

A survey conducted by NITI Aayog showed that nearly two-thirds of the farmers don't favour direct benefit transfer (DBT) of fertiliser subsidy.

The present regime of fertilizer subsidy – Partial DBT (Since April 2018)

Manufacturers of fertilizers receive 100% of subsidy after fertiliser is delivered to the farmer, and the latter's identity viz. Aadhaar is captured on the point of sale (PoS) machine at the dealer's shop.

Therefore, the subsidy continues to be routed through manufacturers even though the sale of fertilizer is being verified using Aadhar ecosystem

The manufacturers sell urea at the maximum retail price (MRP) controlled by the Centre, which is kept at a low level. They also get subsidy reimbursement on unit-specific basis under the new pricing scheme (NPS).

The manufacturers of non-urea fertilisers are given 'uniform' subsidy (on per nutrient basis) under the nutrient based scheme (NBS).

Example to illustrate the scheme

At present, for a bag of urea (containing 50 kg) a farmer pays Rs 268 —as against the cost of supply that is at least twice as much, or Rs 536

The difference is claimed by the manufacturer as subsidy from the government (after the sale to farmer has been verified through Aadhar)

Under this arrangement, subsidy to farmer is embedded in the price—also termed as subsidised price.

Implications:

This system helps ensure the subsidy is not being siphoned off by another beneficiary, but it doesn't help the larger issue of farmers overusing urea many times over as there is a huge subsidy on it.

The unacceptably large urea subsidy has ensured that against the ideal N:P:K ratio of 4:2:1, the average is 6.1:2.5:1, and it is as much as 25.8:5.8:1 in states like Punjab.

What is the full-fledged DBT scheme?

The farmer will have to pay the higher cost-based price or Rs 536 to the manufacturer, and get subsidy of Rs 268 'directly' in his bank account.

In total, he will be spending Rs 268 only for bag of Urea.

Yet, the switch-over makes a big difference as he has to first pay the full price, and thereafter, get the subsidy.

Benefits of Direct Benefit Transfer Scheme:

It will empower farmers to make the right choices based on crop/soil need, as now the market for fertilizers will be less under government control

It reduces imbalance in fertiliser use – as DBT would mean a dramatic increase in urea prices, farmers would buy only the amount of urea they really need and more of other fertilisers

It improves efficiency in the supply chain as now private players will be encouraged to enter the sector and give a boost to 'Make in India'.

It will lead to saving on the subsidy by eliminating misuse, and owing to better targeting.

Why government has not undertaken full-fledged DBT?

Inadequate working Capital among farmers:

Farmer has to sell out entire cost price of fertilizer (if subsidy is not provided before hand by the government). Given that 85% of Indian farmers are small and marginal and that their incomes are meagre it would be burdensome for them to arrange for this high upfront money.

This would make them depend on informal money lenders making them vulnerable to debt trap

Cash- Strapped government which puts it in a politically difficult situation for DBT

In FY 2020, the government could end up owing Rs 60,000 crore to the industry. While it is possible to accumulate such dues in the current system (partial DBT), the government will have to make upfront payment to farmers to overcome the above obstacle

If farmers don't get the subsidy before they buy the fertiliser, they will never buy it as doing so will mean a big dent in their budgets – thus impacting production & food security

Cash- strapped government will thus not be able to postpone payments (which is being done in present system). Owing payment to farmers will be politically sensitive issue which is thus deterring government to adopt full-fledged DBT

Way forward

Government should ensure fiscal discipline and undertake reforms in subsidy management (rationalisation and DBT) so as to ensure that neither the food security of a Nation nor the welfare of farmers is not compromised



STEP
FOR COMPETITIVE
EXAMS

In recent times sugarcane farmers are raising various demands to the sugar mills. The demands by the farmers will only add to a never-ending cycle of sugarcane arrears and problems. What are the demands of sugarcane farmers?

Farmers in south Maharashtra have demanded more money for this season's crop, beyond the fixed remunerative prices (FRPs).

Farmers associations in this region has also announced that it will not let the mills operate until they agree to pay `200 per ton over and above the FRP of sugarcane.

Irrespective of whether the deadlock gets resolved, this becomes another instance of sugar farmers demanding a further increase in the FRP promised to them and fixed by respective state governments. Some sugar mills in south Maharashtra have decided not to begin sugarcane crushing as farmers have demanded

What is FRP?

The Fair and Remunerative Pricing is used in sugarcane industry to replace the MSP, it is based on the Rangarajan Committee report of reorganizing the sugarcane industry.

The committee found that in the production of sugar 70% of the input cost is sugarcane.

In FRP the farmer is paid 70% of the total turnover of the company if only the sugar turnover is considered and 75% of the total turnover if other products like bagasse and molasses etc are also considered.

This FRP method is useful in times when the sugar prices are high but the FRP method ask the sugar companies to pay the farmer the MSP for sugar when the sugar and hence sugarcane price is low.

What are the concerns behind FRPs?

FRPs would adversely affect the financial health of the sugar factories in times of low sugar prices where the companies has to pay the MSP even though the sugar prices are low.

The FRPs are not market-based and are priced at artificially inflated levels by governments.

This, in turn, puts pressure on the sugar mills who have to purchase the crop from the farmers at these inflated FRPs.

And while the government has raised ethanol prices dramatically to help sugar mills find an alternative source of demand to pay for the excessively priced sugarcane, once oil prices fall to reasonable levels, oil PSUs won't be able to afford the ethanol.

What lies ahead?

India's government-mandated cane prices are already 70-80% higher than those of Brazil, the world's largest supplier—while this means India cannot export sugar, nothing has been done to signal to farmers that they need to move away from sugarcane production (as portrayed by them continuously increasing the FRPs). Further, this demand by specific farmers for the extra payment of 200 over and above the FRP will also burden the mills even more.

In Maharashtra, sugarcane is grown on 4% of the land but uses two-thirds of the water.

What is needed is an efficient crop growth pattern, one that ties the crop to be grown with the amount of water it requires in an area whose water resources can sustainably support such water usage.

Only such a policy will result in the mills and farmers emerging happy out of this endless cycle of price and arrear increases.

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STEP

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West Bengal left with no testing kits, says Mamata Banerjee

page 9



I am confident we will win this battle soon: Shivraj Singh Chouhan

page 10



Stress and anxiety rising amid coronavirus pandemic, say experts

page 11

Move to suspend issuance of green cards will help our citizens, says Donald Trump

page 12



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Solatium to kin of fallen frontline workers hiked
 CHENNAI
 Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami on Wednesday announced that the solatium to the families of frontline workers who die fighting COVID-19 will be increased from ₹10 lakh to ₹50 lakh.

TAMIL NADU • PAGE 2

Ration tokens to be given on April 24, 25
 CHENNAI
 Tokens for getting essentials from ration shops for May will be distributed at the doorsteps of consumers on April 24 and 25, Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami said.

"The tokens will have a specific day and time when cardholders can get their supplies," the CM said.

TAMIL NADU • PAGE 2

Tangedco provides relief to commercial consumers
 CHENNAI
 In a major relief to industrial and commercial consumers, the Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corporation (Tangedco) has allowed 'self-assessment' of meter readings.

Tangedco said self-assessment of electricity meters would be allowed in place of payment of the previous month's bill.

TAMIL NADU • PAGE 2

METROPLUS • 4 PAGES

Confirmed cases cross 20,000; nearly 4,000 people recover

With 50 new deaths, toll jumps to 652; 1,383 fresh cases reported in 24 hours

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN
 NEW DELHI

India on Wednesday reported 50 new COVID-19 deaths and the recovery of 3,959 patients, taking the recovery rate to 19.36% from 17% previously.

The Union Health Ministry said 20,971 individuals have been confirmed positive as of now, while the death toll stood at 652. Since Tuesday, 1,383 new cases were reported.

However, reports from the States put the toll at 683 and the total number of positive cases at 21,324, out of which 16,489 are active. Maharashtra has the most number of cases (5,649), followed by Gujarat (2,407) and Delhi (2,248).

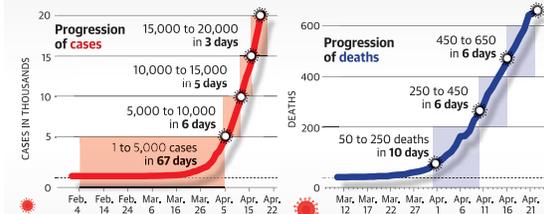
COVID-19

The Ministry said the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) had promised to collect data from the States to assess the scope and extent of the utility of the rapid antibody test in field conditions.

"It [ICMR] shall keep advising the States on a regular basis. The States have also been advised to follow the prescribed protocol for this test and use it for the purpose for which it is meant," said a release issued by the Ministry.

Viral impact

COVID-19 cases in India have increased at a quick-pace over the last two weeks. While it took 67 days to cross the first 5,000 cases, it took only three days for it to jump from 15,000 to 20,000



of surveillance. "Globally also, the utility of this test is evolving and it is currently being used for detecting the formation of antibodies in individuals. The test results are also dependent on field conditions," the release noted and asserted that the test cannot replace the RT-PCR test to diagnose COVID-19 cases.

The Ministry said it had directed State Chief Secretaries and the UT administrators to ensure the safety of health workers. "Their skill and service amongst all professionals place them in a unique position to save people in present times. The States and the UTs have been advised to take up various measures, including human resource and capacity-building training, medical safety, timely payments, psychological support, training of frontline workers and life insurance cover," it stated.

Continued on page 8
 MORE REPORTS ON PAGES 2,3,4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11 & 12

Attacks on health workers to attract up to 7 years in prison

Union Cabinet approves promulgation of ordinance

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
 NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the promulgation of an ordinance to amend the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, making acts of violence against medical staff a cognisable and non-bailable offence and to provide compensation for injury to healthcare personnel or for damage or loss to property.

The ordinance proposes that in cases of attacks on the healthcare workers, the investigation will be completed within 30 days and the final decision arrived at within one year.

The punishment for such attacks will be three months to five years and the fine ₹50,000 to ₹2 lakh. In severe cases, where there are grievous injuries, the punishment will be six months to seven years and the fine ₹1 lakh to ₹5 lakh.

'Zero tolerance'

Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan, in a series of tweets after the announcement, said that as per the "new ordinance, there shall be zero tolerance to any incidents of violence against healthcare service personnel and/or damage to property. All offences of violence will be cognisable and non-bailable".



Battle ready: Medics performing a mock drill in Ernakulam district of Kerala on Wednesday. • PTI

IMA calls off protest plan

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) on Wednesday withdrew a protest planned against the attacks on doctors and healthcare professionals after the Union government promised that all necessary steps, including relevant legislation, would be introduced for their safety and dignity.

The Ministry of Home

Affairs (MHA) asked the States to appoint nodal officers to redress any safety issue related to medical professionals 24/7. In a letter, Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla asked the States to take strict action against those who obstruct last rites of a medical professional and provide security for the final rites. • PAGE 8

Most sectors will be open by May 3, says Sanjeev Sanyal

Downturn could last years, says Principal Economic Adviser

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ
 NEW DELHI

The process of "unwinding" the lockdown imposed to contain COVID-19 has already begun, and most sectors of the economy will be open by May 3, Principal Economic Adviser Sanjeev Sanyal told members of the PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry via a video-conference call.



Sanjeev Sanyal

ed to dole out support in incremental doses, rather than spend all its resources in one go.

Mr. Sanyal acknowledged that many other countries announced huge stimulus packages, running into trillions of dollars, even before announcing shutdown measures to prevent the spread of the infection. However, most of these countries "wasted" their money on a "big bang" and felt the Indian approach of first announcing the lockdown, and then taking "calibrated" measures to protect and revive the economy was more effective in the long run.

Continued on page 8

Back to work



Against all odds: Workers resume construction on the Mahatma Gandhi Setu in Patna, Bihar, on Wednesday following relaxation of restrictions during the lockdown imposed in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. • RANJEET KUMAR

Continued on page 8

Four militants killed in J&K encounter

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
 SRINAGAR

Four militants were killed by security forces in a village in south Kashmir's Shopian district on Wednesday. "The identities of the militants are being ascertained," the police said.

The militants were encircled during a search and cordon operation at Melhora village on Tuesday evening.

"The operation was launched after a tip-off. The militants opened fire on the search party, triggering a gunfight," said the police.

The operation was carried out jointly by the Army, the police and the Central Reserve Police Force.

Continued on page 8

33 more persons test positive for virus in T.N.

Chennai accounts for 15 of the cases

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
 CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu reported 33 cases of COVID-19 on Wednesday, taking the total number of cases to 1,629 (including three who died - two who were counted in other States and one person who tested negative after death). The day also saw 27 patients being discharged from hospitals.



Corporation workers waiting for transport at Perungudi. • M. KARUNAKARAN

The majority of cases were contacts of COVID-19 patients. Only three patients - one woman in Dindigul and two men in Madurai - were primary cases, and an investigation is on to trace their source of infection.

The city now accounts for a total of 373 cases. There were two patients, including a 12-year-old boy, in Ariyarah, Madurai had four, while Thanjavur had five new patients.

There were two cases in Tiruvallur, and one each in Dindigul, Kancheepuram, Tiruvannamalai, Tiruchi and Villupuram, according to the bulletin issued by the Directorate of Public Health and Preventive Medicine.

Continued on page 2

Ethics

Migrant workers give a gift of warm colours

Quarantined labourers help community in Rajasthan with free repairs to school

MOHAMMED IQBAL
 JAIPUR

It was a labour of love in the midst of the lockdown. Migrant workers from multiple States quarantined in a government school at Palsana in Rajasthan's Sikar district decided to give something back to the community that was taking care of them. They repaired and painted the school building.



A new bond: The team at work in the school near Sikar, brightening up the main building. • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The Government Senior Secondary School at Palsana, 28 km away from Sikar, was turned into a temporary shelter, and 54 daily wage earners from the local units, who could not return home, were housed in it. The workers belong to Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, while four are from other districts of Rajasthan.

panchayat asked them to complete the 14-day quarantine period in the school. Food and medical assistance were arranged. Palsana Naib Tehsildar Vipul Chaudhary told *The Hindu* on Wednesday that the labourers were surprised at the hospitality. Good food and essential items were offered readily.

Medical teams from the block headquarters visited them for a regular check-up.

Decade-old structure
 The workers could not help noticing that the old school building, which had not been painted for a decade, was in bad shape and the premises could do with a clean-up. They offered to

deploy their skills, to paint and repair the building, clean up the compound, and plant samplings.

Buckets of paint, brushes, polish and tools came through a fund-raiser by the teachers, panchayat staff and villagers. Shankar Singh Chauhan from Haryana, a painter, led the team while Tara Chand, Om Prakash and others took up repairs.

The workers wanted to do something for the village which cared for them in a crisis, when they were emotionally shattered and had no money.

Palsana Sarpanch Roop Singh Shekhawat said the school's alumni campaigned to raise funds for the infrastructure and collected ₹1.15 lakh. "The money is funding repairs. The villagers are overwhelmed by the gesture of the labourers," he said.

Facebook buys ₹43,574 cr. stake in Jio Platforms

WhatsApp to link JioMart, shoppers

PIYUSH PANDEY
 MUMBAI

Mark Zuckerberg's Facebook Inc. on Wednesday announced that it had agreed to buy a 9.99% stake in the Mukesh Ambani-led Jio Platforms Limited for ₹43,574 crore, valuing the subsidiary of Reliance Industries Ltd. (RIL) at an enterprise value of ₹4.62 lakh crore.



Mark Zuckerberg

The transaction, which will need regulatory approval, will help the RIL unit to leverage Facebook's WhatsApp in accelerating business on the JioMart platform and connecting neighbourhood grocery stores with consumers. "In the near future, JioMart and WhatsApp will empower nearly 3 crore small Indian kirana shops to digitally transact with every customer in their neighbourhood," Mr. Ambani said in a video message.

houses all of RIL's digital businesses, intends to use a part of the funds invested by Facebook to reduce debt. "Jio Platforms has debt of ₹40,000 crore," Anshuman Thakur, head of strategy at Reliance Jio, told *The Hindu*. "About ₹15,000 crore of proceeds will stay in Jio Platforms and the remaining will be used to pay for optionally convertible preference shares investments made by RIL in this company," he added.

Continued on page 8

Solatium to relatives of deceased front line staff hiked to ₹50 lakh

Govt. job to be given to a member of victim's family: CM

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami on Wednesday announced that the solatium to families of front line workers who died fighting COVID-19 would be increased from ₹10 lakh to ₹50 lakh.

In a statement, Mr. Palaniswami said that a family member of the deceased would be given a government job based on qualifications. "The solatium is applicable to the Health, Police and Local Administration departments, whose workers are involved in the fight against COVID-19, on a war footing," he added.

The Centre had announced a medical insurance cover of ₹50 lakh for health workers battling the disease, Mr. Palaniswami noted.

The CM said that the State government would take all possible steps to provide protection during front line workers' funerals, irrespective of whether the deceased were government or private sector staff. "It is the duty of the government to honour the selfless service of front



Fenced off: A portion of a road in Triplicane is barricaded to earmark a containment zone. ■ K.V. SRINIVASAN

line staff," he said.

Mr. Palaniswami also announced that doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers of both government and private hospitals, who die fighting COVID-19, would be honoured with awards.

COVID-19

"If a health worker serving in a private hospital contracts COVID-19, permission will be granted to examine all those serving in the unit, as per protocol. After mea-

asures are taken to prevent the spread of the disease, medical services will be allowed to resume in the unit," the CM said.

He said that he had instructed officials to intensify precautionary and screening measures in Chennai to identify those with symptoms such as breathing difficulty, cold and cough, and trace contacts of those who had tested positive for COVID-19. IAS officers Karthikeyan and Baskaran had been tasked with the exercise, he added.

Ration tokens on April 24, 25

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI

Tokens for getting essentials from ration shops for May will be distributed at consumers' doorsteps on April 24 and 25, Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami said on Wednesday.

"The tokens will have a specific day and time when ration cardholders can get their supplies. Consumers can collect them from ration shops on the specified day and time," the CM said in a statement. He insisted that people strictly observe physical distancing norms while collecting rations.

It may be recalled that the State government had earlier announced that ration supplies for the month of May would be distributed for free. Essentials for May for a ration cardholder includes 1 kg of sugar, 1 kg of tur dal and 1 kg of edible oil, besides the usual entitlement of rice.

'Restrictions to become part of daily life'

Post-lockdown, testing and local containment measures will be key, say experts

SERENA JOSEPHINE M. CHENNAI

Even after the lockdown is lifted, certain restrictions and norms may become part of daily life, for at least a year, say officials and public health experts. This will include restrictions on mass gatherings, visits to recreation/entertainment facilities and thermal scanning in office buildings.

Officials of the Health Department said that presently, COVID-19 was under control in the State. "Measures to keep it under control will continue. However, after the lockdown is relaxed, we will witness cases in June, as people will start to travel and move around. We will continue to be vigilant, and continue testing all persons with Severe Acute Respiratory Infection and Influenza Like Illness. Intensive laboratory testing and local containment measures will continue," an official said.

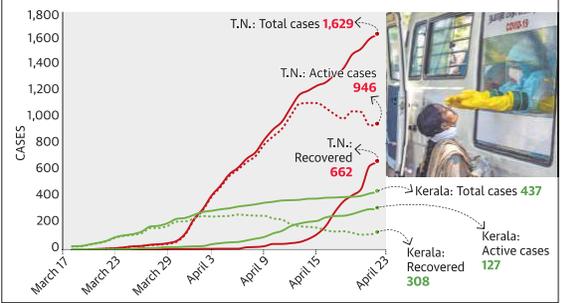
Hygiene practices

But after the lockdown, life may never be the same again, say public health experts. They say that hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene will become a part of lifestyle in the post-lockdown period.

Officials are looking at res-

Bending the curve

A comparison of the growth in total and recovered cases between Tamil Nadu and Kerala. With a significant reduction in new cases, recovered cases outnumber active cases in Kerala by a considerable margin. In Tamil Nadu, despite an increase in the number of discharged patients over the past week, there is still a big gap to bridge as the number of new cases continues to grow



trictions for at least a year. "There will be restrictions on mass gatherings and at entertainment facilities. Offices should have thermal scanning, and leaves should be granted to employees who have cold and cough. Every building should have adequate facilities for regular hand washing," the official said.

Adherence to such restrictions and practices for a year will help reduce the damage due to COVID-19, officials said.

T. Jacob John, retired professor of virology, Christian Medical College, Vellore, said that once the lockdown ends, everyone should wear masks to achieve the aim of physical distancing.

Preventing mass gatherings is a good idea, he said. Lifting the lockdown is important, he said, adding: "A staggered approach can be followed and decisions

should be left with State governments."

"The epidemic spreads very much like H1N1 influenza, but it will kill a few more. The fury of the epidemic will be down in six months like what we saw with H1N1. As sufficient herd immunity is built, the epidemic will come down, muted by wearing masks and the lockdown. It will die out, meaning only a few people will get infected," he said.

How hand-washing will impact water needs

Two experts work out estimates

T. RAMAKRISHNAN CHENNAI

With people having to wash hands frequently in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, two water experts have worked out estimates of the State's water demand.

In the absence of any stipulation from authorities on the number of times one has to wash hands every day, the experts, P.M. Natarajan, former director, Centre for Climate Change, Periyar Maniammai University, Thanjavur, and V. Sivakumaran, former chief engineer, Chennai Metrowater, differ in this respect. Mr. Natarajan estimates the number of times as 15, whereas according to Mr. Sivakumaran, it is 10. Both accept that the duration of washing has to last 20 seconds.

In the former's assessment, the water requirement will be 20 litres per capita per day (LPCD) whereas, in the estimate of the other, it will be 12 LPCD.

Both take the present population of the State as 8.2 crore, but differ again on how many people have to wash their hands. Mr. Natarajan's calculation covers the entire estimated population, whereas Mr. Sivakumaran points out that only two-thirds of the State's popula-



The State, with enough availability of surface and groundwater, will face no shortage, says an expert.

tion may have to wash hands daily, leaving out elderly, children and the sick — this means around 5.5 crore people of the total of 8.2 crore. The former, by applying his yardstick, arrives at the figure of 1,640 million litres a day (MLD) as the State's water demand, while the latter says it is 660 MLD.

N. Meenakshisundaram, water activist-engineer, said there was no shortage of water in the State, as there was enough availability of surface and groundwater.

As on date, the Mettur reservoir, the main source of water for irrigation and drinking water in a host of districts, has about 66 thousand million cubic feet (TMC) of water, against a capacity of 93.47 TMC.

Long arm of the law



Slamming the 'brakes': A police officer tries stopping motorists from speeding away after they were found violating prohibitory orders and carrying a liquor bottle. They were later taken to the Arumbakkam police station. ■ R. RAVIDRAN

Relief to firms as Tangedco allows self-assessment of meter reading

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI

In a major relief for industrial and commercial consumers, using low tension current transformers (LTCT), the Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corporation (Tangedco) has allowed 'self-assessment' of meter readings during the COVID-19 crisis.

Tangedco, in a circular issued by the Accounts Branch (a copy of which is available) on Tuesday, instructed that self-assessment of electricity meters would be allowed in place of payment of the previous month's bill.

All officials of Tangedco have been directed to accept the self-assessment by LTCT



The self-assessment facility is open only till May 3, the circular states.

industrial and commercial consumers. However, the facility is not available for low tension domestic consumers.

Tangedco had earlier directed domestic consumers and LTCT industrial and commercial consumers to

pay the previous month's bill amount as the current month's due to the assessment not being carried out during the lockdown.

Firms' representation

The circular states that the move comes in the wake of industrial and commercial consumers making a representation to Tangedco that as a majority of commercial establishments were going to be shut from March 24 to May 3, the direction to pay the previous month's bill for April would prove very expensive as the actual usage was low to negligible.

The self-assessment facility is open only till May 3, the circular from Tangedco stated.

Outside Chennai, close to 40 lakh people in urban containment zones

Among Corporations, Tiruppur has the most residents under containment

T. RAMAKRISHNAN CHENNAI

The 300 containment zones in urban local bodies (ULBs) other than Chennai house 39.5 lakh people.

Of these, around 18.4 lakh people are living in 72 containment zones located across 14 Municipal Corporations (barring Chennai); 17.5 lakh people in 129 such zones across 121 Municipal-

ities and 3.6 lakh in 99 zones of 528 town panchayats of the State.

Among the Municipal Corporations, Tiruppur accounts for the maximum number of people covered under containment zones with around 4.17 lakh people, followed by Coimbatore with 3.68 lakh people and Vellore with 2.78 lakh.

As many as 43,656 persons are under home quarantine in all ULBs, of whom 27,432 are in the Erode Municipal Corporation alone.

The town panchayats have the lowest number with, 707; Municipalities have 10,711 and Municipal Corporations 32,238.

According to a senior official of the Commissionerate of Municipal Administration, the 300 zones are being

monitored by 264 medical officers; an equal number of sanitary inspectors or officers, 177 nodal officers and 23,855 workers, drawn from various institutions such as anganwadi centres and self-help groups.

Urban local bodies have a stock of 4.35 lakh masks; 2.53 pairs of gloves and about 42,000 personal protective equipment (PPE).



Police personnel manning the entrance to a containment zone in Salem on Friday. ■ E. LAKSHMI NARAYANAN

FROM PAGE ONE

33 more persons test positive for virus in T.N.

Keeping count | A tracker, across parameters, on how the pandemic has affected the State so far

	Until April 15	April 16	April 17	April 18	April 19	April 20	April 21	April 22	Total
Cases reported	1,242	25	56	49	105	43	76	33	1,629
Recovered and discharged	118	62	103	82	46	46	178	27	662
Deceased	14	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	18

Persons tested		In home quarantine		Districts with maximum cases		
47,168	22,254	53,072	23,760	Chennai	373	
Active cases	Discharged	Died	In hospitals	In quarantine facilities	Coimbatore	134
940	635	18	1,917	145	Tiruppur	109
946	662	18	1,878	155	Dindigul	77
					Erode	70

*Changes in 24 hours ■ As on April 21, 6 p.m. ■ As on April 22, 6 p.m.

Active Cases + Discharged + Died do not add up to Total Cases as 2 deaths were cross-notified to other States and 1 patient, who initially tested positive for COVID-19, tested negative after death, as per the Health and Family Welfare Department

A total of 27 patients — two from the Government Kilpauk Medical College Hospital, three from Thanjavur Medical College Hospital, five from Karur Medical College Hospital, two from Sivaganga Medical College Hospital, nine from Raja Muthiah Medical College Hospital and two from priv-

ate hospitals — were discharged. So far, a total of 662 persons have been discharged across the State.

There were no deaths. A total of 59,023 samples have been tested in the State, of which the day's count was 5,978. A total of 53,072 persons have been tested so far. Testing of 1,937 samples is

under way.

"The cases are increasing in Chennai, and this is worrying. So, we had a meeting with the Chief Secretary on Tuesday, and have decided to post additional officers in the city. Strict containment measures will be taken up across the city," Health Minister C. Vijayabaskar said.

Officials of the Health Department said that the COVID-19 situation was under control in the State. A total of 1,878 persons were admitted to isolation facilities, while 23,760 persons were under home quarantine. A total of 155 persons were lodged in government quarantine facilities.

'Normalcy in cine industry only by Sept.'

Shooting in a limited way can start in June, says FEFSI president

UDHAIA NAIG CHENNAI

The Tamil film industry is expected to return to a normal state of affairs only by September.

Film Employees Federation of South India (FEFSI) president R.K. Selvamani on Wednesday said, "Though we can start shooting in some limited way from June, complete normalcy in operations will return only in September."

A decision on returning to work will only be taken after the official removal of lockdown, he said and added that the 25,000-strong union will need to take stock after the lockdown is fully removed.

"We need a week to take stock after lockdown is completely removed. Cinema is not an essential, so even if the lockdown is partially removed, cinema will be one of the last industries to start working. Rapid testing needs to be started. I doubt if we



Once the lockdown is lifted, the biggest challenge will be to convince the audience to come to theatres. ■ K.V. SRINIVASAN

can start working in May," he said.

Ruling out the possibility of conducting COVID-19 tests on all union members or maintaining strict physical distancing on sets, Mr. Selvamani said: "It is also not possible to maintain physical distancing in movie shoots. Hero and heroine have to act together. The cameraman and director have to work to-

Cinema is not an essential, so even if the lockdown is partially removed, cinema will be one of the last industries to start working

R.K. SELVAMANI President, FEFSI

theatres around Deepavali. The fans might come but I doubt if families would go to the theatres," he said.

Donations not enough Mr. Selvamani also said that donations from various actors to FEFSI were not enough to provide relief to members.

"If we have to give ₹1,000 to 25,000 members, we will need ₹2.5 crore. Now, we have received around ₹3.25 crore. We have now given a bag of rice plus ₹500 to only 20,000 members. We are still falling short," he said.

"People might come to

Timings
CHENNAI

THURSDAY, APR. 23
RISE 05:52 SET 18:23
RISE 06:03 SET 18:41

FRIDAY, APR. 24
RISE 05:52 SET 18:23
RISE 06:41 SET 19:30

SATURDAY, APR. 25
RISE 05:51 SET 18:23
RISE 07:22 SET 20:19

Chennai Weather max min

Thiruvananthapuram	39	25
Chennai Airport	36	27
Chennai City	35	28

Chennai Airport Today
36°C A dry and warm weather with a partly cloudy sky will continue. The night will be comfortable.

Chennai Airport Tomorrow
36°C A dry and warm weather with a partly cloudy sky will continue. The night will be comfortable.

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IN BRIEF

3 policemen and a home guard test positive

CHENNAI
Three more policemen have been admitted to the special ward of the Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital (RGGH) following their test results showing positive for COVID-19. A home guard also tested positive for COVID-19.

3 workers in Egmore station test positive

CHENNAI
Three persons, including a woman, engaged in cleaning the Chennai Egmore railway station have tested COVID-19 positive. They have been admitted to the isolation ward of the Government Rajiv Gandhi General Hospital.

Two murders reported in city

CHENNAI
A 24-year-old youth was haled to death by a gang in Pallikaranai. The victim was Kirubakaran, an electrician of Periyar Nagar, Vengalivasal. Another murder was reported from Kabali Garden, Mylapore, in the early hours of Wednesday.

THE HINDU
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'Shift doctor's mortal remains to Kilpauk cemetery'

Anandhi Simon appeals to CM to honour husband's 'last wishes'



No-go area: A locality near Anna Nagar West has been declared a containment zone. * K. PICHUMANI

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

The family of neurosurgeon Simon Hercules, who died of COVID-19 on Sunday and was buried in Velangadu amid chaos, has appealed to the Chief Minister that his mortal remains be shifted to the cemetery in Kilpauk, as per his last wish.

On Sunday evening, the Chennai Corporation had made arrangements at its burial ground near Kilpauk. However, as residents took to the road, objecting to the burial, they decided to bury him at Velangadu which has a crematorium with limited space for burials.

But a mob attacked Corporation staff and colleagues of the doctor, in Velangadu, opposing the burial. The body was later buried with police protection.

In a video message, the

doctor's wife, Anandhi Simon, said that it was his last wish to be buried at the Kilpauk cemetery.

"We had obtained permission to bury him at the Kilpauk cemetery, but he was buried in Velangadu due to a few incidents. We could not witness his burial. He has been buried in a sealed casket and this can be shifted to the Kilpauk cemetery. It will not create any trouble for

anyone," she said. She added that he spoke to them before he was put on ventilatory support. "It was his last wish to be buried as per our rituals. Please fulfil his last wish," she appealed to the Chief Minister.

CM speaks to Anandhi
On Wednesday forenoon, Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami spoke to Ms. Anandhi Simon over the

phone and expressed his condolences to the bereaved family. In his tweet about his phone call with her, @CMO-TamilNadu said he requested her to remain strong considering the future of her son and daughter.

Stalin's call

DMK president M.K. Stalin spoke to Ms. Anandhi and expressed his condolences. He also spoke to journalist who had tested positive for the virus.

The Tamil Nadu Engineers' Federation (TNEF) has condemned the attack on persons who had accompanied the mortal remains of Dr. Simon to the burial ground on Sunday.

In a statement, president of the TNEF S.Ananth said that two engineers belonging to the Greater Chennai Corporation had sustained injuries when they were on duty and are currently undergoing treatment for the same.

They welcomed the immediate action taken by the Tamil Nadu government against the perpetrators.

Archbishop offers help in burying doctor's body on church grounds

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

The Archbishop of Madras and Mylapore, Most Rev. George Antonysamy, has offered full cooperation for the burial of the body of Simon Hercules, a neurosurgeon who died of COVID-19, in a church cemetery in Kilpauk, after the deceased's wife made a plea to the Chief Minister for the same.

Following Anandhi Simon's request to the CM that she be allowed to bury the mortal remains of her husband in the church ground, in accordance with religious traditions, the Archbishop said he was for doing that, with the permission of the State government.

Rejects claim

He also rejected the claim that a dispute between two churches had led to the body being shifted to a Corpora-

tion burial ground. He pointed out that a church in Mehta Nagar had given a letter of permission for the burial to the deceased's relatives soon after he died. Welcoming Mrs. Simon's request to the Chief Minister, he said the church consoled the death of the doctor and was standing by the bereaved family and holding them in its prayers.

A spokesperson of the Tamil Nadu Bishops' Council said this was also the stand of the Catholic Church and the Bishops of T.N.

Violence condemned

Condemning the violent untoward incidents that took place after the doctor's death in Velangadu, the Archbishop also hit out at what he described as communal slander on social media which, he said, was shocking, unfounded and

part of a hate campaign.

"Though the deceased's body was handed over to his family, it was still under the control of the Greater Chennai Corporation as it was a death related to the disease (COVID-19). Since it was advised to complete his burial that night itself, a decision was made to avoid the Kilpauk burial ground and conduct the funeral in another ground in the same locality, falling under the control of the Greater Chennai Corporation," the Archbishop pointed out.

It was the Greater Chennai Corporation which took the decision to send the remains to the burial ground in Velangadu from the hospital, the Archbishop said, adding that all the violent and untoward incidents happened in Velangadu and not near the burial ground in Kilpauk.

Stranded foreign nationals fly back home in 30 rescue flights

SUNITHA SEKAR
CHENNAI

Since the lockdown, hundreds of foreign nationals, who were stranded in the city, have left in 30 rescue flights from various countries over the past month.

According to Airports Authority of India (AAI) officials, the rescue flights flew to destinations like Australia, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Bangladesh, USA, UK and Malaysia in the past few weeks carrying their nationals stranded in the city.

Some of the flights picked up passengers from Chennai then head to Mumbai or Hyderabad or Bangalore, take more foreign nationals stranded there and head to their respective country, the officials said.

For instance, a flight to Atlanta in USA from Chennai had a stopover at Mumbai, took in some more passengers and departed, officials



Homeward bound: A special flight carrying stranded passengers. * B. VELANKANNI RAJ

said. Many flights also land here for refueling of their flights, they added.

"Almost everyday, a special rescue flight departs from the city. Before each such flight, the international terminal is fumigated thoroughly. All the areas are deep cleaned so that passengers are not at risk. Also, all passengers are subjected to temperature checks before they board the aircraft. There is always someone

monitoring the activities during such times in the terminal," an official said.

Meanwhile, hundreds of Indians, who have been stranded in various parts of world like Singapore, Malaysia, Japan and Australia, have been waiting to return. Many have constantly requested the government and posted tweets asking them to make arrangements to help them get back home, officials said.

Tele-counselling service gets around 300 calls daily

S. POORVAJA
CHENNAI

The Chennai Corporation's tele-counselling services for persons reaching out with concerns during the lockdown has been receiving an average of 300 calls every day.

The helpline (4612 2300), manned by volunteers from Loyola College and the Network of Professional Social Workers, had initially received calls from persons who had been placed under home quarantine. "Over the last week however, we've seen an increase in calls from the families of persons testing positive for COVID-19 or even the patients them-



A health worker spraying disinfectant at the Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital. * B. VELANKANNI RAJ

selves. Many family members are anxious or stressed about infecting other people in their localities and we immediately reassure them as well as put them in touch

with counsellors," said Gladston Xavier, associate professor, social work department of Loyola College who has been coordinating this initiative. The volunteers had also

initially been making calls to persons who were under home quarantine, to address any queries that they might have. "Ever since containment zones have been marked, we are receiving queries from residents there as well. If they have any psycho-social concerns, our counsellors address it and for other queries, they are connected to the officials in-charge," Mr. Gladston added.

As of 11 a.m. on Wednesday, 86 persons have recovered in Chennai and 263 people have been hospitalised, data from the Chennai Corporation indicated. Ambattur Zone recorded its first positive case on Tuesday.

Two policemen suspended for stealing liquor bottles

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

Two police personnel have been placed under suspension for stealing seized liquor bottles from the strongroom of New Washermenpet police station.

The bottles, which were seized during a recent raid, were stored in the strong room of New Washermenpet Police Station, to be produced before a court later.

Police said that a head constable and a constable, both posted at the police station, stole the bottles when they were on night du-

ty on April 14. The next day, police found at least 50 bottles of 180 ml quantity missing.

Following a report from the intelligence wing, the two police personnel were transferred and a detailed probe was conducted. A probe revealed the duo engaged an offender to open the lock of the strongroom and then they took the bottles for personal consumption, sources said. Meanwhile, city police seized liquor bottles from two persons in Ambattur Estate and Koyambedu market.

CENTRAL MEDICAL SERVICES SOCIETY
(An Autonomous Body of Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Govt. of India)
2nd Floor, Vishwa Yuvak Kendra, 8, Teen Murti Marg, Chanakyaपुरi, New Delhi-110021.
Phone: 011-21410905, 21410906 Website: www.cms.gov.in

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

Central Medical Services Society (CMSS), a Central Procurement Agency of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), Government of India, has opening for the following position on contract basis:

Position	No. of Vacancies	Mode of Recruitment
Assistant General Manager (Finance)	01	On Contract

For minimum qualification, eligibility conditions, other details and prescribed application form for the above post, please visit Central Medical Services Society website: www.cms.gov.in.

The candidates are to apply in the given application form attaching self-attested copies of qualification and experience and other related documents. Applications complete in all respects to be sent to the General Manager (Administration), Central Medical Services Society, 2nd Floor, Vishwa Yuvak Kendra, 8, Teen Murti Marg, Chanakyaपुरi, New Delhi-110021. The last date of receipt of application is 05.06.2020. Incomplete applications, or those received after the last date will not be entertained. CMSS will not be responsible for any postal delays.

Advt. No: CMSS/ANI/015 dated 21.04.2020 GM (Administration)

SWAMI RAMA HIMALAYAN UNIVERSITY
(Estd. under section 2(f) of UGC Act, 1956 & enacted vide Govt. of Uttarakhand Act No.12 of 2013)
Swami Ram Nagar, Jolly Grant, Dehradun-248016 (Uttarakhand)
Phone +91-0135-2471600, 2471158 www.srhu.edu.in

NOTICE FOR ADMISSION INTO
P.G. MEDICAL (MD/MS) PROGRAMMES FOR ACADEMIC SESSION 2020-2021 AT
HIMALAYAN INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL SCIENCES, DEHRADUN

It is hereby informed that for the academic session 2020-2021 admissions to all Post Graduate Medical (MD/MS) courses conducted at **Himalayan Institute of Medical Sciences**, a constituent college of the University, shall only be made based on the merit of NEET (PG)-2020 through common counselling conducted by the State agency, i.e. **Hemwati Nandan Bahuguna Uttarakhand Medical Education University (HNBUMU)**, Dehradun. HNBUMU has since opened registration process for admission through common counselling. Interested candidates may visit HNBUMU website www.hnbumu.ac.in for registration and other details.

For details of Himalayan Institute of Medical Sciences, kindly visit the University website www.srhu.edu.in

Public, in general, is informed that Swami Rama Himalayan University or its constituent college, Himalayan Institute of Medical Sciences, have never authorized/solicited any person(s) or any agent(s) for admissions in any of the programmes / courses offered by the University and/or its constituent college referred herein above. Therefore, public is cautioned to be aware of unscrupulous person(s)/agent(s)/advertisements. None of the Authority(ies) shall be responsible if students/ wards are cheated on this account.

Registrar

Department of Public Health and Preventive Medicine

PUBLIC NOTICE

Cremation / Burial of Dead Bodies of COVID-19 Patients

Government of Tamil Nadu is taking all steps on war-footing, for prevention and control of COVID-19 in the State. In spite of special care and treatment, unfortunately death occurs in few instances. There are misconceptions and unfounded fear among the general public about disposal of such dead bodies.

Prescribed infection control measures as per the guidelines issued by Government of India from time to time are strictly followed for burial/cremation of the dead body of COVID-19 patients. The body is tightly packed in a plastic bag. Both inside and outside of such plastic bags are disinfected.

All the clothes of the deceased are removed safely and disposed. With all precautionary measures in place, there is no possibility of spread of infection from the dead body. Relatives of the deceased are not permitted to touch and embrace the body. Last rites are permitted without touching the body.

The safely packed body transported by the mortuary van for cremation/burial will not spread any Infectious disease to the people residing near the burial/cremation ground. The smoke and ash of the dead body after cremation will not infect anybody.

Mortuary vans are disinfected with proper disinfectants. Public are hereby informed that they need not panic or fear about the cremation/burial of the deceased.

Chennai - 6, 22.04.2020
DIPR/490/DISPLAY/2020

Director,
Public Health and Preventive Medicine,
Chennai-600 006.

6 days salary cut for next 5 months in Kerala

It would also apply to PSUs, and government-aided and quasi-aided institutions

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM
Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has said the government is temporarily setting aside a part of the salary of State employees to help it tide over the COVID-19-induced financial crisis.

At a briefing on Wednesday, Mr. Vijayan said the State government would deduct the salary of employees for six days every month for the next five months. The cut also applied to public sector units, government-aided and quasi-government institu-

tions. Ministers, legislators and members of various boards would give up 30% of their monthly salary for the next year.

Expert panel mooted
The government would constitute an expert committee to study the economic fallout of the pandemic and suggest means to come out of economic recession.

Mr. Vijayan said the pandemic had adversely impacted the global economy. The outbreak happened when the country's economic

growth had slowed from 9% to 5%. It had laid low the economies of wealthy nations.

COVID-19 had hit Kerala close on the heels of the catastrophic floods in 2018 and 2019. The State's impressive 7.5% growth rate could plummet. Remittances from non-resident Keralites had already slumped, he said.

Tourism and construction had ground to a halt. Exponentially increasing unemployment had robbed people of purchasing power.

Kerala is predominantly a consumer State and had to

import its food and a range of essential commodities. Ensuring food security was paramount, he added.

Mr. Vijayan unveiled a plan to restart the economy by focusing on self-sufficiency in food production. The government would not allow fallow land to languish without cultivation.

The State would adopt cage farming to grow muskels, clams, crabs, shrimps and lobsters. It would also promote fish farming in inland water, lagoons and water bodies, he said.

A.P., Telangana report 3 deaths, Kerala records 11 new cases

Andhra Pradesh says it now leads States in tests per million people

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

VIJAYAWADA/BENGALURU/HYDERABAD/THIRUVANANTHAPURAM
With two more persons succumbing to COVID-19 in Guntur district and 56 new cases as of Wednesday morning, the toll in Andhra Pradesh touched 24 and the tally of positive cases was 813.

On the brighter side, 24 patients - eight from Guntur, five from Anantapur, four each from Nellore and Kadapa, two from Krishna and one from Visakhapatnam - were discharged from hospitals after recovery. So far, 120 have recovered, and active cases stand at 669.

Acknowledged hotspots Kurnool and Guntur districts reported 19 new cases each taking the tally in the districts to 203 and 177 respectively.

The number of new cases in other districts was: Chittoor six, Kadapa five, Prakasam four, and Krishna three.

With 19 of 21 persons who had tested positive in Visakhapatnam recovering so far, there were only two active cases there.

The tally of positive cases in other districts was Krishna (86), Nellore (67), Chittoor (59), Kadapa (51), Prakasam (48), West Godavari (39), Anantapur (36), and East Godavari (26).

Meanwhile, the State claimed that it was ahead of other States in the COVID-19 tests per million, conducting 813 tests as of Wednesday.

So far, 41,512 samples had been tested and in the last 24 hours, 5,757 samples were taken up.

Among them, 3,082 were tested using TrueNat kits, the Health Department said.

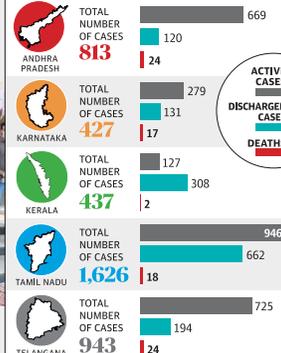
Rajasthan, which was leading until Tuesday, is now in the second position with

Tough fight

State governments are striving hard to offer treatment to COVID-19 patients and bring them back to normal life



Home-bound: People discharged from a hospital in Tirupati after treatment for the virus on Wednesday. ■ K.V. POORNAHENDRA KUMAR



809 tests per million.

Baby tests positive

Nine new cases - including a four-month-old baby from Kalaburagi and the mother - were detected on Wednesday taking the total number of positive COVID-19 cases in Karnataka to 427.

The baby is the youngest patient to date in Karnataka. Among the new cases, while five were from Kalaburagi, two each were reported from Bengaluru Urban and Nanjangud, Mysuru. While one had severe acute respiratory illness, the other four were contacts of previous positive patients.

Of the two positive cases from Bengaluru Urban district, which had not reported any cases for the last three days, one was a 54-year-old labourer from Bommanahalli slum, who had no contact or travel history.

"This person reported with SARI symptoms. We have identified his 24 primary contacts and 50 secondary contacts," said Primary and Secondary Education Minister S. Suresh Kumar.

The Minister said a total of 3,279 samples were tested on Wednesday.

Validation of the rapid antibody blood-tested test strips is under way at NIM-

COVID-19

HANS, and the Health Department would wait for a "green signal" from the ICMR before using them, said Jawaid Akhtar, Additional Chief Secretary (Health and Family Welfare).

The National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) has directed Surveillance Officers of all States to formulate patient data privacy norms. "Personally identifiable data should be shared with discretion and strict privacy should be ensured," stated a NCDC circular.

A State-level expert committee recommended that cases of Influenza Like Illness (ILI) and Severe Acute Respiratory Illness (SARI), with symptoms similar to COVID-19, should be screened at the initial stages to arrest morbidity and mor-

tality due to COVID-19.

10 Hyderabad cases

One person died and COVID-19 cases in Telangana touched 943 as 15 more were detected on Wednesday. Of the 15 positive cases, 10 were from GHMC area, three from Suryapet, and two from Gadwal. Till April 22, there were 725 active cases, 194 were discharged, and 24 people had died.

11 positive in Kerala

Eleven more persons tested positive for COVID-19 in Kerala on Wednesday, taking the total number of cases to 437. Kannur had seven new cases, Kozhikode two, and Kottayam and Malappuram districts one case each.

One patient from Palakkad tested negative and was put on the recovery list.

Five new cases were persons who returned from abroad and three got the disease from imported infections.

Two house surgeons and a nurse at Kozhikode Medical College were among the 11 new cases.

Fish eye



Sea view: (Clockwise from top) A bird's eye view of Thengathittu fishing harbour in Pudukkottai; fishermen bringing a 30 kg sailfish to the Kollam fishing harbour; and hectic activity seen at Jalaripeta after the demand for fish soared in Visakhapatnam. Centre had exempted fishing from the purview of the national lockdown. ■ T. SINGARAVELU, C. SURESHKUMAR & K.R. DEEPAK

IN BRIEF



Godavari water reaches Siddipet

SIDDIPET
Godavari water from Kaleshwaram via Annapurna reservoir, located at the border of Siddipet and Sircilla, reached here on Wednesday. Water can be pumped here once the water level at Annapurna reservoir stands at 1.75 tmft. The authorities are making efforts to fill 1.5 tmft water into Ranganaikalsagar reservoir, which has a total capacity of 3 tmft, in a phased manner. The reservoir systems would be tested during pumping.

'Expats should have COVID-19 certificate'

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM
Expatriates from Kerala settled in various countries, especially the Gulf, should mandatorily carry a COVID-19-negative certificate if they want to return home once the Centre gives its nod for bringing them back, the State government has said. Keen to avoid fresh cases after successfully containing its spread in the State, the government issued an order stating that expats with certificates showing they tested negative can register with NORKA department.

Two sent to juvenile home for murder in Kerala

PATHANAMTHITTA
A juvenile court here sent two 16-year-old boys who have been identified as the accused in the killing of their friend at Kodumon on Tuesday to the Juvenile Home in Kollam on Wednesday. According to the police, the accused confessed to having an altercation with the deceased over the exchange of a mobile phone to the former towards compensation for a shoe destroyed by the latter. They pushed the boy to the ground and struck his head with a piece of rock.

MGR Medical University

Mango Soil & Climate

Mango is very well adapted to tropical and subtropical climates. It thrives well in almost all the regions

00 of the country from sea level to an altitude of 600 m. The ideal temperature range for mango is 24 -30 C

during the growing season, along with high humidity. A rainfall range of 890-1,015 mm in a year is considered as ideal for growing mangoes. However, mango can be grown in regions of both heavy (2540 mm) or scanty (254 mm) rainfall. Dry weather before blossoming is conducive to profuse flowering.

Rain during flowering is detrimental to the crop as it interferes with pollination.

Fog, cloudy weather at the time of flowering from November to February results in poor setting of fruits and favours pest and disease incidence. Mango

grows well on wide variety of soils, such as lateritic, alluvial, sandy loam and sandy. The loamy, alluvial, well-drained, aerated and deep soils (2-2.5 m) rich in organic matter with a pH range of 5.5-7.5 are ideal for mango cultivation.

The water table should be around 3 m and soils with high water table are unsuitable for mango.

Lockdown hits harvest, sale of Jagtial mangoes

The 'Benishan' or Banganapalli variety is popular due to its quality, taste and long shelf-life

K.M. DAYASHANKAR

JAGTIAL

The 'Benishan' or Banganapalli variety of the king of fruits, which is widely grown in Jagtial district, is witnessing a slump in sales due to the nationwide lockdown. Marketed as 'Jagtial mango - Telangana' in Delhi, Chandigarh, Ahmedabad, Kolkata, Lucknow, Gwalior and Srinagar, the mangoes are popular for their quality, taste and long shelf-life.

However, the prevailing lockdown and the non-arrival of migrant workers from Bihar, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh for grading and

packing the fruits has impacted their sale.

Farmers suffered a big blow due to unseasonal rain in November-December 2019. It damaged the crop at the flowering stage. Usually, the crop arrives by the first week of April but due to the rain, it got delayed, arriving at the Chalgal fruit market here only from Saturday.

Some traders purchased the crop in the groves itself. But they too are facing labour shortage to pack and pack the fruits, and also in transporting them. About 4,000 migrant workers, who have expertise in grading

and packing the fruits, could not arrive due to the lockdown.

The crop is cultivated on 33,000 acres in the district. Last year, the yield was 1.1 lakh metric tonnes. This year, the yield is likely to come down to 66,000 metric tonnes.

District Horticulture Officer Pratap Singh said harvesting had got delayed this season due to unseasonal rain. The yield had also come down drastically. The farmers were supplying to markets in Hyderabad and Nagpur. But supply to northern parts had been hit, he said.

UDF, BJP seek HC help to stop

polls in Karnataka

The Union Democratic Front (UDF) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have sought the help of the Karnataka High Court to stop the state government from holding assembly elections in Karnataka.

The UDF and BJP have filed a petition in the High Court, challenging the state government's decision to hold assembly elections in Karnataka.

The petitioners argue that the state government's decision to hold assembly elections is unconstitutional and against the public interest.

The High Court is expected to hear the petition in the coming days.

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



1. POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INKAT/IMO (TAKEEN AT 18.00 HRS)

sdny: Thunderstorm accompanied lightning, nds very likely at isolated places over Uttarakhand and Chhattisgarh; with light drizzle at isolated places over West Bengal, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala.

CITY	MAX	MIN	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Kozhikode	34.2	23.6	...	36.4	28.8
Kurnool	41.3	28.1	...	41.8	29.2
Lucknow	25.3	14.9	0.3	35.7	21.6
Madurai	39.6	23.6	...	37.5	27.5
Mangaluru	34.6	24.6	...	37.0	26.4
Mumbai	35.7	21.8	...	36.3	25.1
Mysuru	33.6	22.0	...	35.1	24.2
New Delhi	15.2	10.5	...	39.0	20.3
Patna	35.0	28.2	...	34.0	21.2
Port Blair	37.4	25.4	...	32.9	27.0
Puducherry	31.7	15.7	...	26.4	...
Pune	27.9	17.9	...	39.0	20.3
Raipur	34.4	26.6	...	37.2	23.8
Ranchi	27.9	17.9	...	32.2	18.5
Shillong	37.0	23.0	...	3.0	19.3
Shimla	1.2	-39.6	26.6	...	19.7
Srinagar	0.4	-26.2	16.5	...	20.0
Thiruvananthapuram	...	...	...	...	...
Tiruchi	...	...	...	...	...
Vijayawada	...	...	...	...	...
Kolkata	...	...	...	...	...
Visakhapatnam	...	...	...	...	...

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITY	SO ₂	NO ₂	CO	PM _{2.5}	PM ₁₀	Yesterday
Ahmedabad	22	16	50	91	...	...
Bengaluru	...	...	...	...	...	...
Chennai	03	17	20	42	...	...
Delhi	20	25	100	232	118	...
Hyderabad	04	55	19	57	...	...
Kolkata	14	07	19	34	32	...
Lucknow	05	21	51	101	...	...
Mumbai	07	12	08	33	65	...
Pune	26	09	51	32	31	...
Visakhapatnam	09	31	06	13	31	...

AQI Quality Code: ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate 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.
CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.
PM_{2.5} & PM₁₀: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease.



Script of unity

The virus knows no caste or creed, but it is feeding existing social prejudices

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's reminder that COVID-19 does not recognise "race, religion, colour, caste, creed, language or border" before striking, was axiomatic but essential. The pandemic has fanned the flames of communalism instead of dousing them, as it has compounded economic woes. The Prime Minister has recognised the calamitous rage of the virus when he called for "response and conduct" that "should attach primacy to unity and brotherhood". He cannot be more right about the fact that countries and societies can no longer afford to face off with one another and the future can be secured only through togetherness and resilience. He spoke against the backdrop of criticism of the apparent communal strand in the response of some sections to the COVID-19 challenge. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and the UN expressed concern over stigmatisation, in India, of a particular community. India sought to reject these concerns as external interference, which they were. But then, as he noted, the virus threat has made borders irrelevant. There have been reports of religious discrimination towards patients. The situation was aggravated when a vocal section of the Indian diaspora, often touted as proponents of India's interests in their host countries, was seen as Islamophobic in the UAE.

Such odious digital behaviour routinely goes unquestioned in India, but in the UAE, the response has been quick. Many have lost their jobs for posting hateful content and this culture of diatribe now looms over a critical bilateral relationship that Mr. Modi has personally nurtured. The Indian Ambassador to the UAE reminded expatriates that discrimination was against "our moral fabric and the rule of law". Indeed, the narrative of the pandemic as a communal conspiracy against the nation began to take shape immediately after a Tablighi Jamaat congregation in Delhi in March turned out to be a prodigious source of the contagion. The Centre and the Delhi government appeared to be using the unfortunate episode scripted by an irresponsible and ignorant group to fend off scrutiny of their own shortcomings. A section of the media continues to play a dishonourable role in amplifying it. In an environment that is already rife with fear and uncertainty, the official communications strategy must focus on building trust and offering reassurance. The extremely inadequate messaging has led to stigmatisation of patients and their families, and despicable incivility towards even the bodies of unfortunate victims. All this makes the Prime Minister's statement timely. His call for unity in the face of this calamity must be translated into firm action, and a good place to begin is the government's own messaging.

Exploiting a pandemic

Trump's immigration policy is more campaign point than response to impact of the virus

United States President Donald Trump has announced that he would be using an executive order to suspend, for 60 days, legal immigration into the country that he has a little more than six months left to govern through his first term in office. In a tweet, he said this was in light of "the need to protect the jobs of our GREAT American Citizens", even though the order is not expected to halt visa processing for many thousands of temporary employees, potentially including a sizeable number of Indian nationals in the H-1B skilled worker category; and seasonal workers in areas like landscaping, agribusinesses, and service jobs in hospitality, who fall into the H-2B category. The executive order, which he is expected to sign this week, will also likely carve out exemptions for certain categories of essential workers, including those in health care and who have a critical role to play in fighting the ongoing pandemic, and those who seek to immigrate via their immediate relatives. The question that Mr. Trump's action begs is whether this is a genuine attempt to mitigate the impact of the accompanying economic crisis for American workers, or whether it is a diversionary tactic designed to shore up the President's flagging political capital in the wake of what many have described as his ineffective crisis management strategy.

For example, what impact does the White House expect this policy to have on the job market given that immigrant and non-immigrant travel into the U.S. has anyway fallen considerably over the past month, as the coronavirus toll has soared in the country to over 8,26,000 people infected and over 44,000 dead? Second, why target immigrants, who are anyway vastly outnumbered each year by job-seekers entering through the temporary visa route, when the approximately 22 million Americans who have filed for unemployment in recent weeks have done so less due to immigration and more due to the cessation of business activity in the face of the pandemic? One possibility is that the executive order is only the first of several policy salvos that the Trump administration will introduce to bolster the collapsing U.S. labour market. Yet if such a comprehensive strategy does not emerge in the coming weeks and months, then that only suggests that the President has pivoted to his signature campaign issue of immigration — like he did effectively during the 2016 election — to animate his core constituent base of blue-collar workers across the "red states" of the country. If the latter theory about Mr. Trump's motivations for announcing an immigration ban is true, then not only should Americans expect that his administration's stumbling early response to the crisis and reckless attempts to open the economy prematurely will impose a deadly human cost on the population but also that his strident policy rhetoric on immigration will exacerbate the deep divisions in American society in the months ahead.

The village is still relevant

As the pandemic crisis shows, villages have a right to flourish as habitations with their own distinctive future



KRISHNA KUMAR

The upheaval caused by the novel coronavirus should inspire a review of past choices and policies. Some of these policies had gained so much acceptance that one felt there was no point left in questioning them. Public health and education are two areas in which India took a decisive turn in the 1990s. When several States decided to stop giving permanent appointment letters to doctors and teachers in the mid-1990s, they were guided by an ideological shift at the national level towards allowing health and education to be opened up for private enterprise. This was viewed as a major policy reform, a necessary part of the bigger package of economic reforms. They were presented as a package, offering little choice for specific areas.

Taking a back seat

The new buzz was public-private partnership. It covered everything from roads to schools. The form it took made it amply clear that the state would take a back seat after issuing a set of rules for private operators while the state's own infrastructure will shrink. Soon enough, cost-effective measures became the priority in both health and education. Chronic shortage of functionaries became the norm while young persons learned to wait for years for vacancies to be announced. Working on short-term contracts, with little security or dignity, became common.

As we begin to imagine the post-

coronavirus scenario, a key question to contemplate is whether we should revisit the policies put in place during the 1990s. Some will doubtless argue that the clock cannot be put back, and that we should not waver from the path we had chosen, no matter what hardships people have to endure. Certain policies were specific to domains such as health and education. Others were more like frameworks within which policies for specific areas emerged and evolved. One such framework had to do with villages.

For a long time, a view had been gathering support that villages were no more viable as sites of public investment. A generalised logic had surfaced to justify and thereby encourage emigration from rural areas to cities. According to this logic, providing basic amenities such as running water, electricity and jobs to rural people becomes easier if they move to a city. This kind of thinking had considerable academic support. Modernisation was a dominant paradigm of social theory that saw nothing wrong in the growth of vast slums in mega-cities and depletion of working-age people in villages. Some social scientists did not mind declaring that the village as we had known it in Indian history was on its way to extinction. They argued that agriculture, the main resource of livelihood in the countryside, was no longer profitable enough to attract the young. And handicrafts too were destined to die, they said, as craftsmen and women cannot survive without state support. Only pockets of support survived the powerful wave of market-oriented economic reforms.

All such arguments and the data they were based on provided a comfortable rationale for policies that encouraged emigration of a



REUTERS/ANWAR

vast section of the rural population to cities. It was something 'natural' that happens in the course of economic development in countries like ours. Students were taught that shrinking of rural livelihoods was a universal phenomenon and it was, therefore, inevitable in India.

Acceptance of historical destiny implied that we could simply sit back and let history take its familiar course. The only thing the welfare state might do was to mitigate the misery of the masses. As they faced the decimation of the rural people's economy, safety nets could be thrown at them to provide subsistence-level provision of food, literacy and disease control. Special measures were designed to select the 'best' among rural children and make them competitive enough to survive in the urban world that was treated as mainstream.

Imbalance and invisibility

This general framework justified discriminatory funding in every sphere, including health and education. No serious public investment could be made in villages. Even as medical education and teacher training became increasingly privatised, the availability of qualified doctors and teachers willing to work in villages dwindle

died. Ideologically-inspired pursuit of economic reforms swept State after State, leaving little room for dissent or longer term thinking. A veneer of welfarism was maintained. It allowed the expansion of essential facilities of a rudimentary kind in villages. They served as sites for special schemes for the poor and provided minimalist provisions. The goal was to keep the poor alive and occupied. Privately-run facilities burgeoned, creating an ethos that boosted commercial goals in health care and schooling. Stuck between state minimalism and commercial entrepreneurship, villages lost what capacity they had for regenerating their economy or intellectual resources.

No words can compete with recent pictures that cast a delayed doubt on this policy scenario. These are pictures of urban workers marching with their families to their native villages hundreds of miles away. There is more than one way of interpreting these pictures. On one hand they encapsulate desperation and apprehension. On the other, these same pictures reveal a story that generations of policy makers and scholars have been reluctant to acknowledge. The photographs captured by the media show men, women and children walking on highways designed to provide high-speed connectivity to cities. In the absence of trains and bus, these families decided to embark on foot. With no prospect of work and income, they felt vulnerable in their shanty towns. They wanted to go home. In the city where they had lived for years, they were part of the informal economy which offers no protection against exigencies. The new urban architecture denies them visibility too. That is perhaps why no one thought about them till they

emerged on the wide highways.

Obsolete debates

The novel coronavirus has demonstrated how unsustainable this socio-economic arrangement was, apart from being ethically indefensible. It was characterised by sharp and growing regional disparities. No matter how hard we will try to rebuild the world as it was before the virus struck it, its unsustainability will not go away. It is rooted in the structural imbalance between the urban and the rural on one hand and the predominance of a skewed vision of economic growth on the other. In this vision, the village has no future other than becoming a pale copy of the urban and eventually dissolving into it.

Once upon a time, there were debates over the nature of India's rural society — on whether it was intrinsically good or bad. These debates are no longer relevant. The village is, however, still relevant, at least for the vast number of urban workers. Similarly, while the problem of defining a village in an academic sense has ceased to matter, its existential reality has asserted itself, and we need to recognise this assertion. If we do, we might agree to notice a problem in policies that do not acknowledge the right of villages to flourish as human habitations with their own distinctive future. They deserve to have new sites and forms of livelihood. They also deserve systems of health and education that are not designed as feeders to distant centres. Initiatives in this direction will make both cities and villages more sustainable and capable of coping with the kind of crisis we are currently facing.

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

A time for planetary solidarity

Rather than fortress worlds, nations need to focus on building shared programmes of knowledge and collective welfare



SUJATHA BYRAVAN & SUDHIR CHELLA RAJAN

Self-help gurus say it takes 21 days to develop a new habit. However, in a crisis, we may learn quite a few overnight. The microscopic SARS-CoV-2, by causing a global pandemic, has forced much of humanity to cease every day practices and jump-start new ones. It has also reminded us of certain tenets that we have always known. For instance, it is possible for individuals, communities, and nations to respond to a planetary crisis within days. The nature of the response in different settings, however, depends on leadership, the quality and strength of local institutions, resources deployed and the ability to deliver straightforward and meaningful messages regarding behavioural change.

More reassuringly, empathy for fellow travellers around the world turns out to be at least as widespread as avarice and insularity. Compassion and structured forms of support by different kinds of non-state actors have been amply demonstrated across the world, with people enduring personal threats to life to assist the most vulnerable.

As in any crisis, the poorest — daily wage workers, the homeless, migrants and operators of micro-enterprises — are the worst affect-

ed. Even so, in the present instance, their fate is especially dire. Any person whose livelihood is directly connected with their physical labour has been left with zero options unless they are somehow connected with health care, food or sanitation. It is the old privileging of mental over manual labour, but the inequities and disparities are starker now and in more brutal circumstances than ever before.

Learning lessons

For knowledge workers, one of the new social norms being created is extensive Internet use for learning and work. While some of this was happening earlier, the scale of international video meetings and virtual classes taking place now is unprecedented. In certain sectors such as accounting, desk-based research and software development, working remotely turns out to be profitable to companies.

There are some guidelines to infer from this. The drastic reduction in flights, for instance, has affected the airline industry adversely but also highlighted the fact that many flight trips during 'normal' times are in fact unnecessary. Before the pandemic, business meetings, including international conferences and climate change meetings, were responsible for a bulk of flight travel. For example, a return flight, economy class, from Delhi to New York releases about 0.9 tonnes of carbon dioxide (it is twice as much in premium economy). This is half of India's per capita annual emissions. The same can be said of many



GETTY IMAGES/SYDNEY PHOTO

vehicle trips. The lockdown has shown that up to half of these trips are dispensable, especially if commuting and education trips can be cut down severely.

For a sizeable fraction of the workforce, conducting tasks from home ought to be encouraged, better organised and provide more freedom for people, not less. It should be the norm in many sectors and people could work from home at least half the time, thus reducing travel needs, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and simplifying child care and other domestic services.

An even more revolutionary approach to education and learning is conceivable. Online schooling and college education without paywalls is already available, but if it were expanded to develop open access schools and universities, the scam of high admissions fees can be altogether eliminated.

Industrial production and electricity generation also do not have to go back to pre-COVID-19 levels. Life under lockdown has already demonstrated that there are essentials, superfluous items and luxuries. Responsible consumer action and new social norms to li-

mit the last two can make a dent on greenhouse gas emissions while promoting simpler and potentially happier ways of life.

Fundamental change

There are many encouraging signs of truly 'green' alternatives to the current economic system and the beliefs that govern it. Becoming sustainable is vital for ensuring that the worst effects of climate change — another planetary crisis lurking just over the horizon of the present one — also do not fall on the already underprivileged.

Unfortunately, the popular version of 'green growth' is flawed because it assumes that normal business activity can be made more sustainable merely by adding renewable technology and trees to it, for instance. But such spiritless measures often harm economic or social welfare even if they improve environmental outcomes. Sustainability will need not just decoupling economic growth from pollution but ultimately decoupling planetary welfare from economic growth while fostering social progress.

U.S. President Donald Trump's \$2-trillion stimulus plan turns out to be mostly another corporate bailout. India cannot afford to do the same. The true losers are low wage and daily wage earners, who need assistance along with the farming community. Vehicle manufacturers, fossil-fuel companies, airlines and large businesses and even banks should not be on the bailout queue.

For the vast majority of the working class, the provision of un-

iversal basic income would be the first step towards reducing their precarity. Such change requires bold measures to reduce financial speculation and the hoarding of wealth by the rentier class by reintroducing the estate tax and putting brakes on high-speed trading, for instance.

A transformation of work is also needed for the entrepreneurial class, where greater flexibility, coordination and access to markets are made easier. In addition, social measures must be strengthened to protect the health and safety of the poorest. Public hospitals need to be improved and have the capacity to respond to pandemics and related crises. Access to care in the emergency and beyond should be equally available to all. By focussing on the delivery of basic services, we will discover new opportunities for equitable action.

What is also quite clear, and shared with the climate change crisis, is that if you ignore science, it will come back to bite you. Mixed and confusing messages from the government add fuel to a flaming pandemic. Ignoring or denying the science of climate change does the same. United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said: "This is, above all, a crisis that calls for solidarity." That implies building shared programmes of knowledge and action for collective welfare, not fortress worlds.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

Case spike

Whatever be the mathematical model adopted, the stark reality of micro-demographics will be a key deciding factor (Page 1, "Huge spike in cases likely in Mumbai: Central panel", April 22). Dharavi, for example, has been described by various sources as a 2.1-2.6 sq. km zone with a population estimated at about 15 lakh. There are also an estimated 15,000-25,000 tiny industries. Thus if we set aside 15% of the area for "roads" and industries, the area per resident is about 1.5 sq. m at worst or an area of about 4.5ft x 4.5ft per resident. It is all very well to lay emphasis on social

distancing, but where is the distance in such areas in Mumbai which cannot be wished away? The rich do not care as they can afford to observe many precautions and have ample facilities and opportunities to be safe. Whatever be the steps being taken by the government, the contagion will grow at a rapid rate in such specific areas and eclipse the number of cases in the rest of the State of Maharashtra.
D.M. MOHUNTRA,
Chennai

Testing kits

The data shared by the Indian Council of Medical Research is perhaps an

indicator that asymptomatic infections are on the rise (Page 1, "ICMR asks States to stop using rapid tests for the next 2 days", April 22). This makes epidemiological and surveillance exercises tougher in hotspots as such patients would be silently spreading the infection. Contact tracing would become extremely difficult and mapping containment zones would not be possible. Though guidelines have been laid down clearly by the ICMR on who should be tested, random testing in hotspots may be what is needed. The ICMR needs to revise its testing strategies.
NAGARAJAMANI M.V.,
Hyderabad

It was no surprise to read the report, especially after the Health Ministries in countries especially in Europe have called out the quality of kits, many being of Chinese-make. The complaints are that results are widely inaccurate. India must look at indigenous solutions and encourage Indian manufacturers to make kits with local components. Inaccurate tests giving false positives are more dangerous than the disease. This could lead to wrong treatment options.
H.N. RAMAKRISHNA,
Bengaluru

In the e-cart

In the decision about e-commerce companies and

non-essential goods, it is essential to define what "essentials" are. In this, the customer is best accomplished to do this. Indeed, as the lockdown has been extended, conventional non-essential goods are turning into essentials (Editorial, "Non-essentials can wait", April 22). Hand sanitizers and masks seem to be universally essential. But what about do-it-yourself hair cutting kits for men, given the uncertainty over the opening of salons? Or perhaps foot-friendly

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footwear and bicycles for those who had relied on public transport so far? Of course, the list may become endless and the imagination is the limit. So won't it be better to limit the number of products and deliveries in a given period for a particular residential address? With some modifications in software, e-commerce giants should be able to implement these restrictions.
A. VENKATASUBRAMANIAN,
Tiruchi, Tamil Nadu

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

A front-page story titled "N.N. not to relax lockdown" (April 21, 2020) wrongly gave the number of active COVID-19 cases in the State as 1,406. The correct figure was 1,043.

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There may be no going back

The 'normalcy' that China is returning to may provide a snapshot of our post-COVID-19 world



ANANTH KRISHNAN

May 4 is the date marked on many calendars, the day we in India hope some semblance of normalcy may return to our lives. We may well have to wait a lot longer – lockdown or no lockdown – if the “normalcy” that people across the border in China are returning to, after two long months of isolation, is anything to go by. From January 23, when 50 million people in Hubei province were kept in one of the biggest quarantines in history, much of China, where the COVID-19 pandemic first began, was placed under some form of restrictions. By one estimate, more than 750 million people were effectively under a strict lockdown. Since late March, as the number of cases outside of the Hubei epicentre in China began to subside, some restrictions were eased. On April 8, the government said Hubei would finally end its 76 days of isolation.

The new normal

As offices, restaurants and even trains resume service, people in China are, however, finding that the normalcy they were waiting to return to is, in fact, anything but normal. The shadow of COVID-19 is still hanging over every aspect of daily life. In constant fear of the possibility of a second wave of infections, authorities are continuing with a range of physical distancing measures as a precaution.

For the rest of the world too, this may be the new normal that awaits us. An April 14 study by Harvard researchers suggested physical distancing measures may be here to stay, perhaps on an on-and-off basis, until 2022, because one-time lockdowns will not be enough to control the pandemic. Some are suggesting this could continue even longer until the world achieves “herd immunity”, which most scientists say can only be achieved through widespread vaccinations, which could take years. The post-COVID-19 world may be here to stay for a while yet.

Conversations I have had in recent



“As offices, restaurants and even trains resume service, people in China are finding that the normalcy they were waiting to return to is, in fact, anything but normal.” A shopping mall in Wuhan in Hubei province. •AFP

days with acquaintances in Beijing and Shanghai have painted a picture of what this world may look like, a world where all those new words and phrases that have now become a part of our vocabulary – nucleic acid testing, social/physical distancing, and temperature screening – are becoming an integral part of day-to-day life. A friend who works in a start-up in Beijing’s Zhongguancun tech district told me offices now have to choose which employees go into work every day. Offices are reorganising their staff so every department is split into several teams, to ensure that one infection won’t paralyse the entire team. In some buildings, offices cannot hold more than a specified number of people on a given day, which may range from five to 10 depending on the size of the office, according to rules imposed by the property management.

Health is no longer a private matter. Your health QR code is now the most important passport to get you anywhere in any Chinese city. An app that every citizen has to download marks you green (safe), while orange or red may mean you can’t enter a shopping mall or restaurant. The colour depends on your travel history and who you have been in contact with, among other things.

Then there is temperature screening. Getting half-a-dozen temperature checks a day is now the norm. Building authorities check every employee’s temperature every time they enter or leave the building. So do shopping malls, railway stations and airports. A high temperature means an ambulance may be called and you’ll have to go to hospital, whether you like it or not. If you are running a fever, even if you don’t have COVID-19, you may not be able to board a subway, or catch a train, or enter a shopping mall. Some businesses require every employee to take a nucleic acid test before returning to work. And of course, you cannot leave home without a face mask. Not wearing a face mask in public is now a punishable offence.

Social gatherings aren’t what they used to be. Weddings are being put on hold. Restaurants have reduced the number of tables by half, and you can only seat three at a table. In some restaurants, you will be sprayed with disinfectant before entering. Forget about ambience, too – plastic sheets separate every table. In China, the way people eat isn’t what it used to be either. On April 12, the National Health Commission said diners will have to be served meals in separate dishes. So if three diners order a

dish, it will be served to each separately to prevent the risk of infection. Shops and restaurants are opening, but many other establishments remain closed. Bars and pubs now firmly limit the number of patrons who can be present at any given time. Some bars in China are openly barring foreigners, because of what the government calls a rise in “imported infections”, which is fanning a new kind of health-triggered xenophobia.

Transformative changes

While some businesses have opened, gyms, swimming pools, cinema halls, and not to mention most schools and colleges, remain shut. Perhaps the most transformative changes are being seen in education and tourism. Some 300 million Chinese students in schools and universities are now taking classes online every day, and all kinds of new e-learning platforms, teaching everything from classical music to Pilates, are now booming. Travel and tourism have been the hardest hit. In Beijing, starting April 12, a nucleic acid test certificate has to be produced when you check into a hotel. If you don’t, you can’t get a room. (If you’re a foreigner, you may not get a room anyway, according to the policies some hotels are following). Inter-city travel is now a costly exercise. Travelling to another city for work may bring you a 14-day mandatory quarantine when you return home. Then there is air travel. Travel for pleasure may become a thing of the past. And forget about travelling in pleasure. In China, most airline passengers are now decked out in not just masks, but full hazmat suits and goggles. Some airlines, such as Emirates, have started testing passengers for COVID-19 before boarding. Results are issued in 10 minutes.

As a result of the continued closures and restrictions, many businesses are floundering. To get consumers to support them, some cities in China are now issuing 30-day spending vouchers to encourage people to support small businesses and retail. They are also making two-and-a-half-day weekends the norm – perhaps one small sliver of a silver lining to hold on to amid all the dark clouds.

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Pre-retirement judgments and post-retirement jobs

Enacting a law barring appointments of retired judges by the government will restore confidence in the judiciary



N.G.R. PRASAD & K.K. RAM SIDDHARTHA

The Constitution has been conceived to provide a pride of place to the judiciary. Constitutional appointees to the Supreme Court have been guaranteed several rights in order to secure their independence. Chapter 4 of Part V of the Constitution deals with the Supreme Court, and Chapter 5 of Part VI deals with the High Courts. The salaries of judges and their age of retirement are all guaranteed in order to secure their independence. They cannot be easily removed except by way of impeachment under Articles 124(4) and 217(1)(b). They have the power to review legislation and strike it down. They can also question the acts of the executive. All this makes it clear that the framers of the Constitution envisaged an unambitious judiciary for which the only guiding values were the provisions of the Constitution.

The Gogoi example

It was thought that on retirement from high constitutional office, judges would lead a retired life. Nobody ever expected them to accept plum posts. But the clear demarcation between the judiciary and executive got blurred as many judges over the years began to accept posts offered by the government. A few years ago, a former Chief Justice of India (CJI) was made a Governor by the ruling BJP government. Now, we have the case of a former CJI, Ranjan Gogoi, being nominated by the President to the Rajya Sabha and taking oath as Member of Parliament. During his tenure as CJI, Justice Gogoi presided over important cases such as Ayodhya and Rafale where all the decisions went in favour of the government. This gave rise to the impression that his nomination was a reward for these ‘favours’. Thus his appointment – and that too within a few months of his retirement – not only raised eyebrows but drew severe condemnation from varied quarters.

People are fast losing confidence in the so-called independent judiciary. In 2013, former Union Minister Arun Jaitley, who was also a senior Advocate, ironically said on the floor of Rajya Sabha: “I think, we are going a bit too far now, in every legislation, in creating post-retirement avenues for Judges. Almost everyone, barring a few notable, ho-

nourable men, who are an exception, wants a job after retirement. If we (Parliament) don’t create it, they themselves create it. The desire of a post-retirement job influences pre-retirement judgments. It is a threat to the independence of the Judiciary and once it influences pre-retirement judgments, it adversely impacts on the functioning of our Judiciary.” It is in this context that the appointment of Mr. Gogoi has to be perceived.

An interview that Justice Gogoi gave after assuming office as member of the Rajya Sabha made the situation worse. When asked whether his nomination was a quid-pro-quo for his having delivered judgments in favour of the Central government, his answer, that he was not the only judge but there were other judges too, was damaging. His view that membership of the Rajya Sabha was not a job but a service, and that once the President nominated him the call of duty required him to accept it, only created the impression that the judiciary is pliant. A bare reading of Article 80(3) of the Constitution only envisages the President to nominate “persons having special knowledge... in literature, science, art and social service” as members to the Rajya Sabha. It is difficult to imagine that the Constitution-makers had in mind a retired CJI while framing this provision.

Undoing the damage

Therefore, appointments of persons who have held constitutional office will undermine the very constitutional values of impartiality in the dispensation of justice. It will also go against the clear demarcation of separation of powers. It is true that there are no rules which stood in Justice Gogoi’s way of being appointed to the Rajya Sabha. But such matters cannot be left to the individual vagaries of judges. If post-retirement appointments are going to undermine confidence in the judiciary and in constitutional democracy, it is time to have a law in place either by way of a constitutional amendment or a parliamentary enactment barring such appointments. This is the only way to secure the confidence of the people and prevent post-retirement appointments. Judges can be compensated by being given their last drawn salary as pension. Also, the age of retirement for judges can be increased by a year or two. This will undo the damage caused by post-retirement jobs. It is important to remember that judges are constitutional servants, not government servants.

N.G.R. Prasad and K.K. Ram Siddhartha are Advocates, Madras High Court

No transparency in West Bengal

The State government’s handling of the COVID-19 crisis leaves much to be desired

DIVYA GUHA

While the global media is painting a medical apocalypse, sections of the Indian media fear that reporting the Central and State governments’ specious image management during this extraordinary viral outbreak will come with consequences. Meanwhile, front line health workers – doctors, nurses and trainees, who are under-equipped and not always fully appreciated – look like lambs to the slaughter. As the fight against more infections rages, stoic and selfless, hospital staff continue to do what they are trained to do.

Delays and data issues

In West Bengal, the medical fraternity claims that the State is reporting fewer cases as only a minuscule proportion of the population is getting tested. Recently, at least three healthcare workers, including interns, tested positive for the virus after delivering babies of COVID-19-positive mothers in the Kolkata Medical College and Hospital. The Gynaecology Department at the hospital was aware that the patients were COVID-19 positive, but were themselves tested for the disease only a week later. Such delays are dangerous.

West Bengal has acquired the dubious reputation of conducting the least number of COVID-19 tests among the larger Indian States (62.7 per million of population). To make matters worse, its methodology for aggregating ‘asymptomatic and those under observation’, ‘sick’ and ‘deaths’ leaves important questions unanswered. Doctors complain that the Standard Operating Procedure for COVID-19 death certification has not been followed. In Kolkata Medical College and Hospital, for instance, when doctors clinically assess a person to have died of COVID-19, and is yet to be lab-tested (test results may take up to two days), the bodies in their highly infectious states have been released to family members for last rites. No tests are being conducted posthumously outside of the specialised (Level 4) hospitals converted for treating COVID-19 positive patients, doctors say. With the testing rate low, we don’t know if there are COVID-19 deaths outside

Level 4 hospitals. How many are succumbing in general wards, homes and villages? Who is checking?

West Bengal’s numbers come under further doubt as the State government is instructing doctors to be cautious while recording COVID-19 as the cause of death in the case of those patients who have other underlying medical conditions. This is not in keeping with international standard practices. In the U.K., doctors record a wider set as having succumbed to COVID-19, including deaths strongly suspected as being by COVID-19, even if no laboratory test has taken place, or if there are co-morbidities such as kidney, lung or heart disease. West Bengal authorities are telling doctors to do the opposite.

As more healthcare workers test positive, their calls for testing much more are stonewalled. Authorities, they say, have “no intention” of doing enough tests. This is unconscionable, a galling failure of the State government’s duty of care towards medical professionals and the public. Then there is the newspeak: how do surveillance, quarantine and being under observation differ? Do these numbers (31,023) include those in self-isolation? Who collects, collates and checks these figures from hospitals and District Collectors’ offices before they reach the panicking public? Is it only up to the hospitals to track COVID-19 deaths?

More questions than answers

Is there bureaucratic delay in reporting or are there other unforeseen limiting circumstances such as a State budget shortage or delays from the Central government in releasing funds? If there are inevitable delays, how long will the delays be on average? Can the gaps be narrowed and closed for better estimates? Can the true numbers then be higher? There are many questions, but no answers. The lack of transparency indicate that true figures are being suppressed to appear low. Why is Mamata Banerjee’s Cabinet and the Centre unable to answer such specific questions even though citizens and businesses are eager to know?

Divya Guha is a Kolkata-based independent journalist



DATA POINT

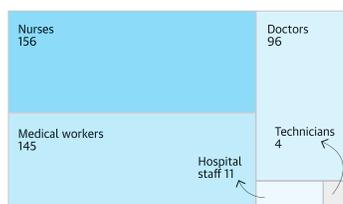
In the front line of the battle

At least* 96 doctors and 156 nurses have tested positive for COVID-19 across India as of April 22. As most of these infections were transmitted by patients in a hospital environment, at least 826 medical workers who came in contact with the infected personnel had to be quarantined and at least 20 hospitals had to be fully or partially closed. In the graphs, when the occupation of the infected/quarantined could not be ascertained, the patients were labelled as “medical workers” (it may include doctors and nurses). By **Vignesh Radhakrishnan, Sumant Sen and Nareesh Singaravelu**

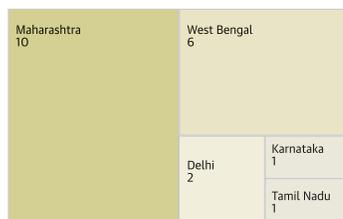
QUARANTINED MEDICAL WORKERS | The chart depicts the number of doctors, nurses and medical workers who were placed under quarantine across India. Maharashtra accounted for close to 83% of all doctors quarantined, followed by 11% in Delhi and 6% in Karnataka



INFECTED MEDICAL WORKERS | The chart depicts the number of infected doctors, nurses and medical workers. Maharashtra accounted for close to 42% of infected doctors, 70.5% of infected nurses and 84% of infected medical workers (does not include administrative staff)



HOSPITALS AFFECTED | Close to 10 hospitals in Maharashtra had to be completely or partially shut down after many of their staff were quarantined following exposure to COVID-19 patients. Closures were also reported from West Bengal, Delhi, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu



*The figures are a conservative estimate based on information collated from The Hindu news reports, reports from news agencies such as PTI and ANI, statements from hospitals, numbers cited in government press conferences etc.

The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO APRIL 23, 1970

Visvanath – batsman of the year

G. R. Visvanath, the Mysore State cricketer, is very much a national hero to-day. He received the biggest ovation for any player when he made his maiden appearance at the Brabourne Stadium in Bombay in the semi-final of the Ranji trophy championship between Bombay and Mysore last month. His 95-run knock in the second innings, played on Holi day, was described by one critic as having “heralded spring.” The cricket season in the country had been a plentiful one. Amidst a mass of performances in batting the one that stands out is the century knock of Visvanath in the third Test match against Australia at Kanpur. This singular performance entitles Visvanath to the encomium of the batsman of the year. Visvanath’s century was in the second innings of his maiden Test. Though he was out for a “duck” in the first innings, in cricket parlance he has earned a name in the record book as having scored a century in his Test debut. In the first innings, Visvanath making his first entry into a Test match arena, was hustled by A. N. Connolly with a variety of deliveries – two quick ones, two bouncers and, then, a slower ball, which the young man touched for a catch at short leg by Redpath.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 23, 1920.

The Scientific Study of Labour.

(From the Editorial)

The proposed establishment in England of a National Institute of Psychology and Physiology to make a scientific study of labour, discussed in the Engineering Supplement to the Times of March, deserves the careful attention of all employers and workmen. It is a well-recognised fact that by the choice of a profession with little or no experience for guidance, through accidental circumstances irrespective of mental and physical qualifications, many of our young men often find themselves engaged in professions for which they are quite unfit, bringing failure on themselves and disappointing lesson to the employer. In view of the disastrous consequences to the employers and employee caused by the unscientific and often perverse arrangements in the labour world, both physical and intellectual, the necessity for an institution of expertise in experimental and industrial psychology to give advice in the proper selection of vocations and the scientific handling of labour problems will be readily admitted by all thinking persons.

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.

Composition:

Besides directly recruiting personnel, the Directorate also draws officers from different Investigating Agencies, viz., Customs & Central Excise, Income Tax, Police, etc. on deputation.

Other functions:

Processing cases of fugitive/s from India under Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018.

Sponsor cases of preventive detention under Conservation of Foreign Exchange and Prevention of Smuggling Activities Act, 1974(COFEPOSA) in regard to contraventions of FEMA.

Special courts:

For the trial of an offence punishable under section 4 of PMLA, the Central Government (in consultation with the Chief Justice of the High Court), designates one or more Sessions Court as Special Court(s). The court is also called “PMLA Court”.

Any appeal against any order passed by PMLA court can directly be filed in the High Court for that jurisdiction.

“Our first few efforts are to make sure you have enough working capital to keep yourself alive through this shock,” said Mr. Sanyal. A larger package was in the works and would be announced “sooner rather than later.”

“Of course, we are not going to solve poverty by giving ₹500... But we are just

worried on the other side of this crisis will be very different,” he said. Geopolitical realities, supply chain structures and the use of technology would all have changed.

“This is not the end of the world... India should see it as an opportunity not just to rebuild ourselves, but also participate in the rebuilding of this new world,” he said.

taken to flatten the curve of the COVID-19 infection rate in India, such as adopting a national lockdown and expanding focused testing...,” he wrote.

cial transactions pertaining to those who came from abroad. Statements of those named in the case and the others involved will be recorded under the Prevention

automatically. The applicants have to provide correct information about only three things: name, date of birth and place of birth, which are already men-

tionals in question applied for, and got, e-tourist visas. We suspect that they were specifically told to apply under this category.”

The trend was detected

of Pakistani origin. According to government records, more than 25 lakh e-visas were issued in 2018 – an almost five-fold increase from 5.29 lakh in 2015.

quadrupled the period of report Wadhawan and Dheeraj Wadhawan – accused in the Yes Bank and DHFL fraud cases – and their family members ended at 2 p.m. on Wednesday and the agencies could come and arrest them. “Till such time, the State police will keep a watch on them,” Mr. Deshmukh said. The ED had recently issued summons against both in the Yes Bank case.

4 militants killed in Shopian encounter

Inspector General of Police (IGP), Kashmir, Vijay Kumar said, “We have taken DNA samples of the killed militants. We are conducting their burial in the presence of a magistrate. So far, the family of one of them has come forward. We will show them. If they identify, then two to three family members will be permitted to participate in the burial.

Those who make the claim later, their DNA samples will be taken for further course of action.”

The IGP did not disclose the identity of the outfits the militants belonged to.

However, police sources said it was a joint group of the Lashkar-e-Taiba, the Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) and the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen.

FB buys ₹43,574 crore stake in Jio Platforms

Facebook’s investment in Jio will be the largest foreign direct investment (FDI) in the technology sector in India.

Facebook, which counts India as one of its largest markets, said the investment “underscores our commitment to India and our excitement for the dramatic transformation that Jio has spurred in the country”. By investing in RIL’s digital business, the U.S. social media company aims to deepen its engagement with users in Asia’s third-largest economy.

Reliance Jio Infocomm,

which provides connectivity to more than 388 million subscribers, will continue to be a wholly owned subsidiary of Jio Platforms.

“Our goal with this investment is to enable new opportunities for businesses of all sizes, but especially for small businesses across India and create new and exciting digital ecosystems that will empower, enrich and uplift the lives of all 1.3 billion Indians,” RIL said in a statement.

RIL shares rose 10.3% on the BSE on Wednesday to close at ₹1,363.65.

Centre cuts non-urea fertilizer subsidy

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI**

The Centre has cut the subsidy for non-urea fertilizers this year to ₹22,186 crore. That is about 3% lower than the ₹22,875 crore which was the estimated expenditure on the nutrient based subsidies in 2019-20.

The Cabinet Committee on economic Affairs on Wednesday decided to reduce the subsidy for nitrogen-based fertilizers to ₹18.78 per kg, for phosphorous-based fertilizers to ₹14.88 per kg, and set the subsidy for potash-based fertilizers at ₹10.11 per kg, according to

an official statement. And while the subsidy for sulphur-based fertilizers had been raised last year to ₹ 3.56 per kg, from ₹2.72 per kg, this year it has been slashed to just ₹2.37 per kg.

The CCEA also approved the inclusion of a complex fertilizer, ammonium phosphate, under the nutrient-based subsidy scheme. The scheme was set up in 2010 to ensure the availability of phosphatic and potassic fertilizers to farmers at an affordable price, as the retail prices of such non-urea fertilizers are decontrolled and set by manufacturers.

Centre, State can fix sugarcane price, says SC

**LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI**

A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court on Wednesday held that both the Central and State governments have the power to fix the price of sugarcane under the Concurrent List of the Constitution.

However, the five-judge Bench, led by Justice Arun Mishra, said that even though a State cannot fix a “minimum price” if the Centre has already fixed it, the State is always welcome to fix the “advised price”.

The advised or remunerative price shall be higher than the minimum price in accordance with the provisions of the Sugarcane (Control) Order, 1966, issued under Section 16 of the Uttar Pradesh Sugarcane (Regulation of Supply and Purchase) Act, 1953. The case revolved around a petition by the Western Uttar Pradesh Sugar Mills Association questioning if the State had the power to fix a minimum price when a similar price had already been set by a Central legislation.

101 arrested in Palghar lynching case

**STAFF REPORTER
MUMBAI**

Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh on Wednesday made public the list of 101 accused arrested in the Palghar mob lynching of three persons, including two sadhus.

The Minister, while declaring the list, categorically said that none of the arrested accused was Muslim and once again appealed to everyone not to communalise the incident.

In a statement on social media, he said: “Palghar mob lynching is a grotesque incident which happened due to rumours on social media about child kidnappers and thieves prowling in the area. A high-level inquiry is going on and, meanwhile, people are requested not to fall for rumours and verify facts from trusted sources.”

Three people were lynched at the remote Gadchinchle village in Palghar district on the night of April 16. The three were trying to cross the border to Gujarat and were refused entry at Dadra and Nagar Haveli Union Territory. The villagers stopped the car as the area was rife with rumours about a kidnappers’ gang and thieves. A mob of over hundred lynched them.

No 100% quota for tribal teachers: SC

Bench says it is an ‘obnoxious idea’

**KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI**

A five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court held it unconstitutional to provide 100% reservation for tribal teachers in schools located in Scheduled Areas across the country.

A 152-page judgment by a Bench led by Justice Arun Mishra said it was an “obnoxious idea” to have only tribals teach tribals.

“It is an obnoxious idea that tribals only should teach the tribals. When there are other local residents, why they cannot teach is not understandable. The action defies logic and is arbitrary. Merit cannot be denied in toto by providing reservation,” Justice Mishra, who wrote the verdict for the Constitution Bench, observed. The five-judge Bench was answering a reference made to it in 2016 on whether 100% reservation is permissible under the Constitution.

Sawhney judgment
The court held that 100% reservation is discriminatory and impermissible. The opportunity of public employment is not the prerogative of few. A 100% reservation to the Scheduled Tribes has deprived Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Classes



The SC felt that merit cannot be denied in toto by providing reservation.

also of their due representation. The court referred to the Indira Sawhney judgment, which caps reservation at 50%.

“Citizens have equal rights, and the total exclusion of others by creating an opportunity for one class is not contemplated by the founding fathers of the Constitution of India,” Justice Mishra wrote.

The case stemmed from a legal challenge to January 10, 2000 order issued by the erstwhile State of Andhra Pradesh Bench providing 100% reservation to the Scheduled Tribe candidates, out of whom 33.1/3% shall be women, for the post of teachers in schools located in the Scheduled Areas of the State. The court said the 2000 notification was “unreasonable and arbitrary”.

Cong. seeks legal action against Arnab Goswami

NEW DELHI

The Congress reacted sharply to Republic Editor Arnab Goswami’s “condemnable comments” against party president Sonia Gandhi in the context of the Palghar lynching incident and sought legal action against him. “His comments were disgraceful and condemnable. Mr. Goswami claims to be an independent journalist but the deplorable language that he is using certainly matches that of the BJP,” general secretary organisation K.C. Venugopal told *The Hindu*. Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala told *The Hindu* that the party would pursue all legal options.

Aadhaar seeding deadline extended

NEW DELHI

Farmers in Assam, Meghalaya, J&K and Ladakh have been given a one-year extension to provide Aadhaar data to avail themselves of income support benefits under the PM-KISAN scheme. The new deadline will be March 31, 2021. The decision to relax the mandatory requirement of Aadhaar seeding of data for beneficiaries in these States and the Union Territories was taken by the Union Cabinet on Wednesday. This will benefit about 38 lakh farmers who have already received at least one instalment of PM-KISAN support.

Bengal left with no testing kits: Mamata

'Centre not giving required numbers'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

Raising the issue of paucity of COVID-19 testing kits in West Bengal, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday blamed the Central government for creating a "health hazard" in the State.

The State and the Centre have been at loggerheads for the past few days as the number of cases see a jump in the State and in the country.

On Wednesday, Ms. Banerjee said the Centre was not supplying an adequate number of kits. There are three types of kits, she said. One is rapid testing kit and the other is BGI Group's real-time reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR), while the third one is antigen kits. "The BGI RT-PCRs are withdrawn as per the email from NICEID, received yesterday (Tuesday). Antigen KITS are not available in the Bengal Hospital. Therefore, the



All rapid testing kits which were sent to our State have been withdrawn

State would not even have one kit currently in stock. All rapid testing kits sent to our State have been withdrawn," said Ms. Banerjee.

"The Health Department had made previous orders, but we do not know when we will receive those orders," she said. "While 2,500 viral transport kits were provided by the Centre, we did 7,037 tests. We required 14,000 kits."

Centre continues Bengal study

Team asks the State government to provide information on nine aspects

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Central team visiting West Bengal has demanded that the State government provide information on nine aspects, which include testing criteria and instances of COVID-19 among health care workers.

Additional Secretary Apurva Chandra, who was rushed to Kolkata on April 20 to take stock of the State's preparedness in the wake of the pandemic, shot off a letter to the Chief Secretary Rajiva Sinha on Wednesday seeking a detailed presentation on the level of testing, protocol adopted for testing, availability of personal protective equipment and masks for health professionals, availability of oxygen beds, ICUs, number of surveillance teams and COVID care hospitals, instances of COVID in healthcare workers and system of approval of cause of declaration of death of COVID patients by a committee.

The Inter-Ministerial Central Team (IMCT) also wanted to know about the procedure for identifying and quarantining people, supply of essential commodities, condition of the relief camps and "support required from the Government of India" in this regard.



Wait and watch: The scene at a quarantine centre in Kolkata on Wednesday. ■ RAJEEV BHATT

The team asked the State government to arrange visits to quarantine centres, hot-spots and market places and wanted an opportunity to interact with health care workers on the ground.

Earlier, refuting the claims of the Union Home Ministry, the State government said "it is not a fact" that there was no cooperation.

Doctors seek protective measures for staff

KOLKATA
More than half a dozen doctors' associations in West Bengal have written to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee urging her that the State provide protective measures to front line medical staff and increased testing for COVID-19. "Healthcare workers working relentlessly in different categories should be provided with necessary protective measures as per the ICMR, WHO guidelines," it said. "More testing centres should be opened at least in every region and testing done as per ICMR guidelines," the letter said.

Responding to a letter by Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla, Chief Secretary Rajiva Sinha said in a letter that he had shared up-to-date reports with them. "The teams arrived without any prior consultation, so there was no opportunity to provide logistic help, [and] neither did they ask for any help."

Death toll in Gujarat increases to 103

Total number of cases climbs to 2,407

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
AHMEDABAD

Gujarat's death toll due to COVID-19 infections has climbed to 103, with 13 new deaths reported on Wednesday, while the number of positive cases have jumped to 2,407, with 229 new cases added on the same day.

The State continues to see a higher number of cases and casualties, a trend that began a week ago.

On Wednesday, as many as 30 patients were discharged after full recovery, bringing the number of patients who have recovered to 179 so far. Of 13 deaths recorded, nine were from Ahmedabad, three were from Vadodra and one from Surat.

In Ahmedabad, the total number of cases have climbed to 1,501, and 62 deaths, the highest tally in the State. On Wednesday, besides nine deaths, Ahmedabad also reported 128 new positive cases, continuing



Keeping an eye: Policemen in protective suits patrolling an area in Ahmedabad. ■ PTI

the trend of over 100 cases per day since a week. So far, 86 patients have recovered and have been discharged in the city. In Surat, the total cases have jumped to 415, with 12 deaths and 13 recoveries, while in Vadodra, the total number of cases has reached 208, and ten patients have succumbed to the infection.

Meanwhile, the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation has decided to set up another COVID-19 care centre with a 4,000-bed capacity.

IN BRIEF



4 new cases in Odisha, total mounts to 83

BHUBANESWAR

Four new COVID-19 cases were detected in Odisha, taking the State's total number to 83 on Wednesday as Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik administered an oath for sarpanchs to discharge their duties with a commitment to protect villages from the virus. The number of active cases stood at 50 in the State and the number of recovered patients increased to 32. The State has reported only one death due to COVID-19. Interacting with the sarpanchs, Mr. Patnaik asked them to ensure strict observance of lockdown rules, compulsory use of mask for all, frequent hand washing, social distancing and zero tolerance for spitting in public.

Ministry of Civil Aviation employee tests positive

NEW DELHI

An employee of the Ministry of Civil Aviation has tested positive for COVID-19 and his colleagues have been asked to go into self-isolation. "An employee of the Ministry who had attended office on 15 April 2020 has tested positive for COVID-19 on 21st April. All necessary protocols are being stringently followed on the premises. All colleagues who came in contact are being asked to go into self-isolation as a precaution," the Ministry said on Twitter. The Delhi government was taking appropriate steps to conduct tracing, it stated.

Assam gives three days for inter-State travel

GUWAHATI

The Assam government has announced a three-day window for certain categories of people to travel from one district to another. State Finance Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said people stranded in various parts of the State would be allowed to travel back to their native places from April 25-27. Such movement would be allowed only if permission was taken from the district authority concerned and the traveller possessed an e-pass, he said.

Haryana cancels order for Chinese testing kits

CHANDIGARH

Punjab on Wednesday reported six fresh COVID-19 cases taking the tally to 257 even as the Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar (SBS) district, which reported the State's first virus death, has no more active cases. The Health Department said five new patients were from the Jalandhar district while one from the Kapurthala district. Till April 22, Punjab has seen 16 pandemic-related deaths while 53 patients have so far recovered, it said. No fresh case has been reported in the SBS district

Maharashtra to ramp up fight after Centre's report

State believes cases can be restricted to under 1,00,000

SHARAD VYAS
JYOTI SHELAR
MUMBAI

Taking cognisance of a Central report that has projected a staggering spike in COVID-19 cases in Mumbai, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Wednesday directed officials to ramp up the State's response accordingly.

A day after *The Hindu* reported on a Central report projecting a spike of 6.5 lakh cases in Mumbai by May 15, Mr. Thackeray ordered converting the tertiary care GT Hospital and multi-specialty St. George Hospital into COVID-19 facilities on the lines of Nair Hospital.

In a presentation, senior State health officials said Maharashtra's peak - taken at a doubling rate of 7 as opposed to the Centre's assumption of 3.8 days - will result in 80,000 to 90,000 cases in the financial capital by May 15. The State is not completely discarding the projections made by the Centre but believes numbers could be restricted to under 1,00,000 by stringent measures, said an official present during the meeting at Mayor's Bungalow.

"We are in the process of ramping up facilities at the GT and St. George Hospitals in line with the decision to convert the tertiary care Nair Hospital into a COVID-19 facility. The decision was taken by the Chief Minister," said Principal Secretary Manisha Mhaikar, currently in charge of the State's response to the pandemic. Earlier, a mathematical modelling study carried out by a Deputy Director General (DDG) rank officer from the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare on April



Surveying the scene: Members from the Inter-Ministerial Central Team visiting Dharavi on Wednesday. ■ VIJAY BATE

16, projected COVID-19 cases to touch an estimated count of 42,604 by April 30 and jumping to 6,56,407 cases by May 15 in Mumbai alone. The State has countered the methodology and tools used for the latest projection and gap analysis, and raised the "discrepancies" in the modelling with the visiting Inter-Ministerial Central Teams (IMCT).

'Don't discard figures'

During the meeting at Mayor's Bungalow, Mr. Thackeray urged officials not to discard the Central figures even if they appear to be on a higher side. By substantially increasing contact tracing exercise in slums, the State will be able to achieve a doubling rate of 7 and later to 10, he said. "We are not discarding the Central report completely but are only scaling our response, especially contact tracing, to increase doubling rate to 7 and much higher to 10 by May. This way, the numbers will be controlled," said an official present during the meeting.

The Central projections raised a heated debate among experts who argued

that the report seems to have completely ignored the State's efforts to tackle the virus. Subhash Salunkhe, technical adviser to Maharashtra on pandemic control, said: "The projections look as if the virus has a free hand. The aggressive quarantining activities in Mumbai, the lockdown, social distancing, treatment and recovery of patients and the impact of all these efforts have not been factored in at all," said Dr. Salunkhe, adding that the projections were made when the city's case doubling rate was at 3.8 days while it had now come to nearly 7 days.

A former public health official agreed that predictive mathematical models can be uncertain but questions must be asked how prepared is the State even if 15% of the predicted figures are to come true. "A lot of focus has been given to creating new COVID-19 facilities. It will be sensible if the government takes over private healthcare facilities that already have good infrastructure and a team of doctors who are not working at their full capacity," he said.

Mumbai case load rises to 3,683

431 fresh cases in Maharashtra with 18 more deaths

STAFF REPORTER
PUNE

The number of fresh COVID-19 cases in Maharashtra continued to soar relentlessly, with 431 new cases reported from the State on Wednesday, taking the cumulative tally to 5,649. Eighteen new deaths took the death toll to 269.

According to State health officials, 10 of these deaths were from Mumbai city, while two deaths each were reported from Pune and Aurangabad districts. Kalyan-Dombivli, Solapur, Jalgaon and Malegaon in Nashik recorded a death each. Maharashtra accounts for more than 30% of the country COVID-19 death toll.

Mumbai's death toll now stands at 161, while that of Pune district has risen to 57. While the number of cases in Aurangabad has remained in check thus far, the deaths of a 76-year-old woman and a



Warm welcome: Sandeep Awti, a cab driver, being received after his discharge from Hiranandani Powal hospital. ■ P. SRISTI

60-year-old man in the past 24 hours have sparked alarm among authorities, who have tightened lockdown measures. The district has recorded five deaths so far.

"More than 60% of the deaths reported had high-risk co-morbidities such as diabetes, hypertension, asthma and heart disease," said State Surveillance Officer Pradeep Awte. Alongside the surge in cases, a total of 67 persons were discharged on Wednesday, taking the fi-

Nine new cases takes tally to 189 in Dharavi

MUMBAI

Dharavi reported nine new cases on Wednesday, bringing the total to 189 including 12 deaths. The Centre's team that visited Dharavi on Wednesday has suggested that the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's 1200-bed capacity quarantine facilities in Dharavi are not enough and it should prepare for at least 5,000 beds as numbers peak. A five-member Inter-Ministerial Central Teams (IMCT) is in Mumbai to assess the situation.

those recently recovered were a 92-year-old grandmother and a three-year-old child.

Areas in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (excluding Mumbai city) reported fresh cases with 18 new cases recorded in Thane district, to take its tally to 190, while Navi Mumbai reported seven more to touch 101. Another spurt was witnessed in Nagpur city which reported as many as 21 new cases, taking the district's tally to 100.

Heartening fact

Pune Divisional Commissioner Deepak Mhaikar said as many as 115 patients had recovered and were discharged. A heartening fact, he said, was that among

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TENDER
1. Name of work: PROVIDING SCREED CONCRETE IN VIADUCT FROM ADA TO MACE FOR PREVENTION OF WATER STAGNATION
E Tender ID: 2020_KMRL_353282. 1. Last date of submission: 08.05.2020
2. Name of work: SELECTION OF PROFESSIONAL CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR THE DETAILED STRUCTURAL DESIGN OF THE VIADUCT AND ONE ELEVATED STATION FROM S.N. JUNCTION TO THIRUPUNITHURA OF PHASE 1B OF KOCHI METRO RAIL PROJECT
E Tender ID: 2020_KMRL_353290. 1. Last Date of Submission: 29.05.2020
Tender documents can be downloaded from www.tenders.kerala.gov.in / www.kochimetro.org
Further corrigendum & addendum will be published only on websites

KARNATAKA POWER CORPORATION LIMITED
(BALLARI THERMAL POWER STATION)
CIN: U85110KA1978SS0001919
No. KPCL/2019-20/PS/WORK_ID/NTEND 9863CALL-3 Dated: 22.04.2020
BRIEF TENDER NOTIFICATION (Through e-Procurement Portal)
Compliant bids are invited through e-Tender platform i.e. <https://procure.karnataka.gov.in> from the agencies who meet P-OR, adequate financial resource and experience for the work of Collection, Loading, Transportation, Unloading of Mill Reject, Maintenance of Mill reject stock yard and assistance for allied works of Mill reject Unit - 1, 2 & 3 for a period of One year at BTPS, EMU, Re. 1.67 Lakhs. Tender Processing Fee: As per e-portal. Contract Period: 12 Months. Last Date & Time for Tender queries/clarifications: 25.04.2020 upto 11.00 Hrs. Date & time for Pre-bid meeting: 27.04.2020 @ 11.00 Hrs. Date & time for opening of completed bids through e-portal: 23.04.2020 upto 16.00 Hrs. Date & time for receipt of Technical Bid: 30.04.2020 @ 16.05 Hrs. Date & time for opening of Financial Bid: 02.05.2020 @ 10.00 Hrs. The bid documents will be processed only to those bidders who meet the stipulated qualification requirements. The tender documents may be downloaded from the GoK e-procurement website: <https://procure.karnataka.gov.in> Further details can be obtained from the office of the Executive Engineer (Fuels), BTPS, KPCL, Kudthiri-583 152, Bellary (District). Mobile: +91 94808 49649.

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Regd. Office : First Floor, No.8, Mayor Sathyapathy Road, ESD, Egmore Complex of Food Corporation of India, Chepet, Chennai - 600 031.
Corp. Office : Block-4, Nyalda-01 B3, Gudalore District, Tamil Nadu.
CN No. 13/2020/119566/0003/507, Website: www.nlcindia.com
NOTICE INVITING TENDERS FOR SUPPLIES (e-Tender S.No.1 to 3)
Sl.No. Tender Ref./Scope of Supplies & Qty. Regd.
1. UNIT : M.M. COMPLEX : P/TE/ENQ / 20-21 / 000027 / MM18 (06) dt. 08-04-2020: Procurement of high strength cartridge type explosives 125 mm dia. Qty.: 400000 Kilograms. Due date of opening 08-05-2020
2. P/TE: ENQ / 20-21 / 000028 / MM18 (06) dt. 08-04-2020: Procurement of ordinary Portland cement 43 grade in 50 kg HDPE bags conforming to IS 8112 or IS 269/Latest, Qty.: 3000 Metric Tons. Due date of opening: 11-05-2020
3. 20-21/000053 / MM10 (01) dt. 13-04-2020: (i) HDPE Pipe 110 mm OD conforming to IS specification (4984/1995 and IS 7328) to withstand a working pressure of 6 kg/sq.cm in length as stated in the technical specification annexure with HDPE long neck, stub ends and M.S. slip on flanges, 16 mm thick with epoxy painted both sides and other dimensions as per BS 10, Table-D, with ISI mark on each pipe, Raw material grade PE 83, Wall thickness 7.7 mm to 8.7 mm, Qty.: 6000 Meters. (ii) HDPE Pipe 160 mm OD of designation PE80, PNBG, DN160 conforming to IS 4984/1995/Latest and to withstand a working pressure of 6 kg/sq.cm in length of 12 meter, with HDPE long neck, stub ends conforming to IS:8008(Part 6) : 2003 / Latest and M.S slip on flanges of thickness 16 mm with epoxy painted both sides and other dimensions as per BS 10, Table-D, with ISI mark in each pipe, Raw material grade PE 80, Wall thickness 9.1 to 10.3 mm, Qty.: 5000 Meters. (iii) 160 x 160 x50 mm (ID) HDPE unequal TEE 6kg/sq.cm with HDPE long neck stub ends on all the three sides and M.S Slip on flanges with epoxy painted on three sides as per IS:8360(PART 1) III, Qty.: 200 Numbers. Due date of opening: 11-05-2020
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Punjab's red zone district has no more active cases

State reports six new cases, say officials

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

Punjab on Wednesday reported six fresh COVID-19 cases taking the tally to 257 even as the Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar (SBS) district, which reported the State's first virus death, has no more active cases.

The Health Department said five new patients were from the Jalandhar district while one from the Kapurthala district. Till April 22, Punjab has seen 16 pandemic-related deaths while 53 patients have so far recovered, it said. No fresh case has been reported in the SBS district

since March 26. All the 18 positive patients undergoing treatment have recovered and since been discharged. The first victim in the State, a 70-year-old man and resident of Pathlawa village, had died on March 18. After the 18th patient recovered, Health Minister Balbir Singh Sidhu said all those who have recovered are now a source of inspiration for other affected patients.

He said the teams from Health Department, including the district administration, had worked hard to shift the district from the red zone to the green zone.

TRIMALA TIRUPATI DEVASTHANAMS: TRUPATI CHITTOOR DISTRICT, ANDHRA PRADESH. OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER e-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE					
Adv.No.02/D3/GE/ITD/2020-21					
Sl. No.	LOT No.	Name of the Work	Estimate Amount Rs. in Lakhs & Tms.	Schedule for completion	Down Load End Date & Last Date for Bid Submission
1	2	3	4	5	6
SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER-I					
1	1/SE-I/TTD/2020-21	Facility Management Services for House keeping and Sanitation for Maintenance for Madhavan Rest House (164 Rooms) at Tirupati for the years 2020-2021, 2021-2022 & 2022-23 (Three Years)		Open Tender 36 Months	22-04-2020 5.00 p.m., 07-05-2020 1.00 p.m. & 3.00 p.m.
2	2/SE-I/TTD/2020-21	Facility Management Services for House keeping, Sanitation and maintenance of Sriwanam Multistoreyed Complex, SVRI, SVRI (Main & Annexure) and Archaika Accommodation Dohortary Hall (SVETA), Transit Camp Rest House, Alpani and Information Centre Restigunta Area at Tirupati for a period of 36 Months (2020-2021, 2021-2022 & 2022-2023)		Open Tender 36 Months	22-04-2020 5.00 p.m., 07-05-2020 1.00 p.m. & 3.00 p.m.
3	3/SE-I/TTD/2020-21	Facility Management Services for House keeping, Sanitation and Maintenance for Vishnu Nilayam JMC at Tirupati for the years 2020-2021, 2021-2022 & 2022-2023 (Three Years)		Open Tender 36 Months	22-04-2020 5.00 p.m., 07-05-2020 1.00 p.m. & 3.00 p.m.
4	4/SE-I/TTD/2020-21	Construction of additional floors over existing two hostel blocks with Precast Concrete Technology in SPW College Campus at Tirupati.	2770.00	7 Months	24-04-2020 5.00 p.m., 11-05-2020 1.00 p.m. & 3.00 p.m.
5	5/SE-I/TTD/2020-21	Modifications and improvements to the offices in Floor-1 and 2 in 1TD Administrative Building, Tirupati.	920.00	18 Months	28-04-2020 5.00 p.m., 14-05-2020 1.00 p.m. & 3.00 p.m.
SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER-II					
6	1/SE-II/TTD/2020-21	Operation and Maintenance of Dams, Pumps, Pump Stations, Pumping Lines, Main Filter House (including foundation), Kasavumandampam Filter Plant at Tirumakka, S.V.Poor Home at Tirupati, Kalgudi Pumping Scheme, Alpani & Sivaramiteer footpaths for the period 2020-2022 (2 years)		Open Tender 24 Months	24-04-2020 5.00 p.m., 11-05-2020 1.00 p.m. & 3.00 p.m.

NOTE: For full details log on to the website <https://tenders.apprprocurement.gov.in> or <http://www.apprprocurement.gov.in/>

Rec.No.PR4/13917/Adv.No.01/PRO/2020; Dated:22-04-2020 EXECUTIVE OFFICER

INTERVIEW | SHIVRAJ SINGH CHOUHAN

'I am confident we will win this battle soon and Indore will set the ideal'

'Initially, there were fewer cases in Madhya Pradesh, but the number went up with a rapid increase in the infection around major cities'

NISTULA HEBBAR

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister **Shivraj Singh Chouhan** has had a trial by fire in his current tenure, having been sworn in after much drama and on the eve of the nationwide lockdown that left him without an opportunity to get a large Ministry in place. The situation in the State is also serious with COVID-19 cases soaring.

Indore and Bhopal continue to be huge areas of concern with spiking rates of cases. Why hasn't the situation been under some sort of control till now? Do you think Madhya Pradesh was fatally late in waking up to the challenge due to its political instability all of March?

■ No, we cannot say that. One should try to avoid jumping to conclusions without going into the details. Initially, there were fewer cases found in Madhya Pradesh, primarily in Jabalpur, and after that, a rapid increase in the number of cases around major cities like Indore and Bhopal raised the index. Tablighi Jamaat members of Madhya Pradesh, who attended this event in Delhi, came back and scattered into

many core and prime areas of the State. They are also the reason for this sudden rise as they responded reluctantly and did not come forward willingly and thus indirectly spread it among others.

Indore is the prime commercial centre and densely populated city. It is a place where a big number of people travel abroad for business and commerce. Initially, such people hid their travel histories and somehow came into contact with others and as a result, this infection spread from one to another. For now, we are taking a special care in this regard, special attention is being paid to cases found here. In Indore, the entire staff, including the police and the administration, with the cooperation of public representatives, social workers,

organisations, the media and the public, have been fighting wholeheartedly in this fight against the novel coronavirus. I am confident that we will win this battle soon and Indore will set the ideal for this. I have also ordered effective implementation of the strategy to identify, isolate, test and treat (IITT) in all districts, including Indore. With this strategy, we will conquer the coronavirus soon. The testing rate in Indore is much higher than the rest of the State. 5,120 samples have been taken in Indore, out of which 1,000 have been sent to Delhi for testing. 489 teams are engaged in this work. So far, 3.9 lakh persons have been surveyed in the infected areas. A total of 12-13 lakh persons have been surveyed in the entire city. In the next 7 days, 20-21 lakh persons will be surveyed. I have also given a clear instruction that the fair price ration be sent to all the districts in sufficient quantity and there should be no delay in distribution. If there is no situation of opening a shop, then the ration can be distributed from house to



Our medical system and infrastructure are ready and well prepared and in a better condition than a month and a half before

house. In order to ensure that the vegetables and fruits of farmers are not spoiled, decentralised purchase of their fruits and vegetables can be arranged outside the city in a protective manner. As per the instructions of the Central government, a containment plan is ready, and it is being implemented.

A large number of infected patients are recovering. Till yesterday [Tuesday], 31 infected patients in Bhopal and 71 infected patients in Indore recovered and went home. Similarly, there is not a single

local COVID-19-positive patient in Gwalior and Shivpuri. Reports of 193 samples from Bhopal came negative yesterday. More than 50% of the districts are completely free from the virus. Right from the moment I was sworn in as the Chief Minister, I started monitoring and doing work for preventing the spread of the virus, along with the Health Department and administrative bodies.

What is your plan for ramping up health infrastructure and testing facilities and how soon do you think there will be an exit from the lockdown?

■ Well, our medical system and infrastructure is ready. We are well prepared and in a better condition than a month and a half before. Tests are being conducted in 10 laboratories in the State. There has been an increase in daily checks, now we are doing around 1,800 tests daily. The process to start a few other laboratories is under way. Testing kits are available and are being supplied continuously to all the dis-

tricts. Talking about testing equipment, we have 22,520 RTPCR, 14,200 manual RNA. PPE kits are around 1 lakh, with kits distributed daily to different districts. The availability of N95 masks is around 1.77 lakh, of which more than 1,60,000 have been distributed so far. The availability of hydroxychloroquine tablets is more than 3.3 million. There are 2,776 oxygen cylinders. Over 20,243 isolation beds are available. There are about 783 ICU beds available, with 690 ventilators. We are continuously increasing the facilities.

What is your exit plan. It may seem premature to ask with rate of infection being the way it is, but still?

■ As far as the exit plan is concerned, it is a simple plan - to follow the guidelines of the lockdown and cooperate with each other. Do not leave your houses. I appeal to everyone to follow the lockdown sincerely; it is for your safety. Keep maintaining the rule of social distancing. Stay at home, stay safe. No entry, no exit in the containment

zones. Continuous, State-wide surveys are being conducted. It is a question of life and death. Safety and security of the common man is our top priority. As soon as the situation comes under control, the lockdown will be lifted; things will be back on track soon. We are consistently trying to overcome the hazard and trying to stabilise the situation. I request everyone to have patience; we will soon overcome this pandemic.

With new Ministers, what will be the status of the committee appointed under V.D. Sharma for the management of the crisis?

■ The task force or the committee appointed under V.D. Sharma includes senior and experienced leaders of the State who are very well known to the State and who are eligible to manage the challenges coming out of the situation. They are also here for additional help and suggestions to control the situation at different levels and places and they will be surely supporting the new Minis-

ters and the government with their experience. Many of them are in touch with many social organisations and self-help groups across the State, they are in consistent touch with the government and will be helping us till this fight is over.

You have five Ministers now and you have also notified their portfolios. Are you anticipating any restiveness and resentment among those not accommodated?

■ As you know, the day after I was sworn in as CM, we had the lockdown, and so, in order to manage the situation I have done this small expansion of my Council of Ministers. I will go on for a bigger exercise once the lockdown is eased, and I don't think that this is the time when people will think in this manner. Everyone in the Ministry is a senior member and well experienced to deal with the situation. Portfolio allocation has been done after due consultation. Our prime focus right now is to safeguard the State and get control over the pandemic.

Policemen in virus fight have no insurance

States using CM Relief Fund to compensate victims' families

VIJAYA SINGH
NEW DELHI

In the absence of a specific Central insurance scheme for policemen and paramilitary personnel who may die from COVID-19 infection while on duty, the States are customising policies for the frontline workers.

On March 29, the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare announced the 'Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package: Insurance Scheme for Health Workers Fighting COVID-19'. The package provides an insurance cover of ₹50 lakh to around 22.12 lakh public healthcare providers, including community health workers, who may have to be in direct contact and care of COVID-19 patients and who may be at risk of being impacted by this.

Since the Central package does not include policemen who are working on the frontline, the States are using the Chief Minister's Relief Fund or other budget heads to compensate the families of those who die on



Safety net: Policemen sanitising their hands in a COVID-19 containment zone in New Delhi on Monday. • P11

duty. Punjab said it would pay ₹50 lakh from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund to the family of Assistant Commissioner of Police Anil Kohli (52), who died in a Ludhiana hospital on April 18. The State Cabinet approved an insurance policy in this regard.

Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh have also announced similar relief measures for police personnel.

"They [police] are the first point of contact and on some occasions have also come under attack. Yet they are not covered under the Central scheme," a senior

police officer said.

The paramilitary or the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) personnel who are killed on duty are entitled to ₹60 lakh ex-gratia relief but no specific policy has been announced by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) for COVID-19 related deaths.

On March 14, the MHA issued an order to treat COVID-19 as a "notified disaster" for the purpose of providing assistance under the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF). The SDRF is the primary fund available with the States for responses to notified disasters.

Don't deport foreigners with Tablighi link: Centre

MHA tells States to book them under NDMA, other Acts

S. VIJAY KUMAR
CHENNAI

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has written to all States that foreign nationals who came on a tourist visa and took part in Tablighi Jamaat activities in India should not be deported after the COVID-19 quarantine period.

In a letter to all Chief Sec-

retaries, Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla said punitive action under the National Disaster Management Act, 2005, The Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, Sections 13 and 14 of the Foreigners Act, 1946 and other relevant provisions of the IPC should be taken against them, police sources told *The Hindu* on Wednesday.

About 1,000 foreign nationals from various countries came to India on a tourist visa and took part in the Tablighi Jamaat conference

in the Markaz Mosque, Nizamuddin, Delhi in early March. After the religious congregation, the foreign missionaries visited different States and camped there to preach the religious values of Islam. Many of the delegates along with scores of Indian nationals were linked to the spread of COVID-19 across the country, the sources said.

In Tamil Nadu alone, at least 125 foreign nationals, from countries like Indonesia, Bangladesh and Thai-

land, were reportedly camping in mosques to preach.

111 held in T.N.

At least 111 of them have been arrested and remanded in judicial custody in an isolated Borstal School. Of the 11 Bangladeshis, two tested positive to COVID-19 after their arrest and prison officials moved the whole group to a quarantine facility.

Security agencies and immigration authorities zeroed in on the foreign delegates of Tablighi Jamaat based on

their travel documents. The MHA directed the States to take legal action against all the foreigners and Indian nationals for the offences committed under various provisions of law. The Home Secretary called for a detailed report on the action taken from the States, police sources said.

"Even if bail is granted, the foreigners will not be allowed to be deported. They have to face trial by staying in a special camp..." a senior police official said.

10 lakh claims settled in 15 days: EPFO

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has settled over 10 lakh claims, including 6.06 lakh claims under the special COVID-19 pandemic withdrawal scheme, in 15 working days, the EPFO said in a statement on Wednesday.

An amount of ₹3,600.85 crore had been disbursed in 10.02 lakh claims, of which ₹1,954 crore were for the COVID-19 claims.

Indian test kits must for reliability

Seven manufacturers awaiting approval from the National Institute of Virology

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

For reliable antibody testing kits, India will have to make its own, according to independent epidemiologists and biotechnologists.

A day after the Rajasthan government said that it would stop antibody tests because they were returning inaccurate results, the Indian Council of Medical Research announced that it had advised putting such tests on hold because it was generating widely varying results. The ICMR on Wednesday said it had forwarded a "protocol" for rapid antibody tests to all States, but did not specify the details.

Quick results

Much like home-based pregnancy tests, antibody tests are valuable because they give results quickly and only need a pinprick's worth of blood. However, they can only detect antibodies produced by the immune system in response to the virus and this can take as many as seven to 14 days to manifest. "The initial expectation was that an antibody test would soon be available. But it was the PCR technology that



BACKGROUNDER

came first. That's also due to the fast moving nature of the virus," said Iype Joseph, epidemiologist with the Rajiv Gandhi Centre for Biotechnology, Thiruvananthapuram.

The PCR technology is confirmatory because it identifies the SARS-CoV-2 based on genes, whereas the presence of viruses have usually been detected via antibody kits by the proteins produced by the virus's genes.

An antibody test only tells you whether a person has ever been infected by the virus. These antibodies that are produced are not necessarily specific to SARS-CoV-2 and could even be generated by a variety of other pathogens.

"There are other four other common coronaviruses and antibodies could be generated to that too. So far, nobody has found a protein that is specific to SARS-CoV-2."

Surveillance tool

The ICMR's current recommendation is to test those who show symptoms such as cough, fever and breathlessness and even a sore throat. After quarantining for 14 days, an antibody test is to be done and if positive, the person ought to be tested by RT-PCR.

The ICMR has underlined that tests are a surveillance tool. The utility of the test was evolving and its value was dependent on field conditions. They were not a replacement for RT-PCR tests.

However, with the accuracy widely ranging from 5% to 71%, there are questions on whether they can reliably help indicate the spread of the infection.

All kits need to be validated by the National Institute of Virology, Pune. They test two things: are the kits detecting antibodies at specified intervals after an infection, mirroring when antibodies actually show up

in people with confirmed COVID infections? And do they falsely respond to the presence of other pathogens? It is not clear how tests validated by the NIV began showing widely discordant results for them to be passed by the ICMR. "We need tests that are locally developed and validated," Dr. Joseph said.

"The need of the hour is to have rapidly deployable RT PCR kits. If we can reduce the time taken for analysis, or have a paper-based strip that can detect the virus, it would be more useful," said Asha Kishore, Director, Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology, Thiruvananthapuram. The institute has developed a rapid PCR test that awaits final approval from the ICMR.

Renu Swarup, Secretary, Department of Biotechnology, said that India's challenges with diagnostic kits were temporary. "There are at least seven Indian manufacturers of these kits awaiting approval from the National Institute of Virology and we are hoping to be able to produce at least a million kits by end May."

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STEP COACH

Stress and anxiety rise amid pandemic

Now is the time to put suicide prevention strategies in place for the vulnerable, say psychiatrists

JAGRITI CHANDRA
NEW DELHI

"Every morning I wake up with a panic attack. I sweat profusely even when my air conditioner is on full blast because I am worried how my day at work will be. While there have been no job cuts in my office, the environment has suddenly become very hostile. It is as if the organisation is forcing us to resign," says a communication professional in her thirties.

With her old parents dependent on her, Rithika can't afford to lose her job especially after a medical emergency wiped out all her savings.

Psychiatrists say there is a universal presence of anxiety due to COVID-19, but certain categories of people are highly vulnerable. The first category involves those dealing with poverty and unemployment and the second category includes those with psycho-social issues such as domestic violence, sexual abuse, etc. There is also a small minority of people



Listening ear: Empathy is the key ingredient when helping those suffering from mental health issues. — R. RAJENDRAN

who have COVID-19 infection, or have a family member who has tested positive, who have reported heightened anxiety. Many frontline workers, such as ASHA workers, are also extremely susceptible to stress.

Tippling point

"If any of these sets of people had a prior illness, then their condition is likely to worsen because of stress, or due to medicines and psychiatrists being unavailable," cautions Achal Bhagat, senior consultant psychiatrist and psy-

chotherapist. He says quite often caregivers of those with mental illnesses also burn out as they try to cope with multiple responsibilities such as working from home, managing domestic chores, the threat of a job loss, etc.

The senior doctor recommends that policymakers ensure that relief services are delivered with empathy. "Whoever is providing help to people must ensure that people's dignity is not challenged. If they get humiliated through this process of seek-

ing help, this will have a long term impact. There are fissures in our society on religious lines as well as caste and gender, and if these widen there will be a long-term impact on us as a community."

Multi-pronged approach
Mental health issues will not be solved merely by counselling, but through a multi-dimensional approach that includes financial support. This will help solve the real problems facing the people today, the doctor says.

The real problems are hunger, shelter and clothing, explains Soumitra Pathare, consultant psychiatrist and Director of Centre for Mental Health Law and Policy at ILS Law College in Pune. He also emphasises on devising a policy without any delay, including one to prevent suicides.

"We don't know whether pandemics increase suicides, but for the economic crisis that will follow you get increase in suicide rates. That is something we are go-

ing to see definitely. Now is the time to put suicide prevention strategies in place."

A study conducted by Oxford University researcher Aaron Reeves, and published in *The Lancet* in 2012, estimated that the U.S. had suffered 4,750 "excess suicide deaths" after the recession hit in 2008. Some studies have found that suicides are four times higher among men as they feel "greater pressure and shame" due to financial problems. But the majority of suicides were found to be among those who already suffered from depression.

Experts warn that the relationship between the COVID-19 and mental health problems are "bi-directional": such illnesses are not merely consequences of the pandemic but an inability to deal with them can lead to the spread of COVID-19 infection.

(Helpline for suicide prevention: Sanjivini, Society for Mental Health, 011-40769002, Monday-Saturday, 10 a.m. - 7.30 p.m.)



Labour lost: Litchi farmers anticipate huge losses due to the ongoing lockdown as the supply chain will be disrupted during the peak season. — SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Lockdown leaves Bihar's litchi growers in the lurch

No buyers for the crop with just weeks left for peak season

AMARNATH TEWARY
PATNA

The prolonged lockdown to contain the COVID-19 pandemic has put Bihar's more than 45,000 litchi farmers in a bind as they stare at imminent losses amounting to almost ₹1,000 crore this year. Bihar, especially Muzaffarpur district, accounts for almost 40% of the total litchi production in the country.

"Last year our litchi business was severely hit by rumours that its consumption leads to encephalitis," litchi farmer Bhola Nath Jha told *The Hindu* over telephone. "And this year, the prolonged lockdown is threatening huge losses for us... we appeal to the government to look at our problem immediately," he added. Mr. Jha owns several large litchi orchards with 600 trees in north Bihar's Muzaffarpur district. He estimates that the losses to the State's litchi farmers this year would likely amount to not less than ₹1,000 crore. Litchi is grown on more than 32,000 hectares of land in the State

with annual production totalling to about 0.30 million metric tonnes.

Normally, by this time of the year, the litchi traders, middlemen and agents from major cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Ludhiana, Uttar Pradesh, Pune, Bengaluru and Nepal would have come to Muzaffarpur ahead of the plucking season to tie up produce from litchi orchards with local farmers while paying money in advance. "But, due to the lockdown no one has come yet and our fruits are about to ripen in the next 20-25 days," said Bachha Singh, president of the Bihar Litchi Growers Association.

'Perishes quickly'

"The problem is litchi is a perishable fruit with a shelf life of two or three days, and if it doesn't get buyers on time all will be lost... Ever year, we've been sending approximately 1,500 tonnes to Delhi and 1,000 tonnes to Mumbai from Muzaffarpur but due to the lockdown both these cities are badly af-

ected and none of those traders have contacted us yet," Mr. Singh said. The peak litchi season is between the third week of May and the second week of June.

Alok Kumar Kedia, a litchi exporter from Muzaffarpur, said his plant usually processes 10,000-12,000 tonnes of the fruit annually and exports it to countries like Germany, England, France, Canada and the Netherlands but that this year "due to lockdown and slowdown of the market our sales have dipped about 30%".

And the marginal farmers of litchi are an even more worried lot. "The big farmers can somehow survive the lockdown, but for us it will be a hard hit," said Surendra Singh, a farmer with an orchard in the Bochaha block. "We cannot sell the fruit on carts," he added. "The other problem for the growers is the lack of availability of wooden boxes in which the fruit is packed for export." "The sawmills are all closed," rued Mr. Jha.

Norm for tests for pregnant women

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Pregnant women residing in clusters/containment areas or in large migration gatherings/evacuee centres in hotspot districts and presenting in labour or likely to deliver in five days should be tested even if asymptomatic.

Releasing a new guideline, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) noted that asymptomatic pregnant women should be tested in the health facilities where they were expected to deliver and all arrangements should be made to collect and transfer samples to the testing facilities. Women should not be referred for lack of testing facility, ICMR said.

No decision on Amarnath Yatra yet, says shrine board

"The situation is dynamic and will be reviewed"

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR

The Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board (SASB) on Wednesday said it had as yet not decided whether to hold the upcoming Amarnath Yatra or not due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A SASB spokesperson said the Board members on Wednesday expressed apprehensions over conducting the annual Yatra this year.

"The situation being dynamic, an appropriate decision can be taken on organising the Yatra on reviewing the situation in the coming future," said the spokesperson.



Long trek: In this July 2019 photo, pilgrims taking a mountain trail on their journey to the cave shrine. — NISAR AHMAD

The Yatra was discussed in a meeting chaired by Jammu & Kashmir Lieutenant-Governor Girish Chandra Murmu, also Chairman of the Board, at the Raj Bha-

van. The Yatra is scheduled from June 23 till August 3. Last year, the Centre cancelled the Yatra midway due to revocation of J&K's special status in August.

1,300 pigs die of swine fever in Assam

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

More than 1,300 pigs have died across five districts of eastern Assam of classical swine fever at a time when pig farmers have been hit by the lockdown to curb the spread of COVID-19.

Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Minister Atul Bora said five-member teams of veterinary doctors have been asked to study the causes of the disease that killed 1,374 pigs in less than a week and suggest remedies.

Dhireswar Kalita, principal scientist at the Assam Agriculture University, said the pigs died of classical swine fever and not of swine flu or H1N1 as many in the State feared.

Poor prices for rabi crops at markets bode ill for farmers

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Arrivals of wheat, mustard and other major rabi crops at markets during the first two weeks of April were more than 90% lower than during the corresponding period last year, according to an analysis by research and ratings agency CRISIL.

However, increase in the prices have not been very high. Fruit farmers have been hit the hardest with prices down 9%, despite 85% fall in arrivals.

The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the rabi or winter season harvest has been brutal, despite government efforts to facilitate agricultural activities. The CRISIL research showed that only one lakh tonnes of major rabi crops - wheat,



Fruit producers are among the worst hit.

CRISIL. The main wheat producing areas of Punjab and Haryana had not yet begun harvesting during this period.

Mandi prices for these crops were about 29% higher than the previous year. "Going forward, bumper crop output, lower industrial demand and limited exports [will] exert downward pressure on wheat prices," said the analysis.

The arrivals of pulses and oilseeds were also 93% lower than the previous year, while prices were 28% higher. The situation is slightly better with regard to winter paddy and coarse grains with a 68% drop in arrivals. However, prices are also down about 2%, due to a drop in demand for coarse grains.

Maruti's Manesar plant gets green light for operations

However, a decision to resume production is yet to be taken, says company spokesperson

ASHOK KUMAR
GURUGRAM

Exactly a month after Maruti Suzuki India Ltd. shut down production and office operations across Haryana on March 22, its Manesar plant has been given permission to resume operations in a single shift with restricted number of staff and vehicles.

The company's spokesperson, however, said the decision to resume production had not been taken yet.

The certificate to resume operations said the "authorised strength" of the company during the lockdown period would be 4,696 persons and 50 vehicles and it could run a single shift. However, it later said the application was recommended for permission to operate for 600 employees.

Additional Chief Secretary V.S. Kundu told *The Hindu* that the company could resume operations after they

put in place measures for social distancing and safe management of the workers. He said it depended on the company as to how long they took to prepare their premises for it.

The company spokesperson said no decision was taken on the resumption of production because the Gurugram and Manesar plants were interlinked and the permission was not granted for the former. The company

could also not function in isolation without its vendors.

There was confusion over the number of staff members allowed as well, since different numbers were quoted, and "our team was in talks with the government on this and other related issues," he said.

In a press statement on March 22, the company announced the shutting down of its all private and corporate establishments till further

orders. Manesar Industries Welfare Association vice-president Manmohan Gaiind welcomed the grant of permission to Maruti Suzuki, but added that the administration was slow in clearing applications by the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises seeking to resume operations.

He said around 500 applications were pending with the administration and they should be disposed of fast.

THE CROSSWORD+ 12917 (set by Gussalufz)

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

SCAN TO PLAY

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9							
10							
11							
12							
13							
14							
15							
16							
17							
18							
19							
20							
21							
22							
23							
24							
25							
26							
27							
28							
29							
30							

ACROSS

- Commercial retreat swept back dirt to end matter (8)
- In abundance in Senegal or Egypt? (6)
- Mildew nearly spoiled mother's jam? (7)
- Fruits and leaves may be placed underneath this entree to promote selection? (7)
- Spirit of the ones cycling? (5)
- Dispute totals involving online seconds (8)

DOWN

- Turned to invest in dead organization (9)
- Reverend's request to honour a Star Wars star creature? (7)
- Dummy's useless without my blank spades king unblocking, for starters (9)
- Last piece of pashka confiscated by waving gun? Yes, in Russia - some country! (6)
- Chance, in the end, leads to rare triumph, after gangster gets warning (5)
- To a male cooking breakfast: ... (7)
- See, Carwardine, pancakes + syrup = yummy, ultimately! (4)
- Choose to cycle while wearing a formal accessory? Go quietly! (6)
- Mail can be sorted for uneven distribution (9)
- Under anaesthesia - injured lens in eye over the weekend (9)
- Drop outlined using pen that is thin (6)
- She's fainted as well? Bet - is one of those wild Beatles fans? (7)
- Turning feet up, man shows he has lost a toe, unfortunately (7)
- Hopeless revolutionary protest after act (6)
- Woman, perhaps getting imp. limits included in dream platform (5)
- Score that my bad cricket regularly produces? (4)

SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

Solution to puzzle 12916

K	A	Z	A	K	H	S	T	R	A	T	E	S	V
S	D	I	H	H	I	H	I						
B	A	L	L	H	O	E	A	R	W	A	X		
P	H	I	L	O	F	O	R	A	N	E			
B	A	T	H	L	E	O	F	W	I	T	S		
F	I	S	D	R	I	S							
F	O	O	T	E	X	I	T	P	O	L	L		
R	U	A	N	C	R	A	D						
R	E	N	M	I	N	G	I	E	T	T			
S	T	N	B	G	H								
D	R	E	S	T	I	N	G	O	W	N			
C	H	A	N	C	R	A	D						
A	U	B	A	S	E	R	A	K	I	N	G	I	
N	N	R	M	I	C	G							
E	P	I	T	I	O	N	S	N	A	I	S	A	

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

FAITH

Dangers of desires

Everyone has desires, and desires can lead to misery. The story of Yayati shows us that even the old have inappropriate desires, said Kidambi Narayanan in a discourse. Yayati was worried that he was ageing. Ageing is a natural process and a right-thinking person would not worry over something like this. But Yayati was concerned about his age. He wanted to enjoy the pleasures of youth. So, he asked his sons to exchange their youth with his (Yayati's) old age. One after the other, his sons refused to heed him.

But one of his sons, called Puru, was ready to do as his father wanted. So Puru exchanged his youth for Yayati's old age. Eventually, Yayati realised how wrong it was to have hankered after the enjoyments of the senses. He sent for Puru and told him that he regretted what he had done. He said that desire was like a fire. If you pour ghee into a fire, it burns more brightly. Likewise, you may think that once you have fulfilled a desire, then you will experience a sense of satisfaction. But desires do not operate like that. Once a desire is fulfilled, you want something else. So, the fire of desire is kept alive always.

Even if we have vairagya, if we are in the company of the those who are constantly seeking something, then we too are affected by their behaviour, and we are tempted to give up our vairagya. A person who does not get what he wants, becomes envious, is filled with anger, and may even commit unpardonable acts of sin. It would help if we could consult someone when we want something. Wise advice helps a lot. But even then, whether we listen to such advice is up to us. Dhritarashtra asked Vidura for advice, but he did not follow the advice. He was so fond of his son Duryodhana, that he could not be reasonable.

India is positioned as the world's top recipient of remittances with its diaspora sending USD 79 billion back home in 2018. The remittances in 2018 grew by over 14 percent in India.

India managed to retain its top spot in remittances by registering a significant flow of remittances from USD 62.7 billion in 2016 to USD 65.3 billion 2017 and to USD 79 billion in 2018, a significant growth over the last three years.

Natural disasters like Kerala floods likely boosted the financial help that migrants sent to their families.

Global findings:

The remittances to low-and middle-income countries reached a record high of USD 529 billion in 2018, an increase of 9.6 percent from USD 483 billion in 2017.

Global remittances, including flows to high-income countries, reached USD 689 billion in 2018, up from USD 633 billion in 2017. The overall increase in remittances regionally was driven by a stronger economy and employment situation in the United States and outward flows from few Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and the Russian Federation.

COVID-19

Tuesday that he would stop the issuing of green cards – permanent residency permits – for 60 days, but would exempt temporary workers such as seasonal farm labourers.

"It will help put unemployed Americans first in line for jobs as America reopens," he said on Tuesday. "It would be wrong and unjust for Americans to be replaced with immigrant labour from abroad."

About 22 million Americans have lost their jobs since the outbreak forced a global shutdown.

The U.S. is the world's hardest-hit country, and health care infrastructure in hot spots such as New York has struggled to cope.

'Divert attention'

The executive order on immigration will likely spark court action to reverse it, and has raised hackles among his Democratic opponents.

Texas lawmaker Joaquin Castro slammed what he called "an attempt to divert

Pushed back: Mexican immigrants in Ciudad Juarez on Tuesday after they were deported from the U.S. • REUTERS

attention away from Mr. Trump's failure to stop the spread of the coronavirus and save lives."

The Supreme Court has in recent months offered several significant victories to the Trump administration on immigration.

A month ago, the court allowed the federal government to maintain a policy that will send more than 60,000 asylum seekers back to Mexico.

Mr. Trump added in his tweet on Tuesday that "even without this order, our Southern Border, aided substantially by the 170 miles of new Border Wall & 27,000 Mexican soldiers, is very tight".

Mr. Trump's administration is keen to get America back to work and has said there are enough coronavirus tests for each State to move to "phase one" of a gradual reopening, ending some stay-at-home restrictions. But several State governors have complained of a lack of testing capacity and a fear of sparking a fresh surge in infections.

Second wave in U.S. may be worse, says CDC chief

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE WASHINGTON
A second wave of the novel coronavirus in the U.S. could be even more destructive because it will likely collide with the beginning of flu season, one of the country's top health officials said on Tuesday.

Robert Redfield, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), called on Americans to use the coming months to prepare – and get their flu shots.

"There's a possibility that the assault of the virus on our nation next winter will actually be even more difficult than the one we just went through," he was quoted as saying in an interview with *The Washington Post* published late Tuesday.

"We're going to have the flu epidemic and the coronavirus epidemic at the

same time," he said.

The U.S. has recorded at least 8,26,250 confirmed cases of COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic, according to a tally from Johns Hopkins University, with 45,150 deaths – the most reported of any country.

Flu season

Mr. Redfield said the virus arrived in the U.S. just as regular flu season – which itself can strain healthcare systems – was waning.

If the two diseases had peaked at the same time, he told *The Post*, "it could have been really, really, really difficult" for health systems to cope.

Getting a flu shot ahead of next flu season, he said, "may allow there to be a hospital bed available for your mother or grandmother that may get coronavirus".

vaccine against COVID-19 in Germany," said the regulatory body PEI. The trial, only the fourth to have been authorised, was a "significant step" in making a vaccine available, the institute added.

Missouri sues Chinese leaders

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE WASHINGTON

The U.S. State of Missouri has sued China's leadership over the coronavirus, prompting an angry rebuke from Beijing Wednesday over the "absurd" claim. Missouri is seeking damages over what it described as deliberate deception and insufficient action to stop the pandemic. The state lawsuit comes amid calls in Congress to punish China. Missouri – led by the Republican Party – filed a lawsuit in a federal court seeking in damages and an injunction on continuing actions by China that are alleged to include hoarding of protective equipment.

tweeted that he would "suspend immigration" to protect American jobs. On Tuesday, he said in a press briefing that the executive order, which is still being written, would suspend issuing new green cards for 60 days, but would spare guest worker programmes. *The New York Times* reported that Mr. Trump had considered stopping new immigrant visas, but backed off in the face of protests from businesses.

Now, the order would not impact immigrants already living in the U.S. or those who come on temporary visas for work or travel, including H-1B visa holders and temporary farm workers. American citizens will still be able to bring their spouses and children to the U.S., but the relatives of the current green card holders or those who want to apply for green cards based on a job offer would be blocked, according to administration officials. Mr. Trump has said that after 60 days, the policy will be evaluated "based on economic conditions" in the country, which he would personally assess. Between October 2018 and October

Rationale behind ban

About 22 million Americans lost jobs over the past month as the pandemic has devastated the economy. "By pausing immigration, we will help put unemployed Americans first in line for jobs as America reopens. So important," said the President, explaining the rationale behind his decision.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Administration officials painted the move as a healthcare emergency step. National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien said on Tuesday, before Mr. Trump's briefing, that the President's decision was to protect the American people's health.

Political calculations

The administration has already restricted immigration to the U.S. in the wake of the pandemic. It has barred travel to the U.S. from China and much of Europe and sealed off the land borders with Canada and Mexico for non-essential travel. In March, the State Department suspended visa

President is committed to crack down on both legal and illegal immigration, a hot issue among the conservative and right-wing voters.

It also gels with Mr. Trump's strategy of building counternarratives to the mounting criticisms of his administration's handling of the virus crisis. The U.S. has the most number of confirmed infections – 8,26,250 cases so far and rising. The country has also seen at least 45,150 deaths.

Mr. Trump faces criticism for failing in moving fast in containing the outbreak in the early days and in mobilising resources to fight its spread. But he has rebuffed such criticism and blamed China and WHO for the crisis. He first called the virus "Chinese virus" and then suspended funding for the WHO. He attacked the "stay-at-home" orders issued by State Governors and even endorsed protests organised by his supporters to end the restrictions in States.

Now, by suspending immigration, he's back to his favourite agenda in an election year in the midst of the severest economic crisis in decades.

China tightens restrictions in Harbin as cases spiral

The northeastern city has air links with Russia

REUTERS BEIJING

A northeastern city of 10 million people, grappling with what is now China's biggest COVID-19 outbreak, further restricted inbound traffic on Wednesday to contain the spread of the highly contagious disease.

Harbin, the provincial capital of Heilongjiang and its biggest city, has banned entry to residential zones by non-locals and vehicles registered elsewhere, state media said. It had already ordered isolation for those arriving from outside China or key epidemic areas.

Heilongjiang has been in the forefront of China's latest efforts to identify infected citizens arriving from Russia, with which it shares a border, to curb the spread of the virus. "All confirmed cases, suspected cases, close contacts of asymptomatic people, and close contacts



On high alert: A checkpoint in the border city of Suifenhe, in China's northeastern Heilongjiang province. • AFP

of close contacts should be quarantined and tested," state media cited the city government as saying.

Harbin said this month it was ordering 28 days of quarantine for all arrivals from abroad, with two nucleic acid tests and an antibody test for each. It also set 14-day lockdowns for residence-

es where confirmed and asymptomatic cases are found. Harbin, which has air links with Russia, reported seven new confirmed cases on Tuesday, taking its local infections to 52.

By Tuesday, Heilongjiang reported 537 local confirmed cases, including 470 discharged from hospital.

Global remittances will see a sharp fall: WB

In India, remittances for 2020 are likely to fall by 23% to \$64 billion, it says

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN CHENNAI

Global remittances are projected to experience their sharpest decline in recent times – 20% – owing to migrants losing jobs and wages because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Bank Group said in a report released on Wednesday.

The pandemic and declining oil prices are likely to reduce remittances from the U.S., the U.K., and EU countries to South Asia, resulting in a projected fall of 22% in remittances to \$109 billion. This is in stark contrast to 2019 when they grew by 6.1%.

At risk

In India, remittances for 2020 are projected to fall by 23% to \$64 billion. They grew 5.5% in the previous year to \$83 billion, the report, "COVID-19 Crisis Through a Migration Lens", said.

Remittances are crucial in low and middle income



Grim projection: COVID-19 and declining oil prices are likely to reduce remittances to South Asia. • GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

countries, financing household and family expenses – such as higher education. As studies have shown that higher remittances improve nutritional outcomes by increasing investments in higher education, a fall in these remittances puts these outcomes at risk, warned the Bank.

This is especially true at a time when households were tackling food shortages and

financing livelihood needs. "Remittances are a vital source of income for developing countries. The ongoing economic recession caused by COVID-19 is taking a severe toll on the ability to send money home and makes it all the more vital that we shorten the time to recovery for advanced economies," World Bank Group President David Malpass said in a statement.

Chinese media target West for its handling of virus crisis

Official news outlets used words like 'purgatory' and 'apocalypse' to describe the tragic hospital scenes in Italy and Spain

LI YUAN

Trevor Noah, the host of *The Daily Show*, has won praise on the Chinese Internet for his searing criticism of the Trump administration's mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic. So has Jerry Kowal, an American who makes Chinese-language videos chronicling the dire situation in New York.

China's response to the virus has its own sharp-eyed critics at home, and they have found a vastly different reception. One resident of the virus-struck city of Wuhan, who writes under the name Fang Fang, documented despair, misery and everyday life in an online diary and has endured withering attacks on social media.

The pandemic unfolded

dramatically differently in China from the way it has in the rest of the world – at least, if one believes state-run Chinese media. Chinese news outlets used words like "purgatory" and "apocalypse" to describe the tragic hospital scenes in Italy and Spain. They have run photos of British and American medical workers wearing garbage bags as protective gear.

A lot of the same miseries happened in China, but those reports were called "rumours" and censored.

For the Communist Party, keeping up a positive image for the Chinese public has long been an important part of maintaining its legitimacy. That facade was broken during the outbreak in late January and February, as dying



A battle of perceptions: When the U.S. and other countries bungled in their responses to the COVID-19 outbreak, China's media saw an opportunity. • GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

patients flooded hospitals and medical workers begged for protective gear on social media.

Some people started asking why the government suppressed information early on

and who should be held accountable.

The death of Li Wenliang, the whistleblowing doctor in Wuhan, on February 6 galvanised many Chinese people into demanding freedom

of speech. Online sentiment became much more sceptical, and many young people openly challenged the party's message.

Then the U.S. and other countries bungled their own responses, and China's propaganda machine saw an opportunity.

Free flow of news

Using the West's transparency and free flow of information, state media outlets chronicled how badly others have managed the crisis. Their message: Those countries should copy China's model. For good measure, the propaganda machine revved up its attacks on anybody who dared to question the government's handling of the pandemic.

For many people in China,

Military satellite launched, claims Iran

This comes after threat from U.S.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE TEHRAN

Iran said it put its first military satellite into orbit Wednesday, making it an emerging "world power", as U.S. President Donald Trump issued a new threat. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps broke the news of what it said was its own satellite launch, hailing it as a milestone for the country's space programme.

"Today, we are looking at the Earth from the sky, and it is the beginning of the formation of a world power," the Guards' commander Hossein Salami said, quoted by Fars news agency.

U.S. President Donald Trump took to Twitter on Wednesday to say he had

"instructed the United States Navy to shoot down and destroy any and all Iranian gunboats if they harass our ships at sea".

Sepahnews, the Revolutionary Guards' website, said the satellite dubbed the Nour – meaning "light" in Persian – had been launched from the Markazi desert, a vast expanse in Iran's central plateau. The satellite "orbited the Earth at 425 kilometres" above sea level, said Sepahnews.

Iranian state television aired footage of a rocket blasting off into sky. The rocket bore the name Qassed, meaning "messenger", in what appears to be the first time Iran has used a launcher of this type.

ELSEWHERE



North Korean media silent on Kim's health

SEOUL
North Korean state media on Wednesday made no mention of leader Kim Jong-un's health or whereabouts, a day after intense international speculation over his health was sparked by media reports he was gravely ill after a cardiovascular procedure. "I just hope he's doing fine," U.S. President Donald Trump said on Tuesday. • REUTERS

Taiwan leader apologises for infections on ship

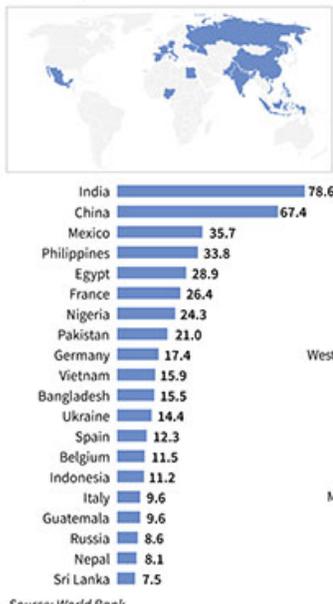
TAIPEI
Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen apologised Wednesday for "major shortcomings" within the military after a cluster of COVID-19 infections emerged on a Navy vessel that returned from a mission to Palau. So far 28 people on board the frigate *Panshi* have tested positive. • AFP

World of remittances

Total amount sent to low-middle income countries



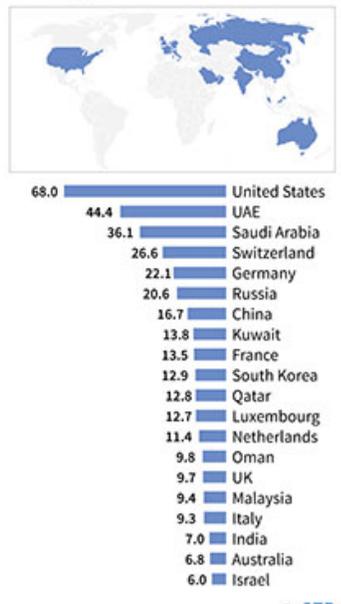
Received in Top 20, by total amount US\$ billion, 2018



Received in Top 20, by percent of GDP 2018



Sent from Top 20, by total amount US\$ billion, 2017



Complaints galore: SEBI received representations that current pricing guidelines are onerous for investors. ■ REUTERS

Fund-raising to get easier for stressed firms

Preferential allotment rules relaxed

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI
Markets regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has made it easier for listed, stricken companies to raise money from potential investors. SEBI has relaxed the pricing norms for preferential allotment by such companies while also exempting investors in such issuances from making open offers if they acquire a substantial stake in the listed entity. "It has been represented that the pricing guidelines are too onerous for any financial investor to consider investments in a stressed company," stated the SEBI discussion paper. The regulator has proposed that preferential allotment can be done at a price that is not less than the average of the weekly high and low of the volume weighted average prices of the shares during the two weeks preceding the relevant date.

Erosion in share value
Typically, a preferential allotment is priced on the preceding 26 weeks share price movement which is practically difficult for stressed companies since the shares see massive erosion in their value. Further, the regulator has proposed that if an investor had acquired more than 25% in the company by way of preferential allotment, he will be exempted from making an open offer for further 26% shares. However, as a safeguard, SEBI has proposed that the allotment can only be made to entities that are not part of the promoter group and the resolutions related to the allotment and the exemption from making an open offer will have to be approved by a majority of minority shareholders.

Lock-in period
Further, the shares allotted will have a three-year lock-in period. Meanwhile, for a company to qualify as a stressed entity, it should comply with at least two of the three criteria, namely default on its payment obligations for two consecutive quarters, credit rating of listed securities downgraded to D and existence of inter-creditor agreement in terms of Reserve Bank of India (Prudential Framework for Resolution of Stressed Assets) Directions 2019 dated June 7, 2019.

Responsible pricing
"The price of SS 99 is ₹30 a piece, excluding the transportation and GST costs. Our chairperson wanted socially-responsible pricing," he added. In the case of PPEs, Loyal has worked with its in-house and IIT Delhi researchers, doctors at AIIMS and the World University of Design, New Delhi. "We have supplied seven lakh pieces of masks in the last one month and nearly 4,000 pieces of PPEs in the last one week," A. Velliangiri chief executive officer of the company added.

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turing activity in non-COVID-19 zones, stating without retail consumption, manufacturing will have little meaning. Committing to adhere to the highest safety standards in terms of social distancing and hygiene, the association has pleaded for a gradual opening up of retail units to

pay salaries, working capital loans of three months of sales at a very low rate of interest and a moratorium of six to nine months for repayment of loans which will help in achieving normalcy in nine to 12 months. They said all earlier loans should get a similar moratorium and GST across the

closed. If retail does not open, then manufacturing will be [hit]. Malls, shops and multiplexes must open," said B.S. Nagesh, chairman, RAI. He said RAI has come out with safety standards to be implemented across all retail units to provide safe shopping experience to customers.

most Asian markets. The 30-share Sensex gained 742.84 points, or 2.42%, to close at 31,379.55. Index heavyweight Reliance Industries was the biggest contributor to the day's gains, surging 10.30% as Facebook announced it will pick up almost 10% stake in Reliance Jio.

however, selling pressure was also visible as 1,135 stocks declined against 1,254 that gained. The Sensex pack comprised 16 gainers with stocks such as Nestle India, IndusInd Bank, Maruti Suzuki, Hindustan Unilever and Hero Motocorp gaining between 3% and 4% each.

Rupee recovers after hitting fresh lows

Weak dollar, rising indices aid currency

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI
The rupee hit a fresh low on Wednesday but recovered later, supported by a rise in domestic equities and some weakness in the dollar. The rupee opened weaker at 76.90 a dollar compared with the previous close of 76.83 and then touched an all-time low of 76.92. The previous all-time low was reached earlier this month when the rupee touched 76.87 to a dollar. The rupee finally closed the day at 76.68, up 15 paise from the previous close. The Sensex closed up 742.84 points, or 2.42%, higher, compared with the previous close. Currency dealers said there would be pressure on the rupee going forward as the domestic unit should breach the 77-a-

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI
"If 77 level is taken out, then rupee looks to quickly resume a downhill move towards 77.5. SUGANDHA SACHDEVA Analyst, Religare Broking

dollar mark in the near term. "Despite some gains in today's session, the sentiment still remains skewed on the downside as the global economy is reeling under the impact of COVID-19 and there is no end in sight to this pandemic. "In the case of level of 77 is taken out, then rupee looks to quickly resume a downhill move towards the 77.50 mark. On the flip side, the zone of 75.30-75.20 will act as a strong hurdle for the domestic currency," said Sugandha Sachdeva, analyst, Religare Broking.

inner layer has anti-bacterial-treated fabric, outer layer gets water-repellant treatment and the middle layer is treated with silicon. For SS 96, the middle layer is replaced with non-woven, five-ply melt-blown composite for higher bacterial filtration efficiency. The SS 99 mask has a middle layer that is PU barrier. It provides 99% efficiency. These are all surgical mask types, he said. "We plan to focus on the SS 96 and SS 99 masks and later, look at export opportunities, too," he said. Since chairperson Valli Ramaswamy and director Vishala Ramaswamy want to come out with reusable N95-equivalent masks, the company is developing such products too. Loyal sources the basic fabric from Nashik and the PU from Taiwan and these are

outsourced for lamination. It has a capacity to produce 75,000 masks and 1,000 PPEs a day and is in the process of ramping up capacity to produce two lakh masks and 5,000 PPEs a day.

Responsible pricing
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Venkat was all style, grace and ruthlessness

The complete cricketing personality turned 75 in a riveting journey that saw him donning varied roles with panache

TRIBUTE

S. DINAKAR
CHENNAI

He is picture perfect with his bowling action when you scan through old photographs. His long mane flowing back, him classically side-on with the pivot and the hip-drive, and the ball, with serious revs, leaving his supple fingers in a manner that is timeless.

Srinivas Venkatraghavan was an amalgam of style and grace, impeccable but also ruthless on the field.

Venkat turned 75 on Tuesday and it marked an important landmark in a riveting journey that saw him donning different roles with panache and sincerity.

Nine roles

"I thank the Lord for the opportunities he gave me and I was fortunate to have nine different roles in my career, and I enjoyed each one of them equally," said the off-spinning great in a conversation with *The Hindu*.

A member of the legendary Indian spin quartet that peaked in the 70s, Venkat al-

so captained India in a Test series in England and at two World Cups. He was, among others, an administrator, selector, manager, coach, match-referee, a part of a bio-mechanical panel, and a famous international umpire.

"I am the only one to captain one's country at Lord's and also umpire at the Mecca of cricket. I am immensely proud of that," he said.

Venkat looked back with affection and happiness at his former spin partners, Erapalli Prasanna, Bishan Bedi, and Bhagwat Chandrasekhar.

Great bonding

"Exchanging ideas with them was wonderful. When one of us had an off-day, the other would step up. We had great bonding."

Venkat, who spun the ball sharply, was both parsimonious and attacking. There was this bite and bounce for him off the surface because of his height, high-arm action and work on the ball.

Venkat played a major role – he scalped 22, choking the run-flow and making inroads



S. Venkatraghavan.
• FILE PHOTO: K. PICHUMANI

"I am the only one to captain one's country at Lord's and also umpire at the Mecca of cricket. I am immensely proud of that"

– in India's sensational maiden Test series triumph in the West Indies over Garry Sobers' formidable side in 1971.

Then, Venkat performed a crucial role as a foil for an inspired Chandrasekhar as India ambushed England in England for its first Test series win in the Old Blighty. Venkat gave skipper Ajit Wade-

kar control from one end, and also captured 13 wickets.

Changed dynamics

Venkat, though, is hesitant to compare eras. "There are some fine young spinners now. The dynamics of the game has changed."

He said, "For instance, I have seen Sunil Gavaskar face some menacing West Indian fast bowlers at their peak on the quick Caribbean pitches. And when Gavaskar took on the Aussies at Perth, the pitch was real fast, not like now." He added, "Now, you cannot hold that against Sachin, because he did not get to face those bowlers on those wickets."

Similarly, Venkat wonders what Don Bradman might have accomplished had he played on covered pitches.

Quest for perfection

Venkat's was a quest for perfection – he was outstanding at gully – in the various roles he took up. "I did not reach perfection all the time, but I tried," he said.

A complete cricketing personality Venkat certainly is. He is still only 75.



A purist's delight: S. Venkatraghavan played a major role in India's sensational maiden Test series triumph in the West Indies and England. • THE HINDU ARCHIVES

'In chess, you don't have to turn a pro'

Anand had an interaction with SAI administrators



Valuable advice: Viswanathan Anand says children should not make a decision on a full-time career in chess till the age of 18. • FILE PHOTO: BIJOY GHOSH

RAKESH RAO

NEW DELHI

"I get worried if 12-13-year olds want to take up full-time chess careers. In all professions, uncertainty is very high and parents should give their children the flexibility to decide what they want to do."

The advice, from five-time World chess champion Viswanathan Anand, came during his online interaction with Sports Authority of India administrators on Wednesday.

Answering questions from Bad Soden in Germany, Anand said, "Children should not make a decision on a full-time career, in chess, till the age of 18 and till you finish your studies. In chess, you do not have to turn professional."

In response to another

question, Anand said, "Online chess has always been popular but we are hearing far more of it now because of the pandemic and the lockdown."

"However, what needs to be seen now is if we can improve the level of these online competitions. In a few weeks from now we will compete in the Online Nations Cup which will see teams from four countries and two continents participating. With technology, everything is possible now."

Speaking on the importance of fitness for chess players, Anand pointed out, "Fitness is not a problem when you are young, but it becomes a factor when you start getting older. Go for a week to a SAI facility and take up fitness with athletes from other sports."

Cricket's unsung workers face a struggle for survival

The shutdown has hurt the livelihood of coaches, groundsmen, umpires and scorers

S. DIPAK RAGAV

CHENNAI

The months of April and May typically see a host of competitive matches featuring young cricketers representing their coaching academies.

The reputed academies ensure that proficient umpires and scorers are in charge of these games. This demand has helped the likes of A. Mathan Kumar, a qualified TNCA scorer who took to the profession when he moved to the city to pursue his graduation.

But the current shutdown has meant coaches, markers / groundsmen, umpires and scorers are now left in the lurch during what is their



A. Mathan Kumar.
• SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

peak earning season. While scorers receive about ₹700 per day for their services, umpires are paid between ₹1,500 and ₹2,000.

"Scoring helped me fund most of my education and I even managed to send money home sometimes. Be-

cause college is shut during these months, we would officiate for nearly 30-45 days," said Kumar, an M.Sc student (Sports Biomechanics and Kinesiology) at the Tamil Nadu Physical Education and Sports University.

Ajanth Kumar, a non-qualified umpire, has been officiating in college and academy tournaments for the last few decades. "This shutdown has dealt a severe blow to me," he said. "I depend only on cricket for my monthly income and this is when we are the busiest. The cricketing fraternity trusts my quality and fairness, and wants my services to officiate in matches which are important for kids."

It is even tougher for markers and groundsmen, who – barring the few that receive monthly retainers – depend on daily allowances. G. Mahendran, a former groundman who has since turned into a throwdown specialist, said, "Groundsmen are the most hard-working people and this has come at the wrong time. They depend on this to put food on their plate."

Mahendran, who was with TNPL side Dindigul Dragons, has been affected, too. He said he is staring at a loss of about ₹1.5 to 2 lakh. "I work for five to six hours a day and can earn a few thousand rupees. Thankfully, the hard work I did before this will

BCCI looks to make inroads into ICC boardroom

AMOL KARHADKAR

MUMBAI

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) is likely to act during the COVID-19 pandemic to not only try and help smaller cricket nations stay afloat financially but also regain its clout within the International Cricket Council (ICC).

The chief executives of the ICC's full members are set to discuss the possibility of deferring the World Test Championship (WTC) and the ODI Super League during Thursday's meeting of the Chief Executives Committee (CEC). With the CEC preparing to deliberate on a re-jigged Future Tours Programme (FTP) assuming a possible resumption of international cricket towards the end of the year, the BCCI is understood to have opened discussions with multiple boards through backroom channels.

It is learnt that the BCCI has been offering tours to virtually every full member in the reworked FTP to ensure other boards can generate income through broadcast deals. Significantly for the BCCI, such an arrange-

ment will help it claw its way back into ICC's boardroom.

The BCCI's influence in the game's governing body has been on the wane over the last four years with Shashank Manohar at the helm. Although a former BCCI president, Manohar – ICC's first independent chairman – is perceived to have not let the BCCI have its cake and eat it too, as re-emerge as the kingmaker in the ICC in the post-pandemic world.

As a result, the BCCI has been sidelined in the ICC boardroom. "If other boards are assured of a tour by the Indian team, that income coupled with the appearance money the BCCI pays every board for releasing its players for the Indian Premier League, may result in other members toing BCCI's line in the ICC," said an observer.

Manohar's successor is scheduled to be elected during the ICC Board meeting in June but the pandemic could result in the process being delayed. If the BCCI can garner substantial votes, it can re-emerge as the kingmaker in the ICC in the post-pandemic world.

Federer suggests merger of tours

REUTERS

PARIS

Roger Federer on Wednesday called for a merger between the ATP and WTA Tours, as tennis wades through a lengthy shutdown.

"Just wondering ... am I the only one thinking that now is the time for men's and women's tennis to be united and come together as one?" tweeted the Swiss. "I am not talking about merging competition on the court, but merging the 2 governing bodies (ATP and WTA) that oversee the men's and women's professional tours ..."



G. Mahendran.
• SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

help me stay afloat for a while, but if this extends, even I will be in trouble."

Finance expert-cum-bhajan singer raising funds for lockdown-hit artistes

Ramesh Subramanian has formed a WhatsApp group for his initiative

BISHWANATH GHOSH

KOLKATA

Ramesh Subramanian likes to call himself "Kolkatar *chhele*" (boy from Kolkata), having been born and raised in the Tollygunge area of the city. He moved to Chennai – then Madras – when he was 17, and today, at the age of 47, he is an expert in finance and accounting, having studied at UCLA, Harvard and Stanford.

But finance is his day job. Mr. Subramanian is also a bhajan artiste, performing *namasankethanam* across India and the world for the past 28 years despite his professional commitments. Today he is doing his bit for fellow artistes, whose livelihood depends solely on performances, which now stand cancelled or postponed indefinitely due to the lockdown.



Ramesh Subramanian

As a result, these people are finding it difficult to run their families.

"There are about 1,000 such people, of which we have so far been able to help 80 with amounts ranging from ₹7,000 to ₹10,000 each, totally disbursing about ₹7,50,000 within a span of one week starting April 2, on the auspicious day of Ramnavami," Mr. Subramanian told *The Hindu*.

'Most deserving'

"We were able to do this due to the commitments we received from over 100 people from across India, the U.K. and the UAE. These are people within the WhatsApp group or connected with them."

"We kept the process transparent by asking sponsors to directly transfer funds to beneficiaries."

"Albeit a logistical challenge, we chose this path to keep questions at bay. The artistes were chosen by recommendations from various quarters and cross-validated to ensure they were indeed the most deserving," he said.

"A few sponsors have already indicated that they would be willing to make donations for the month of May as well."

"We will analyse the needs and take a call on the next steps – we hope reaching out to a wider audience," Mr. Subramanian said.

To raise funds, the group formed a core team that included Shankar Hariharan, C.S. Hariharan, S. Krishnagopal, Bombay Anand, Melarcode Ravi, Palghat Karthik, Palghat Saiji, Dubai Mahadevan and Palghat M.R. Ramachandran.

JNTBGRI to play key role in sequencing of Indian species

T. NANDAKUMAR

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute (JNTBGRI) here is gearing up to play a key role in a nationwide project to decode the genetic information of all known species of plants and animals in the country.

The Institute has been selected as one of the Biological Knowledge and Resource Centres of the Indian Initiative on Earth BioGenome Sequencing (IIEBS). It will join hands with other premier research institutes to utilise cutting edge technologies for genome sequencing. The Union Department of Biotechnology has allotted ₹143.89 lakh for JNTBGRI to take up the project.

24 institutes

The whole genome sequencing of 1,000 species of plants and animals will be taken up in the initial phase of IIEBS to be completed over a period of five years at an estimated cost of ₹440 crore.



Back to basics: The digital repository of genome sequences will help in biodiversity conservation. • GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

The National Institute of Plant Genome Research, New Delhi is the coordinating centre for the nationwide project involving a total of 24 institutes.

JNTBGRI Director R. Prakashkumar said the project was part of the Earth BioGenome Project, an international initiative to catalogue life on the planet. "This will eventually lead to the generation of the genetic blueprint of all living forms," he said.

coaches and players via tele-conference on Wednesday on the topic of 'Advancing Indian Table Tennis through Coach Education'.

Brett said Hurricane rubbers – from China – can be used by Indian players on their paddles to get better results, even if it is slightly different from the one used by top Chinese paddlers. The Olympian said Hurricane rubbers are ideal for strong forehand play. "It (Hurricane rubber) is harder, has a sticky surface and is best for

service, receive and forehand. I would like to see 20% of Indians use this rubber," he said.

According to Clarke, the impact of Chinese rubbers can be witnessed in European players using them now. "[Top German players] Timo Boll and Dimitrij Ovtcharov are using a copy of Hurricane rubbers on their forehand and Japan's [16-year-old whiz kid] Harimoto Tomokazu might have to use it," said the former coach of the Australian men's team.

ral products, biomaterials and biological fuels.

Dr. Prakashkumar said India's participation in the EBP would provide a boost for the field of genomics and bioinformatics within the country. "The project will enable collection and preservation of endangered and economically important species. The decoded genetic information will also be a useful tool to prevent biopiracy," he said.

With over 5,000 plant species in its field gene bank and conservatories, JNTBGRI has a major role in conserving the endemic flora of the Western Ghats.

Vijender live!

Catch India's Olympic medalist and boxing ace Vijender Singh in a live chat on *Sportstar's* Instagram handle (@Sportstarweb) on April 23 (Thursday) at 6.30 p.m. IST.

LITCHI

1. INTRODUCTION

Litchi (*Litchi chinensis*) is a delicious juicy fruit of excellent quality. Botanically it belongs to Sapindaceae family. The translucent, flavoured aril or edible flesh of the litchi is popular as a table fruit in India, while in China and Japan it is preferred in dried or canned state.

2. OBJECTIVE

The main objective of this report is to present a bankable model for high quality commercial cultivation of the crop.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Origin

The origin of litchi is from southern China, particularly the provinces of Kwangtung and Fukien. The spread of litchi to other parts of the world was rather slow probably due to its soil, climatic requirements and short life span of its seed. Litchi reached India through Myanmar and North East region during the 18th Century.

3.2 Area & Production

India is the second largest producer of litchi in the World after China. Other major producing countries are Thailand, Australia, South Africa, Madagascar and Florida in US.

Among fruit crops, litchi ranks seventh in area and ninth in production but is sixth in terms of value in India. The national average productivity of litchi is 6.1 t/ha, which is much lower than the realizable yield of the crop under well managed condition. The average productivity of litchi in Bihar is 8.0 tonnes/ha. and in West Bengal it is 10.5 tonnes/ha. In other states the productivity is much lower, the lowest of 1.0 t / ha in Uttaranchal.

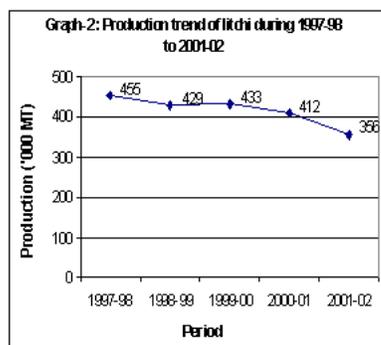
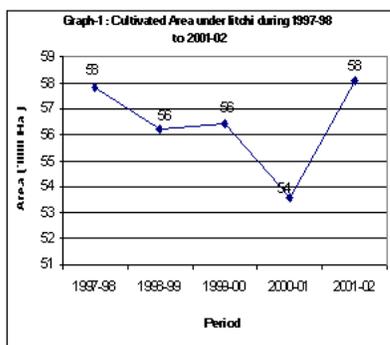
State-wise estimates of area, production and productivity of litchi during 2001-02 are given in **table 1**.

Table 1 : State-wise Area, Production & Productivity of Litchi during 2001-02

State	Area ('000 Ha.)	Production ('000 MT)	Productivity (MT/Ha.)
Bihar	27.7	221.7	8.0
West Bengal	5.9	61.4	10.5
Assam	4.1	18.7	4.6
Punjab	1.2	11.6	10.0
Orissa	3.5	10.2	2.9
Tripura	1.7	9.0	5.1
Jharkhand	1.5	7.5	5.0
Uttaranchal	7.8	7.5	1.0
Nagaland	0.8	4.0	5.1
Others	4.0	4.5	-
TOTAL	58.2	356.2	6.1

Source : Database of National Horticulture Board, Ministry of Agriculture , Govt. of India.

Production of litchi has declined from 4.55 lakh tonnes in 1997-98 to 3.56 lakh tones in 2001-02 although remained constant at 58 thousand ha. during these two years (vide Graphs 1 & 2 below).



3.3 Economic Importance

The food value of litchi mainly lies in its sugar content which varies from variety to variety. The fruit is also rich in Vitamin B₁, Riboflavin & Vitamin C apart from proteins

(0.7%), fats (0.3%), carbohydrates (9.4%), minerals (0.7%), fibrous matter (2.25%), calcium (0.21%), phosphorus (0.31%), iron (0.03%) and carotene. Litchi makes an excellent canned fruit. A highly flavoured squash is also prepared from the litchi fruits, which is used during summers. Various other products such as pickles, preserves and wine are also made from litchi in China. Dried litchi commonly called litchi-nut is very popular among the Chinese.

4. MARKET ANALYSIS AND STRATEGY

4.1 Demand and Supply patterns

Due to very short production season of around two months in a year, market gluts leading to distress sale.

The short span of fruit availability coupled with poor shelf life limits the duration of availability of litchi fruits in the domestic as well as international market. Shelf life of litchi fruits varies from 2 to 3 days under ambient conditions. With proper post harvest treatment (pre-cooling, sulphuring, acidification and storage at low temperature), the shelf life can be extended upto 2-3 weeks. Diverting a part of the produce towards processing is a safe solution to the problem and has been successfully adopted in other fruits like grape. Growers need to be educated on these possibilities in order to get better price for their produce and to minimize market risk.

In India the availability of fresh fruits coincides with the lean period for other fruits i.e. May and June. Arrival commences during the first week of May in Tripura and by the third week of May in Bihar continuing upto the first week of June. In Uttar Pradesh and Punjab the crop is ready for harvest during the second and third week of June while in Himachal Pradesh it comes to harvest by the last week of June, thereby extending the total season of its availability to around two months in a year.

4.2 Import/Export trends

South Africa (28 %), Thailand (25 %) followed by China (20 %) hold a major share in the litchi trade while India's share is hardly 1 %. In International markets the fruit remain available in plenty during November to March from countries like Australia (November – March), Mauritius (February – March), South Africa and Madagascar (November – January).

At present litchi fruits are exported by India mainly to the Netherlands, U.A.E., Saudi Arabia and Canada. APEDA and NAFED are the major export promoters of litchi. The demand from Arab countries, Europe and USA is increasing day by day. However, very little effort has been made by India to capture some part of the world market from China, the main player.

Country-wise quantities and value of exports from India during the two years 1999-2000 to 2000-01 are presented in **Table 2**.

Table-2 : Country-wise export of litchi from India during 1999-2000 to 2000-01

Quantity(Tonnes), Value (Rs. lakhs)

Country	1999-2000		2000-2001	
	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value
Bahrain	29.59	13.00	0.70	0.50
Belgium	87.20	27.19	155.00	147.22
Canada	0.60	0.12	-	-
France	48.00	9.31	-	-
Korea Republic	14.00	1.71	-	-
Kuwait	1.90	0.37	6.96	2.04
Norway	-	-	0.75	0.28
Oman	-	-	2.05	0.48
Philippines	28.00	4.82	-	-
Qatar	2.45	0.60	-	-
Saudi Arabia	26.79	5.86	0.90	0.69
Spain	24.00	3.70	-	-
Sri Lanka	14.00	2.17	-	-
U.K.	1.00	0.23	-	-
UAE	7.86	2.46	0.75	0.62
USA	13.76	2.27	-	-
Total	299.15	73.81	167.11	151.83

Source : APEDA, New Delhi

4.3 Analysis and Future Strategy

Litchi has a vast untapped potential in the domestic as well as the global market. However, inappropriate production practices, lack of regular maintenance, absence of infra-structure facilities (for cold storage, processing and canning) and of institutional support are some of the critical factors impeding the exploitation of the untapped potential.

The following measures need to be considered in order to boost production and marketing of litchi.

- § A three-tier system involving growers, processors and exporters may be formed along with export processing zones and marketing boards.
- § Storage, pre-cooling and transport facilities to help the growers realize better prices.
- § Processing units close to production centres, with financial and technical support from various Govt./non-Govt. agencies.

5. PRODUCTION TECHNOLOGY

5.1 Agro-climatic requirements

Litchi is a sub-tropical fruit and thrives best under moist sub-tropical climate. It usually prefers low elevation and can be grown up to an altitude of 800 m. (m.s.l.). Deep, well drained loamy soil, rich in organic matter and having pH in the range of 5.0 to 7.0 is ideal for the crop.

Frost during winter and dry heat in summer are limiting factors for its successful cultivation. The young trees require protection against frost and hot winds for several years till they are firmly established, even though some variation in temperature is necessary for proper fruiting of trees. The temperature should not go beyond 40.5 °C in summer and below freezing point in winter. Prolonged rain may be harmful especially at the time of flowering, when it interferes with pollination.

5.2 Growing and Potential Belts

In India, the commercial cultivation was traditionally restricted to the north in the foot hills of Himalayas from Tripura to Jammu & Kashmir and plains of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. However, with **growing demand and viability** of the crop, commercial cultivation has spread to several other states viz. Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh etc.

5.3 Varieties Cultivated

State-wise commercially grown varieties are given below .

State	Varieties
Bihar & Jharkhand	China, Deshi, , Purbi, Early & Late Bedana, Mclean, Muzaffarpur, Rose Scented, Shahi, Kasba
Orissa	Muzaffarpur, Bombai, China
Punjab & Haryana	Saharanpur, Dehradun, Calcuttia, Muzaffarpur, Seedless (Late) & Rose Scented
Uttaranchal	Rose Scented, Calcuttia, Early & Late Seedless
Uttar Pradesh	Seedless Early, Seedless Late, Early Large Red, Late Large Red, Calcuttia, Rose Scented, Dehradun
West Bengal	Muzaffarpur, China, Deshi, Purbi, Elachi Early, Elachi Late, Bombai, Goothi, Bedana, Potee, Kalyani Selection

5.4 Land Preparation

The land is cleared of all vegetation and leveled thoroughly. After this, the land is ploughed with disc plough and then with a harrow. Hot and desiccating winds in summer and cold winds in winter adversely affect the growth of litchi plants. Therefore, for proper establishment of a litchi plantation, a suitable wind break should be planted at the orchard boundary and it should be at right angle to the direction of prevailing winds. Tall growing trees such as mango, jamun, eucalyptus, arjun etc. are suitable for this purpose.

5.5 Planting

Air layering is the most common method of propagation. It is usually done in the beginning of monsoon and the air layers can be detached from the mother plant after 60-70 days.

The details of planting operations are given below :

Details	Usual Practice
Planting Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • August – September • Planting may be done in spring and early summer if irrigation facility is available
Planting Distance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 m (both between the plants and rows) • 8 m (when the climate is comparatively dry and the soil is not so fertile). • Average no. of plants- 200 per ha.
Size of pits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1x1x1 m (pits are dug a few weeks prior to planting)
Filling of pits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pits are left undisturbed initially for a period of 15-20 days. • Filled with top soil mixed with manures and fertilizers @ 20-25 kg FYM, 2 kg bonemeal and 300 g muriate of potash per pit • A basket of soil taken from old litchi orchard is added to each pit to ensure mycorrhizal association with litchi roots. • Pits are then watered so that the soil settles down.
Planting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Square system of planting is usually followed. • A small hole is made at the center of the pit and the desired material is planted. Water is applied immediately after planting

5.5 Training & Pruning

After planting, a certain amount of pruning is often necessary to give proper shape to the litchi plant. Once the desired shape is achieved, no pruning is usually necessary, except the removal of dead or diseased branches and damaged shoots or crossed limbs. At the time of harvesting, the part of the shoot bearing the fruit is removed to promote new growth. If the vegetative growth is too much then both root and shoot pruning needs to be done. But heavy pruning causes profuse vegetative growth, which takes place at the expense of flowering and fruiting. When the trees become too old and produce fruits of small size, heavy pruning is suggested.

5.6 Nutrition

The following table gives detail of the fertilizers / manures recommended for application :

Table-3 : Manure/Fertilizer application for Litchi in north India.

Age of the plant (in years)	Manure/Fertilizer applied (per plant/year in kg)			
	FYM	CAN (Calcium ammonium nitrate)	Super phosphate	Muriate of potash
1-3	10 - 20	0.3-1.00	0.2-0.6	0.05-0.15
4-6	25 - 40	1.0-2.0	0.75-1.25	0.20-0.30
7-10	40 – 50	2.0-3.0	1.50-2.0	0.35-0.45
Above 10	60	3.5	2.25	0.60

5.7 Irrigation

Two irrigations at an interval of 45 – 60 days during winter months is required for bearing litchi trees. Irrigation at fortnightly intervals after fruit setting in March till the end

of June is required especially during the hot summer months. Basin or ring system of irrigation is recommended. Use of drip irrigation has proved to be good for plant growth besides being economical.

5.8 Intercultural Operations

Litchi orchard should be kept clean of unwanted weeds especially during the initial years of growth. Orchards should be ploughed with soil turning plough and harrowed once after the rainy season in October and the second after the harvesting of fruits in June or July.

5.9 Mulching

The farmyard manure, compost or straw may be used for soil mulching. When straw is used as soil mulch, an additional dose of 25 – 30 kg. Calcium Ammonium Nitrate (CAN) per ton of dry straw should be applied to hasten the decomposition. Cutting down of tall growing weeds in the orchard and spreading them over the soil is another method of mulching the soil.

5.10 Inter-cropping

Litchi is a long gestation crop taking about 5-6 years to the fruiting stage. Inter-cropping is feasible in the first three or four years. Apart from giving good annual income during the non-bearing period, inter-crops protect the young litchi plant, enrich the soil, improve the physical condition of the soil and keep the weeds under control.

Inter-crops, which may be grown during different seasons, are listed below:

Summer & Kharif Season:

- Ø Vegetables – Pumpkin, cucumber, ridgegourd, bittergourd
- Ø Leguminous crops – Moong, cow pea etc.
- Ø Sunnhemp & dhaincha may be grown as green manure crops.

Winter Season:

- Ø Vegetable – Radish, beet, turnip, cauliflower, peas, beans etc.
- Ø Leguminous crops – Gram etc.
- Ø Spices- Turmeric.

5.11 Plant Protection Measures

5.11.1 Insect Pests

In litchi, mite and shoot borer are the two serious pests that causes immense damage to the crop. The infestation of the latter is more in case of the September-October flush

5.11.2 Diseases

Litchi is almost free from fungal diseases in India. The rot caused by *Helmenthosporium hawaiiense* and rotting of fruits caused by *Aspergillus sp.* are some of the fungal dis

5.12 Disorders

The two types of physiological disorders which are commonly observed are fruit cracking and fruit drop. Fruit cracking is a major problem in litchi resulting in deterioration of fruit quality. Presence of optimum moisture level in the soil during fruit development is crucial for reducing fruit cracking and quality litchi production. Early varieties (e.g. Shahi) are more susceptible to cracking than late ripening one (e.g. China). Application of two foliar sprays of 20 ppm. NAA, first at pea stage of fruit development and second ten days after the first spray and scheduling of irrigation at 20% DASM (at 3 days interval during May-June) should be given to control the disorder. Foliar application of boric acid (0.4 %) and 2,4- D (10 ppm.) is also effective in minimizing the disorder.

5.13 Harvesting and Yield

The litchi plant has a long growing period with four different phenophases. Depending on the tree age there are four growth phases in litchi plants viz. , young non-bearing stage (1-3 years), young bearing stage (6-10 years), junior adult bearing stage (11-20 years) and senior adult bearing stage (21 years and above). During the junior adult bearing phase the tree enters into a condition when the vegetative growth and reproductive growth remain relatively balanced. Fruiting begins from 5 – 6 years of age in case of plants propagated through air layering. After flowering, it takes 70 to 100 days for the fruits to ripe in most of the commercial varieties of India. On an average, the litchi tree yields 40-100 kg. fruits annually depending on the variety, locality, season, nutrition and age.

Harvesting is usually done in May and June. The maturity of the fruits is judged by the flatness of tubercles and comparative smoothness of the epicarp. Besides that the fruit colour changes from green to pink on maturity. The fruits are harvested in bunches along with a portion of the branch and a few leaves. This helps in improving the keeping quality of the fruits and at the same time the tree receives a mild pruning.

6. POST HARVEST MANAGEMENT

Litchi is non-climacteric fruit that possesses poor shelf life and therefore needs specific treatment before packing and transportation for long distance market.

For local markets, the fruits should be collected at the ripened stage, while for distant market, the fruits should be harvested when they have started turning reddish. After harvesting, the fruits should be kept in cool, dry and properly ventilated rooms to facilitate the ripening process under high atmospheric temperature. If exposed to sun even for a few hours the quality deteriorates markedly.

6.1 Grading

Grading is done according to the size of the fruits. The damaged, sun-burnt and cracked fruits are sorted out before packing.

6.2 Storage

The fruits cannot be stored at room temperature for more than a few days. It loses its bright red colour and turns brown within 2 – 3 days after harvesting. Mature litchi fruits can be stored for a period of 8 to 12 weeks at the temp. of 1.6 to 1.7°C and relative humidity ranging between 85 to 90%.

6.3 Packing

The fruits are graded and packed in shallow baskets or crates lined with leaves of litchi, soft dry grass or banana leaves.

6.4 Transportation

The fruit along with twigs is packed and transported by truck to the wholesalers and retailers of the nearest towns. During transit care should be taken to avoid crushing of fruits and damage of the skin. Litchi being a **highly perishable fruit**, its marketing should be done as early as possible.

6.5 Marketing

Farmers directly sell their produce to the middlemen. The fruit is sold through a post harvest contractor to the wholesale or commission agent, who undertakes the harvesting and packing, in addition to transporting the produce to the market. More than 65 % of the growers prefer sale through post harvest contractor and about 20 % undertake self marketing.

The main channels of marketing include the following:

- § Producer – PHC – wholesaler/commission agent (distant market) – stockists – retailers – consumers.
- § Producer – wholesaler/commission agent (distant market) – stockists – retailers – consumers (self marketing).
- § Producer – Village level agent – commission agent – stockists – retailers – consumers.

7. TECHNOLOGY SOURCES

The major sources for technology, as well as quality planting material are:

- i) Hill Campus, Ranichouri, G.B. Pant University of Agriculture and Technology, Tehri Garhwal, Uttaranchal.
- ii) Department of Horticulture and Food Processing, Udhyan Bhawan, Chaubatia, Ranikhet, Almora-263651, Uttaranchal.
- iii) Department of Horticulture, Birsa Agricultural University, Kanke, Tel : (0651)-2230691.

8. ECONOMICS OF A ONE ACRE MODEL

Costs & Returns:

- 8.1 A one acre plantation of the crop is a highly viable proposition. The cost components of such a model along with the basis for costing are exhibited in **Annexures I & II**. A summary is given in the figure below. The project cost works out to Rs.1.50 lakh per acre.

Figure-I: Cost of Project

Project Cost:

(Amount in Rs.)		
Sl. No.	Component	Proposed Expenditure
1.	Cultivation Expenses	
	(i) Cost of planting material	2400
	(ii) Manures & fertilizers	5000
	(iii) Insecticides & pesticides	3000
	(iv) Cost of Labour	5600
	(v) Others, if any (Power)	3600
	Total	19600
2.	Irrigation	
	(i) Tube-well/submersible pump	50000
	(ii) Cost of Pipeline	-
	(iii) Others, if any, please specify	-
	Total	50000
3.	Cost of Drip/Sprinkler	20000
4.	Infrastructure	
	(i) Store & Pump House	10000
	(ii) Labour room	6800
	(iii) Agriculture Equipments	10000
	(iii) Others, if any, (Drying platform)	-
	Total	26800
5.	Land Development	
	(i) Soil leveling	4000
	(ii) Digging	-
	(iii) Fencing	29600
	(iv) Others, if any, please specify	-
	Total	33600
6.	Land, if newly purchased (Please indicate the year)*	-
	Grand Total	1,50,000

*Cost of newly purchased land will be limited to one-tenth of the total project cost

- 8.2 The major components of the model are:

- Land Development: (Rs.4.00 thousand): This is the labour cost of shaping and dressing the land site.
- Fencing (Rs.29.60 thousand): It is necessary to guard the orchard by barbed wire fencing to safeguard the valuable produce from animals and prevent poaching.
- Irrigation Infra-structure (Rs.50.00 thousand): For effective working with drip irrigation system, it is necessary to install a bore well with diesel/electric pumpset and motor. This is part cost of tubewell.
- Drip Irrigation & Fertigation System (Rs.20.00 thousand): This is average cost of one acre drip system for the crop inclusive of the cost of fertigation equipment. The actual cost will vary depending on location, plant population and plot geometry.
- Equipment/Implements (Rs.10.00 thousand): For investment on improved manually operated essential implements a provision of another Rs.10 thousand is included.
- Building and Storage (Rs.16.80 thousand): A one acre orchard would require minimally a labour shed and a store-cum grading/packing room/pump house.
- Cost of Cultivation (Rs.19.60 thousand): The cost on planting material, inputs used and labour in cultivation operations is estimated at Rs.19.60 thousand during the pre-operative period.

- 8.3 Labour cost has been put at an average of Rs.70 per man-day. The actual cost will vary from location to location depending upon minimum wage levels or prevailing wage levels for skilled and unskilled labour.

- 8.4 Recurring Production Cost:** Recurring production costs are exhibited in **Annexure III**. The main components are planting material (80 plants/per acre at 7x7m spacing), land preparation, inputs application (FYM, fertilizers, liming material, plant protection chemicals etc.) and labour cost on application of inputs, inter-cultural and other farm operations.
- 8.5** Besides, provision is also included for power charges, labour for harvesting and packing/transportation charges for the produce to the nearest secondary market.
- 8.6** Inter-cropping with vegetables from year 2 to year 5 has been taken into consideration for economic viability of the project.
- 8.7 Returns from the Project:** The yield from the plantation is estimated to go up from 2.0 tonnes in year 5 to 6.0 tonnes in the year 9 at which it levels off. The produce has been valued at Rs.15,000 per tonne.

Project Financing:

- 8.8. Balance Sheet:** The projected balance sheet of the model in the post-operative period, is given at **Annexure IV**. There would be three sources of financing the project as below:

<u>Source</u>	<u>Rs.Thousand</u>
Farmer's share	75.00
Capital subsidy	30.00
Term loan	45.00
Total	150.00

- 8.9. Profit & Loss Account:** The cash flow statement may be seen in **Annexure V**. **Annexure VI** projects the profit and loss account of the model in the post operative period. Over a five year cycle the gross profit works out to Rs.178 thousand.
- 8.10. Repayment of Term Loan:** The term loan will be repaid in 11 six monthly installments with a moratorium of 60 months. The rate of interest would have to be negotiated with the financing bank. It has been put at 12% in the model (vide **Annexures VII & VIIA**). Depreciation calculations are presented in **Annexure VIII**.

Project Viability:

- 8.11. IRR/BCR:** The viability of the project is assessed in **Annexure IX** over a period of 15 years. The IRR works out to 28.85 and the BCR to 2.2.
- 8.12.** The Debt Service coverage ratio calculations are presented in **Annexure X**. The **average DSCR** works out to 3.51.
- 8.13 Payback Period:** On the basis of costs and returns of the model, the pay back period is estimated at 6.12 years (vide **Annexure XI**).
- 8.14 Break-even Point:** The break even point will be reached in the 3rd year. At this point fixed cost would work out to 61.3% of gross sales - vide **Annexure XII**.