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Day after headlong rush, Govt ensures supplies

Things stable on Wednesday, Centre asks officials to allay fears on availability of food, medicine, other key items

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared a three-week lockdown on Tuesday night to prevent the spread of coronavirus, panicky people flooded the streets to

MARKETS

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GOLD 42,280.00 (+901.00)

SILVER 40,926.00 (+402.00)

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purchase essential items. The mad rush made a mockery of the theme of social distancing. A day later, the Government's focus shifted to providing essential items, including food, dairy products, medicine, etc, to millions of people across the country.

Things looked far stable on Wednesday. Grocery stores, sabji mandi, milk booths, chemist shops, ATMs, banks, petrol pumps and supply of LPG cylinders were open in most of the States and there was no shortage of supply.

Amid reports of panic purchase of essential commodities in some parts of the country, the Home Ministry asked chief secretaries and DGPs of all States to take action to allay apprehensions and maintain peace and tranquility, and inform people about the availability of food, medicine and

other essential commodities. Meanwhile, the Home Ministry has asked State Governments to check the spread of rumours about shortage of food and other essential commodities.

While Union Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan said the Government is monitoring the availability of essential commodities in the market, HRD Minister Prakash Javadekar said the Centre is committed to ensure smooth supply of essential commodities and asked people not to go for hoarding.

In a several cities, including Delhi and NCR, vendors were found selling fruits and vegetables on their carts. Petrol pumps were open and supply of LPG gas cylinders was operational. Mother Dairy outlets too were open. Safal, the fruits and vegetable brand of Mother Dairy group, has announced



Vendors wait for customers at Ghazipur vegetable market during a nationwide lockdown in the wake of coronavirus pandemic, in New Delhi on Wednesday

that all its outlets will be operational at full capacity.

Officials of Agriculture Produce Marketing Committees (APMCs) claimed that there was no shortage of fruits and vegetables. In Delhi, trading at the Azadpur Mandi, Asia's biggest wholesale fruits and vegetable

market, has come down by 50 per cent in the last two days in the absence of curfew passes to traders. Meanwhile, top e-commerce sites Flipkart and Amazon have temporarily suspended their services. Flipkart has listed all products as "out of stock" on the search page.

Whereas, Amazon will serve only products of high priority. Grocery startup Grofers too suspended operations due to lack of clarity in their listing as an essential service provider while supermarket chain Big Bazaar is continued to offer doorstep delivery.

Passes for e-commerce portals to ease delivery of essential goods

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police on Wednesday issued passes to e-commerce portals for delivery of essential goods throughout the 21-day nationwide lockdown period after BigBasket and Amazon claimed disruptions in their services due to restrictions put by the authorities.

The police representative also said the delivery agents of these companies will be helped by them. Curfew passes will be issued to all delivery persons and all warehouses will be opened. Police personnel at border checks are being sensitised. Home delivery process for the essential items will be made easy by weekend.

Mandeep Singh Randhawa, the Public Relation Officer (PRO), Delhi Police, had a meeting with e-commerce website representatives where they shared the problems faced by them in the movement of essential goods.

"We have issued passes

to them and assured that their delivery agents are helped by the police," said Randhawa.

Earlier, e-commerce portals like BigBasket and Amazon were claiming disruptions in their services due to the restrictions put by the authorities.

One of India's largest grocery delivery service BigBasket, on their app, said, "Dear Customer, we are not operational due to restrictions imposed by local authorities on the movement of goods in spite of clear guidelines provided by central authorities to enable essential services. We are working with the authorities



606 infected so far; 1st death in MP

Toll 11; highest cases 128 in Maha, 106 in Kerala, Delhi sees 5 fresh cases

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

On the first day of the three-week countrywide lockdown, the count of confirmed coronavirus cases shot up from 519 on Tuesday to 606 on Wednesday while death toll touched eleven in the country with Maharashtra reporting the highest number of cases at 128, followed by Kerala with 109 cases. Delhi registered five fresh cases. Of the total 606 cases, 42 are cured ones. So far authorities have denied community spread of the disease.

Madhya Pradesh registered its first death when a 65-year-old woman from Ujjain succumbed to the virus on Wednesday afternoon. In its updated figures released on Wednesday morning, the Health Ministry stated that

STATEWISE DEATH TOLL	Himachal: 1
Maharashtra: 3	Gujarat: 1
Karnataka: 1	Delhi: 1
Punjab: 1	Bihar: 1
Madhya Pradesh: 1	West Bengal: 1

STATE-WISE COUNT OF CORONAVIRUS	
Andhra Pradesh: 9	Puducherry: 1
Bihar: 4	Punjab: 29
Chhattisgarh: 1	Rajasthan: 36
Delhi: 31	Tamil Nadu: 18
Gujarat: 38	Telangana: 35
Haryana: 28	Chandigarh: 7
Himachal: 3	J&K: 7
Karnataka: 41	Ladakh: 13
Kerala: 109	UP: 37
MP: 14	Uttarakhand: 4
Maharashtra: 128	West Bengal: 9
Odisha: 2	

the second death reported in Delhi was Covid-19 negative. Five more persons tested



positive for COVID-19 in Delhi, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Wednesday evening.

Kejriwal did not give any details about the new patients, but he did say that only one of the five had a history of foreign travel. The remaining four were either family members of coronavirus patients or had come in close contact with them.

Meanwhile, the Government said of the 64,000 people who arrived in the country since March 21, as many as 8,000 are under quarantine and 56,000 have gone for home isolation.

After the Group of Ministers meeting, Union Health Minister Dr Harshvardhan assured the Centre is making efforts to ensure personal protective equipment and N-95 masks are available in adequate numbers for medical fraternity.

Centre likely to unveil ₹1.5 lakh cr stimulus to undo corona downturn

New Delhi: India is likely to agree an economic stimulus package of more than ₹1.5 lakh crore (\$19.6 billion) to fight a downturn in the country that is currently locked down to stem the spread of coronavirus, two sources familiar with the matter told Reuters.

The Government will also increase its borrowing plan for the fiscal year 2020/21, which starts from April 1, from the current planned gross borrowing of ₹7.8 lakh crore, both sources said.

The sources added that the Government had asked the RBI to buy some of the Government securities being issued, a move not undertaken by the Indian central bank in decades, due to fears of inflation spiking.

One of the sources, a senior Government official, said the stimulus plan could be as large as ₹2.3 trillion, but final num-

bers were still in discussion.

The package, which could be announced by the end of the week, will be used to put money directly into the accounts of more than 100 million poor and to support businesses hit the hardest by the lockdown, the sources said.

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80 crore Indians to get wheat at ₹2/kg, rice ₹3/kg till June

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared a 21-day lockdown to prevent the coronavirus spread, the Union Cabinet on Wednesday announced world's largest food security scheme to benefit 80 crore people across the country.

Briefing media, Union Minister Prakash Javadekar said that every person coming under this scheme will get 7 kg ration per month for the next three months, including wheat at a cost of ₹2 per kg and rice at a cost of ₹3 per kg.

"The Government has decided to provide 7 kg per

person of foodgrains to 80 crore people under the PDS, which is the world's largest food security system," said I&B Minister Prakash Javadekar, detailing the Cabinet decision.

He said PDS wheat provided at ₹7 per kg earlier is being given at ₹2 and rice at ₹3/kg.

Detailing the logistics of supply of wheat, rice and other items to 80 crore people, Javadekar said that all States have been asked to take foodgrains from the Centre in advance for distribution through the PDS and Food Corporation of India (FCI) networks across the country are geared up for this scheme.

Free food for daily wagers, homeless: Kejriwal

SAPNA SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday said the number of night shelters in the city has been increased and more food is being distributed for homeless people. To ensure smooth supply of essential services without any disruptions, Kejriwal announced 1031 helpline number. The Government said widows, senior citizens, and divyans entitled to monthly pension will get additional amount equivalent to one month's annuity.

"The Government has also decided to double the pension under the widow, old-age, and disability pension scheme," said Kejriwal.

Earlier, the CM had said



the Government does not want daily wagers and homeless to suffer due to restrictions hence it had decided to distribute free

food and enhanced benefits under ration scheme.

"We have decided to provide 50 per cent more quantity — 7.5 kg instead of fixed quota of 5 kg — free rations to 72 lakh beneficiaries attached to our ration scheme for one month. The ration will be provided free of cost," he said at his online Press conference.

The Government will also provide free food twice a day to homeless at night shelters, however, Kejriwal added the offer would not be restricted to occupants of those facilities.

"We are arranging free lunch and dinner at 220 night shelters for every person. The Government has also decided to double the pension under the widow, old-age, and disability

pension scheme," he said.

Kejriwal also said due to curfew, several people were not able to get food, and urged the public to send such people to the nearest shelters of the Delhi Government, where food was arranged.

He said the Delhi Government is working to ensure that not a single person in Delhi should suffer from hunger.

EC's indelible ink to stamp persons in home quarantine

New Delhi: Describing the coronavirus outbreak as an extraordinary situation, the Election Commission has allowed the use of indelible ink by health authorities to stamp individuals for home quarantine.

In a letter to the Union Health Ministry, the Commission made it clear that indelible ink mark is normally expected to last for three days when applied on the skin but lasts for a few weeks on the fingernail till the nail grows out.

CAPSULE

NPR, FIRST PHASE OF CENSUS POSTPONED

New Delhi: The updating of the National Population Register (NPR) and the first phase of the Census 2021 have been postponed due to the 21-day lockdown announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, officials said on Wednesday.

RAM LALLA IDOL SHIFTED TO TEMPORARY LOCATION

Ayodhya: The Ram Lalla idol here was shifted to a temporary new location early on Wednesday in the presence of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, clearing the site to allow construction of Ram temple.

COVID-DRIVEN TAX RELIEFS TO COST GOVT 2-3% OF GDP

Mumbai: Taxation experts have welcomed the measures announced by the Government, saying these steps will add up to 2-3 per cent of GDP but will go a long way in addressing the issue of liquidity and deferment of payment obligations.

25 Sikhs massacred in Kabul gurdwara attack

ISIS takes responsibility

PTI ■ KABUL

At least 25 worshippers were killed and eight others injured when heavily armed suicide bombers blasted their way into a prominent gurdwara on Wednesday in the heart of Afghanistan's capital of Kabul, in one of the deadliest attacks on the minority Sikh community in the strife-torn country.

The ISIS terror group, which has targeted Sikhs before in Afghanistan, claimed



Inside view of the gurdwara after an attack in Kabul on Wednesday

responsibility for the attack on the gurdwara in Shor Bazar area about 07.45 (local time) as 150 worshippers were inside the building. "At least 25 people were killed and 8 others

were wounded in the attack at Dharamshala, a Sikh worship place in Kabul," TOLOnews quoted the Ministry of Interior as saying on the attack that lasted nearly six hours.

Prince Charles tests COVID-19 +ve

Now in self-isolation

PTI ■ LONDON

Britain's Prince Charles has tested positive for the novel coronavirus after he displayed "mild symptoms" and is now self-isolating, his office said on Wednesday. The 71-year-old heir to the British throne is self-isolating in Scotland with wife Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, who has tested negative for the deadly virus, which has claimed 422 lives in the UK.

"The Prince of Wales has tested positive for coronavirus," the Clarence House statement read. "He has been displaying



mild symptoms but otherwise remains in good health and has been working from home throughout the last few days as usual," it notes.

In keeping with social distancing advice during the pandemic, Charles has been

noticeably using "namaste" as a greeting rather than a handshake when seen in public over the last few weeks, including during an event to mark Commonwealth Day on March 9 at Marlborough House in London.

His wife Camilla, 72, was seen wearing long black gloves during the same event.

"The Duchess of Cornwall has also been tested but does not have the virus. In accordance with Government and medical advice, the Prince and the Duchess are now self-isolating at home in Scotland," Clarence House said.

The Royals were tested on Monday after they had flown out to Scotland in a jet on Sunday and the royal couple have remained there since then. The statement adds: "The tests were carried out by the NHS (National Health Service) in Aberdeenshire where they met the criteria required for testing.

State tackling COVID-19 efficiently, but public support vital: CM Rawat

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

At a time when the very serious challenge posed by novel coronavirus (COVID-19) to the world has shook even strong and prosperous nations, India and Uttarakhand are committed to overcome this challenge. Chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat said this in his address in the Vidhan Sabha on Wednesday.

Rawat said that under the guidance of prime minister Narendra Modi and recommendations of medical experts, the state government has taken various effective measures. Uttarakhand is among the leading states in the fight against COVID-19. Under the Epidemic Disease Control Act -1897, COVID-19 regulations were imposed in the state and a state task force was formed under the chief secretary. The state cabinet has held two emergency meetings to deal with the situation. Considering the risk of contagion on the Indo-Nepal border, every person passing through the posts in the state was screened. A total of 55,109 persons were screened at these posts and none was found to be a suspected patient. Presently the international border has been sealed. Earlier, the health department teams screened 50,016 persons at the Dehradun, Pantnagar and Pithoragarh airports with none displaying symptoms of infection. Currently, all domestic flights are



prohibited. Since December 31, 2019, the Government of India has been providing the state government with list of persons arriving from China and other affected nations. So far a list of 2,082 persons has been received and all of these were screened at the airport.

Of these, 628 persons have undergone 28 day observation, 131 have gone out of the state and 1,323 are currently under observation.

Since people entering the state are the main source of the virus, the entry of all domestic and foreign tourists was banned on March 20 till further orders. All schools, colleges, cinema halls, malls and other enterprises have been closed till March 31 to prevent crowding with the closure being extended as per the Central

Government's directions. The lockdown announced by the state till March 31 and extended further as per Central Government directions is being strictly enforced in the districts. Rawat further informed that the cabinet has released Rs 50 crore and Rs 10 crore has been made available immediately from the CM assistance fund for measures to prevent spread of COVID-19. Rapid response teams have been formed at the state and district levels while NHM and Asha workers are spreading awareness at the block and village levels.

Apart from ensuring supply of essential commodities, labourers registered with ESIC are being provided Rs 1,000 per month. To provide basic food items to the unregistered labourers, Rs 30 crore from the CM relief fund has been allocated to the district magistrates. All suspected patients are being treated for free while dedicated toll-free helpline number 104 and 0135-2609500 are operational to provide information and directions. Currently 933 isolation beds are reserved for COVID-19 cases in various hospitals apart from 1384 beds for quarantine in the districts.

Rawat stressed that measures taken by the government can succeed only with public cooperation in strictly observing the 21 day lockdown.

Scores including a maulvi booked for violating lockdown



PNS ■ DEHRADUN

A number of people in the state are still not taking the state-wide lockdown seriously. The police have been taking action against such persons. In Dehradun on Wednesday, case was lodged under IPC section 188 against the maulvi of Sattowali Ghati mosque and 20-25 unidentified persons for violating the lockdown and gathering in the mosque to offer namaz. Apart from this, cases were lodged under the same section against 24 persons who were released on personal bonds from police stations. Similarly, challans were issued to drivers of 34

vehicles and 11 vehicles were seized under the Motor Vehicles Act.

During the evening, Indiranagar police were patrolling Sattowali Ghati when they received information about a crowd gathering to offer Namaz.

When the police reached the site, the crowd dispersed. The police lodged a case under IPC section 188 against the mosque's Maulvi Abdul Samad and 20-25 unidentified persons for violating the lockdown. The police have again appealed the citizens to cooperate, follow the directions and remain indoors to stall the spread of COVID-19.

Govt orders immediate stop on deposition of all school fees

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Taking cognisance of some private schools asking the guardians of students to deposit fees, the state government has ordered an immediate stop on deposition of fees in all schools across the state. In the order issued by education secretary R Meenakshi Sundaram to all district magistrates, it was stated that all educational institutions in the state have been closed till further orders to stall the spread of COVID-19. It has come to the notice of the administration that some unaided/private schools are

pressuring the guardians of students to pay their fees immediately.

This is not right in a situation wherein a state-wide lockdown is in place as preventive measure against the spread of novel coronavirus. Considering this, the government has ordered an immediate stop on deposition of all types of fee in all government, unaided/private schools affiliated to CBSE, ICSE, State and other boards. The process of depositing the fees should be undertaken only after the situation returns to normal and the schools reopen.



Haridwar police implement social distancing at shops

PNS ■ HARIDWAR

The major problem being seen during the 7 AM to 10 AM window in the lockdown is the crowding of people at shops which is diluting the very purpose of the lockdown. However, in Haridwar, the police set an example by drawing circles using lime powder outside shops, directing citizens to stand in these to maintain social distancing while waiting to purchase essential items.

Har ki Paidi police in-charge Arvind Raturi stood outside a store and directed people to stand in the circles made by the police to ensure social distancing.

Apart from this the Kotwali police detained eight persons for violating the lockdown. The city superintendent of police Kamlesh Upadhyay said



that the police have been motivating citizens to maintain social distancing while shopping for essentials. Though most people are observing the lockdown, some are still taking it lightly. Eight such persons

were detained and social distancing was maintained between them in the police station too, she added, while appealing the citizens to cooperate in the fight against COVID-19.

Citizens complain of overpricing of food items

PNS ■ HARIDWAR

As is being experienced in different parts of the state, some shopkeepers in Haridwar too are exploiting the situation by overcharging customers for essential items. People thronged shops to purchase daily needs during the 7 AM to 10 AM window. Many alleged that shopkeepers are overcharging for flour, sugar and other essential food items. The district magistrate C Ravishankar has ordered that all shops will display the rate list of items. Apart from this, the district administration has already formed special squads to check over-pricing, hoarding and black marketing. But, concrete action still remains to be seen on the ground. The

DISTRICT ADMIN HAS ALREADY FORMED SPECIAL SQUADS TO CHECK OVER-PRICING

administration has assured citizens that there is no need to panic as there is enough stock of food items in the district. The district has one lakh quintals of wheat, 31,000 quintals of rice with sufficient stock of pulses and sugar. The district supply officer KK Agarwal said that strict action will be taken against shopkeeper found over-pricing.



Defeating the purpose of lockdown, people crowd ignoring social distancing while purchasing vegetables during the 7 AM to 10 AM window in Dehradun on Wednesday
Pioneer photo

Himachal CM urges people to remain indoors during lockdown period

PNS ■ SHIMLA

Himachal Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur on Wednesday held a video conferencing with Deputy Commissioners, Superintendents of Police, Chief Medical Officers and District Food and Civil Supplies Controllers of all the districts from Shimla to take stock of the situation in wake of lockdown for 21 days in the country as well as in the State due to outbreak of Corona epidemic.

He urged the people of the State to remain in-door during the lockdown as government has taken this step keeping in view their safety as corona virus was a pandemic. He said that action would be taken against violators under Clinical Establishment Act or Epidemic Diseases Act 1897 and sections of IPC.

The Chief Minister directed the officers to ensure availability of essential commodities in their respective districts. He said that necessary steps should be taken to check hoarding and profiteering of essential commodities and stringent actions must be taken against the defaulters.

He directed the Deputy Commissioners to ensure adequate social distancing between person to person during the relaxation of curfew period. He also asked them to involve functionaries of Panchayati Raj Institutions as they were the grass root functionaries in the villages as well as urban local bodies in maintaining social distancing. He said that the shopkeepers must provide san-

itizers to the consumers visiting their shops during the hours of relaxation. He also asked them to give preference to senior citizens in providing goods during the relaxation period.

Thakur directed the Police and other law and order enforcement agencies to ensure social distancing while relaxation in curfew for purchasing the daily needs items like milk, bread and vegetables etc. He said that administration of bordering districts of the State should also ensure that borders were completely sealed and outsiders were not allowed to enter their territories.

The CM directed the Chief Medical Officers to ensure availability of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) including N-95 masks in all the health institutions of their districts. He said that the Government has already decided to postpone the date of payment of various public utility bills like electricity, water etc. without any extra charges. He also felt the need for proper coordination between various government departments as well as NGOs for effective implementation of Curfew.

He said that the State Government had already closed temples in the State but still several temples in rural areas were open. He directed the district administration to check any type of social gathering in the rural areas during the hours of relaxation in the curfew. He also asked the district administration to make adequate arrangements for ensure availability of spray, fertilizers and insecticides etc.

No new positive case in Chandigarh, 502 under home quarantine

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

No new positive case of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) was reported in Chandigarh on Wednesday.

The number of cases in the city stood at seven while the persons under home quarantine are 502 till the evening. "The condition of all seven positive cases is stable," said an official spokesman.

On reports of first positive patient being discharged from GMCH-32 after recovery, the spokesperson said that the message is fake and the patient is still admitted in isolation ward at GMCH-32.

The health condition of the patient is absolutely fine, the spokesperson added.

Out of the 566 passengers reported in Chandigarh in past few weeks, 502 passengers are under home quarantine and 64 have completed home quarantine or migrated to other states.

Meanwhile, a 31-year old male resident of Mohali, Punjab admitted at CD-Ward PGIMER has tested negative for COVID-19.

Giving details of other suspected patients, the spokespersons said that a 29-year female resident of Chandigarh with history of travel to Dubai has been admitted at isolation ward of GMSH-16 and has been sampled for COVID-19.

Also, a 25-year female resident with no travel history has been admitted at CD-Ward of PGIMER and sampled for COVID-19. Both reports were awaited till the filing of the report.

Punjab to go for district-wise tie-ups with service providers

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Amid tighter restrictions and controls as part of the anti-COVID curfew or lockdown in place, the Punjab Police on Wednesday went into mission mode to launch innovative and indigenous initiatives across districts to facilitate door-to-door supply of essential goods through strategic tie-ups with Zomata, Swiggy, Verka, Amul, mandi pradhans, chemist associations, among others.

As a result of the initiatives taken by the district police, door-to-door supply of essential goods like medicines, grocery, eatables had started in many of the districts in the state, while similar delivery mechanisms were being worked out in others too.

Passes were also being issued to authorized vendors for the supply of essential goods, said the state DGP Dinkar Gupta, adding that for home delivery of medicines, in particular, necessary tie-ups are being made with the respective Chemist Associations, so that orders can be taken on phone and home delivery is accordingly undertaken.

At the same time, the DGP appealed to the people and the media to show some patience as arrangements on such a large scale need time for implementation. "The police is taking prompt action on any information that comes to their notice from social media," he said while disclosing that prompt arrangements were made for delivery of diabetic medicines to a Jalandhar family after they had tweeted for help.

He pointed that strict enforcement of curfew had curtailed the number of FIRs for violations to 74 on Wednesday against Tuesday's 230, with a 38,468-strong police force on the ground to enforce the restrictions while ensuring access to essential goods and services for the people.

The violations of curfew were reported from Ludhiana City, Ludhiana Rural, Khanna, Ropar, Sangrur, Patiala, Jalandhar City, Hoshiarpur, Kapurthala, SBS Nagar, Mansa and Ferozepur.

Responding to the DGP's directions to think out-of-the-box, Commissioners of Police and SSPs in several districts had come out with innovative ways to ensure that essential commodities reach the citizens.

In Amritsar and Ludhiana cities, 650 persons had been engaged from Swiggy for home delivery of essential goods, while in Patiala district, home delivery of essential commodities was being ensured in coordination with the delivery boys from Zomato and Swiggy.

As many as 100 trolleys containing essential commodities were dispatched across Sangrur district on Wednesday by engaging services of local volunteers, said the DGP adding that in Tarn Taran district, milk producing entities like Verka and Amul have been roped in for ensuring decentralized distribution of milk following proper social distancing measures.

Officers of Verka Milk plant have been liaised with and they have assured that their 700 vendors will undertake door to door supply of milk in Amritsar city too, with

the Commissionerate Amritsar directed to issue the necessary passes, said Gupta.

Further, for fruits and vegetables in Amritsar city, liaison has been established with merchant leader (Pardhan) of the Sabzi Mandi. As a result, around 200 vendors from the Mandi will undertake door-to-door delivery of vegetables to the residents of each colony and area in Commissionerate Amritsar. Similarly, the Pardhan of the Mandi has assured that around 100 vendors will be deputed for undertaking door-to-door supply or delivery of fruits.

In Khanna district, vegetables and fruits are being sold out door-to-door via rehri, after getting the same from mandis.

For dry rations, necessary tie-ups with the Kiryana stores have been made, and they are also taking orders on phone and ensuring home delivery. Information about the availability of the home delivery services is being disseminated through the WhatsApp groups.

"Certain issues are being faced by the police teams in certain areas, including shortage of essential items and LPG etc, daily visits at government hospitals by drug addicts with de-addiction centre cards seeking medicines, pressure from wheat farmers for opening of pesticide markets and shops, demand from potato growers for safe passage and transportation for supply of their crop to other states, among others," he said adding that all efforts were being made to resolve these concerns at the earliest.

64,000 'missing' NRIs, Punjab to seek help at village level

MONIKA MALIK ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab Government has decided to weed out COVID-19 by seeking help at grassroot level. To track the nearly 64,000 "missing" NRIs who landed in Punjab in the recent days, and those who attended Holla Mohalla, the State Government has directed the sarpanches or nambardars in villages to provide information.

The sarpanches and nambardars have been asked to provide detailed information of all residents in their respective villages, who would have travelled abroad after March 1 or who would have received relatives from abroad. That was not all! They have been asked to also find out the number of persons who visited Holla Mohalla festival at Sri Anandpur Sahib, where the Banga-based COVID 19 patient, who died on March 18, had stayed for three days.

Till date, total of 22 corona positive cases, out of 31 reported from Punjab, have been reported which came in contact with 70-year-old Nawanshahr resident Baldev Singh.

"We have asked them to immediately furnish a list of such persons to the government doctors and patwaris in the villages," a senior government official told The Pioneer.

As many as 94,000 NRIs and foreign returned persons have reportedly landed in Punjab, since March 1. While the government maintains that most of these had been tracked and 30,000 placed under home quarantine, efforts to trace the

TOTAL OF 22 CORONA POSITIVE CASES, OUT OF 31 REPORTED FROM PUNJAB

remaining are being made.

Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh on Wednesday also maintained that giving highest importance to tracing all international passengers who arrived after March 10, 2020, direction have been issued that work should continue unabated.

The Chief Minister also directed the Health Department and the Police to ensure further monitoring of those already traced and placed under home quarantine.

For this, the revenue department staff and panchayat staff were being asked to trace such persons.

"This information is very important to curb the spread of corona virus in Punjab. If anyone is found to be hiding this information, the Government can register cases under relevant sections, against such persons," stated the government official.

The Government has made the nambardars and panchayat members accountable for reporting on all people, living in villages under their jurisdiction.

COVID-19 reaches the hills

25-year-old resident of Dugadda in Pauri district found infected

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Amid escalating condition of spread of COVID-19 infection in the country, a 25-year-old patient undergoing treatment at Base hospital Kotdwar (Pauri district) was found positive for the disease. With it the number of COVID-19 infected patients in Uttarakhand has risen to five.

The confirmation of presence of virus in the youth means that the dreaded disease

which hitherto was confined to Dehradun has reached to the mountainous area of the State.

As per the available information, the youth was working as a chef in Spain and had recently returned to his home located in the small town of Dugadda near Kotdwar in Pauri district. On March 16, he was admitted in Base hospital Kotdwar and his swab sample was taken for test on March 21.

The health department received reports of 30 samples on Wednesday and out of them 29 samples were found negative while one was found positive. The department has so far collected swab samples of 265 suspected patients for COVID-19 test. On Wednesday, swab samples of 28 suspected patients of the disease were sent to government medical college Haldwani for test of COVID-

19. Incidentally this centre is the only facility in the state for test of COVID-19.

On Wednesday the Patanjali Yogpeeth, Haridwar donated a RT PCR Machine to the Haldwani medical college which would increase its existing capacity to check sam-



Infected trainee IFS officer on path of recovery

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

In what can be termed as good news amid gloom generated by novel Coronavirus, the health department has declared that the sample of a trainee IFS officer who was positive for the disease and undergoing treatment at the isolation facility of the Government Doon Medical College (GDMC) hospital was found negative for COVID-19 on Wednesday. The Director General (DG) of health ser-

vices, Dr Amita Upreti said that the trainee would be kept in isolation for next 14 days and his second sample would be sent for COVID-19 test. As per the World Health Organisation (WHO) norms, any patient of COVID-19 would be declared free from disease only two when two of their samples are found negative. Three trainee officers of Indira Gandhi National Forest Academy (IGNFA) were found positive for COVID-19 after their return from tour of Spain.

ples of suspected patients of novel Coronavirus.

The mission director of National Health Mission (NHM) Yugal Kishore Pant said that 10 ventilators are being provided for the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of Mahatma Gandhi hospital in Dehradun for control of COVID-19 in the state.

He said that the health

department would soon receive 3 lakh triple layer masks, 40000 N-95 masks, 350 infrared thermometers and 1000 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) kits, 40000 gloves and 1000 ICU kits. Similarly 1.5 lakh tablets of hydroxy-chloroquine would be supplied to the doctors and paramedical staff as prophylactics.

U'khand Assembly passes Budget of ₹53,536.97 crore



CM TS Rawat undergoes screening conducted on all members and officials before entering the House on Wednesday

attitude shown by the opposition members who didn't brought any cut motions on the budget proposals. In view of the threat posed by the novel

Coronavirus (COVID-19), an understanding to hold the second part of budget session at Dehradun instead of Bharadwaj (Gairsain) and pass the budget proposals without discussions was reached between the government and opposition.

After the passage of the bill, the speaker Prem Chand Agarwal adjourned the house sine die. In the proceedings 45 members of treasury and opposition participated.

The proceedings of the house started amid unprecedented health care measures at 11 am on the day. Due to the threat of the COVID-19, the speaker had issued an advisory for the members, officers and the staff of the assembly on

coronavirus. The teams of health department deployed at the entrance of the house sanitised the members and all those who were present.

The members were checked with thermal scanners and they were provided with the masks. At the start of the proceedings, the chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat addressed the house in which he listed out the measures taken by his government to combat the spread of COVID-19 in the state.

The leader of the opposition (LoP), Indra Hridayesh in her speech promised the cooperation of opposition to the government in its efforts to fight the menace of Coronavirus. She however added that the arrangements at the level of government are needed to be improved in view of the lockdown of 21 days. Hridayesh said that the way in which the crowds are gathering at the shops during the three hours of relaxation clearly show that the purpose of lockdown is diluted.

She said that since the elected representatives have given ₹15 lakh from their spe-

COVID-19 threat forces the House to fast forward procedures

cial fund to the administration in fight against COVID-19, they have a right to monitor its spending. After it the budgets of different departments were passed by the house and in the end the house passed the finance bill with voice vote.

Department- Budget
Finance, tax and planning- ₹ 9,90,56,998 thousand
Education- ₹9,14,92,448 thousand
Transport- ₹59,24,818 thousand
Social welfare- ₹1,37,08,157 thousand
Agriculture and research- ₹ 1,04,81,078 thousand
Rural development- ₹ 2,31,30,970 thousand
PWD- ₹2,04,65,565 thousand
Industry- ₹44,22,229 thousand
Animal husbandry- ₹ 41,43,461 thousand
SC, ST welfare- ₹49,86,359 thousand
Labour and employment- ₹39,02,343 thousand
Vidhan Sabha- ₹7,76,244 thousand
Tourism- ₹28,54,524 Thousand
Irrigation and flood control- ₹ 1,27,92,109 thousand
Forest- ₹1,12,05,209 thousand

District admin takes help of Dharmshalas, Gurudwaras to feed homeless

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Dehradun district administration is taking the help of Dharmshalas, Gurudwaras and some Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to feed and provide shelter to homeless people in view of novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) in the city. Due to the state-wide lockdown, a number of homeless people are in danger of starving as they generally depend on restaurants, Dhabas or locals for food. Since such commercial units are shut and no one is allowed to step outside their homes, the homeless people are stranded alone struggling to survive. Therefore, the district administration has started to take the aid of Gurudwaras, Dharmshalas and some NGOs of the city to provide food and shelter to such people during the lockdown period. According to The city magistrate Anuradha Pal, the district administration contacted the management of several Dharmshalas, Gurudwaras and NGOs at different locations of the city for assistance who are currently helping in feeding several homeless people every day.

MCD risking health of sanitation workers, alleges ABSMS

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The state president of Akhil Bharatiya Safai Mazdoor Sangh (ABSMS) Vishal Birla alleged that amid the threat of novel Coronavirus (COVID-19), sanitation workers are not being provided with proper equipment and are being lodged in cramped conditions by Municipal Corporation of Dehradun (MCD). On the other hand, the chief municipal health officer Dr Kailash Joshi denied this allegation, stating that every sanitation worker is provided with all the necessary items.

In spite of the threat of COVID-19, the sanitation workers are still operating to maintain the hygiene in public areas. However, the sanitation workers are reportedly not being provided with the proper equipment for their own safety. According to the Birla, "While the government officers are wearing the N95 masks just to work in offices, the sanitation workers are given the cheapest masks with the life of four to six hours which they have to use for many days."

However, Dr Joshi stated that all the sanitation workers have been given all the necessary equipment like masks, gloves and sanitisers for their safety with instructions to regularly wash their hands properly after their work is done. Furthermore, Birla also averred that the MCD has deployed sanitation workers for spraying disinfectant in the city without any training which is causing them skin and other health problems.

He said, "The sanitation workers have no knowledge about the use of hypochlorite solution as a disinfectant. Several workers are having breathing and skin problems because of it as they do not know about the proper concentration of chemical in the water to use it. The workers have burnt and peeled skin on their back after carrying the small spray tanks on their backs. The MCD is putting the life of workers at risk." Alleging that the MCD has deployed sanitation workers from Bijnor (Uttar Pradesh), he said that the said workers are being kept in different Rain Basera buildings where more than 30 workers are kept in the same room. "While the government has prohibited more than five people on the roads, MCD is keeping sanitation workers like animals in a single room. Without any safety precautions or social distance, these workers can be the carriers of the coronavirus in the city," averred Birla.

Rebutting all the claims, Dr Joshi said that all the workers are given beds which are at least one metre apart from each other. Talking about the burned and peeled off skin of the sanitation workers due to disinfectant tanks, he said that the workers are provided with equipment like raincoats so that the chemical does not come in contact with their skin. He stated that MCD has provided all the safety equipments to workers and it is up to them to use them properly while they work.

Meanwhile, Birla said that he has written letters to chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat and cabinet minister Madan Kaushik about the safety of sanitation workers but so far no response has been received.

यदि स्वयं एवं परिवार को बचाना है, तो लॉक डाउन के दौरान घर से बाहर नहीं आना है

सबसे जरूरी बात

लॉक डाउन के दौरान आपको या आपके परिवार के सदस्यों को कोरोना वाइरस बीमारी के लक्षण जैसे- बुखार, खांसी, कफ, सांस लेने में तकलीफ आदि होने पर

उत्तराखण्ड राज्य नियंत्रण कक्ष CoVID-19, देहरादून

के टोल फ्री नम्बर

104 या 18001801200

अथवा दूरभाष नम्बर

0135-2609500

पर फोन करें अथवा

9412080544

पर Whatsapp करें

राष्ट्रीय स्वास्थ्य मिशन, चिकित्सा स्वास्थ्य एवं परिवार कल्याण विभाग, उत्तराखण्ड द्वारा जनहित में जारी

आइये, हम सब मिलकर COVID-19 को हरायें

खुद बचें और सबको बचायें

#IndiaFightsCorona

कोरोना वायरस संक्रमण से हमें सुरक्षित और स्वस्थ रखने के लिए 24 घंटे जो लोग काम कर रहे हैं, प्रदेश सरकार द्वारा उन सभी का जीवन बीमा किया जा रहा है। इसमें डॉक्टर, नर्स, पैरामेडिकल स्टाफ, पुलिस कर्मी, मीडिया कर्मी, अधिकारीगण, पर्यावरण मित्र, इत्यादि शामिल हैं।

वर्तमान में कोरोना वायरस (COVID-19) के संक्रमण के बचाव/ रोकथाम के दृष्टिगत शासकीय एवं अशासकीय/ निजी विद्यालयों में अध्ययनरत छात्र-छात्राओं से विद्यालयों के खुलने के बाद ही शुल्क लिया जाएगा।

आपका सुखद स्वास्थ्य हमारी प्राथमिकता है

त्रिवेन्द्र सिंह रावत
मुख्यमंत्री, उत्तराखण्ड

पत्रांक: 13/7/20 एवं लोपोत्पत्ति(विज्ञापन) दिनांक: 25.03.2020

PM: Endure hardship for 21 days to defeat corona

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday asked citizens to adopt a right "war strategy" against pandemic coronavirus by maintaining social distancing, assisting administration and health workers, and providing for poor, left stranded because of the lockdown. The PM appealed to public to "endure temporary difficulties" with determination to win the battle against the virulent disease in 21 days.

A day after announcing a three-week nationwide lockdown, the Prime Minister on Wednesday interacted with a section of citizens from his parliamentary constituency Varanasi via video conferencing.

In his address and interactions, the Prime Minister reiterated that none should "hold the illusion" that problem would not come in a crisis like the one that has been looming large across the globe.

"Main nahin keh sakta hoon ki sab kuch theek hai," Modi said and asked people to cooperate and assist administration and "not to put pressure on them and create negativity". He asked the people to cooperate, particularly with the doctors and health workers,



who he said were "working for 18 hours to save human lives" and are like Gods.

Modi said instead of allowing things to worsen beyond imagination, all should "endure difficulties for next 21 days and follow social distancing protocol with all seriousness."

He appealed to all social, cultural and religious organisations and public spirited people to pool in their efforts to help out poor who are suffering difficulties on account of the lockdown.

Modi said "Centre and states are putting their best to defeat the pandemic" but people need to chip in to win the war against the coronavirus. The Prime Minister said these are not "normal times."

Prime Minister also shared a WhatsApp number (9013151515), which has been created by the government to help people get answers to any of their queries relating to Coronavirus.

He asked people to observe the 9-day "navratras" by providing food to at least nine needy families and also to ani-

mals around as they may have been deprived of their daily food due to the corona-quarantine. "Conquer Corona with Karuna (win Corona virus battle by being kind)," he affirmed.

The Prime Minister, who took questions from people from Varanasi, said, "Aapda ko avsar mein badalna hoga" and pointed out that this has also offered an opportunity to people to be with their families and "humanity as such has come together to deal with calamity".

He praised children's contribution in providing positive messaging on social media and raising confidence of the all those engaged in coping with the situation across the country.

Answering a question on a section of people not adhering to general instructions and "misbehaving" with doctors, the Prime Minister said though most of the people across the country whole-heartedly participated in the "janata curfew" on Sunday, some may have deviated from the prescribed line. Modi said "bad behaviour against doctors or nurses" will not be tolerated and that he has asked the Home Ministry and Directors General of Police of states to take strict action against the miscreants.

EC's indelible ink to stamp quarantined

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission (EC) on Wednesday allowed the use of indelible ink, which it exclusively uses to mark the index finger during voting, to stamp the hand of people who have been advised to stay under home quarantine for coronavirus. The EC took the decision after a suo motu review against the backdrop of various State Governments having already started using the indelible ink.

The EC, however, clarified that the indelible ink mark is normally expected to last for three days when applied on the skin but lasts for a few weeks on the fingernail till the nail grows out. Usually, people are kept under home quarantine for a period of 14 days. People in several States like Delhi, Maharashtra, Kerala and Karnataka are putting stamps on the back of the palm of those put under home quarantine.

The EC made it clear that the authorities should not use indelible ink on any finger on the left hand of any persons and it should not be used for any other purpose. In a statement, it said,

"Due to extraordinary circumstances because of COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission has reviewed its

decision suo-moto and it is decided to allow usage of Indelible Ink on persons for stamping for home quarantine by health authorities with the conditions."

"As per the provisions of Rule 49K of the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961, the left forefinger of electors is required to be marked with indelible ink at the polling stations before the elector is allowed to vote. Subrule (4) of the said Rule 49K provides that in cases where the elector does not have forefinger on the left hand, the ink is to be marked on his left hand, and if he does not have any finger on his left hand, the ink is to be marked on his right forefinger. Hence, concerned authorities shall be instructed not to use the Indelible Ink on any finger on the left hand of any persons," read the statement.

"The Ministry may standardise mark and location on the body where the mark has to be applied so that it does not affect the conduct of any poll. The authorities concerned should be instructed to maintain the record of the persons to whom Indelible Ink is applied. The authorities should also be instructed to ensure that the Indelible Ink shall not be used for any other purpose," the EC said.

Armed Forces to enforce social distancing at headquarters

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With the objective of social distancing to prevent spread of coronavirus pandemic, the Armed forces have decided to have bare minimum staff at their respective headquarters here. While the Army started the process on Wednesday, the IAF and Navy will implement the orders from Thursday onwards.

Meanwhile, in the national effort to look after Indians coming from pandemic affected countries, the Army on Wednesday received another batch of 273 citizens, mostly pilgrims from Iran, at its medical facility at Jodhpur. At present, the Army is looking after nearly 1,200 Indians in its various centres all over the country.

As regards the closure of the Army Headquarters, officials said here the global lock-down has affected and significantly reduced the office work be it international cooperation, training events, postings and courses besides many such other functions. The critical appointments and which includes almost 40 per cent of the office goes continued to work from home. Emergency staff including, duty official, medical fraternity, drivers, cooks and other support staff continued to work at the headquarters.

Army Chief General M M Naravane last week had

reviewed the preparations for meeting the challenge of coronavirus and decided that at least 35 percent officers and 50 per cent other ranks will work from home at the Army Headquarters till March 31. The second batch will work from home from March 31 onwards. The IAF and Navy Headquarters here will also implement more or less the same system of working with bare minimum staff, they said.

Giving details about the ongoing efforts to look after the Indians evacuated from foreign countries, officials said the batch of 273 pilgrims from Iran included 149 women and six children. The evacuees, who were transferred on IA Flights from Delhi to Jodhpur were screened on arrival at Jodhpur airport and then taken to the Army medical facility which has been designed isolation as well as mental and physical wellness which includes various activities including sports.

At present, the Army is operating medical facilities for evacuees at Manesar, Jaisalmer and Jodhpur with evacuees from Iran, Italy and Malaysia lodged in these camps. Evacuees from Wuhan and Japan have already been discharged after full protocol was observed. Over 1,200 evacuees, medical staff and air crew have so far been catered to

in these facilities. In addition, more Army medical facilities at Jhansi, Binnaguri and Gaya are kept at standby with an additional collective capacity of 1,600 in addition & those activated already. This does not include the additional capacity created and kept ready, they said.

Moreover, the Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) has designated 285 beds for isolation wards in handling Coronavirus (COVID-19) cases. Forty beds have been earmarked in hospitals at Vehicle Factory Jabalpur, thirty beds each at Metal and Steel Factory Ishapore, Gun and Shell Factory Cossipore, Ammunition Factory Khadki, Ordnance Factory Kanpur, Ordnance Factory Khamaria, Ordnance Factory Ambajhari, 25 beds at Ordnance Factory Ambernath and twenty beds each at Heavy Vehicle Factory Avadi and Ordnance Factory Medak. Setting up of Isolation ward and corresponding number of beds in OFB hospitals has been done as per Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) instructions in the Cabinet Secretary's meeting on Tuesday, officials said. The OFB is also trying to produce personal protection equipment and face masks as per pilot order quantity placed by HLL Lifecare Limited (HLL), a PSU under MoHFW.

Fresh push to strengthen rural banking

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

To strengthen the rural banking in the wake of the corona pandemic, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Wednesday, approved the continuation of the process of recapitalisation of Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) by providing minimum regulatory capital to them for the next financial year 2020-21.

The RRBs were facing problem to maintain minimum capital to Risk weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR) of 9%, as per the regulatory norms prescribed by the Reserve Bank of India and this decision will help to overcome the minimum capital keeping crisis.

As per this decision, the Centre will pay Rs.670 crore (50%), subject to the condition that the release of Central Government's share will be contingent upon the release of the proportionate share by the sponsor banks, said Union

Minister Prakash Javadekar detailing the package. This scheme will make the RRBs financially stronger and will enable them to meet the credit requirement in the rural areas, he added.

"As per RBI guidelines, the RRBs have to provide 75% of their total credit under PSL (Priority Sector Lending). RRBs are primarily catering to the credit and banking requirements of agriculture sector and rural areas with focus on small and marginal farmers, micro & small enterprises, rural artisans and weaker sections of the society. In addition, RRBs also provide lending to micro/small enterprises and small entrepreneurs in rural areas. With the recapitalization support to augment CRAR, RRBs would be able to continue their lending to these categories of borrowers under their PSL target, and thus, continue to support rural livelihoods," said the statement issued by Government.

The Cabinet also approved

the taking up of construction of Aligarh-Harduauganj flyover by Ministry of Railways. The total length of the railway flyover will be 22 kilometre. The project is expected to be completed by 2024-25 at a cost of over ₹1,285 crore. "At Aligarh Junction Station a branch line Bareilly-Aligarh terminates. The trains coming from Howrah side and going to Harduauganj/Bareilly cross Howrah-New Delhi main route, which is busiest section of Indian Railways. Due to heavy traffic there is no path available for surface crossing of loaded goods trains coming from Howrah side and going to Harduauganj/Bareilly. This results into heavy detention of trains at Aligarh Junction.

"This location has become a bottleneck and is affecting the train working badly causing delays and detentions and also reducing the wagon turn round. Flyover at Aligarh going over the existing Delhi-Howrah main line is an operational necessity and is essen-

tially required to remove the bottleneck to traffic movement. By construction of flyover connecting Aligarh to Harduauganj the delays and detentions will be avoided," said Government.

The Union Cabinet also approved continuation of Rebate of State and Central Taxes and Levies (RoSCTL) from 1st April, 2020 onward until such time that the scheme is merged with Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP). "RoSCTL scheme for apparel and made-ups will be continued with effect from 1st April, 2020 without any change in scheme guidelines and rates as notified by Ministry of Textiles till such time that the RoSCTL is merged with RoDTEP. Continuation of RoSCTL beyond 31st March, 2020 is expected to make the textile sector competitive by rebating all taxes/levies which are currently not being rebated under any other mechanism," said Government.

Cong seeks implementation of Nyay Yojana

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Wednesday demanded the implementation of the party-proposed Nyay Yojana (minimum income guarantee scheme) to help the poor families in the country to cope with the situation arising out of the nationwide lockdown.

Former party chief Rahul Gandhi said those who survive on daily wages need immediate help and support through direct cash transfers into their accounts and free rations. "Delaying this will cause widespread devastation & chaos," Rahul said.

Asserting it supports the lockdown, the Congress in a statement, however, said it was "deeply disappointed" by the lack of a coherent strategy or a clear way ahead on the part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"Dear PM, India will adhere to the lockdown. But what steps did the government take to tackle the corona pandemic

despite early warnings in February," Congress chief spokesman Randeep Surjewala asked.

In a series of tweets, addressed to the prime minister, Surjewala said, "The Congress demands relief package for framers... fair price for crops, indebtedness relief and suspension of all recoveries from farmers."

"Dear PM, need of the hour is to implement forthwith 'minimum income guarantee scheme (Nyay)' mooted by Rahul ji and Congress. Please transfer Rs 7,500 to every Jan Dhan A/C, PM Kisan A/C & every Pension A/C to tide over nutrition needs of 21 days and give free PDS ration," he said.

Ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the Congress had proposed, and promised to implement the Nyay scheme if voted to power.

In his remarks, a day after Modi announced a complete nationwide lockdown for 21 days to contain the spread of

COVID-19, the Congress leader also said, "we will rise together as a nation & defeat COVID2019. We stand with the lockdown but are deeply disappointed by the lack of coherent strategy or a clear 'way ahead' on your part."

"Please remember, Trying times are true test of leadership. Is government ready to rise up & deliver," he asked.

"The Congress demands a comprehensive package for daily wagers, MGNREGA workers, factory workers, unorganised workers, fishermen and farm labourers," Surjewala said.

He asked when the doctors, nurses and health workers will have adequate protection and how many isolation beds and ventilators are available in the country and where.

"How will daily wagers, labourers, MGNREGA workers, Factory workers, Unorganised workers, Fishermen, Farmers & Farm Labour sustain for 21 days," he asked.

Asserting that indebted-

ness relief to farmers was the only way forward in these testing times as they are the "backbone" of country's economy, he said there should be a moratorium on farmer's loans and recoveries and the government should ensure procurement of crops at MSP.

Rahul also stated that India is fighting a war against the Coronavirus but the question is how can we minimise casualties in this war. "Isolate the virus and block its escape routes. Massively expand testing to identify and treat those who are infected. Create massive emergency field hospitals in particularly in urban areas with full ICU capability to provide care to patients," Rahul demanded.

Rahul Gandhi further said many industries are struggling. "Act quickly by announcing tax breaks & financial support to prevent massive job losses & reassure business owners that the Government will support them through this crisis," he said.

MPs to use MPLADS fund for medical testing to contain virus spread

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Members of Parliament (MPs) can now use Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) fund for medical testing and other facilities required to detect and contain coronavirus. After this, Union Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan, and Ram Gopal Verma have donated RS one crore each from the MPLAD funds for coronavirus treatment. The move follows appeals by some MPs to use MP LAD for coronavirus treatment. As per earlier guidelines, MPLADS funds can be used only for permanent work.

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation then issued fresh guidelines on Tuesday allowing the use of MPLAD fund for the purpose. As per the amendments to MPLADS Guidelines, MPs can now utilise funds under MPLADS for procurement of infra-Red thermometers (Non-contact) to enable doctors and medical personnel to record and track a person's temperature.

The ministry, based on the requests of MPs, has decided that district authorities may utilise MPLADS funds for medical testing, screening and other facilities required to detect and contain COVID-19, an order said. It has been decided to grant one-time dispensation under MPLADS fund to buy face masks, gloves and sanitisers for medical personnel, coronavirus testing kits,

thermal imaging scanners or cameras for railway stations and airports, and any other medical equipment to check COVID-19, among others, the ministry said in the order.

"Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) Kits to keep the medical personnel well-protected and enable them to function efficiently by minimising the risk of transmission," the order stated. It also stated that with the help of these funds, thermal imaging scanners or cameras for railway stations, airports and other points of entry which allows detecting of temperature from a safe distance can also be purchased.

"Corona testing kits approved by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, ICU ventilator and isolation/quarantine wards within their approved facilities and face masks, gloves, and sanitisers for medical personnel can be procured," the circular stated. The Government has also allowed procurement of any other medical equipment recommended by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for prevention, control, and treatment of COVID-19.

Vivek Tankha, a Rajya Sabha member from Madhya Pradesh, of the Congress thanked the prime minister and the government of India for relaxation in MPLADS rules permitting MPs to use public funds in the war against coronavirus. "This battle is everyone's responsibility," Tankha said. He said the parliamentarians will now be able to help the administration in providing assistance to the needy ones.

India terms terror attack on Kabul gurdwara diabolical

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Wednesday condemned the terror attack on a gurdwara in Kabul terming it "diabolical" at the time of Covid-19 crisis even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the killings have saddened him and expressed condolences to the families of the deceased. The attack claimed at least 27 lives.

In a strong reaction to the incident, the ministry of external affairs while describing it as a "cowardly attack," said India stands ready to extend "all possible assistance to the affected families of the Hindu and Sikh community of Afghanistan."

Stating this in an official

statement, the ministry also said "We convey our sincerest condolences to the immediate family members of the deceased and wish speedy recovery to the injured. Such cowardly attacks on the places of religious worship of the minority community, especially at this time of COVID 19 pandemic, is reflective of the diabolical mindset of the perpetrators and their backers."

Besides the Prime Minister, Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Singh Puri and Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh also expressed sorrow. "Suicide attack on a Gurudwara Sahib in Kabul needs to be strongly condemned. These killings are

a grim reminder of atrocities that continue to be inflicted upon religious minorities in some countries and the urgency with which their lives & religious freedom have to be safeguarded," Puri tweeted.

The Punjab Chief Minister called the incident "tragic and unfortunate" and asked Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani to "find out the perpetrators and look after our people." He also tweeted "Horrific news coming from Kabul where a barbaric terror attack happened in the Gurudwara Guru Har Rai. It's extremely tragic and unfortunate. Request President @AshrafGhani ji to find out the perpetrators and look after our people."

NIA chargesheets 1 for ₹2.2 cr transfer

Feb 2019 sophisticated arms interdiction case of Bihar

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The NIA on Wednesday chargesheeted an accused Santosh Kumar for money transfers to the tune of ₹2.2 crore in the February 2019 sophisticated arms interdiction case of Bihar.

Northeast insurgent group NSCN (IM) was involved in supplying Under Barrel Grenade Launcher (UBGL) and AK 47 assault rifles to banned Naxal outfit Tritiya Prastuti Samiti (TPC) in Jharkhand.

The National Investigation Agency filed the chargesheet against Kumar under various Indian Penal Code Sections

besides those of the Arms Act and Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act at a designated court in Patna on Wednesday.

The accused Santosh Kumar has a number of aliases including Santosh Singh and Umesh Kumar and is a resident of village Horil Chappra under district Ara, Bhojpur, Bihar.

The case relates to interdiction of highly sophisticated weapons and ammunition on February 2, 2019, by Bihar Police, including Under Barrel Grenade Launchers (UBGL), AK series rifle and large number of 5.56 x 45 mm ammunition from three persons---Suraj

Prasad, Varenegnow Kahorngam and Cleanson Kabo travelling in a SUV.

"Investigations found that accused Santosh Kumar was one of prime members of the weapons trafficking network and their supply to Naxals in Jharkhand.

He had extensively used banking and hawala channels for transfer of funds for procurement of weapons and such transactions worth more Rs 2.2 Crores have been identified during investigation," the NIA said in a statement.

The agency said investigation has established that a large number of illegal sophisticated prohibited

Allottees under Central Govt General Pool Residential get suo-moto retention

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has allowed suo-moto retention for the period from March 17 to May 31 for all allottees under the Central Government General Pool Residential

Accommodation (CGG-PRA) Rules, who were/are expected to vacate or shift their houses. This relaxation will be applicable to all cases of retention and change of accommodation under GPRA Rules. "The Retention will be suo moto and allottees need not apply for it. The suo-moto retention period will be on the payment of licence fees as applicable to the allottee under these rules. No damage will be charged for this period," the ministry said in a statement.

According to the ministry, these relaxations will be given to such allottees also where (s)he has become unauthorized occupant of government accommodation before March 17. However, in such cases, after the retention period of 75 days up to May 31, the damages at telegraphic rates, as was continuing prior to this period, will be resumed.

The Ministry has been receiving calls from various allottees of General Pool Residential Accommodations (GPRA), who were/are due to vacate their flats/houses and are not able to do so in the light of the advisories regarding social distancing issued by Ministry of

Health and Family Welfare (MoH&FW) under the current global Corona Virus Pandemic (COVID-19).



weapons and ammunition were supplied by an accused Ningkhan Sangtam, a self styled Major of NSCN(IM) through illegal arms dealers of Bihar to Bhikhan Ganju, a Zonal Commander of TPC, a Naxal terrorist gang, proscribed

August 3 and November 22 last year.

Further investigation against co-conspirators and other suspects including absconding accused Bhikhan Ganju is continuing, added the agency.

NPR, Census updating process deferred due to virus lockdown

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In view of the 21-day lockdown, the Union Home Ministry on Wednesday postponed the first phase of Census and National Population Register (NPR) updating process. The Home Ministry said that the population enumeration process is postponed till further orders.

"The Census 2021 was scheduled to be conducted in two phases, viz., (a) Phase I i.e. House listing & Housing Census during April-September, 2020 and (b) Phase II i.e. Population Enumeration during 9th to 28th February, 2021. The update of NPR was also proposed to be done along with the Phase I of Census 2021 in all the States/UTs, except Assam.

"Keeping in view the above, the first phase of Census 2021 and update of NPR, which was to begin on various dates decided by the State/UT governments beginning 1st April 2020 and various related field activities, are postponed until further orders," said the Home Ministry in a statement. There has been continuing protests against the proposed NPR exercise, besides the Citizenship Amendment Act, both by some opposition parties as also some Opposition-ruled States as it was being billed as a precursor to the Centre's National Register of Citizens (NRC) move, especially against the backdrop of some new queries being incorporated in it.

15 MORE TEST +VE IN MAHA TOTAL CASES MOUNT TO 122

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

With no let-up in the continued increase in the confirmed coronavirus cases in Maharashtra, another 15 more persons tested positive for the pandemic on Tuesday, taking the total number of infected persons in the State to 122.

On a day when Maharashtra celebrated its traditional new year day "Gudi Padwa" in a low-key manner, the State witnessed an alarming jump in the total number of people testing positive for coronavirus, a jump from the earlier 107 cases to 122 cases.

In what came as a relief, the first two patients -- who had earlier tested positive for Covid-19 -- were discharged from Pune's Naidu Hospital after they recovered fully. The two, who are a married couple from Pune, tested negative twice during the follow-up period. The two were presented flowers by the in-charge doctors when they were discharged from the hospital on Tuesday.

Of the fresh Covid-19 positive cases reported on Tuesday, Mumbai accounted for a maximum seven positive cases, while five persons from a same family from Islampur town in Sangli district in Western Maharashtra. There was one case each from Kalyan-Dombivli, Navi Mumbai and Parel.

The Kasturba Hospital in Mumbai, which is the nodal hospital dealing with Covid-19, reported four infected cases in the morning, while five more persons tested positive for pandemic in the afternoon. Three of the four infected reported from Kasturba Hospital in the morning were that of persons with history of international

travel, while one person contracted the pandemic through "a close contact".

In what came as a cause of concern for the authorities, all the five members of a family who have been diagnosed positive for Covid-19 had contracted Coronavirus through contacts. "...In Sangli 5 people from one family are identified as positive due to contacts," State Health Minister Rajesh Tope tweeted. In another tweet, Tope said that fourteen patients had recovered from the illness and were in the process of being discharged from the hospitals.

Significantly enough, the total number of infected cases has nearly doubled during the last five days from 64 and 122.

Currently, as many as 14,502 people are in home quarantine, while 932 people are in institutional quarantine in the state.

There have so far been four Covid-19 deaths in the state. On Monday evening, a 65-year-old COVID-19 patient died at Kasturba Hospital in Mumbai on Monday evening. Earlier on Sunday night, Filipino died at a private hospital late on Sunday night. The coronavirus had claimed first life in the state on March 17, when a 63-year-old disease-infected had died at the Kasurba Hospital on March 17. Subsequently, another 63-year-old male patient, who had been admitted to private hospital in Mumbai died on March 19.

Addressing the people across the state through social media, chief minister Uddhav Thackeray all Maharashtra a traditional Marathi new year on the occasion of "Gudi Padwa".

Likening the ongoing spread of Coronavirus to the

world war, Uddhav said: "This is a World War. During war you do not get out of your safe zone which in this case is your home. We literally do not know where the enemy (CoronaVirus) is going to attack us from. I hope people have now started understanding the gravity of the situation".

Making appeal to the citizens not to indulge in panic buying, the chief minister said: "We have enough stock of essential commodities and food grains, do not worry. In any case, shops selling essential goods & services will not be shut. So, I appeal to you to not panic".

"The positive that we can take out of the current situation is we have more time to spend with our family which we all agree that we had lost on our way. This feeling of togetherness & spending time with parents, children, grandparents, grand children is inexpressible," Uddhav said.

Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, state Congress President and Revenue Minister Balasaheb Thorat, Health Minister Rajesh Tope appealed to people to celebrate Gudi Padwa indoors exercising all

precautions in view of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Unlike in the past, the Maharashtra celebrated the festival by hoisting the auspicious 'gudi' in the confines of homes with only family members in attendance.

Meanwhile, State Public Works Department Minister Ashok Chavan said that as precautionary measure, his ministry had readied 22,118 beds to accommodate Coronavirus patients and it could increase the bed capacity to 55,707.

In a news released put out by his ministry, Chavan said: "The people need not panic as the situation in the state is very much under control. We have made all kind arrangements for extreme situations that they might arise. As part of the exercise, the Public Works Department (PWD) has made available 22,118 beds in hundreds of our buildings. They include rest houses, hostels and new built government buildings which are not being used currently".

"The places where we have made bed arrangements have drinking water and electricity facilities. These places can be used as centres to quarantine patients with Coronavirus symptoms. They can also be used as make-shift hospitals," Chavan said.

Printing, circulation of newspapers to resume in Maha from April 1

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MUMBAI

The people across Maharashtra, who have been going without newspapers since March 23 in view of the coronavirus situation, will have to wait till April 1, before the publication and distribution of the newspapers resume.

In a joint issued after the representatives of the publishers and distributors met him on Tuesday in connection with the difficulties faced by them in the distribution of newspapers, Maharashtra Industries Minister Subhash Desai said: "As decided at the meeting, newspapers will resume publication and distribution from April 1."

Kerala may opt for online distribution of spirits

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

Whatever the court disposes, the Government proposes is the new dictum in the State of Kerala. Last week saw the Kerala High Court dismissing a petition filed by a private citizen who had pleaded with the court to direct the Government to ensure the availability of liquor through online platforms so that tipplers need not stand in long queues for hours to get their daily quota of spirits.

Jyothish, a Cochin-based youth had approached the judiciary in the backdrop of the coronavirus and the medical directives regarding the social distancing.

His contention was that if the Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL), as the stuff is known in this Southern State, is sold through in-line platforms like Amazon or Flipkart, the tipplers need not stand in

the queues in front of the Kerala State Beverages Corporation (BEVCO for short) counters, the State monopoly in liquor business, exposing themselves to potential attack by coronavirus. He also pointed out that if liquor is sold through the online platforms, the State need not surrender or sacrifice the revenue accrued through the sector.

But the judge who heard the petition came down heavily on Jyothish by giving him a sermon on the responsibilities of the court, Government and the citizen. To express the displeasure of the court towards the petitioner for filing such pleas, the judge ordered him to pay Rs 50,000 as fine which would be credited into the Chief Minister's Disaster Relief Fund. The State Cabinet which met on Wednesday morning decided to shut down all the BEVCO outlets in view of the national lock out declared by the Centre on Tuesday night.

This has dampened the spirits of millions of tipplers across the State, which has a reputation as the largest guzzler of liquor in the country.

But sources in the Department of Excise said the Government was studying the possibilities of making liquor available through online platforms. Officials pointed out that the Excise Minister T P Ramakrishnan had launched a project of on-line booking of liquor to help the tipplers from the hassles of standing in serpentine queues in front of BEVCO.

Consumerfed, the apex body of all consumer cooperatives in the State too had made elaborate arrangements for the on line booking of spirits through on line agencies. A final declaration about the new venture may be out shortly as the unprecedented closure of 'watering holes' has dampened the spirits of veteran tipplers.

Lockdown forces 1.7L Infosys techies to work from home

Bengaluru: A lockdown in many countries the world over has forced 1.7 lakh Infosys techies to work from home to ensure business continuity, a senior executive said on Wednesday.

About 70 per cent of our 2.4 lakh global workforce is working from home to avoid being affected by coronavirus," Infosys Chief Operating Officer U.B. Pravin Rao told IANS in an email.

In 46 countries, Infosys employs more than 2.4 lakh employees, serving 1,384 customers. The 70 per cent workforce translates to 1.7 lakh employees.

Calling coronavirus pandemic an uncertain and testing time for the company, Rao said both employees and clients are of utmost importance. "We are doing all we can to be there for those employees and their families that need our sup-

port the most, while prioritizing the safety and wellbeing of our entire global workforce," he said.

Though Rao did not declare that all business travel has been suspended, he said the company has restricted travel as appropriate after monitoring the situation across countries.

To facilitate so many geeks to operate from home, the IT major has arranged for laptops, relocated desktops to home environments, customised personal devices for official use, arranged high speed broadband internet connectivity at residences and improved virtual private network bandwidth. Admitting that all work cannot be executed from home, especially, business critical functions, Rao said the company has prepared teams to deliver account-specific business continuity plans. IANS

Four more test coronavirus +ve in Kashmir

Total cases rise to 11 in J&K, normal life hit

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Normal life came to a standstill in Jammu & Kashmir on the first day of the 21-day long nation-wide lockdown imposed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

Meanwhile, with four new fresh cases testing positive from Bandipore, the authorities in Kashmir valley stepped up their efforts to break the chain. Appeals were made to all those who may have skipped screening and deliberately hid foreign

travel history after landing in Srinagar.

Spokesman of Jammu & Kashmir Government, Rohit Kansal Wednesday evening tweeted, "4 more persons, all from Bandipore, tested positive on Wednesday. Preliminary findings suggest they were close contacts of Srinagar patient who tested positive on Tuesday. All 5 reported to have participated together in religious event".

So far, 11 cases tested positive (10 active positive and 01 recovered) in Jammu & Kashmir. At a high level meeting chaired by Chief Secretary BVR Subhramanyam, Financial Commissioner Health and Medical Education Atal Dullo informed that the two confirmed cases of Coronavirus

have been now tested negative after following due protocol in Jammu.

On the other hand, health department authorities quarantined at least eight contacts of a religious preacher, who had stayed with them in Teli Basti area of Bari Brahmana in Samba district of Jammu on his return from Andaman Nicobar Islands.

According to local contacts of the religious preacher, he arrived here in Teli Basti area on March 13, participated in religious events and returned to Kashmir valley on March 14. The samples of all those eight persons who came in contact with him have been sent for testing in GMC, Jammu

Meanwhile, on the first day of the nine day long Navratra festival, main doors of famous temples remained shut

and devotees stayed at home. Special prayers were only offered by the priests in famous temples of Mata Vaishno Devi, Raghunath temple, Ranbireswar temple, Kali Mata temple located inside Bahu Fort in Jammu.

Shops, supplying essential items, remained open while markets remained shut and roads were a deserted look.

In old city area of Jammu, policemen were deployed outside the main streets and concertina wires were spread to prevent movement of people in the walled city area.

Police teams were deputed on ground zero to patrol thickly populated areas. Complete lock down was witnessed across Kathua, Samba, Udhampur, Reasi, Ramban, Doda, Kishtwar, Rajouri and Poonch districts of Jammu

Corona crisis: Didi wants Central package for States

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Even as Bengal entered the third day of lockdown, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday slammed the Centre for not doing enough to help her State tackle the coronavirus crisis and demanded an immediate package of ₹1,500 crore. "It is very difficult to tackle such a huge crisis with our limited resources" and the Centre should come out with adequate financial packages for all the corona-affected States, the Chief Minister said while making her own claim for Rs 1,500 crore.

"We had made the same request at the all-party meeting two days back. The Centre should announce a special financial package for the state in the current situation," she said.

Reminding how her Government had already created Rs 200 crore fund to tackle the initial spell of the crisis Banerjee appealed to the corporate, industrialist, organizations and well-off citizens including the non-resident Indians to generously donate in the designated State Emergency Relief Fund. Banerjee who has earned special acclaim for her inspiring performance in handling the crisis used a white board to personally draw diagrams showing citizens how to maintain physical distance while visiting markets for daily essentials.

Saying that the total lockdown under National Disaster Management Act had been imposed by the Central Government not in consultation with the States the Chief Minister said the State's still had right to take decisions on certain things while implementing

the Act.

Accordingly "we will hold a review meeting on March 31 before giving relaxation in the ongoing lockdown," adding her Government was fully aware of the approaching Bengali New Year's Day on April 15. "Like the New Year in Punjab and some other States we too have our New Year coming on April 15 and for that we will review the situation on March 31 on how some relaxation can be given if at all it can be given," she said.

Directing the police not to stop the online delivery service of essential items and also the vegetable vendors and staff of medicine shops as also the farmers who were working in fields Banerjee said "the police have been instructed to strictly go by the rules and ensure the lockdown but with a human face." If required, passes should be issued to people employed for home delivery services, she said.

Warning that strong action would be taken against policemen who would stop people involved in essential services Banerjee said "Social distancing doesn't mean social isolation." The Chief Minister also warned of stern action if doctors, nurses and health workers are harassed by their neighbours or landlords.

Meanwhile, BCCI president Sourav Ganguli have come out with a proposal offering a part of the Eden Gardens as a quarantine centre for suspected Corona cases, sources in the Cricket Association of Bengal said adding a proposal to this effect has already been sent to the State Government.

FIRST DEATH IN TAMIL NADU 54-yr-old coronavirus patient dies

PTI ■ MADURAI

A 54-year-old man infected with the coronavirus died at a hospital here in the early hours of Wednesday, Tamil Nadu's first recorded death due to the disease, State Health Minister C Vijayabaskar said. The man had a medical history of prolonged illness with uncontrolled diabetes.

"Despite our best efforts, the COVID19 positive patient at MDU, Rajaji Hospital, passed away... he had medical history of prolonged illness with steroid dependent COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), uncontrolled diabetes with

hypertension," the Health Minister tweeted. The Minister also cautioned that COVID-19 with co-morbidity is a high risk condition.

"Having known the impact of virus infections, I've been telling in my press meets that COVID19 with co-morbidity like uncontrollable diabetes & hypertension, immunosuppression are high risk conditions. If anyone in ur family has such conditions be extra cautious, pls," he added in another tweet.

On Tuesday, the total number of COVID-19 cases in the state rose to 18 after six more people, including three women, tested positive for the coronavirus.

According to the Union Health Ministry, the number of coronavirus cases on Wednesday rose to 562 with nine deaths. This does not include the Tamil Nadu death. The State Government had announced a lockdown from March 24-31 as part of its efforts to stem the spread of the deadly virus.

On Tuesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the entire country would be under lockdown for three weeks starting midnight. The Tamil Nadu Government had also said it will impose section 144 of Cr.PC, which prohibits the Assembly more than five persons in public places to implement the lockdown.

TN asks Modi for ₹4,000 cr to combat virus

Chennai: Tamil Nadu Chief Minister K. Palaniswami on Wednesday asked the Central Government for Rs 4,000 crore to combat the coronavirus pandemic in the State.

In a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the text of which was released to the media here, Palaniswami requested special assistance of Rs 4,000 crore and other financial measures be considered expeditiously.

Citing the hit taken by the government revenues due to coronavirus and the additional expenditure, he also requested Modi to relax the fiscal deficit limits of three per cent of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) for fiscal 2019-20 and 2020-21 as one time measure.

"Further, additional borrowing of 33 per cent above the level permitted for the fiscal year 2019-20 may be allowed for 2020-21 to enable the states to meet the additional expenditure requirements," Palaniswami said the state needs Rs 3,000 crore for the augmentation and strengthening of the

health infrastructure and for essential equipment, medicines and for preventive public health measures at this crucial juncture. He said Tamil Nadu is vulnerable to coronavirus because of the large number of international passengers who transit through its four international airports and four major ports and as it also adjoins states where the outbreak has been initially more severe.

"Hence, while immediate measures have been taken, we will need to prepare for a significantly higher case load in the coming weeks and months," Palaniswami told Modi. According to Palaniswami, more resources are needed to face the projected number of cases effectively including through the establishment of isolation hospitals, quarantine centres, supply of hospital equipment including hospital beds, ventilators and personal protection equipments (PPE), medicines and testing kits and disinfection equipment and chemicals. IANS

Workers at WB's main Covid-19 facility protest lack of protection

IANS ■ KOLKATA

Complaining of inadequate supply of masks, sanitisers and personal protection equipment (PPEs), nurses and health workers of ID Hospital, Beliaghata — the epicentre for treatment of coronavirus in Kolkata — on Wednesday staged a demonstration and threatened to go on mass leave if their demands were not met.

The demonstrators laid siege on the office of the superintendent and the principal of the teaching hospital, the state's primary referral facility for infectious diseases, expressing fears that they could themselves contract the disease 'any moment' as the protocol for their personal safety norms were not being maintained.

"We are working day in and day out. But we are not getting adequate medical equipment. Covid-19 is such an infectious disease. But we haven't been provided adequate number of masks, sanitisers and PPEs. Even there is no drinking water and food in the canteen," said a protester.

"If our demands are not met, we have to consider going on mass leaves or strikes," said another.

The nurses also alleged that while their counterparts in other hospitals were being given lift and drop facilities, these have been denied to them.

"As a result, we are facing lot of harassment while returning home from hospital amid the lockdown," said a nursing staff.

Sources in the state health department said the grievances of the nurse and other health workers of ID Hospital were being looked into and proper steps would be taken.

Bhilwara's 3 new cases raise Raj total to 36

Jaipur: Bhilwara, the textile

city of Rajasthan, is fighting the tough Covid-19 battle with the number of people testing positive reaching 16 on Wednesday, making it the highest count from a single city in the state.

Four new coronavirus positive cases were reported on Wednesday, taking the total number of cases to 36 in the state, said Additional Chief Secretary Rohit Kumar Singh.

While two healthcare personnel tested positive in Bhilwara, the third positive case had been of a person who came in contact with a doctor who tested coronavirus positive, while the fourth was from Jodhpur, Singh said.

Bhilwara was declared the epicentre of Covid-19 in Rajasthan soon after the six healthcare personnel tested Covid-19 positive last week. And since then, the town has been undergoing the largest screening exercise with all its borders sealed and the residents facing curfew for the past five days. Till Tuesday, 13 people had tested positive for Covid-19 here.

Intensive search is being conducted in the city to locate active cases. 300 teams are conducting house-to-house survey on the basis of polio microplans. The second phase of survey will be started soon.

During March 19-24, around 70,000 families were surveyed and over 300,000 people screened in Bhilwara. Over 30 lakh people would be screened till March 27 in the Bhilwara district, said Chief Medical and Health Officer

Mushtak Khan.

He said over 38,000 houses had been screened and the remaining 25,000 would be screened in the next two days. The second and third phase of screening would be conducted in areas that reported Covid-19 positive cases, he added.

Calling it a tough process, Khan said potential carriers could have spread all over the district.

Till Tuesday, over 5,000 people had been isolated at home, and 38 were admitted to hospital isolation wards soon after three doctors and nine healthcare workers from the city's Bangad Hospital tested Covid-19 positive.

According to Bhilwara city residents, the spread chain must have begun when a person with breathing issues admitted himself to the hospital, few days back, hiding his travel history.

He then travelled to Jaipur and visited two hospitals. There too his travel history was not checked. He was not tested for coronavirus even after he showed symptoms of pneumonia. He died on March 13.

But the doctor and his team that treated him in Bhilwara didn't share any concern and travelled to Udaipur on Holi. However, a few days after, they isolated themselves. Soon 12 people from Bhilwara tested Covid-19 positive, which included the doctor's wife.

By Tuesday, the administration set up screening centre for all the symptomatic and contacts of the Bangad Hospital, the epicentre of COVID -19 positive cases in Bhilwara. IANS

Lockdown hits Nav Durga festivities in Agra, Mathura

Agra: The festivities associated with the Hindu New Year and Nav Durga beginning Wednesday, were badly hit in the Taj city and the neighbouring Mathura district which has seen a mass exodus of pilgrims due to COVID-19 in the last few days.

The religious shrines and temples in Vrindavan and Goverdhan were deserted. Police effectively prevented movement of vehicles and groups of devotees. Barricades have been raised at all entry points, local officials said.

Bharatiya Janata Party MP Hema Malini made a fervent appeal to the locals to stay home and to strengthen Prime Minister Modi's resolve to contain the menace of COVID-19. She has already donated Rs 1 crore from her constituency funds to help the health services. IANS

Total lockdown

It may have come a bit late but only operational efficiencies will prove if we can win this battle against COVID-19



Maybe it came a little too late in the day, considering it was the world's biggest social experiment with war-time precision and a huge gamble by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, but India is now in a three-week nationwide lockdown to save its 1.3 billion people. A sombre-looking Modi announced a total lockdown as the days ahead were "crucial to break the cycle of transmission" of COVID-19. Many experts have suggested that a tidal wave of the quickly invasive virus was coming but this protocol would halt it in its tracks and limit the spread by a high percentage. Hopefully enough so as not to overwhelm our frail health infrastructure, which, by the PM's own admission, was nothing comparable to the West. Hence, using the magnetism of his persona, he made an emphatic and convincing plea to not cross the *lakshman rekha* of our homes. Modi also allocated about \$2 billion for additional healthcare measures. Though, it is by far the most far-reaching decision undertaken by any Government in the world, it is still too little. With testing still low, India should have placed itself under lockdown in February itself when it became apparent that the Coronavirus was spreading like wildfire and that people were not taking the self-reporting, quarantine or other compliances too seriously. The Government is just beginning to ramp up testing facilities and the number of quarantine centres. This should have been done on a war footing right from the beginning. We could have taken a page from Kerala's playbook which has had experience in fighting the Nipah virus and had done a tremendous job of detecting, tracking and quarantining patients and their contacts. Now, we have reached a crisis point and we are firefighting because till now, we were on a path where cases doubled every six days. However, this week's spike in cases means the country is now veering towards the Italy and US scenario, where cases are doubling every three days. If that happens, our hospitals will be overwhelmed by the end of May or even sooner considering that the number of hospital beds per 1,000 people in India is only 0.7, compared to 11.5 in South Korea. Further, some States will reach the point where they don't have enough hospital beds to treat critical Covid-19 patients much sooner than others, notably Kerala, Maharashtra, Delhi and Punjab. Plus, we have an acute shortage of medical professionals in rural areas. We may have achieved the WHO-recommended ratio of 1 doctor per 1,000 patients but estimates from studies indicate that there are about four times as many allopathic doctors per 10,000 people in urban areas as compared to the rural areas. So given that over 70 per cent of our population is rural, how will we effectively cope with a contagion that no one knows much about and which springs new surprises almost on a daily basis?

The fact remains that the Centre was either overconfident or did not take it too seriously. That the latter seems to be the case can be gauged from the fact that a Congress leader critiqued the Government's response to the outbreak in February. When he said that the Centre assuring the nation that the virus was under control was akin to the "captain of the Titanic telling his passengers not to panic as his ship was unsinkable," the Health Minister had countered robustly, saying that it was not the time for comparisons. We were misled by WHO, too, which is now extremely worried. Lessons learnt? We simply should not reference ourselves against any estimates and rely on our own resources and research expertise. We should finally prioritise a budget for health as a key and not just a social sector. And for all the heroism of ensuring a civil lockdown, we must ensure operational efficiencies first. Or food riots could be a subsidiary crisis.

Virus of racism

We are downright bankrupt as humans if we ostracise those who are manning our frontline relief and healing efforts



They say a crisis brings out the best and worst in us. And the worst is easier to become simply because in a rudderless and hopeless scenario, such as that brought about by COVID-19, everybody is desperate to lay the blame at somebody's door. But when it impacts altruistic people, who risk their lives and everything else, to save us, then it is a defeat of all the surge of humanity that we may claim the crisis has drawn out of each of us. Therefore, it is utterly incomprehensible and condemnable that doctors and frontline healthcare staff, who are braving risks and attending to COVID-19 cases, are being ostracised in their communities. It represents a moral bankruptcy that we thought Indians were never capable of. Or that pilots and cabin crew of rescue flight missions are being treated like untouchables when they get back home. What everyone forgets is that hundreds of families wouldn't have got back their members had these saviours not stepped out of their selfish concerns. That they had a choice to refuse but chose to accept a challenge. What was absolutely uncouth was the hate mail sent to the family of a deceased patient in Maharashtra, as if they had invited the virus home. Troublingly, this has sparked off a new wave of resentment against the Chinese in general and "Chinese-looking" people from the North-east and a total condemnation of their food choices. Did anybody ask fruit-lovers what went wrong when the Nipah virus came from mangoes chewed upon by bats? The worst name-calling and racist-tagging happened with singer Meiyang Chang, who was called "Corona" while out on a jog before the lockdown, and had to clarify that he was Indian, though of Chinese descent. Part of this stereotyping has been done by the Western world for quite some time. US President Donald Trump, who has made a virtue of political incorrectness, legitimised the label of "Chinese virus," setting off a diplomatic pow-wow with China. In fact, given that the geographic origins of most viruses, be it of bird and swine flu, have been Asia, it has become fairly normative to club all viruses as "Asian." UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet may have called on member-states to stop discrimination triggered by the virus but in multi-cultural US, too, intolerance has reached manic levels of absurdity. People have been spraying air-fresheners and disinfectant cans on people of Asian origin, never mind that they are bonafide US citizens. A Vietnamese art curator was dropped by an exhibitor at a UK art fair who claimed her participation would be seen as "carrying the virus."

We live in a globalised world, where people and societies are constantly colliding and merging with each other, travelling everywhere and, therefore, will always be at a risk of exposing themselves to every kind of contagion, biological, social and economic. It is not that the Chinese set out on a nihilistic mission to destroy the world and dominate crumbling economies, risking the huge loss of lives of their own. Or anybody else's for that matter. The West, though multi-cultural, has often found a scapegoat for its ills in "otherising" the so-called Brown races. Post-Corona, there is a real danger of insularity dictating the course of protectionist politics already at play. But what of Indians turing on fellow Indians? Soon, we might all become vectors. Does that mean we abandon each other? This crisis will only be won by the united spirit to heal, not training guns at each other.

Tibet gets back to work

It's perplexing that when China is still in lockdown, work has resumed on infrastructure projects in Tibet. India must watch these developments carefully and take necessary measures



CLAUDE ARPI

A Tibetan man became the first victim of Coronavirus but not in Tibet but in Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh. According to *The Tibet Sun*, Tenzin Choephel, a 69-year-old man from McLeod Ganj (where the Dalai Lama lives), died of Coronavirus after returning from a trip to the US on March 15. It said, "After staying in Delhi for a few days, Choephel returned to McLeod Ganj by a taxi on March 21. On the morning of March 23, he complained of respiratory problems. He was then taken to the Tanda Government hospital where he died." Meanwhile, in Tibet, the situation is surprisingly "normal."

Contrary to other provinces in China, the mountainous region had only one infected patient of the Novel Coronavirus. The patient was a 34-year-old man, who came from the city of Suizhou, the hardest-hit province amid the ongoing outbreak. He was discharged from hospital on February 12. *Xinhua* reported, "He travelled from the city of Wuhan to Lhasa by train from January 22 to 24. On the evening of January 25, he developed symptoms of cough and fever and was hospitalised." He was confirmed to be positive on January 29 and after an 18-day treatment he was let out.

It's difficult to say if this is propaganda or truth. Nevertheless, the high plateau appears to have been less affected than the rest of the Middle Kingdom. If facts are correct, scientists will have to undertake a detailed study of the Tibetan case when the outbreak of the virus recedes.

One reason why Tibet managed to keep cases low is because the authorities over there used Tibetan medicine extensively to fight the disease. For example, when the Tibetan-inhabited area in north-west China's Qinghai province reported 18 confirmed cases of the infection last month, 17 of them received a treatment involving Tibetan medicine (TM) and traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), the two independent traditional medical systems.

Huang Licheng, an official with the provincial Health Commission, was quoted by *Xinhua* as saying, "The Tibetan medicine played an active role in the treatment." He further said, "The provincial hospital of Tibetan medicine produced a batch of anti-virus medications featuring Tibetan medicine; 1,000 of them have already been sent to the front lines in Hubei Province, the centre of the virus outbreak."

This aspect, too, needs to be analysed. At the same time, these harrowing times have shown Beijing's priorities in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), the first region in China to restart normal activities and that, too, on a war-footing. Guess what started first? Infrastructure projects close to the border with India.

On February 20, *China Tibet Online* asserted: "Work continues on infrastruc-



ture projects in Tibet." It gave the example of the 11.5-km long Mainling tunnel on the Lhasa-Nyingchi Railway. It is located just north of Arunachal Pradesh: "It (Lhasa-Nyingchi Railway) currently has the most complicated geological conditions and is the most difficult project in China's construction of a railway on the plateau," noted the website.

The Mainling tunnel is scheduled to be completed by the end of March: "In order to ensure constructing process, currently, the construction workers are digging the last 60m of the tunnel. About 1,881 workers in Tibet are doing their best to construct the Lhasa-Nyingchi railway. With a designed speed of 160 km/h, it will be the first electrified railway in Tibet."

But why so much hurry at a time when the rest of China is still under clampdown? Beijing has already invested \$3.9 billion in this project and the railway line will be operational by next year. "Workers have completed 44 tunnels out of 47 and 119 bridges out of 120 along the route."

Yet another development that should worry India is the Dagu Hydropower Station (HPS) project on the Yarlung Tsangpo (Brahmaputra in

Assam). Located in Sangri County in Lhoka, the Dagu HPS has a capacity of 660 MW. Two billion dollars have already been invested: "It is a major project supported by the Central Government for Tibet's economic and social development." The dam is one of the three cascade dams under construction not far from the Indian border.

It is said that even during the Spring Festival, more than 300 workers remained on duty near the site. Later, they were said to "have successfully returned to construction. The construction site in the valley is busy; a large hydropower station is beginning to take shape."

Another project is in Sakya county, near Shigatse, the second largest town in Tibet. A mega water project restarted around February 20, a few days before Losar, the sacred Tibetan New Year. "With the biggest investment ever in Tibet's water project history, the project will help with irrigation, supply water, generate power and prevent flooding," explained a Chinese website. It further said, "Tibet has arranged 179 projects for this year...Work has resumed on some of these projects."

On March 3, charter flights were being arranged to bring

workers back from the Mainland to Tibet "to resume the construction of major projects in the region." *Tibet Online*, another official website of China, mentioned that on that day, TV6031 flight operated by Tibet Airlines landed at the airport of Nyingchi City. It said, "The 105 power workers onboard, from Zhejiang Province, will be assigned to the power grid projects in the region's most impoverished areas." Other such charter flights landed in Lhasa, Shigatse and Chamdo.

Quoting a Tibetan power company, *China Tibet News* said on February 29 that more than 2,800 workers had resumed the construction of 338 projects, accounting for 75 per cent of the total. It included the Ngari Power Grid Interconnection Project, not far from the Uttarakhand and Ladakh border.

The resumption of construction projects at a time when the rest of China was under lockdown is perplexing. Why this frenzy? It's difficult to answer. A few weeks ago, an intrusion by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) was reported in Naku-la, south of the watershed in northern Sikkim, an area supposed to be a "settled" undisputed area.

This was not a good sign.

With the "victory" of Wuhan, triumphantly announced by the Chinese propaganda, the PLA, which played a decisive role, is bound to come out reinforced from the crisis. Can Chinese President Xi Jinping, who is in an extremely weak position today both internally and externally (despite the disinformation war going on a full swing), keep his control over the PLA in the months to come?

Only time will tell. But the speed at which it has resumed the construction of infrastructure projects in Tibet is certainly ominous. A Chinese website published a photo feature. Its caption read: "Multiple rocket launch systems attached to an artillery brigade under the PLA Xizang Military Command fire anti-aircraft rockets simultaneously during a live-fire operation at the elevation of 4,500 metres in Southwest China's Xizang Autonomous Region on March 11, 2020."

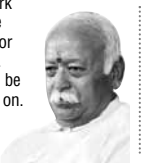
China will argue that it is only a routine exercise but India needs to watch carefully and take necessary measures to be ready for a new outbreak *à la* Doklam.

(The writer is an expert on India-China relations)

SOUNDBITE

We have to continue our work but also stick to rules. In the past, *shakkas* were closed for two years but work went on. The 21-day lockdown has to be adhered to and work can go on.

RSS chief
—Mohan Bhagwat



Being on the farm or being away from people is not new to me. I am having a conversation with nature here. It is important to me more than anything else.

Actor-politician
—Prakash Raj



They (Asian Americans) are amazing people and the spreading of the virus is not their fault in any way, shape or form. They are working closely with us to get rid of it.

US President
—Donald Trump



The time has come when the armed forces will have to operate beyond their mandate in the battle against Coronavirus. The defence personnel should be ready for the challenge.

Chief of Defence Staff
—Bipin Rawat



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Fight fake news

Sir — The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology must be appreciated for asking all social media companies to remove reports spreading misinformation about COVID-19 from their platforms with immediate effect. Circulation of false information is only creating more panic among the people. Social media companies should initiate an awareness campaign on their platforms on the ill-effects of uploading false information about Coronavirus.

MN Musaeed
Mumbai

Strengthen healthcare

Sir — The Prime Minister has done well to impose a nationwide lockdown for three weeks to prevent large-scale transmission of COVID-19 and the public health catastrophe it may bring along. The Central and State Governments are doing their bit in taking precautionary measures but people do not seem to be serious about it. It is the responsibility of every citizen to

What it will take to fight COVID

India responded resoundingly to the Prime Minister's call for self-imposed quarantine, a sort of social distancing programme to break the Coronavirus chain this Sunday. Unfortunately, after the 14-hour curfew ended, crowds thronged the streets in jubilation, undoing all the good it had wrought. This was rather an anticlimax to an event otherwise planned to create awareness for isolation. Migrant workers, too, were seen crowding railway stations to reach their homes. Coronavirus demands more than optics to avoid the spread of the disease at the community level, to treat the infected effectively and to mitigate the collateral economic miseries. This is why the Prime Minister's call to impose a nation-wide lockdown has come well in time. But this should not be allowed to become a similar exercise as the previous one. India, like most nations, is in the grip of dual shocks: COVID-19 and a financial crisis. In fact, no country is immune to the recession that has swept across the globe. Millions have lost jobs and livelihood. Businesses have shut down. Unable to sell their produce, agriculturalists find themselves in dire straits, this being the harvesting season. Governments across the world have done well to sacrifice economic concerns in an attempt to contain the spread of the virus.

follow the instructions of the Government. We have to fight the disease at individual and collective levels. It also remains an indubitable fact that our healthcare management system is rickety at the moment. Neglect on the

part of successive Governments is the reason why the healthcare sector stands crippled today. COVID-19 is definitely not here to stay but after this, the Government must take urgent measures and immediate steps to

be prepared to face any such kind virus in the future. Crucial sectors like healthcare, education and agriculture determine the real status of a country.

Nimai Charan Swain
Bhubaneswar



The fact remains that COVID-19 reached India through the wealthy globe-trotters in society. The rural society as also the poor and the disadvantaged urban populace, who are saddled with perennial anxieties and agonies, played hardly any role in importing the virus into the country. Information trickling down show they have not become carriers till now. The Government must ensure the availability of all essential items, including medicines, close to where they live.

Haridasan Rajan
Kozhikode

Utilise your time

Sir — With the country in complete lockdown mode for three weeks, this time must be utilised well to introspect, think and discuss ways to make life happier. For couples in a strained relationship or not on talking terms, this is the best time for them to restart. This time can also be utilised to improve knowledge about things people wanted to know but did not have the time to find the answer to.

Kumud Agrawal
Via email

Stay calm, composed

Sir — Given the sharp rise in the number of COVID cases, a complete lockdown was unavoidable. Staying home is difficult but people must be patient and not fall prey to rumours. Citizens need to trust the Government and be rest assured that there will be no shortage of food supplies.

Kanika Nayan
Via email

Send your feedback to:
letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

Every dark cloud has a silver lining

COVID-19 is certainly not going to change the world forever but it is going to change quite a few things and for the better in some cases



GWYNNE DYER

They teach you in journalism school never to use the phrase "...X has changed the world forever." Or at least they should. COVID-19 is certainly not going to change the world forever but it is going to change quite a few things, in some cases for a long time. Here are a few of them, in no particular order. First, the clean air over China's cities in the past month, thanks to an almost total shutdown of the big sources of pollution, has saved 20 times as many Chinese lives as the Coronavirus has taken as air pollution kills about 1.1 million people in China every year. People will remember this when the filthy air comes back and want something done about it. India too, would see the same changes in its air and I am certain that there, too, the citizens will want some things to change on the ground.

Next on the list is online shopping which was already slowly killing the retail shops. The lockdown will force tens of millions who rarely or never shop online to do it all the time. (Yes, a lot of the web-sites have crashed or booked until mid-April now but there will be lots of time to scale them up to meet the demand.) Once customers get used to shopping online, most of them won't go back to brick and mortar stores, so retail jobs will be disappearing twice as fast.

There won't be such a radical change with restaurants but basically it will be the same story. More takeaways and home deliveries, fewer people on the seats. Habits will change and a lot of people won't come back afterwards. Food sold out the door generates much less cash flow than food served at the table and half of the waiters' jobs will be gone. There will be a severe cull of restaurants across the world, resulting in more job losses.

Once it becomes clear that working from home is actually possible in most jobs, it will start to seem normal for people not to go in to work most days. So a steep drop in commuting, lower greenhouse-gas emissions and eventually a lot of empty office space in city centres is what the future after the Coronavirus will be like.

There will be a recession, of course but it probably won't be as bad or as long as the one after the financial crash of 2008. It isn't a collapse of "the market" that has cost people their jobs this time. It was a virus that made them stop working and governments are doing far more than ever before to sustain working people through what will probably be a long siege as the world tries to beat this deadly Coronavirus. When the virus is finally tamed, as it will be eventually, and they can go back to work, the work (in most cases) will still be there. Although there will also be a few trillion dollars of extra debt.

Don't worry about the debt. Banks have always created as much money as the Government requires. Put too much money into the economy and you'll cause inflation, which is bad, but just replacing what people would ordinarily be earning so that the economy doesn't seize up, is good. So President Macron can tell the French that no business, however small, will be allowed to go bankrupt. Prime Minister Johnson can tell the British that the Government will pay them 80 per cent of their normal income, up to a limit of £2,500 (\$3,000) a month, if their work has vanished. And President Trump can talk about sprinkling "helicopter money" on the grateful masses.

What is being revealed here is a deeper truth. "Austerity" — cutting back on the welfare state to "balance the budget" — is a political and ideological choice, not an economic necessity. What Governments are moving into, willy-nilly, is a basic income guaranteed by the State. Just for the duration of the crisis, they say and it's not quite a Universal Basic Income but that idea is now firmly on the table. However, whether the Governments of South Asian countries, which have a much-higher population density, can follow the Western example in this, is anybody's guess.

Another good thing to come out of the outbreak is that collective action and Government protection for the old and the poor will no longer be viewed as dangerous radicalism, even in the US. Welfare States were built all over the developed world after the Second World War. They will be expanded after the Coronavirus ends. Indeed, if Joe Biden were to drop out of the presidential race tomorrow for health reasons, Bernie Sanders would stand a fair chance of beating Trump in November.

Decisive action on the climate crisis will become possible (although not guaranteed), because we will have learned that "business as usual" is not sacred. If we have to change the way we do business, we can. So it's an ill wind that blows no good (a saying that was already old when John Heywood first catalogued it in 1546). Some of the anticipated changes are definitely good but we are going to pay an enormous price in lives and in loss for these benefits. It could have been dealt with a lot better. And the West should learn a little humility. Taiwan, South Korea and China (after the early fumble) have handled this crisis far better than Europe and North America. These are already more dead in Italy than in China, and America, Britain, France and Germany will certainly follow suit.

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

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

FORGET ABOUT LEAVING HOME FOR THE NEXT 21 DAYS. IF YOU CROSS THE *LAKSHMAN REKHA*, YOU WILL INVITE THE CORONAVIRUS HOME.
—PRIME MINISTER
NARENDRA MODI



STAY HOME INDIA IS A GREAT RALLY CRY, BUT PEOPLE WILL NEED MONEY AND FOOD. WE MUST PLAN NOT ONLY FOR 21 DAYS BUT FOR WEEKS BEYOND THAT.
—FORMER FINANCE MINISTER
P CHIDAMBARAM

Is India a gardening State?

The CAA, by choosing some and excluding the other has performed the role of 'gardening' within the contours of Indian citizenship



PRASENJIT BISWAS

Home Minister Amit Shah assured the Upper House that no existing citizen will be tagged "D" or doubtful during the course of collection of information under the National Population Register (NPR). The provisions of the Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003 allow for marking a doubtful citizen, verification of documents and even striking off someone's name from the National Register of Indian Citizens (NRIC), if found doubtful by officials vested with discretionary powers at local, State and national levels. Though Shah has also assured that no such verification on the data provided will be undertaken, yet letters of law create some confusion in the larger public. In almost a similar vein, the Union Government kept assuring the country's Muslim minority populace that no one would lose their citizenship under the newly-enacted Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). The fact that such assurances have to be given demonstrates the anomalies and inconsistencies of such laws like the NPR-NRC-CAA. While Shah assured a certain application of mind, it leaves wide open the discretionary powers granted in laws pertaining to the NPR-NRC-CAA.

In a recent article countering the critics of CAA, noted legal luminary Harish Salve argued that with the passage of CAA, Muslim illegal immigrants remain liable to be deported to their country of origin. Salve argued that the criterion of "intelligible differentia" makes CAA rational as it includes only the "six" religiously-persecuted minorities from the three neighbouring countries of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. This is how CAA, according to Salve, fulfils its objective of granting citizenship to those religiously-persecuted refugees who are forced to come to India, leaving behind their homes. In effect, the CAA draws a line between those who are to be naturalised and those who are liable to be deported. It opens up Indian citizenship to a rationally-classified set of people, while it closes it to a set of people who do not fit into this classification. Salve emphasised on this methodological distinction that CAA draws and justified it on heuristic grounds of profiling the "illegal immigrants" on the basis of their religious identity.

What connects Shah's commitment of non-victimisation in the NPR and Salve's justification of the deployment of "intelligible differentia" in the CAA is the common idea of taking the next step without stopping to think about what is going to be the next course of action in case anyone is affected. Salve does not deny the fact that Muslim illegal immigrants remain liable to be deported as CAA would not include them. Many commentators including Mukul Kesavan pointed out that the criterion of differentiation that CAA uses is not self-consistent, as it excluded worst religious persecuted such as Ahmadiyas, Shi'as, Rohingyas, Tamils and Tibetan Buddhists from its purview. Further, as per Kesavan, within the intelligible criterion, CAA creates a sub-class of only three neighbouring countries and then a further sub-class of "select" religiously-persecuted minorities.

Salve's advocacy misses the forest for the trees and trees for the forest. It misses the general point of India's commitment to those who come to it due to fear of civil or any other kind of disturbances, as stated in Section 19 (4) of the Indian Independence Act, 1947. Premised on such a consequential follow-up of India's independence, the Nehru-Liaquat pact guaranteed settlement of the displaced minority in their respective country of choice until the last day of 1950. Recognition of "minority rights" irrespective of religion has been the very bane of this early

“AS CAA DOES NOT SERVE ANY SPECIAL PURPOSE EXCEPT NAMING SOME RELIGIOUS GROUPS AS PERSECUTED AND ELIGIBLE TO APPLY FOR INDIAN CITIZENSHIP, IT IS INTRIGUING TO NOTE THAT SALVE JUSTIFIES IT ON THE GROUND THAT DEMOGRAPHIC DISTORTIONS CAUSED BY BANGLADESHI IMMIGRANTS COULD BE RESTORED BY IT. THIS, TO STATE THE OBVIOUS, LINKS CAA WITH A PROCEDURE OF DETERMINATION OF CITIZENSHIP BY NRIC AND NPR THAT CAN CREATE A SUB-CLASS OF DOUBTFUL CITIZENS BY SUSPENDING THEIR NATIONALITY AND BY TREATING THEM AS A CLASS OF ILLEGALS



legislation and bilateral pact. The same spirit is reflected in the Immigrants' (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950, that excluded any person displaced due to fear of civil disturbances from the definition of "illegal immigrant." Subsequently with the passage of the Citizenship Act, 1955, Section 5 and 6 of the Act provided for naturalisation of immigrants from erstwhile territories of undivided India. Therefore, it is argued that the CAA does not do anything extra that cannot be taken care of by the existing Citizenship Act, 1955, with respect to any class of immigrants. Or rather, the classification and sub-classes drawn up with the CAA can all be given due coverage and even their citizenship could be fast-tracked, depending on the urgency. A case in point is singer Adnan Sami's citizenship did not require CAA, or many other cases of erstwhile Pakistani or Bangladeshi citizens naturalised by due process prescribed under the Citizenship Act, 1955.

As CAA does not serve any special purpose except naming some religious groups as persecuted and eligible to apply for Indian citizenship, it is intriguing to note that Salve justifies it on the ground that demographic distortions caused by Bangladeshi immigrants could be restored by it. This, to state the obvious, links CAA with a procedure of determination of citizenship by NRIC and NPR that can create a sub-class of doubtful citizens by suspending their nationality and by treating them as a class of illegals. Indeed most critics of CAA are worried about this plight of being subjected to undue suspicion on a section of Indian citizens as Bangladeshis, based on ethno-racial profiling and dual filtering through NPR-NRC. The affidavit submitted by the Centre in the Supreme Court in the cases filed against CAA makes it further clear that the power of exclusion of immigrants arises from "sovereign" power of the Indian State by which it is entitled to have its own immigration policy. This power of exclusion of certain class of immigrants in CAA, as per the affidavit, is the

domain of the Parliament, in terms of its direct linkages with the State security and foreign policy. The affidavit further states that neither such matters of national security and immigration policy can wholly be subjected to judicial review, nor could these matters be interpreted even within the ambit of fundamental rights. As a first, the affidavit also separates "fundamental rights" from the scope of interpretations allowed by international covenants and protocols.

Reading together Salve's justification for only a sub-class of immigrants as eligible to be covered in CAA and what the affidavit of the Centre stated, it is a matter of concern whether such stipulated sub-classes of inclusion go against the letter and spirit of part-III of the Constitution. It is a matter of due consideration before the Supreme Court that the constitutional foundation of unity and equality between all classes of citizens of India, as stated in part-III, can be abridged and violated by identifying a special class and granting it certain rights. Assumption of the power of exclusion to discriminate between classes who are affected by the legislation is also a grave concern. If the power of exclusion by the Parliament further leads to abridgment of fundamental rights to equality and right to life of a certain excluded class, constitutional morality prohibits such exclusion. Indeed CAA legalises the prohibited categories of religion under Article 15 and makes it a basis for consideration for citizenship for a special class of non-citizens hailing from foreign countries.

As India is not yet a signatory to the Refugee Convention and Protocol, does this entitle it to draw a distinction between classes of asylum seekers and refugees? This is a grey area in which the current formulation of the CAA excludes Muslims. Salve justifies it by saying that as there is a settled political boundary between India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, so Muslim immigrants from these countries, other than India, cannot claim citizenship and they are liable to be

deported if they entered India illegally without valid papers. In contrast to immigrants from six religiously-persecuted groups, a Muslim immigrant from these countries would now become immediately illegal, because of his/her religion. This difference of entitlement in India, for the first time, sows seeds of selective preference. This runs contrary to the Citizenship Act, 1955 that keeps the process of naturalisation open to people originating from undivided India. As stated by the affidavit, it is true that the Citizenship Act, 1955 allows the State to decide who should be admitted to naturalized citizenship but religion has not been made a reason for anyone's rejection. With CAA, religion could be taken as a factor for rejection of an applicant's citizenship, as CAA gives a power of exclusion of a special sub-class to the State, as per the affidavit. Of course, the State will have an application of mind in not victimising someone as assured by the Home Minister in the case of NPR.

Couldn't framing of such important laws related to immigration be more coherent and non-discriminatory? What stops the State from framing religiously unbiased laws that rise above religiosity and champion India's pluralism, even in case of non-Indian citizens? As stated by political philosopher Charles Mills' book *Racial Liberalism*, sacrificing constitutional impartiality in dealing with different races would result in supremacy of dominant races. Defending such dominance is what Mills called "racial liberalism." CAA, as a consequence, might allow for such "racial liberalism" towards some classes, while excluding certain other classes of immigrants.

Even better is the description given by sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, who considered modern Statecraft of choosing certain people over the other on certain consideration as a "gardening State." The CAA, by choosing some and excluding the other has performed the role of "gardening" within the contours of Indian citizenship.

(The writer is a legal philosopher and a political analyst based in Shillong.)

Respect environment and invest in it

Large-scale casualties due to the Coronavirus must serve as a wake-up call to help understand the reality that the abuse of the environment has now reached catastrophic levels and must stop at all costs



KOTA SRIRAJ

COVID-19 has a vice-like grip over India and the rest of the world. According to the Worldometer, there have been over 19,607 casualties across the globe; the number of people infected stands at 4,35,002 and is growing by the hour. In India, too, the situation is grim as the number of casualties stands at 10 whereas the number of infected people stands at 562.

India has now taken the unprecedented step of imposing a 21-day-long curfew and locking down the nation,

with nearly all States and Union Territories observing the dictat of the Central Government or imposing curfew-like conditions.

Nationally and globally, the impact on economies has been disastrous, with the global stock markets plummeting due to a sell-off amounting to \$6 trillion in value, triggered by the Coronavirus within a short span of six days. The US is already comparing the current economic conditions with the Great Depression of 1930.

However, the fact remains that while the world economy is in the doldrums only now, the environmental conditions across the globe have not been good for decades as is evident by the threat of climate change that is looming large. In February, the Antarctica experienced one of its major meltdowns amid record-high temperatures, causing some of the major glaciers to melt. The environment and ecological biodiversity have

been in a free fall for long and in the process this has been eroding the centuries of resilience developed by Mother Nature to withstand the degeneration brought on by mankind. But now it seems that nature is responding definitively and punishingly. Nature's repositories such as tropical forests around the world with their teeming exotic animals were earlier considered the source of viruses and pathogens that caused diseases such as Ebola and HIV. But new research under the discipline of planetary science is showing that humanity's destruction of biodiversity is in fact causing the creation of new strains of virus pathogens that are moving from animals to humans at an alarming rate. The ongoing COVID-19 is the latest example of this.

There is an urgent need to change the narrative here from exploitation of nature to investment in it. Mankind has, for decades, exploited nature's hotspots by building roads, cutting

down forests and commercialising animal life contained therein. Once these biodiversity hotspots were destroyed by mankind, the animals and the virus strains existing therein, needed new hosts and humans became unwitting hosts to them. This aspect was recently confirmed by the United States Centre for Disease Control as well. The exploitative activities of humans have become a highway of sorts, using which virulent pathogens are crossing from the animal kingdom to mankind. The tragedy is that despite earlier experiences with such viruses as the Nipah, Ebola and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, we are yet to learn any lessons.

This indiscriminate and unthinking exploitation of nature has the potential of ending mankind and hence it is time to start investing in the environment for the greater good of humanity. As a first step, nations where wet markets thrive and sell live

animals for consumption purposes, must ban this forthwith. When the buying stops, so will the exploitation and in turn the transmission of any harmful pathogens. Many of these wet markets in South-East Asia feed a huge number of populations but in the larger interest of humankind, these markets must be forced to close down and Governments must provide alternative source of nutrition for the dependent population. In the aftermath of COVID-19, China has already shut down many wet markets, albeit a delayed move but nevertheless a welcome one. Many other busy wet markets such as those in Lagos must also be shut down if more virus transmissions are to be averted from these locations.

Awareness needs to be made a tool of investment in nature. The stakeholders must be made aware of the risks involved to them and to their family members. This will for instance dissuade a logging company employ-

ee from venturing into the tropical forests to cut trees. Similarly those dealing in live animals for commercial purposes will think twice before laying hands on the animals due to the fear of contracting fatal viruses. If one examines the past, it is clear that the viruses have kept plaguing humanity and possibly will continue to do so unless mankind disconnects itself from the concept of pillaging the environment for material gains and instead focusses on co-existence with nature so that it is given ample space of its own.

Large-scale human casualties due to the Coronavirus must serve as a wake-up call to help understand the reality that the abuse of the environment has now reached catastrophic levels and unless nature is given the respect it deserves, it will eventually reclaim the same and on its own terms.

(The writer is an environmental journalist)



FOREIGN EYE



A TOUGH DECISION TO MAKE

The race to find a treatment for Coronavirus is split between two approaches: The trialling of drugs used for similar diseases and the hunt for a vaccine. In both instances, important ethical decisions must be made. Is it ok to reassign a treatment that comes with side-effects or to cut corners to give a vaccine quickly. It's a hard call to make.
(The Guardian editorial)

GLOBAL DEATH TOLL ABOVE 19,000

AFP ■ PARIS

The number of deaths around the world from the novel coronavirus cases stood at 19,246, according to a tally compiled by AFP at 1100 GMT Wednesday from official sources.

More than 427,940 declared cases have been registered in 181 countries and territories since the epidemic first emerged in China in December.

The tallies, using data collected by AFP offices from national authorities and information from the World Health Organization (WHO), are likely to reflect only a fraction of the actual number of infections. Many countries are now only testing cases that require hospitalisation.

Italy, which recorded its first coronavirus death in February, has to date declared 6,820 fatalities, with 69,176 infections and 8,326 people recovered.

Like Italy, Spain now has

more fatalities than China with 3,434, as well as having 47,610 infections and 5,367 recoveries.

China -- excluding Hong Kong and Macau -- has to date declared 3,281 deaths and 81,218 cases. The other worst-hit countries are Iran with 2,077 fatalities and 27,017 cases, France with 1,100 deaths and 22,302 cases, and the United States with 600 deaths and 55,225 cases.

Since 1900 GMT Tuesday, Cameroon and Niger have announced their first deaths while Libya, Laos, Belize, Grenada, Mali and Dominica reported their first cases.

By continent, Europe has listed 226,340 cases and 12,719 deaths to date, Asia 99,805 cases and 3,593 deaths, the US and Canada together 57,304 cases with 624 deaths, the Middle East 32,118 cases and 2,119 deaths, Latin America and the Caribbean 7,337 cases with 118 deaths, Oceania 2,656 cases with nine deaths and Africa 2,382 cases with 64 deaths.

'We are collapsing': Virus pummels medics in Spain, Italy

AP ■ MADRID

By the time Patricia Núñez's cough started, she was already familiar with the dreaded dry hacking sound tormenting patients who had for weeks been filling the Madrid emergency ward where she works.

"We were fed up of hearing it at the hospital, so it was just a matter of time before I would contract it," said Núñez, a 32-year-old nurse who tested positive for the new coronavirus about a week ago.

Speaking via video call from her home, Núñez said she is eager to recover, so she can relieve overworked colleagues dealing with a rising wave of patients and dwindling numbers of healthy nurses and doctors.

"The worst thing is that you need to stay at home, worried about infecting relatives,

while knowing that you are dearly needed at work," she told The Associated Press.

The coronavirus is waging a war of attrition against health care workers throughout the world, but nowhere is it winning more battles at the moment than in Italy and in Spain, where protective equipment and tests have been in severely short supply for weeks.

Spain's universal health care system is a source of national pride and often hailed as a reason for its citizens' legendary longevity, but the outbreak is exposing its shortcomings, some of which are the result of years of budget cuts.

The country's hospitals are groaning under the weight of the pandemic: Video and photos from two hospitals in the Spanish capital showed patients, many hooked up to oxygen tanks, crowding corridors and emergency rooms. At



Health services staff members protest outside the Txagorritxu hospital

the 12 de Octubre University Hospital, patients could be seen on the floor as they waited for a bed in recent days. The hospital says the patients have since been accommodated elsewhere.

On Wednesday, the number of medical personnel infected was nearly 6,500

nationally, health authorities said, representing 13.6% of the country's 47,600 total cases and about 1% of the health system's workforce. At least three health care workers have died.

"We are collapsing. We need more workers," said Lidia Perera, a nurse who works with Núñez at Madrid's

Hospital de la Paz, which has 1,000 beds.

This week, 11 of the hospital's 14 floors are devoted to caring for those suffering from COVID-19, and there is still not enough room: The patients with less serious cases of the disease are being put in the hospital's gym or in a large tent outside.

"If you had told me three months ago that I would be working in these conditions in Spain, I wouldn't have believed you," Perera said, adding that staff at La Paz are only being tested for the virus if they have symptoms. "If they did (regular testing), they might end up without any workers."

Widespread infections among health workers reflect the universal difficulty of stemming the spread of the pandemic. But sick health workers do double damage: They add to the toll while also hampering

the ability to respond to the crisis. On top of that, they raise the specter of hospitals becoming breeding grounds of infection.

Spain's experience has been reflected elsewhere.

The World Health Organization's director-general this week called reports of large number of infections among health workers "alarming."

"Even if we do everything else right, if we don't prioritize protecting health workers, many people will die because the health worker who could have saved their lives is sick," Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told journalists.

In Italy, where nearly one-tenth of about 70,000 infections are among medical workers, doctors and nurses have been begging the government daily to provide more masks, gloves and goggles.

Italian village where virus is deadlier than war

AFP ■ VERTOVA

The obituaries posted on a board where the newspapers might otherwise hang tell the story of an Italian village living through a disaster the mayor calls "worse than the war."

The war Vertova mayor Orlando Gualdi refers to is World War II — a cataclysmic event more and more Italians cite while describing the damage wrought by the coronavirus pandemic.

Italy's death toll is somewhat hard to grasp when they are read out every evening in Rome. The total across the country soared to 6,820 by Wednesday.

It is 36 in Vertova. But the village — its ancient stone houses hugging the side of a mountain 70 kilometres northeast of Milan — has 4,600 inhabitants and usually sees around 60 deaths the entire year.

"It's worse than the war," Gualdi told AFP in one of the village's empty squares.

Four freshly made coffins are bunched together near the entrance of a chapel nearby.

They are waiting to be cremated and then buried in the cemetery in the back.

Funerals have been banned for weeks and the ceremony will be a muted affair attended by caretakers wrapped in protective suits and masks.

The cemetery itself remains closed to the villagers because public gathering are banned — so grieving for your loved ones with flowers at their grave is no longer allowed.



A woman, wearing a protective face mask, walks along the normally busy Whitehall in central London on Wednesday

Spain seeks NATO help as virus death toll touches 2,700

AFP ■ MADRID

Spain's armed forces on Tuesday asked NATO for humanitarian assistance to fight the novel coronavirus as the national death toll touched 2,700 and infections soared towards 40,000.

With the pandemic spreading across the world, Spain has been one of the worst-hit countries, logging the third highest number of deaths with the latest toll standing at 2,696 after another 514 people died over the past 24 hours.

Despite an unprecedented lockdown imposed on March 14, both deaths and infections have continued to mount, with the Spanish army called in to join efforts to curb its spread. With authorities stepping up

testing, the number of people diagnosed with COVID-19 rose by nearly 20 percent to 39,673, the health ministry said. Health authorities said it would become clear whether the lockdown was having the desired effect.

"This is a very hard week because we're in the first stages of overcoming the virus, a phase in which we are approaching the peak of the epidemic," Health Minister Salvador Illa told a televised news conference.

Like many other countries, Spain has been struggling with a lack of medical supplies for testing, treatment and the protection of frontline workers.

In a statement, NATO said Spain's military had asked for "international assistance," seeking medical supplies to help

curb the spread of the virus both in the military and in the civilian population.

The request specified 450,000 respirators, 500,000 rapid testing kits, 500 ventilators and 1.5 million surgical masks. With the numbers still spiralling, the government of Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez on Tuesday sought parliamentary approval to extend the state of emergency for an extra two weeks, until April 11 — the day before Easter — in a bid to slow the spread of the virus.

"We are aware of just how hard it is to prolong this situation, but it is absolutely imperative that we keep fighting the virus in order to win this battle," government spokeswoman Maria Jesus Montero told the news conference.

China lifts lockdown in Wuhan

PTI ■ BEIJING

China on Wednesday downgraded the risk level of the coronavirus in its epicentre Wuhan from high to medium and resumed bus services within the city for the first time since the nine-week lockdown even as a new study said thousands of positive cases there may have gone under the radar.

China has decided to lift the three-month lockdown on more than 56 million people in the central Hubei province.

However, the prolonged lockdown of Hubei's capital Wuhan will end on April 8, lifting the mass quarantine over

the city with a population of over 11 million.

Also, Wuhan will resume commercial flights from April 8, excluding international flights and flights to and from Beijing.

The government has downgraded the risk level of Wuhan for COVID-19 outbreak from high to medium, state-run China Daily reported on Wednesday.

While Hubei and Wuhan has not reported any new COVID-19 case, four people died in the city taking the death toll in China to 3,281, the National Health Commission (NHC) said on Wednesday.

Iran Prez warns of tough new measures

AFP ■ TEHRAN

Iran's president warned that his government was poised to introduce tough new measures against the coronavirus Wednesday as the death toll from one of the world's deadliest outbreaks topped 2,000.

President Hassan Rouhani said that the new measures, which could be adopted as soon as Wednesday evening, included Iran's first restrictions on movement to try to stem the spread of the virus and were likely to be "difficult" for the public.

Psychologists to study mental health social impacts of COVID-19

London: Psychologists have launched a study of the mental health and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, an effort that may shed more light on how the spread of the disease affects people's behaviour. Researchers, led by Professor Richard Bentall at the University of Sheffield, are surveying 2,000 people in the UK, and again in a month's time, and hope that their findings will help inform the better management of future public health crises, the University said in a release.

PTI

US registers 10,000 new cases

Trump hopes to reopen economy by Easter

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The number of coronavirus cases in the United States jumped by nearly 10,000 while about 150 Americans died in a day even as President Donald Trump hoped to reopen the country's economy by Easter, April 12.

With millions of Americans under a lockdown, the National Guard as well as the armed forces were pressed into service in several states such as New York which saw at least 53 deaths and about 5,000 new cases on Tuesday. New York has so far reported more than 25,000 COVID-19 cases and 210 fatalities.

According to Worldometer, a website which compiles COVID-19 cases, nearly 10,000 new coronavirus cases were reported across the country on Tuesday alone taking the total to around 54,000 while the number of fatalities surged by 150 in a day bringing its total to about 700.

Apart from New York, neighbouring New Jersey, along with California, Michigan, Illinois and Florida were the other coronavirus hotspots. However, no new cases or deaths were reported in Washington, the state which was first hit by the pathogen in the US.

President Trump, whose approval rating touched 50 per cent for the first time apparently because of his handling the coronavirus crisis on a war footing, put up a brave front on Tuesday telling reporters that he expects things to go back to normal in about three weeks'



Passengers wear face masks to fend off coronavirus as they wait in line to check in for their flights at JFK airport in New York

time by Easter, which is on April 12.

"I want to encourage everyone to keep following our guidelines on social distancing, avoiding large gatherings, hand washing and all the other things that everybody knows they are supposed to be doing. Ultimately, the goal is to ease the guidelines and open things up to very large sections of our country as we near the end of our historic battle with the invisible enemy," the president said.

"I hope we can do this by Easter. I think that would be a great thing for our country and we are all working very hard to make that a reality. We will be meeting a lot of people to see if it can be done," he said and also hoped the Congress would soon vote on a USD 2 trillion bill that would deliver direct cash payments to struggling Americans.

"Easter is our timeline, what a great timeline that

would be," Trump said but asserted that his first priority was always the health and safety of the American people.

However, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Dr Anthony Fauci cautioned against setting any timeline for resolving the crisis, saying, "You got to be very flexible."

"You can look at a date, but you got to be very flexible. And on a literally day-by-day and week-by-week basis, you need to evaluate the feasibility of what you're trying to do," he said.

White House Coronavirus Task Force Coordinator Deborah L. Birx informed reporters that of the 3,70,000 tests done so far, 2,20,000 were carried out in the last eight days. The new cases, she said, would continue to surge because the government is still working on the backlog.

You may not kiss the bride: Social distancing in force at Indonesia wedding!

AFP ■ SURABAYA

Closed borders and social distancing rules to stem the coronavirus outbreak failed to stop one transnational couple in Indonesia from tying the knot on Wednesday, minus the customary kiss to seal the deal.

Irira Chorina Octora, 29, and her Turkish partner Yavuz Ozdemir, 32, swapped vows at Al Akbar mosque in Surabaya, as friends and family -- each sat two metres apart -- looked on.

The couple both wore face-masks and kept their distance through the ceremony to comply with strict rules imposed by authorities, who have banned mass gatherings including weddings but allowed some exceptions for marriages booked before the pandemic began.

Virus precautions were on full display, with a maximum of 25 people at the event, temperature checks at the door and hand sanitiser throughout the venue. The wedding was also wrapped up in just 30 minutes.

The only hint of physical intimacy came when Ozdemir, whom Octora first met on social media, briefly took off his mask for his bride to feed him a piece of wedding cake.

Their reception party was cancelled and only a compromise with the mosque allowed the pair to proceed with the ceremony on Wednesday, earlier than planned.

"All people must pass our disinfectant gate after being checked with a thermal gun," Al Akbar mosque spokesman Helmy M. Noor told AFP.

UNIDENTIFIED DEAD BODY



General Public is hereby informed that one person **Namely: Unknown S/o: Unknown, Address: Unknown** was found injured at main Bawana Road, near CRPF Camp, Delhi and admitted in Satyawadi Raja Harish Chandra Hospital, Narela, Delhi on 01.09.2019 at 7:43 am. and during the treatment Doctors declared him dead. The body has been preserved in Babu Jagjeevan Ram Memorial Mortuary, Jahangir Puri, Delhi. In this regard a case has been lodged vide **FIR/DD No. 76/20, dated 01.09.2020** at P.S. Narela, Delhi. The description of the dead person is as under:- **Age:** 30-35 years, **Sex:** Male, **Height:** 5'8", **Complexion:** Shallow, **Face:** Round, **ID Mark:** Tattoo of Lord Shiva on Left arm, **Wearing:** Black colour lower. If any one having any information about this dead person please inform undersigned.

SHO
P.S. Narela, Delhi

DP/156/ON/2020

Ph: 011-27280435, 7065036323

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON

(SECTION 82 Cr.P.C.)

Whereas complaint has been made before me that the accused person **Rahul Prasad s/o R L Prasad R/o D-10/14, Sector-15, Rohini, Delhi** has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case of **Vinod Rana v/s Rahul Prasad u/s 138 N.I Act, at P.S. Shahbad Dairy, Delhi** and it has been returned to warrant of arrest there upon issued that the said accused person **Rahul Prasad**, cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused **Rahul Prasad**, has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that the said **Rahul Prasad, Vinod Rana v/s Rahul Prasad u/s 138 N.I Act, at P.S. Shahbad Dairy, Delhi** is required to appear before the court on or before **15.07.2020**.

By order
Sh. Vaibhav Mehta
MM, Room No. 114,
Rohini Courts, Delhi

DP/134/ON/2020

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON

See Section 82 Cr. P.C.

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused Lokesh @ Bakra S/o Dharam Singh R/o R-1/53, Budh Vihar, Delhi has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case registered vide FIR No. 1054/15 u/s 380/411 IPC has been lodged at P.S. Shahbad Dairy, Delhi. punishable and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said accused Lokesh @ Bakra cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused Lokesh @ Bakra has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant).

Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused Lokesh @ Bakra of case FIR No. 1054/15 u/s 380/411 IPC at P.S. Shahbad Dairy, Delhi is required to appear before this court to answer the said complaint on or before 20.06.2020.

By Order
Mr. Vaibhav Mehta
Metropolitan Magistrate
Rohini Court,
Delhi

DP/133/ON/2020(Court Matter)

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON

See Section 82 Cr.P.C.

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused person namely **Akash@Chira S/o Anil Kumar, R/o: G-Block, Jahangir Puri, Delhi, Permanent Address- Village pachrauli, Kasganj, U.P.** has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case **FIR No. 563/19, u/s 302/34 IPC** registered at P.S. Bhalaswa Dairy, Delhi and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued (unexecuted), stating that the said **Akash@Chira** cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said **Akash@Chira** has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proceeding u/s 82 Cr.P.C. has been initiated in this case. Proclamation is hereby made that the said **Akash@Chira** accused of **FIR No. 563/19, u/s 302/34 IPC** P.S. Bhalaswa Dairy, Delhi is required to appear before this Court to answer said complaint on or before **28.04.2020**.

By Order
Divya Malhotra
Metropolitan Magistrate,
Rohini Court 116, Delhi

DP/127/ON/2020

Air pollution in Italy falls since start of lockdown

AFP ■ COPENHAGEN

Italy's air quality has improved since the country went into coronavirus lockdown, the European Environment Agency (EEA) said Wednesday, a trend seen elsewhere in Europe as well.

In Milan, Italy's economic capital, the concentration of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), a gas emitted mainly from vehicles and power stations and which can cause inflammation of the respiratory system, has fallen by 24 percent in the last four weeks, compared with the preceding four weeks, the EEA said.

The week starting on March 16 alone saw a 21 percent reduction compared with the same week one year earlier.

In Rome, NO₂ levels have fallen between 26 and 35 percent for the same four weeks, and in Bergamo, Italy's hardest hit city, the reduction was 47 percent.

The lockdown in Italy began in certain northern areas

on February 23 before it was extended nationwide on March 9. As of 1100 GMT Wednesday, Italy had recorded more 69,000 cases with 6,820 deaths.

EEA said its "data confirm large decreases in air pollutant concentrations... Largely due to reduced traffic and other activities, especially in major cities under lockdown measures." Other parts of Europe have seen similar effects, in Spain for example where NO₂ concentration has fallen by 55 percent in Barcelona and 41 percent in Madrid, on a 12-month comparison.

In the Spanish capital, average NO₂ concentration has fallen by 56 percent from one week to the next.

NO₂ levels have halved in some other parts of the continent. But the French air quality monitoring agency cautioned that the lockdown had not led to marked declines in so-called PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀ particles, the smallest and most harmful air pollutants, owing to increased home heating and continued agricultural activity.

UN: 'Whole of humanity' at risk from coronavirus pandemic

AFP ■ UNITED NATIONS

The coronavirus pandemic is threatening the entire human race, the United Nations said Wednesday as it launched a humanitarian response that includes appeals for USD 2 billion for the world's poorest people. "COVID-19 is threatening the whole of humanity -- and the whole of humanity must fight back. Global action and solidarity are crucial. Individual country responses are not going to be enough," Secretary General Antonio Guterres said in announcing the initiative.

Putin postpones public vote on reforms over virus

AFP ■ MOSCOW

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Wednesday the public vote on his constitutional reforms must be postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic and declared next week a public holiday.

"I believe the voting must be postponed to a later date," Putin said of the April 22 plebiscite in a rare televised address in which he called on Russians to show solidarity.

The reforms, proposed by the president and approved by lawmakers over the last few

months, would reset presidential term limits and potentially allow Putin, in power for 20 years, to stay in office until 2036.

Putin also took the unusual step of declaring next week a non-working week.

"The long holidays are provided to slow the speed of expansion of the disease," he said. Unlike other countries, Russia has not yet introduced mandatory at home sheltering.

Putin urged Russians to help each other and follow instructions given by medics and the authorities.

UN urges prisoner releases to avoid virus contagion

AFP ■ GENEVA

Countries must protect people in detention from the COVID-19 pandemic by releasing vulnerable prisoners, the UN's rights chief said on Wednesday.

"Covid-19 has begun to strike prisons, jails and immigration detention centres, as well as residential care homes and psychiatric hospitals, and risks rampaging through such institutions' extremely vulnerable populations," Michelle Bachelet said in a statement.

Paris region cuts public transport further in virus fight

Paris: Metro and rail services in Paris and its suburbs will be cut to a minimum as part of the nationwide coronavirus lockdown, officials said Wednesday.

Both Paris transport operator RATP and national rail group SNCF have already sharply reduced services since the self-confinement orders came into effect on March 17. They apply to all but essential employees and those who cannot work from home.

Starting Thursday, about 50 of the roughly 300 Paris metro stations will be closed, and service across the network, as well as on RER commuter lines serving the suburbs, will run only from 6:00 am to 10:00 pm (0500 to 2100 GMT).

The operators said the goal was to keep just enough trains running for health workers and others who need to get to work during the coronavirus crisis.

AFP



Commuters ride an underground train while keeping their social distance due to the coronavirus outbreak, in central Istanbul on Wednesday

Scotland Yard warns against breach of law

PTI ■ LONDON

Scotland Yard on Wednesday said that its officers stand ready to take enforcement action if "absolutely necessary" and called on the UK population to comply with the law and stay indoors as part of the lockdown measures to combat the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

Metropolitan Police commissioner Cressida Dick said that since Prime Minister Boris Johnson's "stay at home" announcement on Monday evening, officers have been on

the streets of London to advise people and businesses of the new rules.

"We will only use enforcement if we absolutely have to but we won't hesitate if there are people who are deliberately breaching the law. But I think the vast majority of people will want to comply with the law to keep their society safe."

"We've shown time and again our ability to adapt, to rise to a challenge, to flex and surge our resources and our staff, and even in the darkest of time to be able to keep people safe and give a good quality

police service. I am determined we will do that," she said.

Her message came as it emerged that police had to step in to break up a barbeque gathering of 20 people in Coventry, central England. "Officers felt they needed to end the gathering by tipping over the BBQ and insisting the group dispersed to their homes," West Midlands Police said.

"It's vital everyone follows the new lockdown instructions. They are essential and will save lives," the force said.

Sensex, Nifty log best day in over 10 years

Investors eye stimulus package

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Indian stock benchmarks Sensex and Nifty posted their best single-day rise in over a decade on Wednesday, mirroring buoyancy in global markets and anticipating a stimulus package by the government to tide over the financial turmoil caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

The BSE gauge Sensex shot up 1,861.75 points or 6.98 per cent to settle at 28,535.78, and the NSE barometer Nifty spurted 516.80 points or 6.62 per cent to end at 8,317.85 – the biggest single-day gain for the indices.

Domestic market was

enthused by recovery in global stocks after the US Senate and White House reached agreement on a USD 2 trillion stimulus package for the US economy.

Reliance Industries was the top gainer in the Sensex pack, rallying up to 15 per cent, followed by Kotak Bank, Maruti, HDFC twins, Titan, L&T and Axis Bank.

On the other hand, IndusInd Bank, ONGC, ITC and Bajaj Auto closed with losses.

All sectoral indices on the BSE ended in the green with energy, finance, bank, auto, basic materials and oil and gas indices rallying up to 10 per cent.

Broader midcap and small-cap indices surged up to 3.53 per cent.

Experts are of the view that

markets took confidence from the 21-day lockdown imposed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi as the move somewhat removes the uncertainty and showed that the government is willing to take hard steps to fight the Covid-19 pandemic.

Receding uncertainty in domestic markets following defined lockdown announcement and assurance of domestic stimulus by the government boosted investor sentiment, said Narendra Solanki, Head-Equity

Research (Fundamental), Anand Rath. "The rally was supported by strength across the markets including large frontline and mid-small cap stocks ahead of expiry tomorrow (Thursday) which also played its part in terms of short-covering which added further fuel to the rally," he added.

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The outbreak of COVID-19 and continued slowdown in the economy are likely to have an impact on banks asset quality and may trigger a surge in gross non-performing assets (GNPA) ratio to 9.6 to 9.9 per cent by the second or third quarter of the next fiscal, says a report. The global pandemic has stalled the economic activity which is going to severely impact sectors such transport, travel and tourism, aviation, among others.

The Reserve Bank and the government may announce a regulatory forbearance or an interest subvention scheme on report by Care Ratings loans to help banks deal with the NPA stress, according to a report it said.

"Considering that there has been no substantial

improvement in the economy, ageing provisions and coupled with the recent outbreak of 'COVID-19', the banking sector might witness an adverse impact on credit delivery and asset quality leading to pressure on capital adequacy," the rating agency's senior director, Sanjay Agarwal, said in the report.

The GNPA ratio of banks is likely to be in the range of 9.6-9.9 per cent by the second or third quarter of FY21 from 9.3 per cent as of December 2019, given the exposures to certain stressed sectors, moderation in the bank credit growth and muted demand scenario, he said.

The rating agency said as there is a lockdown imposed within India and the world, both domestic consumption as well as export-oriented industries could be affected due to muted demand.

Surge for stocks fades despite huge US stimulus package

AFP ■ LONDON

Global stocks rally petered out Wednesday as Europe took up the baton, despite US lawmakers agreeing a mammoth stimulus package to help the world's biggest economy resist effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

After huge gains for equities Tuesday, which continued into Wednesday with Tokyo soaring and European indices jumping at the open, London lost some of its gains and Frankfurt was in the red nearing the half-way stage.

Elsewhere, the dollar was lower against main rivals and oil prices retreated.

"The stimulus is now by and large in place, the question is whether it's enough for the markets or whether the expected spike in cases and deaths in the US and Europe, combined

with the emerging picture of the economic damage, means we need to take another leg lower before the bottom is found," said Neil Wilson, chief market analyst at trading group Markets.Com.

While COVID-19 continues to spread, traders have a rare semblance of optimism after weeks of carnage across global markets, with eyes fixed on Washington where lawmakers thrashed out an emergency bill worth as much as \$2 trillion — around 10 percent of US gross domestic product. "At last, we have a deal," Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said, calling it a "wartime level of investment into our nation."

"We have a bipartisan agreement on the largest rescue package in American history," top Senate Democrat Chuck Schumer said shortly after McConnell

spoke. "So many people are being put out of work through no fault of their own. They don't know what their future is going to be like, how are they going to pay the bills," Schumer noted. "Well, we come to their rescue."

The measure will put cash directly into the hands of Americans, provides grants to small businesses and hundreds of billions of dollars in loans for corporations including embattled airlines, while expanding unemployment benefits.

The prospect of a massive spending splurge, combined with the Federal Reserve's pledge to essentially print as much cash as needed, sent Wall Street into overdrive Tuesday, with the Dow seeing its biggest rise since 1933, while the S&P 500 enjoyed its best day in more than a decade.

Indian aviation firms lose \$3.6 bn owing to 'virus' travel ban

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Aviation consultancy CAPA on Wednesday projected initial losses of USD 3.3-3.6 billion for the Indian aviation industry in the first quarter of FY2021 in the eventuality of all air services including domestic remain shut until June due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The pandemic has had a significant impact on the aviation industry due to the stringent border controls by a host of countries and imposition of the travel ban on the people of other nationalities to contain the virus infection.

The Indian government has also suspended all air services among the several measures to prevent if from getting a large part of the population infected.

"India's aviation sector could incur losses of USD 3.3-3.6 billion in 1QFY2021. Assuming that all domestic and international operations remain grounded until Jun 30," the Centre for Asia Pacific Aviation (CAPA) India said in its preliminary report.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday announced a 21-day complete lockdown from Wednesday, stating that it was the only way of breaking COVID-19 infection cycle.

"Even with some partial resumption of services in May and June, the financial outcomes may not change significantly," Modi said in his televised address to the nation Monday evening.

The CAPA has also sought "urgent" government intervention and coordinated industry response to address all the requirement of the aviation industry.

According to the CAPA, the airline sector losses are expected to be around USD 1.75 billion while that of the airports and concessionaires at around USD 1.50-1.75 billion and another USD 80-90 million losses of the ground handling companies.

Noting that the domestic airline sector was already vulnerable even prior to the advent of COVID-19, the CAPA said most Indian airlines have not structured their business models to be able to withstand even regular shocks, such as elevated fuel prices or economic downturns, let alone once-in-a-century events.

With few exceptions, Indian carriers have weak balance sheets and precarious levels of liquidity, the CAPA said in the report, adding airlines have generated cash to stay afloat through advance sales or sale-and-lease back margins (and government infusion in the case of Air India), but with no cushion to be able to withstand downward cycles.

Stating that with global aviation almost grinding to a halt - and for what could be an extended period - this is a state of affairs that will heighten risks for even the strongest carriers in the world, CAPA apprehended several weaker airlines might go belly-up.

Tea production shortfall likely to be 100 mn kg only because of lockdown

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Tea production in the country is likely to fall by 100 million kg this year due to the 21-day lockdown which was "inevitable" to tackle the coronavirus crisis, an official said on Wednesday.

The country had produced around 1,389 million kgs of tea in 2019, he said.

"The lockdown was inevitable as there is no other option to prevent the spread of the disease. However, the country's tea production will be hit and this will lead to a collapse of the industry," Tea Board Chairman P K Bezbaruah told PTI. It will take time to bring tea bushes again to the pro-

duction stage, he said.

Tea Board's deputy chairman Arun Kumar Ray said that the "likely shortfall in production due to lockdown would be around 100 million kg this year", which could lead to rise in prices.

"The impact of the coronavirus outbreak will be felt across the globe. The priority is to prevent community transmission," Ray said.

With this lockdown, Darjeeling tea planters will lose first flush production, a premium variety, by around 30 per cent, Bezbaruah said.

The loss of production in West Bengal's Dooars is likely to be around 11 per cent and 10 per cent in Assam, he said.

Coronavirus economics: Roundup of radical policy steps

AFP ■ LONDON

Governments and central banks around the world are ripping up the policy rulebook as they battle to immunise their economies from deeper coronavirus carnage.

Printing new money, gargantuan debt spending, loan guarantees, tax breaks and even direct payments to workers are all in the highly unorthodox mix.

AFP surveys the latest responses by major economies as COVID-19 has spread from China to the rest of the world, making a global recession all

but inevitable.

In the United States, Senate leaders and the White House early Wednesday struck agreement on a USD 2 trillion stimulus package for the world's largest economy.

The biggest ever spending plan in US history had been knocked back by Democratic objections to the Republican plan, which was decimated as a "slush fund" for bosses.

But party leaders overcame their differences to clinch a "wartime level of investment into our nation", Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said.

The Senate and House of Representatives still need to pass the legislation before sending it to President Donald Trump for his signature.

The package will put cash directly into the hands of Americans, provides grants to small businesses and hundreds of billions of dollars in loans for larger corporations including airlines, and expands unemployment benefits.

A separate package from US financial overseers including the Federal Reserve would provide a stunning USD 4 trillion in liquidity to juice up the economy.

The Fed has kept up near-daily announcements to keep dollars flowing, in addition to slashing its main lending rate to near zero.

On Monday, the Fed vowed to buy unlimited amounts of government debt - akin to printing money -- and offered to lend directly to small- and medium-sized firms.

Some observers are demanding a collective response from the G7 and G20 to fight the pandemic, and help poorer nations who lack the borrowing capacity of their richer peers.

DELHI – GURGAON EXPRESSWAY: REVISED USER FEE W.E.F 1st APRIL, 2020				
PUBLIC NOTICE				
General public and commuters are hereby informed that in line with provisions of the Concession Agreement dated 18.04.2002 under Schedule G and Consent Order passed by Hon'ble Delhi High Court in the matter of OMP No. 288/2013 on February 19, 2014, the user fee rates on the Delhi–Gurgaon Expressway will be revised w.e.f 1st April, 2020.				
Revised User Fee per vehicle per trip (in Rupees) w.e.f 1st April, 2020.				
S. No.	Category of Vehicles	Rate of Fee per Vehicle per trip (in Rupees) (effective from 01.04.2020 to 31.03.2021)		Rates of pass for 40 trips (in Rupees) valid for 30 days for local personal / local commercial traffic. (effective from 01.04.2020 to 31.03.2021) *
		For Vehicle going to Indra Gandhi International Airport	For Vehicle crossing the toll Plaza at Km.42.00 of NH-8 (New Name NH-48)	
1	Car/Jeep/Van	20	65	(Personal)- 395 (Commercial)- 525
2	LCV	30	100	785
3	Mini Bus	30	100	785
4	Bus	60	200	1,570
5	Truck	60	200	1,570
6	MAV	60	200	1,570

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Tel. : 0135-2763508 Fax: 0135-2763507 Website: www.uttarakhandjvnltd.com

e-Tender Notice

Office of the Executive Engineer (Generation) Chilla Power House invites online bids from interested bidders. Brief summary of tender is given below:
eNIT No. 02/EE(G)/Chilla/2019-20 : Overhauling of 42.5 MVA, 11/139 kV, BHEL make transformer of Chilla Power House
Tender Value : Rs. 93,69,976/- (GST Extra)
Earnest Money : Rs. 1,87,500/- only
Tender Fee : Rs. 5900/- only
Date & Time of availability of Bid Document in the e-Portal : From 16:00 hrs of March 26, 2020
Last Date & Time for submission of Bid in the e-Portal : Upto 17:00 hrs of April 24, 2020
Last Date & Time of Submission of hard copies : Upto 17:00 hrs of April 24, 2020
Date & Time of Opening of Tender in the portal : at 11:00 hrs of April 25, 2020
For full & further details, kindly visit e-procurement portal <https://uktenders.gov.in>.

Executive Engineer (G)
Chilla Power House

Ref. No.: 170/Dated : 24.03.2020

"Avoid wasteful use of Electricity"

Trend Slazer

Arjun recalls mother on death anniversary

Actor **ARJUN KAPOOR** penned an emotional note on his mother **Mona Shourie's** eighth death anniversary. He said that he has managed to survive eight years without her.

Arjun tweeted a photograph of himself along with his sister Anshula, and mother Mona.

He captioned it, "I wish I could be at home like this today and would have felt safe and maybe even smiled more than anyone has ever seen me smile. It's been eight years today since you left us mom. The world has come to a standstill now but mine and Anshula's world was shattered when you left. We have tried to pick up the pieces. Though some days are tougher than the others."



'It is unimaginable for me, as a parent, to think of being separated from my children during nation lockdown. While the world talks about humanity, I think it represents more than just an idea, especially for parents sharing custody of their kids and how to keep their kids close to them without infringing on the right of the other.'

—**Mrithik Roshan**



Actor **FARHAN AKHTAR**, who is currently working on his forthcoming film, *Toofaan*, believes that his key to success is discipline. Inspired by real life, the actor commented on what mattered the most while prepping for his character, "Discipline changes the game. Mental strength and will power is what separates people who are supremely fit from those who are not. A realistic goal is important. You can't be Brad Pitt in three days."

Tom to bring back Meghan Markle

Hollywood actor **TOM CRUISE** is trying to get Duchess of Sussex, **Meghan Markle** back on the big screen in his future film.

Following her decision to step down from royal duties, the internet rumour mill was rife with speculation that Meghan Markle could be all set for a comeback in showbiz.

Cruise wants to sign her up for one of his forthcoming films.

A source said, "If anyone can get Meghan back on a film set, it's Tom. And what better way to get back on the big screen than starring opposite one of Hollywood's biggest stars."



Youtuber and singer **BHUVAN BAM** finds most of his content by picking on the quirks of people around him, says **SAIMI SATTAR**

Lockdown = Soaring demand for internet content for both entertainment and information. But more often than not, these have become the tools for spreading falsehood and myths. YouTuber and singer Bhuvan Bam, who's *BB Ki Vines* has 16.7 million subscribers on YouTube, has come out with a video to tackle both. It is called 'Time to be a Hero' and focusses on the WhatsApp forwards being circulated about Coronavirus. Says Bhuvan, "This has been going on in my head for a long time. In my own house, I see my parents sharing fake news on WhatsApp because they think it is legit. If this is a scenario in my house, then how many families are there who actually believe this?" So he decided to collect all the fake information related to Coronavirus and compared it with the reality in a 4.05 minute video. The video, which lists out the do's and don'ts while providing the links to WHO and Ministry of Health and Welfare site in a conversational manner, a style which the artiste is known for, has garnered eight million views within three days.

Not just falsehood, Bhuvan also feels that there is always the possibility of a message being misinterpreted which happened with the Prime Minister's address calling for a lockdown on March 22. He says the message needs to be spelled out to coherently. "I immediately thought that when he asked for a Janta Curfew on Sunday, we are a billion people, many of whom believe everything. He could have specifically emphasised that you should not be stepping out post 22 too as we have to be spoon-fed. The mindset is that if we have to beat the *thali* or clap, we will do it together. The gravity of the situation was lost on most as many thought that the disease is spreading in China or Italy or even in another Indian states and there is a border, so it cannot cross that. You don't know who is travelling where and who has brought which virus. People are underestimating the situation," he asserts.

However, now with people staying at home, there is naturally an explosion in the demand for content. Bhuvan feels that this is a golden opportunity for YouTubers to create content and share it, though he lists out a prerequisite. "The creator has the responsibility that if s/he is creating a seven-minute comedy, then s/he should also create an awareness video

Observational artiste



for the audience as they will listen to that too even if they don't comply with it in entirety," he says. Of course, there is the possibility that the repetitions from different people might be irritating for the audience but "it is the only way to reinforce the message." He goes on to point out, "The YouTube community is a vast market and each of the creators can do it in their own typical fashion."

Time and again we have seen comedy being used effectively for discussing a social issue. It has been explored and utilised widely in films, series as well YouTube videos. Bhuvan too believes in the efficacy of the genre. "If you look at my channel history, whenever I do a social issue, I try not to sound preachy. I have 18 characters in *BB Ki Vines*, so I can put across my views in the form of a conversation which makes it effective. The message given out as a comedy always registers better," says Bhuvan who before the lockdown had just started working on his dream project, *Dhindora*, about which he refuses to divulge much information.

A genre of comedy that has come into its own in the past few years in India is the one which takes a political stand. However, for Bhuvan, every art form is like an opposition. "Someone can voice their opinion and dissent through music or through stand-up or through painting.

The political views for or against any issue are always there and artistes reflect it. What has made it really popular in India is that the younger generation is taking politics seriously. Earlier, elderly people discussed it occasionally over tea. That way, it is a refreshing change," he says.

However, scrolling through his channel reveals that there is nothing which would qualify as a political satire or comedy. Bhuvan laughs as he says, "I personally don't like getting into politics. I know very little about it and half knowledge is the worst. And you should not speak if you have one-sided or half-baked opinion. Politics is not my cup of tea."

While political content might be absent, *BB Ki Vines* is replete with cuss words and that is often the reason why it has received a lot of flak. Moreover, very often, while the audience might enjoy a particular episode, it is wary of sharing it further unless it is with a group of friends. Bhuvan is upfront and says, "I am from Delhi and let that be the end of discussion." He goes on to explain the content that he puts out, "If someone follows my channel closely, they know that the cuss words are there when three friends are together or if Titu *Maama* makes an appearance. Truth is that my friends have never talked without using slangs. And this is true for every friend group across the world. It is a part of our life. The only

difference is that I am a little transparent while others are hiding it." He believes that it is nothing but "sheer hypocrisy" when people profess to be fans of Russell Peters or claim to have enjoyed *American Pie* or *Euro Trip* but are critical of the content that he puts out. "I am not showing nudity or anything. If someone is criticising me for my choice of language, it is nothing but sheer hypocrisy," he asserts.

While India and Indians might be critical of the content being put out, for Bhuvan, the country and its people have acted as a source of inspiration. "The country is *chalta phirta* (fertile ground) meme material. Everyday, a lakh people can create a thousand different videos on different topics because there is so much comedy and content happening around us. India still wouldn't run out of content," says Bhuvan, who works on observation which the lockdown has put on hold for a bit. To apply this in practice, the YouTuber travels in the metro and sits in a random coach. "When I look at people, I see how they behave and pick at least one trait. Observation is important and we need to be aware and alert to everything around you," he says.

However, comedy and YouTube videos was not what he had set out to do, though he had his heart set on being a performer from the very beginning. Bhuvan

used to sing at a restaurant in Delhi when he saw a news story, which had a TV reporter interviewing a woman during the Kashmir floods. "Her son had disappeared and the reporter was asking, '*Kaisa lag raha hai aapko aapka bachcha baadhi me gayab ho gaya?*' (How do you feel as your son has disappeared during the floods?)" She replied, '*Kaisa lagega?*' (How will I feel?)" I thought this is typical Indian news and an Indian reporter. I made a video about it and posted it on Facebook as at that time, I was unaware that I could use YouTube for this. I thought it was primarily for film trailers. One of my friends told me to separate the videos from my musician profile, so I made a Facebook page called *BB Ki Vines*. It caught on by word of mouth and people started following me," recalls Bhuvan who still finds his escape route in music as he tells us, "When I am done writing jokes and creating content, I play the small keyboard that I keep in my room. That is how I get out of stress and anxiety."

However, he has spread his wings beyond music and videos and even acted in a short film, *Plus Minus*. Bhuvan happened to be in the right place at the right time to bag this. "I was lucky to be in that room when director Jyoti Kapoor Das and the producer were discussing that they were planning a story on Baba Harbhajan Singh. He is the soldier, who, it is believed, continues to guard the Indo-China border, long after his death. I was really intrigued and wanted a narration. When I heard it, I was like 'let's do it'. What made the experience different was that for once, I was not holding a phone in my hand," he says with a laugh and the fact that he worked with actor Divya Dutta made it special. "*Sone pe suhaga ho gaya* (icing on the cake)," he adds.

Bhuvan has also received several awards including the 'Entertainer of the Year' at Cannes last year, recognising the way he is extending his boundaries. Does he see Indian artistes across board getting recognition worldwide? "In every art form, India is right there. I am glad that people across the globe are appreciating us. Bollywood films were already a hit abroad. But now people have started talking about YouTube as well as there is diversity of content. There is comedy as well as bloggers who create cooking, beauty, travel and more content," he says and points out that it seems while the content is exploding there are not enough viewers. He gives several parallels to explain the situation and says, "During 90s, every second house had a bat and ball as everyone wanted to be a cricketer. Then there was the phase of the *Indian Idol* and everyone aspired to be Abhijeet Sawant. Currently, it is the same scenario as every second house has a YouTube. It is growing rapidly."

When asked about his future plans, the artiste points out that he does not know beyond two days from now. "I know what I have to do on Saturday or Sunday but I don't think ahead of that. I take life as it comes and have stopped having any expectations from it," says Bhuvan.



As senior citizens deal with anxiety about the Coronavirus, grocery store chains and other retailers have come up with a way to ease their fears — shopping times reserved exclusively for them.

Target, Whole Foods, Walmart and Dollar General, as well as supermarkets in Europe, began dedicating early morning shopping times for older customers this week. The theory is that allowing seniors to shop among smaller crowds could reduce their chances of acquiring the virus and give them first crack at buying hand sanitiser and other products that have been hard to find because of panic shopping.

The idea seems to have worked well in smaller shops but backfired in some larger stores, where big crowds made "social distancing" difficult.

"If you didn't have coronavirus before you got there, you probably do now," said Roger Glenn Miller, 82, after he showed up on a recent morning at a Stop & Shop grocery store in North Providence, Rhode Island, along with about 200 other seniors.

Don Gregson, 81, had a similar experience at the same shop. Gregson said he expected to shop with a small group of seniors but instead found aisles crowded with people.

When he saw the number of people in the store, Gregson slipped on a surgical mask he carries in his pocket, then bought four gallons (15 litres) of distilled water for the machine he needs for sleep apnea.

"I'm sure they were trying to do the right thing, but somehow the planning went astray," he said.

The Massachusetts-based chain, which has started offering the special shopping time for seniors every day, said in a statement that it is asking its customers to consider staggering the days they shop "to ensure a less crowded environment as well as for everyone to exercise caution and social distancing while shopping."

Ernest Hodge, 72, had a much smoother experience at a Dollar General store just north of Richmond. Hodge showed up at 8 am sharp Wednesday, wearing a face mask and blue rubber gloves to protect himself. He was able to shop among just a half-dozen other seniors and got most of what he needed, including disinfecting wipes, spray cleaner and bottled water.

Hodge said he was happy when he heard about the special shopping hours because he is trying to limit his exposure to people. "I get off work, I go home. I don't come out again unless it's a must," he said. Dollar General is reserving the first

hour of shopping every day for seniors at its more than 16,000 stores. Target has set aside an hour every Wednesday morning for vulnerable shoppers, including the elderly and those with underlying medical conditions. Walmart said it will host an hour-long "senior shopping event" every Tuesday for customers who are 60 and above, one hour before stores open to the general public.

In South Africa, a supermarket chain, Pick n Pay, said that it will open all its markets an hour early every Wednesday for shoppers over 65.

Sainsbury's, one of the largest supermarket chains in the UK, reserved the first hour of shopping in its stores Thursday for elderly and other vulnerable customers.

Jim Gibson, 72, from Crofton Park, southeast London, went to his local superstore in Bell Green, where he said that he had a "relatively trauma-free" experience except for the fact that some younger shoppers appeared

to ignore the request to reserve the hour for senior citizens.

Most of the products he was looking for were there, though many canned items were "leaping off the shelves" and he couldn't get the medicines that he and his 73-year-old wife want "for love or money."

William Petri, a professor in the University of Virginia's Division of Infectious Diseases and International Health, said setting aside dedicated times for seniors to shop makes sense. He added that health officials have found that many people who are infected don't have symptoms right away but are still infectious.

"That's an even better reason to try to isolate those who are most vulnerable, like the elderly, from younger people through dedicated shopping hours," he said. However, Petri suggested that it would be even better for seniors to get groceries delivered to their homes.

—AP

Bollywood supports 21-day lockdown

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a nationwide lockdown for 21 days on Tuesday evening to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, B-Town took to social media to express their support and urge citizens to cooperate and stay indoors.

Bollywood veteran Amitabh Bachchan wrote a poem in Hindi, "*Hath hain jodte vinamrata se aaj hum... Sune adesh Pradhan ka, sada tum aur hum. Yeh bandish jo lagi hai, jeevdayee banegi... 21 Dino ka sankalp nishchit Corona dafnayegi.*"

Veteran Bollywood star Dilip Kumar tweeted, "*Dawa bhi, dua bhi, Pehle kuch faasla bhi, Woh kareem hai raheem hai, Aur wahi mushkil kusha bhi. My sincere appeal to all of you, #StayHome and obey the #CoronaLockdown. God bless us all.*"

Veteran filmmaker Mahesh Bhatt shared on Twitter, "We are now at a collective turning point, where we must stop, listen and help the government implement the 21 days all India lockdown."

Lyricist and censor board chairperson Prasoon Joshi tweeted, "*#IndiaFightsCorona*. In this war, restraint will be our weapon, stillness will be our defence, distance will be the sign that we deeply care. Have to fight it with new rules. #CoronavirusLockdown."

Shahid Kapoor posted, "Be at home. Stay safe. Stay mentally, emotionally and physically strong. Spread love. Have faith. Pray often. Speak to all those who matter daily. Meditate. Read. Cook. See the sky turn bluer everyday. 21 days. Will pass. Keep it real and make it count you all."

Ishaan Khatter urged, "To all my friends, everybody that this post reaches. We've got this. Let's not panic. Let's look out for each other. Let's find ways to help one another. This is the time for resilience, patience and consideration. I promise to do my part. Please do yours, don't step out for anything that is not essential. Don't put others and yourself at risk. We will come out of this stronger. Prayers, LOVE and energies for everybody. #21dayslockdown."

Randeep Hooda tweeted: "*#CoronavirusLockdown*. If we don't follow guidelines for the next 21 days, days after that could be even more challenging. Let's follow what our PM



advised in his address and stay safe. Also, essential services will be operational. Please don't put yourself at risk by overcrowding shops to stock up. #Covid19India."

Aditi Rao Hydari tweeted: "21-day lockdown. Let's be responsible and stay home. If we don't we're in for big trouble and could have an even longer lockdown as well as a catastrophic economy. Help us help ourselves. 21 days of discipline is all it takes, please! Let's do this."

Singer Shreya Ghoshal shared: "*#CoronavirusLockdown* for 21 days announced by our PM in his speech. We can do this India! Let's stay positive and sincere to this effort! #StayHome."

Even though most Bollywood celebs were seen supporting the 21-day lockdown decision, actor Aahana Kumra felt that the government should have given some more time to the panicking citizens to stock up in this crisis.

She tweeted, "I feel the government needs to give some more time for people to stock up. I understand and applaud the government's efforts to combat the coronavirus but this panic is going to create more #COVID-19 patients than ever!"

Singer Adnan Sami shared government's guidelines issued by the government and tweeted, "Ministry of Home Affairs Guidelines for 21-day lockdown. Check out the list of essential services that will remain open."

—IANS

UNINTERRUPTED SERVICE IS CRITICAL

Vice Chairman of Delhi Jal Board, RAGHAV CHADHA, urges officials to maintain unhindered water supply and sewage services amid Coronavirus pandemic



Raghav Chadha, Vice Chairman of Delhi Jal Board (DJB), chaired a meeting to review the present water supply services. He urged everybody to maintain unhindered water supply and sewage services amid Coronavirus pandemic. The meeting was attended by all senior officers and offi-

cials of the board. The following decisions were taken to ensure uninterrupted water services in entire Delhi along with adoption of strict social distancing measures:

- ♦ The stock position and availability of chemicals, and other items used in treatment of water

was reviewed. Directions were given to the officials to ensure that supply chain of such essential chemicals and supply of clean drinking water must remain uninterrupted.

- ♦ Water distribution through tankers was reviewed and necessary instructions were given with regard to coordination with local



police officials for unhindered movement of tankers. Instructions were given with regard to social distancing while supplying the water through tankers.

- ♦ Concerned senior DJB officers were directed to take the local administration of police and magistrates in confidence so that

no problem is faced in movement of water tankers.

- ♦ Availability of staff/human resources on the ground to provide best possible services has to be ensured. It was noted in the meeting that there is an issue of outstationed employees that are unable to report due to non-availability of inter state conveyance and inter-state travel restrictions. Senior officials were directed to coordinate with local police and DMs/SDMs to facilitate the travel of such employees.
- ♦ Maintenance and service level quality to be ensured during the lockdown period.
- ♦ All workshops involved in providing necessary equipment for repair and Maintenance necessary for the functioning of the treatment plants and DJB network lines were asked to make appropriate provisions so that supply chain is not distributed.
- ♦ Delegation of emergency powers (financial and administrative) to field officials will be done for immediate and swift disposal of work and grievances.
- ♦ Decisions regarding quick release of payment to vendors, who are involved in day to day operations and maintenance of plants, is taken so that they do not face any financial crunch and their service quality remains unaffected.
- ♦ Engineering divisions were directed to ensure adequate water supply using tankers at night shelters set-up by the Government, where the food is being provided to the poor and destitute.



Minister of Shipping reviews major ports

In connection with the Covid-19 pandemic, Minister of State (I/C) for Shipping Mansukh Mandaviya reviewed the situation at all major ports regarding cargo handling, SOP, payment to casual labourers, through video conferencing with all the chairpersons of ports and DG, Shipping.

More than 90 per cent of exim cargo is handled through ports. For proper and smooth maintenance of the supply chain, the Ministry of Shipping is taking all-round measures. For easy movement of cargo at ports, the Ministry of Shipping has prepared Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) to be adhered at all ports to fight against Coronavirus.



Precautions by NTPC

National Thermal Power Corporation Limited (NTPC), India's electric power distribution company, is prepared to supply uninterrupted power to the nation despite the pandemic of Covid-19. To deal with the ongoing crisis, NTPC has issued suitable advisories for its employees. All the employees have been advised to avoid face to face meetings and public gatherings to the extent feasible.

The company has ensured wide circulation of do's and don'ts with regards to Coronavirus through different modes of extensive campaigning like films, posters, hoardings etc. Officials have been advised to curtail visit to foreign countries. Further, any person who has visited affected foreign countries in the recent past (last 14 days) is advised to report to the State Health Authorities for necessary action.

While entering NTPC campus or corporate office, hand sanitisers are made available with instruction of its use. Biometric process for employee attendance has been made manual for the time being.

All the trained health care staff at NTPC is observing the prevention and control and are using Protective Personal Equipment (PPE) as per the guidelines issued by the administration. The company has also ensured that visitors with essential business requirement 'only' are permitted to enter NTPC premises with prior approval. For submission of vendor bills, claims pertaining to ex-employees of NTPC can be put in a drop box at the entry gate to avoid physical transactions. Also, strict provisions are in place for screening of visitors and employees entering NTPC premise with thermal scanners/screeners. Allotment of guest houses at the plant locations are being regulated as per essential requirements.

All gyms, clubs, swimming pools, cinemas... have been closed at NTPC Townships. Plant canteens and dining halls are provided with adequate handwashing facilities and proper cleanliness of frequently touched surfaces. Despite this pandemic situation, NTPC is making sure that there is no gap in power generation and taking all precautionary measures to ensure the same.

NLC takes measures to combat Covid-19

Ever since the Government of India started issuing various advisories to take precautionary steps to prevent spread of Coronavirus, the NLC India Limited management is implementing a slew of preventive actions and awareness campaigns. A few of them are listed as under:

- The top management comprising Rakesh Kumar, Chairman-cum-Managing Director, R Vikraman, Director/HR, NNM Rao, Director/P&P, Prabhakar Chowki, Director/Mines, Shaji John, Director/Power and N Jaikumar Srinivasan, Director/Finance are constantly monitoring the activities besides having a structured review starting at 9.30 am daily.
- NLCIL's regular employees and the workmen of contractors have been exempted from marking biometric attendance. Instead, they are recording attendance electronically by using their identity cards.
- A positive awareness campaign has been launched through pamphlets, posters, hoardings and videos to imbibe and promote the habits of personal hygiene, workplace hygiene and maintaining social distance.
- Accommodation in NLCIL's guest houses have been highly restricted. The travel history and medical status of the guests are thoroughly scrutinised before permitting them in the guest house. Guests are also required to record any contact with those who have a travel history within two months to foreign countries and also about any clinical test undergone by them for Covid-19 or H1N1.
- In NLCIL's general hospital, a 'Quarantine Ward' has been created with 20 beds. Additionally three wards with 73 beds have

been earmarked and kept ready to function as isolation wards to meet any emergency.

- A high level team of doctors of NLCIL belonging to various disciplines such as General Medicine, Occupational Health, Pediatrics, Pathology and also with representatives from Nursing, Hospital Administration and Human Resource has been formed to review and implement necessary action on war footing on day-to-day basis.
- The management has sanctioned special funds to purchase all required essential items like sanitisers, masks, personal protective wear, foggers, disposable linen... for hospital, township and units' usage.
- The health department of township administration is taking care of maintaining sanitation and expediting holistic activities to maintain health and hygiene.
- Disinfection, fumigation and related activities are being carried out on regular basis.
- A special awareness programme on Covid-19 has been arranged with participation of Dr Saravana Kumari, MD, Government Medical College, Villupuram.
- A system has been put in place to permit 'work from home' on alternate days for



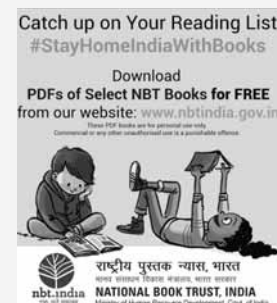
employees working in various regional offices at Chennai, Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Lucknow and Bhubaneswar.

- Similar preventive measures have also been taken up at all project sites —Thoothukudi (TN), Barsingsar (Rajasthan), Ghatampur (Uttar Pradesh), South Pachwara (Jharkhand), Talabira (Odisha) and all solar plants.
- A team of around 130 volunteers is carrying out in thermal scanning of incoming passengers. The Management has enlisted additional volunteers to put in action if situation demands.
- NLCIL, following government guidelines, has ordered that the places of Worship in Neyveli shall not be open to public until further orders.
- The mega annual festival of Panguni Uthirai at Siva Subramania Swamy Temple, Veludayanpattu, has been cancelled to avoid large gathering of public. Only the rituals will be performed by the priest.
- NLCIL has also implemented government guidelines to deploy skeletal staff in activities not directly connected to operation and maintenance of mines and thermal power stations.
- NLCIL is, thus, continuously monitoring the situation arising out of Covid-19 pandemic and taking all possible steps to prevent incidents.

IN SHORT

Keeping in mind the risk of Coronavirus, the biggest adverse effect of the lockdown has been on the animals, roaming on the deserted roads for food and water. Experts say that if these animals start dying due to hunger and thirst, it will be very difficult for the administration to get rid of the infectious diseases arising from them.

Ashima Sharma, founder of the NGO Devbhoomi Animal, said, "We decided to provide them food. So we gathered milk, bread and roti with our own expenses to feed them. We did this in the Rajnagar Extension area." He demanded the same from the administration. In this regard, District Animal Husbandry Officer, Dr Bijendra Tyagi, said that we will strictly look up on this matter and some action will be taken very soon.



To contain the spread of Covid-19, the National Book Trust of India encourages people to read books at home. They are providing their best-selling titles to download for free as a part of their initiative of #StayHomeIndiaWithBooks. In PDF format, 100 plus books can be downloaded from NBT's website. They are available in Hindi, English, Asamiya, Bangla, Gujarati, Malayalam, Odia, Marathi, Kokborok, Mizo, Bodo, Nepali, Tamil, Punjabi, Telugu, Kannada, Urdu and Sanskrit. The books cover all genres of fiction, biography, popular science, teacher's handbook, and are also available for children and young adults.

S N Shrivastava, CP, Delhi has granted out-of-turn promotion to constable (exe) Rajiv, posted in Dwarika district and conferred 'Asadharan Karya Puraskar' to five personnel — namely ASI Ravindra, posted in central district, HC Joginder Singh HC Vijay, HC Sanej, HC Krishan. They all are currently posted at PS Mundka, outer district, in recognition of their extraordinary acts of courage.

OUT OF TURN PROMOTION

Currently posted at PS Dwarika Sector 23, Constable Rajiv (number 2404/DW) joined Delhi Police in 2010 as a constable and now, has been granted out of turn promotion by CP, Delhi, for showing exemplary courage in rounding up the armed desperate criminals without caring for his life. He retaliated and fired at the criminals despite sustaining serious bullet injuries on his face while falling on the ground. Rajiv had to be admitted in a hospital and is currently under observation in ICU.

Acts of courage

The constable was patrolling in the area along with DHG Ajay Kumar on the intervening night of March 16 near L&T construction site in Bharthal village, Sector 26, Dwarika. They received information from the local guard about firing at the construction site and rushed to the spot. However, the assailants had escaped by then. They searched the area for the fleeing assailants and observed some suspicious movements in a plot located at the outer periphery of the area. They entered the premises and questioned those who they were suspicious about. All the four suspected persons had ran away towards different directions. The personnel managed to overpower one of the fleeing suspects and while taking him for further questioning to the PS Dwarika Sector 23, the escaped three assailants returned and opened fire at Rajiv in order to get their asso-



ciate released from their custody. Rajiv, showing exemplary courage, retaliated against and fired at the assailants despite sustaining serious bullet injury on his face.

Later, the police carried out vigorous investigation and arrested two assailants within 12 hours of the incident and subsequently more other accused were arrested.

ASADHARAN KARYA PURASKAR

Currently posted at DCP office complaint branch, central district, Daryaganj, ASI Ravindra (number 439/C) joined Delhi Police in 1991 as a constable and now, has been conferred with 'Asadharan Karya Puraskar' by CP, Delhi for his exceptionally brave work in nabbing one of the accused in a case by going beyond the call of his duty.

On the evening of March 17, he was on his way back to his residence after finishing his duty, when he reached near B-1/30 Building, Noor-E-Illahi, Anand Sagar Road, that he found three persons scuffling with each other

and also heard the sound of firing. Before he could understand the complete situation, he saw one person running with a pistol in his hand. He began chasing him. After doing that for 50 metres, he nabbed him with his pistol. Later, the suspected was identified as Imran from Ziauddinpur, New Musrafabad.

Ravindra, later, handled the situation tactfully and persuaded the group. The accused were handed over to local police of PS Bhajanpura for further investigation.

Currently posted at PS Mundka, outer district, HC Joginder Singh (number 658/OD), HC Vijay (number 1286/OD), HC Sanej (number 1263/OD) and HC Krishan (number 627/OD) have been conferred with the 'Asadharan Karya Puraskar' by CP, Delhi for showing high sense of responsibility in their official duties and putting their lives in danger in the line of duty.

On March 19, Joginder was deployed on QRT vehicle from 8 am to 8 pm. During patrolling,

when he reached at Loknayak Puram, Bakkarwala, he could hear screams of a woman nearby. Later, the woman informed him that two men robbed her gold chain and locket at gun point and ran away. Joginder immediately informed the SHO/Mundka as well as the nearby beat staff and started chasing the accused men. One of the accused opened fire on Joginder, who retaliated the fire with one round in self-defence. During this, both the accused reached the factory area of village Hirankudna and robbed a motorcycle at gun point and fled. Krishan, deployed at Hirankudna Mor, noticed both accused persons reaching the point on the robbed motorcycle. On seeing the police, one of the accused persons opened fired aiming at Vijay. In retaliation, Vijay fired two rounds and caught hold of one of the accused persons while Krishan overpowered the second one. The two were later identified as Dharmender from JJ Colony, Sawada, Delhi and Romil from Jamrud Pur, Greater Kailash I, Delhi.

Rescheduled Oly need sacrifices from all stakeholders: Bach | Coaches back to drawing board

AFP ■ LAUSANNE

International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach on Wednesday said that the postponed Tokyo Games would require "sacrifices and compromises" from all sides to make them work.

"These postponed Olympic Games will need sacrifices, will need compromises by all of the stakeholders," Bach told reporters in a conference call the day after the IOC decided to delay the 2020 Games.

The IOC's role, Bach said, was "to make the Olympic dreams of athletes come true."

He admitted that cancelling the Tokyo Games was "discussed and considered," but said: "It was very clear from the beginning that cancellation was not something the IOC would in any way favour."

It is the first Olympic Games in peacetime to be postponed.

Bach said the rescheduling of the Games in 2021 remained a "very challenging question."

A taskforce, named *Here We Go*, had been created to examine the issue, Bach added, saying the first port of call would be with the 33 international federations, likely starting with a conference call on Thursday.

"The first step, we have to see with them, to see what the options are. We also have to take into account the sports calendar around the Olympic Games," the



IOC president Thomas Bach attends an interview after the decision to postpone Tokyo 2020 Olympics because of coronavirus disease AP German said.

The rescheduling, he added, "is not restricted just to the summer months. All the options are on the table, before and including the summer of 2021."

Both World Athletics and the International Swimming Federation say they are prepared to move their 2021 world championships to accommodate the rescheduled Games.

The Athletics world championships are due to be held in Eugene, Oregon on August 6-15 next year, with the swimming worlds at Fukuoka in Japan between July 16 and August 1.

Tokyo postponement will have 'no impact' on Paris 2024: organisers

PARIS: The postponement of the Tokyo Olympics due to the coronavirus pandemic will have "no impact" on the Paris Games, which will go ahead as scheduled in "summer 2024," the head of the organising committee Tony Estanguet said.

The 2020 Games were delayed until "no later than summer 2021" by the IOC and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Tuesday, but Estanguet said the first postponement of an Olympics during peacetime would not affect the Paris edition, which will now be staged three years after the Tokyo event.

"The 2024 Games will be held in the summer of 2024. There is no impact on the date," said the three-time Olympic canoeing champion.

"It was the best decision for the athletes, for all the players in the Games," added Estanguet. "I believe that the Games must stay in their place."

"We are really advancing on our own preparation plan. Each situation in the Games is different. We do not have the same infrastructure to build."

"We are advancing on our schedule independently of that of Tokyo." AFP

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The athletes are playing the waiting game for now but coaches involved with India's Olympic-bound bunch have already put their thinking hats on to redraw the preparation plans a day after the Games got postponed to 2021.

"It is going to affect the shooters in a big way, especially the young ones who are appearing in their first Olympics. We have been preparing for the past three years. Having said that, we need to accept this without any complaints," national pistol shooting coach Jaspal Rana said.

So far, close to 80 Indian athletes have qualified for the Games and the number is expected to swell once the qualifiers re-start.

Shooters are almost always considered India's best bet for Olympic medals.

In Tokyo, 15 of them — eight men and seven women — will take aim for medals, including a bunch of exciting teenagers competing in their maiden Olympics.

Nine boxers and an equal number of track and field athletes have also made the cut so far.

"I will redraw the plans only after the dates for the 2021 Games are out. We need to know when are the next qualifiers. We aren't really worried because we have got qualification in nine out of 13 weight categories," said boxing's High Performance Director Santiago Nieva, referring to the five men and four women, who have already made the cut for Tokyo.

Boxing was scheduled to have a world qualifying event in May, which was postponed. India will have a shot at more Olympic slots whenever that tournament takes place.

"These are unreal times...The planning going forward would be focussed mostly on building up rather than qualifying. We are not as concerned as some others, who did not have enough qualifications in the Asian tournament (in Jordan)," Nieva said.

Deputy national athletics coach P Radhakrishnan Nair struck a note of skepticism on what can be achieved and feels a postponement till 2022 would have been better.

Indian athletics has not produced an Olympic medallist till date.

"It will be a challenge for us as far as planning of training and competition schedule is concerned. In this situation of lockdown I feel the athletics season is as good as over for this year," Nair said, referring to the nationwide lockdown till April 15.

"I don't think we can start doing any-

thing before September or October. Then the seven-eight months before the Olympics (in 2021) may not be enough. Had it been 2022, it would have been better," he added.

National badminton coach Pullela Gopichand went with the majority view and said he doesn't expect any major glitch in the shuttlers' build-up.

Going by current rankings, P V Sindhu, B Sai Praneeth and the men's doubles pair of Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy are assured of an Olympic berth.

"I think a year is a good time...We will have enough time to come back. So, I don't think there will be any problems or negative effect on preparations," he asserted.

Another strong medal bet for India is wrestling and Vinesh Phogat, one of the biggest stars among the Indian hopefuls, will take the break positively, according to her coach Woller Akos.

"We need to look at the positive side with Vinesh. We have got one more year to prepare against the best opponents," the Hungarian said, asserting that the Asian Games champion is more than ready for any challenge even right now.

"An athlete needs to be a maximalist. She (Vinesh) is ready to follow our dreams and preparation," he added while talking about the lone woman among four wrestlers to have qualified for Tokyo.

National weightlifting coach Vijay Sharma said he will have to rework his planning to ensure that the one year in hand is put to best use.

Only former world champion Mirabai Chanu is currently assured of a Tokyo ticket among the lifters.

"We will have to plan everything again now. We are now waiting for guidelines on the new qualifying system, accordingly, we will plan our training," he said.

"With the cancellation of the Asian Championships (earlier) we changed our plan a bit but now with the Olympic postponement, it will change completely. We will try and find the best way to benefit from this situation," he added.

Rising Table Tennis player G Sathian's coach S Raman, a former national champion, welcomed the postponement.

Based on current rankings, Sathian is eligible for the Tokyo men's doubles event along with veteran A Sharath Kamal.

"Right decision and should not have come later than now as it would have confused players...You don't want panic training and the resultant virus among community of athletes," he said.

BAI postpone Sr National Badminton C'ships

NEW DELHI: The Badminton Association of India on Wednesday postponed the 84th Senior Badminton National C'ships scheduled to be held in Lucknow from April 27 to May 3 after the government put the country under lockdown till April 14.

"Now that the government has extended the lockdown, we have decided to postpone the 84th Senior nationals bad-

minton Championships and 75th Inter State — Inter Zonal. It is unfortunate that the tournament couldn't be held as planned but it is a grave situation and fighting this disease is the priority," BAI General secretary Ajay Singhania said.

"Once the situation comes under control, we will meet and then decide if it is feasible to conduct the tournament at a later date." PTI

IOA, Sports Ministry to revise preparation plans

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Olympic Association on Wednesday conceded that careers of some athletes would be impacted by the postponement of Tokyo Olympics and the IOA would look to address this when it makes revised preparation plans in consultation with the sports ministry.

Like all stakeholders, the IOA on Tuesday welcomed the International Olympic Committee's decision to postpone the Summer Games.

"A one-year postponement might impact the career/qualification and plans of some athletes, which would be addressed in the coming months and all necessary support would also be extended by us," IOA Secretary General Rajeev Mehta said in a letter to the IOC and the Tokyo Games organisers without specifying any names.

"I am holding discussions and there would be meetings scheduled with the Federations after the lockdown in India is over. Athletes' safety is our utmost priority

now.

"We would be also consulting with the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports in revising the preparation plans," he added.

While the postponement of the Games has brought relief to the athletes, it has also made some of them uncertain about the qualification process, which was abandoned in most sports due to the deadly outbreak.

Meanwhile, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe heard from US President Donald Trump during phone

talks that the decision to postpone the Olympics for one year was the right one, Japan's top govt spokesperson said.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told a press conference after the call that Trump had described the move to delay the games amid the coronavirus pandemic as a "wise and great" decision.

"President Trump repeatedly said the postponement was a very wise and great decision and he expressed support for the prime minister's stance," Suga said.

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