



on Sunday



Lockdown alone will not help: Dr. Soumya Swaminathan of WHO
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States must evolve ways to help migrant workers return: Nitin Gadkari
page 6



TRAI says all set top boxes must support interoperability
page 10

Trump announces sanctions on nations not willing to repatriate citizens
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NEARBY



CM seeks rapid test kits, ₹1,000 crore aid
CHENNAI
Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami on Saturday requested Prime Minister Narendra Modi to provide COVID-19 rapid test kits and grant of ₹1,000 crore to procure medical supplies.
TAMIL NADU > PAGE 3

Special task teams set up to trace contacts

CHENNAI
The State government has formed zonal special task teams comprising senior IAS and IPS officers to follow up and ensure that contact persons of COVID-19 patients are traced.
TAMIL NADU > PAGE 3

Corporation sets up testing kiosks

CHENNAI
The Chennai Corporation has started installing COVID-19 testing kiosks to collect samples from residents. Corporation Commissioner S. Prakash said the kiosks had been set up at Corporation hospitals in 10 locations, including Pudukpet.
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14-day extension of lockdown likely

In four-hour video-conference with Chief Ministers, PM hints at resumption of economic activity

NISTULA HEBBAR

Kharif crops

The Kharif crop is the summer crop or monsoon crop in India. Kharif crops are usually sown with the beginning of the first rains in July, during the south-west monsoon season. Major Kharif crops of India include Millets (Bajra & Jowar), Cotton, Soyabean, Sugarcane, Turmeric, Paddy (Rice), Maize, Moong (Pulses), Groundnut, Red Chillies, etc.

Rabi Crops

The Rabi crop is the spring harvest or winter crop in India. It is sown in October last and harvested in March April every year. Major Rabi crops in India include Wheat, Barley, Mustard, Sesame, Peas etc.

Zaid Crop

This crop is grown in some parts of country during March to June. Prominent examples are Muskmelon, Watermelon, Vegetables of cucurbitaceae family such as bitter gourd, pumpkin, ridged gourd etc.

CMs raise funds crunch with Modi

Almost all want lockdown extended



Talking strategy: PM Narendra Modi in a meeting with Chief Ministers via video conference in New Delhi on Saturday. >PTI

T.N. to await PM's decision on extension

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

The Tamil Nadu Cabinet, which met on Saturday, decided to await and abide by the decision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the issue of extension of lockdown.

Briefing the media, Chief Secretary K. Shanmugam said that the Cabinet felt that the full effect of lockdown would not be realised by any one State deciding on an extension. As Mr. Modi would be taking a decision on the issue shortly, the Cabinet decided that it would accept any decision he took.

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami, according to Mr. Shanmugam, apprised the Cabinet on the discussion that he had with the PM earlier. During the video-conference, Mr. Palaniswami requested the Centre to extend the lockdown by at least two weeks, on the basis of inputs from experts.

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“uniform model” of restrictions for the entire country if the lockdown was extended. He said since the Centre and the States were jointly fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, the States must get adequate financial assistance.

He highlighted the difficulties in handling the issues arising out of the lockdown in the State.

Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrababhan Rao said his State used to get ₹40,000 crore each month in revenue, but this had now come down to a mere ₹4,000 crore. He expressed his helplessness in handling the pandemic with limited resources.

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot favoured a

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COVID-19

The video-conference, on the 18th day of the lockdown to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus, was attended by 13 Chief Ministers.

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot favoured a

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Despite lockdown hurdles, sowing of summer crops up

More area under rice, pulses, oilseeds: Agriculture Ministry

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Early sowing of the summer rice crop has covered 37% more area than the same time the previous year, despite the COVID-19 lockdown limitations, Agriculture Ministry data show. This is the pre-monsoon sowing of paddy, with the major kharif crop sowing to be done after the rains begin in June.

Overall sowing of summer crops, including rice, pulses, coarse cereals and oil seeds, is about 31% higher than usual. In total, 48.8 lakh hectares have been sown so far.



A farmer readying his field in Madurai district of Tamil Nadu. >G. MOORTHY

Availability of fertilizers
The Centre has exempted agricultural activity from the lockdown restrictions and has also taken steps to ensure availability of fertilizers and pesticides for the coming season.

So far, more than 32 lakh hectares of rice have been sown across the country, mostly in eastern India, including 11.3 lakh hectares in West Bengal, 7.5 lakh hectares in Telangana, 3 lakh hectares in Odisha and 2.7

lakh hectares in Assam. This is more than a third higher than the 23.8 lakh hectares sown with rice during the same period last year.

Pulses have also seen a significant increase in early sowing, with more acreage covered in green gram and black gram. Overall, there was a 32% jump from about 3 lakh hectares to 4 lakh hectares.

The growth in oilseeds is more modest with a 12% increase in sowing area to 6.7 lakh hectares. Most of the hike comes from more land sown with groundnuts.

Among coarse cereals, more maize and bajra have been sown than in the previous year resulting in a 27% jump to 5.6 lakh hectares under cultivation.

WORK RESUMES IN A FEW TEA GARDENS IN ASSAM > PAGE 8

Safe passage



All hands on deck: People get sprayed with disinfectants at a sanitising tunnel set up at a farmers' market in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, on Saturday. >K.R. DEEPAK

Migrant workers' protest turns violent in Surat

Allow us to return to home States, say desperate men

MAHESH LANGA
AHMEDABAD

Lack of work has pushed several thousand migrant workers in Gujarat to the edge of starvation, sparking protests.

In the second such incident in the last 10 days, more than 2,500 workers in Surat took to the streets late on Friday, demanding wages, food and permission to return to their home States of Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

As the crowd of protesters grew, some elements turned violent, setting vegetable carts on fire and vandalising shops and properties along the road in the Laskana area, a migrant hub. Within an hour, about a dozen properties and as many vegetable carts were gutted. The police used force to disperse the mob, and more than 70 pe-



Swift action: Fire services personnel dousing fires set by migrant workers in Surat on Friday. >SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

sons were detained. Gujarat DGP Shivanand Jha, in a letter to the Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Sangeeta Singh, flagged the worsening plight of the workers in shelter homes and migrant localities due to a lack of food and other basic amenities.

In his letter, Mr. Jha said

there were 778 shelter homes in the State. The 194 homes were 9,351 migrant workers - mainly from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Odisha - are housed lack adequate arrangements for food and sanitation, the letter said.

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With 58 fresh cases, T.N.'s virus count at 969

State has enough RT-PCR kits, says CS

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

On a day when COVID-19 cases in Tamil Nadu went up by 58, taking the tally to 969, Chief Secretary K. Shanmugam emphasised that the State has adequate Reverse Transcription-Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) kits, used for the diagnosis of the disease, as well as stocks of drugs such as hydroxychloroquine.

One patient died in Erode and another, in his fifties, died at the Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital in Chennai, taking the State's COVID-19 toll to 11. The results of 485 patients were awaited.

Officials said the man who died in Chennai, an aircraft maintenance engineer with a private airline, had

tested positive and was undergoing treatment. He was a diabetic.

Answering questions on the delay in arrival of rapid test kits and the efficacy of relying on PCR kits, Mr. Shanmugam said that 15,000 PCR kits were available. While the number was sufficient, the State continued to receive more. “When we get rapid test kits, we plan to cover all those in quarantine and containment zones, in addition to front line workers. But only with the help of a PCR kit can we ascertain whether or not a person is a confirmed case,” he said.

Approximately, four lakh rapid test kits have been ordered by the State.

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Odisha youth pedals 1,700 km to reach home

Left without a job after the lockdown, he cycled across four States over 7 days

SATYASUNDAR BARIK
BHUBANESWAR

Sitting idle doesn't come easy to 20-year-old Mahesh Jena, stuck at a COVID-19 isolation centre in Bichitrapur in Odisha's Jajpur, more so because he cycled 1,700 km across the country from Maharashtra to reach home.

“The seven-day journey was easier than tackling the boredom here,” said Mr. Jena, who pedalled home after the nationwide lockdown on March 25 pulled down the shutters at his workplace and snapped all public transport systems. Mr. Jena was working in an iron casting facility in the Sangli Miraj MIDC Industrial Area in Maharashtra, earning ₹15,000 a month. Soon after the lockdown



Dependable wheels: Mahesh Jena covered close to 200 km daily. >SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Jena needed at least ₹6,000 to pay for accommodation and food, but had just ₹3,000 with him.

Matter of survival
After remaining idle for a week, he realised that the lockdown was not likely to end soon. “All of sudden, I decided to go back home to Badasuiri village in Jajpur by bicycle. It was a matter of survival,” he said.

“On April 1, I set out. Though I did not have a map, I remembered the names of major stations during my train journey here,” said the youth.

On the week-long, cross-country ride, Mr. Jena made most of the cool, pre-dawn hours, cycling till lunch before taking a break. He would stop at the few, still

open dhabas for a bath, lunch and a nap before getting back on his cycle. “I was averaging close to 200 km per day,” he said.

And so Mr. Jena continued pedalling - from Solapur to Hyderabad, then Vijayawada through Visakhapatnam and Srikakulam, before entering Odisha via Ganjam, cycling almost 16 hours a day. “Heat exhaustion was taking a toll, but it did not distract me. I was determined to reach home,” Mr. Jena said.

He reached Jajpur late on April 7 only to be stopped by villagers, who were reluctant to allow him in without a check-up. They informed the district administration, and he was sent to a quarantine centre at a school in Bichitrapur.

West Bengal pulled up for lockdown violations

MHA points to religious meetings

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has sought a report from the West Bengal government regarding the dilution of lockdown measures that could have resulted in the spread of the COVID-19 infection. The MHA alleged that the State police were allowing religious congregations and distribution of free rations by political representatives, pulling the spread of the virus.

In an April 10 letter to the Chief Secretary and the Director General of Police, West Bengal, the MHA said it had received reports from security agencies about “gradual dilution of lockdown” with an increase in the number of exceptions being provided by the State



Protesters protesting against the setting up of quarantine centres in Sian in Birbhum district of West Bengal. >PTI

government. Shops selling non-essential items have been allowed to function. There is no regulation on vegetable, fish and meat markets where people have been thronging in complete violation of social distancing norms,” the letter said.

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Timings CHENNAI SUNDAY, APR. 12 RISE 05:58 SET 18:22...

Chennai Weather max min Thiruvallur 36 24 Chennai Airport 35 26 Chennai City 34 27

Chennai Airport Today 34°C The morning will be comfortable. The sky will remain partly cloudy over the area.

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Corpn. sets up testing kiosks at 10 of its hospitals across city

500-600 samples will be collected every day; 10 more facilities to be installed

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI

The Chennai Corporation has started installing COVID-19 testing kiosks to collect samples from residents in various parts of the city.

Corporation Commissioner G. Prakash said that the testing kiosks have been set up at Korpas hospitals, in 10 locations, including Pudukottai. So far, COVID-19 testing for persons with symptoms was done only at Kilpauk Government Medical College Hospital, Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital, Omandur Government Estate Multipurpose Hospital and Stanley Medical College Hospital.

The new testing kiosks of the Corporation will collect samples from 500-600 persons every day. The centres will start operations from Saturday evening," he added.

"We have avoided primary health centres to prevent



Police conduct checks at a store in Thiruvallur to ensure that precautionary measures are followed. (S. KARUNAKARAN)

infection of pregnant women," said Mr. Prakash.

The Corporation will install 10 additional COVID-19 testing kiosks in two to three days, after which it will be able to collect samples from 1,200-1,300 persons.

"The samples will be randomly collected from residents, living within a 100-m distance from the 76 containment zones where positive cases have been identified," said Mr. Prakash.

Bakeries open

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI

Starting Sunday, the Chennai Corporation will permit bakeries to remain open from 6 a.m. to 1 p.m.

In a tweet, Corporation Commissioner G. Prakash announced that bakeries would open from Sunday.

Pointing to the significance of collecting such samples, he said, "These results are critical. We will know whether the spread of COVID-19 has started. We will know the pattern."

Stressing on the need for home visits by workers for data collection, he said, "We have achieved 90% penetration. So far, 2,488 persons have been identified with

symptoms like cold and fever. All the 2,488 persons will be under our radar for three weeks."

Mr. Prakash organised a meeting with media organisations on Saturday. "Over 20,000 persons deliver newspapers in the city. Personnel from newspaper organisations and persons who deliver newspapers should wear masks and gloves, by Monday," he said.

Octogenarian back home after making a full recovery

Two members of 84-year-old's family were also admitted

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI

More than a fortnight after she tested positive, the recovery of an octogenarian from COVID-19 has turned into a story of hope.

As P. Vasanthamani, dean of the Government Kilpauk Medical College (KMC) Hospital, from where the octogenarian and two of her family members were discharged, puts it: "Not everything about COVID-19 has to be about fear, as 99% persons survive it."

One of the oldest patients in the State — the 84-year-old — was discharged from the hospital on April 9. A diabetic with hypertension, she came to the hospital for a follow-up on Saturday. As she thanked the doctors and hospital staff, they cheered her on with applause.

It all started when her 23-year-old grandson, studying in London, returned home last month.



The 84-year-old was discharged from the Govt. Kilpauk Medical College Hospital on April 9. • B. JOTHIRAMALINGAM

His 54-year-old mother developed symptoms, and both were admitted to KMC on March 24. "We lifted samples from both of them. While the sample returned positive for the mother, it was negative for him. So, we repeated the test after 48 hours and this time, his sample returned positive for COVID-19," Dr. Vasanthamani said.

His grandmother too developed symptoms, and was admitted to KMC on March 25. She tested positive for COVID-19. "All three of them have recovered without complications," she added. While the mother and son were discharged on April 6 and 8, respectively, after two consecutive samples tested negative, the octogenarian was discharged on April 9. "We have advised them a 14-day quarantine at home," she said.

Panel urges govt. to ensure children on the streets don't go hungry

STAFF REPORTER CHENNAI

The children's committee from the shelter for homeless girls, run by the Karunaiyala Social Service Organisation, has appealed to people and the government to take cognizance of street children and the homeless who have been affected by the ongoing lockdown.

"Ever since the lockdown, street children and homeless persons have been the most affected, and their rights need to be protected," stated an appeal put forth by the children's committee, to mark the International Day for Street Children, observed on April 12.

"With no roof over their heads and no jobs or income, the government should ensure the safety of

the homeless. We appeal to them to ascertain the needs of the homeless and street children, in shelters during the lockdown, and provide them necessities," said the children's committee.

It further urged the government to distribute financial aid and ration to the homeless, and those without a ration card or other identity documents.

The langar at the Sri Guru Nanak Sat Sangh Sabha in T. Nagar is usually busy, with food being served to devotees and patients who come for treatment at leading hospitals in the city, and their attendants who stay at the gurudwara.

However, ever since the lockdown due to COVID-19,

T. Nagar gurudwara serves food to 400 migrant workers

Daily menu comprises sambar rice, dal rice, vegetable biryani and khichdi, sent to Corpn. shelters

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI

The langar at the Sri Guru Nanak Sat Sangh Sabha in T. Nagar is usually busy, with food being served to devotees and patients who come for treatment at leading hospitals in the city, and their attendants who stay at the gurudwara.

However, ever since the lockdown due to COVID-19,

the cooks have been making food for another 400 persons, every day. "We make sambar rice, dal rice, vegetable biryani and khichdi and send the food to a few facilities of the Chennai Corporation in Mylapore zone. They asked if we could supply and we readily agreed," said Amandeep Singh Khandhari, committee member of the Sat Sangh Sabha. President

of the Sat Sangh Sabha, Harbans Singh, said that they were purchasing vegetables and rice on a regular basis from various sources, including Koyambedu.

A helping hand "The kitchen runs on donations from various people. And we will be glad to help in any way possible," he said. The Punjab Association,

Chennai, has been providing lunch to close to 1,700 persons, including doctors and supporting staff at various hospitals that treat COVID-19 patients, and a few police outposts as well.

Ramesh Lamba, association general secretary, said that the food was being prepared every day at Hotel Radisson Blu, with support from its managing director,

Vikram Aggarwal, who is also a committee member of the association.

"Members of the association are indebted to the people and government of Tamil Nadu, since they stood with the people of Punjab when they came here during the Partition. We will be soon putting up migrant labourers at our Anna Adarsh College," he added.

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LIFE MADE SIMPLE

SUNDAY • APRIL 12, 2020

THE HINDU CLASSIFIEDS BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER. Includes sections for BRIDEGROOMS WANTED, BRIDES WANTED, ELITE BRIDES WANTED, ELITE GROOMS WANTED, and various matrimonial and business listings.

Zonal teams to focus on contact tracing

IAS, IPS officers to ensure guidelines are followed

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI

The State government has formed zonal special task teams comprising senior IAS and IPS officers to follow up and ensure that all contact persons of COVID-19 patients are traced.

The teams would make sure that the guidelines were implemented effectively and the welfare schemes reached the targeted candidates.

Chief Secretary K. Shanmugam, in an order on Saturday, said 12 teams, each comprising one IAS and IPS officer, will be posted to coordinate with the respective District Collectors in monitoring prompt contact tracing of patients and other cases daily, besides ensuring quick sampling, testing and release of results.

The teams would liaise with the authorities concerned to make sure that proper treatment protocol



K. Shanmugam

was followed in all hospitals. The move comes a day after CM Edappadi K. Palaniswami expressed concern over the risk of State slipping into Stage 3 of COVID-19.

The teams are: Chennai district: Rajendra Kumar and Abash Kumar, ADGP; Tiruvallur, Kancheepuram and Chengalpattu: T. Udayachandran and T.S. Anbu, IGP, in Chennai; Vellore, Tirupattur, Ranipet and Tiruvannamalai: Mangat Ram Sharma and V. Vanitha, IGP, Railways, in Vellore; Villupuram, Cuddalore and Kalla-

kurichi: L. Subramanian and ADGP K. Vannia Perumal in Villupuram; Salem, Dharmapuri and Krishnagiri: R. Kirilosh Kumar, M.N. Manjunatha, ADGP in Salem; Erode: T.N. Venkatesh and SP S. Lakshmi; Tiruppur, Coimbatore and The Nilgiris: Kumar Jayanth and Shankar Jwal, ADGP, in Tiruppur; Tiruchi, Ariyalur, Perambalur and Pudukottai: R. Anandakumar and Shailesh Kumar Yadav, ADGP, in Tiruchi; Thanjavur, Tiruvarur and Nagapattinam: M.S. Shanmugam and M.C. Sarangan, IGP, in Thanjavur; Madurai, Sivaganga, Ramanathapuram and Theni: C. Kamaraj and S. Murugan, IGP, in Madurai; Karur, Namakkal and Dindigul: Munianathan and Abhay Kumar Singh, ADGP, in Karur; Tirunelveli, Thoothukudi, Kanniyakumari, Tenkasi and Virudhunagar: M. Karunakaran and Mahesh Kumar Aggarwal, DGP, Tirunelveli.

Chennai's tally surges to 182 cases

Two doctors contract the infection; 16 persons in Tiruvallur test positive

COVID-19 in T.N.									
	Until April 4	April 5	April 6	April 7	April 8	April 9	April 10	April 11	Total
Cases reported	485	86	60	69	48	96	77	58	969
Recovered and discharged	8	0	0	11	2	6	17	0	44
Deceased	3	2	1	2	0	0	1	1	10

Monitoring*		Capacity*		Testing*	
Persons under home quarantine#	51,996	Beds in isolation wards	1,074	Samples collected	9,842
Persons in isolation wards in hospitals	1,884	Ventilators	3,371	Tested positive	969
Persons in quarantine facilities	165			Tested negative	7,779

*Status as on date; #Includes only Health and Family Welfare Department figures. People under home quarantine as per Bureau of Immigration advisory not included

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI

Chennai remained on top of the list of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) cases in the State. With 10 more persons testing positive for COVID-19 on Saturday, the city's tally surged to 182. However, the day's highest number of cases were from Tiruvallur as 16 of the 58 persons who tested positive were from the district.

In the last two days, two doctors – a government and a private doctor – have test-

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI

ed positive for COVID-19 in the city, officials said. With this, six doctors have tested positive in the State.

Tracing, quarantining
The Health Department and the Chennai Corporation have taken up tracing and quarantining family members, patients and hospital staff who had come in contact with the two doctors.

Disinfection work had been taken up at a private hospital in north Chennai. Apart from Chennai and Tiruvallur, 12 persons (eight women and four men) from Nagapattinam, 11 persons (10 women and one man) from Coimbatore, three persons from Tiruchi, two men from The Nilgiris, and one person each from Chengalpattu, Cuddalore, Dindigul and Tiruvannamalai tested positive, according to the bulletin issued by the Directorate of Public Health and Preven-

tion Medicine. The number of cases in Coimbatore was 97 followed by Erode with 60 cases and Tirunelveli with 56 cases.

1,884 admitted
A total of 1,884 persons were admitted to isolation wards of hospitals across the State. A total of 51,996 persons were under home quarantine, and 165 in government quarantine facilities. Another 49,963 persons have completed the 28-day quarantine period.

Man who ended his life tests negative

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT ARRIYALUR

The swab test of the patient who ended his life at an isolation ward at the Government Hospital here on Friday has turned out to be negative for COVID-19.

The result of the laboratory test done by the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Government Hospital in Tiruchi was out.

He was admitted on April 6 with the complaints of cold and fever.

According to official sources, his wife had visited him at the isolation ward upon his persuasion a day before he took the extreme step.

Spat between couple
He was seen quarrelling with her and expressed his displeasure over his relatives failing to call on him at the hospital.

The body was handed over to his relatives after postmortem on Saturday and was cremated at Kadambur, his native village near Vikkiramangalam.

CM seeks rapid test kits, ₹1,000 cr. immediately

Palaniswami urges PM to allow only freight traffic

T. RAMAKRISHNAN CHENNAI

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami on Saturday requested Prime Minister Narendra Modi to provide COVID-19 rapid test kits and a grant of ₹1,000 crore immediately to procure medical and protective material.

He made the request while participating in a video conference, chaired by Mr. Modi and attended by Chief Ministers of other States, in the context of Tamil Nadu getting only 64.65% increase under State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF), while other States got 120.33%.

The increase was determined on the basis of the 15th Finance Commission methodology.

However, Mr. Palaniswami, who spoke from the Secretariat here, thanked the Prime Minister for releasing ₹500 crore under the SDRF.

In the last three years, Tamil Nadu had faced many natural disasters – Vardah cyclone and severe drought in 2016 followed by Ockhi cyclone in 2017 and the Gaja cyclone in 2018. Still, it got "lesser allocation" under the SDRF, the Chief Minister complained. In recent weeks, Tamil Nadu requested the Union government to provide personal protective equipment (PPEs), N-95 masks and ventilators in sufficient numbers, for which it wanted ₹ 3,000 crore.



Personnel of the Greater Chennai Corporation and Fire and Rescue Services spraying disinfectants at a hospital ward where a doctor tested positive, on Saturday. *B. JOTHIRAMALINGAM

Though the text of his speech, as released by the State government, did not refer to his making any suggestion for extending the lockdown, the Chief Minister said "train and flight services should not be resumed. I appeal to Hon'ble Prime Minister and other Chief Ministers not to allow inter State passengers' movement." At the same time, there should be smooth inter-State move-

ment of these goods through lorries and supply of essential commodities, including dal and spices from other States through Railways. Renewing Tamil Nadu's case for the provision of "rapid test kits," Mr. Palaniswami said the kits were required to cover contacts of positive cases.

Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan had been requested to provide 2 lakh test kits to the State.

At present, the State had 12 government facilities and 17 private labs for COVID testing. "This number will be increased by having at least one per district," he said.

If the lockdown was extended, sections of society, such as unorganised sector workers and agricultural labourers, should be given ₹ 2,000 per family. The Central government should pro-

vide additional funds and allotment of essential commodities, he said.

Special package
Pointing out that "at this hour of prolonged lockdown, we should not allow a food crisis in the country," Mr. Palaniswami sought the announcement of a special package for agriculture and horticulture promotion.

He reiterated various requests of the State government such as the allocation of ₹ 9,000 crore grant for launching a comprehensive plan for combating the effects of COVID-19 and its aftermath on the State's economy; increasing fiscal deficit limits of 3% of Gross State Domestic Product to 4.5% for 2019-20 and 2020-21 and immediate release of 50% of the Finance Commission's grants to local bodies.

State govt. may allow 'liberal' testing

SERENA JOSEPHINE M. CHENNAI

As the wait for the rapid test kits continue, Tamil Nadu is all set to expand its testing for coronavirus disease (COVID-19), according to senior officials and doctors.

A senior doctor said the State was moving towards "liberal" testing. "It will be test, test, test from now. People need to cooperate for two weeks. We are screening all contacts of positive patients and those

with symptoms. The Chennai Corporation has set up 10 centres for lifting swabs, and it is important that people voluntarily go for testing. We do not want the community spread of COVID-19 to happen," he said.

"There is a delay in receiving the rapid test kits. But we want to expand the testing by utilising the existing RT-PCR machines. We are continuously monitoring the secondary contacts of persons, who

have tested positive, in the containment zone. Testing of these persons will be completed in one or two days," a health official said.

The Tamil Nadu Medical Services Corporation has placed orders for four lakh rapid test kits.

The number of samples being tested had been increasing since the start of April.

As on April 11, the number of samples tested in the State since February stood at 2,726.

In the next few days, the samples lifted for testing increased, crossing the 5,000 mark on April 6.

For the first time, the number of samples lifted increased by over 1,000 on April 9.

While 1,094 samples were under process as on April 11, the day saw the highest number of samples lifted till date.

From 8,410 samples on April 10, the number increased to 9,842, adding 1,432 to the list.

Case against 'missing' patient

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT VILLUPURAM

The Villupuram West Police has booked a case against a COVID-19 positive man from Delhi, who went missing after he was released from quarantine from the Villupuram Government Hospital on April 7 following a clerical error.

Based on a complaint by Senthil Kumar, Deputy Director of Health Services, the police have registered a case against the man under Sections 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant), 269 (negligent act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life), 270 (malignant act likely to spread infection of disease) of IPC, Section 3 of Epidemic Diseases Act, Tamil Nadu Public Health Act and 51 (b) of Disaster Management Act.

Vigil to be heightened

STAFF REPORTER TIRUPATTUR

The district administration is thinking of strict enforcement of lockdown period up to April 14 in the wake of increased positive cases for COVID-19 in the State. The total number of cases in Tirupattur district stands at 16 as on Friday and in Ambur it was 13. He said that people can call 7667689852 for advice.

FROM PAGE ONE

T.N. to await Centre's decision on extension



A migrant worker carrying heavy luggage walks on the Chennai-Tiruchi National Highway on Saturday. *B. VELAKANNIRAJ

Asked why the State government should wait for the Central government's decision when States such as Odisha and Punjab had gone for an extension, Mr. Shanmugam asserted that "it is not a matter wherein one State can decide unilaterally.

At the video-conference, all the CMs were also of the view that it would not be proper if one State took a decision which was different from that of another. So, they had all decided that all the States should function in a unified manner and they should rally behind the Prime Minister." Moreover, there was "no hurry" for Tamil Nadu to decide on the issue as the lockdown would remain in force till 6 a.m. on April 15.

One more factor that was considered by the State government was that T.N. was placed second as far as the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases was concerned. The Cabinet, which re-

viewed steps taken to tackle the spread of COVID-19 and examined the status of every district, recorded its appreciation for the cooperation extended by people and the services rendered by front line health workers, doctors, nurses, paramedical staff, officials of various departments, conservancy workers and the police.

Asked whether the State government would provide more assistance to daily wage earners and workers in the unorganised sector if the lockdown was extended, the Chief Secretary said that as and when the extension was done, the CM would announce the government's steps.

On the launch of the scheme of fair price shops selling grocery items at ₹500 a bag, Mr. Shanmugam said that the government felt that the price was on the higher side. So, the authorities had been advised to prepare similar bags with lower quantities of groceries for ₹100 or ₹150 a bag.

ICMR nod sought for plasma therapy trial

Treatment only for critically ill patients

SERENA JOSEPHINE M. CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu's Health Department has sought the approval of Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) for trial of convalescent plasma therapy for critically-ill coronavirus disease (COVID-19) patients in the State.

An official of the health department, while confirming that ICMR nod had been sought, said that plasma therapy was mainly for treating severely ill COVID-19 patients. The Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital has applied to ICMR for taking up plasma therapy and will launch the trial as soon as it gets the nod.

"Plasma therapy involves collection of plasma from a person who has recovered from COVID-19 and transfusion to another patient. When a person recovers from COVID-19, he/she would have antibodies

against the virus. Once the patients make a complete recovery and are screened for viral clearance, we can collect the plasma that will have the antibodies," he said.

Blood would be screened for other infections such as HIV and malaria before being taken for transfusion. "This therapy will be beneficial for patients who are severely ill, as their bodies lack the ability to fight the virus," he said.

A senior doctor said the blood of patients, who had recovered from COVID-19, will have the antibodies, which were protein molecules, that had a definite tendency to fight the antigens. In severely ill patients, it will help in fighting the virus.

As of April 10, the State has 911 patients with COVID-19. Of this, 44 persons were discharged after treatment and nine have died.

129 foreign nationals rounded up

They reportedly split up and travelled to South India after the Delhi event

R. SIVARAMAN CHENNAI

Following the outbreak of COVID-19, 129 foreign nationals, who were staying in various mosques in the State, have so far been held for violation of visa norms and involvement in religious preaching. These preachers hailed from Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Congo.

The police said they had arrived in India on tourist visas and violated the guidelines by travelling to different parts of the country and preaching. They attended the Tablighi Jamaat conference in Delhi.

Police sources told *The Hindu* that they had landed in different airports in the first week of March or even earlier.

Thereafter, the members split up and travelled across the State and stayed in mosques.

Many arrested persons had been kept at special quarantines and some were un-



Police continued to have a tough time with people who defied the lockdown in Chennai on Saturday. *R. RAVINDRAN

der treatment after testing positive for COVID-19.

Visa regulations
General Policy Guidelines Relating to Indian Visa says foreign nationals granted any type of visa and OCI cardholders shall not be permitted to engage themselves in "tabligh" work.

There will be no restriction on visiting religious places and attending normal religious activities such as discourses. However,

before boarding a special flight to Kuala Lumpur. They have been lodged in a quarantine ward at Poonamallee.

They had travelled to Tenkasi and Thiruvananthapuram and involved in preaching activities, the police alleged. When the lockdown was in force, they travelled by private van to the city to board the special flight to Kuala Lumpur.

Subsequently, the Kancheepuram district police booked a case against 10 Indonesians and four Malaysians who stayed in a mosque in the town based on a complaint given by local village administrative officer. Meanwhile, State government facilitated evacuation of 2,470 stranded foreign nationals.

The country-wise break of these people is: Malaysia 755, Singapore 488, France 295, Germany 271, Canada 131, Oman 3, Israel 6, the U.S. 281, and Japan 208.

preaching religious ideologies, making speeches in religious places, distribution of audio or visual display/pamphlets pertaining to religious ideologies, spreading conversion and so on is not allowed.

Most of them attended the Tablighi Jamaat event between March 12 and 22 and later they split into groups and travelled to south India. Among them, 10 Malaysian nationals were first caught at Chennai airport last Sunday

With 58 fresh cases, T.N.'s virus count at 969

These are over and above what the Centre would supply to the State.

On the row over supplies from China, the Chief Secretary said only a limited number of companies were producing the kits. As the consignment, meant for India, was reported to have been diverted to the United States, it was expected that "our country will get the next consignment, in which Tamil Nadu will get 50,000 kits, in view of the State's earlier order. We hope to get another 50,000 kits," he said. Asked why the consignment went to the U.S., he said, "You all know the answer."

Mr. Shanmugam said the State government had got even patients with mild symptoms admitted to hospitals despite the Centre's advice of letting such patients remain at home.

On allowing more testing facilities in the State, he said that the Dharmapuri government medical college

had been given permission by the Central authorities on Friday. This was apart from 12 government facilities and 7 private laboratories. The Centre's approval was awaited for government medical colleges in Kanniyakumari, Thanjavur and Vellore.

As for converting public places into temporary wards, Mr. Shanmugam said that an official group had made an assessment of the State's requirements. It had identified hotels, hospitals and large buildings, in which three lakh patients could be accommodated. The government, which was working on projections regarding the spread of COVID-19, would come out with its findings in a few days.

Asked whether the State government would bear the expenses for tests done at private hospitals, the Chief Secretary said that the Chief Minister was looking into the matter.

The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) is the apex statutory body for disaster management in India. The NDMA was formally constituted on 27th September 2006, in accordance with the Disaster Management Act, 2005 with Prime Minister as its Chairperson and nine other members, and one such member to be designated as Vice-Chairperson.

National Executive Committee (NEC)

A National Executive Committee is constituted under Section 8 of DM Act, 2005 to assist the National Authority in the performance of its functions.

Union Home secretary is its ex-officio chairperson.

NEC has been given the responsibility to act as the coordinating and monitoring body for disaster management, to prepare a National Plan, monitor the implementation of National Policy etc.

National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM)

NIDM has the mandate of human resource development and capacity building for disaster management within the broad policies and guidelines laid down by the NDMA.

National Disaster response force (NDRF)

NDRF is the specialized force for disaster response which works under the overall supervision and control of NDMA.

State level Institutions

State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA)

Headed by Chief Minister of the respective state, SDMA lays down the policies and plans for disaster management in the state.

It is responsible to coordinate the implementation of the state Plan, recommend provision of funds for mitigation and preparedness measures and review the developmental plans of the different departments of the state to ensure integration of prevention, preparedness and mitigation measures.

State Executive Committee (SEC)- Headed by the Chief Secretary of the state, SEC has the responsibility for coordinating and monitoring the implementation of the National Policy, the National Plan and the State Plan as provided under the DM Act.

District level Institutions

District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA)

Section 25 of the DM Act provides for constitution of DDMA for every district of a state.

The District Magistrate/ District Collector/Deputy Commissioner heads the Authority as Chairperson besides an elected representative of the local authority as Co-Chairperson except in the tribal areas where the Chief Executive Member of the District Council of Autonomous District is designated as Co-Chairperson. Further in district, where Zila Parishad exists, its Chairperson shall be the Co-Chairperson of DDMA.

The District Authority is responsible for planning, coordination and implementation of disaster management and to take such measures for disaster management as provided in the guidelines.

The District Authority also has the power to examine the construction in any area in the district to enforce the safety standards and to arrange for relief measures and respond to the disaster at the district level.

The virus versus women



DR. USHA SRIRAM,
Senior endocrinologist

COVID-19

We are just beginning to learn and feel the magnitude of the direct and indirect impact that this pandemic is having on the lives of women across the globe. COVID-19 is not just a health issue. It has complex interactions at the social, economic, cultural, political and gender relations level. Data reveals that the virus does not impact women as severely as men. Women do get infected and develop complications. Just less than men.

Women are bigger casualties due to the nature of their work, the impact of the economic downturn, the lockdown and the stay-at-home mandate, adding to the existing deep fissures in gender parity. These will have a negative impact in the short term and will be more pronounced in the long term.

Health workers

Women make up nearly 70% of the global health care work force. As nurses, doctors, therapists, cleaners and caregivers they are in harm's way with gruelling schedules, compromised safety, lack of protective equipment and poor representation at leadership levels. The thought of how the pandemic will affect their own lives, and their families is a major source of anxiety and stress. Watching many patients die is a heavy emotional burden for many of these women with the potential for serious post-traumatic stress disorders soon.

The economic downturn will have the harshest impact on women. More women work part time, provide a major share of childcare and elder care. They are under paid, unpaid, unorganised and undervalued. Small businesses such as salons, fruit and flower shops are often women-owned. This also exacerbates the economic insecurities and gender inequalities that already exist. The economic shocks felt by

women can drive them to take heavy interest loans, multiple jobs and low paying or risky jobs.

It is well known that during times of crises, violence against girls and women becomes real. We are seeing this yet again. Lockdown, unemployment, financial hardship and access to alcohol are making men/spouses angry and edgy, leading to domestic abuse. The WHO and the UN Women are deeply concerned and flagging this aspect of the pandemic regularly.

Pregnancy should be viewed as a high-risk state. Women missing their antenatal visits/ scans and postpartum visits due to fear of infection and lack of transportation will compound to the existing crises. Maternal morbidity and mortality are likely to go higher now.

Gender based violence, economic insecurities, care giving, front line health care work, loss of physical and emotional support from family and friends due to physical distancing and lockdown, concerns about pregnancy, contraception and abortion, worries about the future of education, physical and mental well-being of their children.

Nearly 700 million girls are out of school now and many adolescent girls who are forced to stay at home run the real risk of being burdened and exploited with domestic chores and

caregiving. Many may never return to school. It is important to anticipate these challenges and begin the remedial measures at local and the national levels.

Transwomen's lives have been upended even more during this lockdown. Begging and commercial sex work are not options. Discrimination and lack of family support for many have made them more marginalised now. Many trans women on hormones are unable to access and afford the medications and getting good health care has always been a challenge for the LGBTQIA+ community.

Way forward

How can we make this pandemic a catalyst for building a better tomorrow for our girls and our women? By taking a gendered approach to the entire situation.

- a) We need women included in decision making and in leadership roles.
- b) Healthcare workers need to have adequate Personal Protective Equipment and mental health support.
- c) Data needs to be disaggregated based on gender
- d) Special needs of pregnant women to be addressed through a hotline
- e) A plan to offer Wellness Clinics post COVID for everyone, particularly women
- f) Transwomen and disabled women to be assisted through the local government
- g) Prioritising physical and mental health of women now and beyond the pandemic

These are very unusual times. They need more than the usual solutions. We need a bright light, a gender lens and good leadership. What are we waiting for?

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- Parrys
- Porur
- Purasawalkam
- Saidapet
- Sholinganallur
- Thiruvallur
- T.Nagar
- Villivakkam

only 73 inmates, though it could accommodate 80 in 40 rooms. Since the two petitioners, Choi Yong Suk and Choe Jae Won, had been booked and detained on charges of evading Goods and Services Tax to the tune of over 40 crore, ordering their release from the camp would set a bad precedent, he added.

Over 1.51 lakh violators arrested

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI
Over 1,51,151 persons have been arrested so far for venturing out on roads, violating prohibitory orders promulgated in the State from March 24, to prevent the COVID-19 outbreak. All of them were released on bail. In the last 20 days, 1,40,176 violations were reported and 1,40,176 first information reports (FIRs) were registered. As many as 1,19,286 vehicles were seized and a total amount of ₹53.72 lakh was collected as fine from the violators, the police said.

K.G. RAJARAJESWARAN
DGM (Personnel) - The Ramco Cement Ltd.
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Mathew 25:21
SAFE IN THE ARMS OF JESUS
A Rare GEM - Genius Exemplary Magnanimous Always in our thoughts, forever in our hearts
Fondly remembered by wife Rajkumar, Children - Preethi and Sam, Nithya and David & Grandchildren - Sheraba, Sharada, Shalini & Roshini
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Fondly remembered by Jami, Rebecca, Vimal, Vasant & their families

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All in a day's work



Slugging on: (Clockwise from top) Farmers transporting tobacco leaves for curing in Ongole, Andhra Pradesh; people who violated lockdown restrictions being made to clean the Devirammani Lake in Mandya, Karnataka; and a migrant worker engaged in construction of the Vyttila flyover in Kochi, Kerala, on Saturday. ♦♦♦KOMMURISRIINIVAS, SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT & THULASI KAKKAT

Guntur sees spike in cases

One death, 17 cases in single day turns focus on A.P. city, Kerala reports 10 cases

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM/
BENGALURU/VIJAYAWADA/
HYDERABAD

The death of one person with COVID-19 in Guntur in Andhra Pradesh and a spike in cases in that city marked the progression of the viral infection on Saturday, with about 100 new cases being reported in the southern States. Data from Telangana were awaited.

COVID-19 positive cases in Andhra Pradesh crossed the 400-mark on Saturday with 24 new cases reported from four districts. There were 17 new cases in Guntur on Saturday.

Kerala's Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan hoped that a low rate of disease transmission would help the State, which is projected to reach a critical phase over the next three to four weeks. The number of people who were newly testing positive for COVID-19 seemed to be on the decline, while the number of those testing negative after treatment was up, he told the media.

On Saturday, 10 new cases were reported in Kerala, three of them with history of foreign travel. The rest were primary contacts of import-

Preventive measures

With the government gearing to contain the spread of the coronavirus, swab collection booths are busy collecting samples throughout the day



Deft work: A healthcare worker collecting samples from a man for the COVID-19 test in Vijayawada on Saturday. ♦♦♦

State	Total number of cases	Ac cases	Number of those cured	Deaths
Andhra Pradesh	405	387	11	7
Karnataka	215	170	6	6
Kerala	373	228	143	2
Tamil Nadu	969	915	44	10
Telangana	503	393	96	14

ed cases. Seven new cases were in Kannur, two at Kasaragod and one at Kozhikode. The State total for positive cases was 373, and 228 were under treatment.

The State has so far tested samples of 14,163 persons, of which 12,818 results had been negative.

Mr. Vijayan said while fo-

tached bathrooms across the State, which could be used as isolation rooms, should a situation arise. Already over 2.5 lakh rooms had been

COVID-19

identified, of which 1.10 lakh room were ready to be used. Local bodies were also being asked to identify empty houses or apartments within their jurisdiction.

Mysuru cluster

Mysuru in Karnataka had five fresh cases on Saturday, and added to another five from the day before, the city was seen as an emerging cluster. The source of infection in the first case from a pharma company in the district was not identified.

Eight new cases were reported in Karnataka on Saturday, taking the total number to 215, according to official data. A 10-month-old boy, the youngest patient in Karnataka in Mangaluru was discharged.

Of Saturday's new cases, apart from three in Mysuru, the others included a 32-year-old private doctor, who got the infection from a patient, and a 10-year-old boy

Southern States want to retain the curbs

But Jagan Mohan Reddy says the lockdown should be limited to 'red zone' in Andhra Pradesh

STAFF REPORTER
VIJAYAWADA/BENGALURU/
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM/
HYDERABAD

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy told Prime Minister Narendra Modi at a video-conference on Saturday that it would be better if the lockdown was restricted to 37 mandals declared as the red zone out of the total 676 mandals in the State.

He informed that 44 mandals were in the orange zone and 595 in the green zone, where there was no trace of

the novel coronavirus. Karnataka announced the extension of the lockdown till April 30.

The announcement came soon after Mr. Modi's meeting with the Chief Ministers.

Chief Minister B.S. Yeddyrappa said at a press conference in Bengaluru that unlike the ongoing 21-day lockdown, the Centre suggested that norms be relaxed in the next phase for fishermen, farmers, industry and labour. However, public transport is likely to remain off

the road and schools and colleges continue to be shut. "The Centre stressed the need for relaxation of the lockdown in a graded manner," he said.

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said the State would not immediately ease the restrictions. Addressing journalists after the video-conference with the Prime Minister, he said the meeting felt there should be no ground for complacency. The country could ill afford to relax guard. Physical dis-

tancing norms would continue in place. So would the regulations on the coming and going of people in public places. The ban on air, sea and road travel and inter-State and inter-district journeys would endure.

Kerala was particularly vulnerable to a resurgence of the infection given its high density of population. Moreover, it anticipated an influx of the Malayali diaspora when the global lockdown ended. Mr. Vijayan said the Centre would finalise its strategy

soon and it would give the States a window to execute their withdrawal plans.

Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrababhan Rao urged Mr. Modi to extend the lockdown by two weeks. He said the lockdown had helped to contain the spread of the virus to a great extent. During the lockdown, he said, the government should ensure that farmers did not suffer losses, the supply of essentials was streamlined and the food processing industry was allowed to function.

STAFF REPORTER
VIJAYAWADA

In a development that surprised everyone by surprise, the Andhra Pradesh government appointed a retired Madras High Court judge V. Kanagaraj as the State Election Commissioner (SEC) in place of N. Ramesh Kumar, who it expelled through an overnight ordinance.

Justice Kanagaraj served as a Madras High Court judge for nine years and has several landmark judgments



V. Kanagaraj taking charge as A.P. Election Commissioner.

Mr. Ramesh Kumar took charge as the SEC in April 2016. He was in the eye of a storm since his postponement of the local body elections, purportedly due to the coronavirus scare, and for requesting the Union Home Ministry to give him protection from Central police forces.

This followed a sharp attack by Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, who attributed motives to his (Mr. Kumar) decision to defer the polls.

IN BRIEF



Centre's response on stranded Indians sought

KOCHI

A Division Bench of the Kerala High Court on Saturday directed the Central government to file a statement in response to a PIL seeking a directive to the Centre to evacuate Indians stranded in the United Arab Emirates in the wake of a ban on international flights following the lockdown. The Emirates Airlines had expressed its willingness to operate its flights to India to evacuate those stranded.

Use of homeopathy: HC seeks Kerala's response

KOCHI

A Division Bench of the Kerala High Court on Saturday sought the response of the State government to a plea for allowing homeopathic practitioners to use and distribute homeopathic medicines as prophylactic medicines against the COVID-19. The petition was filed by M.S. Vineeth, a lawyer from Kozhikode. The petitioner said though the State Secretary of AYUSH had approved the use of Ayurveda for COVID-19 patients, homeopathy was left out.

Veerappan's aide Stella Mary released on bail

MYSURU

An alleged aide of forest bandit Veerappan, Stella Mary, who had been arrested two months ago, was released on bail. The arrest of Stella for her alleged involvement in the Palar blasts of 1993 had not only aroused curiosity over the police taking her into custody 27 years after the crime, but also raised questions over the legality of sending her to judicial custody instead of the Juvenile Justice Board as she was a minor when the offence was reported.

Karnataka's first 'sanitiser bus' rolls out of scrap yard

It will be used to disinfect people offering essential services

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

The Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) is converting old buses slated to be scrapped into "sanitiser buses" to disinfect people in public places. On Saturday, one such bus was launched in the city.

KSRTC Managing Director Shivayogi C. Kalasad said the buses, to be called 'Sarige Sanjeevini', will be operated in city limits for police personnel, health workers, pourakarmikas and others carrying out essential services during the lockdown.

"There are various measures to curb the spread of COVID-19, this is one among them. We can't say that the buses will completely disinfect people. They have to follow other measures, such as maintaining personal hy-



Bug killer: An old KSRTC bus that was converted into a 'sanitiser bus' in Bengaluru. ♦♦♦SREENIVASA MURTHY

giene, and washing hands. This is one of the proactive measures taken by the corporation," he said.

The bus was modified at the central workshop of the KSRTC at a cost of ₹20,000. Modifications include installation of sprinklers. People need to enter from the front

door and exit via the rear end to get disinfected.

"In districts such as Mysuru, Mangaluru, Chikkaballapur and others where COVID-19 positive cases have been reported, the KSRTC is planning to operate sanitiser buses. We may convert 18 to 20 buses for now," he said.

Woman cured of COVID-19 gives birth

Caesarean section performed on her

STAFF REPORTER
KANNUR

A woman, cured of COVID-19, gave birth to a boy at the Kannur Government Medical College Hospital on Saturday, the first such case in Kerala and the third in the country, according to hospital sources. A Caesarean section was performed on the 29-year-old Kasaragod native.

The woman had contracted COVID-19 from her husband, who was found afflicted on his return from Dubai.

The couple were hospitalised on March 27. They were declared cured after their two test results turned negative and were scheduled to be discharged two days ago.

However, since the woman was nearing her delivery date, she stayed back, said S. Ajith, head of gynaecology, who led the surgery

team. The surgery was done in a specially equipped operating theatre with extra security measures.

Baby under observation

The couple are now housed in the isolation ward. The child, weighing 3 kg, will be under observation for some days.

N. Roy, Principal, Kannur Government Medical College, said special arrangements were in place at the operation theatre since a Caesarean had been done earlier on a suspected COVID-19 patient there. The woman was discharged after her results were negative.

Dr. Roy said 15 COVID-19 cases were treated and discharged from the hospital. Seven patients were still undergoing treatment. Two COVID-19 afflicted pregnant women had been cured.

Captive elephants under watch in Karnataka

R. KRISHNA KUMAR
MYSURU

The COVID-19 advisory to monitor the health of captive tigers has now been extended to captive elephants in Karnataka.

Manoj Kumar, Deputy Conservator of Forests (DCF), Nagarahole, told *The Hindu* that there is no specific advisory from the directorate of Project Elephant. But a communiqué has been issued by the principal chief conservator of forests (wildlife) to ensure sanitary conditions in jungle camps and to reduce human contact with elephants, he said.

These elephants are captured from the wild on being marked as "troublesome"



Safe distance: The mahouts have been advised to minimise physical contact with the animals. ♦♦♦M.A.SRIRAM

and indulging in crop raiding. They are darted, tranquilized, chained, and led to the crawls and tamed before

being declared fit to serve in combing operations or in capturing other elephants that stray into human land-

scape. Some are rescued from circuses or have been sold to temples. Karnataka has nearly 150 captive elephants including those under the Forest Department.

Each elephant is assigned to a mahout and his assistant. The mahout who bathes, provides food, and maintain a genetic watch over them. In the wake of the advisory, the authorities have conducted health camps for mahouts and their families in the jungle camps and instructed them to minimise socialising with the public in their hamlet.

Mr. Kumar said the premises of the mahouts and kavadis have been disinfected and even the ration they receive through PDS is subjected to screening.

No scrubbing

Masks and sanitizers have been distributed while the practice of scrubbing the elephants when they bathe, has been discontinued.

Nagarahole veterinarian Mujiib said the camp elephants are allowed to water themselves and physical contact with mahouts has been reduced.

Meanwhile, the big game in the jungles are under watch and camera traps installed to assess their density and presence have been switched to video mode to ascertain if there are health issues evident in their gut.

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSTAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 39.00 HRS)

Forecast for Sunday: Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning and gust likely at Assam, Meghalaya, Maharashtra, Arunachal Pradesh, Karnataka, and Mizoram.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala.....	37.6	24.0	24.0	Kozhikode.....	37.0	26.4	26.4
Ahmedabad.....	42.0	23.2	23.2	Kurnool.....	35.0	25.3	25.3
Aizawl.....	35.6	17.5	17.5	Lucknow.....	38.1	20.2	20.2
Allahabad.....	41.6	20.0	20.0	Madurai.....	37.8	26.2	26.2
Bengaluru.....	32.2	21.0	21.0	Mangaluru.....	37.0	23.1	23.1
Bhopal.....	24.2	24.2	24.2	Mumbai.....	34.8	25.0	25.0
Bhubaneswar.....	39.6	25.3	25.3	Mysuru.....	33.4	22.4	22.4
Chandigarh.....	34.8	17.4	17.4	New Delhi.....	36.9	19.1	19.1
Chennai.....	33.5	27.4	27.4	Patna.....	36.7	21.8	21.8
Coimbatore.....	34.8	24.8	24.8	Port Blair.....	32.6	24.7	24.7
Dehradun.....	33.7	16.0	16.0	Puducherry.....	34.1	27.0	27.0
Gangtok.....	25.7	14.0	14.0	Pune.....	38.4	21.0	21.0
Goa.....	34.0	23.9	23.9	Raipur.....	36.8	20.2	20.2
Guwahati.....	31.0	19.3	19.3	Ranchi.....	36.2	20.9	20.9
Hubballi.....	36.0	23.0	23.0	Shillong.....	23.7	19.5	19.5
Hydrabad.....	35.2	23.4	23.4	Shimla.....	22.8	11.4	11.4
Imphal.....	32.3	15.5	15.5	Srinagar.....	24.4	6.4	6.4
Jammu.....	39.6	25.1	25.1	Thiruvananthapuram.....	34.4	26.3	26.3
Kochi.....	33.8	26.0	26.0	Tiruchirappalli.....	36.9	25.6	25.6
Kohima.....	22.2	12.5	12.5	Vijayawada.....	38.5	25.4	25.4
Kolkata.....	36.3	26.2	26.2	Vishakhapatnam.....	37.2	27.2	27.2

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO ₂	NO ₂	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE	Yesterday
Ahmedabad.....	34	44	14	51	77	Good	In observation made at 7.00 p.m., Kalaburgi, Karnataka
Bengaluru.....	14	08	65	15	47	Good	recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 200 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Ramanagara, Karnataka, recorded a healthy AQI score of 33.
Chennai.....	08	05	23	21	31	Good	
Delhi.....	53	40	71	190	130	Poor	
Hydrabad.....	07	14	13	26	40	Good	
Kolkata.....	07	10	33	39	39	Good	
Lucknow.....	04	31	53	224	31	Poor	
Mumbai.....	04	10	09	59	91	Good	
Pune.....	37	13	51	47	45	Good	
Vishakhapatnam.....	08	34	06	31	46	Good	

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Reads indicative average AQI)

SO₂: 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.

CO₂: Carbon dioxide. 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.

PM2.5 & 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.

It is a Multi Disciplinary Organization mandated with the task of enforcing the provisions of two special fiscal laws – Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999 (FEMA) and Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA).

Historical background:

The origin of this Directorate goes back to 1st May, 1956, when an ‘Enforcement Unit’ was formed, in Department of Economic Affairs, for handling Exchange Control Laws violations under Foreign Exchange Regulation Act, 1947 (FERA ’47).

In the year 1957, this Unit was renamed as ‘Enforcement Directorate’. The administrative control of the Directorate was transferred from Department of Economic Affairs to Department of Revenue in 1960.

For a short period of 04 years (1973 – 1977), the Directorate also remained under the administrative jurisdiction of Department of Personnel & Administrative Reforms.

Powers:

The Directorate enforces two laws;

FEMA, a Civil Law having quasi judicial powers, for investigating suspected contraventions of the Exchange Control Laws and Regulations with the powers to impose penalties on those adjudged guilty.

PMLA, a Criminal Law, whereby the Officers are empowered to conduct enquiries to locate, provisionally attach/confiscate assets derived from acts of Schedules Offences besides arresting and prosecuting the Money Launderers.

‘8.2 lakh cases if there was no lockdown’

Centre justifies steps taken to fight COVID-19

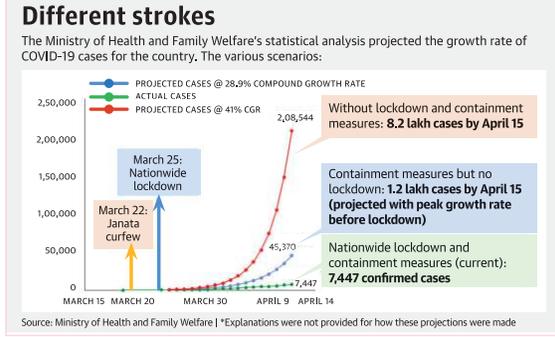
JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

With India recording a first-time ever three-digit rise in the confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the past 24 hours, the Health Ministry on Saturday said that had a lockdown not been imposed, the country would have been staring at at least 8,00,000 cases by April 15. The Ministry reported at least 7,529 cases on Saturday.

Reports from State Health Departments put the nationwide death toll at 287 with the number of active cases at 7,303. Maharashtra had 1,446 active cases with 17 more fatalities on Saturday, while Delhi recorded 1,024 active cases and five deaths.

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) – the technical arm of the Ministry that is overseeing testing and epidemiology – was not involved in preparing this estimate, Lav Agrawal, spokesperson of the Ministry, said at the daily media briefing.

He displayed a graph that showed three curves: One a



red curve, denoting neither lockdown nor containment in place, that steeply rose to 2,08,544 cases on April 9 (and with a note that it would extend to 8.2 lakh by April 15); a blue, gentler curve that rose to 45,370 by April 15 (and 1.2 lakh cases by April 15), the blue indicating the situation with “containment measures but no lockdown”; and the final green line indicating the 7,447 cases at present.

“Lockdown and containment measures are important to fight COVID-19. If we had not taken any measures,

we might have had 2 lakh cases at this time (April 11),” Mr. Agrawal added.

There were no further details available of how the projected figures were arrived at.

COVID-19

Determining the rate of spread of infectious disease is different from extrapolating a given number of cases at an initial point and assuming a particular rate of growth and plugging it into an exponential mathematical equation, experts told *The Hindu*.

“From just this graph alone, it isn’t possible to work backward and figure out the assumption used by the modeller to arrive at the (2,00,000) figures. The curves assume a constant rate of growth, which is not what we’ve seen how the cases increase in India, or anywhere else in the world,” Aritra Das, a medical doctor with a doctorate in epidemiology, who consults with IQVIA. “Estimating the growth in cases requires knowing an RO [reproduc-

tion number that denotes how many an infected person will further infect] and that can’t be derived from what we now have.”

Modelling study

A study in February, which was published on March 23, remains the only actual modelling study involving ICMR epidemiologists and international experts in the field. That study didn’t estimate numbers but – based on the state of affairs in February – recommended that India should have focussed on finding transmission in the community and quarantining instead of “border control” because of the large uncertainty in detecting asymptomatic travellers harbouring the infection and becoming spreaders.

Another ICMR study published this week found that 40% of those with severe respiratory illnesses sampled and detected with COVID-19 could not have their contact history established.

The ICMR said 1,71,718 samples were tested, including 16,564 in the last 24 hours.

The government said it was containing the wide spread of the disease by establishing containment zones.

Call for President’s rule in M.P.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

President’s rule should be imposed in Madhya Pradesh if Chief Minister Shriyraj Singh Chouhan is unable to form Cabinet, Rajya Sabha member from the State and senior advocate Vivek Tankha said on Saturday in a letter to President Ram Nath Kovind.

The Congress leader said the patience of the 7.5 crore people of the State was “wearing thin” as they face a grim situation with regard to the spread of the COVID-19.

He argued that an “illegally designed and poorly conceived one-man show” had been unconstitutional thrust upon the people amid a lockdown.

“If the Chief Minister is unable to form his Cabinet because of issues beyond his control, then a case of breakdown of constitutional machinery will be self-evident warranting the Union to consider the imposition of President’s rule,” Mr. Tankha said in the letter, copies of which were sent to the Prime Minister and the Home Minister.

States must evolve norms to help labourers return: Gadkari

Minister discusses economic revival once lockdown ends

NISTULA HEBBAR
NEW DELHI

Union Minister for Micro, Medium and Small-scale Enterprises (MSME) Nitin Gadkari said the flight of migrant labour from cities was a serious issue in any post lockdown plan for economic revival but added that it would be up to the State governments to evolve guidelines to allow their return.

Speaking to *The Hindu* in a videoconference from his Nagpur residence (where he has been since the travel restrictions came into place), Mr. Gadkari said the plight of migrant labour was a deep concern going ahead.

“There are, according to some reports, nearly 20 lakh migrant labourers in shelters across the country; some have returned to their native



agement Act now in place, the District Collector will be key. Whether factory owners can, with a letter from the Collector travel and speak to his employees who left etc, are issues that are on the table. We have conveyed this to various State governments,” the Minister said.

He added the example of the new policy for Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (API) that had been cleared by the Union Cabinet just before the lockdown was announced.

India wants to regain its

The GCC is a political and economic alliance of countries in the Arabian Peninsula. It was established in 1981 to foster socioeconomic, security, and cultural cooperation. Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE are its members. They gather every year to discuss cooperation and regional affairs.

Kerala MP seeks Centre’s nod for special flights

‘Assist those stranded in GCC nations’

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

Kozhikode MP M.K. Raghavan on Saturday approached the Supreme Court highlighting the urgent need to establish a specialised team to identify Indian citizens stranded in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries who need to be evacuated immediately in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

He said the government needs to facilitate the evacuation of job seekers on visit visa, tourists stuck in the GCC nations – Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman – due to flight cancellations, children separated from their families, pregnant women, labourers and people who have lost their jobs due to the virus and migrants who cannot afford to travel back,



I have been approached by several individuals and organisations to ensure the safe return and well-being of such Indians who are stranded in GCC nations in the absence of basic amenities,” the petition said.

‘Airlines willing’ Mr. Raghavan, in the petition, said he had contacted several airlines which have agreed to ensure the safe return of the Indians.

He said the GCC nations had “accorded their approval and assured their complete support for the operation of flights to India to assist with the repatriation of stranded Indian citizens”.

“However, this proved to be futile as the Indian airspace has been shut since the outbreak of COVID-19. Therefore, Indians continue to be stranded despite several gracious offers being made by airline operators to assist their return from the GCC nations,” the MP said.

INTERVIEW | S. IRUDAYA RAJAN & GINU ZACHARIAA OOMMEN

‘Indian labourers in GCC countries in dire need of help’

They are at the bottom of the pyramid and have little access to healthcare, say experts on migration

VARGHESE K GEORGE
NEW DELHI

Most Indian migrants in the GCC countries are at the bottom of the pyramid in their host countries. With limited access to healthcare, they are in need of urgent assistance, migration studies experts S. Irudaya Rajan and Ginu Zachariaa Oommen say in a joint e-mail interview. S. Irudaya Rajan is Professor at the Centre of Development Studies (CDS), Thiruvananthapuram and Member of the Kerala government expert committee on COVID-19. Ginu Zachariaa Oommen is a member of the Kerala Public Service Commission. Excerpts:

How are Indian migrants in GCC countries coping with the pandemic?

■ Their plight is no less desperate. Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan wrote to the PM on the issue. In the wake of the COVID-19 spread, the situation of Indian immigrants is very precarious.

Nurses, small businessmen, labourers have been infected in significant numbers and there is no care for them.

In Kuwait, Indian localities such as Jleeb Al Shuwaikh and Mahboula have been quarantined; currently 530 of its 993 confirmed cas-

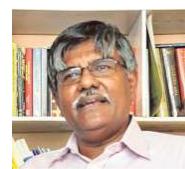
es are Indians. In Dubai, more than 500 Indians have been infected, particularly from Al Raz area. Similar situation in Qatar. These low and semi-skilled labourers have multiple ailments like diabetes, blood pressure, cholesterol and even kidney, liver problems and cancer.

Since medicines are very expensive in Gulf countries, migrants often procure their medication from India and stockpile for three to four months.

Worryingly, there are reports these stocks have been used up and there is now an acute shortage. The Gulf countries lack broad-based



Ginu Zachariaa Oommen, left, and S. Irudaya Rajan



region are Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal and Punjab.

Will the current pandemic change Kerala’s approach to receiving labour from outside the State?

■ Some estimates put inter-State migrants in Kerala at about 30 lakhs while 21 lakh Malayalis work outside.

However, we call them inter-replacement migrants – Kerala plumbers in Dubai being replaced by plumbers from Odisha, for instance.

The mass exodus of Keralites over the years has led to a situation where Kerala needs migrants from other parts of the country.

Kerala is doing a good job during the crisis in providing accommodation, medication and food for these migrants. While the Kerala migrants are struggling for their safety and survival in Gulf, in sharp contrast, in Kerala the internal migrants have been protected and guarded in the most respectful manner –

how will this play out in the future is now unpredictable.

Is there increasing resentment against immigrant labourers in Kerala?

■ Some rare incidents of protests in guest workers’ pockets such as Perumbavoor and Payipad have also become a point of discussion in the State.

In the post-pandemic grim scenario, if there is a reverse migration of the Kerala migrants that might also have an impact on the prospects of internal migrants in Kerala.

We expect some guest workers leave Kerala when the lockdown is eased, though it is not sure how many will leave immediately. It also remains to be seen whether the workers who had left before will return. Kerala surely knows these migrants are strong building blocks of its society.

Do their living conditions allow social distancing?

■ Most of them are single

Other States with high migrant populations in the



JAIPUR United fight: Women police personnel on patrol at Ghat Ki Guni in Jaipur; women maintaining physical distancing as they wait to collect masks, gloves and hand sanitisers being distributed by the Rapid Action Force (RAF) in Ahmedabad, Gujarat; people collecting foodgrains in Bhopal; and people wearing protective suits preparing to cremate a person who died of COVID-19 in Karad, Maharashtra. ♦PTI/A.N. FARUQUI



Maharashtra toll climbs to 127

Most COVID-19 cases from Mumbai; case-fatality rate stands at 7.2%

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Maharashtra recorded 187 new cases and 17 more fatalities from COVID-19 on Saturday, taking the total count to 1,761 cases and 127 deaths. Nearly 65% of the cases and 60% of the deaths have been reported from Mumbai.

State health officials said that of the Saturday's deaths, 12 were reported from Mumbai, two from Pune, and one each from Satara, Dhule and Malegaon.

"Six of the deceased were above 60 years, eight were in the age group of 40-60 years and three were below 40 years," said a State health official, adding that 16 out of these 17 patients had co-morbidities such as diabetes, hypertension, asthma and heart disease.

Increased testing

Maharashtra has conducted nearly 36,771 tests so far of which 34,094 have returned negative.

The State currently had 38,800 people under home quarantine and 4,964 people are in institutional quarantine. So far, 208 patients have recovered and been discharged from hospitals.

The number of fatalities in Pune district rose to 29 with three more deaths.

Maharashtra's case-fatality rate continued rose to 7.2%, among the highest nationwide. Punjab's fatality rate stood at 8.3%, while in Madhya Pradesh it was 7.5%. However the number of cases and deaths recorded in these States were lower than



Virus scan: A doctor conducting temperature checks at Mukund Nagar, Dharavi. ♦PRASHANT NAKWE

in Maharashtra.

Dr. Anup Yadav, head of Directorate of Health Services in Maharashtra said that the numbers of tests carried out in the State were much higher, resulting in more positive cases being detected.

"As far as the deaths are concerned, co-morbid conditions and age-related factors are the main reasons. We are carrying out detailed death audits to know the exact causes," said Dr. Yadav.

He flagged a worrying trend of many patients reaching isolation facilities at the last minute and succumbing before the doctors could do anything to save them. "The death audit will tell us if the virus is manifesting rapidly in some cases," he said.

Maharashtra to extend lockdown to April 30

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Saturday announced that the lockdown in the State would continue till at least April 30.

On Saturday, Mr. Modi had chaired a video-conference with all the CMs.

"In today's video-conference, I got the first opportunity as Chief Minister of Maharashtra to voice my opinion," Mr. Thackeray said in an address to the State through social media.

"I said we will extend the lockdown beyond April 14 as

precautions are needed in Mumbai and Pune. We know the seriousness of the situation and we will do what needs to be done," he added.

Observing that the State government had not restricted agricultural activities and the transportation and supply of essentials, Mr. Thackeray appealed to the public to not get confused or panicky. He said the instructions about examinations in universities and schools, as well as norms for allowing industries to be operational, would be spelt out by April 14.

INTERVIEW | DR. SOUMYA SWAMINATHAN

'Data is key to control of this pandemic'

'Lockdowns alone can't be effective unless combined with other health measures'

ANANTH KRISHNAN

Dr. Soumya Swaminathan, Chief Scientist at the World Health Organisation, says in an interview that the fight against COVID-19 is likely to be long-term, and lockdowns alone cannot be effective unless combined with other health measures. Dr Swaminathan, who has worked in research on tuberculosis and HIV for 30 years, was Director-General of the Indian Council of Medical Research from 2015 to 2017. Edited excerpts:

What do we know so far about how SARS-CoV-2 is spreading around the world?

■ Viral evolution and transmission dynamics can be studied by analysing genetic sequence data. There are over 4,500 viral sequences currently deposited in the GISAID platform, with around 10 Indian strains. What we see is, that over time, there is some variability in the strains. That is to be expected, as all viruses develop mutations as they transmit from person to person. What is not being observed so far is any mutation on any of the important sites of the virus, such as the spike protein or the RNA polymerase or protease enzymes, which are relevant for drug targeting and vaccines. So we believe whatever strategies are now being used to develop both therapeutics or vaccines are not threatened by any changes in the virus.

What does the evidence tell us about the effectiveness of lockdowns as a strategy?

■ The WHO has laid out quite clearly that physical distancing, of which one extreme form is a lockdown, does help bring down the transmission of the virus in the population. What they saw in China [after locking down] was transmissions within households were still going on, so they then took an additional step that was basically testing everyone with symptoms, and taking those who were positive to a separate facility where they could be kept and treated, and the exposed persons to a separate quarantine facility. We need to think about this in terms of the logic for doing that, which is if you are living in a crowded setting, chances are you are more likely to transmit to others. Other public health interventions that are shown to be effective like hand-washing, disinfecting surfaces, covering the face and mouth when coughing, and usage of masks need to be all implemented together, to be effective. We also need to remember that we are going to be facing this infection for a long time, and will need to think of sustainable strategies, as we exit lockdowns eventually. People will need to change behaviour — continue to follow physical distancing, isolate if sick, improve personal hygiene, while the public health system will need to detect, iso-



late, treat and track cases.

Should everyone wear a mask?

■ Anybody who has symptoms should be wearing a mask. There is also no doubt that healthcare workers need to wear masks and proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) as they are the ones likely to see a lot of patients. When we are talking about the general population, the logic there is if you don't show symptoms but you still have the infection, you can still be spreading it. That is the logic for everyone wearing a mask. Asymptomatic people spreading infection is not the bulk of transmission and whatever studies we have seen till now suggest it is not more than 10 to 15%. Wearing masks does not protect the wearer. You are wearing masks to protect others, so it's more of a social good.

Should India be testing more broadly?

■ Data is key to the control of this pandemic. We need to expand the number of people who are being tested.

The fact is, because of shortage of testing kits, we cannot simply test everybody. One way is looking at sentinel surveillance where you test a proportion of people with influenza-like illness (ILI) or Severe Acute Respiratory Infections (SARI), which the ICMR is already doing. Serological testing is also beginning to be used in many countries, from which you can get an idea of the extent of the population exposed and also the geographic spread of the virus.

Is there any evidence to suggest Hydroxychloroquine should be included in the treatment protocol?

■ The Solidarity trial launched 10 days ago is comparing Hydroxychloroquine, Remdesivir and Lopinavir/Ritonavir with and without interferon beta. The goal is to include more treatments as they come through and collaborate closely with groups around the world as they develop new therapies. The approaches are to find an antiviral drug, monoclonal antibody treatment or an adjunct therapy that helps modulate the body's response to the virus. There is currently no drug with proven efficacy against COVID-19. Some are being used on a compassionate-use basis, and not based on scientific evidence. Soon, we will get results from clinical trials which should inform us.

(Full text at bit.ly/SoumyaWHO)

IN BRIEF



Cancel summer vacation: Lawyers urge SC judges

NEW DELHI The Supreme Court Bar Association on Saturday unanimously resolved to press Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde and other judges of the apex court to forego their nearly two-month-long summer vacation and make up for the time lost to the COVID-19 lockdown in the larger interest of litigants and justice. The resolution said lawyers were willing to work through the holidays, from May 16 to July 5.

Haryana to be divided into three zones

CHANDIGARH Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar said on Saturday that amid the indication from PM Narendra Modi that the lockdown would be extended for two weeks, he directed that it be implemented in phases in the State. He said the State would be divided into three zones: red, orange and green. "The red zone will include the districts of Gurugram, Faridabad, Nuh and Palwal, which are the hotspots."

EPFO to credit its subscribers under PMGKY

NEW DELHI The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation has put in place a mechanism to credit employers' and employees' contribution towards its social security schemes under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY). This will benefit 79 lakh subscribers and 3.8 lakh firms, with an outgo of ₹4,800 crore from government. ♦PTI

Lockdown to continue with a human face, says Mamata

Markets to remain open: 6 more cases in the past 24 hours takes total to 95

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday emphasised that the lockdown in the State would continue with a "human face" and that markets would continue to remain open.

"The lock down will continue with a human face, markets will be open and shops selling essentials will remain

open," Ms. Banerjee told journalists at the State secretariat. The Chief Minister repeatedly assured that while the police would be "strict" in enforcing the lockdown, the force "will not indulge in excesses". She said that people in small groups would be allowed to harvest paddy, adding that the State would soon be introducing a mobile app to help farmers sell their produce.



Mamata Banerjee

Asked about a letter from the Union Home ministry, which had reportedly raised questions about lockdown exemptions in the State, Ms. Banerjee consulted with

Chief Secretary Rajiva Sinha seated beside her before asserting that the ministry had only asked the State to remain more vigilant in certain areas. The ministry is reported to have flagged several concerns in its letter, contending that the police were allowing religious congregations and that there was no regulation in vegetable, fish and mutton markets where people had been thronging in complete violation of social distancing norms in Raabazar, Narkel Danga, Topasia, Metiabruz, Garden

Reach, Ikalpur and Manik-tala. The Home ministry is also said to have asserted that areas such as Narkel Danga were witnessing 'more COVID-19' cases.

Observing that the novel coronavirus "is not a communal virus", Ms. Banerjee added, "It is a human dissonance." The Chief Minister said she raised the issue during the video-conference with Prime Minister Narendra Modi earlier in the day that "this was not the time to indulge in politics". Ms. Banerjee also reacted

sharply to repeated questions about the hotspots in the State and countered: "Why are you interested in hotspots. There is nothing called hotspots. We are closely keeping a watch on areas where we have got patients". She said that a better term to use in the situation was "sensitive areas", where the State was engaged in "micro-planning" its response.

'No reason to panic'
Six more cases of COVID-19 were detected in the State in the past 24 hours, taking the

number of active cases to 95. The CM said that there was no reason to panic as the numbers would increase. The State has tested 2,286 persons for COVID-19 infection. Asked if the number of tests was low, she said that the State had been following ICMR guidelines and testing only those with symptoms. "We had only two labs and 40 testing kits," she said. Ms. Banerjee said the State had asked the Centre for rapid testing kits and more tests would be conducted in the next few days.

SC urged to modify order on free COVID-19 testing by private labs

Petition says judgment places unfair burden on them

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

An application was filed on Saturday urging the Supreme Court to modify its April 8 order to make COVID-19 testing by approved private laboratories free of cost.

The petition asked the court to allow private labs to bring back the rates for COVID-19 testing as stipulated in the ICMR advisory of March 17. It said tests could be conducted by private labs free of cost for the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) categories subject to government reimbursing them immediately.

The March 17 advisory allowed private labs to charge up to ₹4,500 for tests.

A Delhi doctor, Kaushal Kant Mishra, represented by



plea says the court had not elaborated on reimbursing private labs. ♦AFP

laboratories, there is a real risk that they may stop testing for COVID-19, thus posing a direct risk to the health of persons across India through unknown transmission and contraction of the disease," Mr. Mishra, a retired surgeon from AIIMS, said in his petition.

Government sources have been quoted as saying that the coming week was a make-or-break week as far as testing was concerned and admitting that the private labs had far greater mobility to reach.

Besides, many people, suspected to be COVID-19 cases, are admitted and confined in hospitals, awaiting their test results. These results are delayed because of the strain placed on the government testing system.

CENTRAL UNIVERSITIES COMMON ENTRANCE TEST

(www.cucetexam.in)

Central Universities Common Entrance Test (CUCET-2020) is scheduled during May - June, 2020 for admission to different Programmes of 14 Central Universities and 4 State Universities at different centres across the country

IMPORTANT DATES			
Opening of Online Application Form	16 March, 2020	Exam Date (U1 & PG)	30 - 31 May, 2020
Closing of Online Application Form	25 April, 2020	Exam Date (RP)	6 - 7 June, 2020
Issue of Admit Cards	18 May, 2020	Result	26 June, 2020

GENERAL INFORMATION:

- Detailed information about CUCET-2020 is available on CUCET website: www.cucetexam.in
- Candidates are required to apply online through CUCET-2020 website
- Candidates who are appearing in the final examination of the qualifying degree/certificate are also eligible to apply
- Details of Programme of Studies, Eligibility Criteria, Programme Structure, Faculty Profile etc. are available at the respective website of Participating Universities (PU) and candidates are advised to check the eligibility criteria of each PU for a given programme before applying for CUCET-2020
- All Research Programmes (RP) examination will be conducted in Computer Based Test (CBT) mode
- All Integrated Under-Graduate (UJ) and Post-Graduate (PG) examination will be conducted in Offline (OMR) mode
- CUCET-2020 provides facilities for applying to admission to these universities by single examination process with nominal examination fees
- Online admission counselling facility is available for some universities with additional fees

Media Partner: BANGALURU DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS UNIVERSITY, Bangalore University Campus, Bangalore University, Bangalore-560 001 Website: www.bars.ac.in

Coordinating University for CUCET-2020: CENTRAL UNIVERSITY OF RAJASTHAN, NH-8, Bandarsindri, Ajmer-305817, Raj. Website: www.cura.ac.in

ADMISSION QUERY : Mob.: 9560268076 Phone: (24X7 Help desk) 01463-230720(CURA) E-mail: enqcucet2020@cura.ac.in

Drug candidate, on trial, holds promise

Findings highlight that virus replication inhibitors could be effective: expert

RAMYA KANNAN
CHENNAI

A recent article published in the journal *Science* has shown that the already-promising drug candidate remdesivir, on trial now, exhibits promising activity against the COVID-19 causing virus and might work well in retarding virus replication.

The SARS-CoV-2 virus exists as a mere strand of RNA and it requires a host to replicate. Scientists have discovered that the active site of RDRp shows striking similarities with the Polio Virus and the Hepatitis C virus, and using that knowledge, they have tried to use known drug candidates that work in that RDRp environment and work back to see if they are effective with the novel coronavirus. They also showed exactly where on the RNA dependent RNA polymerase – the main machinery to

form strands of RNA – that this drug will bind with. Remdesivir, a nucleotide analogue, then acts as part of the growing RNA chain, fooling the virus into believing it is replicating, and thereby stops true replication.

In the article "Structure of the RNA-dependent RNA polymerase (RDRp) from COVID-19 virus" Yan Gao et al., a group of researchers from various institutes in China and one in Australia, describes the biophysical and molecular interactions between COVID-19 virus RDRp and the antiviral drug remdesivir. "The findings highlight the fact that virus replication inhibitors hold promise and that the virus enzyme protein nsp12 represents a high value target to develop novel therapies for treating COVID-19 patients," explains Panduranga Rao Varada, director, Animal

On the trail

After finding striking similarities between the RNA of the COVID-19 virus, the polio virus and the hepatitis C virus, scientists decided to employ the drugs that are known to work with the other viruses, going backward to establish the links



- Remdesivir binds well with nsp12, the main machinery to form strands of RNA
- The more easy the binding, the better will be the ability of the drug to deliver
- These drug candidates have already been through scientific trials, and their safety and efficacy have already been tested
- India is already manufacturing Sofosbuvir, also mentioned as a potential candidate in the study

Science Centre, Boston University.

"The RNA polymerase is what is used to replicate. Here, it began with the identification of similarities in viruses with which we are already familiar – Polio Virus and HCV. If the binding happens with the drug, virus proliferation can be reduced. Then, the stress on the immune system too will come down. This can reduce, to a large extent, the number of people slipping into a critical stage, having a positive impact on mortality

and survival rates," explains V. Dhanasekaran, a structural biologist, who also runs an education start up.

The good news is that these candidates that seem to work well have already been tested, the safety and efficacy has been proven for other usage, Dr. Dhanasekaran adds. The study indicates sofosbuvir, along with remdesivir as probable candidates. Sofosbuvir is already being made in India to treat Hepatitis C, he adds.

Currently, remdesivir, which is made by the Ameri-

can pharma company Gilead Sciences, is not available in India. With over 16 lakh cases of Corona-19 in 213 countries across the world, as per WHO statistics, and a record 99,690 confirmed deaths, the race to pick a winning candidate for treating COVID-19 and reducing the mortality and morbidity from the disease. A couple of trials, are already ongoing to test remdesivir, which has already emerged as a promising candidate. This study further reinforces the viability of using the drug.

CM fund contributions to not qualify as CSR spend

Against principle of federalism, says CPI(M) leader

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Commerce has clarified that the contributions to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund or the State relief fund will not qualify as Corporate Social Responsibility expenditure, while any donation to the PM CARES Fund will.

"The Chief Minister's Relief Fund' or 'State Relief Fund for COVID-19' is not included in Schedule VII of the Companies Act, 2013, and therefore any contribution to such funds shall not qualify as admissible CSR expenditure," it has said in a circular.

The circular has said donations to the State Disaster Management Authority to combat COVID-19 can be counted as admissible CSR



Sitaram Yechury

expenditure. CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury flagged the circular on Twitter and said it was discriminatory and went against the constitutional principle of federalism. "States are at the forefront of this battle to contain the spread of COVID-19, and they are being strangled by the Centre in this fight," he said.

He sought an immediate amendment to Schedule VII of the Companies Act to permit the States to access these funds which could save millions of lives.

Veterans condemn 'red tape'

DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI

Veterans took to social media to express their outrage after the parents of a decorated officer, a Colonel from the Para Special Forces (SF) who died fighting cancer, were forced to travel by road from New Delhi to Bengaluru for the last rites due to confusion in rules between the Defence and Home Ministries. They reached Bengaluru by Saturday night.

Colonel Navjot Singh Bal, 39, who commanded the elite 2 Para SF of the Army, was fighting a rare form of cancer and passed away at a military hospital in Bengaluru on April 9. He was awarded the Shaurya Chakra, the country's third highest gallantry award, in 2008.

His father, Lt. Col. K.S. Bal, is a veteran from Garhwal Rifles and is based in Gurugram.

Sigh of relief



Battle won: A patient who recovered from COVID-19 leaving the district hospital in Palakkad on Saturday. •K. K. MUSTAFAH

AIDWA seeks interest-free loans for women in SHGs

'Banks apply compound interest rates that are exploitative'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A women's rights group has written to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, urging that bank loans to women self-help groups (SHGs) be made interest free to help those in the unorganised sector who have lost their jobs and are unable to repay their loans.

"Nearly six crore women are members of SHGs with bank linkages in both urban

and rural areas. They are utilising these loans for income generation activities, namely selling fruits and vegetables, groceries, dairying, agriculture and also for their children's education, health and other family expenses," the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) wrote, adding that banks apply exorbitant compound interest rates of 18-24%, which are exploitative considering that most wo-

men, who are part of SHGs, live in extreme poverty.

Last month, in her announcement on the relief package for the country under lockdown, the Minister doubled the limit for collateral-free loans for SHGs from ₹10 lakh to ₹20 lakh. It is this loan amount that the AIDWA wants to be offered interest free. They also demanded that a moratorium on EMIs for three months be further extended.

Work res

This follows Cent

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

Work in some tea gardens Assam resumed on Saturday after a fortnight due to COVID-19 lockdown.

Plantation owners are members of the Indian Tea Association (ITA) said preliminary work had begun some major estates at small tea gardens in Darang, Dibrugarh and Jorhat districts.

ITA chairperson Vivi Goenka had on April 4 written to State Chief Secretary Kumar Sanjay Krishna see

India is one of the first countries in the world to make CSR mandatory for companies following an amendment to the Companies Act, 2013 (Companies Act) in 2014.

Under the Companies Act, businesses can invest their profits in areas such as promoting rural development in terms of healthcare, sanitation, education including skill development, environmental sustainability, etc.

Section 135(1) of the Act prescribes thresholds to identify companies which are required to constitute a CSR Committee – those, in the immediately preceding financial year of which:

- net worth is Rs 500 Crore or more; or
 - turnover is Rs 1000 Crore or more; or
 - net profit amounts to Rs 5 Crore or more.
- As per the Companies (Amendment) Act, 2019, CSR is applicable to companies before completion of 3 financial years.

Amount to be spent:

Companies are required to spend, in every financial year, at least 2% of their average net profits generated during the 3 immediately preceding financial years. For companies that have not completed 3 financial years, average net profits generated in the preceding financial years shall be factored in.

SUDOKU

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9		2			6			8
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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

7	6	2	4	5	3	9	1	8
9	4	1	2	8	6	5	3	7
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2	9	4	3	7	8	1	6	5
1	7	5	6	4	9	3	8	2
8	3	6	1	2	5	4	7	9
5	1	9	8	6	7	2	4	3
6	2	7	5	3	4	8	9	1
4	8	3	9	1	2	7	5	6

Punjab's cancer-afflicted hit hard

Suspension of 'cancer train' leaves the poor with few affordable options

VIKAS VASUDEVA
CHANDIGARH

The suspension of passenger train services as part of the ongoing countrywide lockdown has left several cancer patients from Punjab's Malwa region struggling to reach Bikaner in Rajasthan for their treatment. The poor patients, who boarded the Jodhpur passenger train – known locally as the 'cancer train' – from Punjab's Bathinda to travel to the more affordable Acharya Tulsi Regional Cancer Treatment and Research Centre (RCC) across the State border, have now been left with little option but to look for local treatment options.

Gurpreet Singh, president of an NGO 'Bhai Ghanayia Cancer Roko Sewa Society', said patients who used to travel to Bikaner were now forced to take treatment at local hospitals in Faridkot, Bathinda or Sangrur. "Not only those travelling to Bikaner but also other pa-



Journey cut short: The Jodhpur passenger train which departed from Bathinda was used extensively. •FILE PHOTO

tients, who don't have personal vehicles or can't afford to hire a conveyance are finding it difficult to reach hospitals within the State itself. In the absence of public transport, the poor are suffering the most. Earlier, most poor patients used to travel on State transport buses or trains to reach their destinations for treatment but now many can't," he said.

Observing that under the *Mukhyamantri Cancer Rakht Kosh* (Chief Minister's

over the past few days asking about treatment options as they couldn't travel to Bikaner.

"Most of them had their chemotherapy sessions due and wanted to know where they can get it done within the State as they can't travel to Bikaner," he said.

Pardeep Garg, head, cancer department of Guru Gobind Singh Medical College and Hospital in Faridkot, said that apart from regular patients of the hospital, other patients from nearby areas who used to visit Chandigarh, Khanna, Ludhiana or Bikaner for chemotherapy and radiation therapy were now being provided treatment at the hospital.

Ashok Kumar Goyal, who runs Sanjeevani Foundation, an NGO working in the health sector, said as the lockdown continues many patients were now seeking treatment at the Advanced Cancer Institute in Bathinda or travelling to Faridkot.

Groups hail ban on spitting in Rajasthan

'Measure will help check transmission'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
JAIPUR

Voluntary organisations working for tobacco control on Saturday welcomed the Rajasthan government's decision to ban spitting in public places and institutions. They said the measure would help to prevent transmission of COVID-19.

The activists also demanded a complete ban on sale, distribution and advertisement of tobacco products as a part of the efforts to control the pandemic.

The State government has banned the spitting of betel leaf, any chewable tobacco or non-tobacco products or sputum in public places and institutions under the Rajasthan Epidemic Diseases Act, 1957. Any violation would invite penal action under Section 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) of the Indian Penal Code.

Additional Chief Secretary (Medical & Health) Rohit Kumar Singh said it was necessary to place restrictions on the "unhealthy habits" of people.

Groups that have undertaken a sustained campaign for tobacco control in the last four years said the ban on sale of tobacco and its products would not only help in containment of COVID-19 but would also strengthen the government's 'Nirogi Rajasthan' campaign which was launched in December 2019 to create awareness of diseases and their prevention.

Jayesh Joshi, secretary of the Banswara-based VAAGDHARA, a non-governmental organisation, said the smokers and tobacco-users were at a higher risk of infection. The World Health Organization (WHO) has also warned of virus transmission from hand to mouth while smoking.

Self Help Groups are groups of 10-20 people in a locality formed for any social or economic purpose. Most of the SHGs are formed for the purpose of better financial security among its members. SHGs can exist with or without registration.

SHGs in India often work in association with Banks (SHG – Bank Linkage Programme). The same is basis of Indian Micro finance Model too. SHG – Bank Linkage was started in India in 1992 under the guidelines of NABARD and Reserve Bank of India.

Self Help Groups and Their Origin

All problems cannot be solved alone.

SHG are a form of enterprise. They perform the role of collective banks. They mobilize savings from the members and performs both debit and credit functions.

For external credit, SHG links with the banks ie. SHG- Bank linkages.

Now SHGs also links with companies ie. SHG-Corporate linkages.

For Women SHGs, Government is providing interest subvention scheme.

Importance of SHGs – Increased incomes of poor through collective performance.

Statistics of SHGs in India

80 lakh SHGs with active bank linkages in India.

Involvement of 10 crore people of India.

Aggregate bank balance of Rs.6500 crores.

90% SHGs in India consist exclusively of women.

SHG-Bank Linkage Program in India

SHG Bank Linkage

SHG Bank Linkage

Indian Microfinance Model

Introduced in 1992 – Guidelines by NABARD and RBI.

Role of Self Help Groups

Income generation for poor.

Access to banks for poor, financial inclusion.

Against Dowry, Alcoholism etc.

Pressure group in Gram Panchyats.

Social Upliftment of marginal sections.

Upliftment of women.

Why SHG are a necessity in rural development?

In India there is a substantial percentage of rural and urban poor, who if tried individually cannot break their chains of poverty, and hence collective action is required.

For self employment and financial independence, poor sections needs credit.

Bank credits are not easily accessible to individual poor, but by forming a SHG, there are make better prospects for bank credits. (often without collateral).

The chances of successful income generation is high with SHGs than individual attempts.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KABUL

The head of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan has met with Taliban leaders to discuss a reduction in violence in the country, officials said on Saturday, with the insurgents accusing the Americans of violating a landmark agreement.

Washington signed a key deal with the Taliban in February that promised the withdrawal of U.S. and foreign troops from Afghanistan by next summer, provided the militants start talks with Kabul and adhere to other guarantees.

U.S. General Scott Miller held discussions with the group in Doha on Friday night, U.S. forces spokesman Sonny Leggett said. "General Miller met with Taliban leadership last night as part of the military channel esta-



An Afghan soldier guarding a checkpoint near the Bagram base earlier this month. • AFP

lished in the agreement. The meeting was about the need to reduce the violence," he said.

Suhail Shaheen, a Taliban spokesman, said the meeting was about the "implementation of the agreement as well as its violations, particularly attacks and night raids in non-combat areas".

The Taliban has accused U.S. forces of aiding the Afghan government with air support, causing civilian casualties. The U.S. has denied the accusations.

'False allegations'

A U.S. defence official accused the Taliban of making false allegations in a bid to pressure the U.S. into pushing forward a prisoner release swap with Kabul.

The deal requires the Afghan government – which was not a signatory to the accord – to free up to 5,000 Taliban prisoners, and for the militants to release 1,000 pro-government captives in return.

A Taliban team met with the government to discuss a comprehensive prisoner swap last week, but walked out of the talks soon after officials offered a piecemeal release of the prisoners.

ANANTH KRISHNAN
CHENNAI

Taiwan on Saturday released the text of its December 31 communication with the World Health Organization (WHO) that has been at the centre of a controversy about the first warnings of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Both Taiwan and the U.S. had accused the WHO of ignoring a December 31 warning of "human-to-human transmission" from what was then an unknown pneumonia.

On Saturday, Taiwan's Health Minister Chen Shih-chung quoted the text of the December 31 email, which read: "News resources today indicate that at least seven atypical pneumonia cases were reported in Wuhan, China. Their health authorities replied to the media that the cases were believed not to be SARS, however, the

samples are still under examination, and cases have been isolated for treatment. I would greatly appreciate if you have relevant information to share with us."

The email did not mention human-to-human transmissions, but Taiwan's Foreign Ministry, in a tweet, said, "treated in isolation means human-to-human transmission".

Alert to WHO on Jan. 5

The communication did not, however, carry additional information about what the WHO had been informed by Wuhan authorities. The WHO said on January 5 that its country office in China was on December 31 "informed of cases of pneumonia of unknown etiology (unknown cause)" and "national authorities report that all patients are isolated and receiving treatment in



Taiwan's Minister of Health Chen Shih-chung. • AFP

Wuhan medical institutions." "Based on the preliminary information from the Chinese investigation team," the WHO concluded then, "the WHO identified evidence of significant human-to-human transmission and no health-care worker infections have been reported".

Beyond the early warning controversy, the WHO has faced broader criticism for some of its early actions as the outbreak was spreading.

On January 14, the WHO repeated that investigations had found no evidence of human-to-human transmissions based on information provided to them by China. It would later, however, emerge that Wuhan authorities had not disclosed to the WHO that medical workers had, by late December, been reported as being infected in some Wuhan hospitals.

Until mid-January, Wuhan authorities publicly announced there was no human-to-human transmission. Wuhan was locked down on January 23. By that time, an estimated five million people had left ahead of an annual holiday.

Taiwan is not a member of the WHO. China has opposed its entry to international bodies. Taiwan, Apple and Google said the system will not track GPS location

to opt in the system, trusting the technology companies' safeguards, as well as smooth oversight by public health systems. Under the plan, users' phones with the technology will emit unique Bluetooth signals.

People who test positive for the virus can opt to send an encrypted list of phones they came near to Apple and Google, which will trigger alerts to potentially exposed users to seek more information. Public health authorities would need to sign off that an individual has tested positive before they can send on the data. The logs will be scrambled to keep infected individuals' data anonymous, even to Apple, Google and contact tracing app makers, the companies said the system will not track GPS location

ELSEWHERE



Johnson making very good progress: officials

LONDON British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Saturday was making "very good progress" in his recovery in hospital from coronavirus, officials said, two days after leaving intensive care. The 55-year-old leader was hospitalised on Sunday. • AFP

Cuba hits out at 'cruel' U.S. sanctions

HAVANA Cuba hit out at the U.S. on Friday over its nearly 60-year-old embargo, which Havana describes as "even more cruel" given the suffering caused by COVID-19. "The United States' economic-financial blockade is the most unjust, severe, prolonged system of sanctions of all time by one country against another," said Nestor Marimon, a Health Ministry official. • AFP

Crime drops globally as virus keeps people indoors

From the U.S. to Africa, major crimes are falling but officials worry about a surge in domestic violence

ASSOCIATED PRESS
CHICAGO

The COVID-19 pandemic that has crippled big-box retailers and mom and pop shops worldwide may be making a dent in illicit business, too.

In Chicago, one of America's most violent cities, drug arrests have plummeted 42% in the weeks since the city shut down, compared with the same period last year. Part of that decrease, some criminal lawyers say, is that drug dealers have no choice but to wait out the economic slump.

"The feedback I'm getting is that they aren't able to move, to sell anything anywhere," said Joseph Lopez, a criminal lawyer in Chicago who represents reputed drug dealers.

Overall, Chicago's crime declined 10% after the pandemic struck, a trend playing out globally as cities report stunning crime drops in



Leading the fight: Medical workers in New York, which has seen a double-digit drop in crime in recent months. • REUTERS

the weeks since measures were put into place to slow the spread of the virus. Even among regions that have the highest levels of violence outside a war zone, fewer people are being killed and fewer robberies are taking place.

Still, law enforcement officials worry about a surge of unreported domestic violence, and what happens

when restrictions lift – or go on too long.

It's rare for a city to see a double-digit drop in crime, even over a much longer period. During New York City's 1990s crime decline, one of the biggest turnarounds in American history, crime dropped about 40% over three years. That makes the drop-offs occurring now – in a period of just a couple of

weeks – even more seismic.

Across Latin America, crime is down to levels unseen in decades. El Salvador reported an average of two killings a day last month, down from a peak of 600 a day a few years ago.

Limits on movement

Much of the decrease has taken place because of tougher security policies and gang truces. But the imposition of near-total limits on movement is likely driving it down further, according to analysts and national statistics.

In Peru, where crime levels fell 84% last month, Lima mortician Rawl Gonzalez usually has as many as 15 bodies a day – many are homicide victims.

This week, he napped on a bench after six hours without a client.

"There are almost no killings or car accidents these days," Mr. Gonzalez said.

In South Africa, police reported a stunning decline during their first week of lockdown measures. Police Minister Bheki Cele said reported rapes were down from 700 to 101 over the same period last year. Serious assault cases plummeted from 2,673 to 456, and murders fell from 326 to 94.

The U.S. virus epicentre in New York saw major crimes decrease by 12% from February to March. In Los Angeles, 2020 key crimes statistics were down from last year's figures until the week of March 15, when they dropped by 30%.

"There's a lot fewer opportunities for criminals to take advantage of," said Joe Giacalone, a former New York Police Department sergeant who now teaches at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. "Most burglars, they wait for you to leave the house."

Pacifist Japanese director Nobuhiko Obayashi dead

He depicted war's horrors in his works

ASSOCIATED PRESS
TOKYO

Nobuhiko Obayashi, one of Japan's most prolific filmmakers who devoted his works to depicting war's horrors and singing the eternal power of movies, has died. He was 82. The official site for his latest film, *Labyrinth of Cinema*, said that he died late on Friday.

Mr. Obayashi was diagnosed with terminal cancer in 2016, and was told he had just a few months. But he continued working, appearing frail and often in a wheelchair. He stayed stubbornly true to his core pacifist message through more than 40 movies and thousands of TV shows, commercials and other videos.

Mr. Obayashi's *Miss Lonely*, released in 1985, was shot in seaside Onomichi, the picturesque town in Hi-



Nobuhiko Obayashi in a 2019 photo. • AP

roshima prefecture where Mr. Obayashi grew up and made animation clips by hand.

Mr. Obayashi was a trailblazer in the world of Japanese TV commercials, hiring foreign movie stars like Catherine Deneuve and Charles Bronson, highlighted in his slick film work that seemed to symbolise Japan's post-war modernisation.

The ₹1.7 Lakh Crore relief package – named PMGKY- was announced by Union government to alleviate the distress caused by COVID-19 pandemic.

Do You Know?

The cost of the COVID-19 lockdown in India is pegged at nearly ₹9 lakh crore
 This is the third shock that the informal economy faces, after demonetisation and GST.
 US announced 2 trillion USD (Rs 148 Lakh crore) stimulus package to fight COVID-19
 The Key features of PMGKY are:

- Healthcare Workers: Insurance cover of ₹50 lakh**
- Food grains to Poor: 80 crore poor people under National Food Security Act will receive five extra kg of wheat or rice and 1 kg of pulses**
- MGNREGA workers (13.63 crore): Wage increased from ₹182/day to ₹202/day**
- Jan Dhan Women Account holders (20.4 crore): DBT of ₹500/ month for next three months**
- Senior Citizens, disabled & Poor widows (3 crore): Ex-gratia of ₹1000 (through existing pension schemes)**
- Farmers (8.7 crore): Front loading of ₹2000 to them under existing PM Kisan Yojana**
- Ujjwala Beneficiaries (8.3 crore): Free cylinders for next three months**
- Wage earners: Those earning below ₹15000/month in firms having less than 100 workers will receive 24% of their monthly wages into their PF accounts for next three months**
- Construction workers: Centre has directed States to use Construction worker's welfare fund to give relief to 3.5 crore registered workers**

ed on a par with other causes of death and payments shall be made on an urgent basis. COVID-19 has already claimed many lives and efforts are being made by LIC officials to locate the virus victims on the basis of lists provided by government authorities to help the families. Already, under death claims due to COVID-19 16 policies have been settled without losing any time, a release from LIC said. LIC offices were operating with skeletal staff. All other employees are working from home to ensure customer services are provided normally to the extent possible under current circumstances, the release said.

Over 30 crore poor get ₹28,256 cr. under PM Garib Kalyan Yojana

₹13,855 cr. gone towards PM-KISAN first instalment payment

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI
 More than 30 crore poor people have received financial assistance of ₹28,256 crore under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman last month to protect them from the impact of the lockdown.

As part of the ₹1.70 lakh crore relief package, the government announced free foodgrains and cash doles to

women and poor senior citizens and farmers.

"More than 30 cr. beneficiaries have been directly given support through Direct Benefit Transfer amounting to ₹28,256 cr. under #PradhanMantriGribKalyanPackage," a tweet from the Finance Ministry said. Of the total disbursement, ₹13,855 crore has gone towards payment of the first instalment of PM-KISAN. Under the scheme, nearly 6.93 crore

out of the 8 crore identified beneficiaries got ₹2,000 directly in their account. As many as 19.86 crore women Jan Dhan account holders received ₹500 each in their account. The total disbursement under the head was ₹9,930 crore, it said.

The National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) disbursed about ₹1,400 crore to about 2.82 crore old age persons, widows and disabled persons, it added.

The PM-KISAN was launched on February 24 in 2019. All states are implementing the scheme, except West Bengal.

The PM-KISAN Mobile App developed and designed by the National Informatics Centre in collaboration with the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has been launched.

The farmers can view the status of their application, update or carry out corrections of their Aadhaar cards and also check the history of credits to their bank accounts.
PM-KISAN

Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) is a Central Sector Scheme with 100% funding from the Government of India.

It is being implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmer's Welfare.

Under the scheme, the Centre transfers an amount of Rs 6,000 per year, in three equal instalments, directly into the bank accounts of the all landholding farmers irrespective of the size of their land holdings.

It intends to supplement the financial needs of the Small and Marginal Farmers (SMFs) in procuring various inputs to ensure proper crop health and appropriate yields, commensurate with the anticipated farm income at the end of each crop cycle.

The entire responsibility of identification of beneficiary farmer families rests with the State / UT Governments.

Holdings in gold-backed exchange traded funds at all-time high in March

A record-breaking quarter as holdings, assets added \$23 bn in net inflows: WGC

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI

At a time when stocks globally witnessed huge sell-offs and volatility, holdings in gold-backed exchange traded funds (ETFs) reached an all-time high in March.

According to the World Gold Council, March capped a record-breaking quarter as gold ETF holdings and assets added \$23 billion in net inflows – the largest quarterly gain in history.

"Global gold-backed ETFs and similar products added 298 tonnes, or net inflows of \$23 billion, across all regions in the first quarter of 2020 – the highest quarterly amount ever in absolute dollar terms and the largest tonnage additions since 2016," the World Gold Council said in a report.

Further, trading volumes



Trading volumes reached record highs as gold volatility went up to levels last seen during the financial crisis. -REUTERS

and assets under management (AUM) reached record highs as gold volatility increased to levels last seen during the financial crisis, even as gold price performance was mostly flat in dollars for the month.

The global body has highlighted the fact that uncertainty around the short- and long-term economic impacts

of COVID-19 continues to drive sharp volatility across many assets, leaving global equities in the bear market territory, while encouraging inflows into safe havens like treasuries and gold.

Strong inflows
 "Against this backdrop, gold ETFs listed in all regions experienced strong inflows

during the month. European funds led regional inflows, growing by 84 tonnes (\$4.4 billion, 5.8% AUM), while North American funds added 57 tonnes (\$3.2bn, 4%). Asian funds – primarily in China – also finished the month with strong inflows, adding 4.9 tonnes," stated the report. Going ahead, the World Gold Council expects the recent drivers of investment demand to continue. The drivers are primarily widespread market uncertainty and the improved opportunity cost of holding gold as yields move lower.

"We have found that lower rates have a positive impact on gold prices and offer the opportunity for additional gold exposure [potentially replacing bonds] in a low-rate environment," said the report.

An exchange-traded fund (ETF) is a type of security that involves a collection of securities—such as stocks—that often tracks an underlying index, although they can invest in any number of industry sectors or use various strategies. ETFs are in many ways similar to mutual funds; however, they are listed on exchanges and ETF shares trade throughout the day just like ordinary stock.

comparatively better.

According to the latest S&P Indices Versus Active India Scorecard analysis, over the five-year period ending December 2019, 82.29% of large-cap equity funds, 78.38% of ELSS funds and 40.91% of mid/small cap equity funds underperformed their respective indices. While the S&P BSE 100 surged 10.92% in the

horizons.

"Over longer horizons, majority of the actively managed large-cap equity funds in India underperformed the S&P BSE 100 with 64.80% large-cap funds underperforming over the 10-year period ending December 2019," said Akash Jain, associate director, global research and design, S&P Dow Jones Indices.

lockdown.

"The dealer network would be put to severe financial stress otherwise," CIPD president M. Narayan Prasad said in a communication addressed to the three national oil marketing companies. "Though sales volume is less than 10% of our usual sale, our expenditure to run the retail outlets remains the same. We have

said the dealer margin should be calculated based on the average sale during December 2019 to February 2020. In other words, pay the dealers based on their immediate past performance rather than on the truncated sales ever since the lockdown and the related restrictions on movement came into force in March.

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COVID-19: younger patients develop fewer neutralising antibodies, study finds

But older patients who had more neutralising antibodies did not recover faster

R. PRASAD

Analysis of blood samples from 175 patients with mild COVID-19 disease who were discharged from the Shanghai Public Health Clinical Centre as on February 26 revealed that about 30% of patients had unexpectedly low levels of antibodies against novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2). Ten patients had such low levels of neutralising antibodies that these could not be detected, while two patients showed very high levels.

The study threw up another surprise – the plasma of elderly and middle-age patients had significantly higher amount of neutralising antibodies and spike-binding antibodies than young patients. The median age of the patients was 50 years and the median length of hospital stay was 16 days and median disease duration was 21 days.

The study was posted on medRxiv preprint server on April 6. Preprints are yet to be peer-reviewed and published in scientific journals.

Disease duration

Though about 30% of patients failed to develop high amounts of



Age a factor: The higher amounts of antibodies found in older patients may be due to a "strong immune response" in aged people. •GETTY IMAGES

neutralising antibodies even after recovering from COVID-19 disease, the disease duration was not longer than older patients. Likewise, older patients who had more neutralising antibodies did not recover faster. So immaterial of the amount of neutralising antibodies found, both young and old patients took the same time to recover.

The amount of neutralising antibodies generated in response to vaccination determines the efficacy of the vaccine in protecting

against the virus. In this case, if infection with actual virus has not resulted in eliciting strong antibody response and hence elevated neutralising antibodies, it is not clear if the vaccine which had killed or weakened viruses would be able to produce high amounts of antibodies.

But the researchers were not able to detect viral DNA in the blood samples collected, and information about viral load was not available for all the patients. So it is

not known if the young patients had lower viral load thus resulting in lower amount of neutralising antibodies. "This study is preliminary," the authors caution.

The team led by Jinghe Huang was able to detect coronavirus-specific neutralising antibodies 10-15 days after onset of the disease, and the level remained stable thereafter.

Mild symptoms

All the 175 patients included in the study had only mild symptoms. The researchers excluded patients who had been admitted to intensive care units because many of them already had antibodies from donated blood plasma.

The efficacy of passive antibody therapy, otherwise called as convalescent plasma therapy, relies on the concentration of neutralising antibodies in the plasma. The low levels of neutralising antibodies in younger patients who have recovered from the disease strongly suggest that convalescent plasma should be treated before being used for therapy.

The authors wonder if the low levels of neutralising antibodies in about 30% of patients would put

them at risk of infection beyond or reinfection and suggest that further studies are undertaken to understand this.

Immune response

The higher amounts of neutralising antibodies found in older patients may be due to "strong immune response" in aged people, the study suggests. But whether the elevated neutralising antibodies found in older people protect them from progression to severe and critical conditions is not known. But the older over, it has become clear that older COVID-19 patients are at higher risk of adverse disease outcomes. Studies carried out earlier using the SARS virus infection in aged macaques resulted in elevated immune responses, resulting in more severe pathology than younger adult macaques.

The researchers also found that antibodies generated in response to novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) could bind with 2003 SARS strains. However, the binding was not able to stop the SARS virus from replicating. This raises the possibility of developing a vaccine that might be effective against both novel coronavirus and the 2003 SARS virus.

Study indicates sex-specific differences in immune system

SHUBASHREE DESIKAN

A study led by researchers from Australia finds crucial differences in the way the immune system acting in the body fat of male and female mice operates. Studying the visceral adipose tissue (VAT) in the mice, they find key differences. Visceral adipose tissue is fat tissue that is found in the abdominal region, surrounding various organs. This includes perigonadal VAT which surrounds the ovaries in females and testes in males, which is what the researchers studied.

Controlling immune response

The perigonadal VAT taken from male mice had many more regulatory T cells (Treg) than that of female mice. These cells play a role in controlling immune response to the self and external cells, thereby protecting the body from autoimmune diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis or lupus. The Treg cells in the male VAT also showed a distinct phenotype, functional parameters and gene expression pattern compared to Treg cells in female VAT. "We found elevated expression of inflammatory genes in male VAT. A special population of stromal cells that made the cytokine IL-33 was exclusive to male VAT," says Ajith Vasanthakumar, from Department of Microbiology and Immunology, Peter Doherty Institute for Infection and Immunity, University of Melbourne, Australia. He is the first author of the paper published in *Nature*. "Historically, visceral adipose tissue was simply regarded as

an energy storage [organ]. Many studies, however, have highlighted its endocrine function. Visceral adipose tissue has an endocrine function, meaning it secretes adipokines and hormones that play key roles in energy balance and metabolism," says Dr. Vasanthakumar.

It is known that men (in a similar manner to male mice) are more susceptible to metabolic diseases such as type 2 diabetes. "This is linked to higher adipose tissue inflammation in men compared to women, again similar to mice," says Dr. Vasanthakumar. "Finally, we have previously shown that human adipose tissue (omental) harbours Treg cells of a phenotype similar to the one found in mice." Thus, it is likely that the difference in Treg cell distribution seen in the visceral adipose tissue of male and female mice would hold true in humans.

The study has implications for the way trials are conducted with animal models when carrying out research on diseases. For instance when studying metabolic disease, mostly male mice are used. This study implies that findings of such a test will not hold equally good for males and females.

"Until the recent past, for clinical trials mostly men were recruited although it is clear that disease susceptibility and response to drugs are different," he says. "In this context tailoring drugs to gender is a possibility in the future. We will continue to explore the role of sex hormones in metabolism and other inflammatory and autoimmune diseases."

Coronavirus: two vaccines enter human trials, 60 in pre-clinical stage

Include non-replicating viral vector and messenger RNA vaccines

ASWATHI PACHA

With the genetic information of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) available online, governments across the globe, top private players, academics and not-for-profit organisations are working at a breakneck pace to find a COVID-19 vaccine.

According to the "DRAFT landscape of COVID-19 candidate vaccines" released by the World Health Organization (WHO) on April 4, two vaccines are currently being tested on humans.

This includes a non-replicating viral vector vaccine developed by CanSino Biological Inc. along with the Beijing Institute of Biotechnology. A non-replicating vector vaccine can be developed either using a virus that is killed or a part of the virus. Since it is not a complete virus, it cannot replicate inside the host; but the antigens trigger our immune system to produce antibodies, which help fight the disease in case we contract it in the future.

RNA vaccine

According to the Chinese Clinical Trial Registry, men and women between the ages of 18 and 60 were recruited and tests are being conducted on three groups of 36 participants each. Three dosages are being tested – low, medium and high.

The second is a messenger



Clinical trials: Forty-five subjects, 18 to 55 years of age, of both sexes, will enter in tests. •AP

RNA vaccine developed by Moderna and National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. In RNA vaccines, the messenger RNA from the pathogen is translated into antigenic protein recognised by our immune cells and antibodies are produced. But mRNA is a highly unstable molecule making it difficult to handle. So the mRNA is encapsulated in a small ball of fat or lipid nanoparticle (LNP). This LNP acts as a delivery vehicle that helps the mRNA cross the host cell membrane and inside the mRNA is released.

According to the website clinicaltrials.gov, forty-five subjects (18 to 55 years of age of both sexes) will be enrolled and divided into three groups. They will receive an intramuscular injection on days 1 and 29 in the deltoid muscle.

An analysis published on April 9 in *Nature Reviews Drug Discov-*

ery by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) notes that "the global COVID-19 vaccine R&D landscape includes 115 vaccine candidates, of which 78 are confirmed as active and 37 are unconfirmed (development status cannot be determined from publicly available or proprietary information sources)." Along with the two vaccines mentioned by WHO, the list includes one vaccine developed by Inovio Pharmaceuticals and two from Shenzhen Geno-Immune Medical Institute.

Vaccines from India

The WHO draft adds that 60 candidate vaccines are in preclinical trials. This list contains the DNA plasmid vaccine developed by Gujarat based Zydus Cadila and the Attenuated Virus vaccine developed by the Serum Institute of India.

DNA vaccines are made by taking genes from the pathogen and inserting it into the host's body with a vector. The host cells produce the protein of the viral gene and this is recognised as a foreign antigenic protein by the host's immune system.

DNA vaccines are comparatively easy to make, transport, store and are cheaper. Live attenuated virus vaccine is created by reducing the virulence of a pathogen or weakening it, but still keeping it alive.

Why hospitals are hotbeds of coronavirus transmission

Once in contact with the virus on objects and surfaces, there is high risk of infection

R. PRASAD

Across the world, hospitals have become hotspots for novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) infection. And hundreds of healthcare workers have been infected in many countries, and some have died too. While the availability and quality of personal protective equipment (PPE) and the duration of exposure with severe and critical patients have been a factor in determining if healthcare workers were safe or not, a study posted on March 16 in a preprint repository medRxiv reveals how certain areas in the hospitals and certain objects had more viruses.

In another study posted on March 16 in a preprint repository medRxiv, a team of researchers collected 626 samples from 13 hospital function zones, five major objects, and three major PPE from the Zhongnan Medical Center in Wuhan during the period February 7-27, 2020. Preprints are yet to be peer-reviewed and published in scientific journals.

The study was carried out



Paradox: At 31.9%, the intensive care unit specialised for taking care of COVID-19 patients was the most contaminated in the hospital, the study found. •GETTY IMAGES

as 1,688 healthcare workers had become infected with novel coronavirus in China, including 1,080 healthcare workers in Wuhan, the epicentre of the epidemic in China. Widespread hospital contamination could have resulted in occupational exposure for healthcare workers in the hospital on a daily basis.

Routes of transmission

The primary routes of transmission of the virus are through large respiratory droplets and close contact, and contact with surfaces

and objects contaminated with the virus. Once in contact with the virus on objects and surfaces, there is high risk of infection.

The study led by Xinghuan Wang from the Zhongnan Hospital of Wuhan University found that 31.9% of the intensive care unit specialised for taking care of COVID-19 patients was the most contaminated in the hospital followed by obstetric isolation ward for COVID-19 pregnant women (28.1%), and isolation ward for COVID-19 patients (19.6%).

Wang found nearly 14% of

all commonly used hospital objects and medical equipment had the virus on them. Among the most contaminated objects in the hospital were the self-service printers (20.0%), desktop/keyboard (16.8%), doorknob (16.0%), telephones (12.5%) and medical equipment (12.5%). In China, the self-service printers are commonly used by patients themselves to print out examination or test reports in a hospital.

At 20.3%, and sanitiser dispensers were the most contaminated objects, followed by hand gloves (15.4%).

Survival duration Earlier, a team led by Vincent J. Munster from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases found that the novel coronavirus survived up to one day on cardboard and three days on plastic. Now, another team of researchers led by Leo L. M. Poon from The University of Hong Kong found shorter survival time of the virus on different surfaces. Dr. Poon's team did not find any virus on printing and tissue papers

after three hours, while infectious virus could be found on treated wood and cloth on the second day.

Both the teams published their results in a letter. While Dr. Munster's team published the results on March 17 in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, Dr. Poon's team published it in *The Lancet* on April 2.

Much like the NIAID team, the researchers from The University of Hong Kong found that the virus could persist longer on smooth surfaces – infectious virus could be found on glass and banknotes for one day three, while they could not find viable, infectious virus on stainless steel and plastic up to two days.

The NIAID team also found that the virus survives the least time – four hours – on copper, while they could find virus for relatively longer time on plastic (three days) and stainless steel (two days). The virus survived for a day on cardboard.

The most interesting but disturbing finding published by Dr. Poon's team is the presence of infectious virus on

the outer layer of the surgical mask even on day seven. But the amount of virus found on mask on day seven was only 0.1% of the original number.

Temperature and pH

The University of Hong Kong researchers also found that at room temperature, the virus could survive in a broad range of pH conditions – pH 3-10.

They also studied the ability of different disinfectants to kill the virus. Compared with hand soap, no infectious virus could be found five minutes after the virus culture was added to various disinfectants. The study thus shows that surfaces can be made free of the virus using regular disinfectants.

"The SARS-CoV-2 can be highly stable in a favourable environment but is also susceptible to standard disinfection methods," they write. They also mention that method they used to recover virus from different surface that were tested does "not necessarily reflect the potential to pick the virus from casual contact".

When should we blow the shofar?

With COVID-19, we are fighting an invisible enemy

PARTHA P. MAJUMDER

The novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) has already left a large footprint; it has spread itself far and wide. And it is spreading even further. It has killed in thousands. A wartime situation prevails. Strangely, we are fighting an invisible enemy. And yet our ability to return victorious is not obvious. Especially, when we may be able to blow the shofar.

An infected person can transmit the virus directly to many uninfected persons. The larger this number – called the Basic Reproductive Ratio, R_0 , pronounced R-nought – the more contagious is the disease caused by the virus. The faster it will spread in the community. R-nought can be viewed as the product of three numbers: (1) the number of days an infected person remains infective (that is, can infect others), (2) the number of susceptible persons available to infect and (3) the chance that a susceptible person gets infected. The easiest way to keep R-nought low is to keep ourselves distanced from every other person. That way, the chance that a susceptible person gets infected remains low. It is not sufficient to distance ourselves only from those who show symptoms of infection. We have to continue to distance ourselves from every other person. Many apparently normal persons may actually be infected without showing symptoms of infection. Therefore, just as R-nought influences the spread of COVID-19, our behaviour also influences R-nought.

A person infected with SARS-CoV-2 may remain infective for 10-to-14 days. During the initial phases of spread, there will be a large number of uninfected persons to infect. For SARS-CoV-2, R-nought has been estimated to be between 2 and 3. Let us take the best case scenario. Assume R-nought to be 2 and the infective period to be 10 days. Then, the first person will infect two others, each of whom will infect two others (22), each of these four persons will infect two others (23) and so on. In 10 days, this one infected person will have infected 2,046 persons. A person who is infected or has recovered cannot be infected again. At least not in the next several months or even years. An infection activates the immune system which learns to recognise the virus and remembers it. The next time the virus tries to infect him, his immune defenses are able to recognise and protect him against further infection. Therefore, as the infection spreads, there will be less and less number of uninfected persons to infect. An increasing number of persons in the community will have gained immunity from having been infected earlier. This is called herd immunity. (If there was a vaccine for SARS-CoV-2, it would have helped achieve herd immunity without a large number of persons being infected. A vaccine simulates the effect of an infection and builds immune resistance to the virus. We have eradicated polio in this way.) As herd immunity increases in the community, many infected persons will not find another person to infect during the entire infective period. R-nought will then be less than one, on average. Consequently, there will be few new cases arising and existing cases will recover or die. Spread of the disease will slow down and the pandemic will end.

COVID-19 may be long-lasting

There is also a related issue to consider. When there is an outbreak, persons in the community get symptomatically infected one after another. The length of time between appearance of two successive persons with symptoms of infection is called the Series Interval. This interval informs us about the spreadability of the virus. The shorter this interval, the greater the speed of spread through the community. For SARS-CoV-2, the Series Interval is between 5 and 7 days. For influenza, this interval is 1.3 days. Therefore, influenza spreads four to six times faster than COVID-19. Is this good news for us? The answer is no. COVID-19 is spreading through the community slowly. Herd immunity will therefore arise slowly. This means that the COVID-19 pandemic is going to last for a long time.

The current lockdown cannot go on forever. Is there a scientific basis to determine when the lockdown may be lifted? Will the lockdown be lifted only after everyone in the country becomes immune to the virus? No; we can never be sure that everyone has gained immunity. However, if the chance that an infected person finds a person to infect is sufficiently low, then the virus will stop spreading. Then the lockdown can safely be lifted. This will happen if a certain proportion of individuals in the country is immune. This proportion is called the "herd immunity threshold." It is calculated as $1-(1/R_0)$. For SARS-CoV-2, R_0 is 2 or 3. An R_0 of 2 would mean a herd immunity threshold of $1-(1/2)$ or 50%. An R_0 of 3 would mean a herd immunity threshold of $1-(1/3)$ or 67%. We should play safe. Therefore, lockdown can be safely lifted if about two-thirds of our population attains immunity to the virus. But how would we know that two-third of our citizens has gained immunity. We need to estimate this proportion by testing our citizens selected randomly and in large numbers. Surveillance testing in communities has now been initiated in India. We hope that the results of these tests will be used to determine when to blow the shofar.

DNA vaccines are comparatively easy to make, transport, store and are cheaper. Live attenuated virus vaccine is created by reducing the virulence of a pathogen or weakening it, but still keeping it alive.

A policy is immediately required

Daily wage earners are now unable to earn their daily bread. Families are going hungry. Enforcement of the lockdown is leading to clashes – of citizens with the police, between groups of villagers and so on. Yet lifting the lockdown before herd immunity threshold is achieved will be disastrous. However, a hungry person does not have the luxury of being mindful about personal and public health arising from this virus. Either food has to be provided by the Government and by those of us who can afford, or we will have to soften the lockdown and allow them to work. Certainly, all large gatherings – including religious and political gatherings – must continue to be banned. If distancing can be maintained and the net of symptom-monitoring and community-testing can be cast more widely, then allowing a minority of our citizens to work even during the period of lockdown may be a socially viable option. A policy is immediately required.

A compromise

It may be extremely difficult for us to ensure, as science dictates, that two-third of all our citizens have gained immunity. We may identify geographical regions where COVID-19 appears to be affecting people in large numbers. In these regions, lockdown may be extended, surveillance-testing intensified and spread of the infection more strictly monitored. Infected persons should be isolated. Further, contact tracing – identification and listing of persons in close contact with an infected person, testing to identify infected persons among contacts and isolating them or, if testing of all contacts is infeasible, isolating all contacts and following them up for signs of infection – will serve to reduce the likelihood of infection. Thereby R-nought will be reduced in that region. If the spread of the infection from these high-intensity regions can be arrested, then there will be an overall reduction of infection in the country. Of course, surveillance-testing and deep monitoring should continue at some level throughout our country to identify new pockets of high-intensity that may arise whether or not the general lockdown is lifted on April 14th.

(The writer is currently an emeritus professor at the Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata.)



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COVID-19 and immunity

Who are most vulnerable and why are men, women and children reacting differently?

JACOB KOSHY

The story so far: COVID-19, which has affected over 1.5 million globally and killed more than 100,000 people, is not different from how influenza viruses, or even the coronaviruses responsible for the common cold, attack the body. Therefore, the immune system has a predictable response. It is the degree to which this response is tolerated by the body that determines mortality rates.

How does the immune system respond to a coronavirus attack?

A cascade of viral particles enters the body through the nose, eyes or mouth. Breathing carries some of these particles to the lower respiratory tract where the spike proteins of the coronavirus, acting like a key, lock into epithelial cells that line the respiratory tract as well as those in the air sacs in the lungs. SARS-CoV-2 is able to stay undetected longer than many flu or coronaviruses and its spike proteins are able to gain entry by unlocking the ACE2 protein on the lung cells. Once in, they hijack the cell's machinery, replicate and multiply and infect adjoining cells. Like the defining ACE2 proteins on the epithelial cells, viruses too have a tell-tale signature on their surface called antigens and spotting these is what kicks the immune system into action by producing antibodies.

The signals they generate trigger another class of chemicals – cytokines and chemokines – and they alert the immune system to send an array of different kinds of cells that specialise in destroying viral particles. However, these cytokines and chemokines trigger inflammation in the cells. In the nose and upper regions of the respiratory system, this inflammation produces mucus and a runny nose to trap viral particles and prevent their ingress. This also triggers sneezes to expel them. When the sinuses are inflamed we get a headache and the general stiffness that we associate with a cold. When a gland called the hypothalamus is inflamed, it results in a fever.

However, in the case of SARS-CoV-2, the virus seems better at penetrating deeper. The inflammation triggers a fluid build-up in the lungs. The fluids also contain the residue of a host of specialised cells –

Mortality statistics show men are twice more likely than women to succumb to a COVID-19 infection. Studies show women, on an average, have a better-regulated immune response than men in pathogenic infections

including T cells – that carpet bomb and damage many of the body's own cells as well as the viral particles. It is in expelling this fluid that a dry cough, characteristic of the coronavirus infection, begins. As more air sacs are infected, the lungs find it harder to perform their core job of extracting oxygen from the air, and eventually, this aggravates breathlessness.

Why are some infections mild and others life-threatening?

Depending on the degree of infection in the lungs, the inflammation and the fluid build-up can lead to pneumonia. A patient will require hospitalisation to treat the breathlessness and ventilator support to artificially provide oxygen if the condition worsens. However, massive levels of cytokines can cause extensive lung damage and a condition called Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome. The unsustainable cytokine storm can cause organ damage far beyond the lungs and spread to the kidneys as well as the heart. If the infection is acute, it can also lead to a depletion of the frontline white blood corpuscles tasked with fighting the infection and making the body vulnerable to other secondary infections, which may lead to death.

How have the elderly reacted to the virus?

The elderly, especially those with existing conditions such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease, already have an inherent malfunctioning in the immune system. In many ways, it is the reaction of the body in trying to combat the virus that ends up being suicidal. The different kinds of drugs, whether it is hydroxychloroquine or anti-HIV drugs, deployed to treat serious COVID-19 infection, also work in some way to moderate the immune-system's aggressive defence.

Mortality statistics globally suggest that men are twice more likely than women to succumb to a COVID-19 infection. This follows from studies that show women, on average, have a better-regulated immune response than men in pathogenic infections. Estrogen is said to be an immune-system modulator and the ability to deal with a pregnancy – which also begins as a foreign body growing within – primes women to better deal with infections, say experts.

What about children?

The response of the immune system is in many ways a mystery. For instance, so far, there have been few deaths reported in children from COVID-19. Given that children's immunity systems are still maturing and learning to adapt to a galaxy of infectious agents, why they seem to be relatively better protected from severe COVID-19 disease is not known.

Will a vaccine help?

There are several vaccine candidates but it will be months before we know if any of them will be viable. The bulk are aimed at developing a molecular construct, in some cases a weakened version of the coronavirus, that mimics the antigens of the virus and triggers an appropriate antibody response. There are complications – such as an antibody-dependent enhancement – in which insufficient levels of antibodies can actually end up aggravating an infection as in the case of dengue. However, in the case of COVID-19, that's a problem for another day.

To ease lockdown, what are the options?

What are the health measures that must be in place before lifting the shutdown across States?

RAMYA KANNAN

The story so far: From March 24, the country went into a 21-day lockdown period as an emergency measure to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Several States now want it extended; some have gone ahead. With the available evidence, it was believed that physical distancing was the best weapon to combat this little-known virus, transmitted through respiratory droplets. The government announced a shutdown believing that it would stagger the progress of the epidemic, allowing health systems to manage the crisis that would inevitably unfold. An extension is perhaps the best way to go but some basic public health parameters must be put in place to guide the eventual lifting of the lockdown.

How may we safely emerge from the lockdown?

Being an unprecedented situation, there is a stark absence of too many examples from the past of a lockdown of this scale. But there are a number of recommendations as to the period of withdrawal, and pretty much everyone is in agreement over what should be done from a public health standpoint, within that period.

As America's face of epidemic control, Anthony S. Fauci, who heads the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said in a podcast with *The Wall Street Journal*: "It's not a light switch, on and off. It's going to be gradual, not all or none."

He went on to say that getting back to normal must be preceded by a "really clear indication that those areas with big outbreaks, with peaks, have not only stabilised and are starting to turn the corner, and the number of cases are coming down. I don't think you need to get down to zero, though before you contemplate pulling back".

While he was speaking in an American context, the medical science indubitably strikes a chord with nations seeking to safely emerge out of the lockdown. "If you are going to consider a relaxation you have to have the capability for rapid identification, isolation and testing. People are also going to have to continue to be careful. We should never shake hands again."

Consider Wuhan, which just reopened its borders after a long 76-day shutdown: Reports from the Chinese city indicate that local health authorities remain vigilant to prevent fresh imports and resurgence of local transmission. Healthy residents and visitors are allowed to move out, but eternal vigil is clearly the price a connected world, where epidemics loom large, has to pay.

Not surprisingly, the hints from what happened over a 100 years ago are strikingly similar. The Spanish flu of 1918 spread across the globe causing similar havoc, though the world was a vastly different place then. Retrospective studies that are being recirculated today indicate that putting distance between people did help retard the spread of the 1918 flu and reduce the mortality rate overall.

As German Lopez wrote in *vox.com*, one of the key lessons was that it was important not to give up early. In American cities that gave up on physical distancing



R. RAGU

measures early consistently caused a recurrence of flu cases and deaths, in 1918.

Even States in India have recommended a minimum of two months' extension, in order they may be sure that they can progress to the next phase.

What are the phases to follow?

The American Enterprise Initiative (AEI), in its document, "National Coronavirus Response: A road map to reopening" (<https://bit.ly/3a2qz6b>), has outlined four phases in the epidemic. While recording slowing the spread of the epidemic is taken as phase 1, state-by-state (America) reopening is outlined as phase 2.

Individual states can move to phase 2 when they are able to safely diagnose, treat, and isolate COVID-19 cases and their contacts. Caitlin Rivers, one of the authors of the report, explained during a conference with the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, that progress towards phase 2 should be capability-based, rather than time line-based. Schools and businesses can reopen, and much of normal life can begin to resume in a phased approach.

However, some physical distancing measures and limitations on gatherings will still need to be in place. For vulnerable populations, continuing to limit time in the community will be important.

Public hygiene has to be improved, and deep cleaning of shared spaces should become more routine. People may initially be asked to wear face masks while in the community to reduce their risk of

being infected. Physical distancing measures and limitations on gatherings will still need to be in place. For vulnerable populations, continuing to limit time in the community will be important. Public hygiene has to be improved, and deep cleaning of shared spaces should become more routine. People may initially be asked to wear face masks while in the community to reduce their risk of

asymptomatic spread. Those who are sick will be asked to stay home and seek testing for COVID-19. Testing should become more widespread and routine, the report suggests.

Multiple experts, in India and abroad, are urging a consultation with local communities on both the hotspots zones and areas that have not had too many cases, before deciding anything further on the lockdown.

As per the AEI report during phase 3, physical distancing restrictions may be lifted, after establishing immune protection.

This means safe and effective tools for mitigating the risk of COVID-19 are available, including broad surveillance, therapeutics that can rescue patients with significant disease or prevent serious illness in those most at risk, or a safe and effective vaccine. This, along with sufficient data, improvement in health-care system capabilities (both in the private and public sectors), will help ensure that reliance by nations on physical distance as a primary tool to control the epidemic is reduced.

Phase 4 – rebuild readiness for the next pandemic – might seem too far in the future, but the AEI report cautions that it is an important part of the plan. Nations will need to be prepared to face any new infectious diseases threat, and governments will have to invest in research and development, expansion of public and private health-care infrastructure and workforce.

What is the future?

The world post-COVID-19 might well turn out to be a vastly different place to what it was before the SARS-CoV-2 virus swept across the globe, leaving mass casualties in its path. But the lessons from this epidemic – hand and surface hygiene, physical distancing – must never be forgotten. They are valuable in ensuring that if the next virulent pathogen were to strike, the world would be able to tackle it head on.

What are the dos and don'ts on wearing masks?

According to the World Health Organization, how should we use, remove and dispose of face covers?

SERENA JOSEPHINE M.

The story so far: From the start of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), recommendations on use of masks have kept varying, country by country, depending on the virus's trajectories. With SARS-CoV-2 growing exponentially in many parts of the world, countries such as India have begun to include newer recommendations on use of masks, including home-made face covers. The one point that remains unchanged is that medical masks should be reserved for health-care providers, persons with symptoms of COVID-19 or confirmed COVID-19, and their caregivers. Wearing a mask alone is never enough, but it is very important to wear one, all the same. Whether a mask gives complete protection from COVID-19 is still debatable. But top health authorities have always maintained that a mask alone does not suffice. Rather, it complements hand hygiene and physical distancing, both critical to prevent transmission of human-to-human COVID-19.

What is the stand of the World Health Organization (WHO)?

WHO, in its April 6-interim guidance on "Advice on the use of masks in the context of COVID-19" (<https://bit.ly/2RumQ5J>), notes that wide use of masks by healthy people in the community setting is not supported by current evidence and carries uncertainties and critical risks.

It says: "In some countries, masks are worn in accordance with local customs or in accordance with advice by national authorities in the context of COVID-19. In these situations, best practices should be followed about how to wear, remove and dispose of them, and for hand hygiene after removal."

WHO goes a step further and outlines factors for decision makers. They should consider the rationale and reason for mask use, vulnerability of person/population to develop severe disease, the setting in which the population lives in terms of population density, feasibility and type of mask.

Who should wear medical masks?

Almost all health authorities agree that medical masks – surgical masks and N95 respirators – should be reserved for health-care workers. WHO notes that the use of medical masks in the community may create a false sense of security, with a neglect of other essential measures (hand hygiene practices and physical distancing). The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) has been maintaining that apart from health-care providers, persons with symptoms of cough, fever and difficulty in breathing and caregivers of persons with suspected symptoms of COVID-19 or confirmed COVID-19 should wear masks.

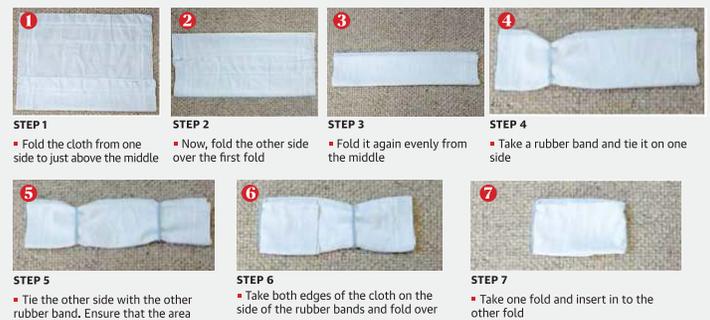
While patients should wear a medical mask as much as possible, changing it at least once a day, caregivers should wear the mask when in the same room as the affected person is.

Is it fine to wear homemade masks?

Do-it-yourself face covers is the latest buzz. Interestingly, the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the

Seven steps to a no-sew DIY mask

The Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India has released an advisory on how to make a protective face cover at home using basic household items:



SOURCE: OFFICE OF THE PRINCIPAL SCIENTIFIC ADVISER TO THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

Government of India has come out with a manual on homemade protective covers for face and mouth (<https://bit.ly/3b4m1M>). The do-it-yourself face cover is recommended for people living in densely populated areas across India.

The Atlanta-based Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has put out a recommendation too on the use of cloth face coverings (<https://bit.ly/2Xw0eUX>) especially in areas of significant community-based transmission. Citing recent studies that a significant portion of individuals with coronavirus lack symptoms and that even those who eventually develop symptoms can transmit the virus to others before showing symptoms, the CDC noted that this meant the virus can spread between people interacting in close proximity – speaking, coughing or sneezing. It has recommended cloth face coverings in public settings where other physical distancing measures are difficult to maintain.

The CDC, while emphasising the point that maintaining six-foot social distancing is critical to slow the spread of the virus, has additionally advised the use of simple cloth face coverings fashioned from household items or made at home from common materials at low cost. Experts say staying at home is the best thing to do now. But if you have to step out, there is nothing wrong in wearing masks. The reason: one can never know if a person has symptoms. All that is needed in this situation is a cloth mask that could be made at home.

Specialists including V. Ramasubramanian, senior consultant, Infectious Diseases, Apollo Hospitals, are of the view that though there is no scientific rationale, it may probably help in both stopping transmission from infected people who are coughing as well as to protect ourselves to a certain extent. While these are not

scientific recommendations, because of the evolution of the epidemic, we are looking at anything which may help and masks seem to be one of the visible factors which may help.

How should a mask be worn?

There are dos and don'ts for wearing masks too. Always wash your hands before wearing a mask. Do not touch the outer surface of the mask as much as possible. Once you wear a mask, do not adjust. If you do so, wash your hands.

If the mask is soiled or wet, or its integrity is broken, do not reuse it. Generally, you can wear a mask for up to three to four hours on an average.

The MoHFW has clear-cut dos and don'ts: Unfold the pleats of the masks and ensure that they are facing down. Place the mask over your nose, mouth and chin, and ensure there are no gaps on either side of the mask.

Cloth covers should be washed after every use. Never reuse disposable masks, and used masks should be disposed of into closed bins after disinfecting them. Avoid touching the mask while using it.

Remove it only with strings, always untie the string below and then the string above. After removing the mask, clean your hands with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand rub. Every member in a family should have a separate mask.

WHO notes that use of medical masks in the community may create a false sense of security, with neglect of other essential measures such as hand hygiene practices and physical distancing

The lame-duck President



The Army-backed Health Ministry and States are leading the virus battle, isolating Jair Bolsonaro

SAO PAULO



With cameras in tow, Jair Bolsonaro drove to a hospital on Friday. When asked about the visit, Mr. Bolsonaro told reporters that he was there to "have an ice cream". Pressed further, Mr. Bolsonaro said he was doing a "pregnancy test". Then he walked into a pharmacy and grabbed a cold drink in a bakery. Returning home, Mr. Bolsonaro, who has tested "negative" thrice for COVID-19 but never released the results, wiped his nose with the back of his wrist and shook hands with an old woman. It was just another day in office for the President of Brazil, a country of 210 million people.

Around the globe, governments are fighting the virus. But Brazil is

busy fighting itself as the virus roams freely, infecting about 20,000 people and killing over 1,000 so far. Experts suspect the real figure to be five to 10 times the official numbers. But Mr. Bolsonaro couldn't care less. As workers dig fresh graves in cemeteries, hospitals run out of test kits, clinics turn away patients with symptoms and the virus reaches tribes in the Amazon, Mr. Bolsonaro is pushing for "ending the quarantine" and "opening the economy".

Since the virus reached Brazil in February, Mr. Bolsonaro has been attacking his own Health Minister, Luiz Mandetta, who has tried to follow the World Health Organization guidelines on combating COVID-19. Things came to a head on Monday as Mr. Bolsonaro threatened to fire Dr. Mandetta unless he fell in line. After several tense hours, during which people banged pots and shouted

against Mr. Bolsonaro, the Health Minister appeared on television. "I am a doctor and doctors never abandon their patient. I will not abandon Brazil," said Dr. Mandetta.

In his 15 months in power, Mr. Bolsonaro has not been so openly rebuffed by a Minister as done by Dr. Mandetta, a surgeon with an approval rating of 76%. As Dr. Mandetta's press conference happened after a Cabinet meeting headed by Mr. Bolsonaro, his tough posture had tongues wagging about if the President had been "isolated". What fuelled the rumours further was the appearance of General Walter Braga Netto, the President's Chief of Staff, at the presser.

Just a day earlier, veteran Argentinian journalist Horacio Verbitsky had told that Brazilian Generals had reported their Argentine counterparts that Gen. Netto was now the "acting-President" of Brazil as Mr. Bolsonaro was not able to "handle the pandemic". As several media outlets in Brazil picked the story and



social media became hyperactive with stories of a "silent coup", there was complete radio silence in Brasilia as Mr. Bolsonaro cancelled all his public engagements and kept quiet on Twitter. "Bolsonaro is a former captain. The Army will never depose

him. Some Generals, who do not agree with him, seem to have taken control of the situation to save the government and save their faces too," said a Ministry of Health official, on condition of anonymity. "The President has been openly sabotaging all our efforts against the spread of the virus."

Attacking China

As if locking horns with his own team was not enough, the Bolsonaro camp has taken the fight to China, the country's biggest trading partner (\$105 billion in 2019). The President's youngest son, Eduardo, has repeatedly called the coronavirus a "Chinese virus" and the Culture Minister sent out a racist tweet last week, accusing "communist" China of deploying the virus to "destroy capitalism". Chinese diplomats in Brazil reacted with ferocity, demanding an apology from the Minister and accusing Mr. Eduardo of being an "ignorant person". China has also decided to ignore

Mr. Bolsonaro's leadership. Since the diplomatic spat between the two governments, China's Ambassador to Brazil has been dealing directly with Dr. Mandetta and Rodrigo Maia, the President of the Lower House of Congress. Heavily dependent on China for medical equipment, several State Governors are talking with China directly. "The State Governors are leading the fight against the virus. They have popular support. Bolsonaro is completely isolated and he can't do anything against China," said the Health Ministry official.

Isolated he may be, but the President hasn't stopped firing up his far-right base with dubious information. Following U.S. President Donald Trump's lead, Mr. Bolsonaro has been promoting hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) as a "wonder drug" against COVID-19. On Thursday, he appeared on social media to prescribe HCQ and take a potshot at Dr. Mandetta. "A doctor never leaves the patient, but a patient can always change the doctor?"



Shobhan Saxena is a Sao Paulo-based journalist

Lockdown with Japanese characteristics

Under the state of emergency, prefectures will 'request' the public to comply with restrictions

TOKYO



The terms 'lockdown' and 'draconian' are somewhat synonymous in the popular imagination. Images of forced quarantining, punitive fines and violators being manhandled by police spring to mind. But a lockdown Japanese-style is a different cup of matcha.

Earlier in the week, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe declared a state of emergency in seven of Japan's prefectures, including Tokyo. The declaration, however, is not backed by any legal means of coercion. It merely authorises the Governors of the concerned prefectures to request people and businesses to comply with social distancing guidelines, relying on peer pressure and a culture of

conformism to succeed. The police in the Japanese prefectures under "lockdown" will not be out on the streets handing out fines or beatings, but safely ensconced in their work booths dealing with the lost and found cases that are their staple.

What exactly does this "voluntary lockdown" entail? Primarily, residents are urged to stay at home and avoid socialising. Working from home is strongly encouraged, but not mandatory. Schools, universities, childcare facilities, movie theatres and music venues are requested to temporarily close. If this proves inadequate, they can then be "ordered" to comply, but the difference is semantic. The order will still not be backed up with any penalties. In the worst case, the violators can be named and shamed, which in Japan carries a huge stigma.

There are, however, some punish-



ments specified for a small number of offences, including hiding supplies that have been requisitioned by local authorities. The emergency declaration further permits government control of the prices of daily essentials. In the event of a surge in

patients, prefectural governments will also be able to requisition land to build temporary medical facilities and could do so forcefully were a landowner to refuse.

Civil liberties

The reason for the Japanese reticence in using punitive measures against citizens lies in the historical memories of rights abuses by the authorities during the Second World War. Japan's U.S.-drafted post-War Constitution enshrined civil liberties and demoted the power of the state. In the past, Mr. Abe's Liberal Democratic Party has lobbied for a revision of the Constitution to give more teeth to the state, but these attempts have met with strong opposition.

The million-yen question is whether the Japanese people will rise to the occasion and respond to the government's requests with enough compliance to contain the spread of COVID-19.

In fact, the government had already been requesting people to curtail

their regular behaviour, long before the emergency declaration. Schools were closed in late February. Sporting events and concerts were cancelled through most of March. Many companies instituted work from home measures weeks ago. Museums and theme parks like Disneyland and Universal Studios shut their doors in early March. For a while, it seemed like these "voluntary" efforts were proving adequate as Japan's infection rate remained low.

But then the cherry blossoms bloomed and despite the warnings of the authorities, large groups of people gathered to picnic under the flowering trees. Trains continued to be packed with commuters as many workplaces found it difficult to adapt to teleworking, given a work culture that values face time. In addition, Tokyo's notorious nightlife continued apace with karaoke parlours and "hostess" bars buzzing with customers.

The sex trade has since emerged as one of the main vectors of spreading

the coronavirus. In the lead up to the formal emergency declaration, Japan's infection rate had spiked. And it remains uncertain whether the emergency, which is in place until May 6, will merely duplicate the status quo of the last several weeks or lead to stricter adherence to the guidelines.

Michiko Sasaki, a 39-year-old Tokyo resident, is confident that the emergency declaration will have a strong psychological impact. "It doesn't matter if there are no fines, we understand that this is serious," she said.

In recent years, Japan has often been derided for its ostensible inability to develop out-of-the-box thinking. But while conformism and respect for hierarchy might not be the most prized characteristics in the contemporary economic paradigm, these old-fashioned traits might just be what the doctor ordered to fight a pandemic. The world will be watching to see if a "voluntary lockdown" is not an oxymoron after all.



Pallavi Aiyar is a journalist based in Tokyo

Between pandemic and poverty

With the shutdown lingering on, more people are going to bed hungry than in the pre-virus period

DHAKA



Imam Hossain, a construction worker in southern Bangladesh, is marooned at home for most of the day due to the coronavirus shutdown. With no significant work on hand, he worries about his family of four as his small savings are fast depleting. Mr. Hossain, 50, sometimes ventures out for work, beyond the prying eyes of law enforcement, when he receives a call from his neighbours.

Local authorities have blocked the major roads and bridges through the area with logs or fences, disrupting the supply chain for home-building materials. "I'm just waiting for the shutdown to end," Mr. Hossain told this reporter by phone from a remote, impoverished village in the

southern district of Pirojpur. "I didn't receive any government relief, nor did I ask for it. I don't even know who to ask."

The power of the coronavirus to create an upheaval in people's lives depends largely on their income in a country with about one out of four people still living in poverty. Mr. Hossain's condition illustrates quiet, anonymous moments of near-starvation among a large swathe of the working poor.

In an effort to limit the spread of the virus, Bangladesh has extended the shutdown to April 25. The country has so far reported over 480 infections and 30 deaths. The shutdown caused economic pain for the daily wage-earners. Before the restrictions came into force in late March, many workers left Dhaka, moving away from the potential hot-spot into seemingly safer zones.

Empathy in times of crisis

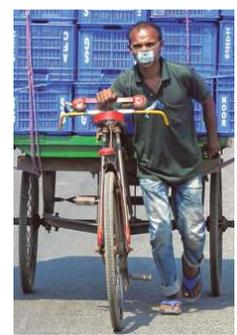
While details of hardship abound, there is more to the story: community efforts have started to trickle in.

Mohammad Baharul Alam, a Dhaka resident, stepped in with food parcels for the poor by mobilising family, friends and colleagues behind his initiative. He started off with 50 parcels a day in the immediate aftermath of the virus outbreak and then

steadily increased the number to 70. "My wife was a bit sceptical about it and asked me what will happen if the supply of food dries up. I assured her that we'll be fine and I pressed on. My friends stood by me."

It's not just the poor who are suffering during the shutdown. There are some "middle-class" families suffering in silence. Mr. Alam devised a way out for those families and assigned a group of night-time volunteers to carry food to their doorstep. "They can't express the problems they are facing due to the lockdown," Mr. Alam, who works at the World Bank's Dhaka office, wrote in a Facebook post. His community effort stems from Tripto Foundation, a non-profit organisation he founded for destitute girls in 2018.

Meanwhile, the government rolled out a 727.5-billion-taka stimulus package, equivalent to 2.5% of Bangladesh's gross domestic product, to cushion the impact of the coronavirus. In a media briefing on April 5, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina



noted the potential implications of the virus on low-income groups and warned of deepening economic costs in the days to come. Fiscal packages and low-cost loans for businesses, including small and medium enterprises, will be prioritised in an

effort to limit the economic fallout. Social safety net programmes will be expanded to ensure the basic needs of people living below the poverty line, said Ms. Hasina.

But questions loom over whether the amount of government aid is enough to offset the colossal damage wrought by the disease. In a report, Fitch Solutions said government aid in the form of cheap loans would do little to alleviate depressed economic activity in Bangladesh.

As the fallout of the shutdown pans out, more people are going to bed hungry than in the pre-virus period. Social distancing is a luxury not everyone can afford. Mr. Hossain will probably be forced to go out looking for work in his neighbourhood if the shutdown lingers. In parts of the country, many scramble for relief distributed by the government, but people like Mr. Hossain will suffer in silence. For them, one hope is the community effort, as espoused by Mr. Alam, who sends packets of food to their homes after dark.



Arun Devnath is a journalist based in Dhaka

Portraits of the victims

An artist is paying tribute to victims of the Easter terror bombings through her illustrations

COLOMBO



Just after the Easter Sunday bombings in Sri Lanka on April 21 last year, Ramesh Raju featured in a few media reports.

From eyewitness accounts, it appears that the father of two had sensed some danger that Sunday morning. He tried to intercept the backpack-wearing young man at the Zion Church in Batticaloa in Sri Lanka's Eastern Province. Except that he couldn't. As the young man - later identified as a suicide bomber - blew himself up, Raju, along with the dozens gathered there on Easter Sunday, including at least 14 children, died.

In the desperate clamour for information on who was behind the

ghastly terror attacks that shook Sri Lanka's relative peace after its civil war, the story's focus soon shifted away from the victims. It turned to the nine suicide bombers, their murderous mission targeting churches and plush hotels in Colombo, nearby Negombo and Batticaloa, and their likely motives. Those who died were all clamped together in a number, reportedly over 270 now, after a few seriously injured succumbed months later.

The thought terrified Tahira Rifath, a 28-year-old illustrator based in Colombo. "I've lost a couple of people very close to my heart in the past few years. I knew that these families who lost their loved ones wouldn't want people to remember them as just a statistic or a number," she told *The Hindu*, speaking of her ongoing initiative that began soon after the tragedy.



She began illustrating each of the victims on her Mac, using a software application for sketching. Sourcing images from their families and friends, she decided to draw each of them. While everyone knows how they all died, few know how they had

lived until then. Who were they? What sort of clothes did they wear? What did they do? What did they dream?

Ms. Rifath's illustrations, which are portraits of the victims, are bright colours and backgrounds. Many are in their professional attire and smiling as they would on a good day.

For instance, in the portrait of Shantha Mayadunne, a celebrity chef, you see in the background light strokes of vegetables and spices that had a key presence in Mayadunne's world.

Toddler Seth's portrait has colourful dinosaurs in the background, indicating he must have loved them. Ms. Kieran dreamt of becoming a neuroscientist, so Ms. Rifath shows him attired in a white lab coat, against a backdrop of an image of a brain and neural circuits.

So far, Ms. Rifath has completed 51 portraits. The tributes are taking longer than she expected. It was easier to get some information soon after the serial blasts but accessing perso-

nal details of several people proved harder with time. "During the first few months, I started off reading news articles online, and browsing through social media to see if I find something. Once I got some information about a person, I messaged individuals to know them and double-checked if the details are correct. But this worked only for some of the victims. In other cases, individuals came forward with details of their loved ones," she said, speaking about the process involved.

Depending on how much she has been able to find out and verify, Ms. Rifath decides on the kind of detail she would include in a portrait. It is important for her to see each of them as people who had "lived full lives, had big dreams and did amazing things".

"The victims had big dreams for themselves and others, but because of an act by a group of very selfish individuals, they no longer can fulfil

them. I just want to say don't waste your life or take it for granted. Yes, living can be exhausting, but push through, dream big, work hard, do good and be kind," she said.

While looking at each victim as a person, getting to know more about the life he or she lived, Ms. Rifath had to connect with their families. She felt she must try and help them heal "even in the smallest way" she could.

For the people who lost their loved ones, the victims would have meant the whole world. "I want to try to understand the pain of these families. Perhaps that is what is helping me to keep telling their stories."

Ms. Rifath is considering making a documentary interviewing survivors and crowdsourcing funds to provide them psychosocial support. Eventually, Ms. Rifath wants to create a book and an online platform compiling her tributes. "I want to point out how ugly racism and extremism can be and the price we all have to pay for it."



Meera Srinivasan is *The Hindu's* Colombo correspondent

Reliving Eden while relaxing with family

Laxman says it's a different feeling to watch the innings now as the kids have grown up

V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM
HYDERABAD

The genius is at work, but in a different sport. Cricketering great V.V.S. Laxman, who is trying his hand at table tennis, is hosting the 'VVS Cup' at home, featuring his family members.

"It is good to be with the kids in what is obviously the longest break of my career, though for an unfortunate reason as the whole world is battling COVID-19," said the 45-year-old Laxman in a chat with *The Hindu* on Saturday.

Being active

Asked how he was spending time during the lockdown, he said: "we are playing table tennis, carrom and chess. It is important to be active, especially when you are confined indoors."

"I am making the most of this break by reading books, watching films and some cricketering moments, including my own. The whole family saw the Kolkata Test innings - 281 against Australia



Game on! V.V.S. Laxman battles with son Sarvajit for the 'VVS Cup'.
*SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Bookworms: Laxman and Achintha are avid readers.

in 2001 - again. It is a different feeling to watch it now as the kids have grown up," said the stylish batsman.

"We also enjoyed watching my ODI hundred in Lahore (2004) and the 2007 Johannesburg Test victory (where he scored a crucial 73 in the second innings)." Cricket runs in the family

as Laxman's son Sarvajit has shown talent, scoring two half-centuries in the Hyderabad Cricket Association (HCA) league recently.

A Warner fan

"My son is a left-hander and a fan of David Warner. He seems to be enjoying his game. I am trying to teach

him a few things on the art of batting," said Laxman. "Obviously, he cannot have a better mentor than his father!"

About bringing up his children, he said: "We are trying to inculcate values, teaching them not to take things for granted and also be good human beings."

"This is the most enjoya-

ble phase. When I was in town earlier, I was either busy with my commitments, or my wife Sailaja was busy with her schedule at the 1st Innings Play School started by us."

Laxman is also involved in various awareness campaigns, appealing to the citizens to stay indoors.

Don't push Dhoni into retirement: Hussain

Says he still has a lot to offer

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI

Doubting Thomases should be careful about what they wish for as there will be no second coming for a once-in-a-generation player like M.S. Dhoni if people "push him into retirement", former England captain Nasser Hussain said on Saturday.

Hussain, one of the most respected voices in world cricket, feels the soon-to-be 39 former captain still has a lot to offer to Indian cricket. "Once Dhoni is gone, there is no getting him back. There are some legends of the game, they are once-in-a-generation cricketers, don't push him into retirement."

"Only Dhoni knows his mental state and in the end selectors select and players turn up when asked to," Hussain told Star Sports on its new show 'Cricknet Connected'.

Dhoni last played for India in the 2019 World Cup



Dhoni. *FILE PHOTO

semifinal against New Zealand in July.

"Is MS Dhoni still good enough to get into the Indian side? It's as simple as that."

"That should apply for anyone across the board. What I have seen, I think MS has a huge amount to offer for Indian cricket," said Hussain.

Lockdown blues for Chahal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Yuzvendra Chahal says he can stay away from home for three years once the lockdown is lifted.

"I will get lock-downed from my home, I will not come back to my home. I can't take this anymore, can't stay at home for longer now. These days of staying at home will suffice for the next three years now," Chahal said in a chat with a TV presenter.

"I will live in a nearby hotel but will not stay at home, that's it for me now, can't bear anymore lockdown days."



Chahal. *FILE PHOTO

Quadri confident of making it to Tokyo

The paddler, ranked 18th in the world, waiting for lockdown to be lifted

K. KEERTHIVASAN
CHENNAI

Aruna Quadri is one of the most sought-after table tennis players in European clubs right now. A Nigerian by birth, the 31-year-old has plied his trade in Portugal and France also.

Ranked 18th in the world, Quadri will be playing in the Bundesliga from September.

In the ITTF-Africa Top 16 Cup in February, which was the Olympics qualification tournament, Quadri sustained a thigh injury, ruining his hopes of making it to Tokyo. But he felt his chances of making it are bright - "more than 90%."

Quadri said he is confident of making the Olympic cut at the World qualification tournament in Qatar.

"I will definitely make it," said Africa's top-ranked player, who became the first from his country to reach the Olympics quarterfinals at Rio 2016.

Quadri is spending quality time with his family in Lisbon now.

'Stay safe'

Speaking to *The Hindu*, he said: "The situation is just like how it is in the rest of the world. Everyone should stay safe."

Quadri said he was doing

his best under the present circumstances.

"I am enjoying my time with family. At this moment, health is wealth," he said.

Praise for UTT

Having played in the first two editions of Ultimate Table Tennis (UTT), Quadri was all praise for the way it was organised. "It was like a family. It was one of the best-organised leagues in the world. I learnt a lot from the talented Indian players. I believe the learning was mutual."

Quadri has fully recovered from the thigh injury and is eagerly waiting for the lockdown to be lifted.



Aruna Quadri.
*FILE PHOTO:
SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Foreign Olympic tourists face a predicament

Uncertainty looms over flight, hotel booking refunds if they stay away in 2021

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LAUSANNE

Thousands of fans planning to travel to the postponed Olympics face uncertainty over flight refunds and reimbursements from hotels and fear they may become victims of greed.

The International Olympic Committee has said that tickets for sporting events will be refunded if people cannot attend in 2021, but admitted that it could "not comment on hotel or flight bookings which were done through third parties."

Lisa Delpy Neirotti, a professor of sport management at the University of Washing-



Impasse: Tourist boats in Tokyo may not find takers if foreign fans don't make it because of travel and lodging issues. *AFP

ton, had reserved 31 rooms for her students for 26 days at a cost of \$90,000. She says that if she does not ask for

the ticket reimbursement, hoping that her students can make the new dates from July 23 to August 8 next year,

there is "no guarantee" that the hotel and plane reservations will be postponed accordingly.

"We are still waiting on both the hotel and the airline. They said it would take a while to let us know."

"I truly believe that if hoteliers and airlines start to be greedy and not work with Olympic fans or organisations, the government will need to step in, as it will not look good for Japan tourism and Japan as a country."

An official with the Tokyo organising committee said the issue surrounding hotel reservations was "under consideration".

Gallant Narayanan falls in semifinals

His conqueror Firouzja will meet Carlsen in summit clash

RAKESH RAO
NEW DELHI

After an incredible run, S.L. Narayanan fell on the threshold of a title-clash against Magnus Carlsen in the Banters Blitz Cup late on Friday night.

Narayanan, who gate-crashed into the semifinals with wins over some better-known names, lost to Iranian Alireza Firouzja 9-6, while Carlsen reached the final beating Russia's Sanan Sjugirov 9-0.

'Horrible' blunder

"I think it (the margin) should have been much closer," said Narayanan, who saw the checkmate coming in the final game, even before his rival could make the rook-move. "Horrible," was how the country's 10th-ranked player described his blunder in the final game where he was clearly better.



Classy show: S.L. Narayanan gained the respect of the chess world by pulling off some sensational victories.
*FILE PHOTO: RAKESH RAO

Even after the painful finish, the soft-spoken GM from Thiruvananthapuram remained gracious. "This is my favourite time-control (three minutes for a player, for a game, with no increment) and I'm thankful to Chess24.com for giving me the opportunity to play

against some of the best."

Indeed, Narayanan gained the respect of the chess world by pulling off some sensational victories in the 128-player \$50,000 knockout tournament, that offers \$14,000 to the winner.

In ensuring \$4,000 by performing beyond his rat-

ing of 2618, Narayanan defeated Spain's Ivan Salgado Lopez (2584) 8.5-0.5, Egypt's Bassem Amin (2686) 8.5-4.5, Carlsen's 'second' Norway's Jon Ludvig Hammer (2608) 8.5-2.5 and Germany's Alexander Donchenko (2646) 8.5-6.5 to reach the quarterfinals.

He beat Venezuela's Eduardo Hurrzaga Bonelli (2607) 8.5-6.5 in a tough quarterfinal before facing the formidable Firouzja, rated 2728.

The online event began on September 25 with no fixed schedule as matches were played at times convenient for both players.

The other Indians in the fray were Nihal Sarin (lost in the third round), Vaibhav Suri, R. Praggnanandhaa (second round), S.P. Sethuraman, Abhijit Gupta and Surya Shekhar Ganguly (first round).

Saqlain live!

Catch Pakistan spin legend Saqlain Mushtaq in a live chat on *Sportstar's* Instagram handle (@Sportstarweb) on April 12 (Sunday) at 2.30 p.m. IST.

Kipchoge's advice to athletes

IANS
NAIROBI

World marathon record-holder Eliud Kipchoge says he focuses on strength-training while in isolation to stay injury-free. He warned fellow athletes not to switch off training, saying if they push their bodies too much when the situation around the world improves, they will be prone to injuries.

Will consider leading AIFF, says Bhutia

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Former India captain Bhaichung Bhutia has said he will consider contesting for the post of All India Football Federation (AIFF) president in future. Bhutia retired in 2011, after being Indian football's posterboy for more than a decade.

"That is definitely something to be considered in future," he said when asked if he wants to become AIFF president one day, while answering questions on Facebook.

"At the moment I am focusing on grassroots football with the Bhaichung Bhutia Football School and United Sikkim Club and also at district level (in Sikkim)," said Bhutia.

Current AIFF president Prafil Patel has effectively



Bhaichung Bhutia.
*FILE PHOTO

been at the helm of affairs since 2008, when then chief Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi fell ill. He was elected president in 2012 and again in 2016, and is unlikely to be eligible this year under the Sports Code.

Liverpool legend Dalglish tests positive

IANS
LONDON

Liverpool legend Sir Kenny Dalglish has tested positive for COVID-19 but is asymptomatic, his family has announced. The Dalglish family released a statement on Friday saying the 69-year-old was admitted to hospital on Wednesday for treatment of an infection and received a routine test for coronavirus.

"Unexpectedly, the test result was positive but he remains asymptomatic," the statement read.

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Magazine

Plain Read



BIG SCREEN

As we mourn the loss of human touch during the pandemic, we turn to cinema for hope and escape **p6**



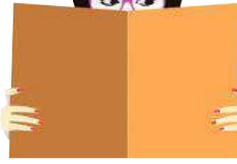
BOOKEND

How the gigantic leatherback turtle bounced back after the 2004 tsunami destroyed its nesting beaches **p7**



60 MINUTES

It's a myth that domestic violence happens only in low-income families, says victimologist Prasanna Gettu **p8**



LITERATURE REVIEW

When reality becomes unpredictable, you turn to that unchanging rock of comfort: books **p4**



COVER

Coming home to roost

Nature seems to be tentatively reclaiming urban spaces, but whether there will be any lasting change is a moot question **p3**

Resplendent A peacock perches on a rock amidst a concrete jungle in Hyderabad.
 * SRIKANTH AYYAGARI / INSTAGRAM

last week



Tiger fever

A tiger in New York's Bronx Zoo tested positive for the coronavirus. The four-year-old Nadia, who developed a dry cough, and a few other big cats in the zoo that also showed symptoms, were infected by a zookeeper who was caring for them. "It's the first time, to our knowledge, that a [wild] animal has gotten sick from COVID-19 from a person," said the zoo.



Berned out

Senator Bernie Sanders suspended his bid to become the Democratic Party's candidate for the U.S. presidency, effectively confirming former Vice-President Joe Biden as the presumptive nominee. Sanders, who had led the race early on with some convincing victories, fell increasingly behind Biden, who racked up wins after his triumph in South Carolina.



Pay cuts

In a move to shore up finances to combat the pandemic, the salaries of the President, Vice-President, MPs and Governors are to be cut by 30% for one year, while the MPLADS fund — the ₹5 crore per annum each MP receives for constituency development — was suspended for two years, saving ₹7,900 crore for the Consolidated Fund of India to go towards pandemic relief.



Rinse and repeat

As the number of COVID-19 cases in India neared 6,000 — and global cases passed 15 lakh — with almost 1,300 in Maharashtra alone, Prime Minister Narendra Modi indicated that he may extend the national lockdown beyond April 14. Several State governments too requested this. A final decision was awaited, to be taken after a meeting with all Chief Ministers.

Panda date

Two pandas in a Hong Kong zoo, which is closed to visitors for the lockdown, took advantage of the privacy to finally mate. Zoo officials have been trying to get Ying Ying and Le Le interested in each other for over a decade now. "We hope to bear wonderful pregnancy news to Hong Kongers this year and make further contributions to the conservation of this vulnerable species," said the relieved zoo in a press note.



Chinese pause

As Wuhan, the original epicentre of COVID-19, came out of its 76-day lockdown, there was an exodus with residents rushing to take trains bound for the countryside. Even as China saw its first day without a virus-caused death, the U.K. and New York State in the U.S. reported their deadliest days so far, with 786 and 731 deaths, respectively.



The Tokyo way

Japan announced a month-long emergency in Tokyo and six other prefectures that have been severely impacted by COVID-19. This grants more authority to regional governors but is not a lockdown. The measures are largely voluntary, and public transport will not be shut down. Tokyo governor Yuriko Koike criticised the measures as insufficient.



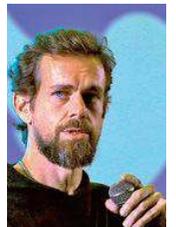
Patient No.10

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was taken into intensive care at St Thomas' Hospital in London when he continued to show symptoms 10 days after testing positive for COVID-19. Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab is acting in his stead. Messages of support poured in from world leaders, including U.S. President Donald Trump, who added that he had asked pharmaceutical companies to get in touch and help.



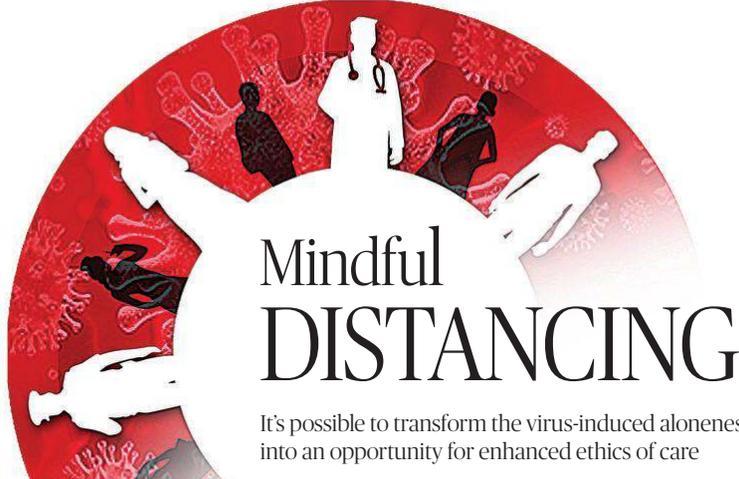
Slow forward

WhatsApp acted to curb pandemic-related misinformation by making it harder to forward messages. If a message has already been forwarded five times or more, you can now only forward it to one contact at a time. This comes amid panics caused by fake messages going viral, including some that triggered panic buying and a recent one purporting to be from WHO that claimed the lockdown in India would be extended till June.



Billion-dollar tweet

Among the host of billionaires pledging support for the fight against the pandemic, Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey made the biggest commitment by promising to donate \$1 billion — roughly 28% of his wealth. Meanwhile, the Rajasthan High Court stayed an FIR filed against Dorsey in 2018 for hurting the sentiments of Brahmins by holding up a placard saying, "Smash Brahminical Patriarchy".



Mindful DISTANCING

It's possible to transform the virus-induced aloneness into an opportunity for enhanced ethics of care

Avijit Pathak

Life is not a picnic; nor is it like a doctrine of what American self-help books love to regard as "You are okay, I am okay". Instead, it surprises us, shocks us, and as we pass through puzzling curves, we realise that the "taken-for-granted world" can crumble. And then, we experience "shock". Yes, as the novel coronavirus haunts our collective consciousness, we find ourselves in a world where fear is normal, surveillance is legitimate, human interactions are prohibited, and "distancing" becomes the new discourse. While every moment we hear how coronavirus is spreading and shattering the self-perception of modernity's triumphant agenda, we are forced to ask a difficult question. What then is the meaning of existence? Is it only about chronic fear, isolation and stigmatisation of the victims? Is it only about the desperate urge to be biologically alive (with masks and sanitisers), yet aesthetically and spiritually dead?

We find ourselves in a world where fear is normal, surveillance is legitimate, distancing is the discourse

To begin with, it is important to acknowledge that modernity has not necessarily prepared us to derive a meaning of dignified existence — particularly, amid existential uncertainty. Instead, it has made us believe that life is an express highway — a smooth road to "progress"; eve-

rything can be predicted and controlled; bio-medicine and technology can postpone death; and all sorts of metaphysical and spiritual riddles are psychic obstacles to be overcome for sustaining a technologically controlled "order". Hence, under "normal" circumstances, as the children of modernity, we go on with physical, vital and mental pleasures in this "taken-for-granted" world. Today as the modernist myth of "certainty" is over; we seem to be at a loss. We really do not know how to live meaningfully even amid this uncertainty: when any time the virus can enter our residential societies, we may find ourselves coughing and breathing with great difficulty, and local hospitals may refuse to admit us.

Ethics of care

In the absence of a meaningful education to engage with the inherent uncertainty of life, we are reducing existence into yet another self-centric strategy for mere survival. It is in this context that I wish to reflect on "social distancing". Well, since there is a possibility of community transmission of the virus, doctors are not entirely wrong in advising us to remain in isolation, and reduce travelling, gathering and other social transactions. There is a positive meaning attached to it. However, what is equally important to realise is that without the aesthetics of living, "distancing" might degenerate into a mode of living filled with chronic

fear, purely self-centric pursuits, and utter indifference to the pain and suffering of others. We should not forget that in our times we have already created enough "distancing".

While anonymity has increased in urban centres, the normalisation of surveillance sanctified through the new technologies of "discipline" has destroyed the possibility of trust and spontaneous relationships. Furthermore, the techno-hallucination that the virtual world with all its media simulations has created is not really conducive to the growth of a real and physically embedded social space. Again, as the market colonises every domain of life, instrumental and strategic rationality kills the possibility of therapeutic and dialogic communication. The paradox is that many of us, despite social media "followers" and "subscribers", remain lonely. Under these circumstances, the question arises: is the spread of the virus giving us yet another excuse for this self-centric/instrumental living? Be a clever and strategic "winner", but never a "loser". Is it like feeling proud that "I have survived; but they could not"? Is it what living is all about?

However, it is not impossible to transform this occasion into an opportunity for enhanced ethics of care. True, we need not travel much; we need not entertain meetings and gatherings. But then, in the name of "distancing", we need not forget others. Instead, we can use — and this time humanely and creatively —

our gadgets for a sustained social intimacy. Instead of neurotically striving for Facebook "likes" and "selfie" perfection, we can truly connect to our friends and neighbours, and overcome all sorts of "otherness". Is it not the time to have a long conversation with a friend who cannot avoid travelling as his wife is undergoing chemotherapy in a hospital? Is it not the occasion when you and I ought to write a long letter to a friend who is worried about his daughter — a doctor dealing with COVID-19 patients?

Or is it not the time to have a telephonic conversation with your domestic help, and enquire whether she is safe in the overcrowded slum she lives in? Or is it not the time not to look at the clock, and have a long chat (over Skype) with your maternal uncle — a widower living alone in Rome, and invoke Mulla Nasruddin, crack jokes, and realise the joy of boundless laughter? Yes, it is possible. And then, we will be able to say that this is not "social distancing"; instead, this is yet another form of social intimacy. We would be able to realise that technology is not for self-indulgence; it is bridge capable of connecting human souls.

It is also important to learn to make a distinction between alertness and obsessive fear. Yes, coronavirus is real; and the continual dissemination of headlines like "Days after partying, visiting malls, Andhra man tests positive", or "Govt. investigating COVID-19 patient in Tamil Nadu without foreign travel history" causes fear. Yet, this is also the time to realise that obsessive fear is essentially counter-productive; it paralyzes, and makes us incapable of handling any emergency. Instead, every second we allow ourselves to die — ethically and spiritually. While alertness or appropriate medical care is important, we often tend to fall into the trap of fear, particularly in an age when WhatsApp messages, far from generating strength, spread negativity. Possibly, as I wish to state, we can transcend the psychology of obsessive fear not through the denial of the crisis, but through intense inner churning.

True, the virus can kill us. But then, this very moment when you and I are alive is the only moment available to us. Can we live this moment with mindfulness, intensity and care? This is the real education.

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FEEDBACK

Letters to the Magazine can be e-mailed separately to mag.letters@thehindu.co.in

Cover story

Humanity spends more on ice cream every year than on ensuring that the technologies we develop don't destroy us. (Pandemics and prejudice'; Apr. 5) Either humanity takes control of its destiny and reduces the risk to a sustainable level, or all human life will be destroyed.



Pandemics were Stephen Hawking's biggest fear. He recalled how the Black Death wiped out as many as half of all Europeans during the 14th century. Or the earlier Plague of Justinian that swept through the Byzantine Empire in 541 CE, reducing humanity's headcount by 3%. By comparison, today's coronavirus outbreak is mild, although it provides a taste of the massive disruption a more lethal strain might bring.

K.M.K. MURTHY

The cover story made sad reading. Just as Mary Mallon was nicknamed "Typhoid Mary", the barrage of similar stories — from Jews being wrongly persecuted for spreading the plague to U.S. President Trump using the term "Chinese virus" — speaks of how quick society is to accuse someone. Science has miserably failed to convince the human race that pathogens are without prejudice. E.S. CHANDRASEKARAN

The cover feature drives home the painful fact that we have different yardsticks for different people. It is a grim irony that in our country, people have directed their anger against all those with a slight facial resemblance to the Chinese. People from the Northeast are as Indian as any of us and stigmatising them is a crime. Let us shed these petty prejudices and acquire the broad-mindedness needed to treat all human beings alike. C.V. ARAVIND

I must thank Mr. Amitanshu for the insightful cover story that clearly details 'epidemic orientalism'. It is true that diseases such as cholera and flu were named after their places of origin, but this is also a fact of the evolution of the infection. Mr. Trump

seems to have 'named' COVID-19 with the same logic. While stigmatisation is unacceptable, I believe China should have responded to the accusation with its own justifications, especially against the backdrop of the Chinese book, *Unrestricted Warfare*, by Colonel Liang and Xiangsui, which highlights a virus warfare tactic. Second, with people not self-disclosing, people defying prohibitory orders and endangering the lives of others, sometimes stricter measures are not necessarily implemented out of 'prejudice' but out of the government's compulsion in the larger interest of the nation. Just as the WHO has christened this pandemic on the basis of the pathogen, if only Ms. Mary Mallon could have explained her reasons for continuing to cook despite being a typhoid carrier, I would have begun my classes on 'Typhoid Fever' for medical students with a different anecdote. DR. AJITH VJAYAN

What pandemics bring is not just infection but racism and hate-mongering as well. These are times when there is a need to come together and realise if nature doesn't obey social categorisations, who are we to do so? PARDDI KHANNA

Reading epidemic Reprise ('La Peste by Albert Camus'; Apr. 5), I remembered *Inferno* by Dan Brown. It is a must-read book during this pandemic. Books on epidemics, like Boccaccio's *The Decameron*, Saramago's *Blindeess*, Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*, Shelley's *The Last Man* etc. portray well the fear and helplessness of mankind in the face of disease. SHIBLI SADDAM

Undying frenzy amid lockdown

Nitasha Devasar

On Day One of the lockdown, I woke up early and rushed to my terrace to view the world around me. The first thing I see is two vegetable carts down the empty road, their owners hidden behind big handkerchiefs. A minute later a familiar young woman appears. Then a couple of teenage boys saunter by. As a DTC cluster bus roars into the bus stop in a cloud of dust and these people clamber in, I think how do you stop a billion-plus people from leaving their homes? How do you convince them that there is a rapidly growing menace that will soon engulf us, if we don't comply?

As soon as the lockdown was announced, people rushed out and crowded their neighbourhood groceries — social distance be damned. The hoarding instinct, the crowding mentality and the complete disregard of the message of physical distancing was frightening. It would have been amusing, in a cynical sort of way, if it wasn't for the fact that that we are more connected to each other than ever before in deadly viral networks. This behaviour is personal, and it endangered each one of us, our elderly parents and children.

Is it some middle class anxiety of a post-Partition generation grown up on tales of material loss and scarcity? Or is it something more recent, more selfish and insular, a creeping disconnection from the real world and real people that has permeated our society in the past decade or so?

Whatever the cause and whether we choose to acknowledge it or not, this is an unprecedented, unknown and overwhelming crises in which apathy, elitism and callousness will harm each individual, family, city, state, nation and the whole world. Could we in our wildest dreams imagine it would be so hard to stay at home. Human interaction will never be the same again.

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A de-cluttering emptiness

The lockdown has brought back the peace and quiet that we had lost somewhere

Jogendra Suryadevara

For many days now, all of us have been inundated with information on COVID-19. News from around the world is devastating and forecasts are grim. I have ventured out of home only once in the past four days and that too for just 15 minutes adhering to the physical distancing norms. Receiving this barrage of depressive information and predictions while staying home, wondering if we are taking the right precautions and if our friends and families are safe and thinking of all the work getting postponed, is playing tricks on my mind.

Reaching the point of "information saturation", I decided on Ugadi morning to just greet my family and friends and stay away from all viral news and updates for a while. The Telugu New Year celebration in our house was curtailed to just sending and receiving greetings. No Ugadi chutney, vada, tamarind rice



or payasam. I decided to start off the New Year on a better note, not with more disturbing news. So, I went to the balcony and stared at the roads for a few minutes. Not a single soul nor a polluting vehicle went by. No calls from the vegetable hawkers or the sofa repair guys with their blaring messages on speakers. Absolute quiet. Just the cawing of crows and cooing of pigeons and an occasional eagle in the skies.

Calm as ever

I then went over to our living room with a hot cup of lemon tea that they say is good for your throat. Sat down and

watched the hazy skies and mountains afar from the comfort of my sofa, and they seemed to be calm just as they have been for ever. But today, the city too has joined them in their stillness and silence.

Not a sound from anywhere. Just eerily quiet. Visakhapatnam, known as the "Steel City", has transformed into a "still city". Determined to stay away from electronic, print and social media, I then went over to our rooftop garden and walked amid the flowers and fruits my wife has been growing. Didn't realise she had grown such a variety. I discovered the soothing fragrances

of the flowers and their pleasing colours. I sat in the shade with a gentle cool morning breeze. No sounds from anywhere except from the wind chimes swaying in the garden. I should spend more time in the garden, I thought.

The natural surroundings are soothing, but the silence is "deafening". I kept thinking how much we have got used to the noise and chaos we create and how far we have got from peace and tranquillity that once surrounded us, and how this new experience of lockdown of just a few days is choking us.

But I am glad that this has been thrust upon us; else we would never have been able to experience this.

And I hope this experience will be frozen in our minds and that every once in a while, we will long for and practice this "emptiness" to cleanse our cluttered lifestyles, minds and souls.

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When prevention takes a back seat

Despite the medical advances, we have failed to adopt preventive health care

Tiny Nair

It was a high-level meeting of a committee comprising top cardiologists, administrators and officials, discussing strategies to improve care of patients with major heart disease in the country. The meeting ended up with plans to have more cardiac cath labs, intensive care units, hi-tech interventions and staff training; sadly no one talked about prevention of a disease that can be kept at bay if measures are adopted early — on an average, a decade before it manifests. I feebly suggested a few preventive strategies, with hardly any impact. People, awe-struck with advances in technology, big data and balance sheets, were already packing their

files, closing laptops and putting left-over peppermints into their pockets. I prayed that the policy-makers answer my prayers — maybe, some day.

Vaccines, hand sanitation, nutritious food, regular exercise, all are meant for the same result: maintaining good health and prevent diseases.

But the high-level meeting discussing "preventive medical strategy for 2020" strangely ended up with handshakes (now *namaste* courtesies corona) and dates for the next meeting; and nobody believes that we are doing anything worthwhile. The first thing in a preventive strategy is the belief that the strategy will work.

A society that doesn't believe in a strategy (for instance, vaccination) is unlikely



to benefit from it. The main challenge in preventive medical strategy is its acceptance. A person suffering from a splitting headache or an unbearable chest pain is likely to land up in the hospital emergency room, even if he hates a hospital (most of us do) or doesn't believe in modern medicine. But decision to vaccinate a child, check blood cholesterol or following a healthy lifestyle

needs acceptance; a conscious and voluntary decision. A sick patient, with no belief in modern medicine, has a high chance of ending up in hospital, often resulting from the collective decision of more informed neighbours or relatives to rush him or her there.

But for a healthy man to adopt preventive steps, the stock answer will be "I am so busy", "I don't have time", or "I would think about it".

With all the hi-tech medical advances, scans and biomarkers at our disposal, we have failed to impress the people at large on our commitment to impart preventive health care. It is our fault; you and me included.

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Humanity in the grip of corona

While deadlier virus types have wreaked havoc, none has achieved superstardom as COVID-19
ARTHUR SANIOTIS

The war against a virus

Survival can't be construed as a victory, as we have to change our ways to prevent such infections
SUKUMARAN CV.

Guarding against COVID-19

Surely many must have become a watchman like me in the ongoing fearful times
RAMESHINDER SINGH SANDHU

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A walk to remember (Clockwise from left) This old photograph of sika deer in Japan was wrongly circulated as deer sighting in Tamil Nadu; but fallow deer did come to graze on the lawns of a housing estate in London; moored gondolas reflected in the now-clear waters of Venice's canals; Jalandhar got a view of the Himalayas hundreds of kilometres away in the now clear air; a gull on a perch in Venice; the video of this common small civet cat in Kozhikode went viral as the endangered Malabar civet; and a herd of Cashmere goats sauntered out into a small town in North Wales. • TWITTER.COM, AFP, AP, PTI & CREATIVE COMMONS



ENVIRONMENT

In our wildest dreams

Is the earth 'healing'? Nature 'reclaiming' the planet? Well... Yes, no and maybe

mismatched orchestra of squirrels, crows and bulbuls, and going to bed with the hum of crickets vibrating through your window are little things that melt away the stress.

But there has been a downside for wildlife too. Conservationists and wildlife researchers worry that an unfounded fear of wild creatures like bats can lead to people trying to eliminate them in these times of fake news and social media misinformation. Two trees with large bat roosts, for instance, were felled in Mysuru recently, because local people were afraid of picking up viruses from them. But this will not succeed in keeping people safe – it will only drive the bats to other habitats, possibly even closer to human residences.

Brief reprieve

Perhaps saddest of all is the realisation that any breather the world may be getting now is only temporary, a brief reprieve. Our reckless tendency to over-consume has unmistakably been the cause for the swift global spread of the virus from Wuhan to the farthest and most distant corners of the world. Greenhouse gas emissions are down, but the excessive volumes of CO₂ that we have pumped into the air for decades will not disappear in a few days or weeks or even months of lockdown. This is an ever-expanding spiral of environmental degradation that we have brought upon ourselves. This short respite only serves to show us how poorly we have lived our lives so far, and to give a brief taste of how it could have been had we lived life differently.

When the crisis winds its way out, and we return to the chaos and frenzy of urban living, will we remember that we have the right to see blue skies and faraway mountains, breathe clean air and listen to the chorus of birds? Or will we push these thoughts away, diving back into our computer screens, headphones plugged in?

If there is hope, it lies in the possibility that social distancing and lockdowns can lead to shifts in imagination. Can we – those of us fortunate enough to live under a roof, with food in our bellies and cash in our bank accounts – understand that daily life needs to slow down, that we need to spend more time looking at flowers that blossom and the butterflies that drink their nectar? Will businesses and employers allow us to return to a quieter, more harmonious way of life?

Unless this period of social distancing leads to a fundamental questioning of our ways of living and working, consumption and leisure, unless we can engineer a fundamental cultural shift, tales of the world healing itself will remain just that – dreamy tales.

The writer is a professor of sustainability at Azim Premji University, and co-author of *Cities and Canopies: Trees in Indian Cities*.

Greenhouse gas emissions are down, but the excessive volumes of CO₂ that we have pumped into the air for decades will not disappear in a few days or weeks or even months

Harini Nagendra

It is after sunset, and I can hear sounds I haven't heard in years: the chorus of chirping crickets, serenading frogs and screeching owls. By day, the squabbling squirrels that hang out on the Bauhinia trees that line the footpath, and the brahminy kite perched on the electric wire, let me come up closer than they used to before. My backyard, frequented by a couple of red-vented bulbuls and a coucal, now has new visitors – sunbirds flitting from corner to corner, hovering around the pomegranate flowers, checking out the dried leaves. And the green bee-eaters I hadn't seen in years are back! Some 15 years ago, when we first moved into this neck of the woods in Bengaluru, bee-eaters kept us company, perched in large groups on the electricity lines; and now here they are again, hanging out on an African tulip tree near our neighbour's house. My mother reports that the crows seem bolder, swooping closer to her when she ventures outside.



away – something not seen in decades. Delhi's air quality this March was the best it'd had in five years for that month.

So is the earth really 'healing'? Are animals 'reclaiming the planet'? Has nature 'triumphed'? The answer is yes and no: sifting truth from fake news depends on what you are looking at, the angle you are looking at it from, and how long a look you are prepared to take.

True or false

There have been some clear hoaxes. No, scores of deer did not occupy a road in Coimbatore or Ooty; those were actually a herd of sika deer in Japan's Nara Park shot several years ago. Another video claiming to be the first sighting since the 1990s of the critically endangered Malabar civet, in Kozhikode, turned out to be of the more common small Indian civet cat, one that scientists said could have been sick and disoriented. And no, the canals of Venice do not now have dolphins, even though the waters indeed run clearer and it's just as exciting that ducks, cormorants, crabs and fish have reclaimed the canals. Venetians are now beginning to talk of possibly reducing motorised boat traffic so that some of this returning biodiversity can be preserved.

Other stories are true. Coyotes and foxes are now being spotted across American cities; raccoons were seen in Panama; wild boars infiltrated Barcelona's city centre; a puma was spotted in Santiago, the Chilean capital; and deer explored subway stations in Japan – heaven knows what they made of it.

Other animals, less wild, are also be-

ginning to explore the now-quiet streets. Cashmere goats have taken to walking the streets of the Welsh seaside town of Llandudno. Imported during Queen Victoria's reign to supply wool, these goats normally graze on the rocky outcrops outside the town, but now, in the absence of traffic, they are drawn to the inviting hedges and gardens of the town. In another Welsh county, Monmouthshire, an adorable Welsh dog shows a herd of sheep taking over a deserted children's playground, trotting on a roundabout, clearly having the time of their lives.

Back home, a nilgai was spotted in Noida, a sambar in Chandigarh, a rhinoceros in Sonapur near Guwahati, and peacocks on the streets of Coimbatore. Olive Ridley turtles are nesting undisturbed in large numbers on the beaches of Odisha, benefiting from the rare lack of human predators.

Taking advantage of this rare opportunity, several citizen science groups have begun to gather data. Macau's annual City Nature Challenge has scaled down its objectives, asking participants to look at whatever they can spot within their apartment – a cockroach under the sink or a

potted plant in the balcony. At the University of Washington, scientists have launched a community science programme, asking volunteers to monitor birds using the eBird app for 10 minutes, either in their backyard or in any local green space. Bird Count India has launched a Lockdown Birding Challenge, asking people to observe birds in their backyard for 15 minutes, twice a day, using eBird to upload the data.

Backyard science

The objectives of many of these citizen science programmes are threefold. Most obviously, they seek to gather data about the impact of the lockdown and the reduced human disturbance on bird, insect and animal activity. Second, they hope to educate people about nature in their backyard, helping parents and children come together for "wow" moments as they spot a brilliantly coloured butterfly or watch a potter wasp building a neat mud nest. Finally, it is about mental health. In these stressful times, watching and listening to nature can help: a moment of fleeting magic can make all the difference. Waking up to the delightfully



ESSAY

Hop in and shut out

This is the time when you want to read yourself out of the moment. Fortunately, the shelves that surround me in my apartment are designed for one and only one thing: escape

Jaideep Unudurti

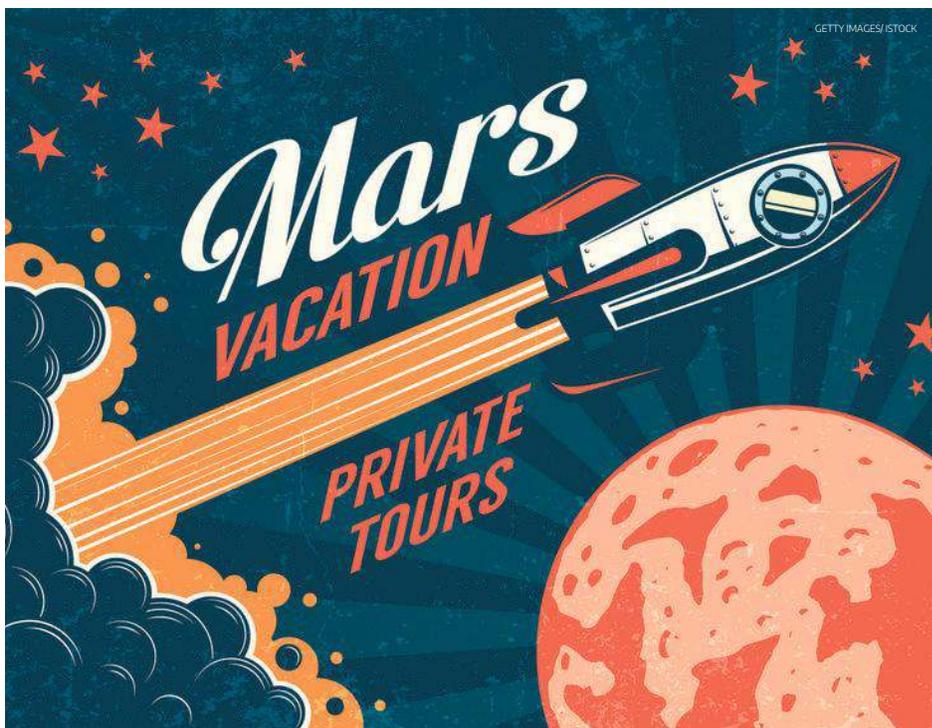
The first thought that crossed my mind when the lockdown was announced was: finally I'll have time to read all those books, swiftly chased by: what if I don't have enough? As a freelancer, living off Maggi noodles and black coffee, unyoked from the calendar of night and day, social distancing is a lifestyle choice, not an imposition. But the thought of being stuck at home and not having anything to read was claustrophobic.

Binge watching is intolerable, given that I already spend so much of my professional life in front of a screen. The same goes for e-books; only the printed page will do. As critic Joe Queenan said, "My philosophy is simple: Certain things are perfect the way they are. The sky, the Pacific Ocean, procreation and the Goldberg Variations all fit this bill, and so do books."

Gateway drugs

The lockdown came at a point when I didn't want to read a single word any more about pandemics, pathogens or pneumonia. At the first sign of the approaching storm, I behaved like the usual news junkie, scouring the underside of the web for conspiracy theories, or looking up fiction about outbreaks.

As the storm hit, one moved from the abstract to the practical – does drinking Assam tea help (it's the theaflavins you see), for how many hours does the virus survive on different surfaces, ranked, and so on. Now that we are in the ominous silence of the storm's eye, you want to stop scrolling Twitter, shut down the newsfeeds, rather like King John who said, "Do not seek to stuff my head with more ill news, for it is full"



"Do not seek to stuff my head with more ill news, for it is full." This is the time when you want to read yourself out of the moment. Fortunately, the shelves that surround me in my apartment are designed for one and only one thing: escape.

I grew up in a boarding school, located on an enormous island of basalt upraised into the sky, isolated and remote. At an early point in my scholastic career, it was found that my appendix was planning to kill me and had to be dispensed with. During a long spell in the school hospital I discovered piles of luridly covered American sci-fi magazines. Even in those pre-Internet days I knew that the model of the solar system these magazines conjured up had been hopelessly overtaken by science, but I didn't care.

The image of Mercury with one side broiling under a sky-filling sun, the other in frozen darkness, and a thin strip of inhabitable twilight in between; the ancient ruins of Mars built by a master race now long extinct; the sinister denizens of the swamps of cloud-shrouded Venus – all these burnt like liquid fire in the brain, far superior to the world of class politics, slip tests and athletic bravado.

Once out of the hospital, my search for the fix led me to the senior library, with its soaring ceilings and

wonderfully comfortable chairs next to wall-high windows. There, arrayed like archaeological strata, were rows of vintage sci-fi, filled with strange names like Asimov and Heinlein, Kuttner and Kornbluth, Le Guin and Williamson. Adventures featuring dashing spacemen on far-flung planets, quests that usually had whole galaxies at stake, impossible machinery and sleek-finned ships that cleaved the stars. This was the gateway drug that led me to fantasy, horror, pulp thrillers and other genre intoxicants.

Grow up?

Even then, there was always the unasked question that persisted through college and the decades beyond – when will you start reading something serious? When will you finally 'grow up'? When will you put behind escapism and confront reality. As C.S. Lewis said, only jailors are opposed to escapism.

Only, in the immediate here and now, escape means not from tedious jobs or bad marriages but from rooms the size of our skulls. Nobody said it was easy – as long ago as in the 17th century, philosopher Blaise Pascal had declared "The sole cause of man's unhappiness is that he does not know how to stay quietly in his room." Indeed, being confined led the desperately bored 18th century writer Xavier de Maistre (he was un-

der house arrest for unauthorised duelling) to write the inspired *A Journey Round My Room*, a parody of conventional travelogues (for example, Chapter V is 'The Bed').

Like other solitary workers from home, I know well this strange geography. How many times I've woken up at 2 a.m., having slept through the day, to start working. The days blur and bleed into one another. Sam Lipsyte advises in his novel *Homeland*: "When you work at home, fellow alums, discipline is the supreme virtue. Suicidal self-loathing lurks behind every coffee break. Activities must be expertly scheduled, from shopping to showers to panic attacks."

Fatal inversion

By some fatal inversion, the inside has now become the outside, the hermeticism practised by the solitary worker suddenly replicated on a planetary scale. For me, the only change is that now I am woken by birdsong instead of traffic noise.

As panic-stricken citizens were ransacking supermarkets, I have no doubt that others like me were casting a critical eye over their book supply – would it last three weeks? The first estimate is invariably wrong: we grossly overestimate our reading speed – even at one book a day, we should have enough – but there are



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

fears. Fears of being trapped in tedious narratives, starting on trilogies with missing entries and so on. However, a decade of collecting and even outright book-hoarding means I'm reasonably safe from such a fate. The poet Frank Bidart is supposed to have boasted that were a cataclysm to end the world and only his cramped Brooklyn flat were recovered, it would still be possible to reconstruct the entirety of Western civilisation from its contents.

All bibliophiles secretly feel that their own collections will stand this supreme test, recreating whatever their obsessions were; in my case it would be literature of the imagination. By the end of the first week my apartment floor was littered with piles of books. I had decided to cate-

gorise them, make reading lists on a thematic basis, the daydream of every reader. For example, I could choose to read only those novels where chess provides motive power to the plot, say Zweig's *Schachnovelle* or Pérez-Reverte's *The Flanders Panel*.

Metaphysical mayhem

Another taxonomical method is size; as Stalin is supposed to have said, "Quantity has a Quality of its own". One shelf buckles under the weight of a row of giant tomes, such as the *Zones of Thought* series by Vernor Vinge, a massive trilogy spanning millions of years and thousands of alien races that I've been too daunted to confront. Or *Perlmann's Silence* by Pascal Mercier, featuring metaphysical mayhem at a conference of philosophers.

Another mode of organisation is picking an author and burning through their oeuvre. This immediately draws me to a shelf which holds the Fandorin series by Boris Akunin. Set in *fin de siècle* Russia, the thrillers have been described as what would happen if Tolstoy and Conan Doyle collaborated on a Russian equivalent of Sherlock Holmes. Akunin uses a literary mechanism that I always appreciate – the character ages as the books progress over two decades – making a sequential reading even more appealing.

In this manner more and more piles are now accumulating, but I haven't actually started reading anything. In the face of the formless panic that stalks the air, the atavistic urge is to retreat into the cave and pull the blanket over your head. In short, abandon the new, and turn back to what once gave you joy. Re-reading gives a feeling of control, because you know exactly what the characters are going to do, their fates predetermined.

In Richmal Crompton's *Just William* series, William Brown and the Outlaws will always save the day. Or go back to *Billy Bunter* and its repetitive but effective formula.

I know that the years I spent hoarding these treasures have not been wasted.

Meanwhile, news sites now have blinking icons showing infection counters. Over the vacant streets there hangs a silence. A silence that smells like an aftermath. Now I think of my home as a spaceship. Grocery runs means cycling the airlock and stepping into the uncaring void. Supermarkets are alien planets where you forage while thinking all the while, who is infected? Who isn't? Paranoia is as essential for survival as a spasm.

It is not a coincidence that in fantasy and sci-fi the space ships always have escape hatches, wardrobe conceal portals, there are magical doorways drawn in the air, and wormholes to transport you away. Sometimes escape is the only option.

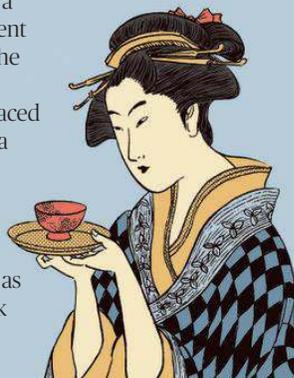
The writer is a freelance journalist and graphic novelist.

Now that we are in the ominous silence of the storm's eye, you want to stop scrolling Twitter and shut down the newsfeeds, rather like King John who said, "Do not seek to stuff my head with more ill news, for it is full"

REVIEW

Everywoman's narrative

Impressive as a social document that records the everyday oppressions faced by women in a patriarchal society, the book doesn't quite pack a punch as a literary work



Anusua Mukherjee

This novel, first published in South Korea in 2016, led to a minor upheaval there. While feminists lauded it for bringing to light the lifelong discriminations faced by South Korean women in a largely patriarchal society, detractors alleged that it made sexist generalisations against men and distorted reality. One can imagine a similar book stoking similar reactions in India: happy societies are all alike, aren't they?

Little rules

Middle-class, 30-something Kim Ji-young, whose mind starts unravelling suddenly, is an everywoman. When she is born, her paternal grandmother is disappointed because she had hoped for a boy; growing up, she and her elder sister share a room while their brother gets one of his own; when she is stalked, her father blames her; although she works hard, she never gets a promotion while underserving male employees go places; her looks are commented upon by random men she meets at work; once she becomes a mother, she has to give up her career and independence to look after the child – if none of this sounds startling to us, it is because most women in Asia are in the same situation. Not surprisingly, the novel became a bestseller in Ja-

pan, China and Taiwan. And why just Asia. As the *Metoo* revelations proved, even in seemingly privileged nations, the 'second sex' remains under-privileged often than not.

Kim's story is told in a flat monotone, indicative of the banality of the endemic evil of gender discrimination. Cho Nam-joo can hardly be accused of bending reality to suit her narrative – she backs up her presentation of the hurdles women are confronted with at every stage of their lives with hard data, which are cited in the footnotes. So, abortion of female foetuses, daughters supporting male siblings' career to their own detriment, the glass ceiling in workplaces, women earning less than men in the same position – all this is supported by statistics and reports, lest they be mistaken as fiction. And Cho Nam-joo doesn't spare women either – many of them, even presumably enlightened ones like Kim's teachers, are shown as having internalised patriarchal dikats and weaponising them against their own sex.

When the crisis comes – Kim starts speaking in the voices of other women, like that other much-abused woman, Grace, does under hypnosis in Atwood's *Alias Grace* – you see it almost as an inevitability, the figurative made literal. Kim is one in the long line of women whose life is predetermined be-

When the crisis comes – Kim starts speaking in the voices of other women – you see it almost as an inevitability

fore her birth and whose minor resistances can create no ripple. "The world had changed a great deal, but the little rules, contracts and customs had not, which meant the world hadn't actually changed at all." Denied her own voice, the voices of other women in her unconscious come to the surface, scaring everybody around her.

Last seen, she is recovering with the help of therapy and medicines. But when the doctor treating her says, "while her symptoms have decreased in frequency, they have yet to disappear," you fear what Kim will turn into once her symptoms do disappear under the male psychiatrist's ministrations. A model 'normal' citizen, like her mother, mother-in-law, her sister-in-law, grandmother, who are deemed normal only because they have successfully taught themselves not to rock the boat?

Forever passive

Here, a spoiler alert is in order: Kim's story is narrated by the psychiatrist based on her and her husband's account of her life. He appears to be a woke man who has been made aware of a reality other than that of the average Korean male's by following his wife's career trajectory – a

promising medical student, she ends up as a stay-at-home mommy.

He is sympathetic, of course, but so is Kim's husband. Yet neither of them actively helps their respective wives to choose differently. And the final remark the doctor makes about his female colleague who is quitting because of her pregnancy – "Even the best female employees can cause many problems if they don't have the childcare issue taken care of. I'll have to make sure her replacement is unmarried" – makes him, at one fell stroke, one of 'them', the Korean males and institutionalised females in positions of power who must screen a female applicant's personal life before considering her for the job. Given this, how reliable a narrator has he been all throughout?

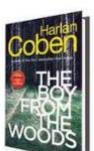
Considering *Kim Jiyoung* as a work of literature rather than a social document, I wish this aspect of the narrative was explored further. Kim is forever passive – whenever something goes wrong, she is shown crying, rushing out, outraged, mortified – and that's that. Didn't she hit back, ever? She could have chosen not to become a mother – facts show that South Korea's fertility rate was being decreasing down the years – why did she do what her husband wanted of her despite knowing that motherhood might mean the end of her career? Is the novel the doctor's subjective interpretation of her story or is it Kim herself who is doggedly naive throughout? Reading *Kim Jiyoung* it seems women are fated to be victims. Surely that's not true?

BROWSER

The Magnificent Conman of Cairo
Adel Kamel, trs Waleed Almusharaf
Hoopoe Fiction
£10.99
With a foreword by Naguib Mahfouz, this is the story of two men from two ends of the social spectrum whose lives cross in unexpected ways. Kamel's satirical voice packs in social commentary, riveting drama and subtle humour



The Boy from the Woods
Harlan Coben
Penguin Random House
£5.99
Wilde was found in the New Jersey backwoods as a child. Now a security expert, he lives off the grid, shunned by community. Till a girl goes missing and Wilde must race against time to save her life and expose the town's dark secrets in the process.



The Secret Hours
Santa Montefiore
Simon & Schuster
£3.99
When her mother dies, Faye realises that she knows nothing about her. Determined to fulfil her mother's last wish, Faye travels to the picturesque village of Ballinakelly to scatter her ashes on the hills overlooking the sea in a remote corner of Ireland. Does her mother's past hold the key to Faye's future?



Mum & Dad
Joanna Trollope
Macmillan
\$7.57 (Kindle price)
Gus and Monica have created a vineyard and wine business in Spain from the ground up. When Gus suffers a stroke, their three grown-up children in London must relocate and step in. As long-simmering resentments and tensions rise to the surface, can family ties hold them together?



POLITICS

Trump and the decline of America

What is stopping emerging powers like Brazil, Turkey, India and Nigeria from seizing the moment to provide some leadership in a post-U.S. world?

Stanly Johny

“Empires are complex structures and cannot be dismantled solely by the whims of a single ruler,” writes Sreeram Chaulia in his book, *Trumped: Emerging Powers in a Post-American World*. But actions by rulers at critical historical junctures could trigger the unravelling of empires. Chaulia gives several examples to buttress his theory.

Emperor Ashoka's decision to switch to pacifism after the bloody conquest of Kalinga would lead to the decline of the Maurya Empire. Dom Pedro II's decision to loosen his monarchical grip was a pivotal moment in the collapse of the Brazilian empire in the 19th century.

In late 20th century, Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms would weaken the Soviet Union's grip over the republics, leading to the eventual disintegration of the USSR. The U.S., according to Chaulia, is facing its moment of reckoning like other empires did with President Donald Trump's 'offbeat individualism' taking centre stage.

The stronger side of the book is that Chaulia doesn't extricate the leader from history. He doesn't look at the decline of the U.S. as a Trump problem. Rather, Trump is a product of that decline whose economic nationalism and

isolationist policies could precipitate the radical changes in the global system.

The U.S.'s relative decline, Chaulia writes, is a secular trend, which was visible even during the stints of Trump's predecessors. The difference with Trump is that he doesn't share the American establishment's liberal internationalist worldview. Since World War II, American Presidents have played a key role in shaping the liberal international global order, which during the Cold War acted as a bulwark against the Communist bloc and thereafter as a U.S.-centric unipolar system.

Trump sees the liberal international global order as a “conspiracy concocted by liberal American elites to impoverish and suppress ordinary American people.” So he's adopted a neo-mercantilist, transactional capitalist policy that's rooted in American nationalism. This is Trump's America First doctrine, which practically

precipitates America's decline as a global power.

Bipolar contest again?

So what comes next? Russia and China have already established themselves as big powers in their immediate regions. Does the American decline mean that the world will again slip into a bipolar contest? Or a tri-polar one? It doesn't have to, according to Chaulia.

There are emerging countries which could seize the moment. “The path to a multipolar world never seemed less imminent than when Trump arrived on the scene,” he writes. In the book, he identifies four such emerging powers – India, Turkey, Brazil and Nigeria.

Next in line

The central message of *Trumped* is that emerging powers can seize this moment only if they have the apt political leadership. Brazil's far-right President Jair Bolsonaro, who has pulled the country back from the South-South cooperation approach adopted by his leftist predecessors and moved closer towards a declining U.S., doesn't tick all the columns. Nor does Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, whose short-sighted adventurism in West Asia is not helping Turkey's strategic path to greatness. But Narendra Modi of India and Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria are ‘safer bets’ for their respective countries, writes Chaulia.

When Trump assumed presidency, India wanted the special partnership to continue. But there was a problem. Trump's predecessors saw India as a democratic bulwark against a rising communist China.

They saw China as a threat to the liberal international order. Here Trump himself doesn't subscribe to this liberal internationalism. His problem with China is its trade practices. And Trump sees India's trade practices also in the same light.

Chaulia believes that the India-China

standoff at Doklam was a historic opportunity for the U.S. to make sure where it stands. But the Trump administration remained ambivalent, much to the surprise of the Indians. Trump's decision to hold talks with the Taliban seeking an exit from Afghanistan also undermines India's interests in the region. A disappointed Modi decided to reassert India's strategic autonomy. Chaulia gives the examples of India's S-400 missile system deal with Russia and Modi's outreach to China through the Wuhan summit after the Doklam standoff.

Strategic autonomy, or previously non-alignment, has been the bedrock of India's foreign policy. India has shifted its foreign policy directions in accordance with changes in the global order, but has always been wary of surrendering its strategic autonomy. Unlike Bolsonaro, Modi followed suit, reasserting the historical trend. But to shift its emerging power status into a big power one, India needs to do more, especially in the neighbourhood. Its ties with Pakistan is immensely hostile.

China has made steady inroads to most of its neighbouring countries. Ties with Bangladesh, an all-weather friend, have also strained after the citizenship row in India. How can India become a stable big regional power if it fails to maintain its benign influence on its neighbours? Therefore, while Chaulia's assessment about the decline of the U.S. and the Trump opportunity holds true for our times, it's to be seen whether emerging powers, including India, is ready for the moment.



Trumped: Emerging Powers in a Post-American World
Sreeram Chaulia
Bloomsbury
₹799

SOCIETY

A difference in the classroom

Taking stock of public education in India, and the improvement in government schools

R. Krithika

Ask an average person about government schools and the first reaction would most likely be ‘ill equipped’ followed by ‘teachers don't turn up’. But that's not true of all government schools. And that's what S. Giridhar sets out to document in *Ordinary People, Extraordinary Teachers: The Heroes of Real India*. From the outset, the author makes it clear where his sympathies lie.

The first registrar and COO of the Azim Premji University, Giridhar was also one of the earliest members of the Azim Premji Foundation and has spent over 20 years documenting public education in India.

In this book, he writes about teachers who have changed the way people look at government schools. The opening chapter is about improvements: getting books and uniforms on time, decline in caning and fights among children and a major reduction in teacher absenteeism. This is only the beginning. Giridhar goes on to show his readers that government school teachers don't really deserve the bad press they get.

He writes about headmasters and teachers who have worked to get the community involved in the school; who encourage parents to educate their children instead of sending them to work. And ensure – by letting children of migrant labourers stay in school – that they don't drop out. For children to get food and school supplies even

if they have to pay for it, coping with bureaucracy and red tape, the teachers ensure that schools get better infrastructure – whether as classrooms, toilets, drinking water or playgrounds, teaching aids and training and so forth.

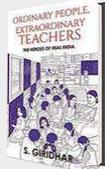
Several challenges

Giridhar also points out the challenges are different in each place. “In Uttarkashi, the terrain and climate are a logistical trial for children and teachers alike; in the plains of Udham Singh Nagar, the pupil-teacher ratio is inimical to a conducive learning environment; Yadgir in northeast Karnataka grapples with the problem of irregular livelihoods because of the migration of parents...; and Sirohi in southern Rajasthan which has a significant tribal population (Garasias, Bhils and others) who speak their own dialects, needs teachers who can use a mix of Marwari, the local dialect and Hindi to initiate any interaction in the classroom.”

What kind of a school do you want? This was the question Harish Chandra Singh Rawat of Government Model Primary School in Shivlalpur, Uttarakhand, took to the community.

At the other end of the country in Gedhalamari, Karnataka, Sangaiiah is waging a battle to ensure that the boy:girl ratio of the school remains at 50:50. “I don't want the girls to drop out of school at any cost,” he says.

All this is stated in a lucid and simple manner. In fact the matter-of-fact writing makes one wonder if we've gotten ourselves mixed up. Yes, there are over a million government schools and Giridhar has visited over 110. But are we taking into account our urban privileged view? Why cannot a government school have the same facilities as an urban private school without having to fight for it? Are we focusing too much on the few bad apples and not considering the roomful of untainted good ones?



Ordinary People, Extraordinary Teachers: The Heroes of Real India
S. Giridhar
Westland
₹499

Lone force A protester holds up a sign in Atlanta, Georgia. • AP



DEFENCE

Fiery Himalayan encounters at Nathu La and Cho La

A former infantryman with the Gorka Regiment traces the battles between India and China on the Sikkim border in 1967

Arjun Subramaniam

Subsumed by the prominent discourse that attributes the current restrained texture of the India-China detente manoeuvring, the military dimension has often been consigned to the background. Among other reasons for the lack of awareness of the many face-offs and skirmishes along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), and the border with China across the state of Sikkim, is the lack of archival data and official narratives that are available in the public domain.

While there is still some reporting in recent times, the period between 1962 and 1971 continues to lie in the

‘grey zone’ of public consciousness with regards to the military dimension of the India-China relationship.

Probal Dasgupta, an ex-Indian Army officer who served in the Gorkha Regiment for several years before embarking on a career in consultancy, has written a detailed account of two fierce encounters between the Indian Army and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) across two 15,000-foot mountain passes in Sikkim in *Watershed 1967: India's Forgotten Victory Over China*.

Two fire fights

Sandwiched between the two India-Pakistan wars of 1965 and 1971, the Nathu La and Cho La fire fights of September 1967 have surprisingly been underplayed even in the Indian

military with war colleges rarely discussing their impact and relevance.

The narrative explains the strategic landscape in the sub-continent during the tumultuous days of the 1965 India-Pakistan War; the twists, turns and intrigue in the progressive amalgamation of the kingdom of Sikkim into the Union of India; and the constant Chinese attempts to prevent the accession.

Even as Lt Gen Harbaksh Singh was orchestrating India's military revival in the 1965 war with Pakistan, the Chinese played their cards carefully and commenced applying pressure on the Sikkim and Bhutan fronts, something that surely played on the Indian leadership as they negotiated a ceasefire.

The constant jostling for ground

across the Tibet-Sikkim border including on the desolate Giagong Plateau in north Sikkim at 18,000 feet comes out vividly, and not many know that several Indian soldiers from the Assam Rifles were killed there in an attack by the Chinese in December 1965. This alerted Major General (later Lieutenant General) Sagat Singh, the divisional commander of the Gangtok-based 17th Mountain Division, that something was cooking. Sagat Singh and two battalions of the Indian Army, 2 Grenadiers and 7/11 Gorkha Rifles, are at the heart of the narrative. While the former showcased his initiative and aggression by going against the difficult posture demonstrated by his corps commander, and advocated a tough posture against the Chinese

along the Sikkim watershed, the latter were more to a match when the guns boomed. Dasgupta does not hold back any punches when he writes that the Indian battalions at Nathu La and Cho La almost wilted in the face of the initial Chinese artillery barrage and withering machine gun fire.

However, it was excellent leadership at all levels that helped the Grenadier battalion fight back with extremely effective artillery support. The fight at Cho La a few days later was equally fierce, with close quarter combat seeing the Gorkhas get the better of the Chinese who retreated after suffering heavy casualties. While individual acts of gallantry get their due weightage, Dasgupta highlights the larger strategic

landscape in which India chose to downplay the impact of the Nathu La and Chola skirmishes. He argues forcefully that it was the Nathu La and Cho La experiences that set the stage for India's robust responses at Sumdorong Chu in 1986/87, and then again at Doklam in 2017.

The book is well-researched, and has impactful photographs and maps. It follows an easy-to-read cross-over style of writing that would appeal to a wide cross-section of readers. Dasgupta does yeoman service to the broader discipline of military history by bringing into focus a turning point in India-China relations.

The reviewer is a military historian and author of *India's Wars: A Military History 1947-1971*.

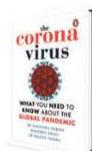


Watershed 1967: India's Forgotten Victory Over China
Probal Dasgupta
Juggernaut
₹595

The Coronavirus: What you Need to Know about the Global Pandemic

Swapneil Parikh, Maherra Desai, Rajesh Parikh
Ebury Press/PRH
₹188

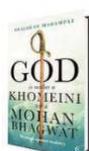
What is the novel coronavirus that has caused the global infection rate to cross a million and led to many deaths? Three professionals help readers understand the disease, and how they can protect themselves.



God is Neither a Khomeini nor a Mohan Bhagwat

Shajahan Madampat
The Book People
₹350

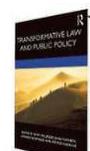
The pieces in this volume argue against zealotry and exclusivism of all hues. Quoting from experience, Madampat says, “...my engagement with the textual and lived worlds of religious faiths convinced me that all of them contain rich inner resources...”



Transformative Law and Public Policy

Edited by Sony Pellissery
Routledge India
₹995

Case studies from Asia, Europe and Australia, examine how judicial and political institutions are closely linked to socio-economic concerns of citizens. They seek the utilisation of legislative and executive, private and public spheres of society.



Pharma: Greed, Lies and the Poisoning of America

Gerald Posner
Simon & Schuster
₹899

A writer traces the heroes and villains of the trillion-dollar-a-year pharmaceutical industry in America and uncovers how those once entrusted with improving life have often betrayed that ideal to corruption and reckless profiteering.



BIG SCREEN

FRAMED in solitude



During this pandemic, we have turned to cinema for comfort, or for eerily prescient visions of our new reality

Namrata Joshi

Patrice, the famous composer, is dead in a car accident. His crowded public funeral service, lush with flowers, music and media persons, is screening on the television set, with the tentative hand of his wife Julie (Juliette Binoche) gently stroking the two lonely coffins on screen – those of Patrice and their only child – as though this desperate, fleeting caressing of the image would somehow compensate for the farewell she could not say in person. It's one of the most devastating sequences in Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Three Colours Blue*, an ode to unforeseen and unfathomable loss and grief and the frantic quest for closure and reconciliation.

The recollection of this haunting scene is particularly heart-wrenching in the time of lockdown, when

one has been reading one painful account after another, of video chats replacing last goodbyes; of quick, curtailed funerals by strangers rather than by family. It is as though Kieslowski, through his mise-en-scène back in 1993, envisioned the gargantuan existential crisis that would befall us in 2020.

Yet, even as we mourn the loss of human touch during the pandemic, it's to the world of images I've been turning for comfort and escape, for answers and hope, often for that fello feeling, of being in it together, sometimes just for the thrill of it.

Too familiar

Contagion, Steven Soderbergh's sci-fi film, eerily foresaw, almost a decade ago, what infected meat ("Somewhere in the world, the wrong pig met up with the wrong bat") and not washing hands properly can lead to. The references to sanitisers and not touching one's face sound way too familiar – "Our best defence has been social distancing. No handshaking, staying home when you're sick, washing your hands frequently," says Dr. Ellis Cheever (Laurence Fishburne).

There is Dr. Erin Mears (Kate Winslet) talking about how the average person "... touches their face two-three thousand times a day. Three to five times every waking minute. In between, we're touching doorknobs, water fountains, elevator buttons and each other."



what Mr. Krumwiede is spreading is far more dangerous than the disease." Replace Krumwiede with, well, we have several candidates for that slot today.

Another much-watched film today is Aashiq Abu's *Virus* (2019), about the Nipah epidemic in Kerala in 2018 and the medical, governmental and bureaucratic efforts that went into its containment. Its story of the bravery of several unknown people who helped manage the disease resonates in 2020 – Kerala's health minister K.K. Shailaja, played by Revathy in the film, is again leading from the front.

Referring to blogger and conspiracy theorist Krumwiede (Jude Law), Dr. Cheever says, "In order to get scared, all you have to do is come in contact with a rumour or the television or the Internet. I think

Haunting (Clockwise from left) Scenes from *Three Colours Blue*, *Pandemic* and *Trapped*. • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



The plague in the South Korean series *Kingdom*, set in the 16th century, holds telling parallels with the outbreak today. You see Spanish film *The Platform* with a whole new perspective when you view it in conjunction with the hoarding of food and goods and the verticality of privileges that have become ignominious sideshows in the battle today.

Besides the nitty-gritty and details in "virus" films or even serials like *Pandemic* or *Outbreak*, there are movies that underline the other significant aspect – the immense human toll. The pandemic has altered all aspects of our lives in the blink of an eye.

It's the exploration of this human dimension, the many paradoxes and dilemmas – not necessarily explored in films about disease and disaster alone – that has been the most compelling for me.

Little banal things

Take the identical rhythm of each day spent in isolation, summed up best in Munshi Ameerullah Taseem's *sher* (couplet): *Subah hoti hai shaam hoti hai, umr yun hi tamaam hoti hai* (A lifetime gets spent seeing morning lead on to evening.) From morning chai with rusk to evening coffee with a handful of dried fruits, except for minor, work-related changes of pattern in the middle, life these days often feels like Phil's (Bill Murray) in Harold Ramis' *Groundhog Day* (1993).

As he says, it's all about *déjà vu*; of yesterday, today and tomorrow becoming no different from each other. It's as though one is living in a never-ending time loop. The newness of the first few days of work from home aside, many of us, after

nearly a fortnight of solitary confinement, are nearing a point of mental exhaustion if not breakdown.

At times it feels like one is Shourya (Rajkumar Rao) in Vikramaditya Motwane's survivor thriller *Trapped* (2016), marooned in the safety of one's own home. It can make one feel like an island, craving human company and connection, valuing the little banal things we have always taken for granted and which are now out of reach, like a humble vada-pav.

I barely saw my neighbours' faces this past month, only exchanging WhatsApp messages about grocery stores and quarantined buildings. I have video-consulted with my GP on an emergency health issue, even though it's only a five-minute walk to her clinic. In such a situation there's every likelihood of some of us turning into lonely Theodore (Joaquin Phoenix) of Spike Jonze's *Her*, who bonds with an artificial intelligence programme, the OS called Samantha (voice of Scarlett Johansson).

In contrast to that, coming back to *Three Colours Blue*, is Julie, deliberately withdrawing from the world: "Now I have only one thing left to do: nothing. I don't want any belongings, any memories. No friends, no love. Those are all traps."

Cast away at home, bereft of family ties and bonds of friendship, can we, like her, cut ourselves off from everyone and everything, even dissociate from our memories? Self-isolation and social distancing notwithstanding, can we free ourselves ever from vital human connections? Sitting by my computer, with no one around me, staring at a still street from my window, I believe the answer is a resounding no.

You see Spanish film *The Platform* with a new perspective when you view it in conjunction with the hoarding of food and goods and the verticality of privileges

GREEN HUMOUR BY ROHAN CHAKRAVARTY

SOME JOYS OF BEING A KANGAROO

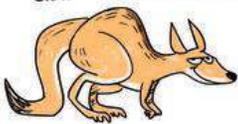
HOP AWAY FROM LIFE'S PROBLEMS AT WILL.



STUFF YOUR BABY IN YOUR POUCH IF IT WHINES IN PUBLIC.



PENTAPEDAL LOCOMOTION: WHEN WALKING ON FOURS GETS TOO MAINSTREAM.



REVERSED FASHION GENDER BIAS: MEN MUST DEAL WITH HAVING NO POCKETS.

CAN I KEEP MY PHONE IN THERE? WHAT'S THE MAGIC WORD, DEAR?



ALLEGEDLY

Karuna-O, India-1

As per data released by the Icy Yama, 9 billion Karuna Viruses went insane during the 9-minute blitzkrieg of April 5



Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week there is only one *shloka* constantly vibrating in my head: 'Go Karuna, Karuna Go; Karuna Go, Go Karuna'. I've been playing an EDM remix of this mantra non-stop and at full volume on my 2,000-watt home theatre system. Needless to say,

it is working brilliantly. The wall of sound I've erected around my house is so strong, so high and so thick that not a single Karuna Virus can break in.

I am aware that I'm just one among India's 130 crore soldiers fighting a historic battle. The fact that the whole world is now looking at India as a shining example of how to beat back the

Karuna Virus is a proud moment for the nation. Therefore, my dear fellow Indians, do accept my congratulations for doing a fantastic job of executing Phase I and Phase II of India's unique strategy against Karuna Virus.

Shock of its life

In Phase I, by banging pots and pans at high decibels – a WHO-approved torture technique – we not only weakened the Karuna Virus by making it deaf, we also gave it the shock of its life. According to the health ministry website, as a result of the collective pandemonium produced by 130 crore patriots, 56 billion Karuna Viruses in India have so far tested positive for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This is the reason COVID-19 has been spreading more slowly in India than in countries like Italy and Spain. Just put yourself in the virus's shoes: would you feel like jumping into strangers' mouths and swimming into their lungs if you were suffering from PTSD?

But it is Phase II that truly embodies the genius of India's strategy against Karuna Virus. We all know how viruses think, how they organise their defences. They are always changing their genes, mutating this way and that way to arm themselves against potential new vaccines. But they were unprepared for the magnificent ambush that India unleashed on April 5.

Pincer movement

Devised by our beloved leader, it was a cunning pincer movement that caught the Karuna Virus unawares. First we confused the virus by suddenly turning off all the lights. The Karuna Virus, unable to see, was *thermifying* in panic. Then came the second blow from the opposite direction: tiny bursts of pure, disinfected, organic light from candles. First plunged into darkness, then blinded by light, the virus was so disoriented it couldn't tell its RNA from its elbow. While it was still reeling from this onslaught, thousands of Indians delivered the knockout punch: firecrackers and disco music.

As per data released by the Icy Yama, 9 billion Karuna Viruses went insane during the 9-minute blitzkrieg of April 5. More significantly for India, especially from a geo-political perspective, another 12 billion Karunas decided to leave India and go – to Pakistan. As the health ministry has pointed out, "Our strategy is, instead of virus chasing us, we chase the virus".

It is also why this whole obsession with PPEs, testing kits, etc. is mis-

Instead of taking action in the realm of public health, we are attacking the virus where it least expects to be attacked – in the spiritual and cosmic realm

placed – these are all reactive and defensive measures. They entail responding to the terms set by the virus – playing on its turf, as it were. Thankfully, unlike other countries, India did not fall into this trap.

Rather, India's strategy has been to go on the offensive. To make the virus react to our moves. So, instead of taking action in the realm of public health, we are attacking the virus where it least expects to be attacked – in the spiritual and cosmic realm. The Karuna Virus has no defence against the vibrations produced by the 'Go Karuna Go' mantra or the photons released by the *agni* in every *diya* or the collective willpower of 130 crore Indians.

Having pushed the Karuna Virus on the defensive, we now have to deliver one last blow to neutralise the threat once and for all. Yes, I'm talking about Phase III of the battle against the virus. It's simple: you donate your next 10 months' salary to PM CARE, a fund set up specifically to enable every Indian to demonstrate how much they care for the PM. In case you are unemployed and therefore unable to donate salary, don't panic. You can donate one finger a month for 10 months. This collective show of love and loyalty to the PM, modelled on the highly effective practices of the Yakuza – Japan, by the way, has done a terrific job of containing the virus – will inflict lasting psychological damage on the Karuna Virus, incapacitating it permanently.

Being the world's sole spiritual superpower, this is India's special gift to humanity: a psycho-spiritual vaccine against Karuna Virus. While the conventional vaccine contains physically weakened specimens of the virus being targeted, India's innovation is to create psychologically and spiritually weakened specimens of the organism.

Simply put, this is the beginning of the end for Karuna Virus worldwide.

From 'Karuna Go', it's now Karuna-O, India-1.



G. Sampath is Social Affairs Editor, *The Hindu*.

The leatherback sea turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*), sometimes called the lute turtle or leathery turtle or simply the luth, is the largest of all living turtles and is the fourth-heaviest modern reptile behind three crocodilians. [5][6] It is the only living species in the genus *Dermochelys* and family *Dermochelyidae*. It can easily be differentiated from other modern sea turtles by its lack of a bony shell, hence the name. Instead, its carapace is covered by skin and oily flesh. What is its IUCN status?

Leatherback populations worldwide declined when people stole their eggs and built hotels and villas on their nesting beaches

Janaki Lenin

Adhith Swaminathan and his team witness a pre-historic phenomenon on remote Little Andaman Island every year. After nightfall, six-foot-long leatherback sea turtles haul their half-ton hulks onto sandy beaches and lay their eggs. The research group has monitored their reproductive efforts for a decade to assess their fortunes.

Each December, Swaminathan and his team of six set up camps on the uninhabited stretches of South and West Bays under a collaborative project of the Dakshin Foundation and the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru. There they remain for the next three months, walking the coast under the stars on the lookout for any turtle that emerges from the waves.

Just for a signal

If the West Bay team members need a mobile phone signal, they walk 20 km to South Bay, wading across a creek with crocodiles, and climb up a lighthouse to snatch a conversation with friends and family. The physical and social distancing means no television, internet, or restaurants. A tiny solar panel provides a trickle of electricity to charge phones and torchlights. They live in such basic splendour for the honour of checking out egg-laden female sea turtles, the patterns of whose backs resemble the starry sky above.

If the expectant mother sports



Homecoming A leatherback sea turtle returns to the sea after nesting. • ADHITH SWAMINATHAN

tags on her flippers, she already has a place in the record sheets that details when she was marked and how often she has nested. If she has no identification, the men punch a metal strip with a unique number to each hind flipper. And she gets a datashet of her own.

Leatherback populations worldwide declined when people stole their eggs and built hotels and villas on their nesting beaches. In India, between 200 and 250 turtles nest every year on the few undisturbed shores of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The 2004 tsunami dealt a blow to the species by dramatically changing the islands' coastlines and obliterating some beaches. For some years after the disaster, few of these giant reptiles visited. As sandy shores formed, the largest turtles in

the world returned to dig holes in which to drop their billiard ball-sized leathery round eggs. Today they come ashore in the same numbers as before the tsunami.

"At a time when many species are struggling, it's astonishing that a creature so huge has bounced back," says Swaminathan. "It shows the leatherbacks can adapt and are resilient."

Thoughtful swimming

But the giants are particular about where they nest. Not any beach will do. Unlike other turtles that have a hard shell, leatherbacks are encased in rubbery skin. For this reason, they avoid beaches with offshore coral reefs and rocks that may rip their fragile bellies. But they don't scout high and low for ideal nesting sites.

They tend to return to the same spots where they were born a decade or more earlier, locations their fore-mothers chose several generations ago. Their unerring navigational skills ensure the females who nest on West Bay rarely show up on South Bay or vice versa.

If that sounds easy, consider that these leatherbacks travel for almost

The patterns on the backs of egg-laden female sea turtles resemble the starry sky above

a year from halfway across the world, eating little for the duration, to lay their eggs. After covering up their nest pits, the worn-out mothers head back into the ocean, drawing on their reserves to power the return journey.

The 10 turtles that Swaminathan and his crew tagged with satellite transmitters in the early 2010s departed in two directions. One lot went southeast towards Cocos (Keeling) Islands while a female reached Western Australia, and the other group made a beeline for Madagascar and the Mozambique coast.

At these feeding waters in the Southern Hemisphere, the female leatherbacks gorge on gelatinous jellyfish. When they hit peak condition two or three years later, they make a 10,000-km voyage across the Indian Ocean to a tiny speck of an island where six men await them.



The writer is not a conservationist but many creatures share her home for reasons she is yet to discover.

GOREN BRIDGE

Calm and confident

NORTH	♠ 10 8 4 3	♥ A 9 8 2	♦ K Q 7	♣ 5 4
WEST	♠ Q 5	♥ K 7 6 5 4	♦ A 9 3	♣ Q J 9
EAST	♠ A 9 7 2	♥ J 10 3	♦ 5 4 2	♣ 10 6 2
SOUTH	♠ K J 6	♥ Q	♦ J 10 8 6	♣ A K 8 7 3

North-South vulnerable, South deals

Bob Jones



The bidding:
SOUTH WEST NORTH EAST
1♣ Pass 2♣ Pass
3♣ All pass
*Negative
Opening lead: Five of ♣

Kerri Sanborn, of Delray Beach, Florida, has been one of America's leading players for more than four decades. She was South in today's deal.

Sanborn has declared many hands in her long career with only a 4-3 trump fit. Very few, however, have seen her as the player with only three trumps. She accepted North's invitation with an air of great confidence. She let the opening heart lead run to her queen and calmly led the king of spades from her hand. East

ducked his ace, thinking it a routine move defending against declarer's "known" four-card trump holding.

Sanborn led a diamond to dummy's king, winning the trick, and a diamond back to her jack, losing to West's ace. West, who thought Sanborn's trumps were headed

by the ace and king and maybe the jack, put dummy in with the queen of diamonds hoping Sanborn would take a trump finesse. Sanborn cashed the ace of hearts and ruffed a heart. The ace-king of clubs and a club ruff brought Sanborn up to nine tricks. She led a heart from dummy, and when East ruffed with the seven, Sanborn over-ruffed with the jack and had 10 tricks. East might have ruffed with the ace and led a spade to West's queen, but then the 10 of spades in dummy would be the tenth trick. There might have been a little egg on the defenders' faces, but it was very well played by Sanborn!

QUIZ

Easy like Sunday morning

Some historic firsts!

Berty Ashley

April 12 is celebrated as International Day of Human Space Flight since 2011, which was the 50th anniversary of a particular mission. That mission lasted 108 minutes and was a single orbit around Earth. The person handling this mission was an Air Force pilot who had earlier been a foundryman in a steel plant. Who was this person who, 59 years ago, made this historic ascent?

This explorer was originally a bee-keeper by profession. He led the first mechanised expedition to the South Pole and led other expeditions to remote corners of the earth. Later in life, he became an active environmentalist and also devoted his energies to humanitarian efforts on behalf of the Nepalese. He wrote an autobiography titled *Nothing Venture, Nothing Win*. Who is this person who we know better, for having reached heights no one else had, with a friend?

This gentleman was appointed the first National Professor by the new government of Independent India. He went on to become the first non-Caucasian individual to win a Nobel Prize in science. A keen lover of music he also investigated the harmonic nature of the sound of the tabla and mridangam. He started a company which manufactured potassium chlorate for the match industry. Who was he who had such fascination with light?

Born in present day Patna in 175 CE, this person is regarded as the first mathematician-astronomer from ancient India. His major work covers arithmetic, algebra, plane trigonometry, and spherical trigonometry. It also contains continued frac-



Way back in 1901 Henry Dunant (left) and Frédéric Passy were the first to win this prize. • WIKI COMMONS

tions, quadratic equations, sums-of-power series, and a table of sines. In it he talks about how *pi* is irrational, a theory which was only proved in Europe in 1761. The Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics in Pune has a statue of him in its courtyard. Who was this pioneer physicist?

This king suffered from chronic bronchitis and was close to death. His lead physician knew that the end was near but realised if he passed away after midnight the news would not be printed in the morning newspaper but in the less respected evening journals, which could embarrass the family. So, the king was injected with morphine and cocaine after which he died at 11:55 p.m. and the news made it to the morning papers. Which king was this who was the first monarch of the currently reigning House of Windsor?

Henry Dunant was a Swiss businessman who, on a business trip in 1859 to Italy, witnessed the aftermath of the Battle of Solferino. This

inspired him to create the International Committee of the Red Cross to care for wounded soldiers. This led to him and Frédéric Passy, a French pacifist, becoming the first people to win a certain award in 1901. What award did they win which, according to the founder's will, is administered in Norway?

The Joeshe Crater is named after Anandibai Joshi, who was the first Indian-origin woman to earn a medical degree in the U.S. The Jhirad Crater is named after Jerusha Jhirad, who was the first woman to be awarded a government of India scholarship to study in the U.K. and her efforts to improve medical education, especially for women, in India earned her the Member of the British Empire (MBE) title in the U.K. and the Padma Shri in India. These women were trailblazers and are honoured by these craters named after them. Where in the universe are these three craters located?

Frank Whittle was an English Royal Air Force officer. On April

12, 1937, he successfully ran an experimental engine. It had four parts, a single stage centrifugal compressor, a combustion chamber, an axial flow turbine and a convergent propelling nozzle. Although he showed the functionality of this engine, the first operational version of this was shown by Hans von Ohain years later. What did Whittle run for the first time on that date which is now a common feature on aircraft?

On April 12, 1907, a new flag was created on the orders of King James VI of Scotland. He had inherited the English and Irish thrones, thereby uniting the crowns of England, Scotland and Ireland. What is the name of this flag which we would see in many other flags as well?

Armalcolite is a titanium-rich mineral (Mg,Fe₂Ti₂O₅). It was first discovered in 1969 and named after the three men who were closest to it at that time. The synthesis of Armalcolite requires low pressures, high temperatures and rapid quenching from about 1,000 °C to the ambient temperature. Who are the three people it is named after?

A molecular biologist from Madurai, our quizmaster enjoys trivia and music, and is working on a rock ballad called 'Coffee is a Drink, Kaapi is an Emotion'. @bertyashley

1. The legend Hilary
2. Sir Edmund Hillary
3. Sir C.V. Raman
4. Aravindhan
5. King George V
6. The Nobel Peace Prize
7. The surface of Venus
8. Left enflure
9. The Union Jack
10. Armstrong (Neil), Aldrin (Buzz) and Collins (Michael) — the first men on the moon.

Respected Madam/ Sir,

Sometimes something will happen in life and you will think *kadavuley*, what *karumam* this is full peace of mind is gone. But then what is the true story? True story is that so much peace of mind is coming that Guinness Book is also checking, hello Mr. Mathrubootham this is too much peace of mind.

What happened? No more suspenses. I will explain.

Tuesday morning itself Mrs. Mathrubootham came and said, "Old man, please do some housework. Whole day sitting and reading novel and watching news and cinema on DVD means house will clean itself?" I said, "Kamalam, breakfast idli has not even reached the stomach, before that itself you will start eating head for lunch?"

She came back with bucket and mug and said, "You please put water in all the plants in house. People are dying means plants should also die?"

Madam/ Sir, this is the beginning of the whole story. Like that, like that I went to balcony. Put water in plants. I went to kitchen. Put water in plants. I went to bedroom. Put water in plants. Then I went to front door. Nearby the lift two-three plants are there. Alive or dead nobody knows. There also I put off water. Then I told Kamalam all watering is complete. She said, "Don't forget to put water in cactus on top of TV stand." I said, "Every day you is cactus or buffalo? Better to get buffalo."

Just then my mobile started making sound. I put the mug down and did some two minutes talk with dear friend Mohammed Usman. He said, "Mathrubootham, you want to watch some film on TV and talk on WhatsApp at the same time?" I said, "Of course any time ready, have you seen *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*?" He said,

"Never, I will purchase online." I said, "Usman, dance means this only is dance. It is superhit."

We set appointment for 4 p.m. Then Madam/ Sir, as I am turning to put phone down, my hand is hitting mug of water. Mug fell behind TV stand, one *kaja-buja* sound came, then *boom-beem-boom*. Kamalam came running like Ashwini Nachappa. What happened, she asked!

"Means what? Water falling on plug. TV gone. DVD gone. Optic fibre colour-changing table lamp gone. Internet router also gone.

Nothing is working." She grabbed bucket and mug and said, "Please sit quietly somewhere. Better you do nothing only. Hopeless fellow."

Madam/ Sir, how to sit quietly in one corner? No TV. No DVD. Nothing. I tried to watch some internet items on phone. But Kamalam said, old man don't use all internet, what if some emergency is there? I said, "Ok, ok." Then I

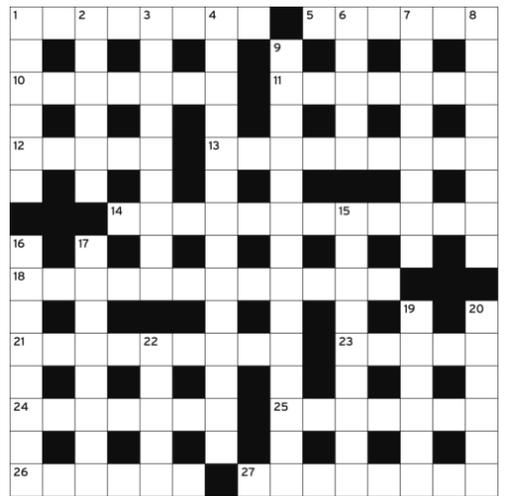
put phone call to electrician. But he cannot come immediately because of lockdown. "Sir, I will try for tomorrow," he said.

Kamalam said, never mind please help me clean storeroom. After store cleaning, I said, "Kamalam, come to bookshelf, let us arrange novels properly in alphabetical order." Then like that, like that we cleaned both Godrej almaris, changed sitting room sofa position, changed two-three fused bulbs, put new painting on wall near washbasin, cleaned pressure cooker washer in boiling water, then tried recipe for Punjabi lassi. Enjoyment means too much couple's enjoyment.

Suddenly phone call came. It was electrician asking if urgent means he can get permission. I said, "Kamalam, leave it. Tell him to come tomorrow. No hurry is there." One big smile came on Mrs. Mathrubootham face. As if Poornima Jayaram. Then we started to clean freezer.

Yours in domestic satisfaction,
J. Mathrubootham

THE SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO. 3095



Across

- A U-boat, to begin with, has never exploded in German transport lanes (8)
- Ancient vessel emptied, filled with fizzy wine (4,2)
- Horrible baby's malodorous sample (7)
- You finally admitting dead pager's broken? Perhaps get a new phone (7)
- Piece of cloth on goggles? (5)
- Tired, I cry about trendy street food (5,4)
- Dean's address is, surprisingly, never ever dry (4,8)
- 'Quakerism' ... not 'quaking' ... ? (8,4) 21 If parties needing animation, drinks served beforehand (9)
- Hellish character, government by the wealthy? Not half (5)
- Country song I Eat Bananas lacking gravity (7)
- Country dancing rodeo mostly welcoming cougar, oddity (7)
- 26 Knock off turbulent priest beforehand (6)
- 27 Rovers maybe making itinerant crusades (4,4)

Down

- Set up in first pad, adolescent achieves accommodation (6)
- Beckett character turns up, carrying finally, finally a tiny pouch (3,3)
- In audition, smile I supposed to be wel-

Coming expression (2,2,5)

- Foal had idly relaxed in hay for time off (4,3,7)
- Primarily, annoyed, narked, getting extremely ratfy? (5)
- 'Where to drink. Everyman?' (Everyman, at last, answers) 'When to drink?' (8)
- To start with, Nicomachus died in his home with painful sickness (3,5)
- Army officers diverted stream in regions (14)
- 15 Poet represented azure pond (4,5)
- Prepare for fight ... or settle (6,2)
- 17 Merit given by the Queen to traitor (8)
- 19 Cockney bruiser returns to wasteland (6)
- 20 Dates and locations for actions (6)
- 22 Nooky after pub: do you agree? (5)

Solution No. 3094



60 MINUTES WITH PRASANNA GETTU

Not all survivors of violence can stitch bags for a living

The important thing is to listen to them and support them in whatever they do, says the pioneering victimologist



ILLUSTRATION: R. RAJESH

Pragati K.B.

centre for victims of all crimes. How and why did the focus shift to domestic violence?

PCVC was started in 2001 by three of us who had gone to Tokiwa University, Japan, for a postgraduate diploma in Victimology and Victim Assistance. We were impressed with the victim assistance centres there and wanted to start something similar here. That's how PCVC began, in a one-room office in Parry's Corner, provided to us by the father of one of the co-founders.

In one year, we noticed that 99% of our clients were women, especially women affected by domestic violence. And they came from all strata of society. It is a myth that domestic violence happens only in low-income, uneducated families. The upper strata simply have the means to keep the violence hidden. The first question they asked was where they could stay if they walked out of their abusive homes.

Victims from the middle and upper classes preferred returning home to staying in government-run

shelters. This realisation made PCVC open an undisclosed free shelter where women and children, including boys up to the age of 16, could take refuge.

In 2002, two of us received professional training in domestic violence and crisis intervention from the U.S. We stayed in shelter homes to learn how they were managed. We have lately ventured into providing services for the LGBTQIA+ community. The violence they face from their families is interpersonal violence. In that regard, it's not different, but the services required are very different.

What trends have you noticed during the lockdown?

We received fewer domestic violence calls on our helpline. This, however, is no indication that instances of domestic violence have reduced. With abusers in close proximity all day, accessibility to phones has decreased. Survivors also probably thought that during a lockdown, they cannot complain or leave

home. We are widely publicising that our call and chat facilities, and shelter homes, are available. We are bracing ourselves for increased distress calls once the lockdown ends or if it's extended.

How has your work evolved?

In 2001, we did not have a vision. If a victim came to us, we supported her in a manner we thought right. We don't do that now, we don't madly do anything. We are more structured and practical.

For instance, we operate with the understanding that it is always safer to involve the police. Our Udhayam programme is a coordinated response project with the local All Women Police Stations in Chennai, to establish a first line of defence.

We have learnt to avoid a confrontational approach with the perpetrators. This serves two purposes. One, it ensures our safety. There's a constant threat to us and our families, mostly from the victim's family and the perpetrators.

When my children were growing

up, I would drop and pick them up from school. I'd double-lock our house. I have now accepted this challenge as a part of my work but I like to stay safe. Two, it has become the value system within which PCVC operates. It is difficult for our staff to keep calm sometimes, but I push for it.

Earlier, we provided solutions. We now realise that just makes the victim more dependent on us. The solution needs to come from them. We continue to keep the victim at the centre but we let her define her trauma and work as per her schedule. We focus on her strengths – everybody has strengths. We cannot ask all survivors to stitch bags and make a living. Women have returned to studying, learnt driving and baking. Whatever they want to do, we support them.

We now understand that emotional abuse, financial control, gaslighting, intimidation, physical abuse, coercion, threatening and blaming, sexual abuse, stalking and dating violence – these are all forms

My courses did not teach me that criminology is skewed and not women-centric. What I have learnt over these 20 years is perhaps worth a dozen Ph.Ds

of interpersonal violence, none smaller than the other.

It's been a learning for me too. My courses did not teach me that criminology is skewed and not women-centric. What I have learnt over these 20 years is perhaps worth a dozen Ph.Ds.

What has been the biggest hurdle for PCVC?

Getting our stakeholders to understand how serious and all-pervasive domestic violence is has been the biggest hurdle. We have been asked why we work only with survivors of interpersonal violence, when there are so many other types of victims, like those of war, HIV/AIDS, etc. In this scheme of things, they think of domestic violence as very minor.

Openly talking about violence in personal spaces is still considered taboo and makes people uncomfortable.

I see a change in the younger generation. There's awareness. They recognise that they don't have to tolerate any form of violence any more. This can only mean that women are now beginning to value themselves. It is my job to tell the woman that she is valuable.

With a formal law in place, things are looking up. There is more media coverage. In my experience, working closely with the government, for the Chennai Safe City project and otherwise, I have seen a sea change in attitude. Senior officers are now focused on increased action for social change.

What else can aid this social change?

A country that starts investing in families, instead of investing so much in detection and prevention of crimes, will be on the path to a violence-free, crime-free society. Every home should realise that they are responsible for bringing up their sons well. Men want happiness, women want happiness – that is gender equality. Abusive behaviour is always learnt behaviour. It is simply a manifestation of what the abuser has learnt all their life.

■ Postgraduate diploma in Victimology and Victim Assistance from Tokiwa University, Japan

■ One of the few practising victimologists in the world

■ Professionally trained in domestic violence and crisis intervention

■ PCVC operates a toll-free domestic violence helpline called Dhvani that provides emergency interventions

PCVC began as an assistance



Armageddon 'The Great Day of His Wrath', an 1851-53 oil painting by John Martin. • WIKI COMMONS

ten 87 years ago, prophetically wrote that the threat to the human race may be as much from insects and micro-organisms as from wars. "...we no longer have occasion, like the cavemen, to fear lions and tigers, mammoths and wild boars. Except against each other, we feel ourselves safe... safe, except from the little creatures – the insects and the micro-organisms. Insects have an initial advantage in their numbers. A small wood may easily contain as many ants as there are human beings in the whole world. They have another advantage in the fact that they eat our food before it is ripe for us. If human beings, in their rage against each other, invoke the aid of insects and micro-organisms, as they certainly will do if there is another big war, it is by no means unlikely that the insects will remain the sole ultimate victors. Perhaps, from a cosmic point of view, this is not to be regretted; but as a human being I cannot help heaving a sigh over my own species." But Russell could not imagine that man was racing towards self-annihilation by means other than war. He did not foresee that man, blinded by avarice and pride, would simply axe off the base of the ecological tree atop which he was perched.

In nature, no excess goes unpunished; there's retribution for every trespass. And nature always has ways of compensation. I remember as a child going along with my father, a teacher in the local village school, to our rice fields in the mornings during planting season in the monsoons. He would point to the Dalits, the men and women covered with conical rain coats made of straw and reeds, planting the saplings and singing in the rain. My father would

du might explain that the tragedy is your karma for past misdeeds. A philosopher may blame it on the hubris of man. A scientist might say that 'new man', intoxicated with pride and greed, cocksure about his knowledge and power, is destroying the planet. And that the pandemic is a punishment by nature for upsetting natural harmony.

Fine balance

When the forests, soil, rivers, oceans, ice caps and the atmosphere as well as the flora and fauna on earth are depleted and in many cases wiped out, there is an impact on human beings, who play a minuscule part in the larger ecological web but have a symbiotic relationship with it. When this fine ecological balance is disturbed, humans cannot stay untouched. There is cause and effect. And a price is always paid.

Bertrand Russell in his celebrated essay 'Men Versus Insects', writ-

show me the two sacks they carried under each arm. Into one they stuffed the wild greens and spinach they plucked as they worked, and into the other they tossed the crabs that scurried in the shallow waters. My father used to say that god was compensating the poor with free food. That message stayed with me – that there was an underlying law of compensation bestowed one way or another in this very life. Nature compensates in strange ways when someone is robbed or defrauded. It unfailingly acts as a leveller.

Life and maths

Speaking of this self-correcting and compensating nature of the universe, Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "If the government is cruel, the governor's life is not safe. If you tax too high, the revenue will yield nothing. If you make the criminal code sanguinary, juries will not convict. If the law is too mild, private vengeance comes in. Justice is not postponed. A perfect equity adjusts its balance in all parts of life. The dice of god are always loaded."

The world is a bit like a mathematical equation – turn it how you will, it will balance itself. Cause and effect, means and ends, seed and fruit cannot be separated. For the effect already blooms in the cause, the end preexists in the means, the fruit in the seed.

There used to be a belief that there was a scientific, provable mathematical law of the universe, determined by these immutable laws. But the quantum mechanics of Heisenberg, Schrödinger and Dirac proved that the motion of atoms and electrons was indeterminate and random, that the ways of the universe were unpredictable. Stephen Hawking said, "Thus it seems that even god is bound by the Uncertainty Principle, and cannot know both the position and the speed of a particle. So god does play dice with the universe... He still has a few tricks up his sleeve."

And so you ask in amazement, is this pandemic a prank by god? Or is it nature's retribution for our pettiness, hatred, violence, bigotry, greed, arrogance and excess? Or is it just a random roll of the dice?

The founder of Air Deccan reads, ruminates and often writes.

OFF-CENTRE

Did god just roll the dice?

... or did nature, like a mathematical equation, simply balance itself?

G.R. Gopinath

When a man kills a fellow being, he does so for many reasons. It could be because he is overcome by hatred or because he wants revenge or maybe he kills for greed. Sometimes he does it in a fit of passion. And when he belongs to a religious order or fringe group, he is so radicalised by a political or revolutionary ideology that he slaughters others swayed by bigotry. Then

there are the wars fought over misplaced nationalism, unleashed by leaders intoxicated with power, which take thousands of innocent lives.

In contrast, animals kill for hunger. But when god kills – through pandemics, pestilence, earthquakes and floods – you wonder, can god be so evil? Is it a cruel sport? Or is there method to his mad fury?

No religious leader or mystic has been able to satisfactorily explain the problem of evil – the death of countless innocents at the hands of

an omnipotent, all-merciful god. When Tagore was asked why there was evil, he said it was the same as asking why there was good. Now, we are visited by the coronavirus. To what purpose and design? Is nature acting in accordance with predetermined laws of the universe? Was Einstein wrong when he said "God does not play dice with the universe?"

The many misfortunes that befall mankind are explained away variously. Many believe the Old Testament that says the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children. A Hin-