

OPINION 6
THE INVISIBLE
PEOPLE

MONEY 9
STOCK MARKET TUMBLES,
SENSEX SETTLES BELOW 28,000

VIVICITY 11
FOR FUN, LAUGHTER AND
RELIEF

Established 1864

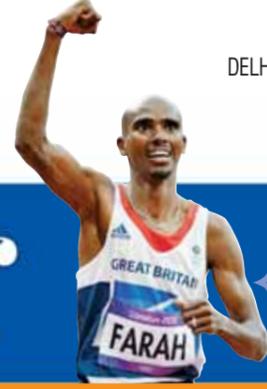
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**FARAH HAS NO
QUALMS OVER
TOKYO DELAY**
12 SPORT

India to go for quicker antibody test

5L kits procured to conduct test in Covid hotspots in urban, rural clusters

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Come Saturday and India will introduce a new way of testing that would identify coronavirus infection through detection of antibody in a patient.

The rapid antibody tests, also known as serology test, will be carried out first in "hotspot" regions in urban and rural clusters. India has reportedly procured nearly 5 lakh such antibody-based rapid testing kits already.

This is not a confirmatory test but the result will come much quicker and will have to be confirmed by an RTPCR test using throat or nasal swab to detect the presence of genetic material of the coronavirus. In the antibody tests, blood testing is done to trace virus in the human body instead of the traditional testing of nasal or throat swab. The outcome will show whether a person had contacted the disease and recovered on his own.

The rapid tests will be conducted on symptomatic cases and even those with "milder symptoms". The decision follows concern regarding spread of the disease after the exodus of workers from cities to their villages and the recent spread of the infection through Tablighi Jamaat congregation in Delhi's Nizamuddin area which the Government has identified as one of the 71 risk hotspots.

The Government told the Supreme Court that there is a



A medic wearing a protective suit as a preventive measure against coronavirus stands outside the building gate of Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan (LNJP) hospital in New Delhi on Friday. LNJP is among a few hospitals in Delhi where Covid-19 patients are attended round the clock

possibility that 30 per cent of these people are already carrying novel coronavirus infection.

Health Ministry Joint Secretary Lav Agarwal on Friday at a Press briefing said from Saturday antibody rapid tests will be conducted and a guideline in this regard is in the final stage.

Following decision by the empowered group, the Indian

Council of Medical Research (ICMR) had issued an interim advisory on Thursday on the use of the rapid antibody test and has finalised modalities in this regard.

So far, the ICMR has given approval to 12 antibody-based rapid test kits for novel coronavirus detection, which will hit the Indian pharma market soon. Seven of these are from

China, and the other five are from the United States and Singapore. At present, symptomatic individuals who have undertaken international travel in the last 14 days, symptomatic contacts of positive Covid-19 cases and symptomatic healthcare workers are tested for coronavirus. Apart from this, on March 21, the Government and ICMR

revised its strategy to include all hospitalised patients of severe acute respiratory infection (SARI) for testing.

Currently, China, South Korea, Japan and the US are manufacturing antibody testing kits to detect Covid-19. An ICMR official said presently there are a total 182 labs, including 52 in private sector that have been approved by the

ICMR.

"Widespread antibody testing could also provide key data for efforts to model the course of the pandemic. Current predictions vary so widely, causing some scientists to question the need for severe containment methods such as lockdowns and social distancing. By indicating how much of the population is already immune because of mild infections, antibody data could offer a key to how fast the virus will continue to spread," says write up in the Science magazine.

Meanwhile, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan has appealed to patients and their families not to create any obstacle in the path of doctors and expressed concerns over misbehaviour with doctors.

US embassy staffer in Delhi corona +ve

New Delhi: The US embassy in New Delhi on Friday said one of its employees had tested positive for the novel coronavirus. According to a news report on Friday, the US envoy to India, Kenneth Juster, in an email dated 1 April informed employees of the mission that an "American had tested positive" and also sought to allay any apprehension of infection spreading by saying that the mission was in the process of "contact tracing" and providing medical support to those who may have been exposed.

Modi: Light lamps to show solidarity in fight against Covid

At 9pm on Sun, the light will show we are together: Modi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

After clapping and beating of Aatensils, now it is time to light up lamps to "show solidarity in the fight against Covid-19". Light candles, diyas and mobile torches at 9 pm this Sunday for nine minutes to energise self and the country to wage a decisive fight against coronavirus, says Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"This Sunday on April 5, we have to challenge coronavirus. I need your nine minutes at 9 pm. Switch off the lights of your house. Light up a candle, lamp or use the mobile torch. This light will show that we are together in this battle," said the Prime Minister in a nationwide address this morning.

He asserted no one must gather on roads. "The only way to break the chain of coronavirus is to maintain social distancing," he said. Modi said amid the nationwide lockdown to fight coronavirus, none should feel alone, the massive collective power of 130 crore people is with everyone. Since the outbreak of coro-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses the nation via a video message in New Delhi on Friday

navirus, Modi has been giving tips to the citizens to cope with the situations emerging from the lockdown, in force since midnight March 25.

The PM's message came a day after he held a meeting with the Chief Ministers and asked them to "formulate a common exit strategy to ensure staggered re-emergence of the population once the lockdown ends" on April 14.

Opp slams PM, says expected financial plan

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Opposition leaders on Friday slammed Prime Minister Narendra Modi for exhorting people to light candles on Sunday evening, saying they had expected him to announce a second financial package to alleviate the pain and anxieties of the people.

Senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor said he listened to the "Pradhan Showman" where there was nothing about how to ease people's pain, their burdens, their financial anxieties.

While former Finance Minister P Chidambaram advised the PM to listen to the Opposition and to the wise counsel of epidemiologists and economists, Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra asked Modi to "get real" and provide a fiscal package to protect poor workers. "Turn out lights and come on balconies," she asked in a tweet.

Tablighis face NSA for indecent behaviour with nurses in Gzb

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Six member of the Tablighi Jamaat quarantined at a hospital in Ghaziabad misbehaved with the nurses, making lewd remarks, dropping their pants and walking naked around the wards, provoking the Uttar Pradesh Government to invoke the stringent National Security Act against them.

The Chief Medical Officer of MMG Hospital in his letter to the Ghaziabad Police stated, "The members of the Tablighi Jamaat who are kept at the isolation ward of the hospital, have been roaming in their wards naked."

Calling those involved in the indecent behaviour with female members of the nursing staff "enemies of humanity", Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said, "They will neither accept the law nor follow arrangements. Whatever they did with women health workers is a heinous crime... The NSA is being invoked against them."

Yogi directed that no women health worker or police personnel be deployed in ser-

vice of Tablighi Jamaat members. "Women officers and workers should not be deployed to treat and provide security to quarantined Tablighi Jamaat members. Only male health staff and cops will be posted in such wards housing Jamaat members," said a statement issued by the State Government on Friday.

In the complaint, a nurse alleged that the Tablighi members roamed without their trousers in the hospital, sang vulgar songs and made ugly gestures towards female staff.

Tablighi members not cooperating: Docs to Delhi Govt

New Delhi: Doctors from various hospitals in Delhi, where the members of Tablighi Jamaat are admitted, have complained to the Delhi Government that those from the religious organisation undergoing treatment are not cooperating with the medical staff, sources said on Friday.

Cases shoot up to 3,000, toll 70

12 deaths in past 24 hours; 650 positive cases linked to Nizamuddin event of Tablighi Jamaat



A man buys fruits in front of a closed shop during lockdown to prevent the spread of new coronavirus in Hyderabad on Friday

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The number of positive cases in India crossed 3,000-mark on Friday night, reporting major increase in Maharashtra, Delhi, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.

Of these cases, nearly 650 are linked to the Nizamuddin event of Tablighi Jamaat. There have been nearly 70 deaths, of which at least 12 have been

reported in the past 24 hours.

Nearly 9,000 people who attended New Delhi's Tablighi Jamaat congregation between March 10 and 15 have been traced across 14 States in India.

While the Ministry of Health confirmed 2,557 cases, the State-wise figure clubbed together placed the number of positive cases to 3,044, registering a massive addition of 500 new cases by 9 pm on Friday.

With 67 new cases detected on Friday, number of coronavirus cases in Maharashtra jumped to 490 and death toll rose to 26.

Second place was Tamil Nadu which recorded 102 cases on Friday taking it overall tally to 441, while Delhi stood at the third place with 384 positive cases and Kerala was placed fourth with 295 cases.

Telangana recorded 75 new cases taking the toll to 229 followed by Uttar Pradesh which added 44 new cases to take the total to 172 cases, 34 of which have come from Noida alone. As many as 647 COVID-19 positive cases were found in 14 States in the last two days are linked to the Tablighi Jamaat congregation. Out of the 12 deaths reported in the last 24 hours some are related to the Tablighi Jamaat congregation, Joint Secretary in the Health Ministry Lav Agarwal said in a daily media briefing.

The Joint Secretary said 647 positive cases of the coronavirus have been found in the last two days that are linked to the Tablighi Jamaat congregation, and these were reported from 14 States (and Union Territories) Andaman and Nicobar, Delhi, Assam, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir,

Jharkhand, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh.

The Joint Secretary said that in the past few days the cases were coming at a particular level, which showed that lockdown aimed towards social distancing was working effectively.

The sudden rise it is due

to carelessness by some people, he said in an apparent reference to the Tablighi Jamaat.

"We should understand that we are dealing with the infectious disease, he said underlining the importance of ensuring social distancing norms during the lockdown announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 24, 2020.

99 new cases in Delhi, total 384, 3rd highest in country

Delhi Govt launches WhatsApp helpline number: 8800007722

SAPNA SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

The total number of coronavirus cases in Delhi has risen to 384 — third highest in India — including 259 who were evacuated from Nizamuddin Markaz, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Friday.

Citing health bulletin report on coronavirus, the CM



Delhi has 384 positive cases, out of which 58 patients have a history of foreign travel while 259 patients are from the Markaz event and 38 cases are of the nature of local transmission from foreign travel.

91 new positive cases were reported in the last 24 hours.

The CM also announced the COVID-19 WhatsApp helpline number to provide credible information at 8800007722.

In Noida, a 55-year-old man and his son tested positive for coronavirus here on Friday, taking the total number of cases in Gautam Buddha Nagar to 50, officials said.

"The two new patients are a man (55) and his son (25) from Sector 93B in Noida," a Health official said.

CAPSULE

DIVYANG DONATES ₹2L AWARD TO PM-CARES

Jaipur: In a noble gesture, a 17-year-old differently-abled boy suffering from a fatal disease has donated ₹2 lakh that he had received as prize money for winning two national awards to the PM-CARES fund to assist relief works in the fight against COVID-19.

COVID-19: CENTRE TO GIVE ₹11,092 CRORE TO STATES

New Delhi: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday approved release of ₹11,092 crore to all States under State Disaster Risk Management Fund for setting up quarantine facilities and arranging facilities for checking the spread of coronavirus. The Home Ministry said the fund has been approved following assurance given by PM Narendra Modi to CMs during his video conference.

3 Dharavi cases raise fear of engulfing Asia's largest slum

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Amid reports of three persons testing positive for Covid-19 in Mumbai's Dharavi slum, authorities are having sleepless night over a possible explosion of Covid-19 in Asia's largest slum, which is also the most densely populated place in the world.

Of the three cases reported from Dharavi, one is a 56-year-old man with no history of international travel — who tested positive for coronavirus on Wednesday and passed away. The second one is a 52-year-old sanitation department worker of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC). The third one is a 35-year-old doctor who practises near the slum. The 56-year-old man who

died on Wednesday night was the first to test positive from the sprawling shanty town in India's financial hub.

The incidence of a couple of Covid-19 positive cases in Dharavi should be seen in the light of the fact that it is the most densely populated slum and the community spread of the pandemic in this slum may prove to be disastrous for Mumbai.

The Dharavi cases have raised fears that India may be in community transmission stage of the pandemic despite a countrywide lockdown since March 25.

Located between Western Railway's Bandra-Matunga and Central Railway's Sion-Matunga stations in north-central Mumbai, Dharavi is home to over anywhere from

60,000 to 70,000 families. The Mithi River slices through a portion of Dharavi into the Mahim Creek and then onto the Arabian Sea.

Spread over 240-hectare area, Dharavi has remained an ugly face and a dark underbelly of Mumbai — a largest slum which has been romanticised in Indian films over the years.

A mini-India of sorts where people belonging to different faiths live, Dharavi has 28 temples, 11 mosques, 60 churches, 50 banks, six Government schools, a mobile design museum, several slum tourism outfits, thriving criminal groups, and a tiny dilapidated fort.

Dharavi also has a small fort known as the Riwa Fort. Better known as Kala Qilla or

Black Fort, it is currently in a dilapidated condition. It was built by the first Governor of Bombay, Gerald Aungier (1669-1677). It was part of the larger Bombay Castle, and marked the northern portion of British-held Bombay in the 17th century. The castle was also used as a watchtower, guarding the territory against the Portuguese-held (and later Maratha-held) Salsette Island.

At that time, the entire area was a large swamp and primarily inhabited by Koli fishermen who made a living from the waters. As the legend goes, the British built a dam on the Mithi river because of which there was no water to feed the swamp and it dried off. The fishermen and a community of potters moved in here.



Impoverished residents rest by their shanties at Dharavi, Asia's largest slums, during the nationwide lockdown to prevent the spread of the coronavirus in Mumbai on Friday

Tabligh-e-Jamaat attendees entered Hry before lockdown: DGP

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

All those who had attended the Tabligh-e-Jamaat congregation in Nizamuddin area in Delhi and were traced in the State had entered Haryana before the nationwide lockdown was announced, State Director General of Police (DGP) Manoj Yadava said on Friday.

The DGP said during investigation it had come to the fore that all 1,277 people including 107 foreigners had entered the State before the lockdown was enforced and a majority of them came on March 14, 17 and 20. The countrywide lockdown was enforced from March 25.

"There were no restrictions in place when they

entered Haryana. I can assure that no one entered after March 25," the DGP said during a joint media conference addressed by him and Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Vijai Vardhan and ACS (Health) Rajiv Arora via video link.

State Home Minister Anil Viji had earlier said the 107 foreigners were from countries, including Bangladesh, Malaysia, South Africa, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

These foreigners were traced to five districts of Palwal, Faridabad, Panipat, Ambala and Nuh, Yadava said. If any other violation comes to the fore during the probe, then charges will be added in the already registered FIRs, he added.

ACS (Home) Vardhan said all the foreigners have

been quarantined.

When asked about the nearly 60-70 people who were in attendance at the Nizamuddin event and had been brought to AIIMS Bada in Jhajjar district, ACS (Health) Arora said, "As far as the National Cancer Institute at Bada is concerned, it has been declared as a designated COVID-19 hospital by the Centre. It is also the sub-centre of AIIMS, Delhi and directly comes under the Centre." He added that only AIIMS or the Union Ministry of Health can give updates on who all have been admitted there.

DGP Yadava said police is at the forefront of the fight to prevent spread of coronavirus infection. "We have put adequate police force at all 162 entry points to the enforce the

lockdown. Police personnel are also deployed in the mandis to ensure that when people purchase essentials, social distancing is maintained," the DGP said.

Care is also taken to ensure that police personnel on duty are provided with masks and sanitizers and each week their medical examination is conducted, Yadava pointed out.

ACS (Health) Arora sought to assure that there was no dearth of personal protection equipment for doctors, nurses and paramedics, who are at the frontline of the battle to prevent the spread of coronavirus, pointing out that none of them will be deprived of proper protection.

In reply to a question, ACS (Home) Vardhan said 573 relief

camp and shelters have been set up across the state to provide succour to poor sections including daily wage workers who have been hit hard by the ongoing situation.

As many as 15,850 migrant workers have been accommodated in 288 relief camps, Vardhan added.

CHIEF SECY DIRECTS OFFICERS ON ESSENTIAL COMMODITIES

Haryana Chief Secretary Keshni Anand Arora on Friday directed the officers to ensure the supply of all the essential commodities being given under the Public Distribution System (PDS) at the depots in each district by April 5. She said that the availability of wheat, rice, pulses, and edible items being distributed under PDS should be done in a staggered manner, ensuring social distancing.

Presiding over a meeting of the Crisis Coordination Committee meeting through video conferencing here, she was apprised that there is adequate availability of essential commodities in the markets. Apart from this new supply chain of Dal and mustard oil from New Delhi market has also started. It was further informed that proper arrangements have been made for ensuring the availability of LPG cylinders and refilling of the same.

She directed that to ensure the adequate availability of PPE kits in each district, the officers should explore the possibilities of identifying the

textile industries and manufactures which can make these kits. She directed the officers to identify such manufactures, while the testing of these kits as per the prescribed medical standards should be ensured.

Showing concern about the doctors, paramedics and health workers, involved in COVID-19 duty, she said that it should also be ensured that availability of essential medical equipments including, PPE kits, masks, , and sanitizers have been made for their safety. She directed that the availability of ventilators, PPE kits and oxygen cylinders in each hospital should be ensured.

Arora directed that a supervisor officer should be deployed for private labs and it should be ensured that new COVID-19

testing labs are to be set up. She said that the facility of telemedicine and mobile OPDs should be started immediately.

Meanwhile, showing concern over the issue of the people living in slum areas across the State, the Chief Secretary directed that close vigil of the people living in these slums should be done and medical testing of such people should be ensured to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

She directed the Deputy Commissioners to keep a close vigil on the control and stop the movement of migrant labourers making inter districts movements and it should be ensured that they are asked to stay in the dedicated 'Relief Camps' set up across the State.

Punjab Govt places ₹53.43cr at disposal of Dy Commissioners

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab Government has placed an amount of ₹53.43 crore at the disposal of the Deputy Commissioners of the State to immediately tackle any exigency arising out of the prevailing COVID-19 crisis.

The amount has been released by the Revenue, Rehabilitation and Disaster Management Department, and the funds have been charged to the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF).

Giving the district-wise breakup of funds released to the DCs, maximum ₹6.75 crore has been allotted to Sri Muktsar Sahib district to tackle quarantine clusters in slums etc as a preventive measure. Mainly, these funds will be used for food and rations, said the state's Special Chief Secretary, Punjab Disaster Management (COVID-19), KBS Sidhu.

Among other districts, Amritsar received ₹6 crore, ₹5 crore each for Ludhiana and

Mainly, these funds will be used for food and rations, said the state's Special Chief Secretary, Punjab Disaster Management (COVID-19), KBS Sidhu

Hoshiarpur, followed by ₹3.50 crore for Faridkot, and ₹3 crore each has been released to Jalandhar and Sangrur.

Patiala district has been given ₹2.50 crore and ₹2.18 crore has gone to SAS Nagar (Mohali) and ₹1.90 crore to Moga.

Similarly, the SBS Nagar (Nawanshahr) district has been given ₹1.60 crore whereas the districts of Tarn Taran, Gurdaspur, Roop Nagar and Fazilka have been given ₹1.50 crore each. Besides, ₹1.25 crore each has been given to Ferozepur, Pathankot and Barnala, followed by ₹1 crore each for Kapurthala and Bathinda while ₹75 lakh has been released to the Mansa and ₹50 lakh to Fatehgarh Sahib.

Punjab CM reviews Rabi season arrangements

Seeks detailed proposal for doorstep procurement mechanism

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

To check overcrowding during the Rabi season in view of COVID-19 restrictions, Punjab Government is considering the doorstep wheat procurement mechanism.

For the same, the Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh on Friday asked the State Agriculture and Food Departments to work out the ways to procure wheat grain from within the villages that are located more than one to two kilometers from the mandis.

The Chief Minister, reviewing the Rabi harvesting and marketing arrangements through video conferencing with officials of Agriculture and Food Departments, directed them to minimize the exposure of the farmers during this critical period. Meanwhile, the Reserve Bank of India has conceded Punjab Government's request for release of Rs 22,936 crore against the cash credit limit (CCL) for April 2020.

"While an Uber-type system of pooling farmers to the

distant mandis, on the lines of the suggestion made by the Prime Minister, could be considered, I am open to accepting the Chief Secretary's proposal to arrange for doorstep kind of procurement of grain if comprehensive modalities could be worked out to ensure feasibility," said the Chief Minister during the meeting.

While around 50 per cent of the villages in the State are located in close proximity to the mandis, and curfew passes could be issued to the farmers to go to the mandis in few numbers at a time, for the villages in distant areas, the Chief Secretary suggested sending officials to handle the procurement.

Arhtiyas, who currently undertake bagging of the grain in the mandis, could be entrusted with the task of handling it in the villages itself, he added. The Chief Minister asked the Chief Secretary to submit a detailed proposal so that a final decision in this regard could be taken in the next couple of days.

He also directed increase in the number of purchase centres and the total procurement days to ensure that the farmers do not overcrowd the mandis.

The minister also emphasized that the procurement should fully comply with COVID-19 preventive measures. He said the arrangements will again be reviewed in the Cabinet meeting scheduled on Saturday.

The state Additional Chief Secretary (Development) Viswajeet Khanna said that incentives for staggered marketing, which the State Government had already suggested to the Centre, would go a long way in checking crowds at the mandis and purchase centres, as that would encourage farmers to delay bringing in their produce.

A total of 1.8 lakh metric tonnes of wheat is expected to be marketed this year, he added. Combine machines would be allowed to operate in the fields from April 15 onwards.

PAY THROUGH ARHTIYAS

THIS SEASON INSTEAD OF DBT

Capt Amarinder also directed his Chief Principal Secretary Suresh Kumar to get the rules amended to provide for payment to farmers through arhtiyas (commission agents), saying that any changes in the system, including direct bank transfers (DBT), should be put in abeyance in the current circumstances.

The system of direct transfer to farmers was to be commenced from this season, as pointed out by Food and Civil Supplies secretary KAP Sinha.

ACT AGAINST HOARDERS: CM TO DGP

Taking note of reports of hoarding and shortage of critical supplies, the Chief Minister has set up a committee of senior officers to monitor essential supplies on a day-to-day basis. He directed the DGP Dinkar Gupta to take strict action against those found guilty of hoarding of material.

Chief Secretary Karan Avtar Singh informed the

meeting that supply of essentials was being ensured through smooth truck movement, with 35-40 per cent of the usual trucks strength still operational. The process would be further streamlined as more and more trucks would be permitted to bring supplies into the state and across districts in the coming days, he added.

SHORTAGE OF BALES TO BE MET THROUGH PP BAGS

Updating the Chief Minister about the other logistics being put in place for the season, Khanna said that in case the West Bengal government, which had ordered the closure of jute mills till April 6, does not open the same, the shortage of bales in Punjab would be met through PP (Polypropylene) bags, which are currently under production. Of the five lakh bales needed, 2.5 lakh had been received so far, he added.

Khanna further said that orders had also been placed for tarpaulin and net as most pro-

cured stocks would be stored in the open. The department was also in the process of arranging for the six lakh wooden crates needed, he said, adding that contracts for labour and transportation had already been finalized, and area for stocking had been earmarked already.

All arrangements were in place for sanitization and distribution of masks to procurement agency staff and farmers (through arhtiyas), said Khanna, adding that segregation and marking were being done at the mandis for social distance.

The bales would also be kept at a distance, he said, adding that during peak season, stocks would be accepted only from farmers carrying tokens issued by the administration or police.

As many as 1498 clusters of the migrant labour had been formed in all the districts, in addition to 162 shelters or relief centres. To cope with any labour shortage, MGNREGA workers would also be hired, said the Agriculture secretary.

Haryana CM announces relief for businessmen using power connection

Fixed charge waived off if half of 50kW consumed

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Friday announced relief for Industrialist, Businessmen, and others using big power connections, under which, if the consumption of 50 kW unit is 50 percent or less, then the fixed charges of last and the present month will be waived off. Apart from this, High Tension (HT) connections larger than 50 kW, the fixed charges up to a maximum limit of Rs 10 thousand will be waived off in these bills.

Addressing the people of the State here, he showed concern for the contractors working with the State Government contract and also announced that this lockdown period will

be considered as 'Zero period' and they will be given a rebate for the same.

Khattar also urged the Industrialist, Businessmen, and traders to treat and take care of the employees and labourers like their family members and do not ask them to leave their jobs or deduct their salaries. He said that in this hour of crisis, we all have to stand together to care for all such families together.

Appealing the Industrialists, Businessmen, and traders, the Chief Minister said that during this lockdown period, they should make efforts to make their business online and ensure the delivery of all the essential commodities to the doorsteps. He further urged them to shift to digital payment mode, rather than making cash transactions.

Khattar assured the people of the State that the State government has made elaborate arrangements to tackle this sit-

uation and the dedicated teams of District Administration, Doctors, paramedics, Sanitation workers Police, NGO's, volunteers, are working 24x7 to ensure the safety and availability of essential commodities to each household.

Expressing the gratitude towards the doctors, nurses, police, sanitation workers, government employees, and others engaged in other essential services, he said that in the need of crisis, they are continuously working towards safeguarding the Nation's interest.

He said the State Government has started monthly and weekly financial assistance has been started for the families belonging to the economically weaker section and BPL. Apart from this, with the help of the Central Government, the State Government will ensure free delivery of ration to every household by April 5.

More than 60,000 calls on Hry helpline numbers answered

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

As the fight against COVID-19 continues, Haryana Government through its dedicated staff deployed at the 24x7 State Covid call center has received and answered more than 60,000 calls on the helpline numbers 1075 & 8558893911 at State Level.

A statement said out of these, 20000 were related to COVID-19 and rest were for other issues such as food, travel pass, law and order, industry, labour and basic civic amenities. Every day the center receives & answers around 2000 calls which are related to the supply of cooked food and ration.

Meanwhile, the State Government has urged that residents across the State should call for essential services



in case of emergencies only. Further citizens have been requested not to misuse the resources in this difficult time as in some districts it has been reported that people are continuously and repeatedly calling the helpline for food and dry ration despite having sufficient food & ration arrangements made by govt.

"The State Govt. urges that only those who have shortage of food or ration should call State/District Covid Call center numbers so that immediate help can be provided," the statement said.

No decision yet on extending curfew; will depend on prevailing situation: Capt

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh on Friday made it clear that any decision on extending the curfew beyond April 14 would depend on the prevailing situation, which he was personally monitoring on a day-to-day basis.

Capt Amarinder was reacting to reports in a section of media quoting him as saying that he will not lift the curfew, imposed in the light of COVID-19 crisis, on April 14. "What I said was that no firm decision or timeline could be committed at this juncture," he clarified, adding that restrictions would have to continue as long as needed to save lives and save the State.

"Any decision on lifting or extending the curfew or lockdown in the State will be taken in the light of the situation that exists at the time," said Capt Amarinder. It would depend

entirely on how things are then, he said, adding that it was not possible to commit either way at this juncture, when the situation is dynamically evolving.

"If things improve, there would be no need for such tight restrictions," said the Chief Minister. However, if the situation takes a turn for the worse, there would be no option with the Government but to continue with controls, either through curfew or lockdown or any other necessary means, he added.

The Chief Minister, at the same time, assured the people of Punjab that his Government would continue to take more and more steps to minimize the hardships suffered by them as a result of the curfew.

Already, a lot of essential services that were initially locked down had been restored, he pointed out, citing the examples of banking, postal

and courier, harvesting, etc. The necessity for doctors, health staff and regular patients to take curfew passes had also been done away with.

Going forward, a lot more steps would be taken to further ease the lives of the citizens, irrespective of whether or not the curfew continues, said Capt Amarinder.

It may be recalled that Punjab was the first state in the country to impose curfew in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, thus enabling the State Government to keep the spread of the coronavirus under check.

The Chief Minister, however, made it clear that the State Government would not allow itself to become complacent and said that he had already directed the Health Department to prepare, on war footing, for any eventuality, including community spread of the pandemic.

Min appeals for cremation of Covid-19 +ve body

PNS ■ SAS NAGAR (MOHALI)

After Padma Shri Awardee Gurbani exponent and COVID-19 positive patient Bhai Nirmal Singh's cremation was held at a secluded place instead of his native village's crematorium amidst protest by villagers, Punjab Health and Family Welfare Minister Balbir Singh Sidhu on Friday made an appeal to the public to not to panic as cremation of COVID-19 positive patient's body does not pose any additional threat.

Sidhu, moved by the incident that took place on Thursday wherein Bhai Nirmal Singh's cremation was opposed owing to his demise from novel coronavirus, appealed to the people to not to oppose cremation of COVID-19 positive patient's body.

Sensitizing the public, the crematorium and burial ground staff, Sidhu reiterated that the cremation has no adverse effects if proper protocols are adhered to. So much so that even the ash does not pose any risk and can

even be collected to perform the last rites, he added.

"As per the guidelines issued by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the crematorium and burial ground staff need to ensure hand hygiene, use of masks and gloves," he said.

Besides, the viewing of the dead body by unzipping the face end of the body bag (by the staff using standard precautions) may be allowed, for the relatives to see the body for one last time and religious rituals such as reading from religious scripts, sprinkling holy water, and any other last rites that does not require touching of the body are allowed, said Sidhu.

"But, the bathing, kissing, hugging of the dead body is not allowed and the funeral or burial staff and family members should perform hand hygiene after cremation or burial. Apart from this, large gathering at the crematorium or burial ground should be avoided as a social distancing measure," he said.

Notably, the cremation of renowned spiritual singer, who

Punjab HFW Min on Friday made an appeal to the public after Padm Shri awardee Nirmal Singh was cremated at an isolated place instead of his native village

died of COVID-19 on Thursday morning, could not be held for the entire day after the villagers of Verka village and crematorium authorities opposed arguing that it would spread the virus. The villagers gathered around the main cremation ground and locked its gates.

When the ambulance, carrying Bhai Nirmal Singh's mortal remain, reached the cremation ground, a lot of people have gathered waiting there to stop the administration from bringing in the body.

After several hours of negotiations with the residents, a solu-

tion was found that his body may be cremated a few kilometres away from the cremation ground, on a secluded piece of land that is the common property of the council. At around 8:30 pm, he was cremated in a private field at Fatehgarh Shukar Chak village, two kms away. Last rites were performed by Akal Takht head granthi Giani Malkeet Singh, along with Nirmal Singh's son Amiteshwar Singh. The conduct of Verka residents was widely criticized on social media, with some users from Punjab even offering their own houses for the cremation. Even SAD chief Sukhbir Badal has also sought Punjab Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh's intervention in the matter. The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee had also offered a local gurdwara for the cremation but by then, the alternative site had already been arranged.

Later, the residents of Verka had declared that they would build a memorial for Khalsa at the site of the cremation.

Don't pressurise parents for fees, directs Haryana Govt

Govt directs all private schools across State

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana Government on Friday directed all private schools across the State not to pressurise the parents of students to deposit any type of fees until the lockdown period is over, thus banning all types of fee collection with immediate effect.

An official spokesperson of Haryana School Education Department said that the Department has directed all the District Education Officers and District Primary Education Officers of the State to the pri-

private schools belonging to their respective areas aware about the directions of the State Government.

He said that all educational institutions across the state have been closed till further orders to prevent the spread COVID-19, however, it has come to the notice of the Directorate that some private schools are pressurizing the parents of the students to deposit the fees immediately so, the State Government has banned all types of fees with immediate effect. "The fees will be collected only after the situation is normal and the schools re-open," the spokesman added.

He said the Department has also directed all District Education Officers to ensure the above orders of the Government are firmly adhered to.

Police warn action against those spreading misleading news

Chandigarh: Haryana Police on Friday warned strict action against those sharing misleading and unverified information related to COVID-19 on social media platforms, adding that all such rumour-mongers will be booked by the Police after holding them responsible under relevant section of the Epidemic Diseases Act 1897.

Additional Director General of Police (Law and Order) Navdeep Singh Virk said that citizens should be more careful about the authenticity of COVID-19 information before sharing or forwarding them on social media. "Several instances of spreading factually incorrect and unverified information on social media are being noticed. Such kind of misinformation can create confusion and potentially lead to panic among the general public. Keeping this in view, any information or content in this regard should be shared after confirmation from the authorized sources," the official said in a statement.

Virk said that cyber police stations, cyber cells and IT teams of Police have been directed to act accordingly in this regard. They are regularly monitoring activities on social media especially the Whatsapp. Apart from group admin, those who post fake or unverified contents on social media would also be held responsible. Police will take stringent action as per the law against those found guilty, he added. He said in the current situation all ranks of State Police are at the forefront in this fight against the spread of COVID-19. All out efforts are being made to educate people asking them to keep away from sharing unverified contents and not to believe any information circulated on social media.

PNS

Baghel requests PM Modi for early 3 months wages of MNREGA

Payment urgently required in this time of crisis: CM

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel on Friday, in a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, requested him to release the first three months' wages under the MNREGA at the earliest.

Baghel in the letter, said the first three months' wages of the MNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) for the financial year 2020-21, amounting to ₹1,016 crore, should be released by the Centre at the earliest.

The MNREGA is an important component of the rural economy and of ₹1016 crore for first quarter of the financial year 2020-21, and



more than 89.20 lakh labourers of more than 39.56 lakh families are registered under the scheme in Chhattisgarh, the CM said.

He further said that more than 66.05 lakh impoverished people of

32.82 lakh families actively get employment through the scheme.

At the beginning of March 2020, more than 12 lakh workers in the state were working under the scheme every day.

Due to the precaution-

ary measures undertaken for last 10 days to prevent coronavirus infection, the number of workers has significantly decreased, the CM said in his letter.

The chief minister said the state government, while ensuring all necessary measures to prevent the coronavirus outbreak, has instructed the district programme coordinators to ensure livelihood and people-oriented work that does not require gathering of a large number of workers at one place.

This step has been taken to provide employment to the labourers to secure their means of livelihood.

The chief minister said the main reason why workers are not showing up at work is due to delayed

payment of wages under the scheme.

He apprised the Prime Minister that at present, payment of wages worth ₹484 crore is pending in Chhattisgarh under this scheme.

In these adverse circumstances, payment of pending wages is urgently required, Baghel told the PM.

Besides, in order to ensure time-bound wage payment in the coming months, the approved labor budget of ₹1,016 crore for 534.73 lakh man-days wages, at the prescribed wage rate of ₹190 every day, for the first quarter of the financial year 2020-21, has been requested to be released for the state at the earliest, the CM said in his letter.

One more Covid-19 positive recovers

Among the total 9 positive cases in state, the number of patients cured had increased to 4 bringing down the Covid-19 active cases here to 5

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The first confirmed Covid-19 patient in the state, a 24-year-old woman from Raipur who had visited the UK and had tested positive for coronavirus on March 18, was on Friday discharged from the AIIMS, Raipur after recovering completely,

doctors said.

The woman, a resident of the capital city's Samta Colony neighbourhood, had been admitted in the state's premier medical institute AIIMS—All India Institute for Medical Sciences—doctors said.

With her release, among the total nine Covid-19 positive cases in the state, the number of patients cured has gone up to four, bringing down the Covid-19 active cases in Chhattisgarh to five.

Of the total nine cases, five cases were found in Raipur. Besides, one each was detected positive in Bilaspur, Bhillai, Rajnandgaon and Korba.

On Thursday too, a coronavirus positive patient from Bilaspur was discharged from the Apollo hospital, after she completely recovered from the viral infection.

Earlier, a youngster from

Bhillai and an elderly man from Rannagar neighbourhood of Raipur were discharged.

According to doctors at AIIMS, Raipur, the condition of five Covid-19 patients, currently in isolation ward, is also stable and they are out of danger.

Notable, the first covid-19 case in the state was detected on March 18, when swab samples of the woman tested positive for the novel coronavirus infection on March 19 evening.

Followed by detection, the entire state administration swung into action and the woman, along with her parents, was immediately admitted to AIIMS keeping them under observation in an isolation ward.

The swab samples of her parents were also sent for testing, which however, were reported to be negative.

COVID-19 Lockdown: Villagers attack policeman

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIGARH

A policeman was attacked by a group of villagers, after he intercepted a man for violating the ongoing Covid-19 lockdown in Raigarh district, an official said on Friday.

The incident took place on Wednesday evening at Kathli square under Pusaur police station area, where constable Harish Chandra was on patrolling duty, the official said.

Chandra and his colleague intercepted Naresh Jangde, a resident of Taparda village who was riding his motorcycle, and asked him to go back home, he said.

Jangde started arguing with

the policemen, but left the spot, only to return later with his brother and 13 other villagers, the official added.

The group of 15 men attacked the policeman, while his colleague called in for additional forces, he said, adding that the accused fled the scene soon after.

On Thursday, the police raided the village and arrested one of the accused Chatursen Jangde, while others were still at large, police said.

A case was registered under Sections 147 (rioting), 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) and other relevant provisions of the IPC, the official added.

Two cops among three killed in road accident

STAFF REPORTER ■ BALRAMPUR

Three people, including two policemen died after the bike they were riding collided head-on with a MUV in Balrampur-Ramanujanjan district, police said here on Friday.

"The accident took place near Jhingo village on the Ambikapur-Ramanujanjan road of Balrampur-Ramanujanjan district on Thursday night," station house officer (SHO), Rajpur, Ferdinand Kuruj said.

The deceased have been identified as constable Kavi Chauhan, constable Manbodh Aayam and a local youngster Chhotu Kashyap, the SHO said.

"The accident took place near Jhingo village on the Ambikapur-Ramanujanjan road of Balrampur-Ramanujanjan district on Thursday night," station house officer (SHO), Rajpur, Ferdinand Kuruj said

The victims were on a bike when and it collided with a

Mahindra pick-up multi-utility vehicle near Jhingo village, he added.

After the mishap, the driver left the vehicle behind and ran away. Police have registered a case under Section 304(A) of Indian Penal Code (IPC) and are looking for the driver, the SHO said.

Meanwhile, chief minister Bhupesh Baghel has expressed deep condolence on their sad demise. He has empathized with the grief-stricken families of the deceased. The chief minister has directed the Balrampur district administration to provide every possible support to the family members of the deceased.

Food-grain distribution under PDS begins

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The state government on Friday decided to distribute rice for April and May simultaneously and the distribution of food grains has started from 8,110 fair price shops across the state from Thursday, officials said.

Official sources said that a total of 13,24,563 ration card holders have benefited from the food distribution.

State food, civil supplies and consumer protection officials said that under the public distribution system, a total of 12,306 ration shops are operating in the state.

Until now, ration of two

months has been stored in 7,011 shops and one month's ration has been stored in 11,407 shops, they said.

Notably, the total number of ration cards in the state is 65,39,184.

Out of which, the number of Antyodaya ration cards is 13,95,635, the number of priority ration cards is 42,06,423.

While the number of single destitute ration cards is 38,302, the number of Annapurna ration cards is 6,163, the number of disabled ration cards is 9,823 and the number of general ration cards (APL) is 8,82,838, the officials said.



Chief minister Bhupesh Baghel on Friday visited a state-run old age home in Mana in Nava Raipur and inquired about the well being of the elderly people residing there. Pioneer Photo

Mobile ambulance to collect samples of Covid-19 suspected

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

For quick identification of coronavirus (Covid-19) patients, the Chhattisgarh health department is now going to deploy mobile ambulances for collecting swab samples from the patient's home, a top official here said on Friday.

This was decided during a meeting of state-level command and control centre, chaired by state health secretary Niharika Barik in Raipur, the official said.

The mobile ambulances will have all facilities and medical kit required for sample collection, Barik said addressing the meeting.

"This will not only help in speedy testing but also



ensure ample use of resources," she said.

The health secretary directed to issue letters to all

other safety gears will collect swab samples at the back of the ambulance, she said.

"While collecting more than one sample, the technician will have to change only their hand gloves and there will be no need to change complete PPE kit.

"The mobile ambulance will ensure multiple sample collection from different place on the same day," the secretary said.

She directed officials to intensify departmental efforts for stopping the spread of coronavirus.

At district hospitals and health centres, essential services like vaccination, institutional delivery and other health services should remain available, she said.

NTPC contributes to fight Covid-19

STAFF REPORTER ■ BILASPUR

In the hour of national lockdown, NTPC power engineers are performing their duties to provide uninterrupted power service even as the temperature rises, so that people can stay at home in comfort.

Apart from power generation, the Sipat power unit has donated ₹25 lakh as financial assistance to the Bilaspur district administration for purchasing of masks, sanitizers and healthcare equipment to fight against Covid-19 pandemic in the state, a release by the power generator said.

This apart, ₹2 lakh have been provided to the CEO,



Janpad Panchayat, Masturi for procurement of soap and other items for sanitizing the villages in and around the Sipat project, it said.

In addition, soap worth ₹2 lakh will be distributed among the villagers to maintain personal hygiene as a preventive measure against the coronavirus outbreak.

As a noble gesture by the women's welfare wing of NTPC-Sipat—Sangwari Mahila Samiti—has donated ₹50,000 to district red cross society, Bilaspur, the release said and added that the NTPC Limited is contributing ₹250 crore and one day's salary of its employees, amounting to ₹7.5 crore, and a total ₹257.5 crore to PM-CARES fund.

In addition, ₹11 crore has been spent or committed by the projects across the country to fight against the coronavirus outbreak, it said.

Prior to this, the Sipat station took numerous steps for prevention of Covid-19 inside the plant and township premises.

Restrictions have been imposed for outsiders coming inside plant and township, employees who are on duty are allowed to join office and others are requested to stay at home.

Thermal scanning at township and plant gates is done regularly among other preventive measures been taken to combat the spread of the virulent disease, the release said.

584 prisoners released from various jails

The move come after Supreme Court directive to reduce congestion in jails in wake of spread of Covid-19

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

For prevention and control of coronavirus infection, 584 prisoners have been released from different jails across the state.

Official sources said that among the 584, include 391 prisoners released on interim bail, 154 prisoners released on parole, and 39 prisoners released on completion of their sentence period.

Notably, to prevent the spread of coronavirus outbreak, the Supreme Court had instructed all the states to reduce the number of prisoners in the jails to reduce the probability of prisoners catching the viral infection in jails, these prisoners were released on April 2, on certain conditions, on interim bail and parole, sources said.

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All medical devices brought under DCA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

From April 1, 2020, all medical devices used to treat a patient — be it syringes, needles, cardiac stents, knee implant, digital thermometers, CT scan, MRIs, dialysis machines — have been brought under the ambit of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act (DCA). In simple words, these will be regulated by the Government as drugs for quality control and price monitoring.

Till now, the Government had been regulating only 24 classes of medical devices.

The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA), a government regulatory agency, issued a notification recently in this regard.

The NPPA's move follows the Union Health Ministry's notification that brought the medical equipment used on humans as drugs under Section 3 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act with effect from April 1, 2020. The Ministry, through a gazette notification, also released the Medical Devices Amendment Rules, 2020, for mandatory registration of medical devices.

Aimed at ensuring that all medical devices meet certain standards of quality and effi-



The 24 classes of medical devices have been notified/regulated as drugs under Drugs & Cosmetics Act 1940 and Drugs & Cosmetics Rules 1945

cacy, the notification will also make medical device companies accountable for quality and safety of their products, noted a senior health official, said a senior NPPA official.

Also, the manufacturers cannot raise price as per their whims and fancies. "The objective is to ensure that no manufacturer or importer increases the price of a drug more than ten per cent of MRP during preceding twelve months" she said.

The 24 classes of medical devices have been notified/regulated as drugs under Drugs & Cosmetics Act 1940 and Drugs & Cosmetics Rules 1945.

Following this order, all medical devices used to treat a patient - be it syringes, needles, cardiac stents, knee implant,

digital thermometers, CT scan, MRIs, dialysis machines - will be regulated under the DCA.

As per the notification, four medical devices, cardiac stents, drug eluting stents, condoms and intra uterine devices (Cu-T), are scheduled medical devices for which ceiling prices have been fixed. These four medical devices are under price control.

The NPPA is monitoring Maximum Retail Prices (MRPs) of remaining non-scheduled medical devices, which have been regulated as drugs. The objective is to ensure that no manufacturer or importer increases the price of a drug more than ten per cent of MRP during preceding twelve months.

Further, with the Essential Commodities Act, 1955, the manufacturer/importer will also be liable to deposit the overcharged amount along with interest thereon from the date of increase in price in addition to penalty, the official added.

Relief and rescue operations

Armed Forces deploy warships, aircraft, helicopters as standby

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Stepping up their efforts to fight coronavirus pandemic, the armed forces have deployed six warships and 50 aircraft and helicopters as standby for relief and rescue operations within the country and in neighbouring nations. Moreover, five viral testing laboratories of the Services capable of COVID-19 test are now part of the national grid against the disease.

Giving this update here on Friday, defence ministry officials said the five laboratories include Army Hospital (Research & Referral), Delhi Cantonment, Air Force Command Hospital, Bangalore, Armed Forces Medical College, Pune, Command Hospital (Central Command), Lucknow and Command Hospital (Northern Command), Udhampur. In a bid to augment capabilities, six more armed forces hospitals are being equipped shortly with the resources to begin COVID-19 testing, they said.

As regards rescue and relief efforts, officials said six warships and as many medical teams are now on standby to assist neighbouring countries including Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Afghanistan when required. The ships with medical teams and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) bricks onboard are on standby for assistance at Visakhapatnam, Kochi and Mumbai.

Moreover, 28 fixed wing aircraft and 21 helicopters of the Indian Air Force (IAF) are on standby at various locations across the country for transporting essential supplies, officials said. Transport fleet of the IAF is being used to assist in transportation of essential supplies, medicines and medical equipment and so far, approximately 60 tonnes of stores have been airlifted to various parts of the country.

An IAF C-130J Super Hercules aircraft has airlifted 6.2 tonnes of medicines to Maldives on Thursday. Earlier, between March 13-21 an Army Medical Corps team consisting of five doctors, two nursing officers and seven paramedics was deployed in Maldives for "capacity building measures and assist in setting up their own testing, treatment and quarantine facilities." An army medical team is likely to leave for Nepal for the same purpose shortly.

Besides this, the Armed Forces are running six quarantine facilities at Mumbai, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Hindon, Manesar and Chennai. These centres have so far catered to 1,7037 of which 403 have been released so far. Three positive COVID cases - two from Hindon and one from Manesar - were referred to Safdarjung Hospital in the national capital for further treatment. In addition, 15 other facilities are being kept ready as standby for use, if required.

Dedicated COVID-19 facilities including High Dependency Units, Intensive Care Unit beds are being prepared in 51 hospitals of the Armed Forces across the country. Some of these facilities are located at Kolkata, Visakhapatnam, Kochi, Dundigal near

CRPF orders 14 days' home quarantine for its personnel living in and around Nizamuddin

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) has directed its personnel residing in Nizamuddin or nearby areas to remain in home quarantine for 14 days following the role of the Tableegh Jamaat in spreading the Covid-19 after it held its markaz in the area last month.

"Keeping in view of the prevailing emergent situation in the country and in the wake of Delhi-Nizamuddin Markaz case, as approved by the competent authority, following orders are hereby issued: Personnel of Directorate General residing in and around Nizamuddin area are hereby ordered to work from home with immediate effect," reads an internal circular.

It further said, "A close watch over these personnel may be kept by concerned branch and they may be briefed personally regarding precautions/care from Coronavirus. They may also be directed for self isolation/home quarantine for next 14 days."

If any symptom occurred to any of these personnel, the same may be informed to all



concerned immediately and all precautionary measures be taken, the circular underscored.

Three CRPF Inspectors, one Sub Inspector and two Assistant Sub Inspectors besides five Head Constables and 25 constables have been identified to be living in the Nizamuddin or nearby area. The list of these 36 personnel has been marked as appendix A of the circular and they have been asked to undergo home quarantine/isolation for two weeks.

Another list of 10 personnel of CRPF who were staying at Nizamuddin area and presently on leave at their

home town are also being contacted to be advised on Covid-19 prevention and briefed accordingly.

Meanwhile, the Union Home Ministry has extended the deployment of 100 companies (10,000 personnel) of Central paramilitary forces in the national capital till April 15 for maintenance of law and order during the ongoing lockdown period across the country including Delhi.

Thousands of Tableegh Jamaat members who have been assembling at the outfit's markaz (headquarters) for the jamaat have been major carriers of coronavirus.

Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Kanpur, Jaisalmer, Jorhat and Gorakhpur.

Also, special flights of IAF have evacuated people and carried medical supplies. A C-17 comprising crew, medical team and support

staff has carried 15 tonnes of medical supplies to China and airlifted 125 persons, including five children comprising Indian nationals and few citizens from friendly countries on its return.

The C-17 Globemaster

III has made another journey, this time to Iran and brought back 58 stranded Indians that included 31 women and two children.

The aircraft has also brought 529 samples for COVID-19 investigation.

Centre releases ₹11,092 crore to States for Covid-19 related rehabilitation works

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Friday released ₹11,092 crore to States for Covid-19 related rehabilitation works after many Chief Ministers raised the issue of immediate release of the money from State Disaster Risk Management Fund (SDRMF) during their video-conferencing session with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday.

Earlier in the morning, the Group of Ministers headed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and comprising Home Minister Amit Shah, Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan and Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar carried out a detailed review of the overall healthcare delivery system as well as situation arising out of the 21-day nation-wide lockdown.

Government sources said the ministers deliberated on various arrangements being made by the different ministries and organisations to deal with increasing cases of coronavirus cases as well as to ensure adequate supplies of medicine and essential commodities during the lockdown. India has recorded over 2,300 positive cases of coronavirus and at least 56

deaths so far. The Home Ministry also asked the States to ensure smooth harvesting and sowing operations, saying agricultural activities were exempted from the 21-day lockdown enforced to combat coronavirus. In a communication to all states and UTs, Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla said the Home Ministry has allowed agricultural operations, keeping in view the harvesting and sowing season.

"The Centre has allowed for agricultural operations keeping in view the harvesting and sowing season. Though exception has been allowed for farming operation by farmers and farm workers, procurement of agricultural products, operation of mandis, movement of harvesting and sowing related machinery," Bhalla said.

Harvesting of rabi (winter) crops such as wheat, mustard, corn and pulses has begun in some places and will pick up in the coming

months. Millions of farmers across the country can work in their farms throughout the nationwide lockdown put in place over the coronavirus pandemic.

States will decide how to implement this order in a safe manner given the pandemic, the officials said.

States told to issue passes to representatives of Insurance companies

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Agriculture Ministry has asked the States to issue passes to representatives of concerned Insurance companies for co-witnessing Crop Cutting Experiments and to relax the norms for conducting field level survey for intimation received for Post-Harvest crop losses due to unseasonal rainfall and hailstorm.

Prez airs concern over incidents of attacks on doctors, health workers and police personnel

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

President Ram Nath Kovind on Friday expressed concern over the incidents of attacks on doctors, health workers and police personnel in some parts of the country and the gathering of migrant workers in Anand Vihar and congregation of Tablighi Jamaat in Nizamuddin in Delhi even as Vice President Venkaiah Naidu called upon the Governors and Lt. Governors of States and Union Territories to motivate spiritual and religious leaders to advise their followers to not hold any congregations and observe social distancing norms to prevent the transmission of the pandemic.

The President and the Vice President held the second round of interactions with the Governors, Lieutenant Governors and administrators of all states and union territories via video-conferencing to discuss measures to combat against COVID-19. The conference was a sequel to the video conference held on March 27 with the Governors/LGs of select States/UTs on the issue.

The President emphasized the need to ensure that no one remains hungry during the

nationwide lockdown. Taking note of the problems faced by the homeless, the unemployed and the weaker sections of society during this crisis, Kovind said, "We will have to be extra sensitive towards their needs."

The Vice President laid emphasis on roping in volunteers of the Indian Red Cross Society, social organisations and private sector to mitigate the plight of the poor. He urged the Governors/Lt Governors and Administrators to persuade leaders from different walks to life to come forward and support the most vulnerable sections of society, particularly farmers, as the lockdown coincides with the harvesting season in many states.

Naidu pointed out that though the Central Government and the State Governments were taking adequate measures to alleviate people's suffering, it would serve eternal human values for social elites to come forward and support the poor and most vulnerable sections in this crisis.

In the conference there was unanimity that there is no scope for laxity or complacency in fighting the invisible enemy, a Rashtrapati Bhawan communiqué stated.

HRD Ministry writes to UGC, AICTE, NCTE, NIOS, NCERT, KVS enlisting how to stay safe

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In the wake of the Covid-19 threat, the Union HRD Ministry on Friday wrote to its higher and secondary education regulators like UGC, AICTE, NCTE, NIOS, NCERT and KVS enlisting how to stay safe during this tough period.

In a letter to these organizations, HRD Secretary Amit Khare informed them about AarogyaSetu app developed by Government of India in public-private partnership to fight Covid-19.

"The app will enable people to assess themselves the

risk for their catching the Corona Virus infection. It will calculate this based on their interaction with others, using cutting edge Bluetooth technology, algorithms and artificial intelligence.

This app will be helpful to students, faculty/ teachers and their family members" said a statement from the Ministry. This app can be downloaded from the various links and software platforms like Apple and Androids.

Further, it has also been informed that Ministry of Ayush has developed a protocol for immunity boosting measures for self-care; it will

be beneficial for our students, faculty members, teachers and their family members.

In the letter, it has also been suggested that as requested by Prime Minister in his address on April 3, 2020, students may light a candle, Diya or torch on their mobile for nine minutes at 9:00 pm on Sunday to realise the power of light and to highlight the objective for which the entire nation are fighting together.

"However, no one should assemble in colonies or on road or anywhere outside their houses," cautioned the Ministry.

Left urges Centre to address concerns of migrant labourers, agriculture, food sectors

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Left parties on Friday urged the Centre to come out with immediate remedial measures to address the concerns of migrant labour, agriculture and food sectors, urban problems and the economy due to the lockdown.

In a statement, the five Left parties also pointed out that many of the measures announced have not yet materialized and asked the Centre to increase the limit of bor-

rowing capacity of the States.

"The country has entered the second week of the 21-day lockdown to contain the community spread of COVID-19 pandemic. Many problems have surfaced in a sharp manner which needs to be resolved urgently. Many of these were anticipated but unfortunately no remedial action was taken before the announcement of the lockdown. There is an urgent need to stop the growth of widespread hunger and malnutrition. The COVID-19 pan-

demie feeds on such conditions of the people.

"The promised ₹5,000 to all Jandhan, BPL and unorganized workers must be transferred immediately. The central government must provide 35kgs per family to all migrant workers and poor, with or without ration cards, from the 7.5 crore of stock of food-grains, all across the country. Proper health care facilities for the migrant workers and others who have travelled from various parts must be put in place.

'Gangtva' can cure coronavirus: Team of Indian Army veterans

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A team of Indian Army veterans have come together on a platform 'Atulya Ganga' and claimed that there are evidences that 'Gangtva' can cure coronavirus.

The team of 100 army veterans have written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Minister of Jal Shakti Gajendra Shekhawat to give presentation in this regard and further conduct research on Ganga Jal's impeccable power amid the grave threat posed by the pandemic.

"Atulya Ganga finds reference that shows Gangtva can treat the deadly virus," said the letter.

Gopal Sharma, founder of Atulya Ganga said: "The Ganges bears a nectar element

called Gangtva (Bacteria that feeds on the virus), the hallmark of our great civilization on the river. There was a time when those bacteriophages were present in four of the world's main rivers. The remaining three rivers and their civilizations were struck by rapid industrialization and developments. Now Ganga exists as the only one that has this nectar element."

The group claimed that Ganga water has been proven to be capable of defending against various bacteria and viruses.

In various studies, it has been shown that even bacteria from serious diseases such as cholera, dysentery, meningitis and tuberculosis do not thrive in the water of the Ganges. We assume in the current corona

crisis the Gangtva of Ganga is capable of defending against this virus," the group said in the letter.

The team has now demanded that the Prime Minister pursue a detailed research to see if the Ganga water can combat a "biological attack" like coronavirus.

Atulya Ganga is a team of ex-military officers who earlier announced a walk along the banks of the Ganges from Gomukh, the origin of the Ganges, to the Bay of Bengal, in what they claim was world's first ever Mundaman Parikrama. The walk is expected to begin in August this year. Organisations like Google and premium education institutes like IIT Delhi are also partners of the Army veterans in the journey.

'CoroFlu', all set to take on deadly Covid-19

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A unique intranasal vaccine for coronavirus, 'CoroFlu', is all set to take on the deadly Covid-19.

An international collaboration of virologists at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the vaccine companies FluGen and Bharat Biotech has begun the development and testing of the unique vaccine named 'CoroFlu' against the COVID-19 that has infected over one million people and claimed over 54,000 lives.

Bharat Biotech has till date commercialised 16 vaccines, including a vaccine developed against the H1N1 flu that caused the 2009 pandemic.

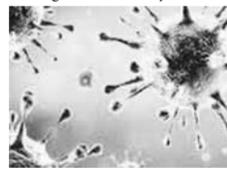
Head of Business Development, Hyderabad based Bharat Biotech pharma, Dr Raches Ealla explained that, CoroFlu will be built on the backbone of FluGen's flu vaccine candidate known as

M2SR. Based on an invention by UW-Madison virologists and FluGen co-founders Yoshihiro Kawaoka and Gabriele Neumann, M2SR is a self-limiting version of the influenza virus that induces an immune response against the flu.

"Kawaoka's lab will insert gene sequences from SARS-CoV-2, the novel coronavirus that causes the disease COVID-19, into M2SR so that the new vaccine will also induce immunity against the coronavirus," Dr Ella said, sharing further details.

He said, "Bharat Biotech will manufacture the vaccine, conduct clinical trials, and prepare to produce almost 300 million doses of vaccine for global distribution. Under the collaboration agreement, FluGen will transfer its existing manufacturing processes to Bharat Biotech to enable the company to scale up production and produce the vaccine for clinical trials."

Refinement of the CoroFlu vaccine concept and testing in laboratory animal



models at UW-Madison is expected to take three to six months. Bharat Biotech will then begin production scale-up for safety and efficacy testing in humans. CoroFlu could be in human clinical trials by the fall of 2020.

Four Phase II clinical trials involving hundreds of subjects have shown the M2SR flu vaccine to be safe and well tolerated. This safety profile, M2SR's ability to induce a strong immune response, and the ability of influenza viruses to carry sequences of other viruses

make M2SR an attractive option for rapidly developing CoroFlu as a safe and effective SARS-CoV-2 vaccine.

"We are going to modify M2SR by adding part of the coding region for the coronavirus spike protein that the virus uses to latch onto cells and begin infection," said Gabriele Neumann, a senior virologist in Kawaoka's lab and co-founder of FluGen. "CoroFlu will also express the influenza virus hemagglutinin protein, which is the major influenza virus antigen, so we should get immune responses to both coronavirus and influenza."

CoroFlu, like M2SR, will be delivered intranasally. This route of administration mimics the natural route of infection by coronavirus and activates several modes of the immune system. Intranasal delivery is more effective at inducing

Validity of CGHS cards extended till April 30

New Delhi: In view of the lockdown, the Union Health Ministry has extended by one month ie April 30, 2020, the validity of CGHS cards that expired on March 31, 2020 in respect of CGHS pensioner beneficiaries.

PNS

multiple types of immune responses than the intramuscular shots that deliver most flu vaccines.

"Ninety percent of our vaccines are sold in lower middle-income countries with affordable pricing being core to our business model. We will fervently work toward the successful development of an efficacious COVID-19 vaccine," said Dr Ella.

Tablighi-corona bond gets stronger

Seven more +ve in Agra

Agra: The connection between coronavirus and those who attended the Tablighi Jamaat event in Delhi is getting stronger by the hour, making the entire scenario rather scary as of the 28 samples of Tablighis sent for testing in Agra, seven have tested positive. Earlier in the day, the UP government spokesman had

stated that 42 persons who had attended the Jamaat event have tested positive. With reports from Agra, the Jamaat toll has gone up to 49 and if sources are to be believed, the number is bound to shoot up since more than 100 samples of this group are under testing. According to official sources, a total of 112 persons who had attended the Tablighi Jamaat were quarantined in Agra and 28 samples were sent for testing. IANS

Villagers refuse to let officials quarantine 20 jamaat followers

Faridabad: Amid a spike in coronavirus positive cases in India after the evacuation of hundreds of people from Tablighi Jamaat headquarters in Delhi, residents of a Haryana village forced authorities to not quarantine 20 Jamaat followers from abroad at a nearby college premises, police sources said on Friday.



Sources in the Bhopani police station in Faridabad district said that Haryana Health Department officials had taken these 20 Tablighi followers to Nachauli village to be quarantined for a few days in a nearby college premises around 10 pm on Thursday. "However, when the villagers came to know about

their arrival, they gheraoed the college premises in their hundreds and protested. They maintained that they could spread coronavirus among the villagers," a police official said. The agitated villagers refused to listen to health officials as well as Bhopani police that reached there to handle the situation. IANS

Maha leaders slam PM's 'light' call on April 5

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The ruling alliance partners in Maharashtra— the Congress, NCP and Shiv Sena — slammed Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday for his call to people to light candles, lamps or mobile torches on April 5 at 9 pm, by saying that the call was "irresponsible" and "stupid" and that it did not behave well for a Prime Minister to give such a call. Reacting to the Prime Minister's call, Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee and State Revenue Minister Balasaheb Thorat said: "The country is going through a tough time as the number of Coronavirus cases increasing each day. During such times, the Prime Minister is expected to take some firm policy decisions. Is it the Prime Minister's job to ask people to clap, light lamps etc? It is about time that PM gets serious about the issues at least now". Dubbing the Modi's call is an act of stupidity, NCP leader and State Housing Minister Dr.

Jitendra Awhad said: "Prime Minister of India asks people to light lamps & candles. Is this some kind of a joke? Not a word on where the country stands in this war. It's preparedness, additional financial aid, new facilities created, diagnostic centres added, what his government proposes to do with gargantuan problem of stranded migrants. Shame!". Shiv Sena MP and spokesperson Sanjay Raut tweeted: "When people were asked to clap, they crowded the roads and beat drums, I just hope now they don't burn down their own houses, sir 'diya to jalalenge' but please tell us what the government is doing to improve condition". To fight the crisis, doctors, nurses, police, para-medical staff are all working by putting their lives at risk. The need of the hour is to stand firmly behind these people and give them the necessary help. What is required at this time is making available adequate number of ventilators, increasing the number of testing labs, provid-

ing doctors and their staff with PPEs, to provide financial assistance to states to fight this crisis", Thorat said. "Also, the general public needs to be given hope, to announce relief packages for people who have lost their livelihoods. Nothing of this was done only an event of lighting of lamps was announced. After hearing the address, the question that is being raised is: whether Narendra Modi will behave like a Prime Minister or not?", the State Congress chief asked, adding that the ruling BJP was trivialising the Coronavirus issue through such "PR stunts". "His (Modi's) so called address to nation this morning smacked of irresponsibility and incompetence personified. It was the most apt example of how a prime minister of the country should not be. He never does his homework. It was desired he will at least at this hour," Awhad said. "All he (Modi) is consistently giving people sedatives such as clap, bang the utensils and light the lamps like celebration or an event. His blind, irrational followers will do it dutifully, oblivious that they too are being cheated. They will not think even for a minute how this will help to tide over the alarming situation. His cockamamie & gimmicks is a narcotic they are addicted to". "On his part, PM is more than happy to peddle this drug as it hides his bankruptcy of will and ability to take any concrete action. On my part, I vow not to indulge into this stupidity. I will share the cost of same oil with some poor and needy. Let Modi know one cardinal truth that you cannot fool all the people all the time," Awhad said in a strong statement issued here.

Police attacked in Kannauj

Kannauj (Uttar Pradesh): A police team was attacked in Kannauj district of Uttar Pradesh on Friday afternoon when they tried to stop a family from offering 'namaaz' collectively. The chowki in-charge and two other police personnel were injured in the attack. They have been admitted to the district hospital. The attackers also damaged the motorcycle of a LIU personnel. Additional forces were called in and four persons have been taken into custody. The entire area is now being monitored by drone cameras.

SIX MORE DEAD IN MAHA, TOTAL CASES JUMP TO 490

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a disturbing development, the coronavirus claimed six more lives in Maharashtra taking the total number of pandemic deaths to 26 in the State, even as 67 persons tested positive for Covid-19 in various hospitals and laboratories in the State. Confirming six fresh pandemic deaths in Maharashtra, the State Health department bulletin said: "While two deaths were reported from Mumbai, one death each has been reported from Vasai-Virar, Badlapur, Thane, Jalgaon and Pune". Those killed comprised: a 67-year-old from Vasai-Virar,

a woman from Badlapur, 63-year-old man from Jalgaon, 50-year-old woman from Pune, 65-year-old man from Mumbai and 62-year-old man, also from Mumbai. All these persons had no history of international travel and they are said to have contracted the epidemic through "contact". With 67 fresh positive Coronavirus cases, the total number of infected persons rose to 490 in the state. Significantly enough, as many as 11 Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) jawans posted at the Mumbai airport were among the new lot of persons who tested positive for Coronavirus in Maharashtra. While six CISF jawans test-

ed positive for Coronavirus on Friday, five Jawans had tested positive on Thursday. Talking to media persons, Municipal Commissioner Ganesh Deshmukh said: "As many as CISF's 15 officers and jawans were under quarantine for the past several days. Of the six CISF jawans tested positive for Covid-19 today, while five jawans had tested positive for Covid-19 on Thursday. With this total number of CISF Jawans testing positive for the pandemic has gone up to 11. All of these infected persons have been kept under quarantine at the MGM Hospital at Panvel". Meanwhile, as many as 67

persons were tested positive for Coronavirus in various hospitals and laboratories of the state. Of the 67 positive cases, Mumbai accounted for a maximum of 45 cases, while there were nine cases in Pune, eight cases in Navi Mumbai, three cases in Ahmednagar and one case each in Palghar, Washim, Kalyan and Ratnagiri. According to the State Health department's medical bulletin, as many as 595 persons with symptoms of coronavirus were admitted to various hospitals in the state on Friday. "From among the 12,758 samples tested since January, 11,968 have tested negative, while 490 have tested positive.

Telangana CM backs PM's call to light lamps

Hyderabad: Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrababhan Nara Chandrababu Naidu on Friday urged the people in the State to light lamps on April 5 at 9 P.M. as desired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The Chief Minister said that people should light lamps on the day to express solidarity and unity among people in the country and make the programme a success. He desired that the fight put up by the entire humanity against the dreaded virus should continue with inspiration and be successful. IANS

Kerala CM welcomes PM's call to light lamps

Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Friday said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call to light lamps on Sunday at 9 p.m. for 9 minutes to dispel the darkness caused by the coronavirus pandemic is a good act, as any display of brightness will always be welcomed. Vijayan however said that following the lockdown lakhs of workers in Kerala

employed in various sectors are finding the going tough and the 'brightness' in their lives has gone. "Maybe, following the April 5th act, more 'brightness' might be on the way and let us all wait for the first 'brightness,'" said Vijayan while addressing the media soon after the daily review of the Covid-19 measures in the State. IANS

Yogi prepares for post lockdown scenario in UP

Lucknow: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday held a meeting with top officials to discuss ways and means to meet the challenges after the lockdown is lifted. The Chief Minister said that the biggest challenge would be to control movement of population since a large number of migrant workers have been kept in shelter homes at present. He said that efforts should be made to maintain social distancing even after the lockdown is lifted. Special care will be taken to enforce the safety protocols in the 16 districts that have reported corona positive patients. Sources, however, said that the lockdown could be lifted in a phased manner. Cinema halls and shopping malls may continue to remain shut for a few more days and a decision will also be taken regarding schools

and colleges. Addressing a meeting of Team 11, set up to combat the coronavirus pandemic in the state, Yogi said the doorstep delivery of food will have to continue even after the lockdown is lifted since people may not return to work immediately. Community kitchens will continue to function in every district and collection centres for food packets will also continue. The Chief Minister said that a volunteer force comprising NSS, NCC, scouts and Yuva Mangal Dal, should be set up and trained to overcome the crisis. The volunteer force could also be deployed in the distribution of food. Yogi also asked officials to prepare a list of private physicians and doctors who could be available to the common man

on phone. He said that the state government has decided to set up a Corona Care Fund of Rs 1,000 crores which will be used to purchase ventilators, personal protective equipment and other medical equipment. Donations would also be taken from the corporate sector under the corporate social responsibility scheme. The state government has also moved to enforce doorstep delivery of FIRs to those who violate the lockdown and misbehave with police personnel. The scheme, under which the police will serve the FIR at the doorstep of the violator, was launched in Muzaffarnagar on Friday. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his video conference with the Chief Ministers, had sought suggestions for dealing with the situation once the lockdown is lifted. IANS

Lamps may lead us to knowledge: Scholars

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The nine minute long video message to the nation by Prime Minister Narendra Modi aired at 9 am on Friday has evoked mixed reactions ranging from taunts to appreciation. The Prime Minister asked the people to switch off the lights in their houses at 9 pm on Sunday for nine minutes and light up candles and diyas as a show of solidarity to fight the Corona Virus. While the Opposition leaders came down heavily on the Prime Minister for his request to the countrymen to light up candles and small oil lamps as a move to take the country away from its proposed path of scientific temper, Sanskrit scholars, physicists and vedanata experts welcomed the suggestion as a right move in the right direction. Shashi Tharoor, Congress leader and MP from Kerala described Modi's speech as a return to Ram Bharose. In a message in Twitter, the controversial MP from Thiruvananthapuram said: "This is no accident: the PM spoke on Ram Navami at 9 am for 9 minutes, asked us to light diyas and candles on April 5 at 9 pm for 9 minutes. He is invoking all the auspicious elements Hinduism associates with number 9. Back to Ram Bharose!! #COVID19 must be more serious than we thought!". The CPI(M) leaders, the

virulent critics of the PM too took to the social media. The party cadre went to town making fun of the PM for taking the country back to the days of religious obscurantism. But Sanskrit and Vedic scholars in Kerala said that the suggestion to light up diyas and candles on Sunday is justified as it finds justification in Upanishads and Vedas. Parappananga Unnikrishnan Panikkar, Vedic scholar who spends his entire time during the lockdown in prayers and pooja told *The Pioneer* that Modi's request to light diyas and candles has similarities with a silent prayer. "Our tradition is based on the prayer tamassomaa jyotirgama-

ya which means lead us from darkness to light. It is a prayer to lead us from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge," said the scholar. He said this is the way to make people understand the seriousness of a complex medical situation and the PM has done it in his own style. "Don't you feel that this is better than the Chumbana Samaram (agitation of kiss) and human wall organised by political parties under the pretext of ushering in renaissance?" asked Panikkar. PM Gopala Menon, Thanthrik scholar, and his son Prof MG Gireeshan a physicist, preferred to analyse the April 5 lighting of lamps through the

eyes of astrology. "Sunday begins with the star Makam which lasts upto 3pm. The combination of Makam and Sunday result in two Yogams (phases), Mrithyu Yogam and Visha Yogam (Death and Poison). The Makam phase gives way to Visha Mukthi yogam (phase free of poison) after 3pm and the choice of the time of 9 pm to light up lamps is an apt move. It is after the period of Visha Mukthi Yogam, the lamps are being lighted. As per Indian philosophy, God is in the form of Viraat and hence the offering of prayers in the form of lamp is similar to praying to the almighty to light up the world from darkness," said Menon.

who are suffering economically in this hour of crisis. Will switching off power handle the crisis?" Attacking the Prime Minister for "playing politics and seeking to extract political mileage in this hour of crisis" former CPI(M) MP and State Left Legislature Party Leader Sujan Chakrabarty said "last time he make people beat thalis. This time he is telling them to light up candles and tail lamp... What additional purpose will it serve besides uniting the saffron people or identifying and get a feel of saffron following in the entire country". Meanwhile, Bengal's total number of active corona related cases went up to 38 with 9 people getting cured and released on Friday. "We have 4 new cases reported today which takes the total number of active Corona cases in the State to 38," the Chief Minister said adding, "nine people have been cured and released today which is in addition to the 3 people cured earlier". Three people have succumbed to the disease, she said. Incidentally the Health Department experts had put the total number of Corona deaths to 7 on Thursday, leading State Chief Secretary to quickly call a second press conference and issue clarifications doubting whether four other deaths were because of the virus. Playing up the co-morbidity factor he said the victims had been hospitalised for other ailments and it was only subsequently that they were found to be Corona positive.

Taj Group salutes medical group

Mumbai: The Indian Hotels Company Ltd (IHCL), which runs the Taj group of hotels, has thrown open its doors for the medical staff combating the Covid-19 pandemic, an official spokesperson said here on Friday. From Friday, the rooms will be available at seven of its properties, including the flagship Taj Mahal Palace in Colaba, Taj Lands End in Bandra, Taj Santacruz, The President, Ginger in MIDC Andheri, Ginger in Madgaon (Goa) and Ginger Noida. IANS

CORONA: 4 NEW CASES, 9 MORE CURED IN BENGAL

PM's candlelight appeal: Didi leaves it on people

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Even as her senior minister-colleagues questioned the "logic" behind Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal to switch off electric lights and light up candles on April 5 to express solidarity for the nation's fight against Corona virus Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee refused to get drawn into politics saying she was nobody to issue advisories on the Prime Minister's appeal and said it was upon the people to consider as to what they would do on Sunday. Apparently losing her cool when asked to comment on how she would react to Modi's appeal to switch off power for nine minutes on Sunday, Banerjee retorted "Don't politicise the issue. It is a grave situation. I will not make any statement on this... How can I say what you will do on what the Prime Minister says... It is upon the people to decide as to what they will do... whether they will follow his (PM's) advice or not... If I will feel like sleeping I will sleep and if you feel like responding to his appeal you will do accordingly... I am nobody to make a comment here. Let us not play politics." Instead of dwelling on the Prime Minister's speech the Chief Minister questioned the attitude of "some political parties (read BJP)" for "doing nothing but taking all the credits". She alleged that "these people are saying that the Centre is providing ration to the people in this hour of crisis... In fact they have not even given a mask. It is the State Government which is bearing the huge costs of providing free ration to the people." Questioning the "logic" behind the Prime Minister's appeal to switch off electric light one of the senior Ministers of Banerjee's Cabinet Subroto Mukherjee said he would follow the Prime Minister's advice if he were to be explained the reason behind doing what has been asked to do by Modi. "I will definitely follow his instructions but before that one has to explain the logic behind switching off electric light for nine minutes and lighting up candles," he said. Disapproving of the Prime Minister's appeal Congress leader in Parliament Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury said "if switching off power and lighting up candles or torches can solve the problem there is no need to do researches to discover medicine against the Corona virus." Bengal Pradesh Congress president Somen Mitra said "we were expecting more important things from the Prime Minister. We were expecting a policy speech on the way out for the poor people, the migrant workers and farmers

who are suffering economically in this hour of crisis. Will switching off power handle the crisis?" Attacking the Prime Minister for "playing politics and seeking to extract political mileage in this hour of crisis" former CPI(M) MP and State Left Legislature Party Leader Sujan Chakrabarty said "last time he make people beat thalis. This time he is telling them to light up candles and tail lamp... What additional purpose will it serve besides uniting the saffron people or identifying and get a feel of saffron following in the entire country". Meanwhile, Bengal's total number of active corona related cases went up to 38 with 9 people getting cured and released on Friday. "We have 4 new cases reported today which takes the total number of active Corona cases in the State to 38," the Chief Minister said adding, "nine people have been cured and released today which is in addition to the 3 people cured earlier". Three people have succumbed to the disease, she said. Incidentally the Health Department experts had put the total number of Corona deaths to 7 on Thursday, leading State Chief Secretary to quickly call a second press conference and issue clarifications doubting whether four other deaths were because of the virus. Playing up the co-morbidity factor he said the victims had been hospitalised for other ailments and it was only subsequently that they were found to be Corona positive.

Manhunt on to track down 1,000 identified contacts of +ve cases in J&K

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Running out of time, the J&K Government has now launched a massive manhunt to track down over 1,000 identified contact people of coronavirus positive cases. The police teams, officials of the State health department and other agencies have been tasked to immediately track down these people. So far, the authorities have managed to trace 975 contact

persons of majority of coronavirus positive cases. Majority of those, who are still at large, are believed to have come in contact with the positive cases and pose a grave risk of spreading the virus among large sections of people in their neighbourhood. According to Rohit Kansal, spokesman of the Jammu and Kashmir Government, "efforts are on to employ smart tracking and aggressive testing methods to isolate suspected cases of

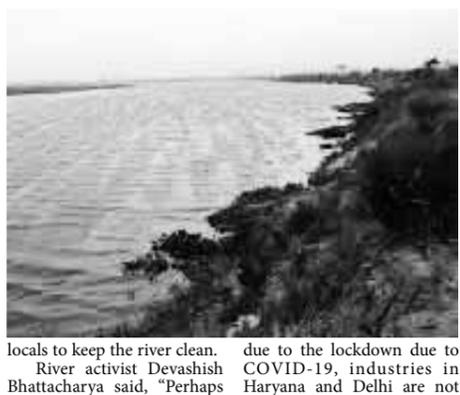
coronavirus to further prevent spread of the pandemic in Jammu and Kashmir". He said, we have identified 34 Red zones, 24 in Kashmir valley and 10 in Jammu division, where the entire government machinery is focusing all its energies to locate each one of the identified 2000 contact persons and put them to test. He said, on Friday five fresh cases tested positive. Out of these four cases tested positive in Kashmir valley. All of

them had come in contact with the already tested positive cases. One patient from Jammu tested positive, he added. According to the daily status report, so far 75 cases have tested positive in Jammu and Kashmir. Out of these, 70 are active cases. One patient, admitted in the GMC, Jammu was discharged late Friday evening after she recovered fully and tested negative. At present 16 patients are admitted in the isolation ward

of Jammu Medical college hospital and 54 others in different hospitals of Kashmir valley. According to the hospital authorities, "all the patients are responding to the treatment and are stable. Currently, no patient is on the ventilator support, the hospital authorities confirmed. Meanwhile, the Government agencies have stepped up efforts to rush essential supplies to Kashmir valley.

For a change, Yamuna flows cleaner & full

Agra: After a long while, river Yamuna is flowing full and cleaner at this time of the year. "When US president Donald Trump visited Agra on February 24, water was released by upstream barrages, but it did not reach Agra. Trump, however, did not go to the rear side of the Taj Mahal, otherwise the polluted and dry Yamuna would have disturbed him. But for the last 25 days or so, we are enjoying a rare view of Yamuna at the Etmauddaula View Point park. The river bed is under water and birds have returned," said River Connect Campaign member Jugal Kishore Shrottriya who conducts a daily arti of Yamuna to mobilise



drawing water from the river. We have had several spells of rain in March, which could have raised the water level." Water level in Vrindavan and Mathura had also seen a steady rise in the past few weeks. In Agra, surplus water from the Ganga Jal Pipeline was also being released in the Yamuna. The two water works in Agra receive 140 cusec of water continuously from the 130 km long pipeline. The entire quantity is not used. The excess goes into the Yamuna, according to a local corporator Anurag Chaubey. The river behind the Taj Mahal, along Mahtaab Bagh

has come alive, offering a breathtaking view. Due to the lockdown, the Taj Mahal, for the first time in its history, is relaxed and breathing freely, deprived of the daily human load, as all monuments have been shut down in Agra for visitors. The Archaeological Survey of India is utilising the opportunity to clean up and carry out repairs long overdue. The city too is largely pollution free, due to restrictions on movement of vehicles. Only an occasional ambulance or a police vehicle can be seen on the Fatehabad road, which has the largest concentration of hotels. IANS

locals to keep the river clean. River activist Devashish Bhattacharya said, "Perhaps due to the lockdown due to COVID-19, industries in Haryana and Delhi are not

The food challenge

While we have enough stocks, the supply chain breakdowns and curfew protocols to choke the virus point to a crisis



The country may have sufficient foodgrain stocks in Central and State warehouses as reserves to tide out an emergency but the breakage of supply chain management due to the lockdown has also meant that they are not reaching beneficiaries. The Government claims that we have nearly 10 times the emergency reserve needed for this time of the year and the fair price shops can go on an overdrive to meet our nutritional requirements. But these are just dry rations, such as rice, wheat, sugar and pulses. Farm supplies have been

badly hit because of sudden closure. Even if there are vegetables waiting to be loaded, varying curfew protocols by different States and the still patchy system of curfew passes for truckers mean that there is no movement. Police harassment has only complicated transit. States like Karnataka, Kerala, Telangana, Delhi, Maharashtra and West Bengal have issued curfew passes promptly and set up police task forces to facilitate smooth movement. But virus hotspot States like Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan have totally closed their borders and even sealed their drop point depots. Although the Government is contemplating a staggered release from lockdown, mainly to ensure the April harvest from the fields, the exodus of daily labourers has meant that there are far fewer hands available to manage field work. There are also reports of truck drivers joining the migrants. The second biggest bottleneck is of manufactured, processed and packaged food items. With consumers hoarding anything with a shelf life, the sudden gush of demand, the flight of labour at units rolling them out and the supply chain gaps have meant that our breakfast platters are beginning to look different. Fast-moving consumer good (FMCG) companies are already registering an upswing in demand from urban centres, indicating the hoarding spiral. The retail network has completely collapsed, its earnings now down to 15 per cent. A longer lockdown would mean that sector players would have to shut down and let go off their staff by June. It is, of course, the neighbourhood stores and grocers, who are back in business, having just enough capacity to serve their ecosystem and, therefore, able to smoothen some shocks given their scale. The online delivery platforms have already collapsed with the supply chain breakdown, running out of stocks, delaying deliveries and some of them not signing up new customers at all. The less said about the poultry sector the better; eggs are still available though chicken and meat are mostly off the shelves because of the zoonotic virus. Even dairy products could be affected as a report said that the Aarey dairy has just enough fodder for the cattle to last a week or so.

In the end, what is needed is enabling bulk supplies and that, too, at a time of isolation protocols that demand there is no over-crowding at procurement sites. Most agricultural produce market committees, where every business sources supplies, have been shut for a while. Some of them have negotiated limited trading hours to minimise numbers. Respecting protocol and enforcing it with precision is a big challenge as is the enormous time lag. Besides, it is the high heat of summer and perishables, without fast movement, run the real risk of being wasted. At least for a month or so, a risk-free procurement will have to be evolved in consultation with Central and State representatives. If the situation prolongs, then the Government may have to look for other alternatives. For example, the Food Corporation of India has both operational and food security stocks. At a stretch, the Centre can offer them to States and then perhaps to select retail chains should the market so demand. Wheat and rice godowns are already overflowing but the holding capacity of fair price shops will have to be ramped up. Of course, we will also have to deal with the possibility of reduced food imports what with export restrictions in place. And while we might be able to ensure emergency food needs of vulnerable populations, pricing interventions just might be required. As for civil society, it can be incentivised to donate to food banks, the amount exempted from taxes, for the vast numbers of homeless and jobless. Saving lives is not just about treating the infected but nurturing a whole nation back to life from a calamitous disruption that had neither been foreseen nor imagined. Call it social welfarism but innovation and enterprise can only come when a nation is well-fed.

Business unusual

Whenever we emerge from the viral attack on the global economic system, business will never be the same again



Where will businesses stand in a post-Coronavirus world? Even as countries make plans to extend their lockdowns, both Government officials and citizens have no clue when the world will return to normalcy. There are those who are looking into the aspects as to where things may stand once everything settles down. However, one thing is certain: Things will not be the same as they were before the Wuhan contagion swept the world. Of course, there will be a lot of families and individuals who will be devastated by

the fallouts. Every passing day, it appears more and more likely that several businesses, which were swimming fine until the outbreak of the virus, will now sink into the depths of bankruptcy, with or without Government intervention. And those that survive will be fundamentally different. One of those differences will be driven from the "work from home" culture that has begun in many industries.

Work from home is a luxury that not every sector can avail. Even in the media industry, while online portals may have been able to spin their stories from a dark basement somewhere, that isn't a change for most such news parasites. Newspapers can survive on limited staff in offices but the printing presses need to be manned. Television channels need to have fully-crewed output desks and editors even if the anchors can be isolated. Nevertheless, working from home is a reality in many sectors and this will lead to some interesting changes in demand for commercial real estate and transportation requirements. Maybe there will be less demand for shared cabs. More companies might invest in "hot desking"; having shared stations for employees where anyone can log in and work. Collaboration applications such as Zoom, which has become extremely popular, and Microsoft's Teams will begin to rule the roost. And as tele-commuting becomes standard, will companies use the opportunity to cut costs as employees spend more time at home? That is extremely likely, salaries are certain to face a reality check. But this may not be the case across the world and in every sector. Whatever happens, it might be too soon to make a prediction of how things will play out in the coming months. There will be some interesting new developments and some puzzling trends that will play out. It is clear that this generation, which has become accustomed to social distancing and wearing masks, will be traumatised for years to come and handshakes might go extinct. But what will business as usual look like in 2021? It is too soon to say but rest assured it will not be the same as it was on February 1, 2020.

The invisible people

The long march undertaken by migrant workers has reminded India of its poor but how long will this awareness last?



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

One can argue that this is not the time to discuss the view, however credible, that the 21-day lockdown has been imposed without adequate thought to its consequences, particularly on the poor. The emphasis now, the argument may continue, should be exclusively on repulsing the COVID-19 invasion which has brought India to a standstill and threatens to play havoc with its life. There is a point in this, as there is equally a point in the contention that the subject needs to be discussed threadbare both from the viewpoint of ensuring accountability on the part of the authorities and the need to avoid in future the mistakes that have been made.

While leaving such a discussion for a post-Corona time — which, one hopes, is not far away — one needs to focus on a related question: How is it that few could anticipate the post-lockdown trudge of hundreds and thousands of migrant daily wage workers, often with their entire families including women and children in tow, to their village homes hundreds of miles away? Anyone familiar with the Indian tradition of family and community support, which survives in a great measure in rural areas despite erosion in urban societies, should have known that the first instinct of starving labourers, without work and shelter and facing uncertain futures, would be to go back to their village homes, with which most of them retain close ties.

The reason is simple: The poor have vanished as an active presence in the consciousness of those who now set the agenda for discourse in India. This was not always so. Mahatma Gandhi's abiding concern for the poor and making their well-being the touchstone for all action has been reflected in his iconic observation, "Recall the face of the poorest and weakest man you have seen, and ask yourself if this step you contemplate is going to be any use to him." He also stated, "Poverty is the worst form of violence." Equally well-known is his theory of trusteeship, the essence of which he expressed succinctly when he said, "Supposing I have come by a fair amount of wealth — either by way of legacy, or by means of trade and industry — I must know that all that wealth does not belong to me; what belongs to me is the right to an honourable livelihood, no better than that enjoyed by millions of others. The rest of my wealth belongs to the community and must be used for the welfare of the community."

The presence of a socialist influence in the Indian National Congress as early as the 1930s was reflected in the formation of the All-India Congress Socialist Party in 1934 under the chairmanship of Acharya Narendra Deva with Jayaprakash Narayan as secretary. The Congress had a number of important socialist leaders like Sampurnanand, Achyut Patwardhan, Ram Manohar Lohia and Minoo Masani. After



Independence, the socialists left the Congress and established the Praja Socialist Party, Socialist Party and the Samyukta Socialist Party respectively and their leaders like SM Joshi, NG Goray, Madhu Limaye and George Fernandes played important roles in the country's politics. Anger over exploitation and the suffering of the poor was, perhaps, the most powerful driving force behind Karl Marx's intellectual and political exertions and the programmes of the Communist Party of India, Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the various Naxalite groups.

For a long time after Independence, the Congress remained oriented towards a moderate, albeit nebulous, form of the ideology. After Parliament had accepted in 1954 the establishment of a "socialist pattern of society" as the aim of economic development, the Avadi session of the Congress, adopted, in January, 1955, a resolution calling for the "establishment of a socialistic pattern of society where the principal means of production are under social ownership or control" and there is "equitable distribution of the national wealth." Later, Indira Gandhi, who nationalised banks, insurance, coal mines and abolished the privy purses of the princes, rode to a massive victory in the 1971 mid-term elec-

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THE POOR AND THE ALLEVIATION OF THEIR POVERTY NO LONGER OCCUPY THE CENTRE STAGE OF THE POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN INDIA. THEY HAVE NOW BEEN TAKEN OVER BY ISSUES LIKE THE TERRORIST THREAT TO THE COUNTRY, THE RAM TEMPLE, CAA, NPR AND NRC. ONE REASON FOR THIS IS, OF COURSE, THE ADVENT OF HINDUTVA POLITICS AND ITS CONCOMITANTS
 ”

tions on the slogan of *Garibi Hatao* (Remove Poverty).

The shift towards a change in the party's political and economic trajectory, however, became manifest from the early 1980s. The launch of the "economic reforms" in 1991 saw, in effect, the *defenestration* of all talk of socialism. The emphasis was now on the market economy and unleashing the animal instinct of Indian entrepreneurs. As in most cases, economic change had its cultural and social consequences. Poverty has ceased to be of concern to the middle class, which enjoys unprecedented purchasing power and which sets the agenda for discourse in the country, constituting over 30 per cent of the population.

The instinctive tendency to look away has been reinforced in its case by the dynamics of a market economy where the driving force is sales, the volume of which is critically linked to revenue and the quantum of profit. Its cutting edge advertising seeks to boost sales by projecting products as not only covetable in themselves but their possession as a measure of a person's worth. With advertising dominating media, particularly television, the latter shaping people's mindsets as never before, conspicuous consumption as a means of showing off, has assumed an unprecedented

universality. It is almost a new religion that worships wealth and possession and not the character of a person. There is no time for the poor who are reduced to invisibility and are often looked down with contempt as failures.

There have been other changes. The poor and the alleviation of their poverty no longer occupy the centre stage of the political discourse in India. They have now been taken over by issues like the terrorist threat to the country, the Ram temple, the Citizenship Amendment Act, the National Population Register and the National Register of Citizens. One reason for this, of course, the advent of *Hindutva* politics and its concomitants. Another is the Congress's new orientation. It does refer to the poor from time to time but that is mostly *en passant*. Even otherwise, the decline in its political fortunes gives a cry-in-the-wilderness dimension to its pronouncements. Equally a factor has been the decline in Marxism's political appeal given its abandonment in Russia and China and the decline of Left politics in general in India. The result: Loss of visibility by poor. The long march and its horrors have made them visible again. But for how long?

(The writer is Consultant Editor, *The Pioneer*, and an author)

SOUNDBITE

Dear @narendramodi, we will listen to you and light *diyas* on April 5. But in return, please listen to us and to the wise counsel of epidemiologists and economists.

Congress leader
—P Chidambaram



Don't let this wretched Corona get the better of us. No, no, you are not getting what I am trying to say. Please read Corona in reverse, it becomes *na ro ko*.

Megastar
—Amitabh Bachchan



Listened to the Pradhan Showman. Nothing about how to ease people's pain, their burdens, their financial anxieties. Just a feel-good moment curated by India's Photo-Op PM!

Congress leader
—Shashi Tharoor



The military dictum is prepare or perish but in these times of Covid, we have refined it to prepare or suffer. We must ensure 100 per cent lockdown and social distancing.

Chief of Defence Staff
—Gen Bipin Rawat



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Relief in times of crisis

Sir — It was pleasing to know that the Punjab and Chandigarh High Court has allowed farmers to work in the field for harvesting crops. The court further said that industries and factories can function as long as workers are provided with accommodation, food and medication. In addition, markets will remain open from 10 am to 6 pm. These rulings bring a big relief for farmers, daily workers, poor and needy people as they can earn their livelihood for survival. It will also boost the declining economy of the State. However, it is also a bit challenging for the State to maintain social distancing among the people in such situations. Thus, the Government must ensure the safety of people at work.

AMS Nadwi
Lucknow

Strengthen ties

Sir — Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is quite active on social media, posted a video link on Twitter and claimed that he practises the Yoga *Nidra asana* once

or twice a week as it relaxes the mind and reduces stress and anxiety. Sharing Modi's tweet, Ivanka Trump, the daughter of the US President, expressed her appreciation of the initiative, especially during a time of crisis when the

Learn from Kerala's preparedness

This refers to the article, "Hope in Kerala model," (April 1) by Amit Sengupta. Kerala's current efforts to keep the deadly Coronavirus at bay need to be mapped with the struggle it went through for two consecutive years. Normally, the southwest monsoon ebbs to facilitate harvest and welcome the festival of Onam when the month of August progresses. But in 2018, torrential rains pounded the coastal State for days and all its 44 rivers were in spate. Kerala turned into a large green pool of water. The double curvature Idukki Dam, built across the River Periyar with a reservoir capacity of 2,403 feet, was filled to the brim. The State had to open the spillways and that raised the water level in the overflowing river. Floods devastated the State. In 2019, a few months before the worst deluge, the dreaded Nipah virus (NiV) that descended on Kozhikode from fruit bats, threatened to send life haywire.

The ruling Central Government compounded the State's misery by rationing its financial support. Certain quarters worked overtime to discourage personal contributions. A noisy pretender in a national television channel called the people of the State "shameless" during a debate on the UAE Government's offer to provide finan-



cial aid. Literally, Kerala waged a battle for survival. Proferring that "Kerala is a beacon to the world," Vijay Prashad and Subin Dennis, writing for "Globetrotter," a project of the Independent Media Institute, concluded, "The fight against COVID-19 is not over. Vigilance is necessary. Vaccines need to be tested and authorised; better cures need to be studied and shared. But even as one is vigilant, the lessons from places like Kerala should be absorbed." With lessons learnt from its struggles, Kerala is now positioned to fight COVID-19 from the front.

Haridasan Rajan
Kozhikode

COVID-19 outbreak has put many countries in lockdown. Ivanka Trump recently visited India along with her family where Modi welcomed them by organising a "Namaste Trump" event. Clearly, Modi has fascinat-

ed Trump and his family. One hopes that this bond between the heads of the two countries reflects in the US' development plans for India.

Munawwar Khurshid
Mumbai

Address food problems

Sir — Besides bringing the entire nation into lockdown, the spread of Coronavirus has created a problem of plenty, which needs to be tackled. With States undertaking large-scale distribution of food grains, the onus is on the Food Corporation of India (FCI) to ensure sufficient supply to meet the enhanced requirement of all States. Thankfully, India has sufficient foodgrain stockpiles to feed its poor for at least a year-and-a-half. But it is now up to the respective States to ensure no genuine beneficiary is left out. Foodgrain wastage and misappropriation must be avoided. Staples must reach the needy without any delay or leakage.

Side by side, the FCI must utilise this opportunity to take control of the many empty warehouses which need to be cleaned. With the harvesting season approaching, fresh stocks would soon arrive and would have to be stored.

Ashok Pal
New Delhi

Send your feedback to:
letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

The social media pandemic

During this lockdown we need to keep our spirits up and not be bogged down by the fake news being spread by scaremongers



PRAKRITI PODDAR

The Coronavirus outbreak has put the entire world under lockdown with the total number of cases rising to a whopping 10,16,395 globally and the death toll reaching 53,238. On January 30, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the Coronavirus outbreak as a Global Public Health Emergency. As more and more new hotspots emerge daily, experts are anticipating that the onslaught of this pandemic will continue for a few more months before we see the end of it. In the meantime, it has wreaked havoc on the world economy and every social activity known to man. Many countries, including India, have asked people to self-isolate themselves and set a 14-day quarantine period for citizens returning home from abroad.

Almost all global and national sports events have been indefinitely postponed, TV shows and film productions have been suspended, schools, colleges, malls, restaurants and cinemas have been closed. Foreign and domestic tourism is at a standstill due to closure of borders and aviation activity has been suspended in most parts of the world as well as India. People are working from home as inter-State borders have been sealed, so much so that transportation of goods across borders in the country has become difficult. Now, with the 21-day lockdown imposed by the Government, people are confined to their homes.

Naturally, anxiety due to the Coronavirus outbreak around the world is at an all time high, with people sporting social distancing discs that limit contact with others, using hand sanitisers as well as wearing masks to protect themselves against this epidemic. Governments around the world have also scaled up their respective healthcare systems and enhanced their capacity to provide timely screenings as well as treatment to people.

Nonetheless, there are various fake news portals as well as social media posts that are being circulated to spread misinformation about the Coronavirus, which is adding to the already-prevalent anxiety. Some myths like cow urine can prevent Coronavirus, spraying alcohol and chlorine on oneself can keep it at bay, mosquitoes can transmit the virus, eating garlic can prevent it, drinking lots of water will flush out the virus as well taking antibiotics will prevent the virus are doing the rounds of social media. People are unthinkingly passing such posts around despite leading scientists and healthcare professionals debunking these myths.

The nature of social media is such that anyone can share any fake or unverified information on their timeline which can cause anxiety among the people who see it. This has led to deterioration of their mental health as they are living in perpetual fear of the disease and resorting to measures which will certainly not prevent the Coronavirus but can potentially harm their health.

Thankfully, Governments are cracking down on such irresponsible behaviour and imposing fines as well punishment for people spreading misinformation. The Indian Government has written to top social media companies, including Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, ShareChat and Twitter, to control the spread of misinformation on COVID-19. In an advisory the Government asked social media platforms to start awareness campaigns, remove misinformation from the platform and promote authentic information on the Coronavirus so that wrong information does not add to the people's stress. So what can we really do to protect ourselves from this dreaded virus? Healthcare professionals have recommended several precautionary and hygienic measures, which include avoiding hospitals unless there is an emergency and as far as possible avoiding direct contact with healthcare professionals. They also advocate washing of hands regularly especially after direct contact with sick people or their surroundings. People must also stay clear of farm as well as wild animals.

People with symptoms of a severe respiratory infection must limit contact with others and cover their mouth while sneezing or coughing. If they develop a number of symptoms of the Coronavirus, they must report to the nearest hospital and not panic unnecessarily. We must also clean everything around the house and workplace with disinfectant as when infected droplets from a person land on a surface it survives for days on end.

Use hand sanitiser regularly and avoid touching your eyes, mouth and nose, especially if you have just been outside. Now when India is in a 21-day lockdown, we also need to keep our spirits up and not be bogged down by boredom or give in to fake news being spread by scaremongers on social media.

If you are not working from home and hence have a lot of empty time on your hands, use it productively to finish chores that have been pending for long. Take up a hobby that you never had time for earlier. Pray and meditate. Spend time with family. Play board games, read, watch movies. Do whatever it takes to protect your sanity by keeping negative thoughts in check and escape the pandemic called social media.

(The writer is a mental health expert and Director of a wellness company)

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

THE 21-DAY LOCKDOWN WAS NECESSARY BUT UNPLANNED. IT CAUSED HARASSMENT TO LAKHS OF MIGRANT WORKERS. —CONGRESS PRESIDENT SONIA GANDHI



INDIA'S EFFORTS TO FIGHT CORONAVIRUS ARE BEING LAUDED DOMESTICALLY AND GLOBALLY. BUT CONGRESS IS PLAYING PETTY POLITICS. —HOME MINISTER AMIT SHAH

Economic cost of the lockdown

The Indian economy will face an income loss of ₹1.7 lakh crore per week or a total of ₹5.1 lakh crore during the three-week-long shutdown called by the Govt



BARUN DEB PAL

SANJIB POHIT

The pandemic COVID-19 has already affected over 10,16,395 people across the world and there have been 53,238 deaths worldwide. Out of this, over 20,000 people died in the last three months alone. Health experts across the world are yet to discover a vaccine for this deadly virus that can be applied for human use worldwide. This is despite the fact that about 35 companies and academic institutions are racing to create an anti-Coronavirus vaccine. There are at least four candidates, which are being tested on animals now. The first firm to conduct a human trial, Boston-based biotechnology firm Moderna, will enter Phase-II of trials, which means widespread human application by early summer. But this is not fast enough. The World Health Organisation (WHO) is expecting an exponential spike in the number of Coronavirus cases across the world in the coming days and is providing necessary information to vulnerable countries. As a result, national and local governments across the world are encouraging social distancing among the people and more and more nations are going into a lockdown mode.

India is already in the second week of its 21-day lockdown that was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 24 in a televised address to the nation. Despite its size and the density of the population, the entire country, that includes 28 States and eight Union Territories, has gone into a lockdown, making it the largest such exercise in the world.

The country, which has a poor healthcare infrastructure has no option but to do this, as social distancing is probably the surest way of stopping the spread of the Coronavirus among the 1.3 billion Indians. However, health experts say that nothing can prevent the country from going into stage-III of the outbreak and the lockdown is just delaying our entry into it. It is giving us more time to prepare for stage-III and increasing the chances of us taking advantage of any medical breakthrough that takes place.

But, the big question is, for how long can India afford to shut itself down? As it is the Indian economy was in a shambles before the outbreak. Now, it also has to bear the huge economic loss of the three-week-long complete shutdown and the burden of the financial relief package of ₹1.75 lakh crore that was announced by the Government for the country.

Once this nightmare is behind us, it will become really hard for the Finance Ministry to prepare an effective package for a quick revival of the economy. Here are some estimates of the direct economic loss to the nation and some possible interventions for quick recovery.

The third advance estimate of India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) published by the Central Statistical Organisation (CSO) revealed that India's estimated GDP for 2019-2020 stood at ₹47 lakh crore, which turns out to be ₹3.6 lakh crore per week, of which 17 per cent is earned by casual labour, 21 per cent by regular wage employees and 62 per cent by self-employed workers. The lockdown will affect all these workers on a different magnitude. According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) data for 2017, a whopping 25 per cent of total workers in India are casual labourers (i.e. almost 93 million people) earning about ₹1,754 per week. Another 23 per cent of the total are regular wage earners who get an average ₹4,063 per week. The rest, 52 per cent workers, are self-employed ones that include own account workers, the self-employed and helpers in household enterprises.



“ THIS ESTIMATE IS ONLY FOR THE DIRECT IMPACT ON INCOME FOR A PERIOD OF 21 DAYS. THE ECONOMIC LOSS WILL BE MUCH HIGHER IF TIMELY RECOVERY DOES NOT TAKE PLACE AND IF WE ARE FORCED TO GO IN FOR AN EXTENDED LOCKDOWN GOING FORWARD ”

According to the PLFS' estimates, a self-employed person earns about ₹3,460 per week. The complete shutdown will affect casual labourers the most as their income depends on working days available in a week.

The situation is, of course, marginally better for regular wage employees. But nearly 46 per cent of the total regular wage earners in India do not have the benefit of paid leave. Therefore, if their salary is not protected during the lockdown period, they will lose their income. On the other hand, self-employed people will lose profit earning from their enterprises/firms due to close of operations.

The lockdown will affect various sectors differently. As Modi's speech indicated, only production and distribution of essential commodities and services have been allowed to be operational. That includes food supply, goods transport, manufacturing of medical equipment, pharmaceutical, medical facilities, communication and financial services. Therefore, workers will definitely suffer income loss if they are engaged in the locked down sectors.

Another 40 per cent casual labourers are engaged in the construction sector, which will surely be closed for 21 days leading to income loss to the respective workers. A further 10 per cent of casual workers are engaged in manufacturing industries, where almost 90 per cent of economic activities are closed for now. The assumption of 90 per cent shut down of manufacturing is based on the output share of food and medical equipment sectors in total production.

The estimate is based on the 2016 Supply Use Table (SUT) of the CSO, which indicates that foodgrain processing and medical equipment contribute to about 10 per cent of the total GDP of the manufacturing sector. Thus, about 45 million casual workers (i.e. 50 per cent of total casual workers) will be vulnerable, provided agriculture and allied sectors con-

tinue to provide job opportunities to the rest of the workers. This is a reasonable assumption for the agriculture sector as harvesting of Rabi crops usually starts in most of the States in late March/early April, coinciding with the complete lockdown period in the country. Hence, the aggregate income loss of the casual workers will be ₹0.3 lakh crore per week during the lockdown period if we consider their per week income earning to be of the same level as in the third quarter (October-December 2019) of 2019-20.

Additionally, as 46 per cent of regular employees do not have the benefit of paid leave, it is estimated that almost 15 per cent of total regular wage employees will lose their income due to the shutting down of economic activities. Thus, it is estimated that the regular salaried group will lose ₹0.35 lakh crore per week as compared to their weekly income obtained during the third quarter of the Financial Year 2019-20.

Since 53 per cent of self-employed people are engaged in agriculture, we assume, there will be no direct impact on their income during this time. However, the income of the rest of the 47 per cent of self-employed people will be affected if they are engaged in locked down sectors. Based on calculations of the sector-specific impact, almost ₹1.05 lakh crore income of the self-employed people will be lost per week.

In effect, the Indian economy will face an income loss of ₹1.7 lakh crore per week or a total of ₹5.1 lakh crore during the three-week-long lockdown.

Considering that almost 95 million workers/entrepreneurs will be hit and if we consider that each of them supports on an average four people, nearly 380 million people will face severe welfare threats. This estimate is only for the direct impact on income for a period of 21 days. The economic loss will be much higher if timely recovery does not take place and if we are forced to go in for an extended

lockdown going forward. So what should the Government do to improve the situation?

As per estimates, the shutdown will cause a loss of ₹5,261 per casual worker, which is nearly equivalent to the income support given by the Government to the farmers through the PM-KISAN scheme (i.e. ₹6,000 annual income support to farmers). It makes sense to extend this scheme to the casual labourers engaged in the non-agricultural sector.

Regular wage employees without entitlement of paid leave are highly vulnerable during this period. Therefore, firms can be encouraged to compensate wage loss to those employees and a tax benefit package for the firms may be thought of.

Self-employed people will also face a severe loss due to the economic downturn. Boosting effective demand in the economy can encourage investment and in this context the first two measures will play a key role. So far, an amount of ₹15,000 crore has been allocated for the health sector for improving healthcare facilities.

The Finance Minister's recent announcement of a ₹1.75 lakh crore package to help the economically-weaker sections survive the loss of jobs and income that would be the inevitable fallout of the Coronavirus outbreak is not adequate.

As indicated above, this is only one-third of the loss of income estimated during the shutdown. Of course, the Government has issued instructions exempting workers and labourers from paying rent for a month and assured wages for them during the lockdown period. This may no doubt lessen the burden. However, foolproof implementation would not be an easy proposition despite the Government's best intention.

(Deb is with IFPRI and Pohit works for the NCAER. The views expressed are personal)

Police excesses during shutdown not justified

Fines coupled with clarifications regarding the extent of the restrictions and positive propaganda like the 'Corona Warrior' videos shared by the Prime Minister are most effective and humane ways of ensuring that people understand the need for social distancing



ISHA SINGH

In the aftermath of the commencement of the lockdown, various incidents surfaced where the police lathi-charged ambulance drivers, stranded migrant workers and other people for venturing out of their homes to buy essential items like milk and groceries. These incidents have been recorded and circulated on social media by onlookers. However, this has resulted in not just physical but also mental trauma for the victims. So, are such police excesses justified, even if they have been committed in the face

of the threat of COVID-19?

In order to understand the legality of the incidents of police action, we must first distinguish between a "lockdown" and "curfew." A curfew is a short-term measure, where essential services are also disrupted, to keep people off the streets in times of riots or terror activities.

On the other hand, a lockdown is a relatively long-term measure, requiring the closure of public and private establishments, schools and religious places in order to restrict the large-scale movement of people. As essential services continue to operate, a lockdown is less restrictive than a curfew. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) guidelines, issued under Section 10(2)(l) of the Disaster Management Act (DMA), 2005, despite having the effect of a lockdown, do not use the term curfew or lockdown. Moreover, the guidelines do not specifically state that people cannot venture out of their houses. Even in States which have

invoked Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), no order has been issued which explicitly makes it criminal to step out of the house. This is less so if one is rendering an essential service or has ventured out to buy essential items.

However, given the Coronavirus outbreak, it is our duty as responsible citizens to ensure that we don't leave our homes. But in the event that we do have to, there is no justification for the police subjecting people to the appalling treatment that we have witnessed over the last few days. We live in a country plagued by illiteracy and poverty. There has been widespread confusion regarding what can and cannot be done during the lockdown. The plight of the migrant workers, who were compelled by their poverty to walk thousands of kilometres back home as they could not afford to live in the city without work, is a glaring instance of why we must exercise compassion and not violence in this hour

of crisis. The majority of the police force must be commended for their remarkable efforts in maintaining order in a situation of extreme panic and for putting their personal safety at risk during a pandemic. However, some errant policemen have chosen to violate the law and strict action must be taken against them. Voluntarily causing hurt to a person is a non-cognisable offence under Section 323 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and provides for imprisonment of up to one year. Victims of police violence should not succumb to such blatant misuse of authority. Instead they must record such incidents, subject themselves to immediate medical examination, if possible, and file a complaint before the nearest Magistrate under Section 190(1) of the CrPC. If this is difficult to pursue during the lockdown, it must be followed up once the restrictions are eased.

The MHA guidelines clearly state that a person found violating stipula-

tions can be charged under Section 188 of the IPC and Sections 51 to 60 of the DMA, 2005. Section 188 of the IPC provides for a fine and an imprisonment term for one month for the violation of an order of a public servant. Further, the DMA also prescribes penalties which can attract fines as well as imprisonment up to two years for violating orders issued under it.

However, these penal provisions must be invoked cautiously, with due application of mind. Consideration must be given to the fact that it is difficult for people to approach the courts, which are functioning on an extremely limited basis. The State must also take care to ensure that the punishment is proportionate to the offence in question, as held by the Supreme Court in the Vikram Singh vs Union of India case, especially when the Government has not expressly clarified whether a single person walking on the street amounts to an offence.

Yascha Mounk, a professor at John Hopkins University, in his book *The People vs. Democracy*, argues that a liberal democracy strikes a balance between two fundamental principles, the "will of the majority" and the "rule of law", which gives primacy to individual rights.

India's constitutional framework may allow for individual rights to be curtailed but they cannot be completely sacrificed at the altar of the "will of the majority." In the face of a public health challenge, it is all the more necessary to be vigilant about human rights, as history teaches us that the gravest human rights violations have taken place during wars, emergencies and disruptive situations. The "majority" should be careful before applauding or normalising police excesses in the name of public interest when alternate and proportionate penalties exist.

The ideal approach in this case would be for the police to fine people

who are found violating a Section 144 order or the MHA guidelines on the lockdown. This can be done by the President or the Governor by promulgating an Ordinance under Articles 123 and 213 of the Constitution respectively, empowering local authorities to impose fines on violators. Such fines must be based on a differential system, accounting for the socio-economic background of the violators.

Fines are being used effectively as a deterrent in the UK, the UAE and Canada. In the UK, police officers have the power to issue on-the-spot fines of £60 for people found violating the lockdown rules. Such fines, coupled with clarifications regarding the extent of the restrictions and positive propaganda like the "Corona Warrior" videos shared by the Prime Minister, are most effective and humane ways of ensuring that people understand the need for social distancing.

(The writer is a lawyer in the Bombay High Court)

Around the Globe

US President Donald Trump has tested negative for the novel coronavirus for a second time and is "healthy" and not displaying any symptoms for the deadly disease, the White House physician has said.

Just when Americans need it most, a US newspaper industry already under stress is facing an unprecedented new challenge. Readers desperate for information are more reliant than ever on local media as the coronavirus spreads across the US.

China will observe a national day of mourning on Saturday for martyrs, including the "whistleblower" Dr Li Wenliang, who sacrificed their lives in the fight against the coronavirus outbreak and the over 3,300 people who died of the infection in the country.

Researchers have created a web application that provides an overview of the coronavirus pandemic across the globe, in a way that is more interactive than other maps and statistics. The app titled "COVID19" is based on data from Johns Hopkins University in the US, the Danish National Serum Institute in Denmark, World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations.

Iran on Friday announced 134 more deaths from the novel coronavirus, bringing the officially confirmed total to 3,294. Health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour told a news conference that 2,715 new infections had been confirmed in the past 24 hours, taking the total to 53,183.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison on Friday warned Australians not to travel during Easter and follow social distancing policies to contain the spread of the coronavirus that has killed 28 people and infected over 5,300 others in the country.

US, UK AND SPAIN DEATHS MOUNT

Virus threatens war zones, world toll above 56,000; more than 1 million cases globally, 2.3 lakh recovered from coronavirus



AFP ■ LONDON

Experts warn that the more than one million cases of COVID-19 confirmed globally are probably just a small proportion of total infections, as testing is not widely available. With more than 55,000 dead, the threat has never been more stark.

The US, Spain and Britain grappled with their highest tolls yet and the world economy took a massive hit. Prosperous countries in Europe and North America are currently bearing the brunt of the disease but — with infections also reported in war zones and refugee camps — there are fears of a new explosion among the world's most vulnerable.

"The worst is yet to come," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said, referring to countries beset with fighting like Syria, Libya and Yemen. "The COVID-19 storm is now coming to all these theatres of conflict." For the moment, the United States accounts for around a quarter of confirmed cases, but Europe is far from being out of danger — Spain reported more than 900 deaths

in 24 hours on Friday, for the second day running. While Italy still leads the world in fatalities, France, Belgium and Britain have also been hard hit.

The UK Government opened a 4,000-bed field hospital on Friday ahead announcing a its highest one-day toll of 684. UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson is himself entering a second week of isolation with a high temperature after testing positive for the virus, but Queen Elizabeth II is to make an historic address to Britain and the Commonwealth nations on Sunday.

The public health battle being waged across the world ebbed and flowed, with Germany saying the rate of new infections is slowing but once confident Singapore closing schools and workplaces to fend off a possible renewed upsurge in cases. The virus has now killed more than 10,000 people across Spain, but it spared 29-year-old Javier Lara, who has returned home after being treated in an overburdened intensive care unit and told AFP of his suffering.

"I was panicking that my daughter would get infected. When I started showing symptoms, I said I wouldn't hold her or go near her," he said, describing facing death with an eight-week-old as the "worst moment in his life". The world economy has

Table with 3 columns: COUNTRY, TOTAL CASES, TOTAL DEATHS. Rows include USA, Italy, Spain, Germany, China, France, Iran, UK.



been pumelled by the virus and the associated lockdowns, with more than half the population of the planet under some kind of stay-at-home order. The US economy shed 7,01,000 jobs last month, its worst since March 2009 in the wake of the global financial crisis, boosting the jobless rate to 4.4 percent for the first time in 45 years.

China's central bank became the latest to announce special stimulus measures Friday when it cut reserve requirements for smaller banks in order to release around 400 billion yuan (\$56 billion) in liquidity. The outbreak began last year in China, which announced a day of national mourning on Saturday for those who died fighting against the disease.

hope their hard-won antibodies can be used to treat future victims. "We can be superheroes," the 45-year-old photographer told AFP. "These are unprecedented, frightening times where everything is beyond our control — except we as survivors can help."

Financial ratings agency Fitch predicted both the US and eurozone economies would shrink this quarter by up to 30 per cent and the Asian Development Bank warned on Friday the global economy could take a \$4.1 trillion hit — equivalent to five percent of

Australia took the extreme step of banning the 15,000-strong crews of virus-stricken cruise ships from coming ashore — dealing the world's teetering tourism industry another blow.

Even in the world's richest country, the US, healthcare providers are under pressure. New Yorkers like COVID-19 survivor Diana Berrent are donating blood plasma in the

Italian PM tells EU to 'show more ambition, unity, courage'

Rome: Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte on Friday extended his feud about coronavirus money with EU Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen in the pages of a Roman newspaper.

Conte wrote a letter to Italy's La Repubblica in response to an apology that von der Leyen had published in that same paper on Thursday.

"I am sorry," von der Leyen had told Italians. "The EU is with you now." Conte sounded unimpressed in his letter.

"Dear Ursula," he wrote. "I hear ideas (from you) not worthy of Europe." He told her it was time for the EU "to show more ambition, more unity

and more courage". At issue is billions of euros that Italy wants from the European Union to help fight the novel coronavirus pandemic that has killed nearly 14,000 people in Italy and shattered the country's economy. Conte wants the EU to start issuing lots of joint debt — dubbed "coronabonds" — that could let countries such as Italy address the crisis more cheaply. Von der Leyen has sided with Germany and some other northern European countries' suspicion of pooled risk because it could raise their own borrowing costs at the expense of more indebted countries.

Trump, Macron discuss convening P5 meeting

Washington: US President Donald Trump and his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron on Friday discussed having a meeting of five permanent members of the UN Security Council on a collective fight against coronavirus, the White House said.

The P5 or the five permanent members of the UNSC are the US, the UK, China, France and Russia. "President Trump and President Macron discussed convening P5 leaders soon to increase UN cooperation in defeating the pandemic and ensuring international peace and security," the White House said.



An aerial view of the Athens University headquarters building and a deserted Panepistimiou street, in Athens. Deserted squares, padlocked parks, empty avenues where cars were once jammed bumper-to-bumper in heavy traffic. The Greek capital, like so many cities across the world, has seen its streets empty as part of a lockdown designed to stem the spread of the new coronavirus

German virus data offers 'hope' but premature to ease curbs: Merkel

AFP ■ BERLIN

Latest figures which show the spread of the coronavirus slowing in Germany give "hope", Chancellor Angela Merkel said on Friday, but warned it was still too early to relax curbs on public life. "It's true that the latest figures, as high as they are, give us a little bit of hope," said Merkel in her weekly podcast, adding that it was however "definitely much too early... To think about loosening the strict rules we have given ourselves."

Corona beer producer halts brewing over virus

AFP ■ MEXICO CITY

The Mexican brewer of Corona beer said Thursday it was suspending production because of the health emergency in the country over the COVID-19 pandemic.

Grupo Modelo — whose brands also include Pacifico and Modelo — said the measure was in line with the Mexican government's order to suspend all non-essential activities until April 30 to slow the spread of coronavirus.

"We are in the process of lowering production at our plants to the bare minimum," the company said in a statement,

adding it would complete the suspension in the following days. Mexico's government has said that only key sectors such as agribusiness will be able to continue to function.

Grupo Modelo said it was ready to operate with 75 per cent of its staff working remotely to guarantee the supply of beer, if the Government agreed. Mexico's other major beer producer Heineken — which makes the Tecate and Dos Equis brands — could also stop activities on Friday, the Reforma newspaper said, although the company did not confirm the report.

On Wednesday, the northern state of Nuevo Leon, where Heineken's Mexican operations are based, said it would stop the production and distribution of beer, which led to panic buying. Since the start of the virus crisis, Corona beer has been the punchline of jokes and memes, and an online rumour said sales in the US dropped by around 40 percent after the outbreak. However, in late February, Constellation Brands, which owns the Corona label, denied the rumour and said sales had stayed strong in the US even as the virus has spread internationally. Mexico has so far registered over 1,500 confirmed cases of coronavirus and 50 deaths.



UN chief: Ceasefire appeal backed by parties in 11 nations

United Nations: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Friday that warring parties in 11 countries have responded positively to his appeal for a global cease-fire to tackle the coronavirus pandemic, but turning words into peace is enormously difficult and fighting has escalated in major conflicts including Yemen, Libya and Afghanistan.

The need is urgent because "the COVID-19 storm" is now coming to all conflict areas. Guterres told a briefing at UN Headquarters in New York that his appeal 10 days ago was rooted in the recognition that "there should be only one fight in our world today: our shared battle against COVID-19."

and more than 1 million people in an online petition organized by Avaaz. He said parties to conflicts in Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Colombia, Libya, Myanmar, the Philippines, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen have also expressed their acceptance.

He called on all governments, groups and people with influence "to urge and pressure combatants around the world to put down their arms," saying

The UN Chief said the appeal is "resonating" across the world, citing a growing number of endorsements for the cease-fire from 70 countries, civil society, religious leaders including Pope Francis,

But Guterres said: "There are enormous difficulties to implementation as conflicts have festered for years, distrust is deep, with many spoilers and many suspicions."

AI can predict corona patients' risk if they need ventilators

IAN S ■ LONDON

As companies the world over commit to make ventilators to meet the demand, researchers are now developing computer models based on artificial intelligence (AI) that calculate the risk of an individual patient's need for a ventilator or intensive care.

Several non-health companies are now scrambling to produce vents as more and more critical COVID-19 cases are showing up globally. "With these AI models, hospitals will be able to know — for example — that 40 per cent of their 300 hospitalised patients will probably require a ventilator within one week. This allows them to plan and deploy their resources in the

best possible way," said Mads Nielsen from University of Copenhagen in Denmark. According to the researchers, algorithms will harvest vast amounts of data from multiple sources.

The data consists of X-rays, tests and measurements taken of patients at the time of their admittance to the hospital, along with their electronic health records. "All data will go to a supercomputer where, within minutes, our model calculates how likely a specific patient is to require a ventilator, and how many days will go by before such a need arises. That's our goal," Nielsen said. Although the models will not be used as a basis for treating individual patients, they will be used as a planning

tool that can still make a big difference for hospital staff. In doing so, doctors hope to identify shared traits among the most severely affected patients. This may turn out to be the number of white blood cells, the use of certain pharmaceuticals or something else.

Researchers said they are aware of certain things that increase risk, such as age, smoking, asthma and heart problems, but there are other factors involved. "After all, we hear about young people who end up on ventilators and older people who do well without understanding why. So let's get the computer to find patterns that we aren't able to see ourselves," explained Espen Solem, Chief Physician, Bispebjerg and Frederiksberg Hospitals.

Poor nations need COVID-19 research to avoid system 'breakdown'

AFP ■ PARIS

Research on the prevention of treatment of COVID-19 in poor and developing nations is urgently needed to avert a "complete breakdown" of health services, a coalition of more than 70 scientific bodies said on Friday. The pandemic is currently hitting Europe and the United States the hardest, straining even their health sys-

tems to the limit. But there are growing fears that widespread coronavirus outbreaks in sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia could prove even more catastrophic. While there are over 600 clinical trials focused on COVID-19 testing, treatment and vaccines, there are virtually none planned in resource-poor countries. With hundreds of millions of people lacking easy access to clean water and sanitation and

with many overcrowded urban settings unable to implement social distancing effectively, the stakes are huge. In addition, many health workers lack the necessary protective equipment and training in handling infectious diseases. "Disruption or complete breakdown of those healthcare systems would result in high direct and indirect mortality since care of all illness would be affected," said the authors of a letter published on Friday in The Lancet.

The COVID-19 Clinical Research Coalition — an unprecedented consortium of scientists, policymakers, public health experts and researchers — is to make it easier for developing nations to access research data to help inform their response.

The show can't go on: Virus halts circus in Netherlands



Sarina Renz kisses one of the eight Siberian Steppe camels, of the stranded Renz Circus in Drachten, northern Netherlands. The circus fleet of blue, red and yellow trucks have had a fresh lick of paint over the winter. But now, as coronavirus measures shut down the entertainment industry across Europe, they have no place to go. "It's catastrophic for everybody," said Sarina Renz, of the German family circus that has been in existence since 1842

Virus deals end to US hiring; Europe's hospitals buckle

AP ■ NEW YORK

The coronavirus outbreak finally snapped the United States' record-breaking hiring streak of nearly 10 years, while US and European medical workers struggling to save ailing patients Friday watched supplies of medicine, protective equipment and breathing machines dwindle by the hour.

Jobs numbers released in the US showed the virus dealt a swift end to the nation's 50-year-low unemployment rate, with employers reporting hundreds of thousands of job cuts in March. The true picture, though, is far worse, because the government figures do not include the last two weeks, when nearly 10 million thrown-out-of-work Americans applied for unemployment benefits.

Worldwide, confirmed infections surged past 1 million and deaths topped 54,000, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University.

Experts say both numbers are seriously undercounted because of the lack of testing, mild cases that were missed and governments that are underplaying the extent of the crisis. Europe's three worst-hit countries — Italy, Spain and France — surpassed 30,000 dead, or over half of the global toll. From those countries, the view remained almost unrelentingly grim, a frightening portent for places like New York, the epicenter of the US outbreak, where bodies are being loaded by forklift into refrigerated trucks outside overwhelmed hospitals.

Shortages of critical equipment led to fierce competition

among buyers from Europe, the US and elsewhere. A regional leader in Paris described the scramble to find masks a "worldwide treasure hunt."

Gov. Andrew Cuomo warned that New York could run out of ventilators in six days.

With more than 245,000 people infected in the US and the death toll topping 6,000, sobering preparations were underway. The Federal Emergency Management Agency asked the Pentagon for 100,000 more body bags.

One Spanish hospital turned its library into an intensive care unit. In France, space was set aside for bodies in a vast food market. The French prime minister said he is "fighting hour by hour" to ward off shortages of essential drugs used to keep COVID-19 patients alive.

Hydroxychloroquine azithromycin mix dangerous for heart

IAN ■ NEW YORK

As the combined use of anti-malaria drug hydroxychloroquine and the antibiotic azithromycin to treat coronavirus patients gains momentum, cardiologists are advising caution because both medications can increase the risk for dangerous abnormal heart rhythms.

In guidance published in the American College of Cardiology publication titled "Cardiology Magazine," cardiologists from Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) and Indiana University recommend clinicians who treat COVID-19 patients with the malaria-antibiotic drug combination to also consider monitoring those patients for "ventricular arrhythmia," which

involves the lower heart chambers beating quickly and irregularly and can lead to cardiac arrest.

There are hundreds of drugs that can increase the risk for cardiac arrest, but using two together in patients who are already at risk or critically ill could increase that risk further, the authors warned.

"While there is yet very little data regarding hydroxychloroquine and azithromycin effectiveness as a treatment for COVID-19, some clinicians are considering combining them during this global pandemic," said lead author Eric Stecker, associate professor of medicine (cardiovascular medicine) in the OHSU School of Medicine and OHSU Knight Cardiovascular Institute.

Doctors forced to attend coronavirus patients without PPE, stipend in Pak

PTI ■ KARACHI

Doctors and post graduate trainees at several hospitals in Pakistan's Sindh province are forced to attend coronavirus positive patients without personal protective equipment, and some of them have not even received their stipend, according to a media report.

The worst affected health facilities include the state-run hospitals in Sukkur and Larkana, the Abbasi Shaheed Hospital (ASH) and the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre (JPMC) in Karachi and the two teaching hospitals, one in Hyderabad and the other in Jamshoro, attached with the Liaquat University of Medical and Health Sciences, Dawn reported.

Trump-Pelosi relationship remains broken in time of crisis

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Two of the most powerful people in Washington have not spoken in five months at a time when the nation is battling its worst health crisis in a century, one that has already killed more than 5,000 Americans and put 10 million others out of work.

President Donald Trump and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi last talked on Oct. 16, when Pelosi pointed her finger at the seated president during a heated exchange in a White House meeting that was captured in a widely shared photograph.

Pelosi stormed out, and the two leaders' frayed relationship was soon severed by the House's impeachment of Trump months later.

Now, there are worries the broken relationship could hinder the federal government's ability to respond to the growing coronavirus crisis, the extent of the damage reflected in Thursday's report that a record 6.6 million people filed for unemployment, adding to more than 3 million from two weeks earlier.

"Relationships are the beginning of everything. Trust in one another is key to cooperation," said John M. Bridgeland, who held government posts under Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama.

The relationship between Trump and Pelosi, never warm, appears beyond repair after the president's impeachment, according to allies of both leaders.

Stock market tumbles, Sensex settles below 28,000

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity indices spiralled lower for yet another session on Friday, pressured by heavy selling in bank stocks, as the steady rise in Covid-19 cases fuelled uncertainty over the economic impact of the pandemic. Unabated foreign fund outflows and a depreciating rupee, which skidded below the 76-mark against the dollar, further kept investors on the sidelines, traders said.

After hitting a low of 27,500.79 during the day, the 30-share BSE barometer ended 674.36 points or 2.39 per cent lower at 27,590.95. The NSE Nifty shed 170 points, or 2.06 per cent, to finish at 8,083.80.

During the holiday-trun-

ated week, the Sensex lost 2,224.64 points or 7.46 per cent, while the Nifty sank 576.45 points or 6.65 per cent.

Bank stocks came under heavy selling pressure on Friday after Moody's Investors Service changed the outlook for Indian banking sector to negative from stable due to the coronavirus crisis.

Axis Bank was the top loser in the Sensex pack, cracking 9.16 per cent, followed by IndusInd Bank, ICICI Bank, Titan, SBI, Maruti, HDFC and Asian Paints. On the other hand, Sun Pharma, ITC, ONGC, M&M and Tech Mahindra were among the gainers.

With fresh cases of novel coronavirus mounting by the day, concerns over a looming

economic recession kept investors on the edge, traders said. The Asian Development Bank warned on Friday that the Covid-19 pandemic could cost the global economy USD 4.1 trillion as it ravages United States, Europe and other major economies. It also said that India's economic growth rate will slip to 4 per cent in the current fiscal.

"The Indian markets opened and stayed negative, with reduced volatility. A ratings downgrade for the Banking sector, due to the impact of Covid-19 and ensuing stressed asset concerns, impacted the financial stocks."

"The slide in the markets, after a brief interlude of short recovery, continued during the

course of this week, but it is comforting to see that the pace of the fall is relatively feeble now.

"Businesses which have good cash flow and who have good cash levels and cash equivalents with them, and also entities who have leadership positions especially in the market share may see good interest from investors. Higher intrinsic value compared to the prices at which assets are available may act as a spur for discerning investors," said Joseph Thomas, Head of Research - Emkay Wealth Management.

BSE bankex, finance, auto, IT, teck and metal indices ended up to 5.39 per cent lower, while healthcare, oil and gas, utilities, FMCG and telecom closed with gains.

RBI reduces trading hours for debt, currency markets from April 7

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The RBI has reduced the trading hours of debt as well as currency markets from Tuesday in view of the lockdown following the outbreak of coronavirus. The revised market timings will be effective during April 7-17, 2020, the central bank said in a circular on Friday. The market will open at 10 am instead of the current 9 am and closing timings too have been revised to 2 pm for all segments. The lockdown has adversely impacted the functioning of

financial markets, the RBI said.

The market timings have been revised in order to "minimise these risks" and to ensure that market participants maintain adequate checks and supervisory controls while optimising thin resources and ensuring safety of personnel, it said. As per the circular, timing of the Government Securities (Central Government Securities, State Development Loans and Treasury Bills) market has been revised to 10 am to 2 pm from the existing 9 am to 5 pm.

Rupee slides 53 p to settle above 76 mark amid meltdown in equities

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee settled 53 paise lower at 76.13 against the US dollar on Friday amid a significant rise in coronavirus cases in the country and weak domestic equities.

Forex traders said heavy selling in domestic equities dragged the local unit amid mounting fears of a coronavirus-led economic slowdown.

Moreover, strengthening of the American currency in the international market also

weighed on the domestic currency.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 75.97. During the day, it lost further ground and finally settled at 76.13, down 53 paise over its previous close.

The rupee had settled at 75.60 against the greenback on Tuesday.

Forex markets in India were closed on April 1 for the annual closing of banks and on April 2 on account of Ram Navami.

India, China trade declines by 12.4 in first two months amid coronavirus outbreak

PTI ■ BEIJING

The trade between China and India fell 12.4 per cent year-on-year to USD 12 billion in the first two months amid the coronavirus outbreak, according to the latest data from Chinese customs.

From January to February, China's exports to India were 67.1 billion yuan (USD 9.5 billion), down 12.6 per cent on a yearly basis and imports from India dropped 11.6 per cent to 18 billion yuan (USD 2.5 billion), the state-run Global Times reported on Friday.

Bilateral trade fell by 12.4 per cent to 85.17 billion yuan (USD 12 billion) in the first two

months, the report quoted Chinese Customs data.

The lockdowns in both the countries due to Covid-19 is expected to badly affect the bilateral trade which declined by three billion billion dollar last year to USD 92.68 billion from USD 95.7 billion in 2018.

The declining trade was largely attributed to the slowdown of the economies of the two countries.

The trade deficit for India continued to be high amounting to USD 56.77 billion in 2019.

The trade deficit has become a major irritant in India-China bilateral relations, figuring high in the bilateral discourse.

Fitch sees India GDP growth in FY21 at 2%

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India may post in 2020-21 a GDP growth of 2 per cent, the slowest since the economy was liberalised 30 years back, Fitch Ratings said on Friday, as it joined a chorus of international agencies that have made a similar cut in growth estimates in recent days on concerns about the fallout of COVID-19 outbreak.

Asian Development Bank (ADB) sees India's economic growth slipping to 4 per cent in the current fiscal (April 2020 to March 2021), while S&P Global Ratings earlier this week further slashed its GDP growth forecast for the country to 3.5 per cent from a previous down-

grade of 5.2 per cent.

India Ratings & Research too has revised its FY21 forecast to 3.6 per cent from 5.5 per cent earlier.

Moody's Investors Service last week slashed its estimate of India's GDP growth during 2020 calendar year to 2.5 per cent, from an earlier estimate of 5.3 per cent and said the coronavirus pandemic will cause unprecedented shock to the global economy.

These growth estimates compare to an estimated 5 per cent growth rate in 2019-20 fiscal that ended on March 31. Indian economy also grew by 5 per cent in the 2019 calendar year.

India's share in world market cap below historic average: Report

IAN ■ MUMBAI

As the Indian stocks markets reeled under the coronavirus crisis, a report by Motilal Oswal said India's share in the global market capitalisation is below the historic average.

Currently, it is at 2.2 per cent below its historic average of 2.5 per cent.

The 'Bull & Bears' report also noted that India's market cap has declined more, compared to the fall in the world market cap in the past 12 months.

"Over the last 12 months, the world's market cap has decreased 12.3 per cent (\$9.6 trillion), while India's market

cap is down 31 per cent," it said.

The report also noted that the market cap-to-GDP ratio of India has declined swiftly from 79 per cent as on FY19 to 54 per cent (FY20EGDP), much below its long-term average of 75 per cent and closer to the levels last seen during FY05 and FY09.

On the market performance across the world, it said: "The Nifty could not have had a worse finish to FY20. As the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic spread across the world, the Nifty nosedived 23 per cent in Mar 20 to close at 8,598 (-26 per cent YoY), the worst since Oct'08."

NAFED contributes ₹5 crore to PM-CARES fund

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd (NAFED) contributed Rs 5 crore to PM-Cares Fund to fight the situation arising out of Covid-19. Sanjiv Kumar Chadha, Managing Director, handed over the cheque to Union Minister of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare and Rural Development & Panchayati Raj, The Government of India has acknowledged the generous contribution for the welfare of

of pulses to poor household of the country under PM Garib Kalyan Yojna.

Necessary preparations have been carried out and very soon the deliveries will be made to the States for its distribution. Unmindful of the ground challenges, the procurement of Pulses and Oilseeds are being made, though affected by Covid-19, but State Governments/ agencies are being requested to streamline it so that farmers stock continue to be procured at MSP.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a cause of great concern while the whole nation is locked down, POWERGRID, the Central Transmission Utility of India, has been ensuring uninterrupted 24x7 power supply. As a Responsible Corporate Citizen, POWERGRID has contributed Rs 130 crore to Prime Minister's

POWERGRID commits ₹200 crore to PM-CARES Fund

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations (PM-CARES) Fund to support India's fight against coronavirus. To help fight the pandemic, it has committed another contribution of Rs 70 crore in next FY. This makes POWERGRID's total contribution commitment as Rs 200 crore. POWERGRID employees are also contributing a part of their salary towards the

cause.

POWERGRID has also distributed food packets in slum areas to help the needy in such difficult times. The laborers and contractual workers at transmission/construction sites are also being provided with masks, soaps, sanitizers, packed food items, grocery items and medical support in all POWERGRID Sub-stations in the country.

Metro Railway, Kolkata
Kolkata's Pride

E-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE NO. 01/20-21 Date: 03.04.2020

Principal CMM, Metro Railway, Kolkata, 33/1, J. L. Nehru Road, Kolkata-700071 on behalf of the President of India invites E-Tender for following items already uploaded in website www.ireps.gov.in

Tender No.	Brief Description	Quantity	Closing Date & time
02201390	High performance plants type lead acid battery 220V (110 No, 2V Cells)	11 sets	21.04.2020 14.00 hrs.
02205049A	Supply, installation and commissioning of Multi-Energy X-Ray Baggage Scanner with 5 years CAMC	24 Nos	21.04.2020 14.00 hrs

Tenderers may visit website www.ireps.gov.in for full details/description/drawing/specification of the tenders and submit their bids online.

Principal CMM, Metro Railway, Kolkata
FASTER • SAFER • SMOOTHER • CLEANER

SEARCH FOR MISSING

General public is hereby informed that a man namely **Naveen Kumar, S/o Dineshwar R/o Gali No. 07, Savita Vihar, Mukundpur, Part-II, Delhi** has been missing since 07/03/2020 from his house. In this regard a D.D. No. 20-A, dated 8/03/2020 has been registered at P.S. Bhalswa Dairy, Delhi. Sincere efforts have been made by the local police to trace out the missing man but no clue has come to light so far. The description of the missing man is as under:

Name: Naveen Kumar, **Gender:** Male, **Age:** 32 years, **Height:** 5'6", **Complexion:** Wheatish, **Face:** Round, **Built:** Strong, **Wearing:** Black colour pant and grey colour shirt.

If anyone has any information regarding this missing Man, kindly inform SHO/ Bhalswa Dairy, Delhi.

E-mail : cbc@cbl.gov.in
Ph.: 011-24368638, 24368641
Fax : 011-24368639

SHO
P.S. Bhalswa Dairy, Delhi
Ph. No. 011-2781933,
2781934, 7065036328

DP/116/ON/2020

SEARCH FOR MISSING

General Public is hereby informed that a person namely **Ajeet Singh S/o Lakh Raj R/o H.No. K-19, Kachipua Village, Nand Nagri, Delhi** has been missing since 02.03.2020 from his house. In this regard a DD No. 44-A, dated 02.03.2020 has been lodged at PS, Nand Nagri, Delhi. The description of missing person is as under:

Name: Ajeet Singh, **Father's Name:** Lakh Raj, **Age:** 28 years, **Height:** 5'1", **Face:** Long, **Complexion:** Sallow, **Built:** Thin, **Wearing:** Green Colour T-Shirt, Blue Colour Jeans and shoes in feet.

If anyone having any clue/information, kindly inform the undersigned at following phone numbers.

Website : http://cbl.nic.in
e-mail : cbc@cbl.gov.in
Fax : 011-24368639
Ph. : 011-24368638, 24368641
Extn No. : 2101
DP/58/NE/2020

SHO
P.S., Nand Nagri, Delhi
Ph. : 011-22137761
8750870730

Appeal For Identification

General public is hereby informed that this child **Name:** Unknown S/o: Unknown, **R/o:** Unknown, **Age:** 1 Day, **Sex:** Male, **Height:** 1 Ft. 5 Inch, **Complexion:** Fair, **Face:** Round, **Built:** Medium, **Wearing:** Naked, has been found on 21.03.2020 at Dhaura Kuan Bus Stand, Delhi and declared dead by the Dr. of Safdarjung Hospital and dead body preserved in Mortuary of Safdarjung Hospital, Delhi. In this regard a FIR No. 71/2020 dated 21.03.2020 u/s 318 IPC has been registered at PS, Delhi Cantt., Delhi.

Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out information about this child but no clue has come to light so far.

Any person having any information or clue about this child may kindly inform to the following.

SHO
P.S. Delhi Cantt., Delhi
Ph. : 011-25693161, 7065036229

DP/124/SW/2020.

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF PERSON ACCUSED

See Section 82 Cr. PC

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused person namely **Naim S/o Islam Khan, R/o 24, Gali No. 14, Phase-6, Shiv Vihar, Karawal Nagar, Delhi**, has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the Offence FIR No. 337/14 u/s 279/3381 IPC at PS, Karawal Nagar, Delhi, and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said Naim cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said Naim has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proclamation u/s 82 CrPC is hereby made that the said Naim accused of FIR No. 337/14 u/s 279/3381 IPC is required to appear before this court to answer the said complaint on or before 05.05.2020.

By Order
Sh. Pawan Singh Rajawat
Chief Metropolitan Magistrate
DP/105/NE/2020-
(Court Matter) Karkardooma Court, Shahdara, Delhi

PSPCL Punjab State Power Corporation Limited

Guru Hargobind Thermal Plant, Lehra Mohabbat Distt. Bathinda (Punjab)- 151111
e-tendering website:- http://eproc.punjab.gov.in

Notice Inviting Tender (Through E-tendering)

Tender Enquiry No. 87/MW-I/CHP/EMC-421/GHTP/2020 Dt. 03-04-2020
E-tenders are invited from reputed and registered firms/ contractors for the following work:-

Short Description of Work
CHP-GHTP STAGE-I (2X210 MW) & STAGE-II (2X250 MW) Breakdown, Shutdown, Preventive & Routine Maintenance of Electrical system as per Tender specification under Coal Handling Plant/ Electrical Maintenance Cell on lump sum basis at GHTP.

EMD: Minimum Rs. 2,16,000/-
Last Date & Time for bid submission: 04-05-2020 upto 11:00 Hrs.
Date & Time of opening of Fee Stage Bid: 05-05-2020 upto 12:00 Hrs.
Detailed NIT and tender specification can be downloaded from PSPCL website http://eproc.punjab.gov.in from dated 04-04-2020 onwards.

Note:
1. The prospective bidders can obtain clarification regarding tender specification from this office. For registration of digital signature and uploading of tender, information may be sought from http://eproc.punjab.gov.in
2. It is informed that in case the tender process is not completed due to any reason no corrigendum will be published in newspapers. Detail regarding corrigendum may be seen on PSPCL official website i.e. https://pspcil.in.

GHTP-22/2020
RO 708-C

Dy. Chief Engineer,
Mechanical Mtc. Circle-II, O&M
GHTP, PSPCL, Lehra Mohabbat,
Distt. Bathinda (Pb.)- 151111

SHORT CIRCUITS



TAMANNAAH BHATIA

The pandemic is not just restricted to a particular industry. It's global and we all need to be responsible citizens and help the government and medical bodies to fight this battle and come out undefeated. We need to keep our anxiety and depression under check as these are trying times, and we need to be there for another.



VIR DAS

My character Hasmukh is super awkward, soft spoken and always mild, until he murders or gets on stage. Stand-up comedians will relate to Hasmukh's journey — well, most of it at least. We're all looking for innovative ways to make people laugh but this guy takes it to the next level. The trailer should give you a sneak peek into this.



DARSHAN RAVAL

I am a self-taught musician. I never joined any music institute or did any course. So it feels more great to look back at my journey so far. I come from a small town. People there generally consider singing a hobby. Coming from a small town and making a name for myself in this profession is a big thing for me.



SRUTI JHA

While I am not shooting for *Kumkum Bhagya* due to the COVID-19 lockdown, I am making the most of my time and reading a lot of novels at home. Good books are my zone, so I am enjoying it. I have completed reading several books and I am currently reading *The Rules of Contagion* by Adam Kucharski.

DJ DIPLO

Charli XCX's personality is just so exciting, she's got so much charisma. She actually had to borrow headphones to do her DJ mix and she made me actually throw them out the window, she's so in that quarantine life. She lives really close to me, we're neighbours.



IMMERSIVE 30 MINUTES

Founder and director of Teamwork Arts SANJOY K ROY tells SAIMI SATTAR that in times of social distancing, it is imperative that entertainment and cultural events shift to the online space

If you ask even a non-reader to guess the name of a literary festival which takes place every year at the Diggi Palace at Jaipur, the prompt answer would be Jaipur Literary Festival. That is the kind of traction the JLF, with its celebrity writers, impressive background, cultural spread and large crowds invites. But then the last is certainly an anathema in current times of social distancing. So then Teamwork Arts, the group behind JLF, which is known to keep abreast with changing times, has decided to evolve and announced a digital literature series. Called the *Brave New World*, it is perhaps the answer to testing times. But then literature also has the power to instill hope when the bleak world doesn't seem to hold out any.

The aim of the virtual initiative is to celebrate the power and positivity of books and rather than the backdrop of the Diggi Palace, it is powered by the borderless Internet. Scheduled to kick off from April 4 which will see eminent author and advocate Abhinav Chandrachud and journalist Pragya Tiwari, in conversation on the devastating Bombay bubonic plague epidemic of 1896 and its repercussions today.

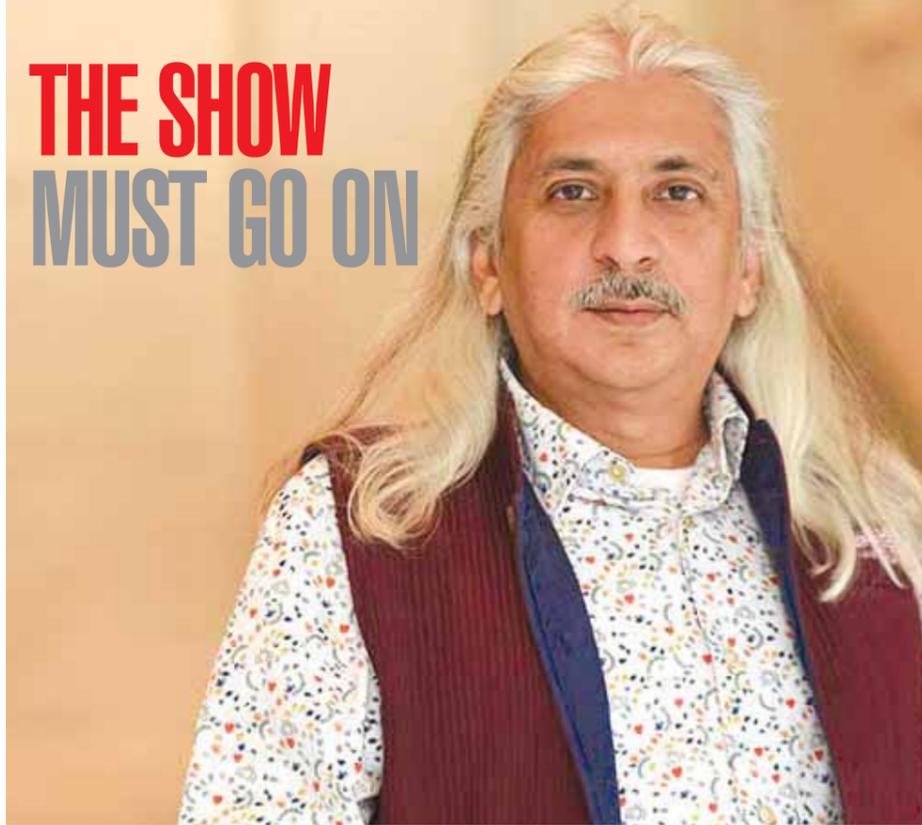
However, it is not just this particular session but the others as well that are relevant to current times. When we are constantly hooked on to our phones all the time, another conversation is relevant where writer and broadcaster Bee Rowlett will explore the need to protect the "forum internum" — our private mental space — from the incursions of digital technology — at a session titled *Freedom of Thought* with Baroness Helena Kennedy.

Similarly, there are writer, politician and public intellectual Shashi Tharoor and President of Observer Research Foundation Samir Saran, co-authors of the recent *The New World Disorder and the India Imperative*, in conversation and will share their views on the current crisis the world is going through.

JLF is known to be a forum open to discussion, debate and dissent. *Walls and Bridges* will be a session on dystopian fiction and its increasingly real and uncanny presence in our lives in which Prayaag Akbar, author of *Leila* (which was adapted into a Netflix series), and Amrita Tripathi, author of *The Sibius Knot* will share their views.

One wonders if it was easy getting the authors on board for such an exercise where they conduct the session online. "The lucky thing is that nothing is happening these days as everything has been cancelled worldwide. JLF is not a new kid on the block and people know what we do. We have a fairly robust advantage to be able to reach out to a fairly large audience quickly and make these interactions fun, interactive and allow the authors to get out there," says founder and director of Teamwork Arts Sanjoy K Roy.

When we connect over a phone call to



THE SHOW MUST GO ON

understand more of the move, he is his erudite self. He enquires how newspapers continue to publish in current times and goes on to quote examples from the world to elaborate upon his understanding of the situation. "A report that I read said that the financial losses of this on sports, arts and more has been gauged at one trillion. And you are looking at events like Dubai Expo, Olympics and more. By the way, this calculation is just for May-June! So there is no way we would be able to compensate this through online business. But every crisis ensures that Man tries to paddle furiously to stay alive and afloat like newspapers are doing by going online and what we are also doing," he says.

The change naturally would bring about drastic transformation in the world the way we know it. "The consequences would be two or three-fold in the Indian scenario where social distancing norms will be in place till October," says Roy who is at pains to point out that, "We fail to see the pandemic outbreak as primarily a

health crisis and focus on the economic aspect. So you need to address the former, first. We need isolation, aggressive testing like Japan and South Korea and try to control the spread by focussing on science and technology to find a vaccine or a medicine to control this. The virus or flu won't disappear on April 14 when the lockdown ends."

Coming to the economy, Roy says that in order to ensure a resurgence the need of the hour is ensuring safe places. "There has been a flight of labour which is not coming back in a hurry so supply and production chains will be disrupted. Kickstarting the economy will take another three to six months after the situation has become normal. But by that time everyone would be so used to eating and buying local that any demand would be kicked out of the window. These things certainly do not bode well for the recessionary economic situation that we were coming out of. This has further increased gloom and doom."

However, Roy besides being pragmatic and well-read also has a tendency to find a silver lining in the situation. He points out that, "The only good thing mentioned in the Boston Consultancy Report is that entertainment will be consumed at a greater level and will go online. And so will the media. In the recovery, entertainment would recover faster but media won't as it is dependent on advertising, which is disappearing." However, with social distancing and the fear of infection having been built into the sub conscience, entertainment will naturally not be on the lines of huge jamborees where success is measured in terms of the number of footfalls. "We are looking more at online products and those that are for online. It is certainly not a rehashing of what we had earlier. But really new stuff which is tailor made for this platform," he says.

Naturally there arises the question of financial viability. "Subscription, online payment and all that will have to be put into place. We cannot do the same old as



THE LUCKY THING IS THAT NOTHING IS HAPPENING THESE DAYS AS EVERYTHING HAS BEEN CANCELLED. JLF IS NOT A NEW KID ON THE BLOCK AND PEOPLE KNOW WHAT WE DO. WE HAVE A FAIRLY ROBUST ADVANTAGE TO BE ABLE TO REACH OUT TO A LARGE AUDIENCE QUICKLY AND MAKE THESE INTERACTIONS FUN, INTERACTIVE AND ALLOW THE AUTHORS TO GET OUT THERE

it will not work," says Roy and adds, "So much has gone online so quickly as there are a plethora of options including music, programme, talkshow and more. These have to be looked at differently and given a more of 360 degree look and feel."

He says that this has become essential since entertainment, as we know it, has changed for a long time to come. "An American survey of about a thousand people had 49 per cent of the respondents saying that they would not go back to a film theatre again. We know that they are more careful but the reality is that we aren't getting a situation anytime soon when people are rushing off to the Kumbh Melas of the world," he says.

Incidentally, Teamwork Arts has several other successful cultural festival including Ishaara Puppet Theatre, Mahindra Kabira Festival, The Sacred Pushkar and many other national and international ones under its ever-expanding belt.

Not just entertainment, but even travel for business, entertainment and destination weddings will change. He says, "The information coming out of aviation ministry is that we would consider case by case basis where we can fly. We would not have to place a system that would allow business as usual even after the lockdown, or the peak of infection disappears."

However, since human beings are essentially social animals, the need to be in touch and connected with others remains. "Every evening there is either a Zoom party or Houseparty that I am attending. These video chats would be the need of the hour. Offline, people would come together but in much smaller numbers. When the virus began to spread two Teamwork colleagues were getting married and there was a grand celebration across cities but then they had a quick court wedding with a lunch where there were just the immediate family members," says he.

Yes, entertainment will remain but the platform are all set to change in this new world.

STUDIO CHAT 15 MINUTES



Sam Hunt's sophomore album *Southside* opens and closes with two of the most personal songs he's ever written, as he draws from his own life to paint candid portraits for listeners.

But the country star admits he wavers when it comes to spilling his own tea in song form. "I'm torn at times about how much of my own life I want to put out there," he said.

Southside, the 35-year-old's sophomore album out Friday, opens with *2016*, a remorseful, rueful song that recounts a variety of misdeeds, including chasing other women. It evokes classic country with lyrics like: *Put the tears back in your eyes/Cause all my lies could still come true*. The album closes with *Drinkin' Too Much*, a confessional apology where he namedrops his wife. Hunt, who apologised last November after he was arrested for driving under the influence, released the song on SoundCloud in 2017, a couple months before they were married.

"Sometimes you hear a song or a lyric and you say, 'Okay, this person couldn't have made that up, that has to be really about them,'" he said. "The whole honesty is the best policy approach is what I end up circling back to, especially in this genre of music that has always been described as three chords and the truth."

But not all of the 11-track *Southside* is a first-person narrative: "It's definitely not autobiographical." In an interview, Hunt — whose

TO SHARE OR NOT

American singer-songwriter SAM HUNT says that he doesn't know how much of his life should he put out there



multi-hit, Grammy-nominated 2014 debut *Montevallo* was named after the hometown his wife grew up in — talks about getting deep on songs and testing the waters with

pop and rap producers like Diplo and Murda Beatz, who worked on Drake's massive hit *Nice for What*.

2016 is a poignant story. Was it hard to write?

Yes, that one is the closest thing to a more honest reflection on my own life experience over the past two years. It touches on a story that I talked about publicly, in terms of what I had going on between putting out the last record and putting out this record, especially year three and four. This song touches on that a little bit and kind of closes the chapter I think more than anything.

Drinking Too Much reminds me of Usher's Confession from 2004. Did you purposely put it at the end of the album?

I think it's the only place on the record where it felt appropriate. It just didn't feel right to put it anywhere else.

The biggest conflict I ever had was about putting that song out. Now that I have put that song out, it's a lot easier to put out songs that are more honest. That was about as honest of a song as I'll ever put out

or I could ever put out.

Your wife is playing the piano on the song?

I didn't want to make a big deal over it but I wanted her to. I wanted the song to have her blessing. Just her playing that part, I felt like it brought an energy of healing to the song — more than anything, her approval of it. I wanted to end the song on a hopeful note. I didn't want it to be a complete down-and-out. I wanted the listener to hear the redemption in the song and not just ... the dark place that the guy's in as he's singing it.

It's also nice to somehow involve the person you're singing about in the song.

Yes. Feels like it could be exploitative. That's the main thing I wanted to avoid is doing that or it even feeling like that.

What was it like trying out recording sessions with pop and hip-hop producers?

I wanted to branch out and find some new inspiration. One of the beauties of writing with the same two people for a long period of time

is that you really get to know each other and there's a level of comfort in the room. There's a clear understanding of what I would say and how we should approach writing the song. At the same time, you can get too comfortable with your co-writers, so it's nice to experiment with bringing new people in, writing with new producers to find some new inspiration.

That's what I was attempting to do for a time there. I wrote with some great writers and wrote with some great producers. (But) I never found that click the way I did with Zach (Crowell).

Who were some of the people you worked with?

I worked with Diplo a little bit, trying to find the right song or the right sound. Another girl, Sasha Sloan (Camila Cabello) ... Sasha is one of the best writers I've written with in the past, or ever, really. A guy named Charlie Handsome (Post Malone, Kanye West) was in town for a few weeks, somebody introduced me to him.

Your wedding anniversary is this month — how will you celebrate since we'll still be stuck at home?

I haven't thought about it. I don't have a plan yet. I'm sure it'll have to be something creative. ... We both do pretty well at the house. At least we have each other to keep each other company. —AP

CONVERSATION 60 MINUTES

FOR FUN, LAUGHTER AND RELIEF

Actor RAHUL DEV tells SAKSHI SHARMA that his character in *Who's Your Daddy?* goes a notch higher with each episode as he explores himself



Given that the Coronavirus pandemic doesn't seem to be going away anytime soon, the promotions of new series and shows, especially the smaller ones, are suffering a major setback. But for actor Rahul Dev, the issues of the world are of a larger concern than his recently released series. "A lot of people find it tough to afford two meals a day. They struggle for their basic needs. We need to be conscious of that and try to help the vulnerable around us. There are bigger world issues at stake. The show is definitely getting affected in terms of its publicity. But we also need to pay attention to the fact that since everyone is at home, watching shows, it is bound to do better. We all have more extra time now than what we did in our normal work days. So the show's fortune might only benefit from it," says he.

The actor's web series *Who's Your Daddy?* revolves around his son Soggy (played by Harsh Beniwal) and him, a retired Major Subedar, Prem Singh Barnala. It showcases the day-to-day adventures of the father-son duo. Based in 'Dilwalon ki Dilli' they are the coolest family in town. Soggy runs a DVD rental shop and earns a sizeable chunk by renting blue films to boisterous lunching ladies of Delhi's posh societies. Prem becomes an overnight star with the women patrons of the DVD world and the duo runs a successful business until their world turns upside down.

The actor usually plays negative characters, way different from this one which is predominantly comedy and fun. "Yes, this one is very different. I thought it would be nice to know this character as the Subedar is simple, naive, humorous and straightforward — certainly a package," says he.

It is a situational comedy. Things happen in a way that they appear funny. "If you play the role sincerely, you don't have to push yourself to do comedy, it will automatically look comic. You just have to react. For instance, if you look and play a certain way, it becomes comic. Imagine a six feet tall person being scolded by his mother, 'Ja kaam kar gadhe, kaam kyu nahi karta?' and he says, 'Biji main toh retire hoke aa gaya hoon,'" adds he.

Though the role is quite different, emotional, instinctive and funny, it was not tough for Rahul to play the character. He says, "It's very easy because there's nothing deep and intense in it. It is not that kind of a subject. If I tell you that yes I worked on it, you'll feel 'what is he talking about?' if you ever see the show. I just



followed a line — 'Just be.' You just have to be yourself and play it simple."

As the series revolves around the DVD rental shop, one wonders why DVDs as these are outdated in the current scenario. The actor tells us that the show is a flashback story set in 2000s.

With each episode, the actor goes a notch higher as he explores himself. He starts out as somebody naive and simple who is self-absorbed. But as he deals with a variety of situations, he gets better. He says, "It was an exploration of various characters because of the journey that the character goes through. He evolves as the show goes on. In the first six episodes, he's finding himself and later he goes on to form a relationship and understanding with his son and mother. There's a new start in life. There are beautiful emotional scenes with his mother which often give rise to a lump in the throat."

As the show explores the father-son relationship, there is something in common with the actor's personal life. He went through a tough phase when he lost his wife in 2009. Since then he has been a single parent, the experiences of which he shared. So did he relate to the character as it deals with the same? "Except for the fact that I am a single parent, there's nothing in common. My journey

'EXCEPT FOR THE FACT THAT I AM A SINGLE PARENT, THERE'S NOTHING IN COMMON. MY JOURNEY IS TOTALLY DIFFERENT. IN TERMS OF THE FATHER-SON RELATIONSHIP, I DO RELATE TO IT A BIT BUT ALTOGETHER IT ISN'T THE SAME. WHEN YOU LOSE YOUR PARTNER IT'S VERY TRAGIC BUT THIS SHOW DOESN'T EXPLORE THOSE LINES'

is totally different. In terms of the father-son relationship, I do relate to it a bit but altogether it isn't the same. When you lose your partner it's very tragic but this show doesn't explore those lines," says Rahul.

Another genre which Rahul really wants to explore is thriller as it is intriguing and engrossing. He finds dark and suspense-driven stories fascinating. "I finished watching the film *Heat* at 3:30 in the morning. It's a legendary film. I loved one sequence of six minutes and 16 seconds where two enemies sit in a cafe and have a conversation. Though they both know about each other but there's mutual respect. No raised voices, banging fists on the table or threats. It's just a conversation and that's interesting," says he. It was interesting to note that the actor who is usually seen doing larger-than-life characters and beating up people, finds two enemies having a conversation interesting. It strikes us that the kind of person is at complete variance with the roles that Rahul has done. "Those characters are not written by me. For example, you might be not be interested in this story. Your heart might be in reporting something else. But you get

stuck and you have to choose the best out of what comes your way. So I believe destiny plays a role in this," says Rahul, raising a thousand questions in our mind.

The actor believes that the platform belongs to the writer and the director primarily. They weave something first and then want you to be a part of it. You might try to play it in your style but it is ultimately their call. For instance, for the Subedar's character, in two scenes the director wanted him to react in an over the top manner and shout. However, he wanted it a bit subtle because a retired Army personnel would not behave that way. Rahul says, "One can show their disappointment in many ways. You can not talk to your son or just emotionally pour it out. I wanted it to be more expressive."

He draws life lessons from the role. "My character teaches the audience to go with the flow of life, irrespective of its pace. But I don't know if people will be able to draw that message out. They will watch it mostly for fun, laughter and relief," adds he.

(The show is streaming on ALTBalaji and ZEE5).

WRITER'S BLOG 30 MINUTES

When hope is her decision

Author ANWESA CHAUDHURY tells AYUSHI SHARMA that even as the world seems to be engulfed by negativity, the existence of hope cannot be denied

We are living in a world where hope seems to be dwindling each day and very soon we may find ourselves without it. Through the eyes of a teenager, this seems all the more terrifying and dismal because this is their future. *Bleak Hope*, a collection of poetry written by teenage author, Anwesa Chaudhury, as she lives in anguish and views the destruction of the world with a heavy heart has been published by Notion Press. Excerpts of the interview:



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

I have always loved reading poetry. I started penning my thoughts when I saw how disturbing these real life situations have become. Today, it is easy to call teenagers oversensitive, entitled and babied. Though, to some extent, this criticism is not wrong, however, if looked at closely, they face challenges that could be difficult for anyone. They are living in a completely different world, as compared to few decades ago. There was no agenda to publish my feelings but when I had finished writing about 40 to 45 poems during the last three years, my parents said, 'why not publish them?' They encouraged me to do so because I wanted to reach other kids of my age. I wanted them to feel that they are not going through the roller coaster ride of emotions alone. Publishing my thoughts was the only way out.

□Are there any real life incidents that you can share with the reference to the book?

I started writing after experiencing some unusual incidents in our society. I wanted to express them in my way. That Night was my first poem, which delves into the life of children who beg for a living. We all have come across such kids but rarely have

we paused and thought about their situation. The poem presents a contrast between my life and theirs as it's a dream that I saw lying on my comfortable bed.

On The Streets was about the homelessness in California. The Unwanted was written after reading the news that Algeria expels refugees and asks them to walk through the Sahara. Real Men Don't Hurt is all about violence against women.

All these are inspired from real life incidents.

□On one hand there are deaths and suffering, wars and destruction, rapid degeneration of the environment and child abuse while on the other there are glimmer of hope and feeling of love. How did you try to keep a balance between two extreme situations?

A coin has two sides. One part of world shows and throws negativity at us, whereas the other end makes us experience kindness

and existence of humanity. I believe in positive affirmations. Though I read and see a lot of negativity, I always feel that there is room for positivity where people help one another, a world of love and kindness. I have seen people going out of their way to help others. I feel in my heart that there are silver linings.

My poems express the despair and despondency that shrouds and suffocates us, speak of that glimmer of hope, the feeling of love and the chance for new beginnings. These poems stand tall as a witness to the hope that struggles to strive, fights to breathe and accomplishes to thrive in the midst of all the gloominess.

□As the book explores the lines: Even as the world seems to be engulfed in the wave of negativity, the existence of hope cannot be denied. What keeps you motivated?

Though the world is going through a lot of darkness, I still think that there is still hope in humanity and in the beauty of nature and that keeps me motivated. The existence of human, world and nature is mere proof of

positivity and ray of hope. □We often feel a plethora of emotions looking at the harsh realities of the world. But how difficult is it to make an emotion come alive through words?

For me it is not difficult because when I feel a particular emotion, words come naturally to my mind. I feel I am blessed with the ability to express. Not everybody has that kind of power.

□Which authors have influenced you?

Right from Rabindranath Tagore, Robert Frost, PB Shelley and John Keats to modern poets like Rupi Kaur are my source of inspiration.

□What does the future of written world look like since we are swamped by digital entertainment?

Things have moved rapidly into a digital world. It's true that ebooks save space on bookshelves and provide convenience, selection and portability. However, there are some things that will always be valued in their original form. There is something about the smell of a new book and physically turning a page, allowing the reader to have an experience that involves all of the senses. Nothing can replace that impact. A right balance is necessary.

Writers must 'document' pandemic: *Lost Children* author

Cooped up at her Bronx home with her daughter and a niece because of the coronavirus pandemic, Mexican writer Valeria Luiselli says she has lowered the "volume and speed" of her life. She is arranging books in alphabetical order, planting legumes on her balcony and listening to old recordings from Argentinian author Julio Cortázar. Her rhythm has slowed but not the accolades and awards for her latest novel, *Lost Children Archive*, which last week was honored with the British Rathbone Folio Prize.

Luiselli accepted the prize at a ceremony held online because of Coronavirus pandemic. The 36-year-old writer said she's sad that she could not be in London to receive it in person but grateful to see people keeping the faith in books. "The fact that the literary community is still in full swing, even from their homes, and behind their screens, is moving and encouraging," she said, speaking in Spanish. "I think it is my duty, and the duty of every writer, whether is a science-fiction writer, a journalist, a poet, each at their own pace and within their own capacities, to document this moment," she said.

Lost Children Archive has also won the Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Fiction, an American Academy of Arts and Letters Award, and a Vilcek Prize for Creative Promise in Literature. It is a finalist for The National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction.

Luiselli's inspiration came from the immigration crisis of 2014, when thousands of children were trying to enter the US in search of asylum, fleeing



poverty and violence in Central America. The author said she started paying attention to how that story was being told, both in the media or at casual conversations in diners in Arizona. "I started asking myself how (the migrant) children of this generation were going to eventually tell this story, what were they going to say about this reality — that on one hand was very real but on the other seemingly implausible — about thousands of children in a migratory limbo," she said.

In New York, she started volunteering with nonprofits as an interpreter in immigration court, writing down the interviews she did with migrant children so attorneys could help them out. That experience led to an essay about immigration, *Tell Me How It Ends*, in 2017. *Lost Children Archive* came in February 2019.

Born in Mexico City, Luiselli grew up in South Korea and South Africa, among others. She speaks both English and Spanish and can write in either language. In addition to writing during her seclusion, she's reading out loud to her family and taking photos. "We are going to need this narrative fabric, some sort of fabric for us to lay down once we overcome this." —AP

PM seeks support of India's sports heroes to battle COVID-19

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday turned to India's sporting heroes for support in the herculean battle to contain the COVID-19 pandemic and more than 40 accomplished champions such as Virat Kohli and P V Sindhu responded by vowing to raise awareness and spirits amid a national lockdown.

The athletes, along with sports minister Kiren Rijju, participated in nearly an hour-long video call which started at 11am.

From Sachin Tendulkar stressing on the need to keep the vigil even after the lockdown ends on April 14, to sprinter Hima Das expressing sadness at the recent attacks on frontline warriors such as health care workers and police officers, to others sharing their experience of being in a lockdown, the sports persons had lots to offer during the interaction. All these athletes have been generous donors to the funds being raised to fight the crisis.

The Prime Minister, on his part, sought their support to raise awareness about the need for social distancing and personal hygiene at a time

when the total number of COVID-19 positive cases in India has crossed 2,000.

"Your suggestions will be taken note of. We are fighting this pandemic like Team India. I am confident that India will be rejuvenated by the inspiration provided by you," the Prime Minister can be seen telling athletes in a clip shared by shuttler B Sai Praneeth, a world championship Bronze-medallist, who also attended the call.

All sporting activities are currently shut in the country and it is still not clear when normalcy will resume.

When Ganguly was asked about the development this morning, he said, "Yes, I will be joining our Honourable PM via video call." But he refused to go into the details.

Cricketers formed a major chunk of the participating list.

Apart from Tendulkar, Ganguly and Kohli, others in the call included top batsman Rohit Sharma, former pacer Zaheer Khan, Yuvraj Singh.

The names of World Cup-winning former captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni and K L Rahul were in the list of participants but it is learnt that they could not attend the call. Olympic Silver-medallist



Prime Minister Narendra Modi chats with Indian cricket team captain Virat Kohli via video conferencing. MIB_Hindi/Twitter

shuttler Sindhu, javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra, chess wizard Viswanathan Anand, sprinter Hima Das, boxing star Amit Panghal, wrestler Vinesh Phogat, and teenage shooting sensation Manu Bhaker were among the other accomplished athletes who took part in the video call.

"Of these, 12 have been given three minutes each to speak and present their view," a ministry source said with-

out revealing the names of the chosen athletes.

It was later learnt that Tendulkar, Ganguly, M C Mary Kom and Kohli were among those who were to speak during the interaction. "I suggested that as much as possible, I will use our way of greeting — saying *Namaste* instead of shaking hands, even after we overcome this pandemic," Tendulkar said after the interaction.

"I told him that it is sad that health care workers and police have been attacked," said Asian Games medallist Hima Das, who is employed with Assam Police as a DSP.

However, six-time world champion Mary Kom could not connect to the call due to network issues.

Among those who managed to, former world champion weightlifter Mirabai Chanu said the PM urged

self-discipline, positivity and self-belief, which are essential to sports, are crucial tools to combat the spread of the virus as well.

Olympic-bound archer Deepika Kumari said the PM advised the athletes to keep their immunity levels high during a time when they are not getting enough training exposure.

"PM Sir urged us to post videos about the awareness campaign. He gave us a few pointers like *Laxman Rekha* (Don't cross the line while maintaining social distancing); *Sankalp Lena* (Taking a pledge not to step out)"; "He said *Dhairya Rakhma* (don't press the panic button). He also advised us to boost our immune system and stay fit by doing daily exercises," she revealed.

Tennis player Ankita Raina said the PM equated the virus to an unknown opposition.

"(He) told us that athletes are stronger mentally and have the quality to adapt to different conditions and in unknown territories. So he wanted us to spread the positive and encouraging message since this is also an unknown territory (fight against coronavirus)," she said.

The Prime Minister said the ability to face challenges,

everyone to be united in the fight to combat the pandemic. "The PM asked us to spread awareness on social distancing and hygiene. He spoke about how we need Virat's (Kohli) fighting spirit to win this battle," added veteran table tennis player Sharath Kamal.

World championship Silver-winning shooter Abhishek Verma said the PM urged athletes "to be positive and spread positivity".

"He said appreciate and highlight the work of frontline workers. Take good care of yourself and family at home. He asked us to e-mail any suggestions we have on how to handle the situation better," Verma said.

The Prime Minister said the ability to face challenges,



UEFA Champions League trophy UCL/Twitter

Clubs risk CL axe if seasons not completed: UEFA

AFP ■ PARIS

UEFA and Europe's top clubs have stated their determination that the current football season should be played to a conclusion and threatened that teams may be excluded from the next Champions League if their domestic competitions are ended prematurely.

In a joint letter released late on Thursday, UEFA, the European Club Association (ECA), and the European Leagues body representing nearly a thousand clubs in 29 countries, said that they were working on the possibility of playing on into July and August if need be.

"The Champions League and Europa League — both of which are frozen in the last-16 stage — could be completed once the domestic seasons are finished, and "stopping competitions should really be the last resort after acknowledging that no calendar alternative would allow to conclude the season."

The joint response came after the Belgian Pro League announced on Thursday that it recommended declaring the season over with the present table accepted as final.

It is the first European league to take such a measure, although more could follow.

That means Club Brugge would in theory go straight into the next Champions League group stage, but UEFA, the ECA and the European Leagues indicated that they may be barred from continental competition if the Belgian league decision is finalised.

"It is of paramount importance that even a disruptive event like this epidemic does not prevent our competitions from being decided on the field, in accordance with their rules and that all sporting titles are awarded on the basis of results," the joint letter said.

"We are confident that football can restart in the months to come — with conditions that will be dictated by public authorities — and believe that any decision of abandoning domestic competitions is, at this stage, premature and not justified."

"Since participation in UEFA club competitions is determined by the sporting result achieved at the end of a full domestic competition, a premature termination would cast doubts about the fulfilment of such condition." The letter concluded: "UEFA reserves the right to assess the entitlement of clubs to be admitted to the 2020/21 UEFA club competitions."

There have been calls in other countries for this season to be declared null and void, but any option which rules out completing this season could have serious consequences for leagues reliant on huge television deals and who could find themselves having to reimburse broadcasters if remaining matches are not played.

SA cricketers symptom-free after returning from India

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

All the South African players, who returned from their incomplete ODI tour of India, were found to be symptom-free of coronavirus and those who underwent tests returned negative, according to the team's chief medical officer Shuaib Manjra.

The Proteas, who returned from India on March 18, completed a 14-day period of self-isolation on Thursday, but will remain in lockdown for the next two weeks just like the rest of the country.

"All the players were symptom-free and those who opted to per-



form the tests returned negative results," Manjra was quoted as saying by *ESPNCricinfo*.

The first match in Dharamsala on March 12 was washed out while the second and third games to be played in Lucknow and Kolkata — on March 15 and 18 respectively — were called off indefinitely.

South Africa is in the midst of a 21-day nationwide lockdown, which prohibits leaving home except to buy food or medicine and does not allow for any outdoor exercise.

CSA's focus now is on maintaining the players' fitness and trainer Tumi Masekela has sent all

the players their training programmes.

"We've got time now to work with players in terms of addressing the small niggles that they may have. They have got time to rest and also to do the strength work," he said.

"But the one big thing is the running volume, the aerobic capacity base, which I am going to try and build up in the next two weeks, so that means lot of running, or a lot of cardio work, cycling or swimming."

The South African team doesn't have any international match lined up until June.

Life is most important now, IPL can wait: Raina

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The IPL can wait till millions of lives, which are at risk due to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, are saved, feels veteran India batsman Suresh Raina.

Raina has already done his bit in this fight against the deadly virus by donating ₹52 lakh.

Ask him about the IPL, which has been postponed to April 15 but is unlikely to take place in the near future, Raina says "it is all about life" at the moment.

"Life is most important at this point of time. IPL can surely wait. We all need to follow the government guidelines on lockdown else we all face the consequences. When life gets better, we can think about the IPL. So many people are dying at the moment, we need to save lives," Raina said.

Raina, whose last competitive game was the IPL final last year, was busy preparing for the 2020 edition in Chennai before the nationwide lockdown was announced. The tournament was also supposed to be M S Dhoni's comeback event.



Suresh Raina waits for his turn to bat during CSK training session. CSK/Twitter

"It was a nice camp. I was there for two months but then this happened. Got to spend some time with Dhoni. He was batting so well in the nets, he had the hunger of a youngster. In one session, he batted for three hours at a stretch," recalled Raina.

Indian badminton goes online



Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy in action. BWF/Twitter

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

With courts out of bound due to the lockdown to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, Indian badminton has gone online with chief national coach Pullela Gopichand handing out tips through videos to the country's top shuttlers.

Staying away from the game can affect fitness of the players and so Gopichand has started putting in place a program for the shuttlers, albeit, through *Whatsapp*, an application which allows users to send text, voice and video messages.

"We can only do fitness (training) because nobody has access to courts so we are doing what we can. I am sending the players videos of what to do in our *Whatsapp* group," Gopichand said.

"It is a generic program but it is tuned in such a way that it caters to the people (Olympic bound) who are important," explained the 46-year-old, who is waiting for his three-week isolation to be over on Saturday.

Apart from Gopichand, Jamshedpur-born trainer Dinaz Vervatwala, who has worked with London Olympics Bronze-medallist Saina Nehwal, is also taking fitness classes for the Indian shuttlers via *Zoom* app, a platform for video communication.

The men's doubles pair of Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy, who were assured of a place in the Olympics, is also part of the group which is following the tips.

"Gopi sir sends us program schedule everyday on *Whatsapp*. It involves mainly meditation, wall practice where I hit the shuttle on the wall, play my strokes and drives, which helps to strengthen the forearm," Chirag said.

"We are also doing at least an hour of training in the evening with a trainer. Dinaz does a video-call through *Zoom* app and everybody joins in and then we practice together."

Talking about the programs, Satwik said: "Gopi sir's program is a combination of a lot of things like wall practice, skipping, small exercises, breathing exercises, it is more like simulating the actions whatever is possible at home to stay sharp."

"Every alternate day, we also have Dinaz taking our fitness classes. She gives us very interesting and different fitness programs, so it is fun. Almost everyone is there, Sikki (Reddy), Ashwini (Ponnappa), Sai (B Sai Praneeth), Guru (RMV Gurusaidutt), Kashyap (Parupalli) and (HS) Prannoy," Satwik said.

While online sessions can keep the shuttlers fit mentally and physically for the time being, to get back to being match ready might be challenging once BWF restarts the international calendar.

However, Gopichand assured that players will get at least six weeks to prepare for tournaments once there is resumption.

"We don't know when the badminton circuit will start but whenever it starts, they will give you 6-8 weeks of headstart," he said.

Everyone keen for IPL to go ahead: Cummins

PTI ■ SYDNEY

The costliest foreign player in Indian Premier League, Pat Cummins says everyone, including his team Kolkata Knight Riders, is still hopeful of the 13th edition of the T20 event to go ahead sometime later.

The Australian, however, conceded that the priority now is to minimise the risk of spreading the coronavirus.

"Everyone is still really keen for it (IPL) to go ahead, but the

priority is to minimise risk of it spreading," Cummins was quoted as saying by the *Australian Associated Press*.

The 26-year-old Australian has been in constant contact with the Kolkata Knight Riders team which bought him for a whopping ₹15.5 crore last December at the auction, as everyone waits for the league's fate.

"It's a holding pattern... The last I spoke to them, they were still really confident and hopeful it'll be on at some stage," he said.



Pat Cummins. AP

IOC announce new deadline for Oly qualification period

IANIS ■ NEW DELHI

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) said on Friday that the new deadline for the qualification period for the postponed Tokyo Olympics has been set to June 29, 2021. It further stated that International Federations (IF) of each sport retain full discretion for defining their own respective deadlines and pathways.

"The new qualification period deadline is June 29, 2021 and IFs can define their own qualification period deadlines should the deadline be prior to this date," said the IOC in a letter addressed to the National Olympic Committees (NOC).

The IOC said that it aims to finalise the qualification systems "by mid-April" with details on specific events to follow when available.

"The priority remains to reflect, where possible, the allocation method/pathway of the original qualification systems for each sport. This principle encourages IFs to follow a like-for-like approach by replacing those lost opportunities that were allocating



quota with the same number of events," it said.

Importantly, the IOC said that in case of sports that have age group-based limits, it is willing to extend the criteria in the case of those athletes who had qualified for the 2020 Olympics.

"The only exception will be if the IF establishes that the one-year relaxation of the upper age limit represents a safety and/or medical risk for athletes. Regarding the eligibility criteria for the lower age limit, if any, the IOC recognises the full authority of IFs to assess the eligibility of those athletes who are not eligible in July 2020 but meet the lower age limit in 2021," said the IOC.

Wimbledon chief fears 'no more tennis this year'

AFP ■ LONDON

Wimbledon chief Richard Lewis admitted that he feared the remainder of the 2020 tennis season could be wiped out.

Tennis has been in lockdown since early last month and is not scheduled to return until July 13 at the earliest following the cancellation of Wimbledon on Wednesday.

"I don't think it's unrealistic to say that there may be no more tennis this year," said All England Club chief executive Lewis.

"But I would like to think that things will settle down so that tournaments can be played sooner rather than later. Who knows what will happen?"

Lewis told *the Guardian* that, despite his fears, he hoped that the



season's next Grand Slam, the US Open in August-September could take place.

"Let's hope the US Open and Roland Garros (rescheduled to start

in Paris a week after the final of the US Open in New York) can take place," he added.

"The optimist in me — and I am often not optimistic — still hopes the American hard-court season, the big tournaments, the Masters and the Premiers, will take place: Montreal, Toronto and then Cincinnati."

"But we all know that's probably tenuous at the moment. Earlier, the president of the Spanish tennis federation, Miguel Diaz, said he hoped the sport could return to the courts "in the last quarter of the year."

"I think that in the last quarter of the season we will be able to see tennis again, we don't know if it will be with fans in attendance or without, but I think our sport will return to the courts," said Diaz.

FIH extend Pro League suspension

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The International Hockey Federation has been forced to extend the suspension of FIH Pro League's second edition due to the COVID-19 pandemic and now plans to hold the ties in July and August, provided the current situation improves.

The FIH was forced to suspend the Pro League twice earlier due to the pandemic. The world hockey body first had postponed all matches scheduled before April 15 and later extended the deferment till May 17.

"Now, following the uncertainty of the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic, FIH and the participating National Associations (NAs) have decided to consider the month of July and the beginning of August 2020 to play matches of the FIH Hockey Pro League, if the health situation improves," FIH CEO Thierry Weil said.

"At present, all matches planned in the current schedule are on hold until further notice."

Ancelotti wants fair play on season restart date

AFP ■ LIVERPOOL

Before the Premier League starts up it must ensure all clubs resume training on the same day, Everton manager Carlo Ancelotti told French newspaper *L'Equipe* in an interview published on Friday.

The Premier League is on hold because of the coronavirus pandemic. It was scheduled to resume on April 30, but club chairmen were meeting by video conference and were expected to push that the date back.

"One of the important things is that all the clubs resume training at the same time, that there are no disparities, that no one has an advantage over the others," the 60-year-old Italian told *L'Equipe*. "Players nowadays



Everton manager Carlo Ancelotti. PL

are capable of being physically ready within a fortnight."

Ancelotti, who took over at Everton in December, has won the Champions League as a player and coach and has led teams to league titles in Italy, Germany, France and England.

Farah has no qualms over Tokyo delay

LONDON: British distance great Mo Farah

has insisted he still intends to compete at the Tokyo Olympics even though they have been delayed a year by the coronavirus.

Farah will have celebrated his 38th birthday by the time of the rescheduled Games and there are concerns that athletes who had planned to be in peak form this year may not reach the same heights in 12 months' time.

But the four-time Olympic Gold medallist backed the postponement and was adamant it would not affect his ability to compete.

"The Olympics was about the last thing to get cancelled. In a way obviously it's disappointing it has been cancelled but I am glad it has been cancelled," Farah told *Talksport* radio on Friday.

Farah, who won Olympics Gold in the 5,000 and 10,000 metres at both the London 2012 and Rio 2016 Games, added

a delay was preferable to trying to fit in an Olympics without sufficient training time and warm-up races.

"In a way we could have been in a far worse situation, there are no races leading up to it, athletes can't test themselves," he said.

"I would probably need about six, seven, eight races beforehand to see what kind of shape I am in," explained Farah. "It is what it is and it gives us another year of preparation."

"At the moment, nobody is thinking about that. I am still running every day, just trying to get through this crisis time."

"It is not just sport, it is affecting everything we do. It is a difficult situation for everyone and particularly for the older people, the more vulnerable."

"We just have to stay together, stay strong. We just have to get through this. It is a test for everywhere in the world and it is growing." AFP