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INDIA'S SUPER SPREADERS

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BAYERN MUNICH RESUME TRAINING

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75% Covid victims are men

Of 4,500 cases, 1/3rd Tablighis; highest death toll 30 in a day

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Out of every four Covid-19 patients, three are men. The Union Health Ministry revealed this on Monday — on a day when nearly 500 new cases surfaced in India. The highest number of single-day deaths stood at 30 in the last 24 hours taking the total tally to 135 fatalities.

The Government data shows that women seem to be having a greater ability to fight against the infections than men as 73 per cent of the Covid-19 deaths have been reported in men, while 27 per cent of those have been in women.

“Seventy-six per cent of the coronavirus patients in India are men, while, 24 per cent of those are women,” said Lav Agarwal, Joint Secretary in Union Health Ministry.

More than 4,500 positive cases have been reported in India by late Monday evening. As many as 1,445 cases are related to Tablighi Jamaat, 25,000 workers of whom and their contacts have been quarantined and five Haryana villages where they visited sealed. Globally, nearly 70,000 people have died and over 1.25 million tested positive.

Elderly people remain a high risk population in the country as also across the world. Statistically, 63 per cent of the deaths in India have been reported among people over 60 years age, 30 per cent in the age bracket of 40 to 60 years and 7

per cent victims being below 40 years age. Agarwal said the deceased below 40 years were suffering from the co-morbidities like diabetes, chronic kidney ailments, heart diseases and hypertension.

Further, though 37 per cent deaths are reported from people below 60 years, approximately, 86 per cent of deaths among people with co-morbidities indicate that young people with co-morbidities are also at high risk of COVID-19.

He implied that if elders, because of their old age and co-morbidities were vulnerable so were those in the young age group having such conditions mainly related to lifestyle which results into weak immunity.

“While coronavirus is a bigger threat for the elderly, young people with co-morbidities also need to be protected,” Agarwal added.

Similar trend was reported in China too where a 2.8 per cent death rate in men while only a 1.7 per cent death rate in women due to COVID-19, according to the data provided by Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). While the number of people infected was almost equal in number, it were the women who had a comparatively more survival rate.

Agarwal emphasised that elders should be protected and every youth has to be careful that they maintain sufficient social distance to not pass infection to anyone in the fam-



North MCD workers sanitise an identified coronavirus patient's residence in the Model Town area during the ongoing nationwide lockdown in New Delhi on Monday

ily, particularly the elderly.

“We urge social distancing in the long term and all the dos and don'ts followed by everybody in the family,” he added. Clarifying the queries connected with community transmission in the country, the Health Ministry said if at all there is any community transmission, it will alert the people.

“Localised community transmission implies that increase in cases was observed

in a particular area. Our action plan is that we should not reach stage 3 (which is the community transmission stage),” he said.

The official also clarified that whenever a drastic increase is observed in the number of cases in an area, the Ministry adopts a containment action plan. “All the districts have been informed to have an action plan on Covid-19, if there are cases or no cases,” added Agarwal.

Google Maps to show locations of coronavirus food, shelters in India

New Delhi: Google on Monday said it will now show the locations of food and night shelters on Google Maps in cities across India to help people find these essential services during the lockdown. Google, in a statement, said it is working closely with State and Central Governments.

UP, Telangana favour lockdown extension

KCR seeks PM's nod for 1 week more lockdown, UP feels same

PNS ■ LUCKNOW/HYDERABAD

Uttar Pradesh and Telangana on Friday hinted that the ongoing lockdown could be extended even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that the country should be ready for a long “haul” to deal with the coronavirus outbreak.

Appealing Prime Minister Narendra Modi to extend the three-week lockdown beyond April 15, Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrababhan Naidu on Monday said the nation can recover from the hit that the economy was taking but it can't bring back lives of the people.

“Lockdown is the only weapon that India has given the weak health infrastructure that we have. I propose that the lockdown be extended by at least one or two weeks and a call on opening up can be taken after that,” the Chief Minister told the media at Pragathi Bhavan in Hyderabad.

“The lockdown is impacting all sections of society and the economy at large, but the issue of coronavirus is the biggest crisis faced by the mankind and it calls for stern measures,” he said.



At the same time, throwing a hint that lockdown in Uttar Pradesh could be extended, a Government spokesman said that it was premature to talk about lifting the lockdown when fresh coronavirus cases are reported across the State.

“The number of positives cases of Covid-19 is increasing day by day, hence it is premature to say that lockdown could be lifted after April 14,” Additional Chief Secretary Awanish Awasthi said here on Monday.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had earlier announced a 21-day lockdown, which ends on April 14.

In his interaction with the State Chief Ministers last week, the Prime Minister had suggested that the lockdown could be lifted in a phased manner. Acting on this advice, UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath had held a meeting with officials asking them to look at the ways and means to lift lockdown in a phased manner so that



stranded migrant workers can reach home without creating a chaos at the highways.

Awasthi said the Government is reviewing the situation. “The religious leaders too had suggested that lockdown is the only way to prevent the virus and hence if required it should be extended,” he said.

He said that Tablighi Jamaat people were responsible for the rise in the number of positive cases. Of the total 305 cases in the State on Monday, 159 are linked to members of the jammat. He said during the past 24 hours, 27 people were tested positive in which 21 are from the jammat.

“This is a big concern for the Government,” he said. “We have identified around 1,600 people of the Tablighi Jamaat till now and quarantined 1,200 of them. Now the administration is tracing the people who came in touch with them besides others who formed the chain,” he said.

Tiger habitats in India on alert after tigress found Covid +ve in US

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Zoos and tiger habitats across the country have been put on high alert after a 4-year-old Malayan tigress was found positive for coronavirus at Bronx Zoo in New York in the US. It is said to be the first known infection of the virus in an animal in the United States or anywhere in the world.

Not taking chance, the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and Central Zoo Authority (CZA), both statutory bodies under the Union Environment Ministry monitoring tiger reserves and zoos respectively, on Monday issued an advisory to the States asking them to keep tabs on Covid-like respiratory signs of nasal discharge, breathing problems or coughing among the animals.

There are around 2,967 tigers in the wild in 50 tiger reserves and their periphery and another 390 big cats in 145 CZA recognised zoos across the States.



This undated photo provided by the Wildlife Conservation Society shows Nadia, the infected Malayan tiger, at the Bronx Zoo in New York

“On Monday, we directed chief wildlife wardens (CWLWs) of all tiger-bearing States that owing to the communicable and zoonotic nature of the disease, big cats may be observed for symptoms of Covid-19 to avert the disease in wild tigers,” said NTCA member-secretary Anup Kumar Nayak.

Prez, PM, MPs take 30% pay cut for 1 yr

MPLAD funds suspended for 2 years, Opp slams decision

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Monday decided to “temporarily suspend” MPLAD funds for two years and approved an Ordinance to cut 30 per cent of salary and pension of MPs and former MPs. The Opposition slammed the decision to suspend MPLAD scheme and Left parties said the decisions reflected the dire straits of the Indian economy.

Citing the age-old adage that “charity begins at home”, Union Minister Prakash Javadekar told the media that President, Prime Minister, Ministers and Governors also decided voluntarily to take salary cut. “The money will go to Consolidated Fund of India,” said Javadekar.

There 788 MPs in Parliament (543 in the Lok Sabha and 245 in the Rajya Sabha). The one-year deduction of 30 per cent of the salary could save around ₹60 crore, according to officials. The pension reduction of all

the former MPs will also save around ₹100 crore, they said.

The Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi was conducted through video conferencing.

“The Cabinet approves Ordinance amending the Salary, Allowances and Pension of Members of Parliament Act, 1954 reducing allowances and pension by 30 per cent w.e.f. April 1, 2020 for a year.

“The President, Vice President, Governors of States have also voluntarily decided to take a pay cut as a social responsibility. The Cabinet approves temporary suspension of MPLADS during 2020-21 and 2021-22 for managing health and adverse impact of outbreak of COVID-19 in the country,” said the Government in a statement.

Every MP is allotted ₹5 crore per year in MPLAD fund to undertake constituency specific developmental and emergency works. ₹7,880 crore big fund usages is now suspended for two years, which is expected to seriously affect the devel-

opmental works in constituencies. The MP fund is preferred as it is very hassle free for development and construction works.

Many schools, hospital buildings, equipment in hospitals, and construction of small roads across India were created by using MPLAD funds.

While Home Minister Amit Shah hailed the decisions, the Congress and TMC were quick to oppose the decision to suspend the MPLAD scheme. “Parliament of the world's largest democracy stands together in these challenging times. I thank all the parties and MPs for their support,” said Shah.

While supporting the decision to deduct the salary of MPs, Congress and Trinamool Congress criticised the suspension of MPLADS. The Left parties took a pot shot at Centre and questioned the state of economy of the Modi Government which forced them to take such decision. They also accused the Centre of fudging data.

“Please note that MPLAD fund is meant to execute developmental works in the constituency. Suspending MPLAD



Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacts with the Central Ministers about Covid-19 via video conference in New Delhi on Monday

fund is a disservice step to the constituents and it will undermine their role and functions,” said Congress party's chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala.

Senior Congress Ahmed Patel “welcomed” the Cabinet pay cut decision, saying “in difficult times it is necessary that we help citizens.”

“As a Member of Parliament, I welcome the Government's decision to cut the salaries of MPs. In this difficult time, this is the least we

can do to help fellow citizens,” he tweeted.

Senior party leader and former Union Minister Jairam Ramesh went against the party's stand and welcomed the Government's decision on MPLADS.

“I welcome the decision on MPLADS. I have been arguing for long that the approximate ₹7,000 crore given to MPs & MLAs annually for development works should be used as a corpus for State funding of elections,” Ramesh said.

CPI-M General Secretary Sitaram Yechury, however, accused the Government of “fudging data”, and said it had pushed the economy “steeply downhill” even before Covid-19.

“Transfer of money to the Consolidated Fund of India, instead of being directed towards fighting COVID-19, shows that it is a measure to deal with the economic destruction caused in the past six years,” Yechury said.

State to raise Covid test capacity to 1K daily

Testing centres at MKCG, VIMSAR soon
Positive cases 40

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Even as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is spreading its tentacles in Odisha, the State Government on Monday stepped up its measures to tackle the situation.

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik directed officials to expedite the process for setting up COVID-19 testing centres at the MKCG Hospital, Brahmampur and VIMSAR, Burla.

Government Spokesperson on COVID-19 Subroto Bagchi, adding that the State would increase its sample testing capacity from 300 samples per day at present to 1,000 samples in next five days.

During a review meeting chaired by the CM and attended by Health Minister Naba Kishore Das and other officials, CM Patnaik directed officials to make VIMSAR and MKCG ready to become testing centres. “Already work is on in the regard and the Government expects to get ICMR approval (for this) soon,” Bagchi said.

Till now, seven COVID hospitals with 1,497 beds have been made operational in the State. A 100-bed Aswini Hospital in Cuttack, a 150-bed Tata Hospital, Duburi, a 50-bed Tata Hospital, Joda, a 500-bed KIMS Hospital, Bhubaneswar, a 500-bed SUM Hospital, Bhubaneswar, a 40-bed IDH, Puri and a 200-bed HI-Tech

Medical College, Rourkela are functioning, Bagchi informed.

The CM also directed officials to ensure that training of doctors and health officials is completed within the time-frame. A total of 1,500 doctors and health officials, including 851 students from SCB, 325 from MKCG and 300 from VIMSAR, have undergone training.

Besides, 360 district master trainers and 2,264 block-level master trainers are undergoing training, Bagchi said.

The CM also directed police to be vigilant and take stringent action against those who are trying to communalise the COVID situation, Bagchi said.

Masks must from April 9

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The State Government on Monday ordered that wearing mask would be made mandatory throughout the State with effect from 7 am of April 9.

A person coming out of home without covering his or her mouth with a mask would be penalised with a fine of Rs 500, the Government warned.



Handkerchiefs and clothes rolled into double layers can also be used as masks, an official explained.

PM: Corona a long battle, also opportunity for Make-in-India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

While indicating that the country should be ready for a long haul, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday assured that “power of light of 130 crore Indians” as reflected from Sunday night's togetherness has provided enough strength to “all of us” to prepare for “a long battle” against coronavirus pandemic.

“130 crore deshvasiyan ki mahashakti ke mahaprayash se utpann mahaprakash ne deshvasiyan ko ek lambi ladai ke leye taiyar kiya hai.”, said the Prime Minister addressing the BJP on the occasion of party's foundation day.

Modi said, “Today our aim, mission and determination is one and that is to score victory against coronavirus.”



Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaks during the BJP's 40th foundation day in New Delhi on Monday

Modi said, “Today our aim, mission and determination is one and that is to score victory against coronavirus.”

Modi on Monday asked Union Ministers to prepare plans to fight the economic impact of COVID-19 on war footing and asserted that this crisis is an opportunity to boost the “Make-in-India” initiative and reduce dependence on other countries.

CAPSULE

KANIKA RECOVERS FROM COVID-19, DISCHARGED

Lucknow: Kanika Kapoor, the Bollywood singer who caught coronavirus and caused a scare among politicians who met her at a party, was on Monday discharged from hospital, cured of COVID-19. The Sanjay Gandhi Post Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences here let her go after two tests reports came negative, officials said.

MUKESH AMBANI'S NET WORTH DROPS 28%

Mumbai: The net worth of India's richest man Mukesh Ambani dropped 28 per cent or \$300 billion a day for two months to \$48 billion as on March 31 due to the massive correction in stock markets.

NO FRESH COVID-19 CASE FOR 2nd DAY IN NOIDA

Noida: No fresh coronavirus case was reported across Noida and Greater Noida for a second day in a row, with the administration now planning a door-to-door COVID-19 awareness campaign, officials said.

Don't panic, stay at home: CM to people

CM warns of stern action for violating social distancing

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has appealed to the denials of the capital city not to venture out of their homes and respect the lockdown which has been imposed to contain the spread of COVID-19 till April 14.

The CMO in a twitter post said, "People need not panic. It is in a contained area of #Bhubaneswar with known contact. Sincere appeal please do not venture out and respect lockdown. Police will take very

tough action on violators."

The CMO issued such a message after the Health and Family Welfare Department announced that 18 people were tested positive to COVID-19 on Sunday itself. Of the 39 COVID-19 cases, as many as 32 come from the state capital.

As Bhubaneswar's COVID-19 status was revealed on Sunday, a large number of people called up travel agencies seeking to hire private cabs to leave the state capital for their villages, a top police officer said on condition of anonymity.

The official said the CMO's "sincere appeal" came in wake of the people's attempt to flee from the city, which is



described as the hot spot of COVID-19.

Seeking cooperation of the people, the CMO also made it clear that there will be zero tolerance on violation of social distancing. "Any violation of social distancing will attract criminal action. The concerned shop or market will be sealed. Earnest request to cooperate in our fight against the coronavirus," the CMO said in another twitter post.

Another 500-bed COVID hospital comes up

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The State now has one more hospital in the capital city to tackle the coronavirus situation.

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik and Union Ministers Dharmendra Pradhan and Pralhad Joshi inaugurated the COVID-19 hospital at the Sum Hospital through videoconference on Monday.

The 500-bed hospital, also with 20 ICU beds, at the existing building of SUM Hospital is funded by the Mahanadi Coalfields Limited (MCL). The hospital would provide treatment, food and other facilities to the affected persons free of cost.

CM Patnaik also interacted with doctors and healthcare

workers of the hospital through videoconferencing and appreciated their commitment to serve people during this global pandemic. He too thanked the Union Ministers for their support and the MCL for sponsoring this facility for people of Odisha.

With this, the State is now ready with four hospitals to exclusively treat COVID-19 patients. Earlier, a 500-bed hospital was developed at the KIMS while another hospital with 125 beds was inaugurated at the Ashwini Hospital in Cuttack. Besides, the Sundargarh district administration has established a 200-bed COVID-19 hospital with 10 ICU beds at the Hi-tech Medical College and Hospital in Rourkela.

Plea to defer hotel power bill payment

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha Electricity Regulatory Commission (OERC) has been requested for a three-month deferment of payment of electricity bills by the hospitality industry in the State.

Energy Secretary Bishnupada Sethi, taking into consideration the plea of the Department of Tourism, has sent a proposal in this regard to the OERC.

Amidst the lockdown imposed throughout the nation to contain the spread of COVID-19, the tourism and hospitality industry, especially hotels and restaurants, have been badly affected. Various hotels' associations have

requested for assistance from the State Government which includes deferment of payment of electricity bills.

Tourism Secretary Vishal Dev has also requested to consider the deferment proposal and accord necessary approval for the sustenance of the hospitality industry.

Representations have been received from the Hotel Association of India (HAI), Hotel and Restaurant Association of Odisha (HRAO) and hotels' associations of Puri and Sambalpur requesting for a relief package for them.

The immediate cause of concern for the industry is that March 31 was the deadline for payment of the electricity dues.

Man dies in SCB; COVID suspected

CUTTACK: A person has died while undergoing treatment at a special corona ward of the SCB Medical College Hospital here late on Saturday night. The deceased, aged about 58 years, was a resident of the Badamba area in Cuttack district. The man with no travel history was reportedly suspected to have been infected with coronavirus (COVID-19). The SCB Hospital authorities have sent his swab sample for COVID-19 test.

The patient had been suffering from various ailments. He was brought to the SCB from a private hospital in Bhubaneswar in a critical condition on Saturday night. As he was undergoing treatment at a Corona Quarantine Ward of the hospital, his swab sample has been sent for COVID-19 test. His body will be handed over to his family after receiving test report, said SCB Superintendent Dr. Annada Prasad Patnaik.

Women SHGs play vital role in anti-corona fight

Making 50,000 masks every day

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

From delivering rations to opening vegetable shops and spreading public awareness about the need of remaining indoors, as many as 70 lakh women members of six lakh Mission Shakti Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are working hard across the State during the time of challenge posed by the coronavirus pandemic.

And Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has expressed his gratitude to the SHGs for

their role. "I am heartened by the all-round response of women, especially members of Mission Shakti SHGs, during this critical time," Patnaik said recently. The women are even making 50,000 masks every day, he noted.

The Mission Shakti programme was launched by Patnaik in 2001, a year after he assumed power. It has always played a vital role during any disaster or emergency situation and has now become a movement in the State, Patnaik said.

The SHG members work both in rural and urban areas and provide a vital link between the Government and the community as leaders, partners in service delivery at the grassroots level, said Mission Shakti Director Sujata R Karthikeyan.

From early March, the SHGs were assigned the

responsibility of creating awareness on coronavirus at the community level. They circulated pamphlets mostly among women, who have little knowledge on hygiene and sanitation, and carried the Chief Minister's pledge of "Stay Home, Stay Safe" at the doorsteps of people, who do not have access to newspapers and television channels. They made the rural people understand in simple language that it is not impossible to defeat corona if they stay home and break the virus' transmission chain, Karthikeyan said. In view of the public demand, about 400 SHGs are making 50,000 masks every day, she informed.

The SHGs have sold nearly 6 lakh masks so far to agencies, institutions banks, police and village health workers at a reasonable rate of Rs 15-Rs 20 per piece. Many SHGs have

also undertaken the job as a philanthropic activity and distributed masks free of cost to those in need, Karthikeyan said.

About 500 SHGs have set up dry ration, vegetable and fruit shops across the State with the help of the district administrations. The SHG members are also carrying out home delivery services for providing ration in many urban centres like Brahmapur, Cuttack, Kendrapada and Koraput, she said.

Meanwhile, the Chief Minister has entrusted the responsibility of managing the free kitchens in every gram panchayat to the SHGs. Moreover, some SHGs and federations have voluntarily contributed from their group savings to the Chief Minister's Relief fund for the coronavirus pandemic.

JSPur DM's Hanuman hymn recital video goes viral

PNS ■ JAGATSINGHPUR

Despite a call given by the Government to maintain absolute social distancing in view of COVID-19 outbreak, hundreds of people gathered in weekly haats at different places in Jagatsinghpur district to buy vegetables and other daily needs.

District Collector Sangram Keshari Mohapatra and his entire team of officers had a tough time in enforcing the lockdown fully. The situations in the Somanathpur weekly haat here and the weekly haat at Kujang witnessed huge gatherings and almost zero social distancing.

Even the police had to take action against more than hundred persons for flouting norms. The district Collector and police visited about 50 weekly haats which had gathering of people during lockdown warning. Many people loitering in the streets on flimsy grounds were taken into custody or warned with stern actions.

In the mean time, the Collector adopted an innovative method of giving a message to people to stay home and pray to God. In his residence, he along with his son



Aditya, a second year engineering student, sang 'Hanuman Chalisa' (hymns of Lord Hanuman). Mohapatra has become popular for his close proximity with people and good governance, said Barada Prasanna Satapathy, a software engineer of the locality. The video of Collector singing songs has

become viral in the social media.

As a good singer and instrumentalist, Mohapatra has performed at Jagatsinghpur official functions and has lakhs of fans in India, the US and Australia. His popularity is expected to work well in this time of crisis.

2,000 vehicles seized in twin city

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Police on Monday seized around 2,000 vehicles from the twin city of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack for flouting the order during the lockdown period on Monday.

While 1,019 vehicles were seized in Cuttack, 876 were seized in Bhubaneswar.

A senior police officer said, "We had warned people repeatedly to follow the directions and stay at home, but many are moving around in their two-wheelers and cars citing fake emergencies. The appeals have not worked and so we have decided to intensify our drive against violators and seize vehicles."



Commissioner of Police Sudhanshu Sarangi said some people are venturing onto the streets with their vehicles despite repeated requests to refrain from using private

transport.

He said people can purchase essentials on foot from nearby shops, as sufficient groceries and vegetable vendors are in operation.

Guv to give ₹13L to PM fund

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Governor Ganeshi Lal would contribute Rs 13.2 lakh to the PM-Cares Fund set up to raise money for fighting the COVID-19.

He would also donate Rs 21 lakh from his discretionary grant to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund, Raj Bhavan sources said on Monday.

The Governor would contribute 30% of his salary from March 2020 to February 2021 amounting to Rs 13.2 lakh to



the PM-Cares Fund.

Prof Lal also appealed to people to donate to the PM-Cares Fund and the CMRF to fight the coronavirus.

Doctor couple feeds patients' attendants

PNS ■ SAMBALPUR

A doctor couple has been distributing cooked food among attendants of patients in a hospital in Sambalpur district as they were facing difficulty in getting eatables due to the coronavirus-induced lockdown.

According to Dr Satya Prakash Dora and his wife Dr Jyotsna Padhan of the Sub-Divisional Headquarter Hospital in Kuchinda, since March 30, they have been distributing cooked food among the attendants of the patients admitted to the 55-bed medical facility.

Dr Dora said the Government provides food for the patients, but their relatives, who have come from far-flung areas, have been suffering due to closure of restaurants because of the lockdown.

"I saw a patient sharing the food provided to him by the hospital with his attendant. I also saw a man bringing food from his village, which is around 20 km away. All this touched me. I and my wife decided to serve food to the patients' attendants," he said.

The doctor couple cooks food in their house with the help of some hospital staffs and themselves distribute the food among the people.

Though the inflow of patients to the hospital has declined due to the lockdown, still around 30 people are attending to patients admitted to the hospital, Dr Dora said.

"It is not an expensive affair to provide food to 30 people. We have decided to feed the attendants of the patients till the lockdown is lifted," he added.

Vans deliver essentials in city

BHUBANESWAR: In a bid to prevent overcrowding at markets in the capital city where more than 30 COVID-19 cases were detected, the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) is plying mobile vans across the city to provide groceries and vegetables to the denizens.

One can pay the bill amount at the time of making the purchases.

In addition to that, new locations for daily markets have been identified by the BMC.

The civic body has appealed people to maintain social distancing and not venture out of home as much as possible for essentials.

Commissioner of Police Sudhanshu Sarangi informed about the mobile vans and contact numbers. One can dial the BMC Helpline number-1929 for further details. PNS

Boon time: Turtles lay eggs unhindered

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

In the time of the lockdown measures for containment of transmission of COVID-19, the deserted sea beaches in the State have become a boon to Olive Ridley sea turtles during their ongoing mass nesting season.



Unhindered by humans, more than 7 lakh endangered Olive Ridley turtles have returned into sea after laying eggs on the beaches. Neither a single turtle has died being hit by trawlers nor eggs have been destroyed by predator humans.

According to the Forest Department's information, over 7 lakh turtles have participated in mass nesting at the Gahirmatha beach in Kendrapada district and the Rushikulya river mouth in Ganjam.

While around 3 lakh turtles laid eggs along the 4.5 km-long trench at Rushikulya river mouth after March 21, over 4 lakh turtles were spotted at nesting sites at the Gahirmatha beach.

Fight the virus in tandem at multiple levels



SWAYAM PRAVA MISHRA

Movies are an expression of the real society in which we reside. That is why the movie 'Contagion' and COVID-19 scenario across the world are so pertinently and peculiarly similar. The novel corona virus was first identified in Wuhan in China in 2019 and was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as on March 11, 2020.

Amid the chaos and uncertainty that prevails today, let us look at the two great economies of our times, China and India, with almost equal population and yet when one is recovering speedily, the other still struggles with the pandemic. Unlike the Chinese economy, the Indian economy is not so equipped to fight and get away with the serious COVID-19 due to several bottlenecks like poor healthcare infrastructure, prevalence of blind beliefs and superstitions, lack of awareness among the people (though thanks to the mobile phones its less now), institutional support to track and help each and every citizen and above all, the panic over the lockdown and the fear of getting dead with hunger rather than the virus.

In line with the neoclassical growth models which highlighted on the importance of technological advancement as a fuel for the growth process,

the Chinese economy no doubt adhered to the same yet with a spotlight on the socialist market economy. When it comes to the Chinese people the Government has always focused for their betterment - a truly communist mindset.

The Indian subcontinent which has various States and UTs is the largest democracy in the world with each State having its own resource endowments and potential threats. Of late, the Governments (be it in the Centre or the State) have been trying to reduce the inequality by various policy initiatives. Here in India, growth is no longer the big question but distribution is. However, there is a lot which has to be done for reducing the inequality gap or to ascertain distributional justice.

If we look back to the 2008 global financial crisis, both India and China were able to float safe due to the fiscal

austerity measures and fiscal strength respectively. Now if we look at the present COVID-19 pandemic, China was the epicenter of the virus, went for a lockdown, virus spread globally and now China has recovered. Various advanced nations like USA, UK, and Italy etc. are still going through the chaos. China is now equipped to help itself and offer a helping hand to the rest of the world; be it as a saviour or a game changer.

However, India is still struggling to get rid of the crisis.

A lot has been debated about the biological weapon in the form of Coronavirus being used by China. However, if or not it is a weapon of mass destruction, the bigger issue at hand is how to ensure a normal situation during and after the lockdown? Further, the vaccine or any medications for the same needs some transmission time in terms of production,

allied issues of procurement and distribution.

Unlike the pandemic board games which are based on cooperative game theory, where there are some four diseases, two to four players and the task is to find four cures without losing the game; here in real life, it's only one Coronavirus which can affect anyone anytime without doing anything. The task is to stay safe from the virus spread. The two players can be seen as a vector of variables. The first player comprising the Government officials, doctors, nurses, medical staff, policemen, community helpers, the service providers and anyone under the essential services; the second player comprising civilians starting from daily wage earners, manual laborers, children, old aged persons, teachers, students, youth and anyone not in the essential services. The payoffs in this case could be seen as a

decline in the number of COVID-19 positive cases; a decline in the number of deaths; a cure (gradually if not immediately) and a slow yet gradual economic recovery.

The whole issue is about coordination at multiple levels (international, national, State, local, regional and community). The time will only show how this coordination and cooperation will reflect upon ending the pandemic. As of now, we need to follow the safety instructions of staying at home, keeping our needs to the minimum, covering our mouth and nose while going out, maintaining our hygiene and of course washing our hands properly. Stay safe and stay healthy.

(Dr Mishra is Assistant Professor at the Department of Analytical & Applied Economics, Utkal University, Bhubaneswar)

No takers, W Odisha veg growers in dire straits

PNS ■ SAMBALPUR

It appears farmers never have secured future. Natural calamities are their permanent enemies. And this time, it is Coronavirus.

Just a few days back, farmers were not getting adequate fertilizers all over the Hirakud command area for second and third doses in Dalua crop.

However, after the interference of the RDC (ND) the problem has been solved. And now non-selling of vegetables, another prime source of income for the farmers of the non irrigated areas, added to their miseries. And they are sure to incur huge losses all over western Odisha.

Local markets apart, businessmen from Cuttack, Bhubaneswar, Rourkela and



neighbouring Chhatisgarh purchase vegetables from here and mainly from Sambalpur and Bargarh districts. But due to lockdown, these traders are not coming here.

"Even if vegetable transportation is not barred from lockdown, but traders and the vehicle owners are not taking the risk of travelling long distances," farmers from Bargarh said.

"We normally sell vegeta-

bles of different varieties at an average whole sale price of Rs 12 to Rs 16 per kg. But we are now unable to sell it even at Rs 4 or Rs 5," said Prafulla Pradhan, a farmer of Ganiapali village of Bargarh district under Padmapur sub division. "There are no takers for all varieties of vegetables like brinjal, tomato, ladies finger, cucumber, chilies, bitter gourd and also water melon," added Pradhan.

"Local market is also equally disadvantageous for us as consumers are not coming both out of fear and awareness for Corona. Hence, we have no market locally or outside," said another farmer V Ramesh Babu of Gaurtikra village.

"This season we are sure to make huge losses and our condition will be worst ever," he added.

Tete distributes foods in S'garh town, GPs

Talks to people about difficulties

PNS ■ ROURKELA

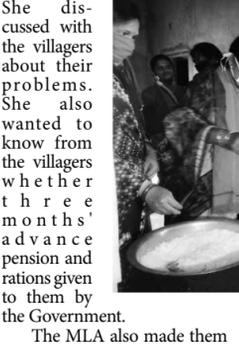
Sundargarh Sadar BJP MLA Kusum Tete has been working day and night to fight against Covid 19 and trying to ensure that the people under her constituency remain safe and healthy.

MLA Tete visited quarantine ward in Women Welfare Centre at Sundargarh and discussed with suspects there. She distributed soap to them and advised them to wash hands regularly.

Later, she distributed grocery items like rice, dal etc., to the poor and needy.

On Thursday, Tete visited Sadar block and went to differ-

ent isolation rooms in panchayats like Salepali, Kulta, Ledimang, Birbira, Majhapara, Karla, Bhasma, Kundukela, Deuli, Masnikani, Bedabahal and



chayats in my constituency to know the difficulties of people," said Tete.

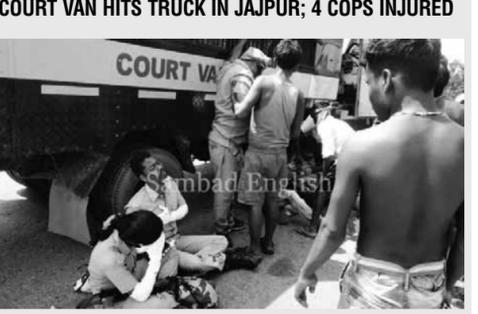
against coronavirus. Several BJP workers accompanied Tete during her visit. She also served cooked food to villagers. "I visited town and different pan-

Briefs

29 SHOPKEEPERS HELD IN BHADRAK
Bhadrak: Police arrested as many as 29 shop owners in Bhadrak town on Monday for violating the social distancing norms. Huge crowds had gathered at a local market to buy essential items giving a toss to the social distancing norms of COVID-19.

THREE ARRESTED FOR POSTING COVID MISINFORMATION
Jajpur/ Brahmapur: Three persons have been arrested in Ganjam and Jajpur districts on the charges of posting and circulating misinformation about coronavirus on social media. The Balichandrapur police registered a case against a person in Jajpur district for objectionable posts on Facebook to create communal disharmony. The Brahmapur police arrested two persons for uploading false information. The accused persons were identified as Basa Visweswar Rao and Dibakar Pradhan. They were accused of posting misinformation with an intention to create panic among people.

COURT VAN HITS TRUCK IN JAJPUR; 4 COPS INJURED
Jajpur: Despite empty roads due to the lockdown, a court van had a head-on collision with a truck on NH-16 at Brahmani village under the Dharmasala police station in Jajpur district on Monday afternoon. Five persons, three Constables, a driver and a prisoner, were injured in the accident. The van was en route to Baleswar from the Choudwar Circle Jail as the prisoner was supposed to be released on parole. Several locals rushed to the rescue of the injured and sent them to Dharmasala CHC by a car and a pickup van.



Odisha doctor in low cost ventilator making team

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A doctor has become a frontline warrior in the ongoing battle against novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as he has been involved in a team engaged in manufacturing of low-cost ventilators for patients infected with the deadly virus in the country.

Dr Devendra Tripathy from Balangir district is among a team of Professors from the IIT Roorkee and the AIIMS Rishikesh manufacturing low-cost ventilators required in hospitals to fight the highly infectious disease.

The tiny-shaped ventilator costs around Rs 25,000. It will help both elderly patients and



infants. The joint team is now devoted to produce a number of ventilators to meet shortage of medical equipment to tackle the pandemic in the country. Dr Tripathy is the classmate of Dr Chittaranjan Joshi, who is heading a team of doctors in war against COVID-19 in Australia.

Cops sing to spread corona awareness

PNS ■ JHARSUGUDA

Adopting a unique formula to spread awareness about COVID-19, policemen sang songs on streets appealing to residents to stay at home during lockdown clamped in the country to fight deadly virus.

Instead of holding baton, a team of police personnel, headed by Jharsuguda SP Aswini Mohanty, took the initiative to spread message through songs.

Holding mike in hand, the cops sang songs on urban streets and roads with an aim



at convincing people not to come out of their houses as part of precautionary measures for containment of the coronavirus. They urged the residents to

Elephant kills 4 people in Bargarh

PNS ■ BARGARH

An elephant has trampled as many as four persons to death in Bargarh district in less than 24 hours.

The animal crushed a 75-year-old man at Rajapada Sahi in the Padmapur area when he was sleeping in his house on Sunday night.

The elephant trampled a 45-year-old man and a 21-year-old youth to death in the locality when they had gone to attend nature's call on Monday morning. The duo was identified as son and grandson of the elderly man, the earlier victim.

Another 52-year-old man was killed when he was crushed by the elephant at Banjanmunda under the Boden police limits.

Being informed, forest officials reached the spots and initiated an investigation. Locals have demanded compensation for the families of the deceased.

HAL SANITISES OFFICES, MARKETS



Koraput: The fire services department of the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) sprayed calcium hydrochloride and disinfected markets, banks, Post Office, gas unit and godowns in its premises at Sunabeda in Koraput on Friday. Its sanitisation move received appreciation from different sections of people.

NAIK NEW SUNABEDA PS IIC

Koraput: Bhimsen Naik joined as the new IIC of the Sunabeda police station in Koraput district on Saturday. He replaced Sumitra Jena, who was transferred to the Koraput PS. Naik, who came from the Nabarangpur Town PS, asked people to avoid gatherings and maintain social distancing to fight out coronavirus outbreak. He also asked people to follow all lockdown norms.

K'pada villages seal entry points for social distancing

PNS ■ KENDRAPADA

Even as the Prime Minister has announced a nationwide 21-day lockdown to contain the spread of coronavirus, some villages in Kendrapada district have gone a step further by blocking entry points to their villages. These villages have several persons working in plumbing sector in foreign countries.

The villagers have also pasted hand-written posters and banners that prohibit entry of outsiders and restrict locals from crossing the village boundary.

The villages in Pattamundai, Mahakalapada, Marshaghai areas have closed the entrance road by putting up makeshift bamboo barricades. Kumarpada under Mahakalapada that has closed all the entrance road of the village can be a case in point.

"We are doing this to avoid spread of COVID-19. We will neither allow outsiders to enter our village nor our own residents to go outside," said Manoj



Kumar Sahu, a villager of Kumarpada.

Even, arrangements for handwash and soap have been made at the entrance of the village for its people, those who go out and return later and also for the outsiders, who came to the village for emergency work.

The youths are literally guarding the entry points and restricting the entry of bikes to the village. The process will

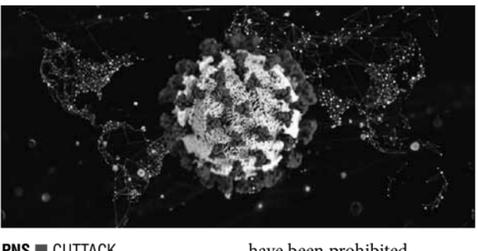
continue till the end of lockdown, told the villagers.

"Precautions are essential to save ourselves. We have sealed ourselves inside the village by putting up makeshift barricades and closing the entrance with old bamboo and tree-trunks to minimise outside contact and ensure social distancing during the countrywide lockdown," said

Bichitrnanda Behera of Marshaghai.

Like Kumbharpada, the villagers of Gunupur, Danaramunda, Gunupurpatana, Kumbharsahi, and more than three dozens of villages have also sealed their entrance roads too to support the complete lockdown and to keep social distancing to contain the COVID-19.

2 areas in Cuttack district sealed



PNS ■ CUTTACK

Two areas of Cuttack district have been sealed and declared as 'containment zones' to check coronavirus transmission.

As per official sources, a COVID-19 patient of Jajpur district had visited Jairampur village in the Tehsil of Nischintakoili and Kanpur village in the Tehsil of Salepur in Cuttack district on March 21. For comprehensive contact tracing, the two areas have been sealed. Free ingress and egress of people in the areas

have been prohibited.

"Ward No. 1 of Jairampur gram panchayat in the Tehsil of Nischintakoili and Ward Nos. 12 and 13 of Mirzapur Gram Panchayat in the Tehsil of Salepur are declared as a containment zone," an official order said.

Movement of vehicles and persons in and out of the area has been stopped till further orders. All commercial establishments shall be totally closed. Supply of medicines and essential goods shall be ensured by the respective block administrations.

WB migrants get timely support in K'jhar

Thank CM, Collector

PNS ■ CHAMPUA

Ever since the countrywide lockdown was imposed on March 25 midnight, the Keonjhar district administration has been working hard to ensure strict enforcement of restrictions and to provide support to needy people.

Sources said thousands of migrant workers from the neighbouring West Bengal were engaged in the different construction works in Keonjhar town. After the lockdown was enforced, they were

living in a miserable condition. On Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik's advice, district Collector Ashish Thakre asked officials to provide rations at their doorsteps soon and ensure that there would be the least possibility of coronavirus outbreak among them.

However, some of the migrant workers had not been given the support. Our correspondent had brought this matter to the notice of Sub-Collector Ram Chandra Kisko. On Saturday, DLO Ajay Kumar Pradhan provided aids to the left out workers, who included a mason and six labourers.

The workers expressed their gratitude to CM Patnaik and Collector Thakre for the support.

Ex-B'swar MP gives ₹2.3L to CMRF

Also distributes rations to distressed

PNS ■ BALESWAR

Former Baleswar MP Rabindra Kumar Jena has donated Rs 2,29,839 to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund (CMRF) for utilisation in combating coronavirus.

Jena said he made the donation out of his pension he received from Government as a former MP after May 2019.

Besides, he has engaged a number of teams in distribution of essentials to the people in distress. On Sunday in the Rasalpur

area, Jena provided rations for 10 days to five pherriwalas (hawkers) of West Bengal who have stranded for lockdown here. Saifull Chaudhary, 27, Musharaf Chaudhary, 28, Niziruddin Chaudhary, 28, Agar Hussein, 31, and Abutiar Mian, 35, all of Birbhum district used to sell utensils at doorsteps in the district.

Jena has also extended similar gesture to the distress in the Nilgiri and Chandipur areas.

"No person should starve on account of this unprecedented situation. Everyone should come forward and extend possible help voluntarily," Jena said.

Earlier, Jena had provided adequate rations to 60 porters at the railway station here.

'Cuttack lockdown tough but successful'

In the wake of 48 hours' complete shutdown at Bhubaneswar, Cuttack and Bhadrak which came into effect from 8 pm on Friday, The Pioneer correspondent Mohammad Shakeel met Collector and District Magistrate of Cuttack Bhabani Shankar Chayani and asked him about the arrangements.

The Pioneer: Why Cuttack city was included when the city was not initially included during early announcement made by Chief Secretary Asit Tripathy?

DM: Cuttack was included in view of one positive case detected under Cuttack Municipal Corporation are. It has become imperative on part of the Government to include Cuttack under shutdown for 48 hours. The administration shall use the time for vigorous contact tracing.

The Pioneer: What about essential commodities like milk and vegetables. Were

they made available within the 48 hours?

DM: Our purpose was to minimise footfall, as these points attract congregation and the whole idea of social distancing would have been foiled. Therefore we did not include any such sale of such items which would allow people to congregate.

The Pioneer: How was the district administration coordinating with the public health system?

DM: Absolutely we are getting lots of support from the public at large, the police administration and municipal corporation administration as well the district administration. We are working together as one team to mitigate the current situation as well the future challenges to fight the pandemic coronavirus. And during shutdown period, we worked in tandem.

The Pioneer: As Cuttack is more than 1,000-year city



and it's densely populated, do you think there are high chances of the virus to spread in community.

DM: You are right. Cuttack is a very old city and it is densely populated, that has made our job tough and we are taking all possible steps to ensure that the denizens don't fall prey to the deadly virus.

The Pioneer: There are reports that migrant labourers and other workers from unorganised sectors belonging to the neighbouring States

promised by the Government DM: PDS points have been activated and commodities are being distributed among the people. But I understand that it has not been distributed seamlessly that is because of the delay in movement of transport vehicles. I assure you all the beneficiaries will be covered soon.

The Pioneer: What the district administration has planned to take care of those people who have no BPL cards or any other Government food schemes facilities?

DM: The municipal administration has been directed to take care of the destitute and those people who cannot support themselves. So they have been offered cooked food and absolutely they have no problems as such.

The Pioneer: It has come to our notice that individuals and community based organizations such as Sikh community, Muslim community,

Marwari community from their own funds are distributing cooked food and other essential food items to the poor in different localities in the city. Does the district administration encourage these kinds of social activities?

DM: We are encouraging the civil society to participate in the process of taking care of the poor people in the respective localities but they should carry out the task in an organised manner and take permission from the district administration and maintain social distancing and other norms of fighting Covid 19.

The Pioneer: If individuals or community based organizations seek help from the district administration for essential commodities like rice and other essentials, will the administration lend a hand?

DM: Whenever they need any help from district administration, we shall support them.

COVID-19 OUTBREAK

CONNECTING FARMERS WITH MANDIS

Centre may go for 'truck aggregators'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Taking a cue from app-based cab services, the Centre may go in for 'truck aggregators' to connect farmers with mandis. Preparing for managing a staggered post-lockdown scenario, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday suggested harnessing technology and encouraging exploration of innovative solutions like 'truck aggregators' while interacting with his Council of Ministers whom he asked to prepare a list of 10 major decisions and 10 priority areas of focus after April 14.

Modi said that welfare of farmers is of high importance and affirmed that his government would provide all possible help to farmers in the harvesting season. He also underlined the need to devise a strategy to ensure procurement of tribal products so that the source of income of the indigenous tribal populace remains intact. While making important recommendations and asking for suggestions, he underlined importance of being 'motivated, determined and vigilant in the battle against COVID-19'. He sought that Ministers should remain in touch with State and District Administration, provide solutions to emergent problems and formulate district level micro plans. Modi asked relevant Ministries to continuously monitor and ensure that benefits of 'Garib Kalyan Yojana' keep reaching intended beneficiaries in a seamless manner and tasked his Ministers to popularize Aarogya Setu app in the rural areas and grass root institutions.

He also asked the Ministries to prepare a Business Continuity Plan and be ready to fight the economic impact of COVID-19 on war footing. He said it is imperative that the leaders communicate exhaustively with the state and district administration, especially in the districts which are hotspots for the pandemic, to be apprised of the ground situation and also provide solutions to the emerging problems. He noted that a graded plan to slowly open departments where hotspots aren't existing should be made and that the crisis offers an opportunity to become self-dependent in the medical sector. It is also important to ensure there is no crowding at PDS centres, maintain effective monitoring, take action on complaints and prevent black marketing and rise in prices of essentials, he said. While mentioning that due to the emergent challenges, the country needs to lessen its dependence on other nations, he asked all departments to maintain an objective index on how their work will promote Make in India.

Smart City control rooms now Covid-19 war rooms

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The hi-tech integrated command and control centre (ICCC) in Pune, Surat, Varanasi Bengaluru and Tumakuru, constructed under the Smart Cities Mission, have been converted into Covid-19 war rooms to keep a tight vigil on people's movement, track healthcare workers, ambulances and coronavirus positive cases. Geographic information system (GIS) technology is being used to map each case and keep tab on home-quarantined people. Till now, the ICCCs were being used for municipal services, traffic management and water supply among others. After the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, these ICCCs have been turned into a coronavirus war rooms, which are equipped with CCTV surveillance of public places, GIS Mapping of COVID positive cases, GPS Tracking of healthcare workers. They have facilities of telecounseling, tele-medicine, real time tracking of ambulances, virtual training facilities to doctors and healthcare professionals. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, which is the nodal agency for the Smart City Mission, said that Pune Smart City Command and Control Centre is using Geospatial Information System for tracking and monitoring the areas and create buffer zones where patients are diagnosed positive with Covid-19. This helps to implement containment plan as per the government guidelines. The Centre has mapped each case using geo-spatial

information systems (GIS), tracking healthcare operations at the city's Naidu Infectious Disease Hospital and drawing up a containment plan using heat-mapping technologies. For this, it has converted its high-tech command centre into a 'war room' from where authorities can monitor operations to check the spread of the contagion. The mapping of the containment zones reflects in the dashboard. "Using heat-mapping technologies and predictive analytics, the city administration will develop a containment plan and the containment zones get reflected on the dashboard," officials added. The Surat Smart City command and control room has published an online dashboard on its municipal website to provide regular updates to the citizens. In addition to providing the overall statistics on tested, confirmed, active, recovered and death cases, the dashboard provides the trends and patterns on the spread of COVID-19 within city, in terms of cumulative cases (each day), number of new confirmed cases reported (date wise), age-wise distribution of cases, zone-wise distribution and gender-wise distribution. Spatial Mapping of the affected areas is made available to citizens on this page. These command and control centres were developed under the Smart Cities Mission have so far been used for various municipal functions, including 24-hour water supply projects, property tax collection, traffic management, street lighting, monitoring bus movement and CCTV for security. As SARS-CoV-2 hit India,

Centre asks State Govts to ensure supply of medical oxygen

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As the number of positive Covid-19 cases continues to surge across the country, the Centre on Monday asked the State Governments to ensure supply of medical oxygen needed for ventilators to treat critical patients of coronavirus that causes acute respiratory problems. For its part, in a bid to meet the shortage of the Personnel Protective Equipment (PPE), the Centre opened up supply lines from abroad with receipt of 1.70 lakh PPE coversalls which were donated from China to India. Along with domestic supplies of 20,000 coversalls, 1.90 lakh coversalls will now be distributed to hospitals and will add to 3,87,473 PPEs already available in the country, said a senior government official. He said that two lakh domestically produced N95 masks are being sent to hospitals. "Including these, over 20 lakh N95 masks have been



supplied by the Government. About 16 lakh N95 masks are presently available in the country. This number will increase with the fresh supply of 2 lakh masks" he added. Also, orders have been placed for 112.76 lakhs stand-alone N95 masks and 157.32 lakhs PPE coversalls. Out of these, 80 lakh PPE kits will include N95 masks. The objective is to achieve a supply of about 10 lakh PPE kits per week, said the official. The order for 80 lakh complete PPE kits (including N95 masks) which were to be supplied by a Singapore based firm will be available from April 11 with 2 lakhs, followed by 8 lakhs more in a week. The Government said that within the consolidated guidelines issued time to time to the States, manufacturing units of medical devices, their raw materials and intermediates; manufacturing units of their packaging material; transportation of essential goods and medical supplies and mobilisation of resources, workers and material for augmentation and expansion of hospital infrastructure have been permitted.

NBA expresses concern over threat to scribes for Tablighi coverage

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The News Broadcasters Association (NBA) on Monday expressed concern over threats received by anchors and reporters of news channels for their coverage of the role of Tablighi Jamaat in the spread of coronavirus. The association appealed to the government and law enforcing agencies to take immediate preventive action against 'anti-social elements'. "This particular trend has

been noticed after electronic media recently exposed the role of Tablighi Jamaat in the spread of coronavirus, resulting in a nationwide spurt in the number of positive cases and subsequent deaths. Anchors and reporters working in news channels are being specifically targeted through social media platforms like WhatsApp, Tik Tok, and Twitter," NBA president Rajat Sharma said in a statement. The association also took note of some of the recent

trends in India on Twitter. "There are videos circulating on social media in which some religious preachers are naming some TV news anchors and threatening attacks on the reporters of those channels. NBA strongly deplores this pernicious trend in a section of society and appeals to the Government and law enforcing agencies to take immediate preventive action against such anti-social elements," the statement read.

500 NCC cadets deployed in corona fight

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Pitching in the national effort to fight coronavirus pandemic, nearly 500 National Cadet Corps (NCC) cadets are now deployed on duties like ensuring supply chain management, law and order, and sensitizing local people about the pandemic. This mobilisation comes after the defence ministry last week permitted temporary employment of the cadets under 'Exercise NCC Yogdan'. Ex-servicemen have also been mobilised to meet the current challenge with many of them already assisting various state governments. Giving details about the deployment of the NCC cadets, defence ministry officials said here on Monday civil and police administration have started requisitioning for services of senior division cadets in fight against Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Some of them have started giving service from Monday. These cadets will give a helping hand to state and municipal authorities to augment relief effort. Union Territory of Ladakh has requisitioned for employment of eight cadets in supply chain management. Neemuch (Madhya Pradesh) Superintendent of Police has requested Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh NCC Directorate for services of 245 cadets in supply chain and traffic management. Sixty-four senior division cadets including seven women have already been employed. Collector of Bilaspur (Chhattisgarh) has requested for service of NCC volunteer cadets for training in COVID-19 preventive measures. These cadets are being imparted training for the job ahead. Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Chandigarh (PHHPC) Directorate has received requisition by Deputy Commissioner of Kangra district in Himachal Pradesh for services of 86 cadets till April

IAF Sergeant tests corona negative

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The IAF Sergeant, who had visited the Nizamuddin area during the time of the Tablighi Jamaat congregation last month, has tested negative for coronavirus in the preliminary tests. However, he will continue to remain in quarantine till all other tests mandated for the pandemic are conducted. This, even as investigations are on to determine if the Sergeant actually attended the congregation. Giving this information here on Monday, officials said the Sergeant was placed in quarantine two days back as a precaution after the Delhi Police found that he had visited Nizamuddin area during the time of the Tablighi Jamaat congregation. The Sergeant came in contact with two other personnel

and they all are asymptomatic. But as per procedure all three have been quarantined. The families of the personnel have also been quarantined. The Sergeant was identified by the police after they traced people present in the Nizamuddin area using phone records as part of efforts to identify those present during the congregation. Once the information was known, the contact list of the Sergeant was ascertained and it was identified that he contacted two more IAF personnel. Currently, the IAF is working on skeletal staff with majority working from home due to COVID-19, so the contact list is very limited. Similarly, the Army and Navy Headquarters are also working with bare minimum staff with most of the personnel working from home.

of CCTV control rooms. According to the employment guidelines, state government/district administration has to send the requisition of employment of volunteer cadets through state NCC Directorates. Details will be coordinated at Directorate/Group Headquarters/Unit level with state government/local civil authority. It should be ensured that ground conditions and laid down requirements are met before the cadets are deployed for the duty. Officials also specified that cadets above the age of 18 years are eligible for these responsibilities. As regards mobilizing ex-servicemen, they said Rajya Sainik Boards, Zila Sainik Boards are playing a dynamic role in identifying and mobilising maximum veterans to assist the state and district administration in performing public outreach activities such as contact tracing, community surveillance, management of quarantine facilities or any such tasks assigned to them. Citing some instances, they said in Punjab, an organisation called 'Guardians of Governance', comprising 4,200 ex-servicemen, are assisting in data collection from all the villages. The Chhattisgarh Government has employed some retired soldiers to assist the police. Similarly, in Andhra Pradesh all the District Collectors have asked for retired veteran volunteers. In Uttar Pradesh, all Zila Sainik Kalyan Adhikaris are in touch with District Control Rooms and retired Army Medical Corps personnel have been identified and kept ready. In addition, Sainik Rest Houses are being readied in Uttarakhand to act as isolation/quarantine Centres if need arises. In Goa, a control room has been established and veterans asked to remain on standby for any assistance to the local administration.

Superstitions and hearsay cannot weaken our battle against COVID-19: Vice-Prez

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Cautioning that superstitions and hearsay cannot be allowed to weaken our battle against COVID-19, Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu has described the spread of misinformation, especially on social media, as a "virus" that needs to be checked. Observing that free flow of authentic information to quell rumours and misinformation is critical, Naidu in a Facebook post said the war on virus cannot be won if we have inadequate or faulty understanding of the magnitude of the problem. Referring to irresponsible floating of the precautionary social distancing guidelines in some states and exemplified by the recent congregation in New Delhi, the Vice President underscored the need for greater dissemination of guidelines and stricter implementation. He said there has to be a greater awareness of the urgency and the scientific evidence about the spread of the virus necessitating a total societal response cutting across caste, creed, class, language, regions and religions. At the same time, Naidu, said that there has to be a common understanding among all religious groups that social distancing norms cannot be taken lightly and there should not be large congregations till the current challenge is overcome. "We hope there will be no more such unfortunate, blatant violations of the prescribed guidelines", he observed. The Vice President also called for steering clear of untenable generalisations about communities and not viewing events from the prism of prejudices and biases. He said this is no time to relax and a tough struggle lies ahead. "Unity of thought and action and solidarity with all the brave warriors is the need of the hour," he outlined.

Tourism Ministry comes to rescue of foreign tourists post lockdown

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Tourism Ministry has come to the rescue of a number of foreign tourists including an American, two Costa Ricans and an Australian family stranded in India. As many as 769 foreign tourists have reached out to the Government for help and support amid the 21-day nationwide lockdown to fight the Covid-19 pandemic. The foreign tourists registered themselves on the Tourism Ministry's portal strandedinindia.com, launched five days ago. The portal has been launched to identify, assist and facilitate foreign tourists who are stranded in various parts of India. Every State Government and Union Territory Administration has identified a Nodal Officer for assisting such foreign tourists and the 5 Regional Offices of the Ministry of Tourism are constantly coordinating with the Nodal Officers. While the Tourism Ministry Regional Offices are coordinating with the Bureau of Immigration and FRROs regarding Visa issues being faced by the stranded foreigners, requests for move-



ment within the country/ state and for transfer to home country of such tourists are also being coordinated with the Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Home Affairs and with the respective Embassy/ High Commission/Consulate. The stranded foreign tourists are being contacted over e-mails, telephones and also in person depending on the nature of support required by them. "A lady, who is an American citizen, was stranded in Supaul district of Bihar amidst the COVID19 lockdown, while her son was undergoing a surgery at Delhi. The portal facilitated the required inter-ministerial, inter-departmental and State-Centre coordination and

secured her a special transit permit to travel to Delhi. She has safely reached her destination and expressed her gratitude for the efforts put in by all the concerned agencies," the Ministry said. It also cited the examples of helping out two Costa Rican and an Australian tourist who was stranded with his family in Ahmedabad. "The tourist has epilepsy and ran out of medication prescribed by Australian doctors due to the lockdown. The portal led to the tourist being reached through the office of the District Collector. He was provided with sufficient medication and was also offered food and local transportation. Now, they are comfortable and safe," the statement added.

14 to assist the police in ensuring social distancing in the city localities. District Police of Kancheepuram (Tamil Nadu) has also approached district nodal officer on COVID-19 for services of NCC cadets. Fifty-seven cadets including two women have assembled and are being employed. In all, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry & Andaman Nicobar Directorate has provided services of 75 cadets in Tamil Nadu and 57 in Puducherry. With Balrampur district administration in Uttar Pradesh

Women stronger against Covid-19 but other factors fail them: Study

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

When it comes to mounting an immune response against Covid-19 infections, women may seem to be a stronger sex as reflected in various data, but, ironically, they bear the brunt of the pandemics in the form of domestic violence and maternal mortality because of disruption of accessibility to vital health and gender-based violence services and social support. Flagging the deeper crisis

owing to the lack of support amid Coronavirus crisis, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) on Monday said that the present situation could also exacerbate existing financial inequality between men and women. Dr Natalia Kanem, executive director of the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), warned that the coronavirus outbreak has "severely disrupted" access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and gender-based violence (GBV) services "at a time when women

and girls need these services most". Among the risk groups she identified are pregnant women who need antenatal care but are unsure whether to attend a clinic, and women in abusive relationships trapped at home during the lockdown. Data available on the impact of COVID-19 on pregnant women is currently limited, with no suggestion of increased susceptibility or of vertical (mother-child) transmission.

However, aid organisations working in so-called "weak health systems" - defined by a high maternal mortality ratio (MMR) - are drawing lessons from the 2014-16 Ebola epidemic in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone. A huge surge in MMR was recorded during and after the outbreak, as women stayed away from medical facilities due to quarantine restrictions or misconceptions about virus transmission, and were forced instead into riskier home births, said the statement from

the UNFPA here. Rising tensions due to economic losses could lead to a spike in domestic violence behind closed doors - during a period when counselling and support services may be stripped back to a minimum. At a time when nations across the world are implementing "stay at home" measures, the UNFPA warned that women are more likely to shoulder higher proportions of the domestic burden during lockdown.

The organisation also warned of a potential rise in female-genital mutilation, as well as early, child or forced marriages at this time of restricted movement, poor visibility and weakened protection systems. Kanem said that preparedness will be key in dealing with the pandemic's knock-on effects. The UNFPA is pressing for the full maintenance of sexual and reproductive health services during the COVID-19 outbreak, which should include

antenatal and postnatal care, access to modern contraception and emergency contraception, and safe abortion and post-abortion care "to the full extent of the law" in all areas where services are likely to be impacted. The organisation is calling for priority testing of pregnant women with COVID-19 symptoms, isolation of pregnancy wards from confirmed COVID-19 cases, an elevation of care for any pregnant women with respiratory illnesses, and extra care for all women in delivery,

in case breathing complications should arise. Another chief area of concern is the medical frontline, where women make up an estimated 70% of the world's global health and social sector workforce. In many cases, their safety is being compromised through contact with high-risk environments and a lack of personal protective equipment (PPE). Adequate psychological support is also essential at a time of high stress for health workers, the UNFPA said.

COVID-19 OUTBREAK

5 ultras killed, 5 jawans martyred in J&K ops

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

The icy heights of Keran sector in North Kashmir's Kupwara district on Sunday witnessed a hand-to-hand combat between elite Para commandos, belonging to the same unit which had raided terrorist camps across the line of control during September 29, 2016 'surgical strike', with a group of heavily armed terrorists in which all five terrorists, who had sneaked inside the Indian territory few days ago, were eliminated in one of the deadliest operations while all five commandos also laid down their lives.

According to field officers, posted in the region, "It was no less than a repeat of several hand-to-hand combat battles, which Indian soldiers had fought at the peak of Kargil war in 1999 to flush out the Pakistani Army regulars from their well fortified locations.

According to Col Rajesh Kalia, Ministry of Defence Spokesman based in Srinagar, "four soldiers under the command of a Junior Commissioned Officer (JCO) from one of the most professional Para SF Units were heli dropped near the LoC after information on the infiltrators was received.

An intense hand to hand battle ensued and all five terrorists were eliminated". "In this battle, however, Army lost five of its best soldiers, three on the site and two more succumbed while they were airlifted to a nearby military hospital", Col Kalia added.

The team of elite commandos were led by Subedar Sanjeev Kumar and included Havildar Davendra Singh, Paratrooper Bal Krishan, Paratrooper Amit Kumar and Paratrooper Chhatrapal Singh. Two of them belonged to Himanchal Pradesh, two from Uttarakhand and one commando hailed from Rajasthan.

According to senior Army officers, "the footsteps of the group of infiltrators were first reported in the Zurhama forest area on April 1. Due to extremely difficult terrain and prevailing inclement weather conditions no engagement with the heavily armed group of infiltrators took place. While tight vigil was being maintained and foot patrolling was enhanced to plug the gaps in the region, security forces were mobilised in the area on April 4.

According to defence sources, "early Sunday morning, a small squad consisting of five soldiers started tracking the footsteps and came dangerously close to the cornice-a mass of hardened snow at the edge of a mountain.

According to defence sources, before members of the squad could realise, it broke and they fell in to the frozen nallah close to where the terrorists were hiding.

Despite suffering a free fall, alert commandos engaged hiding terrorists in a hand-to-hand combat and eliminated all of them. According to defence sources, dead bodies of the soldiers and terrorists were found within 2-3 metres of each other and bore marks of bullet injuries clearly indicted fierce gun fight took place between the two groups.

Meanwhile, situation remained tense along the line of control in Poonch sector. According to Jammu based Defence Spokesman, Lt Col Devender Anand, Pakistan army violated ceasefire agreement by initiating small arms firing and shelling with mortars along the LoC in Mankote sub sector of Poonch around 5.15 p.m. He said, the Indian Army retaliated the fire befittingly. On Sunday also, Indian army inflicted heavy damages on the other side of the LoC while targeting notorious Pakistani posts.

Sudden surge in cases baffles TN Govt

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The sudden spurt in the number of corona positive cases in the State has baffled the Tamil Nadu administration. During the last week of March, the State had hardly 60 corona virus cases while Maharashtra and Kerala topped the table. But by April 1, the number of coronavirus cases in Tamil Nadu touched 200 and since then it was an unexpected surge.

By Sunday evening, it was announced by Beela Rajesh that the number of corona cases had crossed the 570 mark making Tamil Nadu the State with the second highest number of corona patients after Maharashtra. It is reported that the Government has ordered a detailed probe to find out the reasons behind the increase in the number of patients.

Out of the 570 patients tested positive for corona, more than 400 are either the returnees of the Tablighi Jamaat congregation held in Delhi or those who came into contact with them. The State administration is on a mission mode to prevent the disease reaching the Stage-3 (community transmission). But law breakers are having a field day in various parts of the State. Virudhunagar and Thoothukudi districts reported shopkeepers openly violating prohibitory orders and selling meat.

Though there is a notion about the poor hygiene of the people of the State, Tamil Nadu has been doing well in waste management and disposal. The health sector too had registered impressive growth with many corporate hospitals opening branches in interior Tamil

Out of the 570 patients tested positive for corona, more than 400 are either the returnees of the Tablighi Jamaat congregation held in Delhi or those who came into contact with them

Nadu. The State is on its way to establish Government medical colleges in all the districts. South India's first All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) is fast coming up at Madurai.

Chief Minister Edappadi Palaniswamy convened a media meet on Monday after his interaction with officials (both revenue and police) and appealed to the people to cooperate with government officials to prevent the spreads of the disease.

"We have brought in laws to check the spread of the disease. But it could be implemented only with the cooperation of the people. The police are over worked and they have been instructed to be courteous with the people. Now it is for our people to reciprocate by obeying the guidelines, dos and don'ts," said Palaniswamy.

The video message aired by the Government of Tamil Nadu through news channels has caught the attention of the people. Doctors and nurses appeal to the people of the State to stay at home and not to come out. "It is patient who asks us to save his/her life. This is out turn to request you to stay home and stay safe by not coming out of your houses," says Dr Raghunathan, professor of medicine, in this one-minute message.

TN positive cases climb to 621, Govt to import test kits

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

With 50 more persons testing positive for coronavirus on Monday, the number of patients diagnosed with COVID 19 disease in Tamil Nadu reached 621. This was disclosed by Beela Rajesh, Secretary to the department of health and family welfare on Monday.

The health secretary made it clear in her media briefing that the meeting convened by Chief Minister on Monday morning has decided not to use the terms like Tablighi Jamaat or Nizamuddin religious congregation while giving out the details of the tests held to detect the pandemic. "We will just use terms like travelers or passengers. The Chief Minister was of the view that frequent usage of names like Tablighi Jamaat is discriminatory in nature," she said

She said out of the 50 persons tested positive on Monday, 48 were those who returned from New Delhi. "We have tested samples of 1475 persons who had come back from Delhi out of which 573 were found to be positive and 855 tested negative. Samples of 47 persons are under process," said Rajesh. She also disclosed that a 57 year old woman who was admitted to a hospital late Sunday night with severe acute respiratory infection breathed her last on Monday. The lady, a relation of one of the travellers who

had attended the Delhi meet, could have contacted the virus from the latter, said the secretary.

The Government has intensified its efforts to check the spread of the virus. "Aggressive containment plans have been drawn out to prevent the virus reaching the stage-3, which could lead to community spread," she said. As part of the Government's all out war on coronavirus, the health department is importing one lakh rapid test kits from China. "These kits are expected to arrive in Chennai on April 9 and will be dispatched to all districts immediately," said Chief Minister Edappadi Palaniswamy while speaking to reporters after an extended meeting with senior government officials and doctors at Chennai on Monday. The rapid tests would begin in the state from April 10 and the results could be known within 30 minutes, he said.

The chief minister said there was no need to panic as the disease was well under control. "We have screened 2,10,538 passengers at airports in Tamil Nadu and of them, 90,541 are under home quarantine. 10,816 persons have completed the 28-day quarantine period," said Palaniswamy. He disclosed that there were 17 testing labs in government and private hospitals and the state government had sought permission for 21 more labs.

Maha: 7 more deaths, +ve cases at 838

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI:

The coronavirus reached the doorsteps of Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Monday after a tea vendor operating near his private residence at Bandra (E) in north-west Mumbai tested positive for the pandemic, even as seven more persons succumbed to Covid-19 and the 120 fresh infected cases were reported. Confirming that the tea vendor had been infected, a BMC spokesperson said: "The person has been shifted to the nearby HBT Medical College and Dr R N Cooper Hospital".

Acting swiftly, the BMC sealed off the area and began to take immediate steps to insulate the chief minister's private residence "Matoshtri" from the pandemic.

What triggered anxiety among the staff members of the chief minister's office that some security guards of Thackerays used to drink from the tea stall run by the affected vendor.

With no let up in the large number of deaths and fresh infections due to the Coronavirus, the total number of the

pandemic deaths rose to 52 as seven more persons died, while the total infected persons in the state rose to a staggering 838 after 120 more persons tested positive for Covid-19.

Of the fresh deaths, Mumbai accounted four, while one death was reported from Thane, Navi Mumbai and Vasai-Virar. Of the deaths in Mumbai, two took place in Hinduhridaya Samrat Bal Thackeray (HBT) Medical College and Dr R N Cooper Hospital, while one death was reported by private hospitals.

In a tragic development, a 30-year-old woman in her ninth month of pregnancy died at the BMC-run air Hospital on Saturday. Three other deaths - one each belonging to Navi Mumbai, Ambernath in Thane district and another from Virarp-Vasai took place in Mumbai hospitals.

"Out of 17563 laboratory samples, 15808 were negative and 838 have been tested positive for coronavirus until today. 66 patients have been discharged till date after full recovery," a medical bulletin issued by the State Health Department said.

"32,521 people are in home quarantine and 3498 people are in institutional quarantine," the bulletin said.

Meanwhile, the BMC - in its daily bulletin - said that it had surveyed the city's 15 lakh population till date and identified 665 "contacts" which have been referred for testing. "We have also collected 1400 samples through five teams and through this process, 130 patients have tested positive for Covid-19.

"As many as 10968 people had been placed under quarantine. Of them, 3990 people have completed the quarantine period. In all, the BMC has declared 226 areas/buildings as containment zones in the metropolis..

As part of special screening campaign, the BMC has collected 112 swab samples.

In a related development, various nurses' unions and associations -- under the umbrella of Jan Swasthya Abhiyan -- wrote to Mumbai Commissioner Praven Pardeshi on Monday, raising safety concerns faced by nurses while treating the novel coronavirus patients.

J&K positive cases reach 109

PNS ■ JAMMU

With only three patients testing positive in Kashmir division, the total number of Covid-19 cases in Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir Monday stood at 109, recording a jump of 57 patients in last five days alone.

From over 50 reported cases by the end of last month, the J&K reached a cumulative tally of 109 cases on April 6, the media bulletin reported.

The Bulletin said that till date 1708 samples have been sent for testing of which 1583 have tested as negative, and 16 reports are awaited till April 06, 2020.

Director SKIMS, Dr AG Ahangar Monday said, out of 283 suspected patients, 238 have been discharged and 24 positive patients who are under treatment are all recovering well.

The Kashmir Valley had



recorded its first case on March 18 when a 67-year-old woman from Khanyar Srinagar tested positive, two days after her arrival from Saudi Arabia after performing Umrah. As per officials, out of these

109 COVID-19-affected people, 85 are in Kashmir and 18 in Jammu. However, four of them have been discharged—three from Jammu and one from Kashmir while two others succumbed to the disease.

There are 103 active cases—85 in Kashmir and 18 in Jammu.

14 fresh cases were reported on Sunday-five from Baramulla district, two from Budgam and an elderly couple from Shopian besides one each from Ganderbal, Baniapora and Srinagar districts.

Furthermore, till date 35243 travellers and persons in contact with suspected cases have been put under surveillance which include 10556 persons in home quarantine including facilities operated by government, 615 in Hospital Quarantine, 103 in hospital isolation and 17506 under home surveillance. Besides, 6463 persons have completed their 28-day surveillance period. Meanwhile, the district administration in Srinagar Monday sealed Chattabala area of Srinagar after several positive cases reported from the area.

Goa to undertake corona survey: CM

Panaji: The Goa Government will undertake a Statewide survey to trace any potentially suspect coronavirus case, in which all households will be covered, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant said on Monday.

The Chief Minister said the survey will start from April 11, so that when the 21-day nationwide lockdown ends on April 14, the coastal State was able to consider the next step to tackle the spread of coronavirus. "The survey over three days and ill be conducted by nearly 7,000 government servants as well as contract workers employed by the state," Sawant told reporters in Panaji.

The survey's objective was to identify foreigners or persons who may have returned to Goa from other states and to identify persons with fever or flu-like symptoms. "The information gathered will be passed on to Public Health Centre personnel concerned, who will then assess the data," the Chief Minister said. "This is a 100 per cent community survey. Everyone in Goa should cooperate," Sawant said. The Chief Minister announced a 20 per cent hike in salaries of health workers as well as sweepers and security guards involved in coronavirus relief work. IANS

Tiff between BJP, Didi on 'politicising corona'

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

With the BJP Information Technology cell charging the Bengal Government with hiding facts related to corona deaths, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday returned fire saying these were no time to reap political harvests.

Banerjee disclosed the number of Corona infected patients in the State but gave a curt reply to BJP leader Amit Malavya's allegations --- that the Government was fudging the number of corona deaths --- saying "some parties are playing politics in these hours of crisis ... a party's IT cell is using fake news to malign our health department ... at a time when our doctors and health staff are doing their best to fight the disease. This is not the time for

petty politics for which they will get plenty of time later on."

Claiming that she was "not finding faults in what the central government was doing while dealing with the crisis," Banerjee said "they may be more interested in politics by descending on the streets, ringing bells, clanging utensils ... but we are not. We are more interested in serving the people."

Earlier, leaders like Malavya and even Bengal BJP president Dilip Ghosh questioned the Government was functioning in Bengal saying the "hospitals in the State are under pressure from the Chief Minister who is also the Health Minister to underplay the Corona related deaths."

The BJP IT cell chief wondered as to why the State Government did not come out

with medical bulletins on 2nd, 3rd and 5th April. He also questioned the reason "why the number of Covid-related deaths are missing in the bulletin released on the 4th."

Ghosh said the Government was doing so in order to save the insurance money worth Rs 10 lakh that the Chief Minister has promised in case of any death in the medical fraternity for treating Corona. The Chief Minister has promised an insurance of Rs 10 lakh for the government staff involved in fighting the disease.

Not only the Chief Minister but also other opposition leaders slammed the BJP for politicizing the fight against corona by encouraging its supporters to burst crackers and light candles "as if this is a time to celebrate the crisis... as if they have won

the battle."

While Bengal BJP president Dilip Ghosh supported bursting of crackers on Sunday night to express solidarity with 'corona warriors' saying "the locked down people were giving vent to their frustration... so there is no harm in it," State Minister Tapas Chatterjee said "in the name of showing solidarity the BJP was getting the people to celebrate its foundation day."

Congress MP Pradip Bhattacharya wondered whether Corona will go by lighting candles and bursting crackers. CPI(M) Legislature Party Leader said Sujan Chakrabarty "efficient tackling of the crisis and not publicity stunt is the need of the hour."

Elsewhere the police arrested 126 people for bursting crackers. Over enthusiastic sup-

porters of Narendra Modi tended to overshoot the Prime Minister's appeal to switch off lights and light up candles only and hit the streets bursting crackers and flying hot air balloons.

Meanwhile, as per the updates made available by the Chief Minister on Monday the number of Corona infected patients in Bengal was 61 while the number of deaths remained at 3 whereas 13 patients have been cured thus far.

There were 6890 people who have been put under government quarantine, the Chief Minister said adding out of the 61 people infected 55 belonged to seven families with foreign travel history.

In a bid to expand the fight against the virus the Government also set up a

"Global Advisory Board for Covid Response Policy to help and advise us on tackling the crisis," Banerjee said adding Nobel Laureate economist Abhijeet Vinayak Banerjee and WHO accredited Dr Swaroop Sarkar had been requested to be a part of the committee.

Elsewhere the State Government on Monday sent 64 people including patients, medical staff and 39 doctors of the Government owned NRS Medical College and Hospital to home quarantine following the death of a suspected corona patient on Saturday night. His pathological samples had been sent for tests.

As a precautionary measure the CCU unit and the male medicine ward of the hospital had been shut down for disinfection works, sources said.

Kerala has succeeded in containing coronavirus: CM

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Pinarayi Vijayan, Chief Minister of Kerala, said on Monday that 327 persons in the State have been tested positive for coronavirus. Addressing the daily press meeting at Thiruvananthapuram, Vijayan said 122 persons were admitted to various hospitals on Monday.

"There are 266 persons undergoing treatment in various hospitals in the State. We have been successful in containing the spread of the disease. On Monday, nine persons tested positive for corona in Kasargod district. Six out of this nine persons had travelled abroad and would have developed the disease during their trip," the Chief Minister said.

He said more than 1.52 lakh persons in the State have been put under observation. An important information disclosed by Vijayan was that Karnataka Government has agreed to allow non-coronavirus patients from Kasargod district to travel to Mangalore for medical aid. "If the person carried a certificate indicating the name of the hospital in Mangalore where he is planning to get admitted and that he was not suffering from corona virus, the Karnataka Health department officials would allow his passage to the district," said the Chief Minister.

Relations between the two States had reached a flashpoint last week when Karnataka sealed its border with Kerala at Kasargod. This was the fall out of persons

afflicted with corona virus in Kasargod rushing to neighbouring Mangalore for medical aid.

Kasargod, described as Kerala's epicentre of Corona Virus cases, has no speciality hospitals or medical colleges and residents in the district are dependent on Mangalore in Karnataka for their medical needs.

On Sunday, KK Shylaja, Kerala's health minister flagged a team of doctors, nurses and para medical staff from Thiruvananthapuram on deputation to Kasargod to face the medical emergency. Efforts are on by the Government of Kerala and some NRIs to set up super speciality hospitals in the district, said Periyachur Sukumaran, a Government high school teacher in Kasargod.

Data consumption jumps in rural areas during lockdown

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Data consumption in rural India on the network of Common Service Centre (CSC) special purpose vehicle (SPV) jumped nearly 100 per cent within a month - especially during the lockdown period. There has also been a high demand of FTTH (Fiber to Home) with more than 3 lakh subscribers registered across 50,000 Gram Panchayats.

CSC e-Governance Services India, which holds the license for providing internet services, recorded an increase in data consumption to 4.7 terabyte (TB) as on March 30 from 2.7 TB on March 10.

"Based on the growth trend, data consumption on the CSC SPV network is estimated to have increased by close to 100 per cent till date," said CSC SPV CEO Dinesh Tyagi.

He said that a major spike in data consumption has been recorded since the time lockdown started.

CSC also provides wifi hotspot in around 25,000 gram panchayats in the name of CSC Wi-fi Choupal services.

According to the CSC data, Wi-Fi Choupal has more than 12 lakh registered subscribers who use this as a supplement to their mobile connection.

"This clearly indicates the high appetite of internet data in rural areas, which in future can be pivotal in bridging Digital Divide and If nurtured with a regular organic feed of educational and informational content rural India can be Digitally Empowered and Transformed," Tyagi noted.

There are more than 60 crore internet users in India and out of this about 29 crore are in rural areas.

UP man gets cough, cold; commits suicide

IANS ■ BANDA (UP)

A 35-year-old man, suffering from cough and cold, committed suicide by hanging himself in Jamalpur village in Banda district of Uttar Pradesh. The police suspect that he ended his life because of the fear of coronavirus.

According to the brother-in-law of the deceased, Rajendra, the latter had isolated himself in a room after some villagers suspected that he was suffering from corona virus.

"Maybe, he committed suicide due to this. The matter is being probed," a police official said.

Chief medical officer, Santosh Kumar, said the man had not visited any Government hospital for treatment.

CPI seeks all-party meet to discuss crisis

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CPI on Monday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to convene a meeting with all heads of registered political parties at the national and State level to discuss the crisis due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

CPI general secretary D Raja in a letter pointed out that meeting with only floor leaders parties in the Parliament has left out many political parties due to "technicality." The PM is scheduled to interact with floor leaders of political parties with more than five MPs in the Parliament.

"The Government, political parties and all those who matter in shaping the political, economic and social course of the country must come together and put their heads and

efforts together to contain the disaster. In this regard, you have been interacting with the Chief Ministers of the States and other experts.

Now you have decided to have an interaction with the floor leaders of the political parties in Parliament in which some of the important parties are left out on the basis of technicality.

In fact this interaction should have happened during the last days of the last Budget Session of Parliament or immediately after the adjournment of the Session.

"However, our Party is of the view that the initiative taken by you must be followed by holding consultations with the heads of all recognized political parties at National and State level," said Raja.

PAPER WITH PASSION

Masking India

The aftermath of Corona will see many behavioural changes, few might be noticed more than better personal hygiene



Once the Coronavirus passes, there will be innumerable scientific studies about what happened and why some countries dealt with the viral epidemic so much better than others. Some of the questions will have answers to ones that many of us are curious about. Such as how Germany prevented the full impact of the virus when Italy, separated by just a tiny Switzerland in between, was devastated? How could China mysteriously keep the strange Wuhan fever from devastating other major Chinese cities such as Beijing and Shanghai? At the same time, New York City, halfway across the planet from Wuhan, is getting its healthcare system pulverised. Yet, other questions might have simpler answers, such as how come Japan and South Korea prevented the full force of the attack from hitting them (so far)? One answer being offered is the high prevalence of face masks and the overall discipline among the populace in these countries. Indeed, ever since the initial SARS epidemic hit the country 15 years ago, it did not spread to the Western world but ravaged East Asia. The aftermath of those events inspired not just Hollywood movies but also established among its citizens a healthy habit of wearing surgical masks or even simple face masks when they venture outside their homes. Initially, the World Health Organisation (WHO), which has covered itself with all the ignominy during this crisis, had said that only those who displayed symptoms or tested positive had to wear the masks. It had made it clear that healthy people need not wear them. But political leaders across the world were confused and global leaders increasingly ignored the directive of the WHO, which covered up China's mishandling of the outbreak. Wearing masks seems to have become a standard piece of advice being given by Governments to the public. Rightly so, the Indian Government, too, issued an advisory this week, asking all citizens to use "hand-made reusable face cover" when they step outside. The fact appears that wearing masks may not completely prevent the disease but it can considerably reduce its spread. This is a good thing as nations struggle to contain the outbreak. Just like citizens in several east Asian countries have become accustomed to masks in public, so will the general citizenry in India and the rest of the world. And one need not have a top-notch N95 mask, a simple home-made mask, made out of old clothes, would suffice. Given the global shortage of personal protective equipment, we must reserve them first for our medical professionals, who are at the forefront of the COVID-19 infection. Agreed, home-made masks may not be as efficient as N95 but they can reduce transmission significantly.

The genie has left the bottle and we cannot completely stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus until scientists find a preventive vaccine. Nor can we be dependent on hypothetical studies about the hot weather preventing the spread or that those inoculated with the BCG vaccine are more "immune" to the disease. A vaccine might still be a year or more away at the very least and India should not forget the impact the last global pandemic had on its population a century ago. So until a preventive vaccine is developed, wear a mask, wash your hands and maintain general social distancing. This is the least that we can all do in this fight and save each other.

The Bhilwara model

Aggressive door-to-door screening and testing have put the epicentre town of Rajasthan on the road to recovery



Much has been written about how China stifled the Wuhan contagion by aggressive containment and sealing the city so that nobody could leave it, thereby confining and choking the virus in the hotspot. Of course, one wonders why China could not have shown the same military aggression when cases started multiplying, under reported them instead, turned down world virologists and WHO and erred on saving the world a disaster. A bigger success story is of Taiwan next to China, which has had positive cases but deaths in single numbers. That's because it adopted an aggressive protocol since the last week of January, with senior Government officials travelling to China, inspectors keeping a watch on board flights, the Government suspending flights from China and then tracing, isolating, testing, treating and re-testing each citizen with a travel history, monitoring his/her every move. This it topped up with an emergency protocol should there be a flood at anytime. This is perhaps the model that Bhilwara has adapted and applied rigorously to contain the spiral of the disease. Even as the number of Covid-19 cases in India are leaping through the charts, there have been no new cases at Bhilwara, although it was a hotspot with cases spreading from a hospital. The last Coronavirus case in Bhilwara was reported on March 30 when the total positive cases in the district were 26 with two deaths. It is difficult to believe that what was once considered the epicentre of Rajasthan has turned around an intractable situation. The Bhilwara administration acted fast, enforcing a curfew and sealing district borders on March 20, even before the national lockdown. After quarantining the entire hospital staff and patients, it went for aggressive testing, conducting a door-to-door screening of its 28 lakh population to detect any signs of community transmission. It allowed bare essential shops and medical stores to stay open for limited hours while the administration home-delivered ration, fruit and vegetable supplies through local booths. The administration is now contemplating home-delivering milk and medicines so that nobody steps out at all and even cancelling curfew passes. The police are enforcing the curfew through regular patrols. The confinement has minimised the possibility of spread as nobody has been allowed to even walk the streets, leave aside crowding markets. Although it has tested 300 to 400 samples every day, the authorities are planning to ramp that up to 4,000 over the next few days. Not only that, since the samples were being sent to Jaipur, which is about 250 km away and identification took time, the town will have its own testing set-up this weekend. In effect, the entire district is under watch, cut off from the world. And till it is an all-clear, it will continue the rigour.

Perhaps, this is what the Health Ministry is considering as trends clearly establish that 80 per cent of the infection has occurred in 62 districts. And while the lockdown may be eased in low-density parts of the country, the hotspots could be subjected to an aggressive testing and containment protocol along what has come to be known as the Bhilwara model. In fact, India's fight against COVID-19 can only be tackled if it is decentralised down to the unit level and policymakers let specific geographies and local dynamics decide how things could work best at a cluster. The non-pharmaceutical intervention is the best way to contain the crisis given India's non-existent health infrastructure and Bhilwara has shown how to bring the virus out of hiding. The faster we do it, the easier it will be for us to get back on the road to recovery and get the economy going.

India's super spreaders

At a time when the Union and State Governments and institutions are working with the single determination to contain COVID-19, the Tablighi Jamat has turned out to be a spoiler



A SURYA PRAKASH

The latest estimates of the Union Health Ministry indicate that over 35 per cent of the COVID-19 cases that are springing up in the country have their origins in the conference organised by the Tablighi Jamaat, an Islamic evangelical movement, in New Delhi in the second half of March, which was in gross violation of State Government orders. At a time when the Union Government, State Governments and every national institution is working with single-minded determination and focus to contain the pandemic that has affected over a million patients globally and claimed over 50,000 lives, the Tablighi Jamaat has turned out to be a spoiler.

Displaying gross irresponsibility by flouting the orders of the Delhi Government, the Jamaat held a conference of thousands of its members. The congregation continued even as devotees were barred entry in the most popular temples, including the Balaji Temple in Tirupati, the Siddhivinayak Temple in Mumbai, the Sai Baba temple in Shirdi, the Dargah of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti in Ajmer and the Haji Ali Dargah in Mumbai. Lakhs of other temples, churches and religious places remained closed as per Government orders in their areas.

Also, it is said that probably for the first time after the birth of Christianity, churches around the world will be closed in the week leading up to Easter, which is regarded as the most spiritually enriching week for the faithful. Fr Filipe Neri Ferrao, the Archbishop of Goa, asked the clergy to use technology and livestream church services. It quoted him as saying, "The faithful are dispensed from the obligation of participating in the mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation. In order to prevent community transmission of the virus, the faithful are advised not to go for daily mass, unless it is strictly necessary."

If this is so with other faiths, why did the Tablighi Jamaat defy the Government's orders? What do we do with these Muslim clerics, who lack basic civic sense, violate the law and even throw a challenge to the authorities? Also, this writer has seen several videos of Muslims violating the lockdown orders and social distancing norms and congregating in large numbers in *masjids* in different regions in the country in the initial days of the lockdown. This happened because these mullahs pooh-poohed social distancing and virtually laughed at the world that was groaning under the Corona epidemic.

It is now almost two weeks since the authorities suspended prayers in Mecca and Medina. Similarly, several important mosques in India have remained closed. The Kerala Governor, Arif Mohammad Khan, was the other day reciting verses from the *Quran* in which Allah tells the believers not to go to the mosque but to pray from home, when the circumstances are not conducive. Yet, none of this matters to some



Muslim clerics in India, who are hell bent on challenging the system time and again on the specious ground that Islam is under threat (*Islam khatre mein hai*). In fact, this was the theme of the address of the chief of the Tablighi Jamaat, Maulana Muhammad Saad, to his audience at the headquarters of the Jamaat. As per an audio clip of his "sermon" that is in circulation, he asked Muslims to ignore the orders for closure of mosques because there was no better place to be than a mosque.

Second, this Coronavirus scare was a conspiracy to keep Muslims away from each other and to weaken Islam. They should, therefore, not fall a prey to this propaganda. Finally, he declared that there was no better place to die than a mosque. This is absolutely horrendous. It shows that despite his long years of Indian citizenship, nothing in the Indian Constitution, the nation's democratic and fraternal traditions has rubbed off on him. He seems so maladjusted to the nation's secular, liberal traditions that he renders himself unworthy of the citizenship of such a great democracy.

Every word that he has uttered does violence to the core values in the Constitution and to the deep and abiding faith that all of us have in the principles laid down by our nation's founding fathers.

It is indeed ironic that this *maulana*, who delivered this chilling advice to his audience and even said no one can

“
 THOSE WHO VIOLATED THE CURFEW, BEHAVED IRRESPONSIBLY, CONTRACTED THE DISEASE AND SPREAD IT TO OTHERS ARE ONE CATEGORY. BUT THOSE WHO ARE INVOLVED IN THE DIABOLICAL ACT OF DELIBERATELY SPREADING THIS DISEASE SHOULD BE CLASSIFIED AS MASS MURDERERS. WHAT SHOULD BE THE PUNISHMENT FOR ENDANGERING THE LIVES OF MILLIONS?
 ”

escape from the wrath of Allah, has in recent days gone into hiding. It is so sad that all this bombast does not equip him to face the mundane authorities of the Delhi Government.

Meanwhile, JP Nadda, the president of the BJP, rightly exhorted his party colleagues to ensure that the sins of the Tablighi are not pinned on the entire Muslim community. He has advised them to ensure that this does not become a communal flash point. This is very important. We must sift the wheat from the chaff. It is also important that Muslim political leaders must speak up. Unlike the Hindus, who have hordes of objectors in their ranks against fundamentalists and fringe elements, Muslim politicians hesitate to call out those who threaten the nation's secular fabric. They must change tack if they wish to preserve the Constitution that enables politicians of all hues to be elected to public office.

There are trouble-makers like Maulana Saad and some other clerics. If we wish to preserve our Constitution and protect the health of 1,300 million citizens, such people must be dealt with in the most severe manner. Just when we thought we were getting to grips with COVID-19, the *maulana* and other leaders of the Tablighi have triggered a monumental spread of the disease. The Government must send out a strong message that those who play around with the lives of millions of cit-

izens, will be made to pay. The Indian Penal Code (Sections 168-170) deals with persons, who commit nuisance and spread epidemic diseases, but the punishments under these sections are too mild. The Government must go beyond this. Several States, including Delhi, have already invoked the powers vested in them under the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897.

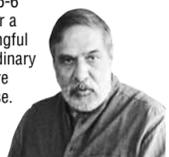
The Delhi Government's regulations required foreigners and persons with travel history to self-quarantine. On March 13, it prohibited assembly or 200 or more people. The Chief Minister, Arvind Kejriwal, slashed this to 20 on March 19. Each of these orders and regulations have been violated by the Nizamuddin gathering.

But the punishments prescribed in these Acts and even in the National Security Act (NSA) are too inadequate for this dastardly and unpardonable sin. Those who violated the curfew, behaved irresponsibly, contracted the disease and spread it to others are one category. But those who are involved in the diabolical act of deliberately spreading this disease should be classified as mass murderers. What should be the punishment for endangering the lives of millions of people and ensuring the death of hundreds of them? The Indian State needs to ponder over this.

(The writer is an author specialising in democracy studies. Views expressed are personal.)

SOUNDBITE

India should commit 5-6 per cent of its GDP for a stimulus to be meaningful and effective. Extraordinary situation calls for more than ordinary response.



Congress leader —Anand Sharma

I haven't seen my father for three weeks. Nirvaan hasn't seen his father for three weeks. We are scared and we are saying it with full bravery.



Actor —Salman Khan

We should take comfort that while we may have more still to endure, better days will return: We will be with our friends again; we will be with our families again; we will meet again.



British Monarch —Queen Elizabeth

Tablighi Jamaat leadership should have cancelled their event that led to a spike in COVID-19 cases across the country. The community stands exposed by its deeds.



RSS Joint Gen Secretary —Manmohan Vaidya

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Shun gimmicks

Sir — Addressing the nation via video conference, Prime Minister Narendra Modi made it clear that the Coronavirus threat could only be combatted with the full cooperation of the people, a token demonstration of which, he said, would be to light candles, lamps and mobile torches for nine minutes on April 5 at 9 pm for nine minutes. Many are now wondering, when the world is busy fighting COVID-19 and scientists are trying to make a vaccine, why did we first bang *thalis*, then blow conch shells and then were asked to light candles.

People have always shown solidarity with the Government in times of any national calamity or crisis — be it the devastating 2004 tsunami or the global economic meltdown in 2008 or the massive floods in Uttarakhand in 2013. Even now, millions of migrants, left jobless, have reconciled themselves to the situation. People do not need gimmicks to prove their collective will, India's history is a proof. Countries such as South Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore undertook a massive testing programme to identify, isolate and

Politics amid pandemic

Ever since the Prime Minister ordered a complete lockdown of 21 days, the nation has been in a state of utter chaos. While the public has been trying to make sense of the pandemic that is only evolving into something more menacing with every passing day, the Government has been conspicuous by its inability to rein in the confusion that has thrown life completely out of gear. Though the spread of COVID-19 has for the moment pushed any thoughts of an imminent war with our neighbour into the realm of fantasy, it is the preparedness to tackle the virus that has created mayhem.

With the lockdown in place, the Government's emphasis has been on "staying indoors." Attempts at identifying the problems that assail the country during this period of closure and envisaging ways to address them have gone for a toss. Social distancing and the "stay home" dictum by the Prime Minister may sound sweet but the problems associated with this "enforced" confinement have not been paid heed to. By and large, countrymen have been left to bear the brunt of the crisis. With the lockdown in force, food scarcity should have been anticipated and necessary steps to ensure the unhindered supply and distribution of essential goods and services should



have been well thought of and planned. But in many parts of the country, an ineffective public distribution system has brought no solace to harried residents. The massive disruption caused by the lockdown has brought the country on the verge of an unprecedented economic catastrophe. However, it is shocking to have political grandstanding by our leaders eclipsing the humanitarian disaster arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pachu Menon Margao

treat infected patients and have been successful in containing the virus. The Government must demonstrate its dedication through such actions and not count on banging *thalis* or lighting candles. Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee Faridabad

Economic fallout

Sir — Even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global economy was undergoing turbulence on account of disruptions in trade flows and attenuated growth.

The situation has now been aggravated due to disruptions in demand and supply chain inflicted by the spread of the virus that has forced nations to impose lockdown. Once the pandemic is brought under control, the speed of recovery in the US and China

will be the key factors determining the nature and traction of the global economy. While India is currently focussed in securing the health of its people, we also need to think about the long-term consequences the current lockdown will have on the economy. Apart from providing a safety net to the vulnerable, ensuring job continuity is essential. There's an urgent need to mobilise resources to stimulate the economy.

Mahima Jain Guwahati

Deteriorating situation

Sir — The congregation of the Tablighi Jamaat in New Delhi has created adverse conditions in the country. It has also led to the possibility of community transmission of Coronavirus in most States where its members travelled. A blame game has started to evade responsibility. But in these times of crisis, a collaborative approach between the Centre and the States is required.

Sritoma Mukherjee Via email

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

An opportunity taken in a crisis

Dictatorship was clearly where Hungarian leader Viktor Orbán was heading — and now he has arrived with the passage of an 'emergency' law



GWYNNE DYER

"Hello, dictator!" said Jean-Claude Juncker cheerily to Hungary's leader, Viktor Orbán, at a European Union summit a couple of years ago. The president of the European Commission was only joking, of course, but it was gallows humour. Dictatorship was clearly where Orbán was heading — and now he has arrived.

Recently the Hungarian Parliament passed a new law, allegedly to deal with the Coronavirus crisis. The law declares a state of emergency and allows Orbán to rule by decree for the duration of the crisis — but it doesn't say when that state of emergency will end. That will be decided by the man who has just been granted supreme power. Orbán's spokesman, Zoltán Kovács, helpfully explained, "Just as in wartime, a state of emergency could extend until the end of hostilities. Today we confront not a military power but are in a war-like state to defend our people against a pandemic the likes of which we have not seen in a century."

"Never waste the opportunity offered by a good crisis," as Machiavelli allegedly said 500 years ago. So is what we are seeing in Hungary now the tip of the iceberg? Will governments in other democracies whose leaders have dictatorial ambitions use the Coronavirus crisis as an excuse to give themselves absolute powers? Will Rodrigo Duterte take "emergency" powers to get around the one-term Filipino presidential limit that obliges him to quit in two years' time? Will Narendra Modi copy Indira Gandhi's 1975 "Emergency" and set up as the "temporary dictator" of India? Will Recep Tayyip Erdogan destroy what remains of Turkey's democracy to save himself if his popularity declines further? For that matter, will Donald Trump use the great wave of American Coronavirus deaths in the coming months and an alleged threat of mass disorder as an excuse for postponing the November election, especially if his prospects for re-election are not looking bright? It's a toss-up with Duterte, who is responsible for so many murders that he can never safely retire. But for the rest, the answer is almost certainly "no."

Both Modi and Erdogan have created solid blocs of religious supporters, who practically guarantee their political futures (at great cost to the unity and future prospects of their respective countries). They don't need to destroy democracy to survive. As for Trump, whose "base" is too narrow to assure him a political victory in November if other elements of his victorious 2016 coalition defect, he doesn't really have the option of cancelling the election. Americans' loyalty to their ancient Constitution is still too strong to let that happen. In any case, Trump probably won't need such extreme measures to hold on to office. He is already re-writing the script so that his heavy responsibility for the silent carnage that awaits the country is erased in the public's mind by his last-minute swerve towards a strong policy of social distancing that averts a much greater loss of life. Hail the saviour!

Which leaves us, then, with the question of why Orbán is going to such political extremes when he already had all the power he could possibly want. He has already fiddled with the Constitution so that his party can win a two-thirds majority of the seats in Parliament on only 44 per cent of the votes.

Hungary is effectively a one-party State and the media and the judges both serve Orbán's Fidesz Party, not the general public. He even had a "state of emergency" in place already, declared in 2016 during the great refugee flood of that year (though none of the refugees came to Hungary) and he has never rescinded it. True, he can now hand out five-year prison sentences to Hungarians who spread "false" information but the courts were already giving his critics multiple shorter sentences if they got too noisy. Why go to this extra trouble when it might even tip the European Union into expelling Hungary as a non-democratic country (although I wouldn't hold my breath on that one)?

I once spent a day with Orbán in Budapest, when we were both much younger men. He was a student leader who had just got famous for defying the Communists with a fiery nationalist speech and I had spent the summer in the Soviet Union interviewing the emerging democratic Opposition. (We were introduced by Hungarian-born philanthropist George Soros, then Orbán's mentor and later a prime target of his rabid anti-Semitism.) We had much to talk about and I enjoyed his company. What struck me, though, was that he really thought like a lawyer. Maybe a radical one and certainly later a corrupt one. But a lawyer by character and by training. So maybe what he's doing now is just tidying up the law. Hungary was already a dictatorship in practice. Now it's also one in theory.

(Gwynne Dyer's new book is *Growing Pains: The Future of Democracy and Work*)

STATES HAVE TO STOCK UP ON KEY MEDICAL SUPPLIES THAT THEY'RE RUNNING SHORT OF. THE FEDERAL STOCKPILE IS A BACK-UP FOR THEM.

—US PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP

POINT COUNTERPOINT



THERE'S NO WAY THAT WE COULD STOCKPILE IN ANTICIPATION OF A PANDEMIC. BUT THE GOVERNMENT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR DOING PRECISELY THAT.

—ILLINOIS GOVERNOR JB PRITZKER

Serve up a fresh NFSA

The 80 crore people the Govt currently targets for giving subsidised foodgrain under the Food Security Act includes millions of higher-income beneficiaries who don't deserve it



UTTAM GUPTA

The Finance Minister, Ms Nirmala Sitharaman, announced a ₹1,70,000 crore package under the PM-Gareeb Kalyan Scheme (PMGKS) to address the plight of tens of millions of workers in the "informal" sector affected by COVID-19, on March 26. The most crucial component of this package was giving five kg of rice/wheat per person per month for "free" to around 80 crore people through the public distribution system (PDS), plus one kg of preferred and region-specific choice of pulse per household for three months. To understand the full implications of the relief — estimated to cost about ₹40,000 crore — let us capture the basics of the food security system in India. Under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013, a quota of five kg of cereals per person per month is made available at a subsidised price of ₹3 per kg rice, ₹2 per kg wheat and ₹1 per kg coarse cereals to 67 per cent of India's population or over 80 crore people. It is a matter of shame that even decades after Independence, when the NFSA was enacted, our rulers still felt that more than 80 crore people were so poor that they needed to be given food at a throwaway price. The belief as embedded in this law (in fact, the prices were mentioned in the Act and were to remain valid for a period of three years from the date of its commencement) also mocks at the official claim that India has achieved big success in bringing a large number of people above the poverty line; that the number of poor people is just about 25 per cent of the population.

Be that as it may, the Government continues to believe that the interest of the poor can be fully safeguarded by not allowing any increase in the price. This is abundantly clear from a statement by Union Minister for Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Ram Vilas Paswan in 2017 that, "The Government will not affect any increase in issue prices for foodgrains under the NFSA." This was made at a time when even the Act didn't prevent a hike. True to that commitment, till date, the price remains unchanged. But has this safeguarded the poor? The answer lies in taking cognisance of a vital fact which often gets ignored.

The supplies under NFSA barely cover 50 per cent of a person's requirement which is 10 kg per month, as estimated by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO). This forces him/her to buy the balance quantity from the market at a much higher price. Being linked to the cost of procurement, handling and distribution (in case of rice, at least ₹35 per kg), the market price is more than 10 times the subsidised price. As a consequence, whatever benefit the Government gives by keeping the price low on sale of certain quantity, that is more than offset by their having to pay many times more on purchase of the balance five kg from the market. Thus, for buying 10 kg — being his/her requirement for a month — they have to spend a total of ₹190. The effective price paid by him/her is ₹19 per kg instead of ₹3 per kg — a sense one gets by a plain reading of the NFSA. The underprivileged are also getting hit in another way.

All along, the Government has taken recourse to increasing the Minimum Support Price (MSP). While this is meant to incentivise farmers produce more, this leads to a collateral damage. The increase in MSP leads to increase in the cost of supplying food, which triggers a hike in the mar-

“ WHEN SUBSIDISED FOOD IS AVAILABLE AT A FRACTION OF THE MARKET PRICE, THERE IS HUGE INCENTIVE FOR DUBIOUS OPERATORS TO SIPHON OFF. WHEN HANDLING AND DISTRIBUTION COST (BESIDES MSP PAID TO FARMERS) IS REIMBURSED TO AGENCIES ON 'ACTUAL' AS FOOD SUBSIDY, INEFFICIENCY AND INFLATED COST CLAIMS (INCLUDING BOGUS) ARE INEVITABLE. WHEN MILLIONS OF THE RICH/BETTER-OFF ARE ALSO MADE BENEFICIARIES UNDER THE NFSA, SUBSIDY IS BOUND TO BALLOON



ket price, implying that the poor will need to spend more on the quantity bought from the market. The decision of the Government to give five kg of rice/wheat per person per month to 80 crore people for "free" over and above the five kg they are already getting under the NFSA can help remove this anomaly. Having got all of 10 kg at an effective price of ₹1.5 per kg, s/he need not buy any from the market. But this is a mere coincidence (an offshoot of the Corona-crisis); it was never intended as a conscious policy move. In any case, the additional five kg for free is available for three months only. Thereafter, it will be back to square one.

Can the Government consider giving 10 kg per person per month at the subsidised price of ₹1/2/3 per kg? In case it is given to all the 80 crore people, this will be at a huge cost, as then the food subsidy (excess of the cost of supply over the issue price multiplied by total quantum of sale under the NFSA) will increase sharply from an already whopping ₹2,19,000 crore during 2019-20 to ₹2,53,000 crore expected during 2020-21. This is unconscionable.

How can the food requirement of the needy be met in full without entailing additional burden on the exchequer? How can the two objectives be reconciled? What is the way forward?

To get there, we need to recognise that the 80 crore people — the Government currently targets for giving subsidised foodgrain under the NFSA — includes millions of higher-income beneficiaries who don't deserve it. This was duly accepted in early 2015, when a committee headed by Shanta

Kumar, senior BJP leader, recommended a reduction in coverage under the NFSA from the existing 67 per cent to 40 per cent, restricting the eligibility of subsidised food at ₹1/2/3 per kg only to the poorest of the poor under the Antyodaya Anna Yojna (AAY), plus increasing their entitlement from five kg to seven kg per month and making the rest pay 50 per cent of the MSP paid to farmers. Reduction in coverage by 27 per cent can remove 35 crore people from the scheme. That will release 175 crore kg per month, which can be used to give an additional five kg per month to those under the AAY. The number of families under the AAY being 2.5 crore or 12.5 crore people (five per family), five kg extra for each will consume 62.5 crore kg per month. Even after this, there will be a monthly surplus of 112.5 crore kg or 1.125 million tonnes. In other words, the Government need not undertake distribution of 13.5 million tonnes of grain annually, which will result in corresponding saving in subsidy or ₹43,000 crore annually.

Likewise, an increase in issue price to beneficiaries, other than those under the AAY or 32.5 crore from the existing ₹3 per kg to 50 per cent of the MSP paid to farmers or ₹14 per kg rice, can help reduce subsidy. The savings will be about ₹1,800 crore per month or ₹21,600 crore per annum.

Yet, the Government has not acted upon the recommendations of the panel. Meanwhile, the country continues to be saddled with millions of underfed poor; unsustainable high subsidy; inefficiency in handling and distribution by State agencies; misuse of subsidy and

subsidised food being cornered by millions of undeserving people.

These maladies are germane to the existing dispensation of controls on almost every aspect of the food supply chain. When subsidised food is available at a fraction of the market price, there is huge incentive for dubious operators to siphon off. When handling and distribution cost (besides MSP paid to farmers) is reimbursed to agencies on "actual" as food subsidy, inefficiency and inflated cost claims (including bogus) are inevitable. When millions of the rich/better-off are also made beneficiaries under the NFSA, subsidy is bound to balloon.

The implementation of the committee's package could have made some headway in addressing these maladies but still it would be far from eliminating them as it does not alter the fundamentals of the existing dispensation.

To achieve drastic outcome in terms of higher efficiency and lower cost in handling operations, prevention of misuse and saving in subsidy, there is an urgent need to remove all controls, allow participation of private entities in procurement and distribution and make way for competitive markets. The subsidy should be restricted only to the poor (about 25 per cent of the population) and given directly to the beneficiaries using the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) mechanism.

Will the Corona crisis wake the political class from its deep slumber into implementing this reform? Only time will tell.

(The writer is a New Delhi-based policy analyst)

Hardly an elevation for a former CJI

Both 'Mr Gogoi' and 'Justice Gogoi' have not broken any law. Still, perhaps Justice Gogoi may have dropped the ball on the way to the Rajya Sabha and allowed the common man to question the independence of the judiciary



ROBIN DAVID

— the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. It is envisaged that the State and the executive are to be separate from the judiciary which is independent. This independence and impartiality is essential for the Supreme Court and the High Courts to direct the Government to enforce the fundamental rights of citizens and order the Government and its functionaries to respect individual liberties.

Liberty, fundamental rights and freedom are essential for existence and the Constitution recognises this. It vests unfettered and independent jurisdiction on the Supreme Court to pass any order in public interest to do complete justice. Independence of the judiciary is an integral part of the Constitution as is expected of a sovereign democratic nation. The power of the apex court to direct the Government is essential in our democracy, considering the immense powers that the Government has. Justice Khanna says that independence of the judiciary is also linked to essential human rights and civil liberties and the rights are needed because

while you want to enable the Government to control the governed, you also want it to control itself.

However, the Government is the biggest litigator in India and about 37 million cases are pending in the District Courts and High Courts. As on March 1, over 60,469 cases were pending in the apex court and according to the Department of Justice in 2017, approximately 46 per cent of the total pending cases in courts pertained to the Government.

The courts are bound to decide millions of cases where the Government is a party. The independence of the judiciary is perceived by the common man by the conduct of the judges. The confidence of the citizens will be diminished if the judges are seen too close to the executive and it is the responsibility of the judges and lawyers to ensure that this trust is not lost.

The CJI's Office is the highest and most respected positions in the judiciary. The importance of this position can be appreciated by the fact that on January 26, 1950, the Chief Justice MK

Kania administered the oath of office to Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India. Later, in 1969 Chief Justice M Hidayatullah was briefly made the President.

In the higher courts when a lawyer becomes a judge, they are referred to as "justice" after that. The judge's oath is to bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution and duly, faithfully and to the best of their ability, knowledge and judgment perform the duties of the office without fear or favour, affection or ill-will uphold the Constitution and laws. Disrespect to a judge or court is contempt of court and punishable to protect the dignity of the institution of justice. Under the Constitution, a judge of the Supreme Court is prohibited from practising in any court after retirement. The first Law Commission headed by India's first Attorney-General, MC Setalvad presented a report on Judicial Reforms in 1958. It was recommended that a Supreme Court judge should be totally barred from accepting any employment under the Union or a State after retirement

other than employment as an ad hoc judge of the Supreme Court under Article 128 of the Constitution. The Law Commission also recommended that judges of the Supreme Court should not start chamber practice after retirement. These recommendations have not been implemented. Other Constitutional functionaries such as the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India and members of the Union Public Service Commission are barred from post-retirement employment with the Government. Bureaucrats in the Administrative Services can take up commercial employment after one year, post-retirement, also known as the cooling-off period. In 2014 Chief Justice RM Lodha at his retirement suggested a two-year cooling-off period for Supreme Court Judges after retirement.

Setalvad's recommendation to ban all post-retirement employment makes good sense for the preservation of the independence and dignity of the judiciary. However, it may not be fair to prohibit a retired judge from working. United States (US) Federal judges are

appointed for life or up to when they choose to quit. The Supreme Court judges in the United Kingdom (UK) retire at the age of 70. Considering that the Government is the largest litigant with millions of cases being heard, a cooling-off period of two to three years is called for in the interest of justice.

In Justice Gogoi's defence, by accepting the RS nomination he has not broken any law. And this is not the first time that a retired judge has been elected to the Upper House. Further, being a MP may not be an employment with the Government.

The experience and skills of retired judges in India are a great resource and should not be wasted. Perhaps the questions arising from the issued raised by the nomination of Justice Gogoi will encourage lawmakers to seriously think about the independence of the judiciary and the enhancement of the retirement age of judges from 65 years to 70 years, with a ban on all post-retirement employment. Our judges are extraordinarily hard-working and highly experienced and this wealth of knowledge

would be put to productive use if they are allowed to continue for a few more years beyond the age of 65.

In a recent interview, Justice Gogoi said that he could be addressed either as "Justice Gogoi" or "Mr Gogoi."

Justice Gogoi as CJI held a high position in the order of precedence till November 2019. Now as an MP, he is about 10 to 15 places down in the hierarchy. As the CJI he was protected by the Constitution and respected in accordance with the finest traditions at the Bar. The Judiciary and the Bar consider the CJI to be the head of the family. The Bar, always holds retired justices in high esteem. Coming down the protocol ladder and getting jeered during his oath-taking ceremony in the RS may have hurt the institution of justice. Both Mr Gogoi and Justice Gogoi have not broken any law. Still, perhaps Justice Gogoi may have dropped the ball on the way to the RS and allowed the common man to question the independence of the judiciary.

(The writer is Advocate Partner at Dua Associates)

COVID-19 OUTBREAK

'HARDEST' WEEK AHEAD

British PM hospitalised; more than 1.3 million cases globally, over 72K deaths worldwide; Spain records deaths down for 4th straight day

AFP ■ LONDON

The coronavirus threatened Americans with their hardest week in living memory on Monday and put Britain's Prime Minister in hospital, despite early signs that some of Europe's hardest-hit countries may be turning a corner.

More than 72,000 people have now died worldwide in the epidemic — some 50,000 of them in Europe — and, as the human tragedy continues to escalate, the global economy is plunging into what leaders warn will be a historic recession. More than 1.3 million declared cases have now been registered around the world.

The US surgeon general compared the likely impact of the epidemic in the week ahead to 9/11 or Pearl Harbour and France warned of the worst economic slump since World War II.

In London, Prime Minister Boris Johnson remained in hospital on Monday but was in "good spirits" after being admitted for tests for "persistent" coronavirus symptoms.

"The Prime Minister had a comfortable night in St Thomas' Hospital in London and is in good spirits," Johnson's spokesman said, adding that the 55-year-old British premier remains "under observation". Johnson tested positive for the virus 10 days ago, and despite his hospitalisation his housing minister Robert Jenrick said the leader was still "in charge" of the Government as the country grapples with the continuing crisis.

It was a mixed picture in Europe, where countries already ravaged by deadly COVID-19 outbreaks reported lower numbers of new infections and, in Austria and Italy, began thinking about easing lockdown restrictions.

The new coronavirus has reached almost every corner of

the planet, confining nearly half of humanity to their homes and turning life upside down for billions.

About three quarters of all deaths have been clocked in Europe, and the US now has the most recorded cases of any country — along with a steadily rising death toll.

"This is going to be the hardest and the saddest week of most Americans' lives, quite frankly," US Surgeon General Jerome Adams told Fox News ahead of what is expected to be a tough week for already hard-pressed American healthcare providers.

Italy's daily coronavirus death toll shot up to 636 on Monday, just one day after dropping to its lowest level in over two weeks, the civil protection service said. The number of fatalities had fallen to 525 on Sunday, the lowest since March 19. Italy's total number of deaths officially attributed to COVID-19 rose to 16,523, more than in any other country.

In Spain, nurse Empar Loren said, "The situation is more stable. The number of patients in intensive care is not growing much anymore, and we are starting to discharge quite a few."

Hard-hit Spain recorded deaths down for a fourth straight day on Monday — but still logged 637 fatalities.

At a field hospital set up at a Madrid conference centre, staff applauded whenever a patient was healthy enough to be sent home. The effective mothballing of the global economy is beginning to hit hard with analysts warning millions of jobs will be lost despite unprecedented stimulus programmes.

Germany announced that the Government would guarantee loans for small businesses but France was gloomy, with Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire estimating that the 2020 crunch would be "far beyond" the previous post-1945 worst case.



Despite the gloom, heart-warming examples of humanity around the globe have lifted spirits, with ordinary people doing what they can to help those on the medical front line. In a Barcelona restaurant, chefs flipped burgers to deliver to nurses and doctors.

"When you deliver the food and you see they're happy, that makes us happy and it makes us stronger," said delivery man Daniel Valls.

And in the southern Italian city of Naples, a street artist lowered a "solidarity food basket" from his balcony, holler-

ing: "If you can, put something in. If you can't, take something out." "We started by putting a piece of bread, a bag of pasta, a box of peeled tomatoes," said English-language tutor Teresa Carro, who also lowered a basket.

Around the Globe

CHINA stepped up border control measures on Monday as the number of imported coronavirus cases rose sharply to 951 while the asymptomatic cases also surged, raising fears of a second wave of the COVID-19 infections, mainly from Chinese returning home from abroad despite drastic containment efforts. A health official in Beijing warned that the Chinese capital, Beijing, will probably remain under long-term coronavirus epidemic control.

The trajectory of coronavirus infections in IRAN appears to have started a "gradual" downward trend, the Government said on Monday, but it warned the disease is far from being under control. The COVID-19 outbreak claimed 136 lives in the past 24 hours, bringing Iran's overall death toll to 3,739, health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour told a televised news conference. Iran registered 2,274 new cases of infection over the same period, he said, putting the total number at 60,500 across the country.

US PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP is confronting the most dangerous crisis a US leader has faced this century as the coronavirus spreads and a once-vibrant economy falters. As the turmoil deepens, the choices he makes in the critical weeks ahead will shape his reelection prospects, his legacy and the character of the nation. The early fallout is sobering. In the White House's best-case scenario, more than 1,000,000 Americans will die and millions more will be sickened.

The UNITED STATES on Monday WARNED CHINA not to take advantage of the coronavirus pandemic to exert itself in the South China Sea after Vietnam said Beijing sank a trawler. Amid the global focus on fighting COVID-19, China has ramped up self-described research stations and landed special military aircraft in the dispute-rife sea, according to the State Department.

A MAN who TRIED TO WALK FROM FRANCE TO SPAIN TO BUY CHEAP CIGARETTES WAS RESCUED in the Pyrenees mountains — only to be fined for flouting anti-coronavirus regulations. The man had initially set out by car on Saturday from Perpignan in southern France to La Jonquera in Spain, but was stopped at a checkpoint, and decided to make his way on foot across the mountain range that separates the two countries.



Coronavirus detected in Wuhan in late December: China

PTI ■ BEIJING

The novel coronavirus was first detected in Wuhan in late December where it was listed as "pneumonia of unknown cause", China said on Monday as it published an official timeline of the detection and control of COVID-19 for the first time, amid international criticism of Beijing for its alleged cover-up.

Since the coronavirus outbreak, the pandemic has killed 3,331 people with the number

of infections rising to 81,708 by Sunday, China's National Health Commission (NHC) said on Monday.

A total of 1,299 patients are still being treated, while 77,078 patients have been discharged after recovery, it said.

The deadly COVID-19 has spread rapidly throughout the world, killing 70,590 people and infecting more than 1.2 million across over 180 countries and territories, according to Johns Hopkins University data. In late last December, the

Wuhan Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in central China's Hubei Province detected cases of "pneumonia of unknown cause", state-run Xinhua news agency reported, citing the timeline document.

On December 30, the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission issued an urgent notification to medical institutions under its jurisdiction, ordering efforts to appropriately treat patients with pneumonia of unknown cause, it said.



A worker sanitises the Ponte Dei Sospiri (Bridge of Sighs), in Venice, on Monday AP

COUNTRY	TOTAL CASES	TOTAL DEATHS
USA	3,52,160	10,369
Spain	1,35,032	13,169
Italy	1,32,547	16,523
Germany	1,01,178	1,612
France	98,010	8,911
China	81,708	3,331
Iran	60,500	3,739
UK	51,608	5,373



Debate heats up over using an anti-malaria drug for COVID-19

AP ■ WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump and members of his administration are growing emphatic in promoting an anti-malaria drug not yet officially approved for fighting COVID-19, even though scientists say more testing is needed before it's proven safe and effective against the virus.

Trump trade adviser Peter Navarro promoted the drug, hydroxychloroquine, in a television interview Monday, a day after Trump publicly put his faith in the drug to lessen the toll of the coronavirus pandemic.

"What do I know, I'm not a doctor," Trump told reporters Sunday. "But I have

common sense."

The administration's promotion of the drug comes after a heated Situation Room meeting of the White House's coronavirus task force on Saturday, in which Navarro challenged the top US infectious disease expert Dr Anthony Fauci over his concerns about recommending the drug based only on unscientific anecdotal evidence.

Navarro, who has no formal medical training, erupted at Fauci, raising his voice and claiming that the reports of studies he collected were enough to recommend the drug widely, according to a person familiar with the exchange who spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe the

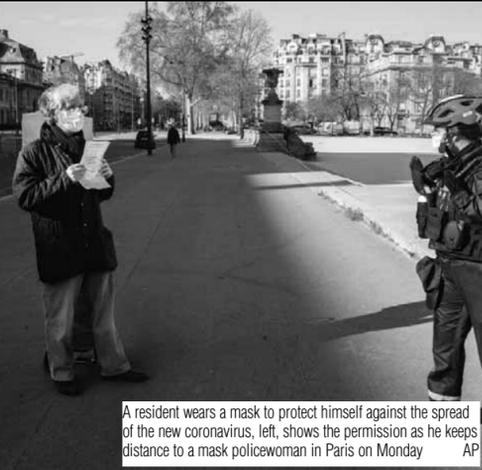
Situation Room blow-up.

Fauci has repeatedly said that current studies provide only anecdotal findings that the drug works. Navarro told CNN on Monday, "I would have two words for you: 'second opinion.'" Hydroxychloroquine is officially approved for treating malaria, rheumatoid arthritis and lupus, but not COVID-19. Small, preliminary studies have suggested it might help prevent the new coronavirus from entering cells and possibly help patients clear the virus sooner.

Two reports gave mixed results. A series of 11 patients in France found that an anti-malaria drug combo did not improve how fast patients cleared the virus or their symptoms.



Police arrest doctors demanding facilities and prevention kits to attend coronavirus patients in Quetta, Pakistan on Monday AP



A resident wears a mask to protect himself against the spread of the new coronavirus, left, shows the permission as he keeps distance to a mask policewoman in Paris on Monday AP

Tigress tests +ve in US' zoo

PTI ■ NEW YORK

Nadia, a 4-year-old female Malayan tiger at the popular Bronx Zoo here has tested positive for the novel coronavirus, probably infected by an asymptomatic employee, in what is believed to be the first known case of an animal infected with COVID-19 in the US, raising new questions about human-to-animal transmission of the deadly virus.

The tigress, her sister Azul, two Amur tigers and three African lions had developed a dry cough late last month with decrease in appetite, said the Wildlife Conservation Society, which manages the zoo. Nadia, along with other

big cats, is thought to have been infected by the zoo keeper who has not been identified, it said in a statement on Sunday, adding that all the animals are expected to recover.

"Though they have experienced some decrease in appetite, the cats at the Bronx Zoo are otherwise doing well under veterinary care and are bright, alert, and interactive with their keepers," the CNN quoted the zoo as saying.

"It is not known how this disease will develop in big cats since different species can react differently to novel infections, but we will continue to monitor them closely and anticipate full recoveries," it said. The test result has stunned

zoo officials. "I couldn't believe it," zoo director Jim Breheny said.

The coronavirus, first detected in humans in the Chinese city of Wuhan late last year, is believed to have spread from animals to humans, and a handful of animals, including two dogs, have tested positive in Hong Kong.

The pandemic has been driven by human-to-human transmission, but the infection of Nadia raises new questions about human-to-animal transmission.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), no other animals at the zoo are showing symptoms.

Scientists link air pollution and COVID-19 mortality in Italy

IANS ■ LONDON

An environmental researcher from Aarhus University in Denmark and health researchers from Italy have claimed there could be a link between the high mortality rate seen in northern Italy and the level of air pollution in the same region.

Environmental scientist Dario Caro from Department of Environmental Science, and two health researchers, Professor Bruno Frediani and Dr Edoardo Conticini from the University of Siena in Italy found yet another

small piece in the puzzle of understanding the deadly disease that has killed nearly 16,000 in the country.

They focused on examining why the mortality rate is up to 12 per cent in the northern part of Italy while it is only approx 4.5 per cent in the rest of the country. In research project published in the scientific journal Environmental Pollution, they demonstrated a probable correlation between air pollution and mortality in two of the worst affected regions in northern Italy: Lombardy and Emilia Romagna.

The population of the northern Italian regions lives in a higher level of air pollution, and this may lead to a number of complications for patients with COVID-19 in the regions, simply because their bodies may have already been weakened by the accumulated exposure to air pollution when they contract the disease. "There are several factors affecting the course of patients' illness, and all over the world we're finding links and explanations of what is important. It's very important to stress that our results are not a counter-argument to the find-

ings already made," said Caro. "Our considerations must not let us neglect other factors responsible of the high lethality recorded: important co-factors such as the elevated medium age of the Italian population, the wide differences among Italian regional health systems, ICUs capacity and how the infects and deaths has been reported have had a paramount role in the lethality of SARS-CoV-2, presumably also more than pollution itself," he explained.

The two northern Italian regions are among the most air-polluted regions in Europe.

Japan PM proposes state of emergency over virus, \$1-trillion stimulus

AFP ■ TOKYO

Japan's Prime Minister on Monday proposed a state of emergency for several major regions seeing a sharp rise in coronavirus cases, as well as a stimulus package worth \$1 trillion to cushion the impact on the world's third-biggest economy.

The official declaration of the state of emergency would likely come as soon as Tuesday, Shinzo Abe told reporters, as the country grapples with a recent spike in coronavirus cases, especially in the capital Tokyo. "Currently, we are seeing rapid increases of new infections particularly in urban areas like Tokyo and Osaka," said Abe.

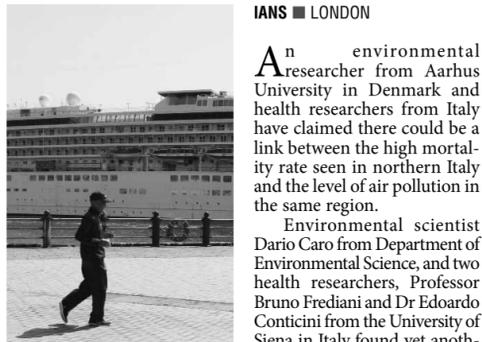
The declaration hands regional governors the power to ask residents to stay inside, seek the closure of businesses that attract large crowds and commandeer land and buildings for medical purposes.

But it falls far short of the sort of lockdown measures imposed in parts of Europe, where police have patrolled the streets and fined offenders.



"We envision, for a period of about one month, that we will ask further cooperation of the Japanese people to reduce person-to-person contacts that lead to infections," said Abe.

The measure does not include legal powers to enforce requests for people to stay inside, or punishments for people who fail to do so. "In Japan, even if we declare a state of emergency, we will not close cities as seen in foreign countries. Experts have told us that there is no need for such a step," said Abe.



COVID-19 OUTBREAK

Virus can last on face masks for a week, banknotes for days: Study

PTI ■ BEIJING
The novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19 can remain infectious on face masks for up to a week, and last on banknotes, stainless steel and plastic surfaces for days, according to a study.



COVID-19 virus can stick to stainless steel and plastic surfaces for up to four days, and to the outer layer of a face mask for a week, Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post (SCMP) reported on Monday.

The report, published in The Lancet journal, adds to a growing body of research about the stability of SARS-CoV-2 — as the novel coronavirus is formally known — and what can be done to prevent its transmission. "SARS-CoV-2 can be highly stable in a favourable environment, but it is also susceptible to standard disinfection methods," said the researchers, including Leo Poon Litman and Malik Peiris, both from HKU's School of Public Health. The researchers tested how

long the virus could remain infectious at room temperature on a variety of surfaces. On printing and tissue paper it lasted less than three hours, while on treated wood and cloth, it had disappeared by the second day. On glass and banknotes, the virus was still evident on the second day, but had gone by the fourth, while on stainless steel and plastic it was present for between four and seven days. "Strikingly," the researchers said, there was still a detectable level of infection on the outer

layer of a surgical face mask after seven days. "This is exactly why it is very important if you are wearing a surgical mask you don't touch the outside of the mask," Peiris said. "Because you can contaminate your hands and if you touch your eyes you could be transferring the virus to your eyes," he was quoted by SCMP. On all surfaces, the concentration of the virus reduced quite rapidly over time, the study said. The researchers said that the results did "not

necessarily reflect the potential to pick up the virus from casual contact," as the presence of the virus in the study was detected by laboratory tools, not fingers and hands as would be the case in everyday life. A study by American researchers on the environmental stability of the coronavirus published last month in the journal Nature also concluded that it can remain infectious on some surfaces for days. They found the virus was present on plastic and steel for up

to 72 hours, but did not last more than four hours on copper or 24 hours on cardboard. The findings from HKU add to the conversation about public health and hygiene, and what kinds of precautions people should take when bringing items like groceries into their homes. Poon said hand washing remains at the top of the list, and it was theoretically possible for tins of food to carry enough live virus to cause an infection, but that the exact risk is yet to be established.

"If you want to protect yourself just maintain good hygiene, wash your hands often and try not to touch your face, your mouth or nose without cleaning first," he said. People who were particularly concerned might prefer to leave non-perishable items in their shopping bags in the kitchen for a day before handling them, he said. "That would reduce the viral concentration a lot. But the most important message is wash your hands," he said.

IMF encouraged by recovery in China, but pandemic could resurge

Washington: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Monday cited limited but encouraging signs of recovery in China, the first country to suffer the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic, but said it could not rule out a resurgence of the pandemic in China and elsewhere. In a blog, top IMF economists said the pandemic caused by the new coronavirus had pushed the world into a recession that would be worse than the global financial crisis, and called for a global, coordinated health and economic policy response. "The economic damage is mounting across all countries, tracking the sharp rise in

new infections and containment measures put in place by Governments," the IMF experts wrote. The total confirmed cases of COVID-19 around the world jumped to more than 1,288,000, with 70,600 deaths reported, according to a Reuters tally. China was seeing a modest improvement in its purchasing manager surveys (PMIs) after sharp declines early in the year, and daily satellite data on nitrogen dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere - a proxy for industrial and transport activity - showed a gradual decline in containment measures, the IMF experts wrote. "The recovery in China, albeit limited, is

encouraging, suggesting that containment measures can succeed in controlling the epidemic and pave the way for a resumption of economic activity," the authors wrote. "But there is huge uncertainty about the future path of the pandemic and a resurgence of its spread in China and other countries cannot be ruled out," they added. European countries such as Italy, Spain, and France were now in acute phases of the outbreak, followed by the United States, while the epidemic appeared to be just beginning in many emerging market and developing economies. Agencies

France heading for worst recession since WWII: Minister

Paris: France is likely to see its deepest recession since the end of World War II this year because of the coronavirus crisis, Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire warned on Monday. "The worst growth figure in France since 1945 was -2.2 per cent in 2009, after the financial crisis of 2008. We will probably be very far beyond -2.2 per cent" this year, Le Maire told a Senate panel. "It's an indication of the amplitude of the economic shock we're facing," he said. France imposed a nationwide stay-at-home order from March 17 after shuttering all nonessential businesses. Officials have said the lockdown will last until at least

April 15. Statistics office Insee said last month that the lockdown has slashed overall economic activity by 35 percent, and estimated every month of shutdown would cut annual GDP by three percentage points. Services, heavy industry and construction are all taking big hits, Insee said, as factories are shut and only a handful of business sectors, such as supermarkets and pharmacies, remain open. A wave of French blue-chip companies have abandoned their profitability targets for the year, while employers' associations have warned that hundreds of smaller firms and shops risk bankruptcy. AFP

Stock markets rebound on easing virus crisis but oil dips

London: Asian and European equity markets rebounded Monday as some of the world's worst-hit countries reported falling death rates, providing much-needed hope in the battle against coronavirus, but oil prices sank after a meeting of top producers was delayed. While deadly COVID-19 continues its deadly sweep across the planet, with more than 1.25 million now declared infected and nearly 70,000 dead, news out of Europe that the rise of fatalities was easing has lifted spirits on trading floors. Italy reported its lowest daily death toll in two weeks,

while Spanish officials said deaths fell for the third straight day and France reported its lowest daily toll in a week. In early afternoon eurozone deals, Frankfurt stocks rallied 4.5 percent, Paris won 3.7 percent, Madrid gained 3.0 percent and Milan added 3.2 percent. "European markets are trading higher because investors are shrugging off the pessimism," said AvaTrade analyst Naem Aslam. "They are focused on more optimistic things: the slowing death rate caused by coronavirus. Italy, Spain, France, and Germany have all seen declining numbers." London jumped

2.1 percent nearing midday, with gains capped by news that British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was hospitalised for precautionary tests after suffering "persistent" coronavirus symptoms for ten days. The pound however rose as officials insisted that Johnson was "still very much in charge of the government." Elsewhere, South Korea saw the fewest new cases in six weeks, Australian new infections were also dropping and Donald Trump said the US was showing signs of stabilising, despite the number of cases there passing 335,000 — the highest in the world. AFP

Mukesh Ambani's net worth drops 28% to \$48 bn in 2 months

PTI ■ MUMBAI
The net worth of India's richest man Mukesh Ambani dropped 28 per cent or USD 300 million a day for two months to USD 48 billion as on March 31 due to the massive correction in stock markets, a report said on Monday. The chairman and managing director of the diversified Reliance Industries saw his wealth decline by USD 19 billion in February-March period, taking his global ranking down eight places to 17th, the Hurun Global Rich List said. Other Indian businessmen who have seen a major drop in wealth include Gautam Adani whose wealth eroded by USD 6 billion or 37 per cent, HCL Technologies' Shiv Nadar (USD 5 billion or 26 per cent) and banker Uday Kotak (USD 4 billion or 28 per cent), it said. All the three have dropped

off the top 100 list, leaving Ambani as the only Indian in the league. The Indian market has corrected by 25 per cent in the last two months as the economic costs and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on companies led to a sell off across the world. "India's top entrepreneurs have been hit by a 26 per cent drop in the stock markets and a 5.2 per cent drop in the value of the rupee compared with the US Dollar. For Mukesh Ambani, it has been a perfect storm, with his wealth down 28 per cent," Hurun Report India Managing Director Anas Rahman said. Ambani is the second biggest wealth loser globally, after French fashion giant LVMH's chief executive Bernard Arnault, whose wealth



dropped by 28 per cent or USD 30 billion to USD 77 billion. Berkshire Hathaway's Warren Buffet also lost USD 19 billion of wealth in the last two months, to USD 83 billion, making it a smaller fall in percentage terms at 19 per cent, the report said. With hospitality coming under intense pressure due to the pandemic, shared economy platform Oyo Rooms' Ritesh Agarwal is "no more a billionaire," the rich list said. Others in the top-10 list of wealth losers also include Carlos Slim and family, Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, Larry Page, Sergey Brin and Michael Bloomberg, it said. Amazon's Jeff Bezos continues to be the richest man in the world with a networth of USD 131 billion, which has slid only by 9 per cent during the

last two months and is followed by Bill Gates with a fortune of USD 91 billion (down 14 per cent), Buffet and Arnault. Chinese billionaires were among the few gainers in the last two months, and included promoters of video conferencing and pork meat producing companies, it said. While India lost three rankings in the top-100 rankings, China added six billionaires in the league, it said.

Reliance Life Sciences to roll out confirmatory tests for Covid-19: RIL Chairman

New Delhi: Reliance Industries Limited (RIL) Chairman Mukesh Ambani has announced that Reliance Life Sciences has developed its own confirmatory tests for COVID-19 which are available to all RIL employees on priority and will soon be rolled out in the community. In an internal note on Saturday, Ambani informed about the comprehensive COVID-19 tracking and treatment facility for all RIL staff and their dependents. He also announced that Reliance Life Sciences has developed its own confirmatory tests for COVID-19 which are available to all RIL employ-

ees on priority and will soon be rolled out in the community. RIL's company-wide online Symptoms Checker was available to all Reliance employees and family members and will soon be rolled out to its wider community in Mumbai and India. He advised staff to continue to practise safe social distancing, report daily on the RIL's company-wide online Symptoms Checker to track health of all staff and their dependents, to use the in-house technology platforms for virtual care and, most importantly, to stay positive, productive, and optimistic through these times. IANS

Petrol sales shrink 17.6%, diesel 26% in March as lockdown wipes demand

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
India's petrol sales shrank by 17.6 per cent and diesel demand tanked nearly 26 per cent in March as the economy froze under the nationwide lockdown announced to check the spread of COVID-19. Also, aviation turbine fuel (ATF) sales fell by 31.6 per cent as flights got suspended alongside the shutting of businesses and most vehicular traffic going off-road. Petrol sales dropped to 1.943 million tonnes in March sold in the same month in 2019, according to provisional industry demand numbers. Diesel, the most consumed fuel in the country, saw demand contract by 25.9 per cent to 4.982 million tonnes. Similarly, ATF sales fell to 4,63,000 tonnes. The only fuel that showed growth was LPG as households rushed to book refills for stocking during the three-week lockdown period. LPG sales rose 1.9 per cent to 2.286 million tonnes in March. These are provisional numbers for the three public sector oil marketing companies — Indian Oil Corp (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corp Ltd (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corp Ltd (HPCL). Actual March numbers after including sales by private sector firms would be announced in the next few days. Industry officials said the pattern in fuel consumption is likely to continue in April as the lockdown is to last till mid of the month and there are indications that part restrictions will continue even after the lockdown is lifted. Petrol and diesel sales in April are one-third of what they were a year back, they said adding demand is expected to pick up when the lockdown is lifted and restrictions on public transport lifted.

Economic recovery to take at least 2-3 quarters: PE funds

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
The situation during the ongoing COVID-19 will be grim and the recovery thereafter will also take time as private equity experts fear that more people will die from hunger than pandemic in India most people under estimating the gravity and period of impact, which at the very least will take two to three quarters. At a private equity webinar, Shailendra Singh, Managing Director at Sequoia Capital flagged that fear that more people will die from hunger than pandemic in India. He added that most people are under estimating gravity and the period of impact, which will be the at the very least two to three quarters. Singh said they are asking every portfolio co to re validate the 5 critical assumptions their business hinges on. "You will be surprised that how many of them have actually changed/ could change in long run (Zivame)," he added. They have also advised companies to look at adjacent markets or alternative business models. Singh said that economic recovery will not start before Q3/Q4 of this financial year. Most countries will move manufacturing towards domestic markets especially in healthcare & R&D and reliance on China will go down. Anuj Ranjan of Brookfield said that cycles are inevitable, it will come back and will take time. After 9/11, no-one thought they would ever get on a plane again. But they did and it was much stronger than before, but in 22 months. Air travel started but the security changed forever.

Tariff hike to buoy wireless telcos' revenue in March qtr; full impact expected in Q1FY21

New Delhi: Revenue and EBITDA for wireless telecom service providers are expected to improve sequentially during March quarter 2019-20 fuelled by tariff hike in December, but the full impact is likely only in first quarter of the current fiscal when majority users come for recharge, according to Axis Capital. Axis Capital, in its recent report outlining Q4FY20 preview, has also anticipated a soft quarter for infrastructure providers, impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak. The report said Reliance Jio and Bharti Airtel are expected to benefit from the price hike as well as subscriber addition, while subscriber loss is expected to continue for

Vodafone Idea. "We expect revenue and Earnings before Interest, Tax Depreciation and Amortisation (EBITDA) for wireless service providers to improve led by tariff hike taken in December 2019, though the full impact is expected only in Q1FY21 when most users come for recharge," it said. The report, dated April 3, added that EBITDA will "benefit from pass-through of the price hike with margin improvement in the range of 20 basis points (bps) quarter on quarter (QoQ) to 80 bps QoQ for Indian wireless business." On infrastructure providers, it said Bharti Infratel, is expected to have a muted quarter with modest tenancy addition. PTI

Banks to witness spike in credit costs, non-performing assets in 2020

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Banks in the country are likely to witness a spike in their non-performing assets ratio by 1.9 per cent and credit cost ratios by 130 basis point in 2020, following the economic slowdown on account of COVID-19 crisis, says a report. In its report titled "For Asia-Pacific Banks, COVID-19 Crisis Could Add USD 300 Billion To Credit Costs" S&P Global Ratings said, it expects the non-performing assets (NPA) ratio for the Chinese banking sector to increase by about 2 per cent in 2020, and credit losses, to increase by about 100 basis points. On India, the report said "the NPA ratio in India is likely to fare similarly to China's (1.9 per cent vs 2 per cent) but

the credit costs ratios could be worse, increasing by about 130 basis points," the rating agency's credit analyst Gavin Gunning said in the report. Gunning said there are concerns that the coronavirus will spread faster, further, and for longer. "This will deepen the economic pain we already anticipate for 2020. Financing conditions may likewise sour as investors become more risk averse. This would hit bank credit," he said. The report noted that an additional USD 300 billion spike in lenders' credit costs and a USD 600 billion increase in (NPAs) will occur in 2020 due to the adverse impact of coronavirus pandemic. While banks are not as exposed as the corporate sector during the initial stage of

MTNL pays March salary, looks at resolving debt now

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
State-owned telecom firm SMTNL has cleared all pending salaries till March and is now looking to resolve debt issues through asset monetisation, a top company official said on Monday. Meanwhile, BSNL has cleared salary of employees due till February and is yet to make payment for the month of March, an another official told PTI. MTNL has seen reduction of over 60 per cent wage load post voluntary retirement of 14,378 employees that left it with the workforce of around 4,000 in Delhi and Mumbai. According to official data, MTNL has a debt of around ₹20,000 crore.

the pandemic, the strain on lenders could ultimately be profound. Banks face a second-order hit compared with the corporate and household sectors. The report said the economic storm created by COVID-19 will test the ratings resilience of the region's 20 banking sectors. "The resilience of banks' asset quality in 2020 hinges in part on the success of governments' and regulators' policy responses. These measures are in early stages. Some have started, some are in planning, and we suspect many more may be in the wings," Gunning said. Asia-Pacific Governments, central banks, and supervisory authorities have rolled out diverse measures to address COVID-19.

COVID-19 pulls India's service sector activity into contraction mode

New Delhi: India's services sector activity contracted during March as the COVID-19 pandemic dented demand, particularly in overseas markets, while public health measures aimed at stemming the outbreak curtailed discretionary spending, a monthly survey said on Monday. The IHS Markit India Services Business Activity Index was at 49.3 in March, down from February's 85-month high of 57.5, as the new coronavirus pandemic pulled the service sector into contraction. The headline figure fell by over 8 points, undoing the strong gains in growth momentum seen throughout 2019, the survey said. In PMI parlance, a print above 50 means expansion, while a score below that denotes contraction. PTI

Moody's: G20 economies likely to contract in H1 2020

New Delhi: As the coronavirus crisis severely impacts the global economy, a report by Moody's Investor Service said that the economies of G20 countries may witness a contraction in the first half of 2020. The forecast gains significance as G20 comprises of the world's largest advanced and emerging economies representing over two-third of the world population. India also is a member of the group. The other members of the G20 are the US, the United Kingdom, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey and the European Union. The report noted that the economic effect of the pandemic includes impact on demand, supply disruption and shock to the financial markets. The Moody's report said: "The global economy will experience an unprecedented shock in the first half of 2020." PTI

the pandemic, the strain on lenders could ultimately be profound. Banks face a second-order hit compared with the corporate and household sectors. The report said the economic storm created by COVID-19 will test the ratings resilience of the region's 20 banking sectors. "The resilience of banks' asset quality in 2020 hinges in part on the success of governments' and regulators' policy responses. These measures are in early stages. Some have started, some are in planning, and we suspect many more may be in the wings," Gunning said. Asia-Pacific Governments, central banks, and supervisory authorities have rolled out diverse measures to address COVID-19.

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF A PERSON ACCUSED (See Section 82 Cr.P.C.)
Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused lady Khairu Nisha @ Sheela, W/o Shri Chunu, R/o H.No. C-23, Phace-1, Metro Vihar Holambi Kalan, New Delhi has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case FIR No. 395/16 U/S 33 Delhi Excise Act, PS Kotwali, Delhi and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said accused Khairu Nisha @ Sheela can not be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused Khairu Nisha @ Sheela has absconded (or is concealing herself to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused lady Khairu Nisha @ Sheela of case FIR No. 395/19 U/S 33 Delhi Excise Act, PS Kotwali, Delhi is required to appear before this court to answer the said complaint on or before 16.05.20. By Order Ms. Prigya Gupta Metropolitan Magistrate-08 Central Room No. 272, Tis Hazari Court, Delhi

Trend Glazer

Short film on Coronavirus

Amid the Coronavirus pandemic, a slew of celebrities, including **AMITABH BACHCHAN, RAJINIKANTH, CHIRANJEEVI, PRIYANKA CHOPRA, RANBIR KAPOOR** and **ALIA BHATT** among many others, have come together to create awareness about COVID-19 through a short film, titled *Family*.

Conceptualised and virtually directed by Praseon Pandey in collaboration with Big B, the film will show that staying at home, staying safe, maintaining hygiene, working from home and maintaining social distancing can be productive and should be taken in one's stride.

Family will be premiered across Sony Network on Monday at 9 pm.



'It is not only Corona that we are tackling. We are also dealing with something much bigger that's affecting the world economy, the food that people are getting, our daily wage earners and just everyone. But we're in this together. So I think the best thing we can do right now is just be at home, be safe and keep donating.'

—Jacqueline Fernandez

Actor **MUGDHA GODSE** says that lockdown has given us time to reboot ourselves.

Talking about daily wage earners, she said, "Once this lockdown is over, the economy is going to topple and there is going to be a huge recession. Many companies are going to have backlog and things are going to change. I don't know the exact ratio but it's going to hit the market severely. I do agree daily wagers are suffering now but once everything is stable, I am sure the government will take care of them. There are also many NGOs which are coming forward and doing the needful. The economy will need time."



'My time in India was unforgettable'

Hollywood star **CHRIS HEMSWORTH** says he was "incredibly excited" about coming to India to celebrate his forthcoming Netflix film *Extraction*.

The actor was scheduled to reach Mumbai on March 16 to promote the film that has been shot in India. The tour was called off due to Coronavirus pandemic.

In a *desi* way, Hemsworth sent his love to India in a video, "Namaste India! Chris here, all the way from Australia. As you may have heard, I was incredibly excited to come to India and celebrate this film where it was filmed. My time in India during production was unforgettable and I was looking forward to returning," he said. The film releases on April 26.

MUSICAL NOSTALGIA

Singer, composer and multi-instrumentalist **RAGHAV SACHAR** pays tribute to his favourite video game, Super Mario Brothers, in his signature style. By **AYUSHI SHARMA**

Can you recall those days when engaging with Super Mario's adventures, typically in the fictional mushroom kingdom, after school was our prime entertainment? Mario was often joined by his brother Luigi, and occasionally by other characters. The player runs and jumps across platforms as well as atop enemies in various levels of the game. For sure, by now the 90s kids must have pictured every bit of the video game, right up to the dragon and rescuing the kidnapped princess Peach from the primary antagonist, Bowser.

Undoubtedly, Super Mario has been one of the most influential games for multiple generations. And singer, composer and multi-instrumentalist Raghav Sachar has paid a tribute to it in his signature style where he is dressed as Mario and Luigi. The main instruments used are the alto, soprano and tenor saxophones along with some other woodwind instruments like piccolo and flute. The trumpet adds bass, and all of this is blended in with electronic instruments like the guitar, seaboard and the keytar.

How did you first conceptualise it? What was the idea behind?

I always wanted to create my own rendition of the Super Mario Brothers theme as it was such an amazing melody. It had a lot of nostalgic value for me and, I am sure, for every child born in the 80s and the 90s. The idea was to do my best to showcase the variety of instruments that I play to emphasize the different stages and melodies of the game. To take things a notch further, I am even dressed up like Mario and Luigi playing various instruments in the video. I wanted the audio to sound larger than life and ended up creating a massive wind symphony of the music. It's my tribute to the makers of the game and the creator of the theme who composed it only with 8bit sound as that was the only thing available then.

Since Mario was a video game of the 90s primarily, do you aim to cater to that age group only? If not, how do you think rest of the audience will relate to it?

Mario has been developed over the years and a new cooler version is available for the millennials to play. It does not have the same theme though but they might be able to relate to the character. However, it will hold a lot more nostalgic value for the people who have played the original game because my rendition is a tribute to that version. I hope that the youngsters and musicians see my video from the point of view of a musical extravaganza.

You have used various instruments for this composition. How difficult was it to synchronise them together so that one doesn't overshadow the other?

I have recorded over 100 audio tracks and featured 11 different instruments. It was crucial that I identify which section would feature which instrument in the foreground. Since it is a wind symphony, woodwinds like saxophones and flute along with trumpet (brass) take centre stage with drums and percussion keeping the energy alive and electric instruments giving the modern vibe. Synchronising all the instruments was very difficult. Mixing and mastering 100 live tracks and making everything heard at the right place was tiring and cumbersome. I would do a mix and hear it on



various systems like my car, headphones, small speakers and more. It took many attempts and days before I was satisfied with the final video.

What is peculiar about the video that you have created?

The most peculiar thing would be that the game is a part of the video. I wanted it to evoke that feeling of nostalgia among viewers when they hear and

watch it. The editing process took ages because finding the right clips and then inserting the sound effects of the game along with multiple other screens of me playing so many different instruments was a huge task. The process of creating this audio and video took more than six months, which is the longest that I have taken to create anything so far.

You do a lot of film tracks often, how is your creative process for them different from the songs for albums?

Private albums and single are an artistes' true calling because he/she is not directed to create it. Creation of Mario has been a passion project for me and it took much more time than I had initially anticipated purely because it's musically very challenging and complicated.

Film work is very different and is very 'agenda' oriented. The makers always need a 'HIT', which frankly no music director can confirm 100 per cent. I feel when you approach music from a commercial point of view, rather than a creative point of view, there's a lot of imbalance and the process is more mechanical rather being organic and intuitive.

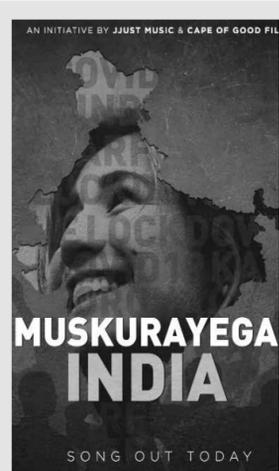
Most of the industries are suffering because of the pandemic. Do you think the music industry is affected as the songs are already online?

This is an unprecedented situation that no one had foreseen. Frankly no one has any answers to what's going on and when will it end. The industries worldwide have been hit and it will take a really long time for all of us to bounce back to our regular routines and for the fear to go away. Music as an industry has the highest demand during this time. In fact, it can easily be classified under essentials because people rely on it to relax themselves, meditate, feel spiritual, reinforce love, experience heartbreak and become positive in their overall outlook towards life. Creating music and releasing it is not as difficult if you are a producer like me who pretty much is self sufficient. If I want any singer to record on my audio, then I can send files to them via internet and mostly everyone who is engaged in making music has a small setup at home. It is also easier to release audio tracks without videos because it can literally be done from home and does not require manpower. We don't do that as much in India because every artiste wants a video to go along with the audio and that costs a lot more money and time while involving many more people.

Is there a specific reason you planned to release it now amid this global crisis? Do you think it will affect its viewership?

This track was supposed to release in March with a big press conference and a performance on various instruments by me for the media to capture. Initially, I wanted to wait and release it after the lockdown but then when I realised that there is uncertainty about how long we will be stuck like this, I decided to entertain the audience while they have fewer distractions. I think it will be a very uplifting video for many and I am expecting huge viewership because the game is not limited to India. It was a huge success worldwide and there are many communities who love Mario. I wish the circumstances were different but life still goes on...

WHEN YOU APPROACH MUSIC FROM A COMMERCIAL POINT OF VIEW RATHER THAN CREATIVE, THERE'S A LOT OF IMBALANCE. THE PROCESS IS MORE MECHANICAL RATHER THAN BEING ORGANIC AND INTUITIVE



NEW ANTHEM OF HOPE

Music heals." This would definitely sound like an old saying but that's the symphony that the nation needs now to win the Coronavirus battle. With this thought, some eminent Bollywood names have come together to bring about positivity and contribute towards a nationwide initiative through *Muskurayega India*. It's a special track, released yesterday, which aims to give strength to Indians in these testing times.

Actor Akshay Kumar took to social media and shared the poster. He wrote, "At a time like this when our days are clouded with uncertainty and life has come to a standstill, bringing you a song of hope."

Jacky Bhagnani also announced about the song. He said, "Phir hogi subah, phir jagmagayega India. Hum sab agar saath dein, toh jeet jayega India. #MuskurayegaIndia."

He added, "This song is a humble tribute to bring smiles to the faces of all Indians. I personally felt the only thing that helps in times of uncertainty is hope so we came up with this song. A big thank you to all our friends who helped us bring this together. All proceeds from this song will go into supporting the central and state governments' efforts to fight the virus. This is just a small tribute to the spirit of our country, to the power of 1.3 billion Indians."

Hinting at the silver lining, the song marks the coming together of the film fraternity for a cause.

Commenting on the same, Akshay shared, "With the help of this song, we want the people to be certain of one thing — everything will go back to usual. All we need is a united stand against COVID-19. *Aur phir Muskurayega India!*"

Curated by Jacky's music label Jjust Music and composed and sung by the talented Vishal Mishra, *Muskurayega India*'s lyrics have been penned by Kaushal Kishore. The anthem is being presented by Cape of Good films and Jacky Bhagnani.

Other names like Tiger Shroff, Taapsee Pannu, Vicky Kaushal, Bhumi Pednekar, Kartik Aaryan, Kriti Sanon, Ayushmann Khurrana, Kiara Advani, Rajkumar Rao, Sidharth Malhotra, Rakulpreet Singh, Shikhar Dhawan and Ananya Pandey have also been a part of the song.

Glow at home

Here are a few tips from experts on how to take care of your skin and hair amid the pandemic.

By **TEAM VIVA**

THAT PERFECT FACE GLOW

Eating healthy, working out, staying happy are some of the ways to achieve that perfect glow. "Climb stairs for 10 minutes. This is a good workout. If you like to dance, then dance to a song in the room. This will keep your hair and skin healthy. Be active for at least 20 minutes each in the morning, afternoon and evening. This also helps in the circulation of antioxidants in the body," says Aashmeen Munjaal, beauty expert and owner of Star Salon n Academy.

Amid this lockdown, it is very important to have a routine and divide time equally for exercise and other physical activities. "The key is to follow a routine of using cleanser, toner and moisturiser everyday. This will help the body follow a pattern," says Vedika Sharma, founder of Mantra Herbal.

STAY HYDRATED AND BANISH PROCESSED FOOD

Processed food is not good for the skin. It affects both the body and skin negatively, especially when physical activities are reduced. The less processed the food, the better it is. Aashmeen says, "Unprocessed, fresh food will strengthen your immune system

ALOE VERA GEL HAND HACKS:

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 tbsp of shea butter
- 2 tbsp of aloe vera gel
- 2 tbsp of grape seed oil
- 1 tbsp of Vitamin E oil
- 2 tbsp of arrow root powder
- 4 to 5 drops of vanilla essential oil

METHOD:

- Using a hand mixer, mix the shea butter for a few minutes till it is fluffy.
- Then add the grape seed oil and vitamin E oil.
- Stir for a few minutes until all the ingredients are well blended.
- Add the arrowroot powder a little at a time and mix it in until it's a smooth paste.
- Then add the aloe vera gel. Mix it a bit more until it feels like a fluffy, soft lotion.
- Keep it in a small mason jar or transfer it to a small glass jar.
- Apply as often as you want.

DIY recipe by Vedika Sharma, founder of Mantra Herbal



TONING MASK:

- Prepare a paste of one beaten egg white.
- Add one tablespoon yoghurt and fuller's earth (*mullani mitti*).
- Apply on your face until it dries up.
- Rinse off with clean water.
- Repeat twice a week.

DIY recipe by Dr Blossom Kochhar, founder of Blossom Kochhar Aroma Magic

and also help in producing antioxidants, which are very important at this time. Drink fruit juice and coconut water. Eat fresh vegetables, fruits and salads." Light food with fewer spices and a healthy soup are good for skin and body. Staying hydrated is the common solution for all the skin, hair or body problems. Vedika says, "It is extremely important to have clean and

healthy eating habits during this time. We should keep ourselves hydrated at all times and drink about three litres of water every day. We should also hydrate our hands and moisturise them often as they get dry and dehydrated due to frequent washing and sanitising."

SWITCH TO NATURAL INGREDIENTS

It is always better to use natural products for skin care instead of readymade cosmetic products. This time is the time to find the skin and hair care ingredients in your kitchen best suited to your needs.

Aashmeen says, "You can follow my tried and tested recipe. You will need a cucumber, tomato and a potato. Wash and grind all these. You can make its ice cubes and apply one cube daily. A tray will last for a week for the whole family. This will keep the skin glowing. At this time, when you are not able to

go to the parlour, adopt this method to make your skin glow." Dr Blossom too is in favour of digging into the kitchen for self care. "Personally, the reason why I feel it is the best time is because I can use things from my kitchen which are really fantastic and are filled with minerals and vitamins. Natural ingredients have no substitutes."

Even for hair care we should use natural things like curd. "Do not use detergent-based shampoos and regularly massage your scalp for naturally shining hair," says Dr Blossom.

KILL THAT DEAD SKIN

The season is changing and there are higher chances of dead cells accumulating on the surface of your skin leading to dull skin. Though we usually use an exfoliator to remove dead skin cells, here is a face pack by Aashmeen for different skin type. "For dead skin, add half teaspoon each of semolina and bran and mix with a teaspoon of gram flour to make the skin glow. If the skin is oily, then add rose water to this mixture. If the skin is normal, then mix with curd and if your skin remains very dry, make a pack with mustard oil. Vary the ingredients according to your skin type while keeping the gram flour, semolina and bran constant. Apply and leave for sometime. Remove the pack by moving your hands in circular motion. Keep moistening the pack by adding water in between. It helps in improving the blood circulation, makes the skin glow and also gets rid of dead skin."

HEALTH

GeneticSay

Delivering drug to the foetus as it develops in the womb may one day treat Usher syndrome, a genetic disorder characterised by deafness and progressive vision loss, suggests new research. The findings suggest an avenue to treat and prevent intractable genetic disorders before birth



WORLD HEALTH DAY

DOCYARD
DR PRAMOD TRIPATHI



Founder

FREEDOM FROM DIABETES,
PUNE



Dos and don'ts for Diabetics

April 7 of each year marks the celebration of World Health Day. Ever since its inception, the celebration has aimed to create awareness of a specific health theme to highlight a priority area of concern for the World Health Organisation. Over the past 50 years this has brought to light important health issues. The celebration is marked by activities which extend beyond the day itself and serves as an opportunity to focus worldwide attention on these important aspects of global health.

This year on World Health Day we are facing the challenge of COVID-19. It is observed that Diabetics are at high risk of having infection from Corona Virus as compared to normal people. Also because of the lockdown, it is becoming difficult to follow optimal diet and exercise patterns, hence special attention to Diabetics is needed so that they can gain health, build immunity and fight the pandemic.

Here are few dos and don'ts for Diabetics during the time of COVID-19-

Firstly, they should mentally adjust with the dietary and exercise constraints happily rather than complaining.

Do's:

■ Dietary innovations: 25% grain, 25% daal and 50% cooked vegetables

■ Intermittent fasting with proper insulin/ medicine dose adjustments

■ Eat diet low in glycemic index which helps keep the blood sugars in normal range.

■ Add anti-diabetic food items in diet — *bhindi* (okra), *tendli* (kundru), cabbage, garlic, onion, cucumber and *methi* as is available.

■ Eat dal-based roti instead of grain.

■ Start meal with clear soup or methi soup.

■ Filtered mustard oil, coconut oil, sunflower oil, groundnut oil, rice bran oil and gingelly oil are preferred. Olive oil can be best used for salads.

■ Ensure eating food at the appropriate time, in appropriate amounts and in proper frequency.

■ Drink sufficient amount of water.

■ Sleep before 11 pm, maintain a proper sleeping time and time period.

Don'ts:

■ Do not eat white bread, chips, and pastries, which quickly increase blood sugar.

■ Avoid processed foods as they are rich in salt and oil.

■ Restrict fried and fatty foods.

■ Do not watch too much of TV especially while eating food.

■ Avoid table salt and restrict the use of salty processed foods.

■ Do not miss your medication.

■ Restrict refined and starchy food items such as *maida*, *rava*, white bread, potatoes, other tubers, processed foods and meats.

■ In shortage of stevia, do not use artificial sweeteners beyond the recommended quantity. If possible drink tea/coffee without sugar.

Exercise is must. Try to concentrate more on exercise than diet in this lockdown phase.

Being homebound means less activity, less mobility, less exercise thus increases the risk to other health problems because of lack of movement. Thus one should include certain homebound easy exercise to be physically active like super brain yoga and chair *suryanamaskar*. This is the best time to master *pranayama* and deep breathing exercise.

SUMMERCoolERS

ZUCCHINI: The zucchini or courgette is a summer squash which is usually harvested when still immature. It has a good amount of potassium, 8 per cent of the recommended daily value. Potassium can help control blood pressure because it lessens the harmful effects of salt on your body. It can also help in reducing stroke risks.

Zucchini is also high in the antioxidant Vitamin C, which may help the lining of your blood cells function better,



lowering blood pressure and protecting against clogged arteries. It also help to boost immunity.

Adding zucchini to your diet can help improve digestion including reducing the incidence of constipation and other digestive issues. Zucchini is rich in fibres and nutrients that promote digestive health.

MANAGE COVID-19

Time and again, doctors are highlighting the importance of having strong immunity to keep coronavirus and other infections away. ARCHANA JYOTI tells you more



There is an adage: Prevention is better than cure. It still stands true, particularly at a time when the entire world is grappling with the deadly Covid-19 which has claimed over 80,000 lives and there seems to be no stopping. As a preventive measure from the virus that primarily affects the lungs and respiratory system, the importance of immunity has been stressed upon once again.

Strong immunity is necessary to fight any kind of foreign body or disease. People with poor immune system tend to be more prone to face the wrath of infections.

While following a healthy diet and lifestyle is the first and foremost way to strengthen one's immunity, there are certain foods and herbs that can speed up the process with their immune-boosting properties, say experts.

Luckily, we have Ayurveda treasure trove that needs to be explored once again, as a good immunity may perhaps sail us through the Coronavirus crisis, said Dr AKS Rawat, former CSIR scientist.

In fact, underscoring the need of good health and strong immunity, Prime Minister Narendra Modi too recently emphasised on the need to look towards our traditional medicine system. He said that he has been witnessing a rise in the discussion on topics related to fitness, staying healthy and boosting the immune system. "This is a great sign," he said as he urged people to make the protocol by Union Ayush Ministry a part of their lives and also share them with others.

Sanchit Sharma from herbal products manufacturing firm, AIMIL Pharma agrees that immunity will be "our saviour" against the virus. "Also, a healthy immune system will help in recovery from the coronavirus infection, Sharma adds. The firm offers herbal drug

Secrets to high immunity

To enhance the body's natural defence system during the COVID-19 crisis, these are the measures suggested by the AYUSH ministry:

- ◆ Drink warm water throughout the day.
- ◆ Daily practice of yogasana, pranayama and meditation for at least 30 minutes.
- ◆ Use turmeric, cumin seeds, coriander and garlic in cooking.
- ◆ Take 10 gm chyavanprash in the morning.
- ◆ Drink herbal tea/decoction (kadha) made from tulsi, cinnamon, black pepper, dry Ginger and



- oil/coconut oil or ghee in both the nostrils (Pratimarsh Nasya) in the morning and evening.
- ◆ Oil pulling therapy — Take one tablespoon sesame or coconut oil in mouth. Do not drink, swish in the mouth for 2 to 3 minutes and spit it off followed by warm water rinse. This can be done once or twice a day.
- ◆ During sore throat/dry cough, steam inhalation with fresh mint leaves or *ajwain* once a day; clove powder mixed with natural sugar/honey can be taken two-three times a day. It is best to consult a doctor if symptoms of dry cough and sore throat persist.
- ◆ Golden milk — Half teaspoon turmeric powder in 150 ml hot milk, once or twice a day
- ◆ Nasal application — Apply sesame

Fifatrol, a multi-drug combination of classical ayurvedic medicines and herbs like *mrityunjay rasa*, *sanjeevani vati*, *tulsi* and *giloe* which are some of the Ayurvedic herbs that are helpful in building the immunity and preventing the infection.

These herbs also help increase the production of interferons (proteins) and antibodies to generate an immune response against viruses and increase the rate of phagocytosis to destroy microorganisms, thus, increasing immunity from containing viral infections, Dr Rawat adds.

Dr Partap Chauhan, Director, Jiva Ayurveda advises not to panic. He tells you that fear and negativity reduces immunity. Excessive mental stress also affects our digestion and thus causes formation of "ama", a toxic material that is responsible for causing many diseases.

"Maintaining hygiene is the best way to prevent the virus from entering the body. Wash hands often with soap and water, use sanitisers, cover nose while sneez-

Mask it

Maharashtra has made it mandatory for people to wear masks when out in the public places. Now that there are 10 days left to a lifting of the lockdown here is what people need to do when it comes to wearing a mask according to WHO guidelines:

- If you are healthy, you only need to wear a mask if you are taking care of a person with suspected 2019-nCoV infection.
- Wear a mask if you are coughing or sneezing.
- Masks are effective only when used in combination with frequent hand-cleaning with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.
- If you wear a mask, then you must know how to use it and dispose of it properly.



- Before putting on a mask, clean hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.
- Cover mouth and nose with mask and make sure there are no gaps between your face and the mask.
- Avoid touching the mask while using it; if you do, clean your hands with alcohol-based hand rub.
- To remove the mask: remove it from behind; discard immediately in a closed bin; clean hands with alcohol-based hand rub.

ing, and avoid visiting busy and crowded places. Performing *agnihotra*/*yaGYa* or burning *havan sama-*

gri (a mixture of herbs) keeps home and environment free from germs," adds Dr Chauhan.

DadiKaKehna

Due to lockdown all salons are closed but there are several alternative home remedies that one can follow for soft hands and feet, says ROSHNI DEVI



Run out of moisturiser? Fret not. There are several cheaper options that are in our kitchen which make for a great way to keep hand and feet soft and moisturised. Use full fat yogurt. For better results add a teaspoon of honey to the yogurt and mix well. Slather this on your hands and feet and leave the marks for 10 minutes. Rinse properly and pat dry.

Scrub your hands and feet at least once a week with a good exfoliating agent to get rid of any dead skin. Take a teaspoon each of sugar, olive oil and mix it well with the juice of half a lemon. Rub this on your hands and feet for five to 10 minutes. Wash off with lukewarm water and pat dry.

Clean under your nails with a nail brush on a regular basis. When you wash your hands, use a good quality nail brush to gently scrub beneath your nails and remove any dirt that may be stuck there.

Being home with no maids means that many are spending a lot of time cooking. After kneading the dough for roti don't wash your hands. Add a few drops of milk and lemon juice. Leave it for a few minutes. This will cleanse and moisture your hands.

Apply a mixture of glycerine and rose water regularly on hands and feet before going to bed. Leave it overnight. Do this regularly.

If you have cracked heels use honey or even coconut oil. Do this till crack disappears.

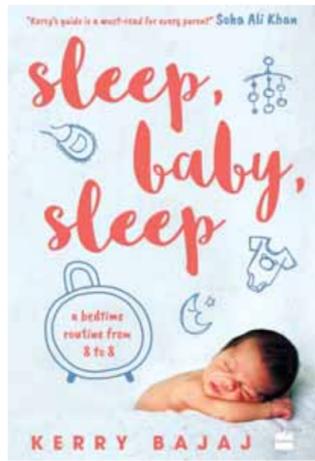
Guide to baby's good night sleep

SLEEP, BABY, SLEEP
Author: Kerry Bajaj
Publisher: Harper Collins
Price: ₹299
Pages: 264

We all know the importance of a good night's sleep. As adults, if we don't get proper rest, we are unable to do our work to the best of our ability and in all probability we are in a bad mood the entire day taking out our anger on others. So why should babies be any different? If your baby is otherwise healthy and yet cranky and irritable, there is a possibility that he has not had a good night's sleep.

Believe it or not, the same holds for school going kids. For a child to be attentive in class it is important that he has had sleep for at least eight to nine hours. Most doctors would tell you the same thing — that for humans to realise our potential we need those many hours of sleep. But hoe does a country that stands at No 2 when it comes to being sleep deprived, get a good night sleep?

It is something that we need to inculcate in our kids from the time they were babies. Kerry Bajaj's book *Sleep, Baby, Sleep* gives you a sneak peek into how one can ensure that your baby is tucked away in bed at 8 pm and sleeps till 8 am without much fretting. What is interesting about this book is that it takes



In order for the baby to have a good night sleep, it is important to create a spa-like environment — dim lights, sweet smell and soft music — during nap time

you step by step on how parents whose babies and kids are not getting as much sleep and keep parents up till late into the night can actually put them to sleep so that the next morning their kid is fresh and ready to tackle the day with a smile.

A smile that is so important to us. If our child is cranky, the parents are worried and harassed. It also means that until the child is old enough to be left on nannies, parents have almost zero social life because the child would not let the parents be.

The language used here is simple so that parents can follow the advice that has been to a T. The sentences are not too long and hence easy to remember. The book tells you that in order for your child to have a good night sleep, it is important to create a spa-like environment. Just live adults instantly relax the minute they enter a spa — with its dim lights, sweet smell and soft music, the same way parents need to create that environment during nap time.

It also advises parents that it is them who decides when and where the baby will sleep and not the baby. Once the parents have set a time and space for the baby to sleep, it is important to stick to it and shuffle the baby around.

Routine matters and parents needs to stick to it is the mantra to a baby's good night sleep.

— Shalini Saksena

IT'S RIGHT TIME TO DETOX

One way to lift your mood and drive away the blues is to have a regimen where one takes care of the skin and the hair. DR AJAY RANA shares tips

As Coronavirus continues to spread, everyone has locked themselves at home. Following the directions issued by the Government, people have stopped going outside the house and following the quarantine period. Spending such a long time at home can be annoying as well as tedious at the same time but one can use the most of this time by doing several things. People can opt for various things such as cooking, reading books and doing household chores but at the same time, it is very important to take care of them as well.

The best thing you can do to uplift your mood is to look after yourself, your skin and hair. During this quarantine period, when people have an ample amount of time it is important to take care of skin and hair. Here are some easy and simple tips to take care of your skin and hair during the quarantine phase.

Detoxify your skin: Detoxifying skin is really important as it helps to make skin soft and supple. At this time, you can detoxify your skin by taking some easily available ingredients such as lemon, mint and cumin. Make detox water by mixing all these ingredients and drink this water regularly. Alternatively, you can use this water to clean your face.

Eat a healthy diet: It is very important to take healthy and nutritious diet in order to maintain healthy and beautiful skin. It is essential to take proper diets that are rich in vitamins and protein. Include green leafy vegetables and fruits, nuts, eggs and berries in your diet to boost your skin.

Stay hydrated: Try to stay hydrated all the time to avoid forming dry and patched skin. Drink enough water which will automatically make your skin soft as dry skin. It is recommended that one should drink two-three liters or at least eight-10 glasses of water regularly. Also, drinking caffeinated beverages like coffee can also increase the risk of getting dull skin. Therefore, make sure that even if you take coffee it should be very limited.

Do regular exercises: As most of the time we are at home, it is significant to move your body in the form of exercise and workout. It not only helps in the blood circulation but also make your skin glowing. You can do yoga and meditation for around 20-25 mins regularly to achieve beautiful skin.

Use natural ingredients: You can try several home-made remedies to make your skin and hair more beautiful and smooth. Natural ingredients have always been considered as the best option to treat skin problems. Lemon juice, aloe vera, turmeric powder, cucumber and tomato are some of the best soothing and anti-inflammatory agents that can be applied to achieve beautiful skin.

Apply hair mask: Hair masks can be applied to make your hair look shiny and healthy. During this lockdown phase, you can different home-made masks such as egg white, honey and lemon mask to treat dry and rough hair.

The writer is Dermatologist and Aesthetic Physician, founder-director, ILAMED

NOT OVER YET

Unfazed by people's opinion Sushil preparing for 2021 Tokyo Games

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
 "People have this habit of writing me off every now and then but it does not affect me," says veteran wrestler Sushil Kumar, quashing talk of retirement and insisting that postponement of Tokyo Olympics has given him a very good shot at qualifying for his fourth Games.

The 36-year-old was struggling to make cut for Olympics, postponed to 2021. The showpiece, originally scheduled for July-August this year, was expected to be a swansong for veterans such as Sushil and tennis ace Leander Paes. But the one-year delay seems to have caused a change of plans.

Set to turn 37 next month, Sushil said, "I am not going anywhere as of now. I have got more time and more time means better preparation."

Making a comeback at the 2019 World Championship, Sushil showed glimpses of the form that made him look invincible in his prime before he lost steam and made an early exit.

That disappointment is, however, already behind him.

"Wrestling is such a sport that if you manage to remain injury-free, practice well, set a target and work on that, you can have a shot at your goal," said Sushil, the only Indian to win two Olympic medals.

"I am still practising twice a day. Obviously I am not hitting the mat but I am trying to be in shape and God willing, I will be able to qualify for the Tokyo Olympics," he added.

Sushil competes in the 74kg category in which India is yet to lock quota. Will he be able to beat the slowing reflexes?

"People were saying similar things in 2011. I know how to handle this. It's my



Sushil Kumar (in red) attempts to drag down his opponent during 2019 World Wrestling Championship match in Nur-Sultan

PTI/File Picture

daily job to manage it." Sushil was referring to doubts cast in 2011 over his ability to repeat his Beijing's Bronze medal-winning show at the 2012 London Games. However, he ended up winning a Silver in London.

The delay in Olympics has also brought Sushil's old foe Narsingh Yadav into the equation since his four-year doping ban will be over in July, making him eligible to take a shot at Oly qualification. The Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) has already said it will allow Narsingh to make a comeback.

Narsingh was preferred over Sushil for the 2016 Games but it all ended in disaster when the former failed a dope test. Sushil's demand for a trial was turned down by the federation as well as the Delhi High Court and he was even accused, without a shred of evidence, of sabotaging Narsingh in some quarters.

When asked about possibility of a face off, Sushil said, "We will see when the time comes. What can I say now about this."

Jitender Kumar is also doing a decent job as he recently won a Bronze in 74kg at the Asian Championship.

Sushil, it seems, does not consider any of the compatriots his real rivals.

When asked about the competition he is likely to face from fellow Indians, he said, "If you think small, you will achieve nothing. I am thinking about the international wrestlers, who are my likely rivals."

"Like there is one Uzbekistan guy, who won Asian Games Gold (Bekzod Abdurakhmonov). He is really good, my preparations are keeping in mind these wrestlers."

"I am keeping an eye on everyone. I am analysing everyone. If I think about the small targets, it won't lead me anywhere," he signed off.

If there is a bad ball, it must be hit: Shafali

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

She might be all of 16, but India's latest cricketing sensation Shafali Verma means business. Going into the World T20 in Australia as a youngster in the Indian team filled with heavyweights like Harmanpreet Kaur and Smriti Mandhana, Shafali stamped her authority to even rise to the top of the T20 rankings for batswomen during the tournament. But she says the journey has just begun.

After winning accolades for her performance in the World T20, Shafali said that the road ahead will only get steeper and she will look to rise to every challenge that comes her way in taking the women's team to becoming world beaters.

"Just didn't go our way that day. But sports is all about winning and losing. There will be other opportunities that will go our way. What happened we cannot change, but what will happen is in our hands and we will not leave any stone unturned as we look to be the best in the business," she said.

But what about her own scintillating show that won her applause from present as well as former cricketers? She says the trophy would have felt much better.

"My job is to go out there and score runs and put India in an advantageous position. It obviously feels good when people appreciate your performance, but the trophy in the hand would have felt so much better," she read.

For a youngster to say this after scoring 163 runs in 5 games at a strike-rate of 158.25 says a lot about how she puts team performance over individual glory.

Speaking about the team, Shafali says that this unit doesn't believe in any senior-junior divide and that helps. "You know, there is nothing like seniors will speak and junior have to listen or things like those. It is a very relaxed atmosphere and in fact not just seniors like Harmanpreet Kaur or Smriti Mandhana, everyone is looking to push the other the extra mile. And we have a really amazing coach in WV Raman sir," she said.

"The best part about Raman sir is that he always has solutions ready and helps out whenever we are stuck. If there is an issue I am facing, I can always go up to him and get clarity on how to work my way out. He just has a brilliant mind and can easily instil confidence."

So what was the general discussion when she went out to open with another explosive batswoman like Mandhana? For Shafali, it is all about playing one's natural game.

"We would keep it simple. If there is a bad ball, it must be hit and there is no two ways about it. So, when I get a bad ball, I hit it and same works for her. And when we get a good ball, we try and steal a single out of it. Nothing beats staying true to your game. Trying to curb your natural instincts don't work I feel," she pointed.

Having won hearts with her performance in her maiden World T20, what is her next goal? For Shafali, the only goal is to win. "Win more games for India. I should be able to put India in a position of strength when I go out to bat. The goal will always be to contribute to India's success," she signed off.



Dhoni owns Malinga in IPL battles: Styris



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former New Zealand all-rounder Scott Styris believes the IPL rivalry between Chennai Super Kings and Mumbai Indians pits the game's best finisher, M S Dhoni, against the best death bowler, Lasith Malinga, in which the former India captain owns the veteran Sri Lankan.

Super Kings have made 8 finals in 10 editions they have played in and Mumbai five in 12 editions, having won four out of those summit clashes.

"It's about consistency, CSK have never missed the final series, have won

the most knockout matches, it's the expectation and reliance on these IPL teams to produce Indian players and CSK has produced the most uncapped players for India and it's a real desire that they have to continue to develop players in that regard," Styris told *Star Sports*.

"It's about the best finisher in the game against the best finisher bowler. Dhoni vs Malinga, Dhoni owns Malinga," he said.

Chennai may be the most consistent side in IPL history but of late Mumbai Indians have managed to gain an upper hand, feels

former India cricketer Sanjay Manjrekar.

Reigning champions Mumbai Indians have won the IPL four times and Chennai Super Kings thrice.

"...When we look at winning percentage, which is a good way of looking at teams, a good winning record, CSK is right up there, but of late, there's been a surge by Mumbai Indians coming through the ranks, winning titles as well," Manjrekar told *Star Sports*.

"Mumbai Indians have won 4, CSK has won 3 but they have played less IPL (they were banned for two seasons). When you look at that, Mumbai Indians is emerging as a team that is threatening CSK in the last few years, they have actually been the better team than CSK, couple of IPL titles to MI."

Mumbai had pipped Super Kings in the final of the previous edition.

"When MI come to the final, they tend to win it, CSK not as much. When you look at the entire IPL, CSK go first, but of late, may be Mumbai Indians have a slight edge."

India's win in Aus because of Smith, Warner absence: Waqar

PTI ■ KARACHI

Former Pakistan captain Waqar Younis feels that India's Test series victory in Australia back in 2018-19 could be largely attributed to the absence of Steve Smith and David Warner from a team that was already reeling due to the after effects of ball-tampering controversy. The legendary fast bowler, who is also the bowling coach of Pakistan team was speaking in context of his country not being able to win even one Test match since 1995.

"I am not trying to take away any credit from India, they played well and they are a very good side. But yes at same time when they won in Australia, there is no doubt that Australian cricket was going through a turmoil and there were problems in their dressing room. And they were without Steve Smith and David Warner," Waqar said during a video conference.

Waqar himself is not sure as to what has been the reason behind Pakistan's failure Down Under.

"I really don't know why we have not won Tests their all these years. At times, we went there with top bowling



Aus Test skipper Tim Paine chats with Indian captain Virat Kohli

attacks yet lost. To me it was a case of when the bowling worked the batting didn't put up enough runs or when the batters put up enough runs the bowlers didn't come through," Waqar said.

For example the tour of 1999, when the bowling attack had Waqar himself, the iconic Wasim Akram, fiery Shoaib Akhtar, along with all-

Waqar not in favour of cricket in empty stadiums

KARACHI: Pakistan bowling coach Waqar Younis said he is not in favour of cricket resuming before empty stadiums amid the COVID-19 pandemic as he feels the desperate plan would end up creating more problems. "No I don't agree with this suggestion that cricket activities should resume soon even before empty stadiums," he said during a video conference with journalists.

Some former cricket stars and officials of cricket boards have said that the game can resume slowly and matches can be held in front of empty stadiums with the proper precautions in place for teams, officials and other ground staff.

"I think maybe in five or six months' time. When things are under control around the world and we get back some normalcy in life, we can think about match-

es behind closed doors," the former fast bowler said.

"At some stage we need to think about these choices but not this month or next month...The situation is not right for any cricket activities," he added.

PTI



FC Bayern Munich players practice at the club's training ground on Monday

Bavarians resume training

AFP ■ BERLIN

Bundesliga leaders Bayern Munich resumed training on Monday for the first time since the German league was suspended due to coronavirus but the players were put through their paces in small groups and maintained social distancing measures.

Keeping at least 1.5 metres from each other, players including captain Manuel Neuer, Robert Lewandowski and Thomas Mueller trained together for the first time since the Bundesliga was halted on March 13.

"It was a very unusual feeling to hold a training session in small groups, but it was also nice to see the boys in person again," said Neuer after Bayern had previously held training sessions online.

After arriving at staggered times to limit contact — with no greeting hugs or handshakes — the 21-man squad was split into five groups, each containing a maximum of five players.

When they changed, the players were kept four metres apart in the changing rooms at the club's state-of-the-art training complex in southern

Germany. On the pitch, Bayern's stars were careful to keep their distance from each other and there were no challenges or tackles.

Once training was over, the players left to shower at home, where they ate food provided by the club in lunch boxes.

Bayern asked fans to stay away from the Saebener Strasse complex, where hundreds of supporters usually turn up to see their heroes.

Other clubs also cautiously resumed training Monday, after the league's ban on doing so until April 5 passed, amid hopes the league will resume in early May.

Bayern are four points clear in the Bundesliga table. At the training ground of their closest rivals Borussia Dortmund, the players also did not shower or eat on site after a session that focused on running and shooting.

The only clubs in Germany's top flight not planning group training this week are Freiburg, whose players continue to work individually, and Werder Bremen, where the city's senate still prevents training in groups.

Cummins prioritises T20 WC over IPL

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

With cricket facing an uncertain future due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Australian pace spearhead Pat Cummins would like to see the T20 World Cup at home being held over the lucrative IPL in which he would enter as the costliest foreign buy.

Cummins became the most expensive foreign buy in the IPL at the auction in December when Kolkata Knight Riders shelled out a whopping ₹15.50 crore for his services.

"The T20 World Cup is something we've spoken about for the best part of two or three years. The (ODI) World Cup in 2015, that was absolutely a career highlight for me and I wasn't even playing in the final. I'd love to see that go ahead," Cummins was quoted as saying by the *Australian Associated Press*. "That's probably the big tournament this year for international cricket... I'd love for that to happen in a perfect world and if I was to be really greedy, I'd love for the IPL to happen as well."



Oz will struggle to dominate in sub-continent till spinners are encouraged: O'Keefe

PTI ■ SYDNEY

The just-retired Steve O'Keefe has rued that spinners are not allowed to win matches in Australian cricket, saying the country will struggle to dominate in the sub-continent until the issue is not addressed.

O'Keefe, the New South Wales left-arm spinner who took 301 first-class wickets at 24.66 and earned nine Test caps, ended his first-class career recently after being denied a new contract by his state.

After calling it quits, he has urged that spinners be given more opportunities to shine. "We have so much talent in this

country, spin-bowling depth. I look across at the top two spinners in each state that I really think there's so much quality," O'Keefe was quoted as saying by *ESPNCricinfo*.

"The problem is that they aren't being encouraged enough to be given a ball in the first ten overs and being told to win a game of cricket. The conditions haven't allowed them to express themselves."

On their last Test tour of India, Australia were thrashed by Virat Kohli's team and even though they came from behind to win an ODI rubber before the 2019 World Cup, the Aussies finished second best in the 50-over face-offs earlier this

year. "When you want to win overseas, spinners are the ones who have to win you games. But go back and have a look at Shield cricket."

"I'm the leading wicket-taker this year with 16 wickets and played five games. I've not had a match-winning role in any of the games," O'Keefe said.

"When you go to these places, it's all on your spinners; they have got to be people who are mentally tough and have the skill. It is a matter of urgency, if we are going to win over there to make sure we encourage these guys."

O'Keefe's last of his nine Tests came in 2017.

F1 in 'very fragile state', warns McLaren boss

AFP ■ LONDON

McLaren boss Zak Brown on Sunday said that the coronavirus pandemic has plunged Formula One into "a very fragile state", warning that as many as four teams could even be driven out of business.

The 2020 world championship has been unable to start with eight races of a scheduled 22 already either scrapped or postponed.

"This is potentially devastating to teams, and if (it is devastating) to enough teams then it's very threatening to F1 as a whole," Brown told the *BBC* on the eve of a meeting planned to discuss cost-cutting in the sport. Brown insisted that all



the teams have agreed to lower the 2021 budget cap to \$150m (138.7 million euros) down from \$175 million.

However, he said the ceiling needs to be reduced further to counter the financial fall-out from the virus-hit season.

"Could I see — through what is going on right now in the world if we don't tackle this situation head on very aggressively — two teams disappearing? Yeah," said Brown.

"In fact, I could see four teams disappearing if this isn't handled the right way."

"And then, given how long it takes to ramp up an F1 team, and given the economic and health crisis we are in right now, to think there would be people lined up to take over those teams like there has historically been... I don't think the timing could be worse from that standpoint."

"So I think F1 is in a very fragile state at the moment."

BWF suspend all tourneys till July

NEW DELHI: The Badminton World Federation (BWF) on Monday suspended a host of its flagship international, junior and para tournaments scheduled from May to July in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It comprises many Grade 2 and 3 events including HSBC BWF World Tour, BWF Tour and other BWF-sanctioned tournaments.

According to a BWF release, the decision was taken in "close consultation and consensus" with the Host Member Associations (HMA) and Continental Confederations (CC). The most prominent tournament affected during the period is the Indonesia Open 2020 (Super 1000).

Last week, the BWF froze the world rankings and world junior rankings until further notice, with the lists backdated to March 17, 2020.

The BWF is also reviewing the impacts of the rescheduling of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games upon the Olympic and Paralympic qualification system. This review process is expected to take several weeks upon which BWF will make a further announcement. PTI

Delhi shooting WC cancelled

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The shooting World Cup scheduled to be held in two parts in the national capital in May was on Monday cancelled owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The World Cup, originally scheduled to be held from March 15-26, was postponed to May barely four days before the start of the event.

"Due to COVID-19 pandemic the New Delhi Organising Committee has been forced to cancel Rifle/Pistol and Shotgun World Cups. Both of these were due to take place in New Delhi," the sport's world governing body ISSF said in a statement.

After the postponement last month, it was decided to hold the tour-

namment in two parts — Rifle and Pistol competitions from May 5-13, while Shotgun competitions were set from June 2-9, later changed to May 20 to 29.

However, considering the situation, the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) and the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) decided to cancel the tournament.

The ISSF has also decided to call off the combined World Cup in Baku, Azerbaijan, which was to take place from June 22 to July 3. "The health and safety of our athletes, officials, staff and of all members of our shooting fraternity are absolutely paramount," the NRAI said in a statement.