



Sonia Gandhi seeks steps to help micro, small and medium units
 page 6



Two militants and their associate killed in Kashmir's Pulwama
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Saudi Arabia abolishes flogging as punishment as part of reforms
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Tripura started early screening at airports and checkpoints: Biplab Deb
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NEARBY
Tamil Nadu has a total of 41 testing facilities
 CHENNAI
 In a few days, the State's testing capacity will go up to 10,000 samples a day, Health Minister C. Vijayabaskar has said. The number of testing facilities has increased from 34 to 41. The State has the highest number of testing facilities in the government sector.
TAMIL NADU ▶ PAGE 2

Central team begins five-day visit to Chennai
 CHENNAI
 A five-member team of the Central government, led by Additional Secretary of the National Disaster Management Authority V. Thirupugazh, on Saturday began a five-day visit to Chennai to take stock of the COVID-19 situation.
TAMIL NADU ▶ PAGE 2

1,200 migrant workers left high and dry
 CHENNAI
 At least 1,200 migrant workers, employed by firms supplying components to a major automobile company and residing in villages surrounding Sriperumbudur taluk in Kancheepuram district, have been left high and dry without sufficient food, rations and wages.
TAMIL NADU ▶ PAGE 2

MAGAZINE ▶ 8 PAGES
CLASSIFIEDS ▶ PAGE 3

Neighbourhood, standalone shops can open in urban areas

Those in markets, market complexes and malls will remain shut, says govt.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
 NEW DELHI
 The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on Saturday clarified that all shops in rural areas, except those in malls, could open. In urban areas, all standalone and neighbourhood shops and those in residential complexes are allowed to open but not those in markets, market complexes and shopping malls.

The MHA said all restaurants, salons and barber shops would remain closed as they "render services" and the relaxation was granted only to shops selling

COVID-19

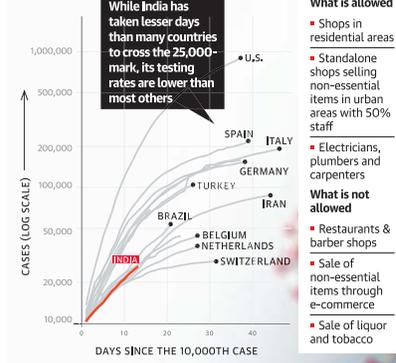
items. In a statement, the MHA added that liquor shops continued to be prohibited and e-commerce platforms could only be used for the sale of essential items.

Several officials of the State governments said they would stick to the ongoing restrictions and would not immediately implement the order. An official said the final decision on the opening of shops would have to be taken by the States.

Manoj Parida, adviser to the Administrator of the Union Territory of Chandigarh,

Up, up and away

The chart shows the day-wise progression of cases from the 10,000th case in countries which have recorded at least 25,000. Only 16 countries have crossed that mark

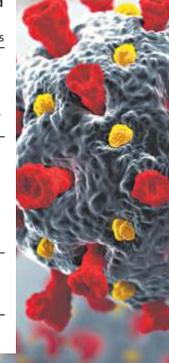


said on Twitter that in the city, a containment zone, "the opening of neighbourhood non-essential shops will not happen till May 3".

Piyush Singla, Deputy Commissioner of Udhampur district in Jammu and Kashmir, said queries poured in about the opening of shops and "it is clarified that the present ongoing set-up shall

continue till any further communication. Anyone violating the directives shall be booked as per law".

Assam's Chief Secretary Kumar Sanjay Krishna said that no further relaxation, like the opening of shops and beauty parlours, had been decided by the State and a decision would be taken only on April 27.



Sudhanshu Sarangi, Commissioner of Police, Bhubaneswar-Cuttack, said the Odisha government would take a decision based on the local situation and requirements and till then, "shops, except for those already exempted, will remain closed."

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6
MORE REPORTS ▶ PAGES 7, 8, 9, 10

Chaos and panic buying in T.N. cities before lockdown

Physical distancing, masks ignored as crowds throng markets

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHAENNAI
 Chaotic scenes prevailed at markets and shops on Saturday in major cities in Tamil Nadu, including Chennai, Coimbatore and Madurai, as people scrambled to stock up on essentials ahead of the four-day "complete lockdown" beginning at 6 a.m. on Sunday.

Physical distancing norms were compromised and the mandate of wearing masks ignored in the rush even as 66 more persons in the State, including 43 in Chennai, tested positive for COVID-19. With one more fatality, the death toll rose to 23 in the State. So far, 1,821 confirmed cases have been recorded.

Limited time
 With only a day to stock up and a 1 p.m. deadline for shops to close, the people in the three major cities thronged the shops from early in the morning.

The situation was equally bad in Tiruppur that will be shut for three days, but in Salem, another city where severe restrictions would be imposed till Tuesday, shops remained closed.

Facing a barrage of criticism from the Opposition that described the "complete lockdown" as an "ill-



Rules defied: No social distancing was observed at the Thiruvanimiyur vegetable market in Chennai. • M. KARUNAKARAN

conceived idea", Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami later allowed shops to remain open till 3 p.m.

The Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority and the Chennai Corporation added to the confusion by announcing that vegetable and fruit shops would remain open during the "complete lockdown".

However, in the evening, Corporation Commissioner G. Prakash clarified that only sale of vegetables and fruits in wholesale markets, on push carts and mobile vehicles would be allowed, as an-

nounced by the government earlier.

Chaos at Koyambedu
 All roads leading to the Koyambedu wholesale market in Chennai witnessed heavy traffic, with nearly 50,000 people visiting the complex within a couple of hours of its opening.

Saturday's sales were 30%-40% higher than the usual, said S. Chandran of the Koyambedu Vegetable Wholesale Merchants Association.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

About NAFED:

National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd.(NAFED), established in 1958, is registered under the Multi State Co-operative Societies Act.

Nafed was setup with the object to promote Co-operative marketing of Agricultural Produce to benefit the farmers.

Composition: Agricultural farmers are the main members of Nafed, who have the authority to say in the form of members of the General Body in the working of Nafed.

The objectives of the NAFED shall be to organize, promote and develop marketing, processing and storage of agricultural, horticultural and forest produce, distribution of agricultural machinery, implements and other inputs, undertake inter-state, import and export trade et

academic year begin in Sep- **CONTINUED ON** ▶ PAGE 6 among others, the govern- **CONTINUED ON** ▶ PAGE 6

Only 15% of poor households received pulses

As against 1.96 lakh tonnes, only 30,000 tonnes have been distributed so far

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ
 NEW DELHI
 Only 15% of poor households have received the 1 kg of pulses promised for April under the Centre's COVID-19 welfare package, according to an analysis of government agency data.

Of the 1.96 lakh tonnes of pulses that should have been given to over 19 crore households this month, only 30,000 tonnes have been distributed so far, according to the Consumer Affairs Department.

Distribution is likely to speed up by the first week of May, with delays caused by the fact that the government only stores unmilled pulses in its godowns, and has had to start a massive milling operation before delivering them to ration shops.

Last month, Finance Mi-



Helping hands: The extra rations from April to June is part of the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana. • G. RAMAKRISHNA

nister Nirmala Sitharaman announced extra ration allocations from April to June as part of the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana, said to be worth ₹1.7 lakh crore.

All 80 crore National Food Security Act beneficiaries were to get an extra 5 kg of rice or wheat each month,

while each household was to get 1 kg of pulses.

Several hurdles
 Given that all States already distribute rice and wheat through a well-established Public Distribution System, with grain provided from a network of Food Corpora-

tion of India warehouses, distribution of the extra grain began early in April. However, distribution to more than 19 crore families was stalled by several hurdles.

The National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation is the nodal agency which procures and stores a buffer stock of pulses. To provide the necessary 5.88 lakh tonnes of cleaned and milled pulses under the scheme, NAFED pressed over 100 mills into service to process 8.5 lakh tonnes of unmilled pulses lying in 165 godowns. "The scale of this operation is massive and far more complex than food-grain movement," according to a Consumer Affairs Department statement.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 6

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The Union Finance & Corporate Affairs Minister Smt. Niramla Sitharaman has announced Rs 1.70 Lakh Crore relief package under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana for the poor to help them fight the battle against Corona Virus.

These measures are intended at reaching out to the poorest of the poor, with food and money in hands, so that they do not face difficulties in buying essential supplies and meeting essential needs.

The package includes a range of measures that the Government of India will take to alleviate the economic, health, and food-related distress of India's poor.

Key components of the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package:

Insurance scheme for health workers fighting COVID-19 in Government Hospitals and Health Care Centres: What are the benefits?

Any health professional, who while treating Covid-19 patients, meet with some accident, then he/she would be compensated with an amount of Rs 50 lakh under the scheme.

Coverage:

All government health centres, wellness centres and hospitals of Centre as well as States would be covered under this scheme.

Approximately 22 lakh health workers would be provided insurance cover to fight this pandemic.

Safai karamcharis, ward-boys, nurses, ASHA workers, paramedics, technicians, doctors and specialists and other health workers would be covered.

PM Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana:

Under this scheme, 80 crore poor people, covering about two-thirds of the country's population, will get 5 kg rice or wheat each month for the next three months free of charge, in addition to the 5 kg they already get. Each household will get 1 kg of dal of their choice, for next three months, also free of charge.

Besides, to ensure adequate availability of protein to all the above mentioned individuals, 1 kg per family, would be provided pulses according to regional preferences for next three months.

Benefit to farmers:

The first instalment of Rs 2,000 due in 2020-21 will be front-loaded and paid in April 2020 itself under the PM KISAN Yojana. It would cover 8.7 crore farmers.

Cash transfers Under PM Garib Kalyan Yojana:

A total of 20.40 crores PMJDY women account-holders would be given an ex-gratia of Rs 500 per month for next three months.

Gas cylinders, free of cost, would be provided to 8 crore poor families for the next three months.

Wage-earners below Rs 15,000 per month in businesses having less than 100 workers: Government proposes to pay 24 percent of their monthly wages into their PF accounts for next three months.

Support for senior citizens (above 60 years), widows and Divyang: Government will give them Rs 1,000 to tide over difficulties during next three months.

MNREGA wages would be increased by Rs 20 with effect from 1 April, 2020. Wage increase under MNREGA will provide an additional Rs 2,000 benefit annually to a worker.

Self-Help groups:

Limit of collateral free lending would be increased from Rs 10 to Rs 20 lakhs.

Other components:

Employees' Provident Fund Regulations will be amended to include Pandemic as the reason to allow non-refundable advance of 75 percent of the amount or three months of the wages, whichever is lower, from their accounts.

admitted to the Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital (RGGGH).

The 26-year-old youth is from Ritchie Street, Chintadripet, and had mild fever and breathing difficulty. He came on his own to the Government Multi-Specialty Hospital at 4 p.m on Friday.

He underwent tests, including for COVID-19, and was admitted. The results came back positive, but he went missing from the hospital.

Sources said that he walked out from the ward, as there was no immediate medical care for at least four hours. On Saturday morning, he walked into RGGGH and readmitted himself at the special ward for COVID-19 patients.

Meanwhile, another 60-year-old patient from Triplicane walked out of RGGGH after he tested positive.

ny front line workers, including government and private doctors and paramedical personnel and police personnel, have tested positive for COVID-19.

According to officials, 62 healthcare providers/workers and 14 police personnel have tested positive for COVID-19 till April 24. Besides, 38 mediapersons have tested positive. Many contacts of affected front line workers have also tested positive.

Chennai, in specific, had two groups of COVID-19 patients – the cardiology department of the Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital and mediapersons. A senior doctor said that the cardiology department had about 20 persons, including nine postgraduates, who had tested positive for COVID-19.

"According to the Indian Council of Medical Research, 80% of COVID-19 patients are asymptomatic. In



A health worker carries out thermal screening in Pudupet. *B. VELANKANNI RAJ

such a situation, we will not know who is infected. So providing personal protective equipment (PPE) only to those on duty in COVID-19 wards is not enough," said A. Ramalingam, State organising secretary of the Service Doctors and PG Association. "All medical and paramedical staff in regular outpatient departments, those handling emergency cases and those performing interventional procedures should be given safety gear," he said.

Doctors, staff nurses, laboratory technicians, CT/X-ray technicians, ward staff and hospital workers should have safety gear. All patients walking into a hospital should be considered a po-

PPES and N95 masks provided to healthcare providers.

Another doctor said the goggles were small and doctors, who wore spectacles, were unable to use them.

P. Pakalavan, Deputy Commissioner of Police-Adyar, said: "Our men are at the front line, and we are taking utmost care of their safety," he said.

'Govt.'s priority Health Minister C. Vijayabaskar said the safety of front line workers was a priority of the government.

"We have recommended *kabasura kudineer* and *nilavembu kudineer* as prophylaxis for them. As per allopathy, they will be given zinc tablets, along with multivitamin or vitamin-C tablets," he said.

The Health Department, in a circular, recommended drug and herbal powder to the police and healthcare workers on COVID-19 duty.

ram district, have been left high and dry without sufficient food, rations and wages during the ongoing COVID-19 lockdown.

"We have to test our luck every day when [representatives of] private companies or NGOs visit our area to distribute food packets. This is because they come here with 500 packets, whereas we number 1,200. Our employers have not paid our salaries in full," said Mukesh Kumar Singh (name changed), who lives in Palnellur.

Mr. Singh, who is in his 20s, said the workers were primarily employed in four to five companies and hailed from Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal. "They (employers) are neither letting us return to our home towns nor providing us sufficient food," he lamented. He said that the workers in neighbouring villages like Selaiyanur, Arane-



Nowhere to go: The workers, hailing from Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal, have been left high and dry without sufficient food and rations. *B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

ri, Maambakkam, Vallam and Kandigai were also in the same boat.

His friend Rajesh Das said, "The contractor is avoiding us and not attending our calls. They should either give us food and salary or allow us to return to our native places."

J. Vinayagam, Inspector of the Sripierumbudur police station, confirmed that he had received an oral complaint, adding that after he followed it up, the contrac-

tor released 75% of the salary. "He has promised to pay the remaining [amount] in two or three days," he said.

Human rights' activist Henri Tiphagne, whose staff from People's Watch have been coordinating with the workers to get relief delivered to them, said, "If migrant workers living so close to the State capital are going through this, it speaks volumes about the prevailing scenario across the State. Like the Health Secretary,

the Labour Secretary should hold a daily press meet to elaborate on how relief is being distributed to migrant workers."

Kancheepuram Collector P. Ponniah told *The Hindu* that the district administration had identified over 38,000 migrant workers living in 163 places in the State. "We found that they were living in congested areas, and decided to help them. We have provided accommodation to 490 of them."

Welfare Fund for Building and Other Construction Workers: State Governments will be given directions to utilise this fund to provide assistance and support to these workers to protect them against economic disruptions.

Why these measures were necessary?

For economic agents – particularly poor households and small businesses – the crisis today is a crisis of liquidity. The nationwide lockdown, imposed to stop the novel coronavirus in its tracks, has led to scores of daily wage workers and informal sector entrepreneurs losing earning opportunities from their existing activities.

Concerns and challenges ahead:

Essentially, this package seems to reach those who are connected to bank accounts and formal payment systems. But certain groups of daily wagers and informal workers may be left out.

And the real challenge would come in implementing these measures. For example, while there was sufficient surplus foodgrains available in government warehouses and an existing system for further procurement, the system for procurement of pulses needed to be created in most states.

Vehicle donated to RGGGH

CHENNAI
Join International Trade Organization, Chennai chapter, donated an ambulatory electric battery-operated vehicle to Rajiv Gandhi Govt. General Hospital. Besides, 1,000 sets of PPEs and 10 video lanyoscopes were also donated.

Man injured by 'maanja' thread

CHENNAI
A 56-year-old man from Tambaram, who was returning home after dialysis, was injured after a thread, which the police said was a 'maanja' thread, got entangled around his neck on Friday evening. Parasuraman fell from his bike and passers-by rushed him to a hospital.

THE HINDU

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and vegetables, he said.

In a bid to support the Corporation, the Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority has mobilised traders at the Koyambedu wholesale market to help residents get vegetables and fruits. CMDA Member Secretary D. Karthikeyan said that officials had been directed to help residents' associations

main closed. Media organisations will continue operations. Hospitals, laboratories and pharmacies will be allowed.

Amma Canteens and community kitchens will continue to offer services. Petrol and diesel will be sold from 8 a.m. to noon. ATMs will not be closed in any part of the city.

lockdown beyond May 31 as the COVID-19 graph keeps climbing, according to a senior government official.

One of the obvious reasons for the authorities to contemplate such a move is that all these areas fall under 'red' zones.

After the first phase of lockdown between March 25 and April 15, the second

na, parts of the neighbouring three districts – Chengalpattu, Kancheepuram and Tiruvallur (forming part of the Chennai Metropolitan Area), Madurai and Coimbatore from 6 a.m. on Sunday to 9 p.m. on April 29. In Salem and Tiruppur, it is from 6 a.m. on Sunday to 9 p.m. on Tuesday (April 28).

The rationale behind the

GOING ONLINE

In Chennai, residents will be served by at least 3,000 mobile vegetable units besides 4,949 pushcarts. On Saturday alone, over 5,000 tonnes of produce was sold through mobile units. In the last month, nearly 80,000 tonnes of vegetables and fruits was sold across the State.

he was offered the best medical treatment. However, he

officials then declared to bury the body at Velangadu.

Lockdown robs Akshaya Tritiya of its sparkle

Some take the online route

SANGEETHA KANDAVEL, CHENNAI

T. Nagar, a prominent jewellery hub in the city, wore a deserted look a day before Akshaya Tritiya. "Last year, around this time, jewellery shops were crowded and people had to wait for hours to pick their gold. But this year,

the lockdown has hampered our business," said a jeweller on North Usman Road.

While most jewellers decided to stay shut on the auspicious day this year, a handful took the online route. Those who went online called it an e-Akshaya Tritiya. GRT Jewellers sent out an SMS to all its customers, urging them to buy gift vouchers online.

"Any reduction in price at

the time of purchase at a GRT showroom, post-lockdown, will be refunded," the jeweller assured.

Tanishq, a jewellery brand from the house of Tata, has said that consumers can shop from its e-commerce platform and once services resume, they can either opt to go to the store and pick up their jewellery or get it delivered at their doorstep. Tanishq has also

introduced a video-calling feature and a live assisted chat on its website. Kalyan Jewellers has come out with a Gold Ownership Certificate that can be purchased on the company website on or before Akshaya Tritiya.

Though there is noise on social media about e-Akshaya Tritiya, old-timers pointed out that the formula would not work. A prominent jeweller said that the

Tamil Nadu market was different. "For people here, gold has an emotional connect... it has to be purchased on a particular date and time. I'm sceptical about this online trend," he said.

A.Sugahasini, a regular buyer during Akshaya Tritiya, said she was staying away from gold this year. "My husband has got only 60% of his salary. So priorities have changed," she added.

THE HINDU

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ADI DRAVIDA, 26, 168 cms, Software Professional, M.Tech, Lives in Salem. Father is a Businessman. Family is financially well off. Looking for a likeminded and well educated match from the same community. Contact: 6366448343

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Sunni Muslim (Rowther) Bangalore based bride, 5'5", slim and beautiful. Pursuing B.Arch, hailing from affluent and respected family with moderate religious orientation. Looking for a well educated bridegroom with independent income, aged around 26 years, from well-to-do family.

COMPUTER / INFO.TECH.
34yr / Shia / MBA / IT/Prof / Seeking working girl. Wisap: 9430087466.

ELITE BRIDE WANTED
Age 30, dynamic and enterprising masters graduate from premier institute abroad. Currently running own business in Chennai. High net-worth Brahmin family with respect for traditions and progressive values. Seeking bride - age 28 and below, from similar background within Brahmin community, willing to relocate to Chennai.

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(Ministry of Earth Sciences, Government of India)
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ADVERTISEMENT No. NIOT/E&/02/Consultant/2020 (Contract)

Applications are invited from Indian nationals for the post of Consultant (1 no.) with expertise in Project Management/Activities on contract basis. Details of requirements, nature of activity, requisite qualification, experience are as in the document uploaded on the website link <https://www.niot.res.in>. Interested persons possessing the requirements in the said document may send proposal in the format specified to the Director, National Institute of Ocean Technology on or before 22.05.2020 super scribing the Envelope with name of the post for which application is furnished.

शिक्षण सं. रासप्रौ/व्या-का/02/परामर्शदाता/2020 (सविदा)

परियोजना प्रबंधन गतिविधियों के क्षेत्र में प्रमाणित विशेषज्ञता के साथ परामर्शदाता (1 सं.) के पद के लिए भारतीय नागरिकों से आवेदन आमंत्रित है। प्रस्तावित सेवा, गतिविधि की प्रकृति, अंशित अवधि, अनुभव तथा अधि से संबंधित जानकारी जैसा कि दस्तावेज में वर्णित है, वेबसाइट लिंक <https://www.niot.res.in> पर उपलब्ध कर दी गई है। इच्छुक व्यक्ति जो उक्त दस्तावेज में वर्णित अपेक्षा की पूर्ति करते हैं, वे एक लिफाफे में अपना आवेदन पत्र, जिस पद हेतु आवेदन कर रहे हैं उस पद का नाम लिफाफे पर लिखकर निदेशक, राष्ट्रीय समुद्र प्रौद्योगिकी संस्थान को 22.05.2020 या उससे पहले तक भेज सकते हैं।

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA MINISTRY OF ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS NOTIFICATION New Delhi, the 13th March, 2020

Gazette No.969 and S.O.1076(E). - In exercise of the powers conferred by sub-section (1) of section-3A of the National Highways Act, 1956 (43 of 1956) (hereinafter referred to as the said Act), the Central Government, after being satisfied that for the public purpose, the land, the brief description of which is given in the Schedule below, is required for building (widening / two lane with paved shoulder / four laning etc.), maintenance, management and operation of New Elevated Road From Chennai Port to Maduravoyal (NH-4), in the stretch of land from Km 13/16 to Km. 16/000 in District of Chennai in the State of Tamil Nadu, hereby declares its intention to acquire such land. Any person interested in the said land may, within twenty-one days from the date of publication of this notification in the Official Gazette, object to the use of the said land for the aforesaid purpose under sub-section (1) of Section 3C of the said Act.

Every such objection shall be made to the Competent Authority, namely, the Special District Revenue Officer (Land Acquisition National Highways), NH-205, NH-716B, NH-4, NH-5 Tiruvallur having camp office at 1st floor at Taluk Office, Egmore in writing and shall set out the grounds thereof and the said Competent Authority shall give the objector an opportunity of being heard either in person or by legal practitioner, and may, after hearing all such objections and after making such further enquiry, if any, as the Competent Authority thinks necessary, by order, either allow or disallow the objections.

Any order made by the Competent Authority under Sub-Section (2) of Section 3C of the said Act shall be final.

The land plans and other details of the lands covered under this notification are available and can be inspected by the interested persons at the aforesaid address of the Competent Authority.

SCHEDULE								
Sl.No.	Name of the District	Name of the Taluk	Name of the Village	Block No.	Town Survey No.	Type of Land	Nature of Land	Area in Sq. Mts.
1.	Chennai	Aminjikkarai	Arumbakkam	4	2 pt.	Private	Ryot Manai	6008
2.			Naduavakkari	6	1 pt.	Govt.	Coovum	2078
3.			Koyambedu	34	1 pt.	Govt.	Coovum River	644
4.				34	4 pt.	Private	Ryot Manai	985
5.	Chennai	Maduravoyal	Nerkundram	-	2 pt	Govt.	Poramboke	1665
6.				-	28 pt	Govt.	Roal	16
							Total	11396

Competent Authority and Special District Revenue Officer, (LA) National Highways, Tiruvallur.

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INSTITUTE OF LIVER AND BILIARY SCIENCES, VASANT KUNJ, NEW DELHI (An Autonomous Society under Government of NCT of Delhi) ADMISSION NOTICE FOR M.Sc. NURSING ENTRANCE EXAMINATION-2020 Date:26-04-2020 Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences (ILBS) invites application for the entrance examination in the prescribed form through online mode for M.Sc- Medical Surgical Nursing (Gastro Enterology Nursing) as regular stream of 2 years duration for the academic session 2020. Commencement of Course : August 2020 Course Fees : Rs. 35,000/- Year The last date for online Application for the above Course is 07/06/2020 at 5:00 pm. For prospectus further details, log on to (<http://www.ilbs.in>) All Applicants are required to visit the website regularly as all subsequent Corrigendum/ Addendum/ Updates will only be

IN BRIEF

18-year-old tests positive in Pudukcherry
PUDUCHERRY
An 18-year-old boy, the son of a COVID-19 patient admitted at the Indira Gandhi Government Medical College and Research Institute, tested positive on Saturday, taking the total number of active cases in the Union Territory to four. The boy has been shifted to the college for treatment.

Two govt. staff booked for violating lockdown
PUDUCHERRY
The Villanur police on Saturday registered a case against two government servants for organising a feast in violation of lockdown stipulations. The duo posted a video of them having lunch with a group of people in a public place on Facebook. A case was registered against 12 attendees of the party.

Trading of agriculture produce picks up
PUDUCHERRY
The agriculture sector is slowly coming out of the lockdown restrictions in Pudukcherry with trading of paddy and pulses picking up in the regulated markets. According to the Director of Agriculture Balagandhi, trading had picked up in the markets in the last two or three days.

Youth warned against usage of manja thread
VELLORE
The Vellore district police on Saturday warned those flying kites using manja thread. They said parents would be held responsible if the children were seen flying kites. A police official Suresh Babu, 36, was badly injured near Voorhees College. He was rushed to a hospital and was out of danger.

State police receive 2,963 calls on domestic violence in April

Withdrawal symptoms due to non-availability of liquor among contributing factors

S. VIJAY KUMAR
CHENNAI
The Tamil Nadu police have received 2,963 domestic violence calls this month alone, amid the COVID-19 lockdown. A majority of the complaints were reported in Ramanathapuram district, followed by Kancheepuram and Chennai.

The authorities of the State police master control room noted that physical and verbal abuse over trivial issues were a common cause of complaints.

In dozens of cases, withdrawal symptoms due to non-availability of liquor were said to have contributed to the harassment of women by their spouses at home.

However, most of the complainants chose not to pursue a criminal case, and instead requested the police to warn the accused and ask them to give a written undertaking that they will not repeat the offence.

The complaints received by the master control room were forwarded to the respective city/district police units, and the follow-up action was closely monitored by the State police headquarters.

Job insecurity
Sharing chores at home, monitoring children's activities, the constant use of mobile phones and the quality of food were among the fac-

HC apprised of steps taken to protect victims

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

The Social Welfare Department informed the Madras High Court that its one-stop centres, spread across the State, handled as many as 65 cases related to women in distress ever since the Centre clamped a nationwide lockdown, from March 25, to fight COVID-19.

In a counter affidavit filed before Justices M. Sathyanarayanan and M. Nirmal Kumar, the Social Welfare Secretary S. Madhumathi said, her department had hired vehicles to rescue the women in distress, rendered counselling to them and referred the

issues to the police. The issues were also referred to the Protection Officers under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act of 2005 in addition to being monitored by the District Social Welfare Officers, the Secretary told the court.

The counter was filed in response to a PIL petition filed by advocate Sudha Ramalingam complaining about most of the Protection Officers in the State being inaccessible and not having transport facilities to rescue victims. The litigation was necessitated due to increase in domestic violence during lockdown.

tors that led to heated arguments or verbal/physical abuse.

Many office-goers, particularly those working in small private companies, were under stress due to job insecurity.

"A woman police officer is the first respondent for every complaint, and calls the victim over the phone. Then, a team visits the com-

plainant's house for a preliminary inquiry. In many cases, we found that men addicted to liquor were showing withdrawal symptoms due to the non-availability of liquor during the lockdown period. They show their frustration on women and children at home," Additional Director-General of Police (Crime Against Women and Chil-

dren) M. Ravi told *The Hindu* on Saturday. In some cases, neighbours or relatives lodged complaints on behalf of the affected women.

Two women officers in the rank of Superintendent of Police, V. Jayashree and A. Kayalvizhi, were monitoring the action taken by the local police on complaints of domestic violence.

Personality change
Senior psychiatrist and State nodal officer (police well-being) Dr. C. Ramasubramanian said that one of the major withdrawal symptoms among several alcoholics was a change in personality.

Besides health issues including a loss of memory, trembling hands and poor functioning of vital organs, such persons would have a high level of frustration or irritation, driven by a strong urge to consume alcohol at any cost.

"In the process, they tend to show their anger on family members. Alcoholism affects the family more than the individual consuming liquor. Be it a physical or a psychological withdrawal, the person has abnormal thoughts and [displays] weird behaviour. This could result in verbal/physical abuse or domestic violence. Addiction to alcohol is completely curable through timely intervention and support from family/friends," Dr. Ramasubramanian said.

COVID-19 and the nervous system

In the last few weeks several articles have appeared from various specialists pointing out how the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) can affect their respective specialties. SARS-CoV-2, the scientific name given to the virus, appears to be truly omnipresent. Its signature appears in many parts of the human body directly or indirectly. Initially, it was believed that SARS-CoV-2 was not neurotropic or it has no preference to hitch on to nerve cells, the nervous system is at a lesser risk than other organs. Now, researchers are not sure.



Prof. G. GANAPATHY
Senior Neurologist

COVID-19

minds, scientists are warning.

In studies on mice, the SARS-CoV-2 has been shown to enter the brain from the nose through the olfactory system, said Avindra Nath, clinical director of the U.S. National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, and chief of the section of infections of the nervous system. In some countries where the pandemic is spreading clinicians are being advised to consider SARS-CoV-2 infection as a causative factor in the differential diagnosis, even for primary neurological presentations. This is to avoid delayed diagnosis, misdiagnosis and prevention of transmission. Hopefully this will not apply to India.

Important repercussions
It is essential that serious neurological disorders are not over shadowed by the COVID-19 crisis. Patients with critical head injuries and stroke, normally accommodated in ICUs, may now have to be transferred elsewhere. Interestingly, worldwide, as per just pu-

blished literature, there is a perception that less number of patients with stroke and brain haemorrhage (non-COVID-19) are coming to hospitals. The significant reduction in head injuries can, of course, be directly attributed to the lockdown. COVID-19 patients operated on for neurosurgical problems had pulmonary complications more than expected. Objective criteria are being drawn to prioritise patients with brain tumours, whose surgery is being delayed. No doctor likes to play God. Now, limited resources have to be judiciously used.

Unfortunately, in the real world, "all are equal, but some are more equal than others". The tendency of super specialists to know more and more about less and less will now change as COVID-19 will make everyone view things holistically. It is no longer only about technical competence to manage a brain tumour. The new norm, more than ever before, will have to factor in COVID-19 for each and every management decision. Forty-five years ago, the concept of treating tumours in the base of the skull, without opening the skull, was introduced. Operating pituitary tumours through the nose became the accepted norm. Last month, the British Society of Neurosurgery suggested that, as the viral load is high in the nose, this route may have to be avoided. We are indeed coming a full circle. The world is turning upside down.

(The author is a former Secretary and past President of Neurological Society of India)

AIADMK govt. has imposed a debt of ₹4.56 lakh crore on State: Stalin

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

DMK president M.K. Stalin on Saturday accused the AIADMK government of imposing an unprecedented debt of ₹4.56 lakh crore on the people of Tamil Nadu and failing to uphold the State's rights in relation to its share of taxes.

In a statement, he criticised the contention of Deputy Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam that the efforts of Chief Minister Edappadi

K. Palaniswami had led to the Union Finance Commission recommending the allotment of ₹32,849 crore as Tamil Nadu's share.

'Contrary to Budget'

"His argument runs contrary to the Budget he had presented in the Assembly on February 14. Mr. Panneerselvam had said that Tamil Nadu had sought an adequate share of taxes from the Centre, and the State government would bring pres-

sure to bear on the Union government to allot the amount," Mr. Stalin said.

Recalling Mr. Panneerselvam's statement that the Centre had not sanctioned the revenue deficit grant, Mr. Stalin said the Finance Minister had 'shamelessly' claimed that the State had received the first instalment.

"Mr. Panneerselvam has criticised me just to divert the people's attention from the Centre's betrayal of Tamil Nadu," he claimed.

Plea to protect children during lockdown

Rights' body submits recommendations to Chief Minister Palaniswami

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

The Tamil Nadu Child Rights Watch (TNCRW) has submitted a set of recommendations to Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami to protect the rights of the children during COVID-19 lockdown.

Over 100 child rights activists are part of the TNCRW. Recently they discussed issues that affect children and their parents and came up

with some recommendations.

"Many children and their mothers may be subject to violence by the men in the family due to withdrawal symptoms as Tasmac shops have been closed. But these children may be suffering silently as there is no one to access or support them. The State should extend and popularise the mental health support to the alcoholic dependants to face the with-

drawal symptoms and lead to de-addiction," said M. Andrew Sesuraj, State convener, TNCRW.

Besides, the TNCRW also wanted government school-teachers to interact with the parents and children over phone at regular intervals and keep them engaged. The majority of parents were unaware of how to handle their children throughout the day, he said.

The group sought a monitoring mechanism to ensure that the private schools did not force parents to pay fees during lockdown. "The chil-

dren who had access to mid-day meals should be given dry rations. Free nutrition packs for children should be distributed through the PDS shops even without ration cards. Children below three years should be provided free milk," added Mr. Sesuraj.

He said children with special needs should be given priority. "Therapy and support mechanisms should be made available to children with special needs. The health and psychological needs of children of frontline health workers should be ad-

ressed," he elaborated. Another recommendation was to ensure that schools were not converted into COVID-19 quarantine facilities.

The recommendations also included livelihood issues of parents. "The Childline 1098 and Child Protection Systems in the districts should be made fully functional to address lockdown related child rights violations. We are preparing an action plan to tackle the child abuse and marriage cases that may increase post-lockdown due to economic issues," Mr. Sesuraj said.

Over 3 lakh booked for violations

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

Over 3 lakh persons have been arrested so far for violating prohibitory orders in the month-long lockdown period across State. They were all released immediately on bail by police personnel.

As on Saturday morning, there were 2,94,809 violations reported from all over state and over 3,12,282 persons were arrested.

As many as 2,65,756 vehicles were seized from the violators and total fine of ₹3.13 crore collected from them, police sources said.

In Chennai, the city police booked 2,408 cases against violators from Friday evening to Saturday morning.

Over 1,907 vehicles were seized from the violators.

Youth from Nagercoil held for sexual harassment, extortion

He had blackmailed over 100 victims, including doctors from Chennai

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NAGERCOIL

The Kottar police have arrested an unemployed youth who had sexually harassed women and extorted money from them.

All-Women police here said Kasi alias Sujji, 26, son of Thangapandi of Ganesapuram Main Road in Nagercoil, befriended women from affluent families through social media. Introducing himself as an entrepreneur, a trainee pilot or a lawyer, he had uploaded his edited photographs and videos taken during gym workouts.

Kasi was in touch with the women through video calls. He had allegedly established physical intimacy with them and took their photos in objectionable manner without their knowledge.

"When the victims sent their personal photos or made video

calls, Kasi either saved the photos or took screenshots of videos, which he later used to blackmail

N. SREENATH
Superintendent of Police

calls, Kasi either saved the photos or took screenshots of videos, which he later used to blackmail them," said Superintendent of Police N. Sreenath who initiated an inquiry on getting an online complaint from a Chennai-based victim, a medico.

He had extorted several lakhs of rupees from more than 100 victims, including doctors from Chennai. When they refused to give money and did not attend

his phone calls, Kasi had blackmailed them that he would upload their nude photos and videos on the net.

"The complainant alone had lost more than ₹7 lakh to Kasi," the police said.

The police raided his house and seized his mobile phone, computer hard disks, pen drives and compact discs.

Mr. Sreenath said the victims may file their complaints online or call him directly on 94981 11103. Their identity would be closely guarded. He had targeted ordinary girls from Kanniyakurum district while his high-profile targets were from Chennai over the past six years.

OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

<p>DEATH</p> <p>Mrs. CHELLAMMAL SAMPATH, Aged 95, passed away in Dallas, Texas on April 24. She is survived by her sons Rajappa and Viji, daughters-in-law Rajni, Lata, and Aruna, six grandchildren, and nine great grandchildren.</p>	<p>DEATH</p> <p>OBITUARY & GRATITUDE</p> <p>Shri. RAJAM VITAL (24th October 1932 - 4th April 2020) Dearly Mourning by His wife: Mrs. Menakalochani Vital & Children: Vase & Sanku, Vital, Ramani & Prakash, Tiburru, Rajini & Sanjay, Gopalakrishnan, Grandchildren: Family & Friends. Phone: +91 94 32646499 - vramvital@gmail.com "May the soul be at rest"</p>	<p>DEATH ANNIVERSARIES</p> <p>In fond remembrance "So will be the resurrection of the dead. It is sown perishable and raised imperishable." 1 Cor 15:42</p>	<p>DEATH ANNIVERSARIES</p> <p>P. MEENAKSHI Fondly remembered by Shobha Venkat, Venkat Adithyan, Ram & Family Members.</p>
<p>DEATH</p> <p>K. GANESH Manager (Retd.) Canara Bank, Trivandrum Expired on 22/4/2020 at Chennai after brief illness. Dearly Mourning by: Wife: X. R. Geetha, SBI, Trivandrum & Family. Ph: 98958 33577</p>	<p>DEATH ANNIVERSARIES</p> <p>FIRST ANNIVERSARY In Loving Memory of</p>	<p>DEATH ANNIVERSARIES</p> <p>Mr. S. Cornelius Jabbaraj PAO, Ministry of Finance Entered into Glory: 26.04.2019 "Till we meet again on that beautiful shore, we will always cherish your gentleness, affection and calm smile." ← Deeply loved & missed by → Wife, Children & Grandchild</p>	<p>IN MEMORIAM</p> <p>In loving memory of</p>
<p>DEATH</p> <p>We regret to inform the sudden demise of Shri K.SUNDARESAN on 24-04-2020 on 24-04-2020 "Punjab Buddies badminton Players" Ph: 9840343540</p>	<p>DEATH ANNIVERSARIES</p> <p>13th ANNIVERSARY</p>	<p>DEATH ANNIVERSARIES</p> <p>Sanjeev Z. Joy 29.10.1973 - 26.04.2019 On Angels wings you were taken away, but in our hearts you will always stay. Nihal, Niharika & Family</p>	<p>DEATH ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</p> <p>In Loving Memory of</p>
<p>OBITUARY</p> <p>Mr. V. SRINIVASAN - 87 yrs Passed away peacefully at Mumbai on 24.04.2020. Funeral at Mumbai on 25.04.2020 - 11.00 am. He will always be Loved, Remembered & Missed by his bereaved family members. S. Natarajan - 74991 21679 S. Prakash - 90046 59685 Dr. S. Ganesh - 92821 43990</p>	<p>TWELFTH ANNIVERSARY</p> <p>R. SESHADRI 05.04.1920 - 26.04.2008 Son of Late K. Ramachandra Iyer "You are always with us" Fondly Remembered by Family Members Seshadri Padma Memorial Charitable Trust</p>	<p>DEATH ANNIVERSARIES</p> <p>13th ANNIVERSARY</p>	<p>DEATH ANNIVERSARIES</p> <p>NARAYANAN CHITTOOR (RAJA) s/o C.N. Raghavan Passed away on 13-04-2020 in Poland. Deeply mourned by Wife: Meera Son - Anirudh, sister and rest of the family. Janaki Meera Ph: 044-24910186</p>

Standalone shops will be allowed to open in Pudukcherry

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
PUDUCHERRY

The government has decided to allow standalone shops, outlets in neighbourhood and residential complexes to function during the lockdown period as envisaged by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs through its revised guidelines issued on Friday, Chief Minister V. Narayanasamy has said.

Chief Collector would issue a fresh order allowing these outlets to remain open though with strict norms to be followed.

Exclusion list

The relaxation was not applicable to shops in markets, market complexes, shopping malls and liquor outlets.

These establishments will to remain closed during the lockdown period, the Chief Minister said.

SOUTHERN RAILWAY
ETENDER NOTICE

Online tenders are invited from the intending contractors by the undersigned through e-tender portal of Railways <https://www.irreps.gov.in> for the following work.

Tender No.	M-RS-RPM-29-OT-19-20-11	M-RS-RPM-29-OT-19-20-12
Description of work	Cleaning and Up-keeping of Electric Loco Shed, Royapuram for one year.	Cleaning of locomotives and electric Loco Shed, Royapuram for two years.
Estimated Cost	₹ 27,35,292,23/-	₹ 58,19,034,39/-
Cost of Tender Form	₹ 3,000/-	₹ 5,000/-
Earnest Money Deposit	₹ 54,700/-	₹ 1,16,400/-
Period of Completion	12 months	24 months
Date & Time of Tender Closing	15.05.2020 at 17:00 hrs.	

Note: For further details of tender please visit <https://www.irreps.gov.in>

Senior Divisional Electrical Engineer,
Rolling Stock, Royapuram, Chennai
(For and on behalf of the President of India)

No food or treatment: Telangana workers

Indian Consulate General in Dubai says 12 migrants in Ajman have tested positive

P. RAM MOHAN
NIZAMABAD
Several migrant workers from Telangana in the UAE have contracted COVID-19 and have been quarantined since Monday, said Indian Consulate General in Dubai Vipul Kapoor.
The workers reside in the Belhasa labour camp at Ajman Aljurf 3.
In a video message that went viral on social media on Saturday, Mr. Kapur confirmed that 12 workers from

Telangana had tested positive and several others from India, who are also in the camp, are likely to be diagnosed positive. "We are taking all necessary measures for the welfare of migrant workers and providing food to those in the camp. However, local authorities are taking care of the persons in quarantine," he said in the message.
Four workers from Nizamabad district are among those who tested positive

and they are in Room No. 6 of the camp.
Working in a private hospital in Ajman, they contracted the virus as they did not wear PPEs due to lack of awareness.
Room locked
Rakesh (name changed), a 23-year-old worker from Velpur mandal, told *The Hindu* over phone that he, along with two others from Kerala, was in quarantine and their room was locked from out-

side. "The authorities are not providing us food or treatment and we are fasting for ourselves," he said.
Another worker, 30-year-old Satish (name changed), who hails from Indaivai mandal, said when he complained of novel coronavirus symptoms, he was quarantined. Later, his test turned up positive.
"The UAE authorities have neither started treatment nor have admitted us to hospital till date," he said.

Andhra Pradesh records two deaths, Kerala widens testing

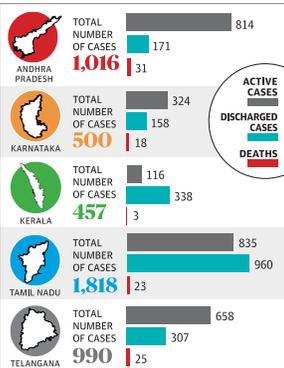
Srikakulam in A.P. reports its first cases, 26 more test positive in Karnataka

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU/VIJAYAWADA/
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM/
HYDERABAD
Andhra Pradesh's COVID-19 case tally crossed the 1,000 mark on Saturday. The State reported two deaths and 61 fresh cases. Karnataka reported 26 new cases, many of the new ones centred around a Bengaluru labour colony. Kerala, which had seven new cases, said its private hospitals were being allowed to put up test facilities.
With its new COVID-19 positive cases Karnataka tally touched 500. Bengaluru's labour colony at Hongasandra ward was the focus, where nine of 13 cases in Bengaluru Urban area were reported. Those found in the colony were contacts of a 54-year-old migrant labourer. The number of positive cases in that cluster stood at 30.
A journalist of a Kannada television channel also tested positive on Saturday. He had visited a containment zone marked by the BBMP. Following this, 27 journalists, his primary contacts, were quarantined in a hotel.
"Although most of them have undergone tests for COVID-19, we will conduct another test on the 12th day," said a Health Department official.
Nine cases from Belagavi, and one each from Dakshina Kannada, Chickballapur, Mandya and Mysuru were reported on Saturday. Karnataka also started trials for convalescent plasma therapy for critical patients.

Serving the masses
State governments and NGOs across the country are providing the needy with food and essential items during the lockdown



Reaching out: An NGO in Visakhapatnam distributing groceries and vegetables to people in Peda Jalaripeta on Saturday.



Back in action



(Clockwise from top) With the easing of lockdown restrictions, life is limping back to normalcy in some cities. A worker watering plants at Vellayani Agricultural Village in Thiruvananthapuram; a person riding a rickshaw in Hyderabad and Bengaluru Metropolitan Rail Corporation Limited labourers resuming their work.



(Clockwise from top) With the easing of lockdown restrictions, life is limping back to normalcy in some cities. A worker watering plants at Vellayani Agricultural Village in Thiruvananthapuram; a person riding a rickshaw in Hyderabad and Bengaluru Metropolitan Rail Corporation Limited labourers resuming their work.



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trict, the worst-hit after Kurnool and Guntur, continued to report more cases. On Saturday, it had 25 new cases, the highest.
Kurnool followed with 14 cases and Anantapur with five; Kadapa and Nellore reported four each and East Godavari and Guntur three each.
Meanwhile, 26 patients – 11 from Prakasam, four each from East Godavari and Krishna, three from Kurnool and two each from Anantapur and Nellore – recovered and were discharged.
For the 1,016 cases detected, the death rate stood at 3.05% and recovery rate 16.8%. The number of active patients under treatment at State and district COVID hospitals was 814.
As many as 6,928 samples were tested in a day, of the cumulative 61,266 samples. This came to 147 tests per million population.
As of Saturday, the tally was: Kurnool 275, Guntur 209, Krishna (127), Chittoor (73), Nellore (72), Kadapa (55), Prakasam (53), Anantapur (51), West Godavari (39), East Godavari (37), Visakhapatnam (22) and Srikakulam (3). Vizianagaram had no

positive cases.
Kerala Chief Minister, Pinarayi Vijayan said private hospitals could have their own testing facilities for COVID-19, within the stipulations of the Health Department.
COVID-19
Hospitals, both public and private, had begun resuming normal functioning and received patients, he observed. Elective surgeries were being resumed by most hospitals, but they should act as per protocol to prevent disease transmission, Mr. Vijayan said.
Private sector hospitals had been very cooperative with the Government. There were complaints from some quarters that many of them did not ensure the safety of patients and visitors to prevent cross infections, and not enough PPE kits were supplied to clinical staff. These should be addressed, Chief Minister said.
People illegally coming into the State from border districts continued to trigger new patient clusters, he said.
Of new cases, three each

were reported from Kollam and Kottayam districts and one from Kannur. One case reported from Kollam was a field-level health worker.
Two persons had come from Maharashtra, while three were cases of local transmission, from imported cases.
Seven persons were added to the recovery list. So far, Kerala had reported 457 cases, of which 338 had recovered. Currently, 116 persons were under treatment.
The number of persons under surveillance was 21,004, of which 464 were in hospitals and the rest, on home quarantine.

6 cases in Hyderabad
After eight days, the number of COVID-19 cases in Telangana on Saturday stood at seven, while 16 persons were discharged. Of the new cases, six were in Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation, and one in Warangal Urban. The total number of cases was 990.
Doctors at Gandhi Hospital said people who had been discharged were ready to donate plasma for clinical trials of convalescent plasma therapy.



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Krishna, Kurnool deaths
Andhra Pradesh now has 1,016 cases, about 45 days after detecting the first positive case.
The toll mounted to 31 with one death each in Krishna and Kurnool districts. Srikakulam district, for the first time reported three cases and Krishna dis-

trict, the worst-hit after Kurnool and Guntur, continued to report more cases. On Saturday, it had 25 new cases, the highest.
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IN BRIEF



Heavy rain brings respite to people in Tirupati

CHITTOOR
Heavy rain lashed the pilgrim city of Tirupati on Saturday, resulting in overflowing of drains and water-logging on the roads. It came as a huge relief to people from the summer heat, which kept soaring since the first week of April. Some trees were uprooted on the Tirumala bypass and Renigunta roads and there was an interruption in power supply.

More Keralites succumb to COVID-19 abroad

KOZHIKODE
More Keralites are succumbing to COVID-19 abroad even as Kerala has managed to limit deaths to three. At least 55 people from Kerala have died in various countries, the highest reported from the United States at 24, as per the latest figures. The United Arab Emirates (UAE), from where the majority of the infected reached the State, has recorded the deaths of 16 Keralites. The total death toll in the Gulf Cooperation Council nation is 64 as on Saturday. Seven persons have died in the United Kingdom.

'Timely action by TTD helped avert disaster'

KOCHI
KARMI-Bot, a robot deployed at the isolation ward for COVID-19 patients at the Government Medical College Hospital, Ernakulam, may soon find its way to hospitals across the country and even abroad.
For, ASIMOV Robotics, a start-up based in Maker Village here, is on the verge of kick-starting its commercial production. The robot, developed by ASIMOV Robotics, with support from the Viswasanthi Foundation run by actor Mohanlal, was handed over to Ernakulam Collector

More exam centres sought in south India

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI
The Indira Gandhi National Tribal University has announced only one centre in southern India in Chennai for its entrance examinations for 2020-21 admissions, much to the dismay of students in the region. The MPs from Kerala have written to the Human Resource Development Minister, demanding multiple centres in each southern State as was provided in previous years.
"In 2019, Wayanad in Kerala was the largest IGNTU examination centre outside of Madhya Pradesh with over 400 applicants," said a letter from Binoy Viswam, a CPI Rajya Sabha MP.
"Wayanad is home to the largest tribal population in Kerala," wrote Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, who represents it in the Lok Sabha MP. "Urging students to opt for examination centres far away from home denies

them a fair opportunity to compete in the admission process."
The Central University, located in Amarkantak in Madhya Pradesh, was set up in 2007. It opened its 2020-21 application process on April 23, and plans to hold the entrance examinations on June 27 and 28.
However, the COVID-19 pandemic may result in changes in dates and venues, the admission notice said.

K.K. Ragesh, a CPI(M) Rajya Sabha MP, said some of the university's other recent decisions also went against its mandate for providing quality education to the tribal communities.
"Recently, the university has proposed to open departments of Sanskrit and Jyotisha, while many of the tribal languages and cultures were ignored from consideration and support," he wrote.

Karnataka begins trial for plasma therapy

STAFF REPORTER
KOZHIKODE
The Kerala police have cracked a cybercrime on fast-track by tracing a 19-year-old Instagram user who allegedly misused the profile photos of more than 15 girls from various parts of Kozhikode district and circulated them widely through his fake accounts with derogatory comments.
Majnas, a native of Ambayathode, was arrested within three days after the girls approached District Police Chief (Kozhikode Rural) Dr. A. Srinivas. The suspect had allegedly created five different fake Instagram accounts to post the girls' images by describing them as prostitutes.
Police sources said the suspect was tracked with the support of the Kozhikode Cyberdome. C. Sivaprasad, Circle Inspector and nodal officer in charge of the Cyberdome, said the ac-

Instagram user held for morphing girls' photos

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count holder was identified in just three days after receiving the complaint.
Majnas was arrested by a team led by Nadakkavu Circle Inspector Ashraf.
The police have registered three cases against him. The youth was charged under various Sections of the IT Act.
According to the police, the reason for misusing the images is yet to be ascertained.
Incidentally, the complainants had no online or offline connection with the suspect who was doing odd jobs after Plus Two course.
A relative of one of the complainants said the online torture by the invisible account holder had caused huge mental agony and disgrace to the girls.
Learning about their plight, a few ethical hackers had voluntarily hacked one of the fake accounts in their efforts to track the suspect.

Robot to help hospitals in breaking the chain

Deployed at isolation ward, it can limit interaction between the patients and health workers

M.P. PRAVEEN
KOCHI
KARMI-Bot, a robot deployed at the isolation ward for COVID-19 patients at the Government Medical College Hospital, Ernakulam, may soon find its way to hospitals across the country and even abroad.
For, ASIMOV Robotics, a start-up based in Maker Village here, is on the verge of kick-starting its commercial production. The robot, developed by ASIMOV Robotics, with support from the Viswasanthi Foundation run by actor Mohanlal, was handed over to Ernakulam Collector

S. Suhas at an event held at the start-up village complex in Kalamassery recently.
Deployed at the hospital isolation ward on Saturday, the robot performs a slew of activities from dispensing food and medicines and collection of trash left behind by patients to initiating a video call between doctors and patients. Besides, it can perform ultraviolet-based disinfection and also spray detergents at targets.
Its main goal is to limit the interaction between patients and health workers, minimising the use of personal protective equipment (PPE)

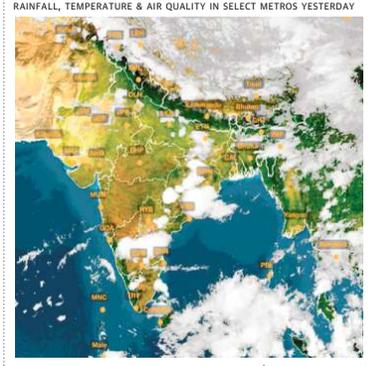
kits, which are scarce in the country at present.
Orders pouring in
"We have already received close to 500 orders for the robot from India and abroad, and the design of the manufacturing model for commercial production is complete. We can go into commercial production as soon as the lockdown is lifted and spares are available," said T. Jayakrishnan, CEO, ASIMOV Robotics.
The start-up is focusing on the healthcare sector and plans to bring out a robot specifically designed with

therapeutic applications for deployment in intensive care units.
KARMI-Bot, Mr. Jayakrishnan said, was developed within a month after consultations with medical college authorities. The robot, capable of carrying a payload of up to 25 kg, can operate up to 6-8 hours after a full charge lasting two hours.
Mr. Jayakrishnan said that it would be loaded with additional features, such as contact-less temperature checking and automated charger docking, once spare parts are available after the lockdown ends.



The robot at the Government Medical College Hospital, Ernakulam.

WEATHER WATCH



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAF/IMD (TAKEN AT 19:00 HRS)

Forecast for Sunday: Thunderstorm with lightning at isolated places Odisha, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Bihar, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Jharkhand.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	0.0	32.0	20.4	Kozhikode	0.0	36.2	26.8
Ahmedabad	0.0	40.0	25.5	Kurnool	0.0	41.6	25.7
Aizawl	0.0	24.6	15.2	Lucknow	0.0	34.3	24.2
Allahabad	0.4	39.1	24.4	Madurai	46.2	39.2	24.2
Bengaluru	0.0	32.0	22.7	Mangaluru	0.0	35.0	25.0
Bhopal	0.0	38.7	25.4	Mumbai	0.0	34.1	25.7
Bhubaneswar	0.8	29.9	21.5	New Delhi	0.0	33.5	22.6
Chandigarh	0.0	35.1	22.4	Patna	0.0	37.9	23.8
Chennai	0.0	36.2	25.0	Port Blair	0.0	32.0	22.6
Coimbatore	0.0	36.6	25.4	Puducherry	0.0	33.0	23.3
Dehradun	0.0	33.2	17.8	Ranchi	0.0	36.3	28.4
Gangtok	0.0	22.7	9.7	Raipur	0.0	36.4	22.8
Goa	0.0	35.2	27.8	Rajpur	0.0	40.4	24.5
Guwahati	41.2	26.6	17.6	Ranchi	0.0	33.6	19.5
Hubballi	0.0	37.0	22.0	Shillong	0.0	5.2	18.0
Hyderabad	0.7	40.7	26.4	Shimla	0.0	22.4	11.7
Imphal	15.9	26.0	15.3	Srinagar	0.0	24.6	10.1
Jaipur	0.0	36.4	24.1	Thiruvananthapuram	5.6	34.3	26.4
Kochi	1.2	33.8	26.0	Tiruchi	0.0	41.1	28.0
Kohima	5.4	20.0	11.4	Vijayawada	0.0	38.8	27.8
Kolkata	0.0	33.2	23.5	Visakhapatnam	0.0	35.0	29.0

(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 18 20 15 46 70
Bengaluru 02 09 25 50 72
Chennai 02 33 60 27
Delhi 06 39 23 122 130
Hyderabad 09 40 22 49 69
Kolkata 08 12 36 27 27
Lucknow 06 37 59 172
Mumbai 61 55 46 52
Pune 23 13 49 45 28
Visakhapatnam
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.

FROM PAGE ONE

'Standalone shops can open in urban areas'

The district magistrates of Lucknow and Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh said there would be no relaxation in the existing lockdown measures. The Rajasthan and Gujarat governments were yet to take a decision.

In an order issued late on Friday, the MHA made amendments to the April 15 consolidated revised guidelines on lockdown measures, issued under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, to allow the States to decide on the additional public activities to be allowed

from April 20 in non-hotspot zones. "In urban areas, all standalone shops, neighbourhood shops and shops in residential complexes are allowed to open. Shops in markets/market complexes and shopping malls are not allowed to open. It is clarified that sale by e-commerce companies will continue to be permitted for essential goods only," the Ministry specified on Saturday.

The sale of liquor and other items remained prohibited.

T.N. cities see chaos and panic buying

"Normally, 20% of the daily arrivals would remain after the sales. But, on Saturday, most traders sold both the day's arrivals and the previous day's stocks," he said.

In many parts of Chennai, anxious residents were either crowding or standing in long queues to buy groceries and vegetables.

In Coimbatore, police and civic officials struggled to ensure distancing at the

temporary vegetable markets. In Salem, there was confusion as the Collector on Friday declared district-wide lockdown for the weekend though the Chief Minister had announced it for three days beginning Sunday.

In Madurai, too, most grocery shops saw long queues and crowding.

(With inputs from Coimbatore and Madurai bureaus)

UGC to suggest academic calendar this week

While UGC secretary Rajnish Jain would not confirm these reports, he noted that any guidelines on these matters issued by the Commission would "not be binding, but only advisory in nature".

"The situation in every State is different, including the rate of COVID-19 infections. Also, some universities may be small and be able to provide online facilities to all students. Others have thousands of students and fewer resources. We cannot mandate one standard solution for all. There will be flexibility in the guidelines," said Dr. Jain.

The vice chancellors of State universities also felt that the decisions of State governments would play a key role in decisions regarding a revised academic calendar. "The role of UGC is

only as a facilitator," said the vice chancellor of a law university, speaking on the condition of anonymity. "It may have more control over central universities. Most States have set up their own advisory panels similar to UGC's panel, which will make their own recommendations," the vice chancellor added. "Supposing a university is located in a hotspot area, which still has high infection rates late in the year... Ultimately, each university will have to make its own decisions based on the needs of its students."

Another vice chancellor, who was consulted by the Kuhad panel, agreed that each institution would have to make its own decisions, but felt that the UGC guidelines would provide a valuable indicator.

(With PTI inputs)

1,429 new cases, 56 deaths in 24 hours

On Saturday, a high level meeting of the Group of Ministers (GoM) on COVID-19, chaired by Health Minister Harsh Vardhan took stock of the number of cases, and the country's preparedness.

As on date, more than one lakh units of personal protective equipment (PPE) and N-95 masks were being manufactured everyday in the country, a PIB release said.

There are at present 104 domestic manufacturers of PPE and three making N95 masks in the country. In addition, production of ventilators by domestic manufacturers has also started and orders have been placed for more than 59,000 units through nine manufacturers, the statement added.

There were 92,000 non-governmental organisations, Self Help Groups and civil society organisations involved in providing food to the migrant workers across various States/UTs.

National database
The GoM was also informed that a national level meta-data of health workers, NSS, NYK, NCC, doctors etc., has been prepared and shared to all the States, Districts and other officials, to mobilise the resources/volunteers (COVID warriors) to much needed locations.

The government claimed that it had prepared a database of 1.24 crore doctors, healthworkers and volunteers from volunteer organisations.

Only 15% of poor households got pulses

"Each kg of pulse goes through at least three (in many cases four) trips by truck and as many cycles of loading and unloading. While for long distances, transport is being done through goods train, in most cases transportation is by road through trucks."

Over four weeks, the operation involves about two lakh truck trips, a challenging target during the lockdown as many godowns and

mills lie in hotspot areas. Availability of trucks and labour for loading and unloading has been a major problem in these areas, said the department. Of the 1.96 lakh tonnes needed for April, about 1.45 lakh tonnes have been offered to States already. Only a few States have dal mills within their own jurisdiction and they have been asked to lift the milled pulses themselves to speed up the process.

Centre passing the buck to States, says Congress

Kapil Sibal calls for a national plan to deal with the impact of 'the lockdown of people and a lockout of the economy'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Centre should have a national plan to tackle the coronavirus pandemic under the Disaster Management Act rather than delegating all the responsibility to the State governments, the Congress party said on Saturday.

"You can't have a lockdown of people and a lockout of the economy. That's not the way to formulate a policy. We are not criticising. We are only saying it is time to rethink. We are with the government. This is constructive criticism," Congress spokesperson and Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal told reporters as he addressed an online media conference.

The lockdown was imposed without consulting the State governments and the migrant workers were left to fend for themselves, Mr. Sibal added. As per the Disaster Management Act, 2005,

the Union government was duty bound to formulate a national plan to deal with COVID-19. However, the Home Secretary, presiding over the National Executive Committee (NEC) under the Act, is issuing directions to State governments to deal with the situation as best as they can, Mr. Sibal said.

"Why were detailed plans not made within seven weeks of the WHO declaration when on March 24, the Prime Minister announced a national lockdown? We are in the fourth week of April, yet there is no plan in place even now," Mr. Sibal said.

Minimum standards
He said the Prime Minister should inform the people about the minimum standards of relief that are required to be provided to persons affected by the disaster. Instead of discharging its "solemn responsibilities to



Raising questions: Congress leader Kapil Sibal asked the Centre to share a comprehensive plan during a video media conference on Saturday. *SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

provide succour to the poor and helpless stranded migrants", the Union government has chosen to shift the onus to state governments to do what they can without a plan and without guidelines prescribing minimum standards of relief, the senior Congress leader alleged.

"It is unfortunate that

even till date, there is no plan. We are all aware that the provisions in shelters are pathetic without adequate sanitation, medical cover, food and clean drinking water. States are not able to make available adequate food supplies to those affected," he said.

"Section 10(2) of the Act

Manmohan flays DA cut

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Opposing the government's decision to cut back on hike in dearness allowance (DA) for government employees and pensioners, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said he did not think that at "this stage" such cuts were "necessary".

In a two-minute video clip released by the Congress, showing the meeting of the

party's consultative group via video-conference, the party slammed the Centre for continuing with construction of "vanity projects" such as the new Parliament building and the Central Vista. "I sincerely believe that it is not necessary at this stage to impose hardship on the government servants and the Armed Forces personnel," Mr. Singh said.

authorises the NEC headed by the Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs to assist the National Disaster Management Authority in the discharge of its responsibilities under the Act. What the MHA failed to mention is that the NEC under Section 10(2)(b) is to prepare the plan to be approved by the NDMA and lay down

guidelines for preparing disaster management plans by different ministries. The NEC is also to monitor implementation of plans prepared by the Ministries," Mr. Sibal said.

He said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's limited role seems to be addressing the nation from time to time.

(With inputs from PTI)

Gehlot seeks clarity on aid for workers

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
JAIPUR

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on Saturday demanded that the Centre clarify its stand on devising a strategy for the smooth movement of migrant workers stranded across the country during the COVID-19 lockdown. He pushed for a common policy for all States and a unified command structure of communication with the State governments.

"In the fight against COVID-19, the whole nation stands united. The Central government should show the same unity when it comes to issuing guidelines for the States irrespective of the party in power there," Mr. Gehlot tweeted.

"Instead of unofficial communication by different officers in the Home Ministry and the Cabinet Secretariat to different States, a planned strategy with unified command structure of communication can be more fruitful," he said, calling for special trains for the migrant workers.

More than 6.3-cr. MSMEs are on the brink: Sonia

Cong. chief demands wage protection package for sector

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Congress president Sonia Gandhi in a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi has requested his urgent intervention to pull the micro, small and medium scale enterprises (MSME) back from the brink that they have been pushed to due to the lockdown.

Ms. Gandhi wrote that if this economic concern is ignored it has the potential to have a devastating and expansive ripple effect on economy. She said the sector contributes one-third of the GDP and accounts for 50% of exports.

Huge losses

"At this moment, without appropriate support, more than 6.3 crore MSME stand on the verge of economic ruin," she said. Every single day of the lockdown comes at a cost of ₹30,000 crore to the sector with declining sale orders and a complete cessation of work.



Sonia Gandhi

is available when they need the most. She also asked for the RBI's intervention to prompt the banks to ensure adequate, easy and timely credit supply.

'Extend moratorium'

"The RBI moratorium on loans should be extended beyond the stipulated three months period. The government should also explore a waiver/reduction of taxes and other sector specific measures."

High collateral security is leading to denial of credit and the limits on margin money are extremely high. These factors combine to ensure a lack of access to avail credit and must be addressed.

"The government has acknowledged the MSMEs to be the backbone of our economy. It is time it takes measures to ensure the revival and strengthening of that backbone. Timely and decisive action can make all the difference," Ms. Gandhi wrote.

'Centre should act now on Franklin Templeton issue'

Chidambaram recalls situation in 2008

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Congress leader P. Chidambaram has urged the government to act swiftly, before the markets reopen on Monday, to resolve the situation created by Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund's decision to wind up six debt schemes. He offered the example of his experience in a similar situation while Finance Minister when the RBI had announced measures to deal with the problem.

The fund has cited a liquidity crisis in the bond markets and an unprecedented level of redemptions following the COVID-19 outbreak as reasons for its decision.

Noting that the situation is "a matter of grave concern to the investors, mutual fund industry and the financial markets", Mr. Chidambaram recalled his actions in October 2008 when mutual funds faced liquidity stress due to the global financial crisis.

The Congress government had immediately con-



P. Chidambaram

sulted the RBI, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), the Indian Banks' Association, and the Association of Mutual Funds in India.

"An urgent meeting of the [Financial Stability and Development Council] FSDC was convened and a solution was found by the end of the day," said the Rajya Sabha member. "The next morning, officers of RBI and SEBI met at 8 am, and RBI announced a 14-day special repo facility and allowed an additional 0.5% of NDTL [Net Demand and Time Liability]." With the markets being closed for two days, Mr. Chidambaram urged the government to "act promptly and resolve the situation quickly".

'Most of RS time spent on issues of public importance'

Study attempts to rebut Opposition charge of lack of time for debates on issues raised by leaders

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Upper House spends 24% of its time in deliberating and passing laws, an analysis by the Rajya Sabha Secretariat has revealed. Most of its functional time is spent on deliberating issues of public importance.

Rajya Sabha Chairman Venkaiah Naidu had directed the Secretariat to carry out this analysis to blunt the Opposition criticism that the Council of the States spends far too much time in government business (legislating) instead of debating the issues raised by them.

Data from 1978 onwards was analysed. During 1978-

2018, the RS held 3,022 sittings and transacted business for 13,946 hours as against the available 18,132 hours. This comes to 76.91% productivity while 23.09% of the available time was lost due to disruptions.

The analysis revealed that 40.20% of time is spent in deliberating issues of national importance followed by 32.22% in asking questions and holding the government accountable.

Only 24.05% of its functional time is spent on making laws. And an additional 3.52% is spent on Private members Bills, which are stand alone legislation drafted by individual members.



In discussion: The Rajya Sabha during the Budget Session of Parliament in March 2020. *FILE PHOTO

These have rarely translated into laws though.

The time spent on the Government Bills ranged from 10.87% of the time in 2015 to 40.09% in 2002. It has touched a record high of 45.90% during the historic 250th session last year. A re-

cord 15 Bills were passed with the House spending 49.08 hours of the session time of 107.05 hours.

Deliberative functions like debating electoral reforms or recent discussion on law and order in parts of Delhi take up the largest chunk of

time. The oversight function — which is to hold the government accountable by way of asking questions — calling attention motions and so on takes about 32.22% of time with portion of time reserved for the daily question hour.

Another interesting outcome of the analysis is how the functioning of the Rajya Sabha has severely deteriorated post 2010. During 1978-2018, the actual functional time excluding disruptions ranged from 139 to 580 hours per year. All instances of working for above 500 hours per year were during 1978-1988 with an evident slide afterwards.

3 killed in Pulwama encounter

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR

Two unidentified militants and an "associate" were killed in an operation of security forces in south Kashmir's Pulwama on Saturday.

A police spokesman said two unidentified terrorists and one hardcore associate of terrorists were killed in a pre-dawn operation at Goripora in Awantipora area.

The police sources said the militants were encircled after a specific tip-off about presence of militants in an orchard.

"A underground hideout was busted during the operation," sources said.



Tense time: Jawans at the encounter site in Pulwama district on Saturday. *NISSAR AHMAD

The police neither disclosed the identity of the outfit nor the militants killed in the operation.

It's second such operation of security forces in south

Family of five, including 2 minors, found dead in U.P.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW

The police in Uttar Pradesh's Western district of Etah launched a probe after five members of a family, including two minors, were found dead inside their locked house on Saturday.

The dead were identified as Rajeshwar Prasad Pachauri, 75, a retired health department staff, his daughter-in-law Divya Pachauri, 33, her two sons, aged 10 and one, and her sister Bulbul, 23.

On an alert from neighbours, police found Bulbul,

Pachauri and the two minor boys dead on their beds, said Senior Superintendent of Police Sunil Kumar Singh. Divya was on a cot outside the house.

There was no clear evidence of entry into the house as the main door and the roof were locked from the inside, the police said. It seems like there was "no forced entry," Mr. Singh said, adding that all items in the house were in their place. Police have formed five teams to dig up CCTV footage and call details to investigate the deaths.

IN BRIEF



NIA court rejects Teltumbde's bail plea
Mumbai

The special NIA lockdown court on Saturday rejected the temporary bail plea filed by Dalit scholar and academic Anand Teltumbde in a case pertaining to the 2018 Bhima-Koregaon violence, and remanded him to judicial custody till May 8. He had sought bail on health grounds in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak.

SC orders govt. to pay ₹1 lakh to ex-RAW officer
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has ordered the government to pay ₹1 lakh as compensation to a former woman Intelligence officer with the Research and Analysis Wing, who attempted suicide outside the Prime Minister's Office in 2008 after her sexual harassment complaint, filed against her seniors in August 2007, was casually dealt with.

MHA nod to bring back mortal remains of Indians
NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) issued an order on Saturday permitting the arrival of mortal remains of Indian nationals and Overseas Citizens of India (OCI) from foreign countries subject to submission of an NOC from the Ministries of Health and External Affairs and "strict adherence to government guidelines regarding management of COVID-19."

No new cases after May 16, says study

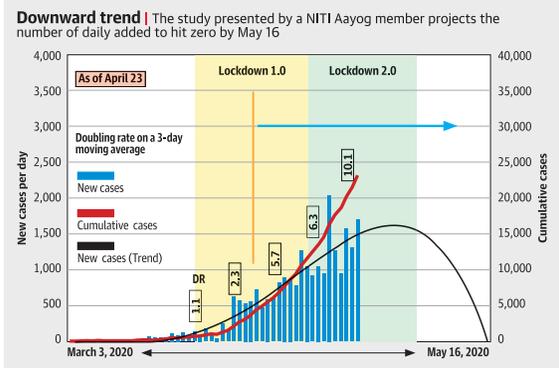
It's highly unlikely going by the rise in numbers in Gujarat, Maharashtra and West Bengal, say experts

JACOB KOUSHY
NEW DELHI

On Friday, V.K. Paul, NITI Aayog member and head of a key government empowered committee on medical management, presented a study to suggest that the lockdown had slowed the rate of transmission and increased the period it took for cases to double, to about 10 days. Though India continues to show a rising trend in cases, his projection also showed a forecast that says new cases would cease by May 16.

From May 3, India would hit its peak in adding daily new cases at a little above 1,500 and this would drop to 1,000 cases by May 12, and down to zero by May 16. In all, this would mean that no more than 35,000 cases would be added between Saturday and the first fortnight of May.

Independent experts, and one of the members of that committee, who didn't want to be identified said this was "highly unlikely". For a decline in the national average, there would have to be declines that lasted over two



weeks in key States such as Gujarat, Maharashtra, West Bengal that were fuelling the rise in numbers. "So far there is no such evidence of a decline. So I don't know the basis of that forecast. We are planning, in terms of keeping ventilators, beds, ICU facilities ready on the assumption that this will last much longer," the member told *The Hindu*.

This week, the Indian Council of Medical Research also published a research strategy detailing how it was planning to ramp up testing far beyond April. Though this paper was prepared based on an assessment of resources at hand on the March 31, it projected 2.1 million RNA test kits, the gold standard in detecting the infection, in May and 2.8 mil-

lion kits in June. In April, it expected at least a million kits. On average, one kit corresponds to one sample. So far, the ICMR has tested 5.4 million samples though this includes repeat tests on the same individuals. In other words, it expects to be testing more people not less in coming months. This also doesn't include the antibody test kits to be used for com-

munity surveillance to gauge the spread, though the use of these kits has now been put on hold because of concerns of accuracy. The ICMR's 200-odd labs now test around 40,000 samples a day.

This study, strategic planning to augment the testing capacity for COVID-19 in India, is co-authored by scientists at the National Institute of Epidemiology, an ICMR body, and the ICMR's headquarters in Delhi as well as WHO representatives.

Text messages sent to Dr. Paul requesting a clarification on the basis for decline weren't answered.

An independent epidemiologist, who advises State governments and didn't want to be identified, also felt that such a decline was unlikely. "To bend the curve or reduce down from the peak, the R0 (a number that shows how many a single person can infect) must stabilise around one for flattening and then go below one to bend it. West Bengal and Gujarat are peaking just now but case detection rates are rising. There are many hidden cases in West Bengal."

Post-lockdown, Indians in Gulf will be the first to return

Govt. gears up to repatriate stranded citizens

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

A week before the current phase of nationwide lockdown to combat the coronavirus pandemic ends, the government has begun preparations for the return of Indians stranded or needing to return from various countries, beginning with countries in the Gulf region. On Saturday, Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba held a meeting of all nodal Ministries, including Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla and all the Chief Secretaries of States and Union Territories, on the issue of repatriating Indians after travel restrictions are lifted.

Also attending the meeting were Home Secretary, Ajay Kumar Bhalla, Secretary, Economic Affairs, and Secretary, Labour & Employment.

Officials took stock of preparations in various States, most notably Kerala, for the return of an estimat-



A file photo of an Indian team, comprising medical personnel, being checked before being airlifted to Kuwait. ♦♦♦

ed 2,00,000 expatriates and other travellers, sources told *The Hindu*. According to plans by the government, the first commercial flights from the Gulf region could be started after May 3, if the lockdown restrictions are not extended.

Indians stranded in the U.K., other parts of Europe, and the United States will be considered after that. Once the government's plans are finalised, the MEA will contact diplomatic missions in Delhi and the DGCA will give clearance to specific airlines to begin advertising flights from the Gulf, sources said.

The government is making a separate assessment about places from where it will need to operate special flights, due to the large numbers of Indians needing to return, many of whom will be unable to afford tickets at present. Many of these countries have contacted Indian missions in the last few weeks, pressing the urgency of ensuring that Indians are allowed to return.

More than eight million Indians live and work in the Gulf region.

(With inputs from G. Anand in Thiruvananthapuram)

Rohtang Pass opened 3 weeks in advance

Essentials can be moved to Lahaul, Spiti in Himachal

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) on Saturday opened the Rohtang Pass, three weeks in advance, for transporting essential supplies and relief materials to the Lahaul and Spiti districts of Himachal Pradesh amid the lockdown, the Army said. The pass is at 13,058 feet on the eastern Pir Panjal Range of the Himalayas.

"Dr. Ram Lal Markanda, Agriculture Minister of Himachal Pradesh, led the first convoy of vehicles, carrying essential supplies and ap-



Clear passage: BRO vehicles clearing snow in the Rohtang Pass. ♦♦♦

proximately 150 farmers, to the Lahaul Valley..., thus officially opening the Rohtang Pass this year," the Army said in a statement.

The operation to clear snow is carried out every year as the pass remains snow-bound for almost six months, from mid-Novem-

ber to mid-May, isolating Lahaul and Spiti districts from the rest of the country.

"Last year, the Rohtang Pass was kept open till December 12. The valley depends on air traffic for external logistics and supplies during winters," the statement said.

On April 11, the Himachal Pradesh government approached the Director-General, BRO, to speed up snow clearance to help farmers return to start cultivation and transport essential supplies and relief materials in the wake of COVID-19. The Army said blizzards, freezing temperatures and avalanches delayed the operation, but teams worked round the clock.

The tunnel is the world's longest tunnel (8.8 km) at an altitude of 3,000 metres. The tunnel reduces the distance between Leh and Manali by 46 kilometres. This helps in saving crores of rupees on fuel usage. It is built under Pir Pinjal range.

It is a single tube tunnel and is 10.5-metre-wide with fire proof emergency provisions. The geological and weather challenges were overcome by the Border Road Organization. It includes the Seri Nalah fault zone.

Rohtang Pass

The pass connects Kulu valley and Lahaul and Spiti valleys of Himachal Pradesh. The three rivers in the region of the pass are chenab, Beas and Chandra rivers. The Beas river emerges from underground and flows southwards, Chandra river flows in the eastern Himalayas and Chenab river flows westward.

Govt. to study lessons learnt from Spanish Flu

HRD Ministry writes to universities

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Universities and research institutes across the country have been asked by the Union Human Resource Development (HRD) Ministry to delve into their archives and other means to study how India handled the 1918 H1N1 (commonly referred to as Spanish Flu) pandemic and what measures were taken to boost the economy after the pandemic had run its course, leaving more than 12-17 million people dead in the country.

The letter, written by B.V.R.C Purushotham (IAS officer currently private secretary and chief of staff to Union HRD minister Ramesh Pokhriyal "Nishank"), also tells university departments to set up research teams and study the levels of awareness of COVID-19 in villages near university campuses.

The Indian government extended the all-India lockdown on April 14 by another three weeks but has been talking about a staggered exit and searching for the optimum balance between saving lives and saving businesses. Laks of migrant workers to have been left high and dry due to the lockdown and the peculiar requirements of the pandemic, in which close contact has led to virulent rates of infection and spread.

The Union Home Minis-

The letter is basically to ask for a non-bureaucratic view on how to effect an exit from the lockdown

try has allowed shops (not in malls) registered under the Shops and Establishment Act to open in non-municipal areas in an order on Friday and for harvesting and sowing operations in rural India to proceed. But a huge question mark still remains on the granular details of just how an exit from the lockdown can be effected without any cure for COVID-19 in sight.

Case studies

"The letter is basically to ask for a non-bureaucratic view on how to effect an exit from the lockdown. Most old universities have, in their archives, much material on how the 1918 pandemic was handled in terms of public health and the economy. That needs to be made into case studies and solutions are needed which are tailored to local areas, and also broad brushstrokes. Bureaucratic solutions can be blinkered," said a source in the HRD Ministry to *The Hindu*.

According to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, as of Saturday morning, India had 24,508 cases of COVID-19.

Laying bare his argum

Lawyer appears in vest during videoconference

MOHAMMED IQBAL
JAIPUR

A lawyer arguing a bail application in the Rajasthan High Court appeared in a vest during the hearing conducted through videoconference, drawing the ire of the judge who admonished him and adjourned the hearing.

The court had switched over to videoconference for litigation during the COVID-19 lockdown.

When the advocate wearing a vest started arguments seeking bail for



ILLUSTRATION: SATHEESH VELLINEZH

his client in a criminal matter on Friday, Justice Sanjeev Prakash Sharma of the High Court's Jaipur Bench took umbrage at his "inappropriate attire" and told him that lawyers must appear in proper uniform

even during video-conference.

"Even in the video-conferencing, the decorum of the court is required to be maintained. The Advocates Act provides for lawyers to wear their uniform while

in his brief order.

Justice Sharma said he had earlier directed that lawyers must appear in uniform during the lockdown, when in-person hearing had been replaced with videoconference. Another advocate had appeared from his home in his innerwear during a hearing in the same court earlier this month.

Public Prosecutor Sumer Singh Ola, who appeared on behalf of the State government in the case, said the court's cause list had clearly mentioned that the lawyers must appear in their uniform.

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court Bar Association wrote to the Chief Justice of India and other judges of the court on Saturday that hearing of cases through videoconference should not become the "new normal" and replace the open court system even

ed. "Once the lockdown is lifted and once the Ministry of Health permits, open court hearings should commence with social distancing norms and crowd management measures made mandatory on the court premises," a resolution said.

CENTRAL UNIVERSITIES COMMON ENTRANCE TEST

CUCET-2020

(www.cucetexam.in)

Central Universities Common Entrance Test (CUCET-2020) is being conducted for admission to different Programmes of 14 Central Universities (Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, Jammu, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kashmir, Kerala, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, South Bihar, Tamil Nadu) and 4 State Universities (Baba Gulshan Shah Badshah University (Rajouri), Bengaluru Dr B R Ambedkar School of Economics, Khamlet University (Berhampur), Sardar Patel University of Police, Security & Criminal Justice (Jodhpur))

Application Form
Last Date Extended
23 May, 2020

Examination Date to be
Notified Later

Media Partner: **BENGALURU DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS UNIVERSITY**, Rajaji Hall, Central College Campus, Bangalore University, Bengaluru-560 001. Website: www.base.ac.in

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

ADMISSION QUERY - Mob.: 9560268076. Phone: (24x7 Help desk) 01463-238728(CURAI) E-mail: enq@cucet2020@cura.ac.in

DIPR/DOU/2975/2020-21

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF PERSONS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES (DIVYANGJAN)

Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan) (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India)
An ISO 9001:2015 Institution

Manovikas Nagar, Secunderabad-500 009, Telangana.
Tel. 091-40-27751741-745, Fax: 091-40-27750198, www.niepid.nic.in

Employment Notice No: 01/2020

This Institute invites applications from eligible candidates for the following Regular Posts to be filled on **Direct Recruitment** basis.

Sl. No.	Name of the Post	No. of Post	Level	Category
NIEPID, Secunderabad (Regular)				
1	Jr. Special Education Teacher	01	Level-06	UR
2	Statistical Assistant	01	Level-05	UR
3	Vocational Instructor Gr-II	01	Level-04	OBC
MSEC Noida (Regular)				
4	Principal	01	Level-12	UR-OH
5	Home Visitor /Teacher	01	Level-06	UR
6	Jr. Special Education Teacher	02	Level-06	UR
RC Noida (Regular)				
7	Jr. Accountant	01	Level-04	UR
8	Driver	01	Level-02	UR
RC Kolkata (Regular)				
9	Jr. Accountant	01	Level-04	UR
RC Navi Mumbai (Regular)				
10	Jr. Accountant,	01	Level-04	UR
CRC Davangere (Deputation / short term Contract)				
11	Director	01	Level-12	UR

Applications are invited from eligible candidates for the following posts to be filled on **Contractual basis** at Composite Regional Center for Skill Development, Rehabilitation & Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, Nellore, Andhra Pradesh State.

Sl. No.	Name of the Post	No. of Post	Consolidated Salary per month
1	Asst. Professor (Medical PMR)	01	Rs. 65,000/-
2	Asst. Professor (Clinical Psychology or Rehab./Psychology)	01	Rs.60,000/-
3	Asst. Professor (Speech Pathology)	01	Rs. 60,000/-
4	Lecturer (Physiotherapy)	01	Rs. 50,000/-
5	Rehabilitation Officer (Social Work & Placement)	01	Rs. 40,000/-
6	Clinical Assistant	01	Rs. 32,000/-

The Last date for receipt of Completed Application forms is 15.06.2020
The detailed notification is available on institute's website: www.niepid.nic.in

Director

KERALA WATER AUTHORITY - e-TENDER NOTICE

Tender No : I/2020-21/PHC/KNR KIFB -WSS to Mattannur and Itity Municipalities Package IV-Construction of 15LL OHSR, Clear Water Gravity Main, Inter connection to Transmission line, Pumping Main, 3.00 LL GLSR and Road reformation work. EMD : ₹ 5,00,000. Tender fee : ₹ 16,800. Last Date for submitting Tender: 09-06-2020, 05.00 pm. Phone: 0497-2705902
Website: www.kwa.kerala.gov.in, www.etenders.kerala.gov.in
Sd/-
KWA-IB-GL-6-7-2020-21
Superintending Engineer, PH Circle, Kannur

INTERVIEW | BIPLAB DEB

'Tripura started screening airports and checkpoints as early as January'

Chief Minister says the State, which has had only two cases of COVID-19, will continue to stay vigilant but ease restrictions for traders dealing in essential commodities

NISTULA HEBBAR

Tripura saw the discharge of its second and last COVID-19 patient this weekend; with that there are no active cases in the State. Chief Minister Biplab Deb discusses the unique challenges faced by the border State. Excerpts:

The actual load of cases in Tripura has been low, with both positive cases having recovered. Yet the State has been put under lockdown. Why?

■ Our State has become coronavirus-free with the blessings of Mata Tripura Sundari and by properly following the guidelines prescribed by Honourable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji. We are thankful to the citizens of Tripura for extending their cooperation and support by obeying the social distancing norms and other guidelines. I also congratulate all the health professionals and other frontline warriors for rendering their dedicated ser-

vice during the pandemic. The government of Tripura had taken preventive measures, including announcement of lockdown, well before the other States. Our government had declared the lockdown on March 23 along with curfew. We had started screening in airports and integrated checkpoints since January 29. We are the first State in the country to impose prohibitory orders under Section 144 of the Cr.P.C on March 16. The goal behind this advance step was to ensure social distancing for preventing transmission of the novel coronavirus and definitely, the plan worked to a great extent. We are fortunate that only two positive

cases have been reported and both the patients have already recovered making the State coronavirus-free. We are continuing with the lockdown since the country-wide lockdown is in force as it been most effective in combating COVID-19 so far. Though we have given relaxation in some sectors in compliance with Central guidelines, I request everyone to maintain social distancing and follow government guidelines till May 3. I have also urged the citizens, especially those on borders, to keep a close watch to ensure zero infiltration from Bangladesh. I have also urged people residing in bordering villages to cooperate with security agencies to ensure no influx.

I must add that we have eased some restrictions for industry, small-time traders, shops dealing with essential commodities and work in construction sites in compliance with advisory of the



Central government.

Tripura, like other States in the northeastern region, depends on connectivity with the rest of the country for a lot of supplies. Has that been a challenge with the suspension of flights?

■ Tripura is getting essential supplies through cargo flights. There is no dearth of essential supplies in the State. Cargo flights have been

landing in Agartala. The essential food items are being distributed to families in need and daily wagers. All departments are providing essential services as mentioned in the consolidated guidelines issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). Other essential public services are being provided at full strength. These departments include health, power, drinking water, municipal services, police, home

guards, civil defence, fire services, prisons, revenue & allied activities, fisheries, forest, industry & commerce, labour, rural development & panchayat, food & civil supplies, district administration & treasury, social welfare & education, among others. So there is no such problem.

The State borders Bangladesh and has an active land port there. What is the situation for trade, etc.?

■ The State government has allowed trade facilities as per MHA guidelines. We have allowed operation in industrial establishments, involved in manufacturing essential commodities. We have allowed necessary trade activities with social distancing and other hygiene measures. We have already declared that industrial establishments are exempt from the

lockdown and can continue to operate. We have allowed manufacturing units of essential commodities and also production units that require continuous process. Despite the challenges and concerns about public health, we are working to ensure that our unavoidable obligations to neighbours are fully met.

The lockdown period has also been used by States to build capacity for quarantine, hospital beds and ventilators. What is the status in Tripura?

■ The State government is very concerned regarding this core area of medical supply and arrangements. We have been procuring ventilators, personal protection equipment (PPE) and alcohol-based hand sanitisers in good capacity. To boost the morale of medical professionals, we have committed to provide jobs to families of

doctors, nurses and health staff, if they die in the line of duty while dealing with coronavirus patients. We have earlier announced a ₹4 lakh life insurance cover for the frontline workers. I have asked people to carry the 'jal gamcha' (towel) on their shoulders at all times during the lockdown. We all have the 'jal gamcha' in our homes. Masks are a must for the doctors, health and paramedical staff. Also, it is not possible to provide masks to 40 lakh people in the State. Tripura has 126 isolation beds, 11 ventilators and 457 quarantine facilities with beds.

To deal with any eventualities, the State government has prepared a dedicated 40-bed COVID-19 treatment centre in GBP Hospital and Agartala Government Medical College. Besides, another 30-bed COVID-19 health centre has been set up in IGM Hospital.

Care denied to non-COVID-19 patients

Hospitals demand virus test reports before treatment

IVYOTI SHELAR
MUMBAI

At 2 a.m. on Thursday, a young media professional diagnosed with malaria, experienced a sudden spike in fever. But the closest hospital near her Mahim home said told her she should not come in for a consultation till she had a COVID-19 negative report in hand.

Scarred by COVID-19 patient encounters that have infected many healthcare workers and have forced some hospitals to shut down, many medical institutions have made it a norm to demand proof of a patient being COVID-19 negative before treatment. This has left patients with other health ailments at the risk of deteriorating conditions and running from one hospital to another.

The doctor at the emergency department of St. Rajeha Hospital in Mahim where the media person first sought help, said she would not be taken in for any treatment until she had a COVID-19 negative report. When told that her condition was serious, he said he could not break the hospital's protocol.

The woman then checked with the Hinduja Hospital also in Mahim where the doctor on duty said she could come down only if she did not reside in any of the containment zones.

"At Hinduja, they checked my vital parameters outside the hospital premises, asked



Nowhere to go: The hospital 'protocols' have left patients with other health ailments at the risk of deteriorating conditions and running from one hospital to another. ♦PTI

for my residential proof to confirm I was not from a containment area and then took me into the emergency department where I was put on an intravenous drip," said the woman, whose fever had spiked to 104F. "I was delirious, giddy and on the verge of collapsing," she recalled.

A check by *The Hindu* with a few other hospitals in the city revealed that the demand for a COVID-19 report had become the norm. At Bandra's Lilavati Hospital, a doctor at the COVID-19 screening area told this reporter to first go to a local physician, get a prescription for a COVID-19 test and then call a private laboratory for home collection of the sample. "Meanwhile, give paracetamol to the patient thrice a day and sponge from the head to toe except for the chest area," the doctor said.

Even if a patient does adhere to the hospitals' demand for a certification, private laboratories currently take three to four days to give COVID-19 reports.

Maharashtra reports a record 811 cases in a day

22 die of infection, 119 discharged

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

With 811 new COVID-19 cases, Maharashtra recorded the highest single-day surge on Saturday. The State also recorded 22 deaths taking the death toll to 323.

Since the SARS-CoV-2 hit the State on March 9, the total number of cases has touched 7,628.

Nearly 66% of the State's cases and 59% of the deaths were from Mumbai alone, making the financial capital a major hotspot for the infection.

3 districts in green zone Saturday's tally surpassed the State's last highest single-day jump of 778 cases on April 23. The 22 deaths on Saturday was also the second-highest daily toll re-

corded by the State. On April 9, the State recorded 25 deaths.

Of the 35 districts in the State, only three — Wardha, Bhandara and Gadchiroli — remain in the green zone now. Chandrapur was also in the green zone but a couple who returned from Indonesia tested positive in Nagpur. The two cases have been counted under Chandrapur due to their residential address.

Of the 22 deaths recorded on Saturday, 13 were from Mumbai, six from Pune and one each from Malegaon, Dhule and Solapur. The recovery rate in the State stands at 14% with nearly 1,076 patients discharged from hospitals to date. On Saturday, 119 patients were discharged across the State.

M.P. writes to Maharashtra on migrants

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The Madhya Pradesh government on Saturday wrote to the Maharashtra government requesting assistance for the return of nearly 4.5 lakh migrant workers stuck in different parts of the State. The Maharashtra government has put its disaster management teams on alert in case arrangements have to be made but is yet to take a final call on how the return journey will be facilitated, officials said.

Students to return from Rajasthan

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Maharashtra government on Saturday initiated the process to bring back over 2,000 students from the State stranded in Kota, Rajasthan, due to the nationwide lockdown. Abhay Yawalkar, Director, Disaster Management, Maharashtra, wrote to the authorities in Rajasthan requesting them to inform institutes in Kota about the scheduled transport.

Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh governments will be informed about the travel via these States.

After Indore, three nearby districts see surge in deaths

They account for 85% of fatalities in Madhya Pradesh

SIDDHARTH YADAV
BHOPAL

Three neighbouring districts of Indore — which reported the most COVID-19 cases in Madhya Pradesh — are fast emerging as the new hotspots. Three out of four patients to die of the illness in the State come from the four districts combined.

The alarming trend is prompting health experts to enquire into why 85% of the 99 deaths owing to COVID-19 have occurred in just four of the 52 districts. After Indore, the country's cleanest city, Ujjain, Khargone and Dewas recorded the most number of fatalities in the State.

As of April 25, in Dewas district, having a population of just 15.6 lakh, as many as six, or 27.2% of all patients have died of the illness, registering one of the highest case fatality rates in the country. District's Chief Medical and Health Officer R.K. Saxena said: "One of the recovered patients was a frequent traveller to a hot spot in Indore." He unknowingly brought the virus upon seven members of his family, of which three have died.

The other three deaths were hastened by co-morbidities.

In Khargone district, six or 10% of all patients have died so far. Whereas in Ujjain, 15 of 103, or 14.5% of patients who tested positive



In focus: Patients who recovered from COVID-19 getting ready to leave a hospital in Indore on Friday. ♦PTI

have died. The infection has inflicted the worst toll on Indore, where 57, or 5.25% of all patients have died.

Hospitals stretched

In the absence of enough government-run tertiary care centres in west Madhya Pradesh, patients from 14 districts are used to seeking treatment in Indore, whose own infrastructure is under stress now. "Our hospitals, both private and government, are overflowing," said a professor at the government-run Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Medical College (MGMMC), Indore, requesting anonymity.

The virus's spread could be contained by restricting mobility, including that of patients, said Sali Sakalle, associate professor, Community Medicine department at the college.

"Shifting every coronavirus patient elsewhere for treatment increases the probability of infecting another 20-25 people, as they are accompanied by attendants too. Therefore patients from neighbouring districts are now being mostly treated there itself unless serious," he said. Health experts were considering whether carriers had taken the virus from the hotspots of Indore to other districts, said Lokendra Dave, member of the State COVID-19 Technical Advisory Committee. "The virus may have been carried by those violating the lockdown and are travelling," he said. Moreover, he said, many patients were presenting themselves late at hospitals. "Around 60 of the 80 initial deaths can be attributed to late reporting. People still do not take cold, cough and fever good enough a reason to see a doctor," said Dr. Dave. In addition, the MGMMC, on advice of the State government, is sending samples collected from the four districts, including Indore, to the National Institute of Virology, Pune, to ascertain whether a mutated, more virulent form of the virus is causing more deaths in the region.

SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★☆☆☆☆

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

Bengal families stranded in Bengaluru

They travelled to the city for medical treatment and are stuck in hotels, PGs

ADITYA BHARADWAJ
BENGALURU

Several families who travelled to Bengaluru for medical treatment find themselves stranded in hotels and paying guest accommodations due to the lockdown. With money running out, they are finding it tough to make ends meet. While the city police are ready to issue passes to enable them to return home by road, the cost of hiring private transport — including in some cases, necessarily, only ambulances — is too steep for most to afford.

Arbab Kumar Ghosh, a Ph.D student and a resident of Malda district, came with his family on March 13 for his father's cancer treatment and has been stuck here ever since. "We are living in a hotel, paying a daily rent of ₹800. We are also forced to buy food. Money is running

out, and the situation is grim," he told *The Hindu*.

Aktar Mondal, a resident of Bongaon, came here with four members of his family for treatment on March 18 and was scheduled to return on March 25. "I had booked the ticket, but a lockdown was announced the previous night. Again I booked tickets when the first phase was supposed to end, but again I lost money as the lockdown was extended," he said. "Police said they would facilitate our return if we arranged for transport, which we cannot afford now," he said.

'Money running out' Bimal Kashyap from Darjeeling, who came to Bengaluru for getting medical attention for his father-in-law's cancer, said, "Some of them [other families that have come for treatment] are in a pretty bad condition, stranded here with no money."



In need of help: Many patients from West Bengal have been stranded in the city since mid-March. ♦SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

This group of five families, stuck in a hotel near Narayana Health City, even approached the city police for help. While the police reasoned with the hotel management and even succeeded in getting them a rebate on the room rent, the hotel, however, rolled it back after a few days, making it a very brief relief.

The State government has issued orders to the police to book cases against landlords if they harass or evict tenants during the lockdown. However, the order covers only

residences and paying guest accommodation and not hotels. Police have booked cases against landlords of PG houses and PG accommodations.

Tapan Chowdhary, a native of Bardhaman, came to the city on March 18 for a family member's treatment and was staying at a guest house when he ran out of money. When the landlord insisted on the rent and warned that failure to pay would require him to vacate, he approached the police. The Kadugodi police booked

a case and arrested two members of the management of the guest house. There are over six cases registered in the Whitefield division alone, but all against guest houses and PG accommodations, not hotels.

'Costs involved'

"We also have to keep the establishment running and that involves costs," said a local hotelier, who spoke on the condition of anonymity. "We are not able to manage if the occupants do not pay up," he added.

Sagar Chowdhary, also from West Bengal, came on March 18 for availing treatment for his father's renal failure and has been stranded ever since. He ran out of money to even buy rations and is now dependent on relief from the government and NGOs. "Since we stay in hotels, relief workers assume we are well off and we do not figure on their priority list. But a kilo of purified rice is sold for ₹120 here. How can we afford it?"

Uttar Pradesh starts bringing back workers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government has started bringing back workers halted from the State who were stranded in other parts of the country due to the lockdown and as many as 2,224 labourers have returned in the first phase, a senior official said on Saturday.

Briefing reporters here, additional chief secretary (Home and Information) Awanish Awasthi said the first batch of workers was brought back in 82 buses from Haryana on Saturday, and 11,000 workers would return by Sunday.

They will be kept under a 14-day quarantine. Orders have been issued to prepare shelter homes in the State so that the returnees can be quarantined there. Once the quarantine ends, preparations should be made to provide them employment near their village, Mr. Awasthi said.

UN pushes for global vaccine effort

Secretary-General asks world leaders and the private sector to join hands; virus toll nears 2,00,000

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

The global coronavirus death toll approached 2,00,000 on Saturday as the UN launched an international push for a vaccine to defeat the pandemic.

Governments around the world are struggling to limit the economic devastation unleashed by the virus, which has infected nearly 2.8 million people and left half of humanity under some form of lockdown.

COVID-19

The scale of the COVID-19 pandemic has forced medical research on the virus to move at unprecedented speed, but effective treatments are still far off and the UN chief said the effort will require cooperation on a global scale. "We face a global public enemy like no other," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told a virtual briefing on Friday, asking for international organisations, world leaders and the private sector to join the effort. "A world free of COVID-19 requires the most massive public health effort in history."

Any vaccine should be safe, affordable and available to all, Mr. Guterres said at the meeting, which was also attended by the leaders of Germany and France.

But notably absent were the leaders of China, where the virus first emerged late last year, and the U.S., which has accused the UN's World Health Organization of not warning quickly enough about the original outbreak.

The spread of COVID-19 is increasing other medical risks as well with the WHO warning nearly 4,00,000 more people could die from malaria because of disruption



Lift the lockdown: A protest in Madison, Wisconsin, against the lockdown. • AFP

tion to the supply of mosquito nets and medicines. Saturday marked World Malaria Day, a disease which the WHO said could kill around 7,70,000 this year, or "twice as much as in 2018".

Early stages

With more than four billion people on lockdown or stay-at-home orders to slow the spread of the virus, governments are weighing how to lift restrictions without causing a spike in infections and how to revive economies battered by weeks of closure.

The daily toll in Western countries seems to be falling, a sign hopeful epidemiologists had been looking for, but the WHO has warned that other nations are still in the early stages of the fight.

Global COVID-19 deaths have climbed past 1,95,000, according to an AFP tally, but new reported cases appear to have leveled off at about 80,000 a day. The U.S. is the hardest-hit by far in the pandemic, recording more than 51,000 deaths and over 8,90,000 infections.

'Recovered patients not immune to re-infection'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
GENEVA

The World Health Organization (WHO) warned on Saturday that there is no evidence that people who test positive for the new coronavirus are immunised and protected against reinfection.

The warning suggests that the issuance of "immune passports" may promote the spread of the pandemic. "There is currently no evidence that people who have recovered from COVID-19 and have antibodies are protected from a second infection," WHO said.

Some governments, wanting a gradual return to work and the resumption of economic activity, have put forward the idea of issuing documents attesting to the immunity of people on the basis of serological tests

revealing the presence of antibodies in the blood.

At this point in the pandemic, there is not enough evidence about the effectiveness of antibody-mediated immunity to guarantee the accuracy of an "immunity passport" or "risk-free certificate."

Additional validation

WHO believes that the serological tests currently used "need additional validation to determine their accuracy and reliability".

In particular, the tests need to make it possible to distinguish the immune response to the novel coronavirus from the antibodies produced during an infection by another of the six known human coronaviruses, four of which are widespread, causing mild colds.

China eases export curbs

REUTERS
BEIJING

China is dropping a requirement that a number of key virus care products get domestic regulatory approval before export, as long as they are approved in the importing countries, the Commerce Ministry said on Saturday.

The ruling applies to products such as virus tests, medical masks, infrared thermometers and ventilators. "Tonight's new rule is a revision to (the older rule)," said Zhang Shuwen, the CEO of Liming Bio-products, a biotech firm offering coronavirus tests targeting the overseas market. "It's wrong to have a one-size-fits-all policy..."

Pak. doctors on hunger strike

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LAHORE

Dozens of Pakistani doctors and nurses have launched a hunger strike demanding adequate protective equipment, the lead organiser of the protest said on Saturday.

Health workers have complained for weeks that the country's hospitals are suffering shortages of safety gear, prompting the arrest of more than 50 doctors who called for more supplies in Quetta.

Frontline staff have been left vulnerable, with more than 150 medical workers testing positive for the virus nationwide, according to the Young Doctors' Association in worst-hit Punjab province.

No consensus in U.S. on accuracy of antibody tests

Of 14 tests, only 3 delivered consistently reliable results

APOORVA MANDAVILLI

The researchers worked around the clock, in shifts of three to five hours, hoping to stave off weariness and keep their minds sharp for the delicate task.

They set up lines of laboratory volunteers: medical residents, post-doctoral students, even experienced veterans of science, each handling a specific task. They checked and rechecked their data, as if the world were depending on it. Because in some ways, it was.

For the past few weeks, more than 50 scientists have been working diligently to do something that the Food and Drug Administration mostly has not: verifying that 14 coronavirus antibody tests on the market actually deliver accurate results.

These tests are crucial to reopening the economy, but public health experts have raised urgent concerns about their quality. The new research, completed just days ago and posted online on Friday, confirmed some of those fears: of the 14 tests, only three delivered consistently reliable results. Even the best had some flaws.

The research has not been peer-reviewed and is subject to revision. But the results are already raising difficult questions about the course of the epidemic.

Surveys of residents in the Bay Area, Los Angeles and New York this week found that substantial percentages tested positive for antibodies to SARS-CoV-2, the official name of the new coronavirus. In New York City, the figure was said to be as high as 21%. Elsewhere, it was closer to 3%.



Antibody test cartridges in South Korea. • AP

The idea that many residents in some parts of the country have already been exposed to the virus has wide implications. At the least, the finding could greatly complicate plans to reopen the economy.

Already Americans are scrambling to take antibody tests to see if they might escape lockdowns. Public health experts are wondering if those with positive results might be allowed to return to work.

But these tactics mean nothing if the test results can't be trusted.

False positive

In the new research, scientists found that only one of the tests never delivered a so-called false positive – that is, it never mistakenly signalled antibodies in people who did not have them.

Two other tests did not deliver false-positive results 99% of the time.

But the converse was not true. Even these three tests detected antibodies in infected people only 90% of the time, at best.

The false-positive metric is particularly important. The result may lead people

to believe themselves immune to the virus when they are not and to put themselves in danger by abandoning social distancing and other protective measures.

It is also the result on which scientists are most divided.

"There are multiple tests that look reasonable and promising," said Dr. Alexander Marson, an immunologist at the University of California, San Francisco, and one of the project's leaders. "That's some reason for optimism."

Dr. Marson is also an investigator in the Chan Zuckerberg Biohub, which partly funded the study.

Other scientists were less sanguine than Dr. Marson. Four of the tests produced false-positive rates ranging from 11% to 16%; many of the rest hovered around 5%. "Those numbers are just unacceptable," said Scott Hensley, a microbiologist at the University of Pennsylvania.

The proportion of people in the U.S. who have been exposed to the coronavirus is likely to be 5% or less, Mr. Hensley said. "If your kit has a 3% false-positive, how do you interpret that? It's basically acceptable," he said. "If your kit has 14% false positive, it's useless."

Mr. Hensley said the study nonetheless was well designed and the results pressing, given the sudden proliferation of antibody tests on the market and the push to use them to lift lockdowns.

Dr. Marson and his collaborator, Patrick Hsu, a bioengineer at the University of California, Berkeley, anticipated that antibody tests would face questions about quality. NY TIMES

ELSEWHERE



Indian-origin party CEO to step down

WASHINGTON
Seema Nanda has announced her decision to step down as the CEO of the Democratic National Committee, the top administrative position in the main opposition party, ahead of the presidential elections in November. Ms. Nanda in 2018 became the first Indian-American to be appointed as the CEO of the Democratic National Committee. PTI

Zimbabwe official charged over 'insult'

HARARE
Opposition municipal official Chrispen Rambau has been charged with insulting Zimbabwe President Emmerson Mnangagwa over his handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, a lawyers' association said. Mr. Rambau is a councillor in the eastern town of Chipinge and a member of the Movement for Democratic Change. AFP

Saudi Arabia abolishes flogging as punishment

'Convicts who have been sentenced to the lash will from now on receive fines or prison terms instead'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
RIYADH

Saudi Arabia has abolished flogging as a punishment, the state human rights commission said on Saturday, hailing a "major step forward" in the reform programme launched by the King and his powerful son.

Court-ordered floggings in Saudi Arabia – sometimes extending to hundreds of lashes – have long drawn condemnation from human rights groups.

But they say the headline legal reforms overseen by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman have brought no let-up in the conservative Islamic kingdom's crushing of dissent, including through the use of the death penalty. The state human rights commission said the latest reform, which was reported by Saudi media, including the pro-government *Okaz* newspaper, would ensure that no more convicts were sentenced to flogging.

"This decision guarantees that convicts who would previously have been sentenced to the lash will from now on receive fines or prison terms instead," its chairman, Awad al-Awad, said.

Previously, the courts had powers to order the flogging of convicts found guilty of offences ranging from extramarital sex and breach of the peace to murder.

In future, judges will have to choose between fines and/or jail sentences, or non-custodial alternatives like community service.

Blogger flogging

The most high-profile instance of flogging in recent years was the case of Saudi blogger Raif Badawi who was sentenced to 10 years in prison and 1,000 lashes in 2014 on charges of "insulting" Islam. He was awarded the European Parliament's Sakharov human rights prize the following year.

The abolition of corporal



No more lashes: Ensaf, the wife of jailed blogger Raif Badawi, holding a picture of her husband in Strasbourg, France, in 2015, after accepting an award on his behalf. • AFP

punishment in Saudi Arabia comes just days after the Kingdom's human rights record was again in the spotlight following news of the death from a stroke in custody of leading activist Abdullah al-Hamid, 69.

Hamid was a founding member of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA) and was sen-

tenced to 11 years in jail in March 2013, campaigners said. He was convicted on multiple charges, including "breaking allegiance" to the Saudi ruler, "inciting disorder" and seeking to disrupt state security, Amnesty International said.

Criticism of Saudi Arabia's human rights record has grown since King Salman

named his son Prince Mohammed the Crown Prince and heir to the throne in June 2017.

The King has launched ambitious economic and social reforms, allowing women to drive and for sports and entertainment events to be staged in the kingdom.

Murder of Khashoggi

However, the brutal murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in October 2018 and the increased repression of dissidents at home have overshadowed the Prince's pledge to modernise the economy and society.

The Saudi authorities put a record 184 people to death last year, according to figures released by Amnesty International on Tuesday.

"Saudi Arabia's growing use of the death penalty, including as a weapon against political dissidents, is an alarming development," the human rights group said.

Pakistan test-fires series of anti-ship missiles

Exercise was overseen by Navy chief

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ISLAMABAD

The Pakistan Navy on Saturday successfully test-fired a series of anti-ship missiles in the North Arabian Sea, a spokesman said. The missiles were fired from surface ships, fixed and rotary-wing aircraft, the Navy's spokesperson Rear Admiral Arshid Javed said.

Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Zafar Mahmood Abbasi witnessed the firing of the missiles, he said in a statement.

Operational capability

"The demonstration is a testament to Pakistan Navy's operational capability and military readiness, the official said. On the occasion, Admiral Abbasi said that the

Pakistan Navy is fully capable of responding to the enemy's aggression in a befitting manner.

Navy spokesperson Rear Admiral Javed took to Twitter to share the information on the firing.

"Pak. Navy conducted Live Weapon firing of Anti-Ship Missiles from Surface & Aviation units in North Arabian Sea. CNS, Adm. Zafar Mahmood Abbasi witnessed LWF as Chief Guest & said that PN is always ready to thwart any aggression against Pakistan's maritime frontiers," he said in a tweet.

The Navy did not provide any further details on the drill, which has come amidst the continued chill in India-Pakistan relations.

Iran shouldn't be allowed to buy arms: U.S.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called on Saturday for the UN to extend its conventional arms embargo on Iran beyond its scheduled end in October, citing Tehran's recent launch of a military satellite.

The lifting of the embargo was stipulated in the nuclear deal which the U.S., under President Donald Trump, unilaterally renounced in 2018. "The world's leading state sponsor of terrorism... should not be allowed to buy and sell conventional weapons," Mr. Pompeo said on Saturday. He called on the European Union to "sanction those individuals and entities working on Iran's missile programmes."

Australia, NZ aim to show the way in fighting virus

Steps taken by them have suppressed the outbreak; they are now aiming to eliminate COVID-19

DAMIEN CAVE
SYDNEY

Thousands of miles from U.S. President Donald Trump's combative news briefings, a conservative leader in Australia and a progressive Prime Minister in New Zealand are steadily guiding their countries toward a rapid suppression of the coronavirus outbreak.

Both nations are now reporting just a handful of new infections each day, down from hundreds in March, and they are converging toward an extraordinary goal: completely eliminating the virus from their island nations.

Whether they get to zero or not, what Australia and New Zealand have already accomplished is a remarkable cause for hope. Scott Morrison of Australia, a con-



Cooperative citizens: Police patrolling a Sydney beach, closed to all activity except exercise. • NYT

servative Christian, and Jacinda Ardern, New Zealand's darling of the left, are both succeeding with throwback democracy – in which partisanship recedes, experts lead, and quiet coordination matters more than firing up the base.

"This is certainly distinct from the United States," said

near normalcy, with the virus defeated, crowds gathering in pubs and every child back in school, is hard to imagine for much of the U.S.

If there are any two countries that could pull off a clear if hermetically sealed victory – offering a model of recovery that elevates competence over ego and restores some confidence in democratic government – it may be these two Pacific neighbours.

Time factor

Far from any global hot spot, they've had the advantage of time: Australia reported its first case on January 25, New Zealand on February 28. But compared to Mr. Trump and leaders in Europe, Mr. Morrison and Ms. Ardern responded with more alacrity and with starker warnings.

Mr. Morrison banned travellers from China on February 1 (a day before the U.S. did) and labelled the outbreak a pandemic on February 27 (two weeks before the WHO), while forming a national Cabinet of federal and State leaders to build hospital capacity and guide the response. In New Zealand, where the government is more centralised, Ms. Ardern introduced an alert system that led to a total lockdown less than a month after the country's first case emerged. "We must fight by going hard and going early," Ms. Ardern said.

In both countries, the public initially resisted and then complied, in part because the information flowing from officials at every level in both nations was largely consistent. NY TIMES

What is the NCAP?

It is a pollution control initiative launched by the Ministry of Environment to cut the concentration of coarse (particulate matter of diameter 10 micrometer or less, or PM10) and fine particles (particulate matter of diameter 2.5 micrometer or less, or PM2.5) by at least 20% in the next five years, with 2017 as the base year for comparison.

Which cities will fall under this?

Following reports of WHO and the air quality data obtained, 102 cities from 23 States and UTs have been chosen as non-attainment cities. With the exception of Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Bengaluru, most of those chosen are tier two cities.

Who all will participate?

Apart from experts from the industry and academia, the programme is expected to be collaboration between the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, Ministry of Heavy Industry, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Health, NITI Aayog, and Central Pollution Control Board.

What do experts say?

Critics have pointed out that the absence of clarity on funding provisions and lack of legal framework might dilute the effectiveness of the programme. That only a paltry amount of Rs. 300 crore has been set aside for this too has been roundly criticised.

or establishments comply with the directions.

It advised insurers to devise comprehensive health insurance products with simple wording, conditions and at affordable cost for industrial and commercial establishments, workplaces and offices. Organisations should be able to "continue the medical insurance policy offered by insurers not only for the present situation but for all time," said a circular from IRDAI Member (Non Life) T.L. Alamelu.

Welcoming the move, Star Health and Allied Insurance MD Dr. S. Prakash said for corporates, group policies were not an expense, but an investment in the welfare of their staff.

Obligations for Insurers

Consider vehicles insured, uninsured

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD

A working group of insurance regulator IRDAI has mooted a change in the formula to decide the obligation of insurers in respect of Motor Third Party (MTP) insurance business.

It has recommended that the obligation should be a function of "number of vehicles insured/uninsured" instead of "premium derived from MTP insurance business".

Accordingly, it has proposed a simple and equitable formula for calculating the obligation, IRDAI has said, inviting feedback from

the stakeholders on the report of the group.

Figuring in the recommendations are also time-bound exemptions for new players. Those underwriting MTP insurance for the first time may be exempted from application of the obligatory requirement during the first two financial years of their operations. The group also favoured the introduction of an MTP credit system in line with the carbon credit system.

Constituted in August, the working group's mandate was to revisit the existing, four-year old regulations.

Bags more contracts in April than in quarter ended March

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI

Larsen and Toubro (L&T) has seen a rise in the pace of orders it has received, over the past six weeks.

The company has bagged about a dozen contracts in April 2020, compared with the half a dozen secured between January and March this year. It had missed its guidance for FY20 as it received fewer orders than expected in the last quarter.

"Order wins of ₹28,100 crore in six weeks amid weak investment sentiment was commendable," wrote CLSA in a note to its clients.

The April orders include a major contract, three large contracts and seven signifi-



cant contracts. A significant contract is one which is valued between ₹1,000 crore and ₹2,500 crore, a large contract is between ₹2,500 crore and ₹5,000 crore and a major contract is between ₹5,000 crore and ₹7,000 crore. L&T shares had gained 28.5% on the BSE over

the past one month, recovering from the 52-week low of ₹661 seen on March 25 to ₹850.60 on April 24. The management said it was now focussing on resuming work at its sites to execute the ₹3.1 lakh-crore pending order book in a phased manner.

Research firm Morgan Stanley has maintained an overweight on the stock with the target raised to ₹1,117 from ₹941 per share, as it expects public capital expenditure to bounce back in FY22.

However, some analysts said that central spending on infrastructure projects may drop given the impact of the pandemic and orders from West Asia may dry up for L&T on falling oil prices.

der and MD Murugavel Janakiraman told *The Hindu* that: "A lot of young professionals, currently working from home, are able to get some personal time as they don't get stranded in traffic, or spend time on shopping, or socialising due to the lockdown. We are suddenly seeing match-hunting becoming a sort of family affair. Also, reaching out to prospects has got a lot better now when compared with finding them in offices, in the middle of meetings or in traffic."

Reconfirming the trend, Anupam Mittal, founder and CEO of Shaadi.com said, "Lockdown has accelerated online matchmaking sign-ups and engagements by at least 30%. We see a

form had seen a significant increase in memberships since the lockdown.

'Fake profiles also up' "The number of sign-ups has gone up by an average of 400% week-on-week from what it was before COVID-19. At the same time, we also see an increase in the number of fake profiles. To counter them, we are introducing more advanced profile filtering and privacy controls technology."

The trend of increasing sign-ups is also visible on EliteMatrimony, which caters to high networth individuals, and celebrities. About 60 million people are looking for life-partners at any given time in India, said Mr. Janakiraman.

INTERVIEW | C.K.RANGANATHAN

'Sanitisers in sachets took us only 15 days to develop'

Virus will have long-term impact, says CavinKare CMD

N. ANAND

FMCG major CavinKare has started offering hand sanitisers in sachets. The product was developed in 15 days as it was the need of the hour, said C.K. Ranganathan, CMD, CavinKare. Edited excerpts:

One has to adapt himself to the emergence of new customer expectation and the new world



What has been the impact of COVID-19 on the FMCG sector?

■ We have already seen a significant impact in the first 15 days of the month. In fact, it is almost a washout for the companies. Very few firms were able to supply things and others were not able to reach the destination as transportation was blocked.

We are not seeing light at the end of the tunnel immediately. Everybody will be performing sub-optimal to their potential. Customers are not coming out. So, April is a washout. They are buying only essential items and we are seeing these trends since the lockdown began.

In my view, the first quarter will be lukewarm, a majority of the companies will de-grow in the second quarter; in the third quarter, they might find their feet in terms of coming to a better level than in the first quarter.

What is the solution?

■ Our only hope is that this COVID-19 issue is resolved faster and it is left behind us. For that, a miracle has to happen. The vaccine is one solution. Otherwise, the way it is going now, it looks like it's going to be a long haul, which means we have to fight for three months aggressively and may be even for six to nine months in a phased manner.

We have the capability to convert every setback, into an opportunity. So from that angle, I believe some scien-

tists across the world will give us an early solution.

Temporary impact seems evident. Will there be long-term impact?

■ I wish it is a temporary one, but my hunch says it will be longer. When you are making customers poorer by giving less money in their hands, I think it will have a long-term impact. In my view, I think the world will go through a year or two of tough times.

So, what steps are FMCG firms taking to mitigate this?

■ We are working with the government as far as possible, as it is a national and not just a business problem.

What are the expectations from the government?

■ Our expectation is to ensure that the jobs and rural agriculture are protected. And, the economy is protected. But, it is a tough game and that's why, as an industry, we have all come forward to support the government.

Has COVID-19 imparted any lessons to the corporate world?

■ Lessons learnt are that you can be as productive as you have been. [That] much more work can be done from home, is one big lesson. The other thing is that you need to be extremely agile and nimble because the situation has changed suddenly. The customer is

locked down and habits are going to change forever, as we go forward. One has to adapt himself to the emergence of new customer expectation and the new world. The best thing is to test ourselves, to see what works for us. We were able to adapt, to survive in this kind of situation.

Being an FMCG company, we decided to produce hand sanitisers within 15 days. It was a revelation to us and we are in the right direction.

What spurred the move to add hand sanitisers in sachets?

■ We have a very strong R&D and we always keep a lot of products ready, on the shelf. In that sense, close to about 300 products are up and readily available. But, we can't launch all of them.

Some of them will be rolled out after modifying them to the current needs. In the case of sanitiser, we decided on March 5 and by March 20, we had billed our first invoice. This demonstrates our agile, nimble-footed character and the speed of execution, the team's capability and our adaptability to the situation.

Are you planning to expand your product portfolio?

■ We are in the personal care, professional care, dairy, food, snacks and beverages [categories]. But, we always keep our eyes and ears open, including to adjacent sectors.

Financiers, intermediaries line up funds for MSMEs

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI

At a time when micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are scouting for funds to keep their operations on, a host of financiers and intermediaries have come forward to meet the demand by capitalising on digital technology.

Arvog, which offers debt, equity and funding, has announced digital micro loans amounting to ₹250 crore to MSMEs to help them come out of the crisis.

Ketan Kothari, director, Arvog, said, "The country's 60 million MSMEs - businesses with annual revenue up to ₹250 crore - make enormous contribution to both India's employment and its gross domestic product (GDP)". "Yet, most of them are operating way below their potential because of a gap in loans and funding. With our focus on digital micro loans, we want to empower these MSMEs to reach their full potential," he said.

The firm has tied up with FinancePeer and PayMe India to provide digital micro loans at an 18% rate of interest.

"Our focus will be to look for companies having scalable ideas and a robust business model. Arvog would then step in and help them realise their growth plans with sustainability," Mr. Kothari said. Meanwhile, London-based CreditEnable, an AI-driven SME credit business, has ramped up its activities in India to help improve access to finance for SMEs during COVID-19.

CreditEnable's India marketplace currently caters to more than 20 leading lenders with ₹53,700 crore of loan books.



#राजस्थान_सतर्क_है

अशोक गहलोत मुख्यमंत्री, राजस्थान

प्रवासी श्रमिकों हेतु महत्वपूर्ण निर्देश

- लॉकडाउन के कारण बड़ी संख्या में श्रमिक एक-दूसरे राज्यों में अटक हुए हैं। श्रमिकों को चरणबद्ध तरीके से लाने/ले जाने के लिए उस राज्य सरकार से सहमत लेने के प्रयास किये जाएंगे।
- इसके लिए प्रवासी श्रमिक सोमवार से हैल्पलाइन नं. 18001806127 अथवा emitra.rajasthan.gov.in पोर्टल, ई-मित्र कियोस्क एवं ई-मित्र मोबाइल ऐप पर रजिस्ट्रेशन करवायें। इससे आने-जाने वाले श्रमिकों को संख्या के अनुरूप तिथि, समय व साधन निर्धारित कर सूचित किया जाएगा एवं उसी अनुरूप आवागमन संभव होगा।
- जो स्वयं के साधन से जाना चाहते हैं वह रजिस्ट्रेशन में यह अंकित कर दें। उन्हें संबंधित कलेक्टर द्वारा पास जारी किये जाएंगे।
- स्वयं की इच्छा से सड़कों पर नहीं आएँ और न ही रवाना हों।

इस आवागमन में निम्न शर्तों एवं सावधानियों की पालना अति आवश्यक है-

- प्रवासी अपने साथ पहचान दस्तावेज रखें। राज्य की चेकपोस्ट पर rajcovidinfo ऐप डाउनलोड करें अथवा फॉर्म IV में सूचना दें।
- परिवहन में सोशल डिस्टेंसिंग (एक दूसरे से दूरी) का पालन करें।
- राजस्थान में अपने नियत स्थान पर संबंधित जिला प्रशासन को वांछित सूचनाएं/जानकारियां दें।
- कोरोना के लक्षण या किसी पॉजिटिव से सम्पर्क हिस्ट्री हो तो अवश्य बताएं।
- आपकी व परिवार की कोरोना से सुरक्षा के लिए सभी प्रवासी श्रमिकों को 14 दिनों के लिए घर पर क्वारंटाइन में रहना अति आवश्यक है अर्थात् दूरी बनाकर अलग कमरे में रहें।
- घर पर क्वारंटाइन की सुविधा या कमरे न हों तो सरकारी क्वारंटाइन सेंटर का उपयोग करें।
- स्थानीय गांव/वार्ड के लोग बाहर से आने वाले हर व्यक्ति की सूचना प्रशासन को अवश्य दें।

सरकार द्वारा आपके राज्य की सरकार से समन्वय किया जा रहा है। आपकी सुविधा और सरकार का सहयोग प्राप्त करने के लिए आवागमन तयशुदा तिथि पर ही करें।

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सूचना एवं जनसम्पर्क विभाग, राजस्थान

Sewage surveillance can estimate coronavirus spread in the community

Viral particles in sewage samples is a collection of virus shed by many people in the community and is akin to pooled testing

R. PRASAD

Sampling sewage for viral particles is a time-tested method of environmental surveillance and is routinely resorted to for understanding circulation of several viruses – wild and vaccine-derived polio, rota virus, Hepatitis E and typhoid – in the community. Now, researchers in France have found that sewage surveillance can help in understanding the circulation of novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) in the human population.

People infected with the virus have been found to shed the virus in their stools. And by studying sewage samples, it is possible to know the viral load in the community through modelling once data on how many viral particles are shed by individuals and how the viral particles get diluted in sewage are available.

Late detection

In the case of novel coronavirus, sewage surveillance becomes particularly useful as a large percentage of infected population is either asymptomatic or show only mild symptoms. Hence, there is a greatly likelihood that circulation of the virus in the community will be detected quite late, if at all. The circulation is likely to continue undetected till such time community testing is



Indirect detection: Infected people shed the virus in their stools, and sewage samples, can indicate the viral load in the community. • COURAGE KOSI SETSODIATA SABA

ramped up so that many get tested, or till such time people become severely ill, requiring hospitalisation.

While a few other researchers have found coronavirus in sewage samples, the study posted on medRxiv preprint server, which is yet to be peer-reviewed, has shown that the environmental surveillance is able to pick up a spike in virus concentration in sewage much before cases show up or overload and strain the healthcare system. The other benefit is that sewage surveillance can be carried out independent of testing in humans and will be

able to pick up early signs even when people in the community do not show symptoms. The ability of sewage surveillance to decipher community spread even when people are asymptomatic is akin to antibody testing.

Correlation with outbreak

The study was carried out in greater Paris for a month (March 5 to April 7), and samples were picked twice a week from 23 raw and eight treated wastewater sites. The study found that the rise and fall in coronavirus concentrations closely matched the

COVID-19 outbreak in the region. Most interestingly, the team led by Dr. Moulin L from Sorbonne University, CNRS, Paris found high concentration of viral RNA about a week before multiple deaths were recorded in Paris on March 10.

The virus concentration in wastewater had the same trend as cases and deaths. The concentration of virus in the wastewater samples increased a few days ahead of an increase in cases and deaths in the city. "We have a very clear curve that precedes the curve in numbers of clinical cases, and now with confinement, we see a flattening of that curve," Laurent Moulin, a study co-author and a microbiologist at Eau de Paris told the journal *Science*.

Surveillance of virus in sewage is not only easy but also good to track and monitor the spread of the virus in the community, says a senior researcher based in India who has carried out sewage surveillance for a few different viruses.

"Environmental surveillance is the key to know and understand community transmission. But one should be clear when to carry out sewage surveillance – when cases have come down once the outbreak has been controlled or before cases show up so as to predict an outbreak," says the researcher. "In the case of novel coronavirus, sewage

surveillance is a good way to detect asymptomatic cases and those who exhibit mild symptoms, who might otherwise not be tested."

According to the scientist, there are two ways to take sewage samples – pick up samples at several places to monitor the presence of the virus in a community living in upstream catchment area and/or terminal sites where the sewage of the city/town is treated or let out into water bodies.

Useful method

The presence of the virus in wastewater treatment closely correlated with cases in greater Paris, reflects how useful this method is in tracking community spread. Higher concentrations of the virus in the wastewater did correspond to higher number of infected people in the region.

"Viral particles in sewage samples is a collection of virus shed by many people in the community and is akin to pooled testing," the scientist said. "But sewage sampling is not a replacement to testing for infection in people but is only a supplement."

The best time and place to carry out sewage sampling in India for coronavirus is when testing of people has been sorted and in places where no cases have been reported, according to the scientist.



Blue skies: The nationwide lockdown has brought about a significant improvement in air quality, albeit for the short term. • PTI

Witnessing the future through the lockdown

Imagine a future with clean air

S.N. TRIPATHI

The nationwide lockdown, and halting of most economic activities as a way to combat the novel coronavirus has brought about significant improvements in air quality across the country, albeit in the short term.

However, this phase of good air quality is lending itself as a real-life experiment to determine the lowest achievable pollution levels possible in a very long time. Attaining blue skies in a short period of about two weeks has allowed us to take a long view of the problem, the multiple sources of air pollution and to imagine a future with clean air. It has allowed us to understand clearly which solutions will work, how, and at what scale.

Fall in pollutant levels

Central Pollution Control Board data analysed from the last two weeks indicates a sudden reduction in pollutant levels across the country, including in some of the most polluted cities. Due to stringent travel restrictions, shutting of most industries and halting commercial and construction activity, the impact of air quality improvements has become immediately visible within and outside the cities.

Delhi, across its 35 monitoring locations, has recorded a drop of 44% in PM2.5 levels between March 24 and April 6. Noida and Gurugram have recorded similarly large and rapid decreases of 51% in their PM2.5 levels and 55% in PM10 levels. Other capital cities, such as Mumbai, Bengaluru and Lucknow have reported a decrease in the range of 18% to 30% during the lockdown period.

It is also notable that the decrease in particulate levels is the same if we compare the two week period (March 24 to April 6) between 2019 and 2020. Delhi NCR registers a drastic decline of 65%-70% in PM10 values compared with 2019 mainly due to construction activity coming to a grinding halt.

Also, Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Kolkata, and even smaller cities such as Jaipur and Guwahati, have recorded significant drop in nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) concentration, ranging from 53-68%, which is largely related to a dramatic decline in vehicle movement. Mumbai, with the maximum COVID-19 hotspots, stands out with a 68% drop in NO_x during the two week lockdown period in which data has been collected. Compared to last year, Kanpur has registered a drop of 83% in NO_x pointing to most vehicles going off the road during the lockdown.

Sulphur dioxide, another polluting gas, mostly released by burning of coal, oil and gas, either in vehicles or in power plants and other industries, also registered a big drop. In Pune, SO₂ level was 44% less during the lockdown, as compared to the week before. For the same time, readings in Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Hyderabad and Kolkata were roughly a quarter less, coinciding with reduced industrial activity and transport emissions.

Major sources

The National Clean Air Programme aims for an improvement of 20%-30% in the air quality by 2024, taking 2017 as the base year. It is necessary to address all major sources including transport, industry, residential, waste burning, road dust, agriculture residue burning, and construction, if air quality across large swathes of India has to be restored to moderate levels.

Our initial findings based on real-time source apportionment of online PM2.5 composition measurements in Delhi, over the period of lockdown show that contribution from incinerators has dropped, indicating much less processing of hotel and food waste. The real time analysis also shows contribution from tyre wear on road dropping close to insignificant. This points to the urgent need for guidelines on reuse of tyres.

Urgent retrofitting of flue gas desulphurisation units in thermal power plants is necessary as thermal plants are likely to continue in the near future. Going forward, tackling the auto sector is crucial. In bringing the economy back to life, filling the gap with an electric vehicle-specific stimulus package could be an interim solution to improving air quality.

Waste disposal and crop residue

The link between waste disposal in cities and poor air quality is a conspicuous one, which deserves due attention and action. Solutions lie in efficient waste segregation at source followed by recycling – especially for industrial units.

It is evident that a large amount of crop residue after each harvest cycle cannot be managed through traditional means or mechanised harvesters alone. Focus on innovation in crop residue management to minimise stubble burning in a sustainable and effective way across different locations alone can control this issue.

As the government prepares the largest ever recovery package to place the economy back on track, undertaking reforms such that it brings in less polluting industries, more clean transport and more resilient infrastructure will ensure that India is able to lock in a clean future and is better prepared for any shocks in the future.

(The author is a professor at IIT-Kanpur and member of the Steering Committee, NCAIP MoEFCC)

Stop villainising bats, say scientists, conservationists

ASWATHI PACHA

Unverified news and social media posts linking bats to the COVID-19 outbreak have led to widespread antipathy and there have been increasing incidents of the public destroying bat roosts and smoking them out. To raise awareness, 64 chiropterologists (those who study bats) from six South Asian countries have released a document clarifying the myths about bats and strongly affirming that bats do not spread COVID-19.

They also clarify that the bat coronaviruses (BtCoV) found in two species of Indian bats (in a recent Indian Council of Medical Research study) are not the same as SARS-CoV-2 and cannot cause COVID-19.

"Human activities and encroaching upon wildlife habitats puts us at risk of encountering new viruses. We need to modify human practices to prevent the emergence of new pathogens," says Arinjay Banerjee, a post-doctoral researcher at McMaster University, Canada in the release. He studies bat viruses and was part of the team that isolated the COVID-19 virus.

Origin unknown

The researchers write that the exact origin of SARS-CoV-2 is still unknown and it is premature to blame bats or any other animal for the pandemic.

"Killing bats and destroying their habitats can be more harmful as this can lead to bats spreading out their habitat. We should remember that all wild animals harbour viruses and it is very biased and unfair to point fingers only at bats. If we keep destroying habitats there are changes of the



Preserve environment: Destroying habitats can cause changes to the spread of other viruses from other animals to humans. • G. RAMAKRISHNA

spread of other viruses from other animals to humans," explains Harish Prakash, Ph.D. scholar, at the Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, to *The Hindu*.

The researchers and conservationists highlight that bats perform vital ecosystem services such as pollination, pest control, and provide intangible economic benefits.

They urge the governments of South Asian countries to strengthen the legal framework to protect bats. As only two species (out of 128) are protected by law in India, the researchers ask the government to reconsider and reinforce the laws governing bat conservation.

They write: "The current pandemic is an outcome of the ongoing ecological destruction, increasing intensification of livestock farming and wildlife trade. We request the media to not oversimplify scientific evidence, to emphasise the role of humans in disease outbreaks, and to highlight the importance of coexistence with bats in urban landscapes."

First merger of two black holes with unequal masses detected

The merging entities were about 30 and 8 times the Sun's mass

SHUBASHREE DESIKAN

For the first time since it started functioning, the gravitational wave observatories at LIGO scientific collaboration have detected a merger of two unequal-mass black holes. The event, dubbed GW190412, was detected nearly a year ago, and this is almost five years after the first ever detection of gravitational wave signals by these powerful detectors. Subsequent analysis of the signal coming from the violent merger showed that it involved two black holes of unequal masses coalescing, one of which was some 30 times the mass of the Sun and the other which had a mass nearly 8 times the solar mass. The actual merger took place at a distance of 2.5 billion light years away. This study has been published in preprint server ArXiv, and is pending peer review.

The detected signal's waveform has special extra features in it when it corresponds to the merger of two unequal-sized black holes as compared with a merger of equal-sized black holes. These features make it possible to infer many more things about the characters in this celestial drama, namely, a more accurate determination of the distance from the event, the spin or angular momentum of the more massive black hole and the orientation of the whole event with respect to viewers on Earth.

While the mass of the black hole



Gravity: The black hole's spin drags along the nearby space-time. • N. FISCHER, H. PFEIFFER, A. BUONANO

bends the space-time close to it, the spin or angular momentum of this inscrutable object drags the nearby space-time, causing it to swirl around, along with it. Hence both these properties are important to estimate.

Crucial difference

Pointing out the difference between binary black holes with equal masses and those with different masses, K.G. Arun of Chennai Mathematical Institute (CMI), says, "Dominant emission of gravitational waves happens at twice the orbital frequency of the binary... In this case, we find, for the first time, emission at a frequency that is three times the orbital frequency. This emission is negligible when binaries contain equal masses and when the orbit is face-on. GR has a unique prediction for the details of this emission which is verified by this observation."

Coronavirus spares no major organ in the body

Lungs are just the ground zero, and the virus spreads its lethal tentacles to multiple organs in some patients

R. PRASAD

As the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 crosses 2.7 million and that of deaths is fast approaching 192,000, physicians are beginning to realise that lungs are just the ground zero for the virus while the virus spreads its lethal tentacles to multiple organs – heart and blood vessels, kidneys, gut, and brain – not necessarily in one patient.

While about 80% of people infected with the virus either don't display any symptoms or only mild symptoms, the remaining need hospitalisation and about 5% need ICU care. Who would need hospitalisation and even ICU care depends on how decisively the body strikes down the virus soon after infection. If not beaten back in the initial stage of infection, the virus invades the lower respiratory tract

and enters the lungs, which very soon turns into a battle ground.

A feature published in the journal *Science* explains how the virus tears apart the body and attacks different organs with so far unseen ferocity. The virus enters the cells by binding to receptors found on certain cells called angiotensin-converting enzyme 2 (ACE2). The lining of the nose is rich in cells with this receptor and hence is the site of entry into the body. The receptors are found in cells found in many other organs, thus leaving them too vulnerable.

The lungs

The tiny air sacs in the lungs called the alveoli, where oxygen exchange between the lungs and blood vessels take place, are rich in ACE2 receptors. Once the virus enters these cells, the immune sys-

tem mounts an all out battle against the virus, disrupting the oxygen transfer and leaving the air sacs with fluid and dead cells, which makes breathing shallow and difficult and accompanied with coughing.

While some patients survive without further complications once provided with external oxygen support, some others deteriorate further, developing a condition called acute respiratory distress syndrome.

Oxygen levels drop sharply and breathing becomes harder. The lungs are by now riddled with fluid white blood cells, mucus, and the detritus of destroyed lung cells instead of air. Many patients end up on ventilators, and while some survive the rest either die or their condition worsens further.

Patients experiencing wor-

sening conditions typically have their immune system overreacting and bringing on a "cytokine storm", where the level of cytokines far exceed the levels needed resulting in healthy tissues being attacked. "Blood vessels leak, blood pressure drops, clots form, and catastrophic organ failure can ensue," the *Science* feature says.

Blood supply

Hear is one of the organs that gets affected after lungs. The disruption seems to extend to the blood itself, causing blood clots, which when breaks can restrict the blood supply to the brain causing stroke or artery supplying blood to the lungs causing pulmonary embolism.

Infection may also lead to blood vessel constriction, causing reduced blood supply to organs. "Some patients

have extremely low blood-oxygen levels and yet are not gasping for breath. The oxygen uptake is impeded by constricted blood vessels rather than by clogged alveoli," the report says. The virus attacking the blood vessels could be one reason why patients with blood pressure, diabetes are at higher risk.

Not at great risk

Surprisingly, asthmatics or patients with other respiratory diseases are not at great risk unlike those with vascular problems – diabetes, obesity, age, hypertension. Scientists are yet to understand exactly what causes damage to the heart and blood vessels.

Kidneys too are very vulnerable and experience in China shows that a sizeable fraction of patients may suffer from kidney failure. It could

be due to direct infection by the virus, cytokine storms reducing blood supply to the kidneys, or pre-existing diabetes causing fatal damage to kidneys.

A small subset (5%-10%) of patients suffer from neurological problems – seizure-like symptoms, strokes, loss of sense of smell and taste, and at times even depression of brain stem reflex, which is responsible for sensing oxygen starvation. In rare cases, the virus finds its way into the cerebrospinal fluid causing meningitis and encephalitis.

"No one knows when or how the virus might penetrate the brain. But one scientist speculates about a possible invasion route: through the nose, then upward and through the olfactory bulb – explaining reports of a loss of smell – which connects to the brain," the report says.



Immigration ban and the impact

Which categories are going to be affected the most by the new visa and green card norms imposed by U.S. President Donald Trump?

NARAYAN LAKSHMAN

The story so far: With the toll of the novel coronavirus on the American population spiralling rapidly, and political pressure increasing on the country's leader to take effective action to bring the pandemic under control, United States President Donald Trump announced on Monday, on Twitter, that he would be using an executive order to suspend legal immigration into the U.S. for 60 days. The White House has indicated that the time limit could be extended depending on conditions on the ground.

Why has Mr. Trump taken such a step?

The immediate context of his proposal is the teetering U.S. economy, which, like many others across the world, has ground to a virtual halt in the face of the pandemic. The deeper context to the announcement is the fact that Mr. Trump is seeking re-election in the November 2020 election against the presumptive Democratic nominee, former U.S. Vice-President Joe Biden. Proposals to restrict immigration served Mr. Trump's campaign well during the 2016 presidential election, particularly when they were situated in the context of protecting jobs for U.S. workers.

What does it mean for visa applicants?

The order is not expected to halt visa processing for many thousands of temporary employees, including a sizeable number of Indian nationals in the H-1B skilled worker category; agricultural workers classified under the H-2A visa; and seasonal workers, who fall into the H-2B category.

Second, according to the White House, the policy will also likely carve out exemptions for certain categories of essential workers, including those in health care and who have a critical role to play in fighting the pandemic.

Third, exemptions are also being made for those who seek to immigrate via their immediate relatives. This includes spouses and minor children of U.S. citizens applying for green cards, or permanent residency.

Also, those who have already been granted permanent residence will not be impacted by this executive order.

Fourth, members of the armed forces, those who are immigrating for law enforcement reasons and are already in the pipeline, and those on the EB-5 programme, which requires individuals to invest at least \$500,000 in U.S. real estate projects, will be considered.

Beyond these exemptions, there is a broader question of how many jobs that could potentially be taken by incoming immigrants will be saved for out-of-work U.S. workers. The number of unemployment claims filed since the pandemic started eating into the U.S. economy is now over 26 million. According to some analysts, out of the million-plus green cards that the U.S. issues annually, approximately 358,000 could possibly be impacted by the pause in immigration processing for the duration of the proclamation. The gap between these two figures is nothing short of gargantuan, and it begs a question of motive behind the executive order.

Could there be any impact on skilled workers from India?

On tourism, there is little concern at the present juncture given that India has stopped commercial flights owing to the risks of coronavirus spread. Numerous airlines across the world have also suspended operations and have cancelled flights across the board. Further, in many countries, quarantine procedures apply to international arrivals and this will dissuade many visitors from international travel. Finally, the U.S. State Department announced in March 2020 that it would be suspending all routine visa processing at its consulates and embassies abroad; this has not only dampened the pace of visa issuance but it has also slowed legal immigration considerably. As a comparator, more than 9.2 million visas were issued at U.S. diplomatic missions abroad last year.

When the worst phases of the pandemic have passed in the U.S. and India, there could be a resumption of air traffic and international visitors may have the option to travel to the U.S. once again. But presently, there is no visibility whatsoever on when such conditions might emerge.

So far as skilled workers seeking the H-1B visa are concerned, similar conditions apply. U.S. visa issuance in all countries, not only in India, has ground to a halt. This has left many H-1B visa-seekers in the lurch in India, and that could have an economically debilitating impact on the Indian IT and Information Technology Enabled Service (ITES) sectors. However, this derives more from the overall impact of the pandemic, and not from Mr. Trump's immigration ban.

How will it affect U.S. politics?

Given the minimal impact on net jobs saved for U.S. workers, there is a real question regarding whether the ban was conceived of as a genuine policy measure or whether it is a diversionary tactic to mask the Trump administration's failure to save more lives, and to bolster the President's sinking political standing.

If the latter case applies, then this executive action has already set the tenor of the upcoming U.S. presidential election. Immigration was a divisive issue in 2016. A Trump-driven encore for immigration issues in 2020 could well polarise American society further and lead to an acrimonious campaign season.

Why pathogens travel in search of a host

What is the link between the virus causing COVID-19 and bats, pangolins and other wild species? Why are zoonotic diseases on the rise?

RAMYA KANNAN

The story so far: Long before the virus causing COVID-19 vitiated normalcy, it split people across geopolitical lines over differing claims about how the vicious virus came to be in the first place. Claims were made of the virus being manufactured in laboratories and then shipped to nations to let loose on their populations. In a paper published on March 17, *Nature Medicine* busted the theory of a lab-cultured SARS-CoV-2. The paper, "The proximal origin of SARS-CoV-2", by Kristian G. Andersen, Andrew Rambaut, W. Ian Lipkin *et al.*, made it clear that this was a case of zoonoses. The "analyses clearly show that SARS-CoV-2 is not a laboratory construct or a purposefully manipulated virus". The paper further posited that the host of the virus was definitely an animal, and that the most variable part of the coronavirus genome in humans – the receptor-binding domain (RBD) in the spike protein – could have occurred in an animal host before the transfer to humans, or natural selection happened in humans after the zoonotic transfer.

What is zoonosis?

The first possible source heard of in relation to the COVID-19 epidemic was the wet market in Huanan, Wuhan, China. While subsequent studies cast doubts on the link, it is quite possible that an animal source was present at this location, the *Nature* paper argues.

Moreover, commenting on the fact that bats and pangolins might have spread the infection, the authors said: "Given the similarity of SARS-CoV-2 to bat SARS-CoV-like coronaviruses, it is likely that bats serve as reservoir hosts for its progenitor... Malayan pangolins illegally imported into Guangdong province, contain coronaviruses similar to SARS-CoV-2."

While agreeing that it was theoretically possible that SARS-CoV-2 acquired mutations in a petri dish, the *Nature* paper added that "the finding of SARS-CoV-like coronaviruses from pangolins with nearly identical RBDs, however, provides a much stronger and more parsimonious explanation of how SARS-CoV-2 acquired these via recombination or mutation". It also posited the possibility of a "progenitor of SARS-CoV-2 that jumped into humans, acquiring the genomic features through adaptation during undetected human-to-human transmission". The changes in the genome occurred as a part of the natural evolutionary process. "All SARS-CoV-2 genomes sequenced so far have the genomic features described... and are thus derived from a common ancestor that had them too."

The issue of pathogens crossing species to cause diseases is not a new concept. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 60% of all infectious diseases in humans are zoonotic, and about 75% of all emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic in nature.

Emerging pathogens are more likely to be viruses, than any other kind – bacteria, parasites, fungi – and are more likely to have a broad host range.

Why are human beings at risk?

The inevitable interaction between humans and livestock with wildlife exposes the human species to the risk of spillover of potential pathogens. For many zoonotic diseases or zoonoses, livestock serve as an epidemiological bridge between wildlife and human infections.

Among zoonoses that emerged or re-emerged recently, the UNEP counts Ebola, bird flu, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), Rift Valley fever, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), West Nile virus, Zika virus disease, and COVID-19.

What are the concerns around the AarogyaSetu app?

Why should there be more transparency on the inner workings of an app that seeks the personal details of millions?

P.J. GEORGE

The story so far: On April 2, the AarogyaSetu app – for pan-India use and available in 11 languages – was launched as the main contact tracing technology endorsed by the Central government. Developed by the National Informatics Centre under the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology, the app got its biggest push when Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged the nation to download it while announcing the extension of the national lockdown till May 3. Soon it became one of the most downloaded apps globally, and has crossed the 75 million mark. The app has now added on functionalities such as donating to the Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund, or PM CARES fund, and hosting e-passes for essential services providers.

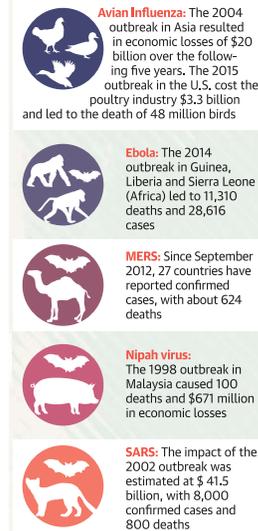
How does the app work?

It is designed to keep track of other AarogyaSetu users that a person came in contact with, and alert him or her if any of the contacts tests positive for COVID-19. It achieves this using the phone's Bluetooth and GPS capabilities. The app will keep a record of all other AarogyaSetu users that it detected nearby using Bluetooth, and also a GPS log of all the places that the device had been at 15-minute intervals. These records are stored on the phone till the time any user tests positive or declares symptoms of COVID-19 in a self-assessment survey in the app. In such cases, the records are uploaded to the servers.

According to the privacy policy of the app, it gives users a colour coding of green and yellow based on their self-assessment. The data of users who fall in the yellow category are uploaded to the server, while that of those in the green category – purportedly the lower risk group – is retained in the app.

While registering, the app collects a set of personal information such as name, sex, age, phone number, current location and travel history that is uploaded to government servers, which then generates a unique digital identity for that user. When the Bluetooths of two AarogyaSetu users sniff each other out, this unique digital identity is exchanged along with the time and location of the

PRIMARY TRANSMISSION/RESERVOIR SPECIES

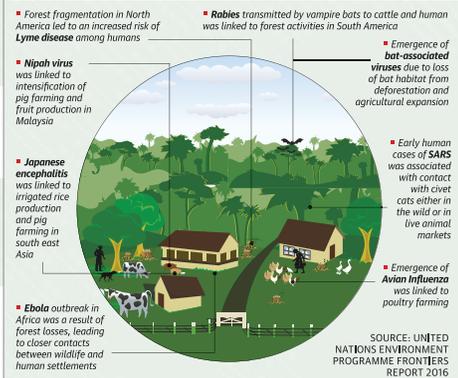


IMPACT OF ZOOONOTIC DISEASES

About 60% of all infectious diseases in humans are zoonotic, so are 75% of all emerging infectious diseases. The chart on the left describes the impact caused due to major zoonotic diseases and the species that carried them

- 1 Livestock often serve as an epidemiological bridge between wildlife and human infection
- 2 Zoonotic diseases are associated with environmental changes or ecological disturbances, such as agricultural intensification and human settlement, or encroachments into forests

PRIMARY DRIVERS OF EMERGENCE OF PAST ZOOONOTIC DISEASE EVENTS



The UNEP is also very clear that the drivers of zoonotic disease emergence are changes in the environment, usually as a result of human activities ranging from land use change; changes in animals or human hosts; and changes in pathogens, which are programmed to survive, and in the process exploit multiple hosts. For instance, bat-associated viruses emerged due to the loss of habitats, it argues. The Ebola outbreak in West Africa was reportedly the result of forest losses leading to closer contacts between wildlife and human settlements; the emergence of avian influenza was linked to intensive poultry farming; and the Nipah virus was linked to the intensification of pig farming and fruit production in Malaysia.

A presentation by the UNEP argues, "Ecosystem integrity underlines human health and development. Human-induced environmental changes modify wildlife population structure and reduce biodiversity, resulting in new environmental conditions that favour particular hosts, vectors, and/or pathogens." Consequently, preserving ecosystem integrity can actually help regulate diseases by supporting a diversity of species so that it is more difficult for one pathogen to spill over, amplify or dominate.

UNEP Executive Director Inger Andersen says: "Never before have so many opportunities existed for pathogens to pass from wild and domestic animals to people. Our continued erosion of wild spaces has brought us uncomfortably close to animals and plants that harbour diseases that can jump to humans."

Changes in weather patterns, and extreme weather events affect the distribution areas of disease, pathogens and pests. Also, changes in human behaviour, including travel, conflicts, migration, wildlife trade, urbanisation, and dietary and medical preferences, can result in disease emergence, according to researchers at the UNEP.

What about the plant kingdom?

It is not just animal-to-human transmission we need to worry about. Peter Beetham writes in the *Scientific American* (<https://bit.ly/3bj5h2d>) that we must be wary of transmission from the plant kingdom as well – "The current COVID-19 pandemic underscores how

unprepared we humans are in fighting zoonotic diseases: pathogens that originate in wildlife and jump to humans. Human immune systems are equally unprepared for drug-resistant diseases that jump from plants to humans. As we work to control and treat the current pandemic, we must simultaneously be thinking one step ahead – how we can avoid other pandemics in the future, without disrupting our food supply?"

In pristine ecosystems, all biological systems have an inherent capacity for both resilience and adaptation, but the current pace of change may be too fast for systems to adapt and achieve resilience, the UNEP argues. So what can be done? The UN agency pitches for 'One Health'.

What is 'One Health'?

According to the World Health Organization, 'One Health' is an approach to designing and implementing programmes, policies, legislation and research in which multiple sectors communicate and work together to achieve better public health outcomes.

The areas of work in which a 'One Health' approach is particularly relevant include food safety, the control of zoonoses, and combating antibiotic resistance (when bacteria change after being exposed to antibiotics and become more difficult to treat). The concept helps practitioners understand disease determinants, manage risks and optimise interventions.

Climate scientists argue and epidemiologists agree that 'One Health' is a key principle for the control of zoonotic diseases, antimicrobial resistance, food safety and vector-borne diseases.

What lies ahead?

It is clear is that it will be difficult to predict, with current tools, where the next outbreak will come from or when it will be. Growing evidence suggests that outbreaks or epidemic diseases may become more frequent as changes continue to have an impact on the ecosystem. But doing nothing will only let these pathogens flourish, jump hosts and make a terrible assault on humans. The UNEP calls for strong global stewardship of nature and bio-diversity. Additionally, developing sharper, reliable early warning systems (for diseases), and a 'One Health' approach may be the guides for the road ahead.



SOMASHEKAR G.R.N.

meeting. When an app user tests positive, all unique digital identities in his or her records get an alert on the risk they face and instructions on self-isolation and next steps.

Has it been effective?

The AarogyaSetu app faces the same issue as every other contact tracing technology that has come up during the pandemic period – it is people dependent. It needs widespread usage and self-reporting to be effective. Given that any number of total users will be a subset of smartphone owners in India, and there are bound to be variations in the levels of self-reporting, the efficacy is not bulletproof. The terms of use of the app also say as much, distancing the government from any failure on the part of the app in correctly identifying COVID-19 patients.

Jason Bay, the brain behind TraceTogether, a contact tracing app from Singapore which has been among the more successful ones, emphasised the point that "automated contact tracing is not a panacea". In a blog post, "Automated contact tracing is not a coronavirus panacea" (April 11, 2020 – <https://bit.ly/2y17nXU>), he said: "A human out-of-the-loop system will certainly yield better results than having no system at all, but where a competent human-in-the-loop system with sufficient capacity exists, we caution against an over-reliance on technology."

TraceTogether's developers worked closely and constantly with frontline health-care workers to make the app effective.

Are there privacy concerns?

Definitely. First of all, the app exists in the privacy law

vacuum that is India. With no legislation that spells out in detail how the online privacy of Indians is to be protected, AarogyaSetu users have little choice but to accept the privacy policy provided by the government. The policy goes into some detail on where and how long the data will be retained, but it leaves the language around who will have access to it vague. As per the policy, "persons carrying out medical and administrative interventions necessary in relation to COVID-19" will have access to the data. According to a working paper from the Internet Freedom Foundation, this "suggests interdepartmental exchanges of people's personal information" and is "more excessive than countries like Singapore and even Israel".

Beyond the legal loopholes, there are technical loopholes as well. The unique digital identity in AarogyaSetu is a static number, which increases the probability of identity breaches. A better approach would be constantly-changing digital identification keys like what Google and Apple deploy in their joint contact tracing technology.

The abundance of data collected is also potentially problematic. AarogyaSetu uses both Bluetooth and GPS reference points, which could be seen as an overkill. Other apps such as TraceTogether make do with Bluetooth.

Another issue that forums such as the Internet Freedom Foundation and the Software Freedom Law Center have raised is that the AarogyaSetu app is something of a black box. There is no documentation publicly available on the app. The advocacy groups argue that there should be more transparency on the inner workings of an app that is being promoted by the government and which is asking for the personal details of millions of citizens.

How is the Apple-Google project different?

The two technology giants that had till date balked at the idea of offering integrations with each other's operating systems, are now doing so, thanks to a global crisis. Android and iOS phones will be able to talk to each other via Bluetooth.

While they are currently offering it built into government health-care apps, this facility may soon be baked into operating systems. This may mean that different health-care apps will also be able to speak to one another using this channel, ensuring wider reach. While Google and Apple have emphasised that consent would be required for this feature to track you, privacy concerns prevail here too.

LIGO India

LIGO India is a planned advanced gravitational-wave observatory to be located in India as part of the worldwide network.

The LIGO project operates three gravitational-wave (GW) detectors. Two are at Hanford in the State of Washington, north-western USA, and one is at Livingston in Louisiana, south-eastern USA.

The LIGO-India project is an international collaboration between the LIGO Laboratory and three lead institutions in the LIGO-India consortium: Institute of Plasma Research, Gandhinagar; IUCAA, Pune; and Raja Ramanna Centre for Advanced Technology, Indore.

Significance of LIGO India Project:

Information extracted by these transmitted waves will help to address unsolved questions and mysteries of physics and astronomy.

It will help Indian scientific community to be a major player in the emerging research frontier of GW astronomy.

The high-end engineering requirements of the project (such as the world's largest ultra-high vacuum facility) will provide unprecedented opportunities for Indian industries in collaboration with academic research institutions.

Multidisciplinary nature of project would provide opportunity to bring together scientists and engineers from different fields like optics, lasers, gravitational physics, astronomy and astrophysics, cosmology, computational science, mathematics and various branches of engineering.

The cutting edge project in India can serve as a local focus to interest and inspire students and young scientists.

What are Gravitational waves

Gravitational waves are distortions or 'ripples' in the fabric of space-time caused by some of the most violent and energetic processes in the Universe.

They transport energy as gravitational radiation and pass through matter without interacting with it.

Gravitational waves were first predicted in 1916 by Albert Einstein on the basis of his Theory of General Relativity.

Strongest sources of gravitational waves are among enigmatic objects in our universe like black holes, supernova, neutron stars and Big Bang

Black Holes- A black hole is a place in space where gravity pulls so much that even light can not get out. The gravity is so strong because matter has been squeezed into a tiny space. This can happen when a star is dying.

Supernova- A supernova is the explosion of a star. It is the largest explosion that takes place in space. A supernova happens where there is a change in the core, or center, of a star. A change can occur in two different ways, with both resulting in a supernova.

Neutron stars-

Neutron stars comprise one of the possible evolutionary end-points of high mass stars.

Once the core of the star has completely burned to iron, energy production stops and the core rapidly collapses, squeezing electrons and protons together to form neutrons and neutrinos.

A star supported by neutron degeneracy pressure is known as a 'neutron star', which may be seen as a pulsar if its magnetic field is favourably aligned with its spin axis.

Big Bang- The Big Bang Theory is the leading explanation about how the universe began. At its simplest, it says the universe as we know it started with a small singularity, then inflated over the next 13.8 billion years to the cosmos that we know today.



Pallavi Aiyar is a journalist based in Tokyo

travel to India. His wife gave birth at a hospital in Thane district of Mumbai, which has been declared a red zone at a high risk for COVID-19 infections.

Meanwhile, in Saitama, an area that borders Tokyo, Oracle database engineer Amit Kumar Sharma paced the streets at night, in tears and unable to sleep. On medication for depression, Mr. Sharma is desperate to return home to his family in Noida.

software engineers or students whose job contracts or terms of study came to an end in March. All were booked to fly back home in late March or early April.

Mr. Jog had been in Japan for five and half years working as a postdoctoral fellow at a university when his research project wrapped up. Getting ready to return home to Ahmedabad, he discontinued his utilities, sold all his belongings and vacated

down was declared. He, too, had to vacate his apartment and is now staying at a Filipino friend's place. Mr. Sharma feels especially vulnerable since he has to visit the hospital for depression medication. "There are no more beds in Japan for sick people. My heartbeat is always racing. I am getting panic attacks," he said, weeping as he told his story over the phone.

Among the stranded, there are al-

ness of India's decision to close borders, a move he compares to demonetisation. He pointed out that other countries, including Japan, gave their citizens time to prepare before imposing emergency measures.

Mr. Vijayvargiya is currently staying at a Japanese client's home, an elderly lady who needs to visit the hospital weekly for dialysis. He is understandably apprehensive that she might contract the coronavirus



and expose him to it.

Astha Taneja, a 26-year-old from Faridabad, is similarly worried. Her contract as a translator with a company in Tokyo is up and she is staying with a friend while waiting for the borders to reopen. But she, too,

These were flying out of Japan empty and the stranded Indians were begging for arrangements to be made for them to hitch a ride on them.

But the Indian government policy has remained unchanged, with all citizens around the world being told to stay put. "Whenever I call them (the Indian Embassy in Tokyo), they keep telling us to just practice Surya namaskar and trust in God," said Mr. Sharma.

For BRICS, challenges and opportunities

A Russian think tank says the grouping can fill the void in global governance in the time of crisis

MOSCOW

The COVID-19 crisis seems to have put Russia's Presidency of BRICS (a grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) to the test. While each BRICS country is busy fighting the pandemic in its own way, Moscow is trying to make sure that it gains from the crisis.

The plans for 12th BRICS summit, scheduled for July 21-23 in St. Petersburg, are still on, although many believe it could be postponed or organised online. Speaking at a summit in Brasilia on November 14, 2019, Russian President Vladimir Putin said BRICS should pay special attention to expanding foreign policy coordination, primarily at the UN.

Many experts believe the CO-

VID-19 pandemic that highlighted a crisis of globalisation and global governance could help the Russian President convince his BRICS partners to overcome the lack of common vision, especially in the political domain, and lead the group towards filling the void of governance.

A report, "BRICS and the Rivalry Pandemic", released by Russian think-tank Valdai Club this week, notes that the question of considering BRICS as a global governance institution has now come to the fore. It argues that COVID-19 is another stage for political rivalry that has reinforced some international disputes and conflicts with the U.S. "ratcheting up its confrontational policy towards China and Russia". In this scenario, BRICS emerges as an important global governance institution.

"BRICS looks better than other



global governance institutions amidst the ongoing COVID crises. There is no blame-game or pointing fingers within BRICS, rather there is only a common vision for intensifying cooperation, including in sectors like healthcare, social welfare," Vik-

toria Panova, managing director of the National Committee for BRICS Research, said during an online conference with the report's authors organised by Valdai Club.

According to Dmitry Suslov, Deputy Director at the Centre for Comprehensive European and International Studies at the Higher School of Economics, Moscow, the pandemic has intensified the fight for global leadership and the tools used in this fight, such as economic sanctions and trade wars, would keep developing and improving.

He added that while G7, created during the Cold War, is today used by the leading Western powers to strengthen their position in the competition with non-West and to restore a rules-based international order, BRICS is based on entirely different values, and adheres to the goals and objectives of the UN Charter and the idea of equality.

The BRICS grouping is often criticised for being ineffective. Many, especially in the West, predicted that it

would not live long. But BRICS is very much alive, has progressed on developing a common position on the most important matters of the global economy and security and also got institutionalised with the setting up of the BRICS New Development Bank in 2015.

Slow progress

However, disagreements between its members and slow progress shown on the ground when it comes to implementation of initiatives make it quite vulnerable to criticism. This is exactly where the pandemic could help BRICS, experts believe.

So what can be done? "The pandemic has highlighted that the five countries need to pay more attention to speeding up the practical implementation of the projects and decisions that are being agreed on," said Pavel Knyazev, Deputy Director, Department of Foreign Policy Planning of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Mr. Knyazev added that work should be accelerated on esta-

blishing the BRICS Center for Research and Development of vaccines.

The decision to set it up was taken back in 2018 at the Johannesburg summit. Apart from that, BRICS countries are planning to work on an early warning mechanism for outbreaks of infection, the development of diagnostic and preventive measures for the disease, as well as joint epidemiological exercises while the New Development Bank would provide financial anti-crisis assistance to members to fight the pandemic.

The intentions are good, but money could be an issue, said Nandan Unnikrishnan from Observer Research Foundation (ORF), New Delhi. "There is going to be very serious lack of money as all the countries in the BRICS are going to be economically affected because of COVID," he said. "So at this juncture, BRICS should focus on what is achievable, making sure it uses the crises time to find a common vision, lack of which has always been one its weaknesses."

IN BRIEF



Archer 'going mad' after losing World Cup medal

LONDON
England fast bowler Jofra Archer said on Saturday he'd "gone mad" looking for his World Cup winner's medal after losing the prized piece of silverware while moving house. "I had it on a portrait. I moved flat and the picture is on the new wall but there's no medal. I know it should be in the house so I will keep eyes out for it but I've gone mad looking for it already," AFP

Sana Mir retires

KARACHI
Former Pakistan women's team captain Sana Mir on Saturday announced her retirement from international cricket, bringing down the curtains on a 15-year career. Sana, 34, played 226 internationals, including 137 as skipper from 2009 to 2017. The off-spinner is the country's leading ODI wicket-taker (151 scalps in 120 matches). Sana played 106 T20Is, a rare achievement. PTI



Carlsen in cruise mode; Caruana stops Firouzja

NEW DELHI
Carlsen missed wins in two games but still managed to beat Maxime Vachier-Lagrave 2.5-1.5 in the fourth round of \$250,000 Magnus Carlsen Invitational online chess tournament on Friday. In another match, Fabiano Caruana (in pic) stopped Alireza Firouzja 3-1. Carlsen retained his lead with 11 points. The results (fourth round): Magnus Carlsen (Nor) bt Maxime Vachier-Lagrave (Fra) 2.5-1.5; Fabiano Caruana (USA) bt Alireza Firouzja (FIDE) 3-1.

Is the BCCI financially COVID-proof?

The Board is on safe ground, thanks to IPL media rights and safety-first investment strategy

AMOL KARHADKAR
MUMBAI

Corporates all over the world have been feeling the pinch because of the COVID-19 outbreak. Sports federations are no exceptions – with live sport coming to a standstill, broadcast revenue has been severely hit.

While Cricket Australia (CA) is in financial trouble, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) – the richest cricket body in the world – is unlikely to be affected in the near future, even if it is forced to cancel the Indian Premier League's 2020 edition.

Insiders attribute the CA's difficulties – staff salaries have been cut by 80% – to "careless planning" since it has invested heavily in the equity market. On the other hand, the BCCI – being a registered society – has played it safe, resulting in financial security.

"We are not allowed to invest in equities," BCCI treasurer Arun Dhumal told *The Hindu*. "Moreover, the BCCI has always parked excess



Cash cow: IPL is perhaps the single biggest contributor to BCCI's coffers. FILE PHOTO: K.V.S. GIRI

funds [in instruments] with assured returns."

According to BCCI's 2017-18 balance sheet, its cash and bank balance, as on March 31, 2018, was ₹5,26,18 crore. Of this, ₹2,011.83 crore was in fixed deposits. Approximately ₹900 crore was kept aside in escrow accounts to deal with various arbitration proceedings.

Add to this the fact that the IPL's media rights have

skyrocketed since 2018, and it hints at the BCCI being well-placed to deal with the financial fallout of the pandemic.

Since 2018, Star India on average pays ₹3,270 crore annually for media rights. Besides, the BCCI earns approximately ₹700 crore in sponsorships (₹440 crore from title sponsor Vivo and ₹250-300 crore from associate sponsors). Even after distributing half of this revenue

equally to the eight franchises, the BCCI is left with an assured annual income of almost ₹2,000 crore, just from the IPL.

The Board also receives approximately ₹60 crore from Star India for every international home game.

As a result, if the IPL – albeit a curtailed edition – is held towards the end of the year and the BCCI's home season with 17 scheduled games proceeds unscathed,

Indian cricket is unlikely to suffer financially in the immediate future.

Still, Dhumal is cautious and admits it's too early to judge whether the BCCI is COVID-19-proof. "Obviously there will be some ramifications. We will have to wait till cricket resumes to assess the actual impact," he said.

Minimising impact

At the moment, though, it's unlikely that the BCCI will have to introduce pay cuts, either for its administrative staff or contracted players and coaches. However, the fact that the BCCI disburses 70% of its annual surplus among affiliates – read state associations – also means that if the Board's revenues are affected, it will have a big impact on domestic cricketers.

"Even in the worst-case scenario, the BCCI will try and protect the staff and cricketers' fraternity, and do its best to minimise the impact on our cricketers and administrative staff," Dhumal concluded.

Aussies mull exemptions for India's Oz visit

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MELBOURNE

The Australian government might make travel exemptions for the Indian team's tour Down Under later this year to save Cricket Australia (CA) from losing a staggering AUD 300 million.

India's four-Test tour in December-January could provide a relief to CA.

As of now, Australia's borders are closed till September 30 and there could be an extension of travel

sanctions.

According to a report in ESPNcricinfo, "International exemptions to allow an India touring party to arrive in Australia next summer would be seriously considered by the federal government in the event of wider travel bans, strongly suggesting that CA will be able to avoid losing up to AUD 300 million."

The report added that CA has received a positive response from its government.

West Indies 'flexible' over England tour

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON

Cricket West Indies has said it is "flexible" about rearranging its tour of England but will not risk the players' health just to complete a three-Test series.

The fixtures were all due to take place in June but Friday saw the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB)

extend the delay to the start of its season until July 1.

CWI chief executive Johnny Grave insisted player safety remained the priority.

Meanwhile, ECB chief executive Tom Harrison has confirmed receiving offers from Australia and New Zealand boards, helping them host their domestic games – county as well as List-A.

'We shall overcome the situation, together'

RAYAN ROZARIO
COIMBATORE

Chennai City FC stars Charles Anandraj and Sriram Boopathi urged the people across the country to stay indoors and help contain the spread of the virus.

Miss the game

"We miss playing the game and the most valuable asset of the game – the fans. I request all the fans and the Indian people to take care of their loved ones in this critical period," Anandraj stated in an AIFF media

team release.

"I urge everyone to obey the lockdown and help the front-line workers, who are directly fighting against the virus," he added.

Sriram voiced a similar view.

"Different situations demand unique solutions. But, the current situation demands that all of us stay at home for the wellness of ourselves and our loved ones."

"Together, we will overcome the situation and come out stronger."

Live cricket in Vanuatu!

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
PORT VILA (VANUATU)

Some overnight rain couldn't prevent Vanuatu from producing a rarity in these coronavirus times – a live sporting event.

The tropical island in the South Pacific was the only venue in the world hosting a competitive sports final on Saturday, as most international sports remains shuttered around the globe.

Vanuatu CA chief executive Shane Deitz invited anyone missing live action to tune in to a live stream.

And more than 3,000

did at various times during a men's 10-over exhibition match and the women's T20 final, won by Mele Bulls.

"It's one of the only live sports around the world at the moment. We can showcase a bit of cricket for everyone who is in lockdown," said Deitz.

Officials set up four cameras and commentary for the online stream on Vanuatu Cricket's FB site.

The commentators had a bit of fun too, suggesting that a few fans were getting rowdy as the red wine had kicked in!

Dingko Singh airlifted to Delhi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Boxer Dingko Singh was on Saturday airlifted from Imphal to the capital for his liver cancer treatment.

Dingko's transfer to Delhi by a SpiceJet air ambulance was facilitated by the BFI after he missed a scheduled radiation therapy session due to the national lockdown. The boxer was accompanied by his wife Ngan-gom Babai Devi.

BFI president Ajay Singh, who is also the chairman and managing director of SpiceJet, personally took the initiative to fly out Dingko.

"I am to happy share that



Special flight: Dingko Singh, with his wife and SpiceJet crew, after landing in New Delhi on Saturday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Dingko, our champion boxer, has reached Delhi and has been taken to hospital for further treatment. SpiceJet is honoured to have pro-

vided its air ambulance service to our national hero and fly him to Delhi for his treatment. We wish him a speedy recovery," said Ajay Singh.

War veteran tops U.K. music charts after record-breaking fund-raiser

Moore's cover of 'You'll Never Walk Alone' sold 82,000 units

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON

A 99-year-old British Second World War veteran who shot to fame raising millions for health workers fighting the coronavirus has become the oldest artist to reach No. 1 in the U.K. music charts.

Tom Moore's rendition of "You'll Never Walk Alone" – a much-loved and widely covered song from a 1945 musical – sold 82,000 units, the Press Association (PA) news agency said on Friday, beating Canadian artist The Weeknd's "Blinding Lights" in second place.

"It's out of this world, truly amazing!" Mr. Moore, a captain who served in India, said in his official Twitter account.

The single, which features Mr. Moore singing alongside



Tom Moore. AFP

war veteran", and his hope that Mr. Moore "can have a No. 1 for his 100th birthday."

"My grandchildren can't believe I am a chart topper!" said Mr. Moore, who turns 100 at the end of this month. Guinness World Records also announced that Mr. Moore has broken the record for raising the most money in an individual charity walk – more than £27 million.

He set out to raise just £1,000 for the Britain's National Health Service (NHS) by walking 100 laps of his 25-metre (82-foot) garden.

The final lap of his garden in Bedfordshire, south England, was met with a guard of honour from the Yorkshire Regiment and broadcast live on British TV on Thursday.

actor and singer Michael Ball and a choir from the state-run health service is also the fastest-selling single of 2020 so far, according to PA.

The race to the No.1 spot had been tight, Martin Talbot, chief executive of the Official Charts Company told PA, until The Weeknd tweeted his support on Thursday for the "incredible 99 yr. old

Peter Engel's interesting observations

The coach shares his experience on working with top Indian paddlers

K. KEERTHIVASAN
CHENNAI

Germany's Peter Engel made some interesting observations about top Indian paddlers and his interactions with them during his tenure as the foreign coach of the National team[s], during a video conference with SAI coaches on Saturday.

Engel, in charge of the senior National teams for the 2014 Commonwealth and Asian Games, shared his experiences on working with Manika Batra, Sharath Kamal and G. Sathiyhan.

When he saw Manika playing most of her strokes on

her backhand with a long pimple, he suggested she use her forehand to finish points.

"I told her that no rubber can solve your problem. You have to work on your forehand. Now if you see her, she is not playing with pimple anymore and is, in fact, hitting winners [using] on the normal rubber," said Engel, who had previously coached National teams from the Netherlands and Spain.

The German said Sharath became strong on his backhand after following his idea of the paddler using his left side more effectively so that he could finish points on his



Peter Engel. FILE PHOTO

stronger weapon – the forehand.

"When I first started with Sharath, I told him it was not enough to use only his forehand. Earlier, his backhand was 50-50 on the table. Now he is placing them preparing

for his forehand."

Sathiyhan, said the coach, was not finishing points and was content playing rallies.

"Earlier, when he had the chance to finish, he didn't. I told him 'you are playing chess on a big court. You should take your chances. Now, he is a smart player.'"

Inputs

The veteran, who has been involved in 11 Olympics, said: "Coaches should involve the advanced players in practice, ensuring they sync with their ideas. They should ask the players for their inputs as well."

IOC's \$25m aid packet

ASSOCIATED PRESS
LAUSSANE

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) is allocating more than \$25 million to cover extra athlete and team costs following the one-year postponement of the Tokyo Games.

The IOC said an extra \$15 million will go to a programme helping 1,600 athletes from 185 less well-funded countries prepare for the 2021 Games. More than \$10 million is available for national Olympic bodies to cover additional operational costs such as travel and accommodation for officials.

Donate a gift, get a smile: an initiative by Assam NGO

RAHUL KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI

A non-governmental organisation in western Assam's Bapeta has turned to humour to tackle the impact of the nationwide COVID-19 lockdown.

The initiative, says NGO Shubham, is for a cause – to collect funds to fight hunger – with donors getting a 'smile profile' in return.

Members of the organisation got in touch with cartoonist Nituparna Rajbongshi to take forward the idea to gift each donor a caricature of their profile picture.

And a few days ago, the 'Your photo can bring a smile' campaign was born. "Donors usually do not expect anything in return. But while encouraging people to donate for the needy and hungry people struggling



A caricature of a donor who supported the project to help the needy during the lockdown.

photograph via WhatsApp and an email to the organisation.

"We have received 98 photographs so far in our initiative to provide food for the needy people around," said Mr. Das.

The seven members of Shubham got together in 2010, concentrating on environmental education such as promoting natural colours for children to play with, organising science congress and camps on climate change issues.

"I liked the idea from the group that I have known to be serious about what they do and sniffed an opportunity to contribute the way I know best," said Mr. Rajbongshi.

"But a caricature that conveys the personality of a subject takes time."

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Magazine



WIDE ANGLE

With liquor shops closed and unaware of withdrawal treatments, alcohol dependent people struggle to cope **p6**



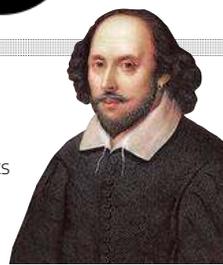
LITERARY REVIEW

What we have to think about, above all, is how to slow down, says author Amitav Ghosh **p4**



ART

To see the late artist Mehlii Gobhai's works is to enter a sphere of images that alter the way we relate to the world **p8**



QUIZ

On this day, 456 years ago, William Shakespeare was baptised. How much do you know about the Bard of Avon? **p7**



COVER

Sparking change

New route A Southern Railway train gets converted into an isolation ward at Chennai's Integral Coach Factory.

• B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

How the Indian Railways is working to repurpose its immense infrastructural framework to respond to COVID-19 **p3**

last week



Mind your language

The Indian government went into damage control mode as several Indians living and working in the U.A.E. landed in trouble for Islamophobic comments on social media. Meanwhile, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation issued a warning about the growing anti-Muslim prejudice in India. Prime Minister Modi responded by tweeting that "COVID-19 does not see race, religion..." etc., while India's ambassador to the U.A.E. warned expat Indians against hate speech.

Free or dead

Right-wing groups across 18 U.S. States organised demonstrations against stay-at-home orders, and many violated social distancing norms. While President Trump expressed his support for the protesters in a series of all-caps tweets saying "Liberate Michigan" etc., healthcare workers staged counter-protests. Meanwhile, in what was derided as a publicity stunt, the State of Missouri sued China in a U.S. Federal Court over its handling of COVID-19.



Green Goa

Goa became the country's first 'green' State as its seven positive COVID-19 cases tested negative. There have been no new cases since April 3. Of over 800 people tested in Goa, seven tested positive. "They will now be quarantined at a government facility and later at home," Chief Minister Pramod Sawant said. Goa was followed by Manipur, whose two patients also tested negative.



Entering Prez Estate

As many as 115 families at Rashtrapati Bhavan have gone into quarantine after a relative of one of the housekeeping staff tested positive for COVID-19. Hundreds of families live on the premises and work towards the upkeep of the rooms and gardens of the sprawling 330-acre estate. No employee of the President's secretariat has tested positive.



Another brick in the wall

U.S. President Donald Trump signed an executive order that bans immigration for 60 days, focusing on those seeking green cards to live and work permanently in the U.S., but with numerous exemptions. Framing the measure as a way to put unemployed Americans "first in line for jobs" and conserve medical resources, he said it could be extended later.



On trial

Oxford University began trials on humans for a COVID-19 vaccine it has been developing called ChAdOx1 nCoV-19, with 510 volunteers aged between 18 and 55 set to take part over the next couple of weeks. This is the fourth vaccine globally to reach the human trial stage, and production is being scaled up to vaccinate thousands of volunteers in later phases.



Mixed doubles

With the governing bodies of men's and women's tennis — ATP and WTA — working closely together to get through the pandemic and support players who depend on tournament income. Roger Federer called for the two bodies to merge and finally streamline the game's fractured governance. His suggestion drew support from players as well as ATP chairman Andrea Gaudenzi, who called it a "big opportunity".



Theron's donation

With reports of gender-based violence increasingly surfacing during the pandemic, Hollywood actor Charlize Theron launched a campaign to fight the troubling trend. "Together for Her", an initiative under the Charlize Theron Africa Outreach Project, in partnership with CARE and the Entertainment Industry Foundation, will donate half a million dollars towards domestic violence shelters and community-based programmes.



Ode to joy

Looking to spread cheer as well as information during the pandemic, Beninese singer-lyricist and UNICEF goodwill ambassador Angélique Kidjo re-recorded a 1967 hit single by the late Miriam Makeba, once called "the world's most defiantly joyful song". It's titled "Pata Pata" — Xhosa for 'touch touch' — but Kidjo's version, released globally by UNICEF, changed the lyrics to 'No Pata Pata'.



Slips below zero

U.S. oil prices fell below zero for the first time in history on April 20, with West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude dipping as far as -\$40.32 a barrel for deliveries in May, as traders reacted to excess supply and sold off futures before their contracts expired. WTI for June deliveries also suffered but recovered with a surge a couple of days later, while Brent crude for June fell to a 21-year low.

Adjutant's last stand

Chasing the stork by that name to Guwahati, one of the last havens of these birds in India

Soumitra Das

Sometimes, beautiful and ugly are two sides of the same coin. Victorian high fashion accessories came from one of the most "disgusting-looking animals" that wear a white collar ruff at the base of their necks which, along with their inflatable neck pouch, turn bright orange in the breeding season. Tippets, boas and victorians, the rage of France and England once and displayed at the Great Exhibition of 1851, were sourced from the adjutant stork, a byword for ugliness, that stalked the streets and rooftops of Calcutta till 1900. They disappeared thereafter. This endangered species were named for the "military" quality of their awkward stride.

The brand name of the ruff was Commercally, after Kumarkhali, an *upazila* in the Shilaidaha area, now in Bangladesh, where Tagore wrote some memorable verse. In Bengali, the adjutant stork is known as *hargila* – literally "bone swallower", a word used to describe a tall, gaunt person.

I saw the birds for the first time in old illustrations of Calcutta, their stomping grounds being Fort Wil-

liam, Government House (today's Raj Bhavan) and other landmarks of Dalhousie Square such as the Town Hall and Writers' Buildings. Silhouetted against the skyline like grotesque statues, they stood on the terraces of the Government House and Spence's Hotel, the city's first luxury hotel, winged around like pterodactyls.

Flying high

Sarah Amherst, daughter of Governor-General William Pitt Amherst (1823-1828), had left behind drawings of her Calcutta residence and comical pen pictures of these birds.

"They are so useful as scavengers that there is a fine for killing them," she writes. "However in the Fort where they abound, the young cadets play them sad tricks, such as throwing out a leg of mutton tied to a large stone, so that when the adjutant has gobbled it up, he finds himself anchored... and there is a story that to satisfy Lord Hastings' own eyes, a calf's leg with an iron shoe on the hoof was thrown out and immediately swallowed whole by an adjutant, they are so greedy..."

Sometimes, they exploded when they swallowed whole marrow bones stuffed with gunpowder by raw cadets.

Two adjutant storks with giant bills facing each other figure prominently in what was once the coat of arms of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation. The date of award of the coat of arms was 1896. The Latin words on it read: *Per ardua stabiliesto* ("Be firm through difficulties").

It is recently that I caught sight of the logo above one of the many entrances of the New Market (Stuart Hogg Market of yore), but a couple of years ago, I had heard from artist Sanat Kar that the Corporation's adjutant birds had survived on Alimuddin Street. Sure enough, the cast iron logos were there – double discs with the mirror-image storks in both – a simple but smart design.

In 2018, I had the good fortune of sighting the storks in Guwahati. I knew that Assam was one of the last havens of the adjutant stork in India. Luckily, the local guide, Prabin Kutum, was an enthusiastic young man, and when I told him I was interested in the birds, he drove me to a huge garbage dump which shares its boundaries with a freshwater lake named Dipor Bil, listed as a Ramsar site for conservation in November 2002.

It was close to sunset, and a distant railway bridge spanned the wa-

Battle for survival Adjutant storks at a huge garbage dump near the Dipor Bil lake in Guwahati. THE HINDU

ter body. Our jeep passed a couple of humongous sheds and, at last, we faced the garbage dump encircled by green hills. It emanated a deeply earthy, not unpleasant, odour. Cows grazed and flocks of snow-white cattle egrets flitted around. A couple of kites were trying to boss around. Then I noticed a huge bird flapping its wings as it soared on thermals. It had something distinctly Jurassic about its appearance, and what with the orange sac hanging from its obscene, like some avian yahoo that Jonathan Swift could have created.

Indeed, it was the greater adjutant stork and they thrived here, on the dump, on offal and carrion, performing their scavenger role. There was an entire colony of them and they stood about stock still, fluttered their wings, or raised their huge bills clattering them almost like castanets. In these dire times, I can't help but recall the storks and the Latin tag associated with them: *Per ardua stabiliesto*.

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Then I noticed a huge bird flapping its wings as it soared. It had something distinctly Jurassic about its appearance



Rejuvenating spring

Latha Menon

The yellow-coloured Indian laburnum, commonly known as golden shower, bloomed a week ago, brightening up the road I live on. There is also a profusion of the copper pod flowers like a tapestry of gold on the road. The *haldi* gulmohar, as it is also known as, was considered a good luck charm in your studies, if it fell on your textbook. The pink and white flowers of the rain trees are vying for attention in this burst of golden-flowered mornings in April. It suddenly dawned on me that Vishu, a festival in Kerala, marks the beginning of spring.

These past couple of weeks have seen you play out a part from *Groundhog Day* caught in a time warp, reliving the same day. I shake the thought off, dress for my morning walk. The time is 7.15 a.m. Zuma, our 18-month-old retriever is excited, happy, looking forward to setting out for his walk every morning. Our eight-year-old Messi, is excited too but will walk at his own pace.

They step on the *haldi* gulmohar flowers, with a spring in their step. In the U.S., U.K., Europe, Asia and many parts of the world, it is spring. A time of coming out of hibernation, opening the windows to inhale fresh air, gathering together in parks and beaches, celebrating this flowering time. Now all this in COVID-19 times seems distant.

"It would have been so pleasant now in Kent," said my younger daughter who is in her final year of college. She was forced to abruptly return home in Chennai. The deep orange flowers of the African tulip tree are distracting me, so does the frangipani trees.

In Buddhism, the frangipani flower is seen as a symbol of renewal, of new life. Well, new life is surely the sign around, of tender new leaves, of fresh foliage, letting the dried-up leaves and branches disappear. The birds are around now, silence can be heard, the air is breathing freely, happy that people have paused in their homes. I remember the lines of a William Blake poem, *Spring*: "Birds delight, Day and night, Nightingale, In the dale, Lark in sky, Merrily, Merrily, merrily to welcome in the year..."

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No gully game, it's grove cricket

It's how many in Kerala started playing

Hormis Tharakan

There is a great sports concept that can be nurtured in the context of Kerala and its unique landscape, a State that has derived its name from *keram*, a Malayalam word for coconut palm.

When we were growing up in our village, Olavipe, full of coconut groves and surrounded on three sides by the backwaters, my cousins and I played cricket and other games. However, the rest of the village did not play the gentleman's game, but was into football.

The chief reason was that coconut trees covered all the grounds. The playground adjacent to the only high school those days was reserved for football, which was far more popular all over Kerala. The remaining grounds had sandy, beach-like soil where not even a tennis ball, leave alone the red cherry, would bounce.

We played cricket among the coconut trees wherever the ground was firm and covered with buffalo grass, imagining the tall palms to be fielders who could stop a drive but would never take a catch. We used tennis balls or plain rubber balls and bats fashioned out of the wood of fallen palms. Sometimes, stumps were chiselled out of coconut trunks, but often, sticks broken off

from the neighbouring fences would suffice.

We enjoyed our game thoroughly, with our own improvised rules. Some of us became accomplished batsmen, bowlers and even all-rounders. Then we formed a regular team, armed ourselves with proper bat and ball and played a few matches on proper cricket grounds against college teams in Alleppey (now Alappuzha) and Changanassery, besides Swantons CC, a club team in Enakulam which, in later years, produced a Test cricketer in Sreesanth. We did not do too badly.

To the big arena

So it is possible to graduate from cricket played in coconut groves to cricket played in regular stadia. The exponential expansion of electronic media and the consequent increase in coverage of Test and One Day Cricket led to a spike in the popularity of cricket in our State. Kerala cricket has, by now, produced a few international cricketers and State teams do well in domestic competitions, even the Ranji Trophy.

But my feeling is that there would have been more success stories in cricket from Kerala had "cocoriccket", the game played in coconut groves, got more encouragement. In land-starved Kerala, it is not realistic to expect to be

able to discover and develop more cricket grounds. It is possible to lay down innovative rules for "cocoriccket" without following the diktats of the ICC and the BCCI.

Look at the natural advantages that "cocoriccket" will have in Kerala. Coconut trees are planted at a distance of 20 feet from each other, enough space to lay a pitch. Coconut cultivation and "cocoriccket" can coexist without any problem. Byproducts from the coconut tree or its parts can be used for making bats, stumps and balls. Matting can be made from coir, another byproduct of the coconut tree. Coir nets can be used for covering the ponds to stop a lustily hit ball from landing in the water. Balls made from rubber, another product of Kerala, can be used instead of cricket balls made of cork and leather. Thus various natural products of the State can be given a boost by promoting "cocoriccket". With players running across the length and breadth of the groves, weeds would wilt in the fields.

If Test matches attract meagre crowds as they do of late, we may consider converting some Test venues to coconut groves. Let the game go on!

(The author is former Secretary, RAW)

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The period drama on the idiot box

Television once brought together total strangers in a neighbourhood

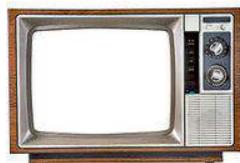
Alka Varma

In the mid-1960s, Doordarshan was the only television channel in India, with barely an hour of transmission a day. Our neighbour's son brought a TV set from the U.S. some time then, creating excitement not only in his family but in the entire neighbourhood.

We had only heard of the box which when switched on would open up a whole new world.

The family sat around the sofa and watched very animatedly the black-and-white visuals. Next evening, five of our children mustered up the courage and rang their door bell.

When the man of the house opened the door, we rushed in without saying a word and made ourselves comfortable on their carpet. He was kind enough to smile despite the fact that we were intruding into their privacy. We sat



watching till the end of the transmission. This then became our daily ritual. And what did we watch each day with such rapt attention – Krishi Darshan. We would watch experts conversing with farmers and villagers, explaining how to grow better and more crops. All through this, we would be glued to the screen in silence. It was the magic of the box.

In the following decades, TV was spreading its tentacles. I vividly re-

member a Sunday morning in 1987, returning to India after living abroad, we found the Delhi roads deserted when the Ramayana series was being telecast. Had never seen the idiot box grip people of all ages and classes.

Now, we have hundreds of channels at our fingertips. So much to choose from and yet we complain – nothing to watch while restlessly surfing channels.

With TV sets in every home, 24-hour transmission and Internet apps, some of us are glued to the screen. You rarely get a gentle knock at the door these days from your neighbour who wants to drop in and chat. I can't help but yearn for those days when TV brought together total strangers in a neighbourhood rather than make strangers out of neighbours.

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Greater Adjutant Storks

It is the world's most endangered of the stork species. Earlier it was distributed throughout northern and eastern India and many countries of south and south-east Asia, it is currently only in Assam and Bihar and a few other locations in Cambodia. It is listed as "Endangered" in IUCN Red list of threatened species.

It is locally called 'Hargila' in the Brahmaputra Valley in Assam, which harbours more than 80% of the global population of the species. It is considered family by women of Dadara and Pacharia villages in Assam's Kamrup district.

Families observed a unique ceremony of baby shower for the greater adjutant nesting in their neighbourhood. They build colonies on tall trees during their breeding season in winter.

A campaign was launched in Assam to save the birds by Aaranyak, a wildlife conservation organisation in 2009.

Assam's renowned environmentalist Purnima Devi Barman has won the prestigious Whitley Awards, also known as the Green Oscars, for her efforts in conserving greater adjutant storks in association with Aaranyak.

for the communal rhetoric and spread bizzare conspiracy theories, they'll be thankful for sops and blame fate, not leaders. The situation is not unlike domestic abuse, where the victim often resists fixing the problem. This isn't about victim-blaming. The idea is to end the cycle of abuse by recognising the roles of all participants. The otherwise thoughtful article elides over this point.

ANIL MENON

Unknown terror
The headline ("No new year's day to celebrate";

breadcrumbs"; Apr. 19) made us nostalgic, reminding us of how as children we too swarmed to the bakery across the street for hot buns.

RAO & RAJU

The 40 days
As Aakar Patel says ("Observe, detect, eliminate": April.19), Ibn Sina, or Avicenna, the Persian polymath and father of early modern medicine, was the first to use 40 days for sanitary isolation. *Al-ʿArb al-ʿImyā* in Arabic means "The 40". He introduced the concept to limit the spread of infections.

NAWAZ ISMAIL



More on the Web

thehindu.com/opinion/open-page

COVID-19 and the vulnerable

The lockdown has exacerbated the disadvantages of migrant workers and the urban homeless

CLEMENT AROCKIASAMY

How pandemics begin

There are certain striking common threads in each outbreak, with the most deadly ones being zoonotic

GOURI PASSI

A summer flavour

There was a time when the arrival of the palm fruit vendor was eagerly awaited in Bengaluru

STANLEY CARVALHO

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Ready to roll (Clockwise from left) Workers ready an isolation coach at a yard in Howrah; refitting a coach in Prayagraj; food and medicines being moved on board freight trains at Coimbatore; laying new linen on the spacious berths; hospital curtains and separate bathrooms; mosquito nets being fitted on windows of an isolation coach at ICF in Chennai.

• PTI & B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

LIFELINE

Reinventing the wheels

Passenger trains ground to a halt after the lockdown, but the massive Indian Railways infrastructure has been chugging away steadily

Ajeet Mahale

It was April 7, two weeks into the nationwide lockdown announced to combat COVID-19, and all roads were closed. Riku Singh was stuck in Guwahati, while his mother, who has stage four cancer, was in Udharbond in Cachar district, more than 300 km away. Singh was distraught because he could not find a way to get medicines to her urgently. In desperation, he tweeted at the Assam Health Minister and the Assam Police asking for help.

Meanwhile, post-lockdown, the Northeast Frontier Railway or NFR had set up a Swift and Efficient Transport of Utilities (SETU) team, whose members were scanning Twitter. They read Singh's tweet and contacted S. Umesh, the Area Manager at Badarpur railway junction in Assam. Umesh called NFR's Divisional Operations Manager, Kapinjal Kishore Sharma, in Guwahati, who picked up the medicines from Singh. The package was then put in a goods train and sent to Silchar, from where Singh's uncle picked it up and delivered it to the patient. "The railway people arrived like angels. I have no words to express my gratitude," says Singh.

When Sukhdev Mandar in Ludhiana urgently needed a particular drug from Nagpur for his immunity-related ailment, the Central Railway (CR) chief parcel supervisor at Nagpur agreed to trans-ship it via Itarsi in the absence of a direct train.

They don't normally do trans-shipment but, as Krishnath Patil, CR's senior divisional commercial manager, said, "These are extraordinary circumstances".

Indian Railways (IR), the world's fourth largest rail network, seems to be responding nimbly to the times. IR might have suspended all passenger trains on March 22, the first time in its history, but the country's lifeline has been far from idle. Apart from a myriad off-beat interventions like the ones above, it has been busy reinventing itself so that its massive infrastructure – spread across a staggering 64,000 km, over 7,000 stations, and with 12 lakh employees – can be honed into a valuable tool during the pandemic.

Coach to ward

"We were asked to come up with ideas to use our existing facilities in the fight against the novel coronavirus," says a senior official with the Railways. The Railway Board, the top decision-making body, started daily video conferences with officers across 16 zones.

One of the first ideas that came up was to convert coaches into quarantine or isolation wards, given the acute shortage of these. Soon, the idea became a key initiative for IR. By the end of March, the Railway Board had issued a set of guidelines in consultation with the Armed Forces Medical Services, the medical departments of zonal railways and Ayushman Bharat. Some 5,000 coaches had been repurposed as of April 10.

These isolation coaches have one toilet and one bathing room each, the middle berths have been removed, and windows fitted with mosquito nets. They have oxygen cylinders and fixtures for medical equipment. They have special COVID-19 features like taps with long handles and dustbins with foot pedals.

However, even if these coaches are pressed into service – as Rajesh Bajpai, Executive Director, Railway Board, says, "Our hope is the country never reaches a stage when these coaches have to be used" – the challenge will be to station them in spots where uninterrupted water and electricity supply is assured. Second, in the absence of airconditioning and specialised equipment, it might make more sense to use these as second-line quarantine rather than treatment facilities.

Hospital back-up

The next major initiative was to put to use IR's extensive health facilities, consisting of 586 health units, 45 sub-divisional hospitals, 56 divisional hospitals, eight production unit hospitals, and 16 zonal hospitals across the country. This vast network is now being readied for COVID-19 patients, with as many as 5,000



beds earmarked. In Mumbai, Jagjivan Ram Hospital, the zonal hospital of Western Railways, has become the only one to be converted into a COVID-19 hospital. Spokesperson Ravinder Bhakar said it was treating around 80 patients.

In the Northeast, NFR has modified 315 passenger coaches, with 2,500 isolation beds, and has earmarked another 170 beds as isolation beds across its hospitals. "These will be made available whenever required," says NFR's chief spokesperson, Subhanan Chanda.

While these measures were under way, the doctors in IR's hospitals pointed out the need for personal protective

equipment (PPE). Producing PPE is no mean feat: a special type of fabric has to be procured, a particular sewing machine is used for seamless stitching, and a special tape attached to prevent contamination. The final design adopted by the Railway Board was prepared by the Jagadhari Workshop, which sent its sample PPE to the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) for approval.

"Right now, we are aiming for just 1,000 PPEs a day. They will first be used by doctors working in COVID wards at railway hospitals. But as we ramp up production, we can provide it to other hospitals too," says a senior railway official.

NFR, meanwhile, has so far made 407 PPE coveralls, 2,500 litres of hand sanitizer and 76,000 reusable masks. In Tamil Nadu, the government is in touch with the Integral Coach Factory in Chennai and Goldenrock Workshop in Tiruchi for the bulk supply of healthcare consumables like steel cots and IV stands. The Hubballi Workshop is making contactless cubicles, while the Coach Rehabilitation Workshop in Bhopal has come up with a mobile cubicle that can be transported to remote areas.

The meal wagon

Most importantly, with roads blockaded and trucks abandoned by drivers, IR has had to play a crucial role in ensuring that the supply of foodgrains is not hit.

Not surprisingly, it more than doubled its numbers, moving 4.58 million tonnes of foodgrains from April 1 to April 22, compared to 1.82 million tonnes over the same period last year.

In an innovative move, two sets of long-distance, super-heavy, fast freight trains were introduced – Annapoorna Trains by Northern Railways and Jai Kisan Specials by South Central Railway. These services have taken advantage of the freed-up tracks to join two freight trains and run them as one, thus doubling capacity.

Normally, a freight train of 42 wagons carries around 2,600 tonnes of foodgrains. The special trains now carry 5,200 tonnes. As this goes to print, 55 Annapoorna trains and 8 Jai Kisan specials have been run, clocking a creditable average speed of 44 kmph.

Other quick decisions have also helped IR up its role. It has tweaked its regular routes, aggregated small parcels, and picked up unique cargo. It identified 65 parcel routes for essential goods and, until April 14, has run 507 such trains.

In Bhusaval in Maharashtra, for instance, trains transport onions but not bananas, which go by road. Post-lockdown, a parcel van of bananas was sent to Delhi. Now, following requests from fruit

In Mumbai, Jagjivan Ram Hospital, the zonal hospital of Western Railways, is being converted into the first COVID-19 hospital

traders, Central Railway plans to run several parcel trains for fruit. Similarly, Western Railway has dramatically increased milk loading at Palanpur in Gujarat to transport milk to Haryana and Delhi. From March 23 to April 20, 14 milk specials have run, carrying 9,903.20 tonnes of milk.

In the Northeast, NFR has moved more than 480 rakes of essentials and 25 parcel trains for the seven sister States. Assam's Barak Valley is one of the remotest corners of the area that NFR services, and Umesh and his team there ensure that supplies keep coming in.

For the first time, a goods terminal near Silchar was used for medicine parcel service – one for Barak Valley and the other for Tripura; then a milk rake came from Gujarat, supplying 50 wagonloads. The SETU helpline allows customers to call and place requests for bulk transport of essentials such as PPE, medicines and foods. Nationwide, IR has transported 1,150 tonnes of medical items.

IR is also providing cooked meals for the needy, tying up with local NGOs and groups for distribution. IRCTC, the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation, has set up kitchens across the country, starting at Mumbai Central.

At present, the Railways is providing meals to over 50,000 people a day nationwide, and efforts are on to increase this to 2.6 lakh meals per day wherever it is possible.

Fast forward

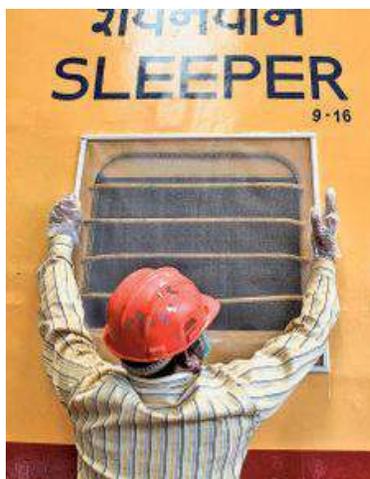
The challenge will be to see if IR can keep up the momentum after the lockdown is lifted. While it's always played a leading role in the transport of bulk commodities such as coal, iron ore and foodgrains, it could use the opportunity provided by the pandemic to dramatically revamp its freight business.

Its huge, trained workforce and extensive resources and networks could be used to create a new freight model if it has the foresight to do so. It could, for instance, tie up with road transport to offer seamless cargo movement, and incorporate sophisticated facilities to cover a wider range of goods, including perishables, medicines etc. The challenge will be to establish timetabled long-distance trains and assured delivery times even after passenger trains are back on track. And, most important, keep its rates competitive.

In other words, as much as the Railways has upped the ante to deliver during the pandemic, its real victory will be if it can emerge from the pandemic a smarter, sharper, and more efficient brand.

With inputs from Rahul Karmakar in Guwahati.

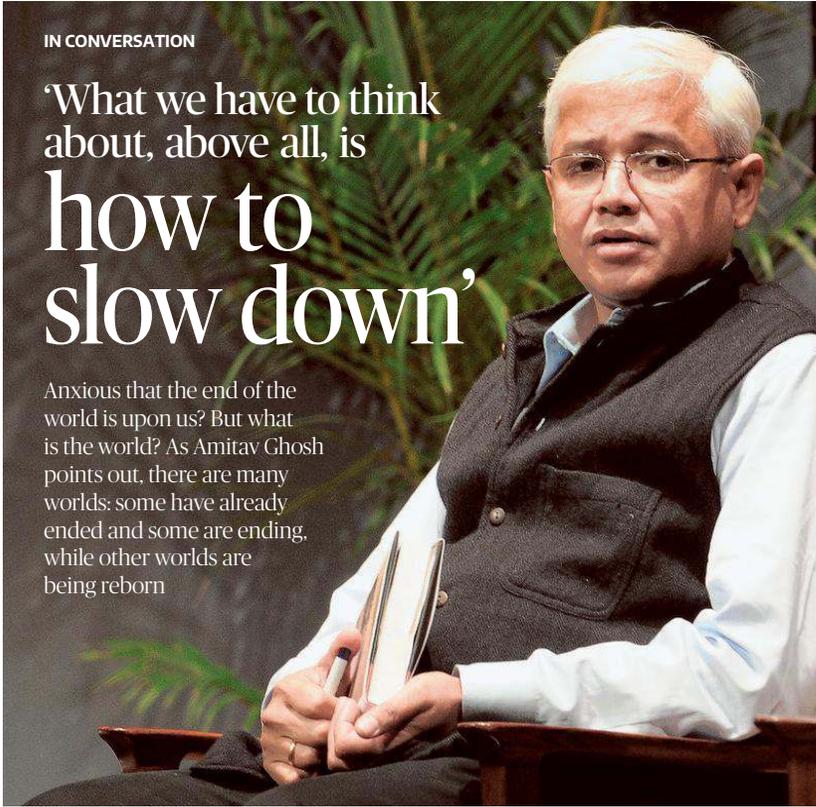
Western Railways has dramatically increased milk loading at Palanpur in Gujarat to transport milk to Haryana and Delhi. From March 23 to April 20, 14 milk specials have been run



IN CONVERSATION

'What we have to think about, above all, is how to slow down'

Anxious that the end of the world is upon us? But what is the world? As Amitav Ghosh points out, there are many worlds: some have already ended and some are ending, while other worlds are being reborn



• V.V. KRISHNAN

Zac O'Yeah

Brooding over the COVID-19 pandemic that has resulted in a global crisis of never-before-experienced proportions, I turned to my mentor, fellow author Amitav Ghosh, for advice and perspectives on the state of our planet.

When we chatted the other day, you predicted that "unfortunately I am sure things are going to get worse." In what ways do you foresee things getting any worse than this?

■ There are many ways the present situation could get much worse. Just imagine what would happen now if a major city were to be threatened by a cyclone or a wildfire (as was happening only a few months before the pandemic). In any case it is very clear now that the measures taken to

control the pandemic will cause a great deal of immiseration in many countries, India being just one of them. What will be the social response to the worsening conditions? We don't know at this point, but if we look back to the last great period of climate disruption – the so-called Little Ice Age of the long 17th century – we see a truly terrifying cycle of epidemic, famine, war, revolution and social breakdown.

Some would say that the world is more resilient now than it was then. But it could also be argued that the world is much more fragile now than it used to be, simply because of the incredible complexity of so many of our systems (the catastrophe inflicted on India's migrant workers is an example of this). It has been instructive also to see how food distribution systems have been affected by the novel coronavirus lockdown in many countries, including the U.S. The

global food system is fragile and my greatest fear right now is of a food crisis.

In much of your writings, you talk about the earth sending messages through disasters — already in *The Calcutta Chromosome* 25 years ago you hinted at the idea of malaria as some kind of entity with its own soul like a cult god. But how are we to interpret these messages: as angry threats or anguished prayers or stern guidance? They're certainly not polite requests, if we think of damaging floods, tsunamis, forest fires, etc. Or is the earth saying: You only have yourself to blame for behaving so stupidly, short-sightedly and egoistically?

■ One of the more positive aspects of the climate crisis is that it has

made it clear that the Earth is not an inert entity. No one has said this more clearly than James Lovelock, who (in collaboration with Lynn Margulis) propounded the Gaia hypothesis. Here are some sentences from an article of his called 'What is Gaia': "Long ago the Greeks... gave to the Earth the name Gaia or, for short, Ge. In those days science and theology were one and science, although less precise, had soul. As time passed this warm relationship faded and was replaced by the frigidity of schoolmen. The life sciences, no longer concerned with life, fell to classifying dead things and even to vivisection... Now at least there are signs of a change. Science becomes holistic again and rediscovers soul, and theology, moved by ecumenical forces, begins to realize that Gaia is not to be subdivided for academic convenience and that Ge is much more than a prefix."

Lovelock's ideas were for a long time criticised and mocked by scientists, not the least because of his choice of the name 'Gaia' – who was the Greek goddess of the Earth. But the reason he chose that name is that he couldn't find an equivalent concept in the modern technoscientific vocabulary; he had to go back to a personification of the Earth as a goddess.

That's certainly food for thought, but sometimes mankind is compared to a cancer on the planet, a bad virus. What do you think? Are we the virus from Gaia's point of view?

■ This implies that human history could have had one, and only one trajectory. I don't think that is true. Even 'capitalism' had many trajectories, some of which, like the so-called East Asian model, were much less resource-intensive than the Anglo-American model. Things could have been different if certain key chapters in our history had not worked out as they have: the conquest of the Americas; Britain's rise to global dominance in the 18th and 19th centuries; and, most of all, the near-universal adoption of the Washington Consensus after 1990.

We should not forget that no less than half of all the greenhouse gases that are now in the atmosphere, were put there in just the last 30 years. This period had been called the 'Great Acceleration', and it's a fitting name, I think, because all our crises are effects of this acceleration – climate breakdown, the migration crisis, and, of course, the novel coronavirus pandemic.

These crises are all cognate, although there is no direct causal link between them.

So, is everything wrong with the planet? Isn't there any glimmer of hope that you see?

■ Personally I think it's not productive to look at the state of our world through the frame of 'hope/despair'. We need to try to cope with the crises that are unfolding around us because it is our duty to do so, not because there is (or isn't) a magical solution.

Okay, but assuming that the end of the world might just be around the corner — when can we expect it to happen? Or has it already started and we are seeing it unfold before our eyes?

■ 'The world' is not the same for everyone. There are many worlds: some have already ended and some are ending, while other worlds are being reborn. It's often been pointed out that for many indigenous peoples the world they knew ended a long time ago. However, they have managed to survive and have drawn on their experiences to create new worlds. I think we have a lot to learn from them at this time.

When this lockdown began I felt something akin to the relief one feels when one falls sick with exhaustion after a long period of hyperactivity

Worlds also end and begin in small ways sometimes. For most of my life I lived in a certain kind of literary world, one that followed certain practices and methods. That world ended for me when I began to understand the reality of climate change. But that doesn't mean I stopped thinking or writing – quite the contrary. So you could say the passing of one world led to the birth of another.

That's extremely interesting. As for the present crisis you earlier told me: "I think we will all have to rethink our ways of life, our ideas of travel and so forth." How do you view each person's responsibility in this regard, to put this rethinking in concrete terms?

■ To begin with I think we need to recognise that the planetary crisis requires collective action. It has now been established that the idea that it could be addressed by individual lifestyle changes was thought up by an advertising firm, as a conscious strategy, so that fossil fuel companies would not be subjected to regulation. In that sense our most important responsibility, if we live in a democracy, is to bring pressure to bear upon our politicians.

At the same time, changing our lifestyles is important too, because it does, at the very least, foreground

important issues in our own minds and in the minds of others. Greta Thunberg's approach is exemplary, to my mind: at the same time that she has created a global political movement she has also made very important lifestyle changes.

Any suggestions you can share for people who might be wondering what they can do as individuals? For example, what rethinking are you doing?

■ To be honest, when this lockdown began I felt something akin to the relief one feels when one falls sick with exhaustion after a long period of hyperactivity. Suddenly it became clear that we were all caught, almost inadvertently, in a spiralling cycle of acceleration. And of course, it is this acceleration, on a global scale, that lies behind the pandemic. What we have to think about, above all, is how to slow down.

Slowing down indeed seems to be one of the best things to do now. Apart from your own books, are there other you would recommend for the current crisis?

■ One obvious reading is J.R. Macneil and Peter Engelke's *The Great Acceleration*.

Will it be enough if a large number of individuals rethink? In my experience, except for some environmentalist cliques, the majority of people are not rethinking. They will try to put the COVID-19 experience behind them as soon as they can.

■ I think, unfortunately, that you are right. What the history of epidemics shows is that while they are raging people imagine that they will rethink everything. But when they are over they go back quite quickly to their old ways.

Do you think intellectuals, artists, writers can play an important role in this situation? We're not exactly experts in saving the world... I mean, writers in general are not practical-minded. If you ask a writer to hammer a nail into a wall, it's likely both the writer's hand and the wall will get damaged...

■ I am always a little wary of the idea of writers, artists and intellectuals setting out to 'change the world'. We are, as you point out, not very practical people. But, on the other hand, the world cannot do without its dreamers.

Read the full interview online.

The interviewer and detective novelist based in Bengaluru is the author of the Majestic Trilogy.

REVIEW

White anger, crimson sky

These stories about political and ethnic conflicts in Assam leave a strong impact despite the spotty translations

Debapriya Basu

This book brings together 15 short stories from Assam, originally written in Assamese, Bodo or English, and edited by one of the foremost names in Assamese literature, Aruni Kashyap. As the title indicates, all the narratives address the realities of political agitation and ethnic conflict that has been Assam's share since colonial times.

Shadow of the gun

Curiously, however, the editor seems to assume that all readers will have an understanding of how and why the stories represent "what it means to live under the shadow of the gun". Apart from invoking the universality of human suffering, this book purportedly also wants to present such experiences through the lens of very specific cultures and communities of a particular region.

Strange, then, that not a single line of context is offered in the preface, none of the individual texts have headnotes, and no author biography possesses publication dates and

sources. This does leave one to flounder a bit. Since the colours of oppression and insurgency have shifted and coalesced in Assam in complex ways over time, some contextual information would have not only been helpful, it would have intensified the impact of these tales.

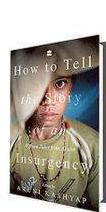
And the tales do leave a strong impact, in spite of the spottiness of the translations. Of the 15 stories, four were originally written in English, two in Bodo and the rest in Assamese. The most notable of the English narratives is 'Vigil' by Jahnabi Barua, exploring with understated intensity the mind of a mother torn in love for her sons, one of whom is a police officer, the other an insurgent. The Assamese stories almost uniformly choose straightforward nar-

These are strong stories, dealing with love, loss, politics, idealism and suffering seen almost exclusively through the eyes of women, children, and other outsiders of a given community

rative over stylistic experimentation and all the contributions use simple, even stock, situations to convey an affective message. These are strong stories, dealing with love, loss, politics (personal and organisational), idealism and suffering seen almost exclusively through the eyes of women, children, and other outsiders of a community.

Stuti Goswami's assured translation of Sanjib Pol Deka's 'What Lies over Here?' uses the motif of folk theatre to tie in the themes of communities in conflict, others explore political indoctrination meetings (Ratnottama Das Bikrom's 'Crimson' sic) or village burnings (Arun Kumar Nath's 'Koli-Puran').

'Crimson' (sic) is easily the most accomplished in the collection, supported by Mitali Goswami's luminous translation. A teenage boy and his "pekpeki" (chatterbox) sister come of age in the aftermath of unexpected violence. Teenage rivalry, idealism, menstruation and bloodshed are masterfully woven into the titular refrain: "[C]rimson sun, crimson blood, crimson western sky." Wordplay and world-play come together to produce



How to Tell the Story of an Insurgency
Edited by Aruni Kashyap
HarperCollins
₹399

a tale that's sensitively handled, insightful and moving.

A stylistically different piece is Juri Baruah's 'A Political Tale'. It is a meditation on the road as metaphor for life, spinning the conceit out into symbolic spaces of memory and experience. But the emotional force of a female political activist's interior monologue is hobbled by an awkward translation and inadequate footnotes.

Heat of outrage

What ties all the stories together is the white heat of outrage. These are deeply angry voices, one and all, not yet ready for laughter as resistance. The Assamese tales are all marked by earnestness; it is only in the two Bodo tales that we see sparks of satire.

In time, perhaps, anger will be able to perfectly turn the knife of sarcasm, and more stories like Nandeswar Daimari's superb Bodo non-fable 'A Hen that Doesn't know how to Hatch its own Eggs' will emerge.

Both Bodo tales use some black humour in offerings that are stark and pitiless in their refusal to comment. The careless translations (especially in the rendering of Katindra Swargiary's 'Hongla Pandit') cannot detract from the power of these deceptively simple tales.

At the end of the day, this is a book so important that one is tempted to overlook its uneven quality and shoddy presentation.

The reviewer is Assistant Professor, English, at IIT Guwahati.

Riven

A security guard keeps vigil at a relief camp in Narayanguri village in Baksa district of Assam in May 2014.

• RITU RAJ KONWAR

BROWSER

If I Had Your Face

Frances Cha
Ballantine Books
\$27.00

In contemporary Seoul, four young women make their way in a world defined by impossible standards of beauty, secret salons for wealthy men, strict social hierarchies and K-pop fan mania. In this hostile setting, their tentative friendships may turn out to be the only thing that saves them.



A Saint in Swindon

Alice Jolly
Fairlight Books
Price not mentioned

A stranger arrives in town and never leaves his room. He only demands books. Who is he? What is he reading? Speculations run rife. This funny and dystopian tale is about the importance of literature in an increasingly dark world.



Not That Kind of Guy

Andie J. Christopher
Berkley
\$8.45 (Kindle price)

State attorney Bridget Nolan is successful in all aspects of her life except romance, not that she has much time for it. Matt Kido, the legal intern, falls for her. They spend a rollicking time together in Las Vegas, but are quite ready to put it all behind them. Then everything changes.



Mad, Bad & Dangerous to Know

Samira Ahmed
Soho Teen
\$10.99 (Kindle price)

Told in alternating stories set 200 years apart, this novel is about two young women fighting to write their own narratives and escape the pressure of cultural expectations. Leila and Khayyam's lives intertwine, and as one woman's long-forgotten life is uncovered, another's is transformed.





Winding paths Mirra Alfassa (centre, standing) in Japan. • WIKI COMMONS

PROFILE

A celebration of faith amid the darkness

Pages from the life of Mirra Alfassa who arrived in Pondicherry in April 1920 and became famous as the Mother of the Aurobindo Ashram

Manoj Das

It matters little that there are thousands of beings plunged in the densest ignorance. He whom we saw yesterday is on earth; his presence is enough to prove that a day will come when darkness shall be transformed into light," Mirra Alfassa wrote in her diary dated March 30, 1914. She was a seeker from France who, guided by some inner conviction, had arrived at Pondicherry, then a French colony, to meet Sri Aurobindo. Subsequently renowned as the Mother, she was a spiritual child prodigy who, even before she learnt the alphabet, wondered if humanity was the highest the earth could evolve or if the mystery of evolution was yet to manifest something more sensible and perfect that would justify its experiment with species over millennia.

Mystic experience

She had gone through several phases of her quest, including delving deep into occultism through the help of probably the greatest practitioners of that lore, Max and Alma Theon of Algeria. She had several mystic experiences, but they were all to prove to be preparations for her meeting with Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo had said words that seem prescient today, "At present mankind is undergoing an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed the choice of his destiny: for a stage has been reached in certain directions an enormous development while in others it stands arrested and bewildered and can no longer find its way... man has created a system of civilisation which has become too great for his limited mental capacity and understanding and his still more limited spiritual and moral capacity to utilise and manage, a too dangerous servant of his blundering ego and its appetites. For no greater seeing mind, no intuitive soul of knowledge has yet come to his surface of consciousness which could make this basic fullness of life a condition for the free growth of something that exceeded it."

Yet Sri Aurobindo did not subscribe to the widely prevalent Indian notion of the world as an illusion. The process of life on the earth was not launched for it to be branded false or its latest product, man, to be an embodied paradox, a bizarre

amalgam of brutish instincts and splendid dreams, awful evils and great virtues, to be its apex.

The Mother realised that she was destined to collaborate in Sri Aurobindo's adventure of seeking consciousness. That was, however, not to be. As World War I broke out, she had to leave for Paris, but her pursuit continued. It may be especially relevant to recount an incident in her life in the context of the current pandemic. Circumstances led her to Japan towards the end of the war. Suddenly a terrible epidemic, then infamous as Spanish Flu, broke out, wiping out some 30 million lives and Japan too was ravaged. One day a postman travelled to a small village near Tokyo and found all the villagers dead and "the snow was their common shroud."

Circumstances led her to Japan towards the end of the war. Suddenly a terrible epidemic, then infamous as Spanish Flu, broke out, wiping out some 30 million lives

The Mother was in Tokyo. Exigency had obliged her to travel to the other end of the city. Looking at the masked and gloomy passengers in the tram car, she asked herself what could have caused the phenomenon. By the time she returned home, she had caught the flu. She isolated herself from everyone and even when a friendly doctor came rushing with a rare medicine, the only probable panacea then, she advised him to save someone else with it.

Sudden deaths

On the second day of her fever, the Mother saw a phantom in tattered military uniform, half his head blown off, entering her room. Pouncing upon her, the phantom tried to suck her life out. When unable to get rid of the menace with her normal strength, she took recourse to her occult power and only then could throw the being off.

She writes, "I understood that the illness originated from beings who had been thrown violently out of their bodies." They were normal human beings full of dreams but suddenly jolted out of their physical existence. "They didn't know that they had no body anymore and

tried to find in others the life force they could not find in themselves..."

Strangely, the epidemic stopped soon after. What emerges from the experience is that it is not crude material conditions alone but a subtle consort between all that is rotten behind the physical conditions and all that is rotten within our consciousness – violence, ill will, treachery, unabashed greed – that spawns such invisible vampires. This truth can be extended to every crisis today. In theory, we do not lack ethics or ideals in society. But it is something stubborn in our consciousness that corrupts everything. This can be transformed only by a tremendous spiritual intervention.

Birth of Auroville

The Mother returned to Pondicherry on April 24, 1920, to join Sri Aurobindo in this task of invoking that transforming power. With her arrival, 'children' or disciples began gathering around her – and they were from several continents, belonging to various faiths. The Mother taught them how to put into practice Sri Aurobindo's revelation that 'All life is yoga.' The Ashram took formal shape in 1926 and its activities expanded, with residents looking upon their mundane activities as a powerful means of sadhana or meditation.

After Sri Aurobindo's death on December 5, 1950, the Ashram ran under the Mother's guidance. She founded the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education in 1951, and in 1968 she launched the daring experiment that is Auroville, the City of Dawn, the city for a future 'that belongs to humanity as a whole.'

This daring dreamer, a supreme optimist, left the earth on November 17, 1973, after organising a worldwide celebration of Aurobindo's birth centenary on August 15, 1972. The best tribute that can be offered to her on the centenary of her arrival is to take note of a significant message she left behind: "The future of the earth depends on a change of consciousness... and the change is bound to come. But it is left to men to decide if they will collaborate for this change or if it will have to be enforced upon them by the power of crushing circumstances. So, wake up and collaborate."

Manoj Das is an author and Padma Bhushan awardee.

HISTORY

Questioning diverse identities

In the aftermath of the 1962 war, Chinese Indians became victims of hate

Anuradha Raman

When the final draft of the National Register of Citizens was released in July 2018, around four million people were left out in Assam. By December 2019, the Narendra Modi government had brought in the Citizenship Amendment Act to grant citizenship to religious minorities of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh facing persecution.

Indian Muslims saw it as a threat of disenfranchisement, as the government, wanting ostensibly to address the issue of migrants, excluded people on the basis of their faith. Protests swelled in the streets across the country against the CAA and a possible National Register of Citizens for all of India, and if people have moved indoors it's largely because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown.

In this context, *The Deoliwallahs* is a sad reminder of what happens to people who are trapped by decisions made by governments, and how it forces them to become victims of suspicion and hate.

Prisoners at home

In the aftermath of the 1962 Indo-China war, 3,000 Chinese-Indians, practitioners of small trade in leather, running restaurants, and other family businesses, who had made India their

home, suddenly faced the prospect of being interned in a disused World War II prisoner-of-war camp at Deoli, Rajasthan. The Defence of India Act, 1962 defined the 'enemy' as 'any person or country committing external aggression against India; any person belonging to a country committing such aggression.'

As authors Joy Ma and Dilip D'Souza write, there was more to come. "The Indian Government amended the Foreigners Act which essentially said that any person whose parents or grandparents were subjects/citizens of any country that India was at war with would be subject to certain consequences." And the Foreigners (Restricted Areas) Order was passed – declaring that foreigners could not enter restricted areas. All these executive and parliamentary actions together laid the ground for the incarceration of the Chinese Indians.

This is a moving account of how people were picked up from far-flung places in Shillong, Darjeeling, Tinsukia, and Kalimpong, forced to carry only the essentials with them, and made to undertake a week-long rail

journey to Deoli which was to mark the beginning of a five-year internment.

Along the way, many of them realised that the place they had called home no longer wanted them. They had been singled out as persons of hostile origin by virtue of their physical features. It did not matter to the police authorities that Hindi and English were the two languages spoken by the Chinese Indians. The camp was ill-prepared to meet the new detainees. Most of all, the camp officials were shocked to learn that the detainees could speak Hindi fluently. With just the bare minimum afforded to the Chinese, the lives they had known changed forever. After they were released, many left India for Canada.

The book's authors remind us that much like the Foreigners Act, the omission of Muslim refugees from the protection of the CAA will offer a legal structure to the government to target people who profess Islam.

The Deoliwallahs remind us that in a democratic India, often hailed as an exemplar of unity in diversity, this is a road best not taken. The most difficult hurdle for the detainees was the stigma of being in jail. They haven't been able to forget it.



The Deoliwallahs: The True Story of the 1962 Chinese-Indian Internment
Joy Ma, Dilip D'Souza
Pan Macmillan India
₹650

ECONOMICS

Gross domestic problem

An analysis of the past few decades, delves into India's economic constraints

Kandaswami Subramanian

T.C.A. Ranganathan spent four decades in the banking sector in senior positions and Srinivasa Raghavan had long and varied stints as an economist-cum-journalist with financial papers. Their treatise on the Indian economy over the past several decades sends several messages but falls short in some areas.

Their book, *All the Wrong Turns*, is divided into six sections each analysing a separate sector such as agriculture, manufacturing, and so forth. There is no interconnection between them except for manufacturing and international trade. Nor is there an over-arching economic philosophy for assessment. Indeed, there are obligatory references to China's growth and the Korean and Taiwanese miracles. Though the authors appreciate state intervention in those countries, they feel India's interventions are flawed.

Western influence

The writers argue that in India's efforts to promote development, the state took on a responsibility for which it was not equipped as it 'never had a history of either manufacturing or entrepreneurship.' The other is that, there was too much micromanagement and, beyond a stage, the state should have divested

its role. Yet another point is that India had inherited western institutions which were unsuited to serve its goals.

In the same tenor is the edict that India should 'stop paying heed to economists trained in the West and working here.' But if, as the authors claim, India did not have a manufacturing legacy, how did the indigenous private sector inherit that capacity?

In the section on agriculture, a rosy view of growth since Independence is presented, both in the aggregate and in sub-sectors. They explain that India has done well compared to other countries.

However, the writers underplay the phenomenon of agricultural distress, attributing it to other causes such as poor water management, absence of marketing, frequent changes in export quotas and lack of finance or credit.

The section on manufacturing covers a gamut of issues. They blame the poor performance of the private sector primarily on the shackles imposed under the Industrial Development Act and the Industrial Policy Resolution (IDR/IPR). They feel that if the private sector



All the Wrong Turns: Perspectives on the Indian Economy
T.C.A. Ranganathan, T.C.A. Srinivasa Raghavan
Westland
₹799

was 'left alone to their own devices...[they may] have performed even better...'

On international trade, the lament is India has not done as well as China, Korea and Taiwan. As the authors aver, the failure is in not 'focussing on governance and building blocks of modernity.'

The section on banking is rich with insightful analysis. It is not possible to take up all the issues in this brief review, but two valuable points they make deserve attention. One is that even as Basel compliance is strong for individual banks, it is low for the system as a whole and this has led to increasing bad loans. The other is that in India reliance on banks is heavy, while in other countries the reliance is more on the real economy and less on banks. This imbalance has to be redressed and it may not be easy to achieve it in the near future.

This book is a mixed bag, falling between two stools.

However, it deals with an array of economic issues, and offers ideas, some contrarian, others valuable.

The reviewer writes on economic and strategic issues.

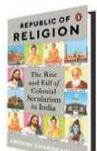
Akbar: The Great Mughal

Ira Mukhoty
Aleph
₹799
Abul Fath Jalal-ud-din Muhammad Akbar, the third Mughal emperor, is regarded as one of the greatest rulers in Indian history. In this biography, Mukhoty covers Akbar's life and times, his military genius, reverence towards all religions, and other acts of statesmanship and humanity.



Republic of Religion: The Rise and Fall of Colonial Secularism in India

Abhinav Chandrachud
Penguin Random House India
₹599
This volume argues that the secular structure of the colonial state was imposed by a colonial power on a conquered people of the subcontinent. It was an unnatural foreign imposition, one which was bound to come apart.



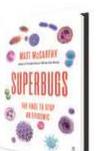
Employment in India

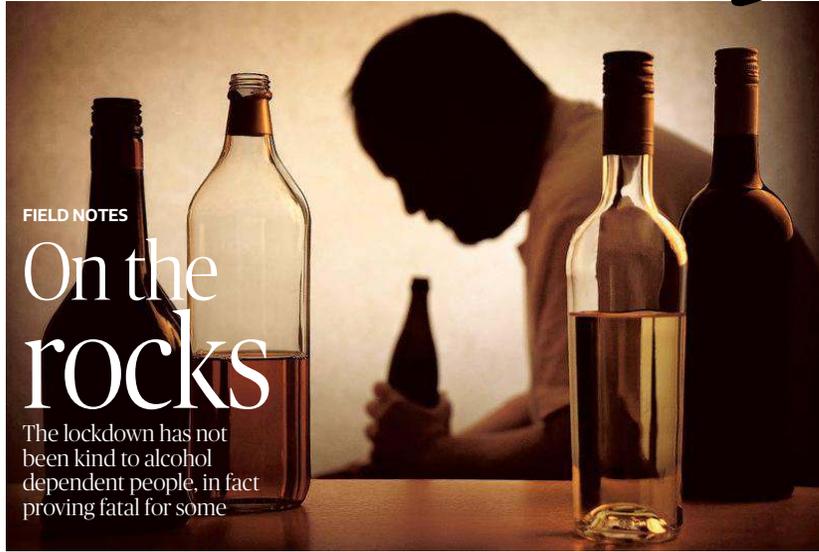
Ajit K. Ghose
Oxford University Press
₹345
Reviewing the evolution of employment conditions in India since Independence, this volume, in the OUP Short Introductions series, outlines the contours of the employment challenge that India faces and discusses viable ways of overcoming this hurdle.



Superbugs: The Race to Stop an Epidemic

Matt McCarthy
HarperCollins
₹599
A physician and researcher explores the history of bacteria and antibiotics, from Alexander Fleming's discovery of penicillin, to obscure sources of new medicines, bringing to light how the world arrived at this juncture of breakthrough and vulnerability.





FIELD NOTES

On the rocks

The lockdown has not been kind to alcohol dependent people, in fact proving fatal for some

Zubeda Hamid & Abhinaya Harigovind

It was March 28, Day 4 of the nationwide lockdown imposed in response to the novel coronavirus pandemic. Kerala government's 14405 Vimukthi de-addiction helpline saw a sudden spike in calls: from eight on March 24, they shot up to 201. One call was from the wife of a 42-year-old daily wage worker in Ernakulam. The man, who had an eight-year history of alcohol dependence, was huddled beneath his bed with his daughter who, he was convinced, was going to be attacked. There was no such danger, but he was hallucinating.

Around the same time, a 45-year-old man was brought in by his family to the Centre for Addiction Medicine at Bengaluru's National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS). The man, also with a history of alcohol use, had suffered three seizures, was dehydrated and comatose. He was one of 89 patients who came to the centre within a week of the lockdown, said Lekshanshukla, an assistant professor there. "This was a big jump; we ordinarily see two or three such cases a day," he said.

In Chennai, a week after the lockdown, Karthik (name changed on request) was brought to the Institute of Mental Health by his parents. He hadn't slept in five days and was hallucinating. "I believed a group of people had entered my house and were beating me up," the 31-year-old, who works as a driver with an app-based service, told us. "I couldn't tell the difference between reality and hallucination."

Tip of the iceberg

Each of these men was experiencing severe withdrawal symptoms, triggered by the sudden unavailability of alcohol after the lockdown, when all shops except groceries and pharmacies were shut down. Alcohol withdrawal symptoms can range from shivering, dehydration and sleeplessness to more acute conditions such as delirium, hallucinations, fever, vomiting and seizures.

Within a week of the lockdown, reports of deaths and suicides related to alcohol withdrawal began to rise. In Tamil Nadu, for instance, 10 deaths have been reported in this time, many of them caused because addicts consumed dangerous substances in lieu of alcohol – aftershave lotion, varnish, sanitiser, and

methyl alcohol. The last few decades have seen alcohol abuse grow into a major public health problem. As far back as 2009, a report in *The Lancet* found that more than half of all alcohol drinkers in India fall into the 'hazardous drinking' category. A 2018 report by WHO noted that about 2.6 lakh deaths in India each year can be directly or indirectly traced to excessive alcohol consumption.

The majority of alcohol drinkers across India are men, but the percentage in some States is higher than the national average of 29.2%, according to the National Family Health Survey 2015-16. In Tamil Nadu, it is 46.7%; in Kerala 37% and in Andhra Pradesh 34.9%.

What worries Dr. Shukla is the scant awareness about treatment, and the curtailed access to medical centres at this time when public transport is closed. "The people we are seeing with alcohol withdrawal is just the tip of the iceberg – we can assume that most people have not made it to a hospital and have suffered. Studies tell us that the mortality rate for people with severe withdrawals is over 15%."

Healthcare professionals are also worried about the impact on families: there has been a withdrawal-re-

In a bind (Clockwise from below) Murals depicting the ill-effects of alcohol addiction on the walls of the excise building in Thiruvananthapuram; a toddy shop in Ernakulam; representational image.

• S. MAHINSHA, H. VIBHU & GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK



lated spike in incidents of domestic violence, said Maya Varadarajan, managing trustee of TTK Hospital for Addiction, a Central government-designated Regional Resource and Training Centre. The hospital has been closed since the lockdown, but its counsellors are working from home, checking up on patients.

Serious distress

The treatment protocol for people suffering from alcohol withdrawal syndrome is to admit them, do blood investigations and brain imaging, check for fractures that could have occurred during falls, check for malnutrition and dehydration, and give intravenous benzodiazepines and high doses of vitamins.

On March 30, the Kerala government issued an order that said that

since a section of people were undergoing serious distress, some even attempting suicide, due to alcohol unavailability, a process should be initiated to make a limited amount of alcohol available to them. But doctors petitioned the Kerala High Court against the order. "The order to issue passes to obtain alcohol is a peculiar one and not scientific. Medicines and complete abstinence from alcohol are used to treat alcohol-withdrawal symptoms," said G.S. Vijayakrishnan, general secretary, Kerala Government Medical Officers Association. On April 2, a division bench of the Kerala High Court stayed the government order for three weeks.

Today, as part of Vimukthi, Kerala's anti-narcotics campaign, 14 de-addiction centres operate at district

or taluk hospitals across the State. Each centre has 10 beds now, and the process of expanding facilities by another 10-20 beds is under way in each district, according to D. Rajeev, Additional Excise Commissioner and CEO of the Vimukthi Mission.

Harm minimisation

Tamil Nadu's District Mental Health Programme, meanwhile, foreseeing a rise in alcohol withdrawal cases, has chalked out a set of guidelines for medical officers and district psychiatrists. The State-run Institute of Mental Health in Chennai is functioning round-the-clock, with a counselling helpline, in addition to the State health helpline. Diazepam, a drug used to treat alcohol withdrawal, is available at all Primary Health Centres, said IMH director P. Poorna Chandrika.

If alcohol dependent people today find themselves in such difficult straits, it's symptomatic of the state's contradictory approach to alcohol, which is both puritanical and pragmatic, said Soumitra Pathare, Director of the Centre for Mental Health Law and Policy in Pune. "Alcohol is seen as morally repugnant – but it is also a huge revenue generator for the state. What we need during lockdown is a harm minimisation approach, where people are given access to de-addiction treatment, but where people are also allowed to decide when they want to undergo treatment, because unplanned withdrawal can be life threatening," said Dr. Pathare.

With inputs from Divya Gandhi.

'If alcohol dependent people find themselves in difficult straits, it's symptomatic of the state's contradictory approach to alcohol, which is both puritanical and pragmatic'

GREEN HUMOUR BY ROHAN CHAKRAVARTY



ALLEGEDLY

Kattabomman colours an apple

I've never worked as hard in my whole life as I have during this lockdown

So how is the lockdown treating you? I have a simple, three-point formula that anybody can use to make sure they not only survive the lockdown but positively enjoy it: don't be poor, don't be a migrant worker, and don't be a member of a minority community. If you can manage this, everything will be fine. At least until you lose your job. As and when you lose your job, don't panic – apply to the IT cell, and you'll get a job that pays infinitely better than MGNREGA. As for me, I've never worked as

hard my whole life as I have during this lockdown. I'd never imagined that work-from-home would be so much more hectic than work-from-work. Not only have I been working in 18-19 hours a day, I've also been forced to learn new skills and new facts about everyday life – all thanks to Modiji.

Jhaadu-pocha-bartan routine
Apart from reading, writing, and forwarding propaganda on WhatsApp, now I also know how to comb a toddler's hair when the toddler is in continuous and irregular motion,

the strategic-tactical line on when to use Scotch-Brite and when to deploy the steel mesh, and to never EVER turn away, even for one second, when milk is on the stove – it will always, ALWAYS stab you in the back.

In our home, three individuals – all women, of course – do the heavy-lifting when it comes to domestic work: cook, cleaner, nanny. In their lockdown-induced absence, the wife's MHA advisory – in complete disregard of the patriarchal settings that come factory-fitted with every entitled Indian male – has divided the household and care work equally between herself and myself. Out of consideration for me, she has assigned to herself the tougher 50% – all the managerial stuff that is high value and therefore full of tension. These include planning the day's schedule, issuing precise instructions, monitoring me for timely compliance and quality control, etc. I get the 50% that is less stressful because it is merely physical labour, and rather easy to do so long as you know your Lizol from your Colin from your Harpic.

Just chill

So the lockdown for me has been a non-stop, confused blur of jobs: jhaadu-pocha, bartan-cooking, reading-writing, pot-banging-potty-cleaning, hand-washing-candle-lighting, milk-feeding-copy-editing, tear-wiping-fairytale-telling, arguing-mask-wearing, handwashing-and-praying.

The easiest – because you've been doing it all your life – is your work-life. The household chores – mopping, cleaning, etc – I don't mind so much because they leave me mentally free to contemplate the planet's post-human future. The toughest is shepherding Kattabomman from morning to midnight. I dread his daily official meetings. Since April 1, the first day of his school life, I've been waking up earlier than I ever have to set up his school calls with his nursery teacher. I undertake extensive online research to prep for his 'learning activity', and still manage to bungle it every time.

Last Friday's 'activity', for instance, was a typical disaster, with potentially calamitous side effects on marital concord. On an A4 sheet of paper, I'd drawn an outline of an apple, as I was supposed to. Katta-

bomman somehow turned it into a pink heart with green whiskers. The pink heart also sported thick yellow hair in the style of Cher. For some reason, it also had purple eyes, a sad purple mouth, and a limp, purple tail.

"What the hell is this?" the wife asked, from over our (mine and Kattabomman's) shoulders.

"Eh...I was just asking myself the same question," I said.

"Where is the apple cut-out I gave you?"

"You were wrong about the apple cut-out," I said. "You..."

"God, I don't have time for this," she said, rolling her eyes like Cersei Lannister.

"Just chill," I said. "It's just a stupid activity for three-year-olds."

"You had one job," she said. "To paste the apple cut-out on the bloody page."

"You were supposed to give me an apple outline, not an apple cut-out," I said.

"Is there a difference between an outline and a cut-out?"

"There is. If you check the Oxford English Dictionary..."

"Forget it. The app says cut-out."

"The noodle app?"

"It's noodle, not noodle," she said.

"The app is wrong about the apple activity."

"A-for-apple," said Kattabomman.

"Ok I'm done!" she said, throwing her hands up in a dramatic but hackneyed gesture of mock surrender. "From tomorrow, you and your son manage on your own. I'm out of it!"

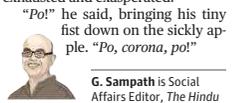
"Let me remind you," I began, "That we agreed to split all suffering 50-50." But she'd already stomped out.

I stared at Kattabomman. He stared at me. We both stared at the botched monstrosity that was meant to be a 'learning activity' for the letter A. It required him to colour inside the outline of an apple while chanting the slogan, 'A-for-Apple'.

He was still at it, painstakingly applying the final touches to what seemed like an apple displaying severe symptoms of COVID-19.

"Dei, emnada idhu?" I asked him, exhausted and exasperated.

"Po!" he said, bringing his tiny fist down on the sickly apple. "Po, corona, po!"



G. Sampath is Social Affairs Editor, The Hindu

PEACE IN A POD

The writing's on the page

Do you enjoy listening to how someone found their groove?

Usha Raman

When Aditi Surana was 14 years old, a handwriting coach pointed out that she had spent the better part of an hour carefully drawing a string of zeroes on the page. Instead of feeling apologetic or embarrassed, Surana looked at the writing carefully and found that there was definitely a pattern there. And patterns usually say something – or can be decanted for meaning.

Graphology seems a rather odd gateway to a podcast, but what Aditi Surana has done is combine her longstanding passion for handwriting analysis with her skills as a high-performance coach to create the context for conversation.

In each episode of IVM's new podcast series, *Absolutely Write*, Surana engages with a guest to unpack their personal journey while she peers into their handwriting for clues to their personality. The conversations are open-ended and somewhat winding, peppered with friendly banter and some serious reflective pauses.

"Complicated conversations actually offer insights to the passive listener," says Surana, explaining what she hopes to achieve with her podcast. "Just listening to someone talk about their journey in a non-judgmental space can create clarity."

Surprises, anyone?

Guests on the show so far have been IVM insiders, hosts of other podcasts, and hence there is a level of comfort and familiarity that comes through. This is also the limitation, precluding any real surprises for either the host or – by extension – the listener.

Surana is quick to note that this is by design, as the team wanted to include guests who "were



Clearly, having a seasoned podcaster as a guest helps smooth awkward pauses, though tell-tale nervous laughter does punctuate some of the early shows

Podcast episodes toggle between interviews with these selected guests and shorter pieces launched every Friday where Surana focuses on "a topic that is essential to your personal growth." These deal with such themes as our relationship with money, building – and breaking – habits, and finding flow (recalling Eckhart Tolle), speaking, clearly, to an audience that enjoys self-help as a genre.

Achievers in conversation

If you are among those who enjoy listening to how someone found their groove, I'd like to recommend another show that recently came to my attention. Former NPR journalist and U.S.-based leadership coach Chitra Ragavan's *When It Mattered* engages achievers in conversation around their professional journeys – and the personal moments that propelled them to success or brought them back from the brink of failure.

Started in July 2019, the podcast has had guests including former FBI Director James Comey and physician-astronaut Shawna Pandya.

Ragavan's long experience with radio and her training as a journalist comes through in her audio style, the research that informs the interviews, and the expert way in which she guides the conversation to yielding those decisive moments.

The Hyderabad-based writer and academic is a neatnik fighting a losing battle with the clutter in her head.

comfortable with the medium." To her credit, Surana is able to bring in a measure of the unexpected when she unravels the dots and crosses in the writing samples from her guests.

Trait and reason

Speaking with her first guest Anupam Gupta, host of the business podcast *Paisa Vaisa*, she points to his habits of close observation and attention to process as a basis for decision making, expressed in parenting styles as much as in advising on stock market moves.

Rather than becoming caught up with the handwriting itself, Surana then pulls back to ask Gupta on how he applies this trait to his work as a financial analyst. This is where, potentially, the learning for the listener takes place. Clearly, having a seasoned podcaster as a guest helps smooth awkward pauses, though tell-tale nervous laughter does punctuate some of the early shows.

GOREN BRIDGE

NORTH
 ♠ A J 4 3
 ♥ K 8
 ♦ A 9 2
 ♣ A K 9 6

WEST
 ♠ 10 9 8 6
 ♥ 3
 ♦ K J 10 6 5
 ♣ J 5 3

EAST
 ♠ 7 5 2
 ♥ Q J 9 6 4
 ♦ 7 4
 ♣ 8 4 2

SOUTH
 ♠ K Q
 ♥ A 10 7 5 2
 ♦ Q 8 3
 ♣ Q 10 7

The bidding:
 SOUTH Pass
 WEST Pass
 NORTH 1♠
 EAST All pass

Opening lead: 10 of ♠

Argentina!

North-South vulnerable, South deals

Bob Jones

Today's deal is from an important tournament held recently in Argentina. Most pairs reached six no trump and failed, due to the foul heart split and the unlucky location of the king of diamonds. One declarer, Argentine expert Monica Angelieri, brought it home.

Angelieri won the opening spade lead in hand with the king. She led a heart to dummy's king and a heart to the jack and ace as West shed a dia-

NORTH
 ♠ Void
 ♥ Void
 ♦ A 9 2
 ♣ Void

WEST
 ♠ Void
 ♥ Void
 ♦ K J 10
 ♣ Void

EAST
 ♠ Void
 ♥ J 4
 ♦ 7 4
 ♣ Void

SOUTH
 ♠ Void
 ♥ Void
 ♦ Q 8 3
 ♣ Void



mond. She cashed three more spade tricks and four club tricks, thanks to the fall of the jack, to reach this three-card ending with the lead in dummy; (grid 2)

She knew that West had started with five diamonds, and she had to play her for the king, as East could just cash a heart if she had that card. She led a low diamond to her eight, putting West on lead with the 10. West had to lead away from her king of diamonds and Angelieri had her slam. Beautifully played!

QUIZ

Easy like Sunday morning

'All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players'

Berty Ashley

1 On April 26, 1564, William Shakespeare was baptised in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, England. We know his date of birth from the Baptism records. He is credited for introducing more than 3,000 words to the English language. Under the patronage of which monarch did he do most of his work and consequently under which era does he come?

2 Between June 1592 and March 1594, a disease ravaged London leading to 11,000 deaths in a population of just 2,50,000. So a lockdown was ordered (just like now) and this led to a huge loss for the London entertainment industry. Since there was no demand for plays, Shakespeare started writing poetry and began his famous poems of 14 lines. What was the deadly disease that brought about the two-year lock-

down and what group of poems was the result?

3 Shakespeare wrote 39 plays in total and they all can be classified under three broad categories. The first category were meant to be biographies of kings, the second were plays full of fun, irony, wordplay, with contrived endings. The last followed a noble, flawed hero who made a mistake and fell from position before the normal order was somehow resumed. What were the categories?

4 This word which means 'to strut in a defiant or insolent manner' was first seen in 1590 in *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *King Lear*. The noun version of this, that millennials use today to denote stylish confidence, can be traced back to 1640. What word is this?

5 Shakespeare was also an actor who performed many of his own plays and those of other playwrights. One of the characters that we believe he played was that of a spirit of the titular character's father that ap-

pears three times at night in the play. Which play was this that was also the name of the spirit?

6 Shakespeare had become a famous playwright in London but in his hometown of Stratford he was well known and respected for his other job. This job made him very wealthy and he was regarded as a brilliant businessman as he made excellent investments. What was his other job which is fitting, as now his house and the theatre he performed are all of prime value?

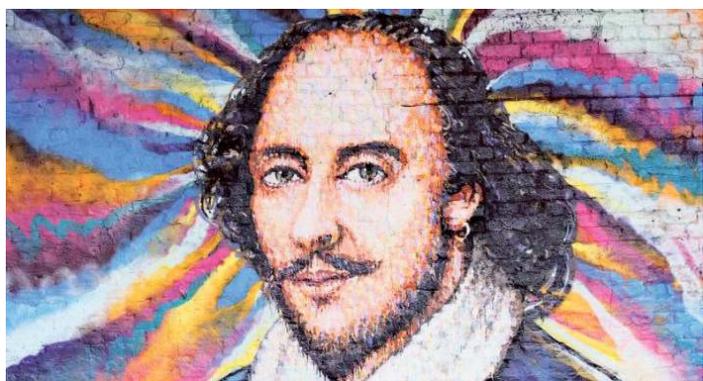
7 This planet has 27 moons and 24 of them are named after characters from the plays of Shakespeare. When the first two moons were discovered the responsibility for naming them was taken by John Herschel, son of the discoverer. Instead of assigning names from Greek mythology he named the moons Oberon and Titania from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the International Astronomic Union decided to carry on the tradition. Which planet is this, whose largest moon Titania is also a character from the same play?

8 Eugene Schuffelin wanted to introduce in his hometown all the birds mentioned in the plays of William Shakespeare. In *Henry IV Part I*, Hotspur fantasises about teaching a starling to say 'Mortimer', so this person introduced 100 of these European birds in 1890 in a huge park. These now number more than 200 million and are a major pest as they destroy crops. Which continent is this that sees immense loss to agriculture due to Shakespeare?

9 Shakespeare and his father went to the College of Arms to secure their own Shakespeare family crest. The design which is in use till today was a yellow weapon on a yellow shield supported by a silver falcon, with the French inscription *Non Sans Droict* (Not Without Right). What weapon is fittingly on the Shakespeare family crest?

10 The first vocal critic of Shakespeare in his time was Robert Greene who, in 1592, wrote that Shakespeare was an 'upstart', being used with our feathers'. He was using a bird from the Corvid family to refer to Shakespeare as an actor who had the temerity to write plays and takes him to task for excessive pride. This term is also the name of a brilliant comedy show on BBC starring the amazing David Mitchell as Shakespeare. What did Robert Greene refer to Shakespeare as?

A molecular biologist from Madurai, our quizmaster enjoys trivia and music, and is working on a rock ballad called 'Coffee is a Drink, Kaapi is an Emotion'. @bertyashley



Street-smart A mural of William Shakespeare. • FLICKR

LETTER FROM A CONCERNED READER

Fully cowfeffe only

Respected Madam/ Sir,

How is the quarantine news? Whether everything is ok in the esteemed newspaper? One day rumour is coming that one newspaper is terminating employees. Next day rumour is coming that one TV channel is terminating employees. Everyday rumours only. Kali Yuga. What else one can say?

Before Corona days, I used to think oho, it will be so nice to work in office. Full computer and AC and all. Decades ago, during probation time, maybe I have told this story. Bank of India branch used to be next to one cowshed. Smell is very bad. But after two-three weeks, brain is adjusting for smell. But we are noticing one thing, deposit slip is being used like anything. Every day, one or two slip books are disappearing. During morning meeting manager said, "Hello, what nonsense. Whole day seven customers are coming. But evening 70 slips are missing."

Mrs. Chacko, is it you? Mrs. Chacko face is turning red. She said, "Sir,

just because by mistake one person tried to take new ceiling fan from the branch to one person's house means every time one person will be treated like Charles Sobhraj?"

Then two-three days later, when we are returning from lunch break, mystery is solved. Everyday lunch time we are locking branch but leaving window open so that post or messages can be put inside. But what is actually happening? Madam/ Sir, nearby cow is coming, putting head into the window and eating all paper items. When we came back, she is casually enjoying deposit slip as if ras malai. We laughed and laughed like anything but whether head office will believe? Never. They said if you want new deposit slip book, please ask cow owner. Whether we are Bank of India or Gold Mohur Cattle Feed Company?

But these days any cows coming inside office? Zero. Full AC and kitchen and sofa set and all. That's why I sometimes think what enjoyment it will be to work in modern office.

But after Corona, no need. At least those days stable jobs was there. Today? Monday you are manager. Tuesday you are in the dustbin.

What story I was going to tell? No no. Not cow story. One other story. OHO. YES. Story of housewarming.

Friday morning Mrs. M came and said, "Please get ready today, tomorrow one housewarming is there." I said, "Kamalam, did I sleep for two months by mistake? Corona is over?" She said, "What nonsense you are talking. My cousin in Bhopal is doing housewarming in video conference. All are attending. Please get ready."

I said, "What is there to get ready? Video conference means put one shirt and look at camera no? Even trouser not needed."

Kamalam looked like M.R. Radha seeing first day first show of *Aayirathil Oruvan*. She said, "Your hair is growing like banyan tree in house."

Theosophical Society. Please do one haircut." I said, "Kamalam, how I will get haircut? Whether police will allow barber shop?" She thought for two minutes then said, "I will cut your hair." I said no no no no.

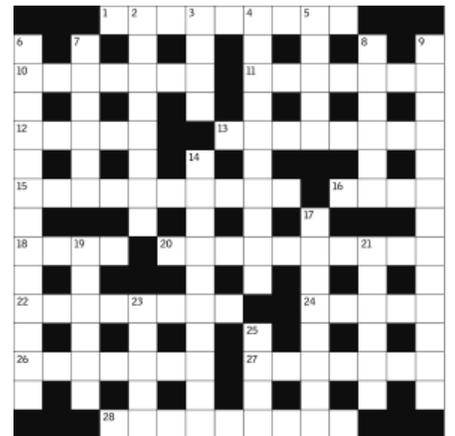
Madam/ Sir, what happened? She cut my hair. Nowadays, from morning to evening I am wearing one Deccan Chargers cap. Under cap hair is like old toothbrush Kamalam is using for jewellery cleaning. Total humiliation. During housewarming people are saying, excuse me, why Mr. Mathrubootham is wearing cap? That too of old team? Mrs. M is saying oho that is because he is lifelong fan of Deccan Chargers.

What did I say? Nothing. Because Mrs. Mathrubootham said, during housewarming pin-drop silence. Only smiling.

Yours in humiliation,
J. Mathrubootham



THE SUNDAY CROSSWORD NO. 3097



Across

- With respect to area around Norfolk, Everyman has to be obnoxious (9)
- Laugh abruptly with derisive interjections following excitement (3-4)
- A Rover's waxed, for starters, when money's seen around here! (3,4)
- Where you find some heresy? No; dogmat (5)
- Nine getting into pastry, sliced for a do (5,3)
- Concert venue, a large place in which to fall asleep entirely (6,4)
- A young woman almost flipped somewhere in Latvia (4)
- They made 'SOS' a palindrome (4)
- Gaffer isn't swayed by facetious excuse for typo in text (3,7)
- Release redacted; it's inevitable (4,4)
- Hush-hush, not about to become public (5)
- Carelessly malingering without a reason for machine's downtime (7)
- Anglesey spending year struggling to become member of African Union (7)
- Where Douglas is breaking flamingoes – not good (4,2,3)

Down

- Serf working across terrain in mediaeval principalities (8)
- Losing head, stop being calm (4)
- 'Clue is "Fish".' Flounders. 'That's how it

- (4,2,4)
- Italian scorer, clever dick to some extent (5)
- Now – regrettably – Dad's eating hay (4,3,3,3)
- Biscuit mix (6)
- Exercise and hot drink proposed by Spooner (3,3)
- Revising hastily at last? There's nothing more to add (4,4,2,3)
- One who told tales when cradle rocked (1,8)
- A minion's faltering complaint (8)
- Supports British experts (6)
- What's displayed by keener gymnasts, in part? (6)
- What cowboys may carry; what may carry cowboys (5)
- Primarily, announcement showing incredulity flatly! (2,2)

Solution No. 3096



ANSWERS
 1. Queen Elizabeth I, Elizabethan Era
 2. The English, Somerset
 3. Histories, Tragedies & Comedies
 4. Swagget
 5. Hamlet
 6. Real Estate/ Property salesman
 7. Lines
 8. North America
 9. A spear
 10. An Upstart Crow

ART SPOT

A retrospective of master abstractionist Mehlii Gobhai, now on view online, weaves between his social and artistic commitments

Coming up for light and air

Sukhada Tatke

How to convey that which lies beyond the realm of words? What secrets are revealed by stretching recognisable forms into almost invisible identities? What mysteries call for splashes of colour to transform into precise dark shapes through which a gleam of light manages to escape and illuminate?

To view the lifework of artist Mehlii Gobhai, who died two years ago, is to find oneself on the path of a parabola, climbing hesitantly in one direction and landing with more questions than answers in a different place. Moving around the five levels of the National Gallery of Modern Art in Mumbai – where his work was displayed before the gallery was shut due to the lockdown – one got a rare glimpse into the evolution of Gobhai's body of work: his drawings as a teenager, life sketches, illustrations as an advertising professional, his paintings using different materials, spanning 70 years of interplay between his intellectual, social and artisanal commitments.

"Mehlii's art focused on the axis mundi, the world axis, the column of light, the sap rising through the world tree – images of ascension were at the core of his work," said Nancy Adajania, co-curator of 'Don't Ask Me About Colour'. The upwardly rising spiral of the building thus served to accentuate the viewing experience. Viewers can now see the show online.

"Mehlii did not avoid colour. He refused to be intoxicated by it," said Adajania, explaining the title of the retrospective. "In fact, the ground colours of all his later paintings – more familiar to viewers – were chalky pink and pale yellow. He would gradually build up the sienna,

umber, charcoal grey over this base," she said.

Shown for the first time ever, his mixed-media works bursting with celebratory colours – red, yellow, mint green, cobalt blue – came as a shock. "I like colours to be somewhat submerged," Gobhai had once said. "I like forms to be somewhat submerged, and to come up for air." This polychrome palette marked the artist's definitive transition from representation to abstraction.

Abstract mysteries

Pivoting the exhibition was a stone sculpture of the tantric goddess Chamunda, which greeted viewers at the base of a staircase. An index finger on her lips in a rahasya mudra suggests her position as a custodian of mysteries. If Gobhai regarded Chamunda as a deity of abstraction, the master abstractionist gently draws us into his sphere of images to alter the ways in which we relate to the world we think we know. Is that the outline of Krishna playing a flute? And there? A dancing woman perhaps? A woman holding a teacup with her toes?

Gobhai later shifted to dark, subdued shades of sepia, charcoal grey, sienna, while always staying alive to the sacredness of geometry and mathematical harmony. Figures now melted into abstract motions, lines and divisions dominated the scene. "How does one manage the chaos, bring the contradictions into a choreography of reconciliation? That was one of his key questions," said co-curator Ranjit Hoskote.

"The line became prominent as a measure of chaos, a geometry that would keep turbulence in check. The swing and weight of the plumb line, the dance of parallel and intersecting lines, become vital gauges of space in his work at this time. These stylised, simplified linearities are al-



Polychrome palette
(Clockwise from above) Two untitled paintings by Gobhai, mixed media on canvas, 1970s; and the late artist.

• SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT &
APARNA JAYAKUMAR

so the last vestiges of the figure in his work, traces of an elbow, a knee, a pelvis, as we see from the drawings in his notebooks of that period," said Hoskote.

Disparate empires

Gobhai's fixation with abstraction had been an almost lifelong one, but he was never removed from the world of ideas. He read poets, aestheticians, philosophers, and discussed them with friends. "For Mehlii, the abstractionist was very much a person who grappled with ideas and had an intellectual life," said Hoskote.

In Gobhai's copy of Wilhelm Woringer's 1908 classic *Abstraction and Empathy*, he had underlined a sentence, reflecting his own thoughts: "These regular abstract forms are, therefore, the only ones and the highest, in which man can rest in the face of the vast confusion of the



world-picture."

From all around the NGMA building, you could experience disparate empires of Gobhai's creative mind. Looking down the atrium from the topmost floor, for instance, his wooden cubes stood surrounded by paintings that were more low-relief



sculptures, moving beyond the two-dimensional surface with layer upon layer of canvas or paper. From another level, standing amid his life sketches and advertising work, you saw his sharp and dark geometric works.

Alongside his work as a leading abstractionist, Gobhai never stopped making life studies. His nude figures, the curators write, are "electric with energy. They convey the body's pulses and torsion through a choreographic economy of strokes, hatchings and loops."

Deep commitments

One cannot write of Gobhai's work without acknowledging his deep socio-political commitments for a safe and inclusive society, be they concerns about street children or solidarity with environment activists and displaced local communities. In one of his 1990 posters for the Sadat Hashmi Memorial Trust just before the Mumbai riots, two figures are entwined in the foreground as a city burns. Accompanying these drawings, the curators found a note which proved prescient: "Don't wait for grief to bind us. Fight communalism now."

For the curators, the retrospective was not so much a project as a

homage to a departed friend. As they went about with their research, "events and anecdotes leaped up from the pages and connected with stories he had told us," said Adajania.

These included his rich journal entries. In one such, there is his delightful attention to both fleeting and lasting moments in nature. "Came to a thicket – misty, cool, with the giant deodars faintly visible around me... suddenly, a group of small lemon-coloured birds flew out of the mist... and alighted on my head and shoulders before they realised I was not an inanimate object. Sudden panic and they flew off into the cool mists."

Gobhai's pantheistic spirit quietly pulls one into the expanse of his swarthy and muted universe, and in proximity with nature. Life jumps out of these basic geometric trappings and encampments, capacious vestibules to earth itself. His work seems to say: from earth we have come, to earth we shall return. Not without light. Always a hint of sublimine light.

The exhibition can be viewed at <https://www.gallerychemould.com>.

The reporter and writer is based in Grenoble.

Gobhai's fixation with abstraction had been an almost lifelong one, but he was never removed from the world of ideas. He read poets, aestheticians, philosophers, and discussed them with friends

• GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK



Urvashi Sarkar

The paediatrician's waiting room was unusually crowded.

Parents and grandparents sat on narrow benches, cradling infants. The sounds of coughing and sniffing, mostly from adults, rang through the room. Some wore face masks – cloth, synthetic or rayon, whatever they had been able to get their hands on. Others had given it a miss. A young man stepped out of the waiting room with his toddler son twice, to cough. It was late March and fears

of the novel coronavirus were spreading fast.

My own persistent cough convinced me that I needed to wear a mask – at least in the presence of my daughter, six weeks old, who had developed a mild temperature the previous night. It had passed, but was enough for her grandmother to decide that it warranted a visit to the paediatrician.

When we went inside, the paediatrician – an elderly woman – was also sniffing. She wore no mask. "I should be wearing a mask...but you know..." she trailed off.

Once I was satisfied that my

daughter's short bout of fever was not serious, I asked if I could breast-feed her, given my cough.

"You can," she replied. "But don't talk to her while you do."

Masked motherhood

Not talk to my newborn? Not sing lullabies, utter gibberish, or babble words of love? That didn't seem possible. And so, the mask stayed on my face while I sang to her, burped or changed her. Practising 'social distancing' or 'physical distancing' was anything but easy; the very idea of it went against my need to hold, cuddle and comfort my infant.

OFF-CENTRE

Bringing a child into the world in 2020, when parenting is paranoia and the shape of the future is hard to imagine

Raising Generation C

Days after our paediatrician visit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivered the shock announcement of a national lockdown from March 25 to prevent the spread of coronavirus. My first concern was whether it would be possible to take my daughter for her vaccination, which was due the very next day.

True to my fears, the paediatrician had shut her clinic without notice. When I called her, she told me that as an elderly woman, she could not risk exposure to the virus. My husband and I panicked. Our daughter's vaccination had already been delayed once because she was underweight. We dreaded delaying it any further. After a number of frantic calls, we found a doctor who was willing to meet us and administer the vaccine at a hospital.

Inside the hospital lobby, we were greeted with the sight of a policeman wearing a mask and a handful of patients, including a profusely coughing old man. My husband and I were instructed to sit separately. Hospital staff glanced at our heavily swaddled infant curiously. "Don't bring your baby to the hospital if you can help it. Hospitals are one of the most infectious places for children to be, especially now," one of them told me.

My daughter was born in a suburban Mumbai hospital in late January; her wails and cries marking her arrival in the world a few days before expected. She had just about made it to a normal birth weight. I began adjusting to the tiny little person in my life, tailoring my clock to hers, teach-

Ethiyo

her naming ceremony and requesting family and friends to defer their visits to meet my daughter. At home, I became a gatekeeper, interrogating family members who needed to step out. If motherhood meant being protective, Corona took my protectiveness to another level, possibly of paranoia.

When my husband and I had talked about whether we wanted to be parents, we had worried that the world was a deeply violent place with hate, discrimination and intolerance on the rise everywhere.

Cities were increasingly unliveable, social and economic security were the privilege of a few, while nuclear weapons and climate change – mediums of mass destruction – presented permanent threats to humanity.

A fraught future

Why had we decided to bring a child into the world? Was it because we were reasonably confident of providing for the needs of another human being? Had we succumbed to social expectations? Thick in the era of COVID-19, I am aware of another underlying reason: it was the idea that we could reasonably predict a certain life trajectory to our child, albeit with caveats.

But now, no previously made calculations about the future hold. We find ourselves at a loss of terms and language in which to imagine a future for her. Right now, we possess neither the understanding nor the ability to anticipate the shape of a post-corona world. If the socioeconomic and environmental inheritance of our generation stood on shaky ground, the world in which my daughter and her generation will grow up promises to be only more uncertain and fraught.

As my daughter nears the three-month mark, I am aware that her name is yet to be registered in the city's municipal records. She is yet to see the colour of the sky or feel the fresh breeze on her face. Instead, we are cloistered at home, caring for a little human being who was born in a year of raging pandemic but whose frequent wails and unexpected smiles still govern our lives even under lockdown.

The writer is an independent journalist based in Mumbai.