



Vellore officials pull down walls erected on roads leading to A.P. **page 5**



India, China among top three military spenders in 2019, says report **page 8**



56% more water in the reservoirs than we had last year: Shekhawat **page 11**

Opposition parties write to Gotabaya asking him to reconvene Parliament **page 12**



NEARBY



State govt. freezes DA for employees

CHENNAI
The State government on Monday issued two orders, one suspending encashment of earned leave "initially" for one year and the other freezing the Dearness Allowance (DA) at the current rate till July 2021 for its employees, teachers and pensioners. According to an order issued by Chief Secretary K. Shanmugam, the decision was taken in view of the ongoing fight against the coronavirus pandemic. **TAMIL NADU** ▶ PAGE 2

Decision to shift market in Koyambedu likely today

CHENNAI
A decision on temporarily shifting the Koyambedu wholesale vegetable and fruits market as a precautionary measure is likely to be taken on Tuesday after the second round of talks between officials and traders' associations. **CHENNAI** ▶ PAGE 3

CM seeks funds, more PCR kits from Centre

CHENNAI
Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami on Monday reiterated several of his requests made earlier to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, including release of funds and provision of more PCR kits. The State is planning to increase the number of tests for COVID-19 to 10,000 a day. **TAMIL NADU** ▶ PAGE 2

Modi hints at graded exit from lockdown, says danger not over

Constant vigilance is of paramount importance, PM tells CMs in videoconference

NISTULA HEBBAR
NEW DELHI

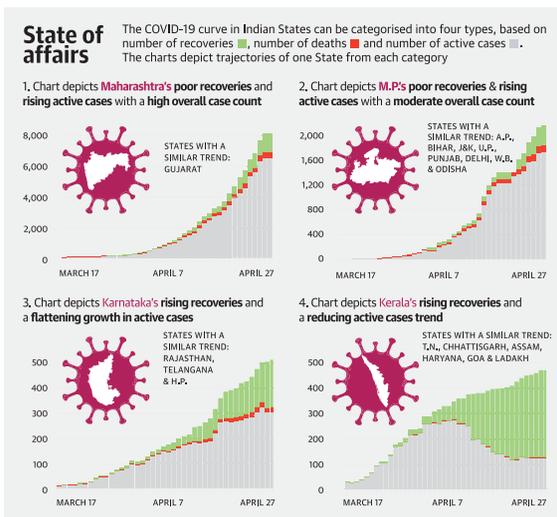
Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday told Chief Ministers that though the lockdown following the COVID-19 outbreak had yielded "positive results" and the country managed to "save thousands of lives in the past one and a half months", the danger of the virus was far from over and "constant vigilance is of paramount importance". He was addressing a videoconference with Chief Ministers.

The signal to the States, many of whom asked for an extension of the lockdown, was clear — that any exit from would be graded, and would take into account case load and virulence.

COVID-19

The decision to extend the lockdown itself, sources said, would be taken around May 3, when the current phase ends.

According to those present at the meeting, the Prime Minister, after speaking to the Chief Ministers (nine of whom spoke, while several others sent written submissions), was of the opinion that while economic activity is important, it would be undertaken with some reservations, only within districts and with several caveats. "We have to be brave and bring in reforms that



touch the lives of common citizens," he said.

Mr. Modi emphasised that all efforts should be made to convert the red zones (where cases have occurred in the past 14 days) to orange (where cases have not occurred in 14 days) and green zones (where no cases have occurred in 28 days). "States should decide minute policies for the three zones. The hotspots and containment

areas will continue to remain sealed," he said.

"The country has seen two lockdowns, both different in certain aspects and now we have to think of the way ahead. Masks and face covers will become a way of life in the days ahead and under the circumstances, everyone's aim must be rapid response," he noted.

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'CBSE exams will be delayed'

Pending exams of the Central Board of Secondary Education will only be held when the government decides to completely lift the lockdown, HRD Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank told students. **▶ PAGE 11**

ICMR says no payment made for Chinese test kits supplies

Alleged profiteering by distributors supplying the kits

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

India does not stand to lose a single rupee, said the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) on Monday in response to a clarification sought on the alleged profiteering by distributors, exposed through a legal dispute between an importer and a distributor, in the delivery of rapid antibody testing kits to it.

According to details provided in the Delhi High Court, the kits procured from China, whose delivered cost was ₹245 a test, were sold to ICMR for ₹600 a test — a mark up of 145%.

The matter came to light when Rare Metabolics Life Sciences Pvt Ltd and Aark Pharmaceuticals, distributors of Chinese Wondfo Biotech's kits imported by Matrix Labs, approached the High Court recently to get delivery/payment disputes cleared. The Council, in a one-page clarification, noted that it had not made any payment whatsoever in respect of the supplies — "because of the due process followed (not going in for procurement with 100% advance amount)".

It should be remembered that this was the first-ever effort by any Indian agency to procure such kits and the rate quoted by the bidders was the only reference point, the ICMR stated. "Testing is one of the most crucial weapons to fight CO-



Virus scan: Medical staff take samples from a person for a rapid antibody test in Vijayawada on Monday. **• V. RAJU**

'India working with China'

India and China are working together to ensure the quality of medical supplies, especially personal protective equipment and testing kits, said Indian Ambassador to China Vikram Misri. **▶ PAGE 10**

Congress calls for probe

The Congress demanded an inquiry into alleged profiteering by companies importing testing kits from China and asked the PM to "act swiftly" against those taking advantage of the pandemic. **▶ PAGE 10**

VID-19 and ICMR is doing everything it can to ramp up testing. This requires procurement of kits and supplying them to the States. This procurement is being undertaken when globally there is a huge demand for these test kits and various countries are applying their full might, monetary and diplomatic to acquire them."

The ICMR said it was important to understand the background in which procurement decisions were

made. It said the first attempt to procure kits did not elicit any response from suppliers. "Our second attempt got adequate response. Of these responses, taking sensitivity and specificity in mind, kits of two companies [Biomedemics and Wondfo] were identified for procurement. Both had the requisite international certifications."

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

RBI opens ₹50,000 cr. liquidity tap for MFs

But banks may remain risk averse

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has announced a special window of ₹50,000 crore for mutual funds in view of the redemption pressure that the fund houses are facing.

While announcing the window, the RBI said the liquidity stress was limited to high risk debt funds and the larger industry remains liquid.

Under the scheme, the RBI will conduct repo operation of 90 day tenor at the fixed rate repo.

Funds availed under this facility will be used by banks exclusively for meeting the liquidity requirements of mutual funds by extending loans, and for undertaking outright purchase of and/or repos against the collateral of investment grade corporate bonds, commercial

papers, debentures and certificates of deposit held by the funds, the central bank said.

Franklin Templeton

The move comes after Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund last week decided to wind up six debt funds that have combined assets under management of nearly ₹26,000 crore on account of illiquid and low-rated instruments in its portfolio.

The fund house said it decided to wind up the schemes to preserve the value at least at the current levels. Their value was getting eroded due to a combination of redemption pressures and mark-to-market losses due to a lack of liquidity on account of the coronavirus impact on the markets, it said.

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In place



Line and length: Bags were lined up on the road as people waited in the shade for rations in the Paud Phata area of Pune on Monday amid the lockdown imposed to control the spread of COVID-19. **• JIGNESH MISTRY**

Essential goods movement up, says govt.

'Four out of five agricultural markets are open'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

There has been significant progress in removing bottlenecks and ensuring smooth movement of essential goods, according to Parameswaran Iyer, Chairman of the Empowered Group 5 on Logistics and Supply Chain of Essential Items.

Trucks moving food and medicines were functioning at about 46% on March 30, and had now improved to 76%. Movement of rail rakes is also at three-fourths of the usual rate, while ports are now handling almost 90% of their usual traffic.



On track: Workers transferring rice sacks from a train to trucks at Nagercoil in Tamil Nadu. **• P. V. V.**

In a key indicator with regard to the food and farm supply chain, four out of five agricultural mandis (markets) have now been reopened, said Mr. Iyer. An online portal had been set up. To connect farmers with mandis, cold storage and buyers.

The empowered group is collaborating with departments at the Central and State levels, as well as industry stakeholders, to ease policy and implementation bottlenecks on the ground. For example, when a worker at the Nashik onion mandi test-

ed positive for COVID-19, the team swung into action to ensure that safe and sanitary supply could be continued.

Overall, there has been a focus on ensuring adequate supply of staples such as onions, potatoes and tomatoes. Supply of milk and LPG cylinders are essentially back to pre-lockdown levels, added Mr. Iyer.

Apart from rail rakes and Lifeline Udan flights, India Post has played a critical role in transporting more than 100 million tonnes of medicines and medical equipment as well as one lakh food packets.

The department has also helped facilitate cash transfer worth ₹730 crore to about 34 lakh people, according to Mr. Iyer.

Fewer districts in T.N. report fresh cases

Chennai accounts for 47 of 52 new patients; 81 discharged after treatment

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

For the first time in the last few weeks, fewer than five districts in Tamil Nadu reported fresh COVID-19 cases on Monday.

Of the 52 new patients, 47 were from Chennai. Only two other districts — Madurai and Villupuram — reported COVID-19 cases.

With 90% of fresh cases coming from the State capital, its count of confirmed cases surged to 570.

Of the 52 patients (33 men and 19 women), 11 were front line workers, of which 10 were from Chennai. Among the 11 are three doctors, including two postgraduate students of Madras Medical



Hot spot: Medical staff in Anna Nagar West in Chennai where 13 persons tested positive on Monday. **• K. PICHUMANI**

College to which the Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital is attached, a staff nurse from the Government Rajaji Hospital, Madurai, and workers of the Greater Chennai Corporation.

Besides, a mediaperson has also tested positive. The day also saw 81 patients walking out of hospitals across the State after getting treated. This included 26 patients from the Coimbatore ESI Medical College Hospital, 20 from the Go-

vernment Stanley Medical College Hospital, 14 from RGGGH and 10 from the Sivaganga Medical College Hospital. With this, 1,101 persons have been discharged till date. No death was reported on Monday.

The State's tally of COVID-19 cases stands at 1,937 (including two deaths cross-notified to other States and one who died after testing negative for the infection). Of these, 809 persons (active cases) are under treatment.

Apart from Chennai, Madurai had four new patients, including three women, and Villupuram had one patient, a one-year-old boy.

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The term 'debenture' is derived from the Latin word 'debere' which refers to borrow. A debenture is a written tool accepting a debt under the general authentication of the enterprise. It comprises of an agreement for repayment of principal after a particular period or at intermissions or at the option of the enterprise and for payment of interest at a fixed rate due to, usually either yearly or half-yearly on fixed dates. According to the section 2(30) of The Companies Act, 2013 'Debenture' comprises of – Debenture Inventory, Bonds and any other securities of an enterprise whether comprising a charge on the assets of the enterprise or not.

Different Types of Debentures:

#1. From the Point of view of Security

Secured Debentures: Secured debentures are that kind of debentures where a charge is being established on the properties or assets of the enterprise for the purpose of any payment. The charge might be either floating or fixed. The fixed charge is established against those assets which come under the enterprise's possession for the purpose to use in activities not meant for sale whereas floating charge comprises of all assets excluding those accredited to the secured creditors. A fixed charge is established on a particular asset whereas a floating charge is on the general assets of the enterprise.

Unsecured Debentures: They do not have a particular charge on the assets of the enterprise. However, a floating charge may be established on these debentures by default. Usually, these types of debentures are not circulated.

#2. From the Point of view of Tenure

Redeemable Debentures: These debentures are those debentures that are due on the cessation of the time frame either in a lump-sum or in instalments during the lifetime of the enterprise. Debentures can be reclaimed either at a premium or at par.

Irredeemable Debentures: These debentures are also called as Perpetual Debentures as the company doesn't give any attempt for the repayment of money acquired or borrowed by circulating such debentures. These debentures are repayable on the closing up of an enterprise or on the expiry (cessation) of a long period.

#3. From the Point of view of Convertibility

Convertible Debentures: Debentures which are changeable to equity shares or in any other security either at the choice of the enterprise or the debenture holders are called convertible debentures. These debentures are either entirely convertible or partly changeable

Non-Convertible Debentures: The debentures which can't be changed into shares or in other securities are called Non-Convertible Debentures. Most debentures circulated by enterprises fall in this class.

#4. From Coupon Rate Point of view

Specific Coupon Rate Debentures: Such debentures are circulated with a mentioned rate of interest, and it is known as the coupon rate.

Zero-Coupon Rate Debentures: These debentures don't normally carry a particular rate of interest. In order to restore the investors, such type of debentures are circulated at a considerable discount and the difference between the nominal value and the circulated price is treated as the amount of interest associated to the duration of the debentures.

#5. From the view Point of Registration

Registered Debentures: These debentures are such debentures within which all details comprising addresses, names and particulars of holding of the debenture holders are filed in a register kept by the enterprise. Such debentures can be moved only by performing a normal transfer deed.

Bearer Debentures: These debentures are debentures which can be transferred by way of delivery and the company does not keep any record of the debenture holders Interest on debentures is paid to a person who produces the interest coupon attached to such debentures.

orders stood cancelled, as per ICMR's advisory.

The ICMR-approved Wondfo SARS-CoV-2 kits were manufactured by Guangzhou Wondfo, a Chinese company. Guangzhou Wondfo appointed two pharma companies to market the product in India – Cadilla Pharma and Matrix Labs.

The Minister said the two importers had authorised a number of dealers across the country, including some in Tamil Nadu. This included Aark Pharmaceuticals, Shan Biotech and Rare Metabolics. The ICMR had issued orders for procuring five lakh kits from Aark Pharmaceuticals at ₹600 each. On this basis, the State placed orders to procure Wondfo kits from Shan Biotech at the same price, he said.

The Minister pointed out that product approvals would have only the name of the manufacturer (Wondfo), and not that of the importer and dealer. "To say that Shan Biotech was not on ICMR list was wrong. The names of no dealer from whom other States purchased would be on the list," he said.

Mr Vijayabaskar's statement came as a response to DMK president M.K. Stalin's charge that the government had purchased the kits from a Chennai

and Kerala ₹699), but Tamil Nadu got them at the ICMR-fixed rate of ₹ 600, he said.

The Delhi High Court order capping the price at ₹ 400, he pointed out, was based on a litigation by the dealer and importer firms. Since, the TNMSC replaced orders at the ICMR-fixed price, it re-fixed the price at ₹ 400 and had obtained the concurrence.

"For the 24,000 kits supplied, the invoice has been raised for ₹96 lakh plus taxes. However, all kits would now be withdrawn," he told *The Hindu*.

Stalin's allegation

Mr. Stalin alleged that the Delhi High Court order capping the price of imported antibody test kits at ₹400 had exposed the AIADMK government, which had purchased them for ₹600 each. "When I accused the State government of buying the kits at a higher price, it claimed it had purchased them at the price fixed by the ICMR. It is condemnable that Health Minister C. Vijayabaskar had justified the higher price," Mr. Stalin said in a statement. He said the Chinese company that produced the kit sold it for just ₹225, and the total price of the kit would be ₹245 when the import charges are included.

sent a fax to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, reiterating the request he had made earlier for funds and PCR kits, among other requirements. The State is planning to increase the number of tests for COVID-19 to 10,000 a day.

Mr. Palaniswami also requested Mr. Modi to announce a relief package to ease the burden on the power sector which, he said, will help discoms in distress.

An official press release said Mr. Modi spoke to the



Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami taking part in a video-conference with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday.

Chief Ministers with whom he had not interacted during the video-conference meetings held earlier. "Due to paucity of time, all other CMs were requested by the PM to send their comments through fax message," it added. As of Monday, a total of 87,605 samples had been

tested and 1,885 persons found positive for COVID-19, the CM said. Effective treatment had ensured that the mortality rate was only 1.2%, and 1,020 patients had been discharged, he added.

"Presently, the State has 30 government and 11 private

labs for COVID testing, with a capacity of 7,500 tests per day. We are planning to increase it by 10,000, and request the Government of India to supply more PCR testing kits," Mr. Palaniswami said.

He reiterated his demand that the fiscal deficit limit of

permitted limit for the fiscal year 2019-20 be allowed for 2020-21 as well.

Pointing out that Tamil Nadu had a large number of MSME units, he requested a support package for the sector. The CM requested the release of GST compensation for December-January and also 50% of the 2020-21 Finance Commission grants to the urban and rural local bodies.

"The Ways and Means limit of the States, which was increased by 30% by the RBI, should be doubled,

Mr. Palaniswami also requested an immediate ad-hoc grant of ₹1,000 crore from the National Disaster Response Fund to procure medical and protective equipment.

"The Chief Minister's Public Relief Fund may be made eligible to receive Corporate Social Responsibility contributions," he said. He requested additional allocation of food grains free-of-cost for all cardholders, including non-priority household beneficiaries, under PMGRAY.

Lockdown opens up innovative avenues for brewing illicit arrack

Till mid-April, as many as 211 bootleggers had been identified across the State and 99 persons arrested

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI

As liquor shops remain shut in view of the COVID-19 lockdown, the brewing of illicit arrack has become widespread in several parts of the State, keeping the Prohibition and Enforcement Wing (PEW) personnel on their toes.

Till mid-April, as many as 211 bootleggers had been identified across the State and 99 persons arrested for offences under the provisions of the Tamil Nadu Prohibition Act, PEW officials said. Around 110 more persons were yet to be arrested,



Unconventional methods: Officials seizing fermented wash, which was hidden inside a water tanker.

they added. Using drones, the police have been detecting illegal distillation of arrack in hills, forests and orchards. A top PEW officer

said, "Over the last 40 days, we have seized lakhs of litres of arrack and over 1,000 vehicles. We are conducting raids in all districts." The

special unit is planning to procure more drones to carry out surveillance of border areas. It recently detected a case of fermented wash being concealed inside a water tanker in a village near Thiruvannamalai. The drone came in handy to nab the smugglers, who had brought huge plastic bags filled with arrack from Andhra Pradesh.

Online videos

In Chennai, the non-availability of alcoholic drinks has prompted tippers to brew liquor by taking a cue from how-to videos posted on social media platforms.

In Neelankarai, two youths prepared arrack with the help of videos posted on YouTube. In a similar incident, Raja, a resident of Teynampet, and his friend George Joseph, made use of TikTok videos to brew arrack at home, only to be caught by the police, who were tipped off by their neighbours.

In Cuddalore district, three daily-wagers procured methanol from a factory in Sipcot and consumed it as a substitute for liquor. In Chengalpattu, three habitual drinkers died after consuming paint varnish mixed with

water as a substitute for liquor. In Pudukottai district, three alcoholics died after consuming soft drinks mixed with an after-shave lotion.

The Prohibition and Excise Department has written to factories dealing in methanol, asking them to take steps to stop pilferage.

The police are constantly monitoring and arresting people for illegally stocking Indian-made foreign liquor bottles and selling them at exorbitant rates. "Some bar owners are trying to sell bottles to cash in on the lockdown. We arrest and remand them," a police officer said.

Commercial Paper (CP) is yet another money market instrument in India, which was first introduced in 1990 to enable the highly rated corporates to diversify their resources for short term fund requirements. They are issued either in the form of a promissory note or in a dematerialised form through any of the depositories approved by and registered with SEBI. They are essentially unsecured debt instruments.

Who is eligible to issue commercial papers?

Corporate, Primary Dealers and All India Financial Institutions are eligible to issue CP. To be eligible to issue Commercial Paper, the Corporate need to have a tangible net worth of minimum Rs. 4 Crore. Further, the company must have been sanctioned working capital limit by banks or all-India financial institutions. The borrower account of the company should be high rated i.e. it should be classified as Standard Asset by the Financial Institutions.

Further, the Corporate, Primary Dealers as well as Financial Institutions must obtain the credit rating for issuance of Commercial Paper either from Credit Rating Information Services of India Ltd. (CRISIL) or the Investment Information and Credit Rating Agency of India Ltd. (ICRA) or the Credit Analysis and Research Ltd. (CARE) or the FITCH Ratings India Pvt. Ltd. or such other credit rating agency (CRA) as may be specified by the Reserve Bank of India from time to time, for the purpose.

Denominations and Maturity of Commercial Paper

Maturity of Commercial Paper is minimum of 7 days and a maximum of up to one year from the date of issue. CP can be issued in denominations of Rs.5 lakh or multiples thereof.

Who can Invest in CP?

Individuals, banking companies, other corporate bodies (registered or incorporated in India) and unincorporated bodies, Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) etc. can invest in CPs. However, investment by FIIs would be within the limits set for them by Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) from time-to-time.

What is return on CP?

CP is issued at a discount to face value as may be determined by the issuer. The difference between issue price and face value is return. Further, CPs are traded in the OTC markets.

Certificate of Deposit (CD) refers to a money market instrument, which is negotiable and equivalent to a promissory note. It is either issued in demat form or in the form of a usance promissory note. This instruments is issue in lieu of the funds deposited at a bank for a specified time period.

A Certificate of Deposit in India can be issue by:

All scheduled commercial banks excluding Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) and Local Area Banks (LABs) Select All India Financial Institutions permitted by RBI

A commercial bank can issue Certificate of Deposit as per its own requirements. A financial institution can issue Certificate of Deposit within a limit prescribed by RBI. A thumb rule for FI is that CD together with other instruments, viz. term money, term deposits, commercial papers and inter-corporate deposits should not exceed 100 per cent of its net-owned funds, as per the latest audited balance sheet.

Certificate of Deposit can be issued to individuals, corporations, companies, trusts, funds, associations etc. The No resident Indians are also eligible for CDs provided they don't repatriate the funds.

What is Minimum amount for Certificate of Deposit?

Minimum amount for Certificate of Deposit has been fixed at Rs. 1 Lakh, to be accepted from a single subscriber

Larger amounts have to be in the multiples of Rs. 1 Lakh.

What is tenure of Certificates of Deposits?

Certificates of Deposit are money market instruments and their maturity period is between seven days to one year for commercial banks. For Financial Institutions, the maturity is not less than a year and not more than three years.

What is Return on Certificates of Deposits?

The CDs are issued at a discount on face value. Return on them is difference between the issue value and face value.

How CDs can be transferred from one person to other?

If CD has been issued in physical form (as usance promissory notes), they can be freely transferred by endorsement and delivery. If they have been released in Demat form, they can be transferred as per the procedure applicable to other demat securities. Other information

There is no lock-in period for certificates of deposit

Banks/FIs cannot grant loans against CDs.

They cannot buy back their own CDs before maturity.

Banks need to maintain cash reserve ratio (CRR) and statutory liquidity ratio (SLR), on the issue price of the CDs.

What is difference between Commercial Paper and Certificates of Deposits?

CD is issued by the Commercial banks and Finance Institutions, while commercial papers are issued by corporates, primary dealers (PDs) and the All-India Financial Institutions (FIs).

CD is issued for Rs. 1 Lakh or its multiples while CP is issued in denominations of Rs.5 lakh or multiples thereof.

IN BRIEF

Minister writes to L-G on rice for APL families
PUDUCHERRY
Social Welfare Minister M. Kandasamy on Monday requested Lieutenant Governor Kiran Bedi to ensure distribution of free rice to Above Poverty Line (excluding government servants and income tax payees) card holders through ration shop employees. The method adopted for distribution of rice to BPL card holders should not be followed for APL families as the procedure was time consuming, he said.

One-year-old boy tests positive for COVID-19
VILLUPURAM
A one-year-old boy from Villupuram tested positive for COVID-19, taking the total count of cases in the district to 48 on Monday. According to officials, the boy was admitted to the isolation ward in Villupuram Government Medical College and Hospital (VGMCH). His family members have also been placed under quarantine. The parents tested negative for COVID-19, a report said.

Life convict Murugan's father dies in Sri Lanka
VELLORE
Vetrivel, 75, father of Rajiv Gandhi assassination case convict Murugan died at a hospital in Sri Lanka in the early hours of Monday. Murugan is at present lodged in Vellore Central Prison. The news was conveyed to him by the prison authorities. Efforts were on to make him see his father through a video call, a couple of days ago by his lawyers. It is learnt that steps are being taken to facilitate Murugan to contact his relatives in Sri Lanka.

Cab drivers to be screened on arrival
VELLORE
Cab drivers from Vellore district, stranded in Odisha on Kolkata-Chennai Highway, are expected to reach by Monday midnight and would be screened by health officials on reaching Vellore, said Collector A. Shanmuga Sundaram. So far, 123 vehicles have been received in two days.

No sign of train operations resuming post-lockdown

IRCTC says booking suspended as part of 'abundant' precaution

S. VIJAY KUMAR
CHENNAI
There is no sign of the Indian Railways resuming operations post-lockdown that ends on May 3, 2020. Though extensive preparations are on to ensure COVID-19 safety protocol such as physical distancing on railway premises, including trains, the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) has not commenced booking of tickets.



The authorities are preparing to implement safety protocol to manage crowds even if the train services are run partially.

The online portal says that in the wake of COVID-19 and as a measure of abundant precaution, booking has been suspended for all trains until further advice. For trains cancelled till May 3, 2020, full refund would be provided automatically by IRCTC and there is no need to cancel the tickets. However, goods/parcel train operations are on in full swing to transport essential commodities, medicines etc.

According to senior railway officials, the Railway

Board has been in touch with Zonal Railways on a regular basis over video-conferencing and no decision has been taken yet on resuming passenger train services after the second phase of lockdown.

Though there is speculation of the lockdown getting extended by at least another couple of weeks, railway authorities are preparing to implement the safety protocol to manage the crowds in case a decision is taken to run the trains even partially. Accident/medical relief

trains have been kept ready with sufficient manpower available at call, sources in the Southern Railway said.

"Some of the crowd control plans include withdrawal of unreserved coaches, removal (not allotting) of the middle berth in Sleeper Class/Third AC coaches and suspending issue of platform tickets.

Physical distance markings are being done in some major stations and steps will be taken to make availability of masks, hand sanitiser etc. for sale at stations. Pas-

sengers may be asked to compulsorily wear masks and report one hour before the departure of the train. There will be a mechanism to ensure end-to-end sanitization of the train," a railway official told *The Hindu* on Monday.

Asked if there was any proposal to operate special trains for migrant workers who were jobless and staying in camps/shelters provided by their employers or government, the official said such requests had to come from the States.

"One State might be willing to send thousands of migrant workers home. But the State where they want to go should be ready to receive them considering the scenario prevailing there. And such trains cannot have stoppages en route...we have to prevent the spread of COVID-19 to the extent possible by taking all precautionary measures," the official who preferred not to be quoted said.

Court rejects Hindu Munnani's plea

Outfit opposes govt. decision to supply free rice to Muslims during Ramzan

MOHAMMED IRMANULLAH S.
CHENNAI
The Madras High Court has rejected a plea made by Hindu Munnani against State Government's decision to supply 5,460 tonnes of raw rice to indigent Muslims for breaking their day-long fast during the holy month of Ramzan.

A Division Bench of Justices M. Sathyanarayanan and M. Nirmal Kumar refused to entertain such a plea styled as public interest litigation after observing that the petitioner organisation appeared to be "proceeding on religious lines."

When the case was listed for admission through video-conferencing, the judges, at the outset, asked the petitioner's counsel T. Annamalai to spell out whether Hindu Munnani was a registered organisation or not.

"The learned counsel for the petitioner is unable to give any answer. It is not even stated in the affidavit that the petitioner organisation is a registered organisation..

"Since the writ petition is styled as a public interest litigation, this court by deleting the name of the organisation, would take it that the

writ petition was filed by the individual (K. Kuttalanathan) who is said to be the secretary of the organisation," the Bench said.

Proceeding further, the judges recalled that the Supreme Court in Prafulla Godara versus Union of India (2011) had rejected a challenge made to financial subsidy provided by the Government to Muslims who undertake annual pilgrimage to Mecca.

In that verdict, a Bench comprising Justices Markandey Katju and Gyan Sudha Misra of the apex court had observed: "It is due to the

wisdom of our founding fathers that the Constitution of India is secular and caters to the tremendous diversity.

"It is the greatness of our founding fathers that they kept a cool head during the 1947 partition and decided to declare India a secular country instead of a Hindu country. This is why despite all its diversity, the only policy which can work and provide for stability is secularism."

In the light of those observations, the Bench rejected the plea against distribution of free rice to Muslims during Ramzan.

Relax: breath holds the key

There is not a day that has gone by in the recent past that hasn't featured the new 'C' word at least once in every conversation worldwide. Some of these conversations are informative while others are loaded with rumours. So, what should we do? Let's face facts first. We are facing a pandemic. It is a difficult time all around but we need to have a winning attitude.



Dr. A.J. RAJENDRAN
Senior Rehabilitation Specialist

External help comes from the government in the form of lockdowns and putting protocols in place. Internal help, on the other hand, comes from within us. Staying positive in trying times like these is paramount. With a calm mind, make a plan of how best to spend your time during the lockdown.

In rehabilitation medicine, there are five main aspects to the American Heart Association protocols that we follow - Diet, Relaxation, Exercise, Attitude, and Motivation. Since diet and exercise are covered in abundance these days, I am going to shift the focus on the other three.

Look at motivating historical incidents where people have overcome all odds to make a bad situation better.

Here's one: Let's take the example of L.J. Flanders, author of *Cell Workout*, a training guide that will help you understand how to train without the need for any gadget except your own bodyweight to get fit. In 2011, Flanders found himself sentenced to prison. Inside a 6 x

COVID-19
8 feet cell, he began to think of ways to use his time productively and he decided that he would become as fit as possible. He signed up for a personal training course that taught him a lot and he created an exercise manual.

Unlike Flanders, you are not in a prison or a place with limitations. You have your house, you have your freedom, most of you have the time; the only thing you probably lack is a plan. And to put together a good plan for your health and happiness, you need to have a calm mind.

A recent study conducted by Stanford scientists indicates the link between breath and states of mind. Appropriate breathing has a powerful effect on stress reduction. Bonus news is that it also supports immune functions and helps rapid recovery from illness.

Count from one to four as you inhale through your nose. Pause for two counts. Then purse your mouth and mentally count from one to

six (or one to eight if comfortable) as you exhale. Repeat for a few minutes and enjoy slow, rhythmic breathing.

Focus your mind on a single word, or sound. Mentally repeat the chosen sound over and over, finding rhythm and cadence that feels best to you. Adopt a passive attitude toward the process, particularly with regard to how well you're doing. If your mind wanders, gently re-direct your focus to your chosen word each time. After 15-20 minutes slowly get back to normal state feeling refreshed and energised.

Progressive muscle relaxation is an effective and widely used strategy for stress relief that creates a state of deep relaxation by involving alternate tensing and relaxing of muscles. This technique helps people who are often so tensed throughout the day that they fail to even recognise how being relaxed feels like. Tense each muscle group in arms, legs and body to about 25-50% of max capacity. Hold for a few seconds as you continue to breathe and then slowly release the tension as you focus on the pleasant contrast between tight and relaxed muscles. Once you have covered the entire group of muscles in the body, sit quietly for several minutes and enjoy the feeling of a relaxed body before you slowly open your eyes. So, beyond the external support that we expect from our political authorities, let us gear up to cope with the circumstances.

Man dies after inhaling poisonous gas

STAFF REPORTER
COIMBATORE
A 49-year-old man from Peelamedu in Coimbatore died in the early hours of Monday after he accidentally inhaled poisonous gas, suspected to have emanated from a generator. The deceased was identified as S. Balaji of HUD-CO Colony.

Police said Balaji, his father Sridhar, 80, mother Padmavathi, 75, and brother Murali, 47, were living in a rented house.

Around 2.30 a.m., Sridhar went to the restroom, but did not come out for long. When Murali went into the restroom to check on his father, he saw him lying unconscious. And, Murali fainted while trying to revive his

father. When Balaji went in to find out what happened, he too fell unconscious.

Padmavathi then sought the help of the neighbours, who rushed the three to the Coimbatore Medical College Hospital. But, the doctors found that Balaji was dead. Sridhar and Murali were admitted to the intensive care unit.

Trucks with stocks of liquor stranded at border

S. PRASAD
PUDUCHERRY

As many as 11 trucks loaded with more than 13,000 cases of liquor meant for liquor shops in Puducherry have been stranded at the interstate border at Pattanur near Gorimedu for a few days owing to the lockdown.

According to sources, the trucks carrying Indian-made foreign liquor (IMFL) and beer from Karnataka and Goa left their places of despatch last month and by the time they reached Tamil Nadu limits, the second phase of the lockdown stood in the way of the consignments reaching the Union Territory. The godowns in Puducherry were sealed by the Excise

Department as part of measures to prevent illegal liquor sale during lockdown.

A truck driver said they could neither bring the vehicles into Puducherry nor take them back to the places of despatch. "I'm afraid there will be no safety for us or the goods if the trucks remain parked here," he said.

An Excise Department official said IMFL shops had placed the order before the lockdown kicked in and the stocks were despatched before they could cancel the order. Meanwhile, Lt. Governor Kiran Bedi asked the local police to inform the Superintendent of Police, Villupuram, within whose jurisdiction the trucks are now stationed.

Pensioner reaches out to the poor in Nagercoil

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

The notice board outside the house of S. Ramaswamy Pillai at Ganapathi Nagar in Nagercoil says that the poor and differently-abled could contact him for help.



S. Ramaswamy Pillai distributing sanitiser to the needy.

Inside the house, the 73-year-old retired employee of the Health Department keeps loads of provisions, vegetables and other essential commodities meant for distribution to the poor, who are left with nothing during the COVID-19 lockdown.

"I distribute five kg of rice, provisions and vegetables to those who seek help. But I make it a point to inquire about the person who approached me. I want to ensure that the commodities reach the deserving candidates because a few people tried to cheat me," Mr. Pillai said.

money from his savings and the monthly pension. "My wife died two years ago and my daughter lives in Bengaluru. My requirements are not much and I am using the money to help people. Even today I bought provision for 10,000," he said.

Mr. Pillai regularly contributes to making food for 300 people. "An organisation called Suyambulingam Trust is preparing food from a marriage hall. I either give money or buy essential commodities," he said.

WESTERN RAILWAY - RATLAM DIVISION
ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT
E-TENDERING NOTICE
Dated 21.04.2020
The Divisional Railway Manager (W/A) RATLAM for and on behalf of the President of India invites "Open Tender" through e-tender on website www.ireps.gov.in the are as under:-

| Sr. No. | E-Tender No. & Name of work | NET Cost | Earnest Money |
|---------|---|---------------|---------------|
| 1. | RTM/2020-21/01 Zone-1 "A" Godhra (Excluding) to Meghnagar (Excluding) section-Dahod-Godhra Excluding. | ₹ 10142998.83 | ₹ 200800.00 |
| 2. | RTM/2020-21/02 Zone-1 "C" Dahod Local Station Colonies (a), (b), (c) & (e) site, station colony, Kaldiam km. 52/02-03 to 54/30 | ₹ 10804499.59 | ₹ 204100.00 |
| 3. | RTM/2020-21/03 Zone No. 2 "A" Dahod Local "D" site colony km. 53/02-03 to 54/30 | ₹ 10142998.65 | ₹ 200800.00 |
| 4. | RTM/2020-21/04 Zone No. 2 "B" Dahod Local workshop maintenance. | ₹ 6725249.00 | ₹ 134800.00 |
| 5. | RTM/2020-21/05 Zone No. 2 "C" Dahod - White washing colour washing work | ₹ 4520250.31 | ₹ 90500.00 |
| 6. | RTM/2020-21/06 Zone No. 3 -Meghnagar (Incl.) to Bajrangath (Incl.) | ₹ 6945748.99 | ₹ 139000.00 |
| 7. | RTM/2020-21/07 Zone No. 3 "A" Bajrangath (Excl.) to Ratlam (Excl.) | ₹ 7607205.34 | ₹ 152200.00 |
| 8. | RTM/2020-21/08 Zone No. 21 - Dahod Proper Sanitary Zone | ₹ 5402248.32 | ₹ 108100.00 |
| 9. | RTM/2020-21/09 Zone No. 6 - Ratlam (Excl.) to Nagda (Incl.) km 65/105-06 to km 69/8 & km 01/03 to 1.25 under Engineer (work) Nagda | ₹ 7607246.89 | ₹ 152200.00 |
| 10. | RTM/2020-21/10 Zone No. 4 "A" -RTM - For colony (Excluding east side of BG) under SSE/W/RTM jurisdiction. | ₹ 12127500.00 | ₹ 210700.00 |
| 11. | RTM/2020-21/11 Zone No. 4 "B" - Service building and Kurel 'dam's work jurisdiction under SSE/W/RTM. Excluding east side of broad-gauge area. | ₹ 6930000.00 | ₹ 138600.00 |
| 12. | RTM/2020-21/12 Zone No. 4 "C" - RTM - White wash and colour wash etc. Work on service building and staff quarters & Ward Dam under SSE (W - 1/2) Ratlam's jurisdiction. | ₹ 11760000.00 | ₹ 208800.00 |
| 13. | RTM/2020-21/13 Zone No. 4 "D" - RTM - Maintenance work of Railway hospitals and officers bungalow. | ₹ 5953500.00 | ₹ 119100.00 |
| 14. | RTM/2020-21/14 a) Zone No. 5 - RTM - Excluding east side of broad-gauge line, i.e. loco, Javara road, ghalla colony, Diesel shed, R.E. building, Kota Building and km - 37/3/10. b) Zone No. 17 - RTM - Repair and maintenance work of Diesel Shed. | ₹ 7770000.00 | ₹ 155400.00 |
| 15. | RTM/2020-21/15 Zone No. 22 - RTM Proper Sanitary work jurisdiction under SSE/W/RTM. | ₹ 9812000.01 | ₹ 196300.00 |
| 16. | RTM/2020-21/16 Zone No. 07 - UJN Proper - km 53/03 to 57/09-10 and Chintaman Ganesht to UJN | ₹ 10694250.00 | ₹ 203500.00 |
| 17. | RTM/2020-21/17 Zone No. 14 - Ratlam (Excluding) to Laxmibai Nagar (Excluding) km 374.58 to 489.65 and Fatehabad to Ujain (Excluding) km. 00.00 to 21.06. | ₹ 9309300.00 | ₹ 186200.00 |
| 18. | RTM/2020-21/18 Zone No. 15 - Laxmibai Nagar (Including) to Dr. Ambedkar Nagar (Excluding) km 489.65 to 514.20 and Rau - Thi Sec. K.M. 00.00 to 08.77 K.M.) (Excluding) indore station and service building and indore proper | ₹ 5407500.00 | ₹ 108200.00 |
| 19. | RTM/2020-21/19 Zone No. 15 "A" - Indore station premises Platform 01 to 06 including circulating area and all service building and indore proper (Excluding Railway colony) | ₹ 6667499.99 | ₹ 133400.00 |
| 20. | RTM/2020-21/20 Zone No. 8 "A" - Nagda (Excluding) to Ujain (Excluding) | ₹ 8268750.00 | ₹ 165400.00 |
| 21. | RTM/2020-21/21 Zone No. 8 "B" - Ujain (Excluding) to Indore (Excluding) & Maski (Excluding) to Dewas (Including) | ₹ 8930250.00 | ₹ 178700.00 |
| 22. | RTM/2020-21/22 Zone No. 9 "A" Ujain (Excluding) to Maski (Including) | ₹ 8599500.00 | ₹ 172000.00 |
| 23. | RTM/2020-21/23 Zone No. 9 "B" Maski (Excluding) to Akodiya (Including) | ₹ 9371250.01 | ₹ 187500.00 |
| 24. | RTM/2020-21/24 Zone No. 10 "A" Akodiya (Excluding) to Bakal (Including) | ₹ 9481500.00 | ₹ 189700.00 |
| 25. | RTM/2020-21/25 Zone No. 10 "B" Bhatkal (Excluding) to Bakaniya Bhowari up to km 226.15 | ₹ 8820000.00 | ₹ 176400.00 |
| 26. | RTM/2020-21/26 Zone No. 16 "A" Dr. Ambedkar Nagar (Including) to Kalakund (Including) km no. 514/06-07 to 529. | ₹ 12677566.72 | ₹ 213400.00 |
| 27. | RTM/2020-21/27 Zone No. 16 "B" Kalakund (Excluding) to Khandwa (Excluding) Km. 529 to 630.19 | ₹ 2866021.47 | ₹ 57400.00 |
| 28. | RTM/2020-21/28 Zone No. 12, Chanderniya (Including) to Nimach (Excluding) Km. 175/07 to 238/07. | ₹ 16537170.64 | ₹ 232700.00 |
| 29. | RTM/2020-21/29 Zone No. 13 Nimach (Including) to Ratlam (Excluding) km. 238/08 to 373/10. | ₹ 16537335.28 | ₹ 232700.00 |

Similar type of work: Any Civil Engineering works for each and not applicable for Sr. No. 27. Completion Period: 30 June 2021 for each. Uploading date on website : 21.04.2020 for each. Date of opening : 22.05.2020 for each. Details of tender notice, qualification term & conditions are available on www.ireps.gov.in

NOTE:- P-V C is not applicable for zonal works contract.

Divisional Railway Manager (W/A)
Ratlam Division, Western Railway

ANUSI/1005 Like us on Facebook.com/WesternRly - Follow us on Twitter.com/WesternRly

OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

DEATH
NAFIA J. Kareem, ex. Bharat Petroleum. Passed away on 20-04-2020. Scolding sisters - Sulia Husain and Rafia Curimbiyoh.

IN MEMORIAM
IN LOVING memory of K. Narayanaswami, who reached the Lotus feet of Sri Gurusuryan on the day of 1987. Inserted by loving mother, brother & family

DEATH
Dr. S. Ramamurthy
Cognizant Foundation deeply mourns the passing of its Founding Director, Dr. S. Ramamurthy. A passionate philanthropist and an eminent economist, Dr. Ramamurthy was a beacon of tireless commitment and dedication, guiding the Foundation's work till his last breath. His rich vision and work will continue to inspire us. May his soul rest in peace.

REMEMBRANCE
SAD DEMISE
N.Sundari
W/o C.N.Neelakandan (late)
(Rtd.) Section Officer, Secretary
A hardworking and independent person, dedicated wife, mother and grandmother, who touched many lives with love.
Passed away in Chennai on Saturday, April 25, 2020
Deeply mourned by family, friends & relatives

DEATH
Mrs Malini Thayakaran (Retired Teacher Sainik School Korukonda, Vizianagaram) Born : 13/7/1959
Passed Away: 27 April 2020
"She was a candle in the wind"
May She rest in peace eternally.
Husband/Daughter & family/Grand child/ Son/Sister & family/Brother & family/ All relatives.
Condolences: +919566106682/+919884915293/+91949048823

DEATH
AL.AR.V. KALAIRAJA CHETTIAR
Zamindar of Devakottai
Passed away in Coimbatore on Monday 27-04-2020
K. Raveendharan - 95975 42212 - K. Vellayan - 94441 04445
K. Natesan - 94430 48149 - S. Kalairaja Narayanan - 98430 99104
L. Somasundaram - 94420 14510

Vellore officials pull down walls on two roads to A.P.

Decision follows constraints in movement of vehicles

STAFF REPORTER
VELLORE

Temporary walls built on two roads connecting Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh were pulled down by the Vellore administration on Monday. The walls were constructed by the authorities on Sunday to prevent movement of vehicles between the two States in the midst of the COVID-19 lockdown.



Barriers removed: Workers demolishing the wall constructed on the Chennai-Ponnai-Chittoor road. *SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

On Monday, however, taking note of the difficulties in the movement of vehicles carrying essential commodities, tahsildars from Katpadi in Tamil Nadu and Chittoor in Andhra Pradesh ensured the demolition of a seven-foot wall constructed at Ponnai.

Officials also ensured the demolition of the wall at the Sayanakunta checkpoint. "This was only a temporary arrangement, and the walls were constructed us-

ing hollow blocks," a revenue official said.

The district authorities initially wanted vehicles that would pass via the Sayanakunta and Ponnai checkpoints, to enter Vellore by taking the Baradharami and the Christianpet checkpoints.

However, since milk and vegetable supply from Chittoor and beyond were disrupted, officials chose to de-

molish the walls.

Officials said six checkpoints connecting Andhra Pradesh with Vellore district were under surveillance with health, police and revenue officials monitoring the movement of vehicles.

Only vehicles transporting vegetables, fruits and medicines are allowed from Chittoor, Palamaner, Bagala and V. Kota.

Two more deaths in A.P., Karnataka

Telangana records dip with two new cases, Kerala sharpens strategy with community sampling

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA/HYDERABAD/
BENGALURU/
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka reported one death each from COVID-19, while all big southern States had new positive cases on Monday.

Andhra Pradesh had 80 new cases in six districts.

The State reported over 80 cases in a single day for the third time in the past five days and 30% of the total reported so far were detected during this period. The State tally went up to 1,177 and the death toll was 32. Four patients recovered and the number of active cases stood at 911.

Kerala reported 13 new cases on Monday, Telangana two cases from Greater Hyderabad area, and Karnataka, nine cases.

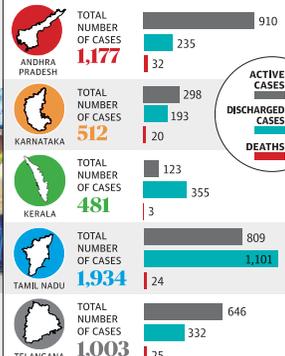
Health officials in Nellore said a 65-year-old person succumbed to the disease. Seven more persons, including six of a family, tested positive in the district.

Strict action

As the number of COVID-19 cases increases across the country, States are taking strict measures to curb the spread



Strict monitoring: A policeman checking passes to stop unnecessary travel in a COVID-19 hotspot area in Nellore, Andhra Pradesh. *K. RAVI KUMAR



The Health Department revealed that over 60% of those infected were in the 16-45 age group. While 6.54% were in the age group of 0-15, 21.48% patients were 45-60.

Krishna district crossed the 200-mark with 33 fresh cases and the tally went up

to 210. Guntur district reported 23 cases while Kurunool had 13 and Nellore seven, West Godavari three and Srikakulam one case.

Telangana has two cases. Telangana had only two samples testing positive on Mon-

day. Sixteen patients were discharged. Till date, 1,003 cases were recorded in the State. Of these, 646 were active.

The two fresh cases were from GHMC area, which includes parts of Rangareddy and Medchal districts.

Kalaburagi district, one of the worst-hit in Karnataka, registered its fifth fatality on Monday. A 47-year-old person from Aland, who was first treated in Solapur and shifted to ESIC Medical Complex later, was the latest victim.

His 65-year-old mother had also tested positive and was in hospital.

Kerala tests community

In Kerala, apart from the routine sampling among those quarantined, 875 samples were randomly collected from healthcare workers, migrants and people interacting more with the community, such as police, from all districts over five days. Of these, 611 were negative, Chief Minister, Pinarayi Vijayan said on Monday.

As part of an intensive drive, the Health department collected 3,056 population-level samples from select groups across the State on Sunday as a single-day "augmented sampling."

CMs for calibrated easing of curbs

Kerala braces for return of expatriates; Yediyurappa holds meeting with officials

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Chief Ministers of Kerala and Karnataka pitched for a continuation of restrictions till May 15 during the video-conference with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday.

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said the government had argued against an abrupt lifting of the regulations on May 3 and sought a progressive dialling down aimed at liberating relatively safe localities first. Kerala has asked the Centre to give States more latitude in the matter.

The government could not ignore the spectre of a resurgence of the disease



Crisis meet: Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacting with Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa and other Ministers. *PTI

with several thousand non-resident Keralites (NoRks) expected to return as soon as the Centre allowed special flights, he said.

Sources in Karnataka indicated that the State is inclined to have a stricter vigil

in red zones until the areas transit to green zones over a period of time in respect to COVID-19 control. "The decision on how to provide exemption will be based on the Union government's directive," sources added.

Following the interaction with the Prime Minister, Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa had a long discussion with the Deputy Commissioners all districts in the evening. Government sources indicated that economic activities could be further eased in districts coming under the green zone post May 3.

Last week, rural industries were permitted to function keeping social distancing in districts under the green zone. A stricter vigil could be mounted in red zones. "The ban on sale of liquor could continue till the end of May as PM is for this," sources said.

Data of virus patients in Kerala leaked

COVID-19 patients from Kasaragod, Kannur receive calls seeking information

STAFF REPORTER
KASARAGOD

Reports of breaches in the data of COVID-19 patients have emerged from Kasaragod and Kannur districts.

Following reports that COVID-19 patients had received calls from unknown numbers seeking information, the Kasaragod District Medical Officer (DMO) has sought an inquiry into the issue. DMO A.V. Ramdas said though he had received no complaints from anyone so far, he had written to District Police Chief P.S. Sabu seeking an inquiry to ascertain the truth.

In the past few days, many people who recovered from COVID-19 reportedly re-

ceived calls from unknown numbers.

Kasaragod District Surveillance Officer A.T. Manoj said the control room had collected details of the patients and their contacts and the information was shared with the State control room. There was no possibility a breach from the control room which was manned by staff from the Health Department and the National Health Mission.

Meanwhile, Mr. Sabu said an investigation would be held to ascertain how such a breach occurred. He said many patients had been in private hospitals too and the details were with the local bodies as well.

It was also reported that the people had received calls from the National COVID Cell as well.

Some of the incoming numbers were traced to a Bengaluru-based private company, which was involved in data collection, he said. However, the company could not be contacted, he said.

Google Maps link

In Kannur, a Google Maps link prepared by the cyber cell using the mobile number and address of the SARS-CoV-2-affected patients and their contacts came out in the open. The police team headed by IG Vijay Sakhare, deputised as the special officer

to curtail the spread of the disease, prepared the link including details of 54 COVID-19 patients and 9,000 of their contacts. This link was used to track the people and was shared with higher police officers.

"The police team should have ensured data security while preparing the link," said T.V. Subhash, District Collector. A report in this regard would be submitted to the Chief Secretary, he said.

Since similar methods were used in Kasaragod as well, it was suspected that private companies were able to source the details through these web-based links.

Mr. Sakhare was unavailable for comments.

IN BRIEF



2.2 lakh Keralites register to return home

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM Non-Resident Keralites (NoRks) from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries form the bulk of the 2.20 lakh persons to register online till 7 p.m. on Monday on the website of the Department of Non-Resident Keralite Affairs to return to Kerala. Among the GCC countries, most of the registrations from Sunday evening onwards on the www.registernorkaroots.org are from the UAE.

Patient ends life in Bengaluru hospital

BENGALURU A 50-year-old autorickshaw driver from Bengaluru, who was being treated in the COVID-19 ICU ward at Victoria Hospital, ended his life on Monday. Sources in the hospital said that the patient (P-466), who had suffered renal failure and was on dialysis for the last four years, was depressed after he saw P-465 succumb to the infection on Sunday. The State Health department's bulletin said the patient died of "non-COVID" reasons and the death was not considered as a COVID-19 death.

Social media post lands man in soup in Telangana

HYDERABAD A fake news that the Cyberabad police had banned sale of oranges in Hyderabad went viral in social media from Monday. A good number of netizens believed the "orange sale ban" news clip, shown as lead news carried in the front page of a Hyderabad-based English daily. The fake (satire as described by the person who posted it) clip, was laced with religious overtones. The police have suo moto registered a case against the person who posted it.

117 students head home after return from Rome

They finished quarantine in New Delhi

S. HARPAL SINGH
PIPAWARUDA

About 117 students from south India, who were pursuing Masters courses in Rome, Italy, crossed over into Telangana on Monday on their way back home. They, however, had to wait for over eight hours for clearance from the Telangana government for transit entry into the State.

The students were brought back to India by the Central government on March 22 and had undergone 30 days of quarantine at a centre maintained by the Indo-Tibetan Border Police in New Delhi.

They also underwent three tests for COVID-19 in Rome and New Delhi before being permitted to go home. Raghu Ramakrishnan

from Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu, a student of the Space and Astronautics Department at Sapienza University of Rome (SUR), said the Indian Embassy had to get a doctor from India to conduct tests on about 264 students.

Delay questioned

Vignesh Sairam from Tiruchy in Tamil Nadu, who is studying mechatronics, revealed that the students had to fund their own travel from Delhi.

The youth were unable to understand why there was such a long delay in allowing the buses carrying them to the inter-State border of Telangana and Maharashtra. It was because of the delay in approval from the State Secretary in Hyderabad.

Lockdown deprives Maoists of rations and revenue flow

They are suffering after villages seal borders fearing spread

SUMIT BHATTACHARJEE
VISAKHAPATNAM

Ever since the COVID-19 lockdown has come into force, a number of interior villages in the Andhra Odisha Border (AOB) region have been using innovative means to restrict the entry of outsiders and prevent local residents from venturing out, except for the purchase or collection of essentials.

This has hit CPI (Maoist) cadres hard, as they have been depending on the villagers for their regular ration. "When getting enough ration for our own families has become difficult, how can we supply essentials to Maoists?" wonders a tribal from the Pedabayalu mandal.

Earlier, the Maoists had been depending on the PDS supply to tribals for their regular ration. Now that it is being regulated, this supply line has been cut off. Moreover, most of the villages have a self-imposed ban on entry. Recently, some Maoists tried to enter a village but were stopped by the residents at the entry point. Because of this, the supply of rations, vegetables and livestock were affected, hitting the left wing extremists, says Superintendent of Police Attada Babujee.

Virus fear

The fear of being infected by the novel coronavirus has also restricted their (Maoist) movement.

The Maoists who have retreated to the cut-off area in AOB, have not been coming out due to the outbreak of COVID-19. "If one gets infected then the entire squad gets infected and treatment is far from their reach. This has restricted their movement to sporadic forays into the villages, where they are being rejected," says ASP of Chintapalle Satish Kumar.

Revenue hit

The lockdown has also hit the revenue flow of the Maoists. Their main sources of income are collections from contractors, weekly shandies and smuggling of gold. All the three have come to a standstill.

Police beats ease lockdown blues in Pathanamthitta

Troupe performs at hospitals and apartment complexes to entertain people confined there

RADHAKRISHNAN KUTTOOR
PATHANAMTHITTA

Music is soothing and relaxing. For many stuck in houses due to the lockdown, it is a stress buster that eases anxiety and boredom.

Now, the police in Pathanamthitta have taken a leap out of their counterparts' book in Maharashtra and formed a music troupe to lift the spirits of the people laid low by the pandemic. The troupe performs at hospital and apartment complexes to enliven and entertain those stuck indoors.

Deputy Superintendent of Police K. Sajeev, who is in charge of the troupe, said it was music therapy for people in isolation wards

and people confined to homes. He said the police were inspired by a video of the Maharashtra police performing in a pandemic-hit area.

The initiative came from District Police Chief K.G. Simon, himself a pianist. The troupe was constituted in association with Cochin Kalastar, a music troupe, and Santhosh, a sound system operator. Kabeer of Cochin Kalastar and Anila, a woman singer, were roped in to assist singers among the force.

Sureshkumar, Jayakumar, Sadasiwan, and Hareendran, sub-inspectors, and Sreeraj, Arundev, Rajesh, and Sreejith, civil police officers, are the mainstay of the



Music for the soul: The music troupe, comprising police personnel, performing at a hospital. *SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

troupe. Cochin Kalastar supports the troupe with orchestra and sound mixing. The maiden performance on an apartment premises on March 31 was much

appreciated. Families enjoyed the programme from their balconies and rooms. The programme began with a universal prayer, followed by popular

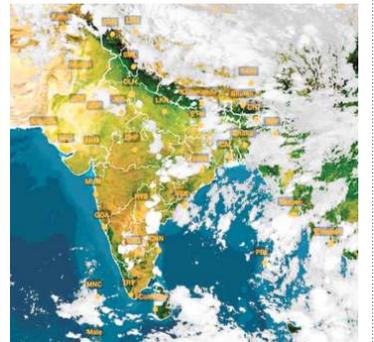
numbers in Malayalam, Tamil, and Hindi and concluded with the national anthem.

The troupe has performed at 32 venues so far, including General Hospitals at Pathanamthitta and Adoor, District Hospital at Kozhicherry, Taluk Hospitals at Thiruvalla and Ranni, Muthoot Medical Centre at Kozhicherry and Pathanamthitta, Police Quarters ground, and at open spaces in front of many apartments in the district.

Mr. Sajeev says the enthusiastic response was a testimony to the fact that their performance could help the people keep a positive frame of mind.

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



Forecast for Tuesday: Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning, hail and gusty winds very likely at isolated places over Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Telangana; with lightning and gusty winds at isolated places over east Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram, coastal Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

| CITY | RAIN | MAX | MIN | CITY | RAIN | MAX | MIN |
|-------------|------|------|------|--------------------|------|------|------|
| Agartala | 34.0 | 20.1 | 16.8 | Kozhikode | 61.8 | 36.8 | 24.0 |
| Ahmedabad | 41.0 | 26.3 | 20.0 | Kurnool | 42.6 | 29.8 | 19.8 |
| Aizawl | 23.9 | 14.5 | 11.1 | Lucknow | 32.5 | 19.8 | 14.4 |
| Allahabad | 20.8 | 32.0 | 19.6 | Madurai | 22.1 | 38.7 | 24.2 |
| Bangaluru | 31.6 | 22.4 | 18.4 | Mangaluru | 0.5 | 36.4 | 24.4 |
| Bhopal | 23.4 | 23.4 | 18.4 | Mumbai | 34.2 | 26.0 | 18.4 |
| Bhubaneswar | 33.9 | 23.1 | 18.4 | Mysuru | 33.9 | 23.6 | 18.4 |
| Chandigarh | 29.7 | 21.7 | 18.4 | New Delhi | 8.6 | 35.0 | 18.6 |
| Chennai | 3.2 | 31.0 | 27.6 | Patna | 0.4 | 33.8 | 18.9 |
| Coimbatore | 35.7 | 23.4 | 18.4 | Port Blair | 32.9 | 28.4 | 18.4 |
| Dehradun | 4.9 | 24.5 | 16.0 | Puducherry | 26.9 | 34.3 | 26.4 |
| Gangtok | 10.6 | 19.3 | 12.6 | Pune | 38.2 | 20.4 | 18.4 |
| Goa | 35.2 | 26.0 | 18.4 | Raipur | 4.0 | 36.0 | 20.8 |
| Guwahati | 33.0 | 20.1 | 16.8 | Ranchi | 30.0 | 18.5 | 18.4 |
| Hubballi | 37.0 | 22.0 | 18.4 | Shillong | 4.5 | 21.4 | 18.4 |
| Hyderabad | 33.9 | 24.6 | 18.4 | Shimla | 21.7 | 14.4 | 18.4 |
| Imphal | 0.8 | 24.8 | 17.3 | Srinagar | 1.0 | 22.7 | 12.6 |
| Jaipur | 37.0 | 21.5 | 18.4 | Thiruvananthapuram | 2.2 | 34.6 | 25.7 |
| Kochi | 2.6 | 33.8 | 25.0 | Tiruchi | 25.6 | 39.1 | 15.4 |
| Kolkata | 2.6 | 24.2 | 12.6 | Vijayawada | 15.9 | 33.9 | 23.6 |
| Lucknow | 32.2 | 24.2 | 18.4 | Visakhapatnam | 83.8 | 33.0 | 22.4 |

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

| CITIES | SO ₂ | NO ₂ | CO | PM2.5 | PM10 | CODE | Yesterday |
|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|----|-------|------|------|--|
| Ahmedabad | 31 | 19 | 23 | 48 | 78 | Good | In observation made at 6:00 p.m. Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 159 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Aizawl, Mizoram recorded a healthy AQI score of 13. |
| Bangaluru | 10 | 17 | 50 | 61 | 61 | Good | |
| Chennai | 03 | 20 | 59 | 34 | 48 | Good | |
| Delhi | 83 | 30 | 33 | 43 | 48 | Good | |
| Hyderabad | 04 | 30 | 36 | 59 | 59 | Good | |
| Kolkata | 09 | 12 | 20 | 32 | 32 | Good | |
| Lucknow | 09 | 09 | 40 | 75 | 75 | Good | |
| Mumbai | 80 | 55 | 81 | 67 | 67 | Good | |
| Pune | 25 | 09 | 50 | 32 | 31 | Good | |
| Visakhapatnam | 07 | 24 | 06 | 11 | 32 | Good | |

Air Quality Code: Poor (Red) Moderate (Yellow) 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.



Virtual, yet open

The situation forced by the lockdown must be used to improve judicial processes amidst the national lockdown, the Supreme Court and several other courts have been holding virtual proceedings. A question of concern to the Bar is whether virtual courts have become the "new normal" and whether it means a move away from the idea of open courts towards technology-based administration of justice without the physical presence of lawyers and litigants. Chief Justice of India S.A. Bobde emphasises that virtual courts are open courts too; and that one cannot describe them as closed or in camera proceedings. The correct way of framing the difference, he says, is to call them virtual courts as distinct from "courts in congregation". A three-judge Bench headed by the CJI, in an order earlier this month, laid down broad norms for courts using video-conferencing and ratified the validity of virtual judicial proceedings. Two aspects are not in dispute: the vital necessity to keep the courts open even during a national lockdown so that access to justice is not denied to anyone; and second, the need to maintain physical distancing. The Supreme Court Bar Association has written to the CJI and other judges that open court hearings should be restored at the earliest, subject of course to the lockdown ending. Citing earlier judgments on the importance of open court hearings, the SCBA has requested that the use of video conferencing should be limited to the duration of the current crisis, and not become the "new normal" or go on to replace open court hearings.

The SCBA also has a specific request: that proceedings held virtually may also be streamed live so that access is not limited to the lawyers concerned, but is also available to the litigants and the public. The court administration should readily agree to this. Advocates appearing in a particular case are now barred from sharing the passwords given to them to join the proceedings through video conference. While it is theoretically possible for the parties to join their lawyers during the hearing, in practice they may be unable to travel to their offices. Media access is also limited. These issues can be resolved through live-streaming. And in the longer term, it should become the general practice. As the use of technology is stepped up, courts should consider other steps that will speed up the judicial process and reduce courtroom crowding. In the lower courts, evidence could be recorded, with the consent of parties, by virtual means. In the higher courts, a system based on advance submission of written briefs and allocation of time slots for oral arguments can be put in place. It may even lead to more concise judgments. Despite the possibility of technical and connectivity issues affecting the process, one must recognise that virtual hearings are no different from open court conversations, provided access is not limited. The opportunity now to improve the judicial process must be utilised well.

Casting out stigma

As India fights the virus, the message of caution is in some places resulting in paranoia

The appalling images of a person flinging water bottles and biscuit packets towards people at a quarantine facility in Agra, Uttar Pradesh that emerged on Sunday show the many things wrong in India's fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Those who were supposed to be kept in isolation were seen squashing against the iron grill, desperate to fetch the food and water on the other side. The district administration has since claimed that the issue has been resolved, but not before officials betrayed their insouciance. The hapless, fenced off people were even blamed for getting restless after their food was delayed by several hours. Infected people and health workers taking care of them are facing dehumanising treatment from the rest of the society and they are often housed in a revolting environment in many places. U.P. has been particularly slow in devising a sensitive and efficient strategy. Of the 75 districts in the State, 53 have fewer than 100 isolation beds; 31 have active cases. In terms of ICU beds and ventilator availability, U.P. is among the worst States. Agra had 372 cases, and 10 deaths by Sunday evening. Meanwhile, the State bought faulty personal protective equipment that would have aggravated the risks for health workers. It is an irony that the Centre asked other States to follow the Agra model in the pandemic fight.

Truth be told, U.P.'s debility is not recent or unique. The densely populated heartland of India has a history of bad governance. The shared character of weak State capacity across Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and U.P. has been left unattended by successive governments. The only reasonable goal of the prolonged lockdown could have been buying time for shoring up the limited resources, which is a function of the political leadership. The data presented by the Cabinet Secretary last week reveal a very dismal level of preparedness by U.P., Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, while Rajasthan has managed things better by creating temporary facilities and ramping up existing ones. Most States are, however, treating the lockdown as the solution to the pandemic. The Centre needs to demonstrate leadership in ensuring that States scale up their capacities and communicate this to the public. It needs to particularly reassure health-care professionals that everything possible is being done to protect them. There needs to be a campaign led by the Prime Minister to erase the stigma against patients, and to mitigate the fear of the pandemic itself. The difference between caution and paranoia needs to be emphasised. In India's particular social context, the notion of social distancing has only added to the disease stigma. The Prime Minister has called for social solidarity in the face of the pandemic more than once last week, and that message needs to spread.



M.K. NARAYANAN

The COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented, involving as it does far too many variables. The very complexity of the novel coronavirus leads to radical uncertainty. Hence, it is unlikely that the world will ever be the same again. Abnormal could well become the new normal.

Pandemics have often changed the world and reshaped human society. Empires have collapsed. Commentators are already talking of fundamental alterations in governance and business norms. What is left unsaid – and likely to pose an even bigger challenge – is the extent to which the pandemic will impact human values and conduct. There is already concern that a diminution in human values could occur, and with this, the concept of an international community might well cease to exist. Each nation is tending to look inwards, concentrating on its narrowly defined national interests.

Institutions under fire

It is singularly unfortunate that at a time like this, existing international institutions such as the United Nations, the United Nations Security Council and the World Health Organization (WHO) are seen to have failed to measure up to the grave challenge posed by the pandemic.

While the UN Security Council is under attack for being slow in dealing with a situation that appears, at least on the surface, far graver than any military threat in recent decades, WHO has been tarred with the charge of bias and of grossly underestimating the nature of the epidemic. That prestigious global institutions should have been singled out for attack at

this time speaks volumes about the mood prevailing across the world.

Economic shock

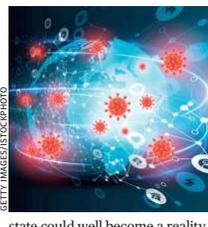
There are many other aspects of the COVID-19 crisis that will drastically impact the globe. On the economic front, the World Bank has already predicted negative growth for most nations. India's growth forecast for the current fiscal year has been put at 1.5% to 2.8%. Contraction of the economy and the loss of millions of jobs across all segments will further complicate this situation.

What is likely to change even more dramatically are certain other aspects relating to political management and security. Both terms are set to gain new meanings. The role of the state as an enforcer of public good will almost certainly become greatly enhanced. The dominant imperative would be to not put limits on the role of the state even where the situation may not be as grave as the present one. Many pieces of legislation of yesteryears that had been relegated to the archives – they were perceived to be anachronistic in a modern democratic set-up – may get a new lease of life. Some pieces of legislation such as the Disaster Management Act already reflect this reality today. Other pieces of legislation could follow in its wake.

This trend is already becoming evident to some extent across the world. Europe has shown a willingness to sacrifice personal liberties in favour of greater state control.

There are no serious protests over the fact that many of the powers being vested in the instruments of state in democracies today, to meet the current challenge, are eerily similar to those already practised by authoritarian regimes such as China.

Post COVID-19, the world may have to pay a heavy price in terms of loss of liberty. An omnipotent



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state could well become a reality.

China in the spotlight

Far-reaching changes can also be anticipated in the realm of geoeconomics and geopolitics. The world needs to prepare for a sea change. One nation, viz. China, is presently seeking to take advantage of and benefit from the problems faced by the rest of the world in the wake of the epidemic. Already one of the most prominent nations of the world and an important player in international institutions, China remains totally unfazed by the stigma that the current world pandemic owes a great deal to its negligence – the first identified and detected COVID-19 victim in Wuhan was on December 1, 2019, but it was only in the second week of January 2020, that China sounded the alarm. More importantly, it is seeking to convert its 'failure' into a significant opportunity. This is Sino-centrism at its best, or possibly its worst.

Already indispensable as the world's supplier of manufactured goods, China now seeks to benefit from the fact of its 'early recovery' to take advantage of the travails of the rest of the world, by using its manufacturing capability to its geo-economic advantage. Simultaneously, it seeks to shift from being a Black Swan (responsible for the pandemic), to masquerade as a White one, by offering medical aid and other palliatives to several Asian and African countries to meet their current pandemic threat. In turn, it seeks to gain a ge-

opolitical advantage by this action.

China also seems to be preparing for the eventuality that the current pandemic could hollow out the financial viability of many companies, institutions and banks across the world. There are enough reports of China's intentions to acquire financial assets and stakes in banks and companies across the world, taking advantage of the scaled-down value of their assets to support this. India seems to have woken up only recently to this threat, after the Peoples' Bank of China acquired a 1% stake in India's HDFC, taking advantage of the sharp decline in the price of HDFC stocks. Across the world, meanwhile, the clamour against China's hostile takeover bids is becoming stronger. Several countries apart from India, such as Australia and Germany, have begun to restrict Chinese foreign direct investment in companies and financial institutions in their countries, recognising the inherent danger of a possible Chinese hostile takeover of their critical assets.

This may not, however, be adequate to checkmate China, which is poised to dominate the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), thus enabling it to exploit market access across the Association of South-east Asian Nations, East Asian nations, Australia and New Zealand. Together with its Belt and Road Initiative, which seeks to combine regional connectivity alongside gaining a virtual economic and substantial stranglehold across Asia, China is ostensibly preparing the way for a China-centric multilateral globalisation framework.

A faltering West

The geopolitical fallout of this pandemic could be still more serious. One distinct possibility is that COVID-19 would effectively put paid to the existing global order that has existed since the late 1940s. The United States which is already

being touted in some circles as a "falling" state, will be compelled to cede ground. Weakened economically and politically after COVID-19 has ravaged the nation, the U.S.'s capacity to play a critical role in world affairs is certain to diminish. The main beneficiary of this geopolitical turnaround is likely to be China, a country that does not quite believe in playing by the rules of international conduct. Europe, in the short and medium term, will prove incapable of defining and defending its common interests, let alone having any influence in world affairs. Germany, which may still retain some of its present strength, is already turning insular, while both France and a post-Brexit United Kingdom will be out of the reckoning as of now.

West Asia and India

Coming to West Asia, both Saudi Arabia and Iran are set to face difficult times. The oil price meltdown will aggravate an already difficult situation across the region. There may be no victors, but Israel may be one country that is in a position to exploit this situation to its advantage. In the meantime, the economic downturn greatly reduces India's room for manoeuvre. In South Asia, it faces the prospect of being isolated, with the Chinese juggernaut winning Beijing new friends and contacts across a region deeply impacted by the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Likewise, India's leverage in West Asia – already greatly diminished – will suffer further, with oil prices going down and the Indian expatriate community (who are among the hardest hit by this downturn) out on a limb. Many of the latter may seek repatriation back to the host country, substantially reducing the inflow of foreign funds to India from the region.

M.K. Narayanan is a former National Security Adviser and a former Governor of West Bengal

India in the post-pandemic world

The manner in which the country deals with the crisis will determine its place in the future world order



SUJATHA SINGH

Yes, we all know that the world we once knew has gone, perhaps forever. Much has changed and will continue to. What has not changed though, is human nature itself. The way we react, as a species to the unknown, or to an existential threat, on a scale not experienced in recent times, to something that we cannot quite comprehend as yet, in its entirety.

We have arrived, once again, at the boundaries of the human race's collective knowledge, and it is sobering to be reminded that what we do not know is much greater than what we do know, about ourselves and the world we live in.

A leadership role

The fact that there is no end in sight to the COVID-19 crisis does not prevent us from making prognoses of what a post-COVID-19 world may look like. The pandemic has added heft to arguments of foreign policy analysts across the entire spectrum of strategic thinking, from nationalists and anti-globalists, to advocating a more robust multilateralism and a leadership role for India in mobilising international cooperation.

I believe, however, that before we get too involved in the contours of a post-pandemic world, we first need to think about where we are headed as a post-pandemic India. Yes, there will be a churning as na-

tions scramble for advantage in the world order as the pandemic recedes, but I think we need to be more concerned at this point of time with the social and economic churning under way within our own country, accentuated and magnified by the COVID-19 crisis.

The role that India plays in the post-pandemic world order will be determined by how we deal with the crisis now, and how we emerge from it. This, in turn, depends on certain fundamental factors – the quality of leadership, the quality of administration at all levels, (Centre, State, district and village), the robustness of institutional frameworks, the quality of health care, and our social coherence as a people.

Admittedly, the manner in which some of these have functioned recently, does not engender great confidence. Further, the manner in which we have dealt with the pandemic until now has made it painfully clear, as nothing else has in recent times, that there are two Indias – an India in which social distancing is possible and an India in which it is not.

Crucial investments

The COVID-19 epidemic has mercifully highlighted our shortcomings and our failures, even as we pride ourselves on being the world's largest democracy and its fifth largest economy. It has highlighted our age-old fault lines of caste, class and creed. There are still too many inequalities, and too many of us who have been left behind, on whom the effects of the lockdown have been the most severe, compounding the economic distress of recent years.

Yes, the lockdown was neces-



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sary in order to pause the spread of the pandemic. However the manner of its implementation, without the government of India even foreseeing, much less planning for, the consequences of such a step, or coordinating with States in advance, or spelling out how it would support the millions so affected, was harsh in the extreme on the poorer sections of our population. It was starkly reflected in the thousands of migrant workers believing (not without reason) that they were invisible to the Establishment, and not knowing what else to do, leaving by foot, trying to reach the only safety net they had – extended families and homes in their villages.

There lies grave danger here, of both the health and the economic consequences of the crisis intersecting amongst our poor, with potentially devastating consequences for them as well as for our overall attempt to manage the novel coronavirus.

It often takes a crisis to bring about fundamental change. Can one dare hope that this crisis too will bring about such change for the good? That it will bring about the policies and mindsets necessary to deal with the injustices and inequalities so painfully magnified by recent events?

It is time for the government to lay out a comprehensive road map to deal with both the health and

the economic consequences of the crisis, and to make long overdue investments on the massive scale needed, in universal health care, education and social security. Or at least to plan for it, and to raise the resources to back these plans with adequate funding, regardless of the fiscal deficit that will follow.

In its absence, we run the risk of social disorder, as witnessed in Bandra (Mumbai), Surat (Gujarat) and other parts of India where our poor are in lockdown. Growing perceptions of injustice and of the government's indifference to their plight could well lead to widespread outrage that would be difficult to control.

The investment that needs to be made in the millions of our people who live in poverty, or on the edge of it, are not merely welfare measures. They are fundamental to our socioeconomic transformation, which in itself is an imperative. Also, if India is to be in any position to make use of opportunities that emerge in the reordering of the global economy as the pandemic recedes.

On the global stage

In parallel with an inclusive, all-India effort on the domestic front, India needs to be part of international efforts to deal with the COVID-19 crisis – multilateral, regional or bilateral. It makes sound humanitarian as well as strategic sense for us to supply medicines of which we are the major producers (dependent though we may be, on China for 70% of the active pharmaceutical ingredients needed to produce them), to other countries. It is also important that we participate in international efforts towards finding a vaccine and

ramp up capacities to produce it in the quantities needed, both for our own people and for the world.

Yes, the world will have changed by the time the crisis recedes, but we, the human race, will continue to be what we have always been – relentless in our search for wealth and power, both within nations and without. On the international front, nations will continue to strive for strategic advantage in furthering their interests and constrained by realpolitik in striving for the common good. Countries that emerge in positions of relative economic advantage will present competing visions for the post-pandemic world order. If we wish to play a leadership role and to present a vision for a more inclusive world defined by international cooperation, then we need to back it with our own example, on the domestic as well as the international fronts.

I believe that in any post-pandemic world order that emerges, regardless of whether it is U.S.-centric or China-centric, there is no scenario in which India, a universe in itself, and home to one-sixth of humanity, will not occupy a place. The question is this: Will we emerge as part of the problem or as part of the solution? Will we emerge weaker or stronger as a nation? Will we have been guided by divisive political agendas that deepen our fault lines? Or will we have worked towards an inclusive India that embraces all of us in its fold, regardless of caste, class or creed? The pandemic has brought us to an inflection point. How we deal with it will determine our place in the future world order.

Sujatha Singh is Former Foreign Secretary

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

Greater responsibility

It has become a case of a Hamletian dilemma for the Indian government to take a call on ending the lockdown. The decision that involves lives on the one side and livelihoods on the other would always be difficult to arrive at. The lockdown is believed to be ending as usual, if one goes by signs from the government. Even though there could be evidence of a slowing down as far as the virus spread is concerned, the government should not

forget the many thousands of migrant workers left stranded and the many more who are poor and living on a thread with meagre support. The economy and livelihoods have taken a big blow even during the first phase of the lockdown. The hard task is to convince people to still follow the same norms. It should be made clear that the onus of being safe will now lie more on the individual than it is now.

Dr. D.V.G. SANKARRAO, Nellore, Andhra Pradesh

The Vitamin C debate

Since 1970, there have been heated debates for and against the use of Vitamin C. But the focus is on the role of Vitamin C as an immune system booster, protecting us from infections such as the coronavirus, as recommended by Dr. Rajan Ravichandran, a senior nephrologist of Chennai (Tamil Nadu, April 27). While recommending the intake of Vitamin C, he has also raised a scare, citing the case of a 74-year-old

man in Belgium who developed serious kidney problem due to high doses of Vitamin C for a week. The most common side-effect of high doses is diarrhoea if taken on an empty stomach. On kidney stones, Dr. Ravichandran has cited an odd case from Belgium and not a flood of such cases in Chennai or India. A medical team led by Dr. Sushila Kataria, physician at Medanta Medicity Hospital, Gurugram, Delhi NCR, has successfully treated 11

Italian nationals who were admitted with COVID-19. She has gone on record that Vitamin C and a new drug, Tocilizumab, were given to these patients.

Dr. VIJAYA GANESH, Chennai

Chance for Kerala

People have still to find their feet in terms of the lockdown, and as far as Kerala is concerned, there could be more unsettlement. It could be in the form of expatriates returning home, most of

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them from West Asia. For an economy and a State dependent on foreign remittances, this will come as a double blow. This crisis should be a chance to create investment-friendly opportunities. It is time to bring about a change in the attitude of the labour force, shedding militant trade unionism which has been the stumbling block to investment.

SHARADA SVARAM, Kochi

Plain Road!

A policy road map to tackle COVID-19

The interest of each and the interests of all now coincide, not only within nations but for all humanity



SANJAY REDDY

How will it all end? Policies to address the worldwide crisis brought about by COVID-19 must satisfy three criteria. First, they must aim to minimise the loss of life directly resulting from the disease, while recognising that there remain deep uncertainties about its true nature.

Second, they must restore the elements of economic and social life as soon as possible, so as to avoid disastrous and lasting consequences, including for other aspects of health, schooling, food security and livelihood. The costs of lockdowns have already been massive and will deepen if they result in foregone health treatments, dropouts from school, and permanent closure of businesses. The direct effect of COVID-19 on the life expectancy of the non-elderly will be modest. But the indirect effects of the lockdown on health and well-being may be severe, especially for poorer persons and countries. An approach that values all lives must give attention to the costs as well as benefits of the lockdown, conceiving the public health comprehensively.

Third, they must aim at a glide path out of the crisis, that can reasonably be projected to end it once and for all – not merely to manage it indefinitely through, for instance, periodic lockdowns. That idea has been motivated by abstract epidemiological models which do not take account of other health effects, let alone non-health effects, of draconian policies, and which make mechanical assumptions about individuals. On and off policies can result in deep damage. There are costs involved in starting and stopping schools and business, but beyond this, human beings need regularity to plan and act sensibly.

An effective health system

Three directions for policy are suggested by these three criteria. First, infections which do not lead to fatalities or lasting illness must be treated as on balance desirable, when determining the right balance of policies. This recognises a central trade-off –



avoiding infection versus gaining possible population-level immunity. As long as the disease is circulating and no medical breakthrough has been achieved, lockdowns, mass testing, contact-tracing and quarantining can only buy time. Reducing the flow of persons who get the disease in each moment diminishes the stock of those who have been exposed, which extends the duration of vulnerability of society. This is not speculation but arithmetic, supposing any degree of immunity from having had the disease. Widespread testing and contact-tracing can help to manage the flow of infections and reduce the danger to those especially at risk, but would have to be continued indefinitely until a vaccine is developed, and demands adequate public health infrastructure, severely neglected in many countries. The need to rebuild an effective basic health system is underlined by the few success stories to date in handling the outbreak, such as Kerala.

Testing on a mass scale is far from being achieved even in the most advanced countries, let alone others. To add to this, spreading the illness over time will likely not lower the number of deaths in developing countries to the same degree as in developed countries which possess superior, although still constrained, curative health infrastructure. As already noted, lockdowns and other means of delaying the spread of the disease come at enormous costs to other pressing societal objectives, including health itself (the already reduced rates of control of other infectious diseases in India and other countries provides a case in point). Due to different circumstances, the

appropriate strategies for protecting life may vary across countries even when the end is the same.

Second, policies must make a link between restoration of economic output and adequate investment in containing, indeed ending, the disease. This means that costs of vaccine development, mass testing and other measures attacking the disease must be viewed as enjoying a healthy societal return. The very low contributions so far to the international fund to develop a vaccine for the virus shows the scale of mismatch between the losses already incurred worldwide and likely to be incurred in the future, and investments to limit those losses. Failure to finance vaccine development is not mere free riding, but borders on suicide, since the prospective gains of individual countries would more than justify paying for the needed investment. Private firms are also being encouraged to contribute, but should agree that any breakthrough must be freely available and benefit all. Recognising the interdependence involved in fighting the disease, and its economic and social consequences, the UN must provide the leadership that has been so far missing.

Smart policies can include re-sumption of contacts across nations, for instance by beginning with testing and quarantines of visitors progressively. Now that infection rates have risen everywhere, the benefit of continued isolation on reducing the spread of the disease is limited, but its other costs are great. It is more feasible to bring the disease under control in one's own society through internal measures than to ensure its control everywhere. That is likely to be impossible because of war zones, weak states and broken health systems. A country that has achieved a degree of control over the disease can, however, sustain links to the world with confidence, and need not wait for universal success to begin to restore international contacts.

The right perspective is not one of business versus life nor of life versus life, but of life and life, seeking to reconcile goals through sensible measures. The interest of each and the interests of all now coincide, not only within nations but for all humanity.

Sanjay Reddy is professor of economics at the New School for Social Research in New York

Lacking in transparency

Citizens must keep themselves informed and push the government to adopt scientific and people-oriented policies



SUVRAT RAJU

The lockdown of the country has had a devastating social impact. A recent survey of internal migrant workers found that 42% did not even have a day's worth of rations left. The situation in the agricultural sector is also grim.

Soon after the lockdown commenced, the Prime Minister apologised for the misery that his decision had caused, but claimed that he had "no other option". However, it is false that a total lockdown was unavoidable. A lockdown is not a permanent solution for the pandemic. Models suggest that, in the absence of other long-term measures, the epidemic could bounce back when restrictions are eased. Therefore, a lockdown is just a method of buying time to prepare the healthcare system for a long battle.

A result of government failure

But if the purpose of the lockdown is to gain time, this begs another question. The World Health Organization declared the novel coronavirus outbreak a "public health emergency of international concern" on January 30. India was lucky because the virus arrived here relatively late. Why did the government not prepare itself despite several weeks of advance notice?

If the government had scaled up testing capability in February, tested and quarantined international travellers from high-risk countries, including asymptomatic travellers, and established stocks of personal protective equipment, a total lockdown could have been avoided. India could not have escaped the epidemic entirely, but it could have minimised damage to the economy, while keeping infections at a manageable level through testing, contact-tracing and, possibly, targeted lockdowns. It follows that the social catastrophe caused by the lockdown is the direct result of the failure of the government to respond to the epidemic in a timely manner.

In his address to the nation on April 14, the Prime Minister remarked that his government took "quick decisions" to contain the disease. This myth has allowed the government to escape accountability for its past failures and emboldened it to charge ahead with problematic policies. An example is the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)'s reluctance to expand the scope of testing. On April 27, India had tested 486 individuals

per million of the population. This is not only more than 50 times lower than the corresponding rate in Italy, it is significantly lower than the rate in Pakistan. Almost a week into the lockdown, on March 30, the ICMR admitted that it was testing at "less than 30%" of its capacity. This raises serious questions about whether ICMR's strict testing guidelines are partly motivated by the desire to keep the number of reported infections low and disingenuously suggest that the epidemic is in control.

Studies suggest that more than 80% of those infected by COVID-19 are asymptomatic or only mildly symptomatic. Since such individuals can nevertheless infect others, they must be included in the ambit of testing. Otherwise, they could form the base for a rapid spread of the epidemic.

The role of the people

The government must not only collect more data, it must share and analyse this data openly so that people can verify the rationale behind its administrative decisions. Instead, the government has started peddling numbers that make no sense. Just before extending the lockdown, the government claimed that India would have had 8 lakh cases by 15 April without the lockdown. But independent analysts believe that the lockdown's role in reducing the number of cases in India has been of a smaller magnitude.

In his address, the Prime Minister stated that "several countries" which were "at par with India" a few weeks earlier had gone on to develop "25-30 times" more cases. But the data fail to reveal the existence of any such country. The U.S. and Spain, which have the world's highest number of infections had, respectively, 53 and 15 times as many cases as India on the day of the address. But these countries have always been ahead of India on the epidemic's curve. By March 14, they had reported 27 and 63 times more cases, respectively, than India.

A crisis provides the state with a ready justification to shun both accountability and transparency. However, while this might be expedient for those in power, it does not lead to an effective public health strategy. The virus is immune to political spin and data-suppression. This is why the role of the Indian people is crucial, and it goes well beyond lighting candles. We can best contribute in the country's battle against the epidemic by keeping ourselves informed, holding the government to account, and constantly pushing it to adopt policies that are scientific, transparent and people-oriented.

Suvarat Raju is a physicist with the International Centre for Theoretical Sciences, Bengaluru. Views expressed are personal

Hostage to obscurantism

Pakistan's experience shows why instrumentalising religion is dangerous

MOHAMMED AYOUB

In the month of Ramadan, Muslims renew their faith by fasting, participating in family and community dinners, and congregational prayers. This Ramadan is unique, however, because of COVID-19, which in most Muslim-majority countries as well as in India has led to the shutting down of mosques and banning of congregational prayers. The holiest sites of Islam in Mecca and Medina have been subject to lockdowns as well. Most Muslims have adjusted to the new reality justifying it with reference to the Prophetic tradition that human life is more important than the performance of religious rituals.

Defying orders

The most visible exception to this rule is Pakistan where reactionary mullahs have defied government orders and insisted on performing congregational prayers even against the powerful military's preferences. Imran Khan's government has buckled under this obscurantist pressure and allowed congregational prayers to continue. It has attached certain social distancing provisions that are unenforceable in the Pakistani milieu.

This is a signal that the most obscurantist elements in Pakistan are now capable of calling the shots even in defiance of the country's powerful military brass as well as putting at risk thousands of lives because of lack of physical distancing. These elements, including some religious parties and jihadist organisations, have been gaining ground politically over the years. It is commonly assumed that their political clout has amplified since General Zia-ul-Haq's programme of Islamising the country and Pakistan's participation in the Afghan "jihad" in the 1980s that, it is argued, changed the political culture of the country. While there is a good deal of substance to this argument it ignores the basic fact that while the movement for Pakistan's creation was led by a largely secular elite it was undertaken in the name of religion, and Islam was touted as the raison d'être for its establishment.

Mohammad Ali Jinnah, who was from a peripheral Shia community,

became the Qaid-e-Azam of the predominantly Sunni Pakistan movement. He and his lieutenants viewed Islam in instrumental terms. To them it was the most effective tool to mobilise Muslim masses to aggrandise power while leaving Muslims in the minority provinces, who they considered dispensable, far more vulnerable than they would have been in undivided India. All they were interested in was creating a Muslim-majority state over which they could rule since they could not compete with the Indian National Congress for influence and power in a united India after the British withdrawal.

A slippery slope

Pakistan's founders were not interested in creating an Islamic theocracy. However, less than two years after Pakistan's independence religious leaders pressured Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan to include in the Objectives Resolution (which later became the Preamble to Pakistan's first Constitution) that sovereignty belongs to Allah who had delegated his authority to the state of Pakistan.

This was the first step on the slippery slope towards making Pakistan an ideological Islamic state. It is clear from hindsight that despite a few bumps on the way there was a linear development from the Objectives Resolution to Zia's Islamisation and the entrenchment of the most reactionary and jihadist elements, the latter encouraged by the military for its own ends, in Pakistan's body politic.

The message that India should imbibe from the Pakistani experience is that once religion is employed, even for instrumental purposes, as the principal component of a nation's identity, it is inevitable that the most bigoted religious elements will end up defining the dominant ideology of the nation's polity. The experience of Israel teaches the same lesson. Established by a secular elite that used religio-ethnic identity for instrumental purposes, it has ended up empowering Jewish fundamentalists who now hold the political balance.

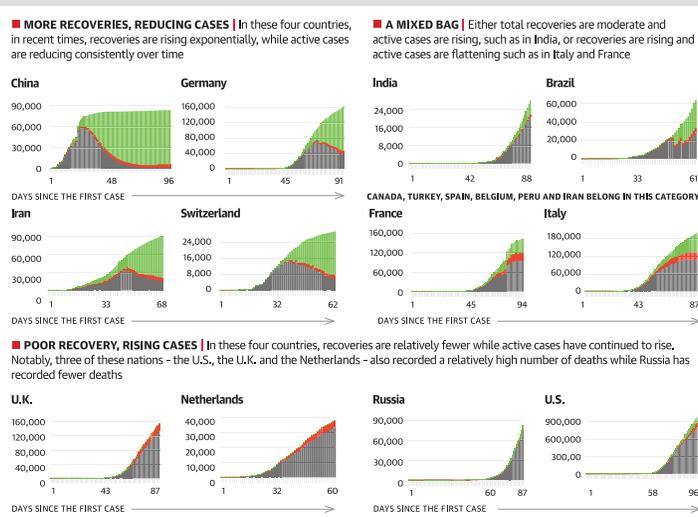
Mohammed Ayoub is University Distinguished Professor Emeritus of International Relations, Michigan State University



DATA POINT

COVID-19 trajectories: The good, the bad and the ugly

COVID-19 curves can be categorised into three types based on the number of recoveries (green) and number of deaths (red) recorded over time. The charts depict the trajectories of 12 out of the 17 countries which recorded at least 25,000 infections. By Vignesh Radhakrishnan, Sumant Sen, Naresh Singaravelu



The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO APRIL 28, 1970

Veterinary Dispensary Inside Temple

Shops inside temples are a common feature, but a veterinary dispensary functions inside the Angala Amman Temple in Belur, Salem district. There is a blue board of the Animal Husbandry Department on the temple tower stating that the Belur veterinary dispensary is functioning within the temple. When your correspondent approached the temple gate, he was greeted with the bleatings of four famished goats. Enquiries reveal that the veterinary dispensary was located in the temple a couple of years ago since no suitable site was available nearby and a nominal rent is being paid by the department to the temple authorities. People belonging to all religious faiths are permitted to visit the dispensary inside the temple for treating their ailing cattle

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 28, 1920

Domestic Servants Conference.

A Conference of the Madras Domestic Servants of the European Employers was held. The Hon'ble Mr. M.C. Rajah in the course of his presidential address said: "Our demands are elementary. We have to plead hard for the most elementary rights of citizenship. We have often to ask that we may be treated as human beings. It is only the Christian missionaries among the European Employers that treat us at all sympathetically but with others our aspirations meet but with little sympathy. In the Legislative Council, I have often been reminded that my interpellations and resolutions relate to trifling matters. They may be trifling and insignificant to those engaged in the game of transcendental politics. They may not be so romantic as big political proposals. But "the toad beneath the harrow knows exactly where each tooth-point goes." The Government seems to be under the impression that by appointing a few men of our community to the councils of the land, they have done their duty to our community. I am often told that my being on the Legislative Council is propitious of the interest the Government takes in our community. As regards the representation in the Legislative Council, though the Joint Parliamentary Committee had recommended six seats for us, you do not know what amount of difficulty I had in getting five seats reserved for us. I desire that we should be treated as office-servants and not as despicable slaves.

FROM PAGE ONE

Modi hints at graded exit from lockdown

The Chief Ministers of Goa, Odisha, Meghalaya and several others had asked for an extension of the lockdown with some relaxations for economic activities within district boundaries. Odisha asked for an extension till June 3, with time being given to the State governments to bring back migrant workers from their States back to their own.

On this issue, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar asked for a clear countrywide policy. Several States have facilitated the return of migrant labourers from their States and even students stuck elsewhere, while Bihar had stuck to the old lockdown policy, which was to tell people to stay where they are. "Now that several States

have started bringing back their people, we want a uniform policy for this," he reportedly said. He also sought more testing kits as well as personal protection equipment (PPE) for medical and front line workers.

Mr. Modi, while emphasising that the restart of economic activity was important, said the fundamentals of the economy continued to be strong. On the issue of getting back Indians stuck overseas, he said it "had to be done keeping in mind the fact that they don't get inconvenienced, and their families are not under any risk." Several reports suggested earlier last week that the process of evacuating the Indians stuck abroad may begin after May 3.

'No payment made for Chinese test kits supplies'

"For Wondfo, the evaluation committee got four bids and the corresponding quotes received were ₹1,204, ₹1,200, ₹844 and ₹600. Accordingly, the offer of ₹600 was considered. Meanwhile, ICMR also tried to procure kits directly from Wondfo," the ICMR said.

The quotation received from direct procurement had issues, including that it was FOB (Free on Board) without any commitment on logistics issues. As it was on the basis of 100% direct advance without any guarantees, there was no commitment on timelines and the rates were communicated in U.S. Dollars without any clause for accounting for fluctuations, it stated.

Wondfo's exclusive dis-

tributor for India for the kit was selected because they quoted an all inclusive price for FOB (logistics) without any clause for advance. "After receipt of some supplies, ICMR again conducted quality checks on these kits in field conditions. Based on a scientific assessment of their performance, the order in question (Wondfo) along with order in respect of another make found under-performing have been cancelled," it said.

ICMR noted that the States have been advised to stop using the kits procured from Wondfo and Zuhai Livzon Diagnostics after it found wide variation in their sensitivity despite early promise of good performance for surveillance.

RBI opens ₹50,000 cr. liquidity tap for MFs

"RBI move is very timely. This move will first improve the confidence; second, it can help in providing the necessary liquidity to mutual fund industry if anyone needs to avail it. With the yields dropping, one would assume banks may go down the credit curve and extend facilities," said A Balasubramanian, chief executive officer, Aditya Birla Sun Life Mutual Fund and also a board member of the Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI).

The scheme is available from Monday i.e., April 27, 2020 till May 11, 2020 or up to utilisation of the allocated amount. The RBI will review the timeline and amount, depending upon market conditions.

"Heightened volatility in capital markets in reaction to COVID-19 has imposed liquidity strains on mutual funds (MFs), which have intensified in the wake of redemption pressures related to closure of some debt MFs and potential contagious effects therefrom. The stress is, however, confined to the high-risk debt MF segment at this stage; the larger industry remains liquid," the central bank said.

RBI said that it remains vigilant and will take whatever steps are necessary to mitigate the economic impact of COVID-19 and preserve financial stability. The facility is on-tap and open-ended, and banks can submit their bids to avail funding on any day from Monday to Friday.

Govt. pitches for home isolation of mild cases

The death toll was 925 with Maharashtra continuing to report the maximum number at 369. Within the State, Mumbai reported 395 new cases and 15 more fatalities, taking the cities death toll to 219, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation said.

The Health Ministry noted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his interaction with Chief Ministers of all the States on Monday suggested that the chain of transmission of the virus should be broken, strictly for districts falling in the red zone and orange zone.

"He highlighted the importance for States/UTs to enforce guidelines strictly in the hotspots i.e. the red zone areas. He stated that the efforts of the States/UTs should be directed towards converting the red zones into orange and thereafter to green zones. He stated that no stigma should be associated with coronavirus disease and health facilities should provide required

other health services besides COVID-19. He further added that traditional medicinal systems should continue their work," said the Health Ministry.

In its guidelines for home isolation, the Health Ministry said, "Very mild/pre-symptomatic patients having the requisite facility at his/her residence for self-isolation will have the option for home isolation. The patients should be clinically assigned as very mild/mild, moderate or severe and accordingly admitted to COVID Care Centres, dedicated COVID Health Centres or dedicated COVID Hospital."

"For home isolation, a person should be clinically assigned as a very mild case/pre-symptomatic case by the treating medical officer. A care giver should be available to provide care on 24 x7 basis and a communication link between the caregiver and hospital is a prerequisite for the entire duration," the Ministry said.

'CMs favour cautious approach'

PM asked to lift lockdown on the basis of State-wise observations: Narayanasamy

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A majority of Chief Ministers during their video conference with Prime Minister Narendra Modi have favoured a cautious approach to lifting the lockdown, scheduled to end on May 3, Puducherry Chief Minister V. Narayanasamy said on Monday.

Addressing an online press conference soon after the video conference, the Puducherry Chief Minister said that since the revenues of the States had completely dried up and that they had advocated 'slowly starting economic activities with some restrictions'.

Mr. Narayanasamy, one of the nine Chief Ministers who participated in the video conference, also made several key suggestions such as a block grant of ₹1 lakh crore

for all States to combat COVID-19 on the basis of population, clearing the pending GST dues, interest-free advances to States by the Reserve Bank of India, rescheduling of Central loans to States for six months and a stimulus package on the lines given by the UPA government in 2008.

"Most of the Chief Ministers were unanimous in telling the Prime Minister that the way in which the corona-affected persons are increasing in the country, there should be a cautious approach and the Prime Minister should take a call on the basis of the observations given by the Chief Ministers," Mr. Narayanasamy said. "And they said economic activity should be slowly started," he added.

Mr. Narayanasamy said he and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar asked the Centre to evolve a policy for sending home migrant workers stranded across the country due to the lockdown.

Asked if any Chief Minister expressed apprehension of law and order due to the prolonged lockdown and migrant workers getting anxious, he said, "The Bihar Chief Minister raised this issue... The Prime Minister also mentioned about migrant workers in passing but did not give any solution to resolve the issue."

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Stranded students

The Puducherry Chief Minister also raised the issue of Indian tourists and students stranded abroad and urged the government to take steps to bring them back.

Mr. Narayanasamy claimed that his party colleague and Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot came in for some praise from Mr. Modi for taking effective steps to curb the spread of COVID-19 in his State.

'Returning migrants a threat to rural areas'

MHA status report to SC says that movement of masses might make pandemic 'unmanageable'

VIJAYA SINGH
NEW DELHI

Days before State governments led by Uttar Pradesh arranged buses to bring back migrants, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) informed the Supreme Court that "so far rural India has largely remained safe from this disease" and if migrants returning on foot are permitted to conclude their journey "there is a serious and imminent potential of the disease penetrating in rural India also."

In a status report filed in the Supreme Court on April 12, Union Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla said in case of movement of large group of persons travelling together, "the epidemic, which has already taken the form of a pandemic would manifest itself in its still most severe form making it unmanageable."

The country was initially placed under a lockdown on March 24 in wake of the pan-



Fatal mistake: The report stated that workers travelling in large numbers defied social distancing norms. •AP

demie that with all forms of public transport suspended and State borders sealed, lakhs of migrant workers in urban areas started walking hundreds of kilometres to reach their homes. On March 28, MHA issued guidelines and asked States to organize relief camps and arrange food for them.

'Migration unnecessary' "There is no necessity for migration of workers to shift from place of occupation to

the place of their residence and rush back to their villages. Their daily needs are being taken care of wherever they are working and their daily needs of their family members were being taken care of at their respective villages.... It is submitted that migrant workers travelling barefoot or otherwise in large numbers inevitably and unknowingly defy the social distancing norms which is one of the globally accepted norm for preventing COVID and put their lives

Meghalaya seeks national lockdown beyond May 3

'States can use RRS at panchayat level'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has found merit in Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma's suggestion that the lockdown should continue beyond May 3 with relaxations for green zones or low-risk COVID-19 areas.

Mr. Modi also felt Meghalaya's idea of a Rapid Response System (RRS) at the micro-level to combat the pandemic could be replicated as a "best practice" for such challenges in the future. "We sought continuation with the lockdown post May 3 with relation to activities in green zones or non-COVID-19 affected areas of Meghalaya," Mr. Sangma said after the video conference of Chief Ministers



Conrad K. Sangma

with Mr. Modi on Monday. He suggested setting up of RRS at the panchayat level as well as creation of an economic task force. "The Prime Minister appreciated our experiment with local-level RRS for activating doctors, local administration and police within 60 minutes of detection of cases. He said all the States should replicate this model," Mr. Sangma said.

'Returning migrants a threat to rural areas'

MHA status report to SC says that movement of masses might make pandemic 'unmanageable'

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and others lives in danger," MHA's status report said. Uttar Pradesh was one of the first States to announce that it would arrange for migrant workers stuck across the country to return to their homes. On Sunday, a batch of workers in Haryana were brought back to Etah in Uttar Pradesh on buses arranged by the State government and were sent to quarantine centres.

The April 19 guidelines issued by MHA asserted that there will be no inter-State movement of labourers. Following U.P. other States like Punjab, Odisha, West Bengal, Maharashtra were also coordinating for inter-State movement of labourers who wanted to return home. Bihar has been requesting the Centre to change its guidelines and allow students and workers to return home.

A senior Home Ministry official said there were no fresh guidelines allowing such movement and States

India among top 3 military spenders: report

'Country's tensions and rivalry with Pakistan, China among major drivers for increased expenditure'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The global military expenditure rose to \$1917 billion in 2019 with India and China emerging among the top three spenders, according to a report by a Swedish think tank, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

"In 2019, China and India were, respectively, the second- and third-largest military spenders in the world. China's military expenditure reached \$261 billion in 2019, a 5.1% increase compared with 2018, while India's grew by 6.8% to \$71.1 billion," the report said.

In 2019, the top five largest spenders - U.S. (\$732



By leaps and bounds: India's expenditure grew 259% over a 30-year period between 1990 and 2019. •FILE PHOTO

bn), China, India, Russia (\$65.1 bn) and Saudi Arabia (\$61.9 bn) - accounted for 62% of the global expenditure. The annual report 'Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2019' was released on Monday.

"India's tensions and rivalry with both Pakistan and China are among the major drivers for its increased military spending," the report quoted SIPRI Senior Researcher Siemon T. Wezeman. The \$71.1 billion spent

by India on defence in 2019 was 2.4% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP). India was at the fourth position in 2018 with Saudi Arabia at the third.

Significant rise

Stating that India's expenditure in 2019 was 6.8% more than that in 2018, the report says the country's military expenditure has risen significantly over the past few decades. "It grew by 259% over the 30-year period of 1990-2019, and by 37% over the decade of 2010-19. However, its military burden fell from 2.7% of GDP in 2010 to 2.4% in 2019."

While India's defence spending excluding pen-

sions, which constitute a significant part, has been growing in absolute terms, it has been going down as a percentage of its GDP as noted by the report. For instance, the defence allocation in the latest budget for 2020-21 which was ₹3.37 lakh crore, excluding defence pensions, accounts for about 1.5% of the country's GDP, the lowest in recent times.

In comparison, Pakistan's military expenditure rose by 70% over the decade 2010-19, to reach \$10.3 billion while the military burden increased from 3.4% of GDP in 2010 to 4% in 2019, says the report. Pakistan was at the 24th position in 2019 compared to 19th in 2018.

J&K extends ban on faster mobile Internet

Cites Pak. bid to recruit militants

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR

Citing "enhanced efforts by Pakistan for recruitment of militants," the Jammu and Kashmir administration on Monday extended the ban on high-speed mobile Internet till May 11.

In its latest order, the Home Department said there was spurt in militant violence and launch of new outfits.

Infiltration attempts "There were well-founded apprehensions of the field agencies regarding enhanced efforts by Pakistan for recruitment in the ranks as well as infiltration attempts, which heavily depend on high-speed Inter-

net," the order added. The Home Department said restrictions on the speed was in place "in order to curb uploading, downloading, circulation of provocative videos, guard against rumour-mongering, fake news, prevent the use of encrypted messaging and VoIP services for infiltration and coordinating [militant] activities."

"[The measure] is aimed to defeat the nefarious designs from across the border to propagate [militancy]," read the order.

Mobile Internet was banned in Jammu and Kashmir on August 5, 2019.

However, 2G speed was restored after a Supreme Court direction in January.

MPs' virtual meeting scuttled over security concerns

Set up secure platform for Standing Committees: Sharma

SANDEEP PHUKAN
NEW DELHI

If Prime Minister Narendra Modi can do video conferencing with Chief Ministers through a 'secure platform', then Parliamentary Standing Committees should also be able to do so, senior Congress leader Anand Sharma, who heads the Standing Committee on Home Affairs, is learnt to have said in a note to Rajya Sabha Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu.

Mr. Sharma's note on Monday came after the Rajya Sabha secretariat did not approve of his plan to hold a meeting of the Standing Committee through video conferencing citing con-



Anand Sharma

cerns regarding "secure online platform".

He had scheduled a meeting on April 28 (Tuesday) where he had planned to speak to the Home Ministry officials regarding the lockdown and had suggested a virtual meeting due to travel restrictions during the on-

going lockdown. Mr. Sharma is now learnt to have asked the Rajya Sabha secretariat to tell the government to 'organise a secure platform for the Committees'.

The former Union Minister is learnt to have said that it was crucial for the Home Affairs Committee to speak to officials as the Ministry is the nodal ministry for coordinating with the State governments, organising relief efforts and a roadmap for a stage-wise opening of the lockdown.

"I have asked the Chairman to reconsider his decision," Mr. Sharma told *The Hindu* but declined to elaborate on his letter.

IN BRIEF



UIDAI allows CSCs to offer updation facility

NEW DELHI The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) has allowed Common Service Centres that operate as banking correspondents to offer Aadhaar updation facility. "To make Aadhaar updation easier for citizens, UIDAI has permitted CSCs, which are designated banking correspondents of banks, to offer Aadhaar update services. Around 20,000 such CSCs will now be able to offer this service to citizens," IT Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad tweeted.

BTAD placed under Governor's Rule

GUWAHATI Assam's Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) was placed under the Governor's Rule on Monday after the expiry of the 5-year term of the council that governs it. Its election, scheduled on April 4, had been deferred. The BTAD, comprising 4 districts of Assam, falls under the Bodoland Territorial Council formed in 2003.

Air tickets refund: SC seeks Ministry's reply

NEW DELHI The Supreme Court on Monday admitted a petition seeking a full refund for airline tickets cancelled due to the COVID-19 lockdown, irrespective of when the booking was done. A Bench of Justices N.V. Ramana, S.K. Kaul and B.R. Gavi admitted the petition filed by NGO, Pravasi Legal Cell, which challenged an April 16 Council Memorandum of the Civil Aviation Ministry. The court sought a reply from the Ministry and the Director General of Civil Aviation.

Priyanka seeks action over faulty PPEs

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Congress general secretary and in charge for Uttar Pradesh (U.P.) Priyanka Vadra on Monday raised the issue of 'faulty' personal protection equipment (PPE) supplied to the State's medical colleges, and asked if the Yogi Adityanath government would take action against those involved in the 'scam'.

In a series of tweets, Ms. Vadra accused the U.P. government of being more worried about who leaked the information rather than probing the scam. She also posted a letter by State Director General of Medical Education that had flagged the issue of faulty PPEs supplied to the medical colleges.

"... Surprisingly, the U.P. government is not bothered about the scam but is concerned about who leaked the information about these faulty kits," she said in a tweet in Hindi.

She also shared a letter by the government seeking to inquire about the source of the leak.

Massive spike of 522 cases in Maharashtra

On Monday, cumulative tally surged to 8,590 positive cases with 27 more deaths

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
PUNE

Maharashtra reported yet another massive spike of 522 new cases as the State's cumulative tally surged to 8,590 COVID-19 positive cases on Monday. As many as 27 deaths were reported from across the State, taking the total death toll to 369.

According to figures given by the State Health Department, 15 of these deaths were reported from Mumbai city, while as many as six were from Amravati city — which had hitherto remained unscathed by the contagion.

Four more deaths were reported from Pune district, and one each from the Aurangabad and Jalgaon districts.

As many as 94 persons were discharged on Monday, taking the total discharged in the State till date to 1,282, said State Surveillance Officer Dr. Pradeep Awate.

Mumbai's death toll now stands at 219, while that of Pune district has risen to 80 of which 77 have been reported from Pune city and the rural areas while the rest



Full protection: A doctor in a PPE examining patients outside his clinic at Dharavi in Mumbai. • ADESH CHOUDHARI

were from Pimpri-Chinchwad. The death toll in Amravati, which had just reported a single death almost a fortnight ago, now stands at seven.

High-risk cases
"81% of the deaths reported had high-risk co-morbidities such as diabetes, hypertension, asthma and heart disease. One of them was an HIV patient and one was suffering from cancer," said Dr. Awate.

He added that information on co-morbidities of

four of the patients was not available as yet.

Yet again, Mumbai reported the overwhelming majority of the new cases — 369 — as its city's cumulative tally climbed to 5,776.

Pune district authorities reported a surge of at least 75 fresh cases in Pune city as the district's cumulative active cases rose to 1,066.

With the accretion of fresh cases, the district has witnessed a rise of more than 200 new active cases over three days. As per government figures, the total of pos-

Dharavi reports 13 new cases, tally now 288

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

On Sunday, Dharavi had reported its highest single-day tally of 34 cases. The number dropped to 13 on Monday, bringing the total to 288.

Of the new cases reported, two are from Mukund Nagar, one from Madina Na-

gar, one from Muslim Nagar, which were already marked hotspots of the virus. Cases were also reported from newer parts of Dharavi like Prem Nagar, Gangadhar chawl, Palkar chawl. Dharavi has seen 14 deaths so far.

Dadar and Mahim have not reported any new cases for three days now.

the number of cases soared to 127, of which 123 are from the Nagpur Municipal Corporation (NMC) area itself.

"There are 572 active containment zones in the State currently. After the first COVID-19 positive patient was found in the Pirburhan area of Nanded city, a thorough search of the patient's contacts was done. Laboratory tests of 80 of his contacts returned negative," said Dr. Awate, adding that, presently, 1,45,677 people across the State were in home quarantine.

247 cases and 11 deaths in Gujarat

81 discharged after complete recovery

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
AHMEDABAD

On Monday, Gujarat added 247 COVID-19 infections and 11 deaths, bringing the State's cumulative numbers to 3,548 cases and 162 deaths.

As many as 81 persons were discharged after complete recovery, taking the total number of recovered patients to 394.

As on Monday, there are 31 patients critically ill with severe viral load requiring ventilator support, while 2,961 are stable and under treatment. So far, the State has tested 53,575 samples, of which 2,484 samples were tested in the last 24 hours.

Of all the deaths reported on Monday, five were from Ahmedabad, four from Surat and one each from Vadodra and Banaskantha.

Ahmedabad is the largest cluster with the highest number of positive cases and deaths in the State. On Monday, out of a total of 247 cases in the State, 197 were from Ahmedabad alone,



A man selling masks in Ahmedabad. • VIJAY SONJEE

while five out of the 11 deaths occurred in the city. Cumulatively, Ahmedabad has recorded 2,378 cases and 109 deaths, with 212 recovered patients.

After Ahmedabad is Surat, with rising numbers and four deaths. So far, there are a total of 516 cases and 19 deaths in the city, with just 20 patients having recovered and been discharged.

The virus has spread to 30 out of the total 33 districts, but the bulk of the cases and even fatalities remain concentrated in Ahmedabad, Surat and Vadodra, where 13 patients have succumbed to the virus.

Students to be sent home from Prayagraj

9,000-10,000 are stranded there

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government on Monday said it would now transport around 9,000-10,000 students stranded in Prayagraj to other districts in the State in a phased manner.

Making the announcement, Awanish Awasthi, Additional Chief Secretary-Home Department, said 300 buses would be used to ferry the students to their home districts.

The government estimates that around 9,000-10,000 students studying in Allahabad University and other colleges and coaching centres, were stranded in various parts of the district, which is a big hub in coaching for competitive examination.

First phase

In the first phase, the buses from Prayagraj would drop students to Sonbhadra, Mir-

zapur, Chandauli, Varanasi, Jaunpur, Pratapgarh, Kaushambi, Fatehpur and Chitrakoot districts, with borders close to Prayagraj.

"The same buses will be sent to other districts in the second phase," Mr. Awasthi said. If other States want to take back their students stranded in Prayagraj, they would also be provided permission, he added.

The U.P. government had earlier sent buses to bring back students stranded in Kota, Rajasthan, and migrant labourers stuck in Haryana, due to the lockdown. Over the weekend, more than 12,000 migrants labourers were brought back from Haryana, as per government figures.

Meanwhile, the number of deaths linked to COVID-19 reached 31 in U.P., while the number of positive cases climbed to 1,986, as per the State Directorate of Health Services.

Testing times



On the go: A child stepping out of a vehicle after undergoing a COVID-19 test as others await their turn in the Sarai area of northwest Delhi on Monday. • SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Delhi HC caps price of test kits at ₹400

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has directed a medical equipment importer to cap at ₹400 the price of each COVID-19 rapid test kit, which was ordered by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) at the rate of ₹600 per kit.

In late March, the ICMR placed an order for five lakh WONDFO SARS CoV-2 antibody test kits from China at the rate of ₹600 per kit. The total order value was around ₹30 crore.

However, the landed cost of each test kit works out to ₹245. Which meant that the actual cost for 5 lakh test kits was ₹12.25 crore.

The court noted that from the ₹30 crore to be paid by the ICMR for the 5 lakh kits, ₹18.75 crore was to be shared by the intermediaries — Matrix Labs, Rare Metabolics Life Sciences and Aark Pharmaceuticals.

Directing that the test kits must not be sold at a rate of ₹400 per piece, the High Court said, "a profit mark-up of ₹155 i.e. 61% on the landed cost price of ₹245 is much on the higher side and in any case more than sufficient for the seller, for the kits/tests to be made available in India for urgent extensive tests through the country...".

West Bengal tests a record 1,150 samples

Lockdown curbs to continue till May 21; Mamata vows help for stranded residents

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

The West Bengal government has made arrangements to ensure the return of the State's residents stranded in other States, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has said. In two tweets on Monday, Ms. Banerjee said the State government will provide "possible help to people of Bengal stuck in different parts of the country" to bring them back, and that "All students

from Bengal stuck in Kota [Rajasthan] would begin their journey back soon."

"I have instructed my officers to do the needful. Till the time I am here, nobody from Bengal should feel helpless. I'm with you in these tough times," Ms. Banerjee tweeted.

"I am personally overseeing this and we will leave no stone unturned in ensuring that everyone gets possible help," she tweeted.

Number of COVID-19 cas-

es increased in Bengal from 461 to 504, in last 24 hours. While the number of persons expired remains at 20, the tests gone up by a record 1150 samples, from 10893 on Sunday to 12043 on Monday.

Ms. Banerjee, meanwhile, said that the lockdown restriction will continue till May 21. "Centre will decide on lockdown. But the State will have orange red and green zones. No planes, no trains no inter-state buses," she said. Criticising the Centre

for inconsistent COVID-combat policy, she said that the State has incurred losses of ₹5 lakh crore. "Only burning no earning," she said

No Congress role

Ms. Banerjee also denied any role of Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury in bringing the students back. Earlier, the leader had said that Rajasthan CM Ashok Gehlot had told him that he could transport the students up to Bengal's border.

M.P. High Court suspends hearings at Indore Bench

Many employees, including a Judge, placed under quarantine

STAFF REPORTER
BHOPAL

The Chief Justice of the Madhya Pradesh High Court on Monday suspended hearing of cases by the Indore Bench through video conferencing up to May 3 in view of the COVID-19 spread in the city and as several of its officials had gone into quarantine.

An employee of the Indore Bench Registry was found positive and some officials had been quarantined, said Rajendra Kumar Vani, Registrar-General, in a circular.

The quarantined officials include a Judge.

As per the guidelines dated April 15 and 16, it is directed that urgent matters shall be filed through e-filing or through email and hearing may be conducted through video conferencing. Four persons died of the disease while undergoing



Daily bread: A vendor of flat bread consumed to break the fast during Ramzan taking his wares to a shop in Bhopal. • PTI

treatment on Monday taking the toll to 110, according to the Directorate of Health Services. Three of the deaths were reported from Bhopal and one from Mandausar.

The State reported 75 cases on the day taking the overall count to 2,165 cases. The tally in Bhopal climbed to 428. So far, 357 patients have recovered.

In Indore, three persons died of the disease on Sunday, taking the toll to 60. The duration of stay for the three men at hospitals was between 10 hours and six days, said Pravin Jadia, Indore Chief Medical and Health Officer.

On the day, 31 persons, or 10% of the 298 samples tested, came out to be positive.

Doctors association in Aligarh condemns BJP MLA's remarks

'Linking the virus spread to JNMCH will demoralise doctors'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GHAZIABAD

The Resident Doctors' Association (RDA) of Aligarh Muslim University's Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College Hospital (JNMCH) on Monday condemned the "irresponsible remarks" of Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) MLA Dalveer Singh and District Magistrate Chandra Bhushan Singh for allegedly linking

the spread of coronavirus in the district to the JNMCH.

"Such statements will demoralise the doctors, who are working day and night to fight the virus. We have been demanding PPEs (personal protective equipment) but what we get are irresponsible remarks. We are in touch with RDAs across the country and if such statements are repeated, we will be

forced to go on a strike," said Dr. Hamza Malik, president JNMCH RDA.

Spike in cases

Aligarh has seen a sudden spike in cases in the last six days. In last two days, the district has recorded 12 COVID-19 cases, taking the tally of active cases to 20. Before that, three junior doctors of JNMCH tested positive.

COVID-19 mother yet to hold her newborn

Baby wrapped in sterile cloth and taken to an isolation unit to prevent viral infection

IVYOTI SHELAR
MUMBAI

A 36-year-old woman, who tested positive for COVID-19, gave birth to a girl at a private hospital in Vile Parle on April 19. But she is yet to hold the baby in her arms or breastfeed her.

Soon after delivery, the baby was wrapped in a sterile cloth and taken to an isolation Neonatal Intensive Care Unit to prevent the mother's infection from passing on to the baby. On the other hand, a civic hospital in the city, that has perhaps carried out the maximum number of deliveries of COVID-19 positive women, has kept the new mothers and babies together and allowed them to breastfeed.

As the pandemic evolves, hos-



Hospitals are following varied protocols to prevent mother-to-child transmission. • GETTY IMAGES

what works and what doesn't," said gynaecologist Dr. Suruchi Desai, who delivered the 36-year-old woman's baby at the Nanavati Hospital through a caesarean section. The woman, a resident of Mumbai Central, has seen her newborn on a video call arranged by the doctors. Not allowed to be in the hospital to avoid unnecessary exposure, the father too saw the baby through a video call and a few pictures sent to him on WhatsApp.

Expert views on the matter differ globally. The World Health Organization (WHO) states that the mother and baby can share the same room and breastfeed can be done after following strict hand and respiratory hygiene. The Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention (CDC) states that mother-to-child transmission of coronavirus during pregnancy is unlikely, but after birth, a newborn is susceptible to person-to-person spread.

The civic-run Nair Hospital has carried out over 20 deliveries of COVID-19 positive women. Head of Paediatrics, Dr. Sushma Malik said that they were following the WHO guidelines. "Only in cases where the mother has severe symptoms or the baby is already sick due to some reasons, we are avoiding their contact. In other cases, the mother is kept with the baby and allowed to breastfeed after following the hygiene protocol," she said, adding that all the babies had tested negative for COVID-19 so far.

GOVERNMENT OF TAMIL NADU
WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT
LOWER CAUVERY BASIN CIRCLE, THANJAVUR - 613001.
Short Term Tender Notice
NIT No.2/2020-2021/ LCB Circle/Thanjavur/dated :27.04.2020.

For and on behalf Governor of Tamil Nadu, sealed Tenders are invited from the eligible contractors for the following works at the office of the Superintending Engineer, WRD., Lower Cauvery Basin Circle, Thanjavur-1.

Date and Time of Tender documents available : 29.04.2020 to 12.05.2020 Up to 5.45 PM
Submission of Tenders : 13.05.2020 upto 3.00 PM
Date and Time of Opening : 13.05.2020 at 3.30 PM
Place of Opening Tenders : O/o the Superintending Engineer, WRD., Lower Cauvery Basin Circle, Thanjavur-613 001

Total No. of works: 3 (Three) : Total Value of Work: Rs.4079.42 Lakhs (3 Works - Two cover Tender system)

For further details and tender documents can be downloaded freely from the website www.tenders.tn.gov.in in the event of specified date for submission of tender is declared as a holiday, tender will be received and opened on the next working day at the same time and venue. Other details can be obtained from the above office.

Any corrections or modification will be published on website only.
SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, WRD.,
LOWER CAUVERY BASIN CIRCLE, THANJAVUR
DIPR/16/3/TENDER/2020

INTERVIEW | VIKRAM MISRI

'India working with China to ensure quality of supplies'

With several agencies in India involved in the procurement exercise, ensuring quality may have been not be possible, says Indian Ambassador to China

SUHASINI HAIDAR
ANANTH KRISHNAN

India is working together with Chinese authorities to identify bona fide suppliers of personal protective equipment (PPE) and other medical supplies, says the Indian Ambassador to China, Vikram Misri, stressing that all procurement by the government is going through independent third-party inspection, amid concerns about Chinese supplies.

The External Affairs Ministry has said more than 400 tonnes of medical equipment from China have arrived in the past two weeks. How are the two countries working together during the pandemic?

■ India is in the process of commercially procuring a large amount of medical supplies from China. Our priority is for quality products to be available at reasonable and stable prices and enable their transport in an efficient and timely manner to India. We have been working together with the Chinese side on identifying bona fide sup-

pliers, facilitating customs procedures and expediting flight clearances, etc. Smooth cooperation in these areas would be an excellent development in our bilateral relations.

Tens of thousands of PPE kits failed quality tests, and the use of rapid antibody test kits had to be put on hold. Why has India continued with imports?

■ China happens to be among the world's largest producers of some of the medical supplies that India is looking to procure at this moment. With regard to

quality issues with the rapid antibody tests, you may have to inquire with the agencies at the Indian end that were involved with the procurement process. Regarding PPE kits, it may be noted that several agencies in India, including private entities, are involved in this procurement exercise and may not have been in a position to look at quality-related issues in detail.

As far as the procurement of PPE kits by the Government of India through the Embassy in Beijing is concerned, we are taking care to ensure that this is confined to a list of approved and qualified suppliers who figure on an official Chinese Government list. Chinese authorities have also added an extra quality inspection requirement for all consignments before they are handed over to customs authorities.



We are also doing our part in the quality assurance exercise by insisting on an independent third-party inspection by reputed agencies [such as SGS Switzerland and Bureau Veritas]. Indeed, it is through this third party inspection that we have been able to detect issues with a recent consignment and have had it returned to the manufacturer for rectification.

China has called India's

... as long as India continues to be a profitable place to do business. I do not expect the trend of investment into India ... to change

decision to push FDI from neighbours through the government route a discriminatory move, violating global commitments. What is your response?

■ There is no prohibition or bar on investments resulting from these procedural changes, which have been made with full cognisance of India's international commitments.

Will this slow the flow of Chinese investments into India?

■ India continues to remain

among the most attractive global destinations for FDI. Capital only seeks returns, and as long as India continues to be a profitable place to do business, I do not expect the trend of investment into India from anywhere in the world to change.

Is India exploring any formal cooperation to learn from mistakes and best practices adopted by Wuhan?

■ Members of the Indian scientific fraternity had participated in a video conference organised by the Chinese side that was dedicated to sharing China's experiences in tackling the COVID-19 crisis.

There may be more such opportunities in future, and we will look forward to participating in them. Right now, the preoccupation in both countries is to deal with the

immediate challenges posed by the pandemic.

Institutes like the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS) and the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research have collaborated in the past in studies with the Wuhan Institute of Virology. Do you see more such collaborations, or will they come to an end after the pandemic?

■ Public health issues, epidemiology, vaccine development, etc., are areas with significant potential for cooperation between India and China, given our large populations, and our large pools of scientific and technological manpower. I think it would be mutually beneficial to remain engaged in these areas.

The agencies concerned would be better placed to

answer questions on specific programmes of cooperation.

Celebrations for the 70th year of India-China relations have been put on pause. Will the informal summit between Prime Minister Modi and President Xi be postponed this year?

■ At the second Informal Summit in Chennai, Prime Minister Modi and President Xi had agreed to celebrate this event through 70 activities. The outbreak has obviously interrupted our plans. We may, thus, not necessarily be able to undertake every activity, but it remains our intention to try and do as much as possible in the time that is available to us. Both sides remain engaged on the issue, and we hope we can resume engagements at the earliest possible, whenever it is safe and healthy to do so.

Kin receive bodies from UAE

Remains were earlier returned to Abu Dhabi due to confusion over guidelines

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

After days of back and forth, bodies of three Indians from Abu Dhabi were brought back to Delhi and handed over to their families on Monday.

The handing over took place early in the morning at the Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA), ending a five-day ordeal for the families, and allowing them to complete the final rites.

The mortal remains of the three men, who were expatriate workers in the United Arab Emirates — Kamlesh Bhatt from Uttarakhand, and Jagjir Singh and Sanjeev Kumar from Punjab — had also earlier arrived on April 23, but were sent back by immigration authorities because there weren't sufficient clearances to admit them into the country.

The case had led to a controversy over government guidelines for the return of bodies during the coronavirus pandemic, as the families pleaded that the bodies should be allowed to remain and not returned to the UAE while permissions were obtained, but to no avail.

"Finally, we are just relieved that we could bring Kamlesh's body back and his parents could see their son's face before his last rites," said his cousin Vimesh Bhatt, who had driven twice to Delhi from Tehri Garhwal amidst the lockdown order to receive Mr. Bhatt's re-



Sad state: The body of Kamlesh Bhatt, who died in the UAE, was received by his relatives in Delhi. • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

mains. "We just wish the government agencies could have moved a little quicker to have avoided the confusion that led to his body being sent back," he added.

Mr. Bhatt, a 25-year-old hotel employee, who was the sole earner in the family, had worked in Abu Dhabi for three years before he died of a heart attack on April 17.

Norms revised

Officials said the confusion last week resulted from the fact that the government had issued three separate advisories. The first from the Ministry of Home Affairs on April 17 that extended the lockdown restrictions at all International Check Points (ICPs),

made no mention of mortal remains of Indians who die abroad. This was interpreted as a ban on bringing their bodies back, without prior

clearances and led to the confusions from Abu Dhabi being sent back.

On April 25, after Mr. Bhatt's family appealed to the High Court, and the Indian Embassy in UAE expressed its shock over the return of the bodies to Abu Dhabi, the MHA issued a second note, clarifying that bodies could be brought back, subject to guidelines specified by the Ministry of Health. On April 26, the government appeared to change its position from the total ban further, putting out guidelines that even dealt with the possibility of bringing back bodies of patients who die of the coronavirus.

Speaking about the risk of bringing back bodies of COVID-19 victims, K.K. Aggarwal, former Indian Medical Association president said the virus is known to spread through contact with contaminated respiratory droplets, or from contact with contaminated hands, surfaces or objects.

Though people are less likely to contract COVID-19 from deceased persons infected with the virus, it is vital, according to WHO guidelines, that precautionary strategies be used to minimise public health risks and to prevent spread of disease, he said.

(With inputs from Bindu Shajan Perappadan)

SC admits plea against wage cuts for scribes

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday admitted a plea challenging the legality of wage cuts, unpaid leaves and termination of employment of journalists by media organisations amid the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown, saying it is a serious issue requiring consideration.

The joint petition filed by the National Alliance of Journalists, the Delhi Union of Journalists and the Brihanmumbai Union of Journalists sought a direction from the court to suspend, with immediate effect, the terminations, resignations, wage deductions and directions to go on leave without pay that have taken place in the media after the announcement of the nationwide lockdown. A Bench of Justices N.V. Ramana, Sanjay Kishan Kaul and B.R. Gavai issued notice to the government, the Indian Newspaper Society and the News Broadcasters Association. They have to file their replies within two weeks.

CSIR to let firms defer fee on use of its technology

These will include diagnostic kits, PPE and drugs

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) has said it will allow firms that use its intellectual property to manufacture items for containing COVID-19 to defer payments for up to six months.

These will include diagnostic kits, personal protective equipment, drugs and health equipment.

"In this time of grave crisis, it is desirable that technology licensing and knowledge licensing for technology and products developed by CSIR is facilitated enabling mass production," according to a note from the organisation.

41 technologies

Currently the 38 labs of the organisation have 41 dedicated technologies to deal with the pandemic.

They include a paper strip-based test to detect the virus, various kinds of hand sanitisers, a pre-fabricated makeshift hospital and a 3-D

In this time of grave crisis, it is desirable that licensing by CSIR is facilitated enabling mass production

printed ventilator.

Being a publicly funded organisation, technologies developed by the CSIR are generally available to the industry on a non-exclusive licensing basis, that is any company can earn the right to manufacture and sell a product provided they pay a technology fee.

"The clause for deferred royalty/upfront payment and co-branding will be included as an integral part of the agreement," according to the note.

CSIR Director-General Shekhar Mande told *The Hindu* that the deferment would not apply if a firm planned on exporting such equipment.

The organisation's thrust areas are on developing diagnostic kits. The paper-

based test uses gene editing technology to rapidly test for the presence of the virus and is being validated for mass manufacturing.

Antibody tests

Mr. Mande said the organisation was working to develop serology or antibody tests that were cheap and could be quickly deployed for checking prevalence of the disease in community settings.

The Indian Council of Medical Research on Monday suspended contracts to deploy 6,00,000 antibody tests after they reported inconsistent results from field tests.

Three CSIR laboratories were already part of the network of government laboratories involved in testing for the disease. These were the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, the Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology, the Indian Institute of Integrative Medicine and the Institute of Microbial Technology.

Probe 'profiteering' in imports: Cong.

Rahul says such activities during the pandemic is 'an insult to every Indian'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Monday demanded an immediate inquiry into the alleged profiteering by some companies while importing rapid testing kits for COVID-19 from China and asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi to "act swiftly" against those who are taking advantage of the pandemic.

Former party president Rahul Gandhi said profiteering on testing kits was "an insult to every Indian."

"That any human being would try & profiteer from the immeasurable suffering of millions of his brothers &



Rahul Gandhi

sisters, is beyond belief & comprehension. This scam is an insult to every Indian. I urge the PM to act swiftly to bring the corrupt to justice,"

he stated. The alleged profiteering came to light after an importer, Matrix Labs, got into a legal dispute with another company, Rare Metabolics, that was meant to distribute/supply 1 million kits to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

While each kit cost Rs. 245, including taxes, they were being sold to the ICMR for Rs 600 a kit. However, the matter reached the Delhi High Court as the importer and the distributor got into a dispute over pending supplies.

"One had heard that Chinese companies had adopted mercenary pricing but

these are Indian companies," Congress Lok Sabha member Manish Tewari said in an online press conference.

"Just imagine how many more kits could have been bought... Therefore, we demand an immediate inquiry into this kind of profiteering during the pandemic," he said.

The government should make all documents with regard to import of medical equipment in the past one month public. "Society should also know who are making such profits even during these times," he added.

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INTERVIEW | GAJENDRA SINGH SHEKHAWAT

'We have 56% more water in reservoirs than we had last year'

I have asked State Ministers to ensure that there is enough supply of drinking water during the lockdown and in the weeks ahead, says Jal Shakti Minister

NISTULA HEBBAR

Jal Shakti Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat speaks on how India is placed in terms of water availability as COVID-19 underlines the necessity of piped supply and the situation in his home State Rajasthan, which remains worrisome:

Under a lockdown with summer approaching and with the injunction of constant hand washing to prevent the spread of COVID-19, how is India placed in terms of just water availability?

The plentiful rains last year and heavy snowfall in the Himalayan States have ensured that in terms of just volumes,

we are pretty well off this year. I did a review of 132 reservoirs under the Central government, which are out of the 5,000 total reservoirs but which provide two-thirds of the total supply of water across the country. I am happy to say we have 56% more water than we had last year in the reservoirs, which is 47% higher than the average for the last 10 years. So in

terms of reservoirs, etc., we have no worries. This year too we have been told that the monsoon will be plentiful.

Water is a State subject, what has been the feedback from the States?

Every summer there is always an issue with regard to availability etc. This year, because the COVID-19 lockdown has entailed that people stay at home, it is even more important to ensure supply. The first thing I did is to hold review meetings with



We are determined to fulfil our promise of piped drinking water to every home

Water Ministers of all States and asked them to ensure that there is enough drinking

water during the lockdown and the weeks ahead. We have gone over the reservoir situation and of water works. There is enough water to get us through this period, both for drinking and irrigation.

The Jal Jeevan Mission was launched last year and there is a time-table to its implementation, how has COVID-19 affected it?

The Jal Jeevan Mission was launched by hon'ble Prime Minister in September last year and yes, it is a time-bound programme, with its

urgency underlined by the fact that COVID-19 is accompanied by lockdowns and the emphasis on hand-washing as a preventative. We have been creative in terms of trying to reach some of our goals despite the lockdown disruption. For example, we have asked all our engineers to complete the drafting and on paper preparatory work for the project.

We have divided the mission works into those where only retrofitting is required, those where existing water bodies need to be harnessed and green field works. This

has been done so that whatever can be done is finished in time. The importance of the Mission cannot be emphasised enough under the present circumstances and we are determined that our promise of piped drinking water to every home will be fulfilled in the time-frame suggested earlier.

Your home State Rajasthan and your constituency Jodhpur have been badly affected by COVID-19. What kind of information are you getting, since you haven't been able to visit?

Jodhpur has been badly affected and most of the cases there are because of the Tablighi Jamaat preachers and the mishandling of the situation.

My constituency also includes Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot's Assembly seat and the curfew or lockdown imposed there was handled very badly and very leniently. We have one example of Bhilwara where things were handled well, but we can't ignore what is happening in Jodhpur and Jaipur, where the administration is not able to get a handle on things.

150 seafarers disembark at various ports

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

More than 150 seafarers have been able to disembark from their ships at various Indian ports since the government order issued last week allowed crew change.

According to industry sources, 47 of the 60 ports have been able to implement the government's standard operating procedures, which include testing and quarantine of mariners disembarking ships.

It is also learnt that nearly 72 seafarers were not able to leave their ships due to the failure of the port authorities to comply with the order of the Home Ministry. These were among the issues discussed at Monday's meeting with Shipping Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, who has promised swift action.

Migrants take sea route out of lockdown

25 workers, who reached Odisha after a five-day voyage from Chennai, placed under quarantine

STAFF REPORTER BERHAMPUR

Yet another motorboat, this time carrying 25 Odia migrant workers from Chennai, reached Rameyapatna in Ganjam district of Odisha on Monday afternoon.

They had undertaken the arduous sea voyage to dodge the continuing lockdown and reach their homes in Ganjam district. This motorboat also carried 14 others, who disembarked at some place in their home State of Andhra Pradesh, said the returned workers.

Spent ₹1.8 lakh on boat The 39 migrant workers had collected ₹1.8 lakh to buy the motorboat. They began their voyage from Chennai on April 23.

As most of them are from fishing communities, with experience at sea, they dared to make the 850-km



Home at all costs: Police and media personnel speaking with the migrant workers who reached Ganjam district of Odisha on Monday. *SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

voyage in a small fishing boat. Officials of the Ganjam district administration and police were waiting at Rameyapatna to prevent the

workers from coming into contact with anyone after getting down from the boat. According to Berhampur Sub-Collector Sindhe Datta-

treya Bhaui Saheb, the group will undergo a medical check-up and placed under quarantine. Swab samples of persons with possible symp-

toms will be sent for COVID-19 test.

Earlier, a motorboat carrying 38 migrant workers from Chennai had reached Patisunapur of Ganjam district on April 25 evening. They included 29 workers from the Ganjam district of Odisha and nine others from adjoining Andhra Pradesh, all of whom are now under quarantine in Ganjam district. They had spent ₹2 lakh to buy the boat. Odisha State Transport Minister Padmanabh Behera has ordered a probe into their return despite the lockdown.

On April 20, a motorboat used for fishing, carrying 27 migrant workers stranded in Chennai - including 10 from Odisha and 17 from Andhra Pradesh - reached the Donkuru coast in Andhra Pradesh. All of them were quarantined in the Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh.

Madhya Pradesh doctor sets an example

Post-recovery, he donates plasma

SIDHARTH YADAV BHOPAL



Iqbal Qureshi

On Sunday, Iqbal Qureshi, a liver specialist, became the first person in Madhya Pradesh to donate blood plasma for COVID-19 patients. Specialists hope the antibodies in his blood, when injected in the veins of critical patients, can boost their ability to combat the virus. Until Monday, three patients in Indore were transfused with his plasma.

Almost a week before Indore reported its first COVID-19 case on March 22, Dr. Qureshi developed fever. "I still don't know how I got infected." Dr. Qureshi recovered from COVID-19 on April 6. "I will donate my plasma again if required."

For donating the plasma again, he may have to wait

for at least three months, said Ravi Dosi of the Sri Aurobindo Institute of Medical Sciences, Indore, where the plasma was extracted and transfused. "A donor must be symptom-free, not carry immunological illness or blood-borne disorders," he said. Before donating, a person should have completed at least 14 days in quarantine after being discharged.

Recovered Tablighis donate plasma

Around 300 have volunteered to join COVID fight

ZIYA US SALAM NEW DELHI



Regaining health: Four Jamaatis being discharged from a hospital in Moradabad on Monday. *PTI

Several Tablighi Jamaat men have donated blood plasma after recovering from the novel coronavirus infection and successfully completing their quarantine period. Around 300 Tablighis, responding to an appeal by their leader Maulana Saad, have volunteered to save the lives of others battling the infection.

Over the weekend, some of the men who were in quarantine in Narela and Sultanpuri went to donate blood plasma. Among them were Tablighis from Chennai, Mumbai, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh who had come to the Capital to attend events in Nizamuddin but found themselves stranded after

the declaration of lockdown.

"I had come from Chennai to attend a jod (meeting) at Markaz [the Tablighi Jamaat headquarters in Nizamuddin] on March 21 and was supposed to leave by Tamil Nadu Express on March 24. Then the Prime Minister declared a lockdown. Like so many others, I was stranded at the centre. On March 30 evening, I was shifted to Ra-

in the mind of the common man," he said, referring to the negative coverage the group received in several sections of the media because of a cluster of cases emanating from the Nizamuddin centre.

Incidentally, Basha went to donate plasma after a day of fasting. "Three other men from our Tamil Nadu group have donated plasma. Our first COVID-19 report was positive, the subsequent two were negative," he said.

Basha's colleague Abdul Rehman had done likewise last Friday. The 45-year-old was under quarantine for almost a month - two weeks in a hospital, then another 17 days at home.

Did he think of his own health? "What was there to worry? I am 45 and fit. I am a salesman and don't feel any weakness. I just wanted to help the needy," said Rehman.

CBSE exams will be delayed: HRD Minister

'Textbooks will be made available'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI



Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank

Pending board exams of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) will only be held when the situation is back to normal and the government decides to completely lift the lockdown, Human Resource Development Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank told students and parents during a Twitter interaction on Monday.

Across the country, exams in 12 subjects for Class 12 are yet to be held, while Class 10 and 12 students affected by the violence in north-east Delhi have even more pending papers.

Competitive examinations for entrance to medical and engineering education, such as NEET and JEE, would also be delayed until the situation is conducive, he told worried students.

Earlier, the Ministry had indicated that these exams would take place in the last week of May.

Mr. Nishank also assured them that NCERT was making every effort to make school textbooks available in all States, and that shops selling these books had been included in the category of essential services so that students would be able to access them.

Although online learning resources and televised teaching sessions had been made available for students to keep up with classes, Mr. Nishank urged parents not to pressure the children to study 24 hours a day.

UGC may give academic calendar tomorrow

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has deferred its decision on a revised academic calendar for college and university students, after an emergency meeting on the issue held on Monday evening. The final guidelines are now expected to be released on Wednesday, after receiving further comments from Commission members and inputs from States, said senior officials.

A UGC panel headed by Central University of Haryana Vice-Chancellor R.C. Khandelwal had recommended starting the next academic year by mid August to early September, according to a

Commission member. It had also suggested a range of options for conducting end-of-semester examinations for the current academic year, from online testing to handwritten exams held after the lockdown is lifted.

Several members made suggestions, especially regarding more flexibility, during the video-conference meeting on Monday, and were requested to submit them in writing by Tuesday, said a person who participated in the meeting.

"The UGC chairman D.P. Singh has been authorised to approve a final decision, and the guidelines will be issued by Wednesday," said a senior official.

THE CROSSWORD+ 12921 (set by Gridman)

There is no lockdown for your brain! Try solving a puzzle today! @ <https://crossword.thehindu.com>

13 It's about Communist being worn out (5)
14 Somehow gains learner-fellows as railway employees to help train movement (9)
16 Record-keeper stern over substance given to rebel leader (9)
19 Principally some Narikuravars are registering low growl (5)
21 Runaway family in disgrace (3,4)
23 Newly-weds get some controls, reportedly (7)
24 Tied up with a kind of test over one newspaper article (9)
25 Show each in the middle of road (5)
26 A smuggler's beginning to transport charm (6)
27 Light in fine sort of fabric (7)

DOWN
1 Molest cleric to repair rare object (10,4)
2 Married exotic lover (7)
3 Stuck on the bottom of the sea? There's a reason! (7)
4 Fame to other hungry one who follows (9)
5 Well at one new country (5)
6 Marie runs around odd poor shops (7)
7 The French bride man's enough space to stretch (7)
8 Each child, least bothered, consumed what's left (8,6)
15 US soldier passes over a coarse Italian leader (9)
17 Girl has a short think-up over one element (7)
18 Fuel gets a company all-round mark of approval (3,4)
19 Pins incidental benefit? (4-3)
20 Promenade sees a boy and a dame exercising (7)
22 Be a type of discriminator without a trace of shame (5)

ACROSS
1 Beginning to cut vestra to make ties (7)
5 Notice man with lady unnoticed - that's proper! (6)
9 Mule disturbed by ultimately clever mammal (5)
10 Winner - one who attracts endlessly in French region (9)
11 True, one goes astray on the way (2,5)
12 With expert losing his head, you in France become twitchy (7)

SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

Solution to puzzle 12920

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

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

FAITH

War against ignorance

The Vedas and the Upanishads have been in existence from time immemorial and the dharma taught in them is also eternal and known as Sanatana Dharma. But in the course of time, there arose the palpable danger of the Astika dharma or Vaidika dharma getting submerged in the theories of the nastikas who did not believe in the Vedas. In a discourse, Sri R. Krishnamurthy Sasrigral drew attention to the significant role of Adi Sankara through whose multi pronged effort the inherent value of Vaidika dharma was established for the benefit of posterity. The acharya has reiterated that every human being should be aware that he is an heir to this good fortune of abiding by this dharma.

One should not miss this opportunity to strive for salvation owing to ignorance of this truth. There is nothing more harmful than spiritual ignorance or Avidya. It is more wily and deceitful than the killer virus for it is capable of enveloping even the effulgent Brahma Swaroopa from people's vision. It can keep people in the dark about not only Brahman but also about the true purpose of one's existence. It leads to attachment to worldly attractions and is the cause of sin, suffering and confusion.

Adi Sankara has dedicated his entire life to eradicate this virus of ignorance. He has enabled people to understand the glory of the Supreme Brahman that the Vedas and the Upanishads extol. To attain Him is the ultimate goal and end of human existence and this is attainable through upasana, or meditation on the ultimate Reality. The paths available are karma, jnana and bhakti and though they appear varied, there is unity of purpose in them. One becomes eligible to attain salvation by learning to treat these in accordance to the sasras until the truth is revealed as a direct experience.

UN warns of a 'human rights disaster'

Countries are flouting the rule of law in the name of fighting coronavirus, says Michelle Bachelet

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
GENEVA

The UN rights chief warned on Monday that countries flouting the rule of law in the name of fighting the novel coronavirus pandemic risk sparking a "human rights disaster".

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet called on countries to refrain from violating fundamental rights "under the guise of exceptional or emergency measures".

"Emergency powers should not be a weapon governments can wield to quash dissent, control the population, and even perpetuate their time in power," she warned in a statement. "They should be used to cope effectively with the pandemic — nothing more, nothing less."

COVID-19

Her comments came after more than 200,000 people have perished in the pandemic and nearly 3 million more have been infected worldwide by the novel coronavirus since it surfaced in China late last year. Ms. Bachelet acknowledged that states have the right to restrict some rights to protect public health, but she insisted that any restrictions should be necessary, proportionate and non-discriminatory, and also limited in duration.

"There have been numerous reports from different regions that police and other security forces have been using excessive, and at times lethal, force to make people abide by lockdowns and curfews," she said, lamenting that "such violations have often been committed against people belonging to the poorest and most vulnerable segments of the population".



The flora speaks: A message of support in Bant, Netherlands, created by cutting flower heads in a field of tulips. • AFP

"Shooting, detaining, or abusing someone for breaking a curfew because they are desperately searching for food is clearly an unacceptable and unlawful response. So is making it difficult or dangerous for a woman to get to hospital to give birth. In some cases, people are dying because of the inappropriate application of measures that have been supposedly put in place to save them," Ms. Bachelet said. She also decried the mass arrests in some countries over curfew violations as "both unnecessary and unsafe." "Jails and prisons are high risk environments, and states should focus on releasing whoever can be safely released, not detaining more people."

The UN rights chief also warned that efforts to rein in dangerous misinformation around the pandemic was in

some cases being used as an excuse to crack down on legitimate free speech. "It is important to counter misinformation, but shutting down the free exchange of ideas and information not only violates rights, it undermines trust," she said.

Highest level of alarm

Meanwhile, the WHO chief said on Monday that the agency had sounded the highest level of alarm early on, but lamented that not all countries had heeded its advice. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus pointed out that the WHO warned the COVID-19 outbreak constituted a "Public Health Emergency of International Concern" on January 30, when there were only 82 cases registered outside China. "The world should have listened to WHO then carefully," he told a virtual press briefing.

Chinese envoy threatens boycott of Australia

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
SYDNEY

China's Ambassador in Australia has warned that demands for a probe into the spread of the coronavirus could lead to a consumer boycott of Aussie wine or trips Down Under.

Australia has joined the U.S. in calling for a thorough investigation of how the virus transformed from a localised epidemic in central China into a pandemic that has killed more than 2,00,000 people. In a thinly veiled threat, Ambassador Cheng Jingye warned the push for an independent inquiry into the origins of the outbreak was "dangerous".

"The Chinese public is frustrated, dismayed and disappointed with what Australia is doing now," he claimed in an interview with the *Australian Financial Review* published on Sunday.

"If the mood is going from bad to worse, people would think 'why should we go to such a country that is not so friendly to China?'" he added. Mr. Cheng also threatened the flow of Chinese students to Australian universities will be affected. The comments mark a significant escalation in tensions between Beijing and Canberra, whose relations are already strained.

Where is Kim Jong-un?

N. Korean leader's public absence has triggered rumours

STANLY JOHNY

The Internet is abundant with speculations about the health of Kim Jong-un. What triggered the rumours was his absence from the 'Day of the Sun' celebrations on April 15 marking the birth anniversary of Kim Il-sung, his grandfather and the founder of North Korea.

This is the first time Mr. Kim is missing the festivities, the most important holiday in North Korea, since becoming leader in 2011. Mr. Kim was last seen in the state media on April 12 when he visited an air force base.

The first bomb was dropped by *Daily NK*, a Seoul-based media outlet largely run by North Korean defectors, on April 20. It claimed, quoting anonymous sources in North Korea, that Mr. Kim underwent a cardiovascular surgery and was recovering at one of his countryside villas.

Japanese magazine *Shukan Gendai* reported last week that Mr. Kim had a heart attack and the North Korean doctors did an emergency surgery to insert arterial stents. The procedure went bad, leaving the leader brain dead, the report claimed, quoting an unnamed Chinese medical source. On April 25, Reuters carried a report, saying China had despatched medical personnel to North Korea.

Not the first time

This is not the first time Mr. Kim is disappearing from the public. In 2014, he went missing from the state media for over a month, triggering speculations about his health. This time, the rumours are more serious with one report claiming that he's in a vegetative situation and unnamed American intelligence officials telling the



Kim Jong-un in Pyongyang in April 2017. • AFP

CNN that he's in "grave danger". In 1986, when the South Korean military claimed that Kim Il-sung was dead, the state media in Pyongyang immediately denied it and published reports of the leader greeting

NEWS ANALYSIS

Mongolian visitors at the Pyongyang airport. But this time, despite speculations, there was no confirmation or negation of the reports from the North Korean side, which in turn is adding fuel to the rumour mills.

So what we know for sure is that Mr. Kim is out of the public eye for now, at a time when the coronavirus crisis is shaking the whole world (North Korea's claim is that there's no virus case in the country). There could be at least three possibilities. The reports about his health condition could be true and he's either in a serious condition or recovering. Two, Mr. Kim, a chain smoker and overweight, could be staying away from the public during the time of the virus crisis. Or his retreat could be part of some tactical plan.

No word leader or intelligence official has confirmed the reports about Mr. Kim's ill-health. When U.S. President Donald Trump was asked, he called the reports "incorrect". Moon Chung-in, a special adviser on national security to South Korea Pre-

sident Moon Jae-in, said on Sunday that "Kim Jong-un is alive and well". He said Mr. Kim had been staying in the east coast resort town Wonsan since April 13.

On Saturday, 38 North, a North Korea-focused website, had released a satellite image of a train that "probably belongs to Mr. Kim", parked at the Leadership Railway Station near the leader's compound in Wonsan. "The train's presence... does lend weight to reports that Kim is staying at an elite area on the country's eastern coast," said the report.

Potential successor

Mr. Kim's absence has also triggered speculations on who could be his successor. When reporters posed this question to U.S. National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien last week, he said, the "basic assumption would be maybe it would be someone in the family..."

Mr. Kim's younger sister, Kim Yo-jong, has been seen as a potential successor. His older full-brother Kim Jong-chol has largely stayed out of politics, while Ms. Kim is an important party leader. She is currently the Deputy Director of the Workers' Party's Department of Propaganda and Agitation. She visited South Korea during the 2018 Winter Olympics, and had attended Mr. Kim's summits with Mr. Trump and South Korean leader Moon. Ms. Kim's rise in a party that has been tightly controlled by the men of the Kim family had made headlines. As journalist Barbara Demick wrote in *The New Yorker*, if the speculations about Mr. Kim's health are true and North Korea is trying to identify his successor, "the last man standing" could "quite possibly be a woman".

ELSEWHERE



Pelosi endorses Biden for presidency

House Of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi on Monday endorsed Joe Biden for President, joining a list of top Democrats, who have thrown their support behind the former Vice-President. In a video, she cited Mr. Biden's experience in government as an evidence of his leadership qualities. REUTERS

Yemen: Saudi-led group urges end to escalation

The Saudi-led coalition engaged in Yemen on Monday urged a leading separatist group that declared self-rule in the south to rescind its move, saying it was an "escalatory action" at a time all parties should focus on confronting. The move by the Southern Transitional Council (STC) threatens to renew conflict between the STC and the government. REUTERS

Pakistan cleric slammed for misogynistic remarks

He linked COVID-19 to 'immodesty'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
ISLAMABAD

A Pakistani cleric whose group has been blamed for spreading COVID-19 is facing ridicule after he suggested the pandemic was caused partly by the "immodesty" of women.

Maulana Tariq Jameel appeared on a television with Prime Minister Imran Khan last week, when he explained various Islamic religious codes and said humanity had been punished in the past for breaking these. "Who has demolished modesty in my country? Who is making the nation's daughters dance? Who is shortening their dresses? Who should be held responsible?" Mr. Jameel said during the fundraiser hosted by Mr. Khan.

The comment spurred an immediate backlash with leading activists and a government Minister blasting the cleric, while social media users roasted the



Tablighi Jamaat leader Maulana Tariq Jameel

preacher for ignoring his own group's role in spreading the virus. Mr. Jameel is a senior member of the Tablighi Jamaat group which has been blamed for seeding the epidemic in Pakistan by holding a gathering with 1,00,000 participants in March after the virus had already been detected in the country — leading to hundreds of transmissions.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan warned that the remarks "only compound the misogynist entrenched in society".

Reconvene Parliament: Sri Lanka Opposition

'Obtaining sanction for utilisation of funds to fight the pandemic is important'

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

Seven Opposition parties in Sri Lanka have urged President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to reconvene Parliament, pledging "responsible cooperation" to his government in fighting COVID-19.

Assuring citizens that they would not draw salaries, attempt to defeat the government or thwart any of the "legitimate actions of the government", the leaders said in a joint statement on Monday: "As members of the dissolved Parliament, we are duty bound to fulfil our obligations to resolve this crisis in a spirit of responsible cooperation extended to the President." Political sources said the statement was handed over to President Rajapaksa's office. He is yet to comment.

Snap polls

Mr. Rajapaksa, who dissolved Parliament on March 2 and called for snap polls on April 25, has maintained that he had no intention to

reconvene Parliament and that the fixing of poll dates was the Election Commission's prerogative.

After COVID-19 hit Sri Lanka — more than 500 cases reported so far — the Commission postponed the election to June 20, a date it said was subject to review.

According to the Opposition parties, the political situation is in "a state of uncertainty" due to the dissolution of Parliament and "the absence of conditions conducive to hold parliamentary elections as stipulated". Several Opposition parties have already voiced concern over holding polls amid a raging pandemic and have instead proposed reconvening Parliament to allow passage of relevant laws to strengthen the novel coronavirus response.

Getting new legislation passed to meet the health crisis and obtaining parliamentary sanction to the utilisation of funds from the Consolidated Fund are "important and urgent" func-

We have failed to use the curfew to reduce the rate of person-to-person spread of the virus

DR. RAVI RANNAN-ELIYA
Health official

tions of Parliament, said the parties.

Former Prime Minister and Leader of the United National Party Ranil Wickremesinghe, former Leader of the Opposition and Leader of the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (United People's Front) Sajith Premadasa, Tamil National Alliance leader R. Sampanthan, Sri Lanka Muslim Congress leader Rauff Hakeem, All Ceylon Makkal Congress leader Rishad Bathiudeen, Tamil Progressive Alliance leader Mano Ganesan and Jathika Hela Urumaya leader Champika Ranawaka have signed the joint statement.

Spike in cases

Sri Lanka has witnessed a spike in the COVID-19 positive cases in the last week,

raising the number to 557 as of Monday afternoon. So far seven persons have succumbed to the infection while 126 have recovered, according to official health bulletins.

Districts identified as "high-risk" areas including Colombo have been under curfew since March 20.

Amid calls from health experts to step up testing rapidly, the health authorities said they would increase testing to over 1,000 a day.

"We have failed to use the curfew to reduce the rate of person-to-person spread of the virus to a level where epidemic spread cannot occur," said Dr. Ravi Rannan-Elিয়া, executive director of the Institute for Health Policy, in a blog published on the Institute's website on Sunday. "It is hard to avoid the conclusion that at the root of the failure was a mindset unable to rise to the urgency of the hour, to fully understand the challenge we face, and to think outside the box," he said.

Violence rose after Afghan deal, says UN

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KABUL

Violence surged in Afghanistan in the weeks after the U.S. and the Taliban signed a deal supposed to pave the way for a peace process, a UN agency said Monday.

Afghans had enjoyed a period of relative calm ahead of the February 29 accord, but the conflict resumed almost as soon as the deal was signed, and the militant group has since rejected multiple calls for a ceasefire during Ramadan.

"The report tracks a disturbing increase in violence during March at a time when it was hoped that the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban would commence peace negotiations," said the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. More than 500 civilians were killed and over 700 injured during the first three months of the year, UNAMA said.

In a crisis year, Sri Lanka gears up for daunting debt repayment

\$2.9 billion of its debt is due this year, at a time when reserves are falling

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

As Sri Lanka battles COVID-19 with its public health expertise and military might, it is gearing up for another imminent crisis — servicing its mounting external debt, of which \$2.9 billion is due this year.

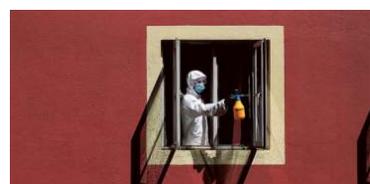
Of the many economic side effects of the global pandemic, is the drastic fall in Sri Lanka's foreign exchange reserves — driven mainly by exports, remittances and tourism that have all suffered heavily post COVID-19.

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka recently sought a \$400 million currency swap with the Reserve Bank of In-

dia (RBI), to boost its foreign reserves. "Yes, we have made a request to the RBI for a swap facility for \$400 million," Central Bank Governor W.D. Lakshman told *The Hindu* on Monday.

Sri Lanka has resorted to the currency swap facility with the RBI from time to time to maintain its reserves, but the middle-income country has a daunting road ahead this year, as it must pay a sizeable portion of its foreign debt amounting to 42.6% of the country's GDP in 2019.

Well before COVID-19 emerged a threat, Sri Lanka mulled appealing for loan moratoriums from India and



On guard: A Sri Lanka Special Task Force member disinfecting a room at the Postal Headquarters in Colombo. • REUTERS

China, two of its willing lenders. Sri Lanka owes about \$960 million to India, while its debt to China was \$5 billion in 2018.

Debt management

Contrary to the popular "Chinese debt trap" analysis often made in regard to Sri Lanka's economy, the country's debt concerns are not

confined to borrowings from China alone. "Sri Lanka certainly has a debt problem, but it is not necessarily a Chinese debt problem," according to Ganesh Wignaraja, executive director of the Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute of International Relations and Strategic Studies.

Along with three other researchers, Mr. Wignaraja re-

cently co-authored a paper on Chinese investments, as part of a study commissioned by the London-based Chatham House policy institute.

Citing 2018 data on Sri Lanka's loans from different lenders, the paper shows that the country's debt owed to financial markets (holders of international sovereign bonds issued in Sri Lanka) are more significant than that owed to multilateral lenders (such as the World Bank, IMF), and bilateral lenders (including China, Japan and India).

Economists like Mr. Wignaraja argue that Sri Lanka's economic situation is better off compared to that of Greece or Argentina at the height of their crises, in terms of meeting its domes-

tic and international obligations — using its reserves, domestic borrowings or by printing money. However, everyone agrees that the debt raised through sovereign bonds in the international money markets is stalling, with little wiggle room or scope for negotiation.

With a \$1 billion international sovereign bond maturing in October, the alarm bells are already ringing in Sri Lanka.

Unblemished record

Asked about Sri Lanka's strategy, the Central Bank told *The Hindu* that the country had maintained "an unblemished record" of debt servicing and had entered into a long-term financing arrangement through which it received funds totalling \$500

million in March, and expected an additional \$300 million soon.

Further, the apex bank said liquidity facilitation arrangements with the RBI — in the form of swap facilities — and other major central banks are at an advanced stage of completion". Arrangements with the IMF and other multilateral donors are also under review, a spokesman said.

However, in addition to managing different lenders, it is time for Sri Lanka to consider some fundamental changes to its policy, economists emphasise, pointing to the need for greater attention to the rural economy, mainly agriculture, and a shift from an "urban bias" in policy, as Mr. Wignaraja put it.

Ahilan Kadirgamar, senior lecturer, University of Jaffna, said Sri Lanka's limited foreign reserves are necessary not only for debt servicing but also for essential imports amid falling foreign earnings. In the current situation, he predicts that the government will be squeezed by its demanding foreign lenders, while facing growing discontent from citizens who are denied imported goods that Sri Lanka has failed to substitute in the past.

"Even as the government makes every effort to avoid defaulting on its foreign debt, can it muster the political will to redistribute wealth to ensure the working people can afford a broad basket of goods amidst rising costs for many goods in short supply?" he asked.

MARKET WATCH

| | 27-04-2020 | % CHANGE |
|-----------|------------|----------|
| Sensex | 31743 | 1.33 |
| US Dollar | 76.25 | 0.27 |
| Brent oil | 19.58 | -9.14 |

NIFTY 50

| | PRICE | CHANGE |
|-------------------|----------|--------|
| Adani Ports | 271.15 | 0.50 |
| Asian Paints | 1851.35 | 23.80 |
| Axis Bank | 427.30 | 23.35 |
| Bajaj Auto | 2505.75 | 60.40 |
| Bajaj Finserv | 4617.50 | 227.70 |
| Bajaj Finance | 2044.05 | 67.80 |
| Bharti Airtel | 494.05 | -0.20 |
| BPL | 355.40 | 4.95 |
| Britannia Ind | 2242.05 | 179.90 |
| Cipla | 608.70 | 9.40 |
| Coal India | 138.10 | 1.10 |
| Dr Reddys Lab | 3980.30 | -22.50 |
| Eicher Motors | 13999.50 | 410.30 |
| GAIL (India) | 81.70 | 0.20 |
| Grasim Ind | 498.25 | -0.80 |
| HCL Tech | 483.10 | 15.00 |
| HDFC | 1591.45 | 11.15 |
| HDFC Bank | 929.70 | -8.35 |
| Hero MotoCorp | 1935.20 | 40.40 |
| Hindalco | 108.20 | 4.55 |
| Infosys | 2320.45 | 37.35 |
| IndusInd Bank | 347.90 | 13.05 |
| ICICI Bank | 407.40 | 24.50 |
| Bharti Infratel | 157.40 | 5.40 |
| Indo | 664.60 | 6.60 |
| Infosys | 2320.45 | 37.35 |
| ITC | 179.85 | 0.20 |
| KJSW Steel | 157.30 | 4.05 |
| Kotak Bank | 1303.60 | 64.05 |
| L&T | 855.25 | 4.05 |
| NDA | 330.30 | -4.00 |
| Maruti Suzuki | 5056.35 | 10.70 |
| Nestle India Ltd. | 17950.80 | 544.75 |
| NTPC | 92.35 | -1.05 |
| ONGC | 68.45 | 0.85 |
| PowerGrid Corp | 159.60 | 0.45 |
| Reliance Ind | 1429.75 | 12.75 |
| State Bank | 180.90 | 1.15 |
| Shree Cement | 19021.85 | 434.40 |
| Sun Pharma | 489.90 | 4.35 |
| Tata Motors | 75.25 | 1.05 |
| Tata Steel | 271.65 | 4.10 |
| TCS | 1836.60 | 18.05 |
| Tech Mahindra | 511.70 | 8.25 |
| Titan | 927.85 | 21.70 |
| UltraTech Cement | 3360.65 | 52.70 |
| UPL | 349.35 | 13.50 |
| Wipro | 78.45 | 0.50 |
| Wipro | 182.05 | 4.30 |
| Zee Entertainment | 149.75 | 4.60 |

EXCHANGE RATES

Indicative direct rates in rupees a unit except yen at 4 p.m. on April 27

| CURRENCY | TT BUY | TT SELL |
|--------------------|--------|---------|
| US Dollar | 76.05 | 76.37 |
| EUR | 82.45 | 82.8 |
| British Pound | 94.44 | 94.85 |
| Japanese Yen (100) | 70.92 | 71.22 |
| Chinese Yuan | 10.74 | 10.78 |
| Swiss Franc | 78.2 | 78.54 |
| Singapore Dollar | 53.58 | 53.81 |
| Canadian Dollar | 54.13 | 54.36 |
| Malaysian Ringgit | 17.45 | 17.54 |
| Australian Dollar | 49.05 | 49.26 |

Source: Indian Bank

Sundaram Finance cuts deposit rates

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI

Sundaram Finance Ltd. (SFL) has revised interest rates on deposits with effect from May 1. The interest rates on fresh deposits, or renewals, stand revised to 6.75% from 7% per annum for 12 and 18 months, and to 7% from 7.25% for 24 and 36 months. The interest rate for senior citizens has been revised to 7% (7.50% per annum for 12 and 18 months and to 7.25% (7.75% per annum for 24 and 36 months. With renewals above 80% consistently, the company's deposit base has crossed ₹3,650 crore, SFL said in a statement.

SEBI halves broker turnover fee

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has halved the broker turnover fee and the filing fee for draft documents. "In its continuing efforts to help market participants to tide over challenges due to COVID-19, Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has decided to reduce broker turnover fees and filing fees on offer documents for public issue, rights issue and buyback of shares," SEBI said in a statement. "The broker turnover fee will be reduced to 50% of the existing fee structure for the period June 2020 to March 2021... Filing fees on offer documents... will be reduced to 50% of the existing fee structure. This will be effective for documents filed from June 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020," it added. Meanwhile, the new margin framework for derivatives segment, that were announced in February and were scheduled to be introduced from May 1, have been postponed until June 1.

Brokers seek action against Templeton

A high-powered panel must take over management of fund house, says brokers' association

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI

Stock brokers want the government and the capital markets regulator to take strict action against Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund, including appointing a high-powered committee to take over the management of the fund house while examining investment decisions taken by the house.

The Association of National Exchanges Members of India (ANMI), an umbrella body representing about 900 brokers, has again written to the Ministry of Finance and the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) seeking urgent action to safeguard further erosion of investor wealth while enabling a plan for investors to get their money in a time-bound manner.

While highlighting the fact that a significant portion of the investments in the six



A picture of Franklin Templeton Investments' U.S. campus. • BROKENSHERE/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

schemes that Franklin Templeton MF decided to wind up were in securities that were rated 'A' or lower, the broker body has said that questionable investment decisions forced the fund house to stop redemptions. "Based on portfolio details published by FTMF of the six funds... it appears

that the profile of some of the companies FTMF chose to invest in and the terms of those investments are questionable. When market slowdown gripped the economy, there was a substantial price erosion in low-rated papers in the debt market where FTMF had invested heavily, forcing them to stop the re-

demption," stated the ANMI letter. It further stated that as much as 64.73% of the total assets under management (AUM) of Franklin India Low Duration Fund was in securities rated A or lower. In Franklin India Short Term Income Plan, such securities accounted for nearly 59% of

total assets. As per the broker body, Franklin Templeton MF invested in long-duration securities even though SEBI norms clearly state that ultra short duration funds can have bonds with a tenure between three months and six months.

"It is surprising that the top management and trustees of FTMF have remained mute spectators to such blatant violation of SEBI Regulations... These long-dated securities with substantial investment in low-rated paper is the real cause of illiquidity that had caused closure of six funds of FTMF," stated the letter.

Meanwhile, in yet another instance of a credit fund taking a hit due to an illiquid debt market, the net asset value of BofI AXA Credit Risk Fund took a 50% hit after marking down seven securities in its portfolio.

IndusInd Bank profit drops

Gross NPAs rise sharply, drive up provisioning

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI

IndusInd Bank reported a net profit of ₹301.84 crore for the quarter ended March 31 as compared to ₹360.1 crore reported a year earlier. The profit declined as provisions increased from ₹1,561 crore to ₹2,440 crore.

The rise in provisions is due to a sharp increase in gross non-performing assets from ₹3,947 crore to ₹5,147 crore for the reporting period. Gross NPAs were at 2.45% of gross advances, compared with 2.1% a year earlier. The bank also made a floating provision of ₹260 crore as a buffer to protect against future losses arising out of the nationwide



lockdown that has adversely impacted business activities. "The extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic will impact the bank's operations and financial results depends on future developments, which are highly uncertain," the lender said. The provision coverage ratio rose to 63.34%, higher than

52.53% as of December 31, 2019 and 43.04% as of March 31, 2019. In the post-earnings media interaction, the bank's newly appointed MD & CEO Sumant Kathpalia said the bank had projected different scenarios as to how the economic lockdown would be lifted.

Mr. Kathpalia also said that March collections were over 95% from retail portfolios despite moratorium offered. The bank reported a net interest income of ₹3,231.19 crore for the quarter, up 44.74% year-on-year while the net interest margin for Q4 FY 2019-20 improved to 4.25% from 4.15% during Q3 FY 2019-20 and 3.59% during Q4 FY 2018-19.

Sensex gains on RBI liquidity boost for MFs

Japan's stimulus bolsters global stocks

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI

Indian equities traded strong on Monday as investor sentiment received a boost with the Reserve Bank of India announcing a ₹50,000 crore special liquidity facility for mutual funds facing liquidity pressures. An overall strong trend in global markets also acted as a catalyst. The 30-share Sensex gained 415.86 points or 1.33% to close at 31,743.08. Earlier in the day, it gained over 770 points to touch an intraday high of 32,103.70.

Gains in the benchmark were led by financial sector stocks such as IndusInd Bank, Axis Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank, ICICI Bank and Bajaj Finance. The broader Nifty rose 1.4% to 9,282.30. Last week, Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund decided to wind up six debt schemes amid liquidity issues. In the markets, more than 1,300 stocks gained while 1,090 declined. Global stocks too surged on Monday after the Bank of Japan announced more stimulus measures to help counter effects of the pandemic. The benchmarks of Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Taiwan and China all gained ground on Monday.

Efficiency to decline "If one comes to a 1,000 sq. ft store and if only four people are allowed, then the efficacy of the store would come down by 50%. In that case, the cost will go up by 10-15% easily. But overall the impact would be 30-35%

Ex-U.S. employees file case against Wipro

Allege discrimination by the company

MINI TEJASWI BENGALURU

Five former employees of Wipro have slapped a class-action suit against the IT services major, accusing it of practising 'discriminatory employment practices'.

According to reports, the suit was filed in March in the district court of New Jersey. The ex-employees have sought "injunctive, declaratory, equitable, and monetary relief for Wipro's systematic pattern and practice of discriminatory employment practices based upon individuals' race and national origin". A spokesperson said: "Wipro does not comment on pending litigation."

The filing said the five employees - Gregory MacLean, Rick Valles, Ardeshir Pezeshki, James Gibbs, and Ronald Hemenway - have alleged 'discrimination' against non-south Asian and non-Indian origin staff. Four of the litigants are of American origin, while one is of Iranian origin. "Wipro operates under a general policy of discrimination in favor of South Asians and against individuals who are not South Asian and not Indian. This general policy of discrimination manifests itself in the same... fashion with respect to Wipro's hiring, staffing, promotion and termination decisions."



Separately, the All India

'Allow liquor sale outside containment zones'

Industry contributes over ₹2 lakh cr. in taxes: confederation

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

Liquor and beer makers in the country have reached out to State governments to allow alcohol sales outside containment zones, with strict social distancing guidelines, while pitching for online sales and home delivery.

"The alcoholic beverage industry contributes over ₹2 lakh crore in taxes, sustains the livelihood of 40 lakh farmers, and employs 20 lakh people. A prolonged shutdown of industry is forcing lakhs of farmers and workers into joblessness and poverty," Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies (CIABC) said in its letter to Chief Ministers of all States, barring those under prohibition. Separately, the All India



Brewers Association (AIBA) has also written to CMs of 13 States, including Maharashtra, Goa, Kerala, Karnataka, West Bengal, Punjab, Haryana and New Delhi, with similar requests. AIBA noted that State governments generate more than ₹36,000 crore of tax revenue per year from beer alone, in the form of excise duties and VAT. "The stringent lockdown measures

have brought our business to a complete standstill. Especially during the peak summer of March to June, when almost 40% of the year's sales and revenues are generated. Similarly, the States too stand to lose a substantial part of the annual tax revenue," it said. "It is requested to allow alcoholic beverages to be sold through e-commerce and allow for home delivery of beer, through existing retailers with accredited delivery staff. This also will lead to reduced crowding at shops and ensure that beer sales and excise revenue is not impacted adversely by closure of certain outlets," AIBA said, adding that beer manufacturing plants also be allowed to restart operations, along with opening of ancillary sectors.

Amazon, Railways boost partnership for supplies

Firm leverages COVID-19 parcel trains

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT BENGALURU

Amazon India on Monday announced that it had strengthened its partnership with the Indian Railways to transport consignments via rail route across the country. The company is leveraging the 'COVID-19 Parcel Special Trains' introduced by the Indian Railways to ramp up operations to 55 lanes during the lockdown period. "Enhanced network Indian Railways, with the support of the Railway Board and the zones across Western, Central, Northern, Eastern, South Central, Southern, South Eastern, North East Frontier, North Western and South Western, have created a proactive solution to provide support for transportation

during the lockdown. This enhanced network will enable sellers to ship their products and keep businesses running, thereby, allowing people to access essential products. "In these unprecedented times, we understand the importance of ensuring that critical supplies reach our customers across the country. With the support of COVID-19 Parcel Special trains introduced by the Railways, we are confident that we can further fulfil customer orders with enhanced speed and capacity," said Abhinav Singh, director, Amazon Transportation Services, Amazon India. "We will continue to build on this partnership to help the industry service customers during this critical period," said sources at the Indian Railways.

B2B firm Udaan fires more than 3,500 contract workers

Lays off about 600 employees in Bengaluru

MINI TEJASWI BENGALURU

Udaan, a business-to-business start-up reportedly laid off over 3,500 of its contract workers across the country in the last three days, beginning April 23.

About 600 people have been laid off in Bengaluru alone, while more than 1,000 contract staff of the e-commerce firm lost their jobs in several small cities as well. A copy of the termination letter, shared with *The Hindu* by a contract employee who was laid off, read: "Due to some unavoidable business challenges we are closing the contract with Udaan and therefore, today, April 24th will be your last working day. You will receive a month's salary as



compensation." "My official email account was terminated around midnight on April 23, without any prior notice. Next day by 11 a.m., I received the termination letter from my employer, Awwar Consultancy [a third-party company that worked with Udaan], said Nagraj Gowda (name changed), who worked as a seller dispute executive, at Udaan. Strongly condemning the layoffs, the Karnataka State IT/ITES Employees Union

Union (KITU) said, "We call Udaan's action illegal and totally inhumane. The company has clearly violated the labour norms as they executed employment terminations of thousands of contract workers across the country, including over 600 people in Bengaluru, without any prior notice." The Labour Ministry had issued an advisory on March 20 asking all employers not to terminate workers, casual or contractual, during the lockdown. Sources said the pandemic had significantly affected Udaan's revenue from items such as electronics and apparel, although its business includes essentials such as fresh food and pharmacy. It had raised \$585 million last year for expansion.

Retailers gear up for the 'new normal'

May switch to appointment-based entry, contact-less shopping to push sales

YUTHIKA BHARGAVA NEW DELHI

While masks and sanitisers are expected to become a way of life due to COVID-19, these might not be enough for the retail sector to instil confidence in shoppers. With shoppers expected to avoid physical shops, retailers are looking at newer ways such as appointment-based entries to shops, contact-less shopping, and online to offline commerce, to push sales. "The overall architecture of retail will change with social distancing as a key component. Customers will be reluctant to go to places where there isn't enough social distancing or the hygiene standards are not perceptibly available," Kumar Rajagopalan, CEO, Retailers Association of India, told *The Hindu*.



Sumit Sehgal, CMO, Sheela Foam Ltd., which makes Sleepwell Mattress, said there would certainly be less consumers in the market and they would definitely move online, making it important for brands to step up their e-commerce strategy. "But since offline retail is still 95% of the market, one cannot ignore that. I think in the short term, one will be very cautious as to how they expand... we have to see how brands use the omnichannel approach to get the best of both online and offline worlds." Pushpa Bector, executive director, DLF Shopping Malls said this was also the best time to innovate. For example, he said, most malls are gearing up to use technology to issue some sort of tokens to designate time for shopping.

last-mile practices that can offer non-touch based self-checkout system in a post-pandemic scenario. Contact less shopping and contact less serving experiences will be the new normal," Ms. Bector said. Honda Cars India on Monday launched its 'Honda from Home' online booking platform. Similarly, Mercedes-Benz India has also launched an online platform for buying new cars. Tanvi Malik, co-founder, FabAlley & Indya, echoed similar views. "Online shopping will definitely be the new normal in the short-to-medium term, making it imperative to have up to date webshops and look at making them more intuitive by incorporating AI-based recommendations and browsing experience."



Nipping margins: In sectors such as salons, the cost would rise by 30-40%, says RAI chairman B.S. Nagesh. • REUTERS

Cost of doing business to see significant rise

Hygiene norms to influence revenue

LALATENDU MISHRA MUMBAI

As COVID-19 takes its toll on the economy and on human lives, the cost of doing business is set to go up as companies gear up to adhere to new safety and hygiene standards in their daily operations despite likely scaled down business activity and lower earnings. "The [change in] cost of doing business will vary from sector to sector. In the case of verticals like salons, where human touch is high, the cost would go up by 30-40%. If a person who gives a haircut or a facial has to wear a new PPE for every new customer, it is about a ₹500-₹600 extra per customer," said B.S. Nagesh, chairman, Retailers Association of India and founder TRRAIN.

He said for larger retail stores, the cost escalation would be anywhere between 10-50%. "Contact-less service "In the hotels business, customers have a lot of concern around safety. We have to think about how to redesign our services and deliver non-contact service, how to maintain social distance norms and how to create more avenues for check-ins etc.," he said. Airlines and airport operators will also have to bear extra costs to take on board fewer passengers, possibly well below existing capacities as well as breakeven levels and deploy more manpower to enforce safety and hygiene norms.

For large manufacturers and hotels and restaurants the cost escalation will be in double digits, as companies will be forced to operate at sub-optimal levels due to lack of demand and fewer employees. "There will be impact in terms of cost because manufacturing facilities will run at lower capacity due to intermittent runs," said Sanjiv Puri, chairman & managing director, ITC Ltd. The company's hotels business is set to undergo changes in service delivery in conformity with the new normal.

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during the lockdown. This enhanced network will enable sellers to ship their products and keep businesses running, thereby, allowing people to access essential products. "In these unprecedented times, we understand the importance of ensuring that critical supplies reach our customers across the country. With the support of COVID-19 Parcel Special trains introduced by the Railways, we are confident that we can further fulfil customer orders with enhanced speed and capacity," said Abhinav Singh, director, Amazon Transportation Services, Amazon India. "We will continue to build on this partnership to help the industry service customers during this critical period," said sources at the Indian Railways.

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IN BRIEF



Ashwin, Yorkshire agree to cancel contract

LONDON
R. Ashwin will not play for Yorkshire this season after the English county announced on Monday it was cancelling the overseas player contracts for the 2020 campaign by mutual consent following the coronavirus outbreak. Ashwin and South Africa slow left-arm Keshav Maharaj were meant to share duties in the First-Class County Championship. **AFP**



Grim prospects for tennis return: Nadal

MADRID
World No. 2 Rafael Nadal says he is "very pessimistic" about a full resumption of the professional tennis circuit. In a virtual chat organised by the Spanish Federation of Tennis Nadal said: "In tennis, you need to travel every week, stay in hotels, go to different countries. Even if we play without an audience, to organise any event you need a lot of people involved, which cannot be ignored. **AFP**



Archer finds his lost World Cup medal

LONDON
England fast bowler Jofra Archer has heaved a sigh of relief after he was finally able to find his 2019 World Cup winner's medal. On Sunday, Archer took to social media to put out a photograph of the medal on a bed with the caption: "Randomly searching the guest bedroom and boom." Archer had told BBC Radio on Saturday he had lost the medal while shifting to a new flat. **JANS**



Giri pulls off a fine win over Carlsen

NEW DELHI
A struggling Anish Giri (in pic) punished in-form Magnus Carlsen for an uncharacteristic blunder and went on to win 2.5-1.5 for his first victory in the \$250,000 Magnus Carlsen Invitational online chess tournament on Sunday.
The results (fifth round): Anish Giri (Ned) bt Magnus Carlsen (Nor) 2.5-1.5; Alireza Firouzja (FIDE) bt Maxime Vachier-Lagrave (Fra) 2.5-1.5.

'Tougher for the physically challenged'

Para-badminton World champion Manasi using the time to learn more about their rights

V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM HYDERABAD

Manasi Joshi was crowned para-badminton World champion hours before P.V. Sindhu scaled the summit in women's singles at the 2019 World Championships in Basel.

After that remarkable high, life hasn't changed much for Manasi. She feels that the physically challenged continue to be treated in an indifferent manner and are suffering the most during this lockdown.

Online course

"It is exactly for this reason that I took up an online course on 'Disability Awareness and Support' from the University of Pittsburgh.

"I chose it as it would enlighten me on the rights of the disabled," says the 30-year-old.

Manasi, at home in Ahmedabad now, said: "We seem to have so many privileges



Family time: Manasi Joshi (centre, back row) with her parents, sister and brother at home in Ahmedabad. •SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

and rights, it is important to be aware of what we actually have in the rule book. I have also re-read the Government of India's Rights of People with Disabilities Act, 2016, to know my rights and communicate about it effectively.

"I want to be more of an activist in the future in order to see the disabled get a better deal," she said.

"I have been through my own lockdown, in 2011, because of the accident," said Manasi, who was on her way

to work in Mumbai when the incident happened. In the accident, her left leg was crushed and arms broken, and she also suffered multiple injuries.

"Right now, I am working out, attending online class-

es, sharing my story on various platforms by going live on Instagram or Facebook, cooking, cleaning, or playing games with my family members. I am spending time in a much better way now.

Start all over again

"The biggest challenge will be to prepare for sports once the lockdown is lifted.

"We were scheduled to compete in the qualifying cycle in Spain before the COVID-19 crisis hit the world.

"We have to start all over again for the Tokyo Paralympics next year," said Manasi.

To emphasise that the physically challenged were being treated differently compared to the able-bodied sportspersons, Manasi revealed that except for the prize money given by the Government of India for becoming a World champion, she hadn't received anything else worth mentioning.

Umar Akmal banned for three years

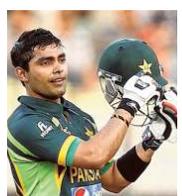
IANS KARACHI

The Pakistan Cricket Board has banned Umar Akmal from all forms of the game for three years on corruption charges.

"Umar Akmal handed three year ban from all cricket by chairman of disciplinary panel Justice (retd.) Faizal-e-Miran Chauhan," tweeted PCB.

Akmal had stated in an interview that he was offered money to skip matches against India. He had also revealed that he was asked to leave two deliveries in a match by the bookies.

"I was once offered \$200,000 for leaving two deliveries. I was also offered to skip matches against In-



Umar Akmal. •AP

dia," Akmal was quoted as saying by Geo TV.

Akmal had not requested for a hearing before the Anti-Corruption Tribunal after he was charged for two breaches of Article 2.4.4 of the PCB Anti-Corruption Code in two unrelated incidents.

CA's financial crisis complicated: Speed

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA MELBOURNE

Former ICC chief executive Malcolm Speed feels Cricket Australia's financial matters are quite complicated and current CEO Kevin Roberts has failed to offer a certain degree of clarity required in these troubled times.

Under financial stress, CA has already put 80% of its staff on 20% salary till end of June, while a handful of others, including the executives, remained on 80% pay.

The decision saved AUD 3 million, which was slammed by critics due to the fact that CA had some AUD 90 million in reserves at the end of March (2020), including AUD 36 million in stock investments.

Speed, also a former CA top boss, pointed out how CA had invested AUD 22 million in 2012, which increased to around AUD 45 million earlier this year be-



Malcolm Speed. •REUTERS

fore slipping to AUD 36 million due to the coronavirus shock.

"I think that's been messy," Speed told SEN Radio.

"I saw an article saying cricket has lost millions of dollars on the stock market. Well, before it lost millions on the stock market it made millions of dollars on the stock market and its lost part of its profits, but it hasn't lost anything yet because it hasn't sold. That was an issue."

No logic, says Holding on legalising ball-tampering

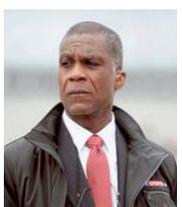
Donald in favour of the move; Waqar says saliva must

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI

Michael Holding feels legalising ball tampering in the post COVID-19 world is a bit "self contradictory" while Proteas great Allan Donald is completely on the opposite end of the spectrum on a subject that has divided opinions.

Speaking to ESPNcricinfo, Holding said, "Before they got to that point they said if they restart cricket it has to be played in a bio-secure environment.

"Now, if you are saying everyone is in the bio-secure environment, you are staying in the same hotel, you are not moving for the length of time you are playing the matches, if that is the



Michael Holding. •GETTY IMAGES

case why are you worried about someone's saliva?

"That person according to what you are doing should be free of Covid-19. If the ICC thinks that the two-week period to prove that you are free of Covid-19 is not foolproof, then that means you

are putting everyone in that environment in jeopardy?"

"It's either safe or it's not. No guessing, please," one of the most respected voices in world cricket said.

Pakistan legend Waqar Younis made it clear that use of saliva is a must and can't be done away with when competitive cricket resumes.

"As a fast bowler, I reject this because this (using saliva and sweat) is a natural process. A ball exchanges hands all day, you run in, huffing and puffing, you sweat and using saliva is natural rather than on intent. It's a habit and you just can't control this aspect," Waqar said.

Donald, however, is open to the idea. "I absolutely



Allan Donald. •PTI

agree with legalising ball-tampering. I said so in an article sometime in the 2000s. It happens anyway, we see guys throwing the ball on the ground and umpires say to throw it up and they're pretty obvious what they are doing. It could work if it is well-monitored."

F1 start likely in July

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE PARIS

Formula One boss Chase Carey on Monday targeted the coronavirus-hit season eventually starting in Austria for July 3-5 weekend after the French Grand Prix was cancelled and fans barred from the British race at Silverstone.

The French Grand Prix, scheduled for June 28, was the 10th race of the season to be scrapped or postponed.

"We're targeting a start to racing in Europe through July, August and beginning of September, with the first race taking place in Austria on 3-5 July weekend," Carey said in a statement.

FIFA proposes five substitutions

ASSOCIATED PRESS LAUSANNE

FIFA wants to let football teams use five substitutes to cope with expected schedule congestion caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

The game's governing body says the temporary plan could help prevent more injuries due to potential player overload as competitions catch up with a backlog.

The proposal gives com-

petition organisers the option of letting teams use five substitutes in 90 minutes and a sixth in knockout games that go to extra time. Teams would still be limited to three stoppages of play to make the changes.

The proposal, which could be used by all competitions finishing this year and the next and all national team games through 2021, must be formally approved by rule-making panel IFAB.

Equipment choices make a difference: Harmeet Desai

TABLE TENNIS

S. DIPAK RAGAV CHENNAI

Reigning Commonwealth table tennis champion Harmeet Desai said the general perception that equipment plays a minor role in a paddler's career is wrong.

Speaking to Sports Authority of India coaches on Monday via video-conference, the World No. 72 cited the transformation of Sweden's Mattias Falck, who profited from a change of rubber, to buttress his point.

"Mattias' backhand was strong but his forehand topspin wasn't," said Harmeet. "Under the coach's instructions, he used short pimples on his forehand and there was no looking back. He won silver in the World Championships last year."

Customised approach

Harmeet, the current National champion, also highlighted the need for coaches to tailor their approach to a player's requirements. "Soutmyajit Ghosh and I were training under [coach and former Euro-



Harmeet Desai. •FILE PHOTO: G. RAMAKRISHNA

pean singles champion] Peter Karlsson. We were both different personalities. While I was self-driven but used to burn myself out during practice, Ghosh thrived when the coach was in his corner and

backing him. So Peter advised me to take it a bit easy to be fresh for tournaments."

The 26-year-old, who won the ITTF Challenge Indonesia Open in 2019, then spoke about the importance of having a weapon and formulating plans to hide and manage weaknesses.

"For example, [World No. 2] Xu Xin has a weakness on his backhand side and everyone knows it. But at the same time, it is impossible to catch him there because of the way he strategises and covers his backhand side."

Recalling a story about the Chinese system's methods of simulating match situations during practice, Harmeet described how Ma Lin was instructed by coach Liu Guoliang to play Zhang Jian with a 2-0 handicap ahead of the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

China had failed to win the men's singles gold at Athens 2004. Harmeet said Guoliang, in a bid to provoke Lin, had stipulated that he stood to lose 10,000 yuan if he was defeated. Lin went on to win the practice match and gold in Beijing.

Perth, the lone perk for a stranded Chennai resident

Neither does Australia want visitors like me to stay back nor has India opened its doors, he says

BISHWANATH GHOSH KOLKATA

It was in early February that Chennai-resident Viswanath Raghu, 64, reached Sydney on an extended visit to Australia.

He tried getting back to India on March 13, as soon as the Centre issued a circular that incoming flights were going to be barred from mid-night GMT that day, but narrowly missed the cut-off time.

Today, neither Australia wants visitors like him to hang around nor has India opened its doors, as a result of which he was forced to travel to the U.S., where he feels he has higher chances of contracting the novel coronavirus.

"I had uneventful flights from Sydney to San Francisco and then to New Jersey [where his son lives]. But the biggest surprise was that I was never screened or questioned before takeoff at Sydney or after arrival at San Francisco and also at Newark. I picked up my bags and came home," Mr. Raghu told *The Hindu* soon after he reached the U.S. on Monday.

Mr. Raghu, who graduated from the Indian Statistical In-



By the beach: Viswanath Raghu made the most of being stuck in Perth by enjoying the vistas in and around the city.

stitute (ISI) in Kolkata, moved to the U.S. back in 1981 and became an American citizen, but at the age of 60 returned to India to again make Chennai his home.

Invertebrate traveller

An invertebrate traveller, he went to Australia in early February to catch up with friends and family members spread out there, and he had barely returned to Sydney after a brief visit to Perth — where a niece and a former ISI classmate live — before

news came that India was barring incoming flights from March 12.

Mr. Raghu said: "You should read the Government of India circular of March 12. According to it, the cut-off time was 12:00 GMT at port of departure on March 13. But people at the airline interpreted it as arrival by 12:00 GMT. So I missed the arrival cut-off by three hours. They didn't allow me to board.

"The friend I was staying with in Sydney had sched-

Luckily, Perth had its lovely bicycle trails everywhere including by the side of highways

uled to renovate the house after my departure. Out of desperation, I called my niece in Perth who was herself a paying guest. Staying with my ISI friend was also not an option because he had his daughter and son-in-law as visitors.

"Finally, she requested her host to let me stay with them and I quickly bought a ticket to Perth. I got a seat on Virgin Australia and there were rumours they will file for bankruptcy leaving me with a worthless ticket. Fortunately, my flight took off and very soon thereafter Virgin stopped all flights.

Fitness freak

"But because I missed the flight to India, I was able to enjoy Perth. I am a fitness freak and just cannot be locked up for too long.

"With no end in sight for India letting me in, I had to find some activity to keep my sanity and health going. Luckily, Perth had its lovely bicycle trails everywhere, in-

cluding by the side of highways. So, I took a spot decision to invest in a used bicycle.

"Initially, I found it hard to be on the bike for even an hour, but soon my leg muscles got used to it and within two weeks I was able to comfortably do three hours every day. The weather became cooler and on weekends, I did even up to four hours with my young niece. I fell in love with Perth.

"But when India extended the lockdown and denied entry to even stranded Indian citizens, I became desperate and contacted both the Indian and U.S. consulates, asking them to request the Australian government to extend my stay beyond the 90-day limit. Both of them sent me stock responses via email.

"The message from Australia to all visitors was clear: Go back.

"The only flight to the U.S. was from Sydney and so my challenge was to find a ticket that took me via Sydney.

"Though Australia is also under lockdown, each state was operating one flight a day for essential travel and I guess I fell under that category."

Odisha-based numismatist to sell collection for COVID-19 fund

Young Mangaraj's labour of love includes 2 lakh coins

SATYASUNDAR BARIK BHUBANESWAR

Moved by the great human tragedy unfolding in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Debiprasad Mangaraj, a leading Indian numismatist, announced his plan to sell 2 lakh antique coins, including some priceless centuries-old currencies. Proceeds from the proposed auction will go to the PM-CARES Fund and the Chief Minister's Relief Fund.

"I have a treasure of 8 lakh distinctive pieces of coins from different eras. Two lakh additional coins are also with me. Numismatists from within and outside India have tried to persuade me to sell some of them, but I had never agreed to it before," said Mr. Mangaraj (28), who began collecting at the age of five.

He began collecting when his grandfather, Dhanraj Mangaraj, gave him 15 priceless East India Company coins.

Over the years, he visited a number of States to expand his collection. The young Mr. Mangaraj had fi-



Philanthropic gesture: Debiprasad Mangaraj says proceeds from the proposed auction will go to the PM-CARES Fund and the Chief Minister's Relief Fund. •FILE PHOTO: K.V.S. GIRI

nanced the land on which he intended to set up a coin museum in Bhubaneswar.

An engineering graduate and entrepreneur, Mr. Mangaraj is also helping his sister produce a film on coins.

He said he possesses rare copper, silver, gold and other metal coins, some used in transactions by the East India Company, the others in circulation during the Maurya, Kushan and Mughal empires. The oldest coin in his collection dates back to 2,300 years.

"I have collected punch-marked coins that were in use between the sixth and second century BCE. A spe-

cial feature of the auction is a coin circulated by German dictator Adolf Hitler," said Mr. Mangaraj.

He claimed that a U.S.-based collector had once offered ₹1.3 crore for an East India Company coin, and the collection, built over purchases, exchange and donations, could be worth several crores of rupees.

"The pandemic, which has caused unimaginable human tragedy, unnerved me. I realised that this was the time to contribute to society with my wealth, although the thought of parting with my coins makes me sad," said Mr. Mangaraj.