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10 VIVACITY

Centre provides ₹1.7L cr succour to poor

Focus on migrant/farm labourers; ₹50L insurance for health-sanitation workers; fund to prevent lay-off



Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman addresses a Press conference to announce Garib Kalyan Yojana to help the poor in the view of the coronavirus lockdown at National Media Centre in New Delhi on Thursday

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Thursday unveiled a ₹1.7 lakh crore relief package for the weaker section of the society to deal with the impact of the three-week nationwide lockdown due to the coronavirus outbreak. However, there was nothing for the corporate sector that has taken a big hit due to the pandemic.

The economic package to help migrant workers, labour-

ers, poor and agricultural workers, and others will come into effect immediately. "It has been made to reach out to the most vulnerable sections of the society who are in need of immediate help because of the economic disruption," said Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

Minister of State for Finance & Corporate Affairs Anurag Thakur was present, besides Atanu Chakraborty, Secretary, Department of

Economic Affairs and Debashish Panda, Secretary, Department of Financial Services.

Sitharaman also announced direct cash transfers for a large number of affected people, including senior citizens, widows, farmers and daily-wage labourers.

As per the package, health and sanitation workers will be insured for ₹50 lakh per person. This will cover nearly 20 lakh persons.

"Safai karamcharis, ward boys, nurses, paramedics, technicians, doctors and specialists, and others' health would be covered by a special insurance scheme. Any health professional who while treating Covid-19 patients meets with some accident, then he/she would be compensated with an amount of ₹50 lakh under the scheme," stated the Government Press release.

The package says that under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana 80 crore poor people will get 5 kg per person rice/wheat each month for the next 3 months in addition to 5kg of rice/wheat that they already get. Besides, 1kg of pulse according to regional preference for each household.

In a big relief to the rural women, the package says that 8.3 crore BPL Ujjwala Yojana beneficiaries will be given free

cylinders for the next three months. During this period, a maximum of three gas cylinders will be provided.

The move comes two days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi ordered a 21-day nationwide lockdown.

Most of the financial benefits will be routed through the DBT scheme into the Jan Dhan account of the beneficiaries. In case, they don't have such accounts, the Government will make alternative arrangement to provide them financial relief.

Sitharaman announced that daily wages under the MNREGA have been increased to ₹202 a day from ₹182. This will benefit nearly 5 crore families, Sitharaman said.

Under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana, farmers will get ₹2,000 in April. This is expected to cover 8.7 crore families. The total amount dis-

tributed is estimated to be ₹16,000 crore.

In addition, a total of 20.40 crore PM JAN Dhan Yojana women account-holders will be given ex-gratia of ₹500 per month for next three months.

"This will help them run their household during this difficult period. For this purpose, the Government of India will spend ₹31,000 crore,"

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said.

Amid clamour for relief to low-wage earners in the unorganised sector who face a gloomy scenario due to the lockdown, the Government has decided to pay 24 per cent of their monthly wages into their Provident Fund accounts for the next three months.

"Wage earners below

₹15,000 per month in businesses having less than 100 workers are at risk of losing their employment," the Government said, adding that the assistance would help prevent "disruption in their employment". The package also hopes to provide succour to senior citizens, widows and divyangs, numbering 3 crore.

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As corona testing ratio too low, assessment has long way to go

With billion plus population, only 25,000 samples tested so far

ARCHANA JYOTI/TN
RAGHUNATHA ■ NEW DELHI

lockdown is not complete solution to combat the virus which has infected over 700 people and killed 15 so far in India.

Compare India with the US, which has four times less population, on testing parameters. While only around 24,000 individuals have been tested in India, the number stands around 60,000 for the USA.

WHO head Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has been maintaining at various forum that "all countries should be able to test all suspected cases, they cannot fight this pandemic blindfolded."

On Thursday, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) directed hospitals, including the private ones, to collect the nasal and throat swab samples of the suspected cases of COVID19 in one VTM tube and transport them to the nearest testing laboratory in cold chain.

Till now, only people in contact with the infected or those with travel history to high-risk countries, or health workers managing patients with severe respiratory disease and developing Covid-19 symptoms, are eligible for test.

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India has over 1-yr foodgrain reserve

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has enough foodgrain reserves to feed the poor amid the nationwide lockdown to contain the spread of coronavirus.

According to official data, the Government currently has 58.49 million tonnes (MT) of foodgrains in the Food Corporation of India (FCI) godowns. Out of which, rice constitutes 30.97 million tonne and wheat 27.52 million tonne.

The foodgrain stock is much higher than the required norm of maintaining a reserve of about 21 million tonne as on April 1. The Government will supply over next three months additional 2 kg subsidised foodgrains under the PDS, taking the total monthly quota to 7 kg per person.

Sources said 58.49 million tonnes of grains can enable the



distribution of a full year's quota in advance to all ration card holders and beneficiaries of other welfare schemes. "Also, there is a stock of around 3 million metric tonnes of pulses, 1.1 million metric tonnes of oil seed and 4 million tonnes of sugar," the sources said.

Further, wheat procurement is about to start soon. The Consumer Affairs Ministry allowed FCI to sell food stocks to private markets under the

Open Market Sale Scheme. Besides, the Government has asked fast moving consumers good firms to ramp up supplies to meet domestic demand.

"FCI godowns has sufficient reserves to meet the demand and officials are keeping a close watch on distribution of foodgrains," Union Food and Consumer Affairs Minister Ram Vilas Paswan said in a tweet.

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CUSHION AGAINST FINANCIAL PROBLEMS

- 8.3 crore BPL Ujjwala Yojana beneficiaries will be given free cylinders for the next three months.
- 80 crore poor people will get 5 kg per person wheat or rice and 1 kg of preferred pulses for the next three months
- 20 crore women Jan Dhan account holders to get ₹500 per month for next three months
- Increase in MNREGA wage to ₹202 a day from ₹182 to benefit 13.62 crore families
- An ex-gratia of ₹1,000 to 3 crore poor senior citizen, poor widows and poor disabled
- The Government to front-load ₹2,000 paid to farmers in first week of April under existing PM Kisan Yojana to benefit 8.7 crore farmers
- Central Government has given orders to State Governments to use Building and Construction Workers Welfare Fund to provide relief to Construction Workers

88 new cases, highest single day hike

Corona number rises to 694, death toll 16; ban on international flight till April 14

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India recorded 88 new positive coronavirus cases on Thursday, the single largest in a day, as the total count of confirmed cases, including 16 deaths and cured ones, reached 694. In a clear message that there will not be any let-up in the lockdown, the Government extended the ban on international flight operations to India to April 14.

It has been decided that scheduled international commercial passenger services shall



A BMC worker fumigates Byculla market area as a precautionary measure against the spread of coronavirus during lockdown in Mumbai on Thursday

remain closed till 6:30 am (GMT) of April 14, 2020. This will not apply to approve inter-

national all-cargo operations and flights," said the Directorate General of Civil

Aviation (DGCA) in a statement. Even as the coronavirus infected cases continue to move northward, the Government on Thursday asserted that India is not in the community transmission stage of coronavirus pandemic.

A senior Ministry official said if and when India registers community transmission of the deadly virus, people will be informed for their safety. Talking to media during the routine Press briefing here, head scientist of the Indian Council of Medical Research

(ICMR) Dr Raman R Gangakhedkar said there is no hard evidence to say there has been community transmission of the novel coronavirus in India. The total count of positive Covid-19 cases in India neared the 694 mark, as per latest figures made available by the Union Health Ministry, as the country entered second day of the 21-day long lockdown announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, as a measure to contain the spread of the deadly contagion.

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Essential goods shops, firms to remain open 24x7: Kejriwal

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In order to ensure smooth supply of essential items and discourage large gathering during ongoing lockdown period, the Delhi Government on Thursday said shops and factories associated with essential services can operate 24x7. No additional licence is required.

In a joint Press meet with Lieutenant Governor Anil Bajaj, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said, "We have decided to allow all establishments that supply essential items or are part of the supply chain for such items to function 24x7 to prevent overcrowding during the day. This will require no additional permits and licences. E-commerce companies in Delhi can home deliver essential commodities and employees' identity cards to be considered valid," he said.

Addressing people via video streaming, Kejriwal said areas SDMs and ACPs must ensure opening of shops and factories supplying such as vegetables, general, ration, medicines in their areas.

"ACPs have been tasked with ensuring that all the grocery shops and other utility stores remain open. Today we discussed delivery of essential services," he said.

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Modi to G-20: Human, not economy, focus

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday urged the powerful G-20 to put human beings rather than economic targets at the centre of the vision for global prosperity and cooperation.

In his address at a video conference of the G-20 leaders, Modi also pitched for developing a new crisis management protocol and procedures to deal with global health crisis besides significantly boosting capability of organisations like the WHO.

Detailed report on P8

3-ply face masks can't be priced above ₹16/piece

Besides capping MRP till June 30, Govt allows distilleries and sugar mills to make hand sanitisers

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In its efforts to make face masks and hand sanitisers available to the masses, the Ministry of Food and Consumer Affairs on Thursday capped the price of 3-ply face masks made of melt blown non-woven fabric at ₹16 per piece till June 30 and also allowed distilleries and sugar mills to manufacture hand sanitisers in bulk.

Licences have also been issued to 45 distilleries in an order to maintain demand and supply balance of sanitisers due to skyrocketing demand amid coronavirus.

Consumer Affairs Secretary Pawan Agarwal on Thursday said the retail price of 2-ply and 3-ply surgical face masks remain the same. The rates will remain in force up to June 30. The Consumer Affairs Ministry had notified MRP



for 2 ply and 3 ply "surgical" face masks at ₹8 and ₹10 per piece, respectively on March 21. But for 3 ply melt blown face

masks, it had said MRP would at the rate that prevailed as on February 12.

"We had a meeting with face mask manufacturers. They were facing some challenges because of lack of clarity on MRP front. So, we have decided to fix the MRP of 3 ply melt blown face masks at ₹16 per piece," Agarwal added.

On allowing distilleries and sugar mills to manufacture hand sanitisers in bulk,

Agarwal said the department had received 100 applications, of which we have given licence to 45 distilleries so far apart from 564 other manufacturers. "These companies will manufacture hand sanitisers in bulk. More than 55 distilleries are likely to be given permission in one or two days and many more are being motivated to produce hand sanitisers," he said.

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National Capital silenced

The Pioneer's Kushan Mitra drove around a desolate and deserted Delhi.

As someone who has called this city home for over the past three decades, this was unusual. Even on the days when much of the city shuts down, Republic Day or Independence Day, the city is still loud, abuzz and full of life.

On a normal Thursday afternoon in late-March with such fine weather, Connaught Place would be full of people, young couples stealing some moments, shoppers hunting for deals at Palika Bazaar, office workers out for a drink with colleagues at the countless bars and restaurants. Instead, the giant flagpole is bare, the streets deserted other than the police-

men running the checkpoints and Palika Bazaar's entrances are locked. This is not Delhi as anyone has ever known it in living memory, even those with memories of the 1965 and 1971 wars will say that while blackouts and curfews were common, this is unnatural.

The destitute and the homeless face a challenge like never before, with few people on the streets to give alms and restaurants and shops shut, they can't even acquire the limited rations that they used to earlier. While various State Governments and the Centre have promised that people will not go hungry, when you ask the runaways in Connaught Place if they have heard anything they tell you they haven't. Some private individuals like

Arjun and Ambika Pandey are distributing food packets and other doing so with fruit, but in these times, small private contributions can never catch up to state machinery.

Outside the Inter-State Bus Terminal (ISBT) at Kashmiri gate, a place that is usually bustling with human traffic 24 hours a day, it is surreal to see the empty roads. There are some buses running, but only for essential workers as notified by the government. Migrants from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar who are still trying to find a way home now that their daily-wage jobs have evaporated thanks to this gift from China, stand helpless around the bus station, although it must be noted that the air in this area, usually thick with

diesel fumes is strangely clean. Among those left behind by India's economic growth of the past few decades, there is confusion and helplessness, but they are beginning to understand the gravity of the situation, but they know that they are, as the saying goes, caught between a rock and a hard place.

At popular destinations for local outings such as India Gate and Red Fort, the emptiness looks like the set of an apocalyptic movie rather than sites in an Indian city. There are some private vehicles around, but those are few and far between, mostly carrying officials and mediapersons.

But we face an enemy whom we cannot see, whom we do not know how to defeat,



indeed nobody in the world knows how to defeat.

Earlier in the day, the Chief Minister, Arvind Kejriwal announced that there were 36 patients for SAR-CoV 2, the so-called 'Wuhan Virus' in the capital, but he also highlighted the risks that healthcare work-

ers face with one virus-infected patient who returned from Saudi Arabia infecting a Mohalla Clinic doctor who subsequently passed it onto his family. The dangers are ever present. Those in the know are pinning some hope on various theories, particularly the 'tem-

perature' theory, but we do not know what will happen next. This is just the third day of the 21-day lockdown, the fifth day of staying at home since Sunday for many of us. This will not be an easy time for anyone. And Delhi might never feel the same again.

Migrant workers say goodbye to Delhi, many on foot

SHEKHAR SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

Following the coronavirus outbreak, the railway stations and Anand Vihar and Kashmiri Gate Inter-state bus terminals (ISBT) have now become home to migrant labourers and rickshaw pullers who spend their sleepless nights, hoping restoration of transport services so that they can return home.

Interestingly, most of them started walking towards their respective States by foot. “What can we do in such a situation except taking a call ourselves? Waiting in open night in hope of situation to get improved is better than walking towards our home states. It may take 10 to 15 days to reach at homes but considering circumstances, we have decided to go-ahead,” said a daily wager, who is staying at ISBT for last couple of days in a hope that he would get a transport for his native house in Uttar Pradesh.

Hailing mostly from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, these labourers are unable to pay rent and these workers had no choice except to vacate accommodation with a little money left in their hand to survive. “We labourers are paid on daily basis. With no work it was not possible for me to pay next month rent for my house in JJ cluster at Rangpuri so only



A group of migrant workers walk to their villages amid the nationwide complete lockdown, on the NH24 near Delhi-UP Border in New Delhi on Thursday

option was to leave for home. We have limited money with us now,” said Ramesh Kumar (37), a native of districr Sitapur in Bihar.

Forced by unprecedented situation, these migrant labourers are feeling trapped with no one paying heeds towards their plight. Many among them are dependent on each other to survive while some of them have

started visiting the nearest overcrowded shelters to have food and return back at the same open premises, fearing that they can also catch the deadly coronavirus infection.

“We around 10 to 12 people including children. The day lockdown was announced we all packed our luggage and left for the bus stand but when we reached here, the bus services

were suspended, leaving us with no other option but to spend our nights here,” said Bhure Lal (43), who used to work as a laborer in city.

“Most of us had left towards their homes on foot due to unavailability of transport system. There is no food and even roof, so what would one do. I have two children but I can’t walk towards Kanpur



PTI

along with them on foot,”said Vijay, a resident of Kanpur who worked as a daily wager in Delhi.

“Though we face issue while staying at bus stand and Railways stations as police keeps on removing us from here. But where do we find shelter as shelters homes in city are also full and we don’t have money even to afford a house

to stay in. We only go to shelter homes for food,” said Vijay in hush tone.

“I used to work in a plastic godown located at Samaypur area. I have not been going to work since the last 6 days. I belong to Muzaffarpur , Bihar but now cannot even travel to reach home due to this lockdown,” said Sanjay Choudhary, a daily wager.

“Here we ourselves do not have money to survive. All we are worried about is our families to whom we used to send money and are not been able to now. Most of our(workers) families are dependent on us. Spending every penny or saving we have is becoming difficult for us,” said Choudhary.

Another dailywager, Dara Singh who used work in at

Ensure essential household items to people: Bidhuri to CM

NEW DELHI: Leader of the Opposition in the Delhi Legislative Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri has written a letter to the Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal suggesting that essential household items like milk, vegetables and fruits should also be made available at ration shops so that people do not have to visit various outlets to get these commodities.

“It is important to ensure some of these things at one place to stop movement. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will give full support to the Delhi Government in dealing with the deadly corona epidemic,” he said. Bidhuri has suggested that the Government should prepare its mobile vans which reach different parts of the capital and provide the people with everything they need. Similarly, e-passes should be issued to ration shopkeepers, milk sellers, vegetable sellers, grocery stores, etc., so that they can also facilitate their business, he said. **SR**

Efforts on to bring back mortal remains of Delhi man killed in Kabul terror attack: Jaishankar

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Condemning the terror attack on a gurudwara in Kabul claiming 25 lives, including a 71-year Delhi resident, Tian Singh, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said here on Thursday the Indian embassy there is in touch with family members of the victims. He also said efforts were on to bring back the mortal remains of the Delhi resident.

The Islamic State terrorist group has claimed responsibility for the attack which came weeks after a historic deal between the US and the Taliban to bring lasting peace to Afghanistan.

Reacting to the killings, Jaishankar said in tweet “Understandable grief and anger at the cowardly terrorist attack on Gurudwara in #Kabul. Our Embassy @IndianEmbKabul is in con-

tinuous touch with the families of those killed and injured.”

“Medical opinion against moving injured at this stage. Embassy @IndianEmbKabul is working on the return of mortal remains of Shri Tian Singh. Will keep you updated,” he said.

Indian Ambassador to Afghanistan Vinay Kumar visited the gurudwara and met community leaders, elders and families of the victims of the terrorist attack.

He shared their grief and offered condolences. He was told that the injured are receiving satisfactory treatment, officials said.

India on Wednesday had strongly condemned the terror attack, saying targeting of a religious place in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic reflected the “diabolical mindset” of the perpetrators and their backers.

1,600 wholesale fruit, vegetable mandis start functioning

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As many as 1,600 wholesale fruit and vegetable mandis have started functioning smoothly and 300 more will operate from Friday after the Central Government on Thursday stepped in to normalise the supply during the lockdown. Social distancing, safety measures are in place at mandis. To ensure that vegetables and fruits continue to reach people without any hindrance, Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) has started giving out passes to those involved in the supply chain for their easy movement in the city.

Officials of the agriculture ministry said that the ministry is in constant touch with state governments in charge of agriculture marketing and APMC or wholesale mandi boards to take proactive measures to ensure supply of essential vegetables and fruits is not hit dur-

ing the lockdown period.

“There were initial resistance but we have persuaded with State Government and APMC board to keep mandis open. As a result, 1,600 fruits and vegetable mandis have started functioning smoothly today and 300 more will open from Friday,” officials said. While there is no scarcity of vegetables and fruits arriving in the capital, wholesale traders said that sending it to retail markets was a challenge. Because of the lockdown, the retailers are finding it difficult to reach the wholesale market. Vegetable traders’ association general secretary Anil Malhotra alleged that wholesalers and staff were not able to reach Azadpur mandi leading to rotting of the stock of perishable items.

There are about 6,900 wholesale mandis, including grains, vegetables and fruits ones, across the country. The grain mandis get activated during the time of harvest.

People in 31-40 yrs age group constitute 25% coronavirus victims

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Busting the general perception that senior citizens are susceptible to contracting coronavirus, a statistical analysis released by the Medical Education and Drugs Department (MEDD), Maharashtra on Thursday revealed that a sizeable of infected patients fell in the 31-40 years age group.

Of the total 122 cases till Wednesday evening , as much as 33 infected persons are in the 31-40 years, 24 each in the age groups of 21-30 years and 41-50 years, while 15 persons are in the 51-60 age group. The remaining 13 are in the 61-70 age groups.

However, all those persons—five as on Thursday evening — were in the age group 60-70 years.

The state MEDD data showed that two minors in the 1-10 age group and three very senior citizens in the age group of 71-80 were also infected.

88 new cases...

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He said social distancing is the strongest counter of the pandemic. Goa and Kashmir reported first coronavirus death. A 65-year-old man hailing from Hyderpora area, Srinagar, died on Thursday, becoming the first fatality in Jammu & Kashmir due to coronavirus while Maharashtra reported its fourth fatality. Dr Gangakhedkar dismissed claims that lack of travel or contact history of a Hyderabad positive case reflected that India was in the community transmission stage. “If we can’t figure out how one-two people got the virus it just means that we have not done enough to trace the history,” Dr Gangakhedkar said. Lav Agarwal, Joint Secretary, Union Health Ministry, said we can consider we are in community transmission stage only when there are about 20 to 30 per cent cases with no clue on how they got the virus. “If India enters that stage, we will not hide it. We will tell people so that we can step up the level of alertness and awareness,” he said. The Health Ministry officials also dismissed international studies saying India may face a staggering number of cases in the near future as doomsday predictors. On being asked about the predictions of a University of Michigan study, which said India could face between 100,000 to 13 lakh confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus by

mid-May, Dr Gangakhedkar said there would be many doomsday predictors, but if the current lockdown is successful then we may not even see the current numbers budge. Agarwal said, “If we collectively work for it and follow guidelines issued by the government, we will soon be able to say that we have proved all these predictions wrong.” He said social distancing has been able to help break the chain of Covid-19 spread. “While the numbers of Covid-19 cases are increasing, the rate at which they are increasing appears to be relatively stabilising. However, this is only the initial trend,” he said. A senior Home Ministry official said the Government is working to ensure the supply of essentials. “The Government is taking steps to ensure that production, supply or distribution of essential goods and services do not get affected during coronavirus lockdown. States are working to provide food and shelter to migrant workers,” Punya Salila Srivastava, Joint Secretary, MHA said. The Health Ministry said 17 States have started work on earmarking hospitals for dedicated treatment of Covid-19 patients. Forty-five people have been cured so far. As per data by the Health Ministry, Maharashtra has reported the highest number of Covid-19 cases so far at 128, including three foreign nationals, followed by Kerala which has recorded 118 cases, including eight foreign nationals.

Centre provides ₹1.7L cr...

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“The Government will give them Rs 1,000 to tide over difficulties during next three months. ₹3,000 crore has been provided for this purpose in the PM Garib Kalyan Package,” the Finance Minister said.

As per the Government’s decision, the Employees’ Provident Fund Regulations will be amended to include ‘pandemic’ as the reason to allow non-recoverable advance of 75 per cent of the amount or three months of the wages, whichever is lower, from their accounts.

India has...

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State-run Food Corporation of India (FCI), the Government’s nodal agency for procurement and distribution of foodgrains under the Public Distribution System, is keeping a close watch on supply of subsidised grains to the ration-card holders, he added.

Under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), the Government is supplying 5 kg of foodgrains per month to over 80 crore people at a highly subsidised price. Wheat is supplied at Rs 2/kg and rice at Rs 3/kg.

In 2018-19, around 57 million tonnes of wheat and rice

was distributed in the country through the ration shops network. That included grain for schemes such as National Food Security Mission (NFSM), Mid-day Meal Scheme, Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) and the Annapurna Yojana, apart from the needs of defence forces.

In the case of pulses, NAFED has stock of pulses at 3 million metric tonnes that can be immediately offloaded to markets. Except for red gram (arhar) that needs processing, all pulses varieties at NAFED are ready for distribution.

In the case of oilseed, one problem is that processing has to be quick, as they need to be

converted into the edible form. This could mean some supply disruption. Even so, the oilseed stock with the Government is around 1.1 mt. Of this, 800,000 tonnes is groundnut seed and the rest is of mustard. Mustard seed’s conversion into oil is easier and quicker than groundnut’s.

The Centre allowed poor households applicable under public distribution scheme to lift six months of grains in one go.

The move will not only ensure that ensure rural families have enough to survive but will also keep a check on price rise. India has enough grain stock to supply to its citizens for more than one year.

As corona...

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To ensure availability of testing kits, the Government through the ICMR has sought price quotes for the supply of 10 lakh antibody kits (serological test) for diagnosis of COVID-19. It will also procure 7 lakh RNA extraction kits, for a method which is currently used for the testing of the virus in the country.

Since, the clearance of the company manufacturing these kits will take its own time, experts say that India is already too late in ramping up its efforts to contain the deadly disease.

Meanwhile, on the suggestions of the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI), the ICMR has given nod to labs at Virology Department of the All Indian Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS), Delhi, National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), Delhi, KEM, Mumbai, NICED, Kolkata and Nimhans in Bangalore the to validate the testing kits.

The DCGI had pointed out that the country’s only lab, NIV-Pune that has been assigned for validation of kits will not be able to do job with cent per cent accuracy because of the load to test the kits hence, more labs should be asked to do the task.

The agency has invited kit manufacturers to quote their prices. It has also asked them about supply timeline and capacity available for COVID-19 testing kits that are approved by ICMR or international authorities like USFDA and EUA. The supply locations for the test kits are Dibrugarh, Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bhopal and Delhi.

In addition to over a 100 Government laboratories that

have been approved for the COVID-19 testing, the Union Health Ministry has roped in close to 30 private laboratories with over 17,000 collection centres all over the country to carry out COVID-19 tests based on the ICMR protocols.

The laboratories are in the process of procuring the test kits and readying themselves for scaling up testing capabilities. The ICMR has also indicated that it might go for parallel contracts to more than one vendors to ensure timely supply.

Once community transmission is documented, the testing strategy will undergo changes to evolve into stage-appropriate testing strategy, the ICMR has said. Advisory for testing are being reviewed and updated periodically.

Now let’s take a look at Maharashtra which has recorded the maximum number of positive cases. Amid reports that Maharashtra lacks enough testing facilities for Covid-19, State Medical Education Minister Amit Deshmukh does not quite agree with it.

“As of now, we can cater to our current requirements. God forbid, there should not community spread of the pandemic in the State. On our part, we are preparing ourselves for the worst and are enhancing further testing facilities across the State,” Deshmukh told The Pioneer.

According to Deshmukh, the State currently has a capacity to test 2,000 Covid-19 samples in 14 Government-run laboratories across the State. “Before the outbreak of coronavirus, we had three laboratories National Institute of Virology (NIV) in Pune, Kasturba Hospital in Mumbai and IGM Hospital in Nagpur that had the capacity to carry out 800 Covid-19 tests.

We have now added 11 more medical college-com-hospitals across the State for carrying out the necessary tests. Together, we have the capacity to 2,000 samples in these 14 Government-run labs,” Deshmukh said. The 11 Government institution labs where Covid-19 testing has now been allowed are BJ Medical College-hospital, Pune, GSMC Hospital, KEM Hospital, Grant Medical-JJ Hospital, Haffkine Institute, all in Mumbai, AFMC college-hospital, Pune and Government medical college-associated Hospitals at Miraj, Akola, Aurangabad, Pune, Solapur and Nagpur.

In addition, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) on Wednesday granted permission to nine private laboratories in Maharashtra to undertake coronavirus tests. They comprise: HN Reliance Foundation Hospital and Research Centre, Kokilaben Dhirubai Ambani Hospital Laboratory, Thyrocare Technology Limited, Metropolis Health Care Limited, iGenetic Diagnostic Pvt Ltd, SRL Limited, Suburban Diagnostics (India) Pvt Limited, all in Mumbai, AG Diagnostics Pvt Limited, Pune and InfeXn Laboratories, Thane (west). “I reckon that these private laboratories can together undertake 2,000 Covid-19 tests a day. If we put the capacities of the Government and private hospitals together, we have total capacity to undertake 28,000-

30,000 coronavirus tests in a seven-day week. This is more than sufficient cases considering that we are currently testing referral Covid-19 samples from various hospitals across the State,” Deshmukh said.

iGenetic Diagnostics, which was one of the pathology labs with NABL accredited centers located in Mumbai, elsewhere in Maharashtra, Delhi and Bengaluru that have been permitted by the ICMR to undertake Covid-19 test, says it can carry out 500 tests in a day. “We can carry out 500 Covid-19 tests in a day. We will collect samples from the homes of patients on the basis of prescriptions. We will carry out tests at the Government-prescribed price of Rs 4,500 per test. We have taken this initiative to support the Government in all its efforts to control the spread of this disease” iGenetic Diagnostics’ founder-CEO Arunima Patel said.

Meanwhile, according to a medical bulletin put out by the Public Health Department of the Maharashtra Government on Wednesday evening, as many as 2,988 people have - since January 18 - been hospitalised in various isolation wards across the State owing to them developing symptoms such as fever, cold, cough etc. Of the total admissions, 2,531 laboratory samples were negative and 122 have tested positive for coronavirus.

Rajnath reviews future action plan

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With the armed forces playing a big role in the national fight against the coronavirus pandemic, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday reviewed the action plan of his Ministry for the coming days in responding to the challenge within and outside the country.

At present, Army teams and two navy ships are on standby to provide any assistance to fight the pandemic in the friendly neighbourhood countries even as an army team has returned from the Maldives after providing all help. A team of six doctors and eight paramedical personnel of the Army was deployed in Maldives since March 13 for setting up a viral testing laboratory for coronavirus.

The Minister was briefed on all these measures besides the fact about the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) laboratories having manufactured 20,000 litres of sanitisers and supplied them to various organisations including the Delhi police, which has been supplied with 10,000 litres of sanitisers. The DRDO has also supplied 10,000 masks to the Delhi Police, officials said.

Paramilitary forces told to set up pan-India facilities

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has asked the Central paramilitary forces to set up facilities across the country to quarantine as many as 5,440 persons amid the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. The central forces have also made arrangements for isolating 75 patients.

While the ITBP quarantine facility at Chhawla in the national capital is operational and successfully quarantined and discharge hundreds of evacuees from Wuhan (China) and other places, the other paramilitary forces have created threshold to set up such facilities within 24 hours, a senior Union Home Ministry official privy to the development said.

Testing kits will be provided to the quarantine facilities on need basis through Ministry of Health (DG Health Service), an official said.

It is tying up with some private companies to make personal protection equipment such as

Apart from monitoring routine health parameters of the inmates by a team of qualified doctors and paramedical staff, these facilities will be equipped with provision of meals and indoor games.

The directive to set up the quarantine facilities across the country was taken following a decision of Group of Ministers and the order was circulated through a letter from the office of the Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba and Health Secretary.

With a provision of 1,940 beds, the Border Security Force (BSF) leads the pack followed by 1,800-bedded facilities by the Central Reserve Police Force and a capacity to quarantine 1,000 persons by the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP).

Likewise, the National Security Guards (NSG) and Central Industrial Security Force CISF will set up facilities with 300 beds each to quaran-

body suits and also ventilators. The Ordnance Factory Board, which has set up quar-

tine suspected coronavirus patients.

The Sasashtra Seema Bal (SSB) will set up a 100-bedded facility at Yelki (near Nanded in Maharashtra).

Besides the Chhawla camp in Delhi, the ITBP will also have a similar facility in Greater Noida (Uttar Pradesh). The ITBP has been allocated 20-bedded isolation wards.

The NSG will have its quarantine facilities at Manesar and Hyderabad. It will also have isolation facility for five patients.

The BSF facilities will be set up 800-bedded quarantine facility at Baikunthpur (Silliguri, West Bengal), Jodhpur (400 beds), Indore (200 beds), Chakur (Maharashtra, 200 beds), Kharkan (Punjab, 120 beds), Hazaribagh (Jharkhand, 100 beds), Srinagar (20 beds), Jalandhar (20 beds), Tekanpur (Madhya Pradesh, 20 beds), Kolakata (20 beds), Kadamtala

antennae facilities at various locations all over the country, has also ramped up production of

(20 beds) and Agartala (20 beds). The BSF will also have isolation wards for 10 patients.

The CRPF quarantine facilities will be located at 19 locations across the countries. While Pinjore (Haryana) will have 190-bedded facility, Guwahati, Jammu, Narela, Neemuch, Kolkata and Imphal each will have 150-bed facility. Nagpur will have 120-bed facility followed by Ranchi (75 beds), 209 CoBRA (75 beds), Mokamaghat (75) and Muzaffarpur (75). Ahmedabad, Allahabad, Coimbatore, Bengaluru, Pallipuram, Hyderabad and Gandhinagar will have bedded facility at the campuses of CRPF. The CRPF will have the most number of isolation wards with a capacity to lodge 40 patients.

The CISF facility for quarantine will be located at Shivganga near Madurai.

sanitisers, masks and body suits. Bharat Electronics Limited, a public sector undertaking, is

CRPF personnel to contribute one day's salary to PM's relief fund

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CRPF personnel have decided to make a contribution of one day salary to Prime Minister's National Relief Fund. "We are dutifully committed to stand firmly with our Nation in this challenging time of COVID-19 spread. It's an unanimous decision and a sincere effort by our personnel. The CRPF remains steadfast towards its motto of service and loyalty, a senior paramilitary official said. With a strength of 3.25 lakh, the CRPF is the biggest paramilitary in the world.

also engaged in manufacturing of ventilators, the minister was informed, they said.

BJP hails ₹1.7 L-cr relief package for weaker sections

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Thursday welcomed the ₹1.7 lakh-crore relief package announced by the Union Government for daily wage earners, farmers, women and senior citizens and pensioners in the organised and unorganised sectors saying it will help the poor sections of the society when the nation is on a 21-day lockdown to fight the coronavirus pandemic.

BJP President Jagat Prasad Nadda said the wide-range of economic package under Prime Minister 'Garib Kalyan Yojna' would mitigate immediate problems of food and money for the economically deprived population who would receive additional 5kg of wheat or rice per person as also 'dal' of 5 kg per house-hold for next three-months besides getting money in their bank accounts through DBT (Direct Bank transfer).

A total of 80 crore people will be covered under the package. Government also announced ₹50 lakh medical insurance cover for all health workers including Doctors, nurses and other medical personnel who are in forefront of battle against Coronavirus which may cross the crucial 'community spread' stage any time from now.

Nadda said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has announced a "huge relief" for the poor in this hour of crisis and asserted that it is the ruling party's resolve that nobody is left hungry.

Former party president and Union Home Minister Amit Shah said the announcement shows the sensitivity of the government towards the poor and other vulnerable sections of society.

Nadda said that over 80 crore poor people will get an additional five kg each of wheat and rice beside one kg of pulse for three months to ensure that everyone gets an adequate amount of food.

Farmers, daily wagers, poor women, people with disabilities

Opp welcomes Central package to tide over coronavirus crisis

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Opposition on Thursday welcomed the Centre's move to come out with the ₹1.70 lakh-crore financial package for several categories of citizens including farmers and daily wage earners. However, a few of them also criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for allocating a lesser amount of ₹15,000 crore for tackling coronavirus when compared to a greater allocation of ₹20,000 crore for development of Central Vista that will include construction of a new Parliament in the national Capital. They sought the diversion of the Central Vista fund to fight the pandemic.

The allocation for the Central Vista had been done on the same day when the PM had announced the countrywide lockdown.

While the Congress welcomed the financial package announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and aimed at helping the poor survive the economic distress due to the Covid-19 lockdown, the Trinamool Congress said it came late and the Centre had actually taken the cue from the measures announced by the Mamata Banerjee government more than a week ago.

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi said the announcements are in the right direction. "The Government announcement today of a

and senior citizens will also get monetary relief through direct benefit transfer, he said.

"On behalf of every BJP worker, I thank the prime minister for this relief to the poor, farmers, women, youths, senior citizens and the organised sector for such important decisions

financial assistance package is the first step in the right direction. India owes a debt to its farmers, daily wage earners, labourers, women and the elderly, who are bearing the brunt of the ongoing lockdown," he said on Twitter.

Terming the financial package as a "modest plan", Congress leader P Chidambaram contended that a lot more needed to be done. While welcoming the provision of foodgrains for the poor, the former FM claimed that there was not enough cash infusion. He observed that some sections of society had been completely left out. He noted that some of his suggestions such as help to tenant farmers, EMI deferment and GST rate cut had not been addressed. At the same time, Chidambaram called on the Centre to put forth a further plan of action very soon.

The Trinamool Congress on Thursday said the Centre's financial package announced in the wake of a countrywide lockdown to combat coronavirus has taken a "cue" from the one offered by the party-led dispensation in West Bengal.

"Centre takes cue from relief plans already rolled out by state govts like #Bengal a week ago -- free 6 months ration for the poor, health insurance for champion frontliners fighting corona and ₹1,000 for daily wagers under new Prochesta scheme. Will supplement State efforts," tweeted TMC MP

and this relief package," he said. Nadda also hailed the Government's announcement of insurance of health professionals and the decision to give free LPG cylinders under the 'Ujjwala' scheme for three months. Cash will be transferred in the bank accounts of

Derek O'Brien.

CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury said that financial package is inadequate to handle the Corona crisis, comparing the ₹7.78 lakh crore loan waiver to big corporate houses.

He said the huge loan waiver to corporate houses shows that there is no dearth of resources in India and urged the Centre to come with more financial packages for the welfare of employees and poor people, who are financially hit due to the lockdown.

Yechury also urged the Prime Minister to immediately stop the Central Vista project and divert the Rs.20,000 crore allotted for it for the Corona relief package.

"Unconscionable that the central government finds it necessary to spend Rs.20,000 crore at this precise moment for a new house for the PM & other beautification schemes. Central Vista plan must be scrapped, earmarked funds must be transferred to tackle Corona crisis and its impact on the poor, said Yechury.

Former union minister and senior Congress Lok Sabha MP Shashi Tharoor also appealed to the Prime Minister to divert the ₹20,000 crore Central Vista fund to fight COVID-19. "This is merely ₹20 crore per district. Grand spending on buildings at this time of crisis is a postponable luxury," tweeted Tharoor.

poor farmers, poor widows, poor pensioners and poor disabled.

Farmers who were receiving ₹6,000 annually would get ₹2,000 upfront under Prime Minister's scheme and MNREGA workers daily wage would be increased from ₹182 to ₹200.

Sonia writes to PM Modi, suggests remedial measures against corona

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

For the first time during the coronavirus crisis, the Congress on Thursday actually came out with its own suggestive remedial measures in view of the pandemic with party president Sonia Gandhi writing in detail to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in this regard.

The Congress, especially its leader Rahul Gandhi has been strongly criticising the Modi Government for not "doing enough" and being "in slumber" to tackle the deadly disease.

Sonia said that the lockdown is a "welcome step" even as she suggested that health and economic measures should be taken to fight coronavirus.

"As president of the Congress, I would like to state that we will support and collaborate fully with every step taking by the Union Government to ensure the containment of the pandemic," Sonia Gandhi wrote in the four-page letter to Modi.

"At this challenging and uncertain time, it is imperative for each one of us to rise above partisan interests and honour one's duty towards our country and indeed, towards humanity," said Sonia.

The Congress chief also

gave a eight-point suggestions which included a demand for a dedicated Web portal with information about designated hospitals and construction of intensive care units and ventilators.

She also requested the Prime Minister to put in place broad based social protection measures, including direct cash transfer, for daily wagers, MGNREGA workers, factory labour, construction and unorganised workers, fishermen, farm labourers and other vulnerable sections of the society.

Sonia Gandhi suggested that the centre should consider deferring all EMI payments for the next few months and also waive interests charged by banks for this period.

She added that the government should immediately put in place several social protection measures which should include direct cash transfers to daily wage workers, MNREGA workers, construction workers, farmers and others part of the informal sector. The Congress President recommended her party's NYAY scheme for minimum income support, she called it "the need of the hour". She said that the implementation of the scheme will provide the poor with basic economic resources to fall back on.

Three-months free cylinders would be provided to women covered under 'Ujjwala' scheme.

BJP general secretary Bhupender Yadav said the Government under Modi's leadership stands solidly with the poor and other segments of the population and is committed to the country getting over the coronavirus pandemic.

The Government has announced three-week's lockdown until mid-April, saying it is the only way out for the country to decisively defeat the virus

by rigorously adopting social distancing.

BJP has also suspended all its official programmes across the country with the party workers asked to assist Government varied efforts to counter pandemic across the country.

A day before, the BJP said one crore of its workers will provide for meals of five poor persons each during the 21-day lockdown. A mechanism will be put in place at the earliest in this regard, according to party's national media head Anil Baluni.

Skype/ email/ fax etc.

However, the guidelines have made it clear that though telemedicine consultation provides safety to the medical professionals from contagious conditions, it cannot replace physical examination that may require palpation, percussion or auscultation; that requires physical touch and feel.

It also clearly specify the categories of medicines that can and cannot be prescribed.

As per the guidelines, doctors are strictly prohibited from insisting on telemedicine, when the patient is willing to travel to a facility and/or requests an in-person consultation and misuse patient images and data, especially private and sensitive in nature. If found violating, penalties will be as per the IMC Act, ethics and other prevailing laws.

At the meeting, officials briefed Singh on various measures and assistance provided so far. The Indian Air Force has made several sorties and evacuated Indian nationals from affected areas in China, Japan and Iran. Various quarantine facilities of the Armed Forces have, so far, handled 1,462 evacuees and discharged 389. Presently, 1,073 persons are being provided care at the facilities in Manesar, Hindan, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur and Mumbai. Additional quarantine facilities are on standby with 950 beds capacity.

The Defence Minister expressed appreciation on the proactive role played by the Armed Forces and various departments of MoD in evacuating Indian nationals as well as foreigners from COVID-19 affected countries and ensuring their proper care at various quarantine facilities. He urged the Armed Forces and other departments to gear up their preparedness and provide all required assistance to the civilian administration at various levels. Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat, Defence Secretary Dr Ajay Kumar, Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Karambir Singh, Chief of Air Staff Air

Chief Marshal R K S Bhadauria, Chief of Army Staff General M M Naravane, Secretary (Defence Production) Raj Kumar, Secretary (Ex-Servicemen Welfare) Sanjeevane Kutty and Secretary Department of Defence R&D and Chairman DRDO Dr G Satheesh Reddy attended the meeting.

Meanwhile, the IAF said on Thursday it has created 09 quarantine facilities of 200-300 personnel capacity each, at nodal IAF bases across the country. Command Hospital Air Force Bangalore (CHAfB) has been designated as the first laboratory in the IAF to undertake COVID-19 testing which will greatly enhance the region's ability to carry out quick testing of suspected cases and allow prompt and timely intervention where required.

To monitor the prevailing situation and provide immediate response and assistance as required, a 24x7 crisis management cell has been set up at Air Headquarters and various Command Headquarters. IAF aircraft are continuing to fly in medical supplies and doctors to Leh and fly out blood samples for COVID testing to Chandigarh and Delhi.

IT Ministry issues work from home protocol for Govt employees



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY) has issued a protocol for work from home (WFH) for the Government employees saying every employee should be disposed of all the receipts and files in their office before 5 pm each day, which is to be monitored by a daily report showing unattended receipts or files. The protocol says every employee must be available for telephonic consultation during office hours, and the phone should be answered every time it rings.

"Every working day, before 10 AM, each officer on WFH shall fix targets/specific work for their immediate subordinate to be achieved on the day. This shall be sent through office/email (not by phone).

The recipient of this e-file/mail shall further allocate work to his/her subordinate (and so on). This correspondence shall be available on office," it said. On the receipt of the work, each employee shall acknowledge to the reporting officer the receipt of work using office network. This communication shall be received before 10:30 AM.

The protocol further states every employee shall be available for telephonic consultation during office hours and the phone

The recipient of this e-file/mail shall further allocate work to his/her subordinate (and so on). This correspondence shall be available on office, it said

shall be answered all the time. In case of any issue that needs consultation, officers can set up remote-meeting (RM) either through the phone or through a WhatsApp Video Call (VC). The notice for such remote-meeting shall preferably be communicated at least one hour in advance.

Everyone who is called for VC/RM shall necessarily attend. "Further, if any work (like submission of Bills etc) calls for physically coming to the office, they shall come for that specific work. The office will make suitable arrangements for their transportation," it said.

"The WFH facility shall not be considered as 'paid leave'(except in case of MTS) and it is expected that the officers who have taken this facility are alert and always available for official functioning remotely," it added.

Guidelines for e-doctors to reach out to needy

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

As tele-consultation with doctors is becoming the norm among people, literally locked in their houses due to the coronavirus threat, the Government has come out with a set of guidelines regarding the e-platform to enable the medical professionals reach out to the needy.

The idea is not only to reduce the load on the already over-burdened hospitals and avoid unnecessary exposure to both medical professionals and patients but also to prevent malpractices, if any.

Incidentally, despite the concept being recognised and defined by the WHO and its spreading influence over the past decade, it is only now that India has come out with such guidelines which singularly deals with the practice of

Telemedicine here.

Prepared by the Board of Governors, which was set up in supersession of the Medical Council of India, in collaboration with the Niti Aayog, the 'Telemedicine Practice Guidelines' gives detailed do's and don'ts while engaging in tele-medicine and tele-consultation and ensure that ethics are maintained on the part of medical professionals.

"There are a number of benefits of telemedicine...In India, providing In-person healthcare is challenging, particularly given the large geographical distances and limited resources. One of the major advantages of telemedicine can be for saving of cost and effort especially of rural patients, as they need not travel long distances for obtaining consultation and treatment," say the guidelines.

The Government feel that with telemedicine, there is higher likelihood of maintenance of records and documentation hence minimises the likelihood of missing out advice from the doctor other health care staff.

Thus, health systems that are invested in telemedicine are well positioned to ensure that patients with Covid-19 kind of issues receive the care they need, it says.

The guidelines aims to assist the medical practitioner in pursuing a sound course of action to provide effective and safe medical care founded on current information, available resources, and patient needs to ensure patient and provider safety.

The BoG will soon develop an online programme on practice of telemedicine to

familiarise the doctors with the subject. "All currently registered medical practitioners need to complete a mandatory online course within 3 years of notification of these guidelines to provide consultation via telemedicine. Thereafter, undergoing and qualifying such a course, as prescribed, will be essential prior to registration of a medical practitioner," as per the guidelines.

The doctors can use any telemedicine tool suitable for carrying out technology-based patient consultation e.g. telephone, video, devices connected over LAN, WAN, Internet, mobile or landline phones, chat platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger etc., or Mobile App or internet based digital platforms for telemedicine or data transmission systems like

NBT provides select, best-selling titles for free to download and read to fight corona

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

In the wake of preventive measures by the Centre to contain the spread of Covid-19, the National Book Trust (NBT), under the Union HRD Ministry, is providing its select and best-selling titles for free to download and read. This is aimed at achieving a twin purpose: Encourage people to stay at home and develop a reading habit for a constructive utilisation of time.

"The people will be able to download the books by Rabinranath Tagore, Premchand and on Mahatma Gandhi. All in all there are books for everyone in the family to read and enjoy. More titles will be added to the list," said an HRD Ministry official.

Available in Hindi, English,

Assamese, 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 majority books for children and young adults.

The select titles available for download also include-- Holidays Have Come, Animals You can't Forget, Nine Little Birds, The Puzzle, Gandhi Tatva Satkarn, Women Scientists in India, Activity-Based Learning Science, A Touch of Glass, Gandhi: Warrior of Non-Violence, and many more.

"The PDFs are for reading only and any unauthorised or commercial use is not allowed," the official added.

University regulator

University Grants Commission (UGC) too has addressed students and teachers and said that the lockdown period can be utilised by engaging in Online learning.

"There are several ICT initiatives of the HRD Ministry, UGC and its Inter University Centres (IUCs) - Information and Library Network (INFLIB-NET) and Consortium for Educational Communication (CEC), in the form of digital platforms which can be accessed by the teachers, students and researchers in Universities and Colleges for broadening their horizon of learning," said a HRD ministry release.

Some of the ICT initiatives include Swayam, e-PG Pathshala, Swayamparabha, Sodhganga, Vidwan and the National Digital Library.

1st death in J&K, panic sets in

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

A 65-year-old religious teacher, who was earlier tested positive for novel coronavirus on Thursday died at Chest Disease hospital in Srinagar triggering panic among the local residents who remained in close touch with him before he was admitted in the hospital on March 21. Four close contacts of this patient had already tested positive on Wednesday.

Large number of other contacts on Thursday reported across different hospitals in Kashmir valley and offered voluntary testing to confirm whether they have contracted the virus or not.

Meanwhile, two more positive cases were reported from Srinagar on Thursday.

The district magistrate, Srinagar also ordered the closure of all places of worship, including mosques and gurd-

waras, to prevent the further spread of coronavirus disease in the district.

Spokesman of the Jammu & Kashmir Government, Rohit Kansal tweeted, “Siblings (7 years old and 8 months old)-grandchildren of a confirmed case from Srinagar with travel history to Saudi Arabia who had tested positive on 24th tested positive”. Total number of active positive cases now 11, he added.

At present 12 people are being treated including nine in the Valley and three in Jammu region of the Union Territory after testing positive for COVID-19.

Thirteen patients are admitted at a Leh hospital.

According to official sources, the deceased patient had returned from New Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Jammu recently after being part of a religious congregation attended also by people from Indonesia and Malaysia. He

arrived in Srinagar on March 16 via Indigo flight from Jammu and first reported the symptoms between March 18-19, he was admitted in the hospital on March 21.

The J&K Government has

ordered an inquiry into the alleged mishandling of the patient after he was tested positive for COVID-19 at the CD hospital.

Meanwhile, second day of the 21 day long lockdown

passed off peacefully barring stray incidents of violation by the local residents.

So far the police authorities have booked over 250 violators across the union territory of Jammu & Kashmir.

50 contacts of Kashmir’s first victim quarantined

Srinagar: Authorities in Jammu & Kashmir were vigorously tracking the travel history of Union Territory’s first COVID-19 victim as nearly 50 of those who came into contact with the victim have already been shifted to quarantine facilities.

Four of these quarantined persons have already tested positive for the virus.

Health officials said the deceased patient had a che-

quered travel trajectory and it was logical to assume that he had come into contact with a much higher number of persons than have been traced so far. “He was in Delhi where he is reported to have come into contact with Indonesian, Malaysian and Italian citizens. He has visited Samba and Jammu towns before he came back to the valley.

“He had attended a religious congregation in Sopore

and met dozens of people in Srinagar city”, health officials said.

The fact that he had been evading isolation and treatment as per the standard operating procedure (SoP) for such patients, was also worrisome. “The fact is that he was symptomatically a full blown case before he was isolated and admitted is very worrisome”, said a doctor.

IAN S

No Friday prayers in Kashmir mosques

IAN S ■ SRINAGAR

Kashmir’s Grand Mufti Nasirul Islam on Thursday said that there should be no Friday prayers in any mosque or shrine across the Valley on Friday in the wake of the coronavirus threat.

Talking to IANS, the Grand Mufti said on Friday people should not hold congregational prayers in Mosques and shrines across Kashmir. “The situation is very grave,” he said. “I appeal to people including Imams and Khateeb and managing bodies of all Masjids and shrines across Kashmir not to hold Friday congregational prayers.”

He said that only three people including the meuzzins of Masjid should offer five times prayers, rest of the people should say the prayers at home.

Meanwhile, DC Srinagar Shahid Choudhary tweeted: “Closure of all religious places in #Srinagar is under way. With active cooperation of Management committees. Revered shrines Hazratbal, Naqshband Saheb show the way. #StayAtHome”

“Dastgeer Saheb , Gurudwara Saheb Chhati Padshahi and others. Mosques follow. Thankful to officials on ground and all management committees. #StayAtHome”

Goa converts 5 tourist resorts into quarantine facilities

IAN S ■ PANAJI

The North Goa district administration here on Thursday took over five tourist resorts, including one private facility, to create quarantine facilities for Covid-19 epidemic

On Wednesday, three persons had tested positive for coronavirus.

The resorts, taken over by the administration, included Goa Tourism Development Corporation-operated facilities at Mayem, Mapusa, Calangute and Old Goa, and a private resort ‘Acron Seaway’ at the popular beach village of Candolim.

These facilities would be handed over to the Deputy Collectors, said a directive issued by the North Goa District Magistrate R. Menaka on Thursday.

“There is need to prepare quarantine facilities in the North Goa district in view of the prevailing health emergency due to spread of Covid-19,” the order said and added, the properties were being temporarily taken over by the administration under the Disaster Management Act, 2005.

Goa has isolation wards at four centres.

Tamil Nadu positive cases rise to 28

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

Even as the number of persons tested positive for coronavirus touched 28 by Thursday evening and two persons succumbing to the pandemic (one each in Madurai and Kanyakumari), the activities of religious preachers from other countries is causing worries to security officials in Tamil Nadu. The cause of death of person in Kanyakumari district is yet to be ascertained and the health Minister’s office is tight lipped about the incident.

The 28 persons who have been admitted to hospitals in Chennai, Madurai, Salem and Erode include four Indonesian and two Thailand citizens. These six persons are in the State for religious preaching. They have been indoctrinating the faithful about Tablighi Jamaat (Society for Spreading Faith), ‘an organization urging Muslims to

return to practicing their religion as it existed during the lifetime of Prophet Mohammed’, according to State Police officials.

The Indonesians reached Salem in the first week of March from New Delhi by Kerala Express and since then they have been proselytizing in the districts of Salem, Madurai and Erode. The person who died on Wednesday, an office bearer of a local mosque management committee , had accompanied the Indonesians during their engagements in Madurai.

TG Vinay, Madurai district collector, told reporters that the health department officials are tracking the persons who had met the Indonesians and the Madurai man during congregations and social gatherings to collect samples from them for testing.

The secret visits undertaken by the foreign preachers belonging to TJ have taken security agencies by surprise.

The secret visits undertaken by the foreign preachers belonging to TJ have taken security agencies by surprise

The organization was in the news recently when they held an ‘international mass religious gathering’ in the last week of February 2020 at Kuala Lumpur. Malaysia where more than 700 COVID- 19 cases have been reported. There is total secrecy associated with the TJ gatherings.

“What we know is that the Indonesians and Thai nationals have been addressing congregations in various mosques in these districts. Since outsiders are not allowed during these meetings, we do not

know what kind of sermonizing is happening during these religious classes. It could be anything ranging from interpretation of Quran to encouraging the Muslims to fight the CAA,” said a senior intelligence official.

The official who spoke on condition of anonymity, disclosed that monitoring of congregations in temples across the State was not at all a problem.

“But mosques and churches are a different class as we can never infiltrate into the religious gatherings inside these places. The concerned Government agency is yet to make any probe into the activities of these proselitizers,” he said.

The statement regarding the number of Corona Virus patients admitted to various hospitals in the State were disclosed by Dr C Vijaya Baskar, Tamil Nadu Minister for Health.

Chief Minister Edappadi

Palaniswamy who held a day long meeting in the secretariat on Thursday with ministers, senior bureaucrats and district collectors later made a passionate plea to the people of the State to cooperate with the administration in its war on Corona.

“I am addressing you not as the chief minister of Tamil Nadu but as a member of your family. Do not get panic as the total lock down has been declared for your own safety and security. The State administration is doing all it can do to make your stay in indoors a comfortable life. Maintenance of social distancing is the only option to prevent the spread of Corona, said the chief minister taking a cue from the Prime Minister’s address to the nation on Wednesday evening.

The chief minister said all arrangements have been made to provide free ration and essential items to people in the lower strata of the society.

Didi hits street to teach physical distancing

WITH 1 FRESH CASE IN WB TOTAL AT 10

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Even as Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee worked frantically taking personal tours of Kolkata to spread social-distancing awareness, Bengal registered yet another corona infection case with a middle-aged person from Nayabad area of the State capital testing positive for the dreaded virus, Health Department sources said.

Though the man has no travel history to Corona-affected countries he recently joined a wedding party at Egra town in East Midnapore where people returning from such countries had assembled, sources said adding the administration had started taking information about the people who joined the said party. The entire family of the affected person has been home-quarantined.

The man is in a critical condition, the doctors said. The Thursday’s case takes the

total number of corona infections in Bengal to 10. The State has witnessed one Corona related death with the victim succumbing to the disease last week.

Meanwhile the Chief Minister has written to her counterparts of 18 States expressing concern about the stranded migrant workers from Bengal.

“The Chief Minister has requested the other Chief Ministers to ensure adequate food and medical facilities for the migrant workers from Bengal who are stranded there ... because the State administration cannot reach out to them due to the ongoing lockdown,” a senior government official said adding Bengal Chief Secretary had been asked to sent the details of the stranded persons to their counterparts of those eighteen States.

Banerjee who had been working frantically to prevent

Corona invasion in Bengal on Thursday personally visited the prominent markets of Kolkata to educate the buyers and sellers about social distancing.

Alighting from her vehicle the Chief Minister was seen asking people to stand at least a metre apart from each other even as she personally drew chalk circles for the buyers to stand within those circles. She visited Posta, Jaan Bazaar, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai Road and Gariahaat

Market where she advised the people on social distancing and wearing masks.

Elsewhere the State Government on Thursday decided to open the School of Tropical Medicine as yet another facility for testing Corona infections. According to sources STM has been provided with about a thousand kits from Pune Institute of Virology and is likely to be functional immediately.

One more death in Maha, total +ve cases rise to 125

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The coronavirus claimed one more life in Maharashtra taking the total number of deaths in the State to five, even as the total number of patients testing positive for the pandemic rose to 125 in the State on Thursday.

On a day when the Maharashtra announced that it had permitted owners of the shops vending essential commodities to keep their establishment open for all 24 hours in a day, the state health authorities confirmed that a 65-year-old woman died at Navi Mumbai’s General Hospital on Tuesday night.

“After undergoing treatment at two private hospitals, a 65-year-old patient was admitted to the General Hospital at in a critical condition on the afternoon of March 24 (Tuesday). She died on the same night. The laboratory reports confirmed yesterday that she died because of Coronavirus,” a medical bulletin put out by the Public Health Department of the Maharashtra Government under the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) said.

“We are trying to ascertain if the deceased had either history of international travel or had she contracted Coronavirus through some contacts,” the bulletin added.

With the latest death, the total number of Covid-19 deaths in the state has risen to five. 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.

Subsequently, another 63-year-old male patient, who had been admitted to private hospital in Mumbai died on March 19. On Sunday night, Filipino died at a private hospital late on Sunday night. Later on Monday evening, a 65-year-old COVID-19 patient died at Kasturba Hospital in Mumbai.

According to the medical bulletin, three more patients – one patient each from Mumbai,

Sindhudurg and Nagpur – tested positive for Covid-19. “The infected patient from Sindhudurg had travelled along with another Covid-19 positive patient in railway compartment. The infected person from Nagpur had travelled to Delhi, but it is not confirmed yet that he had history of international travel.

There was confusion in the total number of patients who tested positive for Coronavirus. In the morning, State Health Minister Rajesh Tope tweeted: “The current count of COVID19 patients in the state of Maharashtra is 124. Yesterday evening, Ieach in Mumbai & Thane such 2 patients have been identified as positive. 15 people from these have been recovered and are discharged from the respective hospitals”.

Later in the evening, the Public Health Department of the Maharashtra Government reported that there were three Covid-19 positive cases in the state on Thursday.

However, the Public Health Department of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) in its medical bulletin issued in the evening said that there were 15 positive cases during the day. Of the 15 cases, there were six

cases from Mumbai and one case from the city, all of which were because of “close contact” with Covid-19 contracted patients, while the remaining eight confirmed cases were from Dombivili (1), Navi Mumbai (1), Thane (2), Vashi (1), Mumbai (1), Mumbai suburbs (1) and Pune (1). All these patients had bene admitted to Kasturba Hospital and were diagnosed as positive in the laboratory there.

Meanwhile, the BMC reported that as many as 10 Covid-19 patients had recovered and were discharged from the hospital.

Meanwhile, in an effort to reduce inconvenience caused to the citizens who venture out to make purchase of essential commodities, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray announced that his Government had permitted the owners of the shops selling essential commodities to keep their establishment open for all 24 hours in a day.

“Owing to lockdown, people are contributing to crowds outside shops selling essential commodities which was not advised from the point of view of their health. That’s why we have asked the shopkeepers to keep their establishments open for 24 hours in a day,” Uddhav said.

BJP MLA asks cops to shoot down lockdown violators

IAN S ■ LUCKNOW

BJP MLA from Ghaziabad, Nand Kishore Gurjar, has asked the State police to “break their legs who violate the lockdown orders”.

In a video that is now going viral on the social media, the MLA can be seen saying that the police can even “shoot them in the legs if people do not listen”.

“Such people should be treated like anti-nationals. If they are not following government orders, they are terrorists,” he said.

Gurjar further said that every constable who breaks the legs and shoots the violators would be given a reward of Rs 5,100 by him.

The BJP MLA also warned the clerics of mosques and said that several Muslims had informed him that people were crowding the markets.

“I am warning the clerics that they should inform the police if people do not listen to them,” the MLA said.

Gurjar had earlier hit the headlines when he prescribed cow urine as a cure for coronavirus.

UP Govt to trace returnees from coronavirus-hit places

Lucknow: With the help of village heads, the Yogi Adityanath Government in UP is tracking people who must have slipped back into the state from coronavirus-affected areas, like Dubai, Maharashtra, Delhi and Kerala. They could be potential coronavirus carriers, said an official.

The Chief Minister’s Office is getting in touch with the village heads to collect information on anyone who might have come from outside the state in the past two weeks.

Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Avanih Awasthi told reporters, here on Thursday, over 10,000 village heads had been contacted through the Chief Minister Helpline 1076 to

garner information regarding people who must have arrived from outside the state in the past two weeks.

The helpline 1076 is available to any UP resident who might want to file a health-related complaint.

Awasthi said all MLAs, MLCs, Ministers would give money from their funds for the medical facilities in the state.

The Chief Minister has instructed formation of district control room in each district as well as carrying out a cleanliness drive in the state during the lockdown.

Meanwhile, Principal Secretary (Health) Amit Mohan Prasad said 38 coronavirus cases had been reported

ed in UP.

The returnees from other states have been advised to stay at home for 15 days. If a person shows any symptom of Covid-19 during the home isolation, he/she can call the helpline number 18001805145, issued by the Department of Health.

Giving details of medical facilities, he said Over 6,000 isolation beds had been set up and emergency health services were operational in the state.

A three-tier arrangement is being made for the treatment of Covid-19 patients. The community health centres are being turned into Covid-19 hospitals in districts. **IAN S**

K’taka reports second death, 4 fresh cases

Bengaluru: The Karnataka Government, here on Thursday, reported second Covid-19 death and four more positive cases, raising the total number of cases to 55.

“A 70-year-old woman, resident of the Chikkaballapura district, had a history of travel to Mecca, Saudi Arabia. She had returned to India on March 14 and died on March 24,” said a health official.

Her death from Covid-19 could only be confirmed after medical examinations on Thursday morning.

According to an official statement, the patient died at a designated hospital, here. “The funeral rites were performed with all the precautionary measures as per the Centre’s guidelines for Covid-19 suspects,” the official said.

Confirming the second death, Medical Education Minister K. Sudhakar tweeted, “I regret to inform that Covid-19 test result has come out as positive for the woman, who had succumbed on Tuesday. The Government stands com-

The three new patients have been admitted to designated hospitals even as the health department has initiated their contact search

mited to curb the spread of coronavirus in the state.”

Karnataka’s first Covid-19 death, a 76-year-old Kalaburagi man, was also India’s first such death.

Among the positive cases confirmed on Thursday all were men. A Mysuru resident, 35, with no travel or positive case contact history emerged as Karnataka’s 52nd positive case. “He was with quality assurance section of a pharmaceutical company and has been in contact with many healthcare professionals,” said the statement.

Similarly, a 64-year-old man from Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh, with travel history to France returned to India on March 1. He also visited Himachal Pradesh, Puttaparthi and arrived here on March 21

to emerge as the 54th case.

Likewise, a 45-year-old man from Bengaluru, a contact of 25th case, is the 55th coronavirus positive case in Karnataka.

The three new patients have been admitted to designated hospitals even as the health department has initiated their contact search.

The State health department has requested the passengers who travelled with 36th positive case to contact it.

“Positive case No. 36 travelled in S3 coach, lower berth in the Mangalore Express from Mumbai, which departed on March 17 and arrived in Batkal on March 18. Passengers who travelled in the same coach may please contact the helpline,” said the statement.

The 36th case was a 65-year-old man from the Uttara Kannada district who travelled to Dubai and returned to India via Mumbai on March 18. He took a train to Uttara Kannada. Sudhakar urged people to stay at home and be safe.

IAN S

Man kills brother for stepping out during lockdown

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In the first of its bizarre crime committed during the 21-day lockdown period, a 21-year-old youngster was killed by his elder brother here on Thursday, after his younger brother stepped out of home ignoring his repeated requests to stay indoors in view of the spread of coronavirus.

The incident took place at Kandivli’s Samata Nagar locality in north Mumbai.

Identifying the deceased youngster as Durgesh Laxmi Thakur, the police said that they had arrested one Rajesh Laxmi Thakur (29) on charges of killing his younger brother.

“Durgesh used to work in a private company in Pune but came to Mumbai to stay with his brother during the shutdown,” a senior police officer at the Samata Nagar police station said.

According to the police, Rajesh had been advising and warning Durgesh repeatedly

The incident took place at Kandivli’s Samata Nagar locality in north Mumbai

against stepping out of home. However, Durgesh was not paying heed to his elder brother’s advice.

When Durgesh returned home from outside this evening, Rajesh and his wife confronted him. This led to a fierce verbal duel between them. At one stage, an enraged Rajesh allegedly hit Durgesh with a sharp object. An injured Durgesh was rushed to a local hospital, where he was pronounced dead on admission.

Rajesh, who owned a local saloon in Kandivli (East) stays with his wife near Gaondevi Road at Samta Nagar.

Meanwhile, Rajesh was booked under section 302 of IPC. He was immediately produced before in a local magistrate court, where he was remanded in police custody.

Humanitarian crisis

Labourers don't have bank accounts and are out of the welfare arc. As they migrate, the flu could swamp rural India



State borders now present a picture of reverse human migration as thousands of daily wage earners, casual labourers and vendors, who do not have a bank account or even money to save, trudge back to their home States despite a lockdown. With no buses, trucks or trains, they have decided to surrender to destiny and return to their villages on foot. For even without a day's work, they would not be able to get food for their families or rent the hovel they live in at slum clusters. Food shortages and uncontrolled hoarding have meant that they have not been able to get basic rations over the last two days, leading to widespread panic. It is a hard choice between starvation and the flu. In the absence of soup kitchens or shelters, the vast numbers of India's unorganised labour market won't even be able to avail the economic relief measures announced by the Government. And they are going back home, thinking they will live off the land with whatever subsistence farming can give them. There will be a roof over their heads where they do not have to pay rent. There's no agricultural activity either, signalling a low output of food crops that may foist another problem on the nation later. This is a humanitarian crisis like no other. Let us not forget migrant returnees may have already unwittingly carried Coronavirus into India's vast rural swathes, which are unaware, unprepared and under-equipped to deal with the criticality of a health emergency of this scale. And considering they are travelling in clusters, all of them could be potentially infected by the time they reach from carriers among them. Then the whole purpose of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 21-day lockdown, to break the transmission cycle of the virus, would get defeated. Worst, rural India could be swamped. Assuming these "non-banked" people even avail of the Pradhan Mantri Gareeb Kalyan Anna Yojana and get 5 kg per person rice/wheat each month for the next three months in addition to 5 kg of rice/wheat that they already get, they would rather use these benefits at their village than be homeless and helpless in cities. This unprecedented flight of migrant workers out of our cities, be it Rajasthan or Telangana, poses a new challenge in our fight against the virus. Containing and settling them at shelters in a specified location pose the biggest challenge. Frankly, India has not had time to prepare for the human dimension of the virus or the lockdown. The WHO did lead it up the garden path, not pressing the panic buttons early on. There was a denial about the inevitability of community explosion, given the density of our population and the failure of Indians to take to social distancing, isolation and quarantining protocols seriously. Now experts are saying the lockdown would have been effective had it been enforced a week or two before and that we are still two steps behind the virus.

According to reports, over 2,000 daily wage workers in Ahmedabad took to their feet and other means of transport for their homes back in Rajasthan. Thousands of wagers are walking long distances, even to the extent of 100 and 300 km, and often on empty stomach to reach their villages. According to the Economic Survey of 2018-19, over 90 per cent of our total workforce is "informal." The worrying part is that the NITI Aayog estimates show that India's informal sector employees are approximately 85 per cent of all workers. The Economic Survey of 2016-2017 had indicated an annual flow of close to nine million migrants among States between 2011 and 2016. Internationally, too, migrants are posing newer challenges to managing the epidemic. Borders throughout the Middle East tend to be porous with political refugees, economic migrants and others often travelling along informal routes. It is very difficult under such circumstances to monitor who is entering and leaving what country. Also, these people cannot access public healthcare. This has caused much of the spread in nations around Iran, too. Now imagine that with our States. We are quite precariously perched but trying to flatten the curve would mean not just lockdowns or an economic package but aggressive testing, isolation and surveillance. Where are these facilities in rural India? If we are to ride this out and look ahead, there can be no two ways about rearranging a nation's health priorities. As the PM said, *Jaan hai to Jahaan hai*. Delhi's Central vista makeover, at ₹20,000 crore, can wait!

Data crunch

Video-streaming services find themselves restricting data consumption across the world



As almost half of humanity finds itself under lockdown, some of the few companies that might be benefitting belong to the video-streaming services, such as Netflix, Amazon Prime globally, and others like Hotstar, Voot and MX Player in India. However, they also have had to face unique challenges, thanks to the Chinese contagion. Production of movies and television shows has come to a screeching halt, forcing players like Netflix to establish a \$100 million fund to ensure that production crews, many of whom do not have permanent jobs, have access to some funds at least. But the bigger problem is the pressure that such streaming services have put on mobile networks. With more people staying home and watching movies and television shows online, there has been a surge in video consumption.

As a result, both telecom operators and Governments across the world have requested that these popular services reduce the quality of the service. With high-definition streaming using upwards of two megabits per second and Ultra High Definition 4K streaming using up to 10 megabits per second, mobile firms, who are the main networks in India, are finding themselves under huge amounts of strain. Many streaming services have already announced that they would be suspending High Definition and Ultra-High Definition streaming on cellular networks with immediate effect. People consuming data on WiFi or broadband networks can still enjoy preferred quality streaming. During a time of a national emergency, which we are facing right now, mobile networks must be kept free. Heavy data consumption is clogging up the networks. While the amount of mobile data available and its prices have been a big boon for the Indian economy over the past two years, the fact is that reducing streaming quality to standard definition will make little or no difference on mobile phones and at the same time keep the networks free for emergencies. This is a responsible act by both the telecom operators and the streaming service providers. However, this thankfully does not apply to fibre and copper networks but the reach of those in Indian households is extremely limited in the first place. This, of course, highlights how India and the world need to strengthen their data networks and make them faster so that more people can use it. It also highlights how different companies get affected when a crisis of this nature emerges and how they are working around it. Hopefully, things will return to normal soon and people will go back to office and the days of "Netflix and Chill" will return but for now, "Netflix and stay at home."

opinion

Force majeure

While the Modi Government deserves wholehearted support in tackling COVID, a few correctives should be in place. Wholehearted and not unthinking support is the need of the hour



AJOY KUMAR

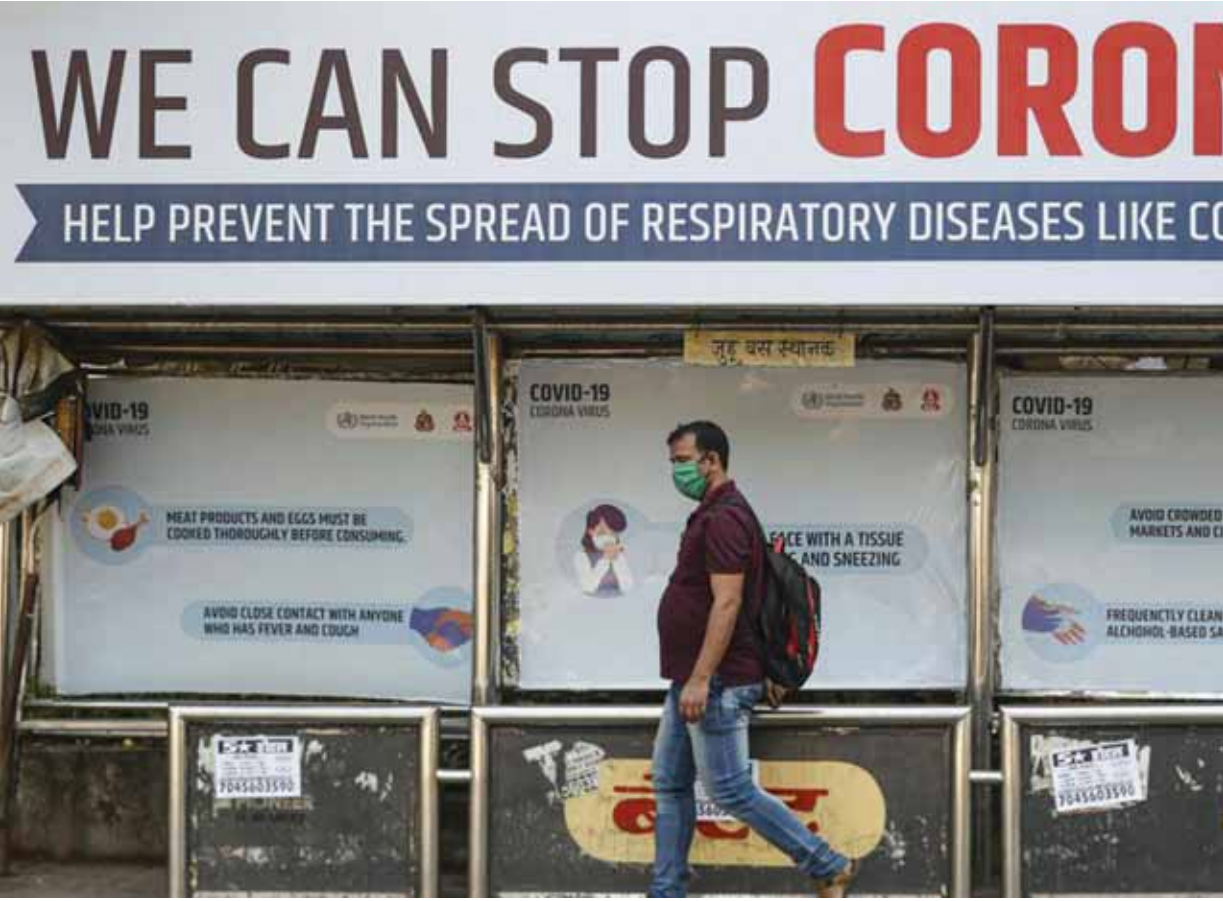
We live in strange and unnerving times. India and the world are currently in the midst of a raging battle against a common enemy — Coronavirus. The total number of cases in India at the time of writing stood at 686 and the number of deaths at 13. Both these numbers, unfortunately, are expected to rise over the weeks that will follow. Numbers across the world are staggering. The death toll in Italy and Spain have reached in the thousands, eclipsing that of China's.

The most worrisome aspect of the virus is not the fatality associated with it — though for the elderly and those without adequate medical care this figure is frighteningly high — but its speed of transmission. The virus took just 67 days to reach the first one lash and in the next 15 days, it infected the next two lash people across the world. The modern world has rarely witnessed an enemy about whom we know so little and which moves relentlessly and ruthlessly. Though this does not require saying, yet: We cannot beat the virus unless we pull in the same direction. This is not the time to squabble as there will possibly never be a more unifying enemy in our lifetime.

In the light of this very different world that you and I have woken up to, it is important to support and recognize the efforts of the Indian Government, healthcare professionals and workers, the media, policemen and all other individuals who have put themselves in the line of fire. The Prime Minister has our full support in tackling the virus. While his decision to impose a nationwide lockdown may seem to be a bit too harsh, we must keep in mind that the Government has our best interests in mind. The Finance Minister has also been announcing several relief measures for the poor and the marginalised. I cannot commend this move enough. With the economy, especially small businesses, in shock, I hope this is the first step in dealing with this unprecedented crisis.

During this time, we must also be grateful to the country's federal structure, several Chief Ministers, most notably Arvind Kejriwal and Pinarayi Vijayan, who have truly shown their leadership capabilities at an hour when this quality is necessary and found wanting at times. While I endorse and support the measures taken by the Government to tackle the unique beast of COVID-19, I, as an Indian, would also like to put forward a few suggestions and perspectives that I believe, can aid our fight against this dreadful disease and, hopefully, see us emerge victorious at the end of this long battle. I hope that the many trollers, who often attack any piece of writing by looking at the writer rather than the content, see this article in that spirit. Stranger things are happening in times of Corona.

The need for a down-up approach: While the lockdown is necessary to contain the virus, it is important to ensure that the cure has (i) the desired effect, ie, it prevents



people from congregating together in large groups and (ii) does not provide greater pain to the very sections of society it seeks to protect than the disease itself. The Prime Minister's speech while commendable in many ways was found significantly wanting on this count.

By giving just a few hours' time for the 21-day lockdown to kick in and that, too, without adequate disclosures/detailing regarding the provision for essential services, the Prime Minister caused widespread panic across the country. There were massive crowds that assembled around grocery stores and chemists, fearing the worst. The impact of this crowding will only be seen later but it was distinctly avoidable.

The Prime Minister, for example, could have taken a note from the Delhi Government, which had itself called for a lockdown two days prior to his announcement. The Delhi Government has been more stringent than the Union Government pertaining to certain measures. The only difference has been the approach followed by both. The former has rather been more down-up than top-down in its tactics. This system has been successfully implemented by various firms as well, where employees and workers at the ground level have been able to provide accurate feedback on what measures work while deal-

ing with the customers.

In the case of Governments, the customer is the vast population of this great country. Therefore, as is becoming more obvious day by day, a top-down approach does not work. Instead, we need a clear line of communication between the Prime Minister and the public. This includes taking a press conference where the media, which has been and will be crucial in highlighting the shortcomings of the Government's measures, can highlight questions that the public, too, have been raising. Such press conferences can be done effectively through social media platforms like Facebook live events with limited access to accredited journalists. However, to limit this only to the Prime Minister would be a big mistake. Chief Ministers, too, need to follow a similar approach. This is why Delhi Chief Minister Kejriwal must be applauded for being proactive in this regard.

Similarly, there are widespread reports of police officers in a number of States disrupting the supply of essential services by lashing their *lathis* on workers, trying to reach their place of work or transporting essential services. E-tailers allege that up to 15,000 litres of milk and 10,000 kg of vegetables were dumped due to police action. This must be stopped at the earliest. Certain Police Commissioners have held dis-

cussions with e-commerce service providers and come to the conclusion that they would pass instructions to their officers. However, this step must be taken a little further. Officers must hold Facebook live discussions where citizens can highlight areas where they are facing discomfort or harassment. I do not blame the policemen entirely on this count as till now, they have only been given broad guidelines to ensure no movement on the roads. The requirement at this stage is one of nuance, which cannot come from a top-down approach towards governance.

An active bureaucracy: Another step which I think can help is to involve the bureaucracy. I have held many discussions with bureaucrats, and they feel they can contribute in alleviating the issues faced by the public while also maintaining social distancing and following all lockdown norms. One clear area where this can help is with respect to daily-wage and migrant workers. As a result of the lockdown, daily-wage and migrant workers have been left to fend for themselves. The sudden decision to stop all trains and buses from inter-State travel has left lakhs and lakhs of workers in the middle of nowhere or without a roof over their heads. There are numerous stories of workers and children walking hundreds of kilometres

to reach their villages.

While a large number of readers will have the luxury of dealing with the panic and pain caused due to the outbreak of Coronavirus with their families by their side, this essential support system is not within the reach for these migrant workers. On this count, I plead that the Government takes steps while acting within the lockdown protocol, to ensure that these workers can be transported to their home States in buses with strict social distancing norms and sanitation practices in place. The bureaucracy can help implement these steps. It is in times like these that the bureaucracy can and must come to the fore, even if they do so in regulated numbers. By allowing a large number of them to sit at home, we are being deprived of this valuable resource.

Of course, it is easier to speak than it is to write and easier to write than to practise but just like every Indian, I want the country to come out of this crisis as a shining example to the world. While I support the Modi Government wholeheartedly in its efforts to tackle the virus, wholeheartedly does not mean unthinkingly. In order to beat the Coronavirus, wholehearted and not unthinking support is the need of the hour.

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

SOUNDBITE

BCCI should not wait forever to start the women's IPL. The board must make it happen by next year on a smaller scale before gradually developing it.

Indian cricketer —Mithali Raj

It is important that we start a people's movement against COVID-19, just like we did under the leadership of the Prime Minister to make the country open defecation free.

Megastar —Amitabh Bachchan

There is a strong chance the new Coronavirus could return in seasonal cycles. This emphasises the need to develop a vaccine, test it quickly and get it ready by the next cycle.

Top US scientist —Anthony Fauci

Mufti's continued detention during lockdown is cruel. There was never any justification to detain everyone in the first place and none at all to keep them detained during a lockdown.

NC leader —Omar Abdullah

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Lockdown imperative

Sir — This refers to the editorial, "Total lockdown" (March 26). This decision taken by the Centre for the nation is a commendable. But the challenge now is to convince people to not only stay indoors but remain calm. People should be advised not to resort to hoarding that creates further hurdles for the Government. Restrictions on the public and the availability of essential services should be honoured by civil enforcement agencies while also keeping in mind genuine requirements.

Varun Dambal
Bengaluru

Myths vs facts

Sir — Foreign media has been inundating the world with reports of the "success of China" in combating the proliferation of COVID-19 in Wuhan. *Prima facie*, such reports appear to be legitimate. They are commensurate with the claims made by the Chinese Government. As of Tuesday, China reported 3,277 deaths with 81,171 positive cases.

According to the Government, no new cases were reported for the past five days in the central Chinese city of Wuhan, the epicentre of the outbreak.

However, a recent report by the *Epoch Times* would cast doubts on the aforementioned data. The report reveals the alarming disappearance of around 21 million cell phone

accounts in China over the past three months. This number is grossly inconsistent with the statistics released by Beijing. Even public health experts and citizens have cast doubts if the numbers are as good as officials have reported. The zero-transmission rate, too, is being doubted even as the leaders have prioritised restarting the economy over deci-

Misreading Kashmir



and any other legalese. There was hardly any justification for the continued incarceration of the Abdullahs under the Public Safety Act. Now, the Government must release other leaders, too, especially former Jammu & Kashmir Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti.

R Narayanan
Navi Mumbai

Beef up tracking system

Sir — This refers to the editorial, "Total lockdown" (March 26). The decision taken by the Government to shut down the country for three weeks is historic but not enough. The next task is to trace every traveller who entered the country after a specific date and subject them to a diagnostic test. This is a gigantic exercise and this is why the private sector must be roped in.

Shambhavi
Via email

For the sake of existence

Sir — Most nations have been put under house arrest in the wake of the spread of a deadly virus. With this all kinds of liberties, be it the right to free movement, entertainment or the pursuit of happiness have been curtailed. But it must not be forgotten that the right to live is the most sacred human right.

Manisha
Via email

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

G20 nations to inject \$5 tn into global economy

Modi pitches for new crisis management protocol

Let us put human beings rather than economic targets at centre of our vision for global prosperity, cooperation: PM

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

As the world reels under the coronavirus pandemic, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday urged the powerful G-20 grouping to put human beings rather than economic targets at the centre of the vision for global prosperity and cooperation.

In his address at a video conference of the G-20 leaders, Modi also pitched for developing a new crisis management protocol and procedures to deal with global health crisis besides significantly boosting capability of organisations like the WHO, Government sources said.



He also said G-20 should work together to reduce economic hardships, particularly of the poor nations in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic which has killed over 21,000 people and infected more than 470,000 globally.

The Prime Minister called for ushering in a new globali-

sation for collective well being of entire humankind, noting that medical research should be freely and openly available for all countries.

He said empowering the WHO was necessary for development of effective vaccines to deal with global pandemics.

“Let us put human beings rather than economic targets at the centre of our vision for global prosperity and cooperation,” Modi was quoted as saying by the sources.

He also stressed on developing a more adaptive, responsive, affordable and human healthcare system that can be deployed globally to deal with healthcare crisis.

AFP ■ RIYADH

G20 nations pledged a “united front” on Thursday in the fight against coronavirus, saying they were injecting USD 5 trillion into the global economy to counter the pandemic amid forecasts of a deep recession.

US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin joined the emergency videoconference chaired by Saudi Arabia's King Salman, who called for coordinated action while facing pressure to end an oil price war between Riyadh and Moscow that has roiled energy markets.

The talks come amid criticism that the G20 has been slow to address the COVID-19 pandemic, which has left more than 21,000 dead worldwide according to official data, and triggered financial shock waves as more than three billion people are locked down.

“We are strongly committed to presenting a united front against this common threat,”

the leaders said in a joint statement after the summit. “We are injecting over USD 5 trillion into the global economy, as part of targeted fiscal policy, economic measures, and guarantee schemes to counteract the social, economic and financial impacts of the pandemic.”

As concerns mount for poorer countries without access to capital markets or adequate health facilities, G20 leaders also pledged to work with bodies such as the International Monetary Fund to deploy a “robust” financial package to support developing nations.

“It is our responsibility to extend a helping hand to developing countries and (the) least developed countries to enable them to build their capacities and improve their infrastructure to overcome this crisis and its repercussions,” King Salman said. The world's 20 most industrialised countries are scrambling to defend their virus-wracked economies amid forecasts they will likely plunge

into a recession. On Wednesday, the financial ratings agency Moody's estimated the G20's overall gross domestic product would contract by 0.5 per cent this year, with the US economy shrinking by 2.0 percent and the eurozone by 2.2 per cent.

This week, French President Emmanuel Macron and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping pushed for an emergency G20 summit to limit the impact of the pandemic.

The lack of immediate action stood in contrast to the 2008 financial crisis, when the group quickly swung into action to mobilise assistance for vulnerable countries.

Talk of global coordination has yet to resonate under Trump's isolationist presidency. On Wednesday, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo took aim at China, saying the top diplomats of the Group of Seven agreed with him that Beijing was waging a “disinformation” campaign about the pandemic.

Xi calls for all-out global war against corona, moots tariff cuts

PTI ■ BEIJING

Battling the coronavirus at home, Chinese President Xi Jinping on Thursday called for an all-out global war against the pandemic and proposed tariff cuts and removal of trade barriers to prevent the global economy slipping into recession.

Speaking at the unprecedented virtual G20 Summit on COVID-19, Xi said the world needs to be resolute in fighting an all-out global war against coronavirus which has created an unprecedented health crisis.

“This is a virus that respects no borders. The outbreak we are battling is our common enemy. All must work together to build a strongest global network of control and treatment that the world has ever seen,” Xi said through videoconference.

Xi's statement came amid growing international criti-

cism of China's reported failure to be fully transparent in reporting the COVID-19 outbreak in the central Chinese city of Wuhan last year.

Xi said the community of nations must move swiftly to stem the spread of the virus and China will be more than ready to share its good practices, conduct joint research and development of drugs and vaccines, and provide assistance where it can to countries hit by the pandemic.

He said China has set up its online COVID-19 knowledge centre that is open to all countries. About the pandemic's impact on global economy, Xi asked G20 members to cut tariffs, remove barriers and facilitate the unfettered flow of trade.

He called on all G20 members to take collective actions, send a strong signal and restore confidence for global economic recovery.

Around the Globe

- Iran reports 157 new virus deaths, imposes intercity ban
- Students can return to India after travel ban is lifted: Embassy
- China seeks opening of border with Pak to supply medical equipment
- Indian doctors want UK PM to scrap 'unfair' surcharge as health service battles COVID19
- WHO 'very much' sided with China on coronavirus, says US President Donald Trump
- China reports 67 new imported coronavirus cases
- Moscow announces deaths of two patients with coronavirus
- Coronavirus deaths in France jump to over 1,300
- Home Secretary Priti Patel looks at UK border closures akin to India: Report
- Germany ramps up coronavirus tests to 500,000 a week
- Virus-stricken cruise ship told to leave Australian waters
- Nepal to reopen key border points with China to allow supply of essential goods
- London hospitals cope with 'continuous tsunami' of coronavirus cases
- Need a war-time plan to win the war against COVID-19: Guterres at G20 virtual summit



VIRUS TOLL OVER 21,000

AFP ■ MADRID

As world leaders hold online crisis talks on Thursday on the coronavirus pandemic that has forced three billion people into lockdown and claimed more than 21,000 lives.

With the disease tearing around the globe at a terrifying pace, warnings are multiplying over its economic consequences, and experts say it could cause more damage than the Great Depression.

Amid squabbling between the leaders of China and the US over who is to blame, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres called for the world to act together to halt the menace. “COVID-19 is threatening the whole of humanity,” he said. “Global action and solidarity are crucial. Individual country responses are not going to be enough.” The global lockdown — which also took in India's huge population this week — tightened further on Thursday as Russia announced it was grounding all international flights, while Moscow's mayor ordered the closure of cafes, shops and parks.

Tokyo's millions of citizens have been told to stay home and tourism-dependent Thailand has shuttered its borders. Economists say the restrictions imposed around the world could cause the most violent recession in recent history.

“The G20 economies will experience an unprecedented shock in the first half of this year and will contract in 2020 as a

whole,” ratings agency Moody's said.

Unemployment rates are expected to soar — as much as 30 per cent in the US — according to James Bullard, president of the St Louis Federal Reserve.

Leaders of the G20 major economies will hold a virtual huddle later Thursday in the shadow of such dire predictions. “As the world confronts the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges to healthcare systems and the global economy, we convene this extraordinary G20 summit to unite efforts towards a global response,” tweeted the king of Saudi Arabia. Saudi currently holds the rotating G20 presidency.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said richer nations needed to offer support to low and middle

income countries. The devastating effect on poorer nations was laid bare on Thursday when the Philippines announced that nine frontline doctors had died after contracting COVID-19.

Three large Manila hospitals said this week they had reached capacity and would no longer accept new coronavirus cases. Hundreds of medical staff are undergoing 14-day self-quarantines after suspected exposure, the hospitals said.

The death toll from the virus, which emerged in China late last year, continued to grow, with the US becoming the sixth country to hit four figures. Almost 1,050 people are now known to have died in the United States, with nearly 70,000 confirmed infections, a tally by Johns Hopkins University showed.



Infections near 5L as health systems buckle

AP ■ MADRID

The number of coronavirus infections closed in on a half-million worldwide Thursday, with both Italy and the US on track to surpass China, and a record-shattering 3.3 million Americans applied for unemployment benefits last week in a stark demonstration of the damage to the world's biggest economy.

Health care systems in Europe and New York buckled under the strain, with Spain's death toll climbing to more than 4,000.

In the US, an unprecedented \$2.2 trillion economic rescue package to help businesses, hospitals and ordinary Americans make it through the crisis cleared the Senate and is expected to be voted on in the House on Friday.

At least 2.8 billion people, or more than one-third of the Earth's population, are under severe travel restrictions.

But the head of the World Health Organization (WHO), Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, scolded world leaders for wasting precious time in the fight against the virus that has already killed more than 22,000



people and infected over 480,000, thrown millions out of work and ravaged the world economy.

“The time to act was actually more than a month ago or two months ago,” he said Wednesday. “We squandered the first window of opportunity. ... This is a second opportunity, which we should not squander and do everything to suppress and control this virus.”

In the United States, where deaths passed 1,050 and at least 70,000 people were infected, the damage from the widespread economic shutdown was made plain when the number of people applying for

unemployment benefits last week was more than four times the old record, set in 1982.

A political battle, meanwhile, raged between those demanding urgent action for a long siege against the pandemic, like New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, and President Donald Trump.

Trump has expressed hope churches could return to normal by Easter on April 12, and grumbled that “our country wasn't built to be shut down” — apparently concerned that the outbreak's devastating effects on financial markets and employment will harm his reelection chances. Democrats

say Trump is putting the economy ahead of the health and safety of Americans.

“I'd like to say, let's get back to work next Friday,” said Joe Biden, the front-runner for the Democratic presidential nomination. “That'd be wonderful. But it can't be arbitrary.”

In Brazil, the country's governors are defying President Jair Bolsonaro over his call to reopen schools and businesses, dismissing his argument that the “cure” of widespread shutdowns is worse than the disease. As of Thursday, the country had more than 2,500 cases and 59 deaths.

New York has emerged as a virus hotspot. The city's mammoth convention center is being turned into a hospital. The state recorded more than 350 deaths.

Spain has become the country in Europe where the outbreak is spreading the fastest.

On Thursday, the Health Ministry reported reported nearly 8,600 new infections and 655 deaths, bringing the total cases to over 56,000 and more than 4,000 fatalities — second only to Italy's death toll of about 7,500.

Spain toll over 4,000

AFP ■ MADRID

The coronavirus death toll in Spain surged to 4,089 after 655 people died within 24 hours, the Health Ministry said on Thursday.

It was a 19 per cent increase on figures released Wednesday by the authorities in Spain, which has the world's second highest death toll from the disease after Italy.

The number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 rose to 56,188, the ministry said. Despite a national lockdown imposed on March 14, which parliament on Thursday agreed to extend until April 11, both deaths and infections have continued to mount, with officials warning this week would be particularly bad.

But the rise in the number of new deaths was smaller than that recorded on Wednesday when the figure rose by 738 or 27 per cent.

Health authorities are hoping it will soon become clear whether the lockdown is having the desired effect.

The Madrid region has suffered the brunt of the epidemic with 17,166 infections — just under a third of the total — and 2,090 deaths, or 51 per cent of the national figure.

Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, whose wife is infected with the virus, has said this is the country's most difficult moment since its 1936-39 civil war.

“Only the oldest, who knew the hardships of the civil war and its aftermath, can remember collective situations that were harsher than the current one. The other generations in Spain have never, ever had to face as a collective something so hard,” he said when he imposed the state of emergency on March 14.

Spain's demographics partly explain why it has been one of the worst-affected nations.

Coronavirus cases in US cross 65,000 with more than 1,000 fatalities

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump has approved major disaster declarations on public health for many US states, including worst-hit New York, as the total number of confirmed cases in the country crossed 65,000 mark and more than 1,000 people have died due to the deadly coronavirus.

According to the Johns Hopkins coronavirus tracker, the number of deaths caused by the novel coronavirus in the US rose to 1,031 with 68,572 confirmed cases. The United States has the third highest number of confirmed cases behind China and Italy.

In addition to declaring a national emergency, President Trump has approved major

disaster declarations for New York, California, Washington, Iowa, Louisiana, North Carolina, Texas and Florida.

This is probably for the first time in recent memory that over half a dozen states have been approved for major disaster declarations on public health.

Condition continues to deteriorate in New York City, which has emerged as the epicentre of the COVID-19 in the US.

By Tuesday, the number of confirmed cases crossed 30,000 and at least 285 people died. New York was followed by neighbouring New Jersey with 4,402 cases and 62 fatalities. California, with nearly 3,000 cases and 65 deaths is under lockdown.

SEARCH FOR MISSING BOY



MANISH
General public is hereby informed that this boy namely Manish S/o Pramod Gupta R/o Jhuggi N1-8-A633, G.K. Block, Wazirpur, Delhi **Age : 13 years, Height : 3'6", Face : Oval, Complexion : Fair, Build : Thin, wearing chocolate colour pant, cream colour shirt and black colour shoes in feet, has been missing since 07.11.2013 from the area of P.S. Jahangir Puri, Delhi. In this regard FIR No. 464/13 dated 09.11.2013 u/s 363 IPC has been registered at P.S. Jahangir Puri, Delhi.**
Any person having any information or clue about this missing boy may kindly inform to the following:-
E-mail: cbc@cbi.gov.in SHO : P.S. Jahangir Puri, Delhi
Website: http://cbi.nic.in Tel. No. : 011-27636000,
Fax: 24368639, 27631600
Tel.: 24368638/24368641

DP/126/NW/20

SEARCH FOR MISSING/KIDNAPPED GIRL



RUBY
General public is hereby informed that this girl namely Ruby D/o Idrish R/o H.N. 312, L-1, Gali No. 1, Sangam Vihar, New Delhi **Age : 16 years, Complexion : Fair, Height : 5'3", Build : Thin, Face : Long, wearing suit and salwar, has been missing/kidnapped since 14.03.2020 at about 10:30 A.M. from the area of P.S. Neb Sarai, New Delhi. In this regard FIR No. 108/20 dated 15.03.2020 u/s 363 IPC has been registered at P.S. Neb Sarai, New Delhi.**
Any person having information or clue about this missing/kidnapped girl may kindly inform to the following:-
E-mail: cbc@cbi.gov.in SHO : P.S. Neb Sarai, New Delhi,
Website: http://cbi.nic.in Tel. No. 011-29551326, 29551597
Fax: 24368639, 8750870835
Tel.: 24368638/24368641

DP/70SD/20

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON
See Section 82 Cr.P.C.

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused **Mukesh S/o Rajender R/o C-141, Astal Colony, Bawana, Delhi** has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence FIR No. 210/18 u/s 279/337/482 IPC & 33/58 Excise Act. Act. P.S. Shahbad Dairy, Delhi and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said **Mukesh** cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said **Mukesh** absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that the said **Mukesh** accused of FIR No. 210/18 u/s 279/337/482 IPC & 33/58 Excise Act. Act. P.S. Shahbad Dairy, Delhi is required to appear before this Court to answer the said complaint on or before **15.05.2020**.

By Order: Sh. Vaibhav Mehta
Metropolitan Magistrate-02 (North),
Court No. 114, 1st Floor,
Rohini Courts, Delhi

DP/145/ON/20

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON
See Section 82 Cr.P.C.

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused **Sanvra S/o Laxman R/o VPO Solia, Teh. Sarvar, Dist. Ajmer, Rajasthan** has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case FIR No. 199/19 u/s 454/380/411/34 IPC P.S. Kirti Nagar, Delhi and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said **Sanvra** cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said **Sanvra** has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that the said **Sanvra** accused of FIR No. 199/19 u/s 454/380/411/34 IPC P.S. Kirti Nagar, Delhi is required to appear before this Court to answer the said complaint on or before **05.05.2020**.

By Order : Sh. Jagminder Singh,
Metropolitan Magistrate (West Dist.),
Room No. 146, 1st Floor,
Tis Hazari Court, Delhi

DP/67/WD/20

PUBLIC NOTICE

ICICI Bank Branch office: ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005

The following borrower/s have defaulted in the repayment of principal and interest of the loans facility obtained by them from the Bank and the loans have been classified as Non-Performing Assets (NPA). A notice was issued to them under Section 13 (2) of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act-2002 on their last known addresses, however it was not served and hence they are hereby notified by way of this public notice.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Co-Borrower/ Guarantor/ (Loan Account Number) & Address	Property Address of Secured Asset / Asset to be Enforced	Date of Notice Sent/ Outstanding as on Date of Notice	NPA Date
1.	Ashish Puri, Ruchika Puri, G-72, South City, Phase-1, Gurgaon, Haryana A/c:- LBDEL00001256268	Flat No.- 1429, Type- III, Second Floor, SF Sector-37 Noida Uttar Pradesh, North East- Road, South East- Open, South West- Flat No-1447, North West- Flat No-1426	07-Feb-2020, Rs.1135635/-	30/09/2019
2.	Ravinder Sharma, Sweetie Sharma, B-219, CDRVB, Paschim Vihar, New Delhi, A/c:-LBDEL00001481592	Mayur Dhwal Co-Operative, Group Housing Society Ltd, Geeta Colony, Flat No- 403- C, Delhi or Alias Mayur Dhwal Co-Operative, Group Housing Society Ltd, Geeta Colony	07-Feb-2020, Rs.1762803/-	30/04/2016

The steps are being taken for substituted service of notice. The above borrower/s and/or their guarantors (as applicable) are advised to make the payments of outstanding within period of 60 days from the date of publication of this notice else further steps will be taken as per the provisions of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002.

Date : 27-03-2020
Place: Delhi/NCR

Authorized Officer
ICICI Bank Limited

In drastic move, Italy shuts most factories to halt virus

Soave: Italy has become the first western developed nation to idle most of its industry to halt the spread of the coronavirus, a potential cautionary tale for other governments, such as the Trump administration, that are resisting such drastic measures.

After more than two weeks of a nationwide lockdown, the Italian government decided to expand the mandatory closure of nonessential commercial activities to heavy industry in the eurozone's third-largest economy, a major exporter of machinery, textiles and other goods.

AP

3.3 MN AMERICANS SEEK JOBLESS AID

Nearly 5 times earlier high

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Nearly 3.3 million Americans applied for unemployment benefits last week — more than quadruple the previous record set in 1982 — amid a widespread economic shutdown caused by the coronavirus.

The surge in weekly applications was a stunning reflection of the damage the viral outbreak is inflicting on the economy. Filings for unemployment aid generally reflect the pace of layoffs. Layoffs are sure to accelerate as the US economy sinks into a recession.

Revenue has collapsed at restaurants, hotels, movie theaters, gyms, and airlines.

Auto sales are plummeting, and car makers have close factories. Most such employers face loan payments and other fixed costs, so they're cutting jobs to save money.

As job losses mount, some economists say the nation's unemployment rate could approach 13 per cent by May. By comparison, the highest jobless rate during the Great Recession, which ended in 2009, was 10 per cent. The economic deterioration has been swift. As recently as February, the unemployment rate was at a 50-year low of 3.5 per cent.

And the economy was growing steadily if modestly. Yet by the April-June quarter of the year, some economists think the economy will shrink at its steepest annual pace ever — a contraction that could reach 30 per cent.

In its report on Thursday, the Labor Department said 3.283 million people applied for unemployment benefits last week, up from 282,000 during the previous week.

Yet many people who have lost jobs in recent weeks have been unable to file for unemployment aid because state websites and phone systems have been overwhelmed by a crush of applicants and have frozen up.

That logjam suggests that Thursday's report actually understates the magnitude of job cuts last week. So does the fact that workers who are not on company payrolls — gig workers, free-lancers, the self-employed — aren't currently eligible for unemployment benefits even though in many cases they're no longer able to earn money.

COVID-19 OUTBREAK

Trump's push to open economy could come at cost of lives

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The contrast could hardly be more stark. Gov. Andrew Cuomo of New York has said that if all of his sweeping, expensive measures to stem the coronavirus saved one life, it would be worth it. President Donald Trump has another view: The costs of shutting down the economy outweigh the benefits, frequently telling Americans that 35,000 people a year die from the common flu.

Though it may seem crass, the federal government actually has long made a calculation when imposing regulations, called "the value of a statistical life," that places a price tag on a human life. It has been used to consider whether to require seat belts, airbags or environmental regulations, but it has never been applied in a broad

public health context.

The question is now an urgent one given that Trump in recent days has latched on to the notion that the cure for the pandemic should not be worse than the disease and argued that "more people are going to die if we allow this to continue" if the economy remains closed. He has targeted a return to a semblance of normalcy for the economy by Easter Sunday, April 12.

Critics say he's presenting the nation with a false choice at a moment when deaths and infections from the virus are surging.

"We're not going to accept a premise that human life is disposable," said Cuomo, whose state has seen far more infections and deaths from COVID-19 than any other state. "And we're not going to put a dollar figure on human life."

Taking aspirin may not reduce dementia risk

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

Aspirin has anti-inflammatory properties and also thins the blood. For years, doctors have been prescribing low-dose aspirin for some people to reduce their risk of heart disease and stroke. However, there are also possible risks to taking aspirin, including bleeding in the brain, so guidance from a doctor is important.

Because aspirin can be beneficial to the heart, researchers have hypothesised, and smaller previous studies have suggested, that it may also be beneficial to the brain, possibly reducing the risk of dementia by reducing inflammation, minimising small clots or by preventing the narrowing of blood vessels within the brain. **IANS**

US grants Iraq shortest sanctions waiver yet for Iran gas

AFF ■ BAGHDAD

The United States on Thursday granted Iraq a 30-day waiver to keep importing Iranian gas despite American sanctions, two Iraqi officials told AFP, the shortest extension yet.

The US slapped tough sanctions on the Iranian energy sector in late 2018 and has granted Iraq a series of waivers, usually for 45, 90 or 120 days. Baghdad relies on gas and electricity imports from its neighbour Tehran to supply about a third of its power grid, crippled by years of conflict and poor maintenance.

"This is the final extension," one source at the Iraqi president's office told AFP.

The source said Washington had been frustrated that Iran was meddling in the Government formation

process in Iraq. Adnan Zurfi, who has had close ties with US officials since the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, was nominated on March 17 and has a month to pull together his cabinet. "The US did not want to put Zurfi in a difficult position by not renewing the waiver," a second senior Iraqi official told AFP, confirming the 30-day extension.

The official said Baghdad had prepared a checklist at the beginning of the last 45-day waiver period of ways the country could decrease its reliance on Iranian oil. "But we haven't been able to accomplish any of them because of the circumstances," the source said. Iraq has been hit by a cocktail of crises in recent weeks, including the government formation stalemate, collapsing oil prices and the novel coronavirus pandemic.

business

Market clocks best 3-day rally in years

As stimulus calms investor jitters amid lockdown

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmarks surged for the third straight session on Thursday, logging their best three-day gains in years, after the Government's much awaited stimulus measures for coronavirus lockdown-hit segments lifted sentiments.

The BSE gauge Sensex surged 1,410.99 points or 4.94 per cent to settle at 29,946.77; while the NSE barometer Nifty shot up 323.60 points or 3.89 per cent to 8,641.45.

After the worst-ever crash on Monday, the Sensex has recovered by 3,965.53 points or 15.26 per cent over the last three sessions. Likewise, the NSE Nifty has regained 1,031.20 points or 13.55 per cent in three days.

On the Sensex chart, IndusInd Bank was the top gainer, rallying up to 46 per cent. Other winners were Bharti Airtel, L&T, Bajaj Finance, Kotak Mahindra, Bajaj Auto, HUL and HDFC — rising up to 10 per cent.

On the other hand, Maruti Suzuki, Tech Mahindra, Sun Pharma and Reliance Industries closed with losses.

All sectoral indices ended with gains with BSE telecom, capital goods, bankex, finance, realty and FMCG indices surging up to 10 per cent.

The broader markets also gained momentum with the Nifty Midcap and Smallcap indices rising 3 per cent each. n an effort to cushion the economic blow of the 21-day lockdown in wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, Finance Minister Sitharaman announced a slew of measures worth Rs 1.70 lakh crore to help citizens survive the crisis.

Paras Bothra, President of Equity Research, Ashika Stock Broking, said, "Domestic markets zoomed for the second day on the trot driven by optimism on USD 2 trillion package to US economy and also in anticipation of an economic package for the Indian economy. "Finance Minister indeed announced Rs 1,75,000 cr package for the poor and needy, however measures addressed to corporate or SMEs are still missing. Perhaps this will be followed by monetary stimulus by RBI along with forbearance on loan repayments."

The Rs 1.70 lakh crore economic package involves free food grains and cooking gas to poor for the next three months, one-time doles to women and poor senior citizens, higher wages to workers and measures

to boost liquidity of employees. The scheme will be implemented with immediate effect.

"This is a package for lockdown impacted segments," said VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services, adding that the Government is prioritising. According to traders, volatility remained during the day as March derivatives contracts expired.

The Indian Rupee surged by another 78 paise to close at 75.16 against the US dollar on Thursday after Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced various welfare measures to tide through the coronavirus crisis.

In a positive news for India's fiscal health, the crude oil prices continued to trade below USD 30 a barrel amid steep fall in demand due to COVID-19 led lockdowns in major parts of the world.

More than dozen PSBs announce COVID-19 emergency credit line

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

More than a dozen public sector banks have announced COVID-19 Emergency Credit Line to deal with the hardships faced by various sectors of the economy.

Though public sectors banks (PSBs) were quick to respond with steps to deal with the hardships faced by various sectors of the economy, private sector banks such as ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank and Axis Bank are yet to come out

with any relief measures for their customers.

As many as 15 PSBs out of the total 18 government-owned banks till Thursday evening announced schemes to mitigate hardships faced by various segments. Taking the lead, the country's largest lender SBI last week announced an emergency credit line to meet any liquidity mismatch for its borrowers.

The additional liquidity facility COVID-19 Emergency Credit Line (CECL) will pro-

vide funds up to Rs 200 crore and will be available till June 30, SBI said in a circular issued on Thursday.

Following the suit, Punjab National Bank, Bank of Baroda, Canara Bank, Union Bank of India and Bank of India.

Besides, Indian Bank, Bank of Maharashtra, Syndicate Bank, Indian Overseas Bank, UCO Bank and Andhra Bank have also introduced relief schemes till date for meeting liquidity requirements under COVID-19 emergency.

E-commerce companies temporarily stop taking orders for non-essential items

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

E-commerce companies Paytm Mall, Amazon and Flipkart have temporarily stopped taking orders for non-essential items due to restrictions imposed during the

nationwide lockdown to stop the spread of coronavirus.

The companies had on Wednesday complained about their delivery staff being punished by local police despite government orders to exempt them from lockdown restrictions.

"Paytm Mall has decided to help users buy essential products including household staples, healthcare, hygiene, personal safety products on its platform. The company would temporarily not take any new orders for products that fall in the non-essential categories including fashion, mobile, and accessories, white goods and electronics among others," Paytm Mall said in a statement.

Unitech board working on resolution plan to complete stalled realty projects: Hiranandani

New Delhi: Crisis-hit Unitech's board, which has been superseded by the Central Government, is working on a resolution plan to complete stalled realty projects but the pace has slowed due to the coronavirus pandemic, its member Niranjan Hiranandani said on Thursday. "Board is working on resolution plan but now, with the pandemic crisis, things are moving slow. But, we are definitely working," Hiranandani said in a tweet while responding to a query.

Niranjan Hiranandani is managing director of Hiranandani group. He is also President of industry bodies Assocham and NAREDCO. **PTI**

Yes Bank board okays fund raising of ₹5,000 cr

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Cash-starved private sector lender Yes Bank on Thursday approved a proposal to raise Rs 5,000 crore by way of share sale, including qualified institutions and rights issue. The board meeting held on Thursday cleared this proposal. This fund raising will be over and above Rs 10,000 crore cleared on February 7. The board at its meeting has approved subject to receipt of requisite approvals, raising of funds for an additional amount aggregating up to Rs 5,000 crores Yes Bank said in a regulatory filing.

The fund may be raised in one or more tranches by "way of issuance of securities but not limited to through a qualified institutions placement/ public

issue, rights issue, global depositary receipts, American depositary receipts, foreign currency convertible bonds or any other permissible mode," it said.

So, in aggregate the fund raising cannot exceed Rs 15,000 crore, it added. Facing the collapse of the fourth largest private lender, the Reserve Bank sacked Yes Bank management and placed it under an administrator in the evening of 5 March with a 30-day moratorium.

On March 14, the government notified the rescue plan drafted by the RBI under which State Bank of India would pick up around 49 percent equity in Yes Bank. Private lenders joined SBI to shield the banking sector from a widespread crisis by injecting Rs 10,000 crore into the bank with SBI alone infusing Rs 6,050 crore.

ESAF Small Finance Bank gets Sebi's go-ahead for ₹976 cr IPO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

ESAF Small Finance Bank has received capital markets regulator Sebi's go-ahead to float a Rs 976-crore initial public offering. The company had filed draft papers with Sebi in January and obtained its "observations" on March 20, as per the latest information available with the markets watchdog. Sebi's observations are necessary for any company to launch public issues, including initial public offer (IPO), follow-on public offer (FPO) and rights issue.

The IPO of ESAF Small Finance Bank comprises a fresh issue of shares worth Rs 800 crore and an offer-for-sale (OFS) aggregating up to Rs 176.2 crore, according to the draft prospectus filed with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi).

Asia markets mixed as US lawmakers debate stimulus

Hong Kong: Asian markets mostly rose or clawed back early losses on Thursday as investors breathed a sigh of relief that US senators have finally passed a gargantuan stimulus package for the world's top economy after being delayed by wrangling over details.

Unprecedented USD 2 trillion plan — described by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell as a "wartime level of investment" — helped spur a surge across global equities as panicked traders worried about the impact of virus sweeping the planet. But another advance on Wall Street was blunted Wednesday as it emerged that four Republican senators have balked at the generous provisions agreed to in the bipartisan deal with the White House.

However, the bill eventually cleared the Senate by an overwhelming majority and will now head to the House of Representatives before going to President Donald Trump for his signature. Monster deal thrashed out between Republicans, Democrats and White House includes cash payments to American taxpayers and several hundred billion dollars in grants and loans to small businesses and core industries. It also buttresses hospitals desperately in need of medical equipment and expands unemployment benefits. **AFP**



SEARCH FOR MISSING BOY

General public is here by informed that one boy **Namely:** Tushar Asiwai, **S/o** Suresh Asiwai, **R/o** H.No. 3D-1, Imarti Block, Ganga Rama Vatika, Tilak, Nagar, New Delhi, **Age:** 16 years 11 Months, **Height:** 5'9", **Complexion:** Shallow, **Face:** Round, **Built:** Medium, **Wearing:** Blue Jeans, Blue, Shirt, Green Jacket and White Colour Shoes in feet has been missing since 15.03.2020 from his home, Delhi.

In this regard a FIR No. 139/20 dated 16.03.2020 has been lodged at P.S. Tilak Nagar, Delhi.

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

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

SHO
P.S. Tilak Nagar, Delhi
E-Mail: cbc@cbi.gov.in
Website: http://cbi.nic.in
Ph. 011-25409290
25407800
DP/60/WD/2020



SEARCH FOR MISSING

General Public is hereby informed that one person **Namely:** Ashok Kumar Gupta, **S/o:** Duni Chand, **R/o:** H.No. Q-41, Budh Vihar, Ph-1, Delhi, **Age:** 39 Years, **Height:** 5', **Face:** Round, **Complexion:** White Fair, **Built:** Medium, **Wearing:** Blue Colour Jeans & Grey Colour Pant & Black Colour Sweater has been missing since 16.03.2020 from the area of PS. Vijay Vihar, Delhi. In this regard **DD No. 29A, Dated 16.03.2020** has been lodged at **PS. Vijay Vihar, Delhi.**

Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the missing person but no clue has come to light so far. If anyone have any information about this missing person please inform the undersigned.

SHO
PS. Vijay Vihar, Delhi
E-Mail id: cbc@cbi.gov.in
Fax: 011-24368639
DP/104/RD/2020
Ph: 011-24368638, 24368641

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON

(SECTION 82 Cr.Pc.)

Whereas complaint has been made before me that the accused person **Manish Sethi, S/o** Bhushan Sethi **R/o** A-91, Abchal Nagar, Chander Vihar, Nangloi, Delhi has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case **FIR No. 904/18 u/s 379/411/482 IPC, P.S. Pashim Vihar East, Delhi** it has been returned to warrant of arrest there upon issued that the said accused person **Manish Sethi**, cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused **Manish Sethi**, has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of said warrant).

Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused **Manish Sethi, FIR No. FIR No. 904/18 u/s 379/411/482 IPC, P.S. Pashim Vihar East, Delhi**, is required to appear before the court on or before **27.04.2020**.

By order
Sh. Puneet Nagpal
MM -07, Room No. 289, 2nd floor
Tis Hazari Court, Delhi

DP/93/OD/2020

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF PERSON ACCUSED

See Section 82 Cr. PC

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused person namely Vinod Sharma S/o Sh. K.C. Sharma, R/o H.No. 100, 4th Floor, Vigyan Lok, Delhi-92, has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the Offence FIR No. 524/16 dated 07.11.2016 u/s 420/34 IPC at PS. Krishna Nagar, Delhi, and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said Vinod Sharma cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said Vinod Sharma has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proclamation u/s 82 CrPC is hereby made that the said Vinod Sharma accused of FIR No. 524/16 dated 07.11.2016 u/s 420/34 IPC is required to appear before this court to answer the said complaint on or before 20.05.2020.

By Order
Ms. Aakansha Vyas
Metropolitan Magistrate
Karkardooma Court, Delhi

DP/12/SHD/2020-
(Court Matter)

PUBLIC NOTICE

Home Finance

Branch office: ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005

The following borrower/s have defaulted in the repayment of principal and interest of the loans facility obtained by them from the secured creditor and the loans have been classified as Non-Performing Assets (NPA). A notice was issued to them under Section 13 (2) of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act-2002 on their last known addresses, however it was not served and hence they are hereby notified by way of this public notice.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Co-Borrower/ Guarantor/ (Loan Account Number) & Address	Property Address of Secured Asset / Asset to be Enforced	Date of Notice Sent/ Outstanding as on Date of Notice	NPA Date
1.	Rajat Sharma, Monika Sharma, B 18, 2nd Floor, Paryavaran Complex, Delhi, Saidulajab A/c No:- NHND000001261503	Flat No B- 501, 5th Floor Ninex City Tower B, Village Khirki Daula, Sector 76, Gurgaon- 122001	11-Feb-2020 Rs. 13625473.99/-	05/11/ 2019
2.	Lalit Saini, Dinesh Saini, House No 5A, Near Railway Road Opposite Justice, Gopal Trust Hospital, Gurgaon, Gurgaon Haryana A/c No:- NHND000001269303	Flat No. Valencia- 101 1st Floor, Oasis Grand Stand, Plot No-GH-01, TS 01 B, Sector- 22D, Yamuna Express Way Gautam Buddha Nagar	11-Feb-2020 Rs. 3212386/-	05/11/ 2019
3.	Parveen Kumar, Mrs Soma, Sanjeev Kumar, B 67 Vikas Vihar Colony Nagar Kakrola South West Delhi, Delhi, A/c No:- NHND000001260070	Flat No 12A-02 Floor 13, Tower C, Upside Sector, Surajpur Plot No. Hra-12/A, Oasis Venetia Heights Greater Noida	11-Feb-2020 Rs. 3161992/-	06/10/ 2019
4.	Jeenesh Kumar, Monu, House No 336/20, Street No 1, Shanti Nagar, Gurgaon, Gurgaon A/c No:- NHND000001267807	Flat No C- 1907, 19th Floor, Oasis Venetia Heights Plot No. Hra 12 A, Group Housing Sector, Surajpur Site C (Extension) Phase - II Greater Noida	11-Feb-2020 Rs. 2980792/-	05/11/ 2019
5.	Harkesh., Manju Singh, 45/22, Sharat Bose Lane, North Dumdum Rajbari Colony, North 24, Parganar, Calcutta, A/c No:- NHXBA00000888035	Khwat No 1290 Min, Khatoni No 2039 Min, Khadra No 2764, 2768, 2767 Mouja Bahadurgarh, Surat Nagar Line Par Bahadurgarh	11-Feb-2020 Rs. 1526014/-	07/08/ 2019
6.	Sanjay Kumar, Kanchan Patel, 26/128 Block 26 Trilok Puri, Preet Vihar East Delhi New Delhi Preet Vihar East Delhi, Delhi, A/c No:- NHGHZ00001273584	Flat No- 1112, 11 Floor, Oasis Grand Stand, Plot No. Gh 01, Ts 01 B, Sec-22 D, Yamuna Express Way Noida	11-Feb-2020 Rs. 1275999/-	11/09/ 2019
7.	Dharam Pal Singh Rathor, Shiksha Rathor, B- 58, Preet Vihar, Delhi, Delhi, A/c No:- LBDEL00001107640	H. No. C- 498, Yojna Vihar Delhi	11-Feb-2020 Rs. 818132.87/-	09/08/ 2019
8.	Rampal, Amit., Lalgarh 145, Palwal, Palwal, A/c No:- LHDVJ00001296958	409, Kalda Colony Khewat Khata No 4807/5602 M, Kila No 26 (40-10) Kita No 1 Palwal, 1, Palwal -121105 Haryana	11-Feb-2020 Rs. 10037127/-	06/12/ 2019

The steps are being taken for substituted service of notice. The above borrower/s and/or their guarantors (as applicable) are advised to make the payments of outstanding within period of 60 days from the date of publication of this notice else further steps will be taken as per the provisions of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002.

Date : 27-03-2020

Place: Delhi/NCR

Authorized Officer

For ICICI Home Finance Company Ltd

LIFE IMITATES FILMS

With binge-watch becoming the ideal quarantine activity, pandemic films are the new favourite genre across the world, says CHAHAK MITTAL



'CONTAGION FEELS PRESCIENT AS IT NOT ONLY GIVES AN ILLUMINATING GLIMPSE INTO WHAT HAPPENED — BUT WHAT MIGHT.'
—STEVEN ANDREW SODERBERGH (DIRECTOR)

There's no trespassing in this city or the planet. I'm sorry! Earth is closed today." Till a month back, this was just a dialogue by Tony Stark aka Robert Downey Jr in *Avengers: Infinity Wars*. But now, it is a lived reality. The shopping complexes, cafes and bars, cinema halls, theatres, museums, public centres, offices, and schools and colleges have downed their shutters and there is not a single soul on the streets amid the ongoing global pandemic of Coronavirus or COVID-19.

'Netflix and chill' was the buzzword for hanging out alone or with friends earlier but now, it's the favourite 'quarantine' activity. And while people juggle with deciding on what to watch online, data shows that streaming and downloads of films, which show global crises or pandemics akin to the present one, have seen a sharp rise. One such is *Contagion* (2011), which gives the viewer a feeling of *déjà vu* as the film revolves around a family man (played by Matt Damon) who tries to navigate a partial societal collapse after a deadly virus spreads across the globe.

As per the data released by various sources, the film is becoming one of the most popular pandemic genre movies of 2020. According to iTunes, it is the third most popular film on the channel currently as well as the only film in the top 10 that didn't come out in 2019 as every film that's listed in the top 20 was released in 2019, except for this one. The film might have not garnered as much attention when it was first released due to its "unrealistic" and some "highly fictional" assumptions as claimed by many critics. There were sequences where a vaccine was developed really quickly and the film depicted that the virus reached humans through contact with animals.

However, today, it has returned to make the audience realise how it predicted the Coronavirus outbreak of 2020

long back in 2011. As per the data released on March 8 by The Verge and TorrentFreak, which collaborated to study the rise of number of downloads of *Contagion* between January 1 and March 4, thousands of people around the world were found to be illegally downloading the pandemic film. The results were analysed by checking the IP addresses that shared the film and studying torrent tracker data. The study also said that before January 24, *Contagion* was torrented about 200 times per day around the world. On January 25, the number rose to 1,500. As per the US, after the virus started spreading there, the downloads were around 18,000 every day.

According to MUSO, a piracy analytics firm, *Contagion* downloads, from 546 on January 7, rose to over 30,000 by January 30. Such a high number of piracy visits of the film have proven what heights people reach up to when they are not able to stream any film that they want to watch.

As per the data by Google trends of the last 90 days, "Where can I watch *Contagion*?" became the ninth most searched query whereas "*Contagion* online," "*Contagion* full movie download," or "*Contagion* Netflix" became the 19th, 20th and 21st queries respectively. The film is now available on Amazon Prime Video and Google Play only in some countries.

Not just the surge, the film is also becoming a medium of learning about the situation for students.



Tyres are of vital importance since they are the only part of the vehicle that makes contact with the road. Yet motorists often neglect their condition and age, and the results can be catastrophic. In its most recently available information, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says that 738 people died in 2017 from tyre-related crashes.

As a tyre ages, small cracks in the rubber begin to develop over time, appearing on the surface and inside the tyre. This cracking can eventually cause the steel belts in the tread to separate from the rest of the tyre. Tread separation can also happen to defective, underinflated and poorly maintained tires. Hot climates will also accelerate the aging process.

Here's what you need to know to determine tyre age and what issues old tyres can pose:

HOW LONG DO TYRES LAST?

Carmakers and tyre manufacturers differ in their recommendations on when to replace a tyre. Many automakers,

Tiring effect

Here's why having old tyres on your car could be a risk

including Ford, Nissan, Mazda and Mercedes-Benz, tell owners to replace tyres six years after their production date regardless of tread life. Brands such as Continental and Michelin say a tyre can last up to 10 years, provided you get annual tyre inspections after the fifth year.

The NHTSA has no specific guidelines on tyre age and defers to the recommendations of carmakers and tyre manufacturers.

DETERMINING THE AGE OF A TYRE

You'll need to locate the transportation number printed on the sidewall of the tyre. The first two numbers represent the week in which the tyre was made. The second two represent the year. A tyre with a

DOT code of 1018, for example, was made in the 10th week of 2018.

Tyres made before 2000 end in a three-digit code that is trickier to decode, but essentially if you see a DOT number ending in three digits, the tyre was made in the last century and should be immediately replaced.

If you see a partial DOT number on the outer sidewall, look for the full number on the inner side. Some tyre manufacturers opt to brand the number on the inside to reduce the chance of injury to the tyre mold technician.

AVOID USED TYRES

New tyres can be expensive, which is why used tyres are attractive to people who are strapped for cash. You'll often

find used tyres for sale in classified ads or at tyre-and-wheel shops that offer them as a low-cost alternative.

The problem with used tyres is that, while you can check their age, you have no idea how well they were maintained or what conditions they were used in. It is safer to avoid them entirely.

MAKE SURE YOU'RE GETTING FRESH TYRES

There are instances when people have purchased what they thought were new tyres at retail stores only to find out that they were manufactured years earlier. A tyre from the prior year is common, but anything older is likely to have a shorter life span. You have the right to request newer ones. Check the date before you drive away to save yourself the hassle.

Make a tyre inspection part of your routine when evaluating a used car to buy. If you find that the vehicle you're interested in has old tyres, make that a part of the negotiation. The seller of the vehicle might be willing to discount the price so that you can buy new tyres, or even install new tyres before you purchase it.

LEARN TO LET GO OF OLD TYRES

If your tyres have plenty of tread left but are approaching the six-year mark, it's time to get them inspected for signs of aging. And if the tyre shop recommends a set of tyres, spend the money and don't put it off. Getting rid of an unused spare or tyres with plenty of tread may seem counterintuitive, but if they are too old, it is the smartest thing you can do.

Rebecca Katz, director of the Centre for Global Health Science and Security at Georgetown University, recently revealed that she made her students watch the film's ending to "educate them about the interconnectedness between animals, the environment and the humans."

Film writer Scott Z Burns recently told a magazine, that while the disease in the film was more deadly than the COVID-19, Scott was more interested in using the virus to explore how the pre-existing conditions in society make us susceptible to fear as well as the virus. He said, "The similarities between *Contagion* and the Coronavirus are immaterial, accidental, and really not that important. What is more important is the societal response and the spread of fear and its knock-on effects, which are proving to be accurate" and that's why the film is gaining popularity among netizens across the world.

Director Steven A n d r e w Soderbergh also pointed out that *Contagion* feels "prescient" as it "not only gives an illuminating glimpse into what happened — but what might."

W e l l , another film that has taken the inter-

net and netizens by storm is Korean Netflix series *My Secret Terrius*, which was released in 2018. Viewers believe that the film had "predicted" the current virus outbreak. One of the sequences in episode 10 depicts a doctor and an information spy talking about a potential virus named Coronavirus, which has allegedly been tweaked to make its mortality rate reach 90 per cent as compared to the MERS, which only had 20 per cent mortality rate. The doctor says that "the Coronavirus has an incubation period of two to 14 days," which is a more serious concern. She adds that the virus has been "manipulated to attack the lungs directly within just five minutes of being exposed." The "mutant virus" could be used as a weapon and lead to a biochemical global terrorist attack. The film is unavailable or has been removed from the online platform in many countries now.

Other Hollywood films which are again making it big because of the pandemic scare are *Pandemic: How to Prevent an Outbreak* (American documentary series, a Netflix Original, 2020), *Pandemic* (2016), *Outbreak* (1995), *Carriers* (2009), the series, *Containment* (2016), *I Am Legend* (2007), and *The Andromeda Strain* (1971). As the virus claims more and more lives, the films show how the average person must maintain social distancing, try hard not to touch his or her face, and only stay indoors. Nothing else can be done until a solution is found, which wouldn't happen overnight. Netflix Original film *Bird Box* (2018), which was a fictional and a metaphorical take on how a global pandemic can take over humanity, also depicted how people in order to survive must stay put in their homes to not let the plague reach them.



Corona doesn't spread via tears



Contrary to some reports, researchers now claim that the novel Coronavirus doesn't spread via tears and it is unlikely that infected patients are shedding virus through eye fluid.

While researchers are certain that Coronavirus spreads through mucus and droplets expelled by coughing or sneezing, it is unclear if the virus is spread through other bodily fluids, such as tears, said the study published in the journal, *Ophthalmology*.

There is one important caveat, though. None of the patients in the study had Conjunctivitis, also known as pink eye. However, health officials believe pink eye develops in just one per cent to three per cent of people with Coronavirus.

For the findings, researchers at National University Hospital in Singapore collected tear samples from 17 patients with COVID-19 from the time they showed symptoms until they recovered about 20 days later. Neither viral culture nor reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) detected the virus in their tears throughout the two-week course of the disease, the researchers said.

The study researcher Ivan Seah also took samples from the back of the nose and throat during the same time period. The findings showed that when a sick person coughs or talks, virus particles can spray from their mouth or nose into another person's face.

You're most likely to inhale these droplets through your mouth or nose, but they can also enter through your eyes, according to the research.

The study also revealed that you can also become infected by touching something that has the virus on it — like a table or doorknob — and then touching your eyes.

While the patients' tears were clear of virus, their noses and throats were teeming with COVID-19, the researchers said. The authors wrote that the findings, coupled with the low incidence of pink eye among infected patients, suggest that the risk of virus transmission through tears is low.

The researchers hope their work helps to guide more research into preventing virus transmission through more significant routes, such as droplets and fecal-oral spread.

—JANS

Trend Blazer

Kishen Kanhaiya is special to me: Anil

Actor **ANIL KAPOOR** said that his 1990 release *Kishen Kanhaiya* has a special place in his heart. The actor reminisced about the **Rakesh Roshan** directorial as it completed 30 years. The actor said that he is glad to see "the love and appreciation that the film has received."


Anil said, "Madhuri Dixit and I have worked together in a lot of films and each has a set of memories which can never be forgotten. *Kishen Kanhaiya* was and continues to be my favourites. My double role gave me an opportunity to explore two very different personalities — one strong and the other soft."

The film will air on Zee Bollywood tomorrow.



'Samisha Shetty Kundra completes 40 days today. The first milestone for a mother and her child, as per Hinduism. It only makes me realise that there are so many other things we should be grateful for even if some things don't go as planned. For next 20 days, I'm going to document one thing that I'm grateful for every day.'

—**Shilpa Shetty Kundra**



Actor **HRITHIK ROSHAN** has stressed that the safety of the most fundamental caretakers of the city and society must be ensured. He has taken an extra step by procuring masks for Brihan Mumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC).

He paid his gratitude to minister Aaditya Thackeray for giving him the opportunity to support the Maharashtra government.



Miley suffers anxiety in isolation

Hollywood singer **MILEY CYRUS** said she suffered a panic attack as she self-isolated in her mansion amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The 27-year-old revealed how the time she spent locked away in her home triggered a number of issues.

"I was sitting outside my house one night and I was looking at the stars. And it was the one place where I felt really safe. I was thinking about how fortunate and lucky I am that I live in a space where I can still go out and take a walk. But not everyone has that space," she said.

"And so I started having this fear, anxiety and panic, and I actually started giving myself really cold feet," she added.



Rohit still hopeful on IPL 2020

FIANS ■ MUMBAI

Star Indian opener and Mumbai Indians captain Rohit Sharma felt that the time he spent with Ricky Ponting at the Indian Premier League (IPL) franchise was “magic.”

Ponting was captain of MI in 2013, when they were yet to win an IPL title. He resigned from the post and handed it over to Rohit but stayed on as part of the coaching staff. His contribution is often seen instrumental in helping MI win their maiden IPL title that year and he would return to the franchise as a head coach, before moving to Delhi Capitals.

“Ricky Ponting to me was magic,” said Rohit on Thursday in an interaction with former England captain Kevin Pietersen on *Instagram*.

“The way he handled the team when he was captain during the first half and then he gave the captaincy to me midway. That takes a lot of guts and after that to be as involved as he was as a support staff member. He was supporting all the younger players in the team and he was guiding me in captaincy,” said Rohit.

Rohit said that he feels MI have made a few good purchases at the auction this year and hopes that the season starts whenever things settle. “We have got a few good additions to the squad like Chris Lynn, Trent Boult, Nathan Coulter-Nile.

“Boult is a good buy on a pitch like Wankhede with the swinging ball, I was looking forward to that. Alongwith (Jasprit) Bumrah he would have made a good combination. Still looking forward, fingers crossed. At some stage if things settle down, it should happen,” said Rohit.

Rohit also said that current Mumbai Indians coach Mahela Jayawardene is someone who gives a lot of clarity to his players. “Mahela is very calm, very composed. He only tells you to do things he sees as right



Mumbai Indians skipper Rohit Sharma bats during team's practice session

@mipaltan/Twitter

or not to do them if they are wrong. His messages are very clear,” said Rohit.

The 2020 season of the IPL was scheduled to start on March 29 with defending champions MI facing Chennai Super Kings at the Wankhede Stadium in what was a repeat of the 2019 final. However the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic forced the organisers to push the tentative starting date to April 15, which itself is now clouded in uncertainty due to the three-week lockdown.

ITCHING TO PLAY

Indian limited overs vice-captain is holed up in his apartment like everybody else these days due to three-week lockdown but said that he is making do with running up and down the stairs of his building to stay fit. “Its very hard actually (to stay fit),” said Rohit. “I live in a building which has about 54 floors and we had to stop all the indoor and outdoor activities. So just been running up and down the stairs. Not 54 floors but about two or three floors up and down and doing some conditioning exercises here and there.”

Rohit had been recovering — from a calf injury which he sustained during the fifth T20I between India and New Zealand — at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Bengaluru before it was shut down due to the spread of the pandemic.

He however said that he is completely fit now, although he is yet to do an official fitness test because the NCA is not working.

He said that he has been itching to play the game again after spending two months on the sidelines and was looking forward to the IPL.

“Definitely miss playing the game. I was injured for two months so have been itching to play. When I got the news that everything was going to be postponed I was very sad. I was really looking forward to playing in the IPL,” he said.

Stokes continues IPL preparations despite cancellation threat

PTI ■ LONDON

Star England all-rounder Ben Stokes continues to train for the 13th IPL even though he is aware that the T20 league may become yet another sporting event to be cancelled due to COVID-19 pandemic.

“At the moment my next competitive cricket is going to be in the IPL,” Stokes, who was bought by Rajasthan Royals in the 2018 IPL auction for ₹ 12.5 crore, told the *BBC*.

“That hasn’t changed yet so I have to think I will be playing on April 20.”

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) had said last week that the county season would not start until at least the end of May, while England’s tour of Sri Lanka was also postponed due to the dreaded disease. And given the current circumstances, a cancellation of this year’s IPL looks inevitable.

However, Stokes said he needs to keep working on his fitness to be ready if and when the IPL happens.

“I have to get my head round that I am playing even though in the back of my mind I know I am



Ben Stokes and Jos Buttler in action for Rajasthan Royals in IPL 2019

probably not,” he said.

“I have to build up and get myself physically in a position that if it does happen I am good to go. I cannot take three weeks off and expect the body to be ready for April 20 because it doesn’t work like that. It might happen and if it does I don’t want to be behind.

“There will be a lot of advice given to us and if it was an option to go we will have to take the sensible one.”

SHORTENED IPL

England wicketkeeper-batsman Jos Buttler is hoping for at least a cur-

tailed IPL this season, aware that it would be difficult to conduct the “massive tournament” in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic.

“No news at the moment. We saw, initially, that it was going to be postponed. It’s very hard to see this changing in the immediate future, so I don’t see that as a possibility at the moment,” Buttler said in a *skysports* podcast.

“Obviously, it’s such a massive tournament for world cricket, so hopefully some of it can go ahead — perhaps a shortened tournament.”

Mithali wants women’s IPL next year

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

BCCI should not “wait forever” to start the women’s IPL, said India women’s ODI captain Mithali Raj, urging the board to make it happen next year on a smaller scale before gradually developing it.

“I personally feel they should start a women’s IPL by next year, even if it’s on a slightly smaller scale and with some changes in rules, such as, say, have five to six foreign players in the first edition instead of four as is the case with the men’s IPL,” Raj told *ESPNCricinfo*.

After India lost the T20 World Cup in the finals earlier this month, former skipper Sunil Gavaskar had called for a full-fledged women’s IPL from next year to unearth talent.

In 2019, a three-team women’s tournament was held featuring sides called IPL



Mithali Raj, Harmanpreet Kaur and Smriti Mandhana pose for photo after pre-match conference of women's tourney in 2019

Velocity, IPL Trailblazers and IPL Supernovas.

This year, the BCCI had decided to organise a four-team women’s T20 challenge to

run parallel to the men’s IPL playoffs, but now it has been put on hold along with the main event due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

India don’t have enough women cricketers for a full-fledged IPL but Raj said it can still be conducted if existing IPL franchises own teams to begin

the process.

“I agree we don’t have the depth in the domestic pool yet, but the key is to get the existing franchises to form teams, even if (only) five or six of them are keen to begin the process because in any case, the BCCI was going to have four teams,” she said.

“You cannot wait forever; you have to begin at some point, and gradually, year by year, you can keep evolving the league and then bring it down to four foreign players.”

Raj also said that teen sensation Shafali Verma, who impressed with the bat in the T20 World Cup, should be included in the ODIs too.

“It’s not a bad idea to consider her for the ODIs. She is young but that should not be a criterion for not giving her opportunities in the ODI side,” she said.

ICC to discuss contingency plans

NEW DELHI: The members of the ICC Board will meet via video conference on Friday to discuss contingency plans for its multiple tournaments.

While a couple of ICC Board members confirmed that no concrete decisions are expected during the conference call, it became imperative that a meeting was necessary to discuss contingency plans.

The most high-profile ICC flagship event in 2020 is the Men’s T20 World Cup in October-November besides the various bilateral series which are part of the World Test Championship. The points system in case of cancelled series will be a topic of discussion.

One such series, England’s away tour of Sri Lanka, has already been postponed.

“Right now, the situation is such that no decision can be taken as no one knows when normalcy returns. Obviously



the members will give a low-down of the situation in their respective countries.

“But we need to be ready with plans if this lockdown continues for two more months. The complete FTP will be topsy turvy,” an official of a member nation said.

He said that points allocation of Test Championship games that will be postponed will be another issue.

“The England versus Sri Lanka series got postponed but

where will it be slotted considering the FTP calendar is choca-bloc. It’s not one series that will be affected but a few more which are lined up,” he said.

There is England hosting West Indies and Pakistan in June and July while New Zealand travel to Bangladesh in August. India next play Test matches in November against Australia in an away series.

“So like what could be the ideal points distribution system. Whether giving 60 points each to both teams will be fair deal is something that members need to discuss,” he added.

As of now, there is no imminent threat to the World T20 in Australia but if lockdown continues for two to three months then it might be become Australian government’s prerogative to decide on travel restrictions and how they perceive the situation in their country at that point in time. *PTI*



Shooter Rajput presses reset button

NEW DELHI: Armed with the experience of staying afloat in the face of adversities, battle-hardened Indian shooter Sanjeev Rajput promptly pressed the “reset button” after learning of the Olympics’ postponement.

“This is a very different situation, an extraordinary situation where sports couldn’t have happened at all. The well-being of human lives is above everything else,” ace rifleman Rajput said.

“Yes, I have been preparing for the Olympic Games for more than three years, hoping to go there and perform at the biggest stage.

“But we simply don’t have any choice now but to postpone the Olympics. I support the decision, we know it is for our well-being,” the 39-year-old rifle ace said.

Confined to his flat in Faridabad, which is close to the Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range, Rajput is now doing all he can at home.

“Of course we must remain indoors for the next three weeks or till the time the situation improves. But I am doing dry practice (or dry firing) at home besides yoga and meditation,” Rajput, who was dropped from the 2016 Olympic team at the expense of a shotgun shooter, said.

Rajput secured his Tokyo quota in Rio de Janeiro last year when he gunned down a Silver in the men’s 50m rifle 3 positions event.

Since the 2008 Games, he has secured an Olympic quota four times on the trot.

Asked about the changes to his plans now that the Olympics have been pushed to next year, the shooter stressed on “peak performance.”

“Peak performance is something that needs a lot of emphasis. It means we follow the plans designed for us and peak at the right time, which is the Olympics in this case,” he said. *PTI*

Wimbledon fate to be decided next week

AFP ■ LONDON

Wimbledon could be postponed or even cancelled after All England Club chiefs called an “emergency meeting” for next week to discuss whether to go ahead with this year’s tournament amid the coronavirus outbreak.

Wimbledon is set to start in London on June 29, but the continuing spread of the virus has caused havoc with the sporting schedule and the grass-court Grand Slam could be the next major event to be delayed.

“The AELTC can confirm that it is continuing a detailed evaluation of all scenarios for The Championships

2020, including postponement and cancellation, as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak,” an All England Club statement said.

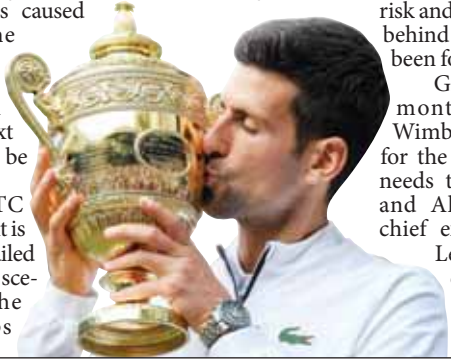
“An emergency meeting of the AELTC Main Board is scheduled for next week, and in preparation we are communicating closely with the LTA, and with the ATP, WTA, ITF and the other Grand Slams.” Pressure is growing on the All England Club

to make a decision and organisers have ruled out playing the tournament behind closed doors.

“The build for The Championships is due to begin at the end of April,” the statement said.

“At this time, very short window is available to us to stage The Championships due to the nature of our surface suggests that postponement is not without significant risk and difficulty. Playing behind closed doors has been formally ruled out.”

Given it takes two months to get the Wimbledon site ready for the event, a decision needs to be made soon and All England Club chief executive Richard Lewis expects the call will be made at the emergency summit.



Delaying Olympics will involve ‘massive’ costs, say organisers

AFP ■ TOKYO

Rescheduling the Tokyo 2020 Olympics will involve “massive” additional costs, organisers of the Games conceded on Thursday as they convened a taskforce to begin working on the “unprecedented” and complex task.

The historic decision to postpone the Games over the new coronavirus outbreak leaves organisers with a logistical headache as they work to shift the enormous event to an as-yet-undecided date next year.

“One by one, we need to ensure the problems we face can be solved,” Tokyo 2020 CEO Toshio Muto said in opening

remarks at the first meeting of the taskforce.

“Additional expenses are going to be quite massive we assume. With regards to our revenues, we need to make a lot of effort there,” he added.

Muto gave no estimates for how much the process of postponing the Olympic and Paralympic Games could cost.

But according to the *Nikkei* daily, organisers estimate it will cost an extra \$2.7 billion, including for venue rentals, rebooking hotels and additional payments for staff and security guards, among others.

Those costs could still



This was every athlete's worst fear and it has come true: (Everybody knows that competing at the Olympics is the toughest test for an athlete but I believe waiting for an opportunity to be on that stage is tougher!

I don't really know what to say right now but inside me there is a rollercoaster of emotions!

This is a very crucial time for the world and the greater sporting fraternity. Though I am very deeply disappointed, it is important more than ever to see the silver lining in this dark cloud. Now is the time for all of us to be stronger than ever, keep fighting these extraordinary circumstances and believe with all our might that we will overcome this challenge 🙏🙏🙏 We need to summon all our reserves of determination, refocus, and work towards our goals! While there is more to this chapter, a new story is already being written, but WE WILL OVERCOME! 🙌

We are all together in this, one world, one goal! This is that unique chance to do something for your family, your community, your country, and OUR world! 🙌🙌🙌

The postponement of Tokyo Olympics was her ‘worst fear’ and India’s medal hopeful Vinesh Phogat says and the extended wait is going to be tougher than competing at the Games. She qualified for Tokyo after finishing on the podium at the last year’s world championships

come down depending on the outcome of negotiations, the business daily reported.

Muto said organisers would not rip up their existing plans, but added: “I guess we need to step back a bit.”

“Sometimes you need to go back to the drawing board,” he said.

The Olympics have never faced this much disruption in peacetime, and the decision to delay the event has created unprecedented challenges, Tokyo 2020 president Yoshiro Mori said.

Tokyo 2020 staff “will experience difficulties they have never experienced

Italian football chief ready to finish season in August

MILAN: Italian football federation (FIGC) president Gabriele Gravina on Wednesday said he was determined that the Serie A season would be concluded even going into August.

All sport in Italy has been suspended until April 3 as of now.

“We will do everything to complete the championships, if necessary we will ask for the support of UEFA and FIFA to go beyond June 30 and play also in July or August,” Gravina told *Radio Marte*.

“It’s premature to think of a date, but we must think positively, also for the health of Italians and hope that this situation will end as soon as possible.”

The FIGC chief had last week expressed his hope that the championship could resume on the weekend of May 2.

As for the suspended championship, Gravina rejected either cancelling or assigning the title as the table stands where champions Juventus were leading by a point when the season was halted. “This would lead to an unpleasant scenario. As long as possible, I will continue to reject these options.” *AFP*

before. I am sure they will rise to the occasion. This is going to be a very difficult task that we are facing,” he said.

No deadlines have yet been set for the rescheduling of the Games, which are now due to take place by summer 2021, but Mori said he would ensure “all the decisions are made as quickly as possible.”

Muto underscored the scale of the task ahead, saying even he “didn’t imagine at all we would be tested to this degree.”

“We want to make sure we go beyond this test and that next year in Tokyo, the torch is lit for the Olympic and Paralympic Games. We believe this is the mission we face.”

Ronaldo is world’s best footballer right now: Pele

FIANS ■ RIO DE JANEIRO

Brazilian football great Pele has described Cristiano Ronaldo as the world’s best contemporary footballer, rating the Juventus forward ahead of Barcelona’s Lionel Messi.

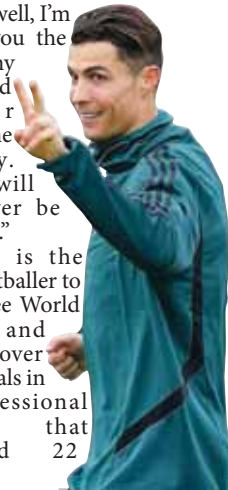
But the 79-year-old believes neither Ronaldo nor Messi are as good as he was during a celebrated career with Santos, the New York Cosmos and Brazil.

“Right now, Cristiano Ronaldo is the best, because he is the most consistent over the past 10 years, although Messi should not be forgotten,” Pele said in an interview on the *Pilhado* YouTube channel.

The former Brazil No 10 also cited Zico, Ronaldinho, Ronaldo Nazario, Franz Beckenbauer and Johan Cruyff in his list of all-time favourite players. He did not mention former Argentina forward Diego Maradona, widely regarded as Pele’s only rival for the title of the greatest player in history.

“There is only one king. Pele was better than all of them,” he said. “If I have to be honest, well, I’m telling you the truth: my father and mother closed the factory. There will only ever be one Pele.”

Pele is the only footballer to win three World Cups, and scored over 1,000 goals in a professional career that spanned 22 years.



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