



135 personnel from CRPF unit in Delhi test positive for COVID-19

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UAE sends medical aid to India as evacuation plans are being framed

page 8



PM meets FM for second economic stimulus package

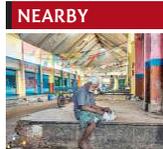
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'Missing' North Korean leader Kim Jong-un reappears in public

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NEARBY

Koyambedu market emerges a hotspot

CHENNAI The Koyambedu market has turned into a COVID-19 hotspot in the State. Not just Chennai, but at least six more districts have witnessed a spillover of cases from the cluster. The city's neighbouring districts have stepped up surveillance.

TAMIL NADU PAGE 2

Hospitals ready to shift asymptomatic patients

CHENNAI As cases of COVID-19 continue to surge in the city, government hospitals have begun making alternative arrangements to accommodate patients. The Government Stanley Medical College Hospital transferred some asymptomatic patients to a quarantine facility on Saturday.

TAMIL NADU PAGE 2

Containment zones in city being redrawn

CHENNAI Civic officials on Saturday started redrawing the boundaries of containment zones to reduce hardship of residents and to facilitate effective implementation of disinfection drive.

CHENNAI PAGE 3

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MAGAZINE 8 PAGES

2,411 cases recorded in highest single-day spike; toll now 1,223

One million tests conducted till date; ICMR ramps it up to 75,000 per day

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

India, on Saturday, recorded the biggest single-day jump of 2,411 COVID-19 cases, taking the total number to 37,776, according to data released by the Union Health Ministry.

This is the largest rise in cases since January, when the infection was first detected in India.

With 71 more deaths, the death toll has gone up to 1,223. India currently has 26,535 active COVID-19 cases, and 10,017 patients have recovered.

"In the last 24 hours, more than 1,061 patients were cured. This takes our total recovery rate to 26.65%," added the Ministry.

Data from the State Health Departments put the total number of cases at 39,435, of which 27,534 are active ones.

The number of fatalities stood at 1,316.

With 790 new cases, the number of cases in Maharashtra reached 12,296. Mumbai accounted for 547 of the cases.

The death toll in the State rose to 521, with 27 deaths in Mumbai and nine in other parts of the State.

Gujarat reported 26 deaths, the highest number

Consistent spike

India has recorded more than 1,000 new COVID-19 cases every day in the past 15 days and over 50 new deaths every day in the past seven days. More than 2,000 new cases were recorded each day in the past three days



Anxious wait: A man, with his 10-day-old baby, waiting to get tested for COVID-19 in New Delhi on Saturday. REUTERS

of fatalities in a single day so far, taking the overall toll to 262. With 333 new cases, most of them in Ahmedabad, the tally in the State rose to 5,054, an official said.

419 labs

India crossed the million-mark for conducting RT-PCR tests, with the Indian Council of Medical Research now

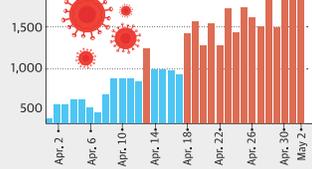
having ramped up testing to more than 75,000 samples per day.

"Currently, there are 419 labs testing for coronavirus in the country. There are currently 14 mentor institutions, including AIIMS, PGI Chandigarh, CMC Vellore, JIPMER Puducherry, and SGPGMS Lucknow, who are hand-holding several medi-

cal colleges/ labs/ hospitals in carrying out tests. There are 15 institutions spread in the country working as depositories for supplying testing kits/material to these labs," a senior government source said.

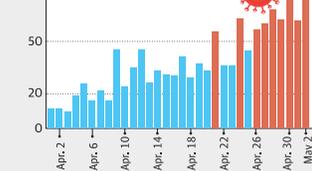
CASE COUNT

The chart shows daily cases recorded between April 1 and May 2



DEATH COUNT

The chart shows daily deaths recorded between April 1 and May 2



T.N. Cabinet eases lockdown norms in large parts of State

Infrastructure sector, SEZs and IT firms allowed to restart

T. RAMAKRISHNAN
CHENNAI

A day after the Central government extended the country-wide lockdown till May 17, the State Cabinet decided to follow suit. It, however, announced relaxations in non-containment zones of the State by permitting a re-commencement of key infrastructure activities and reopening of special economic zones and export-oriented units/export units with restrictions.

These decisions, among others, were taken by the Cabinet, which met for two-and-a-half hours at the Secretariat. Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami and Deputy Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam were among those present. As soon as the meeting began at about 11 a.m., Chief Secretary K. Shanmugam and Health Secretary Beela Rajesh gave an elaborate account of the prevalence of COVID-19 in the State. Additional Chief Secretary (Finance) S. Krishnan, who submitted preliminary recommendations of his committee to the Chief Minister on Friday, was also present.

Given the fact that the State had, till recently, one green zone (Krishnagiri), 24 orange zones and 12 red

Lockdown 3.0

Excerpts from the decisions taken during the Tamil Nadu Cabinet meeting on Saturday:

- ▶ Lockdown to continue till May 17 midnight
- ▶ Chennai Corporation Commissioner & District Collectors to ensure commencement of industries by May 6
- ▶ Sectors permitted already, including agricultural work, agro-processing & essential services, to continue
- ▶ Central and State government offices to function with 33% staff strength
- ▶ Special permission not needed for MSME; rural industrial units & shops to continue functioning
- ▶ Maximum of 20 persons allowed at funerals
- ▶ Further relaxation of lockdown conditions depends on prevalence of COVID-19



No entry: Police restricting two-wheeler entry near Koyambedu market in Chennai recently. R. RAVINDRAN

zones, the Cabinet did not have much scope for extending relaxations, pointed out a senior official. What it did was to peruse the guidelines of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, issued at different points of time in April and the latest one on May 1, before taking the decisions. There were only "marginal differences" between the

conditions for red and orange zones. However, as the State government did not completely act on the MHA's notifications of April 15 and 16 with regard to allowing a number of economic activities, it had now decided to give effect to most of the revised guidelines.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Majority of curbs lifted in orange zones

Barring containment areas, domestic help, electricians and plumbers can work

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A day after the nationwide lockdown was extended till May 17 and major relaxations were allowed, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) clarified on Saturday that taxis would be permitted with two passengers.

Inter-district movement of vehicles are allowed only for permitted activities with a maximum of two passengers. Other than these, all activities are allowed without any restriction in the orange zones.

Also, e-commerce could be used for the delivery of essential and non-essential products in districts designated as green and orange zones. In red zones, e-commerce can only be used for the delivery of essential items, an MHA official said.

Salons, liquor shops

In another significant addition, the official said barbers and salons could also open in orange and green zones. Liquor shops could open in all zones, except containment areas. In urban areas, liquor shops that are not in market complexes and malls could open everywhere.

Regarding the entry of domestic helps, electricians, plumbers and others, the official said Residents Welfare Association (RWAs) in all zones, except containment areas, should take a call "by keeping health protocols in mind".

"In case of any mishapening, the responsibility lies with the person allowing the outsiders in their homes," said the official.

Public transport was still barred, except in green zones where buses have

COVID-19

been allowed to ply with 50% capacity.

MHA also issued a separate clarification for orange zones where it said that "inter-district and intra-district plying of buses remains prohibited." According to the guidelines issued on Friday, buses were allowed only in green zones with a 50% cap. "However, States and Un-

ion territories based on their assessment and priorities, may choose to permit a lesser number of activities," MHA said.

Green zones are districts with either zero confirmed cases till date; or, no confirmed case in the last 21 days. Red zones are defined based on the total number of active cases, doubling rate of confirmed cases, extent of testing and surveillance feedback from the districts. The districts, which are neither defined as red nor green, shall be classified as orange zones. According to the Health Ministry's classification, there are 130 red zone districts, 284 orange zone districts and 319 green zone districts in the country.

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has reviewed the Limits of Way and Means Advances for Center and States/UTs.

Key takeaways:

For central Government: Recently, The Government of India increased the ceiling on WMA with RBI by 60% to Rs 1.20 lakh crore (from Rs 75,000 crore last year) to tide over the cash flow mismatch in FY21 expected from higher spending to combat the spread of COVID-19.

For States/UTs: RBI had constituted an Advisory Committee (Chairman: Shri Sudhir Shrivastava) to review the WMA limits for States/UTs. Meanwhile, it has been decided to increase their WMA limit by 30%. Important value additions:

Under Section 17(5) of RBI Act, 1934, the RBI provides Ways and Means Advances (WMA) to the central and State/UT governments.

It is a temporary liquidity arrangement with the central bank.

It enables the centre and the states to borrow money up to 90 days from the RBI to tide over their liquidity mismatch between its inflow of revenues and outflow of expenditure.

A higher limit would provide the government flexibility to raise funds from RBI without borrowing them from the market.

WMA is not a security as it is not tradable.

Interest rate for WMA is currently charged at the repo rate.

The limits for WMA are mutually decided by the RBI and the Government of India.

Despair packs them into a concrete mixer truck

Ride ends in Indore for 18 U.P. men

STAFF REPORTER
BHOPAL

Desperate to return home, four drivers took turns crawling into the steel drum of a concrete mixer truck as they set out on a 1,380 km ride to Uttar Pradesh. They left Mumbai on International Workers' Day on May 1, after battling hunger and with virtually no money after being denied wages for three months.

"The heat inside was more bearable than the hunger," said Manoj Yadav. On the way, they picked up 14 others trudging back home. While most of the others planned to get a ride to Gorakhpur district, Mr. Yadav hoped to disembark in Lucknow and walk to his home in Prayagraj, 200 km away. On the outskirts of Indore, Madhya Pradesh, a policeman caught sight of a head popping out from an opening on the side of the truck's drum.



A man gets off the concrete mixer truck in Indore

*SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

"We have taken them to a quarantine centre, where they have been screened and given food," said Sunil Yadav, in-charge of the Sanwer police station. The police booked the driver for disobeying the lockdown.

The drivers had given up hope of the lockdown ever being lifted. "They said it would be lifted on April 14, but it has not ended. We couldn't wait for something that was never going to end," he added.

States scrape the barrel as revenues dry up

They face mounting costs of lockdown

The nationwide lockdown to prevent the spread of COVID-19 has left the finances of the State governments in a precarious position. States have to depend on the Centre for devolution of funds under various heads.

Revenues from own taxes account for just under half of the total revenues of the States, according to a Reserve Bank of India study; central transfers account for 47.5%. Of the own tax revenues, 90% comes from taxes on liquor, petroleum products, stamp duty and registration of vehicles.

All of these are now under strain. There have been no new vehicle and property registrations since the lockdown began and also no sale of liquor. Petroleum sales have dropped by about half. Resultantly, own tax revenues of the States have plunged by 80-90%.

Meanwhile, they have been called upon to spend more to ease the burden on the poor with direct cash transfers to the needy and on beefing up health infrastructure, apart from the expenses on testing, quarantining and treating of patients.

Entreaties to the Centre to hasten the transfer of GST compensation, increase fiscal deficit limits from 3% to 4.5% and for higher ways and means advances (WMA) limits have all fallen on deaf ears till now. The RBI did increase the WMA limit but that is not adequate.

In this backdrop, we will be running a series of reports on the finances of the major States over the next few days. We begin with Tamil Nadu.



STATE OF STATE FINANCES

PANDEMIC JOLTS T.N. PAGE 6

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

Koyambedu market emerges a hotspot

A spillover of the cluster is seen in at least six districts

SERENA JOSEPHINE M.
K. LAKSHMI
CHENNAI

The Koyambedu market has turned into a COVID-19 hotspot in the State. Other than Chennai, at least six districts are witnessing a spillover of cases from the wholesale hub.

The districts of Tiruvallur, Kancheepuram and Chengalpattu are stepping up surveillance after the Koyambedu cluster started bringing in new cases.

According to officials of the Greater Chennai Corporation, 52 persons have tested positive for COVID-19, so far in Koyambedu. Results of 250 more persons are awaited.

Loaders from the Koyambedu wholesale market continue to leave the city, according to wholesaler traders.

As only the wholesale vegetable market is allowed to function now, there are about 2,000 loaders in the market. At least 30-40 of them are leaving the market to their native places, as they are unable to find proper food and water. They return in trucks that bring produce from other parts of the State, said traders.



While loaders attached to wholesale shops remain in the market, others are leaving the city. — M. KARUNAKARAN

While those attached to the wholesale shops remain in the market, some common loadmen are leaving the city

WHOLESALE VEGETABLE MERCHANT
Koyambedu market

lesale vegetable merchant.

The results of the cluster have started to show in a number of districts. "There are more cases from the Koyambedu cluster. In Kancheepuram, we made a list of vegetable vendors in five blocks and screened them. We lifted samples from 17 vendors, of which seven have tested positive in Uthiramerur," an official said.

Affected districts

Nineteen workers — 18 in Ariyalur and one in Perambalur — who returned from Chennai on April 30, tested positive. All 19 were working at the Koyambedu market and returned to their hometown after it was closed for retail

vendors. Seven persons who tested positive in Cuddalore were also from Koyambedu.

In Tiruvallur district, a vegetable vendor in the Municipality limits tested positive two days ago.

She initially told officials that she only visited the local market to procure produce. But during contact tracing, officials found that she had visited the Koyambedu market. Of her seven family members who were tested for COVID-19, her daughter and son-in-law have tested positive, said officials.

Chengalpattu district, which has been reporting new cases continuously in the last few days, is facing a similar issue.

Among the new cases, the Koyambedu cluster has been identified as one of the main links. Officials are planning to stop movement from the district to Koyambedu and operate local markets with produce from local cultivation.

Chennai continues to account for bulk of new cases

Of 231 fresh cases, city's share is 174; death of 76-year-old takes toll to 29; another 29 discharged

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

Chennai reported 174 of the 231 fresh COVID-19 cases in Tamil Nadu on Saturday.

This is the highest ever single-day spike the State has reported till now, taking its tally to 2,757*.

Of the 231 new patients, 158 were men, 72 women and one was a 48-year-old transperson in Chennai. The youngest among the new COVID-19 patients was a 14-day-old baby in Kancheepuram.

A 76-year-old woman from Chennai died due to COVID-19 at 5.30 p.m. on May 1 at the Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital. With this, the State has reported 29 deaths due to COVID-19.

Sample testing

The State's single-day sample count crossed the 10,000-mark. A total of 10,127 samples were tested. This took the total number of samples tested so far to 1,39,490.

With another 29 persons discharged from hospitals

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

	Until April 25	April 26	April 27	April 28	April 29	April 30	May 01	May 02	Total
Cases reported	1,821	64	52	121	104	161	203	231	2,757
Recovered and discharged	960	60	81	27	82	48	54	29	1,341
Deceased	23	1	0	1	2	0	1	1	29

Persons tested	In home quarantine	Districts with maximum cases
1,20,083	33,184	Chennai 1,257
1,30,132	35,418	Coimbatore 142
Active cases	In hospitals	Tiruppur 114
1,183	2,013	Chengalpattu 90
1,384	2,099	Madurai 88
Discharged	In quarantine facilities	
1,312	40	
28	40	
Died		
1,341		
29		

*Changes in 24 hours ■ As on 01 May 2020, 6 p.m. ■ As on 02 May 2020, 6 p.m.

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

across the State, the total number of persons discharged increased to 1,341. In Chennai alone, a total of 223 persons have been discharged till now, followed by 127 in Coimbatore and 108 in Tiruppur. The total number of active cases in the State was 1,384, according to a bulletin issued by the Directorate of Public Health and Preventive Medicine.

With Chennai adding 174

more cases to its tally, the total number of cases in the city stand at 1,257. Along with Chennai, 13 more districts have reported fresh cases — 18 in Ariyalur, 13 in Kancheepuram, seven in Tiruvallur, five in Chengalpattu, two each in Cuddalore, Perambalur, Ramanathapuram, Tiruppur and Villupuram, and one each in Coimbatore, Madurai, Salem and Theni.

Another nine children in the 0-12 age group have tested positive, taking the total number of affected children in the age group to 159. As on date, a total of 2,318 persons in the 13-60 age group and 280 persons aged above 60 have tested positive for COVID-19 in the State.

One more private testing facility has been approved — the Metropolis Healthcare, Chennai. As of now, the State

has 34 testing facilities in the government and 13 facilities in the private sector.

A total of 1,30,132 persons, including 10,049 today, have been tested so far. A total of 35,418 persons are under home quarantine and 40 in government quarantine facilities. Another 2,099 individuals with suspected symptoms of COVID-19 have been admitted to isolation wards in various hospitals.

To make room, asymptomatic patients to move out

Transfer to quarantine facilities will free up space for new admissions in hospitals

SERENA JOSEPHINE M.
CHENNAI

As cases of COVID-19 continue to surge in the city, government hospitals have begun making alternative arrangements to accommodate patients.

While the Government Stanley Medical College Hospital transferred some asymptomatic patients to a quarantine facility, the Government Kilpauck Medical College (KMC) Hospital discharged a few patients who had suspected symptoms of COVID-19 and were in a stable condition, and took in around 10 new patients on Saturday.

A health official said that quarantine facilities in 11 places in the city were being readied. Officials said that the Tamil Nadu Medical Ser-

vices Corporation was arranging around 1,500 beds for the facilities. Besides, it had supplied 1,561 additional cots and mattresses to the Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital, the Government Stanley Medical College Hospital, KMC and the Government Medical College Hospital, Omandurar Estate, to augment bed capacity, a fortnight ago.

At the Government Stanley Medical College Hospital, an official said that patients who were asymptomatic, with no co-morbid conditions and less than 55 years of age, were transferred to a quarantine facility established at a private college. "As of now, we have 200 patients in the hospital. We have 200 beds — all single-room facilities as per norms



Health Minister C. Vijayabaskar inspecting the facilities for COVID-19 patients at the Kilpauck Medical College Hospital.

— and are getting 100 more ready," he said.

Officials said that hospitals were making internal arrangements to create more space to accommodate new patients every day. "At KMC, 298 patients have been admitted. Of them, 218 have

tested positive for COVID-19. The remaining patients are individuals suspected to have symptoms of COVID-19. The hospital has discharged some of these patients, who are stable, and will keep track of their health. After making such arrangements,

around 50 beds were vacant at the hospital," an official said.

Hospital authorities said that they were also taking measures to shift asymptomatic patients to three quarantine centres. The hospital had requested the COVID-19 room to refer new patients to other government hospitals, in accordance with bed availability.

"We are trying to increase bed capacity to 400," an official said.

A senior doctor suggested that the government could utilise peripheral hospitals to treat patients requiring intensive care. "These hospitals have all [necessary] facilities, while the required manpower could be moved [there] from government hospitals in the city," he said.

COVID-19

The market, on Saturday, received nearly 15,000 visitors, which is less in number than usual.

"We insist on masks and gloves as much as possible for visitors and for our labourers. While those attached to the wholesale shops remain in the market, some common loadmen are leaving the city," said a who-

FROM PAGE ONE

T.N. Cabinet eases lockdown norms in large parts of State

Among the non-containment zones, the Cabinet distinguished between those falling under the jurisdiction of the Greater Chennai Police and those in the remaining areas of the State. Compared to the Chennai region where the number of cases was on the rise, it chose to give more relaxations for the rest of the State. For example, in respect of the IT/ITES sector, the permitted quantum of staff strength is 10% for firms in and around Chennai, while it is 50% in other parts of the State.

The Cabinet took a conscious decision of treating the textile sector cautiously as it received feedback from Ministers of the western belt that the scope was "limited" for adherence to norms of personal distancing at mills. With regard to infrastructure or road works, the Cabinet's recommendation was that the services of locally available labour should be utilised.

"We cannot go on with the present state for months together as the livelihood opportunities of a large number of the poor are at stake," pointed out Mr. Shanmugam. Another official said that "to the extent possible", the government had struck a balance between social and economic goals.

Asked about the continued denial of permission for salons and beauty parlours, the official replied that given the nature of service to be rendered to customers, the chances were extremely limited for adhering to the norms on personal distancing.

Besides, the Centre itself had included "barber shops, spas and salons" in the list of prohibited activities for red zones.

Pointing out that more focus would be paid to containment zones, Mr. Shanmugam said that the

Easing of curbs

Cabinet decision with regard to non-containment zones in the rest of Tamil Nadu

- All factories including textile mills in rural areas and town panchayats to commence operations with 50% of staff strength (minimum of 20 employees)

- Resumption of activity by textile mills with 50% staff strength in town panchayats of over 15,000 population with the clearance of District Collectors

- SEZs, EOUs, industrial estates/clusters in rural and urban areas to be allowed to function with 50% staff strength but not textile mills located in industrial estates of urban areas

- District Collectors to decide on reopening of export units in urban areas with 50% staff strength and units for designing and production of samples for export of garment and leather products with 30% staff strength

- Hardware manufacturing firms and spinning mills in rural areas to restart their functions, both with 50% staff strength

- IT and ITes units allowed to function with 50% staff strength (minimum of 20 employees)



Colour-coded cards being distributed to residents in Madurai on Saturday. — S. JAMES

- Government departments, public sector enterprises to resume infrastructure & road works, locally available labour to be utilised

- Plumbers, electricians, AC mechanics, domestic helps, tailors, homecare providers to be allowed to work after getting permission from District Collector

- Shops selling materials needed for infrastructure, cement and all private shops in rural areas allowed to function between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m.

- Servicing shops for mobile phones, computers and home appliances as well as all private shops in municipalities and municipal corporations, barring malls and market complexes, allowed to function from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

We cannot go on with the present state for months as the livelihood opportunities of a large number of the poor are at stake

K. SHANMUGAM
Chief Secretary

government had also felt that there was no point in penalising the remaining parts of the State. As the period of "broader lockdown"

was nearing its end, the government would hereafter have to go for "localised lockdowns" to ensure that the pandemic did not spread.

About arrangements for getting e-passes for household helps, the Chief Secretary said that a provision would shortly be made on the system and the passes would be issued by the Corporation Commissioner in Chennai and Collectors in other districts.

Firms welcome easing of curbs, but say more steps needed

Denied permission to resume operations, jewellers to make representation to government

SANJAY VIJAYAKUMAR
CHENNAI

The State government's decision to lift certain restrictions, except in containment zones, has evoked a mixed reaction from industries. While some players have welcomed the move, others say the government should go further.

"We welcome the move to allow factories outside the city to operate with 50% of their workers. To begin with, we will operate one shift, and slowly ramp up [operations]," said B.C. Datta, vice-president, Hyundai Motor India.

"Most of our suggestions have been factored into the relaxations, especially [the one on] allowing the operation of export-oriented units. Allowing construction work



At the front line: A policeman gets a much-needed break from his lockdown duties in Chennai. — R. RAJENDRAN

would also help kickstart economic activity," said Hari K. Thiagarajan, chairman, CII Tamil Nadu State Council.

S. Vasudevan, joint secretary, Tamilnadu Small and Tiny Industries' Association,

welcomed the announcement and said that clear standard operating procedures need to be issued. However, he added that employees' movement should have been allowed on the basis of self-declaration by the

employer, with address proof and ID proof, as getting permission from the administration would pose practical difficulties.

Strict adherence

"It is important that industries behave responsibly and strictly follow the newly-defined standard operating processes, as they shoulder an equal, if not bigger, responsibility to make the lockdown exit seamless, sustainable and scalable," said Ramkumar Ramamoorthy of the Madras Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

"We will resume construction activities by May 6, after seeking further instructions from the government. The allowing of construction activities will help reduce the anxiety of migrant workers,

who are waiting to return to their home States," said S. Sridharan, chairman of CRE-DAI Tamil Nadu.

He pointed out that real-estate firms wanted their back offices to function with minimal staff. This had not been allowed, and the association would make a representation to the government in this regard, he said.

"Jewellery outlets have not been allowed [to function], which is disappointing. We would make a representation to the government," said N. Anantha Padmanabam, chairman of the All India Gem and Jewellery Domestic Council.

Panaruna Aqeel, chairman, Council for Leather Exports, welcomed the relaxations and said this would help the industry get orders.

Lockdown violations touch 3.66 lakh

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

The total number of violations across the State during the lockdown, starting March 24, has touched 3,66,430, said the police.

According to the police, 3,86,509 violators were arrested and released on bail immediately. Over 3,25,851 vehicles were seized and ₹3.76 crore collected as fines from the violators.

Director General of Police J.K. Tripathy has appealed to the people not to venture out unnecessarily and has urged them to follow the prohibitory orders promulgated by the government to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Special train travellers will have to pay extra

Migrants taking Shramik trains will be charged ₹50 along with sleeper class fare

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

Even as the Ministry of Home Affairs has directed the Indian Railways to operate Shramik special trains to move migrant workers, pilgrims and students, stranded in various States during the lockdown, the Railway Board has announced extra charges, in addition to the normal sleeper class fare, to be collected from the passengers. The extra charges will come into force from May 1.

Although the Railways has said that special trains would be operated only based on requests from the State governments, it has announced that an additional charge of ₹50 per passenger



Nowhere to go: Migrant workers have the worst affected by the COVID-19 lockdown. — M. VEDHAN

would be collected, along with the sleeper class fare, in the special trains to be operated across all special trains to be operated in the country.

The Railway Board has issued a circular directing various railway regions, includ-

ing the Southern Railway, to charge ₹50 per passenger, in addition to the cost of the sleeper class fare.

Superfast charges

The circular states that the extra charges would comprise superfast charges of ₹30 and an additional charge of ₹20.

For a short trip between two States, from Chennai to Bengaluru, the sleeper class fare is around ₹260, with the price increasing based on the number of kilometres.

Similar to the special train operated by the South Central Railway, the Southern Railway is operating a special train from Kochi to Bhubaneswar, the Railways official said.

Timings CHENNAI

SUNDAY, MAY 03
RISE 05:48 SET 18:25
RISE 14:31 SET 02:26

MONDAY, MAY 04
RISE 05:47 SET 18:25
RISE 15:30 SET 03:13

TUESDAY, MAY 05
RISE 05:47 SET 18:25
RISE 16:28 SET 04:00

Chennai Weather max min

Thiruvananthapuram	38	27
Chennai Airport	37	29
Chennai City	36	30

Chennai Airport Today
37°C Dry and warm weather with partly cloudy sky during the day. Night will be pleasant.

Chennai Airport Tomorrow
36°C Dry and warm weather with partly cloudy sky during the day. Night will be pleasant.

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IN BRIEF

Health Minister interacts with COVID-19 patients
CHENNAI Health Minister C. Vijayabaskar on Saturday, visited the Government Kilpauk Medical College Hospital. He interacted with a few of the patients in the COVID-19 isolation ward via videoconferencing.

Former delivery executive held for selling ganja
CHENNAI Mylapore police on Saturday arrested Gunasekaran, 25, a former delivery executive for a food aggregator, for carrying and selling ganja during the lockdown. He flew under the police's radar using his former work uniform.

Four drown in a lake in Kancheepuram
CHENNAI Chitra, 35, Poomrini, 12, Sathya, 13, and Kalai, 16, drowned in Manimangalam lake in Kancheepuram on Saturday. Thilaka, 40, who accompanied them, has been admitted to the hospital and is being treated.

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Lockdown relaxations to give city residents a breather

Containment zones remain closed for business; Anna Salai to be reopened

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI

Residents of Chennai can breathe easy from May 4 with relaxations being extended to shops and other establishments, despite the city witnessing new COVID-19 cases every day, with more than 100 cases being reported over four consecutive days.

Chennai alone has registered a total of 1,257 cases till Saturday with only 223 persons have been discharged. The city is among the 12 red zone regions in the State and has a large number of containment zones where no activity will be allowed.

In Chennai, the administration has extended the timings for shops selling essential items from 6 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Standalone shops will be allowed to function from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., while hotels will be allowed to provide take-away service from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m.

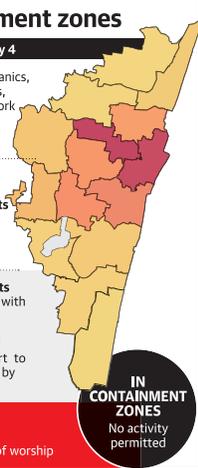
The government has allowed opening of stores selling hardware, cement and construction materials, electrical items, mobile phones, computers, household products and spectacles from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Plumbers, electricians,

What's allowed in non-containment zones

Guidelines to apply to Greater Chennai Police limits from May 4

- Shops selling essential commodities to remain open between 6 a.m. and 5 p.m.
- Restaurants (only for takeaway) to function from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m.
- Standalone and neighbourhood shops to function between 11 a.m. and 5 p.m.
- Stores selling hardware, cement, construction material, sanitaryware, electrical items, mobile phones, computers, household products and spectacles to stay open between 11 a.m. and 5 p.m.
- Plumbers, electricians, AC mechanics, tailors, carpenters, domestic helps, homecare service providers can work with permission from the Chennai Corporation Commissioner or District Collector
- e-commerce deliveries as per the earlier timings
- Construction activity allowed if workers stay at site
- Infrastructure work with locally available labour
- Road works by government/public sector unit
- SEZs and export-oriented units allowed to operate with 25% of employees
- IT/ITES units can function with 10% of their employees (minimum of 20); transport to be arranged by employers



WHAT STAYS BARRED

Salons, beauty parlours, malls, jewellery stores, cinema halls, auto rickshaws, gyms, beaches, zoo, tourist spots and places of worship

home appliance mechanics, carpenters, household help, home care service providers will be allowed to work after getting permission from either the Chennai Corporation Commissioner or District Collector.

E-commerce companies will be allowed to operate as per the timings announced earlier. Salons, beauty parlours, gyms, beaches, zoos, places of worship and auto-rickshaws will not be allowed to operate till the lockdown restrictions are reviewed.

Meanwhile, police officers told *The Hindu* that the arterial Anna Salai will be

opened for traffic and all barricades on roads will be removed.

However, police will conduct checks at designated points and motorists will be checked if they are going out for valid reasons. Action will be initiated against violators, they said.

Civic officials start redrawing containment zone boundaries

Radhakrishnan inspects hotspots, addresses issues

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI

Civic officials on Saturday started redrawing the boundaries of containment zones to reduce hardship of residents and to facilitate effective implementation of disinfection drive.

The Greater Chennai Corporation special nodal officer J. Radhakrishnan started inspection of containment zones and hotspot clusters on Saturday and instructed officials to make changes in containment zones to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Residents and volunteers at the containment zones reported issues faced by them to the team led by Mr. Radhakrishnan. After assessing the civic condition in the containment zones, he ordered officials to make suitable changes to help residents. "Toilets were outside containment blocks in some areas. We had to relocate the barricades," Mr. Radhakrishnan said.

The team led by him also visited hotspot clusters such as Triplicane where many cases were reported. "Quite a lot of people in containment zones are not ensuring that their houses are disinfected. Workers have distributed bleaching powder. All



Residents and volunteers at containment zones reported issues faced by them to the inspection team. - B. VELANKANNI RAJ

residents have been advised to wear masks. *Kabasuva Kudiner* distribution has started in all such areas," Mr. Radhakrishnan said. The team visited areas such as Patalam, Triplicane and Choolai.

"Residents in various neighbourhoods are getting vegetables at an affordable cost through mobile units. Chennai gets its supply from 4,949 puscharts and 1,100 vehicles," the Minister said.

"Residents have been requested to support Corporation workers in proper disposal of waste in containment zones. Conservancy workers should wash hands using soap. Amma canteens will continue to supply food free of cost three times a day," Mr. Velumani added.

"Officials should ensure that all residents in containment zones get adequate supply of essential commodities at an affordable price. Redressal of complaints from residents should be done without any delay," Mr.

Migrant labourers seek nod to return home

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI

Over 400 migrant labourers from Bihar and Jharkhand staying in Velachery and Guindy protested on roads and demanded authorities to permit them to travel back to their homes.



On Saturday, around 150 labourers staying in rental accommodation at Nehru Nagar, Velachery, trooped towards Velachery Main Road. They demanded special trains to return to their homes in Bihar and Jharkhand. Another group, numbering over 300, protested near the Olympia Tech Park in Guindy.

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IN BRIEF

Prince of Arcot clarifies
CHENNAI
The Prince of Arcot, Nawab Mohammed Abdul Ali, has refuted news being spread on social media about his family's health. The Nawab said that there had been rumours that he and 13 family members had tested positive for COVID-19 and were quarantined in a Nungambakkam private hospital. Refuting this, he said, neither he nor his family members had tested positive, and were all keeping well. He asked people not to believe the rumours, in a statement. He added that he had kept the City Commissioner of Police informed about the fake news.

44 JIPMER staff quarantined
PUDUCHERRY
The Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research has quarantined 44 of its staff who came in close contact with three COVID-19 patients. All three are undergoing treatment at the COVID-19 block. The healthcare workers who had high risk exposure were further assessed.

Seven test positive in Cuddalore
CUDDALORE
The number of COVID-19 cases in Cuddalore district touched 37 with seven more persons testing positive on Saturday. Official sources said that they had returned from the Koyambedu wholesale market in Chennai in the last few days. They have been shifted to the isolation ward at the Rajah Muthiah Medical College and Hospital (RMMCH) in Chidambaram.

Correction

The article titled 'Induct Home Guards into police force' that appeared on May 2, was incorrectly attributed to PMK founder Dr. S. Ramadoss. It was a statement made by PMK youth wing leader and Rajya Sabha MP Anbumani Ramadoss. The error is regretted.

Stalin demands ₹5,000 for unorganised workers

'Give special pay to medical staff, police and other govt. staff'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI

DMK president M.K. Stalin on Saturday demanded payment of ₹5,000 for all workers in the unorganised sector and people on the fringes of society in the wake of the lockdown extension by the Centre for another two weeks. He also wanted the government to give special pay for medical staff, police personnel and all other government employees who were in the forefront of combating COVID-19.

In a statement, Mr Stalin said the extension of the lockdown till May 14 was clear proof that the virus has been spreading uncontrollably in the last 40 days. Stressing that the financial assistance offered by the government to daily wagers, workers in the unorganised sector, autorickshaw drivers, agriculture labourers,



M.K. Stalin

small traders and weavers was not adequate, he said ₹5,000 should be given to them. "I came across a news item stating that that daily wage earners in Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami's constituency were subsisting on just porridge," Mr Stalin said.

Expressing concern over the spike in the cases in Chennai, he said people had the responsibility to prevent

it from becoming a "community spread" disease. "If we want to put an end to the catastrophe, people should restrict the restrictions and avoid coming out of their home unnecessarily," he said.

Mr. Stalin said the DMK had been extending help to the poor and supplying them with food and medicine. "We have launched kitchens in 25 towns and offer food to 1 lakh people through volunteers. I spoke to the beneficiaries and they expect the government to fulfil their requirements," he said. Mr Stalin also made a strong case for waiving of electricity tariff for all ration card holders who were eligible for rice as they were at home without incomes. "The government should also control the prices of vegetables and essential commodities," he said.

Kamal Haasan takes video-conference route to reach out to cadre

UDHAV NAIG CHENNAI

In the light of the COVID-19 lockdown, Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) founder Kamal Haasan has been interacting with newly-appointed office-bearers via video-conference.

Mr. Haasan had been planning to meet the party's office-bearers in various regions in person prior to the lockdown. Party sources said the MNM leader had already reached out to over 600 office-bearers, holding positions at various levels, to discuss how the party could be strengthened in rural areas. "We had been looking forward to such an interaction since the party's launch. So, it was good to speak to him about the local impact of COVID-19, infection rates and the State government machinery's response," said Priyadarshini Udayabhanu, district secretary, Chennai (North West).



Kamal Haasan

Ms. Udayabhanu added that sometimes, the conversations go on for over an hour if the topics brought up by the office-bearers warrant a detailed discussion. MNM office-bearers said Mr. Haasan had instructed them to reach out to people in need and help them with food, groceries and other essentials during the lockdown. On Saturday, Mr. Haasan and actor Vijay Sethupathi had a long conversation about the former's experience in films and politics.

Puducherry Cabinet meet today

Lockdown relaxation norms on agenda: CM

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT PUDUCHERRY

The Cabinet will meet on Sunday to decide the modalities for implementing extension of lockdown in the Union Territory, Chief Minister V. Narayanasamy said.

In an audio released to the media on Saturday, the Chief Minister said the Cabinet would decide on the relaxations to revive economic activity.

While extending the nationwide lockdown till May 17, the Centre permitted relaxation in green and orange zones, the Chief Minister said.

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs had permitted opening of standalone shops and industrial units in

rural pockets, outside the containment zones.

The Cabinet would look into the demand of the trade and business to ease rules for opening units, he said.

Urging the Centre to provide more aid to marginalised sections of people and States to tide over the financial constraints arising out of the lockdown, he urged people to contribute generously to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund. So far, the fund had received ₹7 crore, he said.

From next week, the government would start distributing multivitamin and zinc tablets to front line workers in a bid to improve their immunity against novel coronavirus.

As per the request of his government, Uttar Pradesh had made arrangements for the return of 22 pilgrims from the U.T. stranded in Varanasi. They were expected to return in a few days, the Chief Minister said.

Enhance subsidy on wages under Central scheme: hotel owners

'Defer bank liabilities, including EMI repayment and interest, by 12 months'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI

The Tamil Nadu Hotels Association (TNHA) has urged the Centre to subsidise wages of employees through the Atal Beemit Vyakti Kalyan Yojana Scheme of the Employees State Insurance Act.

In a letter to the Centre and State governments, association president M. Venkadasubbu said that since it would take at least a year for the travel and tourism industry to get back on its feet, this was pertinent. "The scheme has a provision to subsidise 25% of wages. We are asking that it be enhanced so that both employees and employers do not suffer," he said.

There were around 50,000 restaurants and hotels in the



There are around 50,000 restaurants and hotels in the State employing over one lakh.

State employing over one lakh people and indirect employment to four lakh people.

Association secretary R. Srinivasan said that bank liabilities, including repayment of EMI and

interest, should be deferred by 12 months with the extended period to be added to the overall term of the loans.

GST on cooking gas
"We are also asking that GST on cooking gas refills supplied to stand alone restaurants be charged at 5%. They should not be treated on a par with large hotels," he said. The association has sought waiver of licence fees for all government licenses for one year; GST holiday for standalone restaurants; rentals to all government buildings, including municipal buildings, property taxes and licences such as exercise fees be suspended for one year and utility charges such as electricity tariff be charged on actuals.

'Don't open liquor shops in green zones'

STAFF REPORTER CHENNAI

PMK founder S. Ramadoss on Saturday said that liquor shops should not be opened in green zones as announced by Centre on Friday as it could further complicate the fight against COVID-19 in Tamil Nadu.

He said that people have begun supporting alcohol-free Tamil Nadu for the last 40 days. "In this context, it would only be appropriate to implement State-wide prohibition of alcohol. Instead, if liquor shops are opened in green zones, then it would affect the COVID-19 containment measures in other regions as well," he said. The State government should provide ₹2,000 and essential groceries, he demanded.

Judiciously managing brain tumour patients

Brain tumours affect people of all ages and can be benign or malignant and require well-coordinated multi-specialist care. Brain tumours in children are especially associated with very high chance of cure and treatments have to be administered to ensure tumour control as well as minimal late toxicity, to maintain quality of life.



Dr. RAKESH JALALI
Senior Neuro-Oncologist

Like other cancer patients, brain tumour patients can be at an increased risk of COVID-19 infection due to their immunocompromised state caused by the tumour and treatments given to them. Our team recently published a collaborative effort with modified recommendations as per available evidence for managing brain tumour patients optimally during the COVID-19 pandemic (<http://www.cstonline.com> / http://temp/CancerResStat/Treat3549-2058932_054309.pdf). Health care professional involved in management of brain tumour patients must take into cognisance the ongoing situation with limited resources and optimise treatment strategies along with prioritising patients based on disease severity. Here are some suggestions:

COVID-19

Proper prioritisation
For patients requiring definitive treatment, their management can be discussed in virtual multidisciplinary tumour boards (MDT) with only key decision making members. Surgical management should be planned judiciously during this time and should be done only for urgent cases, such as patients who have increased pressure (e.g., hydrocephalus) and require measures such as emergency shunt placement. Minimisation of hospitalisation and critical care stay should be encouraged to reduce burden on in-patient re-

sources. Procedures where aerosol risk is high should be avoided and alternative approaches adopted. For brain tumour patient requiring radiation therapy, identifying and stratifying patients according to the priority of treatment can be done as follows:

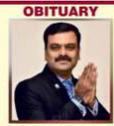
- Malignant brain tumour patients can be considered for radiotherapy on high-priority basis.
- Radiotherapy in benign tumour and low-grade gliomas can be put on moderate to low priority.
- Radiation dosage using fewer sittings should be employed wherever applicable. All staff administering treatment should use appropriate PPE.

Similarly, brain tumour patients requiring chemotherapy should get priority based on their diagnosis (type and grade of brain tumour).

Emergency care
In case of intractable seizures that may be life threatening, the patient must be given intravenous anti-epileptics with due COVID-19 precaution. In case of seizures in COVID-19 patients, neurological symptoms due to COVID 19 should be considered as a rare possibility of acute necrotizing encephalopathy also needs to be kept in mind.

Compassionate Care
Health care professionals should be in touch with their brain tumour patients more frequently during this time of the pandemic. (The author is Medical Director, Apollo Proton Cancer Centre)

OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

DEATH	DEATH	DEATH
<p>SAD DEMISE</p>  <p>Shri. V. Pandurangan Aged 80 yrs Retd CEO, Chennai Co-operative bank Natesa Nagar, Virugambakkam, Chennai Deeply mourned by family & friends.</p>	<p>OBITUARY</p>  <p>Rtn. M. Ganapathi alias Ganapathi Mandiram PPF, President Rotary Club of Madras North. Dist. 2232 CE O, Agria Technologies D.O.B: 09.05.1980 D.O.D: 01.05.2020 Mourned by Family Members & Extended Family Members of Rotary Club - Madras North</p>	 <p>Sri. V. PARANKUSAM S G AUDITOR (Retd) / S.Rly DOB 22-08-1925 27-04-2020 Deeply Mourned by Family, Relatives & Friends</p>
 <p>We deeply mourn the sad demise of our beloved Dr. Ramanathan Subramanian (Ramu). He breathed his last in Chennai on 29th April 2020. He was a man who lived on his terms, a musical wizard, multi-talented and always cherished extending a helping hand. He will always be loved, Remembered & Missed by his family. Dr. Jamma Ramanathan, Dr. Rohini Ramanathan, Anupama, Dr. Sabarina Ramanathan and extended family</p>	 <p>MR. K. MADHAVAN ADVOCATE Wants to rest peacefully in the 'Land on 1st May 2020' Deeply Mourned by: Mrs. Geeta Madhavan - Wife Mr. Niranjan Madhavan - Son Family and Friends</p>	 <p>V. VENKATAKRISHNAN FCA, aged 58 passed away suddenly and left for his heavenly abode on May 01, 2020 at Chennai. His sudden demise has given us extreme shock and immense grief Deeply Mourned by: Wife LALITHA VENKATAKRISHNAN and Son HARISH KRISHNA Contact: 9892964367</p>
<p>DEATH</p> <p style="font-size: 1.2em; font-weight: bold;">SHRADHANJALI</p>  <p style="font-size: 1.2em; font-weight: bold;">V.K. GOPALAKRISHNAN</p> <p>(05.06.1937 - 01.05.2020) Peacefully passed away at Chennai, Tamilnadu</p> <p>Gowri Gopalakrishnan Rajesh Vellat & Family Muralidharan Vellat & Family Harish Vellat & Family Relatives & Friends</p>		

Govt. of Bihar

Bihar Medical Services and Infrastructure Corporation Limited

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In view of Pandemic situation prevailing due to Novel Corona Virus (COVID-19) outbreak leading to an emergency like situation including the lockdown in the country and its anticipated adverse impact on the supply chain of Medical Devices/ Consumables, Bihar Medical Services and Infrastructure Corporation Limited (BMSICL) is going to procure Sterile Filter tips, to be use for COVID-19 testing and Hand Hygiene in the State of Bihar on an urgent basis.

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Sl. No.	Name of the item	Specification	Pack Size	Estimated required quantity
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3	Hand Hygiene (Hand Sanitizer)	Each 100ml contains: Iso propyl Alcohol IP-75% v/v, Hydrogen Peroxide IP- 0.125%v/v, Glycerol IP- 1.45%v/v Solution. Or, Each 100ml contains: Ethanol IP- 80%, Hydrogen Peroxide IP- 0.125%v/v, Glycerol IP- 1.45%v/v Solution.	500ml bottle with dispenser.	50,000 bottles

Note:

- The required quantity may increase/ decrease according to the requirements. The Purchase Order will be issued to the successful declared supplier as per the actual demand.
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The interested suppliers are required to submit through e-mail, their proposal in the below mentioned format along with the delivery schedule, the details (Address, GST Registration no. and PAN) of the supplier and details of the Principal manufacturer, at the office of "Managing Director, Bihar Medical Services and Infrastructure Corporation Limited (BMSICL), 4th Floor, Bihar State Building Construction Corporation Limited, Hospital Road, Shastri Nagar, Patna-800023" within three days of publication of this notice to the e-mail id: bmsicl.covid19@gmail.com. The suppliers are required to provide the Required Certificates as mentioned in the specification to justify the quality, if any, along with Authorization certificate (In case of distributors).

Format to be used by the bidders to express their interest:

Sl. No.	Name of Item	Specification along with the name of the manufacturer. (to be filled by the bidders in accordance to the availability of the respective item for immediate supply)	Available Quantity with the supplier (in units)	Quality Certificate	Unit Price (Price for each packet/ bottle) excluding GST.	Unit Price (Price for each packet/ bottle) including GST.	Delivery Schedule (in days)

NOTE:

- All interested applicants are essentially required to submit an undertaking that they fulfil the specification criteria of the material in accordance to the Government of India Guidelines as applicable.
- Priority will be given to the supplier who ensures early supply.
- For any clarification or query the interested parties may contact GM (Procurement), BMSICL on 9471006242 or visit our website.

BMSICL (Procurement)
GM (Procurement)
PR-00622 (Ni Ni) 2020-21

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बिस्तुत जावकरी के लिए www.prdbihar.gov.in पर सर्कफ करें

प्रभाव कोयोग के संक्षेप में बिस्तुत जावकरी एवं सरावग हेतु **104** पर सर्कफ कर सकते हैं।

प्राप्त सामग्री - संक्षेप में बिस्तुत जावकरी अथवा सुझाव हेतु दूरभाष संख्या 0612-2217636 पर सम्पर्क किया जा सकता है।

किसी भी तरह कावकरी के बिस्तुत अथवा सुझाव हेतु आमंत्रण संख्या के हेतुपत्र नं. 1070 पर सर्कफ किया जा सकता है।



Patient wait: Migrants standing outside the Thiruvananthapuram station to board the 'Shramik Special' train. *S. GOPAKUMAR

Railways operate five 'Shramik Specials'

Two went to Bihar, two to Jharkhand and one to Odisha

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Railways operated five 'Shramik Special' trains from Kerala to Bihar, Odisha and Jharkhand on Saturday for migrant workers stranded by the nationwide lockdown.

The special trains, with 24 sleeper class coaches and two SLRs (seating-cum-luggage rake), commenced journey from the Thiruvananthapuram Central, Ernakulam Town, Aluva, Tirur, and Kozhikode railway stations. Of the five, two are to Jharkhand, two to Bihar and one to Odisha.

Minister for Tourism Kadakampally Surendran was present to see off 1,124 migrants who boarded the train from Thiruvananthapuram Central to Hatia in Jharkhand. The second special train was from Aluva to Khurda Road in Odisha and the third from Ernakulam Town to Danapur in Bihar.

Two trains were operated for migrants held up in north Kerala. The special trains were from Kozhikode to Dhanbad in Jharkhand and from Tirur in Malappuram district to Danapur in Bihar.

The District Collectors



A worker cleaning the Bhubaneswar station before the arrival of a special train from Kerala on Saturday. *BISWARAJAN ROUJ

and District Police Chiefs of Thiruvananthapuram, Ernakulam, Malappuram and Kozhikode, supported by labour officers, brought the migrants from their camps and houses. All were subjected to screening before being allowed to enter the stations.

As in the case of the first 'Shramik Special' operated from Aluva to Odisha on Friday, the Railways handed over the tickets to the District Collectors, who collected money from the passengers and paid the Railways.

The 'Shramik Special' accommodates 1,142 travellers on 24 coaches as social distancing norms have to be fol-

lowed. Meals and drinking water are provided to the passengers by the States at the originating station. The Railways provides food during the journey with the assistance of the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation.

The Railway Protection Force and Government Railway Police provide security for the travellers.

Divisional Railway Manager, Thiruvananthapuram, Shirish Kumar Sinha said the Railway Board had made it clear that the rakes of the 'Shramik Specials' would return empty to the originating railway station.

Hundreds wait for buses in Bengaluru

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

The Majestic area in Bengaluru witnessed chaotic scenes on Saturday as hundreds of frustrated labourers gathered, desperate to catch a bus to their home towns. A large number was accompanied by families and children.

In the absence of public transport, people carrying belongings walked for miles to reach the bus stand. Many paid thousands of rupees to hitch rides on autorickshaws.

30 passengers

At Majestic, they had to wait for hours before they could board a bus as the KSRTC was allowing only 30 passengers on a vehicle.

Hanumantha, who came with his wife and children, said, "I have not got a bus; we may have to spend the night here."

Only 3,600 people managed to get a bus on Saturday. Minister S. Suresh Kumar admitted that there were some "lacunae" in the process.

Kerala has cautious exit plan; 3 die in Karnataka, Telangana

Andhra Pradesh reports 62 new cases, with Kurnool leading tally in the State

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Two COVID-19 deaths and 12 new cases were reported in Karnataka on Saturday.

In Telangana, one more person died of the disease, taking the toll to 29. The total number of cases touched 1,061 as 17 more cases were reported on Saturday.

In Andhra Pradesh, there were 62 fresh positive cases, taking the tally to 1,525.

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said on Saturday that the State would shut down on Sundays across the Red, Orange and Green zones.

The Chief Minister's measures for the lockdown exit plan came just as Wayanad district reported a lone case of COVID-19 on Saturday. Kannur also reported one case, taking Kerala's total case tally to 499.

Mr. Vijayan said, ideally, people should remain indoors. The holiday was mandatory except for essential services. The police would not allow travel. However, they would enable journey for an emergency.

On other days, the police would allow necessary travel in private vehicles in the Orange and Green zones. However, they would permit only three passengers, including the driver. The government had prohibited riding pillion on two-wheelers.

The Centre has not allowed stage carriage services. However, taxis and cabs could resume operations. The ban on autorickshaws would continue.

Morning walkers were allowed after 7 a.m. They would have no access to parks, beaches, stadiums, gymnasiums, malls, swimming pools, and clubs. Malls, cinemas and multistoreyed

Robotic check-up

To reduce the risk of infection, some hospitals have started using robots for checking the temperature of patients and collecting their details



Smart staff: A robot installed in one of the hospitals in Bengaluru collecting details of a patient. *V. SREENIVASA MURTHY

textile showrooms would remain closed. However, single-storey cloth shops employing not more than five persons could open between 7 a.m. and 7.30 p.m.

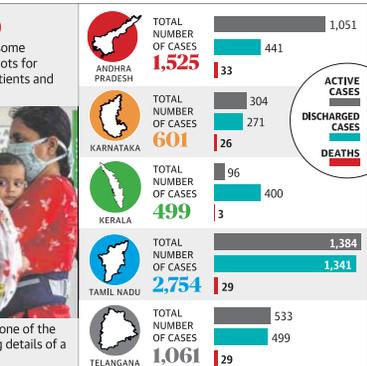
The new COVID-19 patient at Wayanad had travelled from Chennai, while the one at Kannur contracted the disease through contact with another known/unknown source of infection.

Eight persons got on the recovery list, taking the total number of those who had recovered to 400. Also, 96 persons were undergoing treatment in hospitals.

The number of those under surveillance stood at 21,894, of whom, 410 were in isolation in hospitals and the rest on home quarantine. Kerala had tested 31,183 samples so far, of which 30,358 returned a negative result.

Of the 2,093 samples from priority groups under sentinel surveillance studies and sent for testing, 1,234 gave a negative result.

A.P. focus on Kurnool
Andhra Pradesh had con-



ducted 1,08,403 tests so far putting the positivity rate at 1.40%, death rate at 2.16% and recovery rate at 29%.

COVID-19

The number of those recovered on Saturday was 38 and no new deaths were reported. Currently the State had 1,051 active patients and 33 patients died. So far, 441 persons recovered.

Most fresh cases were in Kurnool (25), followed by Krishna (12). Nellore reported six fresh cases and Anantapur, Visakhapatnam and Kadapa four fresh cases each while East Godavari reported two new cases, Prakasam and West Godavari, one fresh case each.

As of Saturday, Kurnool had 436 cases and Guntur, 308 cases, Krishna reported 258 cases and Nellore reported 90 cases.

Karnataka's 600 cases

The number of positive cases in Karnataka touched 600.

Two new cases were reported on Saturday, adding up to 601 in all.

Of the two COVID-19 deaths, which took the total to 25, one was a 63-year-old man from Bengaluru with a history of diabetes, hypertension, hypothyroidism, renal failure and multiple myeloma. Another was a 82-year-old patient from Bidar, who died on April 28, and was confirmed COVID-19 positive on Saturday.

Of 12 new cases, four were from Bengaluru Urban, two each from Tumakuru and Vijayapura, one case each from Bidar, Chikkaballapur, Belagavi and Bagalkote. One patient had Severe Acute Respiratory Infection, and others were contacts of positive patients. Primary and Secondary Education Minister S. Suresh Kumar said the number of positive cases since 26 April was 101, while 113 were discharged.

Also, 45% of 601 patients tested positive recovered. (With inputs from Vijaywada, Bengaluru and Hyderabad Bureaus)

IN BRIEF



Thirissur Pooram held in deafening silence

Silence reigned at Thekkinkadu Maidan, the main venue of Thirissur Pooram, on Saturday. There were no caparisoned elephants, colourful processions, eye-catching fireworks, or teeming crowds. The Pooram came to a close with a few essential rituals performed on the premises of the Paramakkavu and Thiruvambadi temples. The organisers had earlier decided to keep festivities out of the Pooram this time because of the lockdown restrictions.

CPI(M) begins campaign to resume production

Complementing the Kerala government's COVID-19 containment initiatives, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) has launched an online awareness drive for resuming production in all sectors and reviewing the experience the State has gained in fighting the pandemic. The campaign 'Nammal Onnichu' (we together) through the CPI(M) Facebook page was launched by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Saturday.

Elephant tramples man to death in Wayanad

A 70-year-old worker was trampled to death by a wild elephant at Anapplam near Mundakkolli inside the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary on Saturday. The deceased was identified as Kumaran, a native of Karnataka. The incident took place on the Kerala-Tamil Nadu inter-State highway, when Kumaran was going to the work site at Cheral. Though he was rushed to the talk hospital at Sulthan Bathery, he succumbed to injuries, Forest Department sources said.

Maoist case: NIA may question more people

Two held on Friday being interrogated

STAFF REPORTER
KOZHIKODE

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) is likely to question more persons suspected of maintaining contacts with Allan Shuhaib, 20, and Thaha Fasal, 24, arrested earlier under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) on the charge of being associated with the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist).

The NIA office confirmed that Vijith Vijayan and Abhilash Padachery, who were detained in Kozhikode on Friday following raids on their houses and later taken to Ernakulam, are suspected of inducting Shuhaib and Fasal into the banned organisation. Their interrogation is on to elicit details of others from north Kerala who had cooperated with the CPI (Maoist), sources said.

The NIA has reportedly

got details of a few persons with help from local police stations and intelligence units. To prevent the suspects from fleeing, the local police have kept them under surveillance.

Phones seized

The objects seized from Vijayan and Padachery, including eight mobile phones, two memory cards, one laptop, seven pen drives, books and documents supporting left-wing extremism and the CPI (Maoist), will be examined with the help of experts. A probe is on to check whether those arrested or their friends were in touch with suspected Maoist functionary C.P. Usman, who is still at large.

Shuhaib and Fasal were arrested on November 1, 2019, allegedly at a meeting with Usman, who escaped.

A.P. to ready 1 lakh hospital beds to tackle a rise in cases

Many are expected to return from other States, abroad

STAFF REPORTER
VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has ordered officials to make at least one lakh hospital beds ready to tackle a possible rise in COVID infections as people stranded in foreign countries and other States are heading home, subject to certain relaxations given by the Central government.

He also wanted quarantine facilities to be provided in village secretariats for 10 to 15 persons and at least 500 RTC buses (equipped with freezers) to be arranged for transporting essential commodities.

At a meeting on Saturday, Mr. Reddy said doctors, auxiliary nurse midwives and accredited social health activists should be posted within the reach of the people.



Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy

He said guidelines and standard operating procedures laid down by the Centre should be clearly communicated so that social distancing and other norms would be followed scrupulously.

Officials told the Chief Minister that the number of tests done per million population had reached 2,030

and the positivity rate stood at 1.41% against the national average of 3.82%.

Assistance to farmers

Mr. Reddy instructed officials to make Rythu Bharosa centres functional by May 30 and to work out the modalities for setting up agriculture advisory boards at the village, mandal and State level.

Officials said arrangements had been done for paying financial assistance to fishermen under the Matsyakara Bharosa scheme on May 6. They said priority was attached to procurement of various crops.

Ministers Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas and K. Kanna Babu, Chief Secretary Nilam Sawhney, DGP Gautam Sawang and Agriculture Mission vice-chairman M.V.S. Nagi Reddy were present.

Unicode nod for proposal to add Tamil characters to Telugu

The step is meant to aid in transcribing religious texts and to preserve them digitally

SYED MOHAMMED
HYDERABAD

The Unicode Consortium, a body which specifies the representation of text in software products, has accepted the proposal to add two Tamil characters to the Telugu list for transcribing religious Tamil texts.

The Unicode Standard assigns code to characters from different languages in the world so that they can be understood and displayed across software platforms.

The proposal was submitted by Vinodh Rajan, a computer science researcher at the University of Hamburg. Speaking to *The Hindu*, Mr.

Rajan said the idea was to "borrow" the characters (LLA) and (RRA) so that Tamil texts can be transcribed into Telugu without worrying about equivalents.

Citing the example of texts of Aazhvaar's *Tiruppavai*, he said, "We want to preserve these Tamil texts written in Telugu as they were printed."

Mr. Rajan's proposal said that though there was a Telugu equivalent in the Unicode Standard for both, one was unknown to a vast number of people while the other had not been used for many years.

On transcribing Tamil into the Telugu script, an ex-



Vasudev Varma

cerpt from the 14-page proposal reads, "Both these problems were resolved by the wholesale importation of these two Tamil consonants and simply treating them as if they were Telugu consonants. Using this hy-

brid orthography, the original Tamil phonetic realisation of the source text was appropriately preserved in the Telugu script without any loss."

The proposal has ruffled feathers among both Telugu and Tamil-speaking people. Several Twitter handles opposed the move, stating that these characters must not be "imposed" on Telugu-speaking people.

In Hyderabad, Prof. Vasudev Varma from the International Institute of Information Technology - Hyderabad, whose research areas include semantic search, said, "A controversial proposal. Wish such

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



Forecast for Sunday: Thunderstorm likely at isolated places over Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, west Madhya Pradesh, Andam & Nicobar islands, Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Sikkim, Odisha, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, coastal Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Mahe.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Ahmedabad	0.6	33.0	23.0	Kozhikode	60.0	35.0	25.0
Amritsar	41.0	26.0	16.0	Kurnool	41.0	30.0	28.0
Aizawl	27.0	26.0	13.0	Lucknow	35.0	22.0	22.0
Allahabad	37.0	23.0	13.0	Madurai	39.0	26.0	26.0
Bengaluru	34.0	23.0	13.0	Mangaluru	36.0	28.0	28.0
Bhopal	0.7	40.0	26.0	Mumbai	32.0	24.0	24.0
Bhubaneswar	37.0	24.0	13.0	Mysuru	32.0	23.0	23.0
Chandigarh	35.0	23.0	13.0	New Delhi	38.0	24.0	24.0
Chennai	38.0	29.0	13.0	Patna	10.2	30.0	21.0
Coimbatore	37.0	26.0	13.0	Port Blair	4.9	33.0	26.0
Dehradun	32.0	18.0	13.0	Puducherry	36.0	28.0	28.0
Gangtok	2.8	19.0	13.0	Pune	40.0	24.0	24.0
Goa	35.0	22.0	13.0	Raipur	41.0	25.0	25.0
Guwahati	32.0	27.0	13.0	Ranchi	32.0	20.0	20.0
Hubballi	36.0	23.0	13.0	Shillong	12.9	22.0	14.0
Hyderabad	39.0	23.0	13.0	Shimla	32.0	23.0	23.0
Imphal	28.0	18.0	13.0	Srinagar	25.0	8.0	8.0
Jaipur	42.0	29.0	13.0	Thiruvananthapuram	35.0	28.0	28.0
Kochi	34.0	26.0	13.0	Tiruchi	40.0	28.0	28.0
Kolkata	23.0	13.0	13.0	Vijayawada	39.0	28.0	28.0
Kolkatta	32.0	24.0	13.0	Visakhapatnam	24.8	33.0	24.0

(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	20	29	42	68	49	Good
Bengaluru	10	12	24	24	49	49	Good
Chennai	9	11	37	24	49	49	Good
Delhi	19	14	66	95	100	100	Very Poor
Hyderabad	4	58	29	22	51	51	Good
Kolkata	10	24	22	22	49	49	Good
Lucknow	8	48	90	20	49	49	Good
Mumbai	60	50	59	59	59	59	Very Poor
Pune	25	9	31	30	30	30	Good
Visakhapatnam	8	26	6	31	57	57	Good

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)

SO₂: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO₂: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal water to form red tide 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.

PM2.5 & PM10: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease.

FROM PAGE ONE

2,411 cases in highest single-day spike

Pandemic jolts prudent T.N.'s calculations

With economic shutters down, the State faces a revenue shortfall of 80% amid mounting healthcare and welfare costs

T. RAMAKRISHNAN CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu... on a strong wicket till now

rowed ₹8,000 crore in the last one month" said the by the 15th Finance Commission for local bodies: a spe-

Recently, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has downgraded India to the lowest ranking of "Countries of Particular Concern" (CPC) in its 2020 report on religious freedom.

USCIRF has placed India alongside China, North Korea, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. India was categorised as a "Tier 2 country" in last year's listing.

This is the first time since 2004 that India has been placed in the CPC category.

Key Points

Designation of the CPC is the top tier recommendation by the USCIRF when it comes to violation of international religious freedom. It is followed by Special Watch List Countries for severe violations.

Reasons:

India took a sharp downward turn in 2019, which included specific concerns about the Citizenship Amendment Act, the proposed National Register for Citizens, anti-conversion laws and the situation in Jammu and Kashmir.

Indian government used its parliamentary majority to institute national-level policies violating religious freedom of minorities, especially for Muslims.

Earlier, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) had criticised the Indian government for "growing Islamophobia" in the country.

Steps suggested to U.S:

The U.S. government should take stringent action against India under the "International Religious Freedom Act" (IRFA).

The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 was passed to promote religious freedom as a foreign policy of the United States.

It aims to promote greater religious freedom in countries which engage in or tolerate violations of religious freedom, and to advocate on the behalf of individuals persecuted for their religious beliefs and activities in foreign countries.

To impose targeted sanctions on Indian government agencies and officials responsible for severe violations of religious freedom.

India's stand: The Indian government has rejected the USCIRF report and termed it "biased and tendentious".

U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission, dedicated to defending the universal right to freedom of religion or belief abroad.

The USCIRF is also an advisory body to the US Congress.

USCIRF reviews the facts and circumstances of religious freedom violations and makes policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress.

It is Headquartered at Washington DC.

metimes, the local panchayat would give them lunch.

"I had spent the last penny a month ago," Mr. Yadav added. His family owns

not been stopped at any check posts. "There was enough space for everyone inside the mixer to sleep," said Mr. Yadav. "There was no problem breathing," he added.

ing. Joint Secretary V. Sheshadri will report to him for these matters but will also report to advisor Bhaskar Khulbe for matters related to Home.

lockdown? When will the lockdown finally end? The Prime Minister must come forward and address 130 crore Indians and enlighten them on the way ahead," Mr.

How do you propose to ensure 'jobs and pay protection' for the middle class and salaried people? What is the strategy for revival and restarting the tourism and hotel

to a notification issued by the Home Secretary."

"We think the government is obliged to spell out the objectives and the course of action after May 17," he said.

program, women and people, children walking barefoot without any food or water or medical help ... We urge upon the Government of India to not shirk its responsibility," he said.

file a case against seven of its MLAs who have been supporting the BJP-led government in Manipur. After their election on Congress ticket in 2017, the seven MLAs, along with former Forest Minister Thounaojam Shyamkumar, helped the BJP form the government. The Supreme Court's January 21 judgment asked the Assembly Speaker to act within the stipulated time. "We will go to court again if the Speaker fails to take a decision..." said Congress MLA Keisham Meghachandra on Saturday.

CPI(M) offers suggestions for revival

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) on Saturday released a detailed note offering suggestions to the Union government on revival of the economy.

"...difficulties being faced by crores of Indians, especially migrant workers, daily labourers and the poor, unable to survive will deepen. This is what needs the Centre's attention," tweeted CPI(M) general Sitaram Yechury, while releasing the note.

Separately, CPI general secretary D. Raja told *The Hindu*, "The coronavirus pandemic has not changed the neo-liberal economic trajectory of the BJP government at the Centre. And this has worsened the economic inequality."

In the note, the CPI(M) said: "How long this distress will continue is not known ... the central government must make available to every non income tax paying household ₹7,500 per month for three months, and to every individual 10 kg. of free grains per month for six months."

USCIRF report may prompt concerns

Though India has dismissed the report, the bigger worry is the CPC list

SUHASINI HAIDAR NEW DELHI

The government has unequivocally dismissed the US Commission of International Religious Freedom's latest report, which ranks India on the lowest grade of "Countries of Particular Concern", citing the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and the proposed National Register for Citizens, both of which were announced by the government in the past year. In its statement this week, the External Affairs Ministry hit back at the USCIRF directly, calling it an "Organisation of Particular Concern", with no "locus standi" or official standing.

The government's stand is consistent with its policy on the USCIRF, which it has refused to cooperate with, and has disallowed its officials to visit India since 2009. The bigger worry this year is the fact that the USCIRF has recommended that India be put on the CPC list by the State Department, which is due to publish its annual report on religious freedom in a few weeks, most likely in May or June.

Former Indian Ambassa-



Nirupama Rao

dors to the U.S. point out that though a CPC designation is unlikely to make any difference to the U.S.-India bilateral relationship on other issues, it would be premature to dismiss the USCIRF's recommendation completely.

NEWS ANALYSIS

"It's wrong to focus just on the statements of the USCIRF on CAA and NRC and other such issues. The question is, who has supported India [in the U.S.] on these issues? No one. One can say that you don't expect there will be reactions to such [domestic Indian] policies. Frankly, that is wishful, unrealistic thinking," Ronen Sen, who was Ambassador in Washington in 2005 when India was removed from the State Depart-

ments' CPC list, told *The Hindu*. "There is a reputational issue involved, for India, as the world's largest democracy that draws strength from the protection of diversity," said former Ambassador to Washington Nirupama Menon Rao, stating that the report could not be "ignored outright". "To be clubbed with China and North Korea, Pakistan and North Korea as a country of particular concern is unfortunate," she said.

More punitive steps

The decision before U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (who will act on behalf of President Donald Trump) on whether to designate India as a CPC is significant, as it could bring other punitive actions. According to the US IRF Act, the President is obligated to take one of 15 possible actions, ranging from a demarche to cancellation of bilateral exchanges, to travel sanctions against specified officials, within 3-6 months. It was under this determination that the U.S. had banned trading visas for PM Narendra Modi (then Gujarat Chief Minister) in 2005. Diplomats point out the

State department hasn't always followed the USCIRF's recommendations. In December 2019, Mr. Pompeo designated nine countries including "Burma (Myanmar), China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan" that were on the recommended list, and put others like "Comoros, Russia, Uzbekistan, Cuba, Nicaragua, Nigeria, and Sudan to its 'Special Watch list', but left out Syria, Vietnam and Central African Republic, which were also on the USCIRF's list.

The Office of International Religious Freedom (IRF) in the State Department and the USCIRF were created by the American "International Religious Freedom Act of 1998", but are separate entities and the USCIRF's recommendations are non-binding on the State Department. However, according to the State Department website, the U.S. Secretary of State, who makes the final recommendation on whether to designate a country as a CPC, "takes into account" the recommendation made by the USCIRF.

(With inputs from Kallol Bhattacharjee)

135 CRPF jawans of Delhi unit test positive

Deceased SI was part of the same unit

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

Days after a 55-year-old sub-inspector of the CRPF died of COVID-19, as many as 135 personnel from the same unit have tested positive to the virus.

In all, 480 personnel were tested, of whom 323 tested negative and the results of 22 are awaited. The entire unit at Mayur Vihar in east Delhi has been quarantined at a Delhi government facility in Mandoli and an inquiry has been ordered to study the lapses that led to the infection spreading among such a large number of the force.

On April 28, sub-inspector Mohammad Ikram Husain died at the Safdarjung Hospital. This was the first such death reported in the Central Armed Police Force (CAPF), comprising the CRPF, the Border Security Force, the CISF, the ITBP, the SSB and the Assam Rifles. The deceased SI, a diabetic, was a resident of Barpara in Assam.

Many personnel, including the deceased, were put in quarantine after a 43-

15 BSF personnel infected in Delhi

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

Fifteen Border Security Force (BSF) personnel in Delhi, including two cancer patients, have tested positive for COVID-19 in the past week. They were deployed in the Jama Masjid and Chandni Mahal area, said a BSF officer.

year-old constable posted as a nursing assistant tested COVID-19 positive on April 21.

'Source not clear'

The constable, posted in Jammu and Kashmir's Kupwara, was on leave and living in Noida. Due to the lockdown, he joined the medical unit of the CRPF in Mayur Vihar close to his local base on April 6 after his leave ended.

He developed symptoms on April 17 and a test confirmed the infection on April 21, an official said.

It was not clear how he contracted the infection.

Assam allows liquor shops to open

GUWAHATI

The Assam government has allowed liquor wholesalers and retailers to resume business two days ahead of the date recommended by the Centre. An official notification issued on Saturday said, "wholesale vends of foreign liquor and country spirit across the State" and retail outlets in districts under green zones have been allowed to open with immediate effect.

Fresh charge sheet in illegal cash deposit case

NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) filed a supplementary charge sheet against Rajan S. Shah, proprietor of V.S. Healthcare, and 11 others for illegal cash deposit during demonetisation. A request has been made for confiscation of assets worth ₹8.12 crore. The accused, Moti Lal, director of MTI Cotton Mills, allegedly made deposits worth ₹44.79 crore in various accounts, in connivance with some Bank of India officials.

All Bhopal gas leak survivors to be screened

STAFF REPORTER
BHOPAL

The Bhopal district administration is going to survey all 1984 gas leak survivors for illnesses and identify high-risk patients in view of their greater vulnerability to COVID-19.

"For the identification of the gas-affected people, their survey and the identification of high-risk persons after that and the collection of their samples and subsequent treatment, a team has been constituted to take necessary action," said an order passed by Bhopal District Collector Tarun Kumar Pithode on Saturday.

Besides, the Pulmonary Medicine Centre, one of the six State-run hospitals for the survivors, has been designated as a care centre for the observation of asymptomatic virus patients among the survivors.

Bengal govt. in data cover-up operation, says Governor

Trinamool MP says 'agenda of the Governor is to target Mamata Banerjee'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar on Saturday asked Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to share data relating to COVID-19 "transparently". He alleged that the government was engaged in a "COVID-19 data cover-up operation".

The Trinamool Congress leadership criticised the Governor for his remarks.

The Governor took to Twitter to share images of a letter said to have been written by Principal Secretary, Health Department, Vivek Kumar to the Centre on April 30 that contained district-wise numbers of COVID-19 cases. In addition to all the cases mentioned in the letter, the number of total cases in the State stands at 931.



Tracking the virus: Health workers wearing protective gear during door-to-door screening in Kolkata on Saturday. •RVI

The bulletin released on April 30 states that the number of "active cases" is 572. Mr. Dhankhar asked why the bulletin on May 1 was not released.

"Give up 'Covid-19 data cover-up operation' @MamataOfficial and share it transparently. Health bulletin 30/4 No of Active Covid cases 572. No health bulletin on May!! Information to central Government No of cases 931" (on April 30), his tweet read. "Gap between 572 and 931 not reconcilable even if recovered/dead r [are] considered... For way forward @MamataOfficial withdraw 'political parties r [are] vultures in wait of dead bodies' and take all on board," he stated.

Hours later, a letter, without the signature of any State

15 COVID-19 deaths in 48 hours in Bengal

West Bengal recorded 15 deaths from COVID-19 in 48 hours, taking the toll to 120 in the State, the State Health Department said on Saturday. In the past two days, 127 infections were recorded and 60 persons discharged from hospitals.

was made public by officials. It was a reply to the Governor's letter to Ms. Banerjee on April 24. Saturday's letter stated that the tone of the Governor to the Chief Minister was "unprecedented in the annals of Indian political history."

Trinamool MP Kalyan Banerjee said the only "agenda of the Governor is to target the Chief Minister."

790 new cases reported in Maharashtra

Tally stands at 12,296; State records 36 deaths in one day; new cluster emerges in Nanded gurdwara

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Maharashtra recorded 790 COVID-19 cases on Saturday, pushing the tally to 12,296. It also recorded 36 deaths, the highest in a single day, pushing the number to 521.

A new cluster emerged from Gurdwara Langar Sahib in Nanded, raising concerns about a possible spurt in the district. The new cases include 20 volunteers of the gurdwara and two drivers and a cleaner who had transported pilgrims to Punjab over the past two weeks.

Nanded, a popular pilgrimage centre for the Sikh community, witnessed a



Daily grind: A health worker during a routine check-up in Dharavi on Saturday. •RAVI NADAR

large gathering for the Holi Mohalla festival on March 10. While most pilgrims left for their home States after the festival, nearly 3,500 stayed back. However, they got

Dharavi nears 500 mark with 89 fresh virus cases

Dharavi recorded 89 new cases on Saturday, the highest in a single day, taking the tally to 496. The slum pocket, which falls under Mumbai's G North ward, has recorded 18 COVID-19 deaths so far. The new cases included a 17-year-old boy, the youngest in the lot, as well as a 71-year-old man who was the oldest.

stuck because of the lockdown. After discussions among the two States, 325 pilgrims were sent to Punjab in 10 buses. When these buses returned to Maharashtra,

the drivers and cleaners were tested. Two drivers and a cleaner tested positive on April 28.

The Punjab government sent 78 buses on April 26 to

take the remaining pilgrims back home. The drivers and cleaners of these buses spent a night in Nanded before leaving with the pilgrims on April 27. "Before coming to Maharashtra, these drivers had many halts. As they had come in contact with the gurdwara volunteers, we collected their swabs for testing. Twenty of them returned positive," said Neelkanth Bhosikar, Nanded's civic surgeon.

Gurdwara Langar Sahib and Takht Sachkhand Shri Huzur Sahib Gurdwara were sealed on Saturday and the entire area was declared a containment zone.

Madhya Pradesh reports 73 new cases, six deaths

The number of cases stands at 2,788

STAFF REPORTER
BHOPAL

Madhya Pradesh on Saturday recorded 73 new COVID-19 cases, taking the tally to 2,788, the Directorate of Health Services said.

Six persons were reported dead on Saturday. While two died in Indore, one each died in Hoshangabad and Mandla. Two persons died in Ujjain, where the fatality rate touched 18% on the day. So far, 147 persons have been infected in the city and 27 have died.

Meanwhile, 100 persons were discharged from hospitals on recovery. With this, 624, or 22.4%, of all the patients have been discharged in the State.

Till May 2, at least 16.7 tests were conducted before a person infected with the novel coronavirus was iden-

tified. So far, 6% of those testing for the illness had tested positive, according to an analysis of the data released through the media bulletin. Until now, 41,460 of the samples have tested negative, while 2,330 have been rejected. The tests per million in the State stand at 558.6.

At a meeting, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said there had been a remarkable improvement in the situation. "For the first time, the count of active cases has gone down. Besides, no new cases were detected in Bhopal on the day."

In Indore, the hardest-hit city, 32 persons tested positive, while the number of deaths touched 74 on Friday night, said Pravin Jadia, Chief Medical and Health Officer.

Virus tally in Gujarat crosses 5,000 with 333 fresh cases

With 26 deaths in a day, the toll goes up to 262

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
AHMEDABAD

The number of COVID-19 cases crossed the 5,000 mark in Gujarat on Saturday when 333 fresh cases and 26 deaths were recorded. The total number of cases now stands at 5,054 and the number of deaths at 262.

Gujrat is the second State after Maharashtra to cross the 5,000 mark.

Recovered cases

On Saturday, 126 patients were discharged after recovery. So far, 896 patients have been discharged. There were 3,860 patients under-

going treatment at various hospitals and they were said to be in a stable condition. Thirty-six others were in a serious condition and put on ventilator.

The State has so far tested 74,116 samples.

Main cluster

Ahmedabad remains the main cluster. On Saturday, the city reported 250 fresh cases and 20 deaths, its highest single-day tally. The total number of cases in the city is 185, while 462 people have recovered.

The rate of death in the

State and in Ahmedabad remains above 5%, higher than the national average and the worst-affected Maharashtra.

Besides Ahmedabad, 3 deaths occurred in Vadodara, 2 in Surat and 1 in Anand. Fresh cases were also registered in Vadodara and Surat, 17 each, and Gandhinagar, 18.

Surat's death toll has reached 28 and Vadodara's 24.

The infection has spread in 30 of the 33 districts, but more than 85% of the cases have been reported from Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Surat and Rajkot.

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR EMPOWERMENT OF PERSONS WITH MULTIPLE DISABILITIES (Divyangjan) (NIEPMD)
(DEPWD, MSJ&E, Govt. of India)
ECR, Mutlakuda, Kovalam Post, Chennai-603112
Tel: 044-27472104, 27472113, 27472423
Toll Free No.: 18004250345
Website: <https://niepmd.tn.nic.in>; Email: niepmd@gmail.com

Notice Inviting Expression of Interest (EOI) for Establishing Early Intervention Centres
NIEPMD invites Expression of Interest for Establishment of Early Intervention Centre at NIEPMD, Chennai & Port Blair (Andaman & Nicobar Island). The Eligible Vendors should submit their proposal in prescribed format available at website: <https://niepmd.tn.nic.in>
For any query please contact: 08608335324.
Last date for submission of Proposal - 3.00 P.M. 21-05-2020.

Sd/-
Director

TIRUMALA TIRUPATI DEVASTHANAMS: TIRUPATI CHITTOOR DISTRICT, ANDHRA PRADESH. MARKETING DEPARTMENT e-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE

e-Tender cum e-Reverse Auction is invited for procurement of the following items by the Marketing Department, T.T.D., Tirupati.

Sl. No.	Name of the Item	Quantity	EMD Amount	Downloading Starting and Ending Dates
01	Cow Ghee with AGMARK Spl. Gr. through tins	32,000 Kgs.	3,39,000/-	02-05-2020 15-05-2020

Further, the following COMMODITIES OF OIT IS POSTPONED by the Marketing Department, T.T.D., Tirupati due to COVID-19 effect.

Sl. No.	Name of the Item	Quantity	Existing e-Tender Date	Postponed e-Tender Date
1.	Pattu Sariga Duppatta (Silk X Silk)	3,200 Nos.	15-04-2020	07-05-2020
2.	Refined Camphor (450 Grams each Pkt.)	1,800 Pkts.	15-04-2020	07-05-2020
3.	Cotton Uppers	1,600 Nos.	16-04-2020	08-05-2020
4.	Cotton Blouse Pieces	1,16,000 Nos.	16-04-2020	08-05-2020
5.	Theor Dhaal Tandoor Variety Spl. Gr. with Agmark	1,50,000 Kgs.	16-04-2020	08-05-2020
6.	Cow Ghee with Agmark Spl. Gr. through Tankers from National Wide Dairies	11,50,000 Kgs.	15-04-2020	11-05-2020
7.	Cow Ghee with AGMARK Spl. Gr. through Tankers from Andhra Pradesh State Dairies	2,50,000 Kgs.	15-04-2020	11-05-2020
8.	White Chenna	20,000 Kgs.	17-04-2020	11-05-2020
9.	Paper Cups (150 ML)	85,50,000 Nos.	17-04-2020	11-05-2020
10.	Almonds	4,000 Kgs.	17-04-2020	11-05-2020
11.	Sona Masoori Slender variety (old) without steamed with AGMARK	15,30,000 Kgs.	16-04-2020	13-05-2020
12.	Grease Resistant Laddu Carry Bags of Small Handle (size L:8 x W:7xG:5 inches)	10,00,000 Nos.	16-04-2020	13-05-2020
13.	Grease Resistant Laddu Carry Bags of Large Handle (size L:11 x W:8xG:4 inches)	60,00,000 Nos.	16-04-2020	13-05-2020

For Tender Notice and Tender details log on to the web site <http://www.tirumala.org> and <https://tender.aeprocurement.gov.in/> & <https://konugolu.ap.gov.in/>. For further details contact phone numbers: 0877-2264079, 2264555. Fax No. 0877-2264554.

Rec.No.PP4/13918/Adv.No.10/PRO/2020; Dated:02-05-2020 EXECUTIVE OFFICER

MSME-TOOL ROOM, HYDERABAD
(CENTRAL INSTITUTE OF TOOL DESIGN)
A Govt. of India Society, Ministry of MSME
Balanagar 'X' Roads, Hyderabad - 500 037 (TS) INDIA
Ph No: 9908211787, E-Mail Id: online.training1@citindia.org www.citindia.org

ADMISSION INTO FACULTY DRIVEN ONLINE COURSES
TOOL ENGINEERING TRAINING COURSES

Sl.No	Course Name	Duration	Eligibility	Course Fee	Batch Size
1.	GD&T (Geometrical Dimensioning & Tolerancing)	1 Month (1 1/2 Hrs./day)	(Diploma/ Degree)	Rs. 2,950/- (Including 18% GST)	Max. 30 participants (For Each Course)
2.	Design of Press Tools	1 Month (1 1/2 Hrs./day)	(Mech. Engineering/ Prod.)		
3.	Design of Moulds	1 Month (1 1/2 Hrs./day)	(Auto Mobile Engineering)		
4.	Design of Jigs & Fixtures	1 Month (1 1/2 Hrs./day)	(Engineering/ Instrumentation)		
5.	CNC Programming - Milling	1 Month (3 Hrs./day)	(or its equivalent)		
6.	CNC Programming - Turning	1 Month (3 Hrs./day)			

ESDM TRAINING COURSES

Sl.No	Course Name	Duration	Eligibility	Course Fee	Batch Size
1.	Verilog	1 Month (3 Hrs./day)	(Diploma or Degree in Electrical/Electronics/Computer/Biomedical/IT/Instrumentation, B.Sc./M.Sc. in (I.T./Electronics/Physics) or its equivalent)	Rs. 2,950/- (Including 18% GST)	Max. 30 participants (For Each Course)
2.	System Verilog	1 Month (3 Hrs./day)			
3.	Python	1 Month (3 Hrs./day)			
4.	C Programming	1 Month (3 Hrs./day)			
5.	Embedded C	1 Month (3 Hrs./day)			

MECHATRONICS TRAINING COURSES

Sl.No	Course Name	Duration	Eligibility	Course Fee	Batch Size
1.	Programmable Logical Controller (PLC)	1 Month (3 Hrs./day)	(Diploma/ Degree in Mech. Engineering/ Prod. Engineering/ Electronics Engineering/Electrical Engineering/ Instrumentation Engineering) or its equivalent	Rs. 2,950/- (Including 18% GST)	Max. 30 participants (For Each Course)
2.	Simulation of Pneumatic Systems	1 Month (3 Hrs./day)			
3.	Matlab Programming	1 Month (3 Hrs./day)			

NOTE: (1) Batch Starts on 1st & 3rd Wednesday of Every Month from May 2020.
(2) For Registration and more details visit our website www.citindia.org.
(3) Classes will be conducted through google meet or WebEx meetings.

Sd/-
PRINCIPAL DIRECTOR
ISO 9001 : 2015, ISO 29990:2010, ISO 14001:2004, ISO 50001:2011 Certified Institution

KARNATAKA INDUSTRIAL AREAS DEVELOPMENT BOARD
(A Government of Karnataka Undertaking)
49, East Wing, 4th & 5th Floor, Khanija Bhavan Race Course Road Bengaluru - 560 001. Phone No. 080-22265383
website : www.kiadb.in

No. IADB/ENGG/ETNP-EP-09/2020-21 Date: 02.05.2020

NOTICE INVITING TENDER
(Through GOK e-Procurement Portal Only)

KIADB is inviting tender for providing consultancy services for Project Management Consultancy Services from Consulting Firms under two cover system for the work of Consulting Services for Proof Checking of Design, Project Management Consultancy for the work of Improvements to water supply pipeline from break pressure tank to treatment plant at Kottur, Belur industrial area, Upgradation of Roads & drains in Kelageri Housing Layout, Dharwad District and at Narasapur Industrial Area Gadag District. (3rd Call).

The last date and time of receipt of tender is: 13.05.2020 upto 04:00 pm

Applicants May Download Bidding Documents from the E-Procurement Portal <https://eproc.karnataka.gov.in>.

Sd/-
Chief Development Officer & Chief Engineer-1
DIPR/DOU/R0-3009/2020-21

A salute from the sky and sea

Fly-pasts and illuminated naval ships will pay tribute to corona warriors

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

As part of a flypast by the Indian Air Force (IAF) to thank the corona warriors on Sunday, the national capital will see both fighter and transport aircraft flying between 10 a.m. and 11 a.m., an Army spokesperson said on Saturday.

The nation will witness the fly-pasts at multiple locations.

"The aerial salute from the armed forces will be flown as low as 500 metres so that everyone is able to witness the same from the safety of their homes. Military bands all over the country will visit various civil hospitals treating corona patients to express their gratitude by playing patriotic tunes," Army spokesperson Col. Aman Anand said, reading out a statement on behalf of the Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) and outlining the various activities.

The events start on Sunday morning with a wreath-laying at the Police Memorial on behalf of all three Service chiefs to show respect to the



Cost is bright: A naval ship is illuminated off the Gateway of India in Mumbai on Saturday as part of the rehearsal for Sunday's show of solidarity with health workers. • VIVEK BENDRE

sacrifice by police and paramilitary forces.

"Forces have always stood as a wall against all threats to the country and every time our citizens have come out in large numbers and showered their blessings and appreciation towards us", Col. Anand said. "This time, it is our turn to applaud the sacrifice of our corona warriors."

This was also to assure the nation that in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic, the armed forces were fully prepared to

address any type of threat, he stated.

Petal shower

Helicopters from the IAF and the Navy would fly over hospitals treating patients and shower petals as a tribute to the Corona warriors.

Naval helicopters would shower petals on hospitals in Mumbai, Goa, Kochi and Visakhapatnam between 10 a.m. and 10.30 a.m.

In the evening, naval ships at sea on the coasts of Mumbai, Porbandar, Karwar, Vi-

sakhapatnam, Chennai, Kochi and Port Blair would light up and fire flares in solidarity, Col. Aman said.

In addition to the Navy, Coast Guard ships would be seen at 24 places, some of which are Porbandar, Okha, Ratnagiri, Dahanu, Murud, Goa, New Mangalore, Kavarrati, Karaikal, Chennai, Krishnapatnam, Nizampatanam, Puducherry, Kakina-da, Paradip, Gopalpur, Sagar Island, Port Blair, Diglipur, Mayabundur, Hut bay and Campbell Bay.

Ministry wants Aarogya Setu app made disabled-friendly

Social Justice Dept. writes to National Informatics Centre

DAMINI NATH
NEW DELHI

The government's Aarogya Setu app to track COVID-19 cases is not accessible to persons with disabilities (PwD), particularly those with hearing and visual challenges, the Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry has informed the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) and the app developer, the National Informatics Centre (NIC).

Downloading the app has been made mandatory for all government staff by the Department of Personnel and Training through an order on April 29 and for all employees in the public and private sectors through a Union Home Ministry order on Friday.

The Social Justice Ministry's Department of Empowerment of PwD (DEPWD) wrote to the MeitY and NIC on April 27 listing the shortcomings of the app.

"The Aarogya Setu app needs to have a separate sec-



Downloading of the Aarogya Setu app has been made mandatory for employees.

tion with specific information for persons with hearing impairment with sign language interpretation/ close captioning. So far as persons with visual impairment are concerned, provision for audio guide for navigation, audio description of colour used, proper colour contrast etc. need to be incorporated," the DEPWD wrote, asking the NIC and MeitY to address the concerns.

Disability rights activist and founder of Smarthyaam Anjee Agarwal said on Saturday that the app had been tested by 11 persons with vi-

sual challenges and who were associated with the NGO. The app was found to be inaccessible, which was a violation of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, she said. She added that a report of the findings of the testing had been sent to the DEPWD on Saturday.

Navigation issues

The Smarthyaam report said that according to users, the screen reader in the app did not announce the purpose of all controls or the type of control, whether a link or button.

The report added users could not identify the number of slides in a carousel, so after receiving the information in the first slide they could miss out on information on other slides. On the "Your status", "COVID updates" and "E-Pass" tabs of the app, the screen reader was not announcing the control type, so users did not know these were interactive tabs, the report said.

Rahul Prasad spar over Aarogya Setu

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Congress and the government were engaged in a war of words on Saturday over the Aarogya Setu app, with former Congress president Rahul Gandhi calling it a "sophisticated surveillance system".

Union Information Technology Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad called the charge a "lie".

"The Aarogya Setu app, is a sophisticated surveillance system, outsourced to a pvt operator, with no institutional oversight — raising serious data security & privacy concerns. Technology can help keep us safe; but fear must not be leveraged to track citizens without their consent," Mr. Gandhi tweeted.

"Daily a new lie. Aarogya Setu is a powerful companion which protects people. It has a robust data security architecture. Those who indulged in surveillance all their lives, won't know how tech can be leveraged for good!" Mr. Prasad wrote on Twitter.

Flights stay suspended till May 17: DGCA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

A day after the government announced the extension of the lockdown till May 17, the DGCA on Saturday said all commercial flights will remain suspended till the midnight of May 17.

"It is reiterated that foreign and domestic airlines shall be suitably informed about the opening of their operations whether international to/from India or domestic, respectively, in due course," a circular of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation stated. India has been under lockdown since March 25 to curb the spread of coronavirus.

All commercial passenger flights have been suspended for this period. Cargo flights, medical evacuation flights and special flights are allowed to operate.

When duty calls



Frontline hero: A policeman being dragged on the bonnet of a car by a driver who did not halt at a checkpoint in Jalandhar on Saturday. The driver was later arrested. • ANI

Activists say over 300 deaths related to lockdown troubles

'Starvation, exhaustion and suicide are among the reasons'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Activists tracking the reported deaths during the lockdown to control COVID-19 said on Saturday that over 300 people had lost their lives owing to starvation, exhaustion, suicide, accidents and other non-virus related reasons.

Tracking news reports in English and Hindi primarily, as well as in regional languages such as Kannada, Telugu and Tamil, the group found that 310 deaths had occurred from March 19 — when an auto-rickshaw driver in Bengaluru died by suicide owing to financial distress — till Saturday.

"News reports tracked during the ongoing lockdown suggest that more than 300 people died because of the lockdown: as a result of hunger, financial distress and exhaustion, due to police atrocities for lockdown violations, and inability to get timely medical attention. There have been a staggering number of suicides as well, caused by fear of infection, loneliness, lack of freedom of movement, and alcohol withdrawal during the lockdown," the group of activists and academics said in a release.

Among the deaths connected to the pandemic but non-virus related, 34 were due to starvation and finan-



Testing times: A family of migrant workers walking with their belongings from Sriperumbudur to Chennai in search of shelter on Saturday. • B. VELANKANNI RAJ

cial distress, including the inability to sell farm produce; 20 were caused by exhaustion, including while walking long distances to reach their homes or standing in lines for ration; and 73 were from suicides due to fear of testing positive for the novel coronavirus and fear of loneliness.

Aman, an assistant professor of legal practice at Jindal Global School of Law, who is part of the project, along with researcher and Ph.D scholar Kanika, said the aim of the tracker was to keep these deaths in public memory. "These deaths

should be counted while assessing the success or failure of the lockdown," he said.

Thejesh G.N., a Bengaluru-based engineer on whose website thejeshgn.com the tracker can be found, said the real numbers would be higher as the tracker could not capture all the news reports of such deaths in the country, and news organisations would not be able to report on every such incident.

"Our goal is to put a spotlight on these deaths. While we are focusing on the COVID-19-related deaths, we are neglecting the other deaths," he said.

Workers' rights group seeks employment guarantee

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
JAIPUR

With the migrant labourers returning home from different parts of the country, a demand has been raised in Rajasthan for giving employment guarantee to every adult for a number of days in view of the workers having been deprived of their livelihood during the COVID-19 lockdown.

The Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), which made a "virtual celebration" of the May Day and its 30th foundation day through online platforms on Friday, said the majority of migrant labourers, who worked in the unorganised sector, were fighting poverty and hunger without any social security. The workers had not received wages even for the

days when they worked. The huge fair marking the May Day, held every year at the Patiya square in Bhim town of Rajasamand district, was not organised for the first time in 30 years.

Strong campaign

The MKSS members recollected the memories of previous fairs when the people were apprised of their rights

and the labour movement gained strength.

MKSS founder Aruna Roy said a provision should be added to the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) for engaging the labourers on work for a number of days as per their demand.

"Every adult in the rural areas needs employment

during the present crisis," she said.

Norti Bai, former Sarpanch of Harmada in Ajmer who has been in the forefront of the right to information campaign, said the pandemic had afforded an opportunity to the workers to unite against discrimination. Ms. Norti Bai is also the president of the Rajasthan Asangathit Mazdoor Union.

20-day-old in Jaipur dies of COVID-19

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
JAIPUR

A 20-day-old infant, who died of complications relating to COVID-19 here on Friday, could be the world's youngest victim of the disease. The boy was treated for septicaemia at the J.K. Lon Children's Hospital, where the paediatricians ruled out intrauterine infection.

The infant was admitted to the hospital early on Friday with complaints of diarrhoea and vomiting. No member of his family was earlier detected as positive and nor did the family have a travel history.

After brief treatment, the child died during the day. As his family resided in the Chandpole area of the Walled City where a large number of COVID-19 positive cases have been found, the hospital authorities sent his samples for viral test, which turned out to be positive.

The United Arab Emirates on Saturday sent seven tonnes of medical supplies for Indian health workers dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. The aid from the leading Gulf nation is part of the Indian engagement with the region that is likely to lead to Delhi carrying out a massive evacuation of its nationals from the Gulf in the coming months.

The Embassy of UAE in a statement said the consignment underscores the "brotherly" ties. "Combating COVID-19 has become a primary global concern, and we act out of our conviction that strengthening the efforts of other countries to contain the virus is a pressing necessity," said Dr. Ahmed Abdul Rahman Al-Banna, Ambassador of UAE to India.

The Indian mission has also arranged to send a team of 88 specialists, doctors and

UAE sends aid for health workers

India may bring back thousands of its nationals from the Gulf in the near future

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The United Arab Emirates on Saturday sent seven tonnes of medical supplies for Indian health workers dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. The aid from the leading Gulf nation is part of the Indian engagement with the region that is likely to lead to Delhi carrying out a massive evacuation of its nationals from the Gulf in the coming months.

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The Indian mission has also arranged to send a team of 88 specialists, doctors and



Essential aid: A consignment of medical supplies from the UAE ready for despatch to India. • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

nurses to the UAE to deal with the pandemic. The gesture from the Gulf monarchy coincides with India's ongoing preparation to evacuate a large number of nationals from the Gulf which is likely to pose a big logistical challenge.

Commentators here have pointed out that the number of evacuees is likely to be between two to five lakhs,

making it the largest evacuation campaign undertaken by India. New Delhi had undertaken a mass evacuation from Kuwait in October 1990 which led to repatriation of nearly 1,76,000 citizens. That operation is part of the Guinness Book of Records.

That apart, a big evacuation was from Libya when the civil war hit that country in 2011 leading to the return

of around 18,000 Indians. Evacuation challenge A veteran diplomat said the large number now is partly necessitated as a bulk of the blue collar workers are without employment.

Anil Trigunayath, former Indian Ambassador to Libya who oversaw the evacuation in Tripoli during 2012 to 2014, recollected that India had to open a bank account in a third country, Malta, for meeting local expenses in Libya.

But this time around, its missions in the Gulf will have to shoulder the burden. "Missions usually have a large amount of money for community welfare and they can utilise it to meet the local logistical and other expenses," said Mr. Trigunayath.

According to the former envoy, the number of Indians willing to be evacuated may reach even the half-million mark in view of the widespread job cuts.



COVID claims life of Lokpal member

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Lokpal member Justice A.K. Tripathi (ret'd) died of COVID-19 infection at the Jai Prakash Narayan Apex Trauma Centre of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), here at 8:30 pm on Saturday, a hospital source has confirmed.

He was admitted to the AIIMS after he tested positive on April 2.

Tripathi, 62, former Chief Justice of the Chhattisgarh High Court, was in the intensive care unit.

U.S. officials take a hard line on China

Trump was prodded to block a government pension fund from investing in Chinese companies

EDWARD WONG
ANA SWANSON
WASHINGTON

Some top Trump administration officials are moving to take a more aggressive stand against China on economic, diplomatic and scientific issues at the heart of the relationship between the world's two superpowers, further fraying ties that have reached their lowest point in decades.

White House aides this week have prodded President Donald Trump to issue an executive order that would block a government pension fund from investing in Chinese companies, officials said — a move that could upend capital flows across the Pacific. Mr. Trump announced on Friday that he was restricting the use of electrical equipment in the domestic grid system with links to “a foreign adversary” — a reference to China.

COVID-19

The administration is cutting off grants that would help support virology laboratories in Wuhan, China, the city where the coronavirus outbreak began, and is looking into scientific collaborations undertaken there by the University of Texas.

Senior aides, led by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, have asked intelligence agencies to continue looking for any evidence to support an unsubstantiated theory that the pandemic might be the result of an accidental lab leak, even though agency analysts have said they most likely will not find proof.

The open rivalry between the two nations has taken on a harder and much darker shading in the months since the virus spread from Wu-



Rebelling for freedom: A demonstration in Los Angeles, California, on Friday calling for an end to the ongoing shutdown. *AFP

han across the globe, speeding up efforts by hard-liners in both Washington and Beijing to execute a decoupling of important elements of the relationship.

Information war

The bitter information war over the virus has become a core part of the competition, but the administration's efforts to counter China have sharpened across the board. That is partly in response to what administration officials say are China's own aggressive moves, including the pushing of anti-American disinformation worldwide, increased military activity in the South China Sea and clampdowns on freedoms in the semi-autonomous global financial city of Hong Kong.

Mr. Trump's aides and Republican lawmakers also aim to amplify criticism of China partly to deflect from the administration's own record on

the pandemic, especially as the general election in November approaches.

Those in Washington advocating a more stable relationship with China, including some of Mr. Trump's top economic advisers, warn that the administration must take care not to overreach.

China is likely to emerge from the recession caused by the pandemic faster than other nations. The U.S. — still reeling from the virus, with more than 1.1 million infected and more than 65,000 dead — will probably rely on economic activity in Asia to help prop up its own economy. Part of that involves getting Beijing to comply with a trade agreement signed in January.

China controls a vast supply of the masks and protective gear needed by U.S. hospitals. And if China develops a vaccine first, it will wield a powerful card. *NY TIMES*

China, U.S. spar over Taiwan

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
UNITED NATIONS

China has condemned a U.S. tweet backing Taiwan's push for participation at the United Nations as the global body works with its 193 member states to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic.

Beijing's diplomatic mission to the UN expressed “strong outrage and firm opposition” to a message on Friday by the United States calling Taiwan's exclusion an “affront” to UN principles. The self-ruled island, which Beijing considers a wayward province awaiting reunification, has been held up as a model in fighting the virus.

“Barring #Taiwan from setting foot on UN grounds is an affront not just to the proud Taiwanese people,

Drug approved for use in emergency

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

American authorities have approved an experimental drug for emergency use on coronavirus patients, as more U.S. states eased pandemic lockdowns despite another spike in deaths from the disease. The approval is the latest step in a global push to find viable treatments and a vaccine for the coronavirus.

Remdesivir, an antiviral drug initially developed to treat Ebola, was given the green light on Friday after a major trial found that it boosted recovery in serious COVID-19 patients.

Kim reappears in public after weeks of speculation

State news agency releases images of him visiting a plant

REUTERS
SEOUL

After weeks of intense speculation about the health of Kim Jong-un, state news agency KCNA said on Saturday that the North Korean leader attended the completion of a fertilizer plant north of Pyongyang, the first report of his appearance since April 11.

Reuters could not independently verify the KCNA report.

KCNA said Mr. Kim cut a ribbon at the ceremony on Friday and those attending the event “burst into thunderous cheers of ‘hurray!’ for the Supreme Leader.”

Mr. Kim was seen in photographs smiling and talking to aides at the ribbon-cutting ceremony and also touring the plant. The authenticity of the photos, published on the website of the official *Rodong Simnun* newspaper, could not be verified.

Many in the large crowd of people, described as officials of the Army, the ruling party and the community who worked on the project, were wearing masks and standing some distance from the podium where Mr. Kim and his aides took part in the ceremony.

Tough measures

North Korea has not reported any case of the coronavirus and has said it has been taking tough measures to prevent an outbreak. One reason for Mr. Kim's absence has been the suggestion he may have been taking precautions against the coronavirus.

Mr. Kim was accompanied by senior North Korean officials, including his young



Back in limelight: North Korean leader Kim Jong-un visiting a fertilizer factory in South Pyongan, near Pyongyang, in a picture provided by the government. *AP

reports about his condition and his whereabouts followed. Officials in South Korea and the U.S. expressed scepticism about the reports.

Stiffness in leg?

State TV footage on Saturday showed Mr. Kim's leg movements appearing stiff and jerky and one of the images showed a green golf cart in the background, similar to one he used in 2014 after a lengthy public absence.

“Preparing desks and chairs on the stage seemed a bit rare for such an outdoor occasion,” Nam Seong-wook, a professor of North Korean studies at Korea University, said of the ceremony. “Kim might have some physical conditions that prevent him from standing too long and he needs to be seated after standing up for a while.”

Mr. Nam said if Mr. Kim is unable to stand for long periods that maybe the reason he did not attend the anniversary event in April at the Kumsusan Palace of the Sun, where he would have had to stand for at least about an hour.

ELSEWHERE



Kazakh President fires potential successor
NUR-SULTAN
Kazakhstan's President on Saturday dismissed the eldest daughter of his veteran predecessor Nursultan Nazarbayev as Senate Speaker, triggering fresh speculation over a power struggle in the energy-rich Central Asian state. The 56-year-old Dariga Nazarbayeva's post had positioned her as second in line to the head of state. *AFP

U.K. PM names son after doctors who saved his life
LONDON
Boris Johnson and his fiancée Carrie Symonds have named their newborn son Wilfred Lawrie Nicholas, partly as a tribute to two of the intensive care doctors who they said had saved his life as he battled COVID-19. Ms. Symonds announced the name on Saturday on Instagram. *REUTERS

Russia reports highest daily rise in cases
MOSCOW
Russia reported 9,623 new cases of COVID-19 on Saturday, its highest daily rise since the start of the pandemic, bringing the total to 1,24,054, mostly in the capital Moscow. The death toll nationwide rose to 1,222 after 57 people died in the last 24 hours, Russia's coronavirus crisis response centre said, after revising the previous day's tally. *AFP

Singapore to ease some curbs this month
SINGAPORE
Singapore will start easing some curbs put in place to contain the spread of the virus over the next few weeks, authorities said on Saturday. Selected activities such as home-based businesses, laundry services and barbers will be allowed to operate from May 12. Some students will be allowed to go back to schools from May 19. *REUTERS

Cousin pleads to Syrian President to save firm

Makhlouf is also a key backer of Assad

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BEIRUT

A cousin who has been a bulwark of support for President Bashar Al-Assad posted a video on Facebook late on Thursday pleading with the Syrian leader to prevent the collapse of his telecommunications company through what he called excessive and “unjust” taxation.

The unprecedented video pries open what has been rumoured as a major rift in the tight-knit Assad family, which has ruled Syria for nearly 50 years.

The cousin, Rami Makhlouf, was once described as central to Syria's economy and a partner to the President. Media reports by pro- and anti-government sites suggested a campaign against Mr. Makhlouf, possibly at the behest of Russia. Russian media reports in



Rami Makhlouf in a 2010 photo. *AP

recent weeks have published criticism of corruption in Syria.

Former Syrian diplomat Bassam Barabandi aid Makhlouf's financial holdings and charities have played a central role in financing and ensuring patronage, particularly among Syria's minority Alawite community — from which Mr. Assad hails.

U.S. offers relief to H-1B holders, green card applicants

They have been given 60 more days to submit documents

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WASHINGTON

In a major relief for professionals and immigrants from countries like India, the U.S. government has given a grace period of 60 days to H-1B visa holders and Green Card applicants, who have been served notices for submission of various documents, taking into account the massive COVID-19 outbreak in America.

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (U.S.CIS) on Friday said the 60-day grace period for responding to its requests will include requests for evidence; continuations to request evidence (N-14); notices of intent to deny; notices of intent to revoke; notices of intent to rescind; and notices of intent to terminate regional investment centres;



and filing date requirements for Form I-290B, Notice of Appeal or Motion.

USCIS's comment

“USCIS will consider a response to the above requests and notices received within 60 calendar days after the response due date set in the request or notice before taking action,” it said in a statement. The USCIS said it will consider a Form I-290B re-

ceived up to 60 calendar days from the date of the decision before it takes any action. The USCIS can issue a maximum of 65,000 H-1B work visas every year to highly skilled foreign workers. It can issue an additional 20,000 H-1B visas to those highly skilled foreign workers who have obtained masters or higher degrees from an American educational institution. Under the existing law, the U.S. can issue a maximum of 1,40,000 employment-based green cards every year with a per country cap of seven per cent.

Accordingly, in fiscal year 2019, Indian nationals received 9,908 category 1 (E-B1), 2,908 category 2 (E-B2), and 5,083 category 3 (E-B3) green cards. E-B1s are different categories of employment-based green cards.

10 Iraqi paramilitary men killed in Islamist attack

IS jihadists carry out late-night assault

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
SAMARRA

Ten Iraqi paramilitaries were killed in Islamic State (IS) group attacks north of Baghdad overnight, security forces said on Saturday, the deadliest operation by jihadist sleeper cells in months.

Iraq declared IS defeated in late 2017 but remnants of the group still wage hit-and-run attacks on security forces in remote areas of the north and west.

Fighters targeted

Early on Saturday, the jihadists attacked fighters of Iraq's Hashed al-Shaabi paramilitary force stationed outside a town about 180 km north of Baghdad, according to a statement by Iraq's security forces. “Six fighters were killed. As another unit was dispatched to reinforce them, an explosive device detonated on that convoy

and killed three fighters,” the statement said. A 10th fighter was killed in a separate IS attack on nearby unit from the Hashed, a network of armed groups incorporated into the regular army chain of command.

A security source in Salahaddin province, where the attack took place, said that the first IS ambush took place just before midnight.

“All the Iraqi security forces manning the checkpoint were killed. F16 planes are flying overhead to search for the IS fighters,” said the source. The attack was IS's deadliest in several months and appeared to cap a period of more numerous and aggressive operations. Last week, the jihadists claimed a suicide attack that wounded four outside an intelligence headquarters in the northern province of Kirkuk.

Ex-Green Beret led failed attempt to oust Venezuela's Maduro

The plan was to send some 300 heavily armed volunteers to Venezuela and ignite a popular rebellion against the regime

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MIAMI

The plan was simple but perilous. Some 300 heavily armed volunteers planned to sneak into Venezuela from the northern tip of South America and ignite a popular rebellion that would end in President Nicolas Maduro's arrest.

Instead, the ringleader of the plot is now jailed in the U.S. on narcotics charges. Authorities in Colombia are asking questions about the role of his former U.S. Green Beret adviser. And dozens of combatants who flocked to secret training camps in Colombia have been left to fend for themselves amid a global pandemic.

This bizarre, never-told story of a call to arms that crashed before it launched is drawn from interviews with more than 30 Maduro oppo-



Memories of a leader: A woman cleaning a pedestrian walkway in front of a mural of Hugo Chavez in Caracas. *AP

nents directly involved in or familiar with its planning. Most spoke on condition of anonymity fearing retaliation.

The poorly-planned operation stood little chance of beating the Venezuelan Army, said Ephraim Mattos, a former U.S. Navy SEAL who

trained some of the would-be combatants in basic first aid. “You're not going to take out Maduro with 300 hungry, untrained men,” Mr. Mattos said.

When hints of the conspiracy surfaced last month, the Maduro-controlled state media portrayed it as a CIA plot.

An Associated Press investigation found no evidence of U.S. government involvement in the plot. Nevertheless, interviews revealed that leaders of Venezuela's U.S.-backed opposition knew of the covert force, even if they dismissed its prospects.

Opposition leader Juan Guaido was also told about it but was not involved and showed little interest, according to Hernan Aleman, a Venezuelan lawmaker.

Barracks revolt

Planning for the incursion began in the aftermath of an April 30, 2019, barracks revolt by a cadre of soldiers who swore loyalty to Mr. Guaido, recognised by the U.S. as Venezuela's rightful leader.

A few weeks later, some involved in the failed rebellion retreated to Bogota, Co-

lombia. That's where they met Jordan Goudreau, an American citizen and three-time Bronze Star recipient who served as a medic in U.S. Army special forces.

Mr. Goudreau, 43, said in a written statement that he would not “confirm nor deny any activities in any operational realm.” Venezuelans he interacted with described him alternately as a freedom-loving patriot, a mercenary, and a gifted warrior.

After retiring from the Army in 2016, he set up Silvercorp USA, a private security firm, near his home in Melbourne, Florida. Mr. Goudreau's focus on Venezuela started in February 2019, when he worked private security at a concert on the Venezuelan-Colombian border in support of Mr. Guaido. In Bogota, Lester Toledo, Mr. Guaido's aide, introduced

Mr. Goudreau to a rebellious former Venezuelan military officer — Cliver Alcalá.

Mr. Alcalá and Mr. Goudreau told the volunteers that — once challenged in battle — Mr. Maduro's troops would collapse like dominoes. The plot came to an end in late March when Colombian police stopped a truck transporting a cache of brand new weapons. Mr. Alcalá claimed ownership of the weapons shortly before surrendering to face the U.S. drug charges.

After the would-be insurrection collapsed, Mr. Maduro's allies celebrated. Socialist party boss Diosdado Cabello said the government was aware of the plot for at least six months. “We knew everything,” said Mr. Cabello. “Some of my meetings we had to pay for. That's how infiltrated they were.”

17 killed in Venezuela prison riot

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
CARACAS

At least 17 inmates were killed Friday in a Venezuelan prison riot, military authorities said. Detainees at Guanare city's Los Llanos prison staged “a disturbance of public order... resulting in 17 deaths and nine injuries,” according to a military report.

The Army gave no reason for the riot, stating that inmates had attacked prison officials. Among those wounded were the prison's director, hurt in the back, and a lieutenant injured by shrapnel from a grenade.

“The prisoners are upset that they are not allowed visits and they do not have water or food,” said Carolina Giron of the Venezuelan Prison Observatory (OVP).

RBI cancels CKP Co-op Bank's licence

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has cancelled the licence of Mumbai-based The CKP Cooperative Bank Ltd., with effect from the close of business on April 30, 2020, as the lender's financial position had deteriorated and it was not in a position to repay depositors.

"The Registrar of Co-operative Societies, Pune, Maharashtra, has also been requested to issue an order for winding up the affairs of The CKP Cooperative Bank Ltd., Mumbai, and appoint a liquidator for the bank," RBI said in a late evening statement on Saturday.

The depositors of the bank will get a maximum of ₹5 lakh from the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC), as per law. The deposit insurance cover was increased to ₹5 lakh from ₹1 lakh earlier this year. The bank has a deposit base of ₹485.56 crore, as on November 2019.

"The financial position of the bank is highly adverse and unsustainable. There is no concrete revival plan or proposal for merger with another bank. Credible commitment towards revival from the management is not visible," the RBI said, giving reasons for the decision.

The bank has negative networth of ₹239.2 crore. It has a customer base of 1,34,167 and has eight branches spread across Mumbai and Thane districts.

The banking regulator said the bank did not satisfy the requirement of minimum capital and reserves and was not in a position to pay its present and future depositors.

Das reviews credit flow, loan moratorium with bank chiefs

Discusses credit flow, particularly to MSMEs, and liquidity situation

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Top officials of the Reserve Bank of India, including its Governor Shaktikanta Das, and Deputy Governors, met the chief executives of public and private sector banks on Saturday to review the current economic situation and took feedback on the credit flow and liquidity situation.

The central bank also discussed the issue of loan moratorium in the meeting. The issue assumed significance in the light of the recent Supreme Court ruling that banks need to follow the RBI guidelines on moratorium in letter and spirit.

There was a lot of customer complaints that banks and other lending institutions were not extending the loan moratorium benefit, particu-



Reality check: There had been complaints that lenders were not extending the moratorium benefit to NBFCs. AFP

larly to non-banking finance companies.

Credit flows to different sectors of the economy, including liquidity to NBFCs, micro finance institutions, housing finance companies and mutual funds, were discussed in the meeting, the RBI said. Some of the mutual funds also faced redemption

pressure due to which RBI had opened a window specifically for these entities which can be accessed by banks to tap liquidity to lend to mutual funds. However, there was not much appetite from banks to tap the liquidity window.

In his opening remarks, Mr. Das appreciated the ef-

forts of banks in ensuring normal to near normal operations during the lockdown period, the RBI said. The interaction was held in two separate sessions through video conferencing.

Post-lockdown credit flows, including provision of working capital, with special focus on credit flows to MSMEs, were also discussed. The government has provided significant relaxation for starting economic activities in the third phase of the lockdown that starts from Monday.

Some other issues that came up during the interaction was monitoring of overseas branches of banks in view of the slowdown in economies across the globe, and stability of the financial ser-

PM meets FM for second economic stimulus package

'Govt. likely to announce second dose of relief measures'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday held a series of meetings with key ministers, including Home Minister Amit Shah and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, and officials to firm up the second stimulus package for sectors impacted by the lockdown to curb the spread of COVID-19, sources said.

The Prime Minister held discussions with Mr. Shah and Ms. Sitharaman and would have followed up meetings with ministers of key economic ministries such as micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME), sources said.

The Finance Ministry, which deferred release of monthly GST collection numbers on Friday, is also scheduled to make a de-



Nirmala Sitharaman

tailed presentation to the Prime Minister later in the day on the state of economy and several initiatives that it plans to undertake to stimulate Indian economy.

The Prime Minister already had meetings with different ministries including civil aviation, labour and power on Friday. He had detailed deliberation with commerce and MSME ministries among others on Thursday with focus on attracting both domestic and

overseas investment and revival of small businesses in the country so that the recovery process is hastened.

During these meetings both the Home Minister and the Finance Minister were present.

To mitigate hardships faced by the bottom of the pyramid, the government in late March had announced a ₹1.7 lakh crore stimulus package comprising free fogfragns and cooking gas to poor and cash doses to poor women and elderly.

Sources said the government is considering to announce a second dose of relief measures for the segment and a stimulus package for India Inc. shortly. The government had first imposed a 21-day nationwide lockdown beginning March 25 and later extended it till May 3.

India Inc. welcomes resumption of economic activity in lockdown 3.0

Seeks revival package to put economy on growth trajectory

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Industry captains have welcomed the government's decision to extend the lockdown till May 17 allowing selected economic activities in all zones.

"We appreciate PM Narendra Modi's decision to exit the nationwide lockdown in a graded manner by giving equal importance to the lives and livelihood of Indian citizens. This will go a long way in uplifting the sentiments of the stricken Indian industry, helping the daily wagers, poor and the needy earn their livelihood and re-

store India's economic growth trajectory, said D.K. Aggarwal, president - P.H.D. Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The chamber, however, urged the government to provide an increased stimulus relief package of ₹16 lakh crore, which is around 7% of GDP, sooner than later to mitigate the impact of the pandemic.

"The virus while controlled will be a threat till we find a vaccine. However, we need to find ways to work within a 'new normal' to bring this economy back to capacity in the shortest pe-

riod of time," Saijan Jindal, chairman of JSW Group, said in a tweet.

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), while welcoming the decision to extend the lockdown, has asked for a revival package.

"CII has suggested instituting a government spending package equivalent to 3% of GDP, which would add ₹6 lakh crore to the available fi-

repower. Enhanced debt to GDP ratio can be a way out for adding fiscal space at a time when the debt to GDP ratio is modest in India," Chandrajit Banerjee, director general, CII, said.

'Now is the time for Centre to use its mints'

Print notes for liquidity, allow firms to access foreign capital, says lawyer Salve

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

Printing currency notes, abolishing the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) and allowing Indian firms to borrow abroad at low interest rates are among the steps that former Solicitor General of India and Supreme Court lawyer Harish Salve said India needed to take right away to help resuscitate the economy.

Addressing the ICAI Leadership Summit last week, Mr. Salve said the economy needed a ventilator immediately. "The first thing you will do (to such a patient) is give a blood transfusion ie cash in the system. The second is the electrolytes; that

every person without a job, so at least the groceries can be bought. Where is the money coming from? This is the time to use your mints.

"Don't worry about inflation. Print money, put it back in the system, fill in the hole created by the NBFC crash; demand will pick up, small-medium enterprises and real estate will pick up. In six months you'll start seeing the change."

"Inflation rates the world over are at an all-time low; LIBOR was between less than 1% to 1%; in India, interest rates are still 6%. Why not allow Indian industry to freely borrow from anywhere in the world? Repeat FEMA. Do we really need it?"

Mr. Salve batted for the removal of bank officers from the purview of the Prevention of Corruption Act. "Which bank officer today would risk sanctioning a loan? He would be hounded if the loan is not repaid."

"Global firms want to move out of China. But India has to stop fantasising that we are the only alternative destination." He cited Ireland convincing Apple to set up base there by offering low tax rates. "The PM sat with the CEO of Apple and negotiated a deal. This is how people do it. Prime Ministers talk to business folks saying, 'Invest \$20 billion in my country and we will charge one third the tax.'"

INTERVIEW | R. DINESH

'It will take 6 to 9 months or even longer for consumption to get back to normal'

Lockdown impact will last beyond Q3, says the TVS Supply Chain Solutions MD

N. ANAND

The supply chain sector needs cash flow. As such, banks have to provide funding through ways and means advances, which means that it is not linked with an asset or with any working capital related security, says R. Dinesh, managing director, TVS Supply Chain Solutions, in an interview to The Hindu. Edited excerpts:

Do you think COVID-19 will have a long-term or short-term impact?

It will have both short-term and long-term impact. Today, we are operating only about 15-20% of our normal business. We have about a thousand people working, as against 12,000 to 13,000 people under normal circumstances. Therefore, it is going to have a short-term impact on our cash flow and operations. While post-lockdown this may improve, it is going to have a significant short-term impact as we ramp up during the next couple of months. It will affect other businesses and the economy as a whole. It will be about six to nine months or even longer for the consumption side to get back to normal. Definitely the first two quarters will be significantly impacted and it will last beyond the third quarter, with some pick-up happening by the fourth.

What are the measures you feel that can kick start the economy?

The supply chain sector needs cash flow. So, the banks have to provide funding through ways and means advances, which means that it is not linked with an asset or with any working capital related security. Logistics sector can use these funds

to pay salaries to employees and repay this over a period of three years. Further, the losses incurred during the first quarter can be treated as a deferred revenue loss and can be written off over a period of the next three years rather than writing off in one go, because this is an extraordinary event affecting everyone. This would also help the engines of the economy to keep running.

What lessons can be learnt from these kind of disasters?

The biggest takeaway is that we have to focus on technology. We have learned to deliver and interact with our customer without any physical interaction and by moving to app-based solutions. As we evolve, all physical paperwork will disappear, which is a good business practice, and actually speeds up the whole process.

Do you have any plans for the next three months or six months?

In the initial three months, there are three focus areas for us - employee safety, cash protection and business opportunity by pivoting to new customers for growth. So, obviously, we are taking all necessary actions to make sure that as an organisation are ready whenever the lockdown gets lifted and have money left not just to run the business, but also make the necessary investments to be ready for the future.

The focus for the next six months is to invest further in our technology solutions.

if you look at other areas of supply chain like automotive, or FMCG, we could see a general slowdown. Therefore, I do not see truck additions taking place and the challenge would be to increase the utilization of these vehicles.

Your advice to MSMEs and other companies?

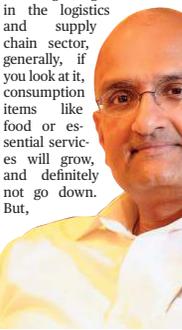
To the extent possible, MSMEs need to have better cash management and choose the right partners who are ready to support them in their difficulty. Many MSMEs look at turnover and the profit and loss, but the focus on cash is something which would come out very strongly at this time.

How long will it take for your company to bounce back?

As a global organisation providing essential services, we are already fairly active. If you look at in the U.K., 80% of our business is operational because we are supporting mainly essential services, about 60-70% of our businesses are working in Asia and as mentioned earlier, 15-20% in India. Since supply chain is the lubricant of the economy, we will ramp up our operations as the government starts opening up different sectors.

Will there be any change in your capex or any other investment plans for the current year?

Short term, yes. Obviously, we will stop all non-essential capex and investments in this year, but we will continue to focus on providing technology solutions and therefore, we will continue to spend on further strengthening our capabilities. The other focus area would be specific customer related support which will also be necessary and essential during this period.



WESTERN RAILWAY
TRANSPORTATION OF BOGIES
Tender No. No. CW/PO/WCI/2020(WORKS). Dated: 03.05.2020.
Chief Workshop Manager, Carriage Repair Workshop, Lower Panel, Western Railway, Mumbai-400013 invites e-bids through E-tenders in prescribed form from experienced and reputed contractors for the following work: (1) Name of the work with its location: PL Workshop: Transportation of Complete assembled LS-5 LHB Flat Bogies from ICF Chennai to Lower Panel workshop. Quantity - 34 Trps (08 Bogies to be transported in 34 Trps) (2) Approx. Cost of the work: ₹ 25,01,24,386/- (INR 25.01 Crore) (3) EMD: ₹ 50,000/- (4) Date and Time for submission and opening of E-Tender: Submission: Upto: 26.05.2020 at 14.00 hrs. Opening: On: 26.05.2020 at 14.30 hrs (5) Website particulars: http://www.irps.gov.in/Mechanical

WESTERN RAILWAY
VARIOUS ENGINEERING WORKS
By Chief Electrical Engineer Construction Vadodra invites E-tender as per details given below:

Sr. No.	Executive	Tender Notice No & Date	WORK AND LOCATION	Approx. cost of work ₹	EMD ₹	Date of Opening
1	Dy.CEE/C/ BRC	TR-C-5-2020 dtd 28.04.20	Design, Supply, Erection, Testing & Commissioning of 25 KV AC OHE between Vad - Kathana Section on Vadodra Division of Western Railway in connection with Electrification of Existing BG line.	17,71,38,787.34	10,35,70,000	29.05.2020 at 15.30 Hrs.
2	Dy.CEE/C/ BRC	TR-C-5-2020 dtd 28.04.20	Design, Supply, Erection, Testing & Commissioning of 25 KV AC OHE between Anand - Khamhat with Borivay - Vadad Section on Vadodra Division of Western Railway in connection with Electrification of Existing BG line.	18,43,51,891.11	10,71,800,000	28.05.2020 at 15.30 Hrs.

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THE HINDU
Air Surcharge as applicable:
New Delhi - Rs. 15/-
Port Blair - Rs. 15/-

NORTH WESTERN RAILWAY
E-Tender Notice
Following E-tenders are invited by DRM (WA) NWRA/Amr at 15:30 Hrs. on the mentioned date, Tender No. - 68/2020
Name of work: Complete Track Renewal Work between Madar-Daaru Eye Pass Line Section (From Km. 14.40 to 297.50 Total 810 Kms), Approximate Cost: Rs. 2,38,11,72,077.
Earnest Money: Rs. 2,69,10,00,000
Money: Rs. 4,38,80,00,000
Tender No.: 67/2020, Name of work: ADEN-RPZ sub Division: Deep Screening work and Providing Sleepers on joints in MVJMJ Section between KBK-CBG-LSG from Km. 55/8 to 88/8 = 33 Kms., Approximate Cost: Rs. 68,38,05,000. Earnest Money: Rs. 1,99,10,00,000
Tender No.: 69/2020, Name of work: ADEN-RPZ sub Division: Supply of Ballast (Machine Crushed) in MVJMJ Section between KBK-CBG-LSG from Km. 55/8 to 88/8 = 33 Kms., Approximate Cost: Rs. 1,22,67,09,000. Earnest Money: Rs. 2,16,30,00,000
Tender No.: 69/2020, Name of work: ADEN-RPZ sub Division: Transportation of P/Way Material under ADEN-Rana Pratap Nagar sub Division., Approximate Cost: Rs. 54,52,47,00,000. Earnest Money: Rs. 1,99,10,00,000
Tender Closing Date: 27.05.2020, Tender No.: 68/2020, Name of work: ADEN-RPZ sub Division: Supply of Ballast (Machine Crushed) in MVJMJ Section between KBK-CBG-LSG from Km. 55/8 to 88/8 = 33 Kms., Approximate Cost: Rs. 68,38,05,000. Earnest Money: Rs. 1,99,10,00,000
Tender No.: 69/2020, Name of work: ADEN-RPZ sub Division: Transportation of P/Way Material under ADEN-Rana Pratap Nagar sub Division., Approximate Cost: Rs. 54,52,47,00,000. Earnest Money: Rs. 1,99,10,00,000
Tender Closing Date: 27.05.2020, The detailed information of the above tender is available on website www.irps.gov.in and Tender Notice Board of DRM, Office, NWRA/Amr. 438-SP/2020
Please join us on: Facebook.com/WesternRly

Government of Jharkhand
Jharkhand Rural Health Mission Society
Department of Health, Medical Education & Family Welfare
Nankum, Ranchi.
Letter No:IDSP/150/2020- Part III-133 (IDSP) Dated: 02.05.2020
COVID-19 MOST URGENT

Public Notice
National Health Mission, Jharkhand is in urgent requirement of the following items:

S.No	Item	Quantity
1	COVID-19 IgM/IgG Antibody Rapid Test Kit (ICMR Approved) with Alcohool Swab (Single Use pack)	100000 Pcs

Note:-
1. Any interested vendor may submit immediately available quantity, delivery time, price and purchase order from any state/central government agency for the above.
2. Quantity may be increased or decreased by 25%.
3. In case a vendor has the required quantity in ready stock, splitting with the order between multiple vendors may be considered at the quoted price.
4. Proposal to be submitted by e-mail on jharkhandcovid@gmail.com by 04.05.2020 - 12 Noon.
5. Vendor with immediate delivery terms and P.O. from any state/central government agency will be preferred.
Sd/-
(Director Finance)
PR 228113 (Jharkhand Rural Health Mission Society) 20-21 (D)

WESTERN RAILWAY RAJKOT DIVISION
VARIOUS CONSTRUCTION WORKS
E-TENDER NOTICE NO. DW/CE/RLT/20(1) (1) Name of work with its location: Earthwork in bank, cutting in all kind of soil rock and blasting for formation, yards, trolley refuges and bridge approaches etc and construction of Minor Bridges, side drains, toe walls, retaining walls and protection works etc from Chamara (Incl) to Daladi (incl) in connection with Suburban Rajkot Doubling Project. (2) Approx. Cost of the work: ₹ 39,55,00,797,881/- (3) EMD: ₹ 21,27,00,00/- (4) Completion Period: 12 (Twelve) Months (5) Date & Time for submission of bid and opening of bid: Submission: 01.06.2020 upto 15.00 hrs. Opening: 01.06.2020 at 15.30 Hrs. (6) Website particulars Notice Board location where complete details of tender can be seen & address of the office: Website: www.irps.gov.in Office of the Dy. Chief Engineer (Construction), Western Railway, Kothi Compound, Rajkot. 647
Like us on: Facebook.com/WesternRly

WESTERN RAILWAY-RATLAM DIVISION
TENDER FOR MECHANISED CLEANING AND HOUSEKEEPING WORK
No.: C331/Group 01/2019-20. Date: 29.04.2020. Divisional Railway Manager (Commercial), Western Railway, invites open E-Tender (Two Packet System) for the following work. If the date of opening happens to be a BANNED or Holiday, the tender will be opened at same time on the following working day. (1) Name of the work with its location: Mechanized and Manual cleaning, rag picking, garbage collection and disposal, pest and rodent control contract at Group No. 1 of Ratlam Bikanerhatnath Section- (Total 27 stations) with General housekeeping with the station premises for 04 years. BOD (Bangrod) RNH (Rushkesh), KUH (Kashrod), BRNA (Baranavay), PPG (Piplota), UNL (Unhal), PSON (Palsoada), ASI (Asolada), NKI (Naikheid), PLV (Pingshahar), TJP (Tajpur), TSN (Tarana), MKC (Maks), PUO (Punmrod), BCH (Bercha), KSH (Kaisinhd), BLX (Bohar), AKD (Akada), SJP (Shajapur), KKP (Kalsipawa), JBX (Jabri), PRB (Parbhar), BKTL (Boktal), SEH (Sehore), PNWN (Pachawar), PUJ (Punasa), BOE (Bakanianhatnath), with General housekeeping within the station premises for 04 Years. (2) Approx. cost of work: ₹ 4,79,55,381,399/- including all Taxes (3) Cost of tender form: ₹ 10,000/- Tender forms are non transferable. Validity of offer is 60 days. Offers with validity of offer less than what is prescribed will be rejected summarily. (4) Earnest Money to be deposited: ₹ 3,89,80,000/- (In word- Three lakhs Eighty Nine Thousand Eight Hundred only) (5) Completion period of work: 4 Year (6) Office address where tenders will be opened: Commercial Department, Divisional Office, Western Railway, Do Batti, Ratlam (7) E-Tender submission and opening date: E-tenders can be submitted upto to 15:00 hrs on 08.06.2020. And will be opened on same date at 15:30 hrs. (8) Website particulars & notice board location: Tender documents can also be downloaded from the Western Railway website viz. www.irps.gov.in. Any other information required by the tenderer can be obtained from the office of Divisional Railway Manager (Commercial) Ratlam during working hours. Like us on: Facebook.com/WesternRly | Follow us on: Twitter.com/WesternRly

Uttar Pradesh MSLC
(An Government of Uttar Pradesh Undertaking)
GSTIN: 09AAACU2250P1ZZ. CIN:U8510UP2018SSG012425
Tender Ref. No. UP/MSCL/EO/RC/186 Date: 1st May, 2020
e-Tender Notice Invitation
Uttar Pradesh Medical Supplies Corporation Limited, Lucknow invites online tenders from eligible and qualified Manufacturer/Supplier/Authorized Agent for Rates, of Invasive Lung Ventilator which will remain valid for a period of two years. The schedules of E-tendering activities are as here under:

S.No.	Activity	Date & Time
1	Tender Reference No.	UP/MSCL/EO/RC/186
2	Commencement of Downloading of Tender Document	27 th May, 2020 from 10:00 AM Website of www.tenderup.nic.in
3	Date & Time of Pre-Bid Meeting	4 th May, 2020 from 12:00 Noon in presence of all bidders. Lucknow
4	Last Date & Submission of Online Bids	8 th May, 2020 upto 3:00 pm.
5	Date, Time & Place of Opening of Technical Bids	8 th May, 2020 at 4:00 pm in the office of UP/MSCL, 30/24 Bhawan, Lucknow
6	Date of Completion of Examination of Technical Bid	To be decided on www.upmsc.in and www.tenderup.nic.in
7	Date & Time of Opening of Financial Bid	To be declared on www.upmsc.in and www.tenderup.nic.in
8	Date of Completion of Examination of Financial Bid	To be declared on www.upmsc.in and www.tenderup.nic.in
9	Validity of Tender	180 Days
10	Date of Demonstration	9 th May, 2020 at 12:00 Noon in Office of UP/MSCL, 30/24 Bhawan, Lucknow

The details of tender notices are given on website www.upmsc.in and www.tenderup.nic.in. Kindly read the tender notice before applying.
General Manager
Department of Medical Health & Family Welfare, U.P. (Equipment-Procurement) UP/MSCL

WESTERN RAILWAY-RATLAM DIVISION
TENDER FOR MECHANISED CLEANING AND HOUSEKEEPING WORK
No.: C331/Group 01/2019-20. Date: 29.04.2020. Divisional Railway Manager (Commercial), Western Railway, invites open E-Tender (Two Packet System) for the following work. If the date of opening happens to be a BANNED or Holiday, the tender will be opened at same time on the following working day. (1) Name of the work with its location: Mechanized and Manual cleaning, rag picking, garbage collection and disposal, pest and rodent control contract at Group No. 1 of Ratlam Bikanerhatnath Section- (Total 27 stations) with General housekeeping with the station premises for 04 years. BOD (Bangrod) RNH (Rushkesh), KUH (Kashrod), BRNA (Baranavay), PPG (Piplota), UNL (Unhal), PSON (Palsoada), ASI (Asolada), NKI (Naikheid), PLV (Pingshahar), TJP (Tajpur), TSN (Tarana), MKC (Maks), PUO (Punmrod), BCH (Bercha), KSH (Kaisinhd), BLX (Bohar), AKD (Akada), SJP (Shajapur), KKP (Kalsipawa), JBX (Jabri), PRB (Parbhar), BKTL (Boktal), SEH (Sehore), PNWN (Pachawar), PUJ (Punasa), BOE (Bakanianhatnath), with General housekeeping within the station premises for 04 Years. (2) Approx. cost of work: ₹ 4,79,55,381,399/- including all Taxes (3) Cost of tender form: ₹ 10,000/- Tender forms are non transferable. Validity of offer is 60 days. Offers with validity of offer less than what is prescribed will be rejected summarily. (4) Earnest Money to be deposited: ₹ 3,89,80,000/- (In word- Three lakhs Eighty Nine Thousand Eight Hundred only) (5) Completion period of work: 4 Year (6) Office address where tenders will be opened: Commercial Department, Divisional Office, Western Railway, Do Batti, Ratlam (7) E-Tender submission and opening date: E-tenders can be submitted upto to 15:00 hrs on 08.06.2020. And will be opened on same date at 15:30 hrs. (8) Website particulars & notice board location: Tender documents can also be downloaded from the Western Railway website viz. www.irps.gov.in. Any other information required by the tenderer can be obtained from the office of Divisional Railway Manager (Commercial) Ratlam during working hours. Like us on: Facebook.com/WesternRly | Follow us on: Twitter.com/WesternRly

Dead fragments of novel coronavirus led to false positives in recovered patients

This addresses the concern of reinfection or reactivation in people who have recovered from COVID-19

R. PRASAD

In early April, South Korea announced that patients who were declared as COVID-19 recovered have once again tested positive, suggesting that it could be a case of reinfection or reactivation (where the virus is not completely cleared once again begins to replicate). By the end of April, South Korea had recorded 263 such cases. China too reported such cases.

Cause of concern

This news caused concern as it highlighted the issue of low levels of immunity in people who have recovered and the short duration of protection offered by antibodies developed in response to the infection. If natural infection shows only a short duration of protection, it raised concerns about the duration of protection that vaccines can offer.



Limitation: The RT-PCR molecular test cannot distinguish between dead and live genetic fragments of the virus. *AP

But on April 30, infectious disease experts in South Korea confirmed that dead virus fragments still present in recovered people had led the people numbering over 260 to test positive again for the novel coronavirus even weeks after marking full recovery. Addressing a press conference a few days earlier, Zhong Nanshan,

China's top respiratory expert had said the same – recovered persons can test positive because fragments of the disease remained in their body.

Little reason

Oh Myoung-don, who leads the central clinical committee for emerging disease control, said that the committee members found little reason to believe that those cases could be COVID-19 reinfections or reactivations, *Korea Herald* reported. The RT-PCR used for testing samples amplifies the genetic material of the virus prior to testing. The molecular test cannot distinguish between dead and live genetic fragments and hence cannot make out whether the virus is alive or not.

Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (KCDC) deputy director Kwon Joon-wook told CNN that so far there is no indica-

tion that patients who retest positive are contagious, even though about 44% of them showed mild symptoms. "At the moment, we think that there is no danger of further secondary or tertiary transmission," Kwon told CNN.

Family of cases

The KCDC had investigated three cases from the same family where patients tested positive after recovering. But scientists were unable to grow (culture) the virus. Culturing the virus is typically done for testing and producing vaccines. The inability to grow the virus in a cell culture confirmed that live virus was not present.

"The respiratory epithelial cell has a half-life of up to three months, and RNA virus in the cell can be detected with PCR testing one to two months after the elimination of the cell," Oh told *Korea Herald*.

Using human sweat as diagnostic tool and source of power

A recent breakthrough brings in an e-skin patch with six sensor probes



SPEAKING OF SCIENCE

D. BALASUBRAMANIAN

Recall those early days when the family physician was called home to treat a patient. The first thing he'd do was to touch the skin on your face, temples and chest. This would let him diagnose quickly. If the skin feels hotter than usual, you have fever; if it is paler than the usual, you are dehydrated and must drink more water; if it has a bluish tinge, you need to breathe more oxygen; and if it feels wet, you need to exercise less or cut your physical stress and so on. Then you are given what he considers the appropriate medicine as pills or potion, or an injection. Alas, we have now replaced him with a doctor sitting in a clinic, who asks you to go to a commercial centre for diagnostics and prescribes the medicine based on the report. Skin-based diagnosis is a gone thing for general practitioners.

These days, skin specialists do an interesting procedure, in which they attach a thin polymer-based sheet which contains the desired drug, stick it to the skin on your arm or chest and deliver the drug past the sweat fluid directly into the body, using a tiny electric current on the patch. This is thus a wearable technology for personalised medicine – no pills or potions. And with the advent of microelectronics and bio-compatible polymers, we now have 'electronic skin' (e-skin), and nanoscale wires that can be attached and an external electric power supply using micro-scale batteries.

Role of sweat

Notice in all this, the active body fluid, namely, the sweat, is ignored or treated as an inert carrier of no other value. The role of sweat fluid in our body and the chemicals it contains are becoming increasingly understood and utilised only recently. Sweat comes out of three types of glands distributed across all over our skin, secreting water and substances that help keep our body at the optimum temperature of 37 degrees C (or 98.4 degrees F). Our brain has temperature-sensitive nerve cells (neurons) which control the sweat glands in releasing the fluid depending on the temperature and physical and metabolic activity of the body. Sweat is thus our body's thermo-regulator.

What does sweat contain? It is 99% water containing sodium, potassium, calcium, magnesium and chloride ions, ammonium ions, urea, lactic acid, glucose and other minor components. An analysis of the sweat fluid in a patient and how it compares with that of a 'normal' individual will thus be of diagnostic value (just as much as other body fluids do). For example, in the illness called cystic fibrosis, the ratio of the sodium to chloride ions in the sweat is different from that of a normal individual. Likewise, the amount of glucose in the sweat of a diabetic is higher than normal. But the problem is the amount of sweat available from the skin.

Diagnostics based on e-skin

It is here that modern-day technology has become of value. Now that microelectronics and e-skin patches are both available, scientists have been using them for real-time measurements of some chosen component in the sweat, using the appropriate probe (sensor) in the patch in order to detect and measure the level of the component. But would it not be much better if we can measure as many components as we desire if the e-skin patch be loaded with probes not for one but several components simultaneously? A breakthrough on this was made by a group of biologists, material scientists, computer experts and electrical engineers from California (Stanford and Berkeley), and was published with the title: "Fully integrated wearable sensor arrays for multiplexed in-situ perspiration analysis" (*Nature* 2016 January 28; 529 (7587): 509-514. doi:10.1038/nature16521. free access on the web). They put in not just one but six sensor probes – for Na, K, Cl ions, lactate, glucose and the temperature of the sweat – all six of them embedded on a e-skin patch, such that a stable sensor-skin contact is maintained. Signals coming from each sensor measuring the sweat component as a tiny electrical signal are then converted into a digital form, and sent to a micro-controller, and from there to a Bluetooth transceiver, which can be seen on a mobile phone or other screen, and passed on through SMS, email, or uploaded to the Cloud interface.

The Californian Group followed it up with another paper in 2017 titled: "Autonomous sweat extraction and analysis applied to cystic fibrosis and glucose monitoring using a fully integrated wearable platform" in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*, 114(18), 4525-4630; <https://www.pnas.org/content/114/18/4625>. Since the amount of sweat accessible in sedentary people is too low, the group resorted to what is called iontophoresis, wherein one can stimulate local secretion of sweat at chosen sites, thus getting enough of the fluid, analysing its relevant components in normal (control) individuals, and people with cystic fibrosis and also monitoring glucose levels in the sweat – all this in a similar integrated platform as was used in their *Nature* paper. In a control individual, they found 26.7 mM of Na ions and 21.2 mM of Cl ions (note that the Na level is higher than Cl level here), while in a CF patient, Na level was 2.3 mM and Cl level 95.7 mM (far higher than the Na level), in keeping with what CF specialists have found in their routine ("classical") practice. The group further found that oral glucose consumption while fasting led to increased glucose levels in sweat and in blood.

Sweat as power supply

Note that in all these assays, the probes and sensors need to be powered externally using microbatteries. If these e-skin platforms are to be used in robotics and other devices, can we do away with this external, and have the material in the sweat itself be used as a biofuel generator of electric power? The group showed in their paper that just appeared 10 days ago in the journal *Science Robotics* (Yu et al., *Sci. Robot.* 5, eaaz7946(2020)). On a patch on the individual's e-skin patch they added the enzyme Lox which would react with the lactate in the sweat and oxidise it to pyruvate in a bioanode, and reduce the oxygen into water in a biocathode, thus generating electrical energy that is sufficient to drive the patch with no external energy source – what a brilliant idea!

Finally, in these COVID-19 days, it is good to know that sweat does not carry any pathogen (bacteria or virus); on the contrary it carries a germ-killer protein called dermicidin (Schittec et al, *BMJ* 2001, 323(7323):1206). One wonders if dermicidin or its modification can be anti-viral.

dhala@hpei.org

NIAB develops portable coronavirus detection kit

The device can detect novel coronavirus antigens in 20 microlitres of human saliva within 30 seconds

ASWATHI PACHA

Adding support to the Health Minister's promise that India will be able to produce RT-PCR and antibody test kits by the end of May, researchers from the National Institute of Animal Biotechnology (NIAB), Hyderabad, have developed a biosensor that can detect the novel coronavirus in saliva samples.

Biosensors have been currently used across the world to detect toxins, narcotic drugs, and are also considered as a reliable tool to detect infectious diseases.

New device

The new portable device named eCovSens, can be used to detect the presence of novel coronavirus antigens in human saliva within 30 seconds using just 20 microlitres of the sample.

The in-house built biosensor consists of a carbon electrode and the coronavirus antibody. The antibody is capable of binding with the spike protein found on the outer layer of the virus. An electrical signal is generated when the antigen and antibody binds.

Electrical components in the device further amplify this signal, process it, convert it to digital readings on a LCD display.

The device can also be connected to a computer or cellphone via Blue-



Cross-reactivity studies: The researchers checked that the antibody in the device does not bind with any other viral antigen. *GETTY IMAGES

The device is portable and requires only a small amount of saliva. It is stable and when built in bulk can drastically bring down the cost of testing.

SONU GANDHI
DPT-NIAB

tooth and studied. The signal's intensity was found to be proportional to the concentration of the antigen in the sample.

Battery-operated

The device can also be battery-operated as it uses very low voltage of 1.3V to 3V. The team also compared eCovSens to a regular potentiostat and found the new device to be ultrasensitive and quicker.

"The device is portable and can be taken to the bedside of the patient too. Also, it requires only a very small amount of sa-

liva. The device is stable and when built in bulk can drastically bring down the cost of testing. The validation studies using saliva samples from coronavirus patients are yet to be done," explains Dr. Sonu Gandhi from DPT-NIAB, Hyderabad, and corresponding author of the paper posted on the preprint server *bioRxiv* on April 29. It is yet to be peer-reviewed and published in a scientific journal.

Other viral antigens

Cross-reactivity studies were done to check if the antibody in the device binds with any other viral antigen. No electric current was generated when tested with antigens of the Avian influenza virus. The paper adds, "the device can be customised to any target analyte, and can also have other future applications for detection of various other ailments."

A protocol for pooled RT-PCR testing of COVID-19

The algorithm reconstructs the individual list of positives, negatives and their viral loads from the readings of the tests

SHUBASHREE DESIKAN

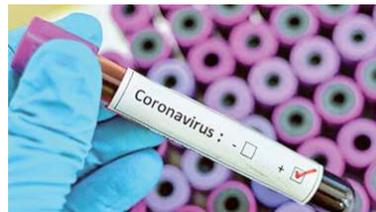
IIT Bombay researchers have developed an algorithm which can be used to help conduct pooled testing of samples for COVID-19. In order to validate this protocol – known as Tapestry Pooling – *in vitro* experiments using synthetic RNA and DNA fragments have been carried out by NCBS and InSTEM, Bengaluru, and Wyss Institute of Biologically Inspired Engineering, U.S. Further validation using clinical samples is under way.

An important part of managing the COVID-19 pandemic is aggressive testing of people and quarantining those who test positive, to contain the spread. Until now, in India tests have been carried out only on people with travel history and their contacts, and on clusters that have known to be infected. This is due to the lack of sufficient testing kits to test a large population. In this context, pooling of samples is one way of reducing the number of test kits used and increases testing capacity.

Pooled tests

Pooling of samples involves testing them in batches, and when pooled sample tests positive, then individual samples are assessed. Using combinatorics, an algorithm is found that unscrambles the test results and tells you which of the individuals in the pool are positive.

In effect, the number of tests that need to be carried out is less than if there had to be test done for each individual.



Pooled test: Pooling of samples is one way of reducing the number of test kits used and increases testing capacity. *ISTOCK

The Android application named BYOM Smart Testing, which was developed by Shop 101, guides the user on how to perform the test. The technician enters how many samples they want to test, and the prevalence rate. They are given a pooling matrix.

"Samples are pooled according to this pooling matrix. Pools are tested and the quantitative reading from the tests is entered into our algorithm, which reconstructs the list of positives, negatives, and their viral loads," says Manoj Gopalkrishnan, from IIT Bombay and corresponding author of the preprint posted in *MedRxiv* server. Preprints are yet to be peer-reviewed.

The present version of the protocol has fixed numbers of samples. That is, for instance, 40 samples can be tested in 16 RT-PCR tests (up to 3 positives). This can go up to 961 samples that can be tested in 93 RT-PCR tests (up to 10 positives).

"In version 2, the user will be able to tell how many samples they want tested, and we will give corresponding pool-

ing instructions," explains Dr Gopalkrishnan. Being a non-adaptive test, all the RT-PCR tests in Tapestry pooling are conducted at one go. This could take four hours to perform typically. An adaptive test which has two rounds of testing, can take twice the amount of time.

Graceful failure mode

The protocol also has a so-called graceful failure mode. "It estimates actual prevalence rate in the batch and if this is much higher than the projected prevalence so that the algorithm is not able to identify all positives exactly, it returns a list of suspected positives which includes all the positives, and possibly a few false positives which can be eliminated in round two of testing," explains Dr Gopalkrishnan.

The group is in the process of drafting and obtaining permissions for a clinical trial in collaboration with Tata Memorial Hospital, Kasturba Hospital and P.D. Hinduja Hospital, in Mumbai, Malabar Cancer Centre, in Thalassery, Kerala, and NCBS, Bengaluru.

Broad-spectrum antiviral inhibits novel coronavirus

There was a dose-dependent reduction in novel coronavirus infections in human airway epithelial cell cultures

R. PRASAD

Broad-spectrum antivirals for emerging zoonotic infections become particularly important when specific interventions do not yet exist. Researchers have found that a ribonucleoside analogue (beta-D-N4-hydroxycytidine or NHC) that has been previously shown to be effective against influenza and Ebola is also potent against coronaviruses, including the novel coronavirus that is currently causing the pandemic.

The drug was found to be effective in both cell lines and primary human airway epithelial cultures against SARS, MERS and SARS-CoV-2. It was also effective against three closely-related bat coronaviruses that were capable of replicating in human cells without undergo-

ing any adaptation, suggesting potential direct transmission from bats to humans.

In vitro analysis

The NHC drug is highly active against all three coronaviruses – 2002 SARS, MERS and the novel coronavirus. While it was not toxic to human cells, there was a dose-dependent reduction in SARS, MERS and novel coronavirus infectious virus production in human airway epithelial cell cultures.

The team led by researchers Timothy P. Sheahan and Ralph S. Baric from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in a paper published in *Science Translational Medicine* found that the antiviral activity of NHC arises from increased mutation rate in viral genomic RNA. In the case of MERS,



Stopgap: Broad-spectrum antivirals are useful when specific interventions are lacking. *AP

treatment with 1 microMolar of NHC resulted in three-fold increase in error rate and 138-fold decrease in virus titer. When the amount of NHC used was increased to 10 microMolar, the error rate increased sixfold and virus titer reduction increased 26,000-fold.

Explaining the process that leads to increased mutation rates, the authors say that NHC gets incorporated

during RNA synthesis and then subsequently misread leading to enhanced mutation.

Prodrug tested

Encouraged by these results, the researchers tested an orally bioavailable prodrug of NHC designed for improved oral bioavailability in humans and non-human primates and better pharmacokinetics. The prodrug was tested *in vitro* using the 2002 SARS coronavirus. Lung haemorrhage was significantly reduced and there was a dose-dependent reduction in lung titer of SARS coronavirus. They found the prodrug given as a prophylactic was "robustly antiviral" and was able to prevent SARS coronavirus replication and disease.

As in the case of the 2002 SARS coronavirus, in geneti-

cally modified mice, the prodrug protected from significant weight loss and lung haemorrhage due to MERS. Viral replication was not seen at all prophylactic doses (50, 150 and 500 mg per kg). But only treatment initiated before 12h after MERS infection prevented body weight loss.

When treatment was initiated 24 or 48 hours after infection, it did not confer any protection. "Collectively, these data demonstrate that NHC prodrug robustly reduces MERS-CoV infectious titers, viral RNA, and pathogenesis under both prophylactic and early therapeutic conditions," they write.

"The data provided in this manuscript suggest that EIDD-2801 should be quickly evaluated in primate models of human disease using

immediate models for MERS-CoV and SARS-CoV-2 pathogenesis or newly described cynomolgus and rhesus macaque models for SARS-CoV-2," the authors write.

Other viruses

"Our data support the continued development of NHC prodrug as a potent broad-spectrum antiviral that could be useful in treating contemporary, newly emerged and emerging CoV infections of the future," they note.

The authors have not been able to test the efficacy of the drug against novel coronavirus using animals models. Also, it is known that disease severity increases with age, but the authors were not able to test the drug against coronavirus using aged mouse models.



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Debt and mutual funds

Why has the Reserve Bank of India opened a liquidity window for mutual funds? What are the concerns about the industry?

ASHISH RUKHAIYAR

The story so far: In view of the possible redemption pressure that the mutual fund industry may face after the abrupt winding up of six debt schemes of Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Monday announced a special liquidity window of ₹50,000 crore for mutual funds. Under the scheme, the RBI will conduct repo (repurchase agreement) operations of 90-day tenor at a fixed repo rate of 4.40% for banks. According to the RBI, banks can avail funds under this facility exclusively for meeting the liquidity requirements of mutual fund houses by extending loans and undertaking outright purchase of and/or repos against the collateral of investment grade corporate bonds, commercial papers (CPs), debentures and certificates of deposit (CDs) held by the fund houses. The scheme will be open till May 11 or up to utilisation of the allocated amount, whichever is earlier.

Why was it needed?

The trigger for the liquidity window was Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund's decision to wind up six debt funds that had a combined assets under management (AUM) of almost ₹26,000 crore. The fund house said that it decided to wind up the schemes to preserve the value at prevailing levels – their value had eroded because of redemption pressures and mark-to-market losses due to lack of liquidity on account of the COVID-19 pandemic. That led to fears that the debt funds of many other fund houses could face redemption pressure accentuated by the panic sparked by Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund's sudden move.

Are mutual funds' debt schemes under pressure?

While the mutual fund industry clarified that what had happened at Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund was an isolated case, wider liquidity and other concerns persist. A couple of fund houses have already seen huge erosion in the net asset values of a

few debt schemes post the Franklin Templeton episode due to mark-downs of their holdings. Incidentally, till date, banks have borrowed about ₹2,000 crore through the RBI liquidity window for mutual funds. Market observers say debt schemes are under pressure due to a combination of factors.

How much debt assets do mutual funds manage?

The AUM of debt schemes of the mutual fund industry is about ₹15-lakh crore, which is more than half of the total AUM of Indian fund houses. The worst affected sub-category of debt funds is Credit Risk funds that account for only 5% of the overall debt assets. Investors, however, are sceptical about the overall credit quality of the assets; hence debt schemes are likely to see a spike in redemptions. Mutual funds are allowed to borrow up to 20% of their assets to meet liquidity needs for redemption or dividend pay-out. As of April 23, four mutual funds – of a total of 42 fund houses – had a cumulative borrowing of ₹4,427.68 crore, according to the Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI). Fund managers say that while such borrowings are common in March – there are huge redemptions due to advance tax payment and other quarter-end obligations – a spillover of such borrowings to April is a cause for concern.

What is the quality of debt securities held by mutual funds?

Fund managers are of the view that more than half of the assets in debt schemes have a rating of AA or above. They say that while about 20% to 30% of total debt AUM would be AAA rated or in cash, another 30% to 50% would be in AA+ or AA rating. While the overall debt quality, based on current ratings, looks good on paper, the ongoing nationwide lockdown has impacted cash flows of most corporates, and investors are expecting defaults especially from the mid and small-sized corporate segment.

What are the regulators doing?

The regulators are aware of the potential risk and are monitoring the situation closely. Market participants have already written to the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to take action against Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund including appointing a high-powered committee to take over the management of the fund house while examining its investment decisions. The Association of National Exchanges Members of India (ANMI), an umbrella body representing about 900 brokers, has written to the Ministry of Finance and SEBI that as much as 64.73% of the total AUM of Franklin India Low Duration Fund was in securities rated A or below, while in Franklin India Short Term Income Plan, such securities accounted for almost 59% of total assets. The brokers' association says Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund invested in long duration securities even though SEBI norms state that ultra short duration funds can only have bonds with a tenure between three and six months.

Can antibody tests help tackle COVID-19?

Why have States complained about the tests being inaccurate in many cases? And, should India use both RT-PCR and antibody tests?

JACOB KOSHY

The story so far: In the COVID-19 fight, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) had advised States to use antibody testing for surveillance and reiterated that the focus has always been on real time RT-PCR (or real-time reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction) tests for diagnosis. The rapid testing kits that State governments had been using to detect antibodies to the novel coronavirus were throwing up unreliable results. In Rajasthan for example, rapid testing kits failed to detect antibodies even when the laboratories had confirmed patients to be COVID-19 positive.

What is the difference between rapid antibody tests and the RT-PCR tests?

There are two ways to detect the presence of a virus, directly or indirectly. Antibody tests, also called serological tests, have usually been the time-tested approach to finding out the presence of a virus in the body. They do so by detecting the presence and quantity of antibodies that are produced by the immune system to battle an infection. It is an indirect test because it cannot find the virus, but it can determine if the immune system has encountered it.

Antibodies can show up between nine to 28 days after an infection has set in; by that time, an infected person, if not isolated, can spread the disease. Sometimes the antibodies may be produced in response to a closely-related pathogen and sometimes they may not be the right kind to counter the infection. These are the factors that can make an antibody test erroneous.

In an RT-PCR test, a nasal or throat swab is taken from a patient suspected of having the disease. The test involves extracting RNA or ribonucleic acid, the genetic material of the virus, and checking if it shares the same genetic sequence as the SARS-CoV-2 virus. If it is a match, the sample is deemed positive. The only way such tests turn negative is if the actual sample does not have the virus or the swab was not properly administered and too little of the virus was gleaned.

As the sequencing of genomes is now widespread and the technology well understood by experts in several countries, China, and subsequently others, were quickly able to determine the structure of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus and learn what differentiates it from related viruses. This is why it was possible to prepare accurate tests to detect the virus relatively quickly, almost in the middle of a pandemic, and the RT-PCR tests began to be followed as the 'gold standard' in detecting the virus. As not enough research hours have been spent studying the antibodies and the profile of recovered patients, the antibody tests we have for COVID-19 are imperfect.

Why is there a clamour for antibody kits?

Antibody tests are fast and relatively inexpensive. The current RT-PCR technology requires RNA extracting machines, a specialised laboratory, and trained technicians. And at least a minimum of 30 samples are needed to make the process economically viable. The tests are done in batches and it can take up to four hours to confidently test for the presence of a virus from a batch. If one adds the time taken to isolate the RNA from swabs, this could again take a couple of hours. The scale of logistics involved can mean that it can practically take a day for results from a sample to be known. If one adds the cost of chemicals needed to perform these tests and the vagaries of importing practically every element of the paraphernalia involved, in the midst of a pandemic when demand far exceeds supply, it results in the test being cheap. It can cost at least ₹4,500 depending on whether one is tested at a public or privately-run facility. Antibody



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

tests are portable, can be administered on-site, conducted en masse and give quick answers. However, these answers are useful in-so-far as those who are using them are asking the right questions.

What do antibody tests reveal?

Given that they are not useful for directly detecting the presence of the virus, antibody tests can be used to gauge the extent of infection in a community or a large group of people who may have had exposure to the virus. Much like pregnancy detection kits, rapid-test kits change colour when particular molecules are detected. Two kinds of antibodies result from an infection: Immunoglobulin M and Immunoglobulin G (IgM and IgG). In response to an infection, the IgM is first produced within a week of infection. Two weeks later, the levels of IgM reduce and are replaced by IgG. The latter is a longer-lasting antibody and, depending on the infectious agent involved, can offer different durations of immunity. Antibodies to the chickenpox virus last for decades.

Those to influenza viruses and even other coronaviruses (that cause the common cold) last no more than a year or two. This is why people need flu shots at regular intervals, and one of the reasons why it is practically pointless to have a vaccine for the common cold. It is too early in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic to determine how long

immunity lasts. Nevertheless the presence of IgM, IgG can in a sample of the population determine whether the virus is present in certain clusters. Ideally, this can help government authorities decide on what regions in a lockdown can be opened up if the aim is to get regular life back on track as soon as possible.

This is what happened when infections had reached frightening proportions in the United States and Europe. It was apparent that the limitations of the RT-PCR combined with the virus's ability to spread even through those who were not visibly sick would mean large numbers would be infected without being detected. Rapid antibody tests can also play a role in determining the degree of "herd immunity" in a population. That is, the true number who may have been infected; when a sizeable fraction of the population has been infected, the

virus ceases its pace of spread. Current research expects herd immunity to have been achieved when 55% to 80% of the population has been infected – only careful serological surveys can establish that. Studies in India too have shown that for every symptomatic positive, there are two asymptomatic or presymptomatic (those who do not visibly manifest the disease). Thus, antibody tests could also be used for such estimates in India. The ICMR had laid out the strategy to use antibody tests to gauge the degree of COVID-19 presence in the country. The plan involved using a combination of both RT-PCR and antibody tests to establish infection levels.

What happened to India's rapid testing plan?

Two Chinese companies, Wondfo and Livzon, got licences to sell 500,000 rapid antibody kits to the ICMR. Several of these were to be given to States and some were for the ICMR's own use. A first batch was deployed in some States and soon complaints began pouring in over inaccurate results. The ICMR then asked States to stop using these kits for two days. After two days, the ICMR advised States to stop using the kits altogether. The Health Ministry has cancelled the licences given to the companies that were importing these kits from China. So far, the ICMR has not clarified what was wrong with the kits. The Chinese companies have also claimed that the kits were validated by the ICMR's expert body, the National Institute of Virology (NIV). However, the NIV only clears batches of kits that are submitted for testing. It is possible that even if a company's kits get cleared, it ends up supplying kits on the field that are not up to the mark.

Another feature of the kits is their sensitivity (in percentage terms, the times the tests correctly identify people as positive for an infection) and specificity (in percentage terms, the times the test correctly rules out those not carrying the virus). Specificity refers to its ability to accurately distinguish between the target virus and other viruses. It is a well-established feature of tests that in regions of low actual prevalence of a disease, they can, depending on the kit's specificity and sensitivity, miscategorise vast numbers of those tested. It is not clear if these were factored in in tests using kits blamed as faulty by States. India is not the only place where complaints over Chinese kits have been raised. The United Kingdom and Spain have also raised such issues with these kits. In either event, there is no clarity if the ICMR has ordered more kits. The Health Minister, Dr. Harsh Vardhan, has said that by the end of May, the country will have kits that are made in India for antibody and RT-PCR tests.

When will a COVID-19 vaccine be ready?

With clinical trials beginning in Oxford, what is the protocol being followed? When are the results expected?

R. PRASAD

The story so far: On April 23, Oxford University initiated a phase-1 human clinical trial of its vaccine – ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 – against the novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2. A single dose of the candidate vaccine will be administered to 1,112 healthy volunteers to study the safety, ability to produce immune response and efficacy of the vaccine. Oxford University is optimistic of a positive outcome of the candidate vaccine and has planned to get millions of doses of the vaccine before the end of the year even as results of the final phase of the trial (phase-3) are awaited. The vaccine candidate was developed by the University's Jenner Institute which began trials in humans on April 23 jointly with the University's Oxford Vaccine Group.

How was the vaccine being tested constructed?

The vaccine, ChAdOx1 nCoV-19, uses the common cold virus (adenovirus) that causes infections in chimpanzees. The adenovirus has been genetically altered so that it does not grow once injected. The construct carries the genetic material of the novel coronavirus that makes the spike protein. The spike protein is found on the surface of the virus and plays a crucial role in binding to specific human receptors found on cell surfaces and entering the cells.

By introducing the genetic material of the spike protein, the candidate vaccine will help the body recognise it and make antibodies against the spike protein. The antibodies produced will help mount an immune response and prevent the virus from entering the human cells and causing an infection.

Oxford University has used vaccines made from the adenovirus construct to over 320 people and has found it to be safe and well tolerated. It does cause transient side effects such as a fever, headache or a sore arm but is otherwise safe.

Has it been tested on animals?

The adenovirus construct has been used by Oxford University researchers to test safety for both the 2002 Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). Once the safety of the MERS vaccine was proven in a trial carried out in the U.K., a trial began in December last year in Saudi Arabia, where MERS outbreaks occur frequently.

The safety of the candidate vaccine was earlier tested on six rhesus macaque monkeys.

A single dose protected all the six animals for nearly a month even when exposed to high levels of the virus,



SEAN ELIAS/REUTERS

boosting the confidence of the researchers.

What is the process of the clinical trial?

Up to 1,112 healthy volunteers from Oxford, Southampton, London and Bristol have been recruited for the phase-1 trial. Volunteers, both male and female between 18-55 years, are being recruited for the trial. A single dose of the candidate vaccine will be administered to volunteers. The participants will be randomly assigned to receive either the candidate vaccine (ChAdOx1 nCoV-19) or a 'control', the MenACWY vaccine, for comparison.

Oxford University is using the MenACWY vaccine – that protects against four strains of meningococcal bacteria – rather than a saline control. The participants will not know if he or she received a candidate vaccine or not. The university researchers will also be testing two doses of the candidate vaccine given four weeks apart on a small group of 10 volunteers to assess the dosage and immune response.

For the control group, why is a vaccine for meningococcal bacteria being used and not saline?

The MenACWY vaccine is a licensed vaccine given routinely to teenagers in the U.K. since 2015. The MenACWY vaccine is being used as an "active control" vaccine to help understand participants' response to ChAdOx1 nCoV-19. The reason for using this vaccine,

rather than a saline control, is because researchers expect to see some minor side effects from the ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 vaccine such as a sore arm, headache and fever. Saline does not cause any of these side effects. If participants were to receive only this vaccine or a saline control, and went on to develop side effects, they would be aware that they had received the new vaccine. It is critical for the study, says Oxford University, that participants remain blinded to whether or not they have received the vaccine, "as, if they knew, this could affect their health behaviour in the community following vaccination, and may lead to a bias in the results of the study".

While all participants will be told how to reduce infection risk, it is necessary that participants receiving both vaccines are exposed to the virus and some get infected. Only then will it become possible to understand if the vaccinated group remained protected or not compared with the control arm. For this purpose, keeping the participants in the dark about the vaccine received makes the trial robust.

What is the timeline for the trial?

The phase-1 trial is expected to be completed in end-May if transmission remains high in the community. The phase-2 trial may be completed by August-September. According to Suresh Jadhav, Executive Director of the Pune-based Serum Institute of India Pvt. Ltd., phase-2 and phase-3 trials may get combined if the phase-1 trial results are encouraging.

When will Pune's Serum Institute start manufacturing the vaccine?

According to Mr. Jadhav, the company will start manufacturing the vaccine the moment the phase-3 trial or the combined phase-2/phase-3 trial begins. If the last two stages of the trial are combined then it would start manufacturing the vaccine by end-June and be ready with millions of doses by the end of the year. The company is confident of manufacturing 60-70 million vaccine doses by the end of the year. He says, "Since we will begin manufacturing when the last phase of the trial is initiated, we will have millions of vaccine doses ready by the time the trial ends."

How much will it cost?

In a tweet on April 30, Oxford University said it is partnering with AstraZeneca to manufacture and distribute the vaccine as quickly as possible. It said the vaccine will be made available on a "not for profit basis for the duration of the coronavirus pandemic".

No country for migrant workers

Remittances to developing nations are set to fall as migrant workers are hit hard by the virus crisis

DHAKA



Mohammad Osman Goni, a migrant worker, shuttered his tiny green grocery shop in Malaysia and flew home to Bangladesh, a day before the Southeast Asian nation locked itself down on March 18 amid the coronavirus rampage.

Malaysia started the nationwide "movement control order," as it is officially known, hours after it reported its first fatality from the disease. It was a moment of reckoning for Mr. Goni. He feared that he would end up paying a hefty fine for keeping his shop open.

"I realised it's time to go home," Mr. Goni, 41, said in an interview from his home in the central district of Munshiganj. "My earnings col-

lapsed. I suffered a big loss." Mr. Goni's case offers insight into migrant workers' struggle in times of crisis as global remittances are projected to decline sharply by about 20% this year due to the economic crisis induced by COVID-19. It also shows the depth of economic chills consuming the entire migrant community and the countries that largely depend on remittances to keep up economic growth momentum.

Mr. Goni is one of about 19,000 migrant workers who returned to Bangladesh from Malaysia between February 18 and March 18. About 2,00,000 Bangladeshi workers returned home in the same period, mostly from West Asian nations, before the country shut its airspace. The projected fall in remittances, which would be the sharpest in recent history, is largely due to a decline in the wages and employment

of migrant workers, the World Bank said in a report on April 22.

Remittances to low- and middle-income countries may fall by 19.7% to \$445 billion, representing a loss of a crucial financing lifeline for many vulnerable households.

Remittances to Bangladesh and other South Asian nations are forecast to decline by 22% to \$109 billion in 2020, following the growth of 6.1% in 2019.

The slowdown is likely to directly affect remittance outflows from the U.S., the U.K., and EU countries to South Asia. Falling oil prices will affect remittance outflows from West Asian countries and Malaysia, which together supplied \$10.88 billion to Bangladesh last fiscal year. Signs of a deceleration are already on the horizon in the country. Inward remittances in March dropped 13% year-on-year to \$1.29 billion, lowest in 15 months, according to data from the central bank.

"As countries respond to the COVID-19 crisis, there is a strong case



for supporting the migrant workforce, which is vital to many economies. There are several interventions governments should consider," Dilip Ratha, a World Bank economist, wrote in a report. Mr. Ratha recommended supporting stranded mi-

grants and their access to health, housing, and other social services, and offering incentives to reduce the cost of remittance services.

In the medium to long-term, policies should encourage the interoperability of online remittance systems and support efforts to reduce remittance costs, which remain far too high for some of the poorest regions, according to Mr. Ratha.

Digital transfers

The coronavirus crisis may have one upside – more people may start sending money home digitally, which the World Bank says can be 50% cheaper than traditional transfers, where recipients have to go to a shop to pick up the money.

In Bangladesh, bKash saw a surge in remittance transfers through its channel. Expatriates sent around 150% more remittances on a daily average in April, compared to the first three months of this year through online and wallet-based money transfer companies from around the

world, bKash, Bangladesh's largest mobile money company, said in a statement.

Much about the pandemic is maddeningly unclear. Economies have nosedived, societies have paused. And the impacts of the disease on migrant workers in parts of the world are swift and severe. For Mr. Goni, the job loss is not the central torment, but uncertainty over a future job is. He pleaded with his friend, a university teacher in Dhaka, for help, but a job is hard to come by anytime soon.

Just after Mr. Goni arrived home on March 17, he had another battle to fight: his wife was pregnant and the delivery date loomed. He worried that the nationwide lockdown in Bangladesh would delay his wife's access to a hospital. "It's an uncertain time."

Days later, Mr. Goni's wife gave birth to their second child. He is now staying at home, nervously watching over the newborn, the only good news in the midst of gloom.



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Hunted by a virus, ignored by government

Blacks and browns, who make up 23% of those hospitalised with virus, account for 35% of deaths

SAO PAULO



After working for 12 straight hours, Everaldo Fonseca, 62, rushed to see his wife at a hospital in Gravataí in Rio Grande de Sul State. During the night, as he sat by his sick wife's bed, a nurse's phone went missing. Soon, a crowd formed around the lanky, black man. He was dragged out and beaten as his wife ran after him and collapsed. A few hours later, the nurse found the phone in her office and "apologised" to Mr. Fonseca for any "misunderstanding".

By that time, his wife was dead. "Not even a dog deserves to go through this... I thought things like this used to happen 50 or 100 years ago," said Mr. Fonseca. "They told us that black people are not citizens."

As the coronavirus roars through Brazil, with a high case fatality rate, its racial fault-line is rattling. Amid the deluge of news about the virus, which has infected 92,000 and killed 6,400 people so far, the cries of a poor, black man barely made headlines.

But these numbers hide an inconvenient truth: the virus is killing black people in large numbers; and they are being pushed to the brink by the government.

Like in the U.S., the deadly virus is making a distinction on the basis of race in Brazil too. According to the Ministry of Health data, the virus is more lethal among black and brown people, who form 52% of the population. While these groups form just 23% of those hospitalised with infections, they account for 35% of fatalities. With the whites, according to government figures, the situation is



opposite: 73% of hospitalised cases but 62% of deaths. "The blacks and brown generally have a worse social condition. This population is often malnourished, not monitored medically and more likely to have other co-morbidities," said Dr. Patricia Ta-

vara, a longevity expert in Sao Paulo.

While blacks (Afro-Brazilians) and browns (a mix of Africans and Europeans) form the majority of Brazilian population, they mostly live in the poorer areas on the margins of cities. As the virus was brought here by upper- and middle-class people who travelled abroad during the pandemic, most victims are still white. But the infection is trickling down fast, especially in Sao Paulo. According to a study by the Faculty of Medical Sciences, blacks living in Sao Paulo "have a 62% greater chance of dying from COVID-19 than whites".

Spread across States

Brazil reported its first COVID-19 case in Sao Paulo on February 25. For a few weeks, the virus circulated only in the rich areas. But in the past two months, with just 50% of the population practising social isolation, the virus has spread across States and cities and invaded the poor communities on the periphery.

A study released last week by the Sao Paulo Mayor revealed two dangerous trends: neighbourhoods with the highest number of deaths were all located on the periphery where tiny houses are packed closely along narrow lanes; and a lot of victims in these areas were over 40 and under 60 years of age. "We do not have masks. We can't practice social isolation as we need to go out and work," says Edson Moreno, 34, a computer technician who lives in a community on the east side. "People have been standing in long queues outside the banks for hours to get \$150 emergency aid promised by the government. You won't get the money, but you will get the virus."

Brazil had more than 11 million unemployed people before the COVID-19 crisis. Another six million have been added to the figure as its economy goes south. Millions are desperate for some help. After much dithering, the federal government decided last month to grant \$220 to poor families. Only half of this mo-

ney has reached the needy as President Jair Bolsonaro delayed signing the order and technical glitches blocked the transfer of money. "The President is forcing us to work by denying the aid. Bolsonaro keeps saying the government doesn't have money. They never have money for the black people," says Mr. Moreno.

As if to add insult to injury, Mr. Bolsonaro on Monday met a federal Congressman, who is the son of an evangelical missionary, and a top Treasury officer to discuss how to "give a break" to the church on its debts. The evangelicals make less than 30% of Brazil's population but form the core of Mr. Bolsonaro's political base. Groups linked to some of these churches have been accused of attacking Afro-Brazilian religious sites. In 2019, after Mr. Bolsonaro assumed the presidency, there was a spike in hate crimes as more than 100 such places of worship came under attack. As COVID-19 hunts them, Brazil's blacks get ignored by their government.

Businesses pitch in to help fight pandemic

From luxury hotels to distilleries, Sri Lanka's private sector has joined the fight against virus

COLOMBO



In the world's fourth-month battle against the COVID-19 pandemic, one reality remains unchanged. It has been an unequal fight with a tiny, but significantly stronger and resilient opponent.

On the frontline are health workers, with the military aiding them in Sri Lanka's case, toiling day and night in stifling full body suits, just so someone can breathe a little more and live. Given that no country was prepared for this, their best efforts are proving inadequate. Like everywhere else, Sri Lanka too is dealing with many gaps – some new and others owing to the many fractures in society that the pre-COVID-19 world was largely indifferent to.

Identifying a few immediate needs, Sri Lanka's business sector has been pitching in.

Luxury hotels are modifying their rooms for quarantine patients and large garment manufacturers – who are about to sack some of their labour force with export prospects collapsing – are busy making face masks with part of their workforce. Meanwhile, engineers and tech solutions companies are developing robots and ventilators. Sri Lanka's relatively small businesses are also thinking on their feet, even if it has meant diversifying into related, but not necessarily familiar terrain.

Healthy twist

Sri Lankan authorities ordered that liquor outlets remain shut for much of the past month. There is little scope for exports as well. But the nearly-century old Rockland Distil-

leries, best known for its arack, decided to give its core product a healthy twist to suit the times. The family-run business is now producing alcohol-based hand sanitisers that have an urgent demand. "So far, we have produced the equivalent of 10,000 x 700 ml bottles of Ceylon Arack," Amal de Silva Wijeyeratne, CEO and managing director of the company, told *The Hindu*. The sanitisers are being supplied to frontline health professionals and other essential workers free of charge. "We had many requests from various organisations and individuals to purchase the bottles at very high prices given the shortage of hand sanitiser, but not a single bottle was sold for commercial gain," he said.

The company's existing bottling plant was adapted to "ensure there was no cross contamination" with its usual arack production. A semi-automated filling unit was used to fill the bottles with the sanitiser alcohol that were later hand-carried to the capping and labelling line, avoiding the

regular, automated line. "Our factory has been closed since the lockdown which meant staffing the production line was an issue, however we had many kind volunteers and staff who lived nearby to the distillery come forward to help manage the project," Mr. Wijeyeratne said.

Rainco, Sri Lanka's best-known umbrella and rainwear brand, had also closed its factory after the government imposed a near-total lockdown in March. "The pandemic caught all of us unawares," the company's managing director Fazal Fausz told *The Hindu*. But the company got several calls from those who wanted "umbrella material" for protective gear that was washable.

"We heard the need was so urgent that in some cases nurses had begun sewing masks. We sought government permission, reopened our factory, and began distributing fabric and some suits to the health sector workers and Army personnel." Mr. Fausz said he hasn't kept accounts of what has been distributed free of



charge until now but estimates it would be worth about LKR 2 to 3 million. "It was the right thing to do at this time. It was also a way of keeping our staff motivated, they take pride in producing something that can be of use at such a crucial time." While

the company has been donating the supplies so far, more business enquiries are coming in that "down the line, it may turn into a business."

Further, as a big question mark looms over exports, Mr. Fausz said the next three to six months are likely to set the ground for new supply chains.

Doing what businesses do best to survive and stay relevant, with the hope that they can later thrive, some are already looking at potential opportunities in this crisis. For instance, while Rainco is preparing for the monsoon months, when demand for their core products will rise, the group company – which also has businesses in outdoor shades and blinds – is keenly watching the space for what might open up for such businesses.

"Post COVID-19, our entire landscape will change. We are going to need modified entrances to buildings, and perhaps disinfectant chambers outside. This is the time for product innovation," Mr. Fausz said.



Meera Srinivasan is The Hindu's Colombo correspondent

What went wrong with Japan's COVID-19 response

The country remains badly placed to deal with a potential escalation in infections

TOKYO



On a global scale, Japan's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic is passable. Even without a total lockdown, the country has avoided an explosion of cases and has a relatively low mortality rate. As of April 26, the number of deaths per million people in Japan stood at 2.85 compared to 164.5 in the U.S. and 490 in Spain.

The reasons for Japan's less virulent brush with the novel coronavirus remain up for debate. Explanatory contenders include a culture of wearing facemasks, elevated standards of hygiene, relatively warm weather, and even the propitiation of plague-fighting Shinto deities. But one factor glaringly missing on this list is political leadership.

The response of the Japanese authorities to COVID-19 has oscillated between hubris and confusion, highlighting a leadership that appears cosseted from the consequences of the policies they are in charge of formulating. A case in point is Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. For weeks, Mr. Abe downplayed the seriousness of the unfolding pandemic, limiting testing, holding off from declaring a state of emergency, and bungling the handling of the *Diamond Princess*, a cruise ship docked at Yokohama port where over 700 passengers and crew eventually tested positive for COVID-19.

Through much of March, Mr. Abe insisted that the Tokyo summer Olympic Games were on schedule, leaving many sanguine about the spread of the disease in Japan. When the cherry blossoms bloomed in late March, large flower-appreciation



gatherings took place despite some weak pleas for the public to avoid these. Even Akie Abe, the first lady, was photographed attending a blossom party in contravention of the government's own social distancing advice.

The consequence was a predictable spike in infections, which had the authorities scrambling to respond, as hospitals began to warn that they were in danger of being overwhelmed. Mr. Abe finally declared an emergency on April 7. As businesses were asked to close, schools and nurseries were shut and people self-isolated, an anxious citizenry awaited concrete details of the government's plan to tackle the crisis.

'Abenomasks' for every house

Their bated breath was rewarded with the announcement that two cloth facemasks would be posted to every household in the country. The "Abenomask", a pun on the Prime Minister's signature economic policy that is dubbed Abenomics, was widely pilloried as an ineffectual waste of taxpayer's money. Once the masks began to be delivered, there were further complaints of the products being stained, damaged or contaminated with human hair and dust. A large number had to be re-

called. Mr. Abe then addressed the nation via a video meant to persuade the nation about the small pleasures of staying at home. It featured the PM cuddling his dog in his spacious apartment, winding down with a large, presumably warm, beverage and watching TV.

The majority of Japanese live in cramped accommodations and are struggling to cope with balancing childcare with making a living in an uncertain economic environment. At a time when the Governor of Osaka was pleading for raincoat donations because doctors had resorted to wearing trash bags as protective gear, Mr. Abe's video struck some as a tad tone-deaf. "You look so elegant at a time when many people feel they are being strangled slowly (by the virus). Why don't you go and see hospitals that have been the battleground?" asked one tweet.

But in a nation governed largely by a cabal of dark suit-wearing older men, Mr. Abe has company in acting clueless. Last week, the Mayor of

Osaka, Ichiro Matsui, came in for flak after suggesting that women stay at home and send men to do the grocery shopping instead, since men were more directed and less likely to dawdle in shops. Speaking to reporters, he said women "take a long time as they browse around and hesitate about this and that," adding, "Men can snap up things they are told (to buy) and go, so I think it's good that they go shopping..."

Social media was once again less than appreciative. "When I hear remarks like this... I feel the need for people with diverse backgrounds to participate in politics," read a tweet.

Despite a long window for preparation having been affected by COVID-19 relatively early, Japan remains badly placed to deal with a potential escalation in infections. It has only half as many ICU beds per 1,00,000 people as Spain. Germany has six times more. More is needed from the leadership than sops in the form of masks or feel-good videos about cuddling pets.



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India has witnessed its highest-ever monthly outflow of \$1.69 billion under the Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS) in July 2019.

The outflow of funds by resident Indians under LRS over the last five years has almost negated the inflow of funds by Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) in the same period.

The sharp rise in the outflow of funds under LRS scheme over the last five years indicates the flight of capital from the country.
Liberalised Remittance Scheme

This is the scheme of the Reserve Bank of India, introduced in the year 2004.

Under the scheme, all resident individuals, including minors, are allowed to freely remit up to USD 2,50,000 per financial year (April – March) for any permissible current or capital account transaction or a combination of both.

Not Eligible: The Scheme is not available to corporations, partnership firms, Hindu Undivided Family (HUF), Trusts etc.

Though there are no restrictions on the frequency of remittances under LRS, once a remittance is made for an amount up to USD 2,50,000 during the financial year, a resident individual would not be eligible to make any further remittances under this scheme.

Remitted Money can be used for:

Expenses related to travelling (private or for business), medical treatment, study, gifts and donations, maintenance of close relatives and so on.

Investment in shares, debt instruments, and buy immovable properties in the overseas market.

Individuals can also open, maintain and hold foreign currency accounts with banks outside India for carrying out transactions permitted under the scheme.

Prohibited Transactions:

Any purpose specifically prohibited under Schedule-I (like the purchase of lottery tickets, proscribed magazines, etc.) or any item restricted under Schedule II of Foreign Exchange Management (Current Account Transactions) Rules, 2000.

Trading in foreign exchange abroad.

Capital account remittances, directly or indirectly, to countries identified by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) as “non-cooperative countries and territories”, from time to time.

Remittances directly or indirectly to those individuals and entities identified as posing a significant risk of committing acts of terrorism as advised separately by the Reserve Bank to the banks.

Requirements: It is mandatory for the resident individual to provide his/her Permanent Account Number (PAN) for all transactions under LRS made through Authorized Persons.

Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999

The legal framework for the administration of foreign exchange transactions in India is provided by the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999.

Under the FEMA, which came into force with effect from 1st June 2000, all transactions involving foreign exchange have been classified either as capital or current account transactions.

Current Account Transactions: All transactions undertaken by a resident that do not alter his / her assets or liabilities, including contingent liabilities, outside India are current account transactions.

Example: payment in connection with foreign trade, expenses in connection with foreign travel, education etc.

Capital Account Transactions: It includes those transactions which are undertaken by a resident of India such that his/her assets or liabilities outside India are altered (either increased or decreased).

Example: investment in foreign securities, acquisition of immovable property outside India etc.

Resident Indians: A 'person resident in India' is defined in Section 2(v) of FEMA, 1999 as :

Barring few exceptions, a person residing in India for more than 182 days during the course of the preceding financial year.

Any person or body corporate registered or incorporated in India.

An office, branch or agency in India owned or controlled by a person resident outside India.

An office, branch or agency outside India owned or controlled by a person resident in India.

LAUSANNE
The International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF), on Saturday, extended the suspension of its activities till the end of July due to the COVID-19 pandemic. **PTI**

ing a multicoloured golf ball and dribbling it with one stump, keeping the sphere in the air as long as possible to help hand-and-eye coordination, so essential for batsmen and 'keepers.

suggested posterior kinetic chain exercises to strengthen key muscles such as glutes, calf, lower back and hamstring. Even for bowlers, agility and footwork drills would be beneficial to

in some kind of rhythm and keep track of their bowling action that can be lost easily during lengthy breaks. Indeed, in times like these, the wall is a cricketer's best friend.

abroad," said the youngster, currently based in Coimbatore. "I had planned to play in the international challenge and series events and hoped to get my senior rankings on-

looks tough," he added.

Great experience

Satish also made his debut in the Premier Badminton League this year for Chennai Superstanz. Although he lost

we just had a centre with two or three courts, but now there are more centres opening with six or more courts. The qualified coaches, trainers and physios at these centres have helped."

are in dire need of funds. The ICA will continue to accept donations till May 15, following which it will shortlist five to six players from each zone (north, east, west, south and central). **PTI**

Documenting the last honey hunting group of Arunachal Pradesh

Award-winning film by Thongdok chronicles a skill likely to die with half-a-dozen men from the Buddhist Sherdukpen community

RAHUL KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI
Kezang D. Thongdok's 26-minute film *Chi Lupo* was adjudged the best documentary at the 10th Dada Saheb Phalke International Film Festival Awards 2020 announced a week ago.

But for the filmmaker from Arunachal Pradesh's West Kameng district, beneath the happiness is a deep sadness: The honey-hunting skill of the Sherdukpen community and the associated indigenous craftsmanship will fade away with the half-a-dozen subjects of his film.

Medicinal properties
Chi means honey and Lupo is hunter in the dialect of the Buddhist Sherdukpen community, whose total popula-



Fading into oblivion? Clusters of beehives hanging from protruding rocks on a steep hill near Thongri in Arunachal Pradesh; Producer-director Kezang D. Thongdok flanked by the honey-hunters. ***SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT**



tion is estimated to be 4,500. They are concentrated in 12 villages in the district.

"Our people used honey collected from the wild for its medicinal properties and for preparing delicacies in the not so distant past," Mr

Thongdok told *The Hindu* from his hometown Rupa. "Very few venture out now because of better connectivity and access to medicines and food stores and the young are not interested in learning the tough skill," he

added. The six honey-hunters the 37-year-old filmmaker had followed into deep jungles at about 6,000 ft above sea level are from Thongri and Jigaon villages that are about 25 minutes' drive from Rupa. While

Thongri has some 70 houses, Jigaon has 100.

Mr. Thongdok's four-member crew and the honey-hunters trekked for almost three hours from Thongri to a base camp where they stayed for the night.

They walked for another two hours to reach the spot where clusters of beehives hung from protruding rocks on a steep mountain.

Body of knowledge

"We shot the film over a few trips in June-July 2018. What struck me while filming was that smoking the bees out with certain leaves and twigs and collecting the beehives was not the only skill under threat. An entire body of knowledge of making ladders, spatula, tongs and baskets with forest produce would go with these six men, who were in the upper mid-50s then," he said.

The honey harvesting – Mr. Thongdok prefers the "phonetically correct" Sherdukpen over the official Sherdukpen – has traditionally

been done twice a year. The bees make honey from wild flowers in June-July and primarily from rhododendron in October-November.

The winter variety has an intoxicating effect if consumed in larger doses, he said.

During the course of filming, Mr. Thongdok noticed that the inside of the baskets used by the honey-hunters for collecting the beehives was lined with a kind of indigenous rubber. "It was neither factory-made rubber nor produced from the rubber tree. And I found out there aren't many around who know that art or the natural element from which it is made," he said.

Mr. Thongdok intends to document the art before it dies with the latex makers.

85 stars join concert to raise funds

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI

Over 85 celebrities from India and across the globe will unite to raise funds for the country's fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

A.R. Rahman, Aamir Khan, Priyanka Chopra, Katrina Kaif and Aishwarya Rai Bachchan are among the Indian celebrities who will join global icons Will Smith, Mick Jagger and Bryan Adams for a Facebook home-to-home fundraiser concert titled 'I For India'.

The four-hour concert will be live globally on Facebook on May 3 at 7.30 p.m. All proceeds generated will go to the India COVID Response Fund managed by GiveIndia.

Magazine

LIBOR is a benchmark interest rate at which major global lend to one another in the international interbank market for short-term loans. LIBOR, which stands for London Interbank Offered Rate, serves as a globally accepted key benchmark interest rate that indicates borrowing costs between banks.

The rate is calculated and published each day by the Intercontinental Exchange (ICE).

LIBOR is the average interest rate at which major global banks borrow from one another. It is based on five currencies including the US dollar, the euro, the British pound, the Japanese yen, and the Swiss franc, and serves seven different maturities—overnight/spot next, one week, and one, two, three, six, and 12 months. The combination of five currencies and seven maturities leads to a total of 35 different LIBOR rates calculated and reported each business day. The most commonly quoted rate is the three-month U.S. dollar rate, usually referred to as the current LIBOR rate.

Why the transition from Libor?

The rate isn't sustainable because of a lack of transactions providing data. Libor became a byword for corruption after traders were caught manipulating the benchmark, leading to about \$9 billion in fines and the conviction of several bankers.

The London Interbank Offered Rate (Libor) transition opens up a sizeable business opportunity for large consulting firms such as PwC, KPMG, EY and Deloitte and also for global IT firms, including leading players in India. Regulators globally have asked firms to move away from Libor to other alternate, risk-free rates (RFRs). Derivatives, bonds, mortgages, loans, mutual funds, securities, underwriting, deposits, advances, pension funds and contracts, worth \$370 trillion, are currently linked to the scam-hit Libor.

Opportunities around the migration include

Assessment of current exposure to Libor.

Design, development and implementation of new products based on new rates.

Creation of new valuation models.

Creation of fresh legal documents and policy frameworks.

Majority of large banks and trading houses, including Bank of America, Bank of England, Merrill Lynch, JP Morgan Chase, Morgan Stanley and Japanese banks have started working on Libor transition.

However, Indian banks are yet to start any work towards migration as the regulator is yet to make any announcement in this regard.

Intercontinental Exchange

Intercontinental Exchange (ICE) is an American company that owns exchanges for financial and commodity markets, and operates 12 regulated exchanges and marketplaces. This includes ICE futures exchanges in the United States, Canada and Europe, the Liffe futures exchanges in Europe, the New York Stock Exchange equity options exchanges and OTC energy, credit and equity markets.

ICE also owns and operates 6 central clearing houses: ICE Clear U.S., ICE Clear Europe, ICE Clear Singapore, ICE Clear Credit, ICE Clear Netherlands and ICE NGX.

Championships after the Boxing Federation of India (BFI) failed to pay the host fee, prompting the International Boxing Association (AIBA) to void the agreement signed in 2017, and award the event to Serbia. BFI then hit out at AIBA, saying the decision was "taken in haste" and the delay in payment was due to "procedural complications".



Homecoming

The government announced a major operation, involving the Navy, the Air Force and Air India, to bring home Indians stuck in West Asian countries. State governments and central police are also reported to be involved in planning the rescue and the subsequent quarantine process, while Indian embassies abroad have been compiling lists of the stranded people.

Fiscal indiscipline

The Centre reacted angrily to an unsolicited report by 50 officers of the Indian Revenue Service with suggestions for coping with the pandemic, such as hiking taxes on the super-rich to 40%. Released through the IRS Association's website and social media, the government termed it an 'act of indiscipline', and filed charges against three senior officers.

been diagnosed with COVID-19 in the U.S., making it the country with the world's most reported novel coronavirus infections. Meanwhile, New Zealand announced that community transmission had stopped. "We are opening up the economy, but we're not opening up people's social lives," said Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern.

the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science announced that films that debuted on streaming platforms will qualify for Oscars nominations this year. Traditionally, films needed to have had at least a week-long run in a Los Angeles theatre to be eligible. This, however, will be a 'temporary exception' to eligibility rules, and will end when theatres reopen.

reported that some government employees would receive their salaries in it from this month onwards. The e-RMB is also being used for transport subsidies in Suzhou, and for food and retail in Xiong'an. Pegged to the renminbi, this is the first digital currency to be adopted by any major economy worldwide.

What is Inflation?

Inflation refers to the rise in the prices of most goods and services of daily or common use, such as food, clothing, housing, recreation, transport, consumer staples, etc.

Inflation measures the average price change in a basket of commodities and services over time.

The opposite and rare fall in the price index of this basket of items is called 'deflation'.

Inflation is indicative of the decrease in the purchasing power of a unit of a country's currency. This could ultimately lead to a deceleration in economic growth.

However, a moderate level of inflation is required in the economy to ensure that production is promoted.

Who measures Inflation in India?

Inflation is measured by a central government authority, which is in charge of adopting measures to ensure the smooth running of the economy. In India, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation measures inflation.

In India, inflation is primarily measured by two main indices — WPI (Wholesale Price Index) and CPI (Consumer Price Index) which measure wholesale and retail-level price changes, respectively. The CPI calculates the difference in the price of commodities and services such as food, medical care, education, electronics etc, which Indian consumers buy for use.

What are the main causes of Inflation?

Some key reasons for Inflation:

High demand and low production or supply of multiple commodities create a demand-supply gap, which leads to a hike in prices.

Excess circulation of money leads to inflation as money loses its purchasing power.

With people having more money, they also tend to spend more, which causes increased demand.

Spurt in production prices of certain commodities also causes inflation as the price of the final product increases. This is called cost-push inflation.

Increase in the prices of goods and services is also a factor to consider as the involved labour also expects and demands more costs/wages to maintain their cost of living. This spirals to further increase in the prices of goods.

What is Stagflation?

The term was coined by Iain Macleod, a Conservative Party MP in the United Kingdom, in November 1965.

Stagflation is said to happen when an economy faces stagnant growth as well as persistently high inflation.

With stalled economic growth, unemployment tends to rise and existing incomes do not rise fast enough and yet, people have to contend with rising inflation.

So people find themselves pressurised from both sides as their purchasing power is reduced.

Case of Stagflation

In the early and mid-1970s when OPEC (The Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries), which works like a cartel, decided to cut supply and sent oil prices soaring across the world.

On the one hand, the rise in oil prices constrained the productive capacity of most western economies that heavily depended on oil, thus hampering economic growth. On the other hand, the oil price spike also led to inflation and commodities became more costly.

For instance, in 1974, the oil prices went up by almost 70% and it leads to a consequent rise in inflation.

Amid the lockdown, many schools in India have started online classes. But only those who have a smartphone or a computer with a strong Internet connection can access these classes.

Technology has improved life. Some schools are now equipped with smart classrooms. Privileged students are going online for advanced courses for better prospects. But the situation is not equal for all. How could a class be limited to a small number of privileged students, given that a large number of students in the country have no access to a smartphone or the internet?

A student in Class 12 regretted that his friend would not be able to join the live classes for he has no smartphone. The extended lockdown does not allow his friend to go out of his home to find a way to get online.

It is heartbreaking that a student is deprived of education just because he or she does not have a smartphone or a computer to attend online classes. It is the school that teaches students that they have the right to be treated equally without discrimination and today the same school is running discriminatory classes.

Each of the schools running online classes may have dedicated teachers. They want to provide an uninterrupted learning experience to the students. But the objective here is defeated as it fails to include all students. How helpless would some poor students coming from financially disadvantaged families feel knowing that they are missing out on classes? If it is a government's directive, every student should have an equal opportunity to attend classes. I fear that it will hurt the poor students.

The value of a year in a student's life is immense. We had to come up with a "feasible" plan to resume classes as soon as possible but not in the way we do it now. If the system is not accessible by all, the extraordinary method, though temporary, will dismantle harmony among students and discourage the poor students.

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On the suggestion, burdened with two small children and two dogs, not to talk of a hyperactive husband, I could do very well without this additional responsibility.

It also had something to do with an unsavoury childhood memory. Years ago, my father, an animal-lover, had bought a cow to meet the rising demand of milk in our house – not for his children, who invented new excuses to avoid milk, but for his many pet dogs. He brought her home despite my mother's stiff opposition. But thanks largely to

our house remained in turmoil for many months until father, in a fit of desperation, sold it off at a loss.

However, on second thought, I decided to buy one for us. Erecting a cowshed wasn't a problem, but finding a suitable occupant was. The factors that came into consideration in the cow selection process were too many – complexion (white, black, brown), looks, breed, and offspring's sex (a she-calf is a better investment). Then, one had to check out the behaviour. The yield was of course the benchmark. Fi-

ed what looked like a perfect choice. It was an elegant beauty of the locally prized Gir breed.

Grand welcome

Thus, one Sunday morning, Gauri – that was her maiden name and we agreed to retain it – took proud steps to an elaborate reception complete with a marigold garland, *tilak*, *aarti* and a large chunk of jaggery as a welcome snack. She received my customary bow with unconcealed arrogance. The grand welcome, it seems, had already begun to work on her head.

As I think, but on other days, milk had to be bought from outside.

Yet, I went along with the experiment for a month hoping the situation to stabilise. However, at the end of it, when I took stock of her maintenance cost, I found it to be higher than the milk bill.

There was no point in keeping a white elephant. Her previous owner agreed to take her back at the original price. I bid her adieu and heaved a sigh of relief.

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get. We also need a flexible administration that can encourage such ideas and implement them.

HARSHIL MEHTA

Adaptability is one of the tests for survival and given its huge network, the Railways can do even more.

AVYASSERI RAVEENDRANATH

Even though the title says 'reinventing', the real crisis will come after the lockdown is

is that the column is a little too lengthy, and can be shortened a bit to make it more comfortable to read. Second, there is no logic in publishing the answers upside down, forcing us to turn the paper around ten times every Sunday. As there is no prize money or competition involved, please publish the answers right side up. Neither you nor us lose anything.

A.R. RAMANARAYANAN

Happy in the middle rung

Who said the middle class doesn't make a good story?

Jairam N. Menon

Let's face it. The middle class is neither here nor there, the people in between, millions like you and me. The inconvenient truth is we don't make a good story.

Or don't we? Perhaps a bit of misplaced modesty has stood in the way of us getting our due. We make perfect "people next door" – give or take the occasional squabble over parking or the racket that the children make in the common lobby. Neighbours in tony Malabar Hill in Mumbai and its counterparts around the country don't meet each other for months and are strangers for all practical purposes. But come down to the less



snooty suburbs and things get far more chummy.

In Andheri, my neighbours know me, my daily routine, state of health and state of wealth. If you get chatting, they will even tell you how things stand between me and my in-laws. All this means that the spectre of loneliness, which looms before the world's big cities, can't spook us. You are never alone in Andheri,

especially Chakala.

The masterminds of big money crimes are millionaires attempting to become billionaires. There is only one role that the middle class play in such financial tuggery – victims. We are scrupulous in paying our taxes. Saying that such morality is by default since most of our dues are deducted at source is meaningless. The fact is apart from those occasions when we claim leave travel allowance while not stirring out of home or getting reimbursed for taxi fare when we have actually taken an autorickshaw, our balance sheet is clean. No ill-gotten gains for us – continue deriving happiness from things money can't buy.

You can pity the poor. And you can call the rich names – crass ("there's no culture in the kiddy party crowd"), heartless ("they torture their maids") and unpatriotic ("they go on vacation when they ought to be voting"). But nobody has an unkind word for us.

As we speak, the rich are rapidly getting richer and the poor poorer. French economist Thomas Piketty says that as long as the returns on capital are higher than the rate of economic growth, the gap between the classes will only widen. This means that the middle will have an even bigger role in the increasingly fierce social tug of war.

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More on the Web
thehindu.com/opinion/open-page



Virus and school education

With the lockdown, the mobile phone, tablet and computer have become essential for teaching

G. GAUTAMA

A time for reflection

The human race needs a narrative that talks about our ability to change the course of our future

JAYADEEP KRISHNAN

For her, it was always a lockdown

Many homemakers have been confined to the home for long, running chores and rearing children

PORAS SHARMA

This page consists of reader submissions. Contributions of up to a length of 700 words may be e-mailed to openpage@thehindu.co.in. Please provide a postal address and a brief background of the writer. The Hindu views plagiarism as a serious offence. Given the large volume of submissions, we regret that we are unable to acknowledge receipt or entertain queries about submissions. If a piece is not published for eight weeks please consider that it is not being used. The publication of a piece on this page is not to be considered an endorsement by The Hindu of the views contained therein.

Amid rising concerns over economic crisis that has been triggered by the COVID-19 lockdown; Helicopter Money is one concept that is being considered by authorities' world over.

In fact, Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao has suggested RBI to adopt the concept of Helicopter Money to help state governments tide over the current crisis and kickstart economic activity in India.

What is helicopter money?

This is an unconventional monetary policy tool aimed at bringing a flagging economy back on track. It involves printing large sums of money and distributing it to the public. American economist Milton Friedman coined this term.

Why it is called so?

It basically denotes a helicopter dropping money from the sky. Friedman used the term to signify "unexpectedly dumping money onto a struggling economy with the intention to shock it out of a deep slump." Under such a policy, a central bank "directly increase the money supply and, via the government, distribute the new cash to the population with the aim of boosting demand and inflation."

Why is helicopter money in news now?

With the coronavirus-hit economy falling deeper and deeper into a chasm with each passing day, Telangana chief minister KC Rao has said helicopter money can help states comes out of this morass. He asked for the release of 5% funds from GDP by way of quantitative easing (QE).

Is helicopter money the same as quantitative easing?

Quantitative easing also involves the use of printed money by central banks to buy government bonds. But not everyone views the money used in QE as helicopter money. It sure means printing money to monetise government deficits, but the govt has to pay back for the assets that the central bank buys. It's not the same as bond-buying by central banks "in which bank-owned assets are swapped for new central bank reserves."

How will Helicopter Money help Indian Economy?

Simply put, Helicopter Money means extension of non-repayable money transfer from the central bank to the state and central governments, to infuse liquidity in the system.

The policy aims at putting more money into the pockets of people to nudge them to spend more money and in turn pick-up economic activity in the country.

The direct impact of Helicopter Money is rise in disposable incomes of the people, increase in money supply with an intention to boost demand and inflation in the economy.

Sunalini Mathew

Delhi-NCR's first novel coronavirus patient, 45-year-old Rohit Datta, jokes that the only yoga he did in the pre-pandemic days was kapal bhati, a breathing technique, because someone told him that each expulsion of breath burnt one calorie. "So if I did 300, I'd be burning 300 calories and save time walking," he says laughing. But when he found himself in hospital with the dreaded COVID-19, taunted by the media for having 'infected' others, he grappled with both the physical effects of the infection and the mental anguish of cruel words. "People started sending me all kinds of WhatsApp messages about cures," he says; they ranged from eating an onion with salt to performing a *havan*. The only message that got him thinking was one from his mother, who suggested he do anulom-vilom pranayama.

In the isolation unit, Datta made a mental list of five breathing exercises he needed to do: om, anulom-vilom, kapal bhati, bhastrika, and kumbhaka. "The first time I tried, I couldn't do any for even two seconds. I felt like an old man who had smoked through his life," he says. But he persisted, doing them twice a day for seven days, gradually increasing the duration. "I didn't have the strength for physical exercise," says Datta, who runs a technical textile business in Rajasthan. He had just returned from a work trip to Europe when he was diagnosed positive. Today, a pranayama loyalist, Datta says he will be one for the rest of his life. "It is both preventive and curative," he says.

In Karnataka, Ashwini Shrinivas G.S. made a YouTube video on her COVID-19 journey, speaking about how yoga and pranayama helped her come through. A Pune couple, who have also recovered from the infection, said it was yoga that kept them engaged in the ward.

Something new

The yoga frenzy that engulfed the world a few years ago has suddenly seen a shift: in these times of COVID-19, it is no longer saffron-tinged and shloka-accompanied; nor is it about 'celebrating' the body with white people on Instagram performing the perfect *vrshchikrasana* (scorpion pose) on a beach. Today, it is seen as a form of mind-body control in a world



where an invisible force bars us from stepping out of our homes.

"The pandemic has given us a different perspective on things we considered important; we're now asking ourselves, 'Are they really so important?' We are looking for answers," says Anju Dhawan, a professor at the psychiatry department of Delhi's All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS). Some three weeks ago, she started a yoga-pranayam-meditation session over Zoom, which she conducts twice a day for students. She says the reason the class sees this level of engagement – there are 150 in the group – is probably because "some people are interested in



self and its oneness with the universe, adapted to the urban needs of yoga for weight-loss, back problems or as a balm for stress. He now focuses on helping people make yoga part of their daily lives. He sees his classes as a comfort zone for people, where they feel like they are in touch with regular life. "A lot of people are bingeing on Netflix and food, so just waking up and attending a morning session puts the day in some order," he says.

But is the new focus on yoga, with its online avatar, going to turn into something entirely commercial? "Purchasing health virtually is going to become the norm," says Vijay Raaghavan, Director, Management Consulting, PwC India, who works on digital health and wellness. "We used to seek management of illness. Going forward, people will become cautious about how to manage health," he says off-

In March, the Harvard Medical School's health blog published an article titled 'Coping with coronavirus anxiety'. The writer, John Sharp, suggested yoga, meditation, breathing as three distinct ways of relaxing



stress reduction, and others have opened up to exploring the spiritual realm. Also, maybe this is a time they want to learn something new, have a new experience."

It's also a reflection of how the world came to yoga in the first place. It was a way to find a few minutes' pause in our over-stimulating environments – long commutes, buzzing work schedules, non-stop entertainment. For Lakshmy Vijayan, a second-year student at AIIMS,

Sister Act Sister Infant Tresa who runs Nirmala Yoga Centre in Muvattupuzha, Kerala, has been practising yoga for almost 35 years. Last year, the Kerala Catholic Bishops Council approved of this wellness tool as the practice had secular origins.

• SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

yoga has helped regulate her sleep-wake cycle. "It also anchors you to the present," she says.

Finding answers

In the second week of March, when the World Health Organization (WHO) announced that the number of COVID-19 cases outside China had increased 13-fold and the number of countries affected had tripled, the Harvard Medical School's health blog published an article titled "Coping with coronavirus anxiety". The writer, John Sharp, suggested yoga, meditation, and breathing as three distinct ways of relaxing. He even offered names of apps such as Yoga Studio and Pocket Yoga, Headspace and Calm, ironically all owned and developed in the West.

The West has studied yoga and found that it boosts flexibility and strength, and in some cases aerobic power too. Its attention to syncing breath with movement and its focus on different breathing exercises helps both physically and mentally,

ers will now be linked to points that 'buy' you more than just products. For instance, if you sign up for a yoga class, it may be linked with a health insurance policy, but may also be linked with an intangible benefit like gaining access to an international flight that has stricter health norms, for instance. It is the sense of having access to 'privileges' that yoga may boom on.

Much like the LinkedIn Social Selling Index which measures the user's profile and engagement across five parameters, Dr. Raaghavan thinks that if a company can draw up an index that fixes parameters for yoga engagement (such as yoga clothes, footwear, food, level of skill), it may be able to take yoga to the next level of commerce. "Instant gratification, say completing an hour-long session, gets you cumulative worth – your breathing gets better – which also leads you to a certain entitlement, say, being able to join a club run by a yoga clothing brand. This is the future of yoga."

ESSAY

The global text of hunger

How does literature contribute to a debate on such basic social issues as hunger? It does so by being able to look at the human being not just as a body but also as a mind

Rukmini Bhaya Nair

Knut Hamsun received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1920, exactly a century ago. His best-known work remains the starkly titled novel *Hunger*, an alarmingly accurate study of the physical and mental distress caused by extreme poverty in a Norwegian town sardonically named Christiania, towards the end of the 19th century. As Hamsun saw it, hunger broke the back of rational thought; it destroyed the body in a way the soul could not tolerate, leading to 'immoral' actions such as theft, corruption and the destruction of property. And on April 21, the Director of the UN Food Programme warned of a "hunger pandemic" also looming in 2020, which could kill as many as 300,000 every day for the next three months, in addition to the Covid-19 toll, unless quick action is taken.

Hunger teaches us that great literature, like the most potent viruses, does not recognise national boundaries. The harrowing scenes in India today of workers and migrant labourers wanting to return to their villages, after being reduced to living in the unbearable conditions imposed on them by the lockdown, remind us that the text of hunger is – and always has been – global. Which is why Indians have as much to learn from Hamsun's dark and complex portrayal of hunger as Norwegians from, say, Premchand's descriptions of destitution in 'Kafan' or 'Godaan'.

If the world today seeks to collectively effect a paradigm shift from the competitive model of "the survival of the fittest" to the compassionate one of "the survival of the weakest", the deep probes of the human sciences could prove invaluable. A post-pandemic situation, like a post-truth one, will depend on sophisticated skills that can separate fake data from real and derive qualitative empathy from quantitative graphs.

Literary scars

Here is a single extended passage from Hamsun's book:



The pains of hunger were unbearable and never let me alone. I swallowed spit over and over to take the edge off, and I felt it did some good. I had had very little to eat generally for several weeks, even before this current trouble, and my strength now was falling off noticeably... How could it be that nothing ever turned up for me! Didn't I have the same right to life as anybody else, Pascha, the rarebook seller, for example, or Hennechen, the steamship clerk? And didn't I have shoulders like a giant and two strong arms for work, and hadn't I in fact tried to get a job chopping wood on Møller Street to earn my bread? Was I lazy? Hadn't I applied for jobs...? And hadn't I lived like a miser, eaten bread and milk when I was rich, bread when I wasn't, and gone hungry when I had nothing?... I lived in a shack, a loft, in a tinsmith's shop deserted by both God and man since last winter because snow came in.

Substitute the word 'snow' and you will recognise how well this description fits 21st century India. For all the well-intentioned talk of "we are in this together", a novel like *Hunger* forces us to remember that although every society struggles with inequality, it is invariably those whose rights, even in the best of times, come last, who are the first to suffer when disaster hits. They may have done nothing in the least criminal, but they are the ones most likely to be 'criminalised'. Disasters throw into sharp relief the fissures that already exist within cultures: between

those at the edge of poverty lines and those at the pinnacles of the social order.

Norway is one of the richest countries in the world, and ranks first on several development indices. In contrast, India stands, for instance, at an unconscionable 102 among 117 countries on the 2019 Global Hunger Index. This is not, however, an attempt at self-flagellation; it is simply to observe that, at first glance, there seem few points of comparison between these two vastly different nations. For starters, India's size and diversity imply that its trust with democracy and development has to be incommensurable with Norway's, with its population of about 5.5 million.

Yet, the fact is hunger and farm-land poverty were grim realities in Norway not so long ago, leaving an indelible mark on the psyche of the nation. *Hunger* is a literary manifestation of that scar.

The fiction of the body

At a time when the COVID-19 pandemic appears to have presented India with disturbing choices between 'lives and livelihoods', between possible deaths from hunger versus probable deaths from an infectious disease, I suggest that we can maybe learn more than what meets the eye from the unlikely juxtaposition of the Indian and Norwegian scenarios. Posing human vulnerability in terms of a face-off between 'nature' (the pandemic) and 'nurture' (the

economics of making goods and services available to all) immediately comes under a scanner when we do this.

This is because vulnerabilities vary. Norway was once a conservative and relatively stressed country; it is now very wealthy, partly because of its large oil reserves, but, equally, because it has a highly progressive democracy and an educated electorate. Even though the crash in oil prices now may affect Norway, we can safely bet that its long-standing social investments will stand it in good stead.

Ironically, Norway still imports basic items such as cereals, whereas India possesses huge buffer stocks of grains that, for some unfathomable reason, it has as yet to freely distribute among its hungry – and increasingly angry – people.

But how can fictional texts possibly contribute to a debate on such basic social issues? I believe they do so by revealing a fundamental flaw in most top-down policy recommendations about the amelioration of distress. In our straitjacketed bureaucratic imaginations, the poor are conceptualised as mere bodies – that must be fed, clothed and kept healthy, but their *individuality* is regarded as less than important in a developing society.

This is a cardinal error. All humans, young children included, are perpetual thinking machines, fuelled by endless desires and opinions. It is exactly these complicated

mental resources that give the 'common man' the uncommon resilience to resist the advice of the 'authorities' and embark on long marches home.

The production of mind

Disciplines like literature, philosophy and psychology are critical because they typically view civilisation and its discontents in terms of insubordinate minds rather than passive bodies – they show that minds are idea factories that produce horror or healing, fake news or true insight.

Consider a chilling illustration: both Knut Hamsun and the infamous Anders Breivik, who killed 77 people in Norway in 2011, had explicit Nazi and fascist sympathies. Both were subjected to cruelty as children, leading to psychological problems in adulthood. Despite being born 120 years apart, both were obsessed with Christendom, subscribed to cultural nationalism, and celebrated 'son of the soil' ideologies. It is the differences, though, that are crucial.

Every page of *Hunger* is nevertheless a compellingly honest, excruciatingly self-aware text that transcends its author's faux beliefs. In contrast, Breivik's e-compilation '2083: A European Declaration of Independence' is a shallow and silly 'manifesto' where one is hard put to find a single original observation. Breivik believed Muslims were encouraged to immigrate to Norway because of the government's liberal

Fissured A homeless child receives food from volunteers in Rio de Janeiro

• GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

policies. Hence, supporters of that view deserved to die. In Hamsun's fiction, one can literally hear the birdsong amid the silences; genuine empathy pervades it. But in Breivik's global social media echo chamber, all you hear is endless chatter; empathy is crowded out. This could be why Breivik was oblivious to a stunning social detail that I feel sure Hamsun would not have missed.

Indian newspapers in 2011 reported that Breivik "was wearing a uniform with an embroidered insignia. The insignia, ordered online by Breivik for his militant outfit Justiciar Knight, was embroidered by Mohammad Aslam Ansari." So absorbed was Breivik with his own narcissistic image that he did not notice that one of its backend producers happened to be a Muslim weaver from the holy Hindu city of Varanasi!

Square one, two square meals

In its report, *The Hindu* noted a further irony. In an interview published on July 26, 2011, Ansari said he had no idea who had ordered the badges and was horrified when he found out. Ansari had not made much money out of his transaction: "I am back to square one, doing jobs on my family loom for others. Generally, we are paid Rs. 150 per metre, of which half goes to the weaver who is working on the loom. It is too meagre to meet even our daily needs."

If the pandemic has brought one truth home to us, it is that we cannot afford to go "back to square one". Independent India managed to wipe out the famines of the colonial period and eradicate diseases like smallpox. Now, India has to find the same willpower to eliminate hunger and strengthen its rickety healthcare system.

Simultaneously, it must address a far more cognitively challenging task: it must train its youthful, mobile-savvy citizenry to distinguish between the real voices of Ansari and Hamsun and the false ventriloquism of a Breivik. This can only happen if our imaginations are released from the prolonged lockdowns to which our educational systems have metaphorically been subjected over the years.

In *Hunger*, the narrator invents a whole new word to describe the phenomenology of his hunger experiences: *Kuboa*. This word, as it first enters the character's consciousness, can signify anything: *padlock* or *sunrise* or even *god*. The nameless narrator says: "My thoughts took amazing leaps as I tried to establish the meaning of my new word". It is these "amazing leaps" of thought for which our shaken world is, I believe, now ready – even hungry.

The writer is critical theorist, writer, poet, and Professor Emerita of Linguistics and English at IIT Delhi.

For all the well-intentioned talk of "we are in this together", a novel like *Hunger* forces us to remember that although every society struggles with inequality, it is invariably those whose rights, even in the best of times, come last, who are the first to suffer when disaster hits

COMING-OF-AGE NOVEL

Fragile as papadums

A book that will make you smell the salty sea of Kerala while sitting at home

Radhika Santhanam

In *The Cliffhangers*, Sabin Iqbal follows the adventures of four friends who are Muslim by birth but wary of the trappings of religion. Moosa, Thaha, Jahangir and Usman live in a new India where, far away from their sea-facing village, eating beef invites death as punishment. They also live in a new Kerala where religious fault lines are beginning to show; where there is a "delicate peace" which

"could crumble like papadums" at any moment.

The *Cliffhangers*, as the boys call themselves, are caught between two extremist groups – the Hindu Rashtra Sangh, which believes that their names spell trouble, and the Jama'at, which considers their free lifestyle beyond the pale. For the *Cliffhangers* who wear only "trainers, sweatpants or track suits, and polos, brought by relatives from the Gulf" and no "symbols of any faith or religion", the middle path is fraught with danger.

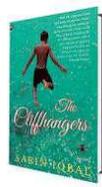
The Cliffhangers is also a story of aspiration. The four boys, all of them tour guides, belong to poor families who depend on remittances sent home from West Asia. Like millions, they believe that English is an emancipatory language. They are keen to befriend tourists, for it always gives them yet another chance to better their English and to upward social mobility, but establishing friendships with strangers proves easier than getting a

grasp over grammar and vocabulary.

This is equally a story about adolescent friendship, romance, and separation. Iqbal masterfully explores a wide gamut of relationships in episodic bursts: puppy love, teenage lust, incestuous relationships, and marriages drained of love. Some of these episodes, in fact, have the potential to be turned into entire books.

The Cliffhangers is an ambitious novel about many things, and while this is not necessarily a bad thing, the many themes tend to overwhelm. There is a subplot about the rape of a foreigner; stray incidents of local tuggery; a minor character drowns in the sea. And yet, the book is surprisingly engaging. Iqbal's simple but descriptive writing immerses us in the cultural richness of Kerala.

You may not get one great story here, but sitting at home in isolation, you will smell the salty sea, reminisce about teenage friendships, and sense the fog of hatred closing in.



The Cliffhangers
Sabin Iqbal
Aleph Book Company
₹499

SPECULATIVE FICTION

The future is now

The futuristic world of the stories seems frighteningly real

Praveena Shivram

A sense of foreboding overhangs Lavanya Lakshminarayan's debut book. The interconnected stories march steadily towards you like an advancing army – with every word you read, the comfortable distance created by speculative fiction is slowly eroded and you feel exposed to possibilities that look all too real.

The book is in a Bengaluru of the future when it is called 'Apex City' – a world where the Bell Corporation has established 'meritocratic technocracy' to define the boundaries of life, literally and figuratively. You have the 'Analog' of Apex City living outside the Carnatic Meridian, bearing the full brunt of a world that has succumbed to climate change, with barely any fresh food and water, and deprived of technology, while the 'Virtuals' live on the other side. There

you have ClimaTech for simulated weather, OmniPorts and HoloTech for communication and interaction, bots as teachers, humble video games that assume larger-than-life proportions and the 'vegetable farm' where you can be 'harvested' should you slip down the ladder of merit – Lakshminarayan's world-building is impeccable. Within this, characters come and go, some etched deeply, some lightly, but each one adding another layer of meaning.

The two stories that especially worked for me are 'Etudes', which sensitively portrays an adopted Analog's journey in becoming a pianist without technology, and 'The Be-Moji Project', which envisions a future

where words will become immaterial and holographic 'emojis' will take their place. Her stories, effortlessly cross-cutting between the poignant and the absurd, pulsate with solid life.

Despite the initial discomfort of not having a central character to invest in emotionally, the book works because of the assuredness with which it subverts ideas of class, power, dissent by showing what the world looks like when boundaries are closed.

We already know one version. Here is another one.

The reviewer edits an art magazine.



Analog/Virtual: And Other Simulations of Your Future
Lavanya Lakshminarayan
Hachette India
₹399

BROWSER

A Ballad of Remittent Fever
Ashoke Mukhopadhyay,
trs Arunava Sinha
Aleph

₹348.60 (Kindle price)
In the early years of the 20th century, Calcutta is grappling with deadly epidemics. Dr. Dwarikanath Ghoshal does not hesitate to dismiss quackery and superstition. Four generations of Ghoshals infuse their scientific temper into the lives of people around them.



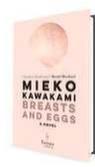
The King's Retribution
Mercedes Rochelle
Sergeant Press

₹2.89 (Kindle price)
This second instalment of The Plantagenet Legacy series is about King Richard II. Here he takes revenge on his enemies for the humiliation inflicted on him but goes too far, underestimating the powers of his arch rival, Henry Bolingbroke.



Breasts and Eggs
Mieko Kawakami, trs Sam Bett,
David Boyd
Barnes & Noble

₹27.00
This novel recounts the intimate journeys of three women as they confront oppressive traditions and reclaim their futures. Thirty-year-old Natsu, her older sister, Makiko, and Makiko's daughter, Midoriko are at the centre.



How Much of These Hills is Gold
C. Pam Zhang
Virago

₹745.50 (Kindle price)
In the twilight of the Gold Rush, two siblings cross a landscape with a gun in their hands and the body of their father on their backs. They roam an unforgiving landscape dotted with buffalo bones and tiger paw prints, searching for a place to give their father a proper burial.



TECHNOLOGY

The curious case of Facebook

Unravelling events and actions that powered the inception and evolution of Mark Zuckerberg's social media network

Jinoy Jose P.

Why does Facebook look like a prison? "Well, you have a Profile photo; you pretty much do nothing all day but write on walls. And, worse, you get poked by guys you don't really know." Jokes apart, this says a lot about how Mark Zuckerberg's social media network has changed human life ever since its inception in the U.S. in 2004.

For sure, when future historians attempt to chronicle the era we live in today, the story of social media will account for a significant part of the narrative, as a formidable force that influenced almost every walk of life in ways previously unimagined. And Facebook, with a claimed customer base of over two billion users, will be the propeller of the whole story.

Global connections

Facebook's story, hence, is the story of our times, too. Steven Levy's well-timed tome, *Facebook: The Inside Story*, tries to capture that – how Zuckerberg and Facebook were able



Facebook: The Inside Story
Steven Levy
PRH
₹799

to connect the world like no other human endeavour had ever done, not even the Roman emperors, has empowered us beyond measure, allowing us to know things as and when we want to, stay in seamless contact with friends and family, discuss everything under the sun without fear and with favour, and make money or spend it by selling and buying products.

That seemed a perfect world. Only that it wasn't. The recent years exposed startling vulnerabilities in the moral infrastructure of Facebook. And they look unfixable to many. Going by the adage that data is the new oil, Facebook seems to be on its way to become the world's biggest polluter.

Levy's narrative, however, doesn't give you that story. Levy's Facebook is long on information and short on insight. It works as a great rich-in-detail textual extension to *The Social Network*, offering all the background stories behind those rapid-fire dialogues written by Aaron Sorkin.

Out with it

Levy's focus seems to be more on unravelling the curious events and actions that powered the inception and rapid evolution of Facebook.

His approach is not critical at all; but to his credit, he treats the subject with some degree of nonchalance that is laudable. He is, clearly, not awestruck at the FB success story, but stays away from offering insights that would help readers figure out where the social network, which many rightly call the Frankenstein monster of the digital world, is headed.

Maybe that could be a different book. Still, Levy's project is so detailed and rich with anecdotes that a keen observer of Facebook can find out – only if the reader is smart and industrious enough to read between the lines – a good amount of cues she can use in analysing where the company is going to be a few crucial years down the lane.

Sample this: Facebook's ad business, when it started, had the code name Panda, "a quasi-portmanteau of the words 'Pages and Ads'." But soon the code for the advertising business – whose hidden desires and dynamics would soon change the social networking world devastatingly – would morph to "something less pleasant: Pandemic". That's some Freudian slip, I tell you.

SOCIETY

Heading into a perfect storm

An estimated 12 million people from across south and southeast Asia live and work in the Gulf region. As borders become rigid, what is the future of such migration?

Aditi Bhaduri

A vast majority of migrant workers in the Gulf region, especially those who are on subsistence wages, are facing a crisis in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Living and working conditions are not anything to write home about, and with links cut off from India, poor migrants are on the brink.

Though the *Asianization of Migrant Workers in the Gulf Countries*, edited by leading migration scholars S. Irudaya Rajan of Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, and Ginu Z. Oommen, a member of the Kerala Public Service Commission, was written before the novel coronavirus attacked the world, the volume gives readers a timely perspective on labour migration in the region.

Among the many migration corridors that exist in the world, the Asia-Gulf Migration Corridor is the largest such corridor – 12 million people from across south and southeast Asia live and work in the Gulf region.

Old and new bonds

A compilation of papers by some of the biggest names in the study of labour migration from Pakistan, Sri

Lanka, the Philippines, Indonesia, and the Gulf countries, as well as migration stalwarts like Andrew Gardner and Marie Perrot, the volume offers valuable insights on current trends and forecasts on future of such migration. For governments across the region, who have enormous stakes in the migration corridor, this is excellent material to draw upon in the drafting of laws and as a blueprint for any future contingency in a consistently volatile region.



Asianization of Migrant Workers in the Gulf Countries
Edited by S. Irudaya Rajan, Ginu Z. Oommen
Springer
₹8,490

Asians constitute around 12 million out of roughly 15 million expatriates in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), comprising Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. This is a natural outcome of the old, historical linkages, religious and cultural proximity, poverty, unemployment, political instability and insurgency in the Asian countries on one hand.

On the other, as Oommen and Rajan demonstrate through carefully analysed data, it was also "to avoid the spread of radical and socialist political ideologies in the Gulf region." So when the development boom perched on oil money demanded the import of labour to the Gulf countries, the workforce came largely from neighbouring Arab

countries like Egypt, Yemen and Sudan. However, by the 1980s, the GCC countries shifted the preference of workforce towards Asian countries, particularly from the South Asian region. This was a conscious decision mainly to safeguard the political interests of oil-rich monarchies as the political establishment of the GCC countries did not view Asians as a threat.

The Asian workforce, as late diplomat and scholar Andrzej Kapiszewski demonstrated in several works, also became a preferred choice due to certain characteristics: specifically docility, political neutrality, flexibility, willingness to work at manageable wages and readiness to work hard. In addition, the involvement of Asian governments in the recruiting process helps in attracting a monitored and filtered workforce.

Remittances flow

Hence, the 'Asianisation' of the migrant labour in the Gulf – the outcome of the "preference and choice" of the receiving governments due to various economic-political considerations – paved the way for the "extraordinary and unmatched movement of the people, remittances flow, developmental initiatives, voluminous trade, energy security, diplomatic and strategic overtures of the 'Asia-Gulf Migratory Corridor' in the region" as George Naufal and Ismail Genc point out in their chapter, Labour Migration in the Gulf Cooperation Council.

The movement of workers to the region was so large that it altered the demographic structure of the GCC countries.

Foreigners constitute on average more than half of the population in the region and in some countries, like in the UAE, some estimates show they are more than 80%. Remittances from GCC countries play a significant role in the foreign exchange reserves of the home country, alleviation of poverty and socio-economic development.

Trends & legislation

Rich in data culled from primary and secondary sources, through case studies of migrants from India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines, the volume unpacks the many layered and different dimensions of the Asianisation process of the Gulf's labour force – migratory trends, gendered experience, migration legislation in both the home and host countries, the status of the migrants in the host countries, the impact of *nitaqat* or localisation of labour laws in the GCC and their impact on Asian migration.

A highlight of this volume is a chapter by Oommen on the impact of "social remittances" on society in his native Kerala, particularly in the religious sphere on the Christian community.

The reviewer is a journalist and political analyst, tracking South, Central, and West Asia.

Trapped A lone truck driver fixes his vehicle as Dubai lies deserted in the wake of the pandemic. • AP



JUDICIARY

A divided bench: Inside the world of courts and their verdicts

Taking up 10 forgotten cases, a writer explains how the judiciary in India has at times been 'more executive-minded than the executive'

Vidya Venkat

At a time when faith in the independence of the judiciary in India has diminished, Chintan Chandrachud provides us with a historical perspective on the uneven legacy of the courts in his new book. He elaborates the course of decision-making in 10 'forgotten cases' that may have faded from public memory but left an indelible imprint on the course of justice in India, nonetheless.

Lost opportunities

With the apex court entering its 70th year in 2020, the book is timely in its critical assessment of the functioning of the courts. Unlike commemo-

rative volumes, this book demonstrates how the court has not always risen to the occasion to safeguard us from the "indiscretions and misadventures of Parliament and the government".

For instance, in *Keshav Singh v State of UP (1965)*, when an opposition party member was charged with breach of legislative privilege for political pamphleteering, it sparked a conflict between the Uttar Pradesh assembly and the Allahabad High Court concerning the separation of powers. When the Supreme Court intervened, it allowed the high court to prevail in the matter but missed a vital opportunity to codify the privileges as per the Constitution. This could have helped strike a balance between elected representa-

tives exercising their privileges and citizens enjoying their fundamental rights. The high court went on to uphold the assembly's decision and Singh was imprisoned for contempt.

An opportunity to make the state policy of reservations a facet of the right to equality was similarly lost when the Supreme Court placed fundamental rights as a stumbling block before the advancement of the backward classes in the *State of Madras v Champakam Dorairajan* case. This helped propagate the vocabulary of binaries such as 'reservations versus merit' that has endured.

Justice delayed, denied

The courts have also failed to deliver justice to women abused by government employees often reinforcing

patriarchal values in the process. In the *Tukaram v State of Maharashtra* case (popularly known as the 'Mathura case'), though two policemen had raped Mathura while in custody, the Supreme Court acquitted her perpetrators arguing that a lack of consent could not be established.

In the *R.D. Bajaj v K.P.S. Gill* case, the law machinery dragged its feet on sentencing the IPS officer for sexual misconduct, with the SC convicting Gill only 17 years later, without imprisonment, and demanding a token amount of ₹2,00,000 as compensation.

The courts are also guilty of using real and imagined threats to national security to shield state excesses as seen in *Kartar Singh v State of Punjab* and *Naga People's Movement of Hu-*

man Rights v Union of India. In these instances, the police and the Army had abused provisions of the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act and the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) respectively against terror accused individuals.

However, in both cases, the Supreme Court upheld draconian aspects of the law in favour of the government.

Guardian of the Constitution

The book demonstrates how, in the end, it falls on civil society, Parliament and rights agencies such as the National Human Rights Commission to pursue the course of justice when the courts fail.

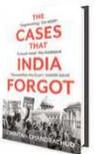
For instance, public pressure in

the aftermath of the Mathura judgment led to the Law Commission recommending changes to rape laws to address aspects of consent given under pressure.

Likewise, the NHRC intervention in 1994 and the mobilisation of political support to discontinue TADA beyond 1995, stopped that law from being enforced.

The book is a must-read for anyone interested in aspects of law and politics in the country. The author has done a fine job of disabusing us of the notion that the courts are the ultimate guardians of the Constitution.

The reviewer is a doctoral researcher in Anthropology at SOAS, University of London.



The Cases that India Forgot
Chintan Chandrachud
Juggernaut
₹599

Reviving Jobs: An Agenda for Growth

Edited by Santosh Mehrotra
Penguin Random House India
₹499

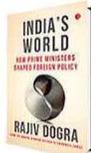
By 2040, India will be an ageing society. This volume offers suggestions on how India can make the best of the remaining period of its demographic dividend that began in 1980. Failure to do so will cause millions to suffer in poverty, it says.



India's World

Rajiv Dogra
Rupa
₹595

Since Independence, Prime Ministers have been the principal architects of India's rise. From Nehru to Narendra Modi, the book outlines ways in which several Prime Ministers have made history. It also discusses India's place in the world and how Prime Ministers have shaped its role.



Taken at the Flood

Vasanth Kannabiran
Rajiv Dogra
Women Unlimited
₹375

An activist and writer gathers the many strands of her life to write a memoir recounting not only her journey, but that of a country in flux. From a tumultuous era in Andhra Pradesh to the women's movement, Kannabiran enfolds her life into the politics she lived.



Mysteries of the Mundane: The Films of Girish Kasaravalli

Orient BlackSwan
John W. Hood
₹495

Girish Kasaravalli's films may be rooted in Karnataka but his exploration of the commonplace shows that within the local culture lie values and dreams that are universal. Across 15 chapters, Hood discusses Kasaravalli's films.



FIELD NOTES

With the medical ecosystem focused on COVID-19, people with chronic illnesses have been left in the lurch

Less than healthy news

"I called more than 15 centres. Most of them said they were full and had patients coming from other centres. Others said I should check back after I get a COVID-19 negative report."

Just before the lockdown was announced, Manikandan*, an autorikshaw driver in Coimbatore, bought train tickets to travel to Chennai with his daughter. After Pooja's Class XII exams were over, he was to take her to the Voluntary Health Services for free blood transfusions, just as he had done twice a month for years: Pooja has thalassaemia, an inherited blood disorder that causes the body to make less haemoglobin than normal.

But now with the lockdown, the family has had to settle for transfusions at a private hospital in Coimbatore, taking their relatives along as blood donors. They have already spent ₹5,000 on transfusions, a sum they can ill afford, especially as Manikandan's income has all but dried up since the lockdown began.

And even if they had managed to go to Chennai, Pooja would have likely faced another problem: a shortage of blood. "We always see a dip in blood donations in April and May because of the summer vacations; but this year, the blood scarcity began even earlier due to the lockdown," says Revathi Raj, paediatric hemato-oncologist and honorary president of the Thalassaemia Welfare Association.

With no public transport, and apprehensions about being booked for violating the lockdown, fewer blood



donors are coming in, says Dr. Raj. Tamil Nadu's health department has now written to Superintendents of Police and District Collectors asking them to facilitate the unrestricted transport of blood vans and donors, and ensure that blood donation camps are held. In some places, such as at Bengaluru's government Victoria Hospital, most of the hospital has been converted into a centre

to treat COVID-19 patients. With resources in several hospitals now directed towards COVID-19 control, and the lockdown curtailing movement, a huge section of people in need of regular medical care and monitoring – people with chronic and non-communicable diseases, such as thalassaemia, who need blood transfusions; people with kidney failure who need dialysis; can-

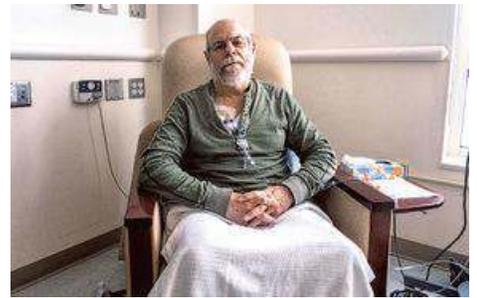
cer patients who need chemotherapy or radiation, and even pregnant women – find themselves dangerously adrift.

Full up

In Mumbai, until a fortnight ago, Irfan's anxiety rose with every sip of water he took. The 26-year-old software engineer has been on dialysis for five years – for an atypical hemolytic-uremic syndrome, a rare genetic disease that leads to kidney failure – and has not missed a single treatment to flush out the toxins from his body.

But on April 20, the hospital in South Mumbai that he visited regularly, shut down after a patient tested positive for COVID-19. Skipping one or two dialysis sessions can be manageable for some patients, but for Irfan it can rapidly become life-threatening. His disease causes clots in his arteries and has already damaged his heart, and a missed dialysis cycle can put him at a greater risk of organ damage. "I called more than 15 centres. Most of them said they were full and had patients coming from other centres. Others said I should check back after I get a COVID-19 negative report." "In the

Adrift (Clockwise from left) A pregnant woman awaiting her turn in hospital; a patient undergoing chemotherapy; a thalassaemia patient. Representative images. • G.RAMAKRISHNA & GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK



meantime, I had no choice but to drastically reduce my fluid intake. I only had water with medicines, I stopped tea, fruits and rice," he says. Mumbai has nearly 10,000 patients on dialysis and there are an estimated 300 dialysis centres in the city. Some are shut temporarily due to COVID-19 encounters, some have a severe staff shortage due to the lockdown. Last week, Irfan finally got dialysis after missing two sessions and getting increasingly breathless. His dialysis centre opened after Mumbai's civic body warned strict action against centres that delayed restarting their services.

Access to any healthcare centre is tedious in Delhi, which now has over 90 containment zones. And Basanti Kumari, 32, who is all set to deliver her fourth child, is worried. She works as a domestic help and has been going for her health check-ups to one of Delhi most crowded government medical institutes – Safdarjung Hospital. The multi-specialty hospital has a footfall of over 1,000 people on average each day and is also a COVID-19 designated hospital. What concerns her now is that the hospital's obstetrics, gynaecology and intensive care units have been shut after a suspected COVID-19 case was detected here.

Turned away

"Doctors have told me I am a high-risk patient with my high blood sugar and high blood pressure," says Basanti. "Doctors at Safdarjung Hospital don't want me admitted before time because of the possibility of cross infection; but I often wonder, will I be able to get to the hospital in

time for delivery?"

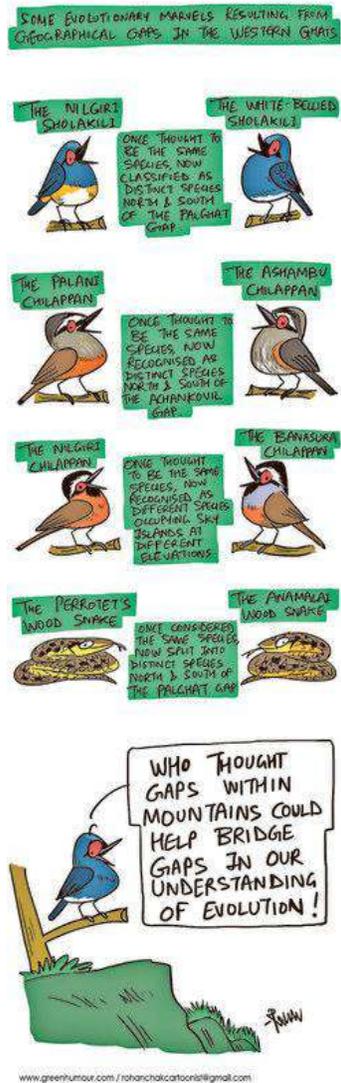
Two private hospitals in Chennai have turned away Sushila, 85, who has been undergoing chemotherapy for breast cancer. "She sometimes has side effects such as fever. Her hospital had assured us that there would be no problems treating her. But two weeks ago, when she developed breathlessness and we took her there, they found she had a fever and refused to treat her," says Sushila's granddaughter. Another hospital said the ICU was full and there were no doctors, but after much pleading, they finally provided Sushila with an ambulance that had oxygen support, and she was taken to a government medical college hospital 20 km away, where she was kept for three days, tested for COVID-19, and discharged after she tested negative.

Meanwhile, after reports of blood shortages across the country, the Union Health Ministry has initiated some steps. The Secretary General of Indian Red Cross Society, R.K. Jain, says they have been asked to send mobile blood collection vans to the homes of regular blood donors to facilitate donations. "This is to ensure that we have an adequate supply for people who need regular blood transfusion such as thalassaemia patients, people with sickle cell anaemia, and haemophilia." But for many many others who are chronically ill with a multitude of ailments, the road ahead is a long and risky one.

*Some names changed to protect identity.

Inputs from Zubeda Hamid, Jyoti Shelar, Bindu Shajan Perappadan and Tanu Kulkarni.

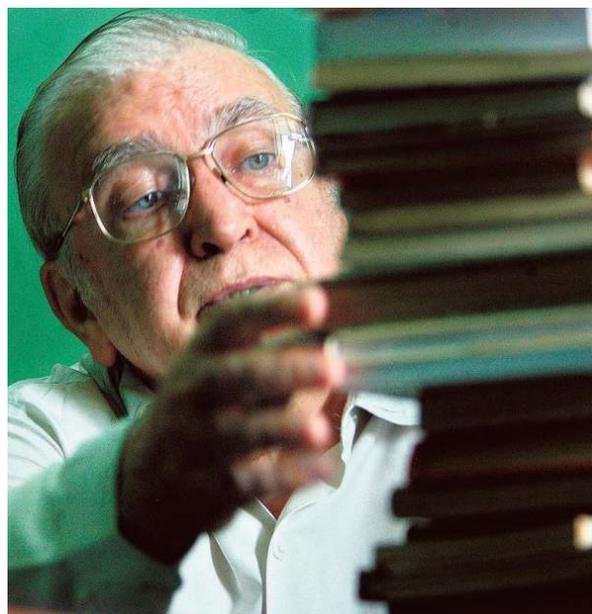
GREEN HUMOUR BY ROHAN CHAKRAVARTY



PASSING BITE

The priest and the maverick

Calcutta's Chitrabani set off ideas and projects that influenced the study of mass media in India long before the discipline became fashionable



Filmi Father
Gaston Roberge in St. Xavier's College, Kolkata, in 2006.
• ARUNANGSUROY CHOWDHURY

As a 17-year-old in Calcutta, just out of school, I had a stroke of great luck. I was waiting outside the best camera-repair workshop in the city for my father's Nikon to be fixed when I fell into conversation with a girl, a little older than me, who was also waiting for her camera. We began discussing photography. After a

while she asked me: "Have you heard of Chitrabani?" I hadn't. She handed me a flyer about this institute that was offering courses in 'Media Communication'. I repeated that I was just out of school and probably not qualified to be accepted. "Don't worry. It's quite an informal thing. Just go and see." I asked the girl if she had joined and she said she hadn't, what with

college and a fledgling modelling and film career, but she wished she could.

A few days later I made my way to the church compound on Wellesley Road where this Chitrabani was located. Asking about the course, I was directed to a small, dark room on the ground floor. I reached through the curtain and knocked on the door. A deep voice asked me to come in. Going in, all I could see was the silhouette of a thin, older man with thick specs, a bright window behind him.

Radio ga ga

He growled, asking me what I wanted. I told him. He asked me to sit down and I did. "Tell me, what are the major mass media of this country?" I answered, "Films, television..." and then I ran out of things. His growl went up a gear. "Radio?! Radio is not a major mass media of this country?" I was told to go away and come back with a few short notes on films and plays I had seen, and how they had affected me. I came back with the notes and was admitted into the course, which was a bit like Alice falling through a magic portal into another world.

The man, who was the director of the course, was one of Calcutta's great intellectual mavericks, Deepak Majumdar. He had recently been hired by Gaston Roberge, aka Father Roberge of the Jesuits, another maverick of sorts, who was the founder and head honcho of Chitrabani. Roberge had come from Quebec to Calcutta in 1961, and then convinced the extremely conservative Jesuit chain of command to send him to UCLA to do a course in film studies.

Upon returning, Roberge began writing on Indian cinema; on everything from Satyajit Ray to Sholay. There are many who would attribute the beginning of Cinema Studies in the subcontinent to the Canadian, but Roberge had wider ambitions. In Chitrabani he set up an institution that contained among other things a state-of-the-art sound recording studio, a work-

ing radio station for the Jesuits, a photography laboratory, the best library on media in the country, a regular film screening programme, and the Media Studies course under Majumdar.

Strange combination

Other media study centres came up across the country soon, but Chitrabani preceded all of them, working in partnership with FTII in Pune and NID in Ahmedabad. At its peak, CB, as we called it, set off all sorts of ideas and projects that influenced the study and understanding of mass media in India long before the discipline became fashionable and, in so many places, watered down into the superficial 'media courses' we see currently.

Today, it is difficult to describe the strange combination of informality and rigour that characterised CB. If Roberge's famously French-accented Bangla communicated his liberal patrician's vision and his metronomic, *de rigueur* priestly sternness, Majumdar's was the pioneering irascible craziness that led students and staff into different risky but fruitful adventures. Through them and through others who associated with them, we learnt all sorts of important lessons: not to look 'down' with the camera at a poor or destitute person, not to regard traditional performance and crafts as 'primitive', not to use the marginal and the downtrodden as image-fodder for your own aggrandisement, to try and understand and value non-verbal communication that operated very far away from the overt and covert canons of Western thought.

That being Calcutta of the late 70s and early 80s, people would often ask me if Chitrabani wasn't a Trojan Horse designed to insert Catholic Christianity in through the back door. Others, tending towards Stalinist-Maoist hackery, would add the lazy charge of the place being a CIA operation. To the first I would reply that this was the place which, with its work on the Bauls, allowed me a proper entry into Bengali Vaishnavism; and to the second bunch I would say this was the place that houses one of the best anti-capitalist photo archives of India.

Ruchir Joshi is a filmmaker and columnist

I came back with the notes and was admitted into the course, which was a bit like Alice falling through a magic portal into another world

TRIBUTE

Irrfan: actor, dissenter, comrade

Socially aware and empathetic, the star's death feels like a personal loss for many who hardly knew him



ILLUSTRATION: R. RAJESH

At other times, he invoked his Muslim identity to make the point that, unlike him, most Indian Muslims were poor, and any communal divide was unsustainable for this country. When he died, he was mourned across religious identities, even though for one set he was just a Muslim 'jihadi' and for another, he was not Muslim enough. There was something about the man that allowed him to be embraced by many despite being disowned by a few.

Freethinking iconoclast

Irrfan was a freethinker, environmentalist, socialist and heretic. His portrayal of the Marxist Urdu poet, Makhdoom Mohiuddin, the man who led the Telangana movement, in *Kalkashan*, made an indelible mark in the hearts of socialists. His recitation of the poem 'Thakur Ka Kuan', a critique of the caste system, at the

Irrfan was one of those rare people from Bollywood who not only had strong socio-political awareness but who wasn't wary of voicing his opinions or taking a stand

Jaipur Literature Festival in 2014, has been shared several times over. As has his own composition, 'Idhar Aao', which alludes to the alienation of labour, *kaam zarurat nahi, zarurat kaam nahi. Junoon aur sukoon mein koi farq nahi* (Work can't be necessity, nor necessity work. What difference then between passion and mere comfort.)

After his death, the iconic lines he spoke in *Pan Singh Tomar*: "Bihad mein toh baghi hote hain, dakaai milte hain parliament mein," (The badlands have rebels, it's Parliament that has the dacoits) have become the status message of thousands of social media accounts. Quietly, smilingly, Irrfan was a dissenter and a comrade. And that is why his death feels like a personal loss to so many people who didn't even know him. He really did make his audience believe in what he said in JNU that day, "Aam aadmi hi hero hota hai" (It's the common man who is the hero.)

Irrfan is no more and hope, like many other things, is in short supply these days. But before we lose what little we have, let's remember that this man fought cancer to give us the joy of one last film, to tell us one more story before he slept.

The writer has a Ph.D. from the School of International Studies, JNU, on migration and identity issues.

In a radical move, given the massive popularity of 'Khans' in the industry, Irrfan Khan dropped his surname, saying he wanted to carve a niche for himself through his work

Vijaya Mahendru

Zamana bade shauq se sun raha tha, hum hi so gaye dastaan kehke kehke. (The world kept listening spellbound, it was I who fell asleep narrating my stories) – Saqib Lakhnavi

The year was 2012 and I was a student at JNU. There were at least 400 or 500 of us students gathered in the open-air theatre. Irrfan walked in, wearing an unassuming black shirt with an olive-green muffler carelessly thrown around his neck. Looking quite like a regular JNUite, a tall and handsome man.

The instant connection he established with the crowd with his four-minute-long speech intensified over the two hours of discussions afterwards, which ranged from cinema to various passions in life and the beau-

ty of ordinariness. He was also asked who his first love was, and no surprises here, it was cinema itself. He had said that his wife Sutapa was his last love! Back then, coming to JNU was not akin to professional suicide for artists, as it has become now.

Irrfan passed away this week, at the young age of 53, battling a colon infection. To a world already reeling under the shadow of a global pandemic, the news of his death was a cruel shock. And it triggered a massive wave of mourning on social media. People spoke of the void he had left behind, but also of his legacy of giving us so many more 'everyday heroes'. They spoke of how they felt his death was a personal loss and how his personality and cinema had been an inspiring presence.

Irrfan played the role of everyday heroes in his movies, his brilliant skills spilling out of the frame each

time, and he grew to become a giant in Indian cinema, even crossing over rather easily into Hollywood. He made us believe that a common person, facing everyday challenges, can also be a real hero. Outside the big screen, Irrfan was a man of few words, who led a discreet and downplayed life. From the outside, it seemed as if his days revolved only around cinema, but he was in fact much more than an actor.

Taking a stand

Irrfan was one of those rare people from Bollywood who not only had strong socio-political awareness but who wasn't wary of voicing his opinions or taking a stand. In the 2009 general elections, in fact, he even campaigned for Mallika Sarabhai when she stood for elections in the Ahmedabad constituency against prime ministerial candidate L.K. Ad-

vani. He had strong views about candidates with criminal charges and said they should be debarred from politics.

Scrolling through his Facebook page, tucked away amidst the film promotions, you come across posts of Gram Seva Sangh (GSS), an organisation that fosters synthesis between rural and urban India and promotes handmade products. In 2018, while inaugurating a GSS symposium, Irrfan said his art was also like that of the artisans – both use the same tools, the human body. This was his peculiar ability, to form a bond with every person he met, to empathise. Among the last posts that Irrfan wrote before he passed away, he expressed support for the *Karoonakach* campaign of GSS, which demanded prioritisation of welfare for poor artisans and the protection of natural resources. He expressed soli-

arity with the organisation's tax denial satyagraha, which demanded a GST exemption for handmade goods, and he called out the exploitation of artisans. These are not easy stands for a star to take, but Irrfan clearly did not care about how the cinema ecosystem might react.

In quite a radical move, given the massive popularity of 'Khans' in the industry, Irrfan Khan dropped his surname, saying he wanted to carve a niche for himself through his work, not his lineage, caste or religion. In 2016, he publicly questioned the concepts of fasting, *qurbaani*, and *tajjia* processions, which didn't go down well with Islamic clerics. He later clarified that he did not intend to create a controversy, but maintained that a discussion must begin around these rituals. All religions must introspect and change to stay relevant, he said.

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK



NOSHTALGIA

1 carrot, 1 radish and a few beans

The principle we learnt back in the days before liberalisation – substitute, replace, adapt – has come in handy now

Vasundhara Chauhan

I know this is not the place: it is, after all, a food column. But when I was asked to write it, focusing on the situation, something in me turned. *The Hindu* has readers who have access to food, but need ideas on how to cope with shortages. Shortages not of quantity, but of variety; in the worst-case scenario, maybe of traditional ingredients. And oftentimes of help.

A couple of weeks ago, an American magazine had a tongue-in-cheek article where the author, an accomplished baker, went to the local grocery, noted that yeast

was clean off the shelves, and had a face-off with another customer over the last bag of flour on the top rack. He muttered – in his mind – about how the other chap had probably never baked bread before in his life, what a waste that bag would be, and how he knew the other would fail and get his comeuppance.

I am a grasshopper

It was slightly funny, in a superior, nudge-nudge, wink-wink sort of way. But deep down, it was a reminder of how privileged we are; we look for variety. When asked to give to those who have nothing, we hem and haw. I'm trying not

to sermonise, but let's count our blessings and do what we can to help others.

I can't help but think of the ant and grasshopper fable because when the lockdown was expected, all the ants I know drove around loading their cars, stockpiling victuals. Grasshoppers like me didn't, for vaguely moral reasons. And now we're stuck with what we have in our cupboards. Which are, like Old Mother Hubbard's, bare. Unfortunately, I'm a relentless cleaner-of-shelves, so no serendipitous delights await me, however far back I reach into fridges or cupboards. I know exactly what I can expect to find – how

many stumps of drying cheese and how many inches of peanut butter in the jar.

I see what people post on social media about what they cook, of how they're coping with the lockdown. And I'm amazed at the dishes home cooks are conjuring up. The Westerners all seem to have forgotten jars of sundried tomatoes in extra virgin olive oil so they can make flavourful pasta, and bags of buckwheat flour so they can make soba noodles, and bags of almond meal and boxes of cocoa powder so they can make gluten-free cake. This seems to be an opportunity to experiment. Some Indian cooks are making gatta curry, chana bhatura, gol gappa and ras malai.

Watching these posts gives me a complex, so I prefer to believe that they must be proficient cooks anyway. Maybe it's to do with their now having more time to indulge a hobby, but I don't know how to make complicated dishes and I'm dealing with a different challenge. Vegetables aren't consistently available. Sometimes, if we have only handfuls of different vegetables in the house, I make combinations that may seem odd bedfellows, but I've always been charmed by the Bengali *panch mishali*. So we collect a single radish, a carrot, a handful of beans, a layer or two of cabbage, a few leaves of spinach, a chunk of pumpkin, a potato, half a cauliflower.

Making do

The principle we've adopted is to make do and to juxtapose textures: firm and soft-and-squishable. The varieties may be more or less than *panch* or five, the spicing may be different, but the method is broadly to temper mustard oil with a single spice like *kalonji*, nigella, or a standard combination like *panch phoran*, a couple of green chillies, and then cook the vegetables, having cut them into cubes or fingers and timing their addition at the appropriate moment to make sure they cook.

A bit of ginger juice freshens the flavour and probably helps digestion. Finally, I add a smidgen of ghee and a pinch of sugar and

it lets me pretend it's authentic.

We are a meat-eating family and there is no meat, fish or chicken. Egg supply is erratic. This week, the local Safal is well stocked with lentils and pulses. Fortunately, I have a full chest of spices. The upshot of all this is that I can only perk up flavour with unexpected combinations and spices. Because I'm one of the miraculously lucky elite whose only pressing concern is combating ennui.

A principle we learnt back in the days before liberalisation was to substitute, replace and adapt. I had a recipe for aubergine parmigiana that looked uncomplicated enough, but since it asked for Parmesan cheese and I had only stubs of Cheddar and Red Leicester, and because it asked for fresh basil and I had none, I did what I could. Because I had the main ingredients: aubergines and tomatoes. And the dish is elastic and accommodating.

Gone yeast

Meanwhile our local 'artisanal' bakery has temporarily shut shop, so last week, the baker-in-residence said he'd make bread. Unfortunately, the dough didn't rise. When I told a friend this, she suggested that the yeast could have expired, and sent me, in the hope of better times, the link to a video describing how to make near-perfect toddy at home, with a mere three ingredients: coconut water, sugar and yeast. I'm saving it for when yeast is available.

Instead I made muffins. I wrote about them about 12 years ago, in one of my earliest columns here. Because they are so satisfying and so easy to make in these hard times, it seemed worth sharing again. As my mother, who taught me the recipe, said, "they're very forgiving" – you can use any flour, any shortening, they take a few minutes, and if you want you can bung in whatever flavouring you have at hand, sweet or savoury.

From the once-forbidden joy of eggs to the ingratitude of guests, the writer reflects on every association with food. vasundharachauhan@gmail.com

SUNDAY RECIPE

Basic muffins (makes 12)

Ingredients

2 cups sifted flour
½ cup sugar
3 tsp baking soda
½ tsp salt
1 cup milk
½ cup vegetable oil
1 egg

Method

- Preheat oven to 200°C (400°F). Grease bottoms only of 12 muffin-pan cups. Sift flour with baking soda and salt. Stir in sugar. In separate bowl, beat together egg, milk and oil.
- Spread flour mixture in wide round bowl and make a well in the centre. Pour in egg-milk-oil mixture all at once. Stir with a fork just until combined. Spoon mixture into prepared muffin-pan cups.
- Bake until golden, for about 25 minutes. Immediately remove from cups by inserting knife tip under each to loosen. Serve hot with butter.

When mixing batter, stir just until flour is moistened. Do not beat. Batter will be lumpy but makes for tender muffins.

Muffins can be frozen or kept for a few days. Wrap in foil and reheat in oven before serving.



Unfortunately, I'm a relentless cleaner-of-shelves, so no serendipitous delights await me, however far back I reach into fridges or cupboards