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WHO should have 'weapons inspector' powers: Scott Morrison
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NEARBY



Grocery kits even for those without cards

CHENNAI
The Registrar of Cooperative Societies on Thursday informed the Madras High Court that a ₹500 grocery kit being sold by the State government during the lockdown can be purchased even by those who have no ration cards, and the kits will be available in other outlets too, apart from all ration shops.

TAMIL NADU ▶ PAGE 4

Exemption for MGNREGS, construction works

CHENNAI
The Tamil Nadu government on Thursday decided to allow construction activities in rural areas and MGNREGS work, and activities in the supply chain of essentials, whether manufacturing or wholesale or retail of such goods.

TAMIL NADU ▶ PAGE 2

Industrialists seek easing of curbs

CHENNAI
Leading industrialists in Tamil Nadu on Thursday urged Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami to relax restrictions to facilitate exports and allied activities during the lockdown. Mr. Palaniswami assured them that he would consider their requests.

TAMIL NADU ▶ PAGE 2

FRIDAY REVIEW ▶ PAGES

Lockdown ensured growth of cases remained linear, says govt.

12 districts free of new cases for 28 days; total number of cases is now 21,700

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

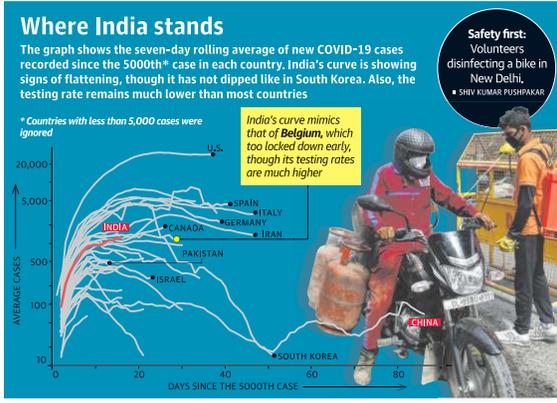
India has managed to maintain a linear growth of COVID-19 cases over the one month period during its lockdown, the Union Health Ministry said on Thursday even as the country reported over 1,409 new COVID-19 cases, taking the total number of cases to 21,700 with 16,689 active ones.

There have been over 4,324 recoveries, which takes the recovery rate to 19.89%, the Health Ministry said. A total of 686 deaths have been reported, with 34 in the past 24 hours.

COVID-19

It added that as on Thursday, there are 12 districts that did not have a fresh case in the last 28 days. Since April 21, eight new districts have been added including - Chitradurga (Karnataka), Bilaspur (Chhattisgarh), Imphal West (Manipur), Aizawl West (Mizoram), Bhadradi Kothagudem (Telangana), Pilibhit (Uttar Pradesh), SBS Nagar (Punjab) and South Goa (Goa).

Also, 78 districts from 23 States/Union Territories have not reported any fresh cases during the last 14 days.



State Health Departments have put the nationwide death toll at 718 with 23,034 cases of which 17,428 are active ones.

Maharashtra has 5,304 active cases, with Mumbai reporting 478 new cases and eight deaths on Thursday taking the death toll to 168 and 4,232 cases.

'Strategies successful'
"Despite a 24-fold increase in testing, the percentage of positive cases is not rising phenomenally when compared to the percentage of positive cases at the beginning of the lockdown," said chairman of the empowered group C.K. Mishra.

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MORE REPORTS ON ▶ PAGES 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11 & 12
RAPID FAILURES ▶ EDITORIAL

Clause allowing FIR against firms for COVID-19 cases goes

Industries can start production fearlessly, says Javadekar

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The government withdrew on Thursday the clause allowing filing of an FIR against a company and its management if an employee tests positive for COVID-19, following concerns raised by India Inc.

"There is no mention of sole responsibility fixed of owner/director on detection of COVID-19 positive cases," stated the reworked guidelines sent to business owners. "The policy has been revised and the FIR clause removed. All the confusions on this matter should end."

Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar, meanwhile, maintained that there was no government directive "for an FIR against a factory".

'No harassment'
On Thursday, Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla wrote to the Chief Secretaries of all States requesting that the guidelines "should not be misused to harass management of any manufacturing/commercial establishment".

He said some apprehension had been raised in the media based on a wrong interpretation of the guidelines. It was believed that the States may take legal action, including imprisonment of the CEO, if a COVID-19 positive



Much needed: Workers preparing personal protective equipment in Patna on Thursday. ▶ RAJJEET KUMAR

'Industries can't be forced to pay'

In a report on the Industrial Relations Code, 2019, the Parliamentary Committee on Labour recommended that "in case of natural calamities, payment of wages until the re-establishment of the industry may be unjustifiable". Panel Chairman Bhartruhari Mahtab said the lockdown could be counted as such a calamity. ▶ PAGE 8

India follows U.S. trajectory: expert

India's trajectory in COVID-19 cases is following the U.S. and is likely to reach a plateau rather than peak soon, one of China's top infectious disease experts has said. Since there were signs of community transmission in India, it was more likely to follow the U.S. trend rather than limit cases to a low number, Zang Wenhong said. ▶ PAGE 10

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Field work



Safeguarding livelihoods: Away from the lockdown, women undertaking desilting as part of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme at Nidigattu village in Visakhapatnam district on Thursday. With over 93 lakh registered workers, Andhra Pradesh is one of the leading States in the implementation of the MGNREGA. ▶ K.R. DEEPAK

Two deaths, 54 new cases of COVID-19 in Tamil Nadu

Chennai accounts for half the fresh cases, tally touches 400

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu reported two deaths due to COVID-19 on Thursday even as 54 persons tested positive for the disease in the State, with Chennai accounting for half the cases. The State's COVID-19 tally now stands at 1,683 (including two who were counted in other States and one person who tested negative after death).

A 70-year-old man died of COVID-19 at the Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital. Hospital authorities said he had diabetes, hypertension and chronic kidney disease. He was on dialysis. He tested positive for COVID-19 three days ago. The other death was of a 56-year-old woman, admitted to Apollo Hospitals. She had tested positive on April 4. With



Relatives at the funeral of a COVID-19 victim in Chennai. ▶ B. JOTHY RAMALINGAM

this, the State has reported a total of 20 deaths due to COVID-19.

At present, there are 908 active cases in the State. Of the 90 persons discharged during the day, 29 were from IRT Perundurai Medical College Hospital, 27 from Coimbatore ESI Medical College Hospital and 20 from the Tirunelveli Medical College Hospital. With this, the total number of persons discharged so far is 752.

Chennai continued to witness a spike in COVID-19 cases, with its count increasing to 400. Of the 27 new cases, four were children aged below 10 years. Dharmapuri district, which had no COVID-19 cases so far, recorded its first. There were five new cases in Salem, four in Namakkal, three each in Dindigul and Virudhunagar, two in Madurai, and one each in Chengalpattu, Ramanathapuram, Tenkasi, Thanjavur, Tirunelveli, Tirupattur, Tiruppur, Tiruvallur and Villupuram.

From 10 districts on Wednesday, fresh cases were reported in 16 districts.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 2

DA for Central staff frozen till July 2021

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Finance Ministry on Thursday issued an order freezing the Dearness Allowance (DA) to the Central employees and Dearness Relief (DR) to pensioners at current rates till July 2021.

"In view of the crisis arising out of COVID-19, it has been decided that the additional instalment of Dearness Allowance... and Dearness Relief... due from January 1, 2020, shall not be paid," said the order.

"The additional instalments of Dearness Allowance and Dearness Relief due from July 1, 2020, and January 1, 2021, shall also not be paid. However, Dearness Allowance and Dearness Relief at current rates will continue to be paid," it said.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

In Rae Bareilly, doctors have untold stories of quarantine

Medical team releases videos of cramped space, dirty toilets, cold food, is then moved to guest house

OMAR RASHID
LUCKNOW

A group of government doctors and medical staff in Rae Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, have released videos highlighting the poor and unpleasant living facilities provided to them at a government-run school, where they were lodged under "active quarantine".

After the "expose", the chief medical officer of the district shifted the 25 doctors and paramedical staff to a guest house, providing them en suite single rooms.

Till Wednesday evening, Rae Bareilly had reported 43 COVID-19 cases, all of them active.

In a series of short videos, the doctors and paramedical



Pushed to a corner: A video grab shows a medical team member in a cramped quarantine facility. ▶ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

staff of the LI facility (community health centre), showed the poor conditions they were made to live in. In a video, a man, identifying himself as a medical officer, described

towards the shared toilet area, which has a dirty and stained floor, and shows the toilets, some of which are blocked and dirty.

'Food not packed'
In another video, a voice describes the food available. Oily puris and sabzi are sealed together in a cloth bag without proper packing. "This is the food for active quarantine for doctors and all staff who are treating coronavirus patients," it said. In the third video, a person in full PPE kit explained how the members lived in conditions that went against active quarantine norms. Not only did they have to share bathrooms and toilets, they were boarded in big classrooms

with four beds in each. "Totally wrong for active quarantine," he said.

There was no light on the premises a day earlier; even the food came late. They were also made to share a single water can of 20 litres, he added.

A mobile toilet was installed outside when they complained but they had no bathrooms.

S.K. Sharma, Chief Medical Officer, said, "We have shifted everyone to a guest house nearby. We are also arranging for a live kitchen there, so the doctors can get hot cooked food. The facilities [at the LI centre] were arranged by the local administration. I was myself not satisfied with it," he said.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

With just about 10 days to go for the lockdown to end on May 3, Maharashtra urged the Union government to plan and resume railway services for several lakh migrant labourers who want to return home.

In a letter to Minister for Railways Piyush Goyal on Thursday, Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar warned of a possible repeat of the violent incidents at the Bandra railway station on April 14, when thousands of migrant labourers who had gathered hoping to return home had to be turned back.

He appealed for advance planning for resuming train services to facilitate the re-



Desperate measure: Migrant workers gathered in Bandra earlier this month, defying the lockdown. ▶ DIVYA THOMAS

turn of nearly 6.5 lakh labourers. The special trains could originate from Mumbai and Pune to all major destinations in the country, he said, "to accommodate all such restless labourers".

Warning of potential law and order problems, Mr. Pawar said Maharashtra has the highest number of migrant workers from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and other northern States.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 8

Curbs eased on supply chain of essentials, building work in villages

More relaxations on the cards, based on recommendations of the expert panel on lockdown exit

DENNIS S. JESUDASAN
CHENNAI

Three days after it announced that there would be no relaxation from the COVID-19 lockdown for any industry, the Tamil Nadu government on Thursday decided to exempt certain activities in non-containment areas of the State and allow some services.

While construction activity in rural areas and MGNREGS work will be allowed, activities in the supply chain of essentials — manufacturing, wholesale and retail of such goods — have been exempted.

A senior official told *The Hindu* that more relaxations were likely to follow the two G.O.s issued on Thursday.

Asked why the government took the decision three days after it chose to retain the restrictions, the official said that the prevailing situation then was such that it was felt that there was no necessity to offer any relaxation.

"But the 21-member expert panel has been continuously monitoring the situation, and as and when it is required to allow relaxations, the panel is giving recommendations," he said.

When asked whether more relaxations would fol-



Playing it safe: A man cycles home with his pet, after paying a visit to the Government Veterinary Hospital in Vepery, on Thursday. *B. RAGU

low, he replied in the affirmative but refused to divulge details.

In a G.O., Chief Secretary K. Shanmugam said: "All facilities in the supply chain of essential goods, whether manufacturing, wholesale or retail of such goods through local stores, large brick and mortar stores or e-commerce companies, including food processing units such as bread factories, milk processing plants, flour mills, dal mills, etc., located in urban areas" were exempted from lockdown restrictions.

Facilities for export/im-

port, such as packhouses, inspection and treatment facilities for seeds and horticulture produce and research establishments dealing with agriculture and horticulture activities were also exempted from the lockdown restrictions, through a G.O. dated March 25.

Subject to conditions
Construction projects in rural areas, including irrigation, desilting of tanks and channels, ongoing works with regard to dam safety, buildings (including construction and maintenance

of medical colleges and hospitals), roads and bridges, water supply and sanitation, brick kilns, hardware material supply on-call basis, electricity-related works (generation, transmission and distribution) could be allowed, subject to certain conditions.

MNREGA works, especially those related to irrigation and water conservation in rural areas, excluding containment zones and red blocks listed (see table, which would be updated by from time-to-time by the Health and Family Welfare

Department) could be allowed, but after ensuring safety norms.

However, not more than one-third of the required number of labourers should be mobilised and strict physical distancing guidelines should be followed.

Besides, State/Central government offices for the maintenance of essential services could function with attendance not exceeding 33% of the total staff.

The decision of the State government was based on recommendations of the Commissioner of Revenue Administration.

Before allowing these select additional activities, the district administration shall ensure that all preparatory arrangements with regard to the standard operating procedures (SOPs) for physical distancing in offices, workplaces, factories and establishments, as also other sectoral requirements, are in place.

The government also allowed the operation of homes for children/ disabled/ mentally-challenged/ senior citizens/diestitutes/ women/widows, bedside attendants and care-givers of senior citizens residing in their homes.

Industrialists list lockdown woes

Some leeway granted

DENNIS S. JESUDASAN
SANGEETHA KANDAVEL
CHENNAI

Leading industrialists in Tamil Nadu on Thursday urged Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami to relax restrictions to facilitate exports and allied activities during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Mr. Palaniswami, who held a meeting via video-conference with captains of industry to examine the feasibility of allowing various sectors to function during the lockdown, gave an assurance that he would consider their requests.

"Since some of them [companies] were in the middle of [transacting] export orders, they sought certain relaxations [of restrictions] so that business could be maintained with international clients," an official told *The Hindu*.

Hari Thiagarajan, chairman, CII, T.N. State Council, said that he had sought priority for export-oriented units and industries in rural areas, without compromising on safety.

Raising the issues faced by the cement industry, N. Srinivasan, vice-chairman, India Cements, told the CM

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

The State government has issued a G.O. identifying 10 industries as continuous process industries. These include refineries, large steel plants including TMT bar manufacturers, large cement plants, continuous process chemical industries, including paints,

sugar mills, fertilisers, float glass plants, large foundries with continuous process, tyre manufacturing plants and large paper mills.

These industries will be permitted to engage "skeletal staff for essential maintenance of all closed industrial units to ensure safety of machinery/ installation," the G.O. said.

that trucks were stuck midway and the drivers had left.

The government heard their views and gave an assurance that it will examine their suggestions, but did not give any timeframe for implementing them, the sources added.

Aqeel Ahmed Panaruna, chairman, Council for Leather Exports, said, "We are extremely satisfied with our meeting."

TVS Group chairman Venu Srinivasan and Tube Investments managing director S. Vellayan were among the participants of Thursday's meeting, which was also attended by Industries Minister M.C. Sampath,

Chief Secretary K. Shanmugam, Finance Secretary S. Krishnan, Industries Secretary N. Muruganandam and other senior officials.

On Friday, representatives of the Apparel Export Promotion Council, the Coimbatore District Small Scale Industries' Association, the Federation of Indian Export Organisations and a few export associations from Tiruppur will participate in a similar discussion.

The 21-member expert committee constituted by the government is scheduled to meet on Friday. (With inputs from Sanjay Vijayakumar)

Ready to pitch in with plasma, say discharged patients

T.N. is taking up trials of convalescent plasma therapy

SERENA JOSEPHINE M.
CHENNAI

Following their discharge from hospitals, a number of persons who have recovered from COVID-19 have volunteered to donate plasma to help other patients in need.

Among these volunteers is 37-year-old M.A. Mohammed Usman Ali, a resident of Theni. He is currently under home quarantine, nearly a month after returning from New Delhi, where he had attended a conference conducted by Tablighi Jamaat. He was discharged from the Government Theni Medical College Hospital on April 15, after being hospitalised for 16 days for treatment of the disease.

"I heard about plasma therapy from a few doctors. They said that those who recover from COVID-19 will develop antibodies. We [patients who have recovered] are discharged after testing negative for COVID-19 twice. I am ready to donate plasma if asked to do so. We are ready to support the government in this [endeavour]. It is important to help people," he said.



Many of those discharged from hospitals have expressed willingness to donate plasma if asked to do so.

A volunteer said that some patients had, during telephonic counselling sessions to allay fears about COVID-19, expressed their willingness to donate plasma. The State is taking up trials of convalescent plasma therapy for critically-ill patients, which involves the collection and transfusion of plasma from persons who have recovered from the disease.

M. Mohammed Abbas, 38, who had returned from the Delhi conference on March 25, said he was hospitalised at the Coimbatore ESI Medical College Hospital and discharged on April 20. "The hospital dean and the Sub-

Collector spoke to us about the trials for plasma therapy. I am definitely ready to donate blood if it will benefit another patient. Many who were discharged along with me have also expressed their willingness to do the same," he said.

Authorities of a government hospital in Chennai said that they had informed discharged patients about the plasma therapy. "We informed them that we would contact them later. They can donate plasma for other patients if they are willing to do so," a senior doctor said.

As of April 22, 662 persons were discharged from hospitals across the State.

'Evolving epidemic' throws up challenges for health officials

Persons testing positive after incubation period a puzzle

SERENA JOSEPHINE M.
CHENNAI

COVID-19 is an "evolving epidemic" and it has started posing a few challenges to public health officials, bringing in the need for detailed investigation. If persons testing positive for COVID-19 after the incubation period is one challenge, understanding the transmission dynamics is another, they said.

According to the World Health Organisation, most estimates of the incubation period — the time between catching the virus and one begins to have symptoms of the disease — range from one to 14 days. When a few States had a quarantine period of 14 days, Tamil Nadu doubled the number of days, fixing it at 28. In one way, this has proved right, as a few persons have tested positive even after 20 days, said officials.

There were a few cases in Tamil Nadu in which persons tested positive after the estimated incubation period of 14 days, said officials. "We have had a few such cases. For instance, patients have tested positive on the 16th



Patients waiting to be tested for COVID-19 at the Government Kilpaik Medical College Hospital. *B. VELANKANNI RAJ

and 20th day. This is why Tamil Nadu had decided to have a double quarantine period of 28 days, right from the start. We are now taking up detailed investigations of such cases," an official said.

Official sources said that persons testing positive at a later point were posing a puzzle. There were similar occurrences in Kerala too. "It is challenging, but COVID-19 is an evolving epidemic," another official said.

Transmission dynamics
Transmission dynamics is another challenge. Health officials said that some persons who had attended the conference in Delhi tested

negative for COVID-19, while their family members tested positive for the virus. In such instances, those testing negative too were put under isolation. "We need to understand transmission dynamics during the asymptomatic period. Who is testing negative is important, and whether the person is capable of transmitting the virus should be looked at," he added.

Age is also a factor, said officials. "The individual's immunity response too plays a role," an official said. Officials cited these as the reason why they continue insisting on strict adherence to home quarantine norms.

'Corona' an age-old term, finds mention in Nanjil Nadu dictionary

It denotes a disease affecting the palm

B. KOLAPPAN
CHENNAI

The term 'corona', which is now commonplace, thanks to the global pandemic, has been in vogue in Kanniyakumari for ages.

In fact, its use to denote a type of skin disease was so widespread that it found its way into the *Nanjil Naatu Sollakarathi* Dictionary of Nanjil Nadu, compiled by folklorist A.K. Perumal. "In the spoken language, it is pronounced as 'corona', but we write the word as 'corona'," he said. Mr. Perumal.

Achiammal, an 80-year-old woman who is familiar with the word, said it was used to curse those who tampered with weighing measurements to cheat the customers.

"We would say, *kaiyile corona theenam pidikkattu* (Get corona disease in your hands)," she recalled. *Theenam* denotes disease.

In the spoken language, it is pronounced as 'corona', but we write the word as 'corona'

A.K. PERUMAL
Folklorist

Agriculturist Shenbagasekaran said the word was common among traders, particularly among those buying and selling milk and paddy.

"If women notice the milkman trying to tamper with the weighing vessels, they would say, 'Let your hand get corona'," he said. "At a time when paddy was given as remuneration instead of money, the word was used to curse the employer if he tried to reduce the amount of paddy."

"In the process it also became more of an imagery. It means that you should be fair when it comes to paying remuneration to workers," Mr. Shenbagasekaran said.

FROM PAGE ONE

2 deaths, 54 new cases of COVID-19 in T.N.

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

	Until April 16	April 17	April 18	April 19	April 20	April 21	April 22	April 23	Total
Cases reported	1,267	56	49	105	43	76	33	54	1,683
Recovered and discharged	180	103	82	46	46	178	27	90	752
Deceased	15	0	0	1	1	1	0	2	20

Persons tested		In home quarantine		Districts with maximum cases	
53,072	23,760	Chennai	400		
59,952	23,303	Coimbatore	134		
		Tiruppur	110		
		Dindigul	80		
		Erode	70		

*Changes in 24 hours As on April 22, 6 p.m. As on April 23, 6 p.m.
Active Cases + Discharged + Died will not equal Total Cases as 2 deaths were cross-notified to other States and 1 patient, who initially tested positive for COVID-19, later died after testing negative, as per the Health and Family Welfare Department.

As on date, Coimbatore has a total of 134 COVID-19 cases, followed by Tiruppur with 110 cases. Nine other districts — Chengalpattu, Dindigul, Erode, Madurai, Namakkal, Thanjavur, Tirunelveli, Tiruvallur and Tiruchi — had 50 and above cases. Ariyarlu, Dharmapuri, Kallakurichi, the Nilgiris, Perambalur and Pudukottai have less than 10 cases. Krishnagiri has reported no COVID-19 case so far.

Rajendra Ratnoo, Central nodal officer coordinating on COVID-19 between the Central and State governments, said, "Tamil Nadu has really geared up and is working systematically. The State's surveillance, testing and clinical management has picked up, and the mortality rate is still quite low."

On the high number of cases in Chennai, he said population density was a key factor. "Thick urban popula-

tion is a factor. A large number of persons have been roped into surveillance in the city," he added.

A total of 6,954 samples and 6,880 individuals were tested today. With this, the total number of samples and individuals tested in the State till now stands at 65,977 and 59,952, respectively.

The State has got another testing facility in the private sector — Medall Healthcare,

Chennai. With this, there are a total of 34 testing facilities — 23 in the government sector and 11 in the private sector.

A total of 1,787 persons were in isolation facilities, 23,303 persons were under active home quarantine and 108 in government quarantine facilities.

Till date, 87,159 persons have completed their 28-day home quarantine in the State.

Concoction to be distributed

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

Over one lakh families residing in COVID-19 containment zones will be provided *kabasu* *kudineer*, a herbal concoction believed to boost immunity, the State government said on Thursday.

The initiative is part of the 'Arogyam' campaign, launched by Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami at the Secretariat on Thursday. The Chief Minister distributed the concoction to police personnel at the launch of the initiative. "The concoction is not a medicine for treating COVID-19, and is meant to boost immunity," a release said.

Hospital shut

CHENNAI

The Chennai Corporation has shut the Andhra Mahila Sabha Hospital in R.A. Puram after three persons — two doctors and a nurse — tested positive for COVID-19 on Thursday, according to sources.

For grieving conservancy worker, village comes first

He turns up for duty soon after his mother's funeral

KATHELENE ANTONY
PERAMBALUR

A. Ayyadurai, 50, a conservancy worker deployed in the COVID-19 containment zone of V. Kalathur panchayat in Perambalur district, returned to work an hour after burying his mother — service to his people amid a global pandemic was more important to him. His mother was ill for a long time and died of blood sugar complications.

Mr. Ayyadurai has been working in the panchayat in Veppanthattai block of Perambalur for over 20 years. "He is well known among people for being a dedicated and humble man, but we did not expect him to put their needs before his own," said G. Prabhu, president of the panchayat.

As part of efforts to check the spread of COVID-19, Mr. Ayyadurai's work involves spraying disinfectant across the village, including the premises of the V. Kalathur police station, which was sealed after the head-conserva-



A. Ayyadurai spraying disinfectant in the village.

back to work for his 6 p.m. shift. "We expected him to stay home and grieve and had even arranged for a replacement, but he came back and went about his regular work," he added.

Mr. Ayyadurai also scheduled rituals for the next day around his lunch time, so that he would not miss duty. "The police had advised us not to keep her remains for long, and to ensure that people do not gather," he said.

"The people of V. Kalathur need me now," he said. "My mother is no more. I can sit at home and grieve for days, but that is not going to help anyone. If I go out to work and keep the village clean and spray disinfectant properly, my people can remain indoors and sleep in peace. The people of my village have been afraid since a policeman tested positive and it is my job to reassure them," he said.

One's personal problems should never come in the way of work, especially during a crisis like this, he adds.

Timings
CHENNAI

FRIDAY, APR. 24
Thiruvananthapuram
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

SUNDAY, APR. 26
RISE 05:51 SET 18:23
RISE 08:06 SET 21:11

Chennai Weather max min

Thiruvananthapuram	37	26
Chennai Airport	37	27
Chennai City	35	29

Chennai Airport Today
36°C The weather will be warm and cloudy. Light rain and thundershower are likely.

Chennai Airport Tomorrow
35°C The weather will be warm and cloudy. Light rain and thundershower are likely.

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MEASI makes ₹50 lakh donation to CM's fund

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

The Muslim Educational Association of Southern India (MEASI), the parent body of The New College, Chennai, has contributed ₹50 lakh to the Chief Minister's Public Relief Fund towards meeting the challenge of tackling COVID-19 pandemic.

Prince of Arcot Nawab Mohammed Abdul Ali, who is also the president of MEASI, spoke to Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami over phone on Wednesday, and requested him to accept the offer from a minority educational institution, says a release.

MEASI honorary secretary T. Rafeeq Ahmed and treasurer Elias Sait assisted Mr. Ali in raising the fund.

Key junctions on Anna Salai closed

Heightened traffic movement on arterial road led to step, say police

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

A major stretch of the arterial Anna Salai in Chennai was closed for traffic on Thursday.

The decision to seal key junctions on Anna Salai by placing barricades was taken after the number of vehicles entering the road increased in the last two days.

Additional Commissioner of Police, Traffic, A. Arun told *The Hindu*, "We effected diversions on Anna Salai as there was higher traffic movement. In the lockdown period, people are not supposed to venture out on roads. Only the essential services and people who have movement passes can move on the roads. We saw a lot of unnecessary movements and so we decided to control those movements. We are not completely closing the road but giving an alternate way to reach their destination. The new measure will be in place daily until the end of the lockdown pe-



No entry: Barricades placed on the Gemini flyover, to curtail vehicular traffic, on Thursday. • K. V. SRINIVASAN

riod," Mr. Arun said, "Our main focus so far is only Anna Salai. We are going to assess the situation in other areas as well for effecting similar arrangement."

Ever since the city police promulgated prohibitory orders restricting movement of people and prohibiting unlawful assembly, traffic police personnel along with law and order police personnel installed iron barricades at several points to check

vehicles and allowed only pass holders, who were providing essential services. From noon on Thursday, the long stretch of Anna Salai was closed, including Little Mount Junction, Nandanam Signal, Teynampet Signal, Vijayaragava road junction, Anna Flyover and Spencer's Plaza. No vehicle was allowed to enter into the road and police personnel refused to remove the barricades for entry of pass holders as well. Along many stretches, even motorists who had relevant passes were not allowed and had to take a detour. A motorist who tried to reach Anna Salai from T.Nagar said the road leading to Spencer's Plaza was blocked. "I had to go around under the flyover and on instruction from a policeman posted there I took a detour via Cathedral Road, Music Academy and General Paterson Road in Royapettah. At the GP Road-Anna Salai junction, I was denied entry by police."

Caught unawares

"The sudden diversion led to confusion and we had to take detours to reach our destination. At many junctions, motorists were stranded and gathered in large numbers requesting police personnel to allow them through," another motorist from Velachery said. Police officials said only ambulances and essential service vehicles were allowed.

Free food at Amma Canteens

NGOs allowed to contribute; many MLAs too chip in

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

Amma canteens in the city have started serving free food. Nearly five lakh residents are expected to get food in the 407 Amma Canteens every day.

Chennai Corporation has issued orders permitting self-help groups to accept funding from non-governmental organisations which have offered to donate food and relief material.

"We will continue to serve free food in all Amma canteens until further orders," said an official of the Corporation. The facility was likely to be continued even after the lockdown as a number of poor people might need support, officials said.

The women SHG members have been asked to submit records of sale of food in their Amma canteens to the NGOs who will pay the money to the Corporation.

Actor donates ₹50 lakh
Actor Raghava Lawrence has donated ₹50 lakh for provid-



Success for the distressed: Nearly 5 lakh people are likely to benefit from free food at canteens. • B. VELANKANNAN RAJ

ing food in Amma Canteens, the officials said. "We are using the money for providing food in Amma canteens," said an official.

As of now, three NGOs had contributed towards free food. Many MLAs had been funding Amma canteens, the officials said. Minister for Fisheries D. Jayakumar had sponsored food in two Amma canteens in Tondiarpet zone and 22 Amma canteens in Royapuram zone.

Another political functionary sponsored food in 11 Amma Canteens in Thiru Vi

Ka Nagar zone. Former Mayor Saidai Duraisaimy has funded food in five Amma canteens, according to a civic official.

Many prefer chapati

"The Corporation has stopped chapati for dinner. They have asked us to provide rice varieties. But most visitors demand chapati for dinner. Many senior citizens, who are diabetic, request chapati. So the footfall has dropped in the evening in Amma Canteens," said a worker in one of the canteens.

Fourth dedicated shelter for workers from Northeast opened in south Chennai

S. POORVAJA
CHENNAI

For students, workers and daily wage labourers from the Northeastern States who have been stranded in the city due to the ongoing lockdown, a fourth dedicated relief centre has been opened in the Chennai South Region.

Officials from the Chennai South region have been closely working with the North East India Welfare Association in identifying and ensuring that those from the northeast who are stranded in the city are safe.

"Many persons who were em-



A shelter in the city. • FILE PHOTO

ployed at salons, spas and restaurants in the city haven't been working since the lockdown and have run out of money. There are some students too who are in the city to study and patients

who have come to the city for medical treatment," said Tluanga Colney, general secretary of the association.

Mr. Colney said that in anticipation of these workers and labourers running out of money and provisions, the association had reached out to community leaders in the city and asked them to identify persons who needed assistance. "The Greater Chennai Corporation has accommodated over 150 persons across three dedicated shelters and have also been arranging transport to help people reach the shelters," he said.

An app for home delivery of fish

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

Now, you can buy fresh fish in Chennai through the Meengal mobile application, launched by the Fisheries Department to facilitate home delivery of both marine and freshwater fish.

"The app has been linked to four of our stores in Anna Nagar, Virugambakkam, Teynampet and Santhome and people within a 5-km radius of these out-

lets of the Tamil Nadu Fisheries Development Corporation (TNFDC) can place orders. Deliveries are being done between 9.30 a.m. and 12.30 p.m. for now during the lockdown. It takes a maximum of an hour from the time of order for delivery," explained an official.

The TNFDC is placing orders from Pulicat for cultured prawns, fresh water fish varieties from reservoirs and marine fish from

Ramanathapuram area.

For now around 1,500 kg of fish is being sold in the city via TNFDC outlets and on-line orders. Consumers can also order fish on their revamped site www.meengal.com. Soon, they plan to introduce fish pickles and after the fishing ban is lifted ready-to-eat fish dishes and dry fish too would be available for sale, the official added.

THE HINDU
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SOUTHERN RAILWAY
CORRIDGEMENT FOR EXTENSION OF TENDER

The tender inviting bids for the work of "On Board Housekeeping Services (OBHS) in Train Nos. 22604/22603 in between VM-KGP-VM section, 22606/22605 in between VM-PRR-VM section, 16855/16856 in between VM-MAQ-VM section, 16857/16858 in between VM-MAQ-VM section, 16861/16862 in between VM-CAPE-VM section, 16864/16863 in between VM-BGKT-VM section and 16796/16795 in between VM-MS-VM section for 4 years, Mechanized Cleaning of Coaches maintained in VM pit line for 4 years, PFTR attention of trains at PF/VM for 4 years, Watering of pass through trains at PF/VM for 4 years and Cleaning of pit lines, Coaching yard, Service buildings at Villupuram Coaching Depot/Station and Collection of garbage and scrap from work areas and disposal of the same from depot for a period of 4 years under single SBD contract" vide **Tender Notice No.Mech-TPJ-SBDVM-10-19-20 dated: 17.03.2020** which was scheduled to open on **30.04.2020** is hereby extended upto **15.05.2020** due to administrative reasons.

The corrigendum for extension of closing date - **15.05.2020** - closing time **15.00 hrs.** of this tender is also available on website **www.reps.gov.in**

Divisional Railway Manager (Mechanical),
Tiruchirappalli - 620 001.

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
ANDHRA PRADESH
TADEPALLIGUDEM - 534 101, A.P. INDIA

Adv. No. NIT-AP/CSFS/TENDER-01/2020-21 Date: 24-04-2020

TENDER NOTIFICATION

Sealed tenders are invited from Reputed Firms / Agencies for the supply of the following items:

- Supply of Man Power - Highly Skilled / Skilled / Semiskilled persons on outsourcing basis contract.
- Providing Security Services.
- Providing Housekeeping Services.

All the details can be obtained from the institute website: **www.nitandhra.ac.in** **DIRECTOR**

Urgent!! **Most Important!!**



DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND PREVENTIVE MEDICINE

PUBLIC NOTICE - COVID-19

Government of Tamil Nadu, under the Tamil Nadu Public Health Act, 1939, section 62 have declared Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) as a Notifiable Disease. Under section 76 of Tamil Nadu Public Health Act, 1939 the entire State of Tamil Nadu has been declared as prone to the outbreak of COVID-19. Accordingly, the guidelines have been issued under Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897 for prevention of outbreak of the disease.

All the Government and Private Buildings, Hospitals, Multi Storied Buildings, Schools, Colleges, Marriage Halls, Amusement Parks, Cinema Theatres, Commercial Buildings, Religious Places, Factories and all other buildings should make adequate provision for washbasins with running water facility along with Liquid Soap / Soap for hand wash. All people should be allowed to **enter** and **exit** the above premises only after washing their hands with soap and water.

All the Hospitals, Diagnostic Laboratories and Doctors should report all confirmed / suspected cases of COVID-19 / Severe Acute Respiratory Illness (SARI) to the Public Health Department, within 24 hours, in writing. Government and Private Hospitals and Laboratory premises should be cleaned frequently with disinfectants to avoid spreading of disease to others, failing which legal action will be taken besides cancellation of approval / permission for such facilities.

This Public Notice is issued in accordance with the provisions of Tamil Nadu Public Health Act, 1939 and Epidemic Disease Act, 1897. Failure to adhere to the above directions will be dealt with under the provisions of the above Acts. In addition, action will be pursued under Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) which may entail imprisonment upto 6 months or fine or with both. This Public Notice is deemed to have been communicated in writing to all those concerned.

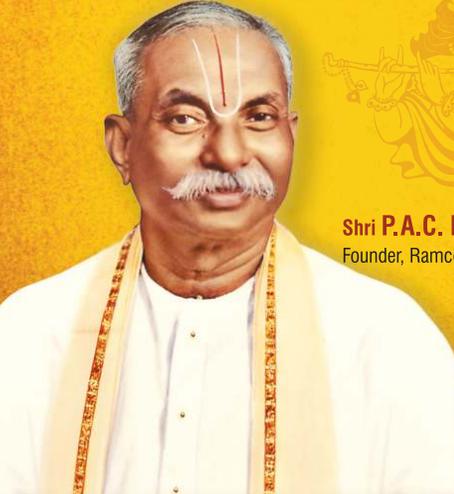
Director,
Department of Public Health
and Preventive Medicine,

Chennai - 6, 23.04.2020
DIPR/491/DISPLAY/2020

ॐ
**ब्रह्मण्याधाय कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा करोति यः ।
लिप्यते न स पापेन पद्मपत्रमिवाम्भसा ॥ १० ॥**

Those who dedicate their actions to Ishvara, abandoning all attachment, remain untouched by sin, just as a lotus leaf is untouched by water.

- Bhagavad Gita : 5.10



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- Raja Charity Trust • P. A. C. Ramasamy Raja Education Charity Trust
- Ramco Institute of Technology, Rajapalayam

CELEBRATING
126th
YEAR
BIRTH ANNIVERSARY

Those without ration cards can also purchase grocery kits, govt. tells HC

The pack will be available in other outlets too, apart from all ration shops

MOHAMED IMRANULLAH S.
CHENNAI

The Registrar of Cooperative Societies on Thursday informed the Madras High Court that a ₹500 grocery kit being sold by the State government, during the ongoing lockdown, can be purchased even by those who do not have ration cards and that the kits will be available in other outlets too apart from all ration shops.

In a counter affidavit filed before Justices M. Sathyanarayanan and M. Nirmal Kumar, Registrar G. Govindaraj said the kit, containing 19 items of consumables, was basically intended to help the poor and the middle class people who were affected by the increased prices of essential commodities during the lockdown.



The kit, containing 19 items of consumables, was basically intended to help the poor and the middle class. • B. JOTHIRAMALINGAM

The Cooperative department had come up with the idea of selling the kits to mitigate the grievances of a particular section of people and hence it was decided to sell those kits through ration shops.

"Now, the grocery kits will also be made available for sale at

self-service units, retail outlets, Amma mini cooperative supermarkets and mobile farm fresh outlets," he added.

The counter was filed in response to a public interest litigation petition filed by advocate A.P. Suryaprakasam seeking a direction to the government to

ensure door delivery of the grocery kits to avoid crowd in the outlets.

Door delivery

However, the Registrar did not commit whether it would be possible to ensure door delivery of the kits.

He said, "The sales personnel in ration shops are engaged in issuing COVID-19 relief package of ₹1,000 and essential commodities to all cardholders. They are continuing to work in this extraordinary situation. They have been stepping out of their homes and serving the people to avoid hunger and to ensure availability of food items during the lockdown period."

With this submission, the Registrar urged the court to dismiss the PIL petition.

HC refuses to direct banks to suspend EMIs

RBI counsel says Centre and apex bank will take a call on the issue

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

The Madras High Court on Thursday dismissed as withdrawn a public interest litigation petition filed by a lawyer seeking a direction to the Union Finance Ministry and Reserve Bank of India to instruct banks and other financial institutions to extend the moratorium for repayment of all kinds of loans till July 31 and not to levy inter-

est on delayed payments.

Justices M. Sathyanarayanan and M. Nirmal Kumar refused to entertain the petition after Chevan Mohan, counsel for RBI, told the court that it was for the Centre and the apex bank to take a call on issues having financial implications and not for courts to issue directions.

Multiple issuers

He also said the litigant had

sought multiple prayers which were beyond judicial scrutiny.

In his petition, the litigant B. Ramkumar Adityan had also insisted upon suspending Electronic Clearance Services (ECS), for collecting Equated Monthly Instalments (EMIs), till July 31. He further wanted repayment of the cheque dishonour charges or ECS non-clearance charges and other charges, if any, levied by the banks for default

after March 1.

The Division Bench also dismissed on merits yet another petition filed by the same lawyer with a plea to open temporary markets in schools, colleges and community halls to decongest regular markets and to issue coloured passes, depending upon age group, to the people for stepping out of their houses on different days of the week for purchasing essentials.

IN BRIEF

Schools asked not to demand fees

The Directorate of School Education on Thursday directed government-aided and unaided private schools not to compel students to pay any type of fees for 2020-21 academic year. The school authorities should also desist from collecting pending dues or penalty for the last academic year during the lockdown period. Director of School Education, P. T. Rudra Goud said in a release.

Parties to protest against Centre today

The CPI, CPI (M), DMK and VCK have decided to stage a protest in front of the Gandhi Statue on Friday against the discrimination shown by the Centre to the Union Territory. CPI local unit secretary A. M. Saleem told reporters on Thursday that the Centre had failed to provide any financial assistance to the U.T. in its fight against COVID-19.

Police officer tests positive in Vaniyambadi

A woman police officer in Vaniyambadi tested positive for COVID-19 on Thursday. She was shifted to Government Medical College Hospital in Adulkamparai. As soon as the test results came the police station was out of bounds for the public.

Kamal unveils song on COVID-19

SRINIVASA RAMANUJAM
CHENNAI

Actor and Makkal Needhi Maalam founder Kamal Haasan is trying to spread hope through music. His latest creation *Arivum Anbum*, a song that sees big names of the film industry teaming up, is an attempt to spread positivity in these troubled times.

"I hope this song is a therapy, a calming factor in these times," said Kamal Haasan, after launching it on a Zoom call with over 50 mediapersons. "The way the artistes came together showed me what a great family I belong to. It's not that me directing this song will ward off COVID-19. All grown-up people were once children who heard lullabies. So, we did this for that man on the street without food...maybe this will keep his hope up for tomorrow."

The launch was perhaps the first time a track has been unveiled virtually in front of mediapersons from across the world, with all of them safe in their homes. Joining the video call was music composer Ghibran.

No community spread of COVID-19 in Puducherry, say officials

Surveillance tests done across city throw up negative results

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
PUDUCHERRY

The results of surveillance tests undertaken across the city have shown that there is no community spread of COVID-19, health officials said on Thursday.

Addressing a press conference, Prashant Kumar Panda, Health Secretary, said tests conducted on randomly drawn samples from various city locations showed no signs of the virus. "This instils confidence that Puducherry, which currently has only three active COVID-19 patients recovering at the Indira Gandhi Medical College & Research Institute (IGMCR) hospital, remains in Stage-1 of transmission," he said. "Our RT-PCR testing has been very good. Till date, we have tested 1,473 patients out of which 1,354 have returned negative results for the coronavirus," he said.



A health worker collecting a sample from Chief Minister V. Narayanasamy in Puducherry on Thursday. • S.S. KUMAR

CM, Speaker undergo test

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
PUDUCHERRY

Chief Minister V. Narayanasamy, Speaker V.P. Sivakulandhu and several MLAs underwent an RT-PCR test for COVID-19 as a precautionary exercise on Thursday.

The Health Department had

arranged the testing between 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. as a safeguard measure for the leaders as they had been visiting public places and high-risk containment zones to evaluate prevention measures.

The results are expected on Friday.

Aid for cine workers

STAFF REPORTER
CHENNAI

The State government has paid ₹1,000 each to 7,489 members of various associations under the Cine Workers' Welfare Board to help them tide over the crisis created by the COVID-19 outbreak, said the Minister for Information and Publicity, Kadambur Raju. The board has 21,679 members.

THE HINDU

Air Surcharge as applicable:
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Uttar Pradesh Medical Supplies Corporation Limited
(A Govt. of Uttar Pradesh Undertaking)
GSTIN: 09AACCU220P12Z CN: UB8510U2018SGC102425

Tender Ref. No. UPMIS/LED/RC/185 e-Tender Invitation Date: 22nd April, 2020

Uttar Pradesh Medical Supplies Corporation Limited, Lucknow invites online tenders from eligible and qualified Manufacturer/Importer/Authorized Agent for Procurement of Automated Nucleic Acid Extraction System (REWA). The schedules of e-Tendering activities are as follows under:

S.No.	Activity	Date & Time
1.	Tender Reference No.	UPMIS/LED/RC/185
2.	Commencement of Downloading of Tender Document	23 rd April 2020 from 10:00 AM Website of www.upmisl.com
3.	Date & Time of Pre-Bid Meeting	25 th April 2020 at 12:00 Noon in Conference Hall of UPMISCL, Lucknow
4.	Last Date & Submission of Online Bids	26 th April 2020 up to 03:00 PM
5.	Date, Time & Place of Opening of Technical Bids	29 th April 2020 up to 04:00 PM in the office of UPMISCL, SUDA Bhawan, Lucknow
6.	Date of Completion of Examination of Technical Bid	To be declared on www.upmisl.com and www.tenderup.in
7.	Date of Time of Opening of Financial Bid	To be declared on www.upmisl.com and www.tenderup.in
8.	Date of Completion of Examination of Financial Bid	To be declared on www.upmisl.com and www.tenderup.in
9.	Validity of Tender	180 Days
10.	Date & Time of Physical Demonstration	30 th April 2020 at 12:00 Noon in the office of UPMISCL, Lucknow

The details of tender notice are given on website www.upmisl.com and www.tenderup.in. Kindly read the tender notice before applying.

General Manager (Equipment-Procurement) UPMISCL

WESTERN RAILWAY
VARIOUS WORKS

Dy. Chief Electrical Engineer Construction Vadodara invites e-tender as per details given below-

Sr. No.	Tender Notice No. & Date	Work and location	Approx. cost of work in Rs.	EMD Rs.
1.	TR-C-4-2020 dtd 11.03.20	Design, Supply, Erection, Testing & Commissioning of 25 KV AC OHE between Dabhoi-Badoli Section on Vadodara Division of Western Railway in connection with Electrification of Existing BG line between Dabhoi-Chhotla Udepur Section	Rs.17,58,36,818.00	Rs.10,29,200.00
2.	TR-C-9-2020 dtd 21.04.20	Design, Supply, Erection, Testing & Commissioning of 25 KV AC OHE between Bodeli-Chhotla Udepur Section on Vadodara Division of Western Railway in connection with Electrification of Existing BG line between Dabhoi-Chhotla Udepur Section	Rs.16,70,27,123.07	Rs.9,85,100.00
3.	TR-C-7-2020 dtd 12.03.20	Design, Supply, Erection, Testing & Commissioning of 25 KV AC OHE between Ankleshwar-Rajpipla Section on Vadodara Division of Western Railway in connection with Electrification of Existing BG line	Rs.19,74,31,489.25	Rs.11,37,200.00
4.	TR-C-9-2020 dtd 12.03.20	Design, Supply, Erection, Testing & Commissioning of SCADA between PRTN-DB-CTD, MYG-SMLA, DB-CDD-Kevaliya Section on Vadodara Division of Western Railway.	Rs.4,70,47,859.60	Rs.3,85,200.00
5.	TR-C-10-2020 dtd 20.03.20	Modification of HT Overhead power line of MG/VCL, Railway track along, Between Anand-Khambhat, Vasad-Kathana, AKV-Raj and KRVN-VTL Section in connection with execution of RE work of W.R. Sanctioned in Budget 18-19 from CORE to WR.	Rs.1,85,80,140.60	Rs.2,42,900.00

Date of submission: Sr.1: 11.03.20, Sr.2: 21.04.20, Sr.3 and 4: 12.03.20, Sr.5: 20.03.20. Date of opening: Sr.1 and 3: 12.05.20, Sr.2: 26.05.20, Sr.4 and 5: 13.05.20. All other terms and conditions of the respective tenders will remain the same. For more details please visit our website www.treps.gov.in.

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COVID-19 and diabetes: can DPP-4 inhibitors play a role?

The whole world has been shaken by the COVID-19 pandemic. Scientists working in different fields such as epidemiology, virology and immunology are struggling to find the remedy to control and prevent this epidemic. A number of theories are going around about the cause and effect of this virus on human beings. The protective role of small pox and BCG vaccination from COVID-19 is also being analysed.

Morbidity and mortality due to COVID-19 is high in those with co-morbid conditions including Diabetes.

Type 2 diabetes is associated with low grade chronic inflammation induced by the excessive visceral adipose tissue (belly fat). Persistent hyperglycemia (high blood sugar) and inflammation can cause ineffective immune response resulting in decreased defense mechanism against any infection.



Prof VIJAYAM BALAJI
Prof V. SESHIAH

COVID-19

As a consequence, uncontrolled diabetes along with advanced age is a major factor of poor outcome during an infection with COVID-19.

Recently a ray of hope has appeared in the usefulness of the class of drug, DPP-4 inhibitors. DPP-4 inhibitors are used to control blood sugar levels and widely used in the treatment of Type 2 Diabetes.

We need to know the function of DPP-4 to understand the role of



DPP-4 inhibitor. DPP-4 is a type 2 transmembrane glycoprotein expressed in many tissues including immune cells. Although its function is not fully understood, it plays a role in post meal glucose regulation.

DPP-4 expression is high in visceral adipose tissues and increases inflammation and insulin resistance.

In a simple way we can now understand a drug that inhibits DPP-4 will reduce blood sugar, reduce insulin resistance and reduce inflammation.

Coming to COVID-19, excessive inflammatory response after an infection has been shown to be

the major cause of an adverse outcome including acute respiratory distress syndrome and acute kidney injury. So harnessing the protective role of DPP-4 inhibitor in decreasing the profound inflammation seems logical.

Few studies published on the anti-inflammatory protective role of DPP-4 inhibitors in diabetic mice with MERS-CoV infection support this concept. A meta analysis in human beings also showed that upper respiratory tract infection does not increase significantly with DPP-4 inhibitors treatment.

It concluded that DPP-4 inhibitors have been associated with anti-inflammatory and anti-adipogenic effect.

We need more data on the anti-inflammatory effect of DPP-4 inhibitors in minimising the risk and the progression of acute respiratory complications in COVID-19 patients with Type 2 Diabetes.

Law College starts online classes

Professors upload study materials of all subjects

R. SUJATHA
CHENNAI

The Tamil Nadu Dr. Ambedkar Law College has introduced online lessons for five-year and two-year law degree students. Officials said the administration transitioned to virtual instruction for both P.G. and U.G. students as the

lockdown came in the middle of the semester. The university has around 1,500 students and a month's classes have not been held due to the lockdown. They said a fortnight ago they announced the launch of online classes. "Students were provided the lectures provided

via applications like Google classroom and other virtual learning platforms. Around 400 students have registered under each professor," an official informed. "It has received good reception. Our professors have been uploading study materials," she said.

Vaiko's plea

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam general secretary Vaiko has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi urging the Centre to implement certain measures under the Atal Bimit Vyakti Kalyan Yojana (ABVKY) to provide some financial relief to nearly 9 million workers who had lost their jobs because of the lockdown.

OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

DEATH	DEATH ANNIVERSARIES	DEATH ANNIVERSARIES
<p>Shri S. RADHAKRISHNAN Alias Pappu aged 79 years Husband of Mrs.R.Saraswathi attained the lotus feet of the almighty at 6AM on 23rd April 2020.</p> <p>Obsequies are underway at 'Bhavani' 7/13, First Cross Street, Jayanagar, Tambaram Sanatorium, Chennai - 47. Ct. 9840746320</p>	<p>27th ANNIVERSARY</p> <p>You are forever in our heart. We love and miss you</p> <p>D.O.B : 1940 D.O.D : 24.4.93</p>	<p>I. STANISLAUS 11th ANNIVERSARY DOB: 08/11/1930 DOD: 24/04/2009</p> <p>S. ANTHONIAMMAL 6th ANNIVERSARY DOB: 18/05/1939 DOD: 25/04/2014</p> <p>Fondly remembered by Inigo Irudayaraj & Family</p>
<p>1st death anniversary</p> <p>Prof. T.RADHAKRISHNAN Found Memories from Wife, Children, Grand Children, Relatives and friends</p>	<p>NELLA S. NAGALINGAM NADAR</p> <p>Fondly remembered by: S/NJ Group of Companies IMFL ♦ Breweries Distillery ♦ Sugar Power ♦ Hotels Transport</p> <p>Family Members, Relatives & Employees</p>	<p>In memory of your loved ones To dedicate a space in this section, Please contact: 044-28575711 / 28575714 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. & 72990 95757 from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. from 5 to 7 p.m. for Monday Edition For Placing Advertisements Online log on to www.thehinduads.com DONATE EYES-GIFT SIGHT</p>

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HARISH FAMILY, VELLORE

Three die in Andhra Pradesh, one in Telangana

Kurnool and Guntur, worst-hit districts in A.P., experience spike; Karnataka records 18 new cases while Kerala has 10 more

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM/
BENGALURU/HYDERABAD

Andhra Pradesh once again saw a spike in COVID-19 positive cases detected in a single day. On Thursday, the State reported 80 new cases and three deaths, taking the tally to 893 and the toll to 27.

COVID-19

One more person with the virus died in Telangana. Two 'green' districts in Kerala with few or no cases turned restricted zones with new ones reported.

Kurnool district in Andhra Pradesh had 31 of the 80 fresh cases, taking the total to 234. It also reported two more deaths and Krishna district reported one more.

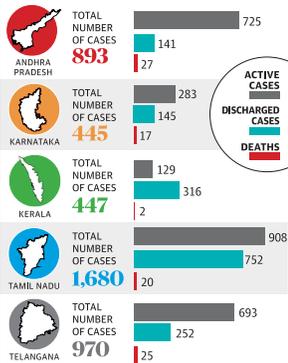
Guntur district followed Kurnool with 18 new cases and 195 in all. Chittoor, an emerging hotspot, reported

Mobile message

The Tamil Nadu government is trying new initiatives to create awareness of COVID-19 among the public



On the move: The Chennai Corporation is driving home the message about the effects of the pandemic through a coronavirus-themed auto on Thursday. ■ B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM



14 new cases while Anantapur and East Godavari reported six new cases each, and Krishna and Prakasam two new cases each. Visakhapatnam had one new case. Meanwhile, 21 patients –

nine in Krishna, seven in Chittoor and five in Kadapa districts – recovered and were discharged. Kurnool and Guntur account for 48% of the State tally. They are followed by Krishna (88), Chittoor (73), Nellore (67), Kadapa (51), Prakasam (50), Anantapur (42), West Godavari (39), East Godavari (32) and Visakhapatnam (22). So far, 48,034 samples

have been tested.

Kerala confidant: CM

The Kerala government has concluded that there is no third stage, or community transmission, of COVID-19 in the State.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, briefing the media, said that there was no community transmission, even though the threat of this happening was very real.

There were 10 new COVID-19 cases reported in Kerala on Thursday. New cases in two districts, Kottayam and Idukki, earlier designated as green zones because there were few or no cases, have got the alarm bells ringing. Idukki accounted for four cases and Kottayam, two, bringing the districts back on the restricted zone list. Kozhikode also reported two cases, while Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam had one case each. Of 10 new

cases, four were from neighbouring States, two from abroad and four were contacts of imported cases.

In Karnataka, 18 new cases were reported on Thursday, nine from a labour unit in Hongsandra, Bengaluru. All were primary contacts of a 54-year-old migrant labourer who tested positive on Wednesday. Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike sealed the area.

970 in Telangana

Besides the fatality, cases in Telangana touched 970 as 27 new ones were detected on Thursday. Also, 58 people were discharged.

Of 27 new cases, 13 were from Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation, 10 from Jogulamba-Gadwal district, said Telangana Health Minister Eatala Rajender. One case each was reported in Kumaram Bheem, Medchal, Jangaon and Rangareddy districts.

STAFF REPORTER
VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh stood first in the country in the COVID-19 tests per million ratio by conducting 961 tests on Thursday, officials told Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy at a review meeting.

Of the 48,034 tests conducted so far, 14,423 were rapid tests. Of them, 11,543 were conducted in the red zones. On Wednesday, 6,520 RT-PCR tests were conducted. Of the total rapid tests, 30 turned out to be positive. For further confirmation, PCR tests would be done, the officials said.

ICMR approval

Stating that the kits procured from South Korea had the ICMR's approval and were working satisfactorily, the officials said the tests were being conducted as per protocol.

Mr. Reddy, while patting



Jagan Mohan Reddy

the officials for the achievement, asked them not to be complacent.

"Take necessary steps and conduct another round of door-to-door survey in July. Focus attention on thalassaemia, cancer and dialysis patients. See that these patients do not face any hardship. Respond immediately to all the calls received on the helpline number 104. Ensure that emergency and delivery cases are not hit," the Chief Minister said.

Dressed to save



Police role: Police personnel on Thursday dressing up a mannequin to be placed at Sirsi Circle in Bengaluru in an effort to curb traffic violations in case lockdown restrictions are eased. ■ SUDHAKARA JAIN

Privacy protected in Sprinklr deal, Kerala tells High Court

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOCHI

The terms and conditions of the master service and non-disclosure agreements signed by the U.S.-based Sprinklr with the State government ensure that the data of COVID-19 patients and those under surveillance are secure and their right to privacy is protected, according to a statement filed by the State government in the High Court on Thursday.

The statement said the privacy policy of the company and international data protection norms, including the General Data Protection Regulations, ensured a high level of confidence. The platform made available by the company could handle large volumes of multichannel data

CPI(M) supports State govt.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) on Thursday said the party-led LDF government in Kerala has not violated the party's stance by engaging a U.S. company to analyse COVID-19 data. "The CPI(M)

does not think that the government has gone overboard... Adequate safeguards have been made to prevent data leak or trading. Moreover, it could be examined once the crisis blows over," State Secretary Kodyeri Balakrishnan told reporters.

ta and these would facilitate effective monitoring of those in home quarantine. None of the government institutions in the State was capable of doing big data analysis in the shortest possible time.

The statement said the choice of jurisdiction of New York courts was a standard form of contract of the company. The data resided in India and there would therefore be no issues of jurisdiction. Even if any breach occurred outside India, prosecution could be initiated within India under Section 75 of the IT Act, provided such breach impacted a computer or computer resource within the country.

Provide relief to migrant workers: HC

STAFF REPORTER
VIJAYAWADA

A Division Bench of the High Court comprising Justices C. Praveen Kumar and R. Ramesh directed the Andhra Pradesh government to provide shelter, food and medicine to migrant workers within 24 hours of identifying them.

The court gave the direction to the State government while hearing a petition filed by the Communist Party of India's State secretary K. Ramakrishna seeking orders to the Central and the State governments to allow migrant workers staying back in Vijayawada, Guntur and other places to return to their hometowns and villages within the State and other parts of the country.

IN BRIEF



KCR happy with work on Kaleshwaram project

HYDERABAD
Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao has expressed satisfaction over the arrangements being made by the Energy department to lift Kaleshwaram project water from Ranganayaksagar to Kondapochamma reservoir. Telangana Transco Managing Director Prabhakar Rao said all the lifts would be readied in four to five days to transfer Kaleshwaram project water to Kondapochamma reservoir.

TTD uploads 781 publications on website

THIRUPATI
The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) has uploaded a whopping 781 publications in seven languages, including the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, in the e-publication section on its website www.tirumala.org. The 781 publications include 492 in Telugu, 75 in Sanskrit, 122 in English, 74 in Hindi, 14 in Tamil and two each in Kannada and Banjara languages.

Six held on poaching charge in Wayanad

KALPETTA
Six persons were arrested on Thursday on the charge of poaching in the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary in Kerala. Wildlife warden P.K. Asif said the accused had hunted Malabar giant squirrel, flying squirrel, porcupine and mouse deer from the Masalakunnu forest on the Kerala-Karnataka border of the sanctuary on April 21. They also vandalised a surveillance camera installed in the Nagarhole tiger reserve in Karnataka adjacent to the sanctuary.

'Occupancy in Karnataka prisons down to 95%

State takes steps to prevent virus spread

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

The average percentage of occupancy in prisons across Karnataka has been brought down to 95% from 110% by releasing 1,198 prisoners on temporary bail and parole, and shifting 575 prisoners from overcrowded prisons to less crowded ones for preventing spread of COVID-19. The State government told the High Court of Karnataka.

As many as 790 undertrial prisoners were released on temporary bail based on veracity of the charges against them on recommendation of a High Powered Committee (HPC), constituted as per the apex court's guidelines to decongest prisons as a precaution. And 408 convict prisoners

were released on parole, the government said in its statement.

It also said that 575 had been transferred from 12 of the overcrowded prisons to the six prisons having lesser number of prisoners, and an additional temporary living space to house 1,471 prisoners has been created since March 23.

Meanwhile, a special Division Bench comprising Chief Justice Abhay Shreenivas Oka and Justice B.V. Nagarathna, taking note of measures taken to prevent COVID-19 in prisons, pointed out that the undertrial prisoners can still file pleas to exercise their right to seek bail from the jurisdictional court even if the HPC had not considered them for release on temporary bail.

Kerala blames illegal travellers for new cases in green zones

Chief Minister flags smuggling of people in cargo vehicles

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The State government on Thursday said the illegal movement of people across interstate borders might have triggered the emergence of new COVID-19 positive cases in Green zone districts such as Idukki.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan flagged the smuggling of people across borders in cargo vehicles and lockdown-defying illegal travel across districts as the foremost threat to the State's epidemic containment strategy, which he said had entered its third phase.

Mr. Vijayan asked law enforcers to commit their resources, including drones, to halt the to and fro movement of people between Kerala and Karnataka and also Tamil Nadu through forest trails, illegal crossing points, and rural roads.

The tightening of lockdown curbs had spawned a mafia that transported people to other States and districts in return for cash. The curfew-breakers contracted a network of ambulance and container lorry drivers to conceal passengers in the holds of their vehicles. Some persons living on properties abutting inter-State borders aided the racket.

Mr. Vijayan ordered an investigation into how a schoolteacher from Thiruvananthapuram could enlist

the help of the police, and later the Excise Department to travel to Thamarassery in Kozhikode from where she crossed over to Karnataka in an excise vehicle for onward passage to New Delhi.

The Wayanad police said the woman had journeyed to Muthanga unchallenged on the strength of a vehicle pass issued by the DySP, Narcotic Cell, Thiruvananthapuram Rural. She then crossed over with the help of an inspector attached to the Excise Circle Office, Kalpetta.

District Police Chief, Wayanad, R. Ilanko, said the police booked the woman and the excise official for violating lockdown and jeopardising pandemic control.

Karnataka gives Devanahalli chakota new wings

Bengaluru airport is helping to grow the citrus variety, which enjoys a Geographical Indication tag

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

Endowed with a unique taste and flavour, and a Geographical Indication (GI) tag, the Devanahalli Pomeo, the citrus fruit popularly known as chakota, is getting a fresh cultivation push.

The Karnataka Horticulture Department is set to provide the plant to interested farmers in Devanahalli and Doddaballapur regions. As urbanisation grows and the landscape changes, the number of farmers growing the fruit has dropped over the years. The fruit is localised to around 13 villages in Devanahalli taluk, eight villages of Sidlaghatta

taluk and seven villages of Doddaballapura taluk. A Joint Director in the Horticulture Department, Krishnamurthy, said, "Farmers in these areas grow chakota on the borders of their fields or near their houses. After the fruit received the GI tag, they are coming forward to grow the plant more widely. The department is using its farms in Chikkaballapur and Bengaluru Rural district to provide plants and promote it."

Massive nursery At Soppahalli farm in Chikkaballapur, the department is growing 5,000 plants, to provide



Fruit punch: A file photo of chakota on sale in Devanahalli.

them to interested farmers. Guru Kumar, a farmer said, "Devanahalli is known for chakota. During the summer season, farmers sell it on the Devanahalli main road, on the National Highway and other areas.

Each fruit is sold at around ₹ 80. But there are no buyers during the lockdown." Bangalore International Airport Limited (BIAL), which operates the Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) too is

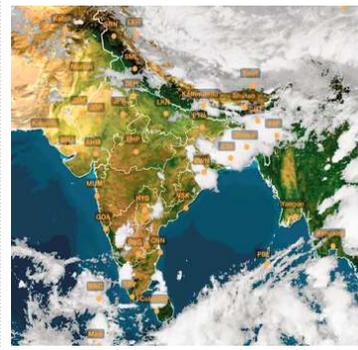
cultivating the fruit. BIAL said in a statement that under its CSR programme 'Namma Ooru', it will have 500 chakota plants.

With departmental support, 50 plants have been planted in the campus that once was a hub for pomeos before the airport came up.

BIAL aims to promote cultivation of the fruit and form a viable market in collaboration with the Indian Council of Agricultural Research and other institutions. It would work with farmers in and around Devanahalli to promote cultivation through self-help groups.

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



Forecast for Friday: Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning, hail and squall very likely at isolated places over Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura; with lightning, hail and squall at isolated places over sub-Himalayan West Bengal, Sikkim, Jharkhand, Odisha, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	38	35	22.5	Kozhikode	...	36.4	27.8
Ahmedabad	...	41.3	27.5	Kurnool	...	42.7	21.8
Aizawl	...	26.8	15.1	Lucknow	...	33.2	21.2
Allahabad	...	38.0	22.6	Madurai	...	39.0	27.2
Bengaluru	...	35.4	23.4	Mangaluru	...	37.1	27.1
Bhopal	...	38.0	24.6	Mumbai	...	36.3	26.5
Bhubaneswar	...	34.2	25.0	Mysuru	...	35.9	24.2
Chandigarh	...	33.0	20.1	New Delhi	...	36.4	23.6
Chennai	...	34.9	28.6	Patna	...	34.8	24.2
Coimbatore	...	37.3	25.0	Port Blair	...	32.9	26.4
Dehradun	...	31.7	17.0	Puducherry	...	35.4	27.4
Gangtok	...	12.0	15.2	...	...	39.6	24.0
Goa	...	34.6	26.5	Raipur	...	37.0	35.8
Guwahati	...	6.0	28.4	...	...	34.8	25.6
Hubballi	...	37.0	22.0	...	...	40.5	27.0
Hyderabad	...	39.1	26.5	...	...	25.0	14.4
Imphal	...	15.6	28.0	...	...	5.6	...
Jajpur	...	31.0	35.1	...	...	34.8	25.6
Kolkata	...	66.0	33.6	...	...	40.5	27.0
Kohima	19.8	...	...	...	...
Kolkata	...	31.7	25.6	...	...	33.8	28.0

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)
Pollutants in the air you are breathing Yesterday
CITIES SO₂ NO₂ CO PM2.5 PM10 AQI CODE
Ahmedabad 08 22 19 22.5 79
Bengaluru 05 08 63 119
Chennai 08 02 39 14
Delhi 25 28 110 283 142
Hyderabad 04 55 28 18.8
Kolkata 09 11 20 18 31
Lucknow 06 40 59 178
Mumbai 09 12 07 40 78
Pune 31 11 51 39 37
Visakhapatnam 08 32 46 3
Air 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.
PM2.5 & PM10: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease.



Rapid failures

Significant error rates for COVID-19 antibody testing kits underscore the need for caution



DEEPAK NAYYAR

Rapid testing kits that State governments have been using to detect antibodies to the novel coronavirus have proved unreliable, making the shift to normal life after the lockdown ends on May 3 more difficult. Governments around the world have been looking for an accurate blood test that can tell people if they have immunity through past COVID-19 infection, and can therefore return to their duties to kickstart the economy. While the diagnostic RT-PCR test to confirm the presence of the virus using a nasal swab in a laboratory setting is considered reliable, attempts to design a rapid test that uses a blood sample to find antibodies after past infection have thrown up errors in as much as a third of cases: a study in the U.K. showed that they were high on specificity – accurate in cases that they found to be antibody positive. But they still missed about 30% of positive cases, showing low sensitivity. This is the phenomenon worrying India, which has imported several hundred thousand rapid testing kits, and its experience is shared by the U.S., U.K., Spain and other countries. Rajasthan had laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 positive cases not being detected by rapid testing kits. Several States have independently ordered thousands of kits, mainly from China, and are in a quandary.

The ICMR has advised States, to whom it distributed kits, that they could be used for surveillance testing, rather than to make medically important decisions. Narrowing down the test to reliable methods is the challenge, and the WHO along with its collaborating centres is working to identify them. The results will be crucial and all countries, including the U.S. White House Coronavirus Task Force, are looking at serosurveillance, the process that will determine the status of the population on COVID-19. An exit from lockdown and other public health measures depend on such testing. India should remain focused on identifying tests that work well. This requires close integration with efforts launched by diagnostics regulators in the U.S., Europe and China who have used emergency provisions to allow early use of kits; the kits themselves are under evaluation. There are reports indicating that some vendors of rapid testing devices in China have run afoul of regulators in that country since they have no prior expertise in the field. Making purchase decisions, therefore, calls for rigorous review. In the immediate context, the message should go out to States that rapid tests cannot substitute for RT-PCR to diagnose infection. It is by no means clear that antibodies developed in response to COVID-19 provide long-term protection against reinfection. Yet, a good test to certify a large section of the population as having developed immunity seems to be a promising tool to reopen the economy with some confidence.

Protection for protectors

Healthcare workers should be allowed to work in an environment free of violence and abuse

Since the first case of novel coronavirus infection in India was reported in end-January, many healthcare workers have been subjected to abuse and violence in the line of duty. Most of the attacks have been on healthcare personnel sent to localities to collect samples from people who are suspected to have been infected or have come in contact with those who have tested positive for the virus. Some doctors returning home from duty have been prevented from entering their homes and, in some cases, even asked to vacate their premises. While such acts have been widely condemned, nothing much changed on the ground. The dastardly act of a few people in Chennai who not only attacked healthcare workers but also prevented a decent burial of a neurosurgeon who died of COVID-19 complications on April 19 shook the nation's conscience. Though belated, the Union Cabinet's decision to promulgate an ordinance to amend the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897 to make acts of violence against medical personnel a cognisable and non-bailable offence and also provide compensation in case of injury or damage or loss to property is thus commendable.

Very often, the abuse and violence against healthcare workers after the outbreak of COVID-19 in the country has been due to fear and ignorance. The communal colour given to the COVID-19 epidemic after the large religious congregation was held in mid-March by the Tablighi Jamaat in Nizamuddin, Delhi initially led many in the community to avoid coming forward to get tested. In many cases, the fear of stigma and isolation resulted in attacks on healthcare workers who had gone to collect samples from those who were part of this congregation. In other instances, the wrong messaging that getting infected by the virus meant certain death, in order to achieve maximum compliance with the shutdown, unwittingly led to a fear psychosis. Negative messaging, especially of the kind that induces fear and stigma, has always been counterproductive, as seen in the early days of the HIV/AIDS awareness campaign in the country. Awareness-building exercises became easier and more effective when negative messaging and stereotyping about HIV/AIDS was shunned. Doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers who are forced to work long hours treating patients infected with the highly infectious virus, and even when protective gear in the form of gloves, face mask and personal protective equipment are scarce, need more empathy, compassion, unmitigated support and cooperation from the society. Symbolic gestures such as clapping hands and lighting candles in recognition of their selfless service during these trying times do not bolster their morale as much as understanding and support does.

The COVID-19 paradox in South Asia

It is surprising that the region has far fewer infections and deaths compared with North America and Western Europe

subcontinent is among the highest in the world. The poor, who live cheek by jowl in urban slums and in cramped spaces in rural areas, are most susceptible to a virus that is contagious. Public health systems and facilities are perhaps the worst in the world.

The oldest and largest democracies in the world are often compared. This time is different. The first person tested positive for COVID-19 on January 21 in the United States and on January 30 in India. Roughly three months later, on April 20, the total number of infections was 7,23,605 in the U.S. and 17,265 in India, accounting for 31.2% and 0.75% of the world total, while the number of COVID-19 deaths was 34,203 in the U.S. and 543 in India, making up 21.7% and 0.33% of the world total. The share of the two countries in world population, by contrast, is about 4% and 18%, respectively.

A puzzling situation

It is even more surprising that a comparison with South Asia – Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka – yields similar results. In Nepal too, it was in late January that the first person tested positive for COVID-19, though it was end-February or early-March in the other countries. On April 20, South Asia, with a share of 23.4% in world population, accounted for 1.25% of infections and 0.5% of COVID-19 deaths in the world.

Before the pandemic, it would have been impossible to predict, let alone imagine, such a reality. Income per capita in South Asia is just 16% that of the world, and a mere 4% of that in industrialised countries. One-third of the world's poor live in South Asia, so absolute poverty is high and nutrition levels are low. Population density in the

South Asia is among the highest in the world. The poor, who live cheek by jowl in urban slums and in cramped spaces in rural areas, are most susceptible to a virus that is contagious. Public health systems and facilities are perhaps the worst in the world.

The outcome, then, is puzzling, if not paradoxical. Compared with North America, Western Europe and East Asia, or their own population size, the number of infections and deaths in South Asia is far lower. Of course, it is plausible to argue that, unlike those parts of the world, South Asian countries are in the early stages where community transmission has not gathered momentum. An explosive growth in infection numbers could yet surface later, or in a second round. But it is simply not possible to assess probabilities or make predictions. However, evidence available so far does suggest some flattening of the curve in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. Infection numbers in Maldives and Nepal are in double-digits and Bhutan's infection numbers are in single digits.

Two possible explanations

How can we explain this situation in which, so far, South Asia has fared better than many other parts of the world? Past experience of the Spanish influenza in 1918, when India accounted for 18-20 million of the estimated 50 million deaths in the world, or conventional thinking even now, would have led to the opposite conclusion. There are two possible explanations.

First, the reality might be much worse than the statistics suggest because the total number of infections is almost certainly underestimated, as testing has been nowhere near enough, given the scarcity of testing kits and the mas-



ROUTES

sive size of populations. Improved statistics might change the numbers but cannot transform the asymmetry emerging from the above comparisons.

Second, the lockdowns imposed by governments in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal, which started in the last week of March and continue until April 27 or longer, have clearly made a difference. The lockdown in India, straddling its vast geography, is perhaps among the most stringent in the world. The common purpose was to break the chain of transmission through physical distancing, which has two dimensions. For one, it confined people to their homes. But this created physical distancing only for the privileged living in homes that have spaces and doors. It was impossible for people in urban slums in mega-cities, where migrant workers lived in cramped spaces, often as many as 10 to a room. For another, it meant that people could not move within cities or across States. Migrant workers could not return to their villages, and citizens or foreigners who might carry the virus could not come from abroad. It did strangle potential chains of community transmission, reducing the geographical spread of the virus through contagion, and flattening the curve compared with what it would have been without a lockdown.

This obvious explanation is necessary but not sufficient because

other countries which have imposed lockdowns, say in Western Europe, with public health systems that are far superior, have not managed to slow down the phenomenal spread in the number of infections as much. The impact of diseases can and does differ across countries, possibly attributable to differences in cultures, immunities, or even climates. I am not an epidemiologist or a virologist. But as a social scientist, it is possible to observe an association of attributes.

A possible hypothesis

It has been suggested that countries which have mandatory BCG vaccinations against tuberculosis are less susceptible to COVID-19 morbidity and mortality. Compare, for example, the Iberian Peninsula countries, Spain and Portugal. On April 20, the former had around 1,96,000 infections and 20,500 deaths, whereas the latter 20,200 infections and 700 deaths. Is it only a coincidence that BCG vaccinations are mandatory in Portugal but not in Spain, or that the U.S. and Italy, both ravaged by COVID-19, never had universal BCG vaccination programmes? Obviously, it is only scientific investigation that can establish cause and effect.

But the BCG vaccine seems to have a stimulating effect on the immune system that goes well beyond tuberculosis. For that reason, perhaps, some countries are running trials of BCG against COVID-19, or thinking of it as a means of protecting health workers. Similarly, countries are buying hydroxychloroquine in large quantities from India, as a prophylactic for health workers and for treatment of COVID-19 patients. In South Asian countries, universal BCG vaccination is mandatory, while immune systems of people have a

lifelong exposure to malaria. These could provide possible explanations for the relatively limited spread of COVID-19 in South Asia so far.

Lives and livelihoods

Obviously, lockdowns have also mitigated the spread. In doing so, they have saved lives, but at the same time, they have also taken away livelihoods. In South Asian countries, almost 90% of the workforce is made up of the self-employed, casual labour on daily wages, and informal workers without any social protection. The lockdowns have meant that hundreds of millions of people who have lost their jobs, hence incomes, have been deprived of their livelihoods, imposing a disproportionate burden on the poor and those who survive just above the poverty line. For them, the trade-off between getting sick and going hungry is no choice. Livelihoods are an imperative for preserving lives.

The problem will not vanish after lockdowns are lifted. Economies that have been shut down for six weeks or longer will be close to collapse. In the short-run, it will be a matter of survival for households and firms and stabilisation for the economy. Economic growth will be zero or negative this year. In the medium-term, it will be about recovery. That will take time. Rapid economic growth in the past 25 years had enabled South Asian countries to bring about a significant reduction in absolute poverty, even though it was associated with rising inequality. Alas, absolute poverty will increase once again, while economic inequality will rise further.

Deepak Nayyar is Emeritus Professor of Economics at JNU and former Vice Chancellor of the University of Delhi

Fishing in troubled waters during a pandemic

As China seeks to restore its credibility, creating tensions in the South China Sea should be the least of its priorities



HARSH V. PANT & PREMESHA SAHA

Even as several countries struggle to cope with the challenges posed by COVID-19, Beijing's military moves in the contested South China Sea continue to take place unabated. In recent days, China has conducted military drills and deployed large-scale military assets to the maritime area, while officially celebrating strides made in exploiting disputed energy resources in the sea.

Strategy for expansion

The Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported early this month that a Chinese Coast Guard vessel "rammed and sunk" a Vietnamese fishing boat carrying eight Vietnamese fishermen in the Parcel Islands in the South China Sea. It maintained that this violates "Vietnam's sovereignty over the Parcel Islands, causes property losses and endangers the lives, safety and legitimate interests of the Vietnamese fishermen". It underlined that Chinese actions "also run counter to agreements reached by Hanoi and Beijing's leaders and the proposed Code of

Conduct that would govern all interested parties in the South China Sea dispute." The Vietnamese government lodged a diplomatic protest with China's embassy in Hanoi, requesting the Chinese side to investigate the incident, strictly discipline the officers aboard the Chinese vessel aforementioned, prevent the recurrence of similar actions, and make adequate compensation for the losses of the Vietnamese fishermen.

There have been incidents involving Chinese fishing vessels and the Chinese Coast Guard with Indonesian fishing vessels in waters around the Natuna Sea as well. In February, Chinese fishing boats flogged by Chinese Coast Guard vessels dropped their trawl nets yet again. China's illegal fishing near the Natuna Sea carries global consequences, reminding regional governments of Beijing's expanding claims to the South China Sea through which one-third of the world's maritime trade flows.

Besides these incidents, there were satellite images showing a Chinese military plane landing on Kagitingan Reef in the West Philippine Sea in late March. There are also reports that China recently opened a research station on Kagitingan and Zamora Reef, also in the West Philippine Sea, to gather data on the ecology, geology, and environment in the Spratlys.

It seems as though the COVID-19 outbreak in China did little to di-



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minish the country's strategy of regional expansion. Routine operations of transport aircraft in the South China Sea indicate that the Chinese military is hardly affected by the country's health crisis.

Other claimant countries such as the Philippines have condemned the sinking of the Vietnamese fishing vessel. The Foreign Ministry of the Philippines issued a statement that said, "Such incidents undermine relations between Southeast Asian nations and Beijing." Meanwhile, the U.S. State Department also published a statement, "We call on the PRC to remain focused on supporting international efforts to combat the global pandemic, and to stop exploiting the distraction or vulnerability of other states to expand its unlawful claims in the South China Sea." These encroachments and advances by China in the South China Sea not only dampen China's image globally, and affect its relations with its Southeast Asian neighbours, but also raise questions on why it continues its assertiveness in the disputed waters

when most of the claimant states are having to contend with the challenges posed by COVID-19.

Window of opportunity

While a military policy of expansion in the neighbourhood can be one way of shoring up the credibility of the Chinese Communist Party, which has been bruised by its handling of the COVID-19 outbreak, it is also a response to what many in the party would view as a rare window of opportunity as the U.S. is grappling with the pandemic. American ties with Vietnam have been on an upward trajectory in recent times. Vietnam has been an ardent supporter of the U.S.'s freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs) carried out in the South China Sea. China has always taken a strong stand against these FONOPs of the U.S. It has flexed its muscles to match up to these operations. In that direction, China also recently conducted anti-submarine drills in the disputed areas soon after the Pentagon deployed the U.S.-guided missile destroyer USS McCampbell in a FONOP in the South China Sea before the pandemic hit the U.S. mainland with full force.

At present, Vietnam is the chair of the ASEAN and will be presiding over the discussions on the Code of Conduct which has been a work in progress for long. Vietnam has always been in favour of non-claimant countries or external players

having an active voice and calling out China for its growing assertiveness in these contested waters. Among all the claimant countries, Vietnam has always taken a strong stand against Chinese actions in the South China Sea. Unlike the Philippines, which has changed its stance quite often with respect to Chinese activities in the South China Sea, and Indonesia, which recognised the Chinese threat in the Natuna Sea rather late, Vietnam has held a firm stand against the China. Even with regard to its COVID-19 response, Vietnam was the first country in the ASEAN to suspend all flights to and from China as early as February. Hence, China has always kept a watch on Vietnamese manoeuvres in the South China Sea dispute.

As China seeks to restore its global credibility, creating tensions in the South China Sea should be the least of its priorities. A more glibrous China during a global pandemic might go a long way in ensuring its global ascent. But that's a hope that has been belied many a times in the past and it's unlikely that the Chinese Communist Party would let go of its regional security agenda of expansion.

Harsh V. Pant is Director, Studies, at Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi, and Professor of International Relations, King's College London; Premesha Saha is an Associate Fellow with the ORF's Strategic Studies Programme

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.

Open in phases

We should be cautious about opening up several sectors at one go in the first week of May ("Most sectors will be open by May 3, says Sanjeev Sanyal", April 23). Every day we have about 1,000 new positive COVID-19 cases in the country. Mumbai, the beehive of economic activity, is a big hotspot, as are some other cities. We should be guarded in opening up the remaining sectors of the economy and do this over phases. Every industry, big or small, should be allowed to function only at a third of its capacity, probably in shifts. Wearing masks and practising physical distancing should be made

mandatory.

KOSARAJU CHANDRAMOULI, Hyderabad

Important, albeit late

The Prime Minister's call for unity is important, but it has come rather late ("Script of unity", April 23). A particular community has received a lot of hatred online for "spreading" the virus. Some TV channels continue to portray members of that community as more dangerous than the virus itself. The ruling party's IT wing and cadres are relentless in their attacks on them. This hatred towards members of one community will affect Indians working abroad, especially in countries like

the UAE. As the editorial points out, the call for unity should translate into action.

G.B. SIVANADAM, Coimbatore

The new normal

It looks like the situation won't be safe for a long time ("There may be no going back", April 23). It is important to understand that we were not asked to practise physical distancing or stay at home to cure society of COVID-19; these measures were taken to only slow the spread of the virus so that our healthcare system wouldn't be overwhelmed. For the most part, India has done that. But when we emerge slowly from the lockdown, the virus could spread faster.

We need to make our healthcare system more robust to handle the load, not mislead ourselves over the outcome of this lockdown period.

NAGARAJANAM M.V., Hyderabad

While we have to accept that things will take a long time to return to some semblance of normalcy, there is a silver lining. The air quality in many places has improved. With fewer people going to work over the next few weeks or months, traffic will greatly reduce. Other infectious diseases might also reduce due to greater awareness about personal hygiene. This pandemic will teach us to be kinder, more resilient

and patient. We should take this opportunity to think about how we can redesign our lifestyle to have a more peaceful co-existence with nature.

P. VENKAT, Chennai

Offers post-retirement

Not only must justice be done; it must also be seen to be done ("Pre-retirement judgments and post-retirement jobs", April 23). Hence, irrespective of the judgments made, it should be made a practice for the serving judges not to accept any government assignments post-retirement. Also, judges should not accept any assignments with any political party whose case

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they handled at any point. However, I do not subscribe to the view that judges must get as pension their last drawn salary. Judges need not be pampered post-retirement and can save for the future. Being legal professionals, they can earn additional money, if needed. I also think that other constitutional functionaries like Governors, Speakers, Election Commissioners and CAGs should also not accept political and government posts after retirement.

B.C. UNNIKRISHNAN NAIR, Kuttanad

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How will India emerge out of the lockdown?

PARLEY

An opening up has to be accompanied by an increase in relief budget for the most vulnerable

After a 39-day lockdown, what will be the shape of things to come? How should one strike a balance between ensuring livelihoods, minimising strife, and maintaining social distancing? In a discussion moderated by G. Ananthakrishnan, Reetika Khera, and Giridhar R. Babu examine the options. Edited excerpts:

With less than a fortnight left for the lockdown to be lifted, there are seemingly conflicting requirements of having to prevent group activity, and restarting economic activity...

Reetika Khera (RK): We need to keep our socioeconomic conditions firmly in focus while deciding on a health strategy to deal with the epidemic. Only 17% of the employed have salaried jobs; one-third are casual labourers. According to the World Bank, 76% are in 'vulnerable employment' in India. There is no provision for unemployment doles. Overall, what we should try to minimise is hardship and deaths from the pandemic. In the past few weeks, we have seen reports of hunger, homelessness, vagrancy – even deaths – from the lockdown, coupled with government apathy to these issues. We, therefore, need to ensure that the poor are not forgotten or abandoned as we protect ourselves, roughly the top 30%, from the viral infection. For the poor, an extended lockdown poses a health risk because they live in cramped spaces and may not have running water to wash their hands; it is also economically disastrous, because they do not have savings or an assured monthly income to keep themselves going. Greater sensitivity and better planning are urgently required.

Giridhar R. Babu (GB): I do not see any conflict in continuing physical distancing and measures to prevent large congregations in the near future. In most circumstances, such as in the IT sector, work from home options should be made mandatory for the next few months. Similarly, annual fair, marathon events, and all such events which require large gatherings for non-essential purposes

should be postponed until we have a drug or a vaccine. When it comes to essential activities such as public transport, ensuring physical distancing, face mask use, and enforcing respiratory hygiene such as cough etiquette is essential.

There is a view that the lockdown cannot be lifted completely. What happens to the self-employed and migrant labourers?

RK: The lockdown will probably be partially lifted allowing some activities and [then] gradually phased out, red zones remaining locked. But it must be accompanied by a massive increase in the relief budget, currently at about 0.5% of GDP, for the most vulnerable. Existing programmes of social support, such as the Public Distribution System (PDS), the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), and pensions need more financial allocations.

The PDS today only covers about 60% of the population, even though the legally mandated coverage under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) is two-thirds of the population. This is because the government is using population figures from the 2011 census to determine coverage. Due to the lockdown, a significant portion of those who would not have been covered anyway – the one-third outside the NFSA – now need support; workers in the gig economy, taxi drivers, delivery boys, etc., for instance. This under-coverage is especially criminal today because at the moment, the government is hoarding grains on an unprecedented scale: three-and-a-half times the buffer stock norms, before wheat procurement has even started. The first step should be to universalise the PDS, for up to a year, by allowing anyone from the 40% without ration card the opportunity to apply for a temporary card. The Centre needs to make grain available to the States and they can do the rest.

As far as the NREGA is concerned, there are two issues. One, whether such works can be opened without increasing the risk of com-

munity transmission at worksites. Two, how to make payments in a convenient manner? Density of bank branches is very low in rural areas and, even in normal circumstances, they are very crowded and far from people. Banking correspondents, who could have eased these pressures, are unsafe at the moment because they use biometric authentication at the time of disbursement of wages. For this reason, the government needs to allow greater flexibility to States in deciding how to disburse cash. Several States have successfully disbursed cash in hand in the past, and have done so without much corruption. Odisha pays pensions through panchayat secretaries; Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu used to pay NREGA wages at the worksite before 2009.

For migrants, the government must provide transport, assisting them to return home, just as it flew back Indians stuck abroad and helped the students stuck in Kota. Those who are willing to stay, must be provided dignified shelter in schools, community halls, along with cooked food.

GB: While their healthcare needs are to be addressed by the public health system, the government has to ensure their subsistence by providing necessary ration and medicines. The situation has exacerbated distress in the informal sector, which constitutes around 303 million people. The nutritional issues around food quality are significant. If these are addressed, a scientific decision tree can be developed by the Indian Council of Medical Research and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to guide the deploy-



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

vestments should primarily address the public health challenges such as [those linked to] nutrition, ensuring behavioural modifications to prevent non-communicable diseases, screening, early diagnosis, and timely treatment.

The feeder pipe of illness is filled with people of several risk factors for infectious as well as non-communicable diseases. Instead of addressing this, most money is spent on curing only part of the resulting conditions. Inaccessible healthcare, in combination with an unhealthy lifestyle, is a deadly cocktail; no amount of healthcare through reimbursing costs can alleviate the disease burden. Nearly 80% of all healthcare expenditure should be on preventive services.

Like Aadhaar, there is emphasis on getting people to accept the Aarogya Setu app. There are fears of lost privacy, stigma and discrimination...

RK: Many people have already warned about over-reliance on technology. One, the app needs smartphones. Less than one-fifth of Indians own smartphones. Two, the reliability of the technology [using bluetooth to detect contacts] has been questioned by computer scientists in India. Three, it entails an unnecessary and unjustified privacy invasion, which nevertheless is projected as necessary. Authoritarian governments across the world are using the pandemic as an opportunity to normalise unprecedented levels of mass surveillance. Finally, Kerala shows us that contact tracing can be done, and possibly better, by utilising human resources. We must guard against techno-solutionism as well as privacy invasions.

GB: Any effort to track the cases or their contacts should involve strengthening the human resources, including (through capacity building. Technology should complement health system strengthening and not [be used] as a shortcut.

How can we prepare for a future pandemic?

RK: I feel that we must understand that we have been cheated for more than 70 years by the political class, that used every possible excuse to

underspend on health. Today, public spending on health in India is barely 1% of GDP, compared with more than 10% in countries like France and Germany. There needs to be a serious discussion on resetting our priorities – not focusing on overall GDP growth only, but also on where GDP growth is coming from. Expenditure on health (nurses, doctors, hospital beds etc.) adds to GDP as much as roads and fighter jets do.

There also needs to be a serious rethink about the health system. At the very least, we should be regulating the (for-profit) private health sector, in a similar manner as Germany do not have socialised healthcare like the National Health Service of the U.K. But Germany has not-for-profit social insurance funds; in Japan, the government regulates what private practitioners can charge patients. In India, the private health providers seem to dictate terms to the government, as happened recently with respect to pricing for the COVID-19 test. This must change right now.

GB: It is time that we start investing in strengthening the public health system. There is disproportionate spending on curative services and heavy reliance on insurance. Pandemic preparedness is a small component of health system strengthening. Public health is the art and science of preventing diseases and promoting health through the organised social efforts. Any aspirations for an increase in GDP allocation should, therefore, be prioritised for the public health system, towards preventing diseases and promoting health. Preventing the disease includes addressing behavioural changes, adequate nutrition, improved living conditions, screening, early diagnosis, and treatment. A significant portion of this should be towards prevention, including strengthening disease surveillance. Public health should be managed by a specialist cadre – epidemiologists, social scientists, economists, bio-statisticians, behavioural scientists. Our response has been mostly reactive – in terms of measures such as scaling up purchase of equipment during a crisis.

The full version can be accessed on www.thehindu.com



Reetika Khera is an associate professor at the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad



Giridhar R. Babu is the head of Lifecourse Epidemiology at the Public Health Foundation of India

Making doctors wash hands

Placing the sanitiser at prominent locations in hospitals and installing bright signage will help

ANAND DAMANI

Ignaz Philipp Semmelweis, a Hungarian-born doctor came to Vienna in 1846 to work at the city's General Hospital. Semmelweis noticed that women delivered by doctors had three times higher mortality rate than women delivered by midwives. He spotted a link between the lack of hygiene of the doctors and the mortality rate of the mothers. After he initiated a mandatory hand-washing policy, the mortality rate for women delivered by doctors fell from 18% to about 1%.

Despite such a brilliant outcome, the idea of hand washing was rejected by the medical community. Doctors were offended by the suggestion that they could be causing infections. Semmelweis's practice earned widespread acceptance only two decades after his death, when Louis Pasteur, of pasteurisation fame, raised awareness of pathogens.

From the 1850s to 2020, hand washing has been advocated as a simple way of reducing the risk of infection. But, studies find that doctors still do not wash their hands often. A systematic review of studies on compliance with hand hygiene in hospitals, done by researchers Vicki Erasmus et al, found that only 32% of doctors and 48% of nurses wash their hands between seeing patients. Another study by researcher Didier Pittet, an infection control expert with the University of Geneva Hospitals, Switzerland found that compliance rates for hand washing amongst doctors and nurses was only 57%, and years of awareness programmes had little effect. A study amongst Indian doctors by researchers S. K. Ansari et al, found that only 49% of doctors and 56% of nurses washed their hands with soap between patients.

Modifying behaviour

If India needs to contain the spread of COVID-19, everybody ought to be washing our hands, especially doctors and nurses. But how can we change their hand-washing behaviour?

The traditional approach of changing behaviour is to educate doctors

and nurses on the importance of hand washing. It seems like the rational and logical thing to do, but even though doctors and nurses know that they should be washing their hands, they forget to do so. That's why we need to apply behavioural design. Behavioural design is about creating subconscious nudges right at the moment where the desired action is to be performed.

A simple intervention

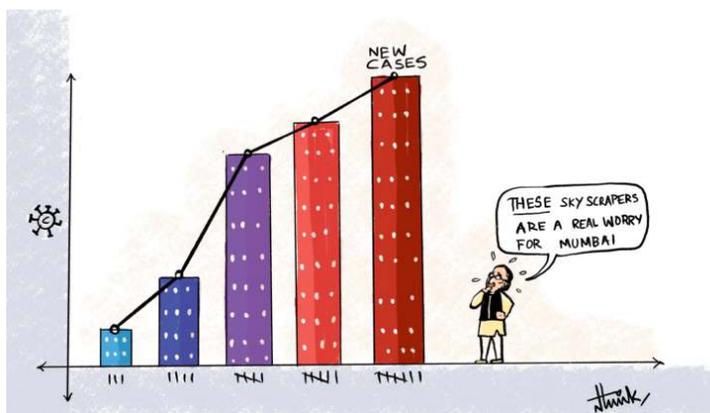
Behavioural scientists piloted a low-cost experiment in rural schools in Bangladesh where nudges were used to guide hand washing with soap after toilet use. Hand-washing stations were built in visible and easy to reach locations, brightly coloured paths were painted from toilets to the hand-washing station, and footprints and handprints were painted on the path and at the hand-washing station.

Hand washing with soap after using the toilet went up from 4% before these behavioural design nudges were created, to 74% six weeks after they were introduced. No other hygiene education was communicated.

Similarly, in hospitals where wash basins and hand sanitisers are placed, stickers of brightly coloured footprints should be placed so that doctors and nurses get attracted by them, which subconsciously directs them to the wash basin or the hand sanitiser. Such behavioural design nudges influence doctors and nurses to wash their hands with soap or sanitiser without making a conscious decision to do so.

Hand washing is often done as a relatively subconscious habitual action, and can be easily triggered by contextual cues, so hand washing lends itself well to such behavioural design nudging. An experiment done at the Gentofte Hospital in Denmark has found that sanitiser usage increased from 3% to 67% when the hand sanitiser was placed at a prominent location with bright signage that caught people's attention. Not bad for such a simple and low-cost intervention.

Anand Damani is behavioural scientist



NOTEBOOK

Locked out of cities, homes and livelihoods

Hakim, an auto driver who had to leave Delhi, is hopeful of returning soon

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ

The defining images of the migrant worker exodus that followed the lockdown may comprise of the long lines of men, women and children trudging down the highways under the scorching sun, leaving Delhi with their belongings on their backs.

But I didn't have to head out of the city to report on the plight of migrant workers; I just had to step out of my front door. The unorganised colony of Jal Vihar lies barely five minutes from my home, crisscrossed between Lajpat Nagar and the railway line that divides it from Jangpura. About a week after the lockdown began, a colleague and I headed to the Jal Vihar bus terminal to meet a migrant worker. The streets of Lajpat Nagar, usually bustling with shoppers and traffic jams, were empty.

We were met by Mohammed Hakim, who led us to a small gate behind the bus terminal and through a maze of small alleys into the heart of Jal Vihar. With hundreds of families crowded into tiny homes and narrow streets, social distancing was impossible.

Kavitha, who works at my home, lives here in Jal Vihar with her family. She is a migrant herself, having come from a village south of Chennai to marry a Tamil man who grew up here in Jal Vihar, who in turn is son of migrants brought to the capital in the 1980s to build infrastructure for the Asian Games. In fact, most of the cleaners and cooks working in my upper-middle class neighbourhood live here in Jal Vihar. So do the young men who clean my neighbours' cars every morning, or tend the civic gardens scattered through the area.

Mohammed Hakim and about 180 other men from Bihar's Katihar district ply

the autos and cycle-rickshaws. The migrants at Jal Vihar had been entwined into the daily rhythms of life in Lajpat Nagar, until the lockdown brought that to a crashing halt.

Hungry and stranded

Mr. Hakim introduced us to about 40 other men from his village. They had not eaten for more than a day, having been deprived of their ability to work and earn a living due to the lockdown. Their ration cards were with their families in Bihar. They still had to pay rent for the windowless shanties they shared, and many had to pay leases or mortgages on their vehicles as well.

Most of the men did not think of themselves as poor. They felt that in normal times, they earned enough for a decent life here in Delhi and send back money to their families as well. But now, reduced to begging from philanthro-

pists for food, their self-esteem had taken a hit. For them, hunger was a bigger spectre than the virus.

The streets of Lajpat Nagar that they ruled as auto rickshaw drivers, were now forbidden and dangerous spaces, with police lathi-charging them if they dared to step out of the colony.

A few weeks later, after the Prime Minister announced an extension to the lockdown, I called Mr. Hakim again. He and his friends had already left Delhi, joining the exodus on the highways. At home in Kathiar, fellow villagers were scared that he had brought the virus with him, and forced him into a quarantine outside the village. Still, he has food and a roof over his head, and for now, that's enough. But once the lockdown ends, his wages will lure him back. "I will take you in my autorickshaw again," he vowed. ("name changed")

The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO APRIL 24, 1970

Why Computerise?

(From an editorial)

A study team on automation headed by Mr. N. M. Tidke, Labour Minister of Maharashtra, has reiterated, in its report submitted recently to the State Assembly that, without selective introduction of automated techniques of production, the ground will not have been prepared for creating job opportunities in the dimension warranted by the country's long-term needs of employment. The team is aware that a suggestion of this sort will not be welcomed by those who are crying hoarse for a deliberate bias towards labour-intensive techniques. It has, therefore, emphasised the point that "it is, on advanced technology that we depend for the realization of the fruits of civilisation and it is for us to convert the same into an instrument of economic growth and social progress." Much of the opposition to computerisation, for instance, has arisen from a misconception of their role. The benefit from these instruments does not consist in large-scale displacement of clerical and other labour, force but in their superior computational ability in terms of both quality and quantity, which helps to expand investment and therefore employment opportunities.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 24, 1920

The Agony of The Punjab: Rebellion.

(From an editorial)

A good deal has been made in the Anglo-Indian press of the necessity for awaiting the publication of the Hunter Report before forming a final judgment on the Punjab episode. There will certainly be no tendency on the part of any section of public opinion to ignore that Report, just as no reasonable man will consent to accept it as the last word on the subject. The conclusions the public has already been able to form, for example, on the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, the crawling order, the floggings and all that ingenious variety of "frightfulness" which would have done honour to a Torquemada, are not likely to be modified by the view taken of them by a cautious Scotch lawyer, a seasoned Anglo-Indian Judge or a capitalist or by a colleague of General Dyer. What the public awaits is not the Hunter Committee's opinion on the nature of the measures taken under Martial Law, for these have so far transcended the code of humanity and civilisation that no two opinions can be possible, but any fresh light that may be thrown on the theory of "rebellion," or in other words the necessity for Martial Law.

China Sea is an arm of western Pacific Ocean in Southeast Asia.

It is south of China, east & south of Vietnam, west of the Philippines and north of the island of Borneo.

Bordering states & territories (clockwise from north): the People's Republic of China, the Republic of China (Taiwan), the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Singapore and Vietnam.

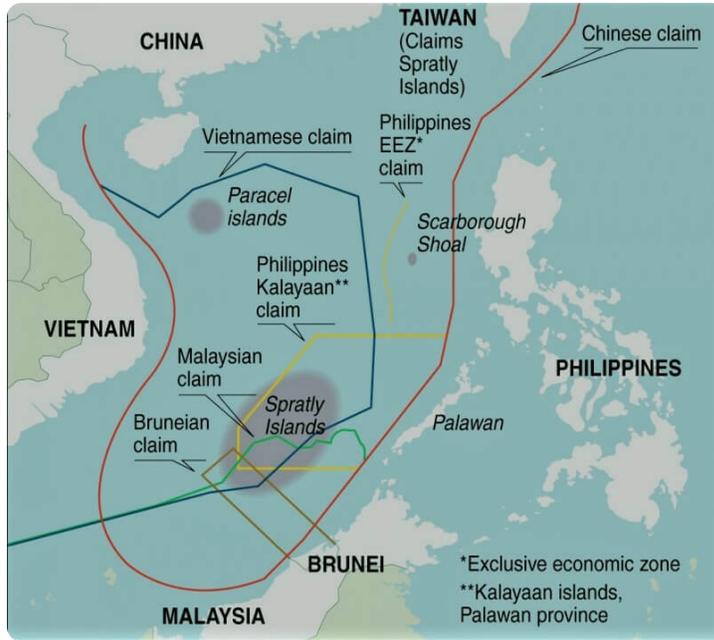
It is connected by Taiwan Strait with the East China Sea and by Luzon Strait with the Philippine Sea.

It contains numerous shoals, reefs, atolls and islands. The Paracel Islands, the Spratly Islands and the Scarborough Shoal are the most important.

What makes it so important?

This sea holds tremendous strategic importance for its location as it is the connecting link between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. (Strait of Malacca)

According to the United Nations Conference on Trade And Development (UNCTAD) one-third of the global shipping passes through it, carrying trillions of trade which makes it a significant geopolitical water body.



According to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Philippines, this sea has one-third of the entire world's marine biodiversity and contains lucrative fisheries providing food security to the Southeast Asian nations. South China Sea is believed to have huge oil and gas reserves beneath its seabed.

Timeline

1994 – The Convention on the Law of the Sea went into effect. The United States called this treaty the “Law of the Sea Convention.”

1997 – Beijing shared the first rendering of its “Nine-dash Line” extending roughly 1,118 miles from Hainan Island to waters off equatorial Borneo under China’s historical claim of having it in the past.

2002 – ASEAN and China signed the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea.

2009 – China issued two diplomatic notes that appear to claim a majority of the South China Sea.

2013 – The Philippines challenged China’s claims of historic rights and other actions in an arbitration case under the Law of the Sea Convention.

2016 – The Arbitration Tribunal ruled in favor of the Philippines and rejected China’s maritime claims that go beyond the entitlements set out in the Convention.

Nine Dash Line

Stretches hundreds of kilometers south and east of China’s southerly Hainan Island, covering the strategic Paracel and Spratly island chains.

China claims it by citing 2,000 years of history when the two island chains were regarded as its integral parts.



Issues Involved

China claims most of the contested sea, reaching almost to the Philippines shores and has built artificial islands with heavy military developments on them which worries the neighbouring nations and it rejects the UN backed international tribunal ruling as well.

The nine dash line asserted by China violates the principle of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ).

The stalled negotiations between China and ASEAN made headway on Code of Conduct as four of the ASEAN nations also made territorial claims on the disputed waters which adds to the problem with already non-negotiable behaviour of China.

Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ)

It is a formula based on compromise and was recognized by the UN Conference on the Law of the Sea in 1976. It covers an area beyond and adjacent to the territorial sea: it can extend to a maximum of 200 nautical miles from the baselines.

Activities allowed in EEZ are -

creation and use of artificial islands, installations and structures.

marine scientific research.

the protection and preservation of the marine environment.

Challenges

China's behavior of negligence, denial and the sense of superiority while overlooking international laws and regulations like the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Along with China's bullying tactics, North Korea's provocative behaviour has attracted US aircrafts in the already troubled waters. The growth of military vessels and planes in the area makes it more challenging to handle.

Undefined geographic scope of the South China Sea; disagreement over dispute settlement mechanisms; different approaches to conflict management (self-restraint, mutual trust, and confidence building); and the undefined legal status of the Code of Conduct (COC) add to it.

The different histories of distant, largely uninhabited archipelagos of the sea make the matter more complicated and multifaceted.

Achievements

The members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and China engaged in discussions on a potential COC to manage the South China Sea maritime and territorial disputes for a very long time and finally settled for a non-binding Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) in 2002. In 2005, the first draft of guidelines to implement the DOC was drawn up, but not adopted until 2011. However, problems still linger so a plan for more robust policies is needed.

After the consultations of 2016, in 2017 ASEAN and China adopted a bare-bone framework for the COC.

Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC), 2002

ASEAN and China agreed to promote a peaceful, friendly and harmonious environment in the South China Sea for the enhancement of peace, stability, economic growth and prosperity in the region.

It reaffirms respect for and commitment to the freedom of navigation and overflight above the South China Sea as provided for by the universally recognized principles of international law, including the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Suggestions

New arbitration processes to bring necessary mediation, facilitation and binding resolution mechanism which can move the military dispute to border management and to joint development finally.

Adopting the concept of joint development zones, which resolves the territorial disputes and allows to pursuit of joint commercial activities, environmental protection, disaster relief and humanitarian perspective and counter-piracy control.

International disputes should be settled by peaceful means in line with international laws on the principle of safeguarding maritime security, navigation and overflight rights and freedoms.

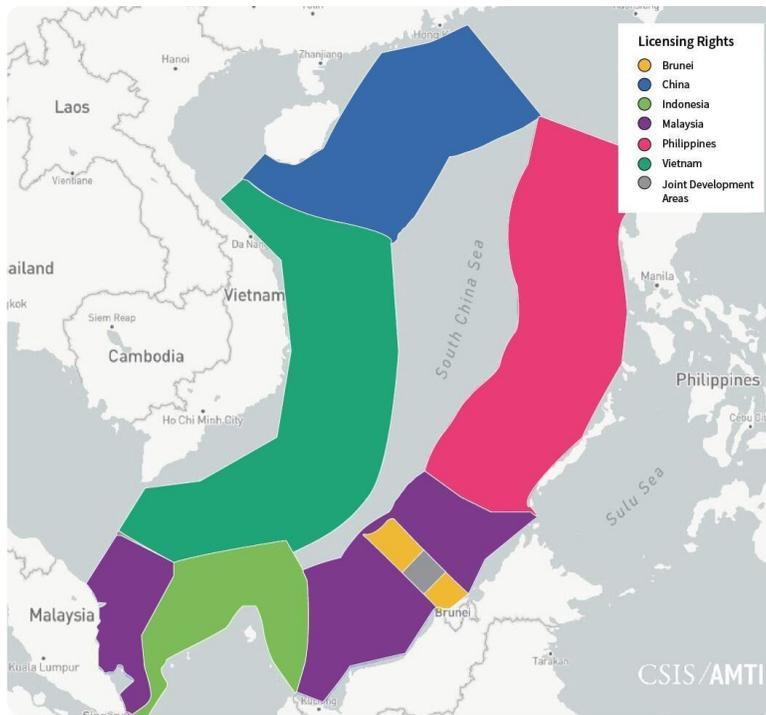
India's Stand on South China Sea Issue

In a Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean Region, India and the USA talked about ensuring freedom of navigation and resolving disputes according to UNCLOS referring to the South China Sea but after Philippines won the arbitration award in its favour in 2016, India has clearly separated itself from the dispute.

New Delhi has not conducted any defence cooperation, navigational patrols and naval exercises with the claimant states in the South China Sea (only recently it conducted a naval exercise with Vietnam).

After the recent development of affairs with Japan and Russia, it might appear that India wants to raise its strategic presence in the South China Sea but it is not so. Firstly, because India is not a party to the maritime territorial disputes in the region and does not want to interfere. Secondly, India wants to preserve its "Wuhan Consensus" with China, in which both nations respect each others' spheres of influence in their adjacent water bodies.

Forming an overarching authority like NATO or European Union (EU) with China as a member, in Asia to settle grievances and specifically find solutions to Asian problems, might help resolve disputes like this. The sense of power of China needs to be checked so that it abides by the intergovernmental and international agreements and conventions. Peaceful bilateral or multilateral talks and negotiations can be used because aggression or war is not a solution to this or any problem at all.



and keen to help two of our strongest Indo-Pacific partners, India and Indonesia, in this matter. The trilateral cooperation had been growing and would continue to be important as we considered the implications of COVID-19 for Indo-Pacific regional order.”

Mr. O’Farrell said COVID-19 would not necessarily change the nature of threats but would hasten the pace at which they were developing.

numbers on the number of COVID-19 deaths reported by hospitals. Though there are no projections on the number of cases, it derives numbers based on the global experience and relationships between testing and the true number of infections and, correlations such as: that 5% of total cases are critical, and 50% of those admitted to an ICU survive.

The website shows an India map with the expected number of positive cases in

luru, wrote in an e-mail reply to *The Hindu*. “So, any increase in deaths is reflected proportionately in confirmed cases. Since the entire model focuses on the healthcare system, we decided against giving out our projections for net infected in the dashboard,” he added. “Having said that, the death rate is approximately 1% of the estimate of true infection (considering South Korea as a benchmark where testing was quite methodical and ex-

pected 21,700 cases and 686 deaths. “It is certainly a large jump, as shown by the model,” P. Sunthar, of the Chemical Engineering Department at the Indian Institute of Technology, Mumbai, wrote in an e-mail. “But we do hope the health administrations will take measures to contain the outbreak in badly affected areas (in which case we won’t see such large numbers in a week). But going by the global trend, this is what the

testing. While India’s approach is reportedly recorded and could be a problem in rural areas or regions with limited hospitalisation facilities. However, being an adaptive model, the numbers as well as healthcare demand can change daily. Scientists who participated in developing the model include those from the Jawaharlar Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research, Bengaluru, and personnel of the Armed Forces Medical Services.

He suggested China’s “100%” lockdown, or Australia’s approach of locking down until very low numbers of new cases were

uncontrollable. **Work goes on** “Do not look only at the number of cases,” he said. “There have been hundreds of thousands of cases in the U.S. and Europe, more than in India. The lives of Europeans still has not stopped, and they are preparing to resume work, school and business.”

Dr. Zhang made the comments on Wednesday while interacting with Chinese na-

reopen their economies and schools. On the question of whether Indians had a higher immunity than the rest of the world – a matter that has been widely debated in China – Dr. Zhang said the incidence rate in India suggested this was not the case. He said he was, however, moved to see how “calm” people were in handling the pandemic, which suggested what they did have was a high “spiritual immunity”.

+ Foreigners paid dearly to fly out

U.S. nationals had to cough up nearly three times the normal one-way fare

S. VIJAY KUMAR
CHENNAI

Hundreds of foreign nationals stranded in India during the COVID-19 lockdown flew home in chartered flights organised by their home countries in coordination with airlines and the Government of India in recent weeks. However, the evacuation trips did not come for free and they were not affordable either.



Foreign nationals at the Kolkata airport to board a special flight recently. **AFP**

While the U.S. nationals had to pay anywhere between \$2,000 and \$2,500 per person from New Delhi to San Francisco or Mumbai to Atlanta, British nationals had to spend between £500 and £600 despite the U.K. government allocating £75 million for chartered flights from countries where commercial flight operations were not available.

Loan option

However, the U.S. gave a loan option to its nationals and even took a promissory note allowing them to fly and pay later. The U.K. government offered conditional loans that many could not avail while flying out of India. U.S. nationals were informed that if they failed to repay the loan, they would not be eligible for issue of new passport. Only U.S. citizens with confirmation with

U.S. Mission to India were allowed to board the flights.

“Please understand this flight is not free. All passengers will need to reimburse the U.S. government for the cost of the flight. Previous flights have cost between \$2,000 and 2,500 per person. A legal document, called a promissory note, for the full cost of the flight must be signed by each adult passenger. However, payment is not required at the time of the flight,” the U.S. embassy in India said in a travel advisory to its nationals.

Responding to an announcement put out on Twitter by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that U.K. travellers should return home and £75 million had been allocated to support special chartered flights

where commercial options were no longer available, an aspiring flyer replied wondering why people were being charged £600 from India if so much money was earmarked. Another traveller said the tickets were “quite expensive” for one way and sought to know how he could take the loan. However, he was informed that he should attempt to use his own financial means to arrange return to the U.K.

No relief

“I had to pay £1,088 for travel from Delhi to London for myself and my three-year-old daughter. This is more than double the normal fare... we usually pay £862 for return ticket on the same sector. We are British nationals and the U.K. government should have considered some subsidy if not free repatriation,” said Neha Chauhan, a banking professional in London who took a British Airways flight from Delhi on April 21, 2020.

Early this month, the U.K. government said that over 3,000 British travellers, including tourists, short-term travellers and their dependents, currently stranded in India could get home on an additional 12 chartered flights for which bookings opened on April 10, 2020.

Travellers who could not afford the cost and had exhausted all other options for getting funds were told to contact a commercial partner for seeking loan. “You may be eligible to apply for an emergency loan to cover the cost of the ticket. This is a last resort option and you would need to repay the loan when you are back in the U.K.,” the advisory said.

Srikanth, an IT director in a reputed firm in Washington DC and a native of Visakhapatnam, said the fare was almost three compared to the normal one-way trip from Delhi to San Francisco or Mumbai to Atlanta, the sectors in which the rescue flights were operated. “Travellers were told to report to the nearest U.S. Consulate for a health check-up. This fare is much more than what is sold during peak holiday season. Many stayed back hoping that flights will resume soon after the lockdown in India,” he said.

Many other countries including Australia, Japan and others operated special flights to move their nationals stranded in India. Their pricing details were not available for comparison though airport sources said that most of the rescue planes charged double since they would fly back empty.

Ex-bureaucrats flag minority harassment

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A group of 101 former civil servants has written to Chief Ministers and Lieutenant-Governors of all States and Union Territories, expressing anguish over reports of harassment of Muslims in some parts of the country, particularly after the Tablighi Jamaat meeting in Delhi’s Nizamuddin in March.

Through the letter, copied to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, they have sought di-

rections to all public functionaries to remain vigilant in preventing social boycott of any community and to ensure that all entitlements, including medical and hospital care, rations and financial assistance, are available equally to all those in need.

Among the signatories are former National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon, former Chief Election Commissioner S.Y. Quraishi, former Chief Economic Advisor Nitin Desai, former

High Commissioner to the U.K. Nareshwar Dayal, former Foreign Secretary and National Security Advisory Board Chairman Shyam Saran, former OSD on Kashmir in the PMO A.S. Dulat and former Health Secretaries K. Sujatha Rao and Keshav Desraj.

Former Director-General of Police Julio Ribeiro, former Chief Information Commissioner Wahajah Habibullah and former Chief Secretary (J&K) Hindal Tyab-

ji also endorsed the letter.

“The Jamaat was criticised for ignoring the principles of social distancing when cases of COVID-19 had started emerging in the country. Although this was hardly the only incident of such gatherings, both political and religious, sections of the media hastened to give a communal colour to COVID-19, including attributing motives to the Jamaat in spreading the virus to different parts,” the group said.

WESTERN RAILWAY
ELECTRICAL CONSTRUCTION
TENDER NOTICE NO. ELC/RTM/2020/027 Dtd. 21/04/2020. Name of work: Design, Supply, Erection, Testing & Commissioning of 25 KV AC OHE, including removal of infringements between Ujjain - Indore Section on Ratlam Division of Western Railway in connection with Doubling between Indore-Dewas-Ujjain Phase-III Work. Completion period: 15 (Fifteen) months. Approx value: Rs. 19,17,78,462.00/- EMD: Rs. 11,08,90,000/-. Tender document fee: Rs. 10,000/- Online bidding start date from: 06/05/2020. Tender Closing date: 26/05/2020 up to 15:00 Hrs. Web site particulars: Tender particulars can be viewed and offers can be submitted on website <https://www.irps.gov.in>

SOUTH EAST CENTRAL RAILWAY
TENDER NOTICE FOR UPGRADATION OF RAKES
E-Tender Notice No.: 160-Mech-Ukrishit-6-Rake, Date: 23.03.2020. Name of Work: Up-gradation of Six rakes of Bilaspur based trains consisting of three rakes of Narmada Express (18233/34) and one rake of Shvsnath Express (18239/40) under Project Ukrishit. Tender Value: ₹ 58,43,224/- (₹ Three Crore Fifty Eight Lakh Forty Three Thousand Two Hundred Twenty Four Only) (inclusive of all taxes and GST). Earnest Money Deposited: ₹ 3,29,300/- (₹ Three Lakh Twenty Nine Thousand Three Hundred Only). Opening of Tender: 12.00 hours on 11.05.2020. Further all details are available on Railway’s website: www.irps.gov.in. Except E-tender no other mode of submission of tender will be accepted. Sr. Divisional Mech. Engineer CPRI/10/20 (Frt)/Bilaspur. South East Central Railway @ SecRail

EAST CENTRAL RAILWAY
E-TENDER NOTICE
E-TENDER NOTICE NO. - ECR-CAO-C-N-ETN-04-20-21
E-TENDER IS INVITED ON BEHALF OF THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA FOR THE UNDERMENTIONED WORK:
S.No. (1). Name of work with it's location: Supplying and stacking Pakur Range/Sahebganj loop machine crushed stone track ballast as per Railway/RDSO specification on ready formation between Muzaffarpur (excl.) (CH: 2.500) to Mehsi (incl.) (CH: 37.500) in connection with doubling work of Muzaffarpur - Sagauli section. (2) Approx. cost of the work of: Rs. 27,58,89,019.90 (3) Earnest money to be deposited: Rs. 15,29,500/- (4) Date and time for closing of tender: 18.05.2020 at 14.30 hrs. (5) Website particular, Notice board location where complete details of tender can be seen and address of the office from where the tender form be purchased etc. - The above E-Tender, E-tendering document including full information is available on website i.e. <http://www.irps.gov.in>. Note: In case of any discrepancies found in tender notice, English version will be final. Tenderers are requested to visit the website <http://www.irps.gov.in> at least 15 days before last date of closing for latest corrigendum/corrections etc in response to this E-Tender.
CAO/Con/North/MHX, Patna PR/0068/COM/Engg./7/20-21/44

WESTERN RAILWAY - RATLAM DIVISION
CORRIGENDUM
No. RTM-MECH-2020-02 Dated 17.04.2020
Sub: Mechanized cleaning & housekeeping services at RTM station including housekeeping Garbage collection and Removal RAG, Litter picking & street sweeping within the premises for the period of 4 years (48 MONTHS), Ref. NIT of even No. Dated 11.03.2020. The following corrigendum may please be incorporated in the NIT of above subject.

S. No.	Detail of Tender Document	For	Read As
1.	Date & Time for submission and opening of tender	Closing Time: 20.04.2020 at 15.00 Hrs. Opening Time: 20.04.2020 at 15.30 Hrs.	Closing Time: 11.05.2020 at 15.00 Hrs. Opening Time: 11.05.2020 after 15.30 Hrs

ANJ3/1002 DRM (MECH) RTM
Like us on: [Facebook.com/WesternRly](https://www.facebook.com/WesternRly) Follow us on: [Twitter.com/WesternRly](https://twitter.com/WesternRly)

BIHAR MEDICAL SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE CORPORATION LTD.
Notice No. :- BMSIC/45025/234-2020/762
SHORT TERM PUBLIC NOTICE
(Invitation for Expression of Interest)
In view of Pandemic situation prevailing due to Novel Corona Virus (COVID-19) outbreak leading to an emergency like situation including the lockdown in the country and its anticipated adverse impact on the supply chain of Medical Equipment, BMSICL is willing to procure ICU Ventilators under emergency procurement so as to deal with the emergency COVID-19 situation across the Health facilities in the State of Bihar on an urgent basis. Interested parties may submit their willingness to supply of the following item:

S.N.	Name of Item	Immediate Requirement (May change as per need)
1.	ICU Ventilator	100 units

The interested suppliers are required to submit through e-mail, their proposal in the format mentioned below along with the delivery schedule and the details (Address, GST Registration no., and PAN) of the supplier, Catalogue, Technical Data Sheet and Quality Certificate at the office of “Managing Director, Bihar Medical Services and Infrastructure Corporation Limited (BMSICL), 4th Floor, Bihar State Building Construction Corporation Limited, Hospital Road, Shastri Nagar, Patna-800023” within three days of publication of this notice to the e-mail id - bmsicl.covid19@gmail.com. The equipment suppliers are required to provide onsite after-sale service for a period of at least ten years including three years onsite warranty and, seven years CMC. Charges of CMC and consumable cost shall be quoted by the supplier separately. The suppliers are also required to provide the quality certificate. Refurbished Ventilators shall not be allowed at any cost.

Format to be used by the suppliers to express their interest:-

Sl. No.	Name of Item	Specification (to be filled by the bidders in accordance to the availability of the ventilator as per attached specifications or better specifications for immediate supply)	Quantity Available with the supplier for supply (in units)	Unit Price with Three Year Warranty excluding GST (to be filled by the Bidder)	Unit Price including GST (to be filled by the Bidder)	CMC Price to 10 th Year	Delivery Schedule (in days)
1.							

NOTE:
1. All interested applicants are essentially required to submit an undertaking that they fulfill the Technical Specification criteria of the Ventilators as given on BMSICL website.
2. Price comparison of Compressed Air Ventilator and Turbine Ventilator will be done separately.
3. Suppliers shall submit the Test Certificate/Import Document/Factory Test Certificate for the originality of new equipment at the time of installation.
4. Priority will be given to the supplier who enters early supply.
5. For any clarification or query the interested parties may contact GM (Procurement), BMSICL on Mobile No. 9471006242 and DGM (BMSICL), BMSICL on Mobile No. 8544406251 or visit BMSICL website (www.bmsicl.gov.in).

बिस्तर जानकारी के लिए www.prbihar.gov.in पर सर्कस करें **GM (Procurement), BMSICL**
PR-00341 (Ni Ni) 2020-21
बिस्तर कोरेमना के संबंध में बिस्तर जानकारी एवं सहायता हेतु **104** पर सर्कस कर सकते हैं।
आप सामग्री - संबंधी किसी तरह की जानकारी अथवा सुझाव हेतु दृष्टिगत संख्या 0612-2217636 पर सम्पर्क किया जा सकता है।
किसी भी तरह आपदा की जानकारी अथवा सुझाव हेतु आपदा प्रतिक्रिया के हेल्पलाइन नं. 1070 पर सम्पर्क किया जा सकता है।

First batch of seafarers disembark in Mumbai

145 crew members of *Marella Discovery* sent to quarantine after undergoing four-stage clearance at the port

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

A total of 145 crew members disembarked from U.S. cruise ship *Marella Discovery* on Thursday, making them the first batch of Indian seafarers to be allowed by the government to return.

The seafarers spent over 40 days in Indian waters as the government put together a standard operating procedure (SOP) for them in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

After *Marella Discovery* called in at the Mumbai Port Trust (MbPT) around 10.30 a.m., the Indian crew were put through a four-stage disembarkation process before being sent to a government-authorised quarantine facility. It was an emotional moment as the remaining crew of *Marella Discovery*, led by its captain Chris Dodds, bid their Indian colleagues goodbye, with promises that they would all sail through the



Safe passage: The crew returned to land after a 40-day wait at sea. *SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

pandemic and regroup for another voyage in the near future.

MbPT officials said that the SOP for sign-on and sign-off for seafarers to embark and disembark was prepared by the Director-General of Shipping.

While a check by the Port

Health Officer and immigration clearance are regular activities, the SOP included a COVID-19 test and quarantine till the results are negative. An electronic pass will be created for all those who test negative.

They will then have to apply to the Brihanmumbai

Municipal Corporation (BMC) for a transit pass so that they can travel to their respective homes in various States by road. Each transit pass will be valid for one seafarer and a driver only. While the crew are from all over India, 99 hail from Goa, and the State government is mak-

ing arrangements for them to return home.

The disembarkation of the *Marella Discovery* crew was carried out by shipping agent J.M. Baxi. "All the 145 crew disembarked on Thursday. After the clarifications on SOP came in late at night, there was limited time in hand. The transition was smooth," said a senior official of J.M. Baxi and Company.

The Ministry of Shipping brought out an order on Tuesday night that paved the way for Indian seafarers to return home. The process devised by the Ministry is going to be a three-phased one.

Three phases

In the first phase, the government will allow seamen on ships docked at Indian ports to disembark and sign off. In the second phase, those on ships in deep sea will be allowed to return. And in the final stage, all those who

have disembarked from ships and signed off in a foreign country will be allowed to return.

Seafarers in foreign countries would be allowed to return to India only when the government lifts its ban on flights and allows other Indians stranded abroad to return.

"It's very heartening to see the extraordinary effort made by the ship owners for crew disembarkation. Patience paid off. The send off was given to the Indian crew by remaining staff, a tradition at sea was followed to the core by Captain of the ship," Sanjay Parashar, member of the National Shipping Board and Chairman, International Maritime Federation, said.

Mr. Parashar said that the return of the seafarers had made their families smile, and given other stranded seafarers the hope that they too would be back soon.

Kamakhya temple festival called off

First time in recorded history

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

With the lockdown, the annual festival at the Kamakhya temple here has been cancelled for the first time in its recorded history.

Legends say the temple atop the Nilachal Hills, whose northern face slopes down to the Brahmaputra river, was built by the demon king Narakasura. Records are available only from 1565 when Koch King Naranarayana had the temple rebuilt.

Kamakhya is one of the 51 shaktipeeths, or holy sites,

for the followers of the Shakti cult, each representing a body part of Sati, Lord Shiva's companion. The temple's *sanctum sanctorum* houses the *yoni* - female genitals - symbolised by a rock. The festival marks the menstruation of the goddess.

"Tough times call for tough decisions. With a heavy heart, we have decided not to organise the annual Ambubachi Mela in view of the possibility of the spread of COVID-19 infection," Kabindra Sarma, a senior temple priest said on Thursday.

DRDO develops mobile virology lab

It will carry out COVID-19 diagnosis and virus-culturing for various therapies

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday inaugurated through videoconference a mobile virology research and diagnostics laboratory (MVRDL). It has been developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), together with ESIC Hospital, Hyderabad, and the private industry.

"The mobile lab will be helpful in carrying out diagnosis of COVID-19 and in virus-culturing for drug screening, convalescent plasma-derived therapy,



On the go: The mobile lab developed by the DRDO and ESIC Hospital, Hyderabad. *SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

comprehensive immune profiling of patients towards vaccine development and early clinical trials specific to

Indian population," the Defence Ministry said in a statement.

The MVRDL is the combi-

nation of a bio-safety level (BSL)-3 lab and a BSL-2 lab and was set up in a record time of 15 days. It can process 1,000-2,000 samples a day, the statement said.

The laboratories comply with the biosafety standards of the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) so as to meet international guidelines.

The first such MVRDL was developed by the Research Centre Imarath (RCI), Hyderabad, in consultation with ESIC Hospital. It can be positioned anywhere in the country, the statement said.

Air ticket refunds from travel sites delayed

Most airlines do not reimburse cash to booking portals but have set up a digital wallet for future use

JAGRITI CHANDRA
NEW DELHI

If you have booked an air ticket during the lockdown through a travel portal, you are unlikely to get a refund immediately despite a government order. Most airlines have not reimbursed money to online travel agents (OTAs) due to a severe cash crunch.

Low-cost carriers IndiGo, SpiceJet, GoAir, AirAsia and TrueJet say booking portals deposit money in advance in the bank accounts of the airlines to be able to buy air tickets. In return for this cash deposit, airlines create a wallet online against which a portal can purchase tickets. These wallets merely give entities an indication of



Airlines are facing a severe cash crunch.

the balance amount they can utilise, unlike other digital wallets that allow one to carry out monetary transactions.

Since the government directive, airlines have not reimbursed cash to portals

such as MakeMyTrip, Yatra.com, EasyMyTrip and ixigo, but merely restored the balance in the online wallet.

"When airlines reimburse an amount to this online wallet, without actually refunding cash into our bank accounts, we don't have money with us to give refunds. Only when fresh bookings start will we be able to utilise that wallet to book tickets for our customers, and with new cash flowing in, we will be able to refund our previous clients who have sought refunds," says Nishant Pitti, CEO & Co-Founder, EaseMyTrip.com.

Mr. Pitti says their website is the only one to refund cash to their clients by digging into its earnings. He

says the website has made refunds for tickets worth ₹50 crore. Citing industry estimates, Mr. Pitti says that tickets worth ₹180 crore were bought by various travel portals from different Indian airlines during the lockdown period.

Full-service carriers such as Vistara and Air India have asked OTAs to share air tickets and a refund application from passengers, which is then verified and processed.

As far as direct bookings with airlines during the lockdown are concerned, the likes of IndiGo and SpiceJet have conveyed to their passengers that the money has been reimbursed and it will take three weeks for the amount to reflect in their

bank accounts. In response to a query, Dhruv Shringi, co-founder and CEO Yatra.com said: "We are closely working with our airline partners to work out more benign policies for the customers and trying our best to streamline the cancellation and refund process. We are processing refunds as per the policies defined by the airlines." MakeMyTrip says on its website, "If you have a credit shell issued by IndiGo or SpiceJet for an impacted booking, you can use it to book your ticket for a future travel date." Ixigo's website says, "We are working with our airline partners to get their updated advisories. In the meantime, the current policies remain valid."

CSIR lab defends sanitisation tunnel after Ministry's advisory

'Correct use of sodium hypochlorite does not harm skin'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
PUNE

In the wake of several advisories advocating against the use of sanitisation tunnels as part of efforts to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus, the Pune-based CSIR-National Chemical Laboratory (CSIR-NCL) and the Mumbai-based Institute of Chemical Technology (ICT) issued a joint statement on Thursday asserting that the advisories "did not have any scientific basis".

"Efficacy of sodium hypochlorite, also known as hypo or bleach, ranging from 0.02% to 0.05% weight concentration was studied on

personnel walking through mist tunnel unit besides antibacterial activity against standard microorganisms before and after exposure in the walk-through," the CSIR-NCL and ICT said in a release.

"Results indicated that [sodium hypochlorite used in this weight concentration range] did not show any adverse effects on the skin. Thus, we recommend using 0.02% to 0.05 wt. % sodium hypochlorite solution (200 to 500 ppm) for external body surface sanitisation of personnel walking through the mist tunnel by following standard safety precau-

tions," the two scientific establishments added.

The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) had in a recent advisory cautioned against the spraying of disinfectant on people as part of measures to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic and had explicitly said that "disinfectants are recommended for the cleaning and disinfection only of frequently touched areas or surfaces by those suspected or confirmed to have been infected" by the virus.

The statement said that the scientific reports would be submitted to government.

THE CROSSWORD+ 12918

(set by Karaoke)

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

SCAN TO PLAY

ACROSS

- 5 Promotes pads around Ohio (6)
- 6 Old and new duck perhaps (6)
- 9 An involuntary agitation, more unusual in Turkey (6)
- 10 Invite trouble with no credit in risk factor perhaps (3,3,2)
- 11 German woman is a charlatan mostly (4)

DOWN

- 1 Small accommodation by river-rat (8)
- 2 Human development centre? (6)
- 3 What one does with the crossword here? (5,3)
- 4 Terribly annoyed without nitrogen in the very beginning (3,3)
- 5 Short comedy line - It's a disappointing disparity! (3,3)
- 7 Delightful time spent around home town (6)
- 8 Flathead owl? Perhaps a fairground attraction (4,2,5)
- 12 Motion sickness controls Y-chromosome in adult during muscular contraction (8)
- 15 Retainers have right to acquire treasure trove at last (8)
- 16 Animals moved quickly with no time in the vessel (6)
- 17 Commercial break at sea (6)
- 19 Traitor gets decapitated lion's share (6)
- 20 Serving clandestinely but not against rules (6)

SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to puzzle 12917

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

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

Introduction:

The Reserve Bank of India will conduct a simultaneous sale and purchase of bonds, in a move seen by market participants as an attempt to bring longer-term yields lower. It is the first time the RBI has conducted a special open market operation (OMO) of this kind, similar to the 'Operation Twist' carried out in the United States near the start of the decade. Bond yields have been rising since the RBI unexpectedly left its key repo rate unchanged, even as it slashed its forecast for economic growth to its lowest in over a decade. The RBI said it will buy 100 billion rupees' worth of the current benchmark 10-year bond while selling four bonds maturing in 2020 for an equivalent amount. The central bank said it had decided to conduct the special OMO after reviewing the liquidity & market situation and assessing financial conditions.

Operation Twist:

It is the new buzz word in the money market ever since the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) made an announcement for the simultaneous purchase and sale of government securities on 19 December of a similar amount of Rs 10,000 crore. The same has been replicated on 26 December and 2 January with the auctions to take place

This is an unusual step by the RBI to flatten the yields curves.

An open market operation (OMO) is where the RBI buys and sells securities to infuse or absorb liquidity in the system.

But when the RBI does the same on both sides, it is different when the amounts are the same which means that overall liquidity does not get influenced at all.

But what is done is that the RBI is buying the benchmark 6.45 percent 2029 paper which is the 10 year one. On the other hand, it sells various papers in the 2020 bracket which is less than one year.

Now what happens is that when the RBI buys 10 years paper, the demand for the same goes up leading to an increase in price or decline in yields. The same happens when it sells short-term paper which banks buy that, in turn, increases the yield as supply increases reducing thus the prices.

This attempt to sell short term and buy long term is essentially aimed at helping out the government to meet its borrowing requirement at a slight lower cost.

Operation Twist normally leads to lower longer-term yields, which will help boost the economy by making loans less expensive for those looking to buy homes, cars and finance projects, while saving becomes less desirable because it doesn't pay as much interest

Why Operation Twist is conducted?

If there is a shortfall in long term investment in the country and the investors are reluctant to do long term investment in the economy, then the government tries to reduce the interest rate for the long term investment ventures.

These long term investment venture includes; purchase of land/house, investment in infrastructure and securities, etc.

The long-term investment will create jobs in the country which would lead to an increase in the demand for other products. So due to a positive atmosphere in the country, the holistic development of the entire country would take place

Why is this being done now?

The idea is to lower the long-term yields to something more tuned to the RBI.

At the time of the first simultaneous OMO announced, the 10-year yield was 6.75 percent and after the two rounds of Operation Twist has come down to 6.51 percent.

Clearly the RBI is not satisfied and is going in for the third round too. It is also possible that this operation can continue until such time the yields come down to the level with which the RBI is satisfied. While the 2020 paper yields have not quite increased to the same extent, the overall differential has come down. The latest auction announced also involves 4 and 6 years paper purchase along with the 10 years paper.

At the theoretical level, such operations are influencing the yield curve which should reflect the differential in the tenures as well as move all rates down as the repo rate has been reduced by the RBI by 135 bps last year.

As the transmission to the market did not take place in the last policy when the repo rate was reduced in October, Operation Twist has been used to guide rates.

Benefits of Operation Twist

The interest rate for the long term investment will come down so the investor will take more loans for long term investments.

Address the worries of lack of transmission of repo rate cuts.

The flow of money will increase in the country, and aggregate demand in all sectors of the economy will boost.

The overall increase in productive activities will further create jobs in the economy.

How does it affect investors?

Fixed income investors with higher exposure to long term debt will benefit from easing yield of long-term bonds.

Consumers/borrowers will also profit from 'Operation Twist' as the retail loans will now get cheaper.

Previously banks were forced to price their retail loans at higher rates owing to high yields on long-term government borrowings.

Cheaper retail loans mean a boost in consumption and spending in the economy which in turn will revive growth.

MARKET WATCH

	23-04-2020	% CHANGE
Sensex	31,863	1.54
US Dollar	76.06	0.81
Brent oil	22.67	9.62

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	277.60	5.70
Asian Paints	1821.65	8.65
Axis Bank	430.05	-1.10
Bajaj Auto	2430.65	50.95
Bajaj Finserv	4729.60	-46.15
Bajaj Finance	2172.45	-24.20
Bharti Airtel	496.00	-5.40
BPL	355.15	-1.55
Britannia Ind	2947.40	-5.25
Cipla	586.70	-0.50
Coal India	140.90	0.20
Dr Reddy's Lab	4027.10	-29.70
Eicher Motors	14068.35	365.05
GAIL (India)	83.25	-0.95
Grasim Ind	500.45	-9.95
HCL Tech	477.70	15.30
HDFC	1663.45	-0.70
HDFC Bank	954.95	26.35
Hera MetaCorp	1865.00	-22.65
Hindalco	111.25	2.95
Hindustan Unilever	2317.50	-68.65
ICI Bank	352.95	17.00
Indian Bank	409.95	-5.95
Indian Infra	166.10	-1.45
Indian Oil Corp	83.10	0.10
ITC	180.55	-1.70
JSW Steel	159.95	-1.25
Kotak Bank	1249.65	97.50
L&T	840.60	-12.00
MHFL	347.60	7.30
Mumbai Stock	187.25	100.75
Nestle Suzuki	5156.35	-24.50
Nestle India Ltd.	17436.05	-206.00
NTPC	95.20	-2.40
ONGC	67.35	2.00
PowerGrid Corp	158.00	-4.20
Reliance Ind	1370.90	7.30
State Bank	186.70	-2.00
Shree Cement	1870.75	-509.40
Sun Pharma	477.45	3.10
Tata Motors	75.65	-0.25
Tata Steel	270.30	1.95
TCS	1827.25	100.75
Tech Mahindra	523.70	5.40
Titan	912.60	-38.80
UltraTech Cement	3442.20	-1.05
UPL	348.90	4.75
Vedanta	77.60	1.50
Wipro	180.90	2.35
Zee Entertainment	157.55	5.70

EXCHANGE RATES

Indicative direct rates in rupees a unit except yen at 4 p.m. on April 23

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	75.87	76.19
Euro	81.74	82.09
British Pound	93.64	94.06
Japanese Yen (100)	70.60	70.90
Chinese Yuan	10.72	10.76
Singapore	77.77	78.10
Swiss Franc	73.28	73.52
Canadian Dollar	53.64	53.87
Malaysian Ringgit	17.39	17.47
Australian Dollar	48.24	48.48

Source: Indian Bank

Repo auction gets poor response

May indicate a reluctance on the part of banks to lend to NBFCs

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The first auction of the second tranche of Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) targeted long term repo operations (TLTRO 2.0), which were meant for liquidity support to non-banking financial companies, (NBFCs), received poor response as total value of bids received from banks was almost 50% less than the notified amount.

The RBI received 14 bids worth ₹12,850 crore in the auction that was conducted on Thursday, against a notified amount of ₹25,000 crore, of three-year tenor.

"The total bids that were received amounted to ₹12,850 crore, implying a bid to cover ratio (i.e., the amount of bids received relative to the notified amount) of 0.5," the RBI said.

"Will review the auction results and take a view in the



Out of steam: At least 50% of funds raised was mandated to be deployed by banks in NBFCs. • REUTERS

matter," the RBI added.

While announcing the auction, the RBI had said that the funds availed from Thursday's auction should be deployed in investment grade bonds, commercial paper (CPs) and non-convertible debentures (NCDs) of NBFCs. At least 50% of the total funds availed of by the banks was mandated to be

deployed in small and mid-sized NBFCs.

"Limited participation by banks in the TLTRO 2.0 clearly highlights the banks' reluctance to lend to mid-size and small NBFCs and MFIs in the current situation," said Vidyathanan Ramaswamy, director and head, financial sector ratings, Brickwork Ratings.

"Given the lack of risk appetite in banks, a structure with partial credit guarantee by the GoI, similar to the PCG [partial credit guarantee] scheme launched last year for securitisation, may be the only viable option to ease liquidity challenges of NBFCs," he said.

NBFCs, including housing finance companies and MFIs, are facing stretched liquidity conditions as banks turned risk-averse and choked lending. Adding to the woes, banks have not extended the three-month repayment moratorium to the NBFCs. NBFCs, however, extended such a moratorium to their customers. As a result, fund inflow for NBFCs has been severely hit.

A Crisil report estimated that NBFCs rated by it will see debt obligation worth ₹1.75 lakh crore maturing by the end of June.

Listed firms can raise funds 6 months post buyback offer

SEBI move to reduce time gap for quicker access to capital

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

As part of measures to ease fund-raising for companies amid the ongoing volatility due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has allowed listed companies to raise funds after six months of making a buyback offer.

Under normal circumstances, SEBI norms stipulate a minimum gap of 12 months between a buyback offer and any fund raising activity by a listed company.

"To enable relatively quicker access to capital, it has been decided to temporarily relax the period of restriction provided in Regulation 240(f) of the buy-back Regulations. Accordingly, the words 'one year' shall be



read as 'six months' in the said regulation," the regulator said in a circular on Thursday.

Effective till Dec. 31
While the relaxation will come into force with immediate effect, it will be applicable until December 31.

The latest move comes following a relaxation in

norms for preferential allotment by companies with stressed assets.

The watchdog has also relaxed certain compliance norms for entities that are planning to come with an initial public offer (IPO), while enlarging the definition of entities eligible for making fast track rights issue.

In another circular regarding valuation of money market or debt securities held by mutual funds, the regulator has said that if an issuer defaults on payment obligations due to the lockdown or the moratorium allowed by RBI, then valuation agencies should not term it a default.

The amended norms will be in place till the period of the moratorium of the central bank, it added.

RBI to restart Operation Twist to manage yields

To sell, buy ₹10,000-cr. bonds each

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has announced simultaneous purchase and sale of government bonds in a bid to soften long-term yields. The central bank will buy ₹10,000 crore of bonds maturing between 2026 and 2030 and sell the same amount of T-bills.

"On a review of current and evolving liquidity and market conditions, the Reserve Bank has decided to conduct simultaneous purchase and sale of government securities under open market operations (OMO) for ₹10,000 crore each on

April 27, 2020," the RBI said on Thursday.

Such open market operations are known as 'Operation Twist,' which was used by the RBI in December last year for the first time.

Following the announcement, the yields on the 10-year bonds dropped by 20 basis points (bps).

The move will also aid monetary transmission by prompting banks to pass on interest rate cut benefits to their customers. The RBI had reduced key policy rate and the repo rate by 75 bps to 4.4% in the monetary policy review, announced in the last week of March.

LIC Housing cuts interest rate to 7.5%

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

LIC Housing Finance has reduced the interest rate on home loans by 60 basis points (bps) to 7.5% for new customers with a credit score of 800 from CIBIL.

The rate is applicable for any loan amount. "An additional reduction of 10 bps i.e. 7.4% will be offered if the customer assigns new/existing single premium term assurance policy with the sum assured equal to the loan amount to LIC HFL," it said. For customers with a below-800 score, the rate will start at 7.9% without the policy and 7.8% with the policy.

Gold attracting first-time buyers, of late

Nearly 30% of respondents who had never bought gold open to investing: survey

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

At a time when Indian investors are shying away from assets like equities and real estate, gold is emerging as a preferred choice of investment. A large number of retail investors, who have never bought gold in the past, are now looking at the yellow metal as an investment avenue.

A recent retail survey from the World Gold Council (WGC) revealed that 29% of retail investors surveyed had never bought gold in the past, but are open to the idea of buying gold in the future.

Further, 52% of investors already owned some form of gold, with 48% having invest-



ed in the 12 months preceding the survey.

Gold jewellery and gold coins remained two of the top five investments held by Indian investors across the board — a position that has been a permanent fixture for some years, stated a release

by the gold body. The survey revealed that there was a clear urban and rural divide with the former having a deeper penetration in terms of gold investment.

In urban areas, 76% of the investors surveyed had invested in gold in the past while 21% were open to buying gold in the future even though they had never previously invested in gold.

On the other hand, 37% of rural investors said they would consider buying gold in future despite never having done so before.

Lack of trust, a key issue
Importantly, lack of trust was found to be the key deterrent for potential invest-

ors looking at gold.

"Our global consumer survey revealed that lack of trust was a key challenge for gold across six key markets: 48% of global considerers were deterred from buying gold due to a lack of trust. The data for India shows it to be a far bigger issue here than elsewhere: 61% of Indian considerers identified issues around trust as a barrier to buying gold," the release stated.

The WGC is working with industry to address the trust issue; it recently launched Retail Gold Investment Principles and is collaborating with the industry to operationalise these to build trust in potential investors.

CII says India growth may slip to 1.5% in FY21

Contraction of 0.9% likely if virus stays

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Confederation of Indian Industry on Thursday said it expected India's economy to slow down considerably, with its estimate ranging from a contraction of 0.9% to a growth of 1.5%, in the current financial year due to the COVID-19 outbreak and the subsequent lockdown.

"Given the extent of damage to the economy from disruption to business, GDP growth in FY21 will likely be the lowest in many decades," said Chandrjit Banerjee, director general, CII.

Noting that by the time the second phase of lockdown ends on May 3, it would have extended for 40 days, the industry body said the economic costs of the lockdown are rising with each passing day, with the impact being felt across sectors.

"The situation requires immediate, across-the-board intervention from the government," it added.

"Any significant revival in investment activity is unlikely as capacity utilisation levels may remain sub-optimal. Consumption demand is likely to remain lacklustre as people's incomes have been impacted," it said.

Best-case scenario
In a new paper titled 'A plan for economic recovery,' the CII said, in an optimistic scenario, wherein a faster pick-up post the lockdown period is envisaged, the GDP forecast is for growth of 1.5% 'in the best case.' In the 'baseline scenario,' the GDP is expected to grow at 0.6%. In the case of a more prolonged outbreak, the GDP is likely to contract by 0.9%, the CII added.

Bharti Infratel profit rises 7% to ₹650 crore

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Bharti Infratel on Thursday posted a 7% increase in net profit to ₹650 crore for the quarter ended March 31, 2020.

The tower infrastructure provider had clocked a net profit of ₹608 crore in the January-March 2019 quarter, the company said. Consolidated revenue stood at ₹3,624 crore. A year earlier, it was ₹3,600 crore.

The company, however, said that due to the adoption of the new accounting system — IND AS 116 — from April 1, 2019 onwards, the amounts for the quarter and full year ended March 31, 2020 are not comparable.

The board of directors declared a third interim dividend of ₹4.10 per equity share of ₹10 each for financial year 2019-20.

Trump's order no threat to IT sector: Nasscom

Will lobby for critical tech staff, it says

MINI TEJASWI
BENGALURU

U.S. President Donald Trump's order banning immigration under various categories to the U.S. for 60 days need not be seen as a negative sign for the Indian IT sector, said Nasscom.

The sector's apex body also said it would make strong recommendations to the U.S. administration to consider critical technology workers from India under the essential category, complying with the guidelines released by the Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), an arm of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

It's too early to see any impact on the Indian tech sector, but what came out is the first executive order speaking about permanent immigrants, green card hol-



ders and also about people who are outside of the country, Shivendra Singh, vice-president and head, immigration, Nasscom, told *The Hindu*.

However, the order will not apply to the more than six lakh Indian H-1B visa holders and their spouses who are currently in the U.S, he said, adding "there's no immediate effect, still we will have to see how these numbers pan out in the future."

Jio-Facebook deal to help deleverage RIL's balance sheet

Indian major eyes zero net-debt with stake sale in other arms

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Jio Platforms Ltd.'s decision to sell 9.99% stake to Facebook Inc. in a \$5.7 billion deal is seen as a step towards deleveraging the balance sheet of its parent firm Reliance Industries Limited (RIL).

RIL, with an outstanding debt of ₹3,06,851 crore (\$43 billion) is banking on a few more multi-billion-dollar deals in energy, telecom and retail sectors to become a zero-net-debt company by the end of this fiscal.

The proceeds from the Jio-Facebook deal will reduce the net consolidated borrowings of RIL and reinforce the company's commitment to reduce its net borrowings to zero by March 31, 2021, which is seen as



credit positive by analysts.

Moody's Investor Services expects the Jio-Facebook transaction to reduce RIL's consolidated net debt/EBITDA by 0.4x to well below 3.0x — the tolerance level for its Baa2 rating. "The investment by Facebook establishes a valuation for RIL's digital services business and can be used as a base for further divestment by the company,

This also increases RIL's financial flexibility," Moody's said. In July 2019, RIL announced the sale of its telecom tower business to Brookfield Asset Management Inc. for ₹25,200 crore.

The company also signed a non-binding letter of intent to sell 20% stake in its oil-to-chemical business to Saudi Aramco for an enterprise value of \$15 billion. The company has also entered into a deal with BP Plc to sell 49% stake in its fuel marketing business in India for \$1 billion. Together, the proceeds from these transactions will result in a \$16 billion reduction in RIL's net debt and the company's leverage.

As on December 31, 2019, the company had cash and cash equivalents were at ₹153,719 crore (\$21.5 billion).

19,000 containers to be 'evacuated'

N. ANAND
CHENNAI

The two major ports in Chennai have successfully evacuated most of the imported containers from their terminals via road and rakes post the COVID-19 lockdown.

"Currently, Chennai Port Trust (ChPT) has 11,000 containers for transshipment and they are being evacuated on a regular basis," said P. Ravendran, chairman, ChPT. "As inventories are at manageable levels, we don't foresee traffic or container congestion in our port," he said.

Meanwhile, Kamarajar Port Ltd. (KPL) has close to 8,000 containers for evacuation. "The containers will be moved by road and some by rakes," said Sunil Paliwal, CMD, KPL.

Govt. to suspend IBC rules for up to one year

Move to help banks to rejig loans

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

In a major relief for corporate borrowers hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, the government has decided to amend the insolvency law to suspend up to one year provisions that trigger insolvency proceedings against defaulters, according to sources.

Further, the sources said amendments to the IBC (Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code) would pave the way for banks to restructure loans. The sources said an ordinance would be promulgated to suspend three sections of the IBC for up to one year and a decision in this regard was taken by the Union Cabinet on Wednesday.

Sections 7, 9 and 10 of the

IBC would be suspended for six months and the suspension time can be extended by up to one year. An enabling provision with respect to extending the time would be part of the ordinance, they added.

Suspension of these provisions could be extended up to one year based on the economic situation going forward. The effective date of the amendments coming into force would be the date of promulgation of the ordinance, the sources said.

Section 7 and 9 pertain to initiation of corporate insolvency proceedings by a financial creditor and an operational creditor, respectively. Section 10 relates to filing of an application for insolvency resolution by a creditor.

Most commodity prices will drop substantially in 2020: World Bank

Energy prices may average at 40% lower than in 2019

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN
WASHINGTON

COVID-19 is projected to bring most commodity prices down substantially in 2020, the World Bank said in its 'April Commodity Markets Outlook,' released on Thursday.

Prices of energy and metals have been worst hit. While there has been only a moderate impact on the agricultural commodities outlook, supply chain disruptions and export restrictions and stockpiling by governments have raised food security concerns, it said.

The outlooks are "exceptionally uncertain" and depend on the severity and duration of the pandemic and when mitigation measures are unwound. Energy prices



demand of 10%. Non-energy prices are expected to fall 5% in 2020 and stabilise next year. Metal prices are expected to fall 13% and rebound modestly next year.

Agricultural prices are likely to stay broadly stable in 2020 because of relatively stable demand and all-time high levels of staple production and stock.

However, supply chain disruptions and trade policy announcements and stockpiling could create food shortages, the report said.

"Policymakers must resist the urge to impose trade restrictions and actions that put food security at risk, as the poor would be hit the hardest," World Bank economist, Ceyla Pazarbasioglu, said.

This reflects a historically large expected drop in oil

Life insurers' first-year premium grows 20.6%

However, March plays spoilsport

N.RAVI KUMAR
HYDERABAD

A sharp decline in March notwithstanding, life insurance companies posted a 20.6% increase in the first year premium for 2019-20.

The key indicator of their performance, the first year premium mobilised by life insurers during the fiscal totalled ₹2,58,896.48 crore against ₹2,14,672.86 crore in 2018-19, as per the data released by the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI).

Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), the lone public sector entity among the 24 life insurers in the country, clocked a 25.17% growth with first year premium at ₹1,77,977.08 crore (₹1,42,191.69 crore).

Together, the private sec-

tor life insurers did ₹80,919.40 crore or an increase of 11.64% from the previous fiscal.

But March came in the way of a better performance. The new business premium of all the life insurers in the month totalled ₹25,409.30 crore or 32.17% lower compared with the year-ago period. For LIC, the decline in March was 31.12% at ₹17,066.57 crore while for the private sector it was a 34.22% drop to ₹8,342.73 crore.

Max Life Insurance deputy managing director V. Viswanad said "due to the COVID-19 triggered lockdown and social distancing, the industry witnessed a significant impact as client meetings were severely hampered."

The Central government introduced the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) in 2016 to resolve claims involving insolvent companies. This was intended to tackle the bad loan problems that were affecting the banking system. Two years on the IBC has succeeded in a large measure in preventing corporates from defaulting on their loans. The IBC process has changed the debtor-creditor relationship. A number of major cases have been resolved in two years, while some others are in advanced stages of resolution.

What is IBC?

Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 is considered as one of the biggest insolvency reforms in the economic history of India.

This was enacted for reorganization and insolvency resolution of corporate persons, partnership firms and individuals in a time bound manner for maximization of the value of assets of such persons.

Background

The era before IBC had various scattered laws relating to insolvency and bankruptcy which caused inadequate and ineffective results with undue delays. For example, Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act SARFAESI –for security enforcement.

The Recovery of Debts Due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act, 1993 (RDDBFI) for debt recovery by banks and financial institutions.

Companies Act for liquidation and winding up of the company.

Ineffective implementation, conflict in one of these laws and the time-consuming procedure in the aforementioned laws, made the Bankruptcy Law Reform Committee draft and introduce Insolvency and Bankruptcy Law bill.

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code ecosystem

National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) – The adjudicating authority (AA), has jurisdiction over companies, other limited liability entities.

Debt Recovery Tribunal (DRT) has jurisdiction over individuals and partnership firms other than Limited Liability Partnerships.

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) – apex body for promoting transparency & governance in the administration of the IBC; will be involved in setting up the infrastructure and accrediting IPs (Insolvency Professionals (IPs) & IUs (Information Utilities).

It has 10 members from Ministry of Finance, Law, and RBI.

Information Utilities (IUs) - a centralized repository of financial and credit information of borrowers; would accept, store, authenticate and provide access to financial data provided by creditors.

IPs- persons enrolled with IPA (Insolvency professional agency (IPA) and regulated by Board and IPA will conduct resolution process; it will act as Liquidator/ bankruptcy trustee; they are appointed by creditors and override the powers of the board of directors.

IPs have the power to furnish performance bonds equal to assets of the company under insolvency resolutions Adjudicating authority (AA) - would be the NCLT for corporate insolvency; to entertain or dispose of any insolvency application, approve/ reject resolution plans, decide in respect of claims or matters of law/ facts thereof.

Key aspects of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code

IBC proposes a paradigm shift from the existing 'Debtor in possession' to a 'Creditor in control' regime. IBC aims at consolidating all existing insolvency related laws as well as amending multiple legislation including the Companies Act.

The code aims to resolve insolvencies in a strict time-bound manner - the evaluation and viability determination must be completed within 180 days.

Moratorium period of 180 days (extendable up to 270 days) for the Company. For startups and small companies the resolution time period is 90 days which can be extended by 45 days.

Introduce a qualified insolvency professional (IP) as intermediaries to oversee the Process

Establishment of Insolvency and Bankruptcy board as an independent body for the administration and governance of Insolvency & bankruptcy Law; and Information Utilities as a depository of financial information.

Coronavirus campaign by auctioning the bat he used to score 606 runs at last year's World Cup. The winning bidder at the online auction on Wednesday was a New York-based Bangladeshi. AFP



Carlsen nails Caruana
NEW DELHI
Magnus Carlsen stamped his superiority over strong title-contender Fabiano Caruana 3-1 to retain his position at the top of the table in the \$250,000 Magnus Carlsen Invitational online chess tournament on Wednesday. **The results (third round):** Magnus Carlsen (Nor) bt Fabiano Caruana (USA) 3-1; Hikaru Nakamura (USA) bt Alireza Firouzja (FIDE) 3.5-0.5.

101 human space flight missions

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

The Directorate of Human Space Programme of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has invited proposals to develop indigenous technologies for its future human space flight missions.

The concepts can range from food and medicine eaten by astronauts during low-earth space trips; to anti-radiation and thermal protection technologies for the spacecraft, life support systems for astronauts, and inflatable habitats to robotic interfaces during more complex missions.

The announcement of opportunity (AO) issued this week suggests 17 potential areas of work for national research and academic agencies.

The directorate of HSP



In August 2018, ISRO announced its first human space trip slated for around 2022. *FILE PHOTO

has sought the proposals by July 15. A selection committee will be formed to scrutinise the proposals. The AO said there was a need to develop affordable local technologies that could support human survival in low-earth orbits initially, and in bigger explorations later.

"This opportunity will en-

able national research/academic institutions to harness their expertise and capabilities towards development of technologies for space exploration," the announcement said.

In the long term, the country's emerging human space programme will need to establish research facilities and develop human resources.

In August 2018, ISRO announced its first human space trip slated for around 2022, the ₹10,000-crore Gaganyaan. It plans to send three astronauts to a distance of 400 km in space in a special spacecraft. They will circle earth over three to seven days.

Four pilots of the Indian Air Force are currently training in Moscow to be the first set of potential candidates for Gaganyaan.

A nominal fee per film has to be paid directly to the filmmaker to access web link

NAMRATA JOSHI
MUMBAI

It continues to rain goodies for binge watchers during the lockdown. With the launch of the "home theatre" on Friday, April 24, one of India's front-ranking film festivals, Jio Mami Mumbai Film Festival with Star, is making one of its arms – the popular year-round film programme – go digital while tiding over COVID-19.

An extension – and not a replacement – of the year-round programme, the online avatar will be open to viewers from across India. While registration will be free, a nominal fee per film will have to be paid directly to the filmmaker, after which the web link will be made available to the member for a limited period of time.

"The idea is to have filmmakers become theatre

owners and bring their films to premiere in your homes," said Smriti Kiran, Artistic Director, Mumbai Film Festival, adding, "It empowers filmmakers and we help them find an audience not just in the city but across the country." The festival's role, as a not-for-profit entity, is of championing the films and the filmmakers and help in outreach and promotion.

Wide reach

The idea is to make it a functional, easy and effective viewing experience online. Unlike the limited seats in the theatre, there won't be any capacity issues here, ensuring a wide reach. "Thousands can watch it. It also empowers the audience," said Ms. Smriti.

The titles will include those not available on streaming platforms. "There

are a considerable number of incredible films sitting with producers and filmmakers that are not available on any platform," said Ms. Smriti. In fact, the idea to begin MAMI home theatre came to her while making a list of titles from the festival's past editions for someone who had asked for it.

A goldmine

She realised that they were sitting on a literal goldmine that hadn't found a way to reach the people.

The online programme kicks off with Tanuja Chandra's delightful documentary *Aunty Sudha*, *Aunty Radha*, about her two aunts, aged 86 and 93, spending the sunset years of their lives together in Lahra village, near Hathras in Uttar Pradesh. The charge per viewing will be ₹55 and the producer, in

this case, has decided to put the proceeds towards COVID-19 charity.

What next? For now it's one step at a time. "We have already started working on a portal. We are also in conversation with a few platforms for a potential tie-up with this initiative. But till we can hone the pipeline, we request everyone for their patience and support with regard to the tech involved. We will get to a place that is systematically smooth soon," said Ms. Smriti.

While stressing that "home theatre" will not be a replacement for the year-round programme, she also underlined that going forward, it would be "an arm that would need to be built stronger". They may be trying something new for now but are committed to it for the long term.