

OPINION 8 FROM IMAGE TO ACTION

MONEY 10 MARKETS MAINTAIN UPTREND ON STIMULUS HOPES

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LUCKNOW, FRIDAY APRIL 24, 2020; PAGES 14 ₹3



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Spike huge, but not 'exponential'

1,670 cases, 40 deaths on April 23; Centre says Covid rise rate is linear



Stranded students from Kota maintain social distancing as they walk out of a bus depot upon their arrival, during the nationwide lockdown to curb the spread of coronavirus, in Ahmedabad on Thursday

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Coronavirus cases saw a huge spike (1,670) on Thursday even as the Centre asserted the rise in cases has been linear, not exponential. The day saw Maharashtra recording the biggest ever a single day gain of 778 cases, followed by Gujarat which added 217 cases. With 40 new deaths, countrywide toll stood at 721. Despite claims by the Government that rise was linear the picture emerging from Maharashtra is worrisome. The State has now overall 6,427 cases and 283 deaths. Gujarat has also seen a manifold surge during the last one week with total count of positive cases

reaching 2,624 and a death count of 112. Delhi continued to be placed on the third rank with a total of 2,376 cases and 50 deaths. The day saw the national Capital adding 128 new cases. Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh added 49 and 100 cases to be among the worst affected States with total of 1,937 and 1,687 respectively. Uttar Pradesh tally of corona positive reached 1,510 with 8 patients found in Bahraich and 13 in Kanpur on Thursday. Andhra Pradesh also saw a rising trend with addition of 80 cases for a total count of 895 cases and 237 deaths. However, the Government pointed out that the country is

experiencing 4.5 per cent positive cases among the tested people, which is similar to the situation a month ago before the lockdown was imposed. CK Mishra, who is chairman of Empowered Group 2, said, "On March 23, we had done 14,915 tests across the country and on April 22, we did more than 5 lakh tests, and as per a rough calculation, we have scaled up nearly 33 times in 30 days. This is not enough and we need to consistently ramp up testing." Talking to reporters here, Mishra said, "Our focus is on the districts now. The way positive cases moved in India, the growth is more or less linear and not exponential.

Certain strategies are in work to contain it to a particular level. Beyond this, looking at the story of positive cases in these 30 days, we are more or less in the same position where we were one month ago. India's positivity rate has remained 4.5 per cent, despite a 24-fold increase in testing." He insisted that through the lockdown, the Government has been able to minimise the spread of the viral infection, cut the transmission rate and increase the number of days in doubling of the cases. Mishra said India has done better than majority of the developing countries, except South Korea, with respect to the percentage of tested cases yielding positive results. "During the 30 days of lockdown, we have been able to

cut transmission, minimise spread and increase the doubling time of Covid-19, consistently ramp up our testing and utilise our time to prepare for the future," added Mishra. "No new case of Covid-19 was reported from 78 districts in the last 14 days. A total of 388 patients were cured in one day, the recovery rate is 19.89 per cent. There are 33 new districts in nine states from where no new case was reported in the last 14 days," said Luv Agarwal, Joint Secretary at the Union Health Ministry. "The lockdown period has been used gainfully to review, assess and expand our hospital infrastructure and preparedness; our effort has been to use resources and be over-prepared," said Mishra. **Continued on Page 6**

Rules misinterpreted, no action if employee found positive: MHA
New Delhi: The Union Government said no legal action will be taken against the CEO of a company in case an employee tests positive for Covid-19. In a letter to the chief secretaries of all States and Union Territories, Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla said some apprehensions, based on wrong interpretation.

Govt plans supply of around 15.40 cr HCQ in domestic market in April
New Delhi: The Government plans to ensure supply of around 15.40 crore Hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) tablets, used in treating coronavirus infections, in the domestic market in April, an official said on Thursday.

2 deaths, 128 new cases in Delhi on Thurs
New Delhi: With 128 new Corona positive cases, the total number of Covid-19 cases increased to 2,376 with two deaths reported on Thursday. The death toll in the national Capital has risen to 50. Surprisingly, 46 Covid positive cases are from Jahangirpuri H block only. Three lanes of H-Block in Jahangirpuri, in the North District, were made the containment zone on April 14 and samples were collected after screening.

Delhi Metro resumption plan: Face masks must, Aarogya Setu e-pass
New Delhi: Passengers using the Delhi Metro, postresumption of operations, will have to take out any metallic item from their body before frisking, use face masks, have the 'Aarogya Setu' app, but those with flu-like symptoms won't be allowed, as per a proposal prepared by the CISF on Thursday.

Govt plans to rev up eco as Fitch forecasts slump

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

On a day global rating agency Fitch lowered India's economic growth forecast for current fiscal year 2020-21 to 0.8 per cent from 1.8 per cent, the Government stepped up efforts to deal with the gloom-and-doom scenario caused by Covid-19 outbreak. While India's growth forecast, Fitch cited fall in consumer spending and fixed investment due to extension of coronavirus lockdown and disruption in economic activities. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) and representatives of industry associations on Thursday discussed ways to boost the economic and industrial activities during lockdown period. The representatives of Industry Associations urged the MHA to allow more industries to operate with reasonable safeguards. Sources said the Government has been considering providing relaxation to some more industries to restart economic activities. State Governments are working to operationalise industrial units in non-hotspot zones as the Central Government has given permission for exempting many essential services post April 20. Certain quarters of the industry and exporters have

Rating agency predicts 0.8% GDP growth



raised concerns over the revised guidelines issued by the MHA on April 15, stating that it is difficult for them to implement those for partial resumption of their factory operations. MHA's Joint Secretary Punya Salila Srivastava said Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla and Department of Promotion Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) Secretary Guruprasad Mohapatra discussed with the industry associations ways to facilitate industrial and economic activities across the country amid the lockdown. **Continued on Page 6**

Eyes on Sweden to gauge 'herd immunity' efficacy

No lockdown curbs; country pins hopes on community cure



People gather for a drink at an outdoor bar in Stockholm, Sweden on Wednesday despite the Covid-19 outbreak

AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI

While much of Europe has remained in coronavirus lockdown, Sweden has bucked the global trend by imposing minimum restriction on public activities in order to generate herd immunity to take on the pandemic. Though for the past

month, outdoor activities have not been unbridled — people having been advised to avoid non-essential travel — restaurants, bars, cafes and nightclubs have remained open, albeit with limiting gatherings of over 50 people. Educational institutions, including school for under 16-year-olds, have remained open.

Sweden's chief epidemiologist has claimed that "herd immunity" could be reached in its capital Stockholm in a few weeks. The strategy — aimed at allowing some exposure to the virus in order to build immunity among the general population while protecting high-risk groups like the elderly — has been controversial. Some health experts argued it is a risky move. Sweden has seen 16,755 Covid-19 cases and 2,021 deaths so far. Herd immunity is also called community immunity and herd or group protection. It occurs when a 60 per cent of the community is deemed immune to a disease (through vaccination and/or prior illness), making the spread of this disease from person to person unlikely. This can happen when many people contract the disease and in time build up an immune response to it (natural immunity). It may also occur when many people are vaccinated against the disease to achieve immunity.

Four more test positive in city

Over 1,500 Covid-19 cases in state so far

LUCKNOW: The coronavirus death toll rose to 24 in Uttar Pradesh as three more people succumbed to the infection on Thursday, an official release said. According to the release, while two deaths were reported from Kanpur, the third one took place in Agra, which has so far recorded the maximum seven fatalities in the state. Agra is followed by Moradabad in terms of the death toll, where the virus has claimed five lives so far. The other districts from where coronavirus deaths have been reported are Meerut and Kanpur (three each); and one each in Basti, Varanasi, Bulandshahar, Lucknow, Firozabad and Aligarh. The state has so far reported 1,510 cases with 61 fresh cases surfacing on Thursday. Out of the total cases, 1,299 are active patients while 187 have been treated and discharged, Principal Secretary, Health, Amit Mohan Prasad told reporters here.

LUCKNOW: Four people tested positive for coronavirus in the city on Thursday, including one in Pandeyganj and three in Topkhana Bazaar, taking the tally of cases in Lucknow to 174. According to a senior official, those who tested positive in Topkhana Bazaar included an undergraduate student, a paan vendor and a vegetable seller's brother. In Pandeyganj, a 51-year-old man living near Birhana crossing under Naka police station tested positive for COVID-19. A senior official said the police sealed the lane in which the patient lives and a medical team collected the swab samples of his family members. He said contact surveillance was being carried out to trace others who might have come in contact with the man. According to sources, the man is a cable TV worker and he might have contracted the infection from his son, who works in a hotel. The CMO teams collected a total of 285 samples across the city while 45 teams carried out awareness drives in Adarshnagar, Malhupur, Gulshan Bihar and Sardarnagar, covering a population of 22,615

in 4,844 houses. The CMO said that 15 COVID-19 patients had been discharged in Lucknow while 169 were under treatment, including 26 from Saharanpur, 17 from Assam, 10 from Rajasthan, 16 from Delhi, one each from Jharkhand & Andaman, and 98 from Lucknow itself. Meanwhile, Defence PRO Gargi Malik said a retired Army officer, father-in-law of the 35-year-old Canadian doctor who had tested positive for coronavirus, had tested negative and they were waiting for the second report before discharging him from the Command Hospital Divisional Commissioner Mukesh Meshram said he had directed all district magistrates in the division to check the quarantine facilities for health workers and check the community kitchens. "CCTV cameras have been installed in the community kitchens and directions have been given to ensure that the heads of the workers are covered and they wear masks. As regards the health workers, those in active quarantine duty have to be put in passive quarantine after one week of duty and during this period they cannot meet anyone," Meshram said.

"The total number of cases reported in the state have increased to 1,507," he said. "The cases have been reported from 56 (out of total 75 districts of the state). Among them there are no active cases in 11 districts. Now, only 45 district have active cases," Prasad said. He said of the total cases, 938 are from the Tablighi Jamaat event or persons, who came in contact with them. On Wednesday, he said, 3,737 samples were collected and a total of 3,955, including backlog of samples, were tested. This is "record testing" in a single day, Prasad said. He said at present, 1,584 persons are in isolation wards while 11,826 are in quarantine facilities in the state. Eleven of the coronavirus-hit districts that have no active cases now, include Pratapgarh, Pilibhit, Lakhimpur Khiri, Hathras, Bareilly, Prayagraj, Maharajganj, Shahjahanpur, Barabanki, Hardoi and Kaushambi, Prasad said.

CAPSULE

IndiGo ROLLS BACK PAY CUT IN APRIL SALARY
New Delhi: IndiGo CEO Ronojoy Dutta told employees on Thursday that the airline has decided to rollback the pay cuts, which were announced earlier for senior staff members, for the month of April in deference to the "Government's wishes".

NO FRESH CASE IN NOIDA, OVER 50% RECOVERED
Noida: No fresh coronavirus case was recorded across Noida and Greater Noida on Thursday, keeping the tally of Covid-19 positive cases in western Uttar Pradesh's Gautam Buddha Nagar district at 103, officials said.

OIC'S ALLEGATIONS REGRETTABLE: GOVT
New Delhi: The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation's allegations of "Islamophobia" in India is regrettable and it should not try to "communalise" the global fight against the Covid-19, Government sources said on Thursday.

INDIA STUDYING TRUMP'S ORDER ON IMMIGRATION
New Delhi: India is studying US President Donald Trump's executive order to temporarily halt immigration for 60 days, a move aimed at protecting the jobs of Americans in an economy battered by the coronavirus pandemic.

BJP spreading virus of communal prejudice and hatred, says Sonia

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Thursday accused the BJP of spreading the virus of communal prejudice and hatred in the country, asserting that "grave damage" is being done to social harmony in the country. Addressing a meeting of the Congress Working Committee, Sonia said it should worry every Indian and her party will have to work hard to repair this damage. "Let me also share with you something that should worry each and every one as Indians. When we should be tackling coronavirus together, the BJP continues to spread the virus of communal prejudice and

hatred," Sonia said at the CWC meet through video-conferencing. This is the second CWC meet this month while she has been taking stock of the situation through various party meetings. **Continued on Page 6**

Sonia doing cheap politics, stoking communal fire, must tender apology: BJP

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a sharp riposte to Congress president Sonia Gandhi, who charged the ruling party with "spreading communal prejudice and hatred," the BJP on Thursday described her comment as "cheap politics". The BJP demanded that she immediately tender an apology for her "irresponsible comments" which would "encourage communal feeling and hatred". Senior BJP leaders and Union Ministers Prakash Javadekar and Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi said it was unbecoming of the Congress leader to make such comments when the entire country is fighting coronavirus pandemic unitedly.

"We are not creating communal divisions. We are unitedly fighting Covid-19. We request them not to do cheap politics. They must not indulge in small politics," Javadekar said, shortly after Sonia took on the ruling party. BJP's national spokesperson Syed Shahnawaz Hussain demanded that Sonia should immediately take back her statement which is aimed at "encouraging communalism" and an attempt to distract attention from violent incidents in the Congress-ruled States like Maharashtra. He was obviously referring to the killing of religious men in Maharashtra's Palghar region. **Continued on Page 6**

Two arrested for attacking Arnab, Cong seeks FIR against anchor

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The Mumbai Police on Thursday arrested two persons in connection with the alleged attack on Republic TV co-founder Arnab Goswami, even as the Indian National Congress demanded FIR against Goswami for allegedly spreading "racial and social hatred" in the society. Acting on a complaint lodged by Goswami with the NM Joshi Marg police station, the police arrested two persons — identified as Prateek Mishra and Raju Borade — in connection with the incident that took place in the small hours of Thursday. Both the arrested persons are in their early 30s. **Continued on Page 6**

Central Govt puts DA hike on hold till July 2021

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Government has put on hold till July 2021 the increase in dearness allowance (DA) for its about 49.26 lakh employees and 61.17 lakh pensioners because of the strain on finances due to the coronavirus lockdown. The Centre also put on hold other allowances like LTC, etc, except for children education allowances till June 2020. The allowances include departmental canteen, office supplies expenses and the kind of wages as scheduled in the Cash Management System in Central Government. It also tweaked norms for advance payment in medical treatment and said only in emergency cases such

grants may be processed. In March, the Union Cabinet had approved an increase of 4 per cent in DA to 21 per cent. "The Central Government employees and pensioners will now continue to receive DA at current rates, i.e., 17 per cent as part of their salary/pension," according to the office memorandum. The memorandum further stated that no arrears will be paid from January 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021. However, any hike in DA due to revision on July 1, 2021 will take into account the previous hikes as well. The Government's tax revenues have plummeted because of the Covid-19 lockdown while expenses have shot up because of the support pro-

vided to the vulnerable groups. The Government revises dearness allowance twice a year to compensate for the rise in prices. This is the first coronavirus impact on Central Government employees. The Government had earlier cut salaries of Ministers, Prime Minister, President and Members of Parliament by 30 per cent. The Government earlier urged its employees to contribute one day's salary of April 2020, which is payable in May. The pay deducted from the salary of employees will be contributed to the Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund (PM CARES Fund).

Generate 15 lakh jobs in next 6 months: CM

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has asked officials to prepare a plan to generate 15 lakh employment opportunities within next three to six months so that economy of the state could be strengthened.

The officials have been asked to give the proposal within a week.

This directive was given after a presentation on generating employment opportunities in the state.

"It will be a great challenge to strengthen the economy once the lockdown is lifted. We need to prepare ourselves for this challenging task. Therefore, prepare a plan which can generate employment for 15 lakh people within next three to six months," Yogi said during the meeting.

He said MSME, Horticulture and Food Processing, Khadi Gramodyog, One District, One Product (ODOP), National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Swarozgar Yojana, Skill Development Mission should work together and come up with a strategy.

"Even MGNREGA could prove a game changer in giving employment to the youth," he said.

The chief minister said that under Chief Minister Apprenticeship Scheme, ₹2,500 was given to trainees. "Prepare a plan to link two lakh youth with this scheme. This will give the youth a foothold to tide over financial crisis," he said and added that youth should be provided employment under Youth Hub programme.

Yogi also suggested that MSME and ODOP could also help in generating large-scale employment. It could start with stitching school dress or weaving sweaters for students of the state-run schools. The women selfhelp groups could be provided machines so that they could get employment at their doorsteps, he added.

"Similarly, the Food Processing department can train women in making papad, pickle and patta. In fact, the women in SHGs can also generate employment by making masks," the chief minister suggested.

"Teach the youth the virtue of branding like itra, dhoop and incense sticks. Provide them market and allow them to sell their products in competitive market. Same can be done with dairy products and flower," he said.

Seize vehicles ferrying passengers: Yogi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday ordered that no vehicle be allowed to ferry passengers during lockdown and in case of violation, such vehicles be seized and action be taken against the drivers and the owners.

"The police should be more strict on highways, and inter-state and inter-district borders. A vehicle permitted to ply will only have a driver and a cleaner. All other occupants will be illegal and they should be quarantined and the vehicle seized immediately," Yogi said during a meeting with Team 11 in Lucknow on Thursday.

The chief minister directed officials to provide better facilities to doctors, paramedics and even to people who were quarantined in different places in the state.

Additional Chief Secretary (Information) Awanish Awasthi told media persons in Lucknow that the

decision has been taken in view of the COVID-19 pandemic to end the crowding in the agriculture mandis, the UP assembly in April 2018 had passed an amendment to the UP Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) Act, 1964, allowing the operation of private 'mandis'.

The amendment had allowed companies to set up procurement centres outside the periphery of existing mandis for direct purchase of produce from farmers. This was aimed at widening the procurement basket and providing more remunerative prices to farmers.

The rules of the amended Act were notified last year and will now be implemented.

With these reforms, all the cold storage/silo owners with storage capacity of 4,000 MT will be eligible to get sub-mandi licence. There are a total of 1,911 cold storages in the state. All the flour mills, dal mills and oil mills with installed capacity of processing 10 MT per day will also get the sub-mandi licence and will be able to directly purchase the agri produce from farmers without going to the Mandi Samiti.

The government has also exempted the sub-mandi licences from the annual licence fee of ₹2,000 for the current fiscal 2020-21 while the fee has been waived for the government controlled organisations, cooperative bodies, public sector undertakings.

The government, for promoting the FPOs in agri trade, has waived the annual licence fee of ₹1,000 and bank guarantee of ₹1 lakh.

The NITI Aayog in 2016 and the Union Agriculture Ministry had set up a panel to draft a model act that would look at agri-marketing in a more holistic manner and suggest a legal template for states to adopt. Since agriculture is a state subject, only states can implement laws related to the farm sector. At present, the bulk of the agri marketing is done through 251 government-operated mandis across the state's 75 districts. These notified 'mandis' had clocked total transactions worth nearly ₹67,000 crore in 2018-19.

UP Krishi Utpadan Mandi Parishad had earned ₹1,823 crore by way of taxes and levies in 2018-19, compared to ₹1,211 crore in 2017-18, an increase of over 50 per cent, despite foregoing about ₹50 crore in taxes on desi ghee. In the 2019-20 its earnings were over ₹2,100 crore.

chief minister was annoyed at reports of people trying to cross borders by hiding in vehicles.

"The chief minister said that district officials, including district magistrates and chief medical officers, should regularly check facilities at all quarantine centres and ensure quality food and hygiene. Pool testing should be done at shelter homes. Covid Care Fund should be used for strengthening medical facilities at COVID hospitals and for providing PPE (personal protective equipment) kits and other gears for doctors and paramedics. Besides, more doctors be engaged to help the patients through telemedicine," Awasthi said.

The senior official said that the chief minister also asked Food Supply department to provide food grains to new ration card holders from May and that Antyodaya card holders should get 35 kg of food grains and others 5 kg per unit. In April, 88 per cent of 3.56 crore ration card holders were

given over 6.55 lakh metric tonnes of food grains in the second phase.

Awasthi further said that wheat purchase was underway and over 4,000 procurement centres were functional across the state. He said 53,000 fertilisers, 37,000 pesticides and 35,000 seed outlets were working for zaid crop and mentha sowing.

The official also claimed that construction work had started and work at three expressways — Purvanchal, Bundelkhand and Gorakhpur Link — had picked up pace with 2,122 machines in operation in Purvanchal Expressway project. He said over 4,835 labourers were also employed there. "The PWD has started 161 projects worth Rs 2,858 crore, Irrigation department has started 49 projects and Panchayati Raj department has undertaken 43,393 projects in rural areas covering 15,120 panchayats, in which 3.36 lakh rural workers, including MGNREGA workers, have been engaged," he said.

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UP govt sets up 34 temp jails to lodge Jamaatis

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

With more and more Tablighi Jamaat members being arrested after completing their quarantine period across the state, the government has set up 34 temporary jails, including two for women. The security agencies have so far lodged 350 odd Tablighi Jamaat members, including 156 foreigners and eight women, in these jails.

The foreigners have been charged with violation of Epidemic Diseases Law and Foreigners Act.

Acting tough on missing Tablighi Jamaat members who played major role in the sudden surge in coronavirus positive cases in UP, the state government has so far arrested 156 foreigners who attended the Nizamuddin markaz congregation and completed their 14-day quarantine.

Another 200 Jamaatis have been jailed for violation of Epidemic Diseases Act and lockdown norms.

On Thursday, the government set up eight more temporary jails, taking the total number of such facilities to 34, for lodging Tablighi Jamaatis.

Two special jails to lodge women have been set up in Lucknow and Bulandshahr, and four Jamaat members each are lodged there at present.

The foreign Tablighi Jamaat delegates are natives of Indonesia, Kazakhstan, France, Morocco, Malaysia, Kyrgyzstan, Bangladesh, Sudan, Palestine, Syria, Mali etc. Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Awanish Awasthi has said that the government would not spare anyone violating the law and threatening lives of the people.

"Hitherto quarantined Jamaatis will now be sent to jail. So far 45 FIRs have been lodged against 259 foreigners who attended Nizamuddin markaz and later hid across the state. Of them, 325 foreigners, including

Districts having 20+ corona cases to have nodal officers

Lucknow (PNS): Taking a serious note of rising number of coronavirus positive cases across the state, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath directed that a senior IAS officer and a Health department official be deputed as nodal officers and sent to districts reporting 20 or more COVID-19 cases so that medicare to patients could be monitored and the spread of the virus to other areas be prevented. Additional Chief Secretary (Information), Awanish Awasthi told media persons in Lucknow on Thursday that a senior IAS officer and a health official would be rushed to those districts on Friday that had reported 20 or more COVID-19 cases.

"There are 15 such districts but Gautam Buddha Nagar (Noida) already has a senior IAS officer monitoring the situation and hence officials would visit the remaining 14 districts and camp there for a week," he said.

These officials would check facilities and medical care avail-

able to the patients and take stock of preparation of the district got countering the pandemic.

Awasthi said that in districts where there were no senior police officials of Inspector General (IG) rank, there too a senior police official would be sent along with administrative and health official. "They would review lockdown, medical and administration, sanitation, quarantine centres, community kitchens and shelter homes," he said.

"The government's focus is on ensuring that there is no spread of coronavirus out of hotspots and testing has also been intensified there," he said.

Awasthi further said that the state had increased its testing capacity and on Wednesday 3,955 tests were conducted against sample collection of 3,737. "This shows that we have started clearing backlog. Besides, UP has become the third state in the number of cumulative tests being done in the country," he said.

66 Nepalese citizens, have been identified across UP. The police have seized their passports for violating Foreigners Act by attending religious gathering on tourist visa," Awasthi said.

Besides, around 3,000 Indian were identified in UP and 2,800 were quarantined.

Meanwhile, the Fire department personnel have so far sanitised 12518 places, including hotspots. Sanitisation exercise was carried out in 635 areas identified as hotspots, 1,277 sensitive places, 1,465 markets, 3,411 residential areas and 5,439 other places and establishments. DG (Fire Services) RK Vishwakarma said that 784

spots were sanitised in Gautam Buddha Nagar (Noida), 724 in Lucknow, 377 in Agra, 216 in Moradabad, 470 in Meerut, 450 in Firozabad, 460 in Ghaziabad, 256 in Mainpuri, 338 in Aligarh, 756 in Bareilly, 576 in Kaushambi, 974 in Varanasi, 346 in Azamgarh, and 318 in Gorakhpur.

NORTH CENTRAL RAILWAY, PRAYAGRAJ
Corrigendum Notice No.:30202254
Date: 23.04.2020
Corrigendum No. 01
On behalf of the President of Indian PCMM, North Central Railway, Prayagraj is issued a following corrigendum for change in Opening Date against EPS Tender No. 30202254 published against EPS Tender Notice No. 20/15 dated 03.03.2020 Sr. No.: 01 Tender No.: 30202254 Particulars: Opening Date From 28.04.2020 To 26.05.2020 Other Terms & Conditions of Tender remains unchanged. 337/20(1) 24x7 Passengers Service Helpline No. 138

NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY
Corrigendum No. 1 Regarding E-tender notice No. M/C&W/43/2019-20 dt. 30.03.2020 published by Mech./C&W/BSS, Published Information: Date of opening of e-tender Dt. 08.05.2020, Corrected Information: Date of opening of e-tender Dt. 21.05.2020. Note: All other terms and conditions shall remain same as per uploaded tender document. The above corrigendum letter can be seen on the IREPS Website www.ireps.gov.in.
Sr. Divl. Mech. Engineer (C&W) CPRO/Mech.-9 Varanasi
About any passenger amenity complain SMS on Mobile No. 09794849555
"DO NOT TRAVEL WITH INFLAMMABLE ARTICLE IN TRAIN"

UP
उप प्रो पावर ट्रान्स्मिशन कारपोरेशन लि. शुद्धि पत्र
इस कार्यालय द्वारा आमंत्रित निविदा संख्या 07/विभागा/गोष्ठा/2020-21, के सम्बन्ध में निम्न शुद्धि पत्र जारी किया जाता है। निविदा संख्या 07/विभागा/गोष्ठा/2020-21 के खुलने की तिथि विस्तार कर दी गयी है, अब यह निविदा दिनांक 29.04.2020 को 14:00 बजे तक अपोलो एवं स्वीकार की जायेगी एवं दिनांक 29.04.2020 को 15:00 बजे सार्वजनिक रूप से खोली जायेगी। निविदा की अन्य नियम व शर्तें यथावत रहेंगी। निविदा के अन्य विवरण www.e-tender.up.nic पर देखे जा सकते हैं। अधीक्षण अभियन्ता, विद्युत पारिषद मन्डल, 220 केजीओ उपकेंद्र परिसर, जेल रोड, गोष्ठा। संख्या - 93/विभागा मा/गोष्ठा/दिनांक - 23.04.2020 'राष्ट्र' हिस में निजली बचामें साधारण बन्व के स्थान पर एलआईडीओ बन्व का प्रयोग करें"

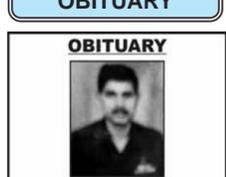
SCHOOLSCAN SCHOLARSHIP



Manan Bhatia, an alumnus of City Montessori School, Gomti Nagar Campus I, has been selected for Maths PhD programme with 100% scholarship at the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), USA. He also received offers from the universities of Berkeley (Columbia) and UCLANYU apart from MIT to pursue research. Principal of CMS, Gomti Nagar Campus I, Abha Anant said Manan was an exceptional student of the school, excelling in academics, sports and extra-curricular activities. Manan is currently a final year student of Indian Institute of Sciences, Bangalore, and is pursuing research from its International Centre for Theoretical Sciences, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research. His special interest has been in the probability theory.

BJP notice to Sitapur Sadar legislator

PNS ■ LUCKNOW



Bharatiya Janata Party's Uttar Pradesh unit president Swatantra Dev Singh issued shows cause notice to its Sitapur Sadar legislator Rakesh Rathore for his comments against the party brass and asked him to submit his reply within a week.

In his letter to Rathore, BJP general secretary Vidyasagar Sonkar said that there were reports of anti-party activities which he should explain within a week's time.

Sonkar further said, "We have asked for an explanation from the MLA and will wait for his reply before taking action."

Recently, an audio had gone viral in which the Sitapur MLA was heard ridiculing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal to people to clap and motivate corona warriors.

"Can clapping or banging vessels drive corona away? This was a stupid act. China, which is a global power, is working hard to control the disease and here we are making people do stupid things," Rathore was heard telling a BJP leader, who called on him for a favour.

PGV seeks package for chikankari industry

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Lucknow (PNS): Congress general secretary and incharge of party affairs in Uttar Pradesh, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, on Thursday appealed to the state government to announce a relief package for Lucknow's chikankari industry, saying it had been badly hit by the lockdown.

Priyanka said that the small and medium industries had earlier suffered due to demonetisation and Goods and Services Tax (GST) and now the lockdown had hit them hard. "Lucknow's chikan industry has brought laurels to UP in India and abroad. This industry, which is already reeling due to demonetisation and GST, has suffered badly due to the lockdown. The UP government should immediately declare a relief package for the chikan industry and all other such small and medium industries and announce help to the labourers working in them," she said in a tweet on Thursday.

Priyanka also attached a news report highlighting that the chikankari industry, a traditional craft of Lucknow, had so far suffered a loss of Rs 2,000 crore due to the lockdown and the craftsmen were on the verge of starvation. She also advocated some immediate relief for the craftsman so that they could survive till the industry re-flourished.

Meanwhile, Priyanka hailed the efforts of students of Ambedkar Hostel in Gorakhpur who are running community kitchen to feed poor and needy stranded due to lockdown in the district. She sent an appreciation letter along with food

Let Azam, kin off as goodwill gesture: Akhilesh

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav said that SP MP Mohammad Azam Khan be released from jail as a "goodwill gesture" by the government since Ramzan was starting from April 25.

Khan, his wife and SP MLA Tazeen Fatma and son and former SP MLA Abdullah Azam have been lodged in

Sitapur district jail in connection with a fake birth certificate case.

In a statement issued on Thursday, Akhilesh said that releasing Khan, his wife and son from jail during Ramzan and letting them fulfil their religious obligations, would be a goodwill gesture by the government.

"Khan is a reputed leader and has been a minister and

MLA several times. Besides being a Rajya Sabha member, he is presently MP from Rampur Lok Sabha seat. His wife is an MLA and their son has also been an MLA. The kind of treatment being meted out to the Khans is indecent," Akhilesh said.

Accusing the Yogi Adityanath government of pursuing politics of vendetta against Khan and his family,

Akhilesh alleged that dozens of fake cases were registered against them and they were persecuted and maligned by the government for narrow political ends.

The SP chief further said that a particular community was being terrorised by the government. "The government must ensure justice to every section of society," he said.

Body of madarsa manager found in gunny bag

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Lucknow (PNS): Hours before a joint team of Crime Branch of Delhi Police and Enforcement Directorate (ED) raided Tablighi Jamaat chief Maulana Muhammad Saad Kandhlawi's Shamli farmhouse, the local police recovered the body of a missing madarsa manager near the farmhouse on Yamuna banks early Thursday morning.

The half-charred, mutilated body was recovered in a gunny bag.

The police sent the body for autopsy and detained two suspects for questioning. Saad is wanted by Delhi Police for holding a congregation in Nizamuddin markaz and later harbouring thousands of Jamaatis there for days, despite lockdown being imposed to prevent the spread of coronavirus and not informing the authorities. Maulana Saad has since gone underground and has been posting clippings claiming to be in isolation.

As per reports, a team of Shamli police recovered a gunny bag on Yamuna river banks containing the body of Mufti Sufiyun, manager of Madarsa Jama'iya Hudlail Aalmin in Mawi Kakaur in Kairana.

The mufti was missing since last Thursday and a report of his disappearance was lodged last Monday. After preliminary inquiry, the police said that the body was half-burnt and mutilated which indicated that the killer eliminated the manager the same day he disappeared and tried to burn the body to conceal crime. The killers later dumped the body in a gunny bag.

Two suspects were detained and the police were waiting for the autopsy report to start a probe. Mufti Sufiyun took charge as manager of the madarsa in 2017 and all angles are being probed to close in on the killers.

Minor raped in Sitapur, 2 held

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A minor girl was gang-raped and filmed by six perpetrators in Sitapur on Thursday and she was threatened not to complain to the police, else she would be defamed using the explicit video. However, the incident was reported to the police and two of the accused were arrested while a manhunt was underway for four absconding aides.

As per reports, 13-year-old Surekha (name changed) of Mirrikh area left her house to ease herself early Thursday morning. But she was intercepted by six local youths who dragged her to a school building and raped. The miscreants also filmed their sinister act on mobile phones. They later released the girl with the warning that they would upload the videos on social sites, if she complained to the police. SP of Sitapur, LR Kumar, said that a case was registered and two of the accused were arrested and efforts were being made to nab the rest soon.

Meanwhile in Bareilly, three local criminals tried to take advantage of the lockdown and entered a house in a hotspot area, whose inmates had tested coronavirus positive and were hospitalised. However, they ran out of luck when they were netted while fleeing the spot. After their arrest, not only the accused but also the cops who nabbed them had to be quarantined. The stolen good were also recovered from them.

SSP of Bareilly, Shailesh Kumar Pandey said on Thursday that three miscreants entered a house in Subashnagar area which has been declared a hotspot due to high incidence of coronavirus infection in the area. All the inmates of the house targeted were admitted to a hospital on suspicion of being coronavirus infected and their reports later turned out to be positive. "These miscreants belong to the same family and lived in the neighbourhood. All three are history sheeters and were earlier engaged in drug trafficking. They knew that the inmates were not at home and hence targeted the house on Thursday before stashing gold jewellery, a laptop, a scooter and ₹10,000. After the theft came to notice, the police launched a manhunt and nabbed them with stolen valuables and goods.

Later, samples of the three thieves and that of the cops were sent for testing and the reports are awaited. Along with the accused, the entire police team was quarantined.

After fracas, eerie silence in Sadar

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

An eerie silence prevailed in Sadar a day after the Wednesday's fracas as police deployment was increased in the area and a drone camera kept hovering through the day on Thursday. Police conducted raids in search of the attackers, but to no avail.

In the incident, a group of youths had attacked a police team, leaving a constable injured. The youths who were just about to cross the railway tracks turned violent after the police asked them to go back to their homes. The police vigil was heightened and residents were not allowed to move out at all. While the Cantonment SHO could not be contacted for details on the arrest of the accused and police action, the spokesman of the Commissioner of Police said raids were conducted in the area in search of the attackers but without any success. He added that the police were looking for unidentified youths who were also involved in the act. The sources said that the police feared backlash from the group of locals on the

arrest of the attackers and they were studying the pros and cons of the situation before laying their hand on the accused.

On Wednesday afternoon, the group of youths had attacked a constable, Jagdambika Pal, with a stone. However, DCP (East) Somen Verma had denied reports of stone-pelting and said the constable suffered bruises on his nose. On Wednesday night, the police had registered a case against the attackers under sections 147/148/149/323/504/506, 332/353/188/269/270/271 of IPC for rioting while armed with weapons, attacking policemen, hindering them from discharging their duty, and violation of lockdown & prohibitory orders. The police had booked them under 7 Criminal Law Amendment Act and also charged them under Epidemic Act and Disaster Control Act.

A spokesman said that the police had recommended slapping of National Security Act on the attackers. The police had identified four of the attackers as Mustaqeem, Vikky, Bablu and Atiullah, all of Sadar locality.



People were not allowed to move out a day after a group of youths clashed with police in Sadar

Pioneer

Islamic Centre urges people to follow lockdown norms

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In view of the nation-wide lockdown to prevent spread of coronavirus and the social distancing protocol in place, Islamic Centre of India announced that it would live stream recitation of Quran during Ramzan from April 25.

The live stream will be done every day on social media site Facebook from 8 pm to 10 pm and can be accessed across the globe.

Clerics and religious leaders have issued appeals to people to stay indoors and pray in their houses to follow lockdown during Ramzan.

Chief of All India Islamic Centre, Maulana Khalid Rasheed Farangi Mahali, said on Thursday, "As lockdown is on and social distancing norms are also in force, All India Islamic Centre will be live streaming recitation of Quran and every day, two paras (chapters) will be recit-

Islamic Centre of India will live stream recitation of Quran during Ramzan from April 25. It will be done every day on Facebook from 8 pm to 10 pm

ed from 8 pm to 10 pm." "People should perform wazu and listen to it with their family and later perform 20 rakats of Namaaz-e-Taraweeh. It is important for Muslims to pray to Allah during Ramzan, but this is the best way to pray and keep everyone safe in the present situation," he said.

"There should be no roza iftar parties at all, instead that money should be utilised for food and ration for the poor. Also, people should avoid sending loads of iftari to mosques and only send for

four or five people in the mosque. People should pray especially to end this pandemic," the maulana said.

A similar appeal was issued by Shia cleric Maulana Saif Abbas who asked people to abide by lockdown norms during the crisis.

"The coronavirus pandemic has affected more than 200 countries till now. Ramzan is coming but one should abide by lockdown norms and we should abide by what is suggested by doctors and authorities," he said.

Earlier Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath had urged religious leaders to ensure that social distancing was maintained during festivals.

"I know there are events like Baisakhi and Ramzan. I would request all religious leaders to urge people not to gather for any public function as social distancing must be practised," he had said.

'Marketing won't be the same post lockdown'

Lucknow (PNS): There is a saying in retail that if people start buying with a shopping list, it is the end of retail because the whole retail industry is based on impulse buying, said Prof Devashish Das Gupta from the Indian Institute of Management (Lucknow). Though the current thinking seems to be largely following this, he said he was sure that retail would emerge in the Covid-19 era post lockdown because the country has a large population of buyers.

"One cannot say when the retail will recover, but one must understand that the biggest opportunity that Covid-19 has given is that how to do cost-effective selling, and brands which were charging huge premiums would have to give way to organisations charging less," he said.

He said the current situation was unprecedented and one needs to think out of box in such times. Sharing some mantras which the corporates

should follow in the current times, he said they should reconsider their marketing approaches. Gupta pointed out that marketing would be all about being functional rather than brand-oriented after lockdown.

He said that the thinking should be on the lines of value-added services, which is some sort of facilitation of the customers. "One can go in for a coronavirus-proof showroom with facilities of hand-wash and little bit of encouragement which helps the customer to step in. One has to be more proactive towards the concerns of the customers," he said.

The situation is such that nothing is going to happen for the next four to five months and one could look into what could be done for revival of business. He said that larger corporates also have to keep their teams motivated and hence they have to do some brainstorming.

Shopowners booked for not ensuring social distancing

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Cracking a whip in Naveen Galla Mandi in Hasanganj police area on Thursday, the police registered cases against 13 shopowners for not ensuring social distancing and seized two vehicles. The action came following reports that a big crowd had flocked to the shops and JCP (Law and Order) Naveen Arora conducted an inspection. A police spokesman said the shopowners were charged for keeping articles in front of their shops and not following the guidelines regarding social distancing while doing business.

The case was lodged on the complaint of sub-inspector Nazim Iman and those named were identified as Tabrez Khan, Mohammed Ismail, Ajay Gupta, Sumit Jaiswal, Gaurav Sharma, Sushil Kumar Gupta, Ramashanker, Manoj Kumar Rathor, Ishu Gupta, Gaurav Gupta, Sandeep Kumar Sahu, Sanjay Sahu and Aman Kumar.

The shopowners were charged for violating the prohibitory norms under sections 188/269/270 of IPC and also booked under Section 3 of Epidemic Act. Reports said that earlier, the shopowners were warned of action if they were found to be violating social distancing norms in



People seemingly oblivious of hazards of ignoring social distancing at a vegetable market on Thursday

Pioneer

view of the coronavirus outbreak. Sub-inspector Nazim Iman said the shopowners did not pay heed to the police warnings and announcements.

Sources said the shopowners were violating social distancing norms for the last four days, taking advantage of police laxity. "The news reached the JCP office and he conducted a surprise inspection. Later, an FIR was registered in this connection," the sources said.

Meanwhile, the police were flayed for failing to arrest the stalker for allegedly forcing a

class XI girl student to end her life at her house in Madaion on the intervening night of April 20 and 21. The police had not recovered any suicide note.

The family of the girl said they had given the name of the accused (Somu), who was stalking the girl for a long time, and a case was registered against him for abetment to suicide. Her brother said the police did not move an inch after registering the case. ADCP, North, Rajesh Srivastava said a team raided the accused's house in Sitapur, but he remained elusive.

Future not rosy for flower growers

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The future does not seem rosy for florists and farmers. They have standing rows of beautiful and expensive flowers but these are just being cut and thrown away. Just when the flower trade picked pace and a 'phool mandi' came into existence, the business has lost its fizz. Farmers said artificial flowers took away 50 per cent of their business in 2019 while in 2020, coronavirus has hit so hard that the trade has completely collapsed. The worst hit are the farmers who have set up poly-houses and are throwing Rs 1 lakh worth flowers of gerbera and gladioli every day in pits which they have dug.

There are over 500 farmers in both Barabanki and Lucknow districts who have set up poly-houses of one acre each and cur-

rently it is a wait-and-watch situation for them.

Moinuddin, a farmer from Barabanki who has set up a poly-house, said the trade is completely finished and when the lockdown ends, there would be no immediate scope for the sale of flowers. "In a polyhouse the same crop has to be grown for a period of five years. We spent Rs 60 lakh in setting up of a poly-house and if a flower is planted once, the plantation continues for five years. If we try to remove this arrangement, it will cost us another Rs 15-20 lakh. Currently, we are simply cutting the flowers and throwing them away and waiting to see what happens when the lockdown will be lifted," he said.

He added that in the open fields, they have removed the flowers of gladioli and planted tomatoes, mentha and chillies.

He said major income comes from the polyhouse farming and that he has lost Rs 5-6 lakh in the lockdown period. He said flower trade gave him 4-5 times more income than vegetable trade. "I was the first farmer in Uttar Pradesh to have set up a poly-house in Uttar Pradesh and encouraged it amongst other farmers too. In 2009, I started gerbera flower farming and was earlier into sugarcane farming," he pointed out.

Mahendra Pratap Singh, another farmer from Maharajganj, echoed the same views. "One of the biggest problems which we are facing is how to sustain the poly-house crop and for how long. The peak season is gone and there is no market or transportation," he said, adding that the farmers were also burdened by loans which they had taken to set up polyhouses.

With few takers, onion prices nosedive

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Onions which brought tears to the eyes of people due to skyrocketing prices are now selling at a wholesale rate of Rs 1,000 per quintal and retail price of Rs 20 per kg. It is one of the cheapest veggies in the mandis at the moment and officials said it was because hotels and restaurants were closed due to lockdown and also because chicken and mutton is not available in the market.

Mandi secretary Sanjay Singh said onion which is used the most in eateries almost had no takers now. "Onion is used as an accompaniment in salad and also in cooking non-vegetarian dishes. With chicken and mutton off the markets and hotels & restaurants closed, the consumption of onion has dropped," he said. He added that only 40 per cent

of the onion was being picked up from the markets in comparison to last year and the incoming of onion had also reduced by almost 50 per cent. "As on today, there is almost 4,200 quintals of onion in Sitapur road mandi and Dubagga mandi. Incidentally, a couple of months ago, the same onion had literally made people cry as it was selling as high as Rs 120 per kg," he pointed out.

Similar is the case with potato which is selling at a wholesale rate of Rs 1,600-1,800 per quintal and a retail rate of Rs 20 per kg. "Potatoes are used by street vendors, chaat stall owners and dhabas to a great extent and as everything is closed, there are no buyers. The incoming has decreased by 22 per cent. Singh said they have 1,200 quintals of potatoes in the market.

IGNOU provides telephonic counselling

Lucknow (PNS): The regional centre of IGNOU, in collaboration with NSS, launched 'Hum Saath Saath Hain' campaign with a view to providing telephonic counselling services to youths across 32 districts under its jurisdiction with the help of its study centres. Anshumali Sharma, OSD and state liaison officer, NSS Unit, in his address during the online training programme, said that due to the coronavirus outbreak, youths are losing hope and hence telephonic counselling services would motivate and guide them towards bright future.

Regional director, IGNOU, Manorama Singh said the objective of the scheme is to provide telephonic counselling related to career, mental wellness, online education and guidelines released by the government related to Covid-19.

Thieves make off with liquor worth ₹5 lakh from shop

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Thieves made off with 203 boxes, each containing 45 bottles of desi liquor worth Rs 5 lakh, from a shop in Para police station area some time on Tuesday night. Ramesh Chandra Jaiswal of Thakurganj runs the shop in partnership with Ramakant Gupta in Sarosa Bharosa village of Para.

"On Wednesday, I got a call from some residents who told me about the theft. I reached the shop and found the liquor boxes and inverter missing," he said. A police spokesman said a case had been registered in this connection and sub-inspector Rajesh Singh tasked with conducting investigations. The incident caught the liquor traders by surprise. "A loader is required to transport 100 boxes of desi liquor and it means that the thieves came

with two loaders. It is puzzling that movement of loaders did not come to the notice of the police," sources said. They said the incident had exposed the tall claims of police.

General secretary of Liquor Sellers Welfare Association (LSWA) KL Maurya said liquor shops had become a soft target for thieves in lockdown. "The theft at the shop in Para is the 14 such incident. Shops located in areas like Bakshi-Ka-Talab, Kakori, Para, Malihabad and other rural parts of the city are more vulnerable," he said. Maurya said LSWA had written to state government requesting it step up police vigil in areas around liquor shops. "We hope our problem will be addressed soon," he added.

Meanwhile, the Husainganj police arrested a man, identified as Arvind

Singh of Murli Nagar locality in the area, for selling desi liquor bottles at Rs 150 each instead of the actual price (Rs 75 per bottle). The police also recovered 60 desi liquor bottles. Hussainganj SHO AK Pandey said Arvind had purchased liquor during 'janata curfew' to cash in on dry days. He said he was selling the liquor bottles kept in a bag. "An informer tipped off us about the same and he was nabbed," the SHO said.

Arvind said he got the liquor bottles from some person and was selling it for a long time. Sources said the total goods recovered were worth Rs 5,000. "It seems that someone invested money to cash in on the lockdown and Arvind was hired to sell liquor bottles at double the rates," they opined. However, police did not endorse the claims.

Man's body recovered from drain

Lucknow (PNS): The body of an unidentified man was recovered from a drain in Varam Khand-5 under Gomti Nagar police station area on Thursday. A video showing a cop entering the drain with the help of a ladder and tying a rope around the body to pull it out earned him accolades on social media. As per reports, some residents spotted the body in the drain near Ram Bhawan in the area and alerted the police. Since the police could not find any safai karmachari to pull out the body from the drain, a policeman performed the task.

The police said the body appeared to be 3-4 days old and the cops did not find any document from him to ascertain the identity of the deceased. Sources said the deceased could not be identified by the locals and it showed that he was an outsider.

ICMR fixes rates for corona testing by private labs

Lucknow (PNS): The ICMR (Indian Council for Medical Research) has fixed the rates of coronavirus testing by private labs who have obtained permission for conducting the tests. The rate for first time screening is ₹1,500 and for second time confirmation ₹3,000. If a person is not suffering from COVID-19 and this becomes apparent in one screening, then he/she will only have to spend ₹1,500 and if he goes for a confirmation, he/she will have to spend ₹4,500. The rate for the single step kit in which the infection can be detected in a single step has been fixed at ₹2,500. The officials said it had come to their knowledge that even those who were not infected were being asked to pay ₹4,500 for the single kit test, which was against the ICMR guidelines.

Make sure teachers are given salaries during lockdown: AKTU VC

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Technical University (AKTU) Vice-Chancellor Vinay Kumar Pathak had an online meeting with chairpersons and directors of affiliated institutions and directed them to ensure that teachers are given salaries during lockdown. The objective of the meeting was to be aware of problems being faced by institutions concerned for conducting term-end examinations, reviewing online teaching-learning and fighting the battle against Covid-19.

The AKTU Vice-Chancellor also said that efforts

should be made to ensure that the poor do not face shortage of food during lockdown. He asked the directors to complete class tests and internal examinations through online mode. He said that the exam dates would be announced after the lockdown is over and that online teaching-learning should be continued. Chairpersons of the institutes said that grains, food, sanitisers and hand-made masks were being distributed in the villages adopted by the institutes. They also said that in order to avoid financial crisis, a soft loan of three months duration should be provided to the institutions.

Pleasant surprise for couple on marriage anniversary

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A move which could help them earn the goodwill of people, a police team celebrated the 50th marriage anniversary of an elderly couple on Thursday. The couple are living alone in Gomti Nagar due to lockdown while their children could not reach Lucknow from the US to celebrate the occasion. ADCP Dinesh Puri, who is the staff officer of the Commissioner of Police, got an information that it was the 50th marriage anniversary of Dr BML Varmani and his wife Geeta Varmani on Thursday and the couple were feeling low after postponing the celebrations in the absence of their children.

The ADCP, along with the Gomti Nagar SHO, left for Varmani's house in Gomti Nagar with a cake. When Dr Varmani opened the door, he had no idea of the surprise the police had in



store for him and his wife. The ADCP and Gomti Nagar SHO extended the couple best wishes and the Varmanis celebrated the occasion by cutting the cake. The couple even gave their

blessings to the police officers for making it a memorable affair for them. The couple were all praise for the police.

Puri said Dr Varmani is a retired scientist of Indian

Toxicology department and lives in Gomti Nagar. "The elderly couple were elated to see us with a cake on the occasion of their 50th marriage anniversary," the ADCP said.

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15 fresh coronavirus +ve cases found in Kanpur

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

There seems to be no respite from the novel coronavirus as 15 more positive cases have been reported from Kanpur district.

Chief Medical Officer Dr AK Shukla told reporters on Thursday that the new cases were from Colonelganj, Coolie Bazaar Kidwai Nagar, all hotspot zones.

With these new cases, the number of coronavirus positive cases reported in the district has risen to 97.

The CMO added that this figures includes two positive cases which were confirmed late Wednesday night.

He said the swab samples taken from a 72-year-old man, who died on Tuesday at his house in Coolie Bazaar, had come out positive for coronavirus infection.

The virus has so far claimed three lives in the city while seven people have recovered. The district has now 87 active cases.

Dr Shukla said out of the total 132 reports received from King George's Medical University in Lucknow, only eight were positive and all these persons were in contact with coronavirus positive case identified earlier.

The CMO reiterated that there was no shortcoming in sending samples to Lucknow, Jhansi and Kanpur medical college for tests. He said the nasal and throat swab tests were sent for testing as and when received, by properly maintaining the cold chain.

He said the swab samples of the suspects were not only being tested in the COVID-19 lab in Kanpur but were also being sent to other laboratories for early detection of the cases so that there was no delay in identifying the fresh cases and starting treatment.

The CMO said around 60 positive cases had been admitted to the COVID-19 hospital and all were stable barring six serious patients who were put on life support system.

Bobde inspects lockdown



The Kanpur Divisional Commissioner, Dr Sudhir M Bobde along with IG Police Mohit Agarwal touring the new hotspot areas on Thursday

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Kanpur Divisional Commissioner Sudhir M Bobde along with IG Police Mohit Agarwal and other senior officials took a round of the city, especially the newly-added coronavirus hotspots, to see the enforcement of lockdown on Thursday.

He said lockdown had to be enforced in the strictest possible terms and there should be no laxity in this regard. He praised the police officials and police personnel who are working day and night to enforce lockdown, putting their lives to risk. He said their devotion was an example of patriotism and national love.

The divisional commissioner asked the police personnel to remain careful of their own health. He said if the police personnel were safe and healthy then only the lockdown could be successfully enforced to save precious lives.

He said the COVID-19 death rate across the globe was an eye opener and people need to be very careful themselves.

Bobde said people should not hide if they were infected by coronavirus because early confirmation of the infection would result in starting the treatment in time and save their lives. He said by voluntarily informing the administration that they were suffering from COVID-19,

such people would not only be saving their own lives but also not risking the lives of the people around them.

The divisional commissioner said if the coronavirus infection spread into the community it would have dangerous repercussions and thus it was the duty of each and every person to voluntarily disclose their health status, maintain social distancing and keep washing their hands regularly.

Bobde also visited the factories where masks are being manufactured. He praised their efforts. He advised the workers there to maintain social distancing and ensure they regularly washed their hands of used sanitisers.

to the COVID-19 hospital and all were stable barring six serious patients who were put on life support system.

The CMO appealed to the people to inform the CMO Control Room (0512-2333810) immediately if they learnt

about persons having symptoms of COVID-19 or people who had arrived from some other place recently.



DM KR Sharma holding meeting with Muslim religious leaders in Varanasi on Thursday

Pioneer

DM appeals to religious leaders to help admn execute lockdown

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

District Magistrate (DM) Kaushal Raj Sharma appealed to the religious leaders and office-bearers of Muslim organisations to help the administration in its bid to execute lockdown strictly in view to prevent spreading of coronavirus pandemic, promising them that there would be no shortage in supply of all essential items during the auspicious month of Ramzan. He was holding a meeting with them at his camp office here on Thursday. He made it clear that no one would be allowed to move in the lanes and in every locality, 2-3 volunteers should be deployed to keep watch on the residents.

According to him, the administration has made its preparations to provide ration kits and other articles to the needy persons and after identifying some social organisations, efforts would be made to distribute articles to the resi-

dents through concerned police stations. He also made it clear that in mosque only those can offer namaz who live there and no outsiders would be allowed to go there. Speaking on the occasion, Gulam Yasim said that as during this season the cases of diarrhoeal and other seasonal diseases have increased so that arrangements of medicines and treatment facilities should be made. In response the DM said that if needed, medical facilities would be provided.

DM also instructed the Municipal Commissioner to ensure proper cleanliness in all Muslim-dominated localities and assured the participants that there would be no problems of water and power supply.

He said that in any case of problems, the complaints can be registered with COVID-19 War Room. Senior religious leaders also appealed to the Muslims to maintain social distancing and respect lockdown in view to prevent spread

of coronavirus pandemic. The meeting was also attended by SSP Prabhakar Chaudhary, Municipal Commissioner Gaurang Rathi, ADM (City) Vinay Kumar Singh, SP (City) DK Singh and Maulana Mufti Batin.

Meanwhile, it was a peaceful day when no new COVID-19 patient was reported. Out of 19 positive corona patients in the city, eight have been discharged while one has died and now the number of patients being treated is 10, nine of them are in Pt Deen Dayal Upadhyay (DDU) Hospital, Pandeypur, while one at Sir Sundaral Hospital (SSH) in Banaras Hindu University (BHU).

Out of six hotspots, maximum seven cases are from Madanpura buffer zone, followed by four from Pitarkunda and three from Gangapur and rest are from Bajardiha, Lohta and Nakkhighat.

Earlier, the administration has collected samples from eight doctors and 11 para-

medical staff from a private nursing home in Mehmoorganj area. Besides, samples of 24 students of Odisha and Jharkhand living at a madarsa near Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth (MGKV) were also collected. Apart from them, the samples of four other suspected persons were also sent for COVID-19 tests.

The district police arrested 22 persons under Section 151 CrPC and took action against 246 under Section 51 of Disaster Management Act. During checking at 14 border points and 49 police barriers, 1760 vehicles were challaned apart from seizing of nine vehicles.

Since the imposing of lockdown, 279 FIRs have been lodged against 592 persons; 700 were arrested under Section 151 of CrPC while action was taken against 1232 under Section 188 or Section 51 of Disaster Management Act. Besides, so far 38,334 vehicles were challaned and 757 were seized.

DM asks schools not to press for fees

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Kanpur (City) District Magistrate BR Tiwari on Thursday reiterated that all private schools should refrain from collecting school fees from children during the lockdown period.

He, however, said that parents who could pay the fees of their wards should deposit it so that schools could pay the salaries to their teachers. He once again clarified that the fees had not been condoned but its recovery had been postponed for the lockdown period.

Tiwari warned school

managements that if they issued fee recovery notices to the parents, they would be liable for government action. He also said there should be no hike in fees during the lockdown period.

The district magistrate expressed concern over the increasing number of coronavirus hotspots in the city and said this was mainly because some people were not following the lockdown seriously.

He said people did not understand the gravity of the situation and warned them to refrain from moving out of

their houses. He flagged off three mobile biometric payment system vans, two of Bank of Baroda and one of the State Bank of India, from his camp office on Thursday.

He said the vans could provide cash up to ₹ 10,000 to any bank account holder and would mainly focus on lockdown areas to ensure that people do not come out for cash needs and go to bank.

He said the three vans along with police patrol would move across the city to facilitate people to withdraw cash in their respective areas. Chief Development Officer

Sunil Singh, bank manager AK Verma and other officials were present on the occasion.

Meanwhile, Zila Panchayati Raj Adhikari Sanvesh Kumar Pandey said that on Panchayati Raj Diwas on Friday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi would interact with two-three gram pradhans of the district who had been highly active in the areas like PM Kisan Samman Yojana, PM Shramik Kalyan Yojana and had made full efforts to ensure that financial aid reached the accounts of the beneficiaries of Jan Dhan Yojana, besides other areas.

Six places declared as hotspots in Varanasi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

District administration has intensified its efforts to ensure that the residents of many hotspot areas do not face inconveniences during the auspicious month of Ramzan beginning from Friday. On the instructions of District Magistrate (DM) Kaushal Raj Sharma, the distribution of sevai, khazoor, besan, chana, matar etc. in all the hotspot areas has started. Meanwhile, the work at sevai making units has also started in view of seeing the rising demands of the same during the auspicious

month.

Sharma said that after finding of several positive COVID-19 patients, as many as six places including four in the city and two in adjoining rural areas have been declared as hotspots and as these areas are fully sealed, the administration is giving relaxation of half-an-hour during morning and evening so that the residents can purchase essentials items like milk, fruits, foodgrains etc.

He said that the efforts are being made to ensure sufficient supply of sevai, khazoor and other items to Muslims during

this auspicious month.

Besides, efforts are also being made to provide money to the residents at their doorsteps from their bank accounts through Bank Mitras apart from medicines and other items through delivery boys in hotspot areas. DM also appealed to the residents of hotspot areas to respect the norms of lockdown so that the country can win over coronavirus.

He assured the residents of making all efforts to ensure that there would be no scarcity of any essential item.

Meanwhile, the DM has

informed that during the lockdown, over ₹ 3.13 crore have been transferred to the bank accounts of 31,398 helpless people of the district apart from distribution of ration kits to 41,474 poor people and migrated workers of other districts staying here.

He accepted that during the lockdown, many vendors, daily wage workers, auto drivers, rickshaw pullers and others are facing problems. In view of seeing their problems and after doing their survey, ₹ 1000 is being transferred to the bank account of each such beneficiary, he added.

One held for kidnapping boy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ALLAHABAD

During the lockdown, six-year-old Mohit son of Bablu was kidnapped from Dhussa area, under the Dhoomanganj police station area here on Thursday. This triggered panic among the people.

Acting swiftly, the Dhoomanganj police and surveillance team launched a search for the kidnapper. And after about two hours of hectic efforts, the Dhoomanganj police claimed to have arrested the accused Abhinav Singh Chauhan and recovered the minor boy from his possession from Phaphamau. The accused is a resident of Rajapur Gonai village located in Raniganj police station area of Pratappgarh.

A resident of Dhussa area, Bablu is a painter by profession. In the morning his six-year-old son Mohit was playing outside his house. In the meantime, Abhinav reached there and kidnapped the child. Kidnapping incident which occurred broad daylight caused panic in the area. On hearing the commotion, people of nearby area also gathered there.

However, the people around saw the kidnapper speeding away on his mobike with the minor and then reported it to the police. When the matter came into the knowledge of SSP Satyarth

Anirudh Pankaj, he immediately constituted a team which comprised surveillance incharge Brijesh Singh, SSI Manish Tripathi of Dhumanganj police station and outpost incharge Rajroopur Rakesh Gautam. The cops questioned the family members of the child after they saw the photograph of the accused through CCTV footage.

Swinging into action, the Dhoomanganj police cordoned off the area and nabbed the accused at Phaphamau. CO Civil Lines Brij Narayan Singh said that the accused and the child's mother are old acquaintances. They had fallen out over some trivial issues upon which the accused had threatened her for dire consequences. The parents' place of child's mother also lies in the neighbouring village of the accused, CO added.

MULTIPLE COURT PROCEEDINGS: Allahabad High Court and the district courts of UP has become the such first state with the software based inhouse facility of virtual courts. The Allahabad High Court and the district courts of UP can now conduct multiple court's proceedings through virtual courts, within the court's premises, without any internet connectivity.

A number of initiatives have been taken by the Allahabad High Court to facilitate the court proceedings

through the video conferencing. Recently, a software for conducting the court proceeding through video conference has been installed in the Allahabad High Court and in all the district courts of Uttar Pradesh.

The Allahabad High Court and the district courts of Uttar Pradesh can now conduct multiple court proceedings through virtual courts within the court premises, without any internet connectivity.

This facility is completely secure and the connectivity is seamless. Existing infrastructure was used for the purpose and no additional expenditure was incurred in providing the above facilities.

Uttar Pradesh is first such state with the software based inhouse facility of virtual courts. Efforts are being made to further strengthen such services.

NCR KNOWN FOR EXCELLENT MOBILITY OF TRAINS: North Central Railway (NCR) maintains its 'Hallmark Mobility' of freight and parcel trains even in these difficult times of lockdown.

and also trains with highest average speed.

Amidst ongoing lockdown passenger services are completely suspended yet, North Central Railway is not only maintaining its unparalleled mobility but it is also upscaling punctuality of parcel trains and average speeds of goods trains.

This wasn't an easy task as owing to lockdown staff concentration had to be reduced to maintain social distancing and availability of materials to sustain operation & maintenance was also a challenge. However with meticulous planning, mechanised & automatic health monitoring of assets, change in maintenance strategy to give condition based inputs and above all exemplary dedication of Railwaymen, North Central Railway could ensure that all fixed and moving assets are maintained in top class.

Recording of track parameters and dedicated inputs based on track parameter data ensured that speed in all sections of NCR remained at its normal level despite working with minimal staff deployment. Similarly in other fields like signalling, overhead electrical equipment and Rolling stock, inputs from various mechanised system were used to give dedicated maintenance inputs to maintain safety and optimum serviceability of these assets with less manpower.

Admn gives permission to restart work

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

After giving some reliefs to daily wage workers by starting work under MNRREGA in rural areas, the district administration has also given permission to various departments to restart work in as many as 53 construction projects even when lockdown-2 continues in view to prevent spreading of coronavirus pandemic. After the permission, the work on some of the sites including Kashi Vishwanath Corridor has also restarted and on Thursday, the labourers were seen busy in construction work in Dashaswamedh area.

However, no permission was given to any individual to start construction work at his site though as many as 13 persons had sought permissions in this direction. The permission was given to the departments and others on conditions that all the workers would use masks and maintain social distancing and they would stay in the premises of the sites. According to information, most of the permissions were given to the projects of construction of roads and Pradhan Mantri Awas.

It is expected that the work in many other sites including in Banaras Hindu University (BHU) where CPWD will construct various flats and other projects. The work at many

places would only be restarted when the concerned organisations would arrange workers apart from making shelter facilities for them in the construction sites so that the administration cannot face much problems in execution of the ongoing lockdown. Meanwhile, National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) has also restarted construction work at its many sites apart from patching work between Mohansarai and Raja Talab.

Earlier, Vice-Chairman of Varanasi Development Authority (VDA) Rahul Pandey held a meeting with delegation of Varanasi Builders and Development Association and apprised the latter of the conditions the work can be restarted. According to him, the permissions will be given on nine conditions including use of masks by all workers, maintain social distancing, stay at construction sites, no involvement of old aged workers and some others. He said that the government has decided to start construction work only in view to check the migration of workers.

MANY POLICE PERSONNEL MADE QUARANTINE: The district administration has made the guest house of Kashi Vishwanath Mandir as Police Institutional Quarantine for the cops on the suspicion of coronavirus. Over a dozen police personnel including a police sub-inspector have been

made quarantine here as precaution after they found suffering from fever, cold, cough and sneezing.

The district administration got information about some police personnel suffering from cough, sneezing, cold and fever and taking a serious note of it, the district administration decided to put them in quarantine. The District Magistrate Kaushal Raj Sharma informed that for such cops, the Police Institutional Quarantine has been made at guest house of Kashi Vishwanath Mandir and asked the police officers to quarantine the suspected coronavirus police personnel here as precaution.

As per information, some police personnel and police sub-inspector posted at Nagar Nigam police outpost were made quarantine at this quarantine centre as precaution after they were found suffering from cold, cough, sneezing and fever. It was said that the temperature of their body was found more than normal. Meanwhile, a police head constable posted at Bhelupur police station was made home quarantine after finding symptoms of virus.

Meanwhile, the police continued their strictness against those found roaming on road without genuine reason and made challan of a number of vehicles for violating the guidelines of lockdown. The police

also dealt strictly with those going by two-wheeler with one more sitting on pillion seat as there is guideline that only one person could go for the purchasing of essential goods during the relaxation period. The police also checked the ambulance in order to implement the lockdown as there was complaint that the ambulance was being misused for other purposes besides carrying patients. The police personnel were deployed at wholesale vegetable markets to ensure the social distancing as there was complaint about gross violation of social distancing particularly in wholesale vegetable markets.

SUICIDE: A graduate student reportedly committed suicide by hanging himself from ceiling fan at a private girls' hostel at Dalhatta area, under the Chetganj police station on Thursday. According to information, the deceased, hailed from Nalanda in Bihar, was living at a private girl's hostel in above mentioned area. She was first year student of a degree college situated in Chetganj. It was said that on Thursday morning when the warden of hostel did not find the girl's room open till noon, he informed the police about this. On being informed the police reached site and took stock of first hand information about the matter. The police opened the room and found the girl hanging from ceiling fan.

Ensure farmers' payment: Commissioner

CORRESPONDENT ■ BANDA

District Magistrates should ensure the inspection of all wheat purchase centres by sub-divisional magistrates (SDMs) and other officials and ensure all essential facilities there. Payment of farmers against the purchase of their wheat should also be ensured within stipulated time. These views were expressed by Commissioner Gaurav Dayal while reviewing progress of wheat purchase, drinking water etc in the entire Chitrakootdam division in Mayur Bhawan meeting hall on Wednesday. He said that arrangements for face masks and sanitisers should be made for the farmers at every wheat purchase centre. Social distancing should be maintained



Commissioner Chitrakootdam division Gaurav Dayal reviewing progress of wheat purchase in Mayur Bhawan meeting hall in Banda

at these purchase centres, he added. Commissioner Dayal expressed resentment over the less number of Pradeshik Cooperative Federation (PCF) centres in Banda. He directed regional manager, PCF, to open eight more wheat purchase centres in Banda. He was

informed during the meeting that total 172 wheat purchase centres had been established in entire Chitrakootdam division. Out of them 136 started purchasing wheat from the farmers. He directed all wheat purchase agencies to make their purchase centres func-

tional within three days without any further delay. He instructed the wheat purchase agencies to speed up the purchase of wheat at all centres of the division in order to achieve the target. Commissioner was informed that the target of wheat purchase of the division was 1,90,000 MT. Out of it 4,520 MT has been purchased at these functional wheat purchase centres. Later Commissioner told *The Pioneer* that he had reviewed the status of the supply of drinking water in the division and directed GM Jal Sansthan Chitrakootdam division to get all defective handpumps repaired and rebored in the division on top priority. He said that he had directed deputy director Animal Husbandry to make available enough straw

for cattle in entire division. He said that his aim was to facilitate the farmers at the wheat purchase centres. The Commissioner made an appeal to the farmers to wear face masks, sanitise their hands when they came out of their houses to sell their wheat at these centres. He said that if the farmers faced problem during sale of wheat at any centre of the division they could contact him on his CUG mobile number and it would be solved immediately. Among those attended the meeting were Additional Commissioner Administration Chandrashekhar, Joint Commissioner Ramesh Chandra Pandey, Divisional Food Controller Sanjeev Kumar, and Joint director Agriculture VK Singh.

VSTPP donates over ₹32.95 lakh for installation, boring of handpumps

CORRESPONDENT ■ SONBHADRA

The Vindhya Super Thermal Power Project (VSTPP) of National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) donated over ₹32.95 lakh for the installation and boring of 35 handpumps in its adjoining rural areas. The cheque of this deposit work under Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme was given by Executive Director (ED) Debashish Sen of VSTPP to executive engineer, Public Health Engineering (PHE) department, Singrauli. Earlier, the plant had also given ₹52 lakh for the same unit of Singrauli for installation of 50 handpumps.



ED Debashish Sen handing over cheque to PHE officer at VSTPP

Besides, VSTPP also proposed to sanction over ₹1.09 crore under its deposit work for the construction of drain and culvert in Navjeevan Vihar Sector-1. The fund will be given in four installments. The first installment of ₹30 lakh was credited to the bank account of Nagar Palika Nigam, Singrauli. In this direction the payment invoice was handed over by VSTPP ED to executive engineer of Nagar Palika Nigam VP Upadhyaya. On the occasion General Manager (Human Resources) Uttam Lal, AGM

(HR) Snehshish Bhattacharya and senior manager (HR-CSR) Abhishek Mehra were also present.

Earlier, the youth wing of Suhasini Sangh (NTPC-Vindhya) distributed as many as 200 packets of ration materials among some poor and needy families of the adjoining areas. Each packet contains two kg rice, one kg flour, half kg pulse apart from salt, turmeric and oil.

The consignment of the items was handed over by chairperson of Suhasini Sangh Karobi Sen to the team leader

of youth wing Ashutosh Soni. Since the imposition of the nationwide lockdown Suhasini Sangh is continuously making efforts to help the poor and needy people by giving them ration packets apart from masks.

The Suhasini Sangh office-bearers including Abha Ratnakar, Shobh Verma, Issa Jain, Kiran Singh, Annpurna, Anita Diwaker, Durgesh, Shivli, Shree, Parvati and Vibhuti are making efforts for preparing masks for helping the people in order to prevent the spread of coronavirus pandemic.

Corona warriors continue to work with zeal

CORRESPONDENT ■ GORAKHPUR

During the nationwide lockdown in force to check the spread of novel coronavirus infection the railway personnel were going to their offices, station and other work places and ensuring the movement of freight and parcel trains in order to meet the needs of the general public. The mainte-

(South) at headquarters, Gorakhpur, was constantly contributing to the prevention of Covid-19 infection. During to lockdown period he was continuously present in the railway colony premises and offices and ensuring cleanliness there. Dinesh's devotion towards duty was indeed commendable for which he was honoured by Additional

technician III working in the carriage and wagon depot located at Gonda under Lucknow division during this corona crisis detected technical fault in the wagon of the goods train at Gonda station and immediately rectified it. Keeping their devotion towards duty in mind both these railway personnel were declared the 'Corona warriors of the day' of

distancing under the measures to prevent Covid-19 infection. For it Jagveer Singh was declared the 'Corona warriors of the Day' of Izzatnagar Division. In order to boost the morale of its personnel during the lockdown period the railway administration will continue to honour them. The railway administration is proud of these personnel.

Northeastern Railway Women's Welfare Organisation (NERWO) and NER Bharat Scouts and Guides. Continuing their struggle against Covid-19 railway employees are working day and night in maintenance and loading and unloading works of freight and parcel trains and the thermal scanning of the employees engaged in them



Dinesh, Housekeeping Assistant, Gorakhpur



Rakesh Singh, Station Superintendent, Kusrmbhi, Varanasi division



Ravi Prakash, technician, Gonda, Lucknow division



Hukum Singh Meena, technician, Gonda, Lucknow division



Jagveer Singh, SSE (Tele), Izzatnagar division

nance of railway tracks, signals, locomotives, freight coaches, parcel coaches, coaches etc and other railway works are being carried out. Apart from this various works are being done by railway personnel for prevention of coronavirus infection and checking its spread. They were doing voluntary humanitarian work as well. Railway personnel belonging to the headquarters and division doing these tasks in such odd times are being honoured by the railway administration by being declared 'Corona Warriors of the Day' daily in order to boost their morale. In the same sequence Dinesh deployed as housekeeping assistant (Medical) under Chief Health Inspector

General Manager Amit Kumar Agarwal by being declared the 'Corona warriors of the Day' of the headquarters. Rakesh Singh, working as the Goods Superintendent at Kusrmbhi station, ensured the unloading of 11 rakes of essential commodities by coordinating with the local administration and by conducting thermal screening of workers and people engaged in other works and by following the social distancing guidelines. Apart from it he also distributed face masks and handwash among workers to prevent novel coronavirus infection. For it he was declared the 'Corona warriors of the Day' of Varanasi division.

Likewise Ravi Prakash, technician I and Hukum Singh, Lucknow division. Besides Jagveer Singh posted as Senior Section Engineer (SEE)/Tele in the Signal and Telecommunication Department in Izzatnagar Division along with his colleagues established a talk back system at five places in the Divisional Hospital, Izzatnagar so that these social distancing guidelines could be followed between the patients and the hospital staff sitting on the counters like registration counter, emergency counter and medicine distribution counter. Besides arrangement to establish communication between doctors and patients from a distance of one meter were made which proved very helpful in maintaining social

55,250 FOOD PACKETS GIVEN Keeping novel coronavirus outbreak in mind the NER administration and railway personnel were constantly doing various tasks for its prevention, transporting essential materials to different places besides providing humanitarian aid. The NER officers and employees are distributing food packets, masks, soaps, sanitisers, medicines and food items among the poor and needy people living around the railway premises. So far 55,250 food packets have been distributed. Apart from it food packets and masks etc are being distributed among the helpless and needy, by

was being done. In addition they are also following social distancing and other hygiene standards to avoid Covid-19. Senior railway officials are inspecting the work sites and adjacent colonies in order to encourage the employees and their families. The NER administration has converted 217 coaches into isolated wards within the stipulated time-frame. To facilitate treatment related to Covid-19 270 beds have been arranged in NER with 200 beds in Lalit Narayan Mishra Railway, Gorakhpur, and 70 beds in the Divisional Hospital Izzatnagar. As many as 80,000 masks and 1,150 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) have been produced so far by the NER from its own resources.

Drive to sanitise Covid-19 hotspots

CORRESPONDENT ■ UNCHAHAR

Continuing its fight against Covid-19, NTPC-Unchahar in association with the district administration and CISF launched a sanitisation drive in the hot spot area in Unchahar town on Thursday. Earlier the drive was carried out in Pitha Patti of Rohania block. Sodium hypochlorite was sprayed in these areas.



SDM Unchahar Keshavnath Gupta said that the district administration and NTPC were fighting this battle against coro-

The drive which started from Unchahar crossing covered Jama Masjid and Darji Mohalla. Unchahar SDM Keshavnath Gupta, Unchahar tehsildar Abhinav Pathak along with his team members made the aware people about Covid-

navoris. Senior officials of the district administration and NTPC were also present during the sanitisation drive.

Guidelines for online classes issued

CORRESPONDENT ■ JALAUJ

BSA Premchand Yadav issued guidelines for online classes in primary education. He told that every teacher should install 'Diksha App' and 'Aarogya Setu App'. BSA Premchand Yadav was in a meeting with ABSAs and BEOs in which he said that 70 per cent of the teachers had already installed both the apps. He said that they were getting content for online teaching through Rajya Pariyojna office. The same content with explanation was forwarded to the parents of students through WhatsApp group. He also



BSA Premchand Yadav holding a meeting with ABSAs and BEOs in his office at Orai, Jalauj on Thursday

appealed to the parents to watch Doordarshan serials, 'Meena ki Duniya' and 'Aao Angreji Sikhen,'

along with their children. Ashish Tiwari, Nitin Anand and Lokesh Pal was also present.

BUAT employees donate day's pay

CORRESPONDENT ■ BANDA

Registrar Banda University of Agriculture and Technology (BUAT) Dr GS Pawar and Director Administration and Monitoring Dr BK Singh handed over a cheque of ₹4,23,477 to Commissioner Chitrakootdam Division Gaurav Dayal to be deposited in Chief Minister's Distress Relief Fund-Covid Care Fund, on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor. Vice-Chancellor BUAT Dr US Gautam told *The Pioneer* that all BUAT officials, teachers and staff had voluntarily donated their day's pay to combat coronavirus. Vice-Chancellor Dr Gautam said that at this crucial juncture we all should come forward and donating our day's pay to which would help the government in providing finan-



A cheque being presented to Commissioner Chitrakootdam division Gaurav Dayal by Registrar Banda University of Agriculture and Technology (BUAT) Dr GS Pawar and Director Administration and Monitoring Dr BK Singh

cial assistance to the poor and needy of the state. Dr Gautam made an appeal to the residents of Chitrakootdam division to wear face masks and follow the guidelines of lockdown.

Man hangs self

CORRESPONDENT ■ HAMIRPUR

A 55-year-old man committed suicide by hanging himself in Maudaha area. According to the police, Binda Prasad, a resident of Khair ka Dera in Sisolar area, committed suicide by hanging himself by a tree located in the fields outside the village. When some people noticed it they reported the matter to the relatives of the deceased. Thereafter they reached the spot and informed the police about the incident which brought the body down from the tree. Police said that the deceased was mentally weak. In the second incident a woman committed suicide by hanging herself due to domes-

tic strife in Aratra village in Maudaha region. On Wednesday Usha, wife of village Arvind, got angry with her husband in the morning and hanged herself after closing the door of a room of the house. Her family members reported the incident to Maudaha police. Thereafter tehsildar Ramanuj Shukla reached the spot with the police force, broke the door of the room and brought her body down. Her family members said that since the sudden death of her two-year-old son two months ago she was stressed and often had a dispute with her husband. Due to it she took this extreme step. Police sent both the bodies for the post-mortem examination.

Old man meets tragic end

CORRESPONDENT ■ CHANDAULI

An elderly man belonging to Pipardha village under the Kandwa police station died when he was knocked down by a goods train on Wednesday morning. On hearing about the matter his family members were shell shocked and a pall of gloom descended on the area where he lived. On getting information the police rushed to the spot, got the *panchnama* of the body done and handed it over to his family members who then performed his last rites. According to a report received here, Jangi Yadav (80), a resident of the village, after his morning walk was going to his pumping set after crossing the railway line. However he suddenly stumbled on the railway track. In the meantime the goods train reached there. The

driver saw him on the track and blew the horn. At this he got up in a hurry but fell down in an attempt to escape but met a tragic end. On receiving the information, his family members rushed to the spot and were inconsolable. By then the police also reached the spot after getting the information and on the request of the people after getting the *panchnama* done handed over his body to his kin. Meanwhile wheat crop was reduced to ashes in a fire in Bakhra village under Mughalsarai Kotwali on Wednesday. Reports said that Anil Kumar Patel had kept the wheat crop kept his house. The owner accused some residents of the village of deliberately setting the crop afire. He informed the personnel deployed on dial 112 service about it. The matter was being investigated.

Two youths held for molestation bid

CORRESPONDENT ■ BANDA

Two youths were arrested for molestation attempt here. Police registered a case against them under Section 354 of the SC/ST Act and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and sent them to

jail. Station House Officer Kotwali City Dinesh Singh said that the 14-year-old girl had gone to collect mahua flowers in a village under the Kotwali city area. In the meantime two youths came there, dragged her to a field and made an attempt to molest her.

However when she raised an alarm the villagers rushed to her rescue but they managed to escape. SHO said that the father of the girl had lodged an FIR against these culprits at Kotwali City in this connection. SHO Dinesh Singh said that both culprits had been arrested.

6,000 lunch packets distributed

CORRESPONDENT ■ BANDA

MLA from Banda Prakash MDwivedi that as many as 6,000 lunch packets were distributed among the poor and needy people in different areas of the city on Thursday.



BJP party workers distributing lunch packets among the poor and needy people in Banda on Thursday

Giving details while talking to *The Pioneer* he said that the areas where the lunch packets were distributed were Rahuniya, Chhoti Bazar, Khutla, Aliganj, Chowk Bazar, Kotwali Road, Khaipar, Katra, Kyotara, Karbala, Muktidham Road, Roadways bus stand, railway station, Peeli Kothi, Padmakar Chauraha, Ram Leela Road, Bangalipura, Civil Lines, Swaraj Colony, Kalu Kuwan, Jawahar Nagar, Gayatri Nagar, Tulsi Nagar, Sarvodaya Nagar and Shukul Kuwan. Prominent among those who distributed lunch packets were Rajesh Gupta, Pushkar Dwivedi, Rajat Seth, Anurudha Tripathi, Rohit Tiwari, Santosh Rajput, Anil Singh, Pankaj Raikawar, Mahendra Singh Kachwah, Ankit Agnihotri,

Vishvaprasad Srivastava, Rahul Dwivedi, Ram Manohar Yadav and Neeraj Tripathi. MLA Dwivedi said that his main aim was to ensure that no one remained hungry in the Banda Vidhan Sabha area. He said that he had distributed 300 ration kits among the needy and poor in Pavai Ghorri village in Bisanda town on Thursday. Those who accompanied on the occasion

were divisional president, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Bisanda, Ranjeet Singh, zila panchayat member, Rajbhawan, Vishnu Sharan Sengar, divisional vice-president BJP Sanjay Gupta, vice-president Ashish Singh, divisional president, youth wing, BJP Shiv Naresh Tripathi, Braj Bhoochan Tripathi, Rajesh Chaurasia, Kamlesh Gupta and Monu Shivhare.

Safety kits given to corona warriors

CORRESPONDENT ■ BANDA

Slate Mahila Ayog member Prabhata Gupta distributed corona fighters' safety kits among policemen on Wednesday. Prabhata Gupta said that she decided to distribute these kits among the corona warriors. Thus she started the distribution of these kits among the policemen of the city posted in City Kotwali and all police outposts of the city. She said that she distributed as many as 200 kits among the policemen on duty in entire



Slate Mahila Ayog member Prabhata Gupta distributing safety kits among corona warriors in Banda

city area. Gupta said that apart from it 230 ration kits were also distributed at Chhoti Bazar, Khutla, Civil Lines, Maharana Pratap Chauraha, Zaraili Kothi, Jail Road, Mardan Naka, Balkhandi Naka, Noniya Mohal, Chhoti Bazar, Chhabhi Talab, Station Road in Banda city area. She said that those who distributed these corona fighters' kits and ration kits were Saurabh Gupta, Shivam Gupta, Savita Gupta, Ravindra Gupta, Vikas Singh, Ram Sufal Sahu and Rambabu Gupta.

Maha mounts pressure on Centre for spl trains for migrants

TN RAGHUANTHA ■ MUMBAI

Ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's interaction with Chief Ministers of all States scheduled for April 27, the Maharashtra Government on Thursday mounted pressure on the Centre to run special trains from Mumbai and Pune to take back 6.5 lakh migrant workers staying at various labour camps, to their respective States after lockdown.

Two days after Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray reiterated his demand for the Centre running special trains "to ensure that migrant labour from other States can return home", Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar upped the ante by urging Railway Minister Piyush Goyal to make necessary

arrangements in advance to run special trains to accommodate "all such restless labourers" so that "there is no law & order problem at railway stations in Maharashtra".

In his letter to Goyal, Pawar wrote: "As Maharashtra is a leading industrial State and having highest construction activities, a large number of informal labourers particularly migrated from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and other northern States are working in these sectors".

"Due Covid-19 lockdown, about 6.5 lakh migrants are staying in respective labour camps in Maharashtra and the State Government is providing daily food and health services to them. In addition to this, almost equal number of labourers are being provided

with food by various NGOs and social organisations," Pawar said.

"All these informal labourers are now jobless and eagerly awaiting to go to their respective States. The incident of Bandra Railway station gathering, which happened in Mumbai, is an example of restlessness of such labourers.

The deputy chief minister said that after the lockdown is lifted on May 3 or any other date decided by the Centre, there would once again be a huge rush of these labourers at all railway stations.

In view of this, he urged Goyal to "make necessary arrangements in advance, including running special trains from Mumbai and Pune to all major destinations of the country to accommodate all



such restless labourers, so that there will not be any no law and order problems at any railway station in Maharashtra".

Pawar's missive to Goyal came just 48 hours after Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray flagged the issue of migrant labourers staying in

Maharashtra.

On Tuesday night, the chief minister's office (CMO) Maharashtra had tweeted: "CM Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray has reiterated his demand for special trains to ensure that migrant labour from other States can return home. He has

demanding to the Hon'ble Prime Minister & the Railway Ministry that guidelines about this to be issued by April-end".

"Approximately 6 lakh migrant labourers are being provided with food, shelter & medical assistance in relief camps setup across Maharashtra by the Government. However, in such times staying away from their homes & families is taking a toll on them," the CMO tweeted.

"If the Central Government is anticipating a rise in the transmission of the virus between April 30 and May 15, then it must consider if it can utilise the time at hand to arrange for special trains to send them back home and issue guidelines about this by April-end," the CMO added. It may be recalled that on April

18, the chief minister had assured the migrant labourers settled in the state that he was in touch with the Centre and he was confident that "in the next few days, some solution would be found for their problems".

As part of the address to the people in the state through social media, Uddhav had said: "The migrants living in the state are in a mood to co-operate with the state government. They have quietened down now. I would like to tell them once again that we are holding talks with the Union government. I am confident that in the next few days, we will find a way out of the current situation".

"Please don't worry at all. In Maharashtra, we are slowly starting the activities. If possible, I request you to come

back to work. You can continue to earn living. The day the situation returns to normal, I assure that the Maharashtra government will ensure that you will return to your native places. What we want is that whenever you go, you go back happily to your home. Don't go back in fear," the Chief Minister told the migrant labourers.

The chief minister's words to the migrants should be seen in the light of the unrest seen among the migrant workers across the state in recent weeks and the assembly of huge crowds witnessed in front of the Bandra railway station in north-west Mumbai on the evening April 14, hours after Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the extension of lockdown till May 3.

Didi accuses Guv of transgressing constitutional dharma

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The slanging match between the Raj Bhavan and Nabanna (State secretary) hit a new low with Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday shooting off a strongly worded letter to Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar reminding him of his constitutional limitations as a "nominated" functionary and advising him to be careful with selection of words while dealing with a constitutional office as high as the one she occupies.

With the Governor repeatedly pulling the Government up for its alleged lackadaisical handling of the deteriorating corona situation in the State the Chief Minister wrote a five-page letter to the Governor wondering whether he had forgotten

his constitutional limitations as a nominated entity.

In an exceptionally harsh letter she wrote, "You appear to have forgotten that I am an elected Chief Minister of a proud Indian state. You also seem to have forgotten that you are a nominated Governor".

In the letter she reminded him of how he had "humiliated" her office by using un-parliamentary words. She said that though Governor might ignore the advice of the Chief Minister, her Cabinet and high officials but he should, as a minimum, honor the recommendations of Sarkaria Commission and look up to the sayings of Dr BR Ambedkar.

The Chief Minister's harsh letter comes a day after the State Government had to digest a strongly worded communique

from the Union Home Ministry directing it to cooperate with the Inter Ministerial Central Team visiting Bengal to inspect the corona situation.

After initially being blockaded by the State government the team was finally allowed to move around and inspect the alleged dilution of lockdown protocols.

Earlier when the Chief Minister was asked to comment on the tweets of the Governor she said "He is a tall man. We are small people. The less said about him the better".

The Chief Minister also referred to how the Governor sent an objectionable text message transgressing the "constitutional dharma and even basic norms of decency".

With no love lost between the two sides the new wave of

conflict started after the Governor took to the twitter alleging how the lockdown protocols were being violated and diluted in the State and accusing the government of not briefing him about the current situation.

The flow of his tweets increased after the BJP leadership lodged a complaint with him against the State administration saying how the saffron MPs like Arjun Singh, Raju Bishta and Subhas Sarkar had been stopped from taking relief materials to the starving people of their constituencies.

On one occasion he wrote, "sent communication to Mamata Banerjee official to abide by constitution. Such continued disregard of constitution cannot be countenanced. There can be no situation of law

unto oneself. Her stance is weakening the fight against covid-19. There is no rationale for such undemocratic attitude (sic)".

Meanwhile, the Chief Minister continued to personally drive down parts of Kolkata for the third consecutive day on Thursday asking people over loudspeakers to remain indoors and follow the lockdown protocols. She visited Park Circus, Moulali, Behala and other areas telling people to maintain social distance and remain indoors.

The visiting IMCT too went about inspecting several of Kolkata on Thursday. It was accompanied by a senior official of the Health Department sources said adding the team visited the New Town corona centre and MR Bangur Hospital.

Company owner claims she has formula to defeat corona

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Closely on the heels of the observation made by Prof BM Hegde and Dr CV Krishnaswamy, two medical scientists from South India that the Centre is ignoring the potential of Ayurveda in the treatment of Covid-19 disease, a pharma company owner based in Pune has come out with the claim that she has the technical know-how to take on the dreaded coronavirus.

Sujatha Vaidya, a scientist and integrated holistic healthcare specialist engaged in developing nutraceutical products says she has a natural medicine Reimmugen Colostrum, if taken with Ayurvedic proprietary formulation Sueded, could make the patient protected against viral attacks like the Covid-19. Dr Krishnaswamy described the formulation developed by Sujatha Vaidya as wonderful.

Dr Krishnaswamy said that the prescription of Reimmugen Colostrum has helped in bringing relief to persons suffering from diseases ranging from cardio vascular ailments to cancer to diabetes. "I have been prescribing this medicine for nearly a decade and the results were wonderful. It is the medicine which the Government should give top priority at this juncture because we all know that nobody is going to invent a vaccine to

fight covid in the near future," said Dr Krishnaswamy who was a personal physician to former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa.

Vaidya pointed out that Covid-19 was caused by the weakening of the immunity power of the human body. "When one's immunity power is lost, it becomes easy for the virus to weaken the body and the victim succumbs to the virus attack," explained Vaidya, based in Pune. It was based on the scientific studies conducted by Prof Hegde and Dr Krishnaswamy that she focussed her attention on increasing the immunity power of the body.

The World Health Organisation and National Health Mission has declared that there was no treatment or vaccine for coronavirus. "People who were saved from the disease escaped from the clutch of jaws only because of their inherent immunity," she said.

It was based on a tradition of knowledge passed through generations that Vaidya could come out with a medicine to increase the immunity power to defeat the virus. "We all know that the first milk secreted by all mammals is thicker than normal milk and is called Colostrum. It has an element by name IMMUNOGLOBULIN or IgG Colostrum in it. The pre-milk, or first milk secreted by mammals includ-

ing human beings have strong content of Immuno Globulin (IgG) in it and this helps strengthening the tissues and cells of the body against viral attack," explained Vaidya.

This formed the basis of her formulation Reimmugen Colostrum which when administered orally with Ayurvedic proprietary formulation Sueded helped protection against coronavirus, said Vaidya. She also said that a number of patients who have been suffering from cardio vascular issues, diabetes and immune compromised persons were better protected due to higher susceptibility to infections with the Reimmugen Colostrum and Sueded.

Colostrum, whether it is from cows, buffaloes or human beings have ingredients in it that help empower the body to become stronger.

"The advantage with this medicine is that it is fully natural. One important thing to be noted is that the death rate due to coronavirus in western countries is more compared to other places. This is because the westerners have moved away from nature which led to a decrease in their immunity power," said Vaidya.

Dr Krishnaswamy added in a lighter vein that Colostrum could be one more reason for the gau-rakshaks (cow vigilantes) to demand a legislation against slaughter of the animal!

Chennai's Mount Road closed for traffic as corona assault continues unabated

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

With 54 more persons testing positive for coronavirus on Thursday, the number of COVID-19 patients in Tamil Nadu increased to 1683. The day saw 90 coronavirus patients getting cured and discharged from various hospitals in the State. This was announced by the Department of Health through a press release by Thursday evening. Taken aback by the hike in the number of persons testing positive for coronavirus, the Government has done away with its daily press briefing since Tuesday.

In a major development the Greater Chennai City Police ordered the closure of Anna Salai (Mount Road), the city's main thoroughfare from Thursday morning. Though the police may allow private vehicles like cars and bikes for a few hours in the morning, the road would remain out of bound for all vehicles from 1 pm onwards.

This is the first time in the history of modern Chennai the Mount Road which connects

the city to airport and the Central and Egmore Railway Stations would remain close down for traffic.

Chief Minister Edappadi Palaniswami launched Arogyam scheme on Thursday by distributing "Nilavembu Kudineer", a traditional and indigenous medicine to check the spread of coronavirus. More than hundred policemen and policewomen whom the chief minister described as the frontline warriors of the society were fortunate to receive the concoction from the hands of the chief minister at a simple function held at Fort Saint George (secretariat).

Palaniswami also announced that the kin of frontline personnel who die of infection fighting the coronavirus would be paid Rs 50 lakh. "A government job will also be given to a family member based on educational qualification. This will apply to personnel from all departments including health, police and local administration and also cleanliness workers," said the Chief Minister.

Capital headache for Bengal

PNS ■ KOLKATA

With people of some areas violating the lockdown norms, Kolkata continued to give goose pimples to the State administration even as State Chief Secretary Rajiva Sinha on Thursday said though the general situation of the State's corona affected districts had improved City of Joy continued to remain a matter of concern.

Though large parts of the city had been sealed by the police there were at least 150 pockets where the people were not taking the lockdown as seri-

ously as they should have taken it Government sources said.

"Though nine districts of the state are in the green zone and 11 more districts have come to the orange zone and we expect them to come out of that in the coming days parts of Kolkata continue to remain a challenge for the administration," he said adding the "Government is taking measures to control the situation in these areas".

Out of the four districts of Kolkata, Howrah, East Midnapore and North 24 Parganas that he mentioned East Midnapore and North 24

Parganas were showing signs of improvement "even Howrah is being managed... but Kolkata Municipal Corporation area continues to bother" he said.

Bengal recorded its highest number of cases on Thursday with 58 new infections being reported, Sinha said adding however that 24 people had been cured and discharged on the same day. The total number of active cases stood at 334 after the Thursday's new infections and discharge. He also said that 103 patients had so far been cured and 15 people had died of the disease in the State.

FROM PAGE 1

SPIKE HUGE, BUT NOT 'EXPONENTIAL'

He added that the country's first goal with regard to hospitalisation has been to ensure that the minimum number of people needs to go to the hospital. The second goal is to ensure enough infrastructure so that every person who needs to go to the hospital is treated well, cured and sent back. Every district in the country is now working towards that, he added.

He said the number of dedicated hospitals increased 3.5 times since last month and the number of isolation beds increased 3.6 times since March.

As on today, 12 districts have not reported any fresh case for the past 28 days and 78 districts have not reported any new case in the last 14 days. In last 24 hours 1,409 positive cases have been reported, which takes our total confirmed cases to 21,393, said Agarwal.

A total of 500,542 samples from 485,172 individuals have been tested as on April 23, said ICMR. Globally, 2,657,611 people have so far been infected, of whom 185,318 have died, according to Worldometer.

At 5,652, Maharashtra has the highest number of cases among Indian states. It is followed by Gujarat (2,407), Delhi (2,248), Rajasthan (1,935), Madhya Pradesh (1,592), Tamil Nadu (1,629), and Uttar Pradesh (1,449).

GOVT PLANS TO REV UP ECO AS FITCH FORECASTS SLUMP

"Feedback is being taken from industrial units and their problems are being addressed, she said during a daily Press briefing on measures related to the lockdown clamped in the country to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Srivastava said progress in economic activities, especially in rural areas, is being witnessed, and added that road construction, brick kilns and cement manufacturing related works have also started. Till April 22, more than 1.5 crore work days have been achieved under the MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) scheme, she said.

The DPIIT, which is a department under the Commerce Ministry, in a tweet said the conference with industry associations was "to facilitate permits for industrial activities in order to boost economic activities".

The DPIIT is holding consultations with State Governments to discuss the extent to

which retail trade and manufacturing can be eased further in the extended lockdown period. In March, industry bodies had sent a list of essential items to the Ministry of Consumer Affairs which recommended that work from home enablers such as mobile phones, laptops, power banks, cable, mouse and repair services, infant products, small kitchen appliances, essential lighting items, innerwear, etc, be included in the list.

Meanwhile, the durable industry also believes that besides fans, air conditioning products should be allowed to be sold.

BJP SPREADING VIRUS OF COMMUNAL PREJUDICE AND HATRED, SAYS SONIA

"Grave damage is being done to our social harmony. Our party, we will have to work hard to repair that damage," she added.

Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, former Congress president Rahul Gandhi and top Congress leaders attended the meeting through video-conference.

Manmohan said the success of the lockdown will be judged later on how the Covid-19 pandemic is handled by the Government. He also said the cooperation between the Centre and States was key to success of the country's fight against coronavirus.

The top leaders of Congress repeated their earlier complaints that the Centre was not doing enough testing to detect coronavirus cases. Sonia also slammed the Government on the poor quality of PPE kits and their shortage.

The Congress president said coronavirus pandemic has increased disturbingly in the past three weeks and called upon the Government to increase testing for it.

Sonia said she has written several times to the Prime Minister since the lockdown was enforced and suggested several measures and constructive cooperation. "Unfortunately, they have been acted upon only partially and in a miserly way. The compassion, large-heartedness and alacrity that should be forthcoming from the Central Government is conspicuous by its absence," she said.

The Congress chief said the focus of the party must continue to be on successfully engaging with health, food security and livelihood issues.

She claimed that around 12 crore people have lost jobs in the first phase of the lockdown and urged the Government to provide a relief package for the MSME sector, which accounts for one-third of the GDP.

Sonia called upon the Government to provide food and financial security to migrants and jobless stranded at various places and were desperate to reach back home.

"We have repeatedly urged the PM there is no alternative to testing, tracing and quarantine. Unfortunately, testing still remains low, testing kits still in short supply," she noted.

She claimed that around 12 crore people have lost jobs in the first phase of the lockdown and urged the Government to provide a relief package for the MSME sector, which accounts for one-third of the GDP.

SONIA DOING CHEAP POLITICS: BJP

Shahnawaz alleged that the Congress was "sowing seeds of communal poison" and asked why the Congress was not demanding its Government to come clean on the killings in Maharashtra. Why Sonia did not condemn the incident?" the BJP leader asked.

The BJP spokesperson sought an immediate apology from the Congress leader for making "irresponsible" charges. He said the Congress did not condemn an attack on a senior mediator by alleged Congress attackers.

Naqvi also dismissed Congress president's charges as those made without giving much thought to the issue. Talking about Sonia raising questions over lesser tests being conducted Naqvi said, "Few people have a habit of asking questions all the time whereas everybody is working hard to keep Indians healthy".

He said the country is successfully battling out the pandemic under the spirited leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

TWO ARRESTED FOR ATTACKING ARNAB, CONG SEEKS FIR AGAINST ANCHOR

The police said they were trying to ascertain the antecedents and political affiliations, if any, of the two arrested persons.

Several FIRs have also been filed across States against Arnab Goswami for his controversial comments on a recently aired programme on Congress president Sonia Gandhi in the backdrop of the Palghar lynching incident. Goswami alleged the two persons, whom the Mumbai Police personnel had apprehended, had "confessed" that they were

from the Youth Congress. To substantiate his point, he said that "just three hours after the attack, Congress party leader Alka Lamba had tweeted "Youth Congress Zindabad".

Meanwhile, the Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC), which met on Thursday under the chairmanship of party's AICC general secretary in-charge of State Mallikarjun Kharge condemned the Palghar lynching incident and termed it inhumane act.

"It is clear that a section of media is continuously trying to spread racial and religious hatred in society. Arnab Goswami of Republic TV, has tried to create misogyny against women in the society. He made an outrageous remark against Congress president Sonia Gandhi on a live TV programme. This is completely unethical journalism and we publicly protest it," the MPCC statement said.

"We believe in brotherhood and cannot accept such animosity. This will be dangerous for the unity and integrity of the country. Therefore, we are jointly requesting Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray to take action against Arnab Goswami and the Republic India news channel for disturbing the social environment," the statement added.

Among the FIRs lodged included: the one registered in Sadar police station in Nagpur city of Maharashtra based on the complaint of Maharashtra's Energy Minister and Congress leader Nitin Raut, while a second FIR was registered in Chhattisgarh's capital city Raipur on the complaint of State Health Minister TS Singh Deo.

In Maharashtra, State Youth Congress president Satyajet Tambe has filed a complaint against Goswami in Sangamner.

Several Congress leaders have slammed Goswami for his comments against Sonia Gandhi. "He has gone insane and crossed all limits, he should be ashamed of himself. I must ask the Editors Guild - isn't this (an) all time low for journalism? Rajeev Chandrasekhar must sack him immediately (sic)," Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot tweeted.

In a related development, BJP president JP Nadda and his party's other leaders on Thursday condemned the alleged attack on Goswami and slammed the Congress over the incident.

Senior BJP leader and Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar also condemned the incident. He said every attack on any journalist is condemnable as this is against democracy and sought action against the accused as per law.

95% +ve curable by simple oxygen treatment: Govt

'Infected persons must reach hospitals at an early stage but stigma, misconceptions prevent them from doing so'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Government on Thursday sought to dispel the misplaced notions among the masses with regard to Covid-19 saying as much as 95 per cent of affected patients recover with the simple oxygen treatment.

"But stigma and several misconceptions about the virus are preventing the infected persons from approaching the hospitals at an early stage. As a result, a large number of people are dying," said Dr Randeep Guleria, Director of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi. India, on Thursday, reported around 650 deaths.

Dr Guleria explained, "Patients who have recovered from Covid-19 are facing stigma, this is creating panic and causing hardship for the patients and their family members. Many patients who might

have symptoms of Covid-19 are not coming forward owing to this stigma."

But we should know that 90 to 95 per cent patients of Covid-19 recover, thus, we have to remember that this is a disease which is not that serious, he said here at a routine press briefing on Thursday. His comments come amid reports of Covid-19 patients and their relatives being hounded by their neighbours and public across the States.

"The infected patients are approaching healthcare officials at a later stage which is leading to increased mortality. As many as 95 per cent of these patients can simply be cured with oxygen treatment and close to 5 per cent need ventilators, however, this delay in approaching local healthcare officials is leading to delayed detection and higher mortality," added Dr Guleria.

He stressed on sympathis-

ing with Covid-19 patients and their families instead of stigmatising them and look at how we can support Covid-19 patients and their families. More and more people need to come out for testing."

"This (Covid-19) is not a very deadly disease because 90-95 per cent of those infected can recover but the delayed treatment caused by stigma could lead to higher mortality among patients," Dr Guleria reiterated.

"If we have that stigma and we don't come forward we may land up in a situation where because of our delay in treatment we have higher mortality," he said.

According to the UNICEF, stigma can undermine social cohesion and prompt possible social isolation of groups, which might contribute to a situation where the virus is more, not less, likely to spread. This can result in more severe health

Researchers at BHU to hold clinical trial on Fifatrol

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Researchers at Banaras Hindu University (BHU) in Uttar Pradesh have plans to conduct clinical trials on immunity-booster herbal drug Fifatrol to check its efficacy to manage the deadly Covid-19 infection that is currently sweeping the entire world.

The drug, which is produced from immunity-boosting herbs like sudarshan vati, sanjeevani vati, godanti bhasma, tribhuvan kirti ras and mrityunjay ras, tushi, kutki, is used to treat bacterial infections, flu and viral infections of upper respiratory tract.

This is for the first time the

researchers have decided to determine if Fifatrol, produced by AIMIL Pharmaceuticals can be helpful in combating the novel coronavirus, a cure for which is yet to be found.

Sources in the Union Ayush Ministry said that the task force for scientific validation of ayurveda and traditional medicine formulas through research institutions, which was set up at the behest of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's clarion call to explore allopathy and Ayurveda therapies for treatment of the Covid-19, is vetting a proposal in this regard.

BHU professor and principal investigator of the proposal Dr KN Dwivedi

said that Fifatrol is given to patients who have similar symptoms as that of patients suffering from the contagion disease. "Hence, we are now trying to evaluate this drug in critically ill Covid-19 patients to reduce mortality," he said.

"During a trial on dengue patients, the drug was found to have doubled the platelets. The study also established that it can strengthen the liver with no systemic side effects," said the scientist.

In fact, researchers at AIIMS, Bhopal, who have been working on Fifatrol have in their preliminary results found that the herbal drug can

be a suitable alternative to allopathic antibiotics without causing any side effects.

"Fifatrol is an anti-microbial solution prepared from 13 key herbs including, chirayata, motha and giloy," said Dr Dwivedi.

The Interdisciplinary AYUSH Research and Development Task Force has members from the department of biotechnology (DBT), Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) as also ayush practitioners and others to identify potential preventive therapy and therapeutic approaches from Ayush systems to different stages in the treatment of Covid-19.

problems and difficulties controlling a disease outbreak.

Stigma can drive people to hide the illness to avoid discrimination, prevent people

from seeking health care immediately as well as discourage them from adopting healthy behaviours.

Guleria also said that the

hospitals in India are trying various drugs and new vaccines and medicines are being tracked. He also said that India has also started trying

convalescent plasma as a treatment plan for Covid-19 patients.

Convalescent plasma is being used to cure more and

more patients and those who have recovered from Covid-19 are the same people volunteering in large numbers to donate their plasma, he added.

Entire Muslim community cannot be held responsible for one group's crime: Naqvi



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister for Minority Affairs Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi on Thursday urged that the entire Muslim community should not be painted with the same brush for the fault of some who did not obey the lockdown guidelines in the wake of Coronavirus pandemic in the country.

The entire Muslim community cannot be held responsible for one group's "crime", the Minister said while reacting to instances of Muslims being blamed for the spurt in Covid-19 cases after the Tablighi Jamaat congregation in Delhi, and affirmed that most of the minority community members have condemned the group's action.

He said the community cannot be blamed for a few isolated cases of violation of the lockdown norms or the rule of law. "By and large all are following rules," he said. The Minister, though, agreed that 'Jamaat' did flout rules by allowing large number of people, including foreigners, to gather at one place.

The Minister said across India, Imams, Ulama and Muslim organizations have unanimously decided that during 'Ramzan', Muslims will not congregate in mosques, religious places and perform all rituals like 'Iftaar' (breaking of fast) and 'taraweeh' (special prayers) at home keeping in mind social distancing norms.

Naqvi said he has spoken with state waqf board officials, social and religious leaders, imams on adherence to the lockdown and social distancing guidelines during the Ramzan month starting Friday or Saturday evening and they have begun creating awareness among the people.

Naqvi's comments in support of Muslim community

India clears air on fake news, says Oman a friend

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Against the backdrop of the controversy over a fake Pakistani Twitter handler posing as that of the Oman Princess and maintaining that Indian workers would be expelled from her country if India did not stop religious persecution of Muslims, Indian Ambassador to Oman, Munu Mahawar tweeted and said, "I thank Mona Al Saïd for clarification on fake social media posts attributed to her. India values its friendly relations with Oman and will continue working closely with

the Government and people of Oman to further strengthen our special relationship". Indian embassies in gulf nations have started warning Indian citizens against posting provocative messages on social media. Indian officials also called the statement by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation as regrettable and factually incorrect.

The OIC had recently urged India to prevent instances of Islamophobia. Government sources said here that attempts are being made to create discord between India and Gulf countries.

● Naqvi said he has spoken with state waqf board officials, social and religious leaders, imams on adherence to the lockdown and social distancing guidelines during the Ramzan month starting Friday or Saturday evening and they have begun creating awareness among the people.

● Naqvi's comments in support of Muslim community have come in the backdrop of charges of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) that Muslims were being "discriminated" in the wake of Coronavirus pandemic in India. The OIC had asked India Government to protect Muslims and contain an alleged surge of "Islamophobia".

have come in the backdrop of charges of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) that Muslims were being "discriminated" in the wake of Coronavirus pandemic in India. The OIC had asked India Government to protect Muslims and contain an alleged surge of "Islamophobia".

Soon after the OIC statement, the Minister had said that Minorities' rights in India were protected by the Constitution and secularism and social harmony was "a passion" in India and not "a political fashion" in the country.

In a message to Indian Muslims, Naqvi had this week cited guidelines issued by all the Muslim countries for Coronavirus lockdown, particularly the "social dis-

tancing" norms, which would prevail throughout the holy month of 'Ramzan', beginning Friday.

Several bodies representing the Muslim community including the Islamic Centre of India and the Delhi Waqf Board have also appealed for daily prayers during Ramadan to be held at home and asked mosques to create awareness about official guidelines to fight the coronavirus pandemic.

According to an advisory by Waqf Boards, people should stay at their homes to offer Namaz during Ramzan, however, Imams, Muazzins and Mutawallis can offer the prayers at mosques.

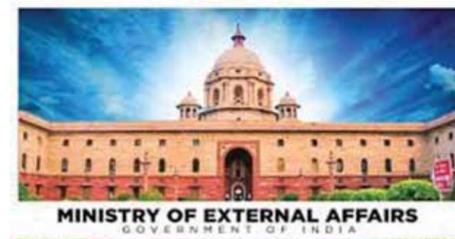
Mosques will announce the guidelines after each 'Azaan' and also at other times through loudspeakers.

MEA hails embassies' role in getting critical med equipment

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of External Affairs on Thursday outlined the efforts by Indian embassies to source critical medical equipment from abroad.

"In the past two weeks, around two dozen flights departed for India from five cities in China carrying nearly 400 tonnes of medical supplies, including RT-PCR test kits, Rapid Antibody Tests, PPE kits, thermometers, etc. Around 20 more flights are expected to bring supplies from China in the coming days and this is likely to be stepped up considerably in the next few months as our procurement efforts gain momentum," said



MEA spokesperson Anurag Srivastava.

In the last 2 weeks, 2 dozen flights have arrived with medical supplies from different towns of China, he said adding "We expect 20 more such flights in the coming weeks".

"Six SUV-sized high-speed testing machines, which are in

high demand, are being sourced from Roche in the USA. Our R&D labs are in touch with labs in Israel and Germany which are undertaking cutting edge work", Srivastava said adding the MEA is also facilitating collaboration between Indian and foreign agencies for R&D on

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo talks to Jaishankar

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo spoke with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and discussed bilateral and international cooperation to con-

tain and mitigate Covid-19 including ensuring availability of pharmaceutical and medical supplies. The US is the worst-hit globally with more than 8.50 lakh positive cases and a death toll of nearly 48,000.

Remdesivir and PLX cell therapy.

"Our Mission has also signed a contract on behalf of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) with another South Korean company to procure and supply 5 lakh

Corona Testing Kits," he pointed out.

India is exporting the anti-malarial drug hydroxychloroquine to as many as 55 countries including the US and Brazil to fight the Covid-19 pandemic.

ICAR recognises eight new hybrid maize varieties to bolster production

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Agricultural Council of India (ACI) has recognised eight new hybrid maize varieties to bolster production. These maize varieties have been identified after discussion with farm scientists through a digital workshop of the All India Coordinated Research Project (AICRP) attended by 150 participants from across the country. The digital workshop was organized due to the nationwide lockdown amid coronavirus pandemic.

Addressing the workshop, the ICAR Director General Trilochan Mohapatra appreciated the efforts of maize scientists for continuing with the research work amid the crisis of the coronavirus pandemic. He asked the Ludhiana-based ICAR-Indian Institute of Maize Research (ICAR-IIMR) to carry out basic, strategic and applied research for enhancing production, productivity and sustainability of the crop. AICRP on maize needs to play a leadership role to make maize as the future crop of the country, he said.

"In this workshop, eight new maize hybrids have been

identified as promising for the release in different seasons and agro-ecologies of the country," ICAR said in a statement. The standard operating protocols (SOPs) for conducting various research projects in AICRP on maize were also discussed and finalised during the workshop, it said. On this occasion, a bilingual mobile app called 'Makka' was launched for the benefit of farmers, industries and other stakeholders in maize.

This app (English and Hindi) has video, static and dynamic features on the crop varietal selection, pest and fertiliser solution, fertiliser/pesticide calculation, crop cultivation practices, mechanisation, news/updates and advisories to the farmers, ICAR added. That apart, the workshop recommended zero-tilled maize after rice, sensor-based nitrogen management, post emergence herbicide for weed control -- for increasing the farm profitability, input use efficiency and reducing drudgery in maize production.

The outbreak of pest attack Fall Armyworm (FAW) that had threatened maize crop last year was also discussed in the workshop. Maize

or corn is a very important crop used as poultry and animal feed and raw material in starch industries besides use as food. The crop also has potential for green fuel (ethanol) production and cultivated in all states of the country. Specialty maize such as sweet corn, baby corn and popcorn are also gaining much popularity and being developed by the ICAR.

India is one of the top 10 maize producers in the world; it contributes around 2-3% of the total maize produced globally and is one of the top-5 maize exporters in the world contributing almost 14% of the total maize exported to different countries around the world. South-East Asia is the biggest market for Indian maize with almost 80% of the exported Indian maize going to Indonesia, Vietnam and Malaysia.

The total cultivated area of maize in India is over 9.0 million ha (2013-14), with most of the Indian states growing it. Ten states in India represent around 80% of the total area of maize grown. Karnataka (15%) is the largest state for maize cultivation followed by Rajasthan (13%) and Madhya Pradesh (10%).

BSF issues circular to ensure safety for its personnel

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

The Border Security Force (BSF) chief has issued a circular asking all officials to strictly adhere to protocols for safety against Covid-19 and warned that those found to be violating the preventive measures will face disciplinary action.

The missive came after a Deputy Commandant who came back from leave did not undergo quarantine and called friends from his Unit to his residence.

"It has been brought to my notice that officers are not obeying the guidelines/instructions issued from time to time regarding Covid-19 protocol. Recently, one Dy Commandant rank officer has joined his duty from leave and refused to undergo quarantine in isolation ward. Further, he called several unit personnel to his house. This is clear violation of orders of Govt and Force HQ (Headquarters). Every personnel, irrespective of rank, on return from leave should be put in quarantine facility so created, under supervision of doc-

tors. No home quarantine is permitted," acting BSF Director General SS Deswal said in a circular issued on Wednesday.

The BSF chief further said, "Strict disciplinary action will be taken against such defaulters as well as the supervisory officers. It is again directed to comply with Covid-19 protocol in letter and spirit."

The circular has been sent to all the formations of the 2.5 lakh strong border guarding forces across the country.

Last month, a second-in-command officer of the BSF posted at the paramilitary academy had tested positive for Covid-19 following which over 50 other officers who were traced to be in his contact were put under 14 day quarantine to check any possible spread of the disease.

As a preventive measure, the paramilitary has extended the leave of those availing the facility in order to avoid any transmission of the viral pandemic.

The BSF is the designated border guarding force for frontiers along Pakistan and Bangladesh.

MHA CLARIFIES LOCKDOWN RULES

No action against CEOs if employee found +ve

New Delhi: The Union Government Thursday said no legal action will be taken against the CEO of a company nor a factory will be sealed in case an employee tests positive for Covid-19.

In a letter to the chief secretaries of all states and union territories, Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla said some apprehensions, based on wrong interpretation of the guidelines, have been raised in the media and by some companies having manufacturing facilities.

He listed the three wrong apprehensions as: (A) States may take legal action including imprisonment of CEO in case a Covid-19 positive employee is found in the factory.

(B) In such a situation, the premises of the factory would be sealed for 3 months.

(C) In case of non-compliance of pre-



cautionary measures, the factory may be closed down for two days and may be allowed to restart after full compliance. "I would like to clarify that there is no such clause in the consolidated revised guidelines and therefore there is no basis for such misplaced apprehensions," Bhalla said in his letter. PTT

KVIC comes to rescue of cocoon farmers

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With the country fighting the deadly coronavirus pandemic, the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC), an autonomous body under the Ministry of MSME, in collaboration with its Khadi Institutions (KIs) in Tamil Nadu, came to the rescue of cocoon farmers.

The KVIC's Chennai office in coordination with six KIs has facilitated the purchase of around 9,500 kg of the cocoon, worth over ₹40 lakh, directly from the farmers. Six more KIs are likely to get permission soon to purchase 8,000 kg cocoon directly from farmers with the main objective of the KVIC being to help the cocoon farmers struggling to sell their crop due to the ongoing lockdown and to ensure the continuous supply of cocoons to the khadi institutions involved in silk pro-



duction.

Chairman, KVIC, Vinai Saxena said, "These purchases were not as easy as it looks. As per the procedure in vogue, silk-producing KIs have to purchase silk

cocoons from the State Government-regulated sericulture markets only. Hence, permission was required from the district administration as well as from sericulture department for the direct

purchase from the farmers". "As a result of constant efforts and ability to narrate the cocoon farmers' hardships in front of district administration and before the sericulture department effectively by the KVIC officials in Chennai, the district administration finally granted the permission. Had we not made these purchases

now, then the damage to the farmers would have been unbearable," Saxena further said.

The necessity of this deal can be gauged by the fact that reared cocoon must be steamed

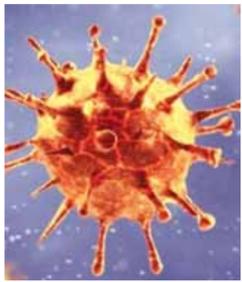
within five days, or else the larvae would come out of it after cutting the cocoon shell, making the entire crop a complete waist. Cut cocoons cannot be used for reeling the silk yarn. In this sense, these purchases are blessing for the cocoon farmers, the KVIC said.

The KVIC has also successfully developed a double layered Khadi mask and has procured orders for supplying it in large quantities.

To add to its success, KVIC has recently bagged an order to supply 7.5 lakh pieces of Khadi Masks to Jammu & Kashmir Government alone.

Some hiccups still

All industrial units do not have the requisite capacity to meet the new standards for resuming production yet



India followed its own definitive path to tackle the menace of COVID-19, ordering the strictest 21-day nationwide lockdown first and then extending it further. In its first phase, the Government chose to save people's lives over the economy. Yet, when it became distinctly clearer that the fight against the virus would be long-drawn, it became impossible for it to ignore livelihood issues and look for ways to get the economy started. So it allowed industrial units to run in non-hotspot areas but with a new set of caveats that is now causing more confusion than clarity. While these are early days yet and the Government has to work out sectoral codes to ensure low risk, social distancing and safety parameters, the first set of compliances seems to have put more pressure on unit owners, who have to now factor in a new overhead like safety costs. In the absence of substantial working capital from the Government, some of them are wary about opening their units because of low consumer demand, labour shortage and a poor chain of logistics. Now they are further spooked by media report of the stringent norms that call for punitive action, to the extent of registration of an FIR, against owners found non-compliant by the slightest degree or even if one staffer was diagnosed with COVID-19, something that even a routine health check-up would not reveal at the time of re-employment. Though the Government sought to allay fears by making it clear that the provisions would be applicable only for offences "with consent, cognisance or negligence" on the part of the employers, uncertainty looms large. This is why the standard operating procedures (SOPs) issued by the Home Ministry following the partial lifting of the lockdown in several areas have drawn flak from several quarters.

Major worries are over the broad norms prescribed under the National Disaster Management Act (NDMA) that have been invoked for the first time on account of a *force majeure* event. First, the implementation of the Act itself will be problematic because the onus now lies with respective States to ensure adherence. As expected, without any clarification, various States have offered different interpretations on whether they should risk people's lives by opening up the factories or keep them shut longer. Even when some have agreed, unanticipated gaps during implementation mean there has to be another review. Further, given the varied capacities of each State, it is only fair to expect a less-than-equal response from all. Other guidelines, too, appear illogical and are hard to implement at the ground level. New rules demand that workers be accommodated in the factory premises or be lodged in nearby areas so that they can be transported with ease while strictly maintaining social distancing norms. Given the previous set-up of industries, it will be impossible for them to lodge even a small group of workers. Further, the guidelines call upon the respective units to get their workers, who have fled to their hometowns, back to work. With trust deficit everywhere and in the absence of a Central assurance, employees may choose to remain in their villages. Assuming they come back, the resumption of work is dependent largely on the behavioural shift of workers — all of whom need to get accustomed to all sanitary guidelines. One lapse by them and the owner would get harassed. This is why we will need far more long-term and sustainable solutions going forward. At the moment, smaller units cannot get rolling without Government support. Half-baked rush can only spoil the gains made till now.

Spread the good cheer

Balcony concerts, synchronised meetings and Samaritan acts, the lockdown has spurred humanity at all levels



The virus still has us in its vice-like grip, sucking life through its tentacles but it surely hasn't been able to defeat humanity. Rather has it come upon us to test our humanity and add the spark back in our lives? As the world goes through unprecedented lockdowns brought on by COVID-19, confining heaving populations to their homes, behind shut doors, there's a window of hope. Those that have more than a window, a balcony, consider themselves even more blessed. For the window sill and the balcony have become the new

social space for connecting not just with your neighbour but the community in general. Balcony performances, be it as concerts, songs or dance, have become the latest spectator delight, beginning with the Italians, who first started singing from their balconies to cheer each other up amid the doom and gloom. Now it is a worldwide phenomenon, with bands in Delhi and Gurgaon asking their members to get out on their balconies for impromptu performances. Even aspiring musicians and dancers are getting out their boom boxes on rooftops and balconies to give some relief to the community. In West Delhi, residents organised a balcony *antakshari* while in Paris, a neighbourhood organised a balcony quiz. An adorable video of two young children from Ohio, US, won the internet recently after they put up a cello performance for a 78-year-old neighbour in quarantine. Ideas keep multiplying as a fitness instructor in Sevilla, Spain, decided to give classes from his rooftop for his neighbours to follow from inside their homes. And a photographer has put together an online gallery of faces of the lockdown by asking inmates to pose on their balconies or windows. Of course, there is a whole breed of Samaritans, particularly the young, who are volunteering to run errands for senior citizens. Shops, too, are working beyond normal hours to accommodate shoppers and have even set aside "senior citizens" hours for their comfort. Quarantined Lebanese peeped out of their apartment windows recently to celebrate the birthday of a woman who couldn't leave her home.

There have been umpteen studies on how disasters and crisis bring out the best version of ourselves. Perhaps the surge in solidarity is global this time because the threat of the virus is the same for all, without regard for geography, religion, politics, race and creed. And there's acceptance that nobody can claim victory over this mysterious virus unless everybody joins hands. This was summed up beautifully by a woman from Wuhan, who came out of lockdown after 76 days, saying the city had now learnt to accept help from others. "Because of quarantine, we have bonded with and supported each other in ways that I've never experienced in nine years of living here," she wrote. Millions of Chinese, normally inscrutable and not given to emotion, are encouraging each other to stand strong, using the expression "*jiayou*" or "don't give up." Just when globalisation had fuelled a consumerist greed and a materialistic acquisition of good fortune, the virus has perhaps challenged our satiety value and testing if we can evolve. But when life seems uncertain by the bend, we have realised that no asset remotely has any value than that of the human bond, our primal need to herd together in solidarity and dependence. Only this awareness can get us through. As Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte said, "Let's distance ourselves from each other today so that we can embrace each other more warmly tomorrow." History will judge if we could indeed become our best or crash to our worst.



AJOY KUMAR

A large number of people from the Indian middle and upper middle class have a certain image of themselves. They view themselves as modern, progressive and ambitious. This segment of society (to which I and many readers of this esteemed newspaper belong) dreams of all nice things that are available to the rest of the world: Houses, multiple cars and an upgraded wardrobe. They are intent on keeping up with the Joneses. This ambition is important and plays a crucial role in India's growth story. After all, this segment also employs a large number of people in different capacities and provides demand for the country's manufacturing sector.

However, buying nice and expensive clothes and taking lovely holidays abroad are not the limited import of modernity and progressiveness. This middle class also views itself as modern in thought: Readers of books on equality; on economics; and on income distribution, among others. We talk and lament about how the migrant workers are suffering so much. We hypothecate about how the economy, which is on a standstill due to the nationwide lockdown, is affecting the poor and the needy. But what about our actions? Do they betray something else and threaten to shatter this self-image?

As Richelle Goodrich said, "Words have less substance than air. Don't tell me about your zealous dreams, your firm convictions, your profound love — show me." The spread of the Coronavirus and the ensuing nationwide lockdown are an opportunity where we have a chance to not just preach or talk about modernity and progressiveness but we can practise it. Unfortunately, events of the past few weeks have shown how quickly we turn selfish and self-absorbed in times of crisis.

In the past month, we have seen numerous examples of how Coronavirus patients and healthcare professionals have been harassed by their neighbours in middle class housing societies. We seem to have forgotten that these individuals are "victims" of a virus that can afflict anyone of us. Instead, we seem to have given in to fear and abandoned compassion. This is a heady combination. Any harm that the virus can cause will only be exacerbated by a return to our more basic tendencies.

Another story was reported from Defence Colony, where a family was affected by the virus and as per reports, based on the family's complaint, the Delhi police registered a first information report (FIR) against the security guard working at the house for allegedly hiding information about him visiting the Tablighi Jamaat headquarters. Ultimately, however, it turned out that the guard tested negative for COVID-19. When the FIR was filed, many messages were forwarded to this writer's friends who lived in Defence Colony. The forwards warned them against the threats of being exposed to security guards and their help who can be a carrier of the



virus. Sadly, there were no similar apologies or retractions after the concerned security guard tested negative. This because it is so easy for us to blame the poor for all our troubles but much harder for us to accept our latent biases. The victims of these biases are not only the poor.

In Madhya Pradesh, for example, a team of policemen and doctors were attacked by locals in Sheopur district. This team had gone to check on a resident who had travelled from Indore, which has become a hotspot for Coronavirus. This type of threat has spread to medical professionals and lab technicians, who are required to travel to the residence of individuals to ensure that the spread of the virus is curtailed as much as possible. But it appears that many of us have given in to fear. We are even getting violent towards these heroes.

Another incident that brought great pain was that of a doctor in Chennai, who died of the Coronavirus, but was refused a proper burial by locals as they protested at the cemetery where his body was taken. Stones were pelted on the ambulance and the doctor's colleagues were forced to dig a grave with their brave hands to bury him. Is this what we have become? Do we lack any sort of control? Are we so driven by fear that we attack the very people who are working day in and

“
WE CAN NO LONGER LIVE AS IF WE ARE A DEGREE OF SEPARATION FROM THE HATE THAT WE SEE AROUND US. WHEN WE FORWARD A WHATSAPP TEXT THAT ENCOURAGES HATE OR MAKES DEROGATORY COMMENTS ABOUT A PARTICULAR CLASS/CASTE OR FOR THAT MATTER EVEN WHEN WE ELECT REPRESENTATIVES, WHO GIVE AN AMPLIFIED VOICE TO HATE SPEECH, THE BLOOD IS ON OUR HANDS AS WELL
”

out to ensure we remain safe? When did caution so easily become paranoia? These incidents bring deep shame to us as a society and leave us diseased in a far worse way than Corona ever could.

Look at how the disease itself has been communalised. So much so that the Prime Minister was forced to break silence on the issue and clarify that this disease has no religion or caste. The middle class is increasingly accepting WhatsApp forwards that target a particular community and a particular class.

Whether it is the security guard or a household maid, we find it so easy to lay the blame on an entire community without realising that they make our lives much easier while they risk exposing themselves to protect our societies. We do not want to cook our food or risk being unsafe but we also do not want to accept the fact that by asking our maids to come to our house or the security guards to do their job, we are risking not only their lives but our own.

Similarly, why do we elect politicians, who all but reflect this shameful and hateful idea? Take the example of Tejasvi Surya, the Member of Parliament from Bagalur. He quoted a shameful, embarrassing and disgusting tweet about Arab women, causing India great embarrassment in front of

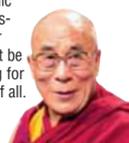
the international community. This is not the first time he has been guilty of promoting such hateful, petty and embarrassing views. While discussing the anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) protests, he had described the protestors as "puncture wallahs." Of course, this speaks volumes about Tejasvi Surya, but it also says a lot about the urban rich constituents of Bagalur, whom he represents. The voters have to share much of the blame as Surya. The same goes for the voters of Bhopal, who voted for BJP MP Pragya Thakur, someone who is a terror accused and who has repeatedly insulted Mahatma Gandhi.

We can no longer live as if we are a degree of separation from the hate that we see around us. When we forward a WhatsApp text that encourages hate or makes derogatory comments about a particular class or caste or for that matter even when we elect representatives, who give an amplified voice to hate speech, the blood is on our hands as well. No matter how much soap and water we use or how often we wash our hands, this is a virus and a disease that will stay with us till the end unless we face our true image in the mirror and start acting to change this.

(The writer is a former IPS officer, a former MP and currently a member of the AAP)

SOUNDBITE

The current global pandemic threatens us all, without distinctions of race, culture or gender. Our response must be as one humanity, providing for the most essential needs of all.



Spiritual leader —Dalai Lama

It's a shame that in our first film (*Josh*), Aishwarya, the most beautiful woman in the world, in the universe and even beyond on all the planets, was my sister.



Actor —Shah Rukh Khan

I did have a chance to meet her (Kim's sister) a couple of times but the challenge remains the same — the goal remains unchanged — whoever is leading North Korea.



US Secretary of State —Mike Pompeo

When we should be tackling Covid-19 unitedly, the BJP continues to spread the virus of communal prejudice. Grave damage is being done to our social harmony.



Congress chief —Sonia Gandhi

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Shun prejudice

Sir — The Government has done well to bring an ordinance to make acts of violence against healthcare personnel treating COVID-19 patients a non-bailable offence with a maximum of seven years of jail term and a fine of ₹5 lakh. Of late, there has been a spurt in the number of cases where healthcare professionals have been attacked; some of them were seriously injured. At a time when our doctors and nurses and other staff members are putting their own and their family's lives at risk to treat the patients, the least we can do is to respect them and let them perform their duty peacefully.

It would have been better if the police, too, are included in this list. There are many cases where large crowds have attacked cops when they were just trying to tell people to maintain social distancing and follow lockdown norms. They, too, deserve to be treated well. Ultimately, the fear of law needs to be there in the minds of the people. Finally, the key lies in successful implementation of the new law.

Bal Govind Noida

There's room for confusion

If the chaos witnessed on April 20, when the lockdown was lifted partially in non-COVID-19 areas, is anything to go by, one shudders to think of what the situation would be when the nation readies itself to get back to complete normalcy. It was a mad scramble. Everyone and everybody was out wishing to take a whiff of fresh air after nearly a month's forced internment. Despite the dangers associated with ignoring the most sacred mantra to keep the potent microbe at bay, it was shocking to observe the scant respect shown for social distancing. People freely mingled with each other as if they had congregated to celebrate the vanquishing of a "distinguished" enemy.

But just quarantining oneself at home does in no way assure oneself immunisation from the toxic effects of the virus. The self-willed confinement is only a means to break the chain of infection in the fight to check the spread of COVID-19. The easing of the lockdown does in no way purport to be the end of the Coronavirus. It will take months of dedicated medical work and public cooperation to eradicate the scourge of the virus. The erratic behaviour of the populace in the interim does in no way help the cause. However, the resumption of activities in most of the industrial establishments necessi-



tates the requirement of sufficient staff strength to operate the factories. Does this justify the companies' demand to relax the transport norms so as to facilitate their employees to reach the workplace? Every other day the Government is issuing revised guidelines, exempting some activity or the other from the ambit of the lockdown. In the resultant confusion, it is becoming all the more difficult to understand who is more exasperated by the lockdown — the public or the Government.

Pachu Menon Margao

Press freedom

Sir — It isn't surprising that India has slipped two places to rank 140th among 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index,

according to a 2019 report released by Reporters Without Borders. With no murders of journalists last year as compared to six in 2018, the security situation for the country's media might seem to have improved but there have been con-

stant violations. It goes without saying that the situation in Jammu & Kashmir, too, is one of the reasons behind this slide. Ever since the Modi Government abrogated Article 370 last year and imposed a

communication blackout for several months, the Press in this border State was forced into silence.

Ironically, this report was published two days after the J&K police were accused of targeting two journalists in Kashmir. The ranking cited "police brutality" and "hate campaigns" on social media by Hindutva followers against journalists to explain India's position. It also highlighted the Government's "tightening" its grip on the media.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee Faridabad

At the receiving end

Sir — It's always the poor who bear the brunt of disasters and diseases. The COVID crisis, too, has put many labourers in a tight spot as they are finding it hard to meet ends meet due to the prolonged lockdown. The Government must formulate a comprehensive plan to look after and rehabilitate the hapless workers to let them live a normal life.

Sartia Via email

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

Do we have the real picture?

The reliability of statistics and numerical data is crucial in order to ensure accurate information, particularly during a pandemic



SURAVI SHARMA

While numbers don't lie, they can definitely mislead people with half-truths. The reliability of statistics and numerical data is crucial to ensure accurate information. Unreliable numerals are arrived at by modifying the figures/values with a motive to portray an improved status or may result from subjective interpretation of data, negligence/ignorance of existing bias in the data collection process or when mathematical amateurs handle important data. Inside locked doors, 1.3 billion Indians have been looking at numbers on screens and newspapers to fathom the country's Corona status. Over 18 per cent of the Indian population is vulnerable to infectious diseases. Hence, we have reason to fear an exponential spike in COVID-19 cases and deaths. With a testing rate as low as about five lakh (total tests done) in a population of 1.3 billion, we can only hope that the available numbers of the confirmed and cured cases and deaths give the real picture and not lull us into a false sense of having the "pandemic under control."

The first line of defence against any pandemic is surveillance: Monitoring humans/animals to spot outbreaks and contain them and in the process, collect meaningful data. A laboratory test is the window to the pandemic without which we have no way of understanding the disease load. While we must prioritise testing of the critically ill, by leaving out patients with respiratory disorders/flu symptoms in a hospital, we are missing the chance of testing potential cases. People from marginalised sections of society may not have the same access to testing as someone from the middle/upper class. This may lead to fear/distrust in hospitals/healthcare centres and be a deterrent in their seeking further care or testing. This is a recipe for undercounting and keeping the disease burden invisible in the country.

In Mumbai, about 80 per cent of the Corona deaths happened within a few hours to a day, following hospital admissions. In contrast, the observed median time from admission-to-death in China is 16 days and in the US for non-ICU and ICU patients the averages are 9.7 and seven days respectively. Thus Mumbai's figures prove delayed testing, just before or after death. They also throw light on how quality data can underscore important points to enable good strategy decisions and crisis response, without which individuals/authorities cannot learn whether measures adopted against the pandemic are working or not. Laboratory tests detect active infections, past infections, immunity status of people and herd immunity in communities. Quality data of the epidemic would be — if the published number is of tests performed or individuals tested (considering one individual may need more than one test), whether negative results are included, whether pending results are included and so on. All these put together will clarify whether the growth of cases is real or only reflects the expanding degree of surveillance/number of tests conducted or if the parameters for data collection are not well sorted. To date, with liberal testing yet to pick up, all eyes are on the rapid serology tests. These tests can decipher results in minutes, are cheaper (than the molecular test — RT-PCR) and can effectively screen blood for public health management purpose though they are not confirmatory in nature and hence not used for clinical practice. Rapid tests will help screen a large percentage of people and if we know that a good chunk of our population has developed antibodies to the virus, it may help authorities allow for less-restrictive measures or staggered lifting of social distancing measures. These tests can be added to routine blood draws that all phlebotomists do regularly with no additional trouble to the patient.

Hospitals are keen on serology tests which could help them identify which healthcare workers have developed a level of immunity already. If there is a batch of say 10 technicians extracting samples and five were immune, the hospital administration could assign them duties and keep the laboratory running. The Coronavirus is here and will surely spread as there is no vaccine or proven cure. At 1.28 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), India's public expenditure on healthcare is the lowest globally (against 17 per cent in the US, 9.8 per cent in the UK and 1.68 per cent in Sri Lanka). Our healthcare system is patchy and we are in no position to cope with this new crisis if it hits us head-on in the coming months.

India has not been able to deal with common infectious diseases like tuberculosis (TB), leprosy, HIV/AIDS, let alone a novel virus of a highly contagious nature. The yearly death toll of TB is 1.5 million, HIV/AIDS is 69,000 besides an ever-increasing number of non-infectious disease morbidities ranging from cancer to cardiac diseases. With a reproductive number or RO of over 2.5, COVID-19, if left to sweep through our population of 1.3 billion, will infect 84.5 million and kill 1.17 million people. With a string of COVID-19 hotspots starting at us, surveillance combined with mass screening must now exist along with quality data collection. There are genuine capacity issues but the Government needs to build it with dedicated funding, perhaps as part of the next stimulus package.

(The writer is an author and a doctor by profession)

CONCERNED AT MAMATA'S REBUFF TO CENTRAL TEAMS AND RED CARPET FOR THE WHO TEAM DURING EAST MIDNAPUR AND BISHNUPUR VISIT.
 —WEST BENGAL GOVERNOR
JAGDEEP DHANKHAR

POINTCOUNTERPOINT



MAMATA IS THE ELECTED CHIEF MINISTER OF BENGAL. SHE IS NOT ONE TWITTER-HAPPY GOVERNOR WHOM THE CENTRE NOMINATED.
 —SENIOR TMC LEADER
DEREK O'BRIEN

Adopt fiscal prudence

The Govt must implement much-needed reforms to rein in unproductive spends and prevent revenue leakages to create a sustainable basis for balancing its budget



UTTAM GUPTA

The economic crisis triggered by COVID-19 has forced the Government to take recourse to some extraordinary measures, which include among others 30 per cent cut in the salary of all Members of Parliament (MP) besides the President, Vice-President and the Prime Minister, suspension of the MPLAD (MP Local Area Development) fund and a steep cut in expenditure of Ministries/departments. Reportedly, barring 18 Ministries/departments connected with health-care, medical infrastructure and other essential services, all others are facing expenditure cuts for the April-June quarter. While 33 Ministries/departments can spend only up to 20 per cent of the budget, for 50 others the expenditure limit is even lower at 15 per cent. This is expected to continue for the remaining quarters of the year.

Faced with the double whammy of mammoth expenditure commitment — mostly on account of having to protect the livelihood of tens of millions in the informal sector on the one hand and steep decline in tax collections on the other, the Government's worries on account of the fiscal deficit going completely out of control have heightened. This and the dire need to show that our macro-economic fundamentals are strong may have prompted the Centre to cut spending.

Inevitably, this will affect India's medium to long-term growth trajectory, as implementation of projects gets deferred. In these moments of grave crisis, when saving precious lives and livelihoods is top priority, our policymakers may dismiss it outright. But it can't detract us from a basic question as to why the Centre and States indulged in fiscal profligacy all through. Why didn't they ever work to create a buffer for a rainy day? To be precise, four areas need urgent attention.

First, despite lofty declarations of reining unproductive expenditure, including reduction and rationalisation of subsidies (for the poor) these expenses continue to rise. They are mostly due to populist promises such as free food, electricity, water, loan waivers and so on, made by parties to win polls. No wonder, major subsidies continue to increase to unsustainable levels. Food subsidy increased from ₹1,45,000 crore during 2017-18 to ₹2,19,000 crore during 2019-20 and is projected to increase further to ₹2,53,000 crore during 2020-21 (free food for three months in the wake of the Corona crisis will lead to a further spurt). Likewise, fertiliser subsidy continues to hover around ₹80,000 crore notwithstanding several measures like neem coating of urea or changes in the pricing norms for urea manufacturers aimed at reducing costs.

There are a host of subsidies given by States such as power, irrigation, credit, bonus over and above the Minimum Support Price (MSP) notified by the Centre, payment of sugarcane arrears to farmers, farm loan waivers and so on, which cost them hundreds of thousands of crores. Studies have shown that a major slice of these subsidies is cornered by better-off farmers (those with land holding over two hectares) even as the majority of resource-poor farmers are left out.

Second, tax collection is not only far below other countries but also has been consistently lower than the target fixed by the Government itself. The tax-Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ratio in India — the Centre and States' tax revenue — was 17 per cent during 2018-19, which is almost half of the average tax-GDP ratio of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, a club of rich/developed

“**THE GOVERNMENT MUST CREATE REVENUE SURPLUS SO THAT IT CAN DEAL WITH CRISIS SITUATIONS WITHOUT JEOPARDISING DEVELOPMENT. THE PRIVATE FIRMS SHOULD ALSO CHANGE THEIR MINDSET OF LEAVING IT ENTIRELY TO THE STATE TO TAKE CARE OF WORKERS IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR. THEY NEED TO PONDER OVER FUNDING 'INCOME SUPPORT' TO THEM DURING A CRISIS. LIKE THE ONE WE ARE FACING RIGHT NOW**”



opened countries at 34.3 per cent during 2018. During 2019-20, the total tax revenue of the Centre — after devolution to the States — was ₹2,00,000 crore less than even the revised estimate (RE) at ₹14,00,000 crore and ₹4,00,000 crore lower than the budget estimate (BE) at ₹16,00,000 crore.

This has a lot to do with the inability of the tax administration to make industries, businesses and High Net Worth Individuals (HNWIs) pay their fair share of taxes. This is exacerbated by cumbersome tax laws and slow-moving judicial systems which tax evaders exploit to the hilt. The tax dues locked up in litigation run into thousands of crores. To get an idea, let us look at the following.

Under the Sakba Vishwas Scheme (SVS) that offered to settle disputes relating to excise and service tax prior to the Goods and Services Tax from July 1, 2017, a total of about ₹2,50,000 crore indirect tax dues from 1,83,000 assesseees were involved.

Fed up with protracted litigation and desperate to garner some revenue, the Government offered relief, varying from 40 per cent to 70 per cent of the tax dues depending on the amount involved in disputes other than those covered under "voluntary disclosure." All that it got was a paltry ₹38,000 crore or 15 per cent of the total dues.

The disputed amount of direct taxes — both corporate and personal — is much higher at ₹96,000 crore involving close to 5,00,000 cases (according to the Parliament Standing Committee on Finance). In her Budget speech for 2020-21, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a scheme christened Vivaad se Vishwas (VSV) wherein the assesseees need not pay interest and penalty if the disputed amount is paid before June 30, 2020. Being much less attractive than the SVS, the VSV may turn out to be a damp squib.

In a bid to look business-friendly, the Narendra Modi Government has gone to extreme limits to offer tax concessions that have led to huge revenue loss. For instance, under the presumptive tax scheme, for businesses having a turnover of up to ₹2 crore per annum, their profit is presumed as eight per cent of the turnover (six per cent in case, the firm conducts all its transactions in digital mode).

For a firm having a ₹1 crore turnover and doing it all digitally, its income is taken as ₹6,00,000 on which the tax works out to a mere ₹33,000 against much higher tax liability on actual profit (e.g. taking profit at 10 per cent or ₹10,00,000, this would be ₹1,16,000 with profit at 20 per cent, tax will come to ₹4,25,000). Given the culture of tax evasion nurtured for generations in business communities, one won't be surprised if several of them may not be paying even a paltry ₹33,000 to cite the above example.

Third, the Government is banking too much on petroleum products (POL) for boosting its revenue. During 2018-19, the Centre mopped up ₹2,58,000 crore from this sector (₹2,14,000 crore from excise duty alone), whereas States garnered ₹2,27,000 crore of which Value Added Tax (VAT) alone contributed ₹2,00,000 crore.

Both grab every available opportunity to hike taxes on POL. Effective March 14, the Union Government hiked Central Excise Duty (CED) on petrol and diesel by ₹3 per litre each from an already high of ₹20 per litre and ₹16 per litre respectively. Further, in the wake of the Corona crisis, it has also taken Parliament's nod for further increase in CED by up to ₹8 per litre each, any time it wishes.

This has resulted in a situation wherein taxes (CED and VAT) alone account for over 50 per cent of the retail price of these products. High tax on fuels comes at a heavy cost to the economy. This contributes to increased inflation, higher sub-

sidy payments on fertilisers, food, irrigation and so on, which takes away a good slice of the higher revenue from fuel tax. This is a classic case of "taking from one hand and giving back from the other." Besides, a lot of revenue is also foregone due to stunted growth of industries which are rendered uncompetitive, courtesy high fuel and power cost.

Fourth, the Government continues to hold on to several Public Sector Undertakings like Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited, Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited, Fertiliser Corporation of India Limited, Hindustan Fertiliser Corporation Limited and so on, which have been making losses year-after-year.

These are neither closed nor restructured to restore viability of their operations; even as they are kept on the ventilator perennially draining out thousands of crores from the public exchequer.

Add to this the money the Government has been losing in recapitalising Public Sector Banks (PSBs) facing capital erosion due to ballooning non-performing assets (NPAs). During the last five years or so, it has pumped in over ₹3,50,000 crore and more capital infusion is not ruled out given the unfolding NPA scenario.

The Government needs to implement much-needed reforms to rein in unproductive spends, including subsidies, and prevent revenue leakages to create a sustainable basis for balancing its budget. It must create revenue surplus so that it can deal with crisis situations without jeopardising development. The private firms should also change their mindset of leaving it entirely to the State to take care of workers in the informal sector. They need to ponder over funding "income support" to them during a crisis, like the one we are facing right now.

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

Consumers must not chicken out

The poultry sector has incurred heavy losses of around ₹1,750 crore in a month due to panic triggered by the spread of misinformation among meat eaters that the Coronavirus can be contracted by consuming chicken and eggs



RAMDAS KAMBALE

The Coronavirus outbreak has brought nearly the whole world to a standstill with multiple countries going into lockdowns in an effort to minimise infection spread and casualties. These shutdowns are having a cascading effect on the economies of nations and many industries are going under. However, one industry that is not just bearing the brunt of the shutdowns but is also reeling from the impact of false news and rumours surrounding the COVID-19 virus is the poultry sector.

The prices of poultry have plunged to ₹10-30 per kg at the farm gate level due to a slump in chicken

demand while the average cost of production is ₹80 per kg.

Consequently, poultry breeders have demanded a relief package from the Government claiming that the sector has incurred heavy losses of around ₹1,750 crore in a month due to panic triggered by the spread of misinformation among meat eaters that the Coronavirus can be contracted by consuming chicken and eggs. This massive drop in sales of chicken and eggs has impacted the livelihoods of a large number of poultry farmers.

Although, the Coronavirus is a deadly disease, which has claimed countless lives around the globe, it certainly is not spread through the consumption of poultry and poultry products and this has been confirmed by scientific reports and studies. However, many irresponsible news agencies and websites are spreading misinformation.

Scientists say it is highly likely that the virus came from bats but first passed through an intermediary animal in the same way that another

Coronavirus — the 2002 Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak — moved from horseshoe bats to cat-like civets before infecting humans. Now, the Coronavirus is spreading globally primarily through people-to-people contact.

Taking note of the myths and misconceptions clouding the poultry industry, even the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India's (FSSAI's) chief GSG Ayyangar came forward to issue a clarification. He stated clearly that the belief that the Coronavirus will spread through eating chicken, mutton and seafood is nothing but a misconception.

Not the first time poultry sector has been hit: Unfortunately, this is not the first time that a virus that emanated from an animal has scared people and they have stopped eating chicken and meat due to it. In the 1980s, the mad cow disease spread in the UK, which was a result of farmers giving non-vegetarian feed to cows that affected their nervous system and triggered health concerns in humans as well.

Later it was established that eating chicken and eggs cannot cause mad cow disease. Similarly, zoonotic viruses such as Swine flu, which started in the pig farms of Mexico, and Ebola virus that was a result of consuming and handling uncooked bush meat had also caused a similar and unwarranted backlash against the poultry industry.

The most recent Nipah virus outbreak, which was found in people living closer to the habitat of bats, had also scared people off chicken and eggs. But the fact remains that except for the first outbreak in Malaysia-Singapore, which was related to contact with pigs and the outbreak in Philippines associated with horse slaughter, most other outbreaks in the Indo-Bangladesh region were associated with consumption of raw date palm sap contaminated by fruit bats. It had a very high secondary attack rate but was most certainly not spread through poultry consumption.

Chicken is safe and a crucial source of nutrients: Chicken is an essential choice for many healthy

diets as it is high in protein and low in calories and carbohydrates. It is also a well-established source of B vitamins and selenium.

The nutritional elements of chicken aid in the metabolism of fats and sugars in the body that is necessary for our daily energy needs. Consuming chicken strengthens the bones as well and is responsible for maintaining healthy cells.

Due to the Coronavirus rumours, many people are looking for vegetarian alternatives like spinach and jackfruit but they cannot provide the same amount of nutrients as chicken. It is imperative, therefore, that the industry as well as the administration rise to the occasion and effectively counter the false narratives with facts.

In fact, the Union Health Ministry must step in to address all such miscommunications through regular advisories and press releases.

Poultry farmers must step up hygiene measures: The onus also lies on the poultry industry to initiate a

series of measures towards raising safe and healthy poultry birds. Unhygienic breeding of birds in several farms and backyards has often been a cause for concern for consumers. The poultry industry must do its bit to boost consumer confidence. They must also adopt the use of safe and healthy solutions and alternatives to antibiotics such as bacteriophage-based poultry feeds to raise healthier antibiotic-free chicken. Poultry farms which take proper hygiene and preventive measures while raising their chicken can prevent any bacterial infections and virus in their stock. Government regulatory bodies must also keep a thorough check on poultry farm operations and issue media releases that squash unfounded rumors, which are affecting poor farmers as well as the industry. This will help in reviving the demand for chicken and eggs and help people get their required amount of nutrition that is necessary for good health.

(The writer is Senior Vice-President, Vetphage Pharmaceuticals)



FOREIGN EYE



THE SHOW MUST GO ON

Until a month ago, Britain's creative industry was the fastest-growing and most dynamic sector of the economy. As we continue to be confined to the sofa, Netflix sensations such as *Tiger King* will keep us entertained. But our cultural alternatives will be diminished when Britain re-emerges from the lockdown, unless we do more for our creative industries now. (The Guardian editorial)

CII forecasts GDP declining by 0.9% if lockdown prolonged

Best case scenario
1.5% growth in FY21

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's GDP, in the best-case scenario, may grow by 1.5 per cent in 2020-21 given a faster pick-up post the lockdown but could see a 0.9 per cent decline in the fiscal if the curbs imposed to contain coronavirus infection are prolonged, a report has said.

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) in a paper — A plan for economic recovery — has laid out its growth expectation under three scenarios and suggested "urgent" fiscal interventions.

In the baseline scenario, the Gross Domestic Product

(GDP) is expected to grow at just 0.6 per cent on an annual basis as economic activity is expected to remain constrained due to continuing restrictions on the free movement of goods and people beyond the lockdown period, the paper stated.

This will lead to disruption in supply chains, slow pick-up in investment activity, labour shortages in the short-run and muted consumption demand on account of reduced household incomes, the industry body said.

In the optimistic scenario, which envisages a faster pick-up post the lockdown period, the GDP is forecast to register a growth of 1.5 per cent in the best case.

In case of a more prolonged outbreak, where the

restrictions in existing hot-spot regions get extended, while new regions are identified as 'hot-spots' leading to intermittent stop and start in economic activity, the GDP is likely to decline by 0.9 per cent.

The urgent fiscal interventions, as suggested by the CII should include cash transfers amounting to ₹2 lakh crore to JAM account holders, in addition to the ₹1.7 lakh stimulus already announced.

The CII has also suggested additional working capital limits to be provided by banks, equivalent to April-June wage bill of the borrowers, backed by a Government guarantee, at 4-5 per cent interest rate.

In addition, the CII paper has suggested the creation of a fund or SPV with a corpus of

₹1.5 lakh crore which will subscribe to NCDs/Bonds of corporates rated A and above.

The fund can be seeded by the government contributing a corpus of ₹10,000-20,000 crore, with further investments from banks and financial institutions such as LIC, PFC, EPF, NII, IIFCL et al. This will limit government exposure while providing adequate liquidity to industry.

For MSMEs, the CII has suggested a credit protection scheme whereby 75-80 per cent of the loan should be guaranteed by RBI, i.e. if the borrower defaults, RBI should buy the loan and repay the bank up to 75-80 per cent of the loan, so the risk to the lender is limited. SIDBI could provide the guarantee for loans to industry

and trade while NABARD could provide the guarantee for loans to agro-processing sectors.

"There is no doubt that the economy is going through turbulent times, and India will have to spend, for navigating its way out of the current crisis. At this stage, the government must do whatever it takes to tide over the crisis," CII Director General Chandrajit Banerjee said.

"Given the extent of the damage to the economy from the disruption to business, the GDP growth in FY21 will likely be the lowest in many decades," he added.

According to him, without an increase in government spending in the near-term to drive an economic recovery,

government revenue will dwindle, and high deficits will continue to be a problem in future.

Any significant revival in investment activity is unlikely as capacity utilization levels may remain suboptimal. Consumption demand is likely to remain lacklustre as people's incomes have been impacted, CII said.

On the external front, as economies across the globe continue to struggle with the pandemic, global trade may decline by 13 to 32 per cent in 2020, as estimated by the World Trade Organisation.

"Given the situation, government intervention becomes critical not only to sustain the economy but also to prevent any humanitarian crisis," observed Banerjee.

FB's investment in Jio Platforms to cut RILs net leverage, credit positive: Moody's

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Facebook's ₹43,600 crore investment in Reliance Industries' digital services business will help the Mukesh Ambani-led firm reduce borrowing and reinforce the company's commitment to cut its net debt to zero by March 31, Moody's Investors Service said on Thursday.

Stating that the investment is credit positive, Moody's in an issuer comment said it expects the transaction to reduce RILs consolidated net debt/EBITDA by 0.4x to well below 3.0x, the tolerance level for its Baa2 rating. As part of the transaction, Facebook will acquire 9.99 per cent of Jio Platforms Limited, a fully-owned subsidiary of RIL that houses the company's digital services business including its mobile telecom services business — Reliance Jio Infocomm Limited (RJIL).

The transaction also solidifies Jio's leading market position in India's growing digital ecosystem. "The investment by Facebook establishes a valuation for RILs digital services business and can be used as a base for further divestment by the company," it said.

This also increases RILs financial flexibility.

Mobile devices firms urge Govt to lift sale curb

New Delhi: Urging the Government to include mobile devices under the essential services category, handset firms on Thursday said many frontline workers, patients and other vulnerable groups are facing a tough time during the coronavirus lockdown due to non-availability of the devices.

The India Cellular and Electronics Association (ICEA), whose members include firms like Apple, Foxconn, Wistron, Flextronics, Xiaomi, Vivo, Oppo and Lava, said mobile phones are at the heart of the digital ecosystem and their non-availability can be life threatening.

"Senior citizens and those with underlying health conditions are most susceptible to Covid-19. In such cases, the fatality rate is upwards of 10 per cent. The disease is such that all times, the patients need to fend for themselves from the time they communicate with municipal authorities regarding symptoms to testing and treatment," ICEA Chairman Pankaj Mohindroo said in a letter to IT Secretary Ajay Prakash Sawhney.

ICEA said this can be a life-threatening situation and more than 10 crore senior citizens at the bottom of the pyramid do not have access to even feature phones and are being denied access.

Markets maintain uptrend on stimulus hopes

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmarks marched higher for the second day on Thursday, helped by IT and banking stocks, as hopes of another stimulus package from the Government bolstered investor sentiment amid the coronavirus overhang.

The 30-share BSE Sensex surged 483.53 points or 1.54 per cent to close at 31,863.08, a six-week high. The broader NSE Nifty advanced 126.60 points, or 1.38 per cent, to settle at 9,313.90.

Kotak Bank was the top gainer in the Sensex pack, rallying 8.59 per cent, followed by TCS (5.97 per cent), Infosys (5.67 per cent), ICICI Bank (4.97 per cent), HCL Tech (3.61 per cent) and ONGC (2.98 per cent).

On the other hand, Titan, HUL, PowerGrid, NTPC and L&T were among the top laggards, shedding up to 4.18 per cent. A sharp recovery in the rupee also lifted the market mood, traders said. The rupee soared by 62 paise to settle at 76.06 (provisional) against the US dollar.

Centre working on scheme to reimburse dues to MSMEs with interest: Gadkari

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre is working on a scheme to reimburse pending payments with interest to micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), Union Minister Nitin Gadkari said on Thursday.

Once implemented, the Government's plans towards framing a mechanism for clearance of huge pending dues owed to MSMEs by central and state PSUs as well as corporate players are expected to provide a major relief to the sector battling distress, as millions of units struggle to survive amid mounting losses caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

In an interaction via video conferencing

with the representatives of Bharat Chamber of Commerce, the minister for MSME and transport said the default on pending payments is one of the "big problems" faced by MSMEs. Gadkari said he has asked the MSME ministry officials to work on formulating a scheme of ₹1 to 2 lakh crore. "Where there is a pending bill we can reimburse that amount with the interest cost. We will find out some solution, some of the cost will be borne by the government, some of the cost will be borne by the industry, some of the cost will be borne by the supplier and we will take the guarantee for that and MSMEs will get their payment. We are working on it. So that can be a good relief to MSMEs," said the minister.

NIFTY 50

| SCRIP | OPEN | High | LOW | LTP | CHANGE |
|------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------|
| NIFTY 50 | 9232.35 | 9343.60 | 9170.15 | 9313.90 | 126.60 |
| KOTAKBANK | 1172.00 | 1255.00 | 1158.10 | 1247.90 | 95.75 |
| INFY | 1780.00 | 1900.00 | 1760.85 | 1867.10 | 97.60 |
| TCS | 647.05 | 683.65 | 638.10 | 675.00 | 33.15 |
| ICICIBANK | 340.25 | 354.80 | 338.00 | 350.80 | 14.85 |
| HCLTECH | 465.00 | 480.75 | 462.40 | 480.00 | 17.60 |
| ZEE | 157.20 | 173.40 | 155.55 | 157.55 | 5.70 |
| ONGC | 67.50 | 69.05 | 66.55 | 67.25 | 1.90 |
| EICHERMOT | 13800.00 | 14250.00 | 13710.00 | 14079.95 | 376.65 |
| HINDALCO | 109.00 | 113.30 | 108.35 | 111.25 | 2.95 |
| HDFCBANK | 955.00 | 958.50 | 912.55 | 952.10 | 23.50 |
| ADANIPOR | 273.50 | 279.70 | 268.50 | 278.00 | 6.10 |
| VEDL | 77.75 | 78.55 | 76.60 | 77.50 | 1.45 |
| BAJAJ-AUTO | 2379.70 | 2446.95 | 2368.00 | 2425.00 | 45.30 |
| M&M | 338.00 | 349.65 | 331.55 | 345.90 | 5.70 |
| WIPRO | 179.40 | 182.60 | 177.10 | 181.00 | 2.45 |
| SUNPHARMA | 476.95 | 487.65 | 474.35 | 478.50 | 4.15 |
| BAJFINANCE | 2160.00 | 2219.10 | 2112.00 | 2165.10 | 16.75 |
| TATASTEEL | 270.00 | 279.00 | 269.00 | 273.50 | 2.20 |
| TECHM | 519.00 | 527.85 | 509.30 | 522.00 | 3.70 |
| ASIANPAINT | 180.00 | 184.50 | 180.05 | 182.50 | 12.00 |
| RELIANCE | 3435.00 | 3470.00 | 3406.00 | 3458.00 | 16.85 |
| ULTRACEM | 1367.35 | 1385.85 | 1330.10 | 1370.15 | 6.55 |
| BPC | 356.85 | 362.90 | 352.50 | 358.20 | 1.50 |
| CPIA | 590.00 | 603.90 | 579.05 | 589.00 | 1.80 |
| BRITANNIA | 2960.00 | 3245.00 | 2918.00 | 3060.00 | 7.35 |
| IOC | 83.40 | 85.00 | 82.80 | 83.20 | 0.20 |
| COALINDIA | 140.80 | 144.75 | 140.10 | 140.90 | 0.20 |
| TATAMOTORS | 76.75 | 78.65 | 75.40 | 75.90 | 0.00 |
| MARUTI | 5169.00 | 5244.00 | 5045.00 | 5160.00 | -20.85 |
| HDFC | 1674.90 | 1687.00 | 1651.60 | 1656.00 | -1.15 |
| AXISBANK | 434.60 | 439.85 | 426.05 | 428.90 | -2.25 |
| ITC | 182.95 | 184.00 | 179.65 | 181.20 | -1.05 |
| DREDDY | 4031.00 | 4086.00 | 4009.25 | 4030.00 | -26.80 |
| INFRADEL | 169.00 | 174.55 | 166.00 | 166.20 | -1.30 |
| GAIL | 84.95 | 88.70 | 82.75 | 83.50 | -0.75 |
| JSWSTEEL | 162.00 | 166.30 | 158.70 | 159.60 | -1.60 |
| HEROMOTOCO | 1900.00 | 1923.45 | 1855.00 | 1869.00 | -18.65 |
| BAJAJFINSV | 860.00 | 869.50 | 835.00 | 843.35 | -9.25 |
| INDUSINDBK | 400.00 | 488.00 | 470.05 | 471.95 | -58.80 |
| BHARTIARTL | 501.85 | 507.30 | 491.05 | 495.00 | -6.40 |
| SBIN | 187.75 | 189.90 | 185.15 | 186.20 | -2.50 |
| NESTLEIND | 1799.95 | 1780.00 | 1730.00 | 1736.00 | -246.05 |
| INDUSINDBK | 420.00 | 427.50 | 407.00 | 409.40 | -6.50 |
| GRUP | 359.00 | 366.40 | 345.70 | 348.00 | -5.65 |
| UPL | 515.00 | 517.85 | 498.70 | 500.80 | -9.60 |
| NTPC | 97.45 | 97.70 | 94.55 | 95.35 | -2.25 |
| SHREECEM | 19050.00 | 19175.00 | 18601.05 | 18749.95 | -468.20 |
| POWERGRID | 161.50 | 161.90 | 157.60 | 158.15 | -4.05 |
| HINDUNILVR | 2389.00 | 2413.00 | 2308.05 | 2321.00 | -65.15 |
| TITAN | 922.25 | 935.50 | 905.00 | 915.90 | -35.50 |

NIFTY NEXT 50

| SCRIP | OPEN | High | LOW | LTP | CHANGE |
|---------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|--------|
| NIFTY NEXT 50 | 2348.50 | 2382.50 | 2305.90 | 2372.65 | 61.90 |
| IDEA | 4.30 | 4.50 | 4.15 | 4.30 | 0.35 |
| PEL | 88.00 | 92.50 | 87.00 | 91.90 | 4.80 |
| SRRANSFIN | 613.00 | 660.00 | 613.00 | 638.00 | 31.95 |
| ICICIGI | 1149.80 | 1199.00 | 1140.00 | 1193.95 | 54.55 |
| L&T | 59.15 | 63.40 | 58.55 | 61.70 | 2.40 |
| ASHOKLEY | 45.95 | 47.20 | 45.65 | 46.65 | 1.70 |
| NMDC | 75.10 | 78.55 | 74.65 | 76.95 | 2.40 |
| SIEMENS | 1135.00 | 1199.65 | 1135.00 | 1165.55 | 34.00 |
| HINDZINC | 168.05 | 172.00 | 167.30 | 171.30 | 4.60 |
| LUPIN | 811.00 | 837.30 | 811.00 | 824.00 | 17.40 |
| HAVELLS | 520.00 | 534.30 | 515.00 | 529.00 | 11.10 |
| DLF | 134.40 | 138.50 | 133.00 | 136.40 | 2.85 |
| IBULHSGFIN | 115.55 | 121.00 | 115.00 | 118.00 | 2.45 |
| SBILIFE | 712.00 | 732.50 | 709.00 | 719.00 | 14.20 |
| OFSS | 2037.00 | 2069.95 | 2022.00 | 2039.00 | 33.75 |
| PEL | 855.00 | 886.60 | 847.50 | 851.70 | 11.85 |
| PAGEIND | 1757.65 | 1844.25 | 1757.60 | 1770.05 | 22.85 |
| DIVISLAB | 2388.00 | 2454.30 | 2376.00 | 2412.00 | 27.50 |
| GODREJCP | 535.00 | 550.80 | 535.00 | 537.10 | 5.95 |
| BOSCHLTD | 10495.00 | 10828.55 | 10460.30 | 10510.00 | 95.90 |
| MOTHERSUNI | 73.80 | 76.35 | 73.10 | 73.70 | 0.55 |
| BANDHANBNK | 199.50 | 208.00 | 197.80 | 200.25 | 1.40 |
| DMART | 2290.05 | 2350.00 | 2290.05 | 2304.00 | 13.95 |
| CADILAC | 332.20 | 346.60 | 330.05 | 333.25 | 1.85 |
| PAHILIM | 10801.00 | 11006.05 | 10655.00 | 10780.00 | 45.30 |
| CONCOR | 367.00 | 373.60 | 362.90 | 368.00 | 1.00 |
| PNB | 31.50 | 31.75 | 31.00 | 31.15 | 0.05 |
| ADANTRANS | 199.00 | 202.05 | 197.10 | 199.50 | 0.30 |
| BANKBARODA | 48.60 | 49.20 | 48.00 | 48.35 | 0.05 |
| PETRONET | 222.20 | 226.90 | 219.35 | 224.20 | 0.20 |
| UBL | 935.00 | 950.00 | 911.80 | 922.75 | -1.50 |
| PIDILITIND | 1548.45 | 1584.00 | 1531.15 | 1534.00 | -4.25 |
| DABUR | 506.10 | 516.15 | 497.05 | 500.30 | -2.40 |
| NIACL | 117.20 | 121.90 | 117.00 | 117.50 | 0.70 |
| BAJAJHLDG | 1980.00 | 2050.00 | 1925.05 | 1929.00 | -23.45 |
| HINDPETRO | 212.70 | 218.35 | 207.90 | 209.80 | -2.90 |
| BERGEPAINT | 529.70 | 543.00 | 519.05 | 522.90 | -7.95 |
| NHPC | 21.30 | 21.45 | 20.70 | 20.80 | -0.35 |
| ICICIPRULI | 371.95 | 386.90 | 359.80 | 363.00 | -6.35 |
| COLPAL | 1507.95 | 1547.00 | 1472.05 | 1481.75 | -26.20 |
| HDFCAMC | 2626.90 | 2671.15 | 2575.50 | 2580.00 | -46.25 |
| AUROPHARMA | 645.35 | 664.45 | 623.00 | 629.05 | -13.20 |
| MARICO | 309.00 | 315.55 | 300.00 | 301.45 | -7.40 |
| AMBUJACEM | 178.50 | 179.50 | 174.00 | 172.25 | -4.25 |
| MCOWELL-N | 544.00 | 549.15 | 527.00 | 540.00 | -13.35 |
| GICRE | 146.90 | 146.90 | 140.00 | 142.00 | -3.95 |
| ACC | 1228.95 | 1237.95 | 1177.55 | 1196.00 | -33.55 |
| INDIGO | 967.45 | 968.60 | 926.50 | 933.00 | -26.70 |
| HDFCLIFE | 505.00 | 511.90 | 486.30 | 487.85 | -15.80 |
| BIOCON | 360.50 | 365.50 | 344.55 | 346.60 | -14.00 |

BSE 500

| Script | Open | High | Low | LTP |
|------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| RELIANCE | 1369.70 | 1385.85 | 1334.25 | 1371.50 |
| INFY | 649.00 | 683.00 | 638.50 | 678.45 |
| TCS | 1786.00 | 1891.70 | 1768.05 | 1876.90 |
| BAJFINANCE | 2166.00 | 2218.30 | 2111.50 | 2175.20 |
| HDFC | 1689.80 | 1689.80 | 1651.75 | 1662.50 |
| HDFCBANK | 938.80 | 958.50 | 913.30 | 954.75 |
| ICICIBANK | 338.30 | 354.60 | 338.30 | 352.80 |
| SBIN | | | | |

Around the Globe

US WAS 'ATTACKED': TRUMP

Total number of cases around the world has crossed 2,672,357. Around 1,86,933 people have succumbed to the disease

US blasts China at Southeast Asian meeting

AP ■ BANGKOK

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told his Southeast Asian counterparts on Thursday that China is taking advantage of the world's preoccupation with the coronavirus pandemic to push its territorial ambitions in the South China Sea.

Pompeo made the accusation in a meeting via video to discuss the outbreak with the foreign ministers of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Beijing's expansive territorial claims in the South China Sea conflict with those of ASEAN members Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia, and are contested by Washington, which has an active naval presence in the Pacific.

"Beijing has moved to take advantage of the distraction, from China's new unilateral announcement of administrative districts over disputed islands and maritime areas in the South China Sea, its sinking of a Vietnamese fishing vessel earlier this month, and its 'research stations' on Fiery Cross Reef and Subi Reef," Pompeo said.

■ The NEPAL Government is planning to create jobs for the Sherpas, who became unemployed due to the COVID-19 lockdown, by hiring them to repair and clean up the trekking trails in the rugged Himalayas, a media report said on Thursday. The initiative by the Government came as all Everest expeditions slated for this spring season were cancelled on March 12 due to the coronavirus spread. The Kathmandu Post reported. Climbers and the Nepal Mountaineering Association suggested that the Government should use this as an opportunity by mobilising the tourism workers for an Everest clean-up campaign

■ BANGLADESH has decided to extend the nationwide Covid-19 shutdown for 10 more days until May 5 amid warnings of heightening risks of coronavirus infections in the country, including among doctors and healthcare workers. To curb the spread of the novel coronavirus, the government initially declared a general holiday on March 26 for 10 days. Later, that was gradually extended till April 25 as the country kept seeing a rise in the number of cases and deaths from Covid-19

■ GREENLANDERS said on Thursday they welcome reports that the United States wants to invest in their island, but the money has to come without conditions. The US administration is expected to announce the opening of a US Agency for International Development office at the new American consulate in the capital, Nuuk, and at least \$12 million in new aid projects

■ GREECE's Government is extending the country's lockdown measures by one week to May 4. They had been due to expire April 27. The measures have shut down most economic activity in the country. Government spokesman Stelios Petsas said Thursday they will gradually be relaxed over the course of May and June

■ SOUTH KOREAN health authorities are planning to soon begin antibody tests to learn how widespread the coronavirus infection is within the population. They are also researching how long people maintain immunity after recovering from Covid-19

■ A federal appeals court has allowed Arkansas to BAN MOST SURGICAL ABORTIONS during the coronavirus pandemic. A three-judge panel of the 8th US Circuit Court of Appeals dissolved a judge's temporary restraining order that allowed surgical abortions to continue after the Arkansas Department of Health told the state's only surgical abortion clinic to stop performing the procedure unless it was needed to protect the life or health of the mother

■ HARVARD UNIVERSITY announced it will turn down \$8.7 million in federal coronavirus relief, a day after President Donald Trump excoriated the wealthy Ivy League school over taxpayer money it stood to receive. Similar action was taken at Stanford, Princeton and Yale universities, which said they too will reject millions of dollars in federal funding amid growing scrutiny of wealthy colleges. Trump later thanked Harvard and Stanford saying he was pleased the schools turned down the funding

AGENCIES ■ WASHINGTON

Struggling to restore normalcy in the US where the coronavirus has claimed the lives of more than 48,000 people and infected over 8,52,000, President Donald Trump has said that the country was "attacked".

"We were attacked. This was an attack. This wasn't just the flu by the way. Nobody has ever seen anything like this, 1917 was the last time," Trump told reporters at his daily White House news conference on Wednesday.

He was responding to a question about the growing US national debt as a result of the multi-trillion dollars stimulus packages that his administration has come up with to help people and businesses in distress as a direct fallout of the pandemic.

"We have no choice. Do we have a choice? I'm always concerned about everything. We had to fix this problem," he said. "We had the greatest economy in the history of the world... Better than China, better than any place," he said.

SPAIN RECORDS 440 NEW DEATHS

Spain has recorded 440 new deaths overnight for the new coronavirus, bringing the total confirmed fatalities to 22,157, according to an official data on Thursday. With more than 4,600 new positive infections tested, the reported cases are now over 200,000, although the real number is thought to be far higher because many people have not been tested and studies suggest that people can be infected without feeling sick. On Thursday, a new genet-

| COUNTRY | TOTAL CASES | TOTAL DEATHS |
|---------|-------------|--------------|
| USA | 8,54,820 | 48,416 |
| Spain | 2,13,024 | 22,157 |
| Italy | 1,89,973 | 25,549 |
| France | 1,59,877 | 21,340 |
| UK | 1,33,495 | 18,100 |
| Germany | 1,51,195 | 5,354 |
| Iran | 87,026 | 5,481 |
| China | 82,798 | 4,632 |



ic study published by the Carlos III Institute, Spain's main epidemiology research centre, suggested that the new coronavirus was spreading in the country since mid-February, weeks before the first local contagion clusters were identified.

The country was celebrating an atypical World Book Day on Thursday, which is marked in the United Kingdom and Spain on the date in 1,616 of the death of William Shakespeare and Miguel de Cervantes, but this year away from outdoor bookstands.

CHINA REPORTS 27 NEW ASYMPTOMATIC CASES

China has reported 27 new asymptomatic coronavirus cases, taking their total to 984, while a high-level committee headed by Premier Li Keqiang asked health officials to remain focussed on the targeted containment of the deadly virus.

Asymptomatic cases refer to people who are tested Covid-19 positive but develop no symptoms such as fever, cough or sore throat. However, they pose a risk of spreading the disease to others.

Besides the 27 asymptomatic patients, 10 new confirmed COVID cases, including six from Chinese returning from abroad, were reported in the country on Wednesday.

The four other patients -- three from Heilongjiang province bordering Russia and one in Guangdong province -- were domestically transmitted, China's National Health Commission (NHC) said on Thursday.

No death was reported on Wednesday, the NHC said.

616 MORE DEATHS IN UK

The British Government said another 616 more people with the coronavirus have died in UK hospitals, taking the total to nearly 19,000.

The daily increase reported was lower than the 759 in the previous 24-hour period.

The UK's death toll is the fourth highest in Europe, behind Italy, Spain and France, all of whom have reported more than 20,000 deaths.

There has been increasing scrutiny of the UK figures in recent days for understating the actual number of people having died of Covid-19. They don't include those who have died in care homes or elsewhere in the community.

The Government also said the number of daily tests increased slightly to more than 23,000. The number remains well shy of the government's target of 100,000 a day by the end of the month, an ambition that has met with widespread

skepticism.

ITALY'S DAILY DEATH TOLL EDGES UP, BUT NEW CASES FALL

Deaths from the Covid-19 epidemic in Italy climbed by 464 on Thursday, against 437 the day before, the Civil Protection Agency said, but the daily tally of new infections declined to 2,646 from 3,370 on Wednesday.

The total official death toll since the outbreak came to light on Feb. 21 now stands at 25,549, the agency said, the second highest in the world after that of the United States.

The number of confirmed cases was 189,973, the third highest global tally behind those of the United States and Spain. People registered as currently carrying the illness fell to 106,848 from 107,699 on

Wednesday, a fourth consecutive daily decline.

There were 2,267 people in intensive care on Thursday against 2,384 on Wednesday, maintaining a long-running decline. Of those originally infected, 57,576 were declared recovered against 54,543 a day earlier.

SINGAPORE RECORDS MORE THAN 1,000 CASES

Singapore has recorded more than 1,000 new cases on Thursday to bring its total past 11,000. It has now overtaken South Korea to be the fourth worst-hit nation in Asia after China, India and Japan.

Fatality is low at 12. The numbers have consistently breached 1,000 daily since Monday because of aggressive testing of foreign workers locked down in crowded dormitories across the city-state.

The upsurge has forced Singapore to extend its partial lockdown by another four weeks until June 1.

RUSSIA'S CASELOAD SURPASSES 60,000

Russia's reported coronavirus caseload has surpassed 60,000. The Government regis-

tered 4,774 confirmed cases on Thursday, which brought the country's total to 62,773. The official death toll rose to 555, with 42 people dying since the Wednesday.

Russia has been in lockdown since the first week of April, with the vast majority of regions ordering residents to stay home and not go out unless it's to buy groceries and medicines or to take out the trash.

As the outbreak picked up speed, President Vladimir Putin indefinitely postponed a nationwide vote on the constitutional reform that would allow him to stay in power until 2036, as well as the traditional military parade on Red Square marking the 75th anniversary of World War II victory.

The events had been scheduled for late April and early May and had dominated the Kremlin's political agenda for months.

China could have had 2.32L cases by mid-Feb: Study

PTI ■ BEIJING

China could have reported over 2.32 lakh Covid-19 cases by mid-February — more than four times of what was officially announced — if it had followed a broader criterion to count the total number of infections, a study has said.

"We estimated that there were at least 2,32,000 infections in the first epidemic wave of coronavirus in mainland China," said University of Hong Kong researchers, who conducted a study on the criteria applied by China in counting number of virus cases.

According to China's

National Health Commission (NHC), the total number of confirmed Covid-19 cases in China stood at 82,798 with 4,632 fatalities as of Wednesday.

China has faced severe criticism from the US and other European countries over under-reporting of coronavirus cases and an alleged cover-up.

On April 17, China revised the death toll in virus epicentre Wuhan by 50 per cent to 1,290 additional fatalities, taking the city's total toll to 3,869.

The total number of confirmed coronavirus cases in Wuhan was revised to 50,333 an increase of 325, according

to an official announcement on April 16.

The Wuhan Municipal Headquarters explained the revision, saying they were in accordance to laws and regulations as well as the principle of being responsible to history, the people and the deceased.

In the study published in medical journal The Lancet, researchers said China might have had 2,32,000 confirmed cases rather than the official count of about 55,000 by February 20, if a revised definition adopted earlier in the month had been applied throughout.

"The true number of infec-

tions could still be higher than what is currently (being) estimated considering the possibility of under-detection of some infections, particularly those that were mild and asymptomatic even under the broadest case definitions," a news report on the study by the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post said on Thursday.

The researchers, led by Peng Wu from the University of Hong Kong's School of Public Health, looked at the various classification systems used by the Chinese Government after the epidemic broke out in Wuhan late December.

AROUND THE WORLD IN PICTURES



Trump temporarily suspends immigration into US for 60 days to protect American workers

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump has signed an executive order to suspend certain types of immigration into the US for 60 days to protect the jobs of Americans laid off due to the Covid-19 pandemic that has ravaged the country's economy.

The temporary suspension of immigration will affect those who are legally seeking entry into the US for employment purposes but not the ones who are already living in the country, the order said.

Describing it as "a very powerful order" Trump told reporters during his daily news briefing at the White House on Wednesday that he signed the



Americans laid off by the virus to be replaced with new immigrant labour flown in from abroad," he said.

The executive order, which contains a number of exemptions, released by the White House, said the new provisions apply to foreign nationals outside the US who do not have an immigrant visa that is valid on the effective date of proclamation.

It also applies to those foreign nationals who do not have an official travel document other than a visa that is valid on the effective date of proclamation or issued on any date thereafter that permits him or her to travel to the US and seek entry or admission.

WHO chief brushes off resignation calls, appeals for US aid

Geneva: The World Health Organization chief said on Wednesday he hopes the United States will reconsider its freeze in funding for his agency and vowed to keep working on "saving lives" despite calls from some US lawmakers for his resignation.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said he hopes the US believes the agency is "an important investment, not just to help others, but for the US to stay safe" amid the pandemic.

President Donald Trump last week announced a temporary halt to US funding for the UN Agency, alleging a WHO cover-up and missteps handling the outbreak. The U.S. is the Geneva-based agency's biggest donor, providing hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of support each year.

In Washington, officials said halt involved new funding for the WHO, and was expected to continue for 60 to 90 days. A group of Republican lawmakers in House of Representatives last week suggested that Trump should condition any voluntary US Contributions to WHO this year on Tedros' resignation. AP

Africa's 43% jump in Covid-19 cases in week worries experts



AP ■ CAPE TOWN

Africa has registered a 43 per cent jump in reported Covid-19 cases in the last week, highlighting a warning from the World Health Organization that the continent of 1.3 billion could become the next epicentre of the global outbreak.

Africa also has a "very, very limited" and "very, very strained" testing capacity, John Nkengasong, director of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said in

his weekly briefing on Thursday.

It means that the surge in infections on the continent is likely to be even higher in reality, he said. WHO's recent report painted a grim picture for Africa. It warned the virus could kill more than 3,00,000 people and push 30 million into desperate poverty.

Africa still has time to avert such a disaster, but testing people and tracing virus cases is critical, said Nkengasong.

2 cats in New York are first pets in US to test positive

New York: Two cats in New York State have tested positive for the novel coronavirus, marking the first confirmed case of the Covid-19 infection in pets in the US, according to health authorities.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL) said on Wednesday that the two cats, who live in separate areas of New York state, have become the first pets in the country to test positive for coronavirus.

"These are the first pets in the United States to test positive," the two agencies said in a joint statement.

The agencies said that both pets had mild respiratory illness and are expected to make a full recovery. PTI

Human trials of vaccine developed by Oxford University begin in UK

PTI ■ LONDON

Human trials of an eagerly-awaited vaccine, developed by the prestigious Oxford University, against the novel coronavirus began in the UK on Thursday, with scientists giving it an 80 per cent chance of success.

The UK government has pledged 20 million pounds to support the "ChAdOx1 nCoV-19" coronavirus vaccine trial programme, with UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock saying the government would "throw everything at it" finding a vaccine against the deadly virus.

"After all, the upside of being the first country in the world to develop a successful vaccine is so huge that I am throwing everything at it," he said. The vaccine being trialled is made from a harmless chimpanzee virus that has been genetically engineered to carry part of the coronavirus to be tested on volunteers aged between 18 and 55 who are in good health.

3 key Madhesi parties in Nepal merge to form Janata Samajwadi Party

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Two key Madhesi parties in Nepal on Thursday merged and launched a new party named Janata Samajwadi Party, two days after President Bidya Devi Bhandari gave her assent to a controversial bill, allowing political parties to split.

With the new bill coming into effect, leaders of political parties can split their party if they have 40 per cent support either in the central committee or in the parliamentary party.

Samajwadi Party and Rastriya Janata Party Nepal (RJPN) on Thursday handed over a joint application to the Election Commission to notify about the unification of the two parties to form the new party. The new party has a

combined strength of 34 members in the House of Representatives, making it the third largest force in the 275-member Parliament.

Major political parties, including Nepali Congress, Rastriya Prajatantra Party, and the Madhesi parties have voiced strong opposition to the new bill and asked the government to withdraw it, saying it will bring political instability at a time when the country is fighting the coronavirus pandemic.

Senior Madhesi leader Rajendra Mahato has slammed Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, saying the bill was brought with a view to splitting the Madhesi party at a time when the country needed unity and consensus to contain the outbreak of the coronavirus.

Iran Guard commander threatens US Navy after Trump tweet

AP ■ TEHRAN

The leader of Iran's Revolutionary Guard warned Thursday he ordered his forces to potentially target the US Navy after President Donald Trump's tweet a day earlier threatening to sink Iranian vessels.

Iran separately summoned the Swiss ambassador, who looks out for America's interests in the country, to complain about Trump's tweet coming amid months of escalating attacks between the two countries.

While the coronavirus pandemic temporarily paused those tensions,

Iran has since begun pushing back against the Trump

administration's maximum pressure policy both militarily and diplomatically.

The Guard also launched Iran's first military satellite Wednesday, unveiling a previously secret space programme.

Speaking to state television on Thursday, Guard Gen. Hossein Salami warned his forces "will answer any action by a decisive, effective and quick counteraction."

"We have ordered our naval units at sea that if any warships or military units from the naval force of America's terrorist army wants to jeopardize our commercial vessels or our combat vessels, they must target those (American) warships or naval units," Salami said.

Trend Slazer

Just embrace yourself: Taapsee

Actor **TAAPSEE PANNU** has opened up about the time that made her accept her flaws, and helped her acquire a new identity.

She took to her social media to share a picture in which she is wearing a blue saree.

"This is like a BTS from a shoot I did. I remember how I was concerned that my short hair won't suit the saree because they are so traditional. But Gaurang was nonchalant and wanted to use my original hair length, colour, texture, and keep everything natural. That really made me think sometimes you just have to embrace yourself the way you are and only then the world will embrace you, too. The day I accepted my flaws was the day I came into my true self."



'Due to the scarcity of funds, particularly among the daily wage earners, most would be looking to spend their money on just food and women's sanitation might not be a top priority for many. We need to focus on how those women can get pads free of cost. I also urge government to distribute sanitary pads with daily ration.'

—**Manushi Chhillar**

Actor **RAJEEV KHANDELWAL** will make his theatre debut through the play *Court Martial*. He says essaying a character on stage is supremely challenging but it provides the ultimate validation for any actor.



"I think essaying a character on stage for theatre is supremely challenging and provides the ultimate validation for any actor. I have always envied actors who can entertain audience on stage. It was as good as one of the things in my 'to do list'," Rajeev said.

Written by Swadesh Deepak, Zee Theatre's teleplay also stars Govind Pandey, Bhagwan Tiwari.

Naomi eats just one meal a day

Supermodel **NAOMI CAMPBELL** has admitted she eats only once a day to maintain her perfect frame.

She confessed when asked in an interview what her usual routine is on a Sunday.

"I eat my lunch, which is my dinner, because I really only eat once a day," Naomi said. But she does believe in some sweet treats.

She said, "Sunday is my treat, so I make desserts, and cakes." Though she refuses to eat gluten and dairy.

She talked about her love for fasting, "I eat when I feel like it and I don't starve myself. If I want to do a day of just not eating, I do it and just do water or juice. It just depends how I feel."



NEXT IN FASHION

As the pandemic hits the world, virtual fitting rooms, garment hygiene, integrated online and offline sales might be the norm forward, says **SAKSHI SHARMA**

Not too long back, stepping into a store, trying out several outfits and purchasing the one with the best fit and style was a routine. But that will not be the case anymore. In the Coronavirus-hit world, fashion companies have been forced to halt their operations as all the stores are shut and the supply chains are left hanging mid-way.

The major question here is — What will happen to the industry when the pandemic is over? Fashion designer Payal Jain says that the fashion world has been moving towards change for the last decade, as fashion weeks have been logistically and monetarily strained. This global shift will certainly bring change to the formats we have been used to and force us to rethink the entire model. A lot of the interaction that happens during fashion weeks can easily move online but sadly, the experience of watching a show cannot. Like everything else around us, we will need to be creative and build platforms that don't endanger anyone's life and health. Large gatherings will be a thing of the past and new platforms will evolve. Life and fashion after COVID-19 will certainly not be the same!

WHAT NEXT?

Right from consumer choices, pricing to upcycling and sustainability, the fashion industry might undergo massive

changes. It may, at the same time, give rise to new themes and trends as cash flow is less. Ayushi Gudwani, founder and CEO, FableStreet, says, "No matter what, the industry is here to stay undoubtedly. However, the consciousness of the customer, both about the costing and the products, is going to evolve. There will be new trends. The functionality of the garment will take precedence over style. Things like anti-microbial, multiple-use wear or easy to wash and quick-dry would become much more important over stylish garments. You would want to ensure that your outfits are regularly sanitised." She goes on to add that the boundaries between office wear and evening wear would start blurring as people would want to use multi-purpose garments from morning to evening. They wouldn't want to buy 10 outfits but prefer one. This mindset is here to stay.

In terms of pricing, the focus will be more on value for money products so high and luxury fashion might take a back seat. Ayushi agrees and says, "Yes, this is because the consumers are becoming fairly conscious about where to spend. We will go through a difficult time for more than one-and-a-half years. And likely to go through recession and job losses too. So people would like to save money, especially in men's fashion. Overall, the mindset of conserving cash and focussing on

value will prevail."

While the pandemic has put brakes on the fashion industry, Sana Jhamb, director, PR and business development, Epistle Communications, believes that this is short-term and expects a gradual pick up. Focus on upcycling and sustainability will become a norm instead of just being a short-term trend. "The industry is likely to develop more transparent, sustainable, localised, and self-sufficient supply chains," adds she.

While agreeing with Ayushi over drop in purchase of fast fashion and a shift towards comfort and sustainability, there are a few emerging trends which Sarika Grover, co-founder, Green Giraffes Consulting, shares. "An inclination towards athleisure brands is being predicted as most of the people would want to be active at home. Athleisure was already a growing trend and category and is now expected to do better than any other segment in the sector." She adds that we will also see smaller collections and less number of Stock Keeping Units (SKUs) per season for a few years as expenditure on clothing will reduce.

WILL TRIALS AND STORES BE THE SAME AGAIN?

Nothing can quite replicate the experience of trying out clothes for the perfect fit and flattering silhouettes before

buying. That was the reason brands like Myntra started the "Try and Buy" offer to cut through customer apprehension about how a particular garment would look. As a result, online fashion was increasingly becoming comfortable for customers to shop but this too, along with offline stores, will suffer setbacks. In a situation, where maintaining distance is the main solution, how can one ensure that the outfit one is trying out is safe?

Payal says that new and creative ways of accessing sizes and deciding fits will probably evolve so that people feel more comfortable buying online or at retail outlets without being apprehensive. Designer Purvi Doshi feels that the fashion business will gradually evolve as an online business as people will start preferring it more. However, contrary to this belief, Ayushi makes an important point. "People assume that trial will become riskier in a retail setup. However, they miss that in an online setup, returned products are re-sent. This will become risky because one will not have control over these garments as to how many people wore it and if that is safe," she says.

She goes on to add that trials are important but these will reduce in due course of time. The consumer will become smarter. For example, if the style of a particular brand fits you well, you would just want to pick up a fresh piece rather than

trying it out. From the brand perspective, she says, that they will have to be extremely conscious to ensure that the outfits are safe and sanitised. "We can reduce the overall trial to 40-50 pieces and the remaining will be kept fresh. Then those tried pieces will have to be sent back to the manufacturing unit to be sanitised. Meanwhile, the fresh stock can be used for trials," adds she.

Focus and trust on the brand you're purchasing from will become very important. She also raises her concern about the unorganised market as it will become risky and organised players and trustworthy brands will take precedence.

Well, fashion stores will never be the same again for one more reason — we will now be more cautious of gatherings. People will be really conscious and would want to maintain social distancing. "Stores will need to put a lot of safeguards in place. For instance, not allowing entry of more than a particular number of visitors at a particular time. Ensuring that people maintain a reasonable distance from each other. We are also coming up with ideas such as creating a "by appointment only" section where the access will be given to only a limited number of people during a given time period," says Ayushi.

Maintaining hygiene in the stores is a must. The pandemic has made people hyper-aware of these issues and hygiene standards will have to increase. "The clothes should be steam-ironed and sanitised. The trial rooms will have to be equipped with face mask, sanitisers and hand gloves," says Purvi.

Sana expects a slow pick-up in brick-and-mortar shops. Online sales are likely to increase while physical retail will see a return to normalcy only after a safe time has passed.

Agreeing with Purvi, Grover adds, "AI Virtual trial rooms would become important. There are a few companies who have built these softwares. I can walk into a store and based on my measurements and other attributes, shortlist garments. So this will help me to buy garments based on the virtual fitting or at the very least, try a lesser number of garments."

CAN RENTALS TREND NOW?

Rental fashion market will become very risky as people will be hesitant to rent clothes. They won't be sure about the number of people who have worn or rented a certain dress before them. Naturally, this would make them apprehensive about safety. The market will have to ramp up its hygiene standards to assure customers that they are safe. "People's hesitation is likely to drive down sales, initially, but as new processes and systems are put into place, a new normal will emerge," says Grover.

Earlier, price was an important factor for the success of rental companies. Going forward, now it would be a combination of price and hygiene. "Communication around care and hygiene would drive the business. Packaging would need to be re-looked. Conversations have already begun on materials and how long the virus can stay on a cardboard box," adds she. Ayushi adds, "The price value equation will undergo changes. Consumers would not be ready to pay more and want that the rentals are sanitised in the same cost."

Another trend that may see an upward spiral is that people would be comfortable with repeating the outfits and upcycling existing ones rather than renting. Ayushi says, "People would prefer buying one quality garment."

Sana holds out a sliver of hope, "Once the threat is over, we will fall back into the same routine, perhaps with some added precautions."

Remembering Rudy

RUDRATEJ 'RUDY' SINGH, president, BMW Group India, who passed away earlier this week, will be missed by one and all



It was from the luxury watch market, which he said, had become symptomatic of the state of the luxury market in India, which is dominated by discounts. He wanted to change that as part of his brief to transform the fortunes of BMW in India, which had seen a few rough years. But now, armed with a new line-up, especially the fantastic new 3-series, Rudy wanted the premium and luxury car market in India to pivot from being discount-driven to becoming experience-driven.

He wanted to highlight that buying a BMW was buying into an experience, a family, and not just a badge, through which it competed with Audi, Mercedes-Benz, Jaguar and Volvo with discounts. "The competition should be about the different experiences that different brands offer," said he. We were supposed to have met in Chennai, on March 9, when BMW India introduced the facelifted X1. The event was later cancelled due to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic. In a text, I'd mentioned to him that we'd meet again soon. But that never happened.

I feel really gutted that Rudy died not just because he



was so young or just a few years older than me but also because it came just two weeks after BMW India lost their sales head Mihir Dayal after a battle with cancer. Ironically, one of Rudy's last tweets was him mourning Mihir's death and he presciently, it seems in retrospect, said that he would join Mihir soon.

Rudy's family, his friends as well as his colleagues both at BMW India and his previous workplaces. It is truly painful to lose someone at a time like this where we cannot even go to a funeral or remember someone at a prayer meeting. But Rudy did leave his mark on the Indian premium car industry and he will be remembered fondly.

My deepest condolences to

'Feels great to break stereotypes'

Randeep Hooda is glad to be the first Indian male actor doing a Hollywood action film, and the Bollywood star says it feels great to be able to break stereotypical references of Indian characters in the West.

Randeep will be entering Hollywood as Saju in Netflix's *Extraction*, starring Chris Hemsworth and David Harbour. Randeep has stepped out of his comfort zone to make an action-packed entry in the West.

"I was glad to get the film on two to three levels. I got to feature as the first Indian male actor doing action in a Hollywood film. Breaking the stereotypes of IT professionals, millionaires or comic relief in a film. It was great that I was able to break that barrier," Randeep said.

He added, "I haven't done hand to hand action much. I have an action image but haven't done much of it (on screen). So, this was a new thing. It was a new territory for me as an actor, to be able to use other factors and not just drama, and to be able to use my body and learn new things. I really enjoyed it. And even felt safe while doing it because they were so well prepared. I was elated and grateful that I got to do this part."

In the film, Saju is the one who brings Hemsworth's Tyler Rake on board to the extraction of his boss' child. The character is layered, with an emotional vein adding a touch of sensitivity in the action-packed story.

"The layers in the part are a result of discussions, and Sam



Hargrave's vision from discussions, ranging from mutually favourite films and writers. And then (it was a result of) adding a universal emotional angle, which is the family. It deals a lot with that, and wanting to create a difference from the point you first see this guy to the last time you see this guy. His journey was a very gratifying experience," Randeep said while explaining his role.

Originally titled *Dhaka*, the film revolves around Tyler Rake (played by Hemsworth), a fearless, black market mercenary, who embarks on the most deadly extraction of his career when he is enlisted to rescue the kidnapped son of an imprisoned international crime lord. It has been shot extensively in India, along with other places around the world.

(*Extraction* releases on Netflix today.) —IANS



DIAL FOR FINE DINING

As eating out becomes a no-go zone, hotels tap into food delivery to reach their patrons while ensuring their safety, says SAIMI SATTAR

For all of us who are experiencing this moment, it is certainly a watershed time. From now on, we would always talk about life before and after the pandemic as nothing will ever be the same. Eating out was one of those things that we did without giving it a second thought as we took it for granted. Birthdays, anniversaries, catching up with friends, not in a mood to cook — all were good enough reasons to eat out. But with the lockdown and social distancing in place, dining out is certainly not an option, at least for some time. But that does not have to mean that you miss out on dishes that you savour. Most of the five star hotels in the city have tapped the delivery route to dish out the favourites of their patrons. Many have seen a spike in delivery which earlier formed almost a negligible part of the services that they offered.

Executive Chef Vikram Ganpule at Andaz, Delhi says that a definite rise can be seen, "On a daily basis, at Annamaya restaurant there were three-four deliveries earlier. The number has now jumped to 10-12 orders per day." But what has really surprised him is the rise in the demand for artisanal breads which, he says, they are making in larger quantities than was done during pre-lockdown.

According to Vivek Shukla, general manager, The LaLiT New Delhi and corporate affairs, deliveries have climbed up by 50 per cent at the hotel.

When it is about food, there are bound to be some dishes which are preferred more than the others. Biryani, in its multifarious variations, certainly makes the cut for most hotels and restaurants. Rohit Arora, area general manager, THE Park

New Delhi says that it is this rice dish along with pizzas and pastries from Flurys that diners want to dig into most. The hotel can send it directly to its and has also enrolled the services of different delivery platforms for the same.

Ganpule lists something more specific. With the outbreak of the virus, there is certainly an increased focus on health and eating more wholesome food. "Our millet biryani, both with chicken and vegetables, has been ordered quite a few times. Then there are the good old favourites like butter chicken, kebabs and tikkas that have found favour. Our regular customers also specially request for our *Lamb chops* and *Homestyle chicken curry* which were popular on our regular menu but weren't included on the delivery one. Even though people are a little wary of salads, *Nutrition bomb* which we make with in-house grown microgreens is also popular," says Ganpule. The hotel has tied up with delivery services for the transport of the 30 odd selected items which is done in two slots, one at lunchtime and the other for dinner.

At LaLiT too, it is the signature dish-

es that rule the menu. "Biryani, *Dal Baluchi* and chicken are the ones that are ordered the most. There is a definite spike in bakery products — cakes, breads and other desserts also," says Shukla. The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group's outdoor catering vertical, The Lalit Food Truck Company looks after larger orders and more elaborate customised and bulk menu for families. This operates from eight in the morning to six in the evening while a special midnight menu can be delivered from 11 at night to four in the morning. Smaller orders are delivered through Swiggy and Zomato from 11 in the morning to 11 at night. The menu for this has snacks, grills, sandwiches biryani, main course dishes and desserts.

A new player on the delivery scene, Roseate Hotels & Resorts which started the service as recently as April 10, has seen the maximum interest in its bakery products like cakes, breads and more. These are delivered from seven in the morning to 10 at night. Interestingly, the delivery menu has a spread which includes macaroons for those with a sweet tooth as well as snacks



like sandwiches, burgers and more. There are Indian restaurant specialties like *Tandoori paneer tikka*, *Silbatte ki shammi*, *Murgh Kolhapuri*, *Chukandar chilgoze ki tikki*, *Malabar fish* and more.

The selections are done and the idea that it can land on your table any moment does not necessarily mean that we can eat

it without any apprehensions in the new world that has established its hold on our minds and hearts. Food delivery needs to be safe as became apparent when a pizza delivery boy infected with COVID-19 visited 72 households before being detected with the virus. So even though it can lead to a little more time, safety is paramount in days of the Coronavirus.

The checks at Andaz are at two levels — in the kitchen and also for the delivery service boys. Ganpule says, "We ensure in-house hygiene, temperature checks, social distancing and mask wearing without a single deviation. Since the lockdown, the team is staying in the hotel and when they come from their rooms, there is a specific path that they follow. Their temperatures are checked thrice everyday while entering, exiting the kitchen and once in between. There is a hygiene manager, who ensures that all the protocols are followed and that everyone is wearing gloves, masks while working." Moreover, the hygiene standards are extended to the delivery services too as the temperatures of people who come to collect the food are checked as is the fact that they wear gloves and masks.

The LaLiT is ensuring safety on its part by following all suggested sanitisation processes by WHO. The teams have been given intensive training, the property is regularly fumigated and kitchen surfaces cleaned. "All staff working in the kitchens and hotel premises are wearing face masks and hand gloves. All products — groceries and vegetables — are first collected at the landing bay, where they are washed and sanitised, before going to the kitchens for use. Our delivery channels ensure that the

delivery men have gone through proper hygiene training. The food also has double layer of packing, so guests can easily discard the outside layer to avoid surface contact," says Shukla.

Roseate too is doing its bit. Dr Ankur Bhatia, executive director, Roseate Hotels & Resorts points out, "We have contact less delivery and ensure safe packaging (double outer layer), multiple frequent sanitation of our kitchen utensils, regular temperature checks of all involved personnel to ensure safe food delivery."

Neeraj Tyagi, Director of Culinary, Pullman & Novotel New Delhi Aerocity says that they are adhering to international standards as the food is prepared with the best in class safety measures and hygiene standards. "The delivery organisations too are using strict safety and hygiene protocols," he says. The hotel does not deliver on its own but has tapped into the two food delivery services like the others.

Shukla says that the reason for the spike in delivery is because people are looking for a change. Bhatia points out the reason why hotels score when it comes to deliveries. He says, "Guests are slightly more comfortable to order directly from the hotel considering hygiene factors as compared to their neighbourhood restaurants. Moreover, the team is in constant touch with regular guests and at times goes out of its way to deliver favourites even if they are not a part of our customised menu."

So the next time that you are craving for a meal from your favourite hotel, all you need to do is place that phone call or simply log in to your favourite ordering platform.

R E C I P E S

WOODFORD RESERVE SOUR

WHAT YOU NEED

- Woodford Reserve: 2 oz
- Lemon juice: 0.75 oz
- Honey syrup: 0.75 oz
- Ginger
- Lemon peel

METHOD

- Mix honey and warm water in 1:1 proportion, which is soluble in cocktail.
- Add whiskey, lime juice and honey water in an old fashioned glass without ice and stir.
- Add four cubes of ice and stir again. Then add four more cubes and stir the drink well once again. Take a slice of fresh ginger, rub it on the rim of the glass vigorously and drop into the cocktail.
- Garnish with a lemon peel.

Courtesy: Jack Daniel.



SPEYSIDE TIRAMISU

WHAT YOU NEED

- Glenfiddich 12-year-old: 60 ml
- Chocolate sauce: 15 ml
- Single cream: 15 ml
- Espresso shot: 15 ml
- Caramel syrup/honey/maple syrup: 10 ml
- Orange peel or cinnamon

METHOD

- In a shaker glass, pour all the ingredients along with some ice and shake well.
- Strain and serve straight up in a coupe or martini or margarita glass. It's up to you.
- Garnish with orange peel or cinnamon.
- The cocktail is ready to serve.

Courtesy: Angad Singh Gandhi, India Brand Ambassador, Glenfiddich.



TOMATO ONION BRUCHETTA MINT MAYO

WHAT YOU NEED

- Mint mayo: 1 cup
- Baguette or Italian bread roll: 1 loaf
- Onions (finely chopped): 2
- Tomatoes (finely chopped): 2
- Olive oil: 1 to 2 tsp
- Pepper powder: 1 tsp
- Butter: 2 tbsp
- Salt to taste
- Basil leaves (finely chopped): 8

METHOD

- Take a tissue paper and press it over the chopped tomatoes to ensure that all the liquid from the tomatoes is absorbed.



- In a mixing bowl, add tomato, onion, basil leaves, olive oil, pepper powder and salt.
- Refrigerate the onion and tomato mixture for 20 minutes.
- Cut the bread diagonally into 1/2 inch thick slices. Apply butter on both sides of bread.
- For this, heat a *tava* and

- toast the slices till they turn brownish.
- Once the slices cool, put them on a plate.
- Spread mint mayo on the toasted slices.
- Top this with two tablespoon of onion and tomato mixture. Serve.

Courtesy: Del Monte.

SPAGHETTI WITH CALIFORNIA WALNUTS, SAUSAGE AND EGG

WHAT YOU NEED

- Spaghetti: 1 packet
- Chicken sausages (chopped): 4
- Egg: 1
- A handful of California walnuts (crushed)
- Italian spices: 1 tbsp
- Red chilli powder: ½ tsp
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Olive oil: 2 tbsp
- Garlic pods: 5 to 6
- Tomato purée: 50 gm
- Fresh tomatoes: 2
- Onion: 1
- Bay leaves: 3 to 4

METHOD

- In a pot, bring water to boil. Add a few drops of oil, a pinch of salt and add the pasta to it. Boil till *al dente*, remove and strain. Let it cool.
- In another pan, add oil, let it heat and add bay leaves. Then add garlic and sauté till golden brown.



- In the mixer-grinder, grind the tomatoes and onion. Add the mix to the pan and cook for five minutes.
- Add spices, crushed California walnuts, salt and pepper and let the sauce bubble.
- Add oil in a pan and sauté the chopped sausages till they are golden brown.
- Add the sausages and spaghetti to the sauce and mix well.

- Last, in the same pan used for the sausages, add a little oil and fry an egg.
- Place cooked spaghetti in a plate and top with the fried egg. Garnish with some spring onions and a dash of chilli powder on the egg. Serve hot.

Courtesy: Chef Anahita Dhondy at SodaBottleOpenerWala.

KAYI OBBATTU TUPA

WHAT YOU NEED

- Fresh grated coconut: 2 cups
- Plain flour: 2 cups
- Jaggery: 1.1/2 cups
- Oil: 2 cups
- Green cardamom: 5
- Turmeric: 1 tsp

METHOD

- In a bowl, take sieved all-purpose flour (*maida*) and turmeric powder.
- Add water gradually to form a pliable dough.
- Add three tbsp of *til* oil and knead it well to form a smooth dough. Keep it aside.

For holige:

- Take two cups of freshly grated coconut and grind. Keep aside.
- In a heavy bottom pan add jaggery and ½ cup of water. Jaggery dissolves in water and you can see the froth on top. Keep stirring until you get the



thick syrup consistency.

- Now add ground coconut into the jaggery syrup. Stir it well to form a thick paste. Switch off the flame.
- Coconut *pooran* is ready for stuffing. Make sure your *hoorna*

or *pooran* is thick in consistency and can easily form balls.

- Now add cardamom powder and mix. Allow it to cool for some time.
- Make small balls with the mix

and keep them ready for stuffing.

For coconut mix:

- Take one ball and flatten it with your fingers while placing it on your hand.
- Place the jaggery stuffing in the centre. Take the edge and start pleating to cover the stuffing.
- When the dough covers *pooran* completely, seal it on top. Dust enough rice flour, roll it very slowly.
- Roll it to medium thickness. Heat the skillet and transfer the rolled *pooran* on to the skillet carefully.
- In medium flame, let it cook, adding four drops of *til* oil.
- When small bubbles form, just flip it over to cook the other side. Remove when it is cooked.
- Serve it with hot ghee.

Courtesy: Chef De Cuisine, Rajesh Kumar Ramaiah at Secrets of Bangalore.

FTP set for complete overhaul

PNS/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/DUBAI

The ICC Chief Executives Committee on Thursday unanimously agreed to revamp the Future Tour Programs (FTP) till 2023, conceding that the "scale and complexity" of getting cricket started again "cannot be underestimated" in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The CEC meeting, held via tele-conference, decided that a decision on the World Test Championship (WTC) and the proposed ODI league, scheduled in June, can be taken at a later date. However, it is a given that the WTC final is unlikely to be held in June, 2021 as per the current FTP cycle and a four-month lag is expected.

But the T20 World Cup is on course even though Cricket Australia CEO Kevin Roberts said that his board is ready for any eventuality.

"There was agreement that the disrupted FTP programme would need to be collectively reviewed through to 2023 with a view to rescheduling as much of the cricket that has been postponed due to COVID-19 as possible," the ICC said in a statement.

Already, England's tour of Sri Lanka stands postponed along with Australia's tour of New Zealand.

Pakistan and the West Indies' tours during the English summer also look to be in serious doubt. In fact, the West Indies' tour is all but postponed.

It was also learnt that contingency plans are being made for the T20 World Cup in Australia, scheduled for October and November.



Rohit Sharma in a file picture PTI

"The CEC was updated on the continuing contingency planning for all ICC global events, including the ICC men's T20 World Cup 2020 and the ICC women's Cricket World Cup 2021.

"Planning for both events as currently scheduled is ongoing."

When asked about the contingency plans, a CEC member told PTI, "The complete FTP has gone for a toss. So, the remaining part of next three years will be revamped.

"Although all these Test series are part of the WTC, but bilateral series is an agreement

between two countries. So, all the rescheduled series will take time.

"So, while all the league phase of WTC was set to be completed by March 2021, it is simply not possible now as there will be a few more Test series that will be disrupted.

The CEC member said that New Zealand might not travel to Bangladesh.

"So expect at least a four-month lag in WTC cycle," he said.

ICC's official line is that "discussions and decisions on this and the future of both the World Test Championship and

the ICC men's cricket World Cup Super League will be held at a later date when there is a greater understanding of the impact of the cricket that has been lost on the competitions."

Chair of the ICC Medical Committee, Dr Peter Harcourt provided a general medical update to the meeting and the challenge that the governing body is facing.

"The situation is rapidly evolving and full of significant risk as there is still a lot to learn about COVID-19 which can make decision making difficult.

"The ICC Medical Committee is working with

Member medical representatives to build a comprehensive picture of the issues cricket is facing," he said.

Harcourt made it clear that the roadmap for resumption will be different for different countries depending on the medical situation.

"This will consider everything from player preparation to government restrictions and advisories and bio-bubbles."

He admitted that it is indeed a complex situation caused by the pandemic which has resulted in lakhs of deaths.

"The scale and complexity of getting cricket started again

Goal is to help India win two of the three upcoming WC: Rohit

FIANS ■ MUMBAI

Rohit Sharma's target is to help the Indian team win two of the three World Cups they are slated to be part of in the near future, the limited overs vice-captain and ace batsman said on Thursday.

India are scheduled to take part in the 2020 T20 World Cup later this year in Australia followed by another T20 World Cup in India next year. Then there is the 2023 50-over World Cup. India, led by Virat Kohli, lost in the semi-finals of the 2019 World Cup to New Zealand.

"We know we have three World Cups coming up. Among the three World Cups, we should win at least two. That is my goal," Rohit said during an Instagram chat with ace off-spinner Harbhajan Singh.

Rohit also said the Indian team is working on giving players a longer rope and backing them to express themselves over a period of time.

"We do talk about backing players and giving them a longer run. We are trying to give players batting at No 5,6,7 a longer rope," he said.

"I understand the captain (Virat Kohli) and head coach (Ravi Shastri) are under pressure to pick team while others are sitting out," he added.

The Indian team has drawn flak for sometime for not giving players enough time to settle in the team. They were heavily criticised for not finding a stable No 4 batsman for the World Cup with first KL Rahul and then Vijay Shankar slotting in that role.

"When I came in the team, I was also in and out. It is on the individual how he makes most of the opportunity and take it forward. We need to



Rohit Sharma in a file picture PTI

back players. He should get his chance otherwise he will always be in two minds," stressed the 32-year old who leads Mumbai Indians in the Indian Premier League (IPL).

Rohit also heaped praise on teammate Rahul, saying he loves watching him bat from the other end. Rahul has been in good form and did well during India's tour of New Zealand.

"I love watching KL bat from the other end. He is a very good looking batsman. He is very pleasing to the eye."

Rohit also spoke highly of young batsman Shubman Gill, saying the 20-year old is India's future.

"Gill is also a fluent batsman. He is India's future. When he will get his chance and score consistently, he will get that confidence."

Asked to name five Indian batsmen he is fond of, Rohit said: "Sachin (Tendulkar), Rahul (Dravid), Virender (Sehwag), VVS Laxman, and Sourav Ganguly."



DK still waiting for CSK call

FIANS ■ NEW DELHI

India wicket-keeper-batsman Dinesh Karthik has revealed he thought he was going to be picked by Chennai Super Kings (CSK) for the inaugural edition of the Indian Premier League (IPL).

Karthik stated he was almost sure to be snapped up by CSK as he was 'the biggest name from Tamil Nadu' at the time. But the move never materialised as CSK sought MS Dhoni for then record sum and didn't go for Karthik at all.

"In 2008, I was in

Australia and the auction was happening. In the lead up to that, I was convinced that the biggest name from Tamil Nadu who is also playing for the country...I'm sure they (Chennai Super Kings) are going to pick me. The question is whether they are going to make me the captain or not...that was going on in my head. And the first name they picked as Dhoni, for 1.5 million and he was sitting right around the corner with me. And he didn't even tell me that they are going to pick him," Karthik told Cricbuzz.

"Probably he didn't know. But that was the biggest dagger to my heart. So I thought that they would pick me later. It's been 13 years and I am still waiting for that elusive call from CSK."

Karthik has been sort of a journeyman in the cash-rich league and has played for teams like Delhi Daredevils (now Delhi Capitals), Kings XI Punjab, Mumbai Indians, RCB, Gujarat Lions and now Kolkata Knight Riders, where he led the team to play-offs last term.

Eng players ready to be quarantined to play int'l cricket: Woakes

PTI ■ LONDON

England players would not mind being quarantined together for a month if that's what resumption of international cricket will require in a world ravaged by the Covid-19 pandemic, all-rounder Chris Woakes has said.

"If players have to be put in quarantine for a period of time, I think players would be happy to do so,"

Woakes was quoted as saying by Telegraph.Co.Uk.

"...If it was at a venue where we stayed on site, players would be happy to do so. But it depends how long for.

"If they said it was going to be for three months, I think players might not be too keen. But if it was a three-to-four week window, I think guys would be open to do that without too many issues," he added.

This Indian team needs more match-winners: Harbhajan

FIANS ■ MUMBAI

Veteran India off-spinner Harbhajan Singh on Thursday said the current Indian team lacks a match-winner down the order and is too dependent on Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma.

"This team is too dependent on Virat and you (Rohit). After Virat and you are gone, we lose 70 percent of the matches. Lower down the order few (players) are there who can win matches," Harbhajan said during an Instagram chat

with India limited overs vice-captain Rohit.

"During our time, we had the trust that someone will make runs even after top three is out, taaki match na nikal jaaye haath se (match does not slip out of our hands). This is one area I think this team can work on. You need to find more match-winners," said Harbhajan, India's third highest wicket-taker

in Test cricket.

"Like you (Rohit) had great World Cup (2019). But one had a great World Cup and we reach the semi-finals. Had we got three who did well in the World Cup, we could have won"

The ace offie, who helped India win the 2011 50-over World Cup, also heaped praise on KL Rahul saying he is another match-winner besides Virat and Rohit and can bat anywhere in the order.

"Apart from you (Rohit) and Virat, KL Rahul is a real match-winner. He can play at No 5, 6 and can open as well," said the Turbanator, as he is fondly called.

Euro 2020 to keep original name

AFP ■ NYON

The next European Championship will continue to be called Euro 2020 despite being postponed by a year to 2021, UEFA confirmed on Thursday.

Following an Executive Committee meeting of European football's governing body by videoconference, UEFA said maintaining the same name would be a way of remembering the coronavirus pandemic and the difficult times faced by the continent this year as a result.

In addition, and most importantly, UEFA had already produced huge amounts of branded merchandise before the tournament was put back by a year.

"This choice is in line with UEFA's commitment to make Euro 2020 sustainable and not to generate additional amounts of waste," it said in a statement.

"A change to the name of the event would have meant the destruction and reproduction of such items."

WOMEN'S EURO IN 2022

The next women's European Championship in England has been put back a year to 2022, UEFA confirmed on Thursday, after initially being postponed as a knock-on effect of the coronavirus crisis.

European football's governing body confirmed that the competition will be staged from July 6-31, 2022.

"When we had to take an urgent decision on the postponement of UEFA Euro 2020, we always had the impact on UEFA women's Euro 2021 in mind," said UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin.

"We have carefully considered all options, with our commitment to the growth of women's football at the forefront of our thinking."

Dismissing concerns that the women's game might be considered an afterthought, Ceferin added that the move to 2022 ensured that the women's Euro would be given "the spotlight it deserves."

Moving the Euros to 2022 also avoids any clash with the Tokyo Olympics, which have been pushed back a year to 2021.



CL qualification should be 'on sporting merit': UEFA

NYON: Qualification for the next Champions League should be "on sporting merit" if domestic leagues cannot be completed but countries should "explore all possible options" to finish seasons suspended because of the coronavirus crisis, UEFA said on Thursday.

"If a domestic competition is prematurely terminated for legitimate reasons...UEFA would require (leagues) to select clubs for the UEFA club competitions 2020/21 based on sporting merit" in the current season, European football's governing body said.

That means that, while it remains hopeful that suspended seasons can still somehow be completed, UEFA is now willing to consider "legitimate reasons" to terminate leagues now, with current standings considered final and used as a basis for teams to qualify for the next Champions League and Europa League.

The announcement comes with several countries looking to bring an early end to their football seasons because of the complications of lockdowns imposed due to the health situation.

AFP

Anderson, Broad set Ashes target

LONDON: England pace bowlers James Anderson and Stuart Broad have set their sights on a final Ashes series in Australia before they consider retirement.

Anderson and Broad are first and second respectively in England's list of all-time Test wicket-takers, but both are entering the twilight of their careers.

Anderson is 37 and has endured a series of injury problems over the last 12 months. Although Broad is four years younger than Anderson, he believes his career will not last as long as his fellow paceman.

With the end in sight, both are eager to keep their England places long enough for a memorable farewell Ashes series in Australia in 2021/22.

When asked by Anderson for his retirement plans during an Instagram Live Q&A, Broad said: "I don't think I could go until your age. Your action's so smooth, it looks a lot calmer on your body whereas mine



is a little more forceful through my body I think.

"I'd never want to get to that place where I'm bowling against a 19-year-old and they're going, 'I thought someone said he used to be a good bowler'. I'd hate that. I'd prefer to go that little bit earlier than that little bit later."

"But I'm loving the environment at the minute. I love playing for

England.

"I still have huge motivation to keep playing and you just assess that year by year. And we've got that carrot dangling over us of Australia in Australia which looks like an achievable carrot to grab."

Anderson sees no reason why he should not feature when England next meet their old rivals, as long as he maintains his high standards.

"The big thing is standards. If your standards feel like they're dropping then yeah you might consider finishing," he said.

"But as long as my standards stay high, my fitness levels stay good and my skills stay where I want them to be and my speed stays pretty good which they have been (I'll keep playing)."

"We've got an exciting team and a few young guys who are just starting out on their journey, we've got some more established guys and we've got two guys who have been around a long time." AFP

German football targets May 9 restart

AFP ■ BERLIN

German league football is prepared to resume without spectators on May 9, making it the first major European league back in action, but the final go-ahead rests with political leaders, its chief executive said Thursday.

Following a meeting with Germany's top clubs, Christian Seifert said the league, suspended since March 13 because of the coronavirus pandemic, is "ready" to return next month.

Seifert stressed though that Chancellor Angela Merkel's government and state leaders will make the final decision. They are due to meet next Thursday.



"It is solely down to what the political leaders decide," Seifert said in a video press conference.

"The Bundesliga is ready — regardless of whether it can continue on 9 May or at a later date." Germany has been less affected by the pandemic than other European countries, partly due to mass testing.

But the move to allow play-

ers to resume competition is being treated with caution and Seifert stressed that hygiene precautions would have to be strictly observed.

The players must be tested regularly, given an 11-point code of conduct and hygiene officers would be appointed to each team to ensure the guidelines are adhered to.

Murray 'would play' Sept French Open

PARIS: Andy Murray has said that he would "definitely" play in the rescheduled French Open in September, if it is able to take place as planned.

The tennis season has been shut down due to the coronavirus pandemic since last month and will not resume until mid-July at the earliest.

Wimbledon has been cancelled and Roland Garros organisers controversially moved the French Open until September 20-October 4, starting just a week after the end of the US Open, from its usual start date in May.

"I'd definitely play on the clay, if it goes ahead," former world number one Murray told CNN.

"I'm a bit sceptical whether it will. I would imagine tennis would be one of the last sports to get back to normality because you've obvi-



ously got players, coaches and teams coming from all over the world into one area.

"I'd be surprised if they're back playing sport by September time, but we'll see." AFP