for about three months. Others, however, had inventories to hold on for about one month only. If the lockdown



"What has kept Indian food prices low is the severe decline in food consumption, especially among the poor, after the lockdown." An FCI godown in Hyderabad. **G. RAMAKRISHNA**

down continues beyond a month, these countries will face food shortages.

India's foodgrain output is projected to be about 292 MMT in 2019-20. On March 1, 2020, the total stock of wheat and rice with the Food Corporation of India (FCI) was 77.5 MT. The buffer norms for foodgrain stocks – i.e., operational stock plus strategic reserves – is 21.04 MT. Similarly, for pulses, India had a stock of 2.25 MT in mid-March 2020. In both cases, the rabi harvest is slated to arrive in April 2020, and the situation is expected to ease further.

There is always an element of uncertainty on how prices will behave if both demand and supply fall together. Prices in different markets fluctuate considerably given differences in the extent of production, stocks, arrivals and supply disruptions. According to the FAO, the world food price index fell by 4.3% and world cereal price index fell by 1.9% between February and March 2020 due to the weakening demand for food and the sharp fall in maize prices owing to poor demand for biofuels. However, retail prices of rice and wheat have been rising in the Western economies in March 2020. The major reasons identified are panic buying by households, export restrictions by countries and continuing supply chain disruptions. Retail prices of beef and eggs have also been rising.

In India, wholesale and consumer price indices (WPI and CPI) for March 2020 have not been published yet. WPI and CPI for food in India

were rising from mid-2019 onwards, reflecting a rise in vegetable prices, especially onion prices. January and February 2020 saw a moderate fall in these indices, but vegetable prices have remained high. If food prices rise due to the lockdown, it will be on top of an already rising price curve.

However, unlike in the West, food prices in India have not risen after the lockdown. While supplies have declined, demand has fallen too. In the APMC mandi in Mumbai's Vashi, if about 600 to 700 trucks arrived per day before the lockdown, only about 200 trucks arrive per day after the lockdown. Yet, wholesale prices of foodgrains and vegetables in the mandi have been stable, with only the prices of pulses showing a tendency to rise. This is because there has been a sharp fall in the consumption of foodgrains and vegetables. Similarly, the consumption of milk has fallen by 10-12%.

The crisis in farming

Harvesting and marketing of crops are in crisis across India, because of (a) disruptions in the procurement of foodgrains by government agencies; (b) disruptions in the collection of harvests from the farms by traders; (c) shortage of workers to harvest the crops; (d) shortage of truck drivers; (e) blockades in the transport of commodities; (f) limited operations of APMC mandis; and (g) shutdowns in the retail markets.

Second, these supply bottlenecks have led to a fall in farmgate prices. According to media reports, tomato

growers in Maharashtra were receiving only ₹2 per kg. Wheat prices in Madhya Pradesh fell from ₹2200/Q to about ₹1,600/Q. In Punjab, vegetable prices fell from ₹15/kg to ₹1/kg. In Delhi, the price of broiler chicken fell from ₹55/kg in January to ₹24/kg in March. In Tamil Nadu, egg prices fell from ₹4/egg in January to ₹1.95/egg in March.

Third, the large-scale return of migrant workers to their homes has disrupted harvest operations, and farmers are being forced to leave the crop in the fields. While mechanical harvesters can be used, there is a shortage of drivers/operators. Most rice mills work with migrant workers, and their return home has meant that these mills are not buying paddy from farmers. There are also severe labour shortages in milk processing plants, cold storage units and warehouses.

Fourth, supply chains remain disrupted across India. Agricultural goods have been notified as essential goods. But about 5,00,000 trucks are reportedly stranded in the highways and State borders. Milk trucks are unable to unload at the destination but unable to return empty, which has upset supply schedules. Trucks are in shortage as drivers have gone home. Imports of vegetable oils are not being lifted from ports due to shortage of trucks. Most APMC mandis are functioning only twice or thrice a week. Livestock feeds are in short supply, and this is breaking the back of livestock growers.

The world and India have adequate food stocks. But as global trade shrinks and supply disruptions persist, a prolonged lockdown will adversely affect food security in many countries. In the Western world, food prices are rising due to panic buying and stockpiling. Food prices are not yet rising in India. What has kept Indian food prices low is the severe decline in food consumption, especially among the poor, after the lockdown. That is, hunger may keep the food inflation in March 2020 low. Concurrently, farmers face acute labour shortages, falling farmgate prices and lack of access to input/output markets. It is unclear who is benefiting, but farmers, workers and the poor are at their wits' end.

R. Ramakumar is NABARD Chair Professor at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai

Preparing for SAARC 2.0

India has shown diplomatic resilience and leadership by forging unity in the neighbourhood in the war against COVID-19



RAJIV BHATIA

A tweet by Prime Minister Narendra Modi resulted in the first-ever virtual summit of SAARC leaders on March 15. Their deliberations reflected a recognition of the serious menace posed by COVID-19 and the need for robust regional cooperation to overcome it. What has happened to this innovative exercise in health diplomacy since then?

Solid follow-up

Those who hastened to dismiss the video conference as a mere show may have been disappointed. Considering that SAARC has been dormant for several years due to regional tensions, it is worth stressing that the fight against COVID-19 has been taken up in right earnest through a series of tangible measures. First, all the eight member-states were represented at the video conference – all at the level of head of state or government, except Pakistan. The Secretary General of SAARC participated. They readily agreed to work together to contain the virus, and shared their experiences and perspectives. Second, India's proposal to launch a COVID-19 Emergency Fund was given positive reception. Within days, all the countries, except Pakistan, contributed to it voluntarily, bringing the total contributions to \$18.8 million. Although it is a modest amount, the spirit of readily expressed solidarity behind it matters. Third, the fund has already been operationalised. It is controlled neither by India nor by the Secretariat. It is learnt that each contributing member-state is responsible for approval and disbursement of funds in response to requests received from others. Fourth, in the domain of implementation, India is in the lead, with its initial contribution of \$10 million. It has received requests for medical equipment, medicines and other supplies from Bhutan, Nepal, Afghanistan, Maldives, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Many requests have already been accepted and action has been taken, whereas others are under implementation. Fifth, a follow-up video-conference of senior health officials was arranged on March 26. The agenda included issues ranging from specific protocols dealing with screening at entry points and contact tracing to online training capsules for emergency response teams. Steps are now under way to nurture technical cooperation through a shared electronic

platform as also to arrange exchange of all useful information among health professionals through more informal means.

Those who argue that SAARC members have committed rather limited resources for a grave threat have a point. But they need to study the latest figures which reveal an interesting picture. So far, South Asia has not exactly borne the brunt of the pandemic. Of the total confirmed cases in the world that stood at 12,89,380 on April 6 (according to the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resources Center), SAARC countries reported only 8,292 cases, representing 0.64%. Whether the low share is due to limited testing, a peculiarity of the strain of the virus, people's unique immunity, South Asia's climate, decisive measures by governments, or just good fortune is difficult to say. But it is evident that India's imaginative diplomacy has leveraged the crisis to create a new mechanism for workable cooperation. It will become stronger if the crisis deepens and if member-states see advantages in working together. Seven of the eight members already do.

A new SAARC?

To conclude that SAARC is now returning to an active phase on a broad front may, however, be premature. In the backdrop of political capital invested by New Delhi in strengthening BIMSTEC and the urgencies it received recently from Nepal and Sri Lanka to resuscitate SAARC, I recently posed a question to External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar at a public forum. He said that India had no preference for a specific platform, but it was fully committed to the cause of regional cooperation and connectivity. The challenge facing the region is how to relate to a country which claims to favour regional cooperation, while working against it. Clearly, India has little difficulty in cooperating with like-minded neighbours, as it showed by forging unity in the war against COVID-19. This is diplomatic resilience and leadership at its best.

Finally, a thought for consideration of 'SAARC purists' who maintain that all proposals for cooperation should be routed through the Secretariat and activities should be piloted by the incumbent chair. Given what Pakistan has done to harm India's interests since the terrorist attack on the Uri Army base in 2016 and its continuing resistance to cooperation against COVID-19, the purists' scenario is unrealistic. Both New Delhi and its friendly neighbours need to start preparing themselves for SAARC 2.0.

Rajiv Bhatia is Distinguished Fellow, Gateway House, and a former Ambassador. While at the Ministry of External Affairs, he headed the division which handled India's relations with four neighbouring countries

Restructuring our food system for a healthy world

Many disease outbreaks show that within the welfare of animals lies the welfare of people

AMBIKA HIRANANDANI

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is an opportunity for us to analyse our food system, ideate and make changes for a healthier and more sustainable future. It is widely believed that the disease is zoonotic, which means that it got transferred to humans from the exotic animals stored in the 'wet markets' in Wuhan, China, the epicentre of the outbreak. Like SARS-CoV-2, SARS too was believed to have spread from civet cats to human beings in 2002. There are similar theories about Ebola and HIV. What lessons do these various outbreaks offer us?

Antibiotic resistance

The first is for us to rethink the ways in which we farm animals. India has the world's largest livestock population, is the largest producer of buffalo meat and produces about a 100 billion eggs annually. Animal agriculture is moving away from backyard operations to larger industrial facilities which aim to produce more meat with fewer resources. Industrialising animal agriculture comes at a huge cost to the environment, animals and to human beings. One concern is antibiotic resistance. According to the World Health Organization, the large volume of antibiotics given to farm animals contributed to the development of antimicrobial-resistant bacteria particularly in settings of intensive animal production.

A majority of Indian households buy meat from local meat shops which, much like the wet markets, follow no regulations in the way the animals are kept or slaughtered. Most of the standalone meat vendors do not follow the standards laid down by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). Further, while welfare standards of animals are often neglected, one thing is clear: immunocompromised animals are the most likely to pass on an infection. It is thus imperative that India understand the risk of zoonosis and antibiotic resistance in terms of following FSSAI regulations and adhering to

welfare standards in animal husbandry.

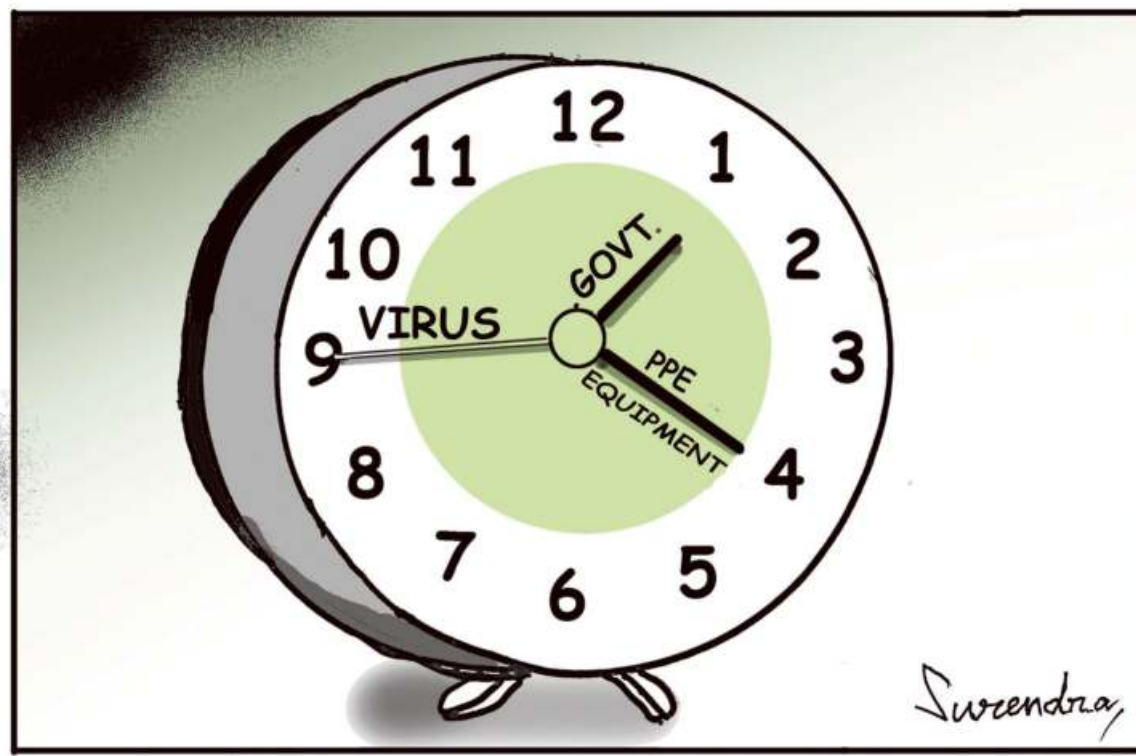
The second lesson is to undertake greater investment in the alternate protein industry. India has a high rate of malnutrition among children under the age of five and is trying to combat this by encouraging meat production. With a paucity of space, this can only be done by giving a boost to industrial agriculture. Before India does that, it must explore the potential behind plant and cultivated meats. Plant-based meats are made from plants and are cholesterol- and antibiotic-free, but taste and feel like meat. Cultivated meat is produced by taking a small sample of animal cells and replicating them outside of the animal; the resulting product is real meat, but without the antibiotics, E. coli, salmonella, or animal waste. These foods represent an enormous opportunity to solve the problems of rampant malnutrition, low farmer incomes, antibiotic dependency, and inhumane factory farming of animals.

In the Western world, these plant-based meats are already popular and two plant-based companies – The Impossible Foods and Beyond Meat – won the Champions of Earth award, the United Nation's highest environmental honour. India, an agrarian economy, could export raw materials to make these products and feed its people.

Every act has an impact

Finally, we must understand the interconnectedness of the world. Advocates of animal rights have argued that within the welfare of animals lies the welfare of people. Every act we undertake has an impact on us all. Pursuant to global lockdowns, wild animal populations have returned to cities and pollution levels have dropped globally. We need to innovate and encourage technologies that allow us to maintain the standard of living we are used to while ensuring that we are working towards a healthier world.

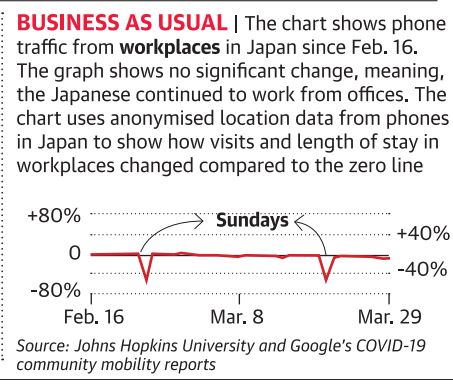
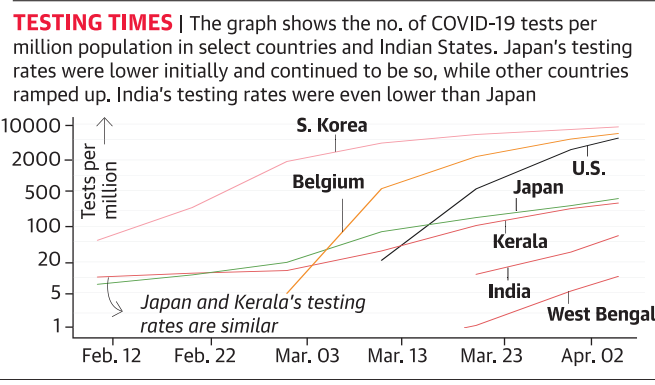
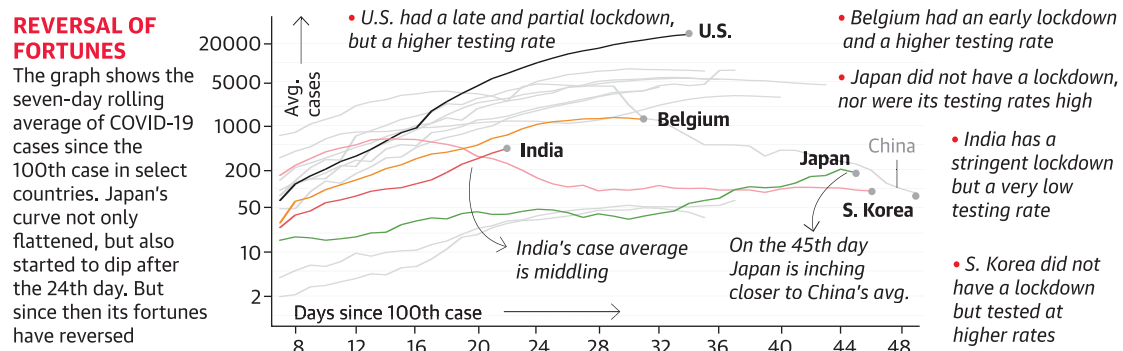
Ambika Hiranandani, Strategic Partnerships for The Good Food Institute, India



DATA POINT

Mercury rising in Japan

Japan is among the few countries that went against the grain in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially, the number of cases was low, largely due to the identification of disease clusters and despite the absence of a lockdown or intensive testing. Lately a surge in cases has led to calls for a state of emergency. Data suggest that Japan's strategy did not work. India has followed a similar course, but has a lockdown in place. By **The Hindu Data Team**



The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO APRIL 7, 1970

Countdown for Apollo-13 begins

The countdown for launching Apollo-13 next Saturday started at 10 p.m. last night (April 5, Cape Kennedy) as planned, despite a hitch which threatens to postpone the moon flight for a month. The decision to start the countdown was taken at the last moment, after a thorough discussion of the best way to right the fault. Space agency officials described the problem as a heat loss in the super critical helium which pressurises the descent engines used by the astronauts to land on the moon. The helium reservoirs are to be kept under watch until 10 a.m. on Monday (April 6) when a decision will be taken as to whether or not their replacement will be necessary. The heat loss from the super cold helium will increase pressure in the tank. If the pressure becomes too high when it is ignited, the combustion chamber could explode, aborting the mission and possibly endangering the spacemen. Saturday is the only launch day available this month for the desired Fra Mauro landing area. If the shot cannot go then, it will be postponed until May. The astronauts who will make the lunar journey, James A. Lovell Jr., Thomas K. Mattingly II and Fred Haise Jr., took a day off from their rigorous training yesterday (April 5).

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 7, 1920

The madness of Amritsar.

(From an editorial)

The Commissioners have remarked that Sir Michael O' Dwyer invited violence from the people so that he could crush them. If the Committee's conclusion is correct, Sir Michael deserves to rank with the political criminals of history, with the men who made a wilderness and called it peace. The following little incident illustrates the frame of mind in which Sir Michael envisaged the Punjab situation. Raizada Bagat Ram relates how "after the meeting of the Punjab Legislative Council, I met the Lieutenant Governor in the drawing room. He asked me what sort of hartal we had at Jullundur. I replied it was a complete hartal and that there was no disturbance. Sir Michael O'Dwyer asked me what I attributed it to. I answered to my mind it was due to the Soul-force of Mr. Gandhi's. On this Sir Michael raised his fist and said, 'Raisada Sahib, remember there is another force greater than Gandhi's soul-force.' That was the outburst of a fanatic. So might Phillip of Spain have talked to a Protestant on the rack. There is the same mixture of hatred and fear, the same determination to leave no means unused to his end.

FROM PAGE ONE

Modi seeks Ministers' views on lockdown exit

"He asked us for suggestions on how some industry can be restarted where labour can work with adequate social distancing safeguards," the source stated.

Mr. Modi asserted that the situation called for bolstering domestic manufacturing and asked the Ministers to see how "Make in India" could be worked out in this scenario.

"Business continuity plans after the lockdown is lifted were also asked, as the economy needs a rescue act," said a source.

Government sources (other than the Ministers at the meeting on Monday) told *The Hindu* that all sorts of suggestions were placed at the discussion table, but it seemed as though reopen-

ing of schools and colleges would not be done in a hurry, not least because many now are shelters for the homeless and migrant labour and quarantine centres.

Even railway and air traffic are unlikely to resume anytime soon, possibly in a staggered manner.

Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Puri took to Twitter on Sunday to clarify his Ministry's position.

"The current lockdown of both domestic and international passenger flights is till April 15. A decision to restart the flights after this period remains to be taken. If required, we will have to assess the situation on a case to case basis," Mr. Puri said.

47% of patients below 40, says government

Stating that the Home Secretary has also asked the State governments and Union Territories to ensure adequate supply of medical oxygen, which is critical for treatment, Joint Secretary in the MHA Punita Salila Srivastava, said: "So far we have quarantined 25,500 people from the Tablighi Jamaat. Five villages in Haryana, where the workers and participants were staying, have been sealed."

Speaking about the use of hydroxychloroquine with the number of cases rising in the country Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has noted that as of now there is only very limited evidence on efficacy of hydroxychloroquine to deal with COVID-19, and also there is not enough proof to advise it for the public.

The Health Ministry added that several steps are being taken along with the States/U.T.s for the prevention, containment and man-

agement of COVID-19 in the country. "We have issued detailed guidelines for setting up of quarantine facilities for COVID-19 outbreak and this is aimed at separating suspected and high-risk contacts as early as possible from among other quarantined persons," said Mr. Agarwal.

"States have already been advised to use funds under National Health Mission (NHM) and State Disaster Relief Fund to undertake activities related with creation of quarantine centres, dedicated COVID-19 hospitals medical equipment and treatment of patients. In addition to this, NHM has already sanctioned ₹100 crore to all States and ₹300 crore additional funds were released on Monday. Also, N-95 masks, ventilators and PPEs are being procured from the central pool and distributed to all the States across the country," he added.

Karnataka refuses to lift blockade

Kerala said its request to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to inform the timing of the video conference in the light of the Supreme Court's April 3 order had elicited no response so far. It had written to the MHA the very next day after the Supreme Court order, considering the urgency of the matter.

Noting that the Disaster Management Act mandated that there should not be any discrimination in essential services and care across the country, Kerala said the blockade violated the fundamental right to life of the people of the State. It asked why the Centre had not directed Karnataka to comply.

"The Central government is constitutionally obliged to direct compliance of laws made by Parliament and to ensure that the executive authority of a State is properly exercised... Blockade is a violation of the fundamental rights of the people of Kerala. The Centre is constitutionally and statutorily empowered and obliged to redress the issue," Kerala submitted in the court.

The blockade was despite the MHA's March 24 order that the delivery and transport of essential items should not be blocked. Karnataka continued with the blockade even after an order from the Kerala High Court to remove it.

Pench tiger death raises COVID-19 fears

However, it was unlikely to be enough to test for COVID and given the remoteness of the forests and lockdown in effect, would likely degrade and be unsuitable for testing.

"We've also been approached by molecular biologists who've offered to conduct a DNA analysis and possibly unearth evidence of the virus," Anup Kumar Nayak, Director General, NTA said.

Officials said they had implemented measures to keep a watch out for COVID among tigers. On Monday, both the Central Zoo Authority (CZA) and the NTA issued guidelines that require zoos to be on the "highest alert" and monitor animals on closed-circuit cameras 24/7 for "abnormal behaviour and symptoms."

Nadia, the COVID-positive tiger in the Bronx Zoo is believed to have been infected by an asymptomatic zoo-

keeper. The CZA has also directed zookeepers to approach sick animals wearing personal protective equipment and isolate and quarantine them. "Mammals such as carnivores especially cat, ferret and primates to be carefully monitored and fortnightly samples of suspect cases to be sent to designated animal health institutes to initiate COVID-19 testing," the circular noted.

The designated testing centres are the National Institute of High Security Animal Disease, Bhopal; National Research Centres on Equines, Haryana; Centre for Animal Disease Research and Diagnostics, Indian Veterinary Research Institute, U.P. The directive to Wildlife Wardens in States and reserves adds that tigers ought to be observed for symptoms consistent with COVID-19 and that personnel handling tigers have to be ascertained negative.

Affected districts rose from 62 to 257 in 15 days

Between March 20 and April 4, the number of districts with over 10 cases spiked from one to 70, says Health Ministry

VIJAYA SINGH
NEW DELHI

The total number of districts that reported COVID-19 positive cases across the country jumped from 62 to 257 in a span of 15 days, a presentation made by the Union Health Ministry to the Cabinet Secretary has said.

COVID-19

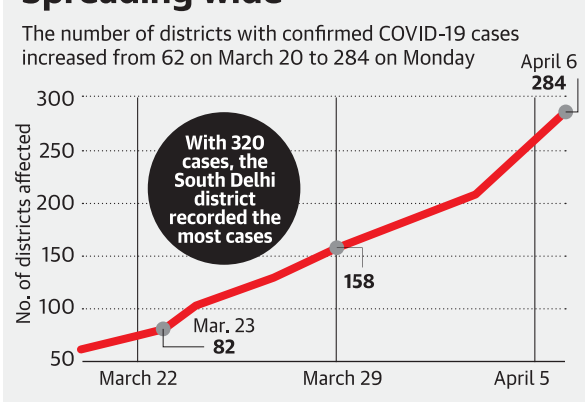
In all, there are 718 districts in the country spread over 28 States and eight Union Territories.

The presentation made by Kuldeep Singh of the Health Ministry before Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba on Sunday showed that as on March 20, there was only one dis-

trict in Maharashtra where more than 10 cases were reported. By April 4, the number of such districts spiked to 70. The cases also soared from 195 to 2,769 in the same period. From 62 districts on March 20, the number of affected districts almost doubled to 117 on March 25. The country was put under a 21-day lockdown on March 25 after a day-long 'Janata Curfew' on March 22. The rate of testing also increased during this period.

The presentation, "COVID-19 - orientation on containment strategy", made during a videoconference of the Chief Secretaries of the States and Union Territories (UTs) projected the figures till April 4.

Spreading wide



On the "graded response" of the government to control the spread of the pandemic, the Ministry official said that on January 17, flights from China and Hong Kong were

placed on surveillance at three airports and screening of passengers arriving from all international flights began on March 4, when the number of positive case jumped

from 6 to 24. The first case was reported on January 30.

The chart showed that the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared COVID-19 a "pandemic" on March 11 and the first-ever advisory on social distancing was issued on March 17, the day 126 positive cases were found. All international passenger flights were banned on March 22, the day the "Janata Curfew" was observed.

On Sunday, Mr. Gauba asked all the States and UTs to formulate a containment plan as part of the strategy to deal with the spread of COVID-19 and ensure its effective implementation on ground to avoid a community transmission stage. The lockdown period provides

the country a window of opportunities to act positively and be prepared to face any eventuality, Mr. Gauba said at the videoconference.

The presentation said that "COVID-19 originated as a cluster of atypical pneumonia from Wuhan, China, in December 2019" and "possibly jumped species barrier and infected humans in a seafood market", after which it developed capacity for "person-to-person transmission".

On March 27, Mr. Gauba wrote to all the States to monitor 15 lakh passengers who arrived at international airports from January 18 to March 23. The details of all the passengers were shared with the States.

Fight against virus 'like a war': PM

Efforts lauded globally, he tells BJP workers on the party's 40th foundation day

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday likened the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic to a war. India's efforts to combat the virus had been lauded around the world, he told BJP workers on the 40th anniversary of the its foundation day.

Mr. Modi's address took place via a video link on the 14th day of a nationwide lockdown announced by him to control the spread of COVID-19. He lauded the people of the country for the "maturity and discipline" they had shown in maintaining the lockdown in such a vast and diverse population.

D. Raja urges PM to hold an all-party meet

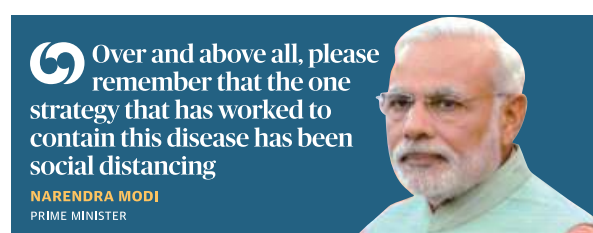
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

An all-party meeting must be called to brief leaders of recognised political parties on the situation arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic, CPI leader D. Raja said in a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He was responding to Mr. Modi's call for a meeting of the floor leaders of both Houses of Parliament on Wednesday.

India to help stranded Australians

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

India will assist Australians who are stranded in the country because of the lockdown imposed due to COVID-19 pandemic, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Monday to his Australian counterpart Scott Morrison. Sources confirmed that around 6,000 Australian citizens have registered with the Australian authorities and options are being explored for evacuating them soon.



Over and above all, please remember that the one strategy that has worked to contain this disease has been social distancing

He termed it "unprecedented."

"We got to see our collective strength on Sunday evening," he said referring to the countrywide exercise of switching off lights and lighting diyas and candles for nine minutes.

Delhi HC reserves order on Christian Michel's bail plea

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Monday reserved its order on the interim bail plea of Christian Michel James, alleged middleman arrested in the AgustaWestland VVIP chopper scam.

Justice Mukta Gupta, who conducted the proceedings through video conferencing, reserved the order after hearing the arguments on

behalf of counsel for Mr. James and the Central Bureau of Investigation and the Enforcement Directorate (ED), which opposed the plea.

Mr. James claimed that his health condition was critical and incompatible with the current prison status, especially to cope with the risk of contracting the COVID-19.

Last week, the Supreme Court had asked Mr. James

to first approach the High Court with his plea.

In his plea, he also referred to the Supreme Court's March 16 order directing all States and union territories to constitute high-level committees to consider releasing on parole or interim bail prisoners and undertrials, for offences entailing up to 7-year jail term, to decongest jails in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Centre profiteering during crisis: Cong.

Share profit with citizens, party says

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The government should not resort to profiteering at a time when the country is battling the COVID-19 pandemic, the Congress said on Monday. It asked the Centre to resort to profit-sharing with the citizens.

In an online media interaction, Congress spokesperson Abhishek Singhvi accused the government making a profit of "₹20 lakh crore" since 2014 through Central taxes and levies on petroleum products.

The need of the hour and immediate necessity is to share a part of this profit made by the government, Mr. Singhvi said.

"It is not a time for profiteering. It is a time for the government to do profit sharing, and do some sharing and caring. This is the need of the hour and the immediate necessity," he said at a press conference addressed through video conferencing.

'Reduce taxes'

The Congress spokesperson said it was time to reduce taxes or give it back in some other form to the farmers, labourers and common people suffering amid lockdown due to COVID-19 and due to the country's economic



Abhishek Singhvi

downturn. He recalled that in March 2014, international crude price was hovering around \$108 per barrel and six years later, it was now a historic low of \$23 per barrel.

"Going by international market prices, petrol can be sold at ₹28 while the price for diesel is ₹32, Mr. Singhvi said.

He alleged that the Centre had made a profit of around ₹20 lakh crore in the past six years.

"The BJP needs to realise that it has to stop solo profiteering; instead of stealing touch, it has to give a healing touch," he said.

"We want to draw your attention to GDP - Gas, Diesel and Petrol - during 21-day lockdown and how they should be harnessed to deal with the lockdown," the Congress spokesperson added.

Opposition slams suspension of MPLADS

A knee-jerk reaction, says Congress; unilateral decision, says Trinamool

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Opposition parties reacted sharply to the Union government's decision to suspend the MP Local Area Development (MPLAD) fund scheme for the next two years, subsuming the funds to the Central pool to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

Congress spokesperson and Lok Sabha MP Manish Tewari said it was a knee-jerk reaction much like the lockdown at a four-hour notice. While he and rest of the

Congress fully supported the 30% cut in the MPs' salary, suspension of MPLAD funds was an "overstretch."

"MPLADS is a targeted and nimble instrument to customise micro level interventions to alleviate distress," he said.

Thiruvananthapuram MP and Congress leader Shashi Tharoor, in a Twitter thread, said it would have been better had the government brought in an order to earmark the funds only to be spent for COVID-19 related

expenditure. "MPLADS is the only means for an MP to direct development resources to his constituency," he said.

"To take one example, the Centre has allocated ₹157 cr. of Disaster Response Mitigation Funds to Kerala, which has 314 #COVID19 cases, while Gujarat, with only 122 cases, gets ₹662 cr. Will this kind of imbalance also affect the reallocation of MPLADS funds?" he asked.

The Trinamool Congress called it a "whimsical" and

"undemocratic" decision.

"We all have contributed to tide over this pandemic but to use it as an excuse to stymie local area development will not solve the problem. Much like the demonetisation, this is an unilateral decision which will hamper the democracy in the country," TMC Lok Sabha MP Saugata Roy said.

CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury said this decision to centralise the funds would weaken the fight against COVID-19.

5 soldiers killed in close range shootout: Army

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR

Five soldiers and an equal number of militants were killed in the four-day long "intense gunfight in a snow-bound area" along the Line of Control (LoC) in the north Kashmir's Kupwara, the Army said on Monday.

"It was an intense hand-to-hand battle in which all five Pakistan-backed terrorists were eliminated. However, the Army lost five of its best soldiers, three on the site and two more as they were being airlifted to a nearby military hospital," a Srinagar-based Army spokesman said.

Sources said the foot-steps on snow were first reported in the morning on April 1 in an inaccessible pocket of the Keran Sector. Due to the rough terrain and inclement weather, the terrorists could not be engaged, sources added.

The combing operation started again on April 4 and contact with the militants was established on April 5 morning.

A squad walked over a cornice and fell into a nallah, putting them face to face with the armed militants. "It was a close quarter battle at virtually point blank range. The remains of the soldiers and terrorists were found within two to three metres of each other," sources said.

Tablighi Jamaat could have called off event: RSS

Joint general secretary Manmohan Vaidya lauds government's handling of the pandemic so far

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

RSS joint general secretary Manmohan Vaidya on Monday said the Tablighi Jamaat could have responded to government orders on not having public gatherings "sensibly" and that the organisation now stood exposed even among Muslims, as "figures tell the truth."

Mr. Vaidya was referring to the spike in all India figures of COVID-19 patients due to a linkage with the Tablighi Jamaat conference in New Delhi in March and the subsequent travel of its preachers across the country.

He, however, pointed out that Muslims were helping government officials in tracing the contacts of the members of Tablighi Jamaat which, he said, should be appreciated.

The Health Ministry on Sunday said the rate of doubling of COVID-19 cases was 4.1 days, but if the cases linked to the Tablighi Jamaat event would not have happened, it would have been 7.4 days.

Mr. Vaidya lauded the government's handling of the pandemic so far.



Manmohan Vaidya

which got public support as well," he said.

The RSS workers helped 25.5 lakh people during the lockdown, fed the poor and daily wagers and started a

helpline, the RSS joint general secretary noted.

'No Pratinidhi Sabha'

Citing the RSS's decision to call off the annual meeting of its highest decision-making body - 'Pratinidhi Sabha' in the wake of COVID-19 outbreak - he said the Tablighi Jamaat could have also called off their congregation.

"The RSS cancelled its 'Pratinidhi Sabha' in Bengaluru scheduled to be start from March 15. The Sangh members numbering 1,500 were asked to get off trains or cancel flight tickets. Others who had reached were immediately sent back," he

said. Mr. Vaidya announced that all RSS programmes scheduled till June, including Sangh Shiksha vargs (annual training programmes for its workers) are cancelled for now.

Economic impact

On the question of the economic impact of the 21-day lockdown, he stated that the first priority should be to tackle COVID-19 and save lives.

I am hopeful that the government will take the necessary steps to minimise the impact of the lockdown on the economy, Mr. Vaidya added.

INTERVIEW | SUJATHA RAO

'Class dimension to COVID-19 needs to be understood'

Former Union Health Secretary says the infection has come mainly from those middle-class people who have been abroad and come back to India

NARAYAN LAKSHMAN

K. Sujatha Rao served as Union Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for the Indian government, until 2010, where she was involved in the process for a national policy for use of antibiotics, introducing vaccines in public health, and the first-ever national programme for non-communicable diseases. Her extensive experience in government puts her at the very heart of the debate on the global COVID-19 pandemic, especially questions surrounding system preparedness in India. Edited excerpts:

Do you think that there is a higher risk of infection cases surging in rural areas after the lockdown was announced and large numbers of migrants moved out of the cities?

It is normally believed that since migrants have gone into rural areas, they are likely to be spreading the infection there. If, as the government says the virus hasn't penetrated the community yet, continues to be a locally transmitted infection, and is

very much in a containment phase around hotspots, then the source of infection assumes importance. It has come mainly from those middle-class people who have been abroad and come back to India.

The probability of these middle-class individuals could have had these symptoms and the infection intermingling with informal workers suggests a class dimension to this infection that needs to be understood.

Regarding India's preparedness in terms of public health infrastructure, especially in rural areas, how ready are we to deal with cases there?

The answer depends on how many people get infected. Whatever the number be – and not just in rural but also in urban areas – the health system will be overwhelmed. I don't think we can handle a big number of critical cases even in the urban, metro areas. We don't have that infrastructure.

There is also a substitution effect going on. That means, if there are many people coming in, the rooms must be vacated, and isolation wards set up.

It is not that we have spare capacity in our government or private hospitals – we are substituting other patients,



Whatever the number be – and not just in rural but also in urban areas – the health system will be overwhelmed

people who have come in for elective surgery, and non-serious cases.

In rural areas, the PHCs cannot handle such stress. It requires massive training and information dissemination to tell each healthcare

worker and doctor what protective measures to take.

The concern is that if we are looking at a large total number of cases, even 5-10% of that total as hospitalisation cases overwhelm whatever health infrastructure is available. In that context, has the government's preparedness moved in tandem with the disease?

There are two levels of preparedness. One is to get the health infrastructure into shape, and that is exactly what the public health systems at the Central and State levels are focusing on right now, during the lockdown period. In fact, part of the rationale for the lockdown was to pause and take time out to sort out the infrastructure challenges, in case of a surge. That is the reason why the

government has now placed orders for ventilators and PPEs.

In places like the well-known Gangaram Hospital in New Delhi, 110 doctors are already in quarantine. We cannot afford to have the few doctors and nurses that we have, who can give the kind of specialised treatment that the Coronavirus infection necessitates, to get infected and be sent off into quarantine.

Another important dimension is testing, which should be our focus right now. This is a race against time to stop the transmission, so they need to test madly. Rapid-test kits are coming but they only test antibodies, which it can only show a person's infection after the seventh day. I also believe the tests should be made free. It is ridiculous to price the test at Rs.4,500 at a time when testing is the only

positive solution for checking this epidemic.

Do we have a broader pandemic preparedness policy in terms of procurement of excess capacity in ventilators, ICU beds, to deploy in a future pandemic?

No, not at all. There have been reports that at a meeting attended by NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant, it was said that potentially up to 30,000 ventilators may be lying dysfunctional across the country. We are not even keeping the few that we have in good working order. What is the disaster management authority doing? We have our act together for tsunamis and cyclones, as we have seen in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. But we never really thought about a disease spreading on this scale.

This is not the first instance of a disease of this virulence coming out of China in particular – there was SARS too. Do you think the lessons will be learned to better tackle future outbreaks?

In India, we have seen SARS, bird flu, swine flu, and traces of Zika, over the past decade or so. But health is given such low priority among the political and development agendas, that even this government, which has emphasised the importance of health, has focused more on Ayushman Bharat and on non-communicable diseases.

I'm hoping that this outbreak will carry some lessons to our political leadership in creating a Department of Public Health, in focusing on surveillance, epidemiology, biostatistics and other crucial public health disciplines.

IN BRIEF



Some parties spreading misinformation: Mamata

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday said that Information Technology cell of certain political parties was spreading misinformation on the State government's attempts to contain the outbreak of COVID-19. "This is not the time to joke or indulge in politics... the IT cell of certain political parties is spreading fake news using the official bulletin of health department," she said.

K.C. Venugopal writes to Health Minister for PPEs

Senior Congress leader and party general secretary K.C. Venugopal on Monday wrote to Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan to demand urgent intervention from the Centre in ensuring Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to the doctors, nurses and health workers who are in the frontline in the battle against the novel coronavirus or COVID-19. The emergence of hospitals in Delhi and Mumbai as clusters of transmission is a pointer to the 'alarming' shortage of the PPE for health workers, Mr. Venugopal noted.

'Ramayan brought back DD to the centre stage'

Amid widespread criticism for re-tecast of epics *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* in the time of countrywide lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic, Prasar Bharati CEO Shashi Shekhar Vempati has said the decision to pull these and other old Doordarshan serials was taken six months ago and the re-tecast had brought back brand Doordarshan to the centre stage.

Bhopal records first coronavirus death

Bhopal registered its first COVID-19-related death on Monday morning after a man succumbed to the illness while undergoing treatment at a hospital. "He tested positive on Sunday and was admitted to a private hospital earlier," said Sudhir Dehariya, Bhopal Chief Medical and Health Officer. In addition, five officials of the Health Department tested positive for the disease on the same day. They were already confined in quarantine, he added. With this, the city's tally touched 45.

ICMR to get 10 lakh RT-PCR testing kits

136 government and 56 private laboratories can handle 18,000 tests a day, says Council

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN
NEW DELHI

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) said on Monday that it was procuring 10 lakh reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) kits used for COVID-19 diagnosis. Seven depots have been established for uninterrupted supply of reagents across the nation for efficient distribution to government testing laboratories, it added.

Addressing the Union Health Ministry's daily press briefing, the ICMR's Head of Epidemiology and Communicable Diseases, R. Gangakhedkar, said the existing 136 government laboratories and 56 private laboratories had a testing capacity of 18,000 tests a day.

"If the labs start working in two shifts, testing capacity will go up to 25,000 but more important is to choose who you are testing," Dr. Gangakhedkar said.

1.7 lakh PPEs from China to ease shortage

Gear to go to States with higher cases

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Supply lines from abroad opened up on Monday with the receipt of 1.7 lakh Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) coveralls donated from China, the Union Health Ministry said.

"Along with domestic supplies of 20,000 coveralls, a total of 1.9 lakh coveralls will now be distributed to hospitals and will add to the 3,87,473 PPEs already available in the country as of now. A total of 2.94 lakh PPE coveralls have been arranged and supplied so far," the Ministry said.

The Health Ministry noted that in addition, two lakh domestically produced N95 masks are also being sent to various hospitals.

A major part of the fresh protective equipment is being sent to States with comparatively higher number of cases including Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Delhi, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Rajasthan. Supplies are also being sent to central institutions like AIIMS, Safdarjung and RML hospitals etc.



Testing times: Health workers collecting samples for testing from the residents of Bhatwadi in Mumbai. • P. SRUJITHI

The ICMR has prepared a data portal for streamlining the data collection from all the laboratories on a real-time basis, he added.

Constant vigil

"The ICMR has a constant vigil on the national testing strategy in line with the current trend of the outbreak. RT-PCR is the gold standard testing method for SARS-CoV-2 diagnosis and is in

place in all the laboratories for diagnosing the disease," he said. Giving details of how ICMR is preparing for worst-case scenario, a press release said interventions were being actively considered to scale up testing capacity to one lakh tests a day in the coming months.

"ICMR is now considering scaling-up interventions such as moving to 24x7 working model at existing labs,

coordinating with states to increase manpower for various functions including data-entry, redefining automated and manual RT-PCR machines already in the country to aid COVID-19 testing effort, and optimising in-lab processes such as RNA extraction to reduce turnaround time between sample receipt and testing," the release added.

The ICMR has developed guidelines ranging from preparation of network of government and private laboratories to ensure efficient validation/evaluation of new diagnostic kits.

"ICMR has validated Truenat beta CoV test on Truelab workstation as a screening test. All positives through this platform will need to be reconfirmed by confirmatory assays for SARS-CoV-2," the release said.

"We have recommended the empiric use of hydroxy-chloroquine for prophylaxis of SARS-CoV-2 infection in both asymptomatic healthcare workers involved in the care of suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19 and asymptomatic household contacts of confirmed COVID-19 cases," Dr. Gangakhedkar said.

New RT-PCR kits are being validated by four ICMR institutes for their use. "Till now, 19 non-U.S. FDA EUA/CE IVD real-time RT-PCR kits have been validated of which five have been recommended based on 100% concordance with positive and negative samples. The recommendations have been shared with the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) for taking it forward," a release from the ICMR said.

32 officials infected as virus hits M.P. Health Department

State grapples to locate the source of the outbreak

SIDHARTH YADAV
BHOPAL

The Madhya Pradesh Directorate of Health Services is floundering to locate the source of the COVID-19 outbreak in its office building which had infected 32 employees, from the senior-most officials to personal assistants and peons, in the past five days. This makes up the largest chunk of the 62 patients in Bhopal.

On Sunday and Monday, 29 of the 44 who had tested positive for the virus were Health officials, including doctors. Currently, every second patient in the capital belongs to the Department. Whereas 20 patients were members of the Tablighi Jamaat in Bhopal, five belong to the police.

"We don't know the source yet," said Sapna M. Lovanshi, Additional Director of the Directorate. "We have not been able to secure any information on it so far."

The infected included the Principal Secretary of the State Public Health and Family Welfare Department,



Safety first: A police official standing inside a mist disinfection tunnel in Bhopal on Monday. • PTI

Deputy Directors, Additional Directors and even class-4 employees, she added. "Almost all the employees at the Directorate had had direct contact with at least one of the infected officials," she said.

At a time when the mortality rate due to the disease hovered around 6% in the State, one of the worst in the country, the Additional Director who is tasked with implementing strategies to combat the outbreak State-wide, the Managing Director of the Madhya Pradesh Public Health Services Corporation Limited, also the State Ayushman Bharat Yojana

CEO, tasked with procuring drugs and instruments, the Joint Director tasked with managing hospitals and the Additional Director in charge of managing manpower, have all been infected.

"An official, who returned from Indore after meeting his wife there is suspected of being the source. But this is yet to be established," said a Deputy Director.

The government is preparing a list of second-line officials as a contingency plan. "Even the Health Commissioner has kept replacements ready if the need be," he added.

Govt. shifts to 'large outbreak containment'

Three-tier protocol listed by Ministry

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

With just over a week left of the 21-day COVID-19 containment lockdown, the Union Health Ministry said on Monday that India has now stepped out of the local transmission phase and moved into the "large outbreaks amenable to containment phase".

With a current case doubling rate of 96 hours and the infection having spread to nearly 300 of the 736 districts across the country, the protocol now followed has been set out in the Union Health Ministry's recently released document "Containment plan for large outbreaks".

This includes "re-defining the area of operation, active surveillance for cases and contacts in the identified geographic zone, expanding laboratory capacity for testing all suspect cases, high risk contacts and SARI cases, operationalize surge capacities created for isolation (COVID-19 hospitals/COVID-19 dedicated blocks) to hospitalise and manage all suspect / confirmed cases."

The other measures under the protocol include implementation of social distancing measures with strict perimeter control, providing chemoprophylaxis with hydroxy-chloroquine to asymptomatic healthcare workers and asymptomatic household contacts of laboratory confirmed cases and the further intensification of risk communication through audio, social and visual media.

As per the surge capacity recommendation, the government is empowered to



Workers sanitising a locality in Delhi on Monday. • PTI

enhance capacity and bring in private hospitals and augment laboratory testing capacity, notes the 20-page document.

Anticipating about 15% of the patients are likely to require hospitalisation, and an additional 5% will require ventilator management, the Centre has planned a three-tier arrangement for managing suspect and confirmed cases which is now being implemented to decrease burden on the COVID blocks and hospitals. "The mild cases will be kept in temporary makeshift hospital facilities, moderate to severe cases who require monitoring of their clinical status will be admitted to COVID hospitals. Some of the severe cases may progress to respiratory failure and/or progress to multi-organ failure and hence critical care facility/dialysis facility etc shall be required," a senior health official said. The Ministry is also looking at scaling down operations "if no secondary laboratory confirmed COVID-19 case is reported from the geographic quarantine zone for at least four weeks after the last confirmed test has been isolated and all his contacts have been followed up for 28 days."

40,000 isolation beds ready, says Railways

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Railways on Monday said it has converted 2,500 of its coaches – part of its initial target of at least 5,000 – into isolation wards.

"In times of a lockdown when manpower resources are limited and have to be rationalised and rotated, the zones have almost done an

impossible task of so many conversions in such a small span of time," the Railways said in a statement.

The Railways now has 40,000 isolation beds ready for contingency.

"On an average, 375 coaches are being converted in a day. The work is being carried out at 133 locations," it said.

Army likely to take over screening at Narela

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Army on Monday said it was actively considering a request to take over the medical screening at the Narela quarantine camp run by the Home Ministry.

"It is clarified that there is no increase in strength of Army medical personnel at Narela camp as of now. Request to take

over only the medical screening set up at the camp has been received. The request is under process," the Army said.

In the first instance of Army doctors being deployed to help civil administration within the country to help tackle the COVID-19 outbreak, an Army medical team, including two doctors and two nursing assistants, was

deployed at the Narela camp at the end of last week. Prior to this, Army medical teams were deployed only at services-run quarantine centres.

Separately, the Defence Ministry said in a tweet that a "Medical team of four doctors, eight nursing assistants and seven security personnel [have been] deployed at Narela quarantine camp."

APTS ANDHRA PRADESH TECHNOLOGY SERVICES (APTS)

Tender call notice for Identification of Service Provider for Facility Management Services (FMS) and Maintenance Services (MS) for Computer Hardware and other peripherals for AP Secretariat Campus Area Network (APSCAN) at Interim Govt. Complex, Velagapudi, Andhra Pradesh (A.P.)

Time Schedule of various tender related events :

| | |
|---|-----------------------|
| Bid calling date | 07-04-2020 |
| Pre-bid conference date / time | No Pre-bid meeting |
| Last date / time for clarifications by mail | 14-04-2020 |
| Issue of clarifications on RFP | 18-04-2020 |
| Bid Submission closing date / time | 27-04-2020, 03-00 PM |
| Bid Document Fee | Rs. 25,000/- (Online) |

APTS Contact person: Mr. Sreedhar Reddy, Manager (IP & Proc-3)
Mob- 99630 29412, Mail-ID- sreedharreddy.a@gov.in

Reference No: ITCS1-180212/2019-IP-APTS
(Computer No. : 1051216)

If your firm is interested in participation, please ask the contact person for details or visit our web site at <http://www.apts.gov.in> or www.approcurement.gov.in. The document is to be purchased by firms for participation.

Sd/- Managing Director, A.P. Technology Services Ltd.

GOVERNMENT OF TAMILNADU / WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT

PALAR BASIN CIRCLE, CHEPAUK, CHENNAI - 5.

Tender Notice No. 10 PBC / 2019-20 / Dt. 27.03.2020

CORRIGENDUM

Due to Administrative Reasons, the receiving date of Tenders called for in Notice No. 09 PBC / 2019 - 20 / Dated 20.03.2020 is **Postponed upto 3.00 P.M. on 17.04.2020** and the tenders will be opened at **3.30 P.M.** at his chamber on the same day.

Other conditions remain unaltered in tender notice.

Superintending Engineer, WRD.,
Palar Basin Circle, Chennai - 5.

DIPR/1595/Tender/2020

Hydro power regulated to support lights out

The exercise showed that the Indian grid could handle large load changes if done in a planned way

M. KALYANARAMAN
CHENNAI

The total reduction in all-India demand during the lights out at 9 p.m. on Sunday was 31,089 MW, which is more than 25% of the demand on a typical Sunday, according to the Power System Operation Corporation Limited (POSOCO). The lowest demand recorded was 85,799 MW at 9.10 p.m. after which the demand started picking up and settled at 1,14,400 MW at 10.10 p.m. Grid frequencies varied from 50.26 Hz to 49.70 Hz. In the run-up to the event, POSOCO had expected a demand variation of 12,000 MW to 14,000 MW over a shorter period of time.

POSOCO data showed re-

gional variations in the demand dip from 8.45 p.m. to 9.10 p.m. The dip was 30% in the northern region, 32% in western region, 17% in the south, 39% in the east and 40% in the north-east.

Demand variations

Just as the power managers had planned, the generation from hydro power plants toed the dip and surge pattern of lighting loads. Hydro generation was maximised by 8.45 p.m. to 25,559 MW. From then it was reduced to 8,016 MW at 9.10 p.m. This meant the 75% reduction in hydro generation achieved in 25 minutes took on the bulk of demand variations. Simultaneously, a reduction of 10,950 MW was achieved



Smooth transmission: Data showed regional variations in the demand dip from 8:45 p.m. to 9:10 p.m. • B. VELANKANNI RAJ

through thermal (6,992 MW), gas (1,951 MW), and wind (2,007 MW) between 8.45 p.m. and 9.10 p.m.

Advance actions such as switching off transmission

lines and taking reactors in service were undertaken to keep voltages and line loads within permissible limits, POSOCO said in a release, adding that the event was managed smoothly without any untoward incident.

Hydro and gas-powered plants can support fast changes in load. Gas turbines can ramp up or ramp down rather quickly and, world over, they are often used to support the grid supplied with fluctuating wind power. Similarly, water can be stored in dams and reservoirs and can be released in a planned manner to achieve a sharp increase or decrease in hydro power. Coal plants have a more limited ability to handle sharp load variations. Nuclear plants even lesser.

On Sunday, the changes in load, though swift, happened over a more prolonged period of time than the 2 to 4 minutes expected by power managers. The coming back to normal took longer, probably indicating that people eased out of the lights out more gradually than expected. They took longer to switch on their house lights, likely spending more time on rooftops and balconies.

The exercise showed that the Indian grid could handle large load changes if done in a planned way. Blackouts are a different matter and typically happen unplanned. Blackouts at one place can spread to other places when power plants that are not designed to take sharp load changes are forced to take those changes.

(The author is an independent journalist)

Brazil seeks lifting of curbs on drug

More nations make the demand

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI



Jair Bolsonaro

A day after U.S. President Donald Trump said he spoke to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the issue, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro announced that he had also requested India to allow the supply of the drug hydroxychloroquine (HCQ), now being used as a possible treatment for the coronavirus or COVID-19.

As requests to supply the drug pile up from other countries as well, officials said the government may consider its notification on Saturday that banned all exports of the drug.

The External Affairs Ministry declined comment, but an official who asked not to be named, said the Ministry was "hopeful" that the Health Ministry and the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) that put out the notification (01/2015-20), would revoke the ban on a "case-by-case basis" for more than two dozen countries that have requested supplies at the "highest level" in the past few days.

Industry groups have also appealed to the government to reconsider the ban.

"We have given an assurance that the domestic consumption will be looked after first, but after that we should consider the needs of other countries too. After all, India's reputation as the pharmacy of the world is built on our ability to manufacture these medicines that are much needed. We must think of that as well as the commitments we have given other countries," Ashok Madan, the Executive Director of the Indian Drug Manufacturers Association (IDMA), told *The Hindu*. He added that the industry has enough stocks for both

domestic needs and international requirements as of now.

However, advocacy groups are warning that the government must not overlook the possibility of an "escalation" in domestic demand, and point out that the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has added HCQ to its protocol for all health workers. "If they remove restrictions on export now, we could face a shortage internally...Even if it isn't a certified cure, it is being used as a prophylaxis by our doctors; we must think of them," said Malini Aisola of the All India Drug Action Network.

Industry sources said that last month, the U.S., Brazil, neighbouring SAARC and European Union countries had placed advance orders for the drug, which is made by only a few Indian companies, most notably IPCA and Zydus Cadila.

In addition to its possible use for in the current COVID-19 pandemic, HCQ is anti-malarial drug, which is also used by patients of lupus and rheumatoid arthritis in India.

Another worry is that the essential ingredients for HCQ come from China, and any disruption in supply or increase in cost of those will also reduce India's manufacturing capacity of the drug.

Restrictions on court hearings lawful: SC

Court invokes special powers under Article 142, says steps in tune with 'social distancing norms'

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday deemed all restrictions imposed on people from entering, attending or taking part in court hearings as lawful in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A Bench led by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde said these restrictions were in tune with the social distancing norms and best public health practices advocated to contain the contagion.

'Matter of duty'

The court invoked its extraordinary constitutional powers under Article 142 to step away from the convention of open court hearings. The open court system ensures transparency in administration of justice.

"Every individual and in-

stitution is expected to cooperate in the implementation of measures designed to reduce the transmission of the virus. The scaling down of conventional operations within the precincts of courts is a measure in that direction... it is necessary that courts at all levels respond to the call of social distancing and ensure that court premises do not contribute to the spread of virus. This is not a matter of discretion but of duty," a three-judge Bench led by the CJI observed in a seven-page order.

The court made it clear that public health takes precedence over conventions. Judiciary would have to improvise and continue to bank heavily on "videoconferencing technologies" in the wake of this "unprecedented and extraordinary outbreak of a pandemic".



"Access to justice is fundamental to preserve the rule of law in the democracy envisaged by the Constitution of India. The challenges occasioned by the outbreak of COVID-19 have to be addressed while preserving the constitutional commitment to ensuring the delivery of and access to justice to those who seek it... Indian courts have been proactive in embracing advancement in technology in judicial pro-

ceedings," the order said. Open court hearings would mean a congregation of large number of people. This would prove detrimental to the fight against the virus.

In the past few days, the SC and the High Courts had stopped open court hearings. Cases were heard via videoconferencing to ensure social distancing. The Supreme Court premises was completely shutdown.

Videoconferencing

The CJI Bench assembled on Monday to suo motu streamline the videoconferencing guidelines for courts. In a series of directions, the apex court allowed the High Courts to decide the modalities for the temporary transition to the use of videoconferencing technologies in their respective States. District

courts in each State would adopt the mode of videoconferencing prescribed by the respective High Courts. Helplines would be set up to receive and rectify technical complaints.

The courts should make available videoconferencing facility for litigants who do not have it or appoint an amicus curiae.

Until appropriate rules are framed by the High Courts, videoconferencing should be employed for hearing arguments. "In no case shall evidence be recorded without the mutual consent of both the parties by videoconferencing. If it is necessary to record evidence in a courtroom, the presiding officer shall ensure that appropriate distance is maintained between any two individuals in the court," the apex court order said.

Plea filed in SC over reports on Jamaat

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A writ petition was filed on Monday in the Supreme Court by the Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind for a direction to the Centre to stop the media from communalising the Tablighi Jamaat incident, which is allegedly linked to the spread of COVID-19.

The plea said certain sections of the print and electronic media are spreading bigotry and communal hatred in relation to the Tablighi Jamaat conference held in the Nizamuddin Markaz area. The plea, filed through advocate Ejaz Maqbool, sought a direction to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to identify and take action against sections of the media, who are communalising the Nizamuddin Markaz issue.

IN BRIEF



'Allow digital self-KYC for new SIM cards'

NEW DELHI

The telecom firms have written to the government to allow a digital self-KYC process for issuing SIM cards to eliminate the need of physical visit to the stores. As per the suggested format, customers need to furnish details such as name, date of birth and address and provide proof of identity and address. They may also be required to record or read out a short video.

Kolkata police arrest 98 for bursting crackers

KOLKATA

The Kolkata police have arrested 98 people in the city for bursting crackers on Sunday night following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's '9 p.m., 9 minutes' appeal. Bursting of crackers was in violation of the lockdown, an official said. In the past 48 hours, 706 people have been arrested for violating the lockdown.

'42% of labourers don't have a day's rations left'

NEW DELHI

A survey of migrant workers in north and central India has found that 42% of labourers did not even have a day's worth of rations left and that 90% had lost their only source of income over the past three weeks. NGO Jan Sahas' report said that of the 3,196 construction workers, 90% reported job losses and 33% said they were stuck in the cities they had moved to.

Lockdown delays assets' seizure in graft cases

NEW DELHI

The process of attaching assets worth hundreds of crores in money laundering cases has slowed down due to the COVID-19 lockdown. The Enforcement Directorate is in the process of initiating attachment of over a dozen properties of Rana Kapoor, the former promoter-director of Yes Bank.

Smart Cities' command centres turn into war rooms

Focus is on CCTV surveillance, traffic management

DAMINI NATH
NEW DELHI

Municipalities implementing the Smart Cities Mission have started using their Integrated Command and Control Centres (ICCCs) as "war rooms" for COVID-19 response, including carrying out CCTV surveillance of public spaces, using heat maps to set up virus containment zones and real-time tracking of ambulances.

Senior officials of the Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry, which oversees the Smart Cities Mission, have been coordinating the efforts of the cities, an official said. Of the 100 municipalities in the Smart Cities Mission, the ICCCs of 45 cities are "online" or operational, another official said.

The ICCCs set up under the Mission are meant to coordinate traffic management, surveillance, utilities



War rooms are taking steps such as CCTV surveillance of public places. • ISTOCKPHOTO

and grievance redressal. Now, they are being used as a part of the government's response to the coronavirus pandemic, the official said.

Virtual training

"As COVID-19 war rooms, the ICCCs are implementing initiatives such as CCTV surveillance of public places, GIS mapping of COVID-positive cases, GPS tracking of healthcare workers, predictive analytics (heat maps) for virus containment across different zones of the city,

virtual training to doctors and healthcare professionals, real-time tracking of ambulances and disinfection services and medical services through videoconferencing, tele-counselling and tele-medicine," a statement from the Ministry said.

For example, Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry secretary Durga Shanker Mishra said in a tweet, Varanasi was using its ICCC as a war room for "24/7 surveillance, tracking and for making important announcements across the city."

The Pune Smart City Development Corporation Limited and the Pune Municipal Corporation had come together to develop an integrated data dashboard to map COVID-19 cases using geo-spatial systems. They then started monitoring the areas around the infected people and setting up buffer zones, it said.

Priyanka demands more testing

An opportunity for people to put up a united fight: Rahul

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Monday asked prominent people to raise their voice to demand more testing for coronavirus, while her brother and former party chief Rahul Gandhi said the pandemic also offered an opportunity to people to put aside their differences and fight as one.

"The #Coronavirus is an opportunity for India to unite as one people, putting aside differences of religion, caste & class; to forge one common purpose: the defeat of this deadly virus. Compassion, empathy& self



Priyanka Gandhi Vadra

sacrifice are central to this idea. Together we will win this battle," he tweeted.

The tweet comes a day after the Union government said the number of COVID-19 positive cases doubled in 4.1 days after the Tablighi Ja-

maat event.

In a two-and-half minute video message posted on twitter, Ms. Vadra said the only way to prevent the infection of coronavirus was through more and more testing.

"Testing not only enables us to determine who has the coronavirus, it also gives us the extremely valuable information about the severity of the disease, disease clusters and th areas that need to be isolated," she said.

She appealed to political leaders, party workers, media, scientists and celebrities "to raise their voice and convince our government to increase testing now".

THE HINDU GROUP

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INTERVIEW | JAIRAM RAMESH

'A second Budget may be required to deal with COVID-19 aftermath'

Public investment will be key to the extent and speed of recovery from the impact of the lockdown, says the economist and senior Congress leader

SANDEEP PHUKAN

A day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi reached out to Opposition leaders, including former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Congress chief Sonia Gandhi, senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said Mr. Modi should have taken the initiative earlier. Mr. Ramesh said the government would now have to completely rework the Budget numbers to deal with the aftermath of the lockdown.

The Congress Working Committee pledged "unstinted support" to the government, but some of your colleagues have called Prime Minister Narendra Modi a showman and a "Photo-Op PM". Is there confusion among leaders on their approach to the government?

Absolutely not. There is neither confusion nor contradiction. The Congress's support to the Union government, as it leads the national campaign to deal with this truly unprecedented situation, has been, and will continue to be, unstinting and unqualified.

The Congress leadership has written to the Prime Minister, giving a number of very constructive suggestions, especially to deal with the consequences of the lockdown. The Congress Chief Ministers too have done the same. The CWC resolution too is in the spirit of constructive engagement. But

the fact remains that it took the Prime Minister 13 days to have a conversation with the Congress president and leaders of other political parties. He should have done this on the night of March 22.

The manner in which Parliament was allowed to continue till the Kamal Nath government fell in Bhopal was absolutely cynical. The Prime Minister has not seen it fit to respond to the suggestions made by the Congress leadership and CMs. Even so, I think this is not the time for political grandstanding and one-upmanship by anyone, even though our Prime Minister has done so by needlessly undercutting the existing Prime Minister's Relief Fund by setting up a parallel PM-CARES, as if nobody else cares, and his taali bajao, diya jalao call that subverts the very spirit of a scientific temper and is a distraction, even though it may well have a cultural resonance. And don't forget that in the midst of the crisis, the government not-



The PM has a special responsibility in reaching out and creating a more collegial political environment

down has caused across the country and just see the millions upon millions of livelihoods lost all of a sudden. What I personally find completely disgusting is that the government can spend time, energy and money evacuating Indians from abroad but is insensitive to the plight of migrant workers within the country. This will have very adverse long-term consequences and may even lead to stigmatisation.

In a democracy of our size (1.3 billion people), it is difficult to keep people under a lockdown for three weeks. Would you not acknowledge that Mr. Modi has managed to do this with reasonable success?

It is the people of our country who have to be congratulated, if congratulations are due. Just see the economic and social havoc the un-planned and sudden lock-

down has caused across the country and just see the millions upon millions of livelihoods lost all of a sudden. What I personally find completely disgusting is that the government can spend time, energy and money evacuating Indians from abroad but is insensitive to the plight of migrant workers within the country. This will have very adverse long-term consequences and may even lead to stigmatisation.

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Online learning out of reach for many

Lockdown exacerbates consequences of digital divide for poor students and those in rural areas

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ
NEW DELHI

For 10-year-old Yash, the lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is exposing the divide between him and his peers. His classmates at Apeejay School, Panchsheel Park, are beginning their new academic year through online classes, logging into a school portal on laptops and tablets.

In the two-room home that Yash shares with his widowed mother and elder brother Karthik in Jagdamba Camp, a basti near Sheikh Sarai, Yash knows there is no money for such devices.

"They are starting online classes through Zoom because we cannot go to school. The school has told us how to log in to the portal, there is a password. But I don't have any way to take part. My mother doesn't even have a smartphone," says the Class 5 student who was admitted to the prestigious private school under the quota for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS).

Since his father died two years ago, the family has been dependent on his mother Santosh's widow pension of ₹2,500 a month



Growing gap: Most edtech products are built with middle and higher income families in mind. ■ AFP

and the goodwill of relatives. "Because of this lockdown, the rest of the family is also facing financial hardship, so I feel guilty for depending on them. When I am worrying about their food, I cannot even afford to charge my phone," says Santosh.

"Normally, because they are EWS students, their fees and uniform is taken care of, but there is always some extra expense, some project or function, and I manage to pay for it. But now, I can't even give them an education because it has gone online," she says.

EWS quota students may be facing the starkest conse-

quences of the digital divide, at a time when many schools are into some form of distance education.

Innovating content
Students in government schools and rural students without access to the slew of new education apps are also at a disadvantage.

The Central and State governments have announced that lessons will be taught on television and radio, but some NGOs and educational technology firms are looking for innovations that will also bring online content into poorer homes.

"We need to rethink how

to reach children in ways that are equitable. The whole nature of education is surely going to change due to COVID-19 and we need to find new modes of delivery," says Sourav Banerjee, country director of Room to Read.

He says the rise in smartphone penetration means that good tech resources could actually help level the playing field if it were not for poor connectivity in many parts of rural India.

"It's much easier for people to access WhatsApp than a portal or a website, so we need to develop content that can be pushed through that medium," he suggested. Room to Read, which works with over 9,000 government schools, has created content for parents, who are key to education now that teachers are inaccessible.

The NGO Pratham has created small neighbourhood groups in 5,000 villages and distributed tablets with its Anganshala app to encourage students to self-learn during the lockdown.

"Learning without teachers may also mean recruiting community volunteers to teach children in small

groups using online resources," says Pratham co-founder and president Madhav Chavan.

Hindi apps
Central Square Foundation (CSF), which focuses on foundational literacy and numeracy for young children aged 3-8, has also created a Hindi language app aimed at low income parents, and is working with the governments of Madhya Pradesh, Haryana and Chhattisgarh to launch it across those States.

The organisation is also working to improve content on the Centre's Diksha app, in association with Google.org.

"More than 90% of the edtech products in the market are built with middle and higher income families in mind. So even if those products are being made available for free during the lockdown, they are not contextualised for a poorer or rural audience," says Gouri Gupta, CSF director. "For example, if you explain fractions using the slices of a pizza, that is simply not accessible for those who have never eaten pizza."

Migrant workers in Haryana worry about rent and wages

Most of them have had cuts in pay during the lockdown

AMIT BARUAH
ASHOK KUMAR
KASAN

Most workers who lived in Kasan village, which abuts the Manesar industrial township in Haryana, have left for home. Only those from Bihar remain. It would take far too long to walk to their villages in Bihar. Their colleagues from Uttar Pradesh were luckier as their homes were closer.

The Maruti factory is about a kilometre away.

Many of them live in rows of rooms, akin to "lines" in tea gardens, a colonial gift to India's working people. Open drains surround their tiny rooms, occupied by three or four people. Flies are constant companions.

The rooms have a chatai (mat), some clothes, knapsacks, similar to those carried by the lakhs of migrant workers who foot-marched their way home after the March 24 lockdown, dot the rooms. All look similar - the rooms and their belongings.

Kundan Kumar Mahto, clad in shorts and vest and wearing a mask of sorts, is



Migrant labourers and their families at Kasan village in Haryana. ■ SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

from Saran district in Bihar. "I have a stark choice... either I starve here, or in my village. We don't know whether we will get our jobs back once the lockdown lifts."

Mr. Mahto has been paid ₹6,100, instead of the monthly ₹9,025 he makes working for a contractor who supplies workers for an online shopping firm. "My wages since March 23 have been cut. I won't be paid till April 14 at least. God knows what will happen after that," he tells *The Hindu*.

Amit Kumar is from Chhapra, also in Bihar. "I would have gone home had there been any transport available." Mr. Kumar is also waiting for the lockdown to end.

Another group of workers, mostly working in garment units, fear the lockdown would be extended further. "It is better if the government sends us to our native villages," said Ramesh, 47.

Many workers said they get the minimum wage paid by the Haryana government. If the company pays the contractor, only then will he release our wages, several of them said.

Mr. Mahto and other workers in Kasan said they cooked separately earlier, but now started a community kitchen. "It saves time and resources. We have been provided some ration by the Workers Unity, a YouTube channel. For vegetables, we pool the money," said Krishan.

Shivaji, who works with an automotive company, said he tried to return to his village in Bihar last Sunday, but the police had sealed the borders by then. The 23-year-old said he worked for 16 days, but was paid only for eight days. "Only ₹3,900 has been credited to my salary account," he said.

Another group of workers, mostly working in garment units, fear the lockdown would be extended further.

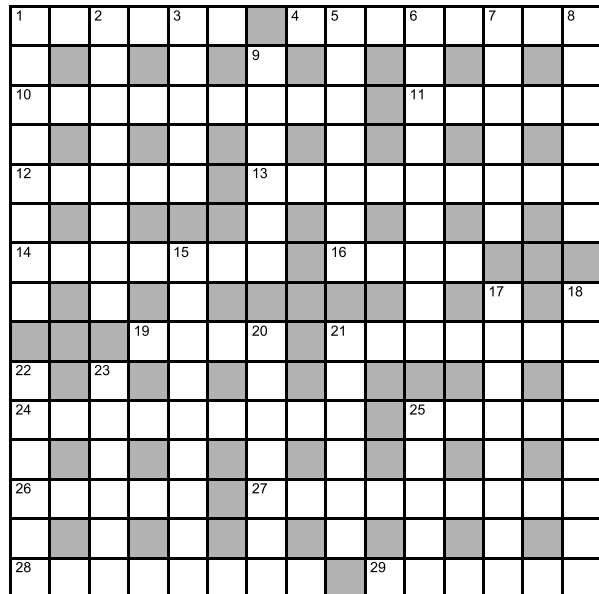
"It is better if the government sends us to our native villages," said Ramesh, 47.

Many workers said they get the minimum wage paid by the Haryana government. If the company pays the contractor, only then will he release our wages, several of them said.

Their future is locked in with the lockdown.

THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12903

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(set by Sunnet)

- 12 Glorify old bunch? That's retrograde (5)
- 13 Once again took over vandalized depot after study (9)
- 14 Scales rail to obtain a quiet room perhaps (7)
- 16 Spare doctor again (4)
- 19 Road's birds (4)
- 21 Some men toil to carry a trophy (7)
- 24 Insurance company's directions to recognize some specific permit holders (9)
- 25 Snake coils around man's tea (5)
- 26 Greek character takes help of Indian poet (5)
- 27 Expert gets to unknown information officer from the east regarding early life (9)
- 28 Wanted suspended reed to be redesigned (8)
- 29 Donkey's rate (6)
- 30 Stiff on the French tower (7)
- 31 It brings good luck to men on racetrack (6)
- 32 Quail's Florida measure (6)
- 33 Energy of irradiated cation (6)
- 35 Works and schedules (5)
- 3 New number by Dizzy Love (5)
- 5 Engineer admires a weapon (7)
- 6 Cable tuner's weight (9)
- 7 Indian caves in a month to the volunteer army (6)
- 8 He finally secures antelopes (6)
- 9 Quantity we hand in to get a keyboard (6)
- 15 Hazardous undertaking manufacturing urea around Germany's empty (9)
- 17 Place a ruler on East-North-East to cross North perhaps (8)
- 18 Love stories of eternal city with a church in two corners (8)

DOWN

- 1 Fiddle duly ends and from out of nowhere... (8)
- 2 Metro to try pushing ahead with experimental container (4,4)

SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

| Solution to puzzle 12902 | | | | | | | | | Solution to yesterday's Sudoku | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| S | H | P | G | A | A | | | | 9 | 4 | 7 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 6 | 8 | 3 |
| L | B | L | F | A | U | A | | | 1 | 8 | 2 | 7 | 6 | 3 | 9 | 4 | 5 |
| R | A | N | C | I | E | L | O | C | 6 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 8 | 9 | 7 | 1 | 2 |
| V | R | E | A | O | E | N | | | 3 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 8 | 7 | 9 |
| F | E | T | A | D | O | M | I | N | 8 | 6 | 9 | 3 | 2 | 7 | 1 | 5 | 4 |
| R | W | E | B | D | | | | | 7 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 9 | 8 | 2 | 3 | 6 |
| K | L | E | P | T | O | M | A | N | 4 | 7 | 6 | 9 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 8 |
| S | H | A | R | L | A | T | A | N | 5 | 1 | 8 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 9 | 7 |
| C | H | A | R | L | A | T | A | N | 2 | 9 | 3 | 8 | 7 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 1 |
| E | A | C | A | T | I | O | N | | | | | | | | | | |
| F | R | E | N | E | T | I | C | P | | | | | | | | | |
| P | E | N | E | T | I | C | P | | | | | | | | | | |
| A | G | E | N | C | Y | S | E | | | | | | | | | | |
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FAITH

Nectar in Kumbakonam

While the Puranic name of the deity in Kumbakonam is Sarangaraja, Azhvars refer to Him fondly as Aravamudhan — the nectar that one never tires of. The deity is housed in a stone structure shaped like a chariot, drawn by elephants and horses. It has two entrances — the Southern and Northern. For six months in a year, one enters through one entrance, and for the rest of the year the other entrance is used. Surya was the recipient of the Lord's anugraha in this kshetra, and hence this arrangement, to mark the movements of the Sun, said V.S. Karunakarachariar in a discourse.

Aravamudhan also has three processional rathas. One of them, a huge one, is believed to have been made by Thirumangai Azhvar. Aravamudhan blessed Surya, and so for the Brahmothsavam performed by Surya, another chariot is used. There is yet another used for the Vasantotsavam. While these are the physically observable chariots, Aravamudhan has the unique distinction of having a chariot of words, composed in His praise by Thirumangai Azhvar. An entire work titled Thiruvazhukootirukkal of Thirumangai Azhvar is in praise of Aravamudhan. And the words in this work come together to form the image of a chariot.

Thirumangai Azhvar had a special affinity for Aravamudhan. This is the first deity to have been sung by him. In commentator Peria Vachan Pillai's ordering of the works of Thirumangai Azhvar, Peria Thirumozhi comes first and Thiruneduntandakam is considered the last of his works. In Thiruneduntandakam, the penultimate verse is in praise of Aravamudhan. Thus, Thirumangai Azhvar, who visited many shrines and prayed the deities therein, began and ended his mangalasarasana with Aravamudhan.

U.S., U.K. face hard time as deaths spike

American official compares the crisis to Pearl Harbor, 9/11 attacks; Britain sees over 600 deaths a day

ASSOCIATED PRESS
LONDON

The U.S. and Britain braced for what could be one of their bleakest weeks in memory on Monday as the human and financial toll of the coronavirus outbreak mounted. But new deaths and infections appeared to be slowing in Italy, Spain and France, suggesting that lockdowns and social distancing are working.

Much of Europe saw glimmers of hope — deaths and new infections appeared to be slowing in much of the three hardest-hit countries, as well as in the Netherlands and Germany. Leaders cautioned, however, that any gains could easily be reversed if people did not continue to adhere to strict social distancing measures and national lockdowns.



Heroes in the battle: People in Barcelona, Spain, playing musical instruments and dancing on their balconies, in support of the country's medical staff, on Sunday. • AP

Ministry reported 637 new deaths, the lowest in 13 days, for a total of over 13,000 dead. New recorded infections were also the lowest in two weeks. Britain reported more than 600 deaths on Sunday, surpassing Italy's daily increase for the second day in a row.

'Rise to the occasion'

In a rare televised address, Queen Elizabeth II appealed to Britons to rise to the occasion, while acknowledging they face enormous disruptions, grief and financial difficulties. Lacking enough for protective gear against the virus, British doctors and nurses were wearing goggles from school science classes, holding their breath when close to patients, and repeatedly reusing single-use masks, Dr. Rinesh Parmar, head of Doctors' Association UK, told Sky News.

Worldwide, more than 1.2 million people have been confirmed infected and over 70,000 have died, according to Johns Hopkins University.

In Washington, U.S. Surgeon General Jerome Adams offered a stark warning about the surge of coronavirus deaths the nation is facing. "This is going to be our Pearl Harbor moment, our 9/11 moment," he told "Fox News Sunday." More than 9,600 people have died of the virus in the U.S., and it leads the world in confirmed infections at more than 3.37 million.

President Donald Trump suggested the hard weeks ahead could foretell the turning of a corner. "We're starting to see light at the end of the tunnel," Mr. Trump claimed at a briefing.

Italy still has, by far, the world's highest coronavirus death toll — almost 16,000 — but the pressure on northern Italy's intensive care units has eased. In Spain, deaths and new infections dropped again on Monday. The Health

Now, China sees rise in asymptomatic cases

REUTERS
BEIJING

Mainland China reported 39 new COVID-19 cases as of Sunday, up from 30 a day earlier, and the number of asymptomatic cases also surged as the government vowed tighter controls at land borders.

The National Health Commission said on Monday that 78 new asymptomatic cases had been identified as of the end of Sunday, compared with 47 the day before.

Imported cases and asymptomatic patients, who show no symptoms but can still pass the virus on, have become China's chief concern after draconian containment measures succeeded in slashing the overall infection rate.

Hubei province, the original epicentre, accounted for

almost half the new asymptomatic cases. A total of 705 people with asymptomatic cases were under medical observation around mainland China. The surge in asymptomatic cases, which China only began reporting last week, poses a worry as Hubei's capital Wuhan prepares to allow people to leave the city on April 8 for the first time since it was locked down in late January.

Wuhan officials revoked the "epidemic-free" status of 45 residential compounds due to the emergence of asymptomatic cases and other unspecified reasons, according to a report on Monday by the official Xinhua news agency.

"Epidemic-free" status allows people living in Wuhan compounds to leave their homes for two hours at a time.

Doctors seeking PPEs held in Pak.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
QUETTA

More than 50 doctors protesting the lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) were arrested on Monday in the southwestern Pakistani city of Quetta, police and physicians said. The arrests occurred after more than 100 doctors and paramedics rallied near the city's main hospital and then moved to protest in front of the Chief Minister's residence, according to a reporter.

"We have taken 53 doctors into custody for violating the law," said Abdul Razzaq Cheema, a senior police official. He said police held the doctors for several hours before the provincial government ordered them to release the group.

Pak. puts off Baisakhi events

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LAORE

Pakistani authorities have cancelled the Baisakhi celebrations at Gurdwara Punja Sahib in Punjab province from April 14, in which around 3,000 Sikhs from India were to participate, due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The number of coronavirus cases in Pakistan on Monday reached 3,277.

The celebrations were scheduled to begin at the revered Gurdwara in Hasanalpur city of Punjab province on April 14, Dawn reported. Now only a symbolic event would be held.

British PM Johnson in hospital with persistent virus symptoms

He will undergo 'routine tests' and continue to run govt.

REUTERS
LONDON

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was undergoing hospital tests on Monday after suffering persistent coronavirus symptoms for more than 10 days, but the government said he was in good spirits and still in charge.

Mr. Johnson, who had been isolating in Downing Street after testing positive for the virus last month, was taken to St Thomas' Hospital in central London on Sunday night.

His office and Ministers said Mr. Johnson, 55, continued to run the government, that he was doing well, and that he would undergo routine tests as a precaution. Downing Street declined to say what check-ups he would have.

"On the advice of my doctor, I went into hospital for some routine tests as I'm still experiencing coronavirus symptoms," Mr. Johnson said on Twitter. "I'm in good



Prime Minister Boris Johnson washing his hands at a laboratory in March. • AP

spirits and keeping in touch with my team, as we work together to fight this virus and keep everyone safe."

Under observation

Mr. Johnson's spokesman said the Prime Minister had a comfortable night in the hospital and remained there under observation. He described Mr. Johnson's symptoms as "persistent". These included a high temperature and a cough. The spokes-

man urged caution about media reports that Mr. Johnson was receiving oxygen treatment but refused to answer directly if he had pneumonia.

Mr. Johnson continues to receive his ministerial box of government documents, he added.

It was not clear how an ill Prime Minister could lead the government's response to the outbreak from a hospital.

Some medics said it was unclear what was meant by precautionary tests for COVID-19 complications.

Britain has no formal succession plan should the Prime Minister become incapacitated. Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, 46, chaired the government's emergency COVID-19 meeting on Monday.

U.S. President Donald Trump said Mr. Johnson was a "strong man" and that all Americans were praying for him.

Abe proposes state of emergency

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TOKYO

Japan's Prime Minister on Monday proposed a state of emergency for several major regions seeing a sharp rise in COVID-19 cases, as well as a stimulus package worth \$1 trillion to cushion the impact on the world's third-biggest economy.

The official declaration of the state of emergency would likely come as soon as on Tuesday, Shinzo Abe told reporters, as the country grapples with a recent spike in virus cases, especially in the capital Tokyo. "Current-

ly, we are seeing rapid increases of new infections particularly in urban areas like Tokyo and Osaka," said Mr. Abe. The declaration hands regional Governors the power to ask residents to stay inside, seek the closure of businesses that attract large crowds and commandeer land and buildings for medical purposes. But it falls far short of the sort of lockdown measures imposed in parts of Europe.

"We envision, for a period of about one month, that we will ask further cooperation of the Japanese people to re-

duce person-to-person contacts that lead to infections," said Mr. Abe. The measure does not include legal powers to enforce requests for people to stay inside, or punishments for people who fail to do so. "In Japan, even if we declare a state of emergency, we will not close cities as seen in foreign countries. Experts have told us that there is no need for such a step," said Mr. Abe.

Tokyo's Governor Yuriko Koike has already urged residents to avoid non-essential outings and to work from home during the week.

Venezuelans stream home from Colombia

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BOGOTA

Hundreds of Venezuelans who fled to neighbouring Colombia during their country's economic crisis are now returning home, pushed by the deadly novel coronavirus and Colombia's own pandemic woes.

Colombian migration officials said on Sunday that 600 people — including 35 children and 167 women — crossed the border point at the Simon Bolivar International Bridge in the north-eastern city of Cucuta, into Venezuela one day earlier.

Another group of 160 departed Bogota on Sunday, officials said.

Although the border is officially closed as a measure taken to halt the spread of the coronavirus, Colombia has opened a "humanitarian corridor" to allow Venezuelans to return home.

In recent years Colombia has welcomed 1.8 million Venezuelans.

Sudan 'finalises' deal to settle USS Cole case

Al-Qaeda attack in 2000 had killed 17

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
Khartoum

Sudan's Justice Ministry said on Monday that it has finalised a settlement with families of the victims of the USS Cole bombing.

Khartoum agreed in February to compensate the families of 17 American sailors who were killed in a suicide bombing targeting their Navy destroyer in Yemen's Aden harbour in 2000, an attack that was later claimed by al-Qaeda.

A U.S. court held Sudan responsible for the attack and ordered compensation, finding that the bombers were trained in the country. In March 2019, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the ruling on procedural grounds.

On Monday, Sudan's Justice Ministry said it had submitted on Friday a petition alongside families who pursued the case with the relevant U.S. court to end pending lawsuits against Sudan



A damaged portion of the USS Cole. • AFP

regarding the USS Cole. "The settlement procedures have now been completed in such a way that would permanently scrap lawsuits," said the Ministry.

Khartoum has denied the charges but by agreeing to a settlement, Sudan has fulfilled a key condition set by the U.S. to remove it from state sponsors of terrorism list. Sudan has been on Washington's blacklist since 1993 over its alleged support of Islamist groups.

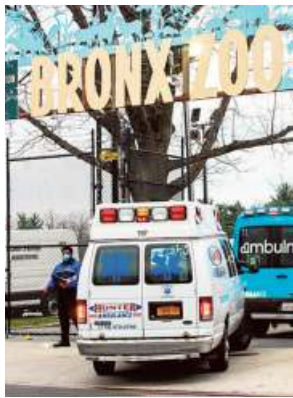
New York zoo tiger tests positive for virus

An asymptomatic caretaker could have passed on the infection to the big cat

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
NEW YORK

A tiger at New York's Bronx Zoo has tested positive for COVID-19, the institution said Sunday, and is believed to have contracted the virus from a caretaker who was asymptomatic at the time. The four-year-old Malayan tiger named Nadia along with her sister Azul, two Amur tigers and three African lions all developed dry coughs and are expected to fully recover, the Wildlife Conservation Society that runs the city's zoos said in a statement.

"We tested the cat out of an abundance of caution and will ensure any knowledge we gain about COVID-19 will contribute to the world's continuing understanding of this novel coronavirus," said the statement. "Though they have experienced some decrease in appetite, the cats at the Bronx Zoo are otherwise doing well under veterinary care and are bright, alert, and interactive with their keepers," it said. "It is not



Humans to cats: The New York-based Bronx Zoo where Nadia (right) the Malayan tiger, tested positive. • REUTERS, AP



known how this disease will develop in big cats since different species can react differently to novel infections, but we will continue to monitor them closely and anticipate full recoveries."

All zoos closed

All four of the zoos and the aquarium in New York — where the virus death toll has topped 4,000 — have been closed since March 16. The zoo emphasised that there is "no evidence that

animals play a role in the transmission of COVID-19 to people other than the initial event in the Wuhan market, and no evidence that any person has been infected with COVID-19 in the U.S. by animals, including by pet dogs or cats."

Chinese disease control officials have previously identified wild animals sold in a Wuhan market as the source of the pandemic that has infected well over one million people worldwide.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture website, there had "not been reports of pets or other animals" in the U.S. falling ill with COVID-19 prior to news of tiger Nadia. "It is still recommended that people sick with COVID-19 limit contact with animals until more information is known about the virus," the department's website says.

In late March, a pet cat was discovered infected with the virus in Belgium, following similar cases in Hong Kong where two dogs tested positive. All of those animals are believed to have contracted the virus from the people they live with. The Bronx zoo said preventative measures were in place for caretakers as well as all cats.

Sarah Caddy, veterinarian and clinical research fellow at the University of Cambridge, said that since domestic cats had been shown to be potentially susceptible to the virus, the tiger becoming infected was "not wholly unexpected".

Deal near a breaking point: Taliban

Militants warn of more attacks if provisions are breached

ASSOCIATED PRESS
ISLAMABAD

The Taliban said its peace deal with the U.S. was near a breaking point, accusing Washington of violations that included drone attacks on civilians, while also chastising the Afghan government for delaying the release of 5,000 Taliban prisoners promised in the agreement.

The Taliban said it had restricted attacks against Afghan security forces to rural outposts, had not attacked international forces and had not attacked Afghan forces in cities or military installations. The Taliban's statement issued on Sunday warned of more violence if the U.S. and the Afghan government continue alleged



U.S. peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad and Taliban leader Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar signing a peace deal on February 29. • AP

violations of the deal. U.S. military spokesman Col. Sonny Leggett in a tweet overnight denied the Taliban allegation, saying the U.S. forces in Afghanistan has "upheld and continues to uphold the military terms of the U.S.-TB (Taliban) agreement; any assertion otherwise is baseless." In his tweet, Col. Leggett called for Taliban to reduce violence and said the U.S. military

will continue to come to the aid of Afghanistan's security forces if attacked.

Meanwhile, the militants said they had reduced their attacks compared to last year, but said continued violations would "create an atmosphere of mistrust that will not only damage the agreements, but also force mujaheddin to a similar response and will increase the level of fighting."

U.S. gives 'terrorist' label to white supremacist group

Russia-based ultranationalist movement is the first such organisation to be given the designation

ADAM GOLDMAN
ERIC SCHMITT
WASHINGTON

The Trump administration on Monday designated an ultranationalist group based in Russia as a terrorist organisation, according to officials. It is the first time the government applied the label to a white supremacist group.

While the label of specially designated global terrorist has been frequently used for Islamist extremists, there have been growing concerns among U.S. officials about violent white supremacists with transnational links over the past five years. In 2018, the White House added that threat to the government's National Strategy for Counterterrorism.



Threat of different nature: A training session of the Russian Imperial Movement in St. Petersburg in 2015.

designation for the organisation, the Russian Imperial Movement, sets up the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control to block any American property or assets belonging to the group. It will also bar Americans from financial dealings with the organisation and make it easier to ban its

members from travelling to the U.S.

The U.S. is also designating three of the group's leaders — Stanislav Anatolyevich Vorobyev, Denis Valliullovich Gariev and Nikolay Nikolayevich Trushchalov — as individual terrorists who will face similar sanctions, officials said.

The authority for either the Treasury Department or the State Department to deem a group or an individual a specially designated global terrorist traces back to an executive order issued by President George W. Bush after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Signing of order

President Donald Trump in September signed an executive order expanding that authority to cover groups that provide training for terrorists even if the groups are not directly linked to any attack.

The Russian Imperial Movement is not considered to be sponsored by the Russian government, officials said, although President Vla-

dimir Putin has tolerated its activities and it has helped advance the Russian government's external goals by recruiting Russian fighters to aid pro-Russia separatists in eastern Ukraine. The group has also helped support neo-Nazi groups in Scandinavia.

NY TIMES

Services sector activity contracts

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The country's services sector activity contracted during March as the COVID-19 pandemic dented demand, particularly in overseas markets, while public health measures aimed at stemming the outbreak curtailed discretionary spending, a monthly survey said on Monday.

The IHS Markit India Services Business Activity Index was at 49.3 in March, down from February's 85-month high of 57.5, as the pandemic pulled the services sector into contraction.

The headline figure fell by over 8 points, undoing the strong gains in growth momentum seen throughout 2019, the survey said.

In PMI parlance, a print above 50 means expansion, while a score below that denotes contraction.

IPO fund-raising up 60% in FY20

Despite the market plunge, seven of the 13 IPOs are trading above issue price

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Fund raising via public equity markets rose by more than 60% in 2019-20 even as the fiscal ended on a highly volatile note with a drop of almost 30% in the Sensex.

In 2019-20, a total of ₹91,670 crore was raised, which was 62% higher than the previous fiscal's ₹56,485 crore, as per data from Prime Database.

The mobilisation, however, was 48% lower than the all-time high of ₹1.76 lakh crore raised in 2017-18.

The fiscal 2019-20 saw 13 main board public issues raising a cumulative amount of ₹20,350 crore, an increase of 38% from the ₹14,719 crore raised through 14 initial public offers (IPOs) in 2018-19.

Further, the largest IPO in 2019-20 was that of SBI Cards & Payment Services, which was worth ₹10,341 crore, though the average



Bidding time: The year also saw about 50 companies allowing the regulatory approval to lapse. ■ AP

deal size was ₹1,565 crore.

Interestingly, the overall response to main board IPOs was decent as eight of the 13 IPOs were subscribed more than 10 times each with IRCTC topping the list by getting subscribed 109 times.

The subscription was also a factor of overall market buoyancy as only the last quarter of the fiscal saw a sudden downturn due to concerns related to global slowdown and COVID-19.

The buoyancy was also reflected in the share price returns as shares of seven of the 13 IPOs gained more than 10% on the listing day.

Moreover, despite the ongoing pandemic and its subsequent impact on the markets, seven of the 13 IPOs are currently still trading above the issue price.

The year also saw about 50 companies, with a cumulative offer size worth ₹34,663 crore, allowing the

regulatory approval to lapse. All IPOs need to get a nod from the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), that is valid for one year.

Meanwhile, for the first time since the dedicated platform for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) was launched in 2012, the activity in the segment declined with only 45 SME IPOs, with total fund-raising of ₹436 crore, hitting the market. It was significantly lower than the FY19's ₹1,620 crore.

Going ahead, as per Prime Database, the IPO pipeline continues to remain strong with 26 firms holding SEBI approval, wanting to raise almost ₹26,056 crore and another six entities, wanting to raise almost ₹7,500 crore, awaiting SEBI approval.

However, it is highly unlikely that any of these issues will hit the market till the time the uncertainty around pandemic ends, it said.

Up to 40% of planes may stay on ground for 12 months: CAPA

Domestic demand for air travel may fall 60% to 90 mn trips

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Nearly 40% of the combined fleet of Indian airlines may not take to the skies in the next 12 months as the demand for air travel is likely to remain subdued, according to aviation consultancy firm CAPA.

In its latest report on the impact of COVID-19 on the Indian aviation sector, the Centre for Asia Pacific Aviation (CAPA) has forecast that the demand for domestic air travel will decline 60% to about 80-90 million trips, and for international travel it may drop 50% to approximately 35-40 million in the current fiscal as compared with the last financial year.

Of the total fleet size of 650 aircraft, as many as 200-250 planes are likely to remain surplus for the next 6-12 months, CAPA noted.



"Demand will be suppressed due to economic dislocation; slow or even negative GDP growth; broken supply chains; low consumer confidence; and concerns about lingering outbreaks of COVID-19, especially if travel insurance companies refuse to provide cover for associated medical expenses or travel disruption costs."

With domestic and international flights suspended

by the Indian government until April 14 and flight operations likely to resume only in a staggered manner, CAPA said that the first quarter of the current fiscal was likely to be a washout, and airlines could be expected to "limp back to recovery" in the second quarter, which is traditionally a weak season for travel demand.

Conservative number

"For India, to return to a pre-COVID operational fleet of 650 aircraft is likely to take up to 12 months from the time that restrictions are lifted, and this may be conservative."

"A gradual path to recovery is expected in quarter three and four."

The slump in demand may force some airlines to return their aircraft to lessors to save on rental costs.

Petrol sales fall 15.5%, diesel 24% as lockdown hits demand

LPG sees opposite trend as households rush for refills

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Petrol sales shrank by 15.5% and diesel demand tanked over 24% in March as the economy froze under the nationwide lockdown announced to check the spread of COVID-19.

Also, aviation turbine fuel (ATF) sales fell by 31% as flights got suspended alongside the shutting of businesses and most vehicular traffic going off-road.

Petrol sales dropped to 1.859 million tonnes in March from 2.2 million tonnes sold in the same month in 2019, according to provisional industry demand numbers.

Diesel, the most consumed fuel in the country, saw demand contract by 24.2% to 4.8 million tonnes from 6.34 million tonnes in March 2019.

Aviation fuel

Similarly, aviation turbine fuel sales fell to 2.25 million tonnes from 2.185 million tonnes last year.

The only fuel that showed growth was LPG as households rushed to book refills for stocking during the three-week lockdown period.

LPG sales rose 3.1% to 2.25 million tonnes in March from 2.185 million tonnes in the same month last year.

Industry officials said the pattern in fuel consumption is likely to continue in April as the lockdown is to last till mid of the month and there are indications that part restrictions will continue even after the lockdown is lifted.

March will be the first month in two-and-a-half-years when petrol sales would see degrowth. The fuel had registered an 8.2% growth during the first 11 months of the 2019-20 fiscal.

Diesel saw a 1.1% rise in consumption from April 2019 to February 2020. It had seen sales slip into negative territory in January this year before rising in February.

Most MSMEs skip March salary: AIMO

Survey cites logistics issues and absence of orders, among others, as reasons

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

About 71% of the MSME establishments were unable to pay either partially or fully the wages due for March 2020 either due to logistics issue or absence of orders, among other issues, according to All India Manufacturers Organisation (AIMO).

AIMO, which is an apex trade body focused on the interests of the MSME sector, surveyed over 5,000 traders/MSMEs across the country over the last few days regarding the status and payment of wages/salaries for the month of March.

K.E. Raghunathan, past president, AIMO, said that salaries could not be paid for reasons such as computation, logistics and distribu-



As receipts from customers had dropped to near-zero, many entrepreneurs were unable to pay wages. ■ PHOTO: KAMAL NARANG

tion issues for cash payments and cash flow.

Besides, more than 52% of the entrepreneurs found it difficult to assess and determine how much to pay as some of their staff had worked from home while some of them had remained idle at home.

money' had come to a zero.

Over 47% of the establishments also found it difficult to determine how to pay salaries to employees who may not have a bank account or access to bank account or had gone back to their villages, despite working for about 20 days in March.

However, certain sectors, which provided necessities such as basic food and toiletries, saw a rise in their net growth over the last 15 days due to panic-buying and increasing demand, the survey said.

Ancillary manufacturing, automobile spare parts, apparel, consumer durables, electronics, tourism, restaurants, seafood and livestock, construction and real estate, travel and transportation are the worst-hit by COVID-19.

Uber, Flipkart in pact on essentials

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

After BigBasket and Spencer's Retail, ride-hailing Uber has now partnered with Walmart-owned Flipkart to provide people in Bengaluru, Mumbai and Delhi access to everyday essentials amid the nationwide lockdown.

"Our partnership with Flipkart will further consolidate our new last-mile delivery service. The partnership will help keep the economy running and enable Indians to stay at home in line with government guidelines for containing COVID-19," said Uber India and South Asia director-operations and head of cities Prabhjeet Singh.

Virus may force firms to alter work style

Social distancing, decluttering may impact businesses dealing with people

LALATENDU MISHRA
MUMBAI

With COVID-19 bringing normal life to a standstill, several sectors, particularly those dealing with people, are likely to be hit hard, while other segments may have to rejig their work strategy.

Some of the businesses that are likely to bear the brunt are from the travel and tourism sector - namely airlines, hospitality and travel agencies. Other segments such as education, malls, theatres and restaurants will also be impacted.

"The wedding eco-system could take a hit like travel and tourism. Education could partially move online. Work places may have flexi-hours to reduce the crowding on the transportation system," said Ambareesh Baliga, an independent analyst.

Religious and cultural



New template: The face mask would become a part of regular attire as people will have to strictly follow hygiene. ■ PTI

events could take a backseat with limitations on headcount due to social distancing, he added.

"Mom-and-pop stores could be back in business with lesser footfalls in malls. The commercial space requirement may contract, whereas spaced out residential requirement could increase as decluttering gains

pace," Mr. Baliga said.

He said in future people may have to pass through disinfectant chambers and follow hygiene more vigorously.

"The face mask would become a part of our attire. People will avoid places that are generally crowded and may prefer to watch movies at home than going to a

theatre. While restaurants may take time to witness footfalls, home deliveries could see a spike. Our buying habits will shift online much faster than we have seen in the past," Mr. Baliga said.

Ravi Saxena, managing director, Wonderchef, said malls may suffer due to long waiting time for entry. Multiplexes and food courts are crowded places where social distancing is simply not possible.

"This means the business would spill over to digital platforms and also neighbourhood kirana stores. E-commerce is the oil that can keep the economy lubricated in this challenging time. Home deliveries are actually the safest form of consumption. They will prevent community spread drastically," he said.

Life insurers to process virus claims faster

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The Life Insurance Council - the industry body of life insurance companies - said all life insurers, both public and private, are committed to process any death claim pertaining to COVID-19 at the earliest.

The Council also said the clause of 'force majeure' will not apply in case of COVID-19 death claims.

"This step was taken to reassure customers who had reached out to individual life insurance companies seeking clarity on this clause in their contract as well as to dispel rumours to the contrary."

"All life insurance companies have also communicated to their customers individually in this regard," the council said.

3M ups health unit production

Raises operations 35-40% to address virus-linked scarcity

MINI TEJASWI
BENGALURU

3M India, which focusses on segments including healthcare, homecare and workplace safety, said it had raised the production of respirators, hand sanitisers and surgical masks in the country in the range of 35-40%.

The country's demand for such gear far outpaced the supply with the outbreak of COVID-19. To improve the supply of these essential accessories in the country, 3M India has increased the production of these at its manufacturing facility in Ranjanagaon, off Pune.

Ramesh Ramadurai, MD, 3M India, said: "We have increased the production of respirators, surgical masks and hand sanitisers in the range of 35% to 40%. Now, we are almost exclusively directing our supplies to a

The authorities have supported us by giving required exemptions for the operations

RAMESH RAMADURAI, MD, 3M India

large number of government and private healthcare providers, front-line healthcare workers and nodal agencies in India."

At full capacity

"The demand has outpaced supply by several times and we are doing our best to make sure that our manufacturing plant is running 24x7 in these critical times. Respirators are close to our heart at this moment of great need."

"The local authorities have supported us by giving us required exemptions for the operation," he said.

Respirators are the most important protective gear against COVID-19. 3M India makes two different types of respirators, P1 and P2, while it imports N95 masks.

Local authorities have also made a wide variety of 3M products, such as kitchen, home and bathroom chemicals, cleaning tools, materials, scrubs, pads, brushes, swipes and gloves, as part of essentials, as the company is globally known for its focus on healthcare and home care.

The Minnesota-based 3M Company said last week it would boost the U.S. production of its N95 filter respirator masks to 50 million per month by June.

Globally, the company has increased production of masks as demand for respirators exploded with COVID-19.

Kotak, HDFC Bank see healthy rise in deposits

Lenders' advances also show increase

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

At a time when some private sector lenders are seeing an erosion in deposits after the Yes Bank episode, lenders such as HDFC Bank and Kotak Mahindra Bank have bucked the trend.

HDFC Bank has said it has seen a 24% year-on-year growth in deposits as on March 31. Deposits increased to ₹11.46 lakh crore from the ₹9.23 lakh crore a year ago and ₹10.67 lakh crore at the end of December 2019.

The current and savings account deposit ratio of the bank, which are low-cost deposits, was around 42% of the total deposits as on March 31 compared with 42.4% a year ago and 39.5%

as of December 31, 2019.

Kotak Mahindra Bank has said its total deposits, excluding certificate of deposits, grew by 19.6% year-on-year to ₹2.58 lakh crore as on March 31. Deposit growth was up 11.7% sequentially, going up from ₹2.31 lakh crore in December 31, 2019.

The ratio of low cost deposits also showed improvement, rising to 56.2% as on March 31 from the 52.5% a year ago and 53.7% a quarter ago.

On the advances, HDFC Bank's advances grew by 21% year-on-year to ₹9.93 lakh crore as on March 31, 2020. Kotak Mahindra Bank's net advances increased 6.7% year-on-year and 1.3% sequentially to ₹2.19 lakh crore.

Tata AIA Life to provide extra cover

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Tata AIA Life Insurance has decided to provide additional life cover up to ₹5 lakh for claims on new and existing policies for deaths due to COVID-19 until June 30, 2020, the company said in a statement.

The additional cover comes without any extra cost.

The life insurer has offered this cover for all of its retail policies, comprehensively covering all categories of policies, be it term, endowment or unit-linked plan.

"This initiative covers retail individually held in-force policies only and is not applicable for customers covered under group policy," the company said.

2-wheeler sales may drop up to 13%

Lower consumer spending to add to industry's woes: ICRA

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The two-wheeler industry is likely to witness another year of demand contraction with sales expected to decline by 11-13% to around 18 million units in FY2021 due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on economic growth and discretionary spending, rating agency ICRA said.

Flattish demand

Even prior to the outbreak, the demand for two-wheelers was expected to be flat in India amid a sharp rise in vehicle prices following the transition to BS-VI emission norms, resulting in 10-12% inflation and a subdued macroeconomic scenario, the agency noted.

"The challenges for the industry are likely to get ag-



gravated as consumer spending will be severely impacted by the outbreak, resulting in lower spending power both in urban and rural markets. There is a likelihood of downtrading by consumers as well once the economy starts to crawl back to normalcy," it added.

Shamsher Dewan, vice-president, ICRA said, "We expect two-wheeler OEMs to

brace for another year of lower earnings and decline in operating margins, to 11.5-12% from around 14% in the previous year."

Mr. Dewan added that besides lower sales, pressure on earnings will also arise due to costs involved in recalling BS-IV inventory from dealers, which is likely to remain unsold due to shutdowns. Additionally, during periods of stress, OEMs would also have to extend credit support to its dealers, thus leading to a potential increase in working capital intensity.

ICRA added that given the rapid spread of the pandemic in India and overseas, and the possibility of further extension of lockdowns, revival from the down-cycle is expected to be delayed by at least a few quarters.

Pharmexcil wants RBI to ease non-fund limits

\$1 bn worth of materials stuck at ports

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD

Pharmaceutical raw materials and finished goods worth more than \$1 billion are stuck at ports on account of transportation and manpower constraints, Pharmaceuticals Export Promotion Council of India (Pharmexcil) has said.

Consequently, the COVID-19-led disruption has led to pharmaceutical units unable to operate beyond 25-30% of their normal operational manufacturing capacity. The situation comes despite the pharmaceutical industry classified as commodities and services.

Pharmexcil chairman Dinesh Datta cited this in an appeal to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for relaxation in



certain terms of non-fund based limit.

"Our member-companies request you to immediately consider at least an extension of six months for due payments against non-fund limits predominantly provided through Letter of Credit for making the payments to the bankers," he said in a letter to the RBI Governor.



IN BRIEF
Gopi Chand contributes to COVID-19 relief
HYDERABAD
P. Gopi Chand donated ₹11 lakh to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund here on Monday. Gopi also contributed ₹10 lakh to the Telangana Chief Minister's Relief Fund and another ₹5 lakh to Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister's Relief Fund. International badminton player K. Sri Krishna Priya, meanwhile, donated ₹5 lakh to the Telangana Chief Minister's Relief Fund.



Golf Majors reset after The Open is postponed
NEW YORK
Three US-based Major golf championships announced rescheduled 2020 dates on Monday in the wake of the British Open being called off until 2021 due to the coronavirus pandemic.
Revised schedule: PGA Championship: August 6-9; **US Open:** September 17-20; **Augusta Masters:** November 12-15. Ryder Cup will be contested one week after the US Open. AFP

BWF suspends more tournaments
NEW DELHI
The Badminton World Federation (BWF) has suspended the cash-rich Indonesia Open and three others, besides a para event and a number of Grade 3 competitions to be held between May and July. The announcement made on Monday lists \$170,000 Australian Open (June 2-7), \$400,000 Thailand Open (June 9-14), \$1,350,000 Indonesia Open (June 16-21) and Russian Open (July 7-12) among suspended events in Grade 2.



Top Italian clubs agree to pay cuts
MILAN
Italy's top-flight football clubs have unanimously reached an agreement to cut the salaries of players, coaches and staff as a result of COVID-19, the Lega Serie A announced on Monday. League leader Juventus had already cut salaries, a move accepted by the players and coach Maurizio Sarri, in pic. FIFA had also urged the clubs and players to reach an agreement on wage reduction to protect clubs suffering financial damage. AFP

Shooting World Cup cancelled
NEW DELHI
The NRAI has cancelled the shooting World Cup scheduled to be held here for rifle and pistol from May 5 to 13, and shotgun from May 20 to 29. "The health and safety of our athletes, officials, staff and of all members of our shooting fraternity are absolutely paramount," said the statement.



Cavendish reveals battle against depression
LONDON
British cycling superstar Mark Cavendish says he has successfully come through a two-year battle against clinical depression revealing on Monday he was "dark" but is now on the "other side". "It's not just my physical health which has been dealt a blow over the last couple of years," Cavendish told *The Times*. "I've battled quite hard with depression. I was diagnosed with clinical depression in August 2018." AFP

'Looking at survival and safety'

Advani says the police, nurses, doctors and paramedics are our saviours

ASHWIN ACHAL
BENGALURU
Pankaj Advani is not worried about missing competitive cue sports action, as there are bigger issues to tackle. "I find it weird when sportspeople speak about their sport at this time, as we're looking at bigger things like survival, health and safety. These things are much more important than one's sporting career. The police, nurses, doctors and paramedics - they are our saviours. They put their lives at risk for us. I express my gratitude to all of them," Advani told *The Hindu* here on Monday.

With a contribution of ₹5 lakh to the PM-CARES Fund, Advani has done his bit in the fight against the coronavirus outbreak.

Massive fight
"I'm not a doctor, policeman or someone who is in the front line of this battle. So this donation is the least I can do. We face a massive fight. The coronavirus has affected the entire world - people are suffering and dying," the multiple-time World champion said. Advani emphasised on citizens doing their bit by tak-



On cue: Pankaj Advani calls for adherence to lockdown restrictions in order to beat the coronavirus pandemic. ■ FILE PHOTO: SUDHAKARA JAIN

ing the necessary safety precautions. The 34-year-old appealed to the public not to turn occasions like 'diya' lighting into celebratory affairs.

"I request everyone to keep distance, stay indoors, wash your hands and wear a mask whenever you go out. We tend to make a 'mela' out of the directions given by the government.

"Lighting a 'diya' and clapping for our health workers is good, but we should do it sensibly.

"We should not make an

event out of it by bursting crackers and so on. Indians are social people in general, but all socialising must wait. Religious gatherings and other functions must wait," Advani said.

Extended lockdown
Advani believes that an extended lockdown would be the right way to go.

"In my opinion, the lockdown should be extended beyond April 14, but of course the government is best placed to take this decision.

"It would also be nice if the government regularly provides numbers and statistics related to the coronavirus. That will help us understand where we're headed," he said.

Advani, who lives with his mother, is finding ways to keep himself occupied. "I'm exercising, though I'm not very regular.

"I'm also helping with household chores like cleaning, dusting and so on. It makes me appreciate the efforts of everyone who works for us at home," he said.

WFI may hold fresh trials

M.R. PRAVEEN CHANDRAN
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM
The Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) may hold fresh trials to complete the selection process before the start of Asian and World qualifying tournaments, said its secretary V.N. Prasood here on Monday.

The WFI was mulling this move in the wake of postponement of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and the subsequent cancellation of qualifying tournaments due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prasood said the federation will either conduct fresh trials or may advance the 2020 National championships to complete the selection process before the start of the qualifying Asian and World tournaments.

He added that the final decision will be taken after the United World Wrestling (UWW) releases a fresh schedule for these events.

Plans upset
"Right now everything is in a flux. The postponement of Tokyo Olympics to next year has upset our plans. Our policy is to select the best and deserving wrestlers. But we want to make sure everyone is given a chance. We may conduct fresh trials in all events and if that is not acceptable by the wrestlers, we may even hold the National championships a little earlier this year.

"But our schedule will depend on the international calendar. We have to see if UWW will hold the World championships before the



Narsingh. ■ FILE PHOTO: PTI

qualifying events. Normally UWW doesn't include Olympic events in world meets held in the Olympic year. But it is a different scenario now, so we have to wait and watch," said Prasood.

Four Indians - Ravi Kumar Dahiya (57kg), Bajrang Punia (65kg), Deepak Punia (86kg) and Vinesh Phogat (53kg) - had qualified for the freestyle events for the 2020 Olympics after winning medals in the 2019 World championships.

Prasood is hopeful that more Indians will make it to the Games from the qualifying events.

End of the ban
The postponement of the Olympics has come as a blessing for Narsingh Yadav, who will complete his four-year ban this July.

Prasood added WFI has kept its doors open for Narsingh. "His ban will be over in July and there are no obstacles in front of him to return back to competition. If he is in good shape he can compete and win back his place in the team for Olympics."

Sunil Kumar's confidence on a high

Asian Greco-Roman champion training on his own during the lockdown

Y.B. SARANGI
KOLKATA
Mental training, which helped Sunil Kumar immensely in rewriting history, has again come to the aid of the 87kg Greco-Roman Asian champion in the time of the coronavirus outbreak.

Hailing from the non-descript Daburpur village of Sonapat district in Haryana, Sunil overcame his negative approach and focused on pre-match preparation to bring home an Asian championship medal after 27 years in Delhi last month.

Not disheartened
The postponement of the Asian Olympic qualifier this month may not have been a welcome development for an in-form Sunil, but the 21-year-old is not disheartened. "My confidence is high af-

ter becoming the Asian champion. It is true that it would have been good (had the Olympic qualifier happened as per schedule). But every wrestler was trying to do his best and the situation is the same for everybody," Sunil told *The Hindu*. "The positive side is that the delay gives me extra time to work on my game and iron out weaknesses."

Despite being restricted to his home, Sunil, backed by Lakshya Sports, has become mentally stronger to make the most of the present situation.

"Without any sparring partner, I am training on my own - doing running, dumbbell, rope exercises and other equipment available at home. I am sticking to my schedule of training twice a day."

Can't wait for Wimbledon 2021: Vijay

RAYAN ROZARIO
COIMBATORE

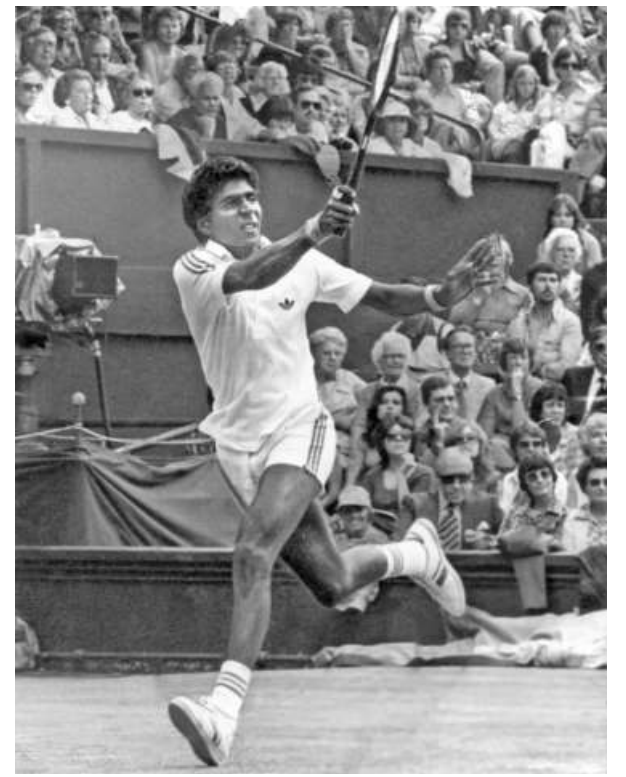
Wimbledon stands out from the other Grand Slams, thanks to its unique blend of tennis and tradition. The atmosphere is so electric and emotional that it brings the best out of every player.

India's Vijay Amritraj, who has experienced them all for five decades as a player and a commentator, was very disappointed with the cancellation of the 2020 event. "It was expected, of course," Vijay told *The Hindu* in an email interview.

"I have been associated with Wimbledon for 50 straight years and always look forward to it with the same enthusiasm as I had in 1969," said Vijay, a two-time quarterfinalist at The Championships.

Vijay, who is now in the United States, said all ranked players have lost a valuable year. "To the best, it means not having a chance to increase their wins. To the challengers, it means a lost opportunity. To the players who get in regularly, it means lost economic opportunity and points. To the Indian players, only if you have a chance to qualify, it would make a difference."

He said no sporting event in the world compares to Wimbledon. "For me, along with the Davis Cup, it's the



Down memory lane: Vijay Amritraj running down a return against Bjorn Borg at Wimbledon in 1979. ■ THE HINDU ARCHIVES

reason I played for so long. The greatest blessing is to have played there for so many years and also coming close to winning it. It has always been my No. 1 event."

In 1973, Vijay lost to eventual champion Jan Kodes; in 1981, he suffered a heartbreaking loss, going down to Jimmy Connors after taking the first two sets.

When Vijay visited the All England Club earlier this year, he would not have expected things to pan out this way.

"The majesty of the club and its history gives me goosebumps whenever I visit. Can't wait for Wimbledon 2021," said Vijay, who has done TV shows for more than 25 years there.

COVID DEATHS

Ligue 1 club doctor commits suicide after diagnosis

REIMS (FRANCE)
French Ligue 1 club Reims was on Sunday in mourning for long-serving club doctor Bernard Gonzalez committed suicide after being diagnosed with coronavirus, sources confirmed. "Devastated, Reims cries for Bernard Gonzalez," said a statement released by the Ligue 1 club. "Not just the club but also hundreds of men and women in Reims." AFP

Guardiola's mother succumbs

LONDON
Pep Guardiola's 82-year-old mother, Dolores Sala Carrio, died in Manresa (Barcelona) after contracting coronavirus, Manchester City announced on Monday. Guardiola, 49, had last month donated \$1 million to buy medical supplies for the fight against coronavirus in his native Spain. AFP

British boxing great Benn bereaved

LONDON
British boxing great Nigel Benn revealed on Instagram one of his brothers Mark had died of coronavirus infection. The 56-year-old - former World champion in two weights - said Mark had been the "joker" of the family. Benn was WBO middleweight champion in 1990 and went on to become WBC super-middleweight champion, holding the belt between 1992 and 1996. He retired from the ring in 1996 after twice failing to wrest the WBO super-middleweight title from Irishman Stephen Collins. AFP

Bayern Munich players back on the field



Welcome sight: Bayern Munich players train in small groups at the Saebener Strasse complex on Monday. ■ REUTERS

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BERLIN

Bundesliga leaders Bayern Munich resumed training on Monday for the first time since the German league was suspended on March 13, but the players were put through their paces in small groups and maintained social distancing measures.

Keeping at least 1.5m from each other, the players trained together. "It was a very unusual feeling to hold

a training session in small groups, but it was also nice to see the boys in person again," said Manuel Neuer after Bayern had previously held training sessions online. After arriving at staggered times to limit contact the 21-man squad was split into five groups, each containing a maximum of five players. When they changed, the players were kept four metres apart in the changing rooms.

'Lack of civic sense led to pandemic'

Situation in Belgium much better than in Spain: Brasa

UTHRA GANESAN
NEW DELHI

Jose Brasa may have been India hockey coach almost a decade ago, but he continues to be one of the most popular ones with the players. The Spaniard, currently coaching in Belgium, categorically blamed the lack of civic sense for the COVID-19 explosion in his homeland.

In 'exile'
"I was in Spain visiting my family from March 8-12. Since then I have been confined to my apartment here in Liege as Spain ordered lockdown the day after I left. Things are better here, although one player from my club (the Old Club of Liege) was infected," he revealed without naming the player. "But he is young and strong and he's been cured. He and his girlfriend are in home quarantine and will



Jose Brasa. ■ FILE PHOTO

remain so for the next two weeks. Almost all of us have probably been in contact with the virus because if this player was infected and the symptoms are seen two weeks later, during those two weeks we all were with him," he said.

Asked about the sporting scene there, he appreciated the Belgians for being decisive. "On April 2, the Nation-

al Hockey League here was over and promotions and relegations decided by classifications obtained in the first round. In football they decided to consider all matches played till now.

"The situation in Spain is the total opposite. Competitions are suspended. Football leagues have not ended and it seems they want to resume," he said.

Brasa insisted the only way to be safe was to stay home. "Staying indoors is the best way to prevent coronavirus from spreading rapidly and clogging up hospitals. In Spain the restriction is total, no one can leave home except workers in essential services like hospitals, pharmacies and food supermarkets. The situation is not so serious in Belgium. All activities that do not involve crowds are open, with precautionary measures," he said.

Deepali Deshpande strikes a cautious note

Weighs in on a problem of plenty in the women's 3p rifle event

KAMESH SRINIVASAN
NEW DELHI

India's problem of plenty in the rifle and pistol events is likely to give selectors a headache when they sit down to select teams for the postponed Olympics.

One primary question is whether World Championship silver medallist Anjum Moudgil will be able to retain her berth in air rifle or will the selectors instead opt for former World Champion and Commonwealth Games gold medallist Tejaswini Sawant. "You try to give your best every time. You cannot think, 'this is not my strong event. Let me wait and get it in my event,'" was Anjum's counter to the question.

Irony
Anjum has shot a world record 1180 out of 1200 in the 50m rifle 3-position event, but the irony is that she could not compete in the



Talent aplenty: Coaches Deepali Deshpande, centre, and Oleg Mikhailov will have to choose between Anjum Moudgil, left, and Tejaswini Sawant. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

regular team in any of the World Cups, as the team was searching for an Olympic quota which she was ineligible to win. After Sunidhi Chauhan, Gaayathri Nithyanandan and Kajal Saini failed, it was Tejaswini who nailed the Olympic quota in the 3P event.

Olympian Deepali Deshpande, the Indian team's high performance rifle coach, put things in perspective. "Anjum is experienced and in good form. Postponement is an advantage for her. In air rifle, 2019 was all about changing technique, equipment and getting over injury.

Still she could maintain her ranking," said Deepali.

With Apurvi Chandela winning two World Cup gold medals it has generally been perceived that Elavenil Valarivan and Mehuli Ghosh could fight for the second spot in women's air rifle.

Two planes

"The national federation and the selection committee will be thinking a lot on these aspects. I feel that we have to be very careful as we will be working on two planes. One is 2020 Olympics being held in 2021, and the other is 2024. Some of the shooters will be front runners for 2024. If we drag them into this selection, we may lose them even for 2024," cautioned Deepali, even as she pointed the high scores of 1170 or more of Tejaswini. "With Olympic quota points she is second to Anjum only," she added.