

OPINION 6
FRIENDSHIP
IN TROUBLE

MONEY 9
INDIA TO GROW FASTEST
AMONG G20 ECONOMIES: REPORT

SPORT 12
SMITH AGAIN ELIGIBLE
FOR CAPTAINCY

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LOCKDOWN
IS CRUCIAL:
KANGANA
10 VIVACITY

Dists sealed, 14-day quarantine for violators

Centre asks States to stop migrants' exodus; SPs/DMs ordered to punish landlords evicting students/labourers; private firms asked to pay salaries



Migrant workers, along with their family members, walk to their native villages, during a nationwide lockdown at NH 24 near Akshardham in East Delhi on Sunday

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The home-bound exodus of thousands of migrant workers has posed a major challenge to the Centre, which, on Sunday, directed States/UTs to seal the borders of districts and cities to prevent movement of people across cities or highways.

The Centre also told the States that all those who have travelled during the lockdown period would be put under mandatory 14-day quarantine at Government facilities.

The Centre has tried to take into account the factors that triggered the massive exodus due to joblessness, pressure from the landlords to vacate their dwelling, and how to find their next meal, the like of which the country has never seen before in post-

Independence period.

To address these issues, the Centre has directed SPs and DMs to ensure action against the landlords asking students/labourers to vacate rented accommodation. Home Minister Amit Shah and Home Secretary AK Bhalla spoke to many Chief Ministers and Chief Secretaries to ensure strict action against landlords who demanded workers to vacate their dwellings.

They also urged the States to ensure the private companies pay salaries to employers and workers. Both of them asked the State Governments to impose penal actions against those who violate the rules of the Disaster Management Act.

Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba also took stock of preparedness with State Chief

Secretaries and DGPs.

"The migrant people, who have moved out to reach their home in States or towns to be kept in the nearest shelter by the respective State/UT Government quarantine facilities after proper screening for a minimum period of 14 days as per standard health protocol. All the employers, be it in the industry or in the shops and commercial establishments, should make payment of wages of their workers, at their work places, on the due date, with-

out any deduction, for the period their establishments are under closure during the lockdown," said a circular issued to the States and Union Territories by the Union Home Ministry.

"It is to be ensured that wherever the workers, including the migrants, are living in rented accommodation, the landlords of those properties must not demand payment of rent for a period of one month. If any landlord is forcing labourers and students to vacate their

premises, they will be liable for action under the Act. The order stated that in case of violation of any of the above measures, the respective State/UT Government, would take necessary action under the Disaster Management Act and the DMs /Deputy Commissioners and SSPs/ SPs/Deputy Commissioner of Police would be personally liable for implementation of the above directions and lockdown measures issued earlier," the circular added.

UP Govt takes over Yamuna E-way flats for migrants' stay

Lucknow: The Uttar Pradesh Government on Sunday took over Jaypee Groups unused flats along Yamuna Expressway to rehabilitate migrant labourers from Delhi who entered the State. UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has ordered to keep all those labourers under 14-day quarantine at the flats where they will be provided medical and food supply.

Daily-wagers return as march stopped; Kejriwal offers help

CHANDAN PRAKASH ■ NEW DELHI

Hit by corona lockdown, thousands of impoverished daily wagers and labourers, including women and children, started returning to their "homes" in the national Capital on Sunday after the Delhi Police sealed arterial roads in the city, especially those leading to the border areas, hours after the Centre asked State Governments to ensure there is no movement of people across cities.

Cops are turning back migrant workers travelling by foot after Delhi Police Commissioner SN Srivastava strictly directed his personnel to stop movement of migrants.

Many people were seen trying to walk on the railway tracks at Anand Vihar to go their hometowns in UP. All DCPs, ACPs and SHOs have been instructed to con-

duct extensive patrolling in their respective areas and deploy maximum number of vehicles for patrolling to check the movement of migrants.

In his tweet, Kejriwal said, "I assure you that the Delhi Government has made sufficient arrangements for your food and accommodation. For now, do not go to your villages in the country's interest."

Now with the border sealed, daily wagers and labourers are looking at administrative support for food and shelter. "I have not paid rent to my landlord this month and cannot pay it next month as the factory we worked is closed. We are left with no option except leaving the city by any mode of transport available," said Rambhuwan, who along with his wife and two children were returned from the bus terminal by the police.

Focus on Covid hotspots, community check

Cases over 1,100; death count 26; 86 corona patients treated or discharged

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With coronavirus confirmed cases going over 1,100 and death count reaching 26 on Sunday, the Centre announced increased focus on high-disease burden hotspots across India and the State Governments intensified efforts to strengthen community surveillance, contact tracing and containment strategy.

The Ministry of Health confirmed 978 positive cases in the forenoon, but data collated from releases issued by various State Governments till late Sunday evening put the count of confirmed case to 1104.

Overall 26 people have died. Maharashtra has reported 6 deaths, Madhya Pradesh 2, Karnataka 3, Gujarat 4, and Delhi 2. One each person has died of COVID-19 in Bengal, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Kerala, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Bihar.

"We are identifying emerg-

ing Covid-19 hotspots in the country and a rigorous cluster containment strategy is being implemented on a war footing," Health Ministry's Joint Secretary Lav Agarwal said at a Press briefing here on the fifth day of the 21-day nationwide lockdown.

With over 200 positive cases each, Maharashtra and Kerala have emerged as the top two States with most number of infections followed by others like Karnataka, Telangana, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh where number of positive cases has gone past 50.

Agarwal said that the Cabinet Secretary held a couple of meetings with the Chief Secretaries of all States in the last 24 hours to review the situation and for the effective implementation of containment measures.

The Government has also set up 10 empowered groups entrusted to oversee the Covid related management and pre-



A member of Municipality sanitises a ward at a hospital in Srinagar

vention strategy at various platforms.

Agarwal added that the Government was busy upgrading the health logistics, including procurement and manufacturing of PPEs (personal protective equipment) like masks, sanitisers and also separation of the treatment facilities for coronavirus cases across States.

Agarwal said the ongoing 21-day lockdown has resulted in some behavioural as well as mental health issues and NIMHANS has launched a toll-free number — 08046110007 — for consultation.

Migrant workers hit streets in Kerala to return home

Kottayam: Seeking transportation to travel to their native places, hundreds of migrant workers on Sunday ventured out into the streets near Changanassery violating the lockdown.

The incident is reported from Payippad village. Hundreds of migrant workers are out on the street, seeking transportation facilities to go to their native places, the authorities said.

50 BSF personnel quarantined

New Delhi: Following detection of the first coronavirus positive case in the paramilitary ranks, the BSF has home-quarantined about 50 personnel and kept at least five other officers under isolation at the Force's academy at Tekanpur in Madhya Pradesh. The move comes after BSF second-in-command officer Ashok Kumar, overseeing preparation of quarantine facility at BSF Academy, Tekanpur, was reported Covid-19 positive.

Deaths double in 2 days in US, hits 2K

Washington: Confirmed coronavirus-related deaths in the United States doubled in two days, surpassing 2,000 on Saturday and highlighting how quickly the virus is spreading through the country. Johns Hopkins University reported that confirmed deaths rose to more than 30,000 around the world.

Mass tests in India must as 50% China cases showed no symptom

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A research carried out by the Chinese authorities show that at least half of the 85,000 Covid-19 cases in the country displayed no symptoms. The study underlines the importance of random testing at a mass scale to identify the "silent carriers" of the disease, completely unaware that they were Covid-19 patients. The data reveals that around 43,000 people in China tested positive despite showing no symptoms.

In a report, the *South China Morning Post* said that around 43,000 people in China had tested positive for coronavirus by the end of February but had no symptoms.

These asymptomatic, silent carriers were placed under quarantine and were closely monitored by the doctors. However, they were not included in the list of officially confirmed cases which then stood at 80,000.

Scientists are not yet sure what role exactly a silent carrier or asymptomatic transmission plays in the spread of

this new type of coronavirus. A patient usually develops symptoms in five days though the incubation period can stretch up to 14 days or even three weeks.

During this period, the asymptomatic patient can pass on the infection to others. A section of scientists are of the view that silent carriers play a vital role in infecting others with the Covid-19 virus.

These findings hold a great deal of importance for India which has been able to test only a fraction of its massive population.

India has been maintaining that cases of community transmission has not been witnessed so far and strict adherence to social distance for a certain period will help it win the war against the Covid-19.

The data available from the Chinese Government notes that asymptomatic carriers of the dreaded virus have been ignored by most of the western countries.

"The Chinese Government changed its classification guidelines on February 7, counting

only those patients with symptoms as confirmed cases. The US, Britain and Italy simply do not test people without symptoms, apart from medical workers who have prolonged exposure to the virus," said the English daily.

China may not have been adding silent carriers on its official list, but it prevented the spread of the disease by isolating and monitoring them.

German Minister kills self on 'virus crisis worries'

AFP ■ FRANKFURT AM MAIN

Thomas Schaefer, the Finance Minister of Germany's Hesse State, has committed suicide apparently after becoming "deeply worried" over how to cope with the economic fallout from the coronavirus, State premier Volker Bouffier said on Sunday.

Schaefer, 54, was found dead near a railway track on Saturday. The Wiesbaden prosecution's office said they believe he died by suicide. "We are in shock, we are in disbelief and above all we are immensely sad," Bouffier said.

Hesse is home to Germany's financial capital Frankfurt, where major lenders like Deutsche Bank and Commerzbank have their headquarters.

SIDELIGHTS

- The Supreme Court will on Monday hear a petition seeking relief for thousands of migrant workers who are leaving big cities en masse for their hometowns because they don't have the resources to sustain during the 21-day coronavirus lockdown
- Delhi Police received over 1,100 calls since Saturday on its 24-hour helpline dedicated to addressing queries related to the coronavirus lockdown, officials said
- People living in Kolkata will now be able to order raw fish online as the West Bengal Government launched an app to tackle rising prices amid the nationwide lockdown imposed in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak, a senior official said
- Indian Railways has decided to run special parcel van trains to keep up uninterrupted flow of essential commodities in the country during the ongoing lockdown to contain the COVID-19 outbreak, officials said



Asks patients who recovered to make their fight against coronavirus viral

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday sought forgiveness from the people who have to undergo hardship during the ongoing lockdown to combat the coronavirus spread. He also referred to reports of discrimination against coronavirus patients and those under quarantine and



called for increasing emotional bonding while continuing to maintain "social distancing".

He also asked patients who have recovered to make their fight viral on social media.

In his monthly Mann Ki Baat address, the PM said, "Task for forgiveness from my country men especially the poor who

have been asked to remain under lockdown and have to face difficulties. I understand their pain and suffering, but it is essential to fight the coronavirus pandemic."

Modi said the measures were for the "safety of you and your families" and sought them to "respect Lakshman Rekha outside your homes".

"I've told you to not to step outside... this is the time to introspect," Modi said and cited examples where people have been using the opportunity and time to enjoy the hobbies or pursuits they had lost track of during their busy routine.

UT Admn focusing on tracking NRIs

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

As thousands of Non-Resident Indians, who are suspected of having COVID-19 (Coronavirus) have gone missing in neighboring Punjab, the Chandigarh Administration on Sunday speed up the process to track around 49 NRIs, who returned to the city after March 14.

The Chandigarh Administration had on Saturday evening received a list of 2200 NRIs who had landed in the city in the recent weeks. Out of the list, the UT Administration on Sunday made the record of 675 NRIs who returned to the city after March 14, considering 14 days incubation period of COVID-19.

Continued on Page 2

Banks in Punjab to remain open on March 30-31

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

To facilitate people in their financial transactions amid the curfew restrictions, banks in Punjab will remain open across the State on March 30 and 31.

As per the orders by the Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh, all bank branches shall be open only for two days in the week, on rotation basis, from April 3 onwards.

In line with the same directives, the State Home Department has issued an advisory regarding operation of banks branches during curfew amid COVID-19 in the State on March 30 and 31, and beyond.

Number of COVID-19 patients rises to 21 in Haryana

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Chandigarh: The total number of Coronavirus cases in Haryana rose to 21, with a fresh case reported from Ambala on Sunday. The total number of positive cases of COVID-19 in Haryana stood at 21, as per the bulletin of state's Health Department.

The northern state has reported 10 cases from Gurugram, four from Panipat, three from Faridabad and one each from Palwal, Panchkula and Sonapat. The test reports of 175 sample is awaited, while 456 samples were found negative, the bulletin said. The total number of COVID-19 patients discharged in the state stands at six, including five from Gurugram and one from Faridabad, it added.

Punjab reports no positive case for two consecutive days

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

No new confirmed case of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has been reported for the second consecutive day in Punjab. The number of confirmed cases remained 38, while the result of 190 suspected cases are still awaited.

As per the latest media bulletin, issued by the state health department on Sunday evening, a total of 977 samples have been collected so far, out of which 38 were found positive and 749 were negative.

Out of the total 38, one Baldev Singh of Nawanshahr has died due to cardiac arrest.

Continued on P2



Temporary bail to undertrials in HP

This is being done in compliance to directions of SC in respect of contagion of virus in prisons

PNS ■ SHIMLA

Temporary bail will be given to the under trials of Himachal Pradesh who are first time offender, facing trial for offences punishable up to seven years and are in the custody for last three months or more, a Government spokesperson said on Sunday. The spokesperson of the State Government said that this is being done in compliance to the directions of the Supreme Court of India in respect of contagion of COVID-19 virus in prisons. He said a committee headed by Justice Tarlok Singh Chauhan, who is also Executive Chairman of HP State Legal Services Authority, has resolved to give temporary bail to the under trials for a maximum period of three months. "The decision of temporary release of prisoners has been taken to ensure social distancing and to avoid spread of COVID-19 virus," the spokesperson said, adding that District Magistrates and Superintendents of Police will make arrangements for trans-

mission of prisoners on release from bail to their respective places.

"These prisoners will be released only after proper medical examination by the jail authority and will ensure that the policy of the State Government regarding complete lockdown is not violated," the spokesperson said in a statement.

It was also decided that the application for temporary bail may be filed online to prevent gathering in masses in the courts or Government offices. The release of convicts and under trials from outside the state or foreigners has not been considered in view of the national lockdown, the spokesperson said.

It has also been decided that competent authority will expedite the applications of eligible convicts to maximize release on parole/furloughs as per rules and procedure who have been convicted with imprisonment up to seven years. The competent authority will also expedite the matter of release of convicts under section 432 of CrPc which are

pending with them, as per rule.

GOVT ADOPTING ALL MEASURES TO ENSURE SUPPLY OF ESSENTIAL COMMODITIES, SAYS CM

Himachal Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur on Sunday said the State and district control rooms are keeping an eye on the situation and monitoring the availability of essential services on regular basis.

He said services of Volunteers and Voluntary organizations will be utilized as part of emergency response team for COVID-19, adding that the database of volunteers trained by the Himachal Pradesh State Disaster Management Authority and District Disaster Management Authority at Panchayat level for the management of disasters has been generated which is ready to be used for present health disaster arisen due to COVID-19 and the same will be available for future use also.

Similarly, the services of 51 NGOs, which are part of emergency response network, will

also be available on a single call.

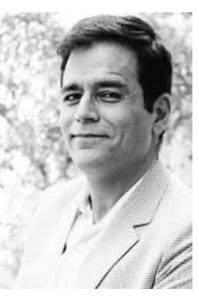
Thakur said that Government is adopting every possible measure to ensure that migrant laborer do not panic and that food and shelter will be provided to them by the State Government and instructions have been issued to assure that no migrant or local laborer is left without food and shelter. The instructions have also been passed on to local Pradhans and Panchayat Secretaries.

HIMACHAL BHAWAN TO BE OPERATED IN NEW DELHI FOR STRANDED HIMACHALIS

The State Government has decided to operate Himachal Bhawan and Himachal Sadan in New Delhi to provide food and shelter facility to such students and individual of the State who are stranded in Delhi NCR and not able to travel to their native places in Himachal Pradesh due to lockdown in the country. Similar facility has also been made available in Himachal Bhawan, Chandigarh.

GUEST COLUMN - SHARAD MEHRA

Brave leadership in corona era: : Infecting people with positivity & responsibility



Learning, adapting and collaboratively battling the unforeseen Lon-the-go. This is the biggest leadership lesson drawn from the Coronavirus pandemic. Online education spurt, remote working, e-commerce is the 'new reality'—in a time where human contact could mean illness or even death. In this scenario, brave leadership has acquired a new meaning. It's much more than being reactive or adapting to new technologies for the business-of-life to continue. It's about every person being a responsible leader in their own right for their family, friends and co-workers. Brave Leadership today means unshackling the chains of negativity and taking the first steps a new reality. Acknowledging and accepting the new normal and not lamenting over a tragedy but rising above and displaying the mettle of human spirit. It's about valuing the humane and infecting people with positivity and a sense of responsibility. It is the display of bravery in a cloud of vulnerability.

We are living in fear. This fear is overpowering us. The constant urge to share the latest statistics, news (fake or real), magic cure is making us spread several facts that are often pieces of fiction created by those who are not realising the damage caused. We are playing into these hands and allowing fear to spread. Bring a stop to it. Stop discussing it with all your loved ones. Stop watching TV channels continuously, Stop being the first one to know and spread everything. Do not allow fear to dictate your action. Fear can only win, if we let it.

Who are the Brave Leaders? These leaders care about their people, are gutsy to envision and execute novel idea in a world ravaged by competition for limited resources and the sustainability pressure. These new age 'mavericks' are open to ridicule, failure, unseen challenges and are backed with a team of believers who are adaptive, innovative, talented, materialistic, pragmatic but also empathy driven. The recent response of top corporate leaders of India—from providing relief measures to corona patients to feeding the needy—bear testimony to a significant fact. They have shown humanity is transitioning from the age of 'I' over 'We'. Today brave leaders are no longer inaccessible doors, but reflect collaborative mindsets who with their flaws, are human. They are the silent warriors and not the megaphone carriers. Last week as India grappled with Coronavirus' march across the states, it was not difficult for institutes like Pearl Academy and University of Petroleum and Energy Sciences (UPES) Dehradun to switchover to virtual learning, as they have done this years ago. But this has also been a learning-

of-sorts for everyone: Like everyone else across the world, for us also it has underscored the need to be more humane and empathetic, even if its virtual.

Human beings are social entities. With the imposed isolation feelings of dread, anxiety, depression, negativity, loneliness manifesting, swiftly. The question is how much of television, creative activities and books can one read in this time? With the harsh reality unfolding around us, leadership must step up and bolster the morale of everyone including employees, working class, students, faculty, business segments, future changemakers and leaders.

Today, virtual dance parties, fitness classes, stand-up comedy acts, hilarious memes, jokes, amateur family videos etc are manifesting to ensure well-being of humans in a digitally trapped world. These novel ideas have erupted from the minds of people who value people and emotions. These are brave leaders, in themselves

Where there is a mood of despondence around the brave leaders make a change and do for others to follow. Some actions that become important:

- ☞ Communicate from the front. Let everyone one that you are there, and they are not alone
- ☞ Empathy is important. Let your humane side show
- ☞ Break routine workday for live interaction where every-one voices their fears and anxieties.
- ☞ Be directive. Crisis needs a leader who can give a clear direction and purpose
- ☞ Be there and show the light at the end of the tunnel. The darkness of the tunnel needs to be blinded by the rage of the light

The world around us is beautiful. The smell of roses, the breath of sunshine, the smile of your beloved and the music of your own thoughts are still around you. Open your heart to them with hope and positivity. Let romance, mirth, love triumph over negativity, that is your power. Every morning when you get up make one-person smile – by a joke or a hug (maybe virtual at this time) or perhaps with a look that says 'My world is beautiful because you are in it. Be grateful and positive and be brave!

(Sharad Mehra is CEO, Asia Pacific, Global University Systems (GUS))

Punjab Agri dept sets up State control room to facilitate farmers

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

To resolve the grievances and issues related to farmers amid curfew or lockdown period due to COVID-19, Punjab Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Department has established a state control room in view of ensuing Rabi Marketing Season for hassle-free wheat harvesting operations besides marketing of farmers produce.

Additional Chief Secretary (Development) Viswajeet Khanna said that Agriculture Officers had been deputed at control room with their mobile numbers to enable farmers to contact them for various issues related to agriculture.

The officer would listen to the issues of farmers at Control Room from 8 am and 8 pm and get their issues redressed in minimal time.

SUGARFED TO PROVIDE 20L KGS SUGAR TO POOR AND NEEDY

During curfew or lockdown imposed due to COVID-19 epidemic, Sugarfed will provide 20 lakh kgs sugar (20 lakh packets of one kg each) to the poor, of which 50,000 kgs have already been supplied.

Punjab Cooperation Minister Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa said that all neces-

sary arrangements have been made to provide ration to poor and needy. "50,000 packets have been sent today and remaining will be supplied in the coming days. To ensure availability of this essential commodity, we will keep a check on black marketing," he said.

OOAT CLINICS, DE-ADDITION CENTRES TO PROVIDE TAKE-HOME DOSE FOR TWO WEEKS TO REGISTERED PATIENTS

In a major relief for victims of drug abuse, Punjab Government has permitted 198 OOAT clinics, 35 government de-addiction centres and 108 licensed private de-addiction centres to provide take-home dose for two weeks of medicine Buprenorphine + Naloxone to the registered patients of substance abuse after assessment by the psychiatrists.

Health Minister Balbir Singh Sidhu said that instructions have already been issued to all Deputy Commissioners in this regard.

"Special instructions are being issued to them to main distance from each other during receiving medicines from centre...Most of the centres are functional and distributing medicine to the patients," he

19 MILK PLANTS FUNCTIONAL, REMAINING 2 TO BE MADE OPERATIONAL

Punjab Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh on Sunday directed the Cooperation Department to ensure that all milk plants in the state are made operational so that milk producers and dairy farmers are not put to any hardship or inconvenience during the curfew or lockdown period in view of corona virus. While 19 milk plants have already been made operational, the remaining two will become operational from April 1, said the official spokesperson.

Health Minister Balbir Singh Sidhu said that the process of patient's bio authentication at the time of admission or discharge has been waived off temporarily in safety interest of the patients who are eligible under the scheme.

Curfew relaxations timings decreased in UT

Chandigarh: After the review meeting held under UT Administrator VP Singh Badnore on Sunday, the UT Administration decided to decrease the hours of curfew relaxations to be allowed in the city. "Until further orders, the essential shops will be allowed to be kept open for only 4 hours i.e. from 11:00 am to 03:00 pm. The residents can come on foot and can make purchases by following social distance norms," said UT Adviser Manoj Parida. The indefinite curfew was imposed on March 24 to ensure social distancing and combat the spread of COVID-19. On Saturday onwards, the Administration had decided to give relaxations from 10 am to 6 pm to residents to buy essential items. During the meeting, it was decided that ration can be ordered and supplied through food delivery boys. Payment could be made online and food delivery boys will be fully sanitized and will follow social distance norms. The Administration also decided that all schools including private schools will reschedule the last date for deposit of fee for the session 2020-2021. One month time will be given to the parents after reopening of the schools to deposit the fee.

Committees set to deal with COVID-19 containment

Chandigarh: To further streamline management of the Coronavirus crisis, Punjab Government has constituted four committees — Health Sector Response and Procurement, Lockdown Implementation, Media and Communication as well as Agriculture and Food—to deal with various key aspects of the state's COVID-19 management efforts. These committees would report to the State COVID-19

Management Group, already notified by the Health and Family Welfare Department, for taking quick decisions with respect to their subjects, and meet as frequently as required and report to the COVID-19 Management Group headed by the Chief Secretary, said a spokesperson of the Chief Minister's Office.

Besides other officers of related departments, the Health Sector Response and

Procurement Committee would also have Dr KK Talwar and Dr Raj Bahadur as professional advisors. The panel would assess and review all requirements of personnel, material, and infrastructure of Health and Family Welfare, and Medical Education and Research Departments and ensure timely procurement. The Committee would also ensure provisioning of IT-support needed for COVID-19 management. The Lockdown

Implementation Committee would review all arrangements related to security and enforcement of law and order and all measures that are required for effective management of curfew or lockdown in the State due to COVID-19, and will take appropriate measures to ensure the supply of essential commodities, and services. The committee on Media and Communication would make all necessary arrangements.

Punjab reports no positive case...

From Page 1

Out of the total 38, one Baldev Singh of Nawanshahr has died due to cardiac arrest and later found to be corona positive, while state's first positive case from Amritsar has recovered and been discharged.

"All the confirmed cases have been hospitalized. The condition of one of the positive cases is critical but stable," said the spokesperson.

The health officials said that the case of 21-year-old man of Ramnagar village in Ghanaur block of Patiala district, who was tested positive for COVID-19, will not be counted in Punjab as he had been living in his native village in Patiala before he was admitted to Ambala Civil Hospital. As his native village was close to Ambala Civil Hospital, he chose to go there.

"He will be counted in Haryana as per the guidelines of the Government of India," said the state nodal officer for COVID-19 Dr Gagandeep Singh Grover. However, district health department admitted it as a first positive case of the Patiala district.

Patiala Civil Surgeon Harish Malhotra, in the press release, said that after he received test report from Ambala Civil Surgeon, he immediately sent his team to

his native village and took his close contacts to Government Rajindra Hospital for isolation. Armed with a lab report from PGIMER-Chandigarh, Patiala Health Department and police rushed to the youngster's native village, Ramnagar. The Health Department has already sent four surveillance teams to identify close contacts at the village.

Patiala Civil Surgeon Harish Malhotra said that they have collected 14 samples of the close contacts of the patient for testing. The patient complained of stomach aches on March 26 and was admitted to the hospital, said the Civil Surgeon.

The Health Department revealed that the patient was working in a private firm in Chandigarh. Notably, the patient recently visited another nearby village, Shahpur. Consequently, Shaipur has been locked down by the police.

"We have already sealed two villages. Four teams have already been formed, and two Senior Medical officers are working continuously for last 12 hours. Samples of close contacts have already been sent to lab," said Malhotra, adding that He, further, a survey has been initiated in his native village to detect any other symptomatic of COVID-19.

UT Admn focusing on..

From Page 1

While 626 such NRIs were already under home quarantine in the city, 30 more were stamped on Sunday to be put under home quarantine.

Till late Sunday night, 19 NRIs were yet to be tracked down by the UT Administration. A senior UT officer confirmed that a total of 19 NRIs are yet to be traced by the local authorities. They are likely to be traced by Monday. Some of these NRIs are not living at the residential address here mentioned in their passport, the officer said. He said that the list of such missing NRIs would be prepared by Monday.

Patiala Civil Surgeon Harish Malhotra, in the press release, said that after he received test report from Ambala Civil Surgeon, he immediately sent his team to

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VOICE WITHIN - VIJAY SINGAL

Dhyana Yoga—the Path of Meditation

Different aspects of dhyana yoga, the aim of which is to explore the inner world of consciousness and bring it in harmony with the empirical reality, have been described in shlokas from 6.10 to 6.28 of the Bhagavad Gita. Through these shlokas, it has been explained as to how can a contemplative mind, through self-discipline, achieve spiritual growth and also enjoy his mundane existence. This path of self-realisation intends to raise one's level of consciousness to higher and higher levels until one attains unity with the Supreme.

Techniques for the practice of this yoga have also been elaborated here in these shlokas. It has been instructed that one should set up a firm seat in a clean place, cover it appropriately; and sit on it comfortably. Holding the body, head and neck straight, erect and steady; and without looking around, he should fix the gaze at the tip of his nose. Sitting in correct posture ensures stability of the body. A relaxed and stable body facilitates concentration of the mind. Keeping his thoughts and senses under control, one should fix the mind on one point; and thus practice meditation for the purification of his soul. Whatsoever makes the wavering and unsteady mind wander away, he should restrain and bring it back under the control of the self. Withdrawing his attention from all the external objects, he should meditate upon the Supreme Self, holding Him alone as the ultimate goal of his life.

But this yoga is not meant for the men of extreme behaviour. For success on the path of meditation, one should be regulated in eating, sleeping and recreation etc. Sorrows of those who are restrained in their actions are mitigated by the practice of this yoga.

Precautions which must be taken while practising dhyana yoga have also been prescribed here. One should meditate alone and in solitude. One can appreciate the moments of comprehensive calmness only when he is withdrawn from the external distractions. He can hear the voice from within only when he has cut himself off from the noise of the outside world.

Meditation should be practised on regular basis. One cannot go too far by taking it to fit and starts. This yoga should be pursued with determination and great enthusiasm, without any mental reservation. For the practice of meditation, one should be self-controlled. Only a pure heart and a disciplined mind can touch the inner layers of one's being.

To succeed in the practice of meditation, one must free himself from all selfish desires. Constant cravings give rise to anxiety, fear, lust and anger etc.; and, thus, a disturbed mind. Such a turbulent mind cannot concentrate itself on anything. To gain the glad freedom of the self, one must overcome the tyranny of ever expanding desires. Only then can he establish himself in dhyana yoga.

Only a serene mind can meditate suc-

cessfully.

To obtain such a peaceful and receptive mind, one must be fearless, be free from evil; and must have proper control over his sex impulses. In this yoga, perfection is gained gradually, little by little. Therefore, one should move forward with full conviction but by means of patient intelligence. Having so fixed his mind on the self, one should not think of anything else. When the mind becomes purified and calm by the practice of meditation, the intelligence gets refined. Through such refined intelligence, one realises the self. In such a state of being, he finds that the supreme delight is beyond the perception of the senses.

To make progress on the path of meditation, one need not be dependent upon any external assistance in the form of a ritual or some dogma. Even while working in the world in every possible manner, passionless serenity of one's mind can remain intact. The stable mind of such a practitioner of meditation is compared to a lamp in a windless place which does not flicker.

When perfection is achieved on the path of meditation; body, mind and the intelligence get purified. The Eternal Light of consciousness shines all around, without any obstruction. The innermost depths of the self are illumined. The embodied soul connects directly with the Supreme. One experiences the Divine within. To conclude, the true happiness is within, which can be gained by discipline of the mind.



Capt: Ensure supply of essential commodities

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh on Sunday ordered the departments concerned to take all possible steps to ensure uninterrupted and regular supply of essential commodities and services at the doorstep of the people across the State so that the people do not suffer any hardships in view of the statewide curfew clamped in the light of the COVID-19 crisis. On the Chief Minister's directions, the Additional Chief Secretary (Home) has issued detailed guidelines to all Administrative Secretaries, Heads of Departments, Divisional Commissioners, Deputy Commissioners, Range IGP's, CP, DIGs or SSPs etc to ensure strict compliance of these orders.

The guidelines clarify that to ensure sufficient and continuous supply of essential, commodities and services, the concerned establishments, including retail, wholesale, mandi warehousing and manufacturing, must be kept open only for home delivery. The supply of all foods and beverages, including fresh foods, fruits, vegetables, eggs, poultry, meats etc, eateries, bakeries, food preparation, general stores, groceries, karyanas, pansaris etc, e-commerce, digital delivery, home delivery etc, LPG, coal, firewood and other fuels, would be ensured to the people in a seamless manner.

Establishments of retail, wholesale, warehousing, manufacturing etc of medicines shall also remain open, besides chemists, doctors, hospitals (including OPDs), drug de-addiction centres, rehab centres, nursing homes, AYUSH practitioners, diagnostic laboratories etc, as per the detailed guidelines.

Besides, animal feed, poultry feed, veterinary medicines, veterinary hospitals, milk plants etc would remain functional.

- Retail, wholesale, mandi warehousing and manufacturing to be kept open only for home delivery
- Supply of all foods and beverages, eateries, bakeries, food preparation, general stores, groceries, karyanas, pansaris etc, e-commerce, digital delivery, home delivery etc, LPG, coal, firewood and other fuels, to be ensured to the people in a seamless manner
- Establishments of retail, wholesale, warehousing, manufacturing etc of medicines shall also remain open
- Chemists, doctors, hospitals (including OPDs), drug de-addiction centres, rehab centres, nursing homes, AYUSH practitioners, diagnostic laboratories etc, to remain open
- Animal feed, poultry feed, veterinary medicines, veterinary hospitals, milk plants etc to remain functional
- Seeds, pesticides, insecticides, fertilizers, agriculture supplies, agriculture implements, harvester combines etc to be made available
- Banks, ATMs, cash vans, cash delivery, payment of wages by employers to workers not to be interrupted
- Supply of packaging, packing material, plastic bags, etc to continue
- Supply of petroleum products to be made available
- Petrol pumps to remain open
- All warehouses, godowns, cold stores, controlled atmosphere stores and all goods vehicles, including trucks, tempos etc to be allowed to operate at all times
- Supply of all foods and beverages, eateries, bakeries, food preparation, general stores, groceries, karyanas, pansaris etc, e-commerce, digital delivery, home delivery etc, LPG, coal, firewood and other fuels, to be ensured to the people in a seamless manner
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- All warehouses, godowns, cold stores, controlled atmosphere stores and all goods vehicles, including trucks, tempos etc to be allowed to operate at all times

Similarly, seeds, pesticides, insecticides, fertilizers, agriculture supplies, agriculture implements, harvester combines etc would also be made available amid COVID-19 restrictions.

Apart from these, banks, ATMs, cash vans, cash delivery, payment of wages by employers to workers shall not be interrupted, and supply of packaging, packing material, plastic bags, etc would also continue, as per the

guidelines. The supply of petroleum products would be made available and petrol pumps would also remain open.

To ensure uninterrupted movement of goods across Punjab and to-and-from other states, all warehouses, godowns, cold stores, controlled atmosphere stores and all goods vehicles, including trucks, tempos etc would be allowed to operate at all times.

Punjab builds large stocks of life-saving equipments

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

To prepare for any COVID-19 related contingency, Punjab Government is building up its stocks of life-saving equipment such as masks, gloves, ventilators, PPE kits etc, with large quantities of these materials already in stock and many more expected to be available over the next few days.

By March 31, the state will have another 25,000 N95 masks, in addition to the 52,500 it already has in stock, along with one lakh Nitrile gloves. While the State Government already has at its disposal 26.32 lakh triple layer masks (TLMs), another 12 lakh will get added to the inventory by April 1, said the state Additional Chief Secretary Vini Mahajan.

As far as the much-needed Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) kits, the government has ordered a total of one lakh, of which 7,640 have already been received, said Mahajan, adding that all efforts were being made to procure the balance at the earliest.

Other critical supplies already available with the government include 10425 hand sanitizers and 17,000 VTM kits, with 2,000 and 10,000

more, respectively, already on the way and expected to be added to the inventory by April 1. The Government is also procuring the much-needed ventilators for handling critical cases, she added.

To reduce dependence on outside vendors, the Government has roped in local manufacturers, she said, adding that samples prepared by them were at present in testing phase.

"Business to business tie-ups are being facilitated, as a result of which 10 lakh pieces of indigenously made hazmat armour suits have been ordered by the Central Government from JCT Mills," said Mahajan, adding that to facilitate testing of these suits, the Punjab Police had taken samples through the lockdown to Delhi from where they were taken to the Central testing laboratory at Coimbatore via a special flight.

The state was also in continuous discussion with the Health Ministry and other central ministries involved in regulatory clearances, to handhold the entrepreneurs and fast track clearances to enable 'Made in Punjab' ventilators, she said, adding that the State Government will ensure immediate orders for these as soon as the clearances come in.

Haryana CM issues directions to DCs to stop migrant labour

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

In a bid to control and stop the movement of migrant labourers in large numbers, Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Sunday directed the Deputy Commissioners to completely seal the Inter and intra state borders and said that the migrants should be stopped at their respective places and no one should be allowed to move from the current locations.

Presiding over a review meeting with the Deputy Commissioners and Superintendents of Police through video conferencing here, Khattar directed the officers to set up 'Shelter or Relief camps' and ensure that proper food and staying arrangements are made for the migrant labourers staying in such camps and if anyone still opposes staying, then strict action should be taken against him.

He directed a nodal officer for every camp in each district should be appointed who will ensure staying, food and medical facilities of these migrants. Apart from this social distancing should be ensured in these camps.

The Chief Minister said that during this time of crisis, the participation of NGOs and various social organizations should also be ensured. The

representatives of such organizations should be allowed to give their contribution.

He said that along with religious organizations like Radha Soami Satang many other have come forward to help the State Government for the same, therefore the officers should coordinate with such organizations to use their Bhawans as shelters for making staying arrangements for the people.

He further directed that an officer should be appointed at every such Bhawan who can take care of various needs including food and drinking facilities for the people. Apart from this health and sanitation facilities at every shelter should be managed by the State Government, he added.

Khattar said that as far as possible, the hot food facility wherever possible should also be provided in association with local Non-Governmental Organizations.

ELABORATE ARRANGEMENTS FOR MIGRANT LABOURERS, CLAIMS HRY CHIEF SECRETARY

Haryana Chief Secretary Keshni Anand Arora on Sunday said that the State Government has made elaborate arrangements for the migrant labourers for their food and lodging.

She said that for the migrant labourers, the district

administration has set up special 'shelter or relief home' in each district. She shared that around 129 'shelter or relief home' have been set up in the districts across the state and food is being provided to 29328 labourers staying in these homes. Presiding over a Crisis Coordination Committee meeting with senior officers through video conferencing here, Arora directed that special health camps should be set up on the borders for the migrant labourers, while thermal screening along with other medical test should be done. She also directed the officers to increase the number of 'Relief and Shelter Homes'.

The chief secretary asked the officers to intensify the checking movement of migrant labourers at the inter-state borders. Apart from this, the officers should explore the possibility of turning the stadiums in their respective districts into temporary stay, so that these labourers who are moving on foot should be kept there. No one should be allowed to move on roads, she added.

The Chief Secretary further said that a nodal officer should also be appointed to track the number of the migrant labourers staying in the shelters. She said it should be ensured that no one coming from neighbouring states should be allowed to enter Haryana.

HC dismisses PIL against admn's decision to keep shops open

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

The Punjab and Haryana High Court on Sunday dismissed a Public Interest Litigation against Chandigarh Administration's decision to open up shops in the city amidst the curfew saying it was a policy matter. The Court said, "The order dated March 27, 2020 (UT Admn) is valid. It has been issued in large public interest. The scope of judicial interference

in a policy matter is very limited."

"The Chandigarh Administration has weighed all the pros and cons before taking the decision. We will not substitute our wisdom for the wisdom of the Administration during this crisis. Maintaining social distance is a sine qua non to control the disease. The Administration may also solicit opinion of the specialists of infectious communication dis-

eases, while taking a decision," the Court said.

"Accordingly, the petition is disposed of with an observation that the Administration may lay down the parameters of social distancing at the time of distribution of essential items and also, to monitor and regulate the same by taking stringent actions against the violators," the Court order further stated.

The petition was filed by a local lawyer, Adityajit Singh

Chadha, challenging UT Administration's decision to relax the curfew between 10am and 6pm, which came into force on Saturday. The decision was taken after four days of curfew as door-to-door supply of essential commodities failed miserably. Senior Advocate Bikramjit Singh Patwalia, appearing on the behalf of petitioner, submitted that specific parameters qua the social distancing be laid down and notified.

The UT Administration submitted in the Court, "A curfew was imposed on March 23. The Chandigarh Administration tried hard to ensure continuation of supplies of essential items.

The senior officers were assigned the task to ensure availability of essential items.

The buses of Chandigarh Transport Undertaking were used to provide food and vegetables.

COVID-19/CURFEW

For the convenience of the people of the State, **EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTERS** are being operated at the State-level and District wise, which are working 24 hours. Contact them for any information or assistance. Nodal officers have also been appointed to assist the people for rescue from COVID-19.

Your safety is the priority of our government. Help in the great campaign to protect humanity from Coronavirus by sitting at Home only.

Jai Ram Thakur
Chief Minister, Himachal Pradesh

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* EOC- Emergency Operation Centre ** DEOC- District Emergency Operation Centre

Migrants to get three meals a day in urban homeless shelters



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Urban homeless shelters would provide three meals a day to those living in and around the premises to help people combat the spread of coronavirus outbreak during the 21-day nationwide lockdown. The Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry said on Sunday that three meals a day would be provided to around 1 lakh people living in and around 1,367 shelters for the homeless in cities.

Not only the Government agencies but religious organisations and community kitchens have come forward to provide meals to daily wagers and migrants due to lockdown.

HUA Ministry secretary, Durga Shanker Mishra, said that three meals a day would be provided to around 1 lakh people living in and around 1,500 shelters for the homeless in the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY-NRLM) shelters. He said expenditure of up to 100 per person per day could be incurred from the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM) and State missions for giving food to the homeless in and around DAY-NULM shelters.

In a letter to all States and Union Territories, the HUA ministry said that there is urgent requirement to support them as they do not have available sources of livelihood right

now. "All states across the country have been advised that newly added homeless/ vulnerable persons should be scanned for fever or other symptoms & referred to the hospital, if suspected, before allowing them to stay in the shelter", it said.

"Also, caretaker of the shelter should ensure awareness for staying indoor, taking care of recommended hand wash using soap/ sanitiser and full cleanliness & hygiene inside and outside campus among the residents," it said.

In Punjab, gurudwaras have taken a lead in providing food and Punjab police personnel are engaged in distributing food packets. "In the past two days, policemen have distributed 1.5 lakh food packets," said a Punjab police statement, adding that milk and dry rations are also being handed out. In Kolkata, community kitchens are providing food to street dwellers and poor people living in the 27-night shelters run by the Kolkata Municipal Corporation.

The Chhattisgarh Government is providing food packets to the homeless and poor people in the state in all 28 districts with the help of police.

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs has already issued an advisory to all States to make arrangements for the stranded workers: "States/UTs need to explore measures by involving various agencies, including NGOs, to provide

Take more nuanced approach: Rahul to PM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Extending his and his party's support in the fight against Covid-19, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi urging him to "consider a more nuanced and targeted approach" given the complex realities of people; spell out the timeline for speedy implementation of the financial package announced by the Government, start setting up dedicated hospitals; and engage small and medium businesses and farmers in rebuilding the economy.

He also called for extending the social safety net to support and shelter the working poor.

The former Congress chief in his letter to the Prime Minister urged him to seri-

ously consider the devastating impact a nationwide coronavirus lockdown would have on the people society and the economy.

Rahul said it was critical for the Government to understand that India's conditions were unique and may be total shutdown may not be necessary as it was likely to create more trouble.

"We may be required to take different steps than other large countries who are following a total lockdown strategy," he said in a three-page letter to PM Modi.

The Congress leader further said that the number of poor people in India who are dependent on a daily income is simply too large for the government to unilaterally shut down all economic activity. "The consequence of a com-

plete economic shut down will disasterly amplify the death toll arising from the covid-19 virus," Rahul said.

The Centre last Tuesday had announced a three-week lockdown across the country to break the transmission chain of highly contagious coronavirus. The shutdown was necessary keeping the rising positive Corona cases in mind and during the week it pushed lakhs of migrant and daily wage workers across the country out of job in one stroke.

Rahul's letter comes couple of days later after party chief Sonia Gandhi had extended her party's full cooperation to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to combat COVID 19 pandemic. Sonia had though urged the PM for financial package which the

government did and addressed the concerns of larger segment of the country particularly the poor people.

It is in this backdrop that Rahul Gandhi too has suggested that the Government should consider a more nuanced a targeted approach that takes the complex realities of Indian people into consideration.

"Millions of India's elderly live in villages. A complete lockdown and the resulting shut down of our economic engine will almost certainly ensure that millions of unemployed youth rush back to their villages, increasing the risk of infecting their parents, grandparents and the elderly population. This will result in catastrophic loss of life," Rahul Gandhi said.

Waive recharge fees of migrants: Priyanka to mobile operators

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi on Sunday requested the mobile operators to waive off the recharge fees of the citizens, particularly the poor migrants who are criss-crossing the country to reach their destinations amid the coronavirus outbreak.

In separate letters to all the heads of mobile operators, Priyanka said that lakhs of poor people are in transit mode and they don't have even money to feed themselves and thus extending their incoming and outgoing calls validity will certainly help them to stay connected with their near and dear ones in this hour of crisis.

Priyanka wrote to almost all telecom operators like

Reliance Jio chief Mukesh Ambani, Airtel's Sunil Bharti Mittal and Vodafone Idea boss Kumar Mangalam Birla, urging them to make incoming-outgoing calls free on their networks for at least one month for migrant workers during coronavirus lockdown. She has also written to BSNL chief PK Purwar, making the same request.

Congress shared the letters on Twitter. In one such letter to Ambani, she said she was writing to him on humanitarian grounds about the plight of the millions of migrant workers across the country who were trying to find their way home to their families battling hunger, thirst and disease.

She said that it was 'our national duty to help our countrymen in this hour of crisis'. "There is one way in which your company Jio

Telecommunications can make a huge difference at this moment. Many of the people going home have run out of money on their phone recharges. This means they are unable to call their families and their families are unable to receive their calls due to financial and mobility restraints," Priyanka wrote.

The Congress leader further said urged Mukesh Ambani to make "incoming and outgoing call facilities on your service in the relevant areas available without charge for the next one month". She wrote similar letters to other service providers such as Airtel, Vodafone Idea, and BSNL. This comes amid reports that thousands of migrant and daily wage workers were trying to rush back to their native places as they had no job in the cities any-

more due to complete lockdown.

Taking up the cause of migrants' exodus a day earlier, Priyanka lashed out at the Centre for the "human tragedy".

Sharing some photos of thousands of daily wage workers and labourers at Delhi-Uttar Pradesh border on Saturday, waiting in long queues to board buses at the Anand Vihar Interstate Bus Terminal in Delhi, she said "India deserves better".

"A human tragedy in the streets of Delhi, Ghaziabad, Anand Vihar. Women, children and the elderly have been left to their own devices. They are, walking, riding rickshaws and sitting on the rooftops of the buses to return home. Don't know what is the government up to," Priyanka Gandhi wrote on Twitter.

Bihar Govt sets up control room at Bihar Bhawan to help migrant workers



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In view of the coronavirus scare, the Bihar Government has set up a control room at Bihar Bhawan in the national Capital to extend all possible support to the State's people, particularly to assist the migrant workers. A total of 2,575 phone calls were received and action was taken on the problems of about 1,15,00 persons till late evening while about 9,000 applications received through GoogleDock connectivity system were processed.

The Resident Commissioner at Bihar Bhawan Vipin Kumar is the nodal officer to extend all possible support to the people of Bihar trapped in different parts of the country. When contacted, Kumar informed that prompt and

appropriate action was taken on problems by coordinating with the preferred officials of the respective States. "Compliance reports have also been received from many places. The Government of Bihar is working on a war footing for basic cooperation and assistance of millions of migrants," Kumar said.

The control room (011-23792009, 011-23014326, 011-23013884) set up at Bihar Bhawan has facilities for calls, fax, internet and email. In this, officials and personnel have been appointed in three shifts.

Ten hunting lines have also been commissioned on these three telephone numbers of the control room, so that all the phones continue to function smoothly and the callers do not face any technical problem.

food and shelter with basic amenities like clean drinking water, sanitation," it said.

Social and religious organisations have started distributing food to the migrants, daily wagers, and the poor, even as the state governments have opened up community kitchens and shelter homes to serve them. More than half of

these 13 million migrated out of just three states - Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan. Also, more than half of the migrants move to just four states - Maharashtra, Delhi, Gujarat and Karnataka - primarily in search of work in cities such as Mumbai, Ahmedabad and Bengaluru and Delhi.

Rajnath OK's contribution of one day salary by Defence personnel to PM-CARES Fund

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal to donate to the national kitty in the fight against coronavirus pandemic, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday approved a proposal for the contribution of one day salary by the employees of Ministry of Defence to the PM-CARES Fund.

It is estimated that around ₹ 500 crore will be collectively provided by the Defence Ministry to the fund from various wings, including Army, Navy, Air Force, Defence Public Sector Undertakings (PSU)s and others.

Giving this information here, officials also said the employees' contribution is voluntary and those desirous of opting out will be exempted. There are more than 13 lakh personnel in the Army, one lakh in the IAF and nearly the same

number in the Navy besides civilian employees in the three Service, defence ministry and the PSUs.

Meanwhile, in the ongoing national effort to meet the challenge of the pandemic, the Army on Sunday received a fresh batch of 275 evacuees from Iran at its wellness facility in Jodhpur. As per the procedure, preliminary screening of the evacuees upon arrival was conducted at Jodhpur airport by the medical teams from the civil administration and the Army. Thereafter, they were moved to the Army Wellness Facility. The earlier batch of 277 evacuees, who had arrived at Jodhpur, on March 25, have settled down comfortably and are being regularly monitored by the army medical teams, officials said.

The Army authorities as part of Operation Namaste, codename given to the endeavor to fight the pandemic, have created Army Wellness Facilities

which comprises all amenities and are fully geared up to accommodate all the evacuees and provide them with requisite medical and administrative support during their quarantine period.

The armed forces have been working relentlessly to provide medical and logistics support to civil authorities in the fight against COVID-19 pandemic. The Armed Forces Medical Services (AFMS) has deployed all resources at its disposal to aid the civilian authorities, shouldering responsibility in the time of extraordinary crisis.

Six quarantine facilities run by the Armed Forces are currently operational at Manesar, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Chennai, Hindan and Mumbai.

So far, a total of 1,463 people, including foreigners, evacuated from COVID-19 affected countries have been housed and observed at these centres. Of them, nearly 1,300 are

Two more Army personnel test corona positive

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Two more army personnel tested corona positive on Sunday. While one jawan of territorial army was found positive in Kashmir, a doctor officer tested positive in eastern command taking the number to three in the Army. The first case was of a jawan of Ladakh scouts some days back in Leh. He has since recovered.

presently under quarantine and being provided proper care. These include evacuees from Iran, Italy, Japan and Malaysia, besides the IAF and medical crew. Three hundred ninety

evacuees from China, Japan and IAF evacuation flight crew have been discharged following completion of their mandatory quarantine period.

Three positive COVID-19 cases have been reported, so far - two from Hindan and one from Manesar. They were referred to Safdarjung Hospital, New Delhi for further treatment.

In addition to the active quarantine centres, more facilities have been readied and may be made operational within 48-72 hours, if needed. These facilities are at Kolkata, Visakhapatnam, Kochi, Dundigal near Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Kanpur, Jaisalmer, Jorhat and Gorakhpur.

Also, 28 Service Hospitals have been earmarked as COVID hospitals for managing purely Corona virus cases. This will include Armed Forces as well as civilian patients transferred from state health author-

Central paramilitary forces contribute one-day salary for fighting Covid-19

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Central paramilitary forces have contributed one-day salary amounting to ₹116 crore for fighting the corona virus epidemic to the PM-CARES fund.

Following the contribution, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday tweeted, "Our paramilitary forces have always contributed to the security and unity of India. On a call

ities, in case their capacity is overwhelmed.

As of now, there are five hospitals across Army, Navy and Air Force which can carry out COVID test. These include

from Prime Minister Narendra Modi, all the jawans of the paramilitary forces have contributed one day's salary (total contribution amount Rs 116 crore) to PM-CARES."

"I thank all those who contributed," Shah added. Meanwhile, the Union Home Ministry on Sunday decided to appeal to all the officers and staff of the Ministry to contribute their one day salary to the Prime Minister Citizens'

Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situation (PM CARES) Fund to aid the Government's efforts to fight the coronavirus pandemic.

"Any officer or staff having objection to it may intimate DDO, MHA over telephone (23438255) and WhatsApp No9968267864 or email socash1@nic.in invariably mentioning his/her employee code by 31.03.2020 positively," added the Ministry order.

Army Hospital Research and Referral, Delhi; Command Hospital Air Force, Bangalore and Armed Forces Medical College, Pune; Command Hospital (Central Command)

Lucknow; Command Hospital (Northern Command) Udhampur. Six more hospitals are being equipped shortly with the resources to begin testing.

HRD Ministry to launch 'Corona Studies Series' for post-corona readership needs

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

Realising the extraordinary psychological, social, economic and cultural significance of corona pandemic for the human society in times to come, the Human Resource Development (HRD) Ministry will launch a publishing series titled 'Corona Studies Series' to document and provide relevant reading materials for all age-groups for the post-Corona readership needs.

HRD Ministry's publishing arm, National Book Trust, has been entrusted to prepare books on various segments like coronavirus (Covid-19) affected families, elderly people, parents with special focus on mothers/women, children and adolescents, professionals and workers, corona warriors like medical and essential services and the differently-abled, special needs and mentally challenged population.

NBT has identified various areas for preparing suitable reading materials under the 'Corona Studies Series'. Besides, the sub-series on the Psycho-Social Impact on various seg-

ment of population due to Corona crisis.

"We have been closely following the Corona-related developments and taking cues from the multi-dimensional initiatives of HRD Ministry's initiatives to meet the challenges of the Corona Pandemic. As a body for reading promotion, we find that we have a significant role to play. Accordingly, we started #StayHomeIndiaWithBooks initiatives by uploading pdfs of some of our select and best-selling titles for free downloads, and we have been receiving tremendous response. Taking a comprehensive view, we are launching this publishing series," said NBT Director Yuvraj Malik.

As the first step, NBT has set-up a Study Group comprising of experienced and young psychologists/counselors to prepare books on the sub-series on 'Psycho-Social Impact of Corona Pandemic and the Ways to Cope'.

"We are preparing children's books to let them know about Our Corona Warriors, and other story and picture books related to various

aspects of Corona to create awareness. Also, books focused on art, literature, folklore, economic and sociological aspects, science/health awareness emerging out of the Corona pandemic, and the lockdown, are also in the pipeline," said Kumar Vikram, Senior Editor of NBT who is leading the Project.

"In response to the national crisis of this proportion, we believe that as a national institution it is our duty to take initiatives within our domain area to provide support in the form of new reading materials. The 'Corona Studies Series' seeks to be our long-term contribution to prepare and engage readers with the various aspects of the Corona times by bringing out affordable books in various Indian languages in the identified subject areas," said NBT Chairman Prof. Govind Prasad Sharma.

The NBT Study Group comprises Dr. Jitender Nagpal, Dr. Harsheeta, S. Ldr (Rtd.) Meena Arora, Lt. Col. Tarun Uppal, Mrs. Rekha Chauhan, Mrs. Sonie Sidhu and Ms. Aparajita Dixit.

India shifts diplomats, staff to Kabul in view of surging corona

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Taking a precautionary step, India has shifted its diplomats and staff from its consulates in the Afghanistan cities of Herat and Jalalabad to Kabul in view of the surging coronavirus cases in that country which shares a long border with Iran, one of the worst-hit countries by the pandemic.

Government sources said here on Sunday all Indian staff at the two consulates were brought to Kabul following the swelling number of coronavirus cases in the country.

According to the figures given by the Afghan Government, a total of 110 people have been infected by the virus in the country, although the real figures are believed to be far higher.

Health experts believe the actual number could be higher as several provinces in the country do not have facilities to carry out a laboratory test to check the infection.

Two foreign diplomats and four officials of the NATO's

Two foreign diplomats and four officials of the NATO's Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan were among the positive cases in the country

Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan were among the positive cases in the country, according to Afghan media reports.

Sources said the Indian staff from the two consulates were shifted to Kabul as the two provinces do not have adequate medical facilities. Afghanistan shares a long border with Iran, which is among the very few countries reporting a large number of coronavirus cases and struggling to combat one of the world's worst outbreaks.

Over 2,500 people have died and more than 35,500 have been infected across Iran since February. There have been reports of a large number of Afghan refugees crossing over to Afghanistan from Iran in view of the deteriorating situation in Iran.

EPF account holders to withdraw up to 3 months' basic pay, DA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In view of the lockdown across the country to fight COVID-19, the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment on Sunday allowed over six crore subscribers of the retirement fund body Employee Provident Fund (EPF) to withdraw an amount of non-refundable advance not exceeding their three months' basic pay and dearness allowance from their EPF account.

The Ministry has notified an amendment in the Employee Provident Fund (EPF) scheme, allowing withdrawal of non-refundable advance, in the wake of coronavirus. As per the latest information available on the EPF website, the entity maintains 19.34 crore accounts (as of 2016-17).

The notification permits withdrawal of up to the amount of basic wages and dearness allowance for three months or up to 75 per cent of the amount standing to member's credit in the EPF account, whichever is



less, in the event of outbreak of the pandemic.

COVID-19 has been declared pandemic by appropriate authorities for the entire country and therefore, employees working in establishments and factories across entire India, who are members of the EPF Scheme, 1952, are eligible for the benefits of non-refundable advance. A sub-para (3) under para 68L has been inserted in the EPF scheme, 1952.

The amended Employees Provident Fund (Amendment) scheme, 2020 has come into force from March 28. Following the notification, the Employees' Provident Fund

Organisation (EPFO) has issued directions to its field offices for promptly processing any applications received from members to help them fight the situation.

In its communication, the EPFO has stated that officers and staff must process claims of EPF subscribers promptly so that relief reaches the worker and his family to help them fight with COVID-19.

The Finance Minister had, last week, announced that about 4.8 crore employees who are members of EPF can withdraw 75 per cent of the amount standing to their credit, limited to three months' wages.

Maha: 2 more deaths, 203 +ve cases

Maha starts 163 centres to house the fleeing migrant labourers
Slashes Govt meal from ₹10 to ₹5 per meal for 3 months

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

With no signs of the coronavirus crisis easing in Maharashtra, two more persons died of the pandemic and the total number of infected people rose to 203 in the State on Sunday, even as Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray announced the start of 163 centres to house the fleeing migrant labourers and slashed the price of Government meal "Shiv Bhojan" from ₹10 to ₹5 per meal for the next three months.

While a 40-year-old woman died of Coronavirus at the KEM Hospital in Mumbai, a 45-year-old Covid-19 infected man died in Buldhana district. With the two latest deaths, the total number of the pandemic deaths mounted to eight in Maharashtra.

"The woman, who was a known case of hypertension

and had severe respiratory distress at the time of admission to the KEM hospital, died on Saturday. She had complaints of breathlessness and chest pain since 3 to 4 days. She had tested positive for Coronavirus," a Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) statement said.

"The man who died at Buldhana had also tested positive for Coronavirus. He had diabetes," a State Public Health Department's medical bulletin said.

That the Coronavirus spread continues to be steady if not rapid could be evidenced from the fact that 22 more persons tested positive for Covid-19 on Sunday, taking the total of infected people from 181 to 203.

Mumbai contributed to a maximum of 10 positive cases. The total number of cases in Mumbai Metropolitan Region

(MMR), which includes the metropolis and neighbouring districts of Thane, Palghar and Raigad, has crossed 100 mark, which is almost half of the total number of positive cases in the state.

Pune, which in the initial days was recording a large number of cases, reported five more infected cases taking the total to 37. Nagpur and Ahmednagar recorded three and two more cases respectively, while Sangli, Buldhana and Jalgaon reported one each case. Meanwhile, what has come as some relief in the midst of the continued spread of the pandemic is that as many as 35 Covid-19 infected patients have recovered and been discharged from various hospitals in the state.

In a related development, the Pandharpur temple management extended the closure of the famous Vithoba temple in western Maharashtra's Solapur district from March 31 to April 14 and announced the cancellation of the annual Pandari Wari (pilgrimage) in which nearly 4 lakh people from Maharashtra, Karnataka

and Andhra Pradesh participate. The devotees walk miles and miles all the way to the Virthobha temple, located on the banks of holy Chandrabhaga river.

Addressing the people across the state live through social media, chief minister Uddhav Thackeray once again appealed to the people to cooperate with the police and to stir out of their homes. "I request people to maintain patience and not to indulge in any untoward incident. Please do not force the government to take rigorous steps to control the situation."

"At some place, we have started free meals for the needy people. We have decided to reduce the price of government meal Shiv Bhojan from Rs 10 to Rs 5 per meal," he said.

"I am getting full cooperation from the Opposition. Even MNS chief Raj Thackeray gave me some suggestions on how to handle the situation. I am in touch with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah and also Union Minister from Maharashtra Prakash

Jawadekar," the chief minister said. "Lots of migrant labourers settled in Maharashtra want to go back to their native places. But, I am asking them to stay back wherever they are. We have 163 centres to house the fleeing migrant labourers in the state. We are asking them to tell us whatever help they need so that we can extend the same," Uddhav said.

Meanwhile, the Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) has started a helpline and a disaster relief cell to help the Coronavirus-affected people. "People who need any essential things like food, medicines or any other help can call our helpline numbers and a congress worker will deliver all these things to the callers' homes," MPCC president and Maharashtra Minister Balasaheb Thorat said.

In another move, the Congress MLAs have decided to donate their one month's salary to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund, while the party MPs will donate their one month's salary to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund.

5th death in Gujarat; total cases 61

IANS ■ GANDHINAGAR

An Ahmedabad resident died of coronavirus infection, taking the COVID-19 death toll in Gujarat to five, even as the total number of coronavirus patients rose to 61 with three more positive cases coming to light on Sunday.

The deceased man, aged 47, was admitted in Ahmedabad Civil Hospital on late Saturday night after he tested positive. He was earlier admitted to Gujarat Cancer Research Society Hospital and was suffering from diabetes. So far, three corona deaths have been reported from Ahmedabad. Three new positive cases were reported on Sunday. Out of the 61 coronavirus positive cases, 21 were reported from Ahmedabad and nine each from Vadodara and Gandhinagar and eight from Rajkot, seven in Surat and one each in Bhavnagar, Mahesana, Kutch and Veraval, Gir-Somnath.

Kashmir records second death

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

A coronavirus patient, undergoing treatment at Chest Disease hospital in Dalgate area of Srinagar, died early morning on Sunday taking the death toll in Jammu & Kashmir to two. Five more suspected cases tested positive on Sunday, official sources said.

According to Jammu & Kashmir Government spokesman, Rohit Kansal, the second death due to Covid-19 was reported early Sunday morning. He said, "5 more positive cases confirmed in Kashmir - 2 from Srinagar, 2 Budgam, 1 Baramulla".

So far, 38 cases have tested positive in Jammu & Kashmir.

According to official sources, the deceased hailed from Tangmarg area of North Kashmir's Baramulla district.

Though he had no foreign travel history but he came in contact with those who had returned from Saudi Arabia.

The deceased patient also had a history of liver ailment and was put on ventilator support late Saturday evening but he breathed his last in the wee hours around 4.00 a.m.

His last rights were performed in his native village where only handful of family members were allowed by the district authorities. Three cases from Udhampur district of Jammu province, tested positive on Saturday evening, were currently isolated in the Government medical college hospital in Jammu. Two among them had visited Indonesia and the third one had visited Ludhiana. The district authorities in Udhampur have identified their contacts and quarantined them. Meanwhile, restrictions on the movement and assembly of people in Jammu and Kashmir were intensified on Sunday. Workers returning home from neighboring states of Punjab, Himanchal Pradesh and Haryana were shifted to quarantine centres in Kathua and Samba.

2 more test positive, WB tally reaches 19

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Corona infection has now spread to North Bengal even as the State on Sunday recorded its first infection with in the medical fraternity with a doctor getting infected by the dread virus.

The doctor posted in the Alipore Army Command Hospital had a travel history to Delhi, sources said adding he might have contacted the disease in the national Capital.

The second infection was recorded in North Bengal where a middle-aged woman from Kalimpong was found suffering from the disease. She too is known to have travelled to Delhi, sources said adding the administration is looking for the people — including doctors both at the Himalayan hill sta-

tion where she belongs to and Siliguri where she came for treatment — with whom she associated in the past one week or so.

Sunday's new cases take up the total number of infected people in Bengal to 19.

In a separate incident where a Delhi-based family with a history of Corona infection had defied quarantine orders to visit Tehatta sub-division of Nadia district has been brought to Kolkata for treatment.

Out of the five persons brought to Kolkata three have tested positive. Apart from this another 19 people have been traced with whom the family had interacted. They have been quarantined.

The Government is trying to locate maximum number of people with whom the alleged

reckless family had come in contact with while it was travelling from Delhi to Nadia — first by the Rajdhani Express and then by a crowded passenger train.

The members of the family from Govindpur area of Delhi had flouted quarantine norms despite being asked by the doctors who had diagnosed one member of the same family with Corona infection. The patient is undergoing treatment in the national Capital.

"We are desperately trying to stop community infection. Till now we have no such report. But with the people behaving so irresponsibly it is getting very difficult for the Government to handle things," a senior Health Department official said.

Notwithstanding a rise in Corona infected cases at least

four patients showed signs of recovery Health Department sources said on Sunday. The son of the senior bureaucrat who had indulged him to flout quarantine directives before testing positive was on the path of recovery, sources said adding a second youth and his father from Ballygunge were also recovering from the disease.

The health of a fourth patient a woman from Habra in North 24 Parganas was also improving with all the four patients testing negative in their first test after more than a week's treatment.

With all these patients getting treated at Belegata Infectious Disease Hospital the Health Department on Sunday issued a circular asking all other hospitals to follow the procedures adopted by the ID Hospital.

WB migrants lived for days at quarantine centre, banyan tree

IANS ■ KOLKATA

Seven migrant workers, who came back home to West Bengal's Purulia district from Chennai amidst the Coronavirus-induced lockdown, perched themselves on a banyan tree to remain in quarantine, in the absence of separate room for self-isolation in their small huts.

After several days in their 'temporary home', the workers were on Saturday ordered to come down by the local administration.

The workers, all residents of Bangidaha village of Purulia district under Balarampur block, said as they live in one-room mud huts with their families, there is no way they can keep themselves in isolation, which is a must to ensure not a single villager contracted the Coronavirus infection from them.

However, none of them have displayed

symptoms linked to COVID-19, nor have they undergone any test for the disease.

"At present we don't have any health issues. But in case we are detected positive for the disease at a later date, then at least none of the villagers will be infected because of us," said one of the workers Bijay Singh Laya.

The workers reached Kharagpur junction station on Sunday last from Chennai and underwent thermal screening and tests but the doctors did not find any symptom of the disease. "However, they asked us to live under self-quarantine for 14 days as a safety measure".

"But we don't have any separate personal room in our home. So, we decided to live on the branches of the banyan tree just outside our village," he said.

The seven labourers tied their beds to the branches of the tree, and used a mosquito net to prevent themselves from bites of insects.

20 new cases in Kerala, 181 under treatment

IANS ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Health Minister KK Shailaja on Sunday said on Sunday, 20 new cases of coronavirus positive cases were registered in the state, taking the total number of positive cases under treatment in various districts to 181.

"Of the 20, 18 came from abroad - eight from Kannur, seven from Kasargode and one each from Thiruvananthapuram, Ernakulam and Thrissur. Two, who turned positive got it from primary positive patients," said Shailaja in a statement.

"Currently 1,41,211 people are under observation which include 593 who are in hospitals. By now 21 people who were positive have now turned negative," added the Minister.

TN positive cases mount to 50

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

A total of 50 patients have been tested positive for coronavirus in Tamil Nadu till Sunday evening. Though by late Saturday night, the number of coronavirus cases stood at 42, eight persons who were in contact with religious preachers from Thailand tested positive on Sunday, according to Dr C Vijaya Baskar, Health Minister of Tamil Nadu. All have been admitted to hospitals in Erode district.

The Department of Health officials confirmed that the reason for the death of three patients in Kanyakumari district was not due to corona virus. The news about the deaths had caused anxiety in the minds of people in the district and the disclosure by the administration was welcomed with a sigh of

relief. Beela Rajesh, secretary, department of health, told reporters that the Tamil Nadu was in stage-2 of COVID 19 transmission. "Our aim is to prevent the progression to stage -3, that is community spread of COVID-19. Stage-2 is when the infection is transmitted to the first-degree contacts of COVID-19 positive patient with travel history," said Rajesh.

Elsewhere in the State, the Police have tightened the rules governing the total lock down and curfew. Police deployed along thoroughfares and arterial roads were seen pleading with two-wheeler riders who were freaking out on Sunday morning to stay back in their houses and not to come out unless it was unavoidable. The pictures of cops pleading and requesting with the "freelers" have gone viral and this has brought in public sympathy for

the law enforcers.

Habitual offenders were asked by the police to perform Thoppukaranam, a kind of brain yoga performed in front of Lord Vinayaga idols in the State. Persons who were caught violating the lock down and social distancing laws were asked to perform the "sit-ins" in Chennai, Tiruchi and other major cities in the State.

Compared to other south Indian States, Tamil Nadu is doing a commendable job according to health experts and management professionals. There are more than 180 confirmed corona virus cases in neighboring Kerala which also witnessed a riot like situation on Sunday evening as hundreds of migrant laborers came out in public questioning the indifference of the district administration towards their requests for food and essential items.

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

Ramayan in the time of corona has brought mixed reactions from people in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The re-run of the popular TV series produced by Ramanand Sagar which was first aired by Doordarshan in 1987 (when terms like satellite TV channels, Direct To Home Service and even local cable TV operators were unheard of in these parts of the country) is being telecast by the National channel of the Doordarshan twice in a day.

"Media is hounding us with corona news throughout the day and night. So Ramayan is soothing to our confused state of mind with the impending corona threats hanging over our heads," said Vijayaraj Ramesh, a social activist in Chennai.

But leaders of Dravidian

outfits in Tamil Nadu (barring AIADMK) have not taken the telecasting kindly. They accuse the government of spreading communalism and Brahminism through public broadcaster.

"Ramayana spreads unbelievable irrational superstitious stories which make the people idiots and against the constitutional guarantee of scientific thinking which is enshrined in the Constitution of India. Ramayana encourages upper caste and lower caste system in the society. Brahmins are placed at the top and the lower caste soodras are portrayed as untouchables and have been created to serve the Brahmins," said S Doraisamy, vice president, Thanthai Periyar Dravida Kazhagam, an offshoot of the Dravidian movement launched by E V R Naiker.

In a statement released to the media, Doraisamy said that telecasting of Ramayana was against Constitution of India. "It preaches unequal and slavery treatment to women. The epic encourages illegal intimacies and prostitution. The story itself was authored by Valmiki, a one time thief and sexual offender. Fomerr Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had said that Ramayana was a mythology and fairy tale," said Doraisamy. According to Doraisamy, Ramayana spreads unbelievable irrational superstitious stories which make the people idiots and it was against the constitutional guarantee of scientific thinking enshrined in the Constitution of India.

Ali Akbar, movie maker and an authority on the great epics rejected the Dravidian theory. "Both Ramayana and Maha Bharat are works authored by depressed classes and both have relevance even

now. The allegation that they are promoting Brahminism and Hindutwa is nonsense. Show me an instance in these books which promote communalism or hatred. There are certain forces in India who do not want the new generation to know about Ramayana or Maha Bharata and they are the ones degrading these epic books," said Akbar.

Jaya Raman, a class nine student in Ernakulam who watched both the episodes aired on Saturday was gung ho and was eagerly waiting for Sunday's episodes.

"This is the first time I am watching it. I liked the parts in which the four brothers are taught the ancient Indian traditions by Sage Vasishth like getting up early in the morning, respecting one's mother, father and teacher and to be punctual and disciplined," he said.

Viewers dependent on local cable operators were in for disappointment as the latter are not relaying the DD National channel in their bouquet. "Only people in cities and towns get to watch all DD channels because they have DTH services. We are at the mercy of local cable operators who decide which channels should be seen by us," said Palaniswamy of Padavedu village in Thiruvannamalai.

DD Bharati, another channel of Doordarshan is airing Maha Bharat, an equally popular epic serial produced by the House of B R Chopras. With the public broadcaster scheduling to air some of the evergreen serials of the 1980s vintage, there is a general feeling that cautions like 21-days Lock Down, Social Distancing and other restrictions may yield results provided the State electricity boards are in good mood!

ISRO to design ventilators, make sanitisers

Chennai: Designing simple to operate ventilators, manufacturing of sanitisers, oxygen canisters and masks while putting on hold manufacture of rockets is what Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC), part of ISRO, is doing to meet the emergency needs of the people and owing to lockdown, said top official.

He also said all the staff at the VSSC are safe and not affected by Coronavirus.

Based in Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala, the VSSC part of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) makes the rockets that launches the Indian and foreign satellites.

"We are designing ventilators that are different from what is already there. We are designing ventilators that can be operated in a simple manner and when power supply is not there," S. Somanath, Director told IANS. He said, as regards ventilators, the VSSC's job is only to design and the manufacturing will be done by industries.

"We are making sanitisers for captive and also for use of others. We have made over 1,000 litres. Similarly, masks are made by employee societies," he added. Meanwhile, the employees have been asked to work from home and VSSC's communication and computer systems are working well in a secure condition.

"Our communication and computer networks are safe and secure and those who can work from home are working from home while critical operations are taken care of by deploying necessary staff. Whenever needed, video conferencing is also held," Somanath added. IANS

UP Govt set to release 11,000 prisoners on bail

Lucknow: In keeping with the directives of the Supreme Court, the Uttar Pradesh Government has decided to release over 11,000 prisoners lodged in 71 jails in the State, in view of the COVID-19 outbreak in the country.

The Supreme Court, last week, had directed all states and union territories to constitute high-level committees to consider releasing on parole or interim bail, prisoners and under-trials for offences entailing up to 7-year jail term. This was in order to decongest prisons in the wake of Corona virus pandemic.

A statement issued by the Uttar Pradesh Government said, "In compliance with the orders of the Supreme Court, a committee was formed by the State Government, which held its sitting on March 27 under the chairmanship of Justice Pankaj Kumar Jaiswal. The committee directed that under-trials lodged in 71 jails of the state in crimes, whose maximum punishment is of 7 years, be given 8-week interim bail on a personal bond, and immediately freed from the jail." The statement further said, "Convicts who have been booked for crime that entails punishment for 7 years or less, are being released on 8-week parole on a personal bond, and will be freed from Sunday onwards. IANS

Twitterati slam Goa Govt for food shortage, 'free hand' to CRPF

IANS ■ PANAJI

Aid growing unease over inability of food and essential items in Goa and the State Government's decision to give central paramilitary forces a "free hand" to punish curfew violators, several voices on Twitter have attempted to highlight the plight of a population which has been facing a lockdown as a food shortage for as many as eight days in a row.

In a tweet, actor Richa Chadda urged users of the social media platform to draw attention to the situation in Goa. "Goa needs food supply. Please draw attention to his, tweekple," Chaddha tweeted on Sunday.

Authors Richa Kaul Padte and Mihir Sharma also highlighted the lack of food and underlined the sense of chaos in the coastal state, which has witnessed panic over lack of supply of essential goods including rice, wheat flour, and cooking oil. "Journalists, twitter folks, etc: pls.. pls... can you draw attention to what is happening in

Goa? We have been on COMPLETE (surprise) lockdown all week. No groceries, no markets, no provisions, cops are patrolling the streets. People have no way to access food. It is getting bad," Padte said.

"All worrying news out of Goa is odd. It is India's most developed state, it's geographically compact, has a solid welfare system - why is it breaking under lockdown? Why are there no groceries, and why is the CRM asking for central paramilitary forces?" Mihir Sharma said. Local resident Lyndon JP, a working professional, paints a grim summary of life in Goa on the eight consecutive day of the lockdown.

"Current situation in Goa: Increase my chances of contracting #COVID19 or go mad at home due to hunger or go out to get supplies & get beaten by the cops! So many helplines, but no one answers or there's no stock. Thanks for the brilliant organization @goacm #COVID2019India," Lyndon says.

While smaller 'mom and pop' grocery stores are virtually

out of stock in most places, the Chief Minister's decision to shut down major grocery stores super markets and instead bank on a network of politicians and their volunteers to home deliver essentials has further added to the chaos, with allegations of hoarding by ruling politicians creeping in.

"Sir Chairman NDMA, @PMOIndia. Giving control to MLAs in Goa over groceries distribution is not mitigating but leading to bigger disaster. Pl get @goacm to go by Disaster mgt Act, instead of unleashing CRPF on people," Goa Aam Aadmi Party convener Elvis Gomes tweeted.

Both, the state Bharatiya Janata Party president Sadanand Shet Tanavade and the Chief Minister Pramod Sawant have urged calm amid the increasing chaos and said that efforts were being made to strengthen the home distribution network. On Sunday morning, the Sawant-led administration also authorized food delivery apps like Zomato and Swiggy to deliver food and groceries to people.

Ladakh MP sanctions ₹1 cr, donates 1-month salary to fight Covid

LEH: In order to strengthen the ongoing fight against global epidemic of COVID-19 in every perspective, MP Ladakh, Jamyang Tsering Namgyal sanctioned Rupees one Crore from his MPLADS for purchase of immediate medical equipments for both Leh and Kargil District. He also donated his one month salary of Rs 1 lakh to PM National Relief Funds.

The funds will be utilized by the Deputy Commissioners of both the districts of Ladakh for Purchase of Laboratory Equipment for Establishment of Bio Safety Level-3 Testing Laboratory, Infra-Red Thermometers (Non-Contact) to facilitate Doctors, Nurses and Medical Staffs to remotely record and trek a person's temperature, Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) including Face Masks, Gloves and Sanitizers Kits for the medical personnel to keep them well-protected and enable them to function efficiently by minimizing the risk of transmission. Thermal imaging scanners, cameras or CORONA Testing kits.

The fund will be further used to improve the ICU Ventilator and Isolation/Quarantine Wards within their approved facilities, Masks, Sanitizer Sprays and allied food materials for Police, Para Military, Bankers and all other officials on duty and other needy persons in Ladakh Parliamentary Constituency and Any other medical equipment for COVID-19.

He urged to establish the BSL-3 Laboratory. Ladakh MP Jamyang Tsering Namgyal has been coordinating between the Union Administration and various Ministries in Central Government very efficiently to deal with the COVID-19 situation in Ladakh. He also donated his one month salary of Rs one lakh to PM National Relief Fund of India to help the country to fight this deadly pandemic COVID-19.

Lessons from the East

Prolonged lockdown can't be a solution and we need to learn from control models in Japan, South Korea and China



Let there be no doubt that India, which had probably misread the extent of the COVID-19 explosion at home, desperately needed to hold the upward curve by way of a lockdown. It looks draconian at the moment but given the huge humanitarian crisis it has generated, with the exodus of daily wage earners back to their villages on foot — a heaving mass of humans that can accelerate the spread — it can only be a stopgap. Dragging the economic slowdown further would mean the country would barely manage to pull along and its vast unorganised labour force would have to live in penury. Which is why all stakeholders concerned should use this lockdown to plan alternative containment strategies. Hereon, India, like any other country in the world, would have to learn to live with the virus. China, Japan and South Korea have already executed templates that work as both our Government and private stakeholders are now planning to ramp up testing kits and facilities on a war footing. Without this, we would not be able to make head or tail of the subterranean monster at work, which might be sleeping during a lockdown. All three nations have resorted to an aggressive testing protocol and enforced quarantine during the early onset of the disease, thereby arresting it, and codified a new lifestyle with military precision. The latter may seem like an insurmountable challenge in India but given the innovative distancing and no-contact models developed in some Government ration shops in some of our smallest towns, might not seem an impossibility. A vaccine isn't coming till the second half of 2021 and till then only a practicable and implementable containment model can work.

Both Japan and South Korea, despite being so close to China, have evolved containment models and have not locked down either the economy or airports, although they've limited civic movement by encouraging work from home possibilities. In South Korea, once the country with the worst outbreak outside China, there is some semblance of normalcy around COVID-19, considering that it had internalised lessons from the first outbreak of a virus causing respiratory syndromes. It has one of the lowest casualty rates from COVID-19 in the world, just one per cent, simply because it is transparent, has mass-tested people (at accessible points like drive-throughs) enforced quarantine and traced contacts. It has even prepared itself for a relapse scenario by stockpiling on supplies like masks and other equipment. It has tested early and it has been swift. There was a time when medical experts were diagnosing more than 900 new cases a day. Yet it flattened the curve. It continues to remain vigilant through data analytics, looking for newer hotspots as they emerge and going for precise and targeted action. At the same time, the South Korean Government created a GPS-enabled app to monitor those under quarantine and set off an alarm if they ventured outdoors. Travellers entering the country are also being asked to record their symptoms on a state-sponsored app. In fact, the term "social distancing" originated here, with the Government codifying and marking spaces for use at public spaces like railway platforms and aggressively propagating guidelines on minutiae like using lifts and common spaces even in apartment complexes. China has used mass surveillance and algorithms to trace contact circles, quarantine them, monitor their daily activity and identify potential hotspots. Apartment blocks have scanners to monitor and screen every resident. Japan is unique, too, simply because it has ensured that 80 per cent of identified cases didn't pass on the infection. No matter how badly it handled the cruise ship *Diamond Princess*, it targeted infection clusters at a comparatively early stage and contained the spread. Of course, Japan's hygiene standards are impeccable — most people wear a mask at public spaces round the year and use sanitisers frequently. Washing hands works better for us and we have a habit that can be built upon. Besides with a culture that is not effusive about hugs and shaking hands, Japan has the advantage of having internalised a social distancing protocol longer than us. That's why Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said that his nation did not need an emergency. Like us, all these countries have high population densities with a high propagation possibility. And like us, they all belong to an Asian culture. It is from these examples that we can draw as, though we are frail on health infrastructure, we can leverage technology to work out enforceable pre-emptive protocols. And use our popular culture media to disseminate the idea of a new way of living.

Animal farm

Wild animals straying into city streets during the lockdown show how we have stifled our biodiversity



They say the Coronavirus is Nature's way of reclaiming its space on its terms for all the degradation of its splendour and resources by humans. So cities across India, that are at a standstill, with no vehicles or people across vast swathes, are witnessing unfamiliar sights of wild animals straying from the natural sanctuaries they have sought out around the peripheries. From Italy to Japan to Thailand and even in India, the roads, that perhaps were once their transit corridors, are now part of their return journeys. In Japan, herds of sika deer, that you got to see only at the tourist hotspot called Nara Park, were seen wandering the streets. In Italy, one of the worst-hit countries by COVID-19, people spotted sheep and horses wandering around without a shepherd or rider. In Spain, more wild boars are having a free run in quiet, deserted streets. Back home, too, there are plenty of videos of animals frolicking on city roads. In Punjab's Chandigarh, a sambar deer was seen walking on a zebra crossing. And in northern Kerala's Kozhikode, the critically endangered civet, a species not seen since the 1990s, casually strolled past police patrol. Closer home, in Noida, nilgais are literally wandering the street in front of an otherwise busy mall. In the mornings, the twitter of the heron, the mynah and unseen birds soothes our souls.

While the wild animals may be testing newer territories, most of the urban species like street dogs, cats, monkeys and stray cows are not having it so good. Dependent on food waste generated by eateries and restaurants and home clearances limited in a time of crisis, these creatures are going hungry. Except for some samaritans, city animals and birds have been forced to fend for themselves foraging in garbage dumps. They are also a vulnerable lot as they could get the virus from humans instead. We cannot ignore them as they are part of our ecosystem too. This is our wake-up call, for co-existence, co-dependence and the dire need to reverse our relationship with the sentient world. We care little for the natural world though ancient texts tell us about protecting and nurturing every creature or *jiva*, not exploiting them selfishly. Can a Coronavirus-free world ensure that endangered species do not go extinct? Can we limit indiscriminate human action that is causing much damage to the entire ecosystem and biodiversity? Can our cities develop mini sanctuaries and forests within them so that the animal world can thrive? Predatory food chain behaviour is not working, we must change that to accommodating the lesser species for our well-being.

Friendship in trouble

If COVID-19 does stall/delay Chinese 'aid' to Pakistan, which is heavily dependent on it, the latter could be saddled with incomplete projects and unsustainable interest payments



BHOPINDER SINGH

As the inevitability and magnitude of the impact COVID-19 would have on global economies sinks in, with estimates worsening day by day, there is no denying the fact that those economies substantially dependent on China will be poised precariously. The traditional Chinese Sinosphere stratagem had been to bankroll, financially and diplomatically, desperate regimes with the help of readily available, uncomplicated and "non-judgmental" Chinese largesse. The dragon leveraged its treasury to systematically ensnare alienated regimes in Pyongyang, Islamabad and Tehran among others to even include financially gasping countries in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, right across to Polynesian Islands, all under its tutelage.

The Chinese economic juggernaut funded its hegemonic instincts and Beijing rapidly connected the dots with "win-win" infrastructural projects like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), supporting inter-linkages like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). For this purpose, it even used the ports around the String of Pearls, which vassalised nations and made them directly susceptible to Chinese whims as also fate.

Pakistan is among the most hinged nations within the Sinosphere, which is poised to feel the direct squeeze of COVID-19. China will inevitably recalibrate its priorities and focus on protecting itself from immediate damage before being concerned about others. Extreme paranoia about managing the expectations of its 1.4 billion population, to avoid a USSR-like implosion, haunts the regime. Such are the insecurities faced by the single-party Government over there. China depicts a combination of fear, opportunities, populism and nationalism to willfully or unwillingly get its populace to accept one-party rule. The bargaining assurance is continuous societal progression of the Chinese masses and their lifestyle.

Undeniable progress on various socio-economic parameters has allowed that bargain between the regime and the Chinese people to maintain the status quo. Now, this economic miracle runs the real risk of a very hard landing as the entire Chinese ecosystem goes into a COVID-19 "containment mode", which will necessitate a pullback from internationalist priorities. Top Chinese priority would now be on a domestic stimulus package that entails a slew of Government-led spending, investments, subsidies and all sorts of deliberate financial pumping that will automatically shrink budgets for external endeavours, at least temporarily.

Meanwhile, the Pakistani economy is on a ventilator mode. It has partaken a record 22nd bailout package from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) besides the many "aid packages" from China, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). While the conditionalities of the IMF's \$6 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) will be subject to unpopular economic reforms and would



be doled out only in tranches, the Chinese have been the single most generous source, donating \$4.6 billion in the form of deposits and commercial loans.

Ties with the US are circumspect. Though the Taliban peace deal may force optics of a thaw but hopes for any meaningful financial aid from Washington, DC, are highly unlikely. Not only has Pakistan maxed out its deals with Saudi Arabia and the UAE but it has unendured itself to both Riyadh and Abu Dhabi recently by cozying up to a rival "bloc" within the Ummah ie, the Turkey-Malaysia-Qatar-Iran combine. This leaves limited scope for any more substantial inflow from the Arab Sheikdoms. Pakistan has extremely limited manoeuvring space. The only viable option is/was China.

Our neighbour has survived embarrassing defaults in the balance of payment timelines by borrowing more. The singular hope that is described by the establishment over there as the "game-changer" is the China-funded CPEC. This \$62 billion infrastructural hope is mired in dangerous opacity with credible murmurs of disproportionate pro-China terms, sovereignty compromises and an eventuality of China's fabled "debt trap." All of this leads it to abject surrender to Beijing. Law-makers had earlier likened the CPEC to a modern-day East India company, yet with no alternatives for an economic revival in sight, the

“ THE TIMING OF COVID-19 COULD NOT BE WORSE FROM ISLAMABAD'S PERSPECTIVE AS PHASE-II OF THE CPEC PROJECT AND ITS BENEFITS ARE KEY TO THE SURVIVAL OF ITS ECONOMY. THE BILL FOR FULL CHINESE AID COULD COMPOUND TO A CRUSHING ESTIMATE OF NEARLY \$100 BILLION OVER THE NEXT THREE DECADES ”

CPEC is the sole sovereign punt. Such are the stakes involved that the Pakistani military has raised and deployed a dedicated division to protect the CPEC imperatives. It is now raising a second dedicated division level force. The gargantuan investment in CPEC is "aided" by China. The CPEC project has just completed phase-I but the forthcoming phase-II is predominantly about industrial cooperation, agriculture and trade — essentially the component that is more relevant to the Pakistanis than the Chinese.

The timing of COVID-19 could not be worse from Islamabad's perspective as phase-II and its benefits are key to its economy's survival. The US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had openly warned the IMF a couple of years back against bailing out Pakistan. He feared that such an aid would be used by it to repay Chinese lenders. Today, the bill for full Chinese "aid" if it were still to be given, could compound to a crushing estimate of nearly \$100 billion over the next three decades. If COVID-19 does stall the Chinese "aid", then Pakistan could be saddled with incomplete projects and unsustainable interest payments for the "aid" already taken.

Beyond bailouts and commerce, "all-weather friendship" has seen China provide invaluable diplomatic and military provisioning. While this could continue, the material wares

may not necessarily come on terms as "soft" as earlier, given the financial angularity. Islamabad is also over-indexed in trade with a whopping 18 per cent of its total trade with China. This also accounts for over 31 per cent of the total imports by Pakistan. This disproportionate tilt exacerbates the Pakistani situation with looming disruptions from China.

While the exact long-term impact of COVID-19 is still unknown and China is known to have sufficient economic buffers, wherewithal and a strategic commitment to withstand setbacks with speedy recalibrations, the health of Pakistan to withstand even a temporary "switch-off" is suspect. Pakistan is too dependent on China to manage without its "aid", especially given its recent relationships with other potential donors.

Unsurprisingly, Pakistan has pitched countries like Turkey to sell the CPEC dream and incredulously so, even the US. American diplomat Alice Wells nipped the idea in the bud by sounding out the alarm bells on CPEC *per se*, even without accounting for the new curvball of COVID-19. This could be the proverbial last straw. As of now, all global economies are mired in untellable uncertainties of post-Corona revival, some completely China-hinged like Pakistan, worse so.

(The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands)

SOUNDBITE

At this time of crisis we have to be compassionate to our fellow citizens. I'm sure to operators shall respond to this call and provide support to migrant workers.

Union Minister
—Nitin Gadkari



Appearing in pageants gave me great confidence. It's something I'm proud of. It gave me a trampoline to my acting career and a sense of self, a sense of confidence.

Actor
—Priyanka Chopra



It's clear that we have entered a recession. We project a rebound in 2021 but only if we contain the virus and prevent liquidity problems from becoming a solvency issue.

IMF chief
—Kristalina Georgieva



'Back to villages' in crowded buses or on foot has significantly dented the lockdown. It is another distressing example of the Government's unpreparedness.

Congress leader
—P Chidambaram



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Protect the workers

Sir — This refers to the editorial, "States take charge" (March 28). In desperate times as we are right now due to the spread of Coronavirus, united efforts on the part of stakeholders — the local administration, State and Central Governments — can help us tide the present crisis.

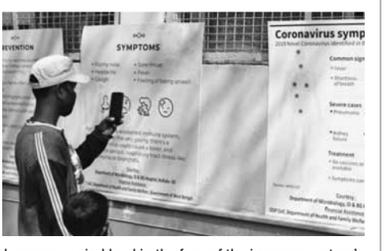
Relief packages announced by the Government will aid our efforts to fight the disease but this may not be enough. The enormity of the situation is such that there are millions of underprivileged people, who are faced with dual challenges. On the one hand, they have been robbed off their livelihood opportunities, which has forced them to walk back home. On the other, mass movements of migrant workers make them susceptible to the virus, defeating the very purpose of a lockdown.

These workers need to stay put where they are. State Governments must join hands and help migrant workers by assuring them proper care, be it in the form of providing temporary shelter or food. Governments in Kerala, Punjab and West Bengal have been

Understand the science of Coronavirus

At a time when social media is flooded with myths and spurious theories, we should be amenable to trust only scientific data and evidence. Efforts must be made to spread information regarding the novel Coronavirus — how it infects the body, what it does and how the body treats/reacts to it. A basic knowledge of the disease will equip us better in the battle against the pandemic. The Coronavirus is a RNA virus with the capability to reproduce and replicate itself. It infects the cell lining of the throat, airways and lungs. The spikes bind the virus on to the host cells and facilitate the infection.

Coronavirus is highly infectious and spreads easily. This is evident from the fact that the killer virus has become a pandemic within a few months of its outbreak. It is, usually or mostly, transmitted from one person, who is infected, to another through droplets while sneezing or coughing. Disinfecting localities where people are "condemned" to live in groups like slums and refugee camps is important. The hand, too, is a vector. This necessitates "regular and thorough" hand washing with water or hand sanitizers. Once inside the host, the virus uses the cell as a "factory" for reproduction and infects more cells. A correlation between age and fatality has been discerned but no age group is immune to the infection or its consequences. The virus multiplies and



becomes a viral load in the face of the immune system's failure to fight it. It puts people with pre-existing conditions such as cardio-vascular diseases, diabetes and chronic respiratory disease at greater risk. While "lockdown" helps in containment, testing, identifying, isolating, tracking and tracing contacts are indispensable to break the chain of transmission. Till scientists succeed in developing safe and effective vaccines to save mankind from the scourge, we are left with no option but to continue to take precautionary measures to protect ourselves from the life-threatening Coronavirus.

G David Milton
Maruthancode

doing exemplary work. Other States must learn from them. Only a collaborative approach will help us sail through.

Bal Govind
Noida

Keep up the good work

Sir — Along with the medical professionals, the police force, too, must be lauded for risking their

lives in a bid to protect the citizens from falling prey to one of the deadliest viruses the world has seen in recent times. Though in most cases the police has been dealing with the public patiently,

sometimes, they are forced to take severe action as some people are not taking the virus seriously, flouting all rules and regulations. If not for the police, the lockdown would have ended in chaos in most parts of the nation. The society is yet to understand the gravity of the situation. The Government must ensure that our personnel are provided with all essentials like masks, gloves and sanitisers to protect them from falling a prey to the virus.

M Pradyu
Kannur

Role of the media

Sir — At a time when the entire world is combating COVID-19, the media has been doing a commendable job by giving all updates regarding the virus without thinking about their own safety. Today, because of the media, people from different religions, have come together to fight the infection and have understood the importance of hygiene and health.

Varsha
Via email

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

Pandemic not the first nor the last

The present experience forms a part of the collage of this planet's history. How we respond will determine how the future shall emerge



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

Clearly the planet is passing through challenging times. However, this is not the first time in the history of mankind that, what is now being termed as a "pandemic", has struck. From plagues, to floods to various viral threats, the Earth has periodically witnessed humongous disasters. It is all chronicled for anyone with a curious mind who wants to update his/her knowledge about the Blue Planet. This is also not the first time, nor will it be the last, when a disease has struck to which there is no known, tested and established antidote available. However, such experiences in the digital era acquire a completely unique aura and dimension. News travels at a speed which has not even been mapped.

A comparative perspective emerges as never before in history. When the nationwide lockdown was announced, one of the questions that was uppermost on everyone's minds was: Has a complete shutdown ever been attempted at such a scale, to include all 1.3 billion people, all together? Add to it the unique dimension of the period over which it will be spread: Three weeks.

To the singularity of the situation add the diversity of the ethnological clusters, which make up the composition of this country. Compound this lay of the land with the reality of the distances people travel to make a living.

Remember, the announcement of the lockdown was based on the expectation that people would stay put wherever they were. The trek that some people have undertaken, in certain cases over several hundred kilometres, to get back to their places of origin can only be an act of desperation brought on by heartless, unscrupulous employers/businessmen. This aspect of the ground condition was not factored in for sure and is not amenable to debates and arguments.

Times such as these, unleash a barrage of perceptions. Kathleen O'Meara's poem *And people stayed home* written in 1869 has been evoked: "And the people stayed home. And read books, and listened, and rested, and exercised, and made art, and played games, and learned new ways of being, and were still. And listened more deeply. Some meditated, some prayed, some danced. Some met their shadows. And the people began to think differently."

Some philosophising has been met with some re-envisioning. The wise are shaking their heads and saying that things will never be the same again. The nature of resources will have to be recalibrated, the nature of work shall change, nature of skill-formation and education will have evolved paradigms.

With the aviation sector down to less than half of its normal operational strength and seafarers almost left to stare at the empty blue wilderness, based on no movement on their part, self-isolation has acquired many more overtones than what the dictionary had so far granted.

Clearly we are passing through seminal times. There can be no discussion of this without some reference to climate change or speculation over nature having its "revenge." The full imprint of the experiences of the last few weeks on the present and future of the Earth will take time to become evident. Yet, it does not take a genius to realise that the contribution of the human species to the present plight of the planet has not been insignificant.

Typically, a research by Alexander Kotch and his colleagues is reported to indicate certain theories. Of them, one is that climate change did not begin with industrialisation. They propose an alternate theory to an understanding of climate change. This was projected for publication in 2019. The study holds that changes in the environment, of the territorial focus of the study, (the Americas), began with the disease and war which the European migrants brought there. By their reported estimates, 90 per cent of the indigenous populations were wiped out by pestilence, warfare and the after-effects of this movement. With Christopher Columbus pioneering the route to the Indies in 1492, began the process which altered the character of the population there, in a hundred years, by simple decimation. Colonisation, virulent or otherwise, altered the character of the ecosystems they ventured into. Most colonisers were essentially "soldiers of fortune." They may not even have been aware of what they could be triggering but the "innocence" of the culprit does not change the fallout of the nature of the act.

The reported media findings hold that this ushered in new vegetation which "preserved" heat. It trapped carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Other researches have thrown up differing theories. There is one attributing the phenomena, this time, of severe cold, to weak solar activity and heightened volcanic activity.

Irrespective, the consensus seems to be that study of the history of mankind must begin with the recognised date of presence of mankind on this planet and not have a beginning, marked with a bias towards "records" of history.

The present experience forms a part of the collage of this planet's history. How we respond will determine how the future shall emerge.

(The writer is a well-known management consultant)

POINT COUNTERPOINT

WE HAVE IMPOSED FULL CURFEW. WE DID NOT GAUGE SEVERITY (OF COVID-19) EARLIER. BUT AFTER THE VIDEOCONFERENCE WITH MODI WE REALISED.

—PRAMOD SAWANT
GOA CHIEF MINISTER



I HAVE URGED THE GOVERNOR TO INTERVENE ON THE ISSUE OF SUPPLY OF ESSENTIAL COMMODITIES. I AM SURE HIS MEDIATION WILL BRING RELIEF TO GOANS.

—DIGAMBAR KAMAT
LEADER OF OPPOSITION

Adapt to remain alive

Businesses across the world and in India are facing unprecedented shutdowns and many may not survive the Coronavirus' economic impact. However, those who remain alert and pliant will endure



HIMA BINDU KOTA

COVID-19 has caused worldwide disruption and all countries are desperately battling this virus. From the most developed nations of the world to the least developed, all are sailing in the same boat. Businesses across the world, both small and large, are facing unprecedented shutdowns and many may not survive this global pandemic. Given the scale of the economic damage being inflicted by the Coronavirus, it is absolutely necessary to understand the risks faced by our businesses in these times.

Social distancing may become a norm: According to Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, most of the time flu-like activity peaks between December and February, although activity can last as late as May. So, in times to come, during the December to March period, it is possible that some virus or the other may rear its ugly head. We may have to get used to the concept of social distancing during these months, which means lower footfalls in malls and shopping areas and a decline in consumer purchases during these times.

Lower employee productivity: The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimated the annual mortality burden of influenza to be between 2,50,000 to 5,00,000 globally. Based on the 2019 research paper of Gianino and other researchers on the Italian industry, the economic burden of absenteeism due to influenza and other virus-related infections was studied. According to them, the highest number of working days lost were reported in the 40-49 age group, accounting for 37 per cent of the total costs. So, every business may be impacted with employees taking long leave due to sickness, either directly or indirectly. Businesses in future may need to adjust to flexible working hours due to several reasons — sickness and tending to children due to school or day care closures.

Stressed logistics network: Globalisation and integrated business have increased the length, complexity and vulnerability of supply chains. Now most companies rely on vendors located in Asia for their businesses to function normally. With the entire world affected by COVID-19, we are already facing delays in the logistics network and the same situation can arise in the future, too.

Economic instability: The world is going through major economic turmoil. Consumers have started spending less and industries are feeling the impact, particularly as more and more nations go into lockdown to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus. Investors are pulling money from markets and corporations are cutting back their investments. Since the economic engine of growth is driven by continuous investment as well as consumption, any cutback in any one or both aspects may lead to recession or economic instability. In fact, economists are already warning of the possibility of a recession in the near future due to the lockdowns.

With these risks facing the business world, how should organisations prepare themselves for these unpredictable times? Here are some strategies.

Safety first: Safety, of both employees and customers, should be the logical requirement of any organisation during any crisis, particularly during a pandemic like the Coronavirus outbreak. Even before the 21-day lockdown began in India, many companies began allowing people to work from home. Once the lockdown is lifted, people will return to their offices. Here are some of the strategies that businesses can employ to ensure that their employees are safe. They can spread the correct information about COVID-19 and the way to stop its spread in the office. Going forward, organisations have to make relevant changes in their sick leave policies and

“ COVID-19 HAS STOPPED THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL WHEEL. AS INDIVIDUALS ARE WORKING FROM HOME, HAVE STOPPED OR CUT DOWN THEIR SOCIAL GATHERINGS AND BINGE SHOPPING TO FIND SOLACE AT HOME IN THE COMPANY OF THEIR LOVED ONES, BUSINESS LEADERS HAVE TO TAKE CRISIS MANAGEMENT AS A PRIORITY AND WORK TOWARDS CREATING RESILIENT ORGANISATIONS TO WITHSTAND THE UNPREDICTABILITY OF THE CURRENT ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT ”



encourage people who are sick to take leave and not come to office due to anxiety over job loss. Formalise this situation by creating new policies for your organisation like an incubation policy, where employees suspected of contracting the COVID-19 virus, can take time off and quarantine themselves. This could be an added policy for your organisation to refer to during any future epidemics. Allow employees to take time off if their relatives or family members are sick. Consider all non-essential travel and use technology to its maximum potential. In addition, make sure that the entire workplace is sanitised before the employees start working again. Showing compassion towards your employees can help both the organisation and employees in these difficult times.

Business continuity: After ensuring the relevant safety for your employees, the challenge is to ensure the continuity of business operations during this pandemic. Some technology-driven organisations may continue operations from remote locations but other traditional manufacturing companies may have to shut their operations temporarily. The impact is not only economic but also social and cultural. For example, Ford, General Motors, Fiat Chrysler, Honda, Toyota and Hyundai have shut their factories in the US. Ford and Daimler have also suspended their production in European factories. The airline industry is bearing the brunt of this virus, with both international and domestic travel severely restricted. All industries are affected with sporting leagues across the world being shut down, the Olympics being called off, major gatherings, including technological events and music festivals cancelled and restaurants and malls closed. To make sure your business continues, establish a reliable communication process with your employees and actively involve them in developing and updating your plans. Unpredictability is the unfortunate reality of the pandemic that the world is fac-

ing now. The way it impacts your business is not known, it may show an immediate effect or the financial distress may take months to become apparent. Protection of your business should be the ultimate goal and a proper scenario analysis that addresses several situations should be created by business owners. Analyse how operationally efficient you are. Are you lean enough to pull this off without a severe impact? Identify your critical operations and key resources that would enable the critical business functions. So focus on mainly three things: Key personnel, important clients and raw materials/supplies required. After identifying critical success factors, create contingency plans for each category. Training of employees to act as back-up for key personnel is crucial and make sure that raw materials/inventory are stocked to tide over any disruptions in supply chain networks.

Prepare your organisation to survive: For many organisations, the first and foremost way to deal with any crisis is development of risk management policies which are detailed contingency plans to assess and respond to any pandemic/disaster. But in these VUCA (volatile, unpredictable, complex and ambiguous) times is simply having guidelines/frameworks/plans or policies sufficient? Or is there a need for companies to be ever-alert and agile, with a keen sense of the changing environment and the ability to respond quickly and efficiently?

The answer is that only companies that can respond quickly can survive in these unpredictable times. To do this effectively, the structure of the organisation may require some changes. An organisation which is hierarchical in its structure with centralised leadership, driven by strict policies with a concentrated workforce of specialists, will definitely have problems in changing, whereas a networked organisation with distributed leadership, driven by flexible and simple policies with dispersed

workforce of generalists will be less rigid and springy and will be able to adapt and survive these unprecedented and unpredictable times.

Collaboration is the key: The uncertainty created by Coronavirus does not have any precedence in contemporary times. No one has any clue as to how long this crisis will continue and what would be the cumulative impact of this virus on the global economy. In this situation, collaboration, co-development and cooperation of organisations with other institutions and members of the community, would be the key to survival. All of us have to tide over this crisis together.

Add a new source of revenue: Winston Churchill once famously said "Never let any crisis go waste." Organisations should take this opportunity and try and create new revenue streams. A cue can be taken from airports, which transformed themselves into entertainment hubs by adding restaurants, shops and so on, after the September 11 attacks and in the process added to their revenue streams. The same goes for banks as they added different fee-based services after the 2008 financial crisis.

COVID-19 has stopped the global economic, social and cultural wheel. As individuals are working from home, have stopped or cut down their social gatherings and binge-shopping to find solace at home in the company of their loved ones, business leaders have to take crisis management as a priority and work towards creating resilient organisations to withstand the unpredictability of the current economic environment. However, at the same time, they have to be flexible and agile enough to adapt to these fast-changing times. By doing so, organisations can try and protect themselves against a range of threats, both natural and man-made, including the COVID-19 pandemic that we all are facing now.

(The writer is Associate Professor, Amity University, Noida)

Of contagions and conspiracy theories

In societies hardwired to understand life through the lens of faith alone, it is a challenge for the Government to impose certain restrictions during outbreaks like the one the world is facing right now



NADEEM PARACHA

A worried colleague at my office asked another if it was okay for a Muslim to use hand sanitisers that contained alcohol. The second colleague took a step back from the inquirer and sardonically replied: "Were the Saudis using juice to disinfect the holy sites?" Later in the day, I saw the worried colleague washing his hands with an alcohol-based sanitiser. Personally, I did not feel any annoyance towards him. There are many like him whose minds have been bombarded with numerous, often

contradictory, ideas about faith and morality. According to Andrew Newberg, the Director of Research at Philadelphia's Thomas Jefferson University, overly religious people "have more tissue in the frontal lobes, or regions of the brain associated with attention and reward." Therefore, they are what they are not only due to doctrinal reasons but also due to physiological variance.

In societies that have been hardwired to understand life through the lens of faith alone, it is a challenge for the Government to impose certain restrictions during pandemics. For example, how to tell people not to gather at mosques, temples or churches? A scientific explanation alone does not cut it. That's why one often sees Governments utilise clerics and priests in such societies to wrap the scientific rationale in theological justifications.

The March 14 issue of *The Guardian* reports that a cleric of a major mosque in conservative Kuwait

changed certain words of the *azaan* (call to prayer). Instead of inviting people to come pray at the mosque, he asked them to pray at home due to the Coronavirus scare.

Thousands of miles away, in the otherwise constitutionally secular US, newspaper reports suggest that instructions to the people by the authorities to avoid attending church services in the so-called "Bible belt states", have increased anxiety levels in regular church-goers. In India, a country recently in the grip of Hindutva nationalism, a Hindu organisation invited fellow Hindus to a "party" where cow urine was served to the guests as a serum against COVID-19.

Psychologists believe that a crisis that may restrict people from engaging with their faith in a normal manner can also cause anxiety within the caretakers of faith — they may become more brazenly exhibitionistic to remain relevant or to "save faith" from eroding.

On March 16, a video clip of a Muslim cleric in Pakistan went viral in which he was inviting people to a large rally and claiming that "God will never allow anyone at the rally to be infected by the virus."

To secularists and even moderate believers, such acts may seem bizarre. Yet, these acts are not emitting from the lunatic fringes of society as such. They are taking place within mainstream segments that have been hardwired to understand reality from a religious point of view — or rather, from their particular religious point of view.

At the same time, there are numerous believers in Muslim, Christian and Hindu societies who do not see any dichotomy between faith and science. In fact, they maintain that their respective faiths are flexible enough to better harness science. Then there are the usual conspiracy theorists. Once relegated to the confines of the so-called lunatic fringe, the

mushrooming of social media outlets, in the last 20 years or so, has lobbied their ideas and claims into mainstream discourses.

One of the stickiest conspiracy theories about the outbreak of COVID-19 doing the rounds is that the virus is in fact man-made and/or it is a "biological weapon" gone astray or — worse — it has been deliberately deployed by China or the US or even that it has been spread to enrich pharmaceutical companies.

There is not an iota of evidence to substantiate these claims. But conspiracy theorists do not deal in evidence, only in connecting disparate dots which may make sense in minds plagued by fear and uncertainty. Viruses have been around for millions of years. Humans have continued to develop antibodies to fight them through the natural evolutionary process or by developing vaccines which introduce new antibodies in the system to ward off what virologists call

"Novel viruses." The dreaded COVID-19 is one such virus. It's a "flu virus" but it isn't the first, nor will it be the last. There have been at least six flu or influenza pandemics in the past. They may have been more but scientists so far have been able to trace just six in the last century and a half. Virologists trace the viruses of each of these pandemics to infected birds who transferred the virus to a mammalian animal before it entered the human body. Bird viruses are largely unable to stick to human cells and when they do, are often slain by human antibodies. However, sometimes, through the evolutionary mutation process, a flu virus from a bird manages to stick to a cell of a mammal. There, it further mutates and is then able to stick more easily to human cells. Further mutations help it fight off human antibodies rendering them obsolete, and this is when the virus becomes "Novel." The natural development of new antibodies, or antibodies triggered through a

vaccine, are the only means to neutralise it. The COVID-19 outbreak has been traced back to an animal and seafood market in Wuhan, China. An infected bat infected a pangolin from which a human handler caught the mutating virus. Many outside China have demanded that the Chinese stop eating "strange animals."

But do they really? Yes, some do. Why? According to Frederick J. Simoons in *Food in China: A Cultural and Historical Inquiry*, China has a history of eating rats, snakes and dogs during famine. The practice receded in the early 20th century but returned when Mao Zedong's radical economic policies in the late 1950s triggered widespread famines. But even after the famines receded in the late 1970s, the practice of getting meat from unusual sources continued in some quarters. Nevertheless, shops dealing in "unusual meat", are now likely to be closed down for good.

(Courtesy: Dawn)

COVID-19 OUTBREAK

US CORONAVIRUS DEATHS SURGE PAST 2,000: JOHNS HOPKINS

Washington: Deaths from the new coronavirus in the United States surged past 2,000 on Saturday, doubling in just three days, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University.

The number of deaths late Saturday was 2,010, about a quarter of them in New York City, the country's hardest-hit region, Johns Hopkins reported.

Confirmed cases in the United States topped 121,000, according to the tally. The surge came as President Donald Trump said he was considering a quarantine on the greater New York area to slow the disease's move from the US epicentre.

New York has reported more than 52,000 cases, and 517 of the US deaths were in New York City.

"There's a possibility that sometime today we'll do a quarantine — short-term, two weeks — on New York, probably New Jersey, certain parts of Connecticut," Trump said, adding that it was important to protect Florida, a favourite winter destination for people in the northeast.

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo objected to the idea, which he said Trump had not discussed with him.

"If you said we're geo-



Spanish Royal guard soldiers disinfect a hospital to prevent the spread of the new coronavirus in Madrid, Spain on Sunday AP

graphically confining people, that would be a lockdown. Then we would be Wuhan, China, and that wouldn't make sense," Cuomo told CNN, referring to the city in central China where the virus outbreak began, which was almost totally isolated by Beijing.

Cuomo said he did not believe such an act would be legal, and added: "Why you would want to just create total pandemonium on top of a pandemic, I have no idea." AFP

US could see 1L-2L deaths from virus: Top health expert

New York: In a frightening warning, the US will see 100,000 to 200,000 deaths from the coronavirus, the Trump administration's topmost infection disease expert forecast on Sunday as the pandemic infected nearly 125,000 people in the country.

100,000 deaths. "Looking at what we are seeing now, I would say between 100,000-200,000" deaths from coronavirus.

"We're going to have millions of cases," he said.

"But I don't want to be held to that" because the pandemic is "such a moving target," Fauci added. According to Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Centre, the US has 124,763 cases and witnessed 2,612 deaths as of Sunday morning. PTI

Iran warns of lengthy 'new way of life' as virus deaths rise

Tehran: President Hassan Rouhani warned Sunday that "the new way of life" in Iran was likely to be prolonged, as its declared death toll from the novel coronavirus rose to 2,640.

The Islamic republic is one of the countries worst-hit by the virus, which first originated in China.

Iran announced its first infection cases on February 19, but a senior health official has acknowledged that the virus was likely to have already reached Iran in January.

At his daily news briefing, health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said 123 more people in Iran had died from the virus in the past 24 hours.

He reported 2,901 new cases of COVID-19 infection, bringing the overall number of officially confirmed cases to 38,309.

According to the official, 12,391 of those hospitalised have recovered and 3,467 are in "critical" condition.

"We must prepare to live with this virus until a treatment or vaccine is discovered, which has not yet happened to date," President Hassan Rouhani said in a cabinet meeting.

"The new way of life we have adopted" is to everyone's benefit, he said, adding that "these changes will likely have to stay in place for some time".

After weeks of refraining from imposing lockdown or quarantine measures, Tehran decided Wednesday to ban all international travel until at least April 8.

Without an official lockdown in place, the government has repeatedly urged Iranians to stay home "as much as possible". AP

Spain announces record 838 virus deaths in 24 hrs

Madrid: Spain confirmed another 838 deaths in 24 hours from coronavirus on Sunday, a new daily record bringing the total number of deaths to 6,528, according to health ministry figures.

The number of confirmed cases in Spain has now reached 78,797 -- after the one-day increase of 9.1 percent -- as the country battles the world's second most deadly outbreak after Italy. Except for a brief lull recorded on Thursday, Spain's death toll has been rising daily.

However, officials have pointed to a slower growth rate for both deaths and confirmed cases and expressed hope that the peak of the outbreak was approaching.

"The spread (of the pandemic) appears to be stabilising. It even appears to be in retreat, but we have to remember that our fundamental problem at the moment is to ensure the intensive care units are not saturated," said Fernando Simon, the health ministry's emergencies coordinator.

Simon said that six out of a total 17 regions "have reached

their capacity limit and three more are fast approaching that stage." The toughening of the current lockdown conditions should help the situation, he added. Spain also reported Sunday that 14,709 people had been cured of COVID-19, a rise of 19.7 percent in 24 hours.

Like Italy, Spain on Saturday tightened measures to contain the outbreak, ordering a halt to all "non-essential" activities. "All workers in non-essential economic activities must stay at home for two weeks," PM Pedro Sanchez said. AP

Netherlands tops 10,000 virus cases

The Hague: The number of confirmed novel coronavirus cases in the Netherlands passed the 10,000 mark on Sunday, the authorities said, as the country focuses on building up herd immunity rather than confining the population of 17 million.

A total of 771 people have died from the COVID-19 epidemic in the Netherlands and 10,866 have tested positive, the country's institute for public health and environment (RIVM) said.

The Dutch government has adopted a series of measures to fight the virus, but has decided so far not to force people to stay home. A review of the policy is due to be unveiled on Tuesday.

"The number of reported hospital admissions and the number of deceased patients appears to be increasing less rapidly than would be expected without measures in place," the institute said on its website.

"In a number of days, it can be concluded whether the number of hospital admissions and the number of deaths among reported patients is actually levelling off, and thus how well the measures are working."

More than two-thirds of the more than 31,000 deaths worldwide from coronavirus have now been recorded in Europe and the Netherlands has warned people will be put under confinement if the measures already taken do not work.

Schools, bars, restaurants, coffee houses and even brothels have been shut down since March 16, while school-leaving exams have been cancelled. AFP

US PREZ ELECTION Virus makes it harder for campaigns to ask for money

Washington: White House candidates aren't usually bashful about asking supporters for money.

But as the coronavirus upends everyday life, inundating hospitals, tanking financial markets and putting 3.3 million Americans out of work, President Donald Trump and his likely Democratic rival, Joe Biden, suddenly find themselves navigating perilous terrain.

What used to be a routine request for political cash could now come across as tone-deaf or tacky. The two also run the risk of competing for limited dollars with charities trying to raise money for pandemic relief.

With a recession potentially on the horizon, there's a question of whether wealthy donors are in a giving mood and whether grassroots supporters who chip

in small amounts will still have the wherewithal to keep at it.

That presents a delicate challenge as both candidates try to stockpile the massive amounts of cash needed for the general election campaign.

"It's hard to have a conversation with someone right now to ask how they're getting by, and then ask them for financial support in the next sentence," said Greg Goddard, a Democratic fundraiser who worked for Amy Klobuchar's presidential campaign before the Minnesota senator dropped out of the Democratic race.

To Tim Lim, a Democratic consultant who worked for both Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, "it's a world where no one has a good answer."

He said that "on the fundraising side, we are going to take some massive hits as a

party." The task is particularly acute for Biden.

The former vice president is trying to pivot from the primary to the general election in a race essentially frozen by the virus. He lacks Trump's reelection cash reserves, which were built up over the past three years of his presidency. Biden also has yet to clinch the nomination and won't be able to do so until postponed primary contests are held in the months ahead.

Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, his sole remaining 2020 rival, has given no indication that he will back out, despite Biden's virtually insurmountable lead in the delegate race. The pandemic has put all big-dollar fundraisers on hold, like all in-person political events. That's forced Trump and Biden, for now, to rely on online fundraising. AP

Mali votes despite virus, security fears

Bamako: Malians voted in a long-delayed parliamentary election on Sunday, barely a day after the country recorded its first coronavirus death and with the leading opposition figure kidnapped and believed to be in the hands of jihadists.



million people — where large swaths of territory lie outside state control — is particularly exposed to a COVID-19 outbreak.

Prime Minister Boubou Cisse admitted that turnout was not very large so far.

"I appeal to the voters: remember to respect the barrier gestures and use the sanitary measures," he said as he voted, adding that turnout was "sufficiently satisfactory".

It is the country's first parliamentary poll since 2013, when President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita's Rally for Mali party won a substantial majority.

Parliamentary elections were meant to take place again in late 2018 following Keita's re-election, but the poll was postponed several times, largely due to security concerns.

Some 200,000 people displaced by the near-daily violence in Mali's centre and north will not be able to vote, a government official has said.

Very few people showed up to polling stations in the northern city of Timbuktu in the morning, but attendance had somewhat increased by midday, an AFP reporter observed.

While the distance between people in lines was too close, voters did wash their hands before entering polling stations, the reporter said.

Polls are to close for Sunday's first round vote at 1800 GMT, with first results not expected for several days. A second round is scheduled for April 19.

Castling a shadow over the vote is the fate of veteran opposition leader Soumaila Cisse, who was kidnapped on Wednesday while campaigning in the centre of the country.

Cisse, 70, who has been runner-up in three presidential elections, and six members of his team were abducted in an attack in which his bodyguard was killed.

It is "likely" he was being held by jihadists loyal to Fulani preacher Amadou Koufa, who leads a branch of the al-Qaeda-aligned GSIM active in the Sahel, according to a security source and a local official.

Cisse and his entourage were probably now "far from where they were abducted," the security source told AFP.

The government's election spokesman, Amini Belko Maiga, has admitted that voting conditions were not ideal.

"It's true that we cannot say that everything is perfect, but we're doing the maximum," he said, referring to the threat of coronavirus.

He added that hand-washing kits had been distributed in the countryside, while in Bamako, authorities would make masks and hand sanitisers available.

Cisse's Union for the Republic and Democracy (URD) on Saturday urged its supporters to turn out in even greater numbers in response to the leader's ordeal. AFP

Things will get worse before they get better: Boris in letters to Britons

London: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who is self-isolating after testing positive for the coronavirus, has written to every UK household to ask people to stay at home and follow the social distancing rules to fight the pandemic, warning them things will get worse before they get better.

In letters which will arrive through the post for nearly 30 million homes along with a leaflet outlining the UK government's advice, at an estimated cost of 5.8 million pounds, Johnson says he will not hesitate to impose stricter measures.

The British Prime Minister, who has been working from home with mild symptoms, warned that things are set to get worse before they start getting better as the UK's death toll from the outbreak crossed the 1,000 mark to hit 1,019, with a further 260 deaths and 17,089 confirmed cases logged on Saturday.

"It's important for me to level with you — we know things will get worse before they get better. But we are making the right preparations, and the more we all follow the rules, the fewer lives will be lost and the sooner life can return to normal," Johnson says in his letter to the nation.

"From the start, we have sought to put in the right measures at the right time. We will not hesitate to go further if that is what the scientific and medical advice tells us we must do," his letter reads.

The 55-year-old Conservative Party leader goes on to express his gratitude to everyone who is "working flat out to beat the virus", including the "truly inspirational" doctors, nurses and other carers.

"Thousands of retired doctors and nurses are returning to the NHS — and hundreds of thousands of citizens are volunteering to help the most vulnerable. That is why, at this

moment of national emergency, I urge you, please, to stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives," he adds.

The letter outlines the guidance everyone should follow and the measures the government has put in place to fight coronavirus and to support businesses and workers. The accompanying leaflet contains UK-wide information as well as directions about where to access online guidance specific to England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

It includes clear explanations of symptoms, hand washing guidance, rules on leaving the house, self-isolating with symptoms and shielding vulnerable people. The initiative comes as other senior ministers of Johnson's Cabinet have been stepping in to conduct the daily Downing Street briefings, with UK Business Secretary Alok Sharma leading the charge on Saturday evening. PTI

Zimbabwe braces for 21-day lockdown

Harare: Zimbabweans braced on Sunday for a three-week lockdown to curb the spread of the coronavirus which has killed one person so far and infected six others, and for many the lockdown means tough times ahead.

The looming lockdown has triggered panic-buying and a spike in prices, adding more upward pressure to an inflation rate that currently stands at 540 percent.

Price of cooking gas shot up almost 50 percent overnight. Long queues have formed in supermarkets as people rush to buy whatever they can afford.

We are supposed to stock up enough things to last us 21 days, but most of us live on what we earn daily, so we only manage a few groceries. I can see us facing tough times ahead," said Sayeed.

The cash-strapped government will not be able to cushion businesses against the lockdown.

"If they failed to buy ventilators for the treatment centres, where will they get the money to shore up small businesses which are in the majority?" Sayeed asked.

Sayeed said his business would take a knock, but he did not dare ignore the lockdown, which will be imposed with both police and military patrols. AFP

Saudi seizes 5 million hoarded masks as death toll doubles

AFP ■ RIYADH

Saudi authorities have seized more than five million medical masks that were illegally stockpiled amid the coronavirus outbreak, state media reported Sunday, as the death toll in the kingdom doubled.

The commerce ministry seized 1.17 million masks from a private store in Hail, north-west of the capital, after authorities Wednesday confiscated more than four million masks stored in a facility in the western city of Jeddah in violation of commercial regulations, the official Saudi Press Agency reported.

The ministry said people behind such activities would be prosecuted, and that the confiscated masks would be redistributed to the open market. Pharmacies in the oil-rich kingdom have reported shortages of masks amid panic buying, as authorities warned against hoarding and price hikes.

Saudi Arabia is scrambling to limit the spread of the deadly disease at home.

Virus fears spark Thailand prison riot

Bangkok: Dozens of prisoners broke furniture and smashed windows during a riot in a Thai jail on Sunday sparked by fears of a coronavirus outbreak in the facility.



During the violence some convicts escaped from the Buriram prison where 2,000 are held, the justice ministry said. Seven have been arrested.

Local media showed footage of black smoke billowing from the facility in the country's northeast.

"There was a group of prisoners trying to escape and were creating chaos... Which included burning down some facilities inside," said Narat Sawetana, director general of the Corrections Department.

Justice Minister Somsak Thepsutin confirmed that a group of inmates sentenced to life had started "agitating" other prisoners with rumours of a virus outbreak.

that the cafeteria and visiting areas were among the facilities torched.

Mental health workers were later deployed to assuage prisoners "after some rumours were spread" about a COVID-19 outbreak, Major General Akkaradej Pimonsri said.

"The situation is under control," he added. Thailand has recorded 1,388 cases of the coronavirus, including seven deaths.

At least two prisoners in the country have caught the highly contagious virus.

In a bid to prevent outbreaks in jails, authorities have banned visitors and are quarantining new inmates for 14 days. Similar panic over the coronavirus sparked a prison riot in the Colombian capital of Bogota last Sunday that killed 23 inmates. AFP

108-year-old woman becomes oldest in UK to die from virus

PTI ■ LONDON

A 108-year-old woman, who survived two world wars and the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic, has become the UK's oldest coronavirus victim after she died within hours of testing positive for the deadly virus, according to a media report.

Hilda Churchill, who was to celebrate her birthday on April 5, started showing mild symptoms of the virus on Tuesday, the Sun reported.

She passed away on Saturday at her care home in Salford city - less than 24 hours after testing positive for COVID-19, the daily said.

She is believed to be the oldest British victim of coronavirus, which has so far killed over 1,000 people in the UK and infected over 17,000. Her grandson Anthony Churchill said, "The most devastating thing is that we were not able to be there with her in her time of need, when she's been with us through all of ours."

Four in 10 people worldwide confined in some form

Paris: More than 3.38 billion people worldwide have been asked or ordered to follow confinement measures in the fight against COVID-19, according to an AFP database Sunday.

That represents around 43 percent of the total world population, which is 7.79 billion people according to a United Nations count in 2020.

The Chinese province Hubei and its capital city Wuhan, the first epicentre of the novel coronavirus, were the first to introduce confinement measures at the end of January.

As Hubei province starts opening up again after its months-long isolation, confinement measures have multiplied worldwide in recent weeks.

By March 18 these measures affected more than 500 million people. This increased to more than a billion people by March 23, and more than two billion just a day later. On March 25 more than

three billion people were affected by confinement measures in some form.

On Sunday at least 3.381 billion people in at least 78 countries and territories have been called on to stay at home. Most of those -- at least 2.45 billion people in 42 countries and territories -- are under obligatory confinement.

No region in the world is excluded. In Europe, the affected countries include Britain, France, Italy and Spain. In Asia, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and more are affected, while many nations have measures in the Middle East including Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel.

In Africa, South Africa, Morocco, Madagascar, Rwanda and more are affected. In the Americas, confinement measures are in place in Colombia, Argentina, Peru and more, including a large part of the United States. In Oceania, New Zealand has imposed a lockdown. AFP

SRI LANKA

Key suspect in Easter bombings arrested

Colombo: The Sri Lankan police on Sunday arrested a key suspect in the last year's devastating Easter Sunday terror attack that killed over 250 people.

The suspect was arrested from the Colombo suburb of Mount Lavinia and was the handler of the suicide bomber who carried out the blast at the Zion church in the eastern town of Batticaloa while the Easter Sunday mass was going on, police spokesman Jaliya Senaratne said.

He had provided lodging and transport to the suicide bomber, the official said. The bomber was part of



the nine-member suicide-squad belonging to local Islamist extremist group National Thawheed Jamaat (NTJ) linked to ISIS that carried out a series of devastating blasts, tearing through three

churches and as many luxury hotels on the Easter Sunday, killing 258 people, including 11 Indians.

The police had arrested over 200 suspects in connection with the attacks. **PTI**

North Korea fires missiles into sea, criticised by South

Seoul: North Korea on Sunday fired two suspected ballistic missiles into the sea, South Korea said, calling it "very inappropriate" at a time when the world is battling the coronavirus pandemic.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said it detected the projectiles flying from the North Korean eastern coastal city of Wonsan into the waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan on Sunday morning.

The projectiles flew about 230 kilometres at a maximum altitude of 30 kilometres, the statement said.

South Korea and US intelligence authorities were analysing more details of the launches. **AP**

The military described them as "very inappropriate" because they occurred while the world is grappling with the coronavirus outbreak. It urged North Korea to stop such military action.

In recent weeks, North Korea has fired a slew of missiles and artillery shells in an apparent effort to upgrade its military capability amid deadlocked nuclear talks with the United States. The talks remain stalled since the breakdown of a second summit between North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and President Donald

Trump in Vietnam in early 2019. The weapons launched recently were all short range and didn't pose a direct threat to the US homeland. **AP**

US-led forces pull out of 3rd Iraqi base this month

Baghdad: The US-led coalition withdrew on Sunday from a military base in northern Iraq that nearly launched Washington into an open war with neighbouring Iran.

The K1 Air Base is the third site coalition forces have left this month in line with US plans to consolidate its troops in two locations in Iraq.

A rocket attack on the base in late December killed one American contractor and led to a series of tit-for-tat attacks between the US and Iran-backed Iraqi militia groups.

The attacks culminated in the US-directed killing of top Iranian general Qasim Soleimani and senior Iraqi militia leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

Coalition forces handed over the K1 air base in the

northern Iraqi province of Kirkuk to Iraq's military, according to a coalition statement.

At least USD 1.1 million of equipment was transferred to the Iraqis as 300 coalition personnel departed.

K1 has hosted coalition forces since 2017 to launch operations against the Islamic State group in the nearby mountainous areas.

Areas south of Kirkuk, and north of neighboring provinces of Diyala, Salahaddin and Nineveh remain hot beds of IS activity.

The stretch of territory is also disputed between the federal Iraqi government and the autonomous Kurdish region, which has created security gaps benefiting IS militants.

The coalition's presence

had at times been a mediating presence between the two competing authorities.

A senior coalition official earlier this month claimed IS forces weren't able to exploit the "security gap" between Iraqi and Kurdish forces as the militants did in the past.

"That doesn't necessarily mean that Daesh is free to operate in the way that they wish," said the official, using the Arabic acronym for the IS group.

"They're still pretty constrained." The coalition official was speaking on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

US-led forces have already withdrawn this month from Qaim, near the border with Syria and Qayara base, in Nineveh earlier. **AP**

Plane catches fire at Manila airport, all 8 aboard killed

Manila: A plane carrying eight people caught fire Sunday while attempting to take off from Manila's airport on a flight bound for Japan, killing all those on board, officials said.

The plane, which was carrying six crew members and two passengers, was on a medical mission to bring a patient to Tokyo when it caught fire at the end of the runway, said Manila airport general manager Ed Monreal.

"There were no survivors," Monreal said at a news conference.

He said two of the eight on board were foreigners — one American and one Canadian — and the rest were Filipinos.

Firetrucks and rescue personnel rushed and doused the aircraft with foam to try to extinguish the flames.

The Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines said in a statement that the plane was an Agusta WW24. **AP**

Saudi intercepts Huthi missiles over curfew-locked Riyadh, border city

Riyadh: Saudi air defences intercepted Yemeni rebel missiles over Riyadh and a city on the Yemen border, leaving two civilians wounded in the curfew-locked capital amid efforts to combat coronavirus, state media said on Sunday.

Multiple explosions shook Riyadh late Saturday in the first major assault on Saudi Arabia since the Huthi rebels offered last September to halt attacks on the kingdom after devastating twin strikes on Saudi oil installations.

The Iran-aligned insurgents claimed responsibility around 15 hours after the attacks, with a rebel spokesman calling it "the largest operation of its kind" as the Riyadh-led military intervention in Yemen enters its sixth year.

"Two ballistic missiles were launched towards the cities of Riyadh and Jizan," the official Saudi Press Agency reported, citing the Saudi-led coalition that is fighting the rebels in

Yemen. Their interception sent shrapnel raining on residential neighbourhoods in the cities, leaving two civilians injured in Riyadh, a civil defence spokesman said in a separate statement released by SPA.

At least three blasts rocked the capital, which is under a 15-hour-per-day coronavirus curfew, just before midnight, said AFP reporters. Jizan, like many other Saudi cities, faces a short-term dusk-to-dawn curfew.

The Huthi spokesman said the rebels struck "sensitive targets" in Riyadh with long-range Zolfaghar missiles and Samad-3 drones.

The rebels also claimed to have hit "economic and military targets" in the border regions of Jizan, Najran and Assir.

The assault comes despite a show of support on Thursday by all of Yemen's

warring parties for a United Nations call for a ceasefire to protect civilians from the coronavirus pandemic.

Saudi Arabia, the Yemeni government and the Huthi rebels all welcomed an appeal from UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres for an "immediate global ceasefire" to help avert disaster for vulnerable people in conflict zones.

The call coincided with the fifth anniversary of Saudi Arabia's military intervention in Yemen's civil war, which was launched to shore up the internationally recognised government against the Huthis.

Yemen's Government condemned the attack, which it said undermined efforts to scale down the conflict amid the coronavirus outbreak. Information Minister Moammer al-Eryani said in a tweet that the strikes also confirmed the "continued flow of Iranian weapons" to the Huthi militias. **AFP**

54 inmates at large after mass jail break: Iran

Tehran: Iranian security forces are searching for 54 escaped inmates following a prison break over which four guards were arrested, Iran's state news agency reported on Sunday.

"Some prison guards were summoned and four of them were arrested and others released on bail," Mojtaba Shirouzbozorgi, a judicial official in Kurdistan province, told IRNA. According to the agency, 74 inmates escaped from Saqqez city's prison on Friday, 20 of whom have so far either turned themselves in or been captured.

On March 19, 23 prisoners escaped from another jail in the western city of Khorramabad, hours before the start of Iran's New Year celebrations, IRNA said. **AFP**

Venezuelan ex-general surrenders to US on drug trafficking charges

AFP ■ BOGOTA

A retired Venezuelan general who was charged by the United States with "narco-terrorism" along with President Nicolas Maduro and other officials has surrendered in Colombia to US authorities, prosecutors said Saturday.

"The national Attorney General learned that Mr Cliver Alcala surrendered to US authorities," the Colombian prosecutor said in a statement, adding there was no arrest warrant when he gave himself up.

Alcala turned himself in on Friday to the Colombians,

who in turn handed him over to US authorities, the El Tiempo de Bogota newspaper said.

He is among several current and former top Venezuelan Government officials, along with Maduro, indicted by Washington on Thursday for "narco-terrorism." The US offered a \$15 million reward for information leading to Maduro's capture.

As part of the US Justice Department indictment, up to \$10 million was offered for the capture of Alcala, who has been living in the northern Colombian city of Barranquilla for the last two years.

COVID-19 OUTBREAK

AMID VIRUS IMPACT

India to grow fastest among G20 economies: Report

New Delhi: India will emerge as the fastest growing economy among the G20 countries even as Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) has slashed India's GDP growth forecast to 2.1 per cent from 6 per cent in the light of the coronavirus pandemic.

India's growth at just 2.1 per cent may be a huge downgrade but given the projected recession in other regions like the US, Europe and Latin America, India will show the highest rate of GDP growth and will be only among three countries in G20 along with China and Indonesia, both at 1 per cent growth, to avoid a recession this year. Italy will be the worst hit at a negative growth of 7 per cent.

The EIU said in a report that Covid-19 is likely to send almost all G20 countries into a recession.

"Following the coronavirus outbreak, we have revised our growth forecasts for all countries across the world. The results paint a bleak picture. Across the G20, all but three

countries will register a recession this year. The global economy will contract by 2.2 per cent," it said.

The EIU has called the picture "bleak" and any recovery may be hit by future waves of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"The global economic picture is looking bleak, with recessions in almost every developed economy across the world. We assume that there will be a recovery in the second half of the year, but downside risks to this baseline scenario are extremely high, as the emergence of second, or third waves of the epidemic would sink growth further," the EIU said.

It has also warned of an impending debt crisis and no clear exit strategy from the lockdowns.

"At this stage, it is also hard to see an exit strategy from the lockdowns, which means that uncertainty will remain high. Finally, the combination of lower fiscal revenues and higher public spending will put

many countries on the brink of a debt crisis," Agathe Demarais, EIU's Global Forecasting Director, said.

The EIU has forecast that the US economy will contract by 2.8 per cent this year. The administration's initial response to the coronavirus was poor, allowing the illness to spread quickly.

"This puts Donald Trump's re-election bid at risk, as unemployment looks set to rise sharply," the EIU said.

The impact on China's economy of the Covid-19 outbreak is set to be much deeper than that of SARS. Assuming that the virus does not flare up again, the EIU expects China's real GDP growth to stand at only 1 per cent in 2020, compared to an estimated 6.1 per cent in 2019.

The eurozone will be one of the hardest hit regions, posting a full-year recession of 5.9 per cent. Germany (-6.8 per cent), France (-5 per cent) and Italy (-7 per cent) will register full-year recessions. **IANS**

No LPG shortage at all, delivering at least 40% more fuel now: Oil firms

Mumbai: National oil marketing companies have come out on Sunday allaying the fears of consumers about product shortages, saying there is absolutely no shortage of any fuel, especially cooking gas, which is being supplied to customers at their doorsteps.

On average, the daily supply of cooking gas has gone up by at least 35-40 per cent since the lockdown, in spite of working with minimal staff, the companies said.

The collective assurance of uninterrupted supplies of all oil products, especially LPG cylinders, by Indian Oil, BPCL and HPCL, come amidst panic booking of cooking gas by consumers since the national lockdown imposed to contain the spread of Covid-19 pandemic.

This, coupled with staff shortage, has led to some delays in the initial days of the lockdown but now it has been normalised, they added.

Talking to PTI in Mumbai on Sunday, Mukesh Kumar Surana, the chairman and managing director of the ONGC-run Hindustan Petroleum said, there

is absolutely no room for consumers to worry about LPG shortages at all.

"I assure all public that there is no shortage of any oil products at all. All the more let me assure that there is absolutely no shortage of LPG at all. In fact, our LPG plants are working at over capacity to meet any spike in demand. I request all not to engage in panic booking of cooking gas," Surana said.

Explaining how HPCL has augmented LPG supplies, he said at the national level the daily supply has gone from 12 lakh cylinders to 15 lakh a day for his company.

In Mumbai, HPCL has supplied 56 per cent more cylinders on Saturday, from 34,000 to 51,000, while in Pune the spike in supplies is 54 per cent, he added. Surana also said, HPCL has equipped all its delivery boys with masks, sanitisers and also trained them in social distancing. Accordingly, they have been asked not to carry cylinders to individual homes but to the society gates as there are restrictions on entry for outsiders at many societies. **PTI**

TRAI grants 6 weeks additional time to telcos to file monthly, quarterly reports due in April

New Delhi: Telecom regulator TRAI has given six weeks additional time to telecom companies to file monthly and quarterly reports that are otherwise due in April, a senior official said on Sunday.

The decision comes within days of industry body COAI writing to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) for granting additional time to telecom companies to file such reports, citing massive efforts being undertaken by them to overcome "numerous operational challenges" in order to keep vital networks up and running amid the 21-day nationwide lockdown to counter the spread of coronavirus.

"TRAI considered the request of COAI in view of the prevailing circumstances, and agreed to extend the time to submit monthly and quarterly reports due in April by six weeks," TRAI Secretary SK Gupta told PTI. **PTI**

In a letter addressed to TRAI Chairman RS Sharma, the Cellular Operators' Association of India (COAI) on March 26 had said that it is "extremely difficult for our members to submit various monthly and quar-



terly reports on the due date as per the requirements of TRAI as most of these reports require circle wise compilation and their compilation in the current environment will not be possible."

"Hence, we request TRAI to kindly extend the timelines for submission of various reports..." COAI Director General, Rajan Mathews had said in the communication to TRAI.

COAI had said that as a provider of an essential service to the nation, the industry is facing "numerous operational challenges", but trying its best to fulfil duties and provide unhindered communication to the nation.

"In the present crisis, there is significant strain on the human resources of the operators as they are grappling with the operational issues arising from the COVID-19 outbreak

on one hand, while also trying to fulfil the licensing compliance on the other hand. Regular day to day operations of the TSPs (telecom service providers) have been impacted with minimal staff manning the requirements," COAI had said.

Citing measures that were recently announced by the Finance Minister for extension of statutory and regulatory compliances in view of the coronavirus pandemic, COAI had said, "Similarly, we request TRAI to kindly provide our member TSPs additional time of at least 6 weeks, from the due date, to file all monthly and quarterly reports which are due for submission in April 2020 i.e. All reports wherein financial disincentive is applied or not."

In an unprecedented move, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 24 announced a complete lockdown of the country to try halt the spread of the pandemic, shortly after which the Centre said road, rail and air services will remain suspended during this period.

The pandemic has so far claimed 25 lives in the country, and number of COVID-19 cases have touched 979. **PTI**

Coal India may register de-growth in FY'20

Kolkata: Coal India Ltd may witness a De-growth in production in the current year as its output is expected to be lower than 607 million tonne achieved in the previous fiscal, sources said.

The production is likely to be at 602-603 million tonne in 2019-20, they said.

The miner is also likely to witness a decline in off-take in the current fiscal as compared to its 608 million tonne supply in the next three days, given the average output trend at present," sources told PTI.

Of late, the miner had ramped up daily production to reach closer to its target, they said. Coal India had set an

ambitious target of 660 million tonne of production and off-take for FY'20.

"The off-take was at 576.80 million tonne till March 28, registering a decline of 4 per cent over last year," the sources said.

The coal behemoth had supplied 608 million tonne of dry fuel to its consumers during 2018-19.

The coal off-take was less than what was projected in the current year due to a slowdown in the economy and as a result of which, the pit-head stock increased, they said, adding that the coal production was also hit by prolonged monsoon this year.

Of its seven coal producing subsidiaries, Northern Coalfields and Western Coalfields, however, had already surpassed their respective annual production target. **PTI**

AMID LOCKDOWN

Labour Min allows EPF withdrawal

New Delhi: The labour ministry has allowed over 6 crore subscribers of retirement fund body EPFO to withdraw an amount not exceeding their three months basic pay and dearness allowance from their EPF account in view of the lockdown to fight COVID-19.

Besides, Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) also introduced online claim settlement facility without manual intervention on Saturday morning for all KYC compliant subscribers during the lockdown.

The ministry has issued a notification in this regard on March 28, 2020 to amend the Employees' Provident Fund Scheme 1952, a labour ministry statement said. **PTI**

The decision is taken in view of lockdown across the country to fight COVID-19.

The notification permitted non-refundable withdrawal not exceeding the basic wages and dearness allowance for three months or up to 75 per cent of the amount standing to the credit of their EPF account, which ever is less, the ministry said.

The COVID-19 has been declared pandemic and therefore employees working in establishments and factories across entire India, who are members of the EPF Scheme, 1952 are eligible for the benefits of non-refundable advance.

A sub-para (3) under para 68L has been inserted in the EPF scheme, 1952. **PTI**

Jack Ma Foundation, Alibaba donate medical supplies, test kits to India, other nations

New Delhi: Jack Ma Foundation and Alibaba Foundation on Sunday announced donation of essential medical supplies, including face masks and COVID-19 test kits, to India and six other nations to help combat the spread of coronavirus.

"Collectively, these seven countries will receive a total of 1.7 million face masks, 1,65,000 test kits as well as protective clothing and medical equipment such as ventilators and forehead thermometers," the two foundations said in a statement. Chinese billionaire Jack Ma is the co-founder of multinational technology behemoth Alibaba Group. Besides India, the medical supplies will be donated to Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Vietnam. **PTI**

Paytm to contribute ₹500 crore for PM CARES Fund

New Delhi: To support the fight against COVID-19 pandemic, India's leading digital payments and financial services platform Paytm on Sunday said it is aiming to contribute ₹500 crore to the PM CARES Fund.

Urging users to do their bit in the fight against Covid-19, the company said that for every contribution or any other payment made on Paytm using the wallet, UPI and Paytm Bank debit card, the company will contribute an extra up to ₹10.

"We are honoured to do our duty to aid the government in all the relief measures being taken to fight the Corona pandemic. We hope our users wholeheartedly donate to PM CARES fund and help save lives," Madhur Deora, President - Paytm, said in a statement. "We will also contribute up to ₹10 for every payment transaction using the Paytm app and instruments.

This money would be directly sent to the PM-CARES fund. Paytm commits to doing everything in its power to support the efforts of our Government in coming out of this crisis," Deora said. Over the last few weeks, Paytm has launched several initiatives to fight the spread of the novel coronavirus. It has started collecting contributions to buy personal hygiene products for people who might not have the means to buy it. Also, the company has created a ₹5 crore fund for innovators who are developing medical instruments or medicines to combat the virus. The PM CARES Fund is exempt under the Income Tax Act, 1961 under Section 10 and 139 for return purposes. Contributions towards PM-CARES are notified for 100 per cent deduction from taxable income under section 80(G) of the Income Tax Act, 1961. **IANS**

30% retailers may shut shop in 6 months if Govt fails to back: RAI

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

About 30 per cent of Indian retailers may be out of business in six months time if the government does not provide them support amidst the nation-wide lockdown, Retailers Association of India (RAI) CEO Kumar Rajagopalan said.

Speaking to IANS on Sunday, Rajagopalan also noted that the business has been severely subdued since February, with 50-60 per cent of normal trade last month and nearly no trade in March.

"Outlook looks quite grim, I think if it continues, for example till April 15-20, I think most of the retailers would already be in very deep trouble," he said.

Trend Slazer

'There could be a potential bio war'

Actor **KANGANA RANAUT** who is currently in Manali, her hometown, spoke about the ongoing pandemic of Coronavirus.

Talking about how the industry is coping, she said, "We have all landed in situation where this could be a potential bio world war and different countries are trying to bring down each other's economy."

She added, "We have to reflect where we have landed as people. If this lockdown goes on for 21 days, we will be two years behind economically. But if it goes beyond 21 days, it is going to be a disastrous situation for our nation as we are a developing one. Right now, I have stopped looking at myself as an actor. I exist as an individual today."



'My character's name (in Netflix film Maska) is Persis. She is strong-headed, independent and very passionate about stories. You will always find her with a camera and a voice recorder. She talks to people and writes about them. She is working on a book about Irani cafes and their culture. That where she meets Rumi (played by Prit Kamani), and the story unfolds.'

—Shirley Setia

Actor **PRABHAS** has extended his support towards fighting the ongoing pandemic of Coronavirus by making a massive contribution.

The *Baahubali* actor has donated ₹4 crore for COVID-19, out of which an ₹3 crore will be added to the PM relief fund for the country, ₹50 lakh to Andhra Pradesh CM relief fund and ₹50 lakh to Telangana relief fund.

Other Telugu actors like Pawan Kalyan, Ram Charan, Chiranjeevi and Mahesh Babu also donated to boost the battle against COVID-19.

Hanks back after COVID-19 battle

Hollywood star **TOM HANKS** and his wife **Rita Wilson** have returned to the US after spending more than two weeks in quarantine in Australia following their COVID-19 diagnosis.

The pair, who were the first celebrities to go public with their battle with Coronavirus on March 11, were photographed driving after flying home on a private jet.

The couple were on a lockdown while recovering in Australia, where Hanks was shooting a film about Elvis Presley, in which he is playing Colonel Tom Parker, Presley's manager, in the film directed by Baz Luhrmann. The production of the film is currently suspended.

The couple shared numerous updates with their fans during their self-quarantine.



INTERPRETER OF CLASSICS

AND HAKSAR, a former diplomat, has become synonymous with translations of lesser-known Sanskrit texts. In conversation with **SAIMI SATTAR** about his new book *Chanakya Niti*, he discusses what spurs him on and how he embarked on this journey after retirement

The tones are clipped. Every syllable carefully pronounced. The accent is old school. It is during the lockdown that I connect over a phone call with Aditya Narayan Dhairiyasheel Haksar, the well-known translator of Sanskrit works. Over the call, he tells me that he has found the quietest corner to sit down for the conversation so that we can proceed unhindered and undisturbed. When another phone threatens to invade the carefully cultivated mindfulness of the discussion, he pauses and shuts it out. He does not desist from making a precise point, pronouncing each word clearly while stressing upon every syllable. The attention to mindfulness and being focused seeps through even over the call and stands in stark contrast to an age where multi-tasking is so glorified. While he is eager to talk about his latest translation, *Chanakya Niti*, but he is equally curious if I am related with another writer who shares my surname and has often reviewed his books.

During the course of the conversation, he touches on a lot of aspects, which concern his 20 translations beginning with *Tales From Panchatantra* in 1992, the language, which he has mastered and what makes it relevant in present times.

● **When it comes to Kautilya/Chanakya, Arthashastra is definitely the more talked-about text. So where did the germ of the idea to translate Chanakya Niti come from?**

In the course of my translating Sanskrit classics, I have taken up all kinds of literature which I feel need public exposure. I came to the conclusion after looking at texts and their commentaries that the *Arthashastra* is very much in the public mind. There are books about it and people make speeches based on it too but the other work, *Chanakya Niti* has become a little obscured in recent years. Public knowledge and popularity of *Arthashastra* is based upon the discovery of manuscripts a hundred years ago in South India.

Moreover, there are in existence six main versions of *Chanakya Niti*. Of these, one, the *Vridha Chanakya*, has become

better known. I thought if we are going to have a new translation it should reflect the whole corpus to give the reader a better sense of the whole corpus.

● **What is the appeal of Chanakya Niti in today's day and time?**

While *Arthashastra* is a scholarly treatise on politics, economics, diplomacy, running the government and more which is concerned with technical information directed at scholars and experts, the *Chanakya Niti* has verse maxims and aphorisms on life and everyday living. These are addressed to common people who are interested in knowing something about everyday worldly life namely the social, ethical and economical aspects. It is about how to get along with friends, family and others. They are addressed to individuals. As compared to other Sanskrit verses, which are embellished, these are exceedingly simple. That is why they attract common people.

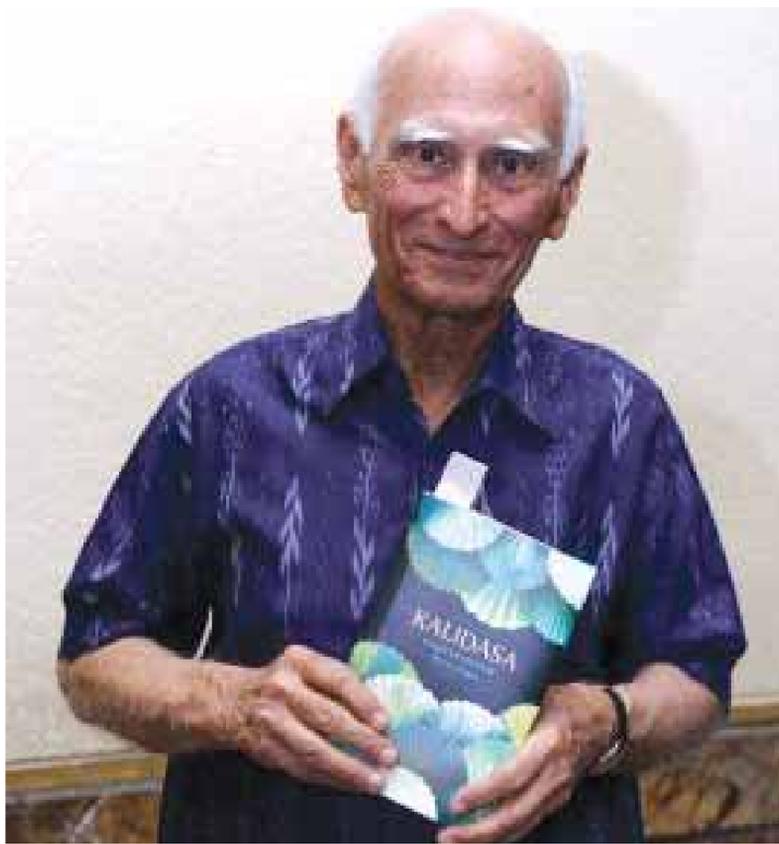
Since these had become obscured over time, I felt the need to put it out in the public domain.

● **Is the fact that Arthashastra has often been compared to Machiavelli's Prince the reason for its popularity?**

The interesting thing is that both *Arthashastra* and *Prince* are addressed to technical expert audience. But *Chanakya Niti* verses are more like the advice of the kind that Socrates or Plato gave about everyday living which appeals to people. It doesn't need deep understanding.

● **Is there any particular verse here that resonates with you the most?**

Some verses resonate more. In fact there are two-three verses which attracted me to the whole. There is a verse that says, "Spoil him for the first five, for the next 10 discipline him, but once the son becomes 16, treat him like a friend." This is something which was said 2,000 years ago and I think it is as relevant today as it was earlier. The other one says, "He speaks before you sweetly but spoils the word behind your back. Always discard such a friend. He is a poisoned pot with milk on top." Both these verses are couched in such simple language and you don't need a dictionary to understand them.



● **Since you've translated the works, what do you say to Amit Shah being called Chanakya?**

The name or epigram Chanakya has from time to time been used for clever and determined political leaders and Amit Shah is not the only one. This has been going on for a long time. It has been used by every generation. But the Chanakya referred to here is more the one who wrote *Arthashastra*.

● **Your last translation, A Tale of Wonder, was a mix of cultures and religions. But in today's times we see everything being compartmentalised separately...**

In this particular case, even though it mentions Hindu gods, *Chanakya Niti* leaves out all considerations of organised religions as you have it. It mentions the caste system in social terms and it also points out that a person from a particular caste might be doing something else. The adjectives, religious and secular, are used very loosely these days but the *Chanakya Niti* is a really secular text.

The last two works which I've done, *A Tale of Wonder* and *Suleiman Charitra* are based upon stories derived from Arabic or Persian Middle Eastern sources. In today's time, when everything is being compartmentalised and seen from a particular point of view, these two works depict cultural confluence and intermingling of culture.

● **How did you get into translating works from Sanskrit?**

When I was a student, 60-70 years back in school, I had to study a classical language. My parents chose Sanskrit. My connection with the language loosened over the years. I spent 35 years as a career diplomat. When I retired I had more time at hand and thought I should get to know the language a little more. I came to a conclusion that a good way of learning a language was by translating it. So I looked at the texts which I had studied as a school boy.

Over the years, it went on to include more complicated ones. The very first translation was of the *Panchatantra* fables that was picked up by National Book Trust more than 20 years ago. It is still in circulation. These are simple tales. I tried to concentrate on translating texts that are not in the public domain. The *Tales of Wonder* has been in existence for 600-700 years but it was definitely not in the public domain. No one associated Sanskrit literature with retelling the story of Yusuf and Zuleikha in terms of a parable of soul in search of God.

● **Did your stint as a diplomat influence the interpretation and the choice of Sanskrit?**

There is one section of Sanskrit literature which is very well-known as it has been written about, translated, discussed over the last 200 years. This literature concentrates more or less on religious and philosophical texts like *Gita* and the *Vedas*. But these are only a tiny part of the vast literature that exists. There are some satires in Sanskrit about corruption in government,

hypocrisy in religion and greed in business. These are facts of life and should be read.

● **Many of your translations have further been translated into Persian, Turkish, German, Malay, Mongolian, Newari, French, Greek, Hungarian, Polish and Russian as well as several Indian languages. What do you attribute their global appeal to?**

At one stage, Sanskrit literature had spread wide from India to neighbouring regions. It was translated in other languages. In colonial times, Sanskrit literature was translated into not just English but all colonial languages. In earlier times, *Chanakya Niti* verses were found in Indonesia and Iran. So they do hold an appeal.

● **Translations can be tough as there are not enough words that can be equated with a particular one in a language? Also, the context for the verse needs to be seen in perspective of the time. Does that affect the quality of translation?**

You are asking me deep questions, I am glad. There are two types of translations where the attempt is to translate from word to word and the object is to give to the person reading the translation a better idea of the exact words of which the translation is being made. That is one kind of translation. In this, very often if you read only the translation and not the original, it may not even make sense.

The other kind of translation is where you try to convey not the literal meaning but the literary meaning. In other words, you are combining both the literal and literary aspects because there is also the spirit behind it. This is the kind of translation I try to do. The difference between literary and liter-

al is very limited in *Chanakya Niti*. I've translated two works of Kalidasa and I am also doing *Vikram Urvashiyam* at the moment for the Kalidasa classic series for Penguin. The language there is full of embellishment.

● **How do you select the text initially? Did the previous text influence it?**

The first work I translated was *Panchatantra* as they were simpler to understand. I happened to know the editor of a newspaper and he asked me to send one every week which was published. That was encouraging as it went on for a year. Then I picked up a collection of works by the playwright called *Bhasha* who lived 1,500-2,000 years ago. He wrote many plays, of which, some are based on stories from *Mahabharata*. He chose to make the villains, the heroes of his plays. These too were picked up by newspaper. Penguin had just started in India and they chose to publish it as the *Shattered Thigh*, which is still around. Then I got into more complicated stuff.

● **What kind of a schedule do you follow? How long does translating a work take?**

It depends on the work you are translating from. After seeing my works getting published, I got interested and did more work. I have become a regular feature on the Penguin's classics series. Earlier, I was sending proposals but, over time, they have been making suggestions. Kalidasa is famous as a poet and a playwright. I didn't go anywhere near his works as I thought that would be too big. But it was the publisher that suggested that I should attempt translating the work. The first work took me a lot of time as it needed more drafting and redrafting.

● **How long does Chanakya Niti take?**

The total verses attributed to *Chanakya Niti* add up to 2,000 but since that would be too much, we decided to select 300. One task was to select those and that involved a lot of reading, thinking and cross-questioning. But the actual act of translating was simple as the language is easy. While half the verses are from *Vridha Chanakya*, the other half from all the other five versions of *Chanakya Niti*. This translation gives the reader a sense of the corpus as a whole.

● **Children in school often do not find it an interesting language...**

It seems that today, students are opting to study Sanskrit because the way it is taught and examined and the possibility of scoring high marks. Just like Mathematics. The grammar and tenses are emphasised upon. But to develop an interest in the language depends on individual temperament and also on the availability of works that could appeal to that temperament. If there were comic, erotic, heroic, colloquial works the language would have a larger appeal.

● **What are you planning to do next?**

I am translating Kalidasa's *Vikram Urvashiyam* and also, a collection of love poems which in my opinion deserves to be known better. I've had this text for long.

TECH TALK

Pilgrims of peace
Virtual volunteers around the globe offer help to strangers amid virus stress



Sitting cross-legged in her living room, Donna Borak rested her palm on her heart as she guided a small group of virtual participants in meditation and deep breathing. Notice where you might be holding tension, she instructed.

"Send your attention to your head... maybe acknowledging it's fine if you've been worried and scared," she told them and added, "Maybe finding comfort that we are all in this together."

From her Washington DC home, Borak has been hosting a free virtual meditation class daily for anyone who wants "a respite during such a moment of uncertainty." Attendees are encouraged to bring children, loved ones or pets. "Even your plants."

"Inhale, maybe even a little bit more deeply this time, slowly letting the air out of your mouth," she added.

As social distancing has emerged as a key tool to staunch the spread of the Coronavirus, ordinary people around the globe have turned to technology to overcome physical barriers. In ways big and small, they are forging new connections and comforting others inundated by bad news about the virus or burdened by unpaid bills.

Borak wanted to carve out a space for togetherness — for a stressed-out parent, a manager or a laid-off employee to take a break. So far, attendees joining her class on Zoom video conferencing have mainly been friends and family, and she's been sharing sessions on Instagram.

"While a meditation class for 15 minutes doesn't solve financial

stress or help to explain what will happen next or address serious health care concerns, to me, it's an opportunity to not be alone and to not exist in isolation," she said by phone. "I didn't want anyone to feel alone."

A journalist and who had been attending yoga teacher training, Borak draws lessons from such testing times.

"Going forward, for every time that we opted out at the last minute of attending an event or a happy hour or a dinner, we'll hopefully feel differently about it when we come back together again," she said. "We need each other."

In Austin, Texas, Catherine Woodiwiss also took to online

media to provide relief of a different kind. She knew that the cancellation of *South by Southwest* — a film, music and technology festival that attracts hundreds of thousands to Austin — could hit artists and small business owners hard.

Her first instinct to help by buying local wasn't going to work amid the social distancing and various shutdowns. So she encouraged those who lost income to reach out online. "I can't give a ton, but I can give something, and will as much and for as long as I can," she wrote on Twitter.

She said takers included an 18-year-old pregnant woman who works as a cashier and said her store would be closed for a month

and a musician whose shows would have covered rent and other expenses.

She used Venmo to send money directly after doing a "light vetting" of recipients by looking at their accounts. "I'm comfortable erring on the side of being of help," she said. "In a moment of need, I am comfortable giving to who asked for it."

There are "times that I have been very much in need of financial support from other people," Woodiwiss said. "I am very lucky to be at a moment... where that's not true."

She's been setting aside money for a while to help with different causes. Now Coronavirus is her cause — and she's part of a bigger effort. On her social media feeds, she's seen people come together in new ways, holding "singing circles" or sharing self-quarantine recipes.

Borak and Woodiwiss are among an army of virtual volunteers worldwide donating time and money. Some have used the internet to set up food delivery services to the elderly. One mother issued an international call for help celebrating the birthdays of her self-quarantined children.

"People are trying to figure out how to belong with each other... when we are physically separate," Woodiwiss said. "In this moment of real, relatively unanticipated crisis, it's been really great to see people show up."

While unending global news about the effects of the pandemic of Coronavirus have become commonplace, so, too, are the stories about the kindness of strangers and individuals who have sacrificed for others.

—AP/One Good Thing

WEBBED



MONEY HEIST — SEASON 4

Lives are on the line as the Professor's plan begins to unravel and the crew must fend off enemies from both inside and outside the Bank of Spain. Starring Úrsula Corberó, Álvaro Morte, Itziar Ituño, Miguel Herrán and Jaime Lorente among others, the series releases on April 3 on Netflix.



COFFEE & KAREEM

A 12-year-old's scheme to scare away his mom's new boyfriend, police officer James Coffee, backfires, exposing his family to a secret network of crime. An inept Detroit cop must now uncover the criminal conspiracy. The film releases on April 3 on Netflix.



BORN FREE BUT IN CHAINS

SHALU AGARWAL documents the journey of a young girl's fight against honour killings in western Uttar Pradesh

The sun was out, not in its blazing glory but tentatively, as the four men convicted in the 2012 gang-rape and murder of a young paramedical student were hanged on Friday, March 20. The execution received mixed reactions from people of different school of thoughts. Many hailed the decision and celebrated the hanging as a step towards justice while others believed that death penalty doesn't ensure that crimes against women will decrease.

The national data on crime released by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) in 2019 reports that while the incidence of rape has reduced, the overall crime against women continue to rise. The cases of rapes reduced from 63 per million people in 2016 to 52 per million in 2017. But a total of 3.5 lakh cases of crime against women were registered including murder, rape, dowry death, suicide abetment, acid attack and kid-

napping. In these crimes, however, no data was provided for honour killings, which means murdering young couples for marrying outside their caste and community. These crimes attack the concept of love and the idea of women's autonomy in our country.

With increased awareness, many organisations and people from different strata have started raising their voice against these crimes that find their roots in our patriarchal system. Adding strength to such efforts is the voice of a group of young girls in western Uttar Pradesh, which had reported 16 cases of honour killing in 2016. The idea behind forming this 'Army' — as they like to call it is to ensure safety of girls who choose to love.

According to these girls, if a boy marries outside his community, he is often spared by their families but when a girl exercises her freedom to choose her

life partner, parents either kill her or her partner and in many cases — both.

The group known as 'War Against Honour Killing' was started by Nisha along with her friends in the Kankerkhara area of Meerut city. Nisha, a student who works part time, believes that our society has always discriminated against women who are subjected to inhumane atrocities whenever they demand fair and equal treatment. She questions these atrocities. "Is choosing life partners on their own such a big crime for our society that they prefer murdering their own daughters? The whole purpose behind establishing 'War Against Honour Killing' is to ensure that we stop this heinous crime. I lost two of my dear friends to this unjust practice. No one listened to them as their parents murdered them mercilessly. Even the police did not take any action against them. I want to make sure that no other

girl is killed. This is a war against all those parents who have murdered girls just for choosing a free life," shares Nisha.

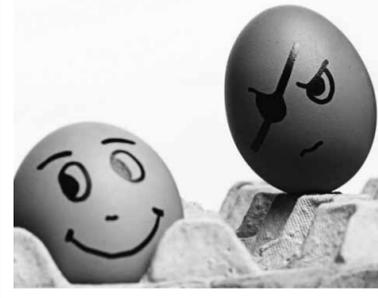
As expected, when she had started the group, the first resistance had come from her own family. The whole idea of questioning the patriarchal social norms and talking about rights of girls was rejected by her family. "My family is a part of the system and the idea of women being a second-class citizen is so deeply rooted in their lives that they could do anything to stop me from getting down to streets and challenging this patriarchal system," says Nisha. When they couldn't stop her, they tried to stop her friends from supporting her.

"Her parents tried to stop us from participating in the initiative. They said that we will get trapped in this mess," Nisha's friends share. But gradually the families too came around after seeing the immense courage these young girls showed.

Today, 70 people from different walks of life are a part of this group of which more than 30 are young, fearless girls like Nisha. Besides organising rallies, protests and awareness campaigns, this group has also started utilising the social media platforms to create awareness among masses. The initiative has received a fair share of both criticism and appreciation from different people at different levels. More people are getting associated with the cause. Students from schools, colleges, coaching institutes along with working girls and boys have joined in the efforts.

What Nisha started as a personal fight for justice for her friend has today become a symbol of hope for many young girls in the conservative society. (This article has been written under the Sanjoy Ghose Media Fellowship 2019.)

—Charkha Features



Listen without prejudice

When opportunity knocks at the door of a biased person, he does not answer or open the door, says RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

It's a fact that most of us are prejudiced or have an opinion on everything even before knowing the actual facts. One of the earliest psychological explanations of prejudice is described as — an antipathy based on faulty and inflexible generalisation towards a group as a whole or towards an individual because they are a member of that group. The first thing that this explanation tells us is that prejudice is not something logical but rather based on a series of assumptions, half-truths and guesses. Second, it tells us that prejudice is based on generalisation — on a whole host of characteristics and qualities that we assume a person has, based purely on the fact that he or she is a member of a particular group.

We often talk of giving up anger, ego, pride and attachment but, perhaps, we do not put proper emphasis on giving up prejudice, biases and jealousy. In practical life, however, we find that because of biases and prejudice, a person does not listen to spiritual knowledge and, if at all he does, he looks at it with suspicion, fear, hatred or a feeling of opposition. Many a times, he misinterprets and criticises it unjustifiably. The result is that the person does not derive benefit from such precious knowledge even if he is offered this with love and goodwill. He disregards this offer and considers it as a strategy of some selfish people.



The opportunity knocks at the door of this prejudiced and biased person but he does not answer or open the door. Not only does he reject fortune so graciously offered to him but he does not allow others to grab the gift as well. The doctors may not be able to identify the virus that has infected his mind because a prejudiced person does not consider himself to be a patient and opposes all attempts to cure him. However, we cannot leave him in the cruel hands of the strange disease. We have to perform the operation rescue in the moral theatre of virtues with the surgical instruments of yoga after putting him on anaesthesia of love and glucose of good-will. Later, treating him with the curative preparations made from spiritual knowledge and using the therapy called yoga.

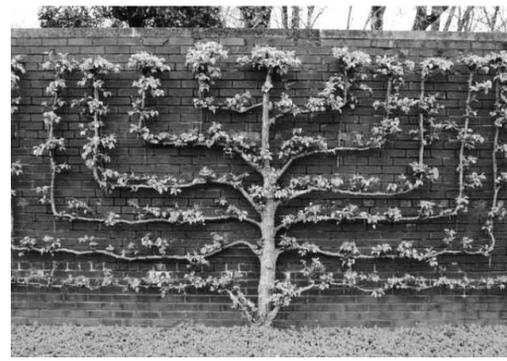
Jealousy too, like prejudice, is a dangerous disease. A jealous person cannot digest facts of life nor can he tolerate the truth. It weakens a person's soul so much so that he cannot stand it when he hears that another person has been praised. Isn't it a strange disorder, which reduces one's level of tolerance and appreciation or approval when it should actually enhance it? The news of another person's success causes nausea and spoils his mood. He becomes a person who suffers from the toxin, called 'selfishness'. Such a person is always sulking, fretting and fuming. He is in a pressure-cooker, making hissing sounds and whistling as he is boiling in the steam of jealousy. He wants peace and, unlike a prejudiced person, he wants to be cured or relieved. Meditation helps him feel relieved and it builds in him a reservoir of goodwill and love that finally cures him of jealousy which is the generator or sustainer of hatred. If a person wants to be free of hatred, he has to banish jealousy because this emotion cannot live with peace. Universal love is the antidote to jealousy. It can be generated and nourished only through meditation. So let's start meditating from today.

Espalier is a way of training and pruning plants so their branches lie in an orderly and ornamental two-dimensional form. The beauty comes from the tracery of the branches. It is a way to create a living border in a garden or decorate a fence or wall.

How to train plants?

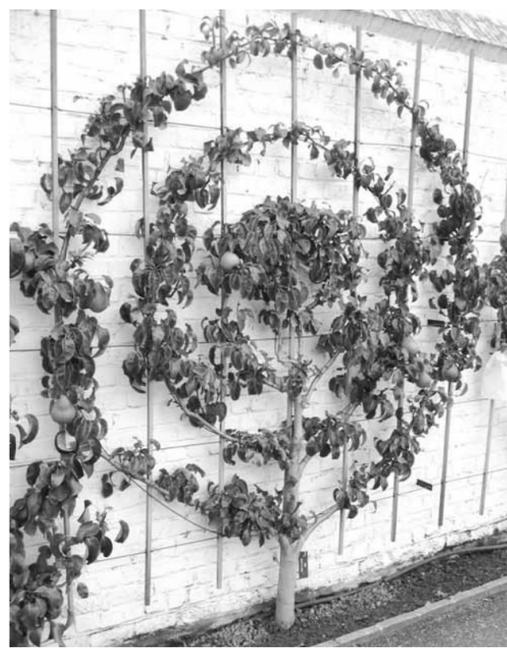
Experts say that red currant espaliers need pruning twice a year. In contrast, pear or apple espaliers require monthly or more frequent sessions

gooseberries. My red currant espaliers decorate the fence enclosing my vegetable garden. Each currant plant is trained to the shape of a T, with a single trunk capped by two fruiting arms that grow in opposite directions along the fence, which provides support.



HOW PLANTS TICK
Knowing a little about what makes plants tick helps in growing an espalier, and makes doing so all the more interesting. "Apical dominance" is the tendency for the uppermost shoots on any plant to grow strongest. Plant hormones, produced in the growing tips of upright stems and at the high points of arching stems, suppress growth of shoots lower down. By merely changing the orientation of a stem you can influence how strongly various parts of that stem grows. The plant also has a say in this, and may turn a growing stem upwards in an attempt to gain apical dominance over other stems. Also keep in mind that horizontally oriented stems are weaker growing, more fruitful, and develop more side branches than

vertically oriented stems. **PRACTICAL APPLICATION** Use these concepts in training and maintaining any espalier. To initially develop a strong trunk on my red currant, I chose the strongest shoot on my plant, removed all others, and then tied that retained shoot to the fence to keep it upright and vigorous. Once this trunk-to-be grew just above the top of the three-foot-high fence, I cut its top back to the three-foot height, releasing



fruiting began even as arms were developing. The arms, because of their horizontal orientation, exhibit little apical dominance, so side branches develop freely. Two simple cuts keep the form neat while encouraging abundant fruit production. First, just before the berries start reddening, I cut each side branch back to about five inches long. I perform the second cut in winter, cutting those side branches back again, this time to about an inch. The only problem I have with my red currant espaliers, which hang onto their beautiful berries for weeks, is picking the fruits. To do so would ruin the plants' appearance, so I don't. I have some other plants, growing as bushes, for the fruit harvest. —AP

Imagination is more important than knowledge. —Albert Einstein

HOW LIFE CAN GET BETTER AS WE AGE

Life can get better with age with mindfulness because older people have the wisdom and time to use mindfulness as a means to improve overall wellbeing, according to a new study.

Mindfulness refers to the natural human ability to be aware of one's experiences and to pay attention to the present moment in a purposeful, receptive, and non-judgmental way. Using mindful techniques can be instrumental in reducing stress, the study said.

According to the researchers, certain characteristics of mindfulness seem more strongly evident in older people compared to younger people. "This suggests that mindfulness may naturally develop with time and life experience," said study co-author Tim Windsor from Flinders University in Australia.

The researchers found that positive relationships between aspects of mindfulness and wellbeing became stronger from middle age onwards.

AVOID DAIRY PRODUCTS TO PREVENT ASTHMA

Suffering from asthma? Following a plant-based diet can help prevent asthma, while dairy products and high-fat foods raise the risk, a new study suggests.

"Asthma can make people more vulnerable in the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak and this research offers hope that dietary changes could be helpful," said study researcher Hana Kahleova from Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine in the US.

For the findings, published in the journal Nutrition Reviews, the research team examined the evidence related to diet and asthma and found that certain foods including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and other high-fibre foods can be beneficial, while others such as dairy products and foods high in saturated fat can be harmful.

High fat intake, consumption of saturated fat, and low fibre intake were also associated with airway inflammation and worsened lung function in asthma patients.

LEGAL MARIJUANA TOO STRONG FOR PAIN RELIEF

More than 90 per cent of the legal marijuana products offered in medical dispensaries are much stronger than what clinical studies have shown that doctors recommend for chronic pain relief, according to new research.

"We know that high-potency products should not have a place in the medical realm because of the high risk of developing cannabis-use disorders, which are related to exposure to high THC-content products," said the study's lead author, Alfonso Edgar Romero-Sandoval from Wake Forest School of Medicine.

Studies showed that levels of up to five per cent tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the main psychoactive compound in marijuana, were sufficient to reduce chronic pain with minimal side effects.

"Better regulation of the potency of medical marijuana products is critical. The FDA regulates the level of over-the-counter pain medications such as ibuprofen that have dose-specific side effects, so why don't we have policies and regulations for cannabis, something that is far more dangerous?," he added.

TOO MUCH SALT CAN WEAKEN YOUR IMMUNITY

Researchers have found that eating too much salty diet weakens your immune system and makes it harder for your body to fight off bacterial infections.

For the findings, published in the journal Science Translational Medicine, the research team fed mice a high-salt diet and found more severe bacterial infections.

Human volunteers who consumed an additional six grams of salt per day also showed pronounced immune deficiencies.

This amount corresponds to the salt content of two fast-food meals, the study said.

Five grams a day, no more: This is the maximum amount of salt that adults should consume according to the recommendations of the World Health Organisation (WHO). It corresponds approximately to one level teaspoon.

ASPIRIN MAY NOT REDUCE DEMENTIA RISK

Taking a low-dose aspirin once a day does not reduce the risk of thinking and memory problems caused by mild cognitive impairment or probable Alzheimer's disease, nor does it slow the rate of cognitive decline, say researchers.

Aspirin has anti-inflammatory properties and also thins the blood. For years, doctors have been prescribing low-dose aspirin for some people to reduce their risk of heart disease and stroke. However, there are also possible risks to taking aspirin, including bleeding in the brain, so guidance from a doctor is important.

"Our large study found that a daily low-dose aspirin provided no benefit to study participants at either preventing dementia or slowing cognitive decline," said study lead author Joanne Ryan, from Monash University in Australia.





Virat Kohli kisses Border-Gavaskar trophy after India win 2-1 in 2019 AP

Aus travel ban could affect India tour

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Australian government's decision to seal its border for the next six months owing to the COVID-19 pandemic could adversely affect India's Futures Tours Programme (FTP), including the much-awaited face-offs Down Under later this year.

India's tour of Australia is to begin with a T20 tri-series in October and end with the Tests in December.

In between is the World T20, scheduled for an October 18 start, but the mega-event's future is also shrouded in uncertainty due to the global health crisis.

In Australia, there has been over 2000 positive cases, prompting the government to seal the country's borders.

The Sourav Ganguly-led BCCI, in all likelihood, might have to explore alternate plans amid the pandemic.

While the BCCI is yet to take a final decision on this edition of IPL, the international calendar will be another cause of concern as there are tours of Sri Lanka (ODIs and T20s), Zimbabwe, Asia Cup (T20) and home a white ball series against England lined up.

A six-month travel ban means no teams will be allowed to enter Australia for the assignments lined up in the coming times, which includes the World T20 and the tour by the Indian team.

Hanuma using break to sharpen skills for series Down Under

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Confined to his home due to the nationwide lockdown, India cricketer Hanuma Vihari says he will use the time to "sharpen" his skills for the Australian tour, scheduled towards the end of the year.

"I am going to use this time to focus on my fitness, sharpen my skills for county cricket as well as for the Australia tour in late 2020," Vihari, who was part of India's last tour of New Zealand, was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo.

Though there is a lot of uncertainty over when sport will resume, the middle-order batsman said he has his "fingers crossed".

"Mentally I am trying hard



Hanuma Vihari plays a shot during India's 1st innings against New Zealand in 2nd Test AP

to keep myself positive and busy. My challenge is: there is no cricket for the next three to four months. I do have a summer to look forward to having signed

with a team in the English County Championship, where my contract starts from late August. Fingers crossed about that."

"Right now it's too early to say anything. It's a potential six-month travel ban. If the situation is under control, it could be lifted early also," a senior BCCI office-bearer, privy to the developments, said.

But those who have an idea of the FTP calendar admitted that the practical problem in such a situation could be the T20 tri-series, which starts in the beginning of October and involves Australia and England.

"If international travel ban in reality exists for six months, then it becomes a logistical nightmare. At least, for the T20 tri-series before the World T20.

"The processing of visa, tickets everything becomes a logistical challenge. Also not only Australia, England is supposed to tour India in September for their white ball leg. Will things be normal in the UK and players allowed to travel. These are big questions," another BCCI source

said.

If the World T20 is pushed back, then the four-Test series between India and Australia, which is part of the World Championship, could also get affected.

"The frustrating aspect is that you can't even decide anything as the situation varies from country to country. However helpless it might sound, we can only wait and watch," the source said.

Smith again eligible for captaincy

SYDNEY: A two-year leadership ban slapped on Steve Smith after the ball-tampering scandal in South Africa ended on Sunday, leaving the master batsman free to captain Australia again.

The 30-year-old captained the team until he was suspended for 12 months over a brazen attempt to alter the ball with sandpaper under his watch during a Test in Cape Town in 2018.

Part of his punishment included a further year-long exile from any leadership role, which has now expired.

Co-conspirator and former vice-captain David Warner was banned from any leadership role for life, although both have successfully resumed their international careers.

There have been calls for Smith to take back the Test captaincy from Tim Paine, but it remains unclear whether he wants to, with the 35-year-old seemingly intent on playing on.

Coach Justin Langer last year praised Paine's leadership as "brilliant" and said Smith may not want the "burden" of captaincy on top of

batting pressures. Aaron Finch is skipper of the Twenty20 and one-day teams.

Smith told Channel Nine television on Sunday he was focused only on trying to stay physically and mentally fit during the coronavirus shutdown of Australian cricket.

He was supposed to be preparing for a big-money payday at the Indian Premier League, but the tournament has already been delayed until April 15.

With India in a three-week lockdown in a bid to contain a spread of the virus, Smith admitted the IPL appeared unlikely to go ahead.

"I think the country's basically shut its borders until the 15th of April," he said.

"It's obviously not looking likely at the moment, I think there might be some meetings over the next couple of days to discuss what the go is with it all.

"But just trying to stay physically fit and mentally fresh," he added. "If it goes ahead at some point, then great. If not, then there's plenty going on in the world at the moment. Just play it day by day." AFP



Laxman's 281 among Chappell's all-time great knocks against spin

MELBOURNE: Former Australia captain Ian Chappell has picked his two all-time favourite innings against high-quality spin bowling and one of those is VVS Laxman's iconic 281 at the Eden Gardens in 2001.

Thanks to Laxman and Rahul Dravid (180), India went on to win the game against Australia after following-on.

"The absence of any cricket gives me an opportunity to reflect on an aspect of the game I enjoy: watching a batsman utilise good footwork to combat top-class spin bowling. Two innings stand out: one played by India's VVS Laxman, the other by Doug Walters of Australia," Chappell wrote in a column for ESPNcricinfo.

Laxman and Dravid shared a marathon 376-run stand to engineer an unforgettable win for



India. Chappell was simply in awe of Laxman's batting as the wisty Indian batsman toyed with the likes of Shane Warne.

"Laxman's incredible 281 at Calcutta in 2001 is the best I've seen against top-class leg-spin. At

the conclusion of that exhilarating series I asked Shane Warne how he thought he bowled.

"I don't think I bowled that badly," he replied. "You didn't," I responded.

"If Laxman comes three paces

out of his crease and hits an unbelievable on-drive against the spin and you then flight the next delivery a little higher and shorter to invite another drive and instead he quickly goes onto the back foot and pulls it, that's not bad bowling. That's good footwork.

"Laxman regularly did this during his 452-ball stay, in which he hit 44 boundaries. Therein lies a clue to Laxman's success: he consistently hit the ball along the ground," said Chappell, also praising Laxman's temperament.

Talking about fellow Australian Walters, Chappell called him the best player against spin.

"Walters was the best player of off-spin bowling I have seen; he didn't just survive against the very best, he occasionally battered them into submission," said Chappell. PTI

Juve players agree to take pay reduction

TURIN: Juventus on Saturday announced that they had cut their players' and coach Maurizio Sarri's salaries after all Italian sport was suspended until at least April 3 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"The economic and financial effects of the understanding reached are positive for about 90 million euros (\$100.5 million) for the 2019/2020 financial year," said a club statement.

Juventus, who led second-placed Lazio by a point in Serie A before the suspension of the season, said they had agreed a "reduction" for pay from March until June.

Juve added that should the season be finished later in the year, the players could be paid extra in those months.

"Juventus would like to



thank the players and the coach for their commitment at a difficult time for everyone," Turin giants said.

Players at other big European clubs have also agreed to take pay cuts, including Bayern Munich and Borussia Dortmund in

Germany. Juventus' highly-paid stars include five-time Ballon d'Or winner Cristiano Ronaldo and Wales midfielder Aaron Ramsey, who joined from Arsenal on a free transfer last year. AFP

Italy's sports minister to extend ban on events

ROME: Italy's sports minister is planning to extend the ban on games and competitions in the country through all of April.

The current lockdown is due to expire on Friday but Italian health experts have said the need to try to contain COVID-19 will likely last weeks beyond that.

Minister Vincenzo Spadafora tells Italian daily La Repubblica that talks about restarting the Serie A on May 3 are "unrealistic."

He adds: "(On Monday) I will propose extending the ban on sports competitions at every level for all of April. And I'll extend the measure to training — an area where we hadn't intervened because there was still a possibility of holding the Olympics." AP



Neymar would be 'spectacular signing' for Barca: Xavi

BARCELONA: Xavi Hernandez has reiterated his desire to coach Barcelona in the future but suggests he will not return until a different board brings a new sense of direction to the club.

Hernandez is in charge of Al-Sadd in Qatar and turned down an approach in January after Barca sacked Ernesto Valverde, which led to the appointment of Quique Setien.

In an interview with Spanish newspaper La Vanguardia published on Sunday, Xavi said Neymar would be a "spectacular signing", and singled out former Spain defender Carles Puyol and the one-time Dutch winger Jordi Cruyff as people he would like to work with.

Yet the relationship between Barcelona's board, led by president Josep Maria Bartomeu, and the players has remained tense, with Lionel Messi's public criticism of technical secretary Eric Abidal among a number of off-field controversies.

"I am clear that I want to return to Barca, I am very excited," said Xavi, who was asked if a change of board would be needed for it to happen. "Obviously I would like to be in tune with everyone," he said. "In the dressing room there can't be a negative or toxic atmosphere."

"Everything has to fit," Xavi added. "I would like to come in with

people from my environment that could form a good team."

Pushed on whether working with the current board would be a deal-breaker, Xavi said: "It wouldn't be definitive but I insist I would like to have total harmony. I don't know if that can happen... I have nothing against anyone and I don't have a bad relationship with Bartomeu.

Xavi mentioned the likes of Puyol, whom he played with under Pep Guardiola, and Cruyff, son of Johan and former Barca and Manchester United winger, as the kind of people he would like to work alongside.

"I would like to work with people in whom I have confidence, with whom there is loyalty," said Xavi. "We are talking about Carles Puyol, who was captain of Barca, and Jordi Cruyff, a very good businessman with a lot of experience as a technical secretary."

He also said Neymar, whom the Catalans tried and failed to sign from Paris Saint-Germain last summer, would be a "spectacular signing".

"Most of the squad seems extraordinary," Xavi said. "The base is very good. I would sign forwards, like Neymar. I don't know if he would fit in a social sense but in football terms I have no doubt he would be a spectacular signing." AFP

ICC @ICC

2007: #T20WorldCup hero 🏆

2020: Real world hero 🙏

In his post-cricket career as a policeman, India's Joginder Sharma is among those doing their bit amid a global health crisis.

Joginder Sharma

International Cricket Council (ICC) has hailed India's cricketer-turned cop Joginder Sharma for doing his bit in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Joginder, who bowled the match-winning final over in the 2007 World T20 final against Pakistan, is a DSP in Haryana Police and is currently involved in dealing with global health crisis. "In his post-cricket career as a policeman, India's Joginder Sharma is among those doing their bit amid a global health crisis," the ICC tweeted on Saturday along with Joginder's photos as a cricketer and cop.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Their training halted by the coronavirus-forced national lockdown, India's Olympic-bound boxers will be provided online classes by their coaches from Monday to ensure that aspects such as mental well-being and nutrition are taken care of.

Nine Indian boxers — M C Mary Kom (51kg), Simranjit Kaur (60kg), Lovlina Borgohani (69kg), Pooja Rani (75kg), Amit Panghal (52kg), Manish Kaushik (63kg), Vikas Krishan (69kg), Ashish Kumar (75kg) and Satish Kumar (+91kg) — have qualified for the Tokyo Games, postponed to 2021 due to the glob-



al pandemic.

In a conference call with these boxers on Sunday, Boxing Federation of India (BFI) President Ajay Singh took stock of their preparations amid a national lockdown till April

14 to fight the pandemic.

"This is a challenging time for all of us and is all the more a reason for us to take care of ourselves... Stay fit, continue with the exercises as directed by the coaches and try to main-

Tokyo organisers eye July 2021 for delayed Olympics

AFP ■ TOKYO

Tokyo Olympics organisers are eyeing next July as a start date for the postponed Games, Japanese media reported on Sunday.

Given the ongoing pandemic and need for preparation time, the most likely plan would be for the Games to begin on July 23, 2021, public broadcaster NHK said, citing sources within the organising panel.

It came after Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike raised the idea on Friday of moving the event to a less hot and humid time of year.

She argued that this would make marathons and other races easier to endure, meaning they could be held in the capital instead of in northern Sapporo city, where the International Olympic Committee (IOC) had decided to move them.

The Tokyo 2020 team led by Yoshiro Mori is currently discussing possible dates with the IOC, according to the Asahi Shimbun newspaper.



Postponing Oly save athletes from mental turmoil: Coe

LONDON: World Athletics president Sebastian Coe on Sunday said that the decision to postpone this year's Tokyo Olympics because of the coronavirus has saved athletes from "mental turmoil".

Former Olympic champion Coe supported the move to push and said competitors would have been placed in an impossible position if the event had been left to start on July 24 as originally scheduled.

They would have been tempted to continue training despite large parts of the world being in lockdown.

"We didn't want to have

athletes in a position where they were countering govt advice, maybe even breaking law," Coe told TalkSport.

"And of course in the back of their minds was always that concern, it wasn't just their own training programme, but that they ran the risk of effectively infecting themselves, their families, and we just wanted to take them out of that mental turmoil as quickly as we possibly could.

"We're no different from everyone else out there but I think we just concluded that sport, on this occasion, had to take a back seat." AFP

On Saturday, Mori told a Japanese TV station that "some kind of conclusion" would be reached within a week.

The Olympics were scheduled to open on July 24 this year with the Paralympics on August 25, but Japan announced last week it had secured agreement from the IOC to postpone the Games — a decision unprecedented in peacetime.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said they would be held in around a year instead as a testament to humanity's victory over the pandemic.

The decision had been seen to open options for Tokyo, with IOC chief Thomas Bach saying that "all the options are on the table" and rescheduling "is not restricted just to the summer months".

Meanwhile, NHK said the Olympic flame would be displayed for a month at the J-Village sports complex in Fukushima, which was used as a base camp for thousands of relief workers in radiation protection suits during the 2011 nuclear disaster.

BFI start online coaching for Olympic-bound boxers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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14 to fight the pandemic.

"This is a challenging time for all of us and is all the more a reason for us to take care of ourselves... Stay fit, continue with the exercises as directed by the coaches and try to main-

tain your weights as much as possible," Singh told the boxers.

"We will tide over this crisis soon and get back to the ring but staying motivated in the meantime is absolutely necessary," he added.

Elaborating further on the 45-minute discussion, BFI's Executive Director R K Sacheti said that the areas of concern are diet control and mental health.

"They are at their homes right now where diet can go for a toss. So the idea behind these online classes starting tomorrow (Monday) is to ensure that they are kept aware of their nutritional needs," he said.

Sacheti said India boxing's High Performance Director Santiago

Nieva, who is now in Patiala after completing a 14-day self-isolation period in Delhi, will be conducting classes for men.

The classes for women will be conducted by their high performance director Rafaela Bergamasco.

"Santiago is the only boxing coach who is in Patiala right now. He will have access to the boxing hall where he will educate the boxers on technicalities. The idea is to keep them connected and aware," he said.

"We hope things improve and the lockdown ends but we can't start from the scratch when that happens. We have to have something going so that when it ends, there is a seamless transition," he added.