

**OPINION 6**  
TIBET GETS  
BACK TO WORK**MONEY 8**  
SENSEX, NIFTY LOG BEST DAY  
IN OVER 10 YEARS**SPORT 12**  
BAI POSTPONE SENIOR  
NATIONAL BADMINTON C'SHIP

LUCKNOW, THURSDAY MARCH 26, 2020; PAGES 12 ₹3



# the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com


**DISCIPLINE  
IS KEY:  
FARHAN AKHTAR  
11 VIVACITY**

# Day after headlong rush, Govt ensures supplies

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared a three-week lockdown on Tuesday night to prevent the spread of coronavirus, panicky people flooded the streets to purchase essential items. The mad rush made a mockery of the theme of social distancing. A day later, the Government's focus shifted to providing essential items, including food, dairy products, medicine, etc, to millions of people across the country.

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

Amid reports of panic purchase of essential commodities

in some parts of the country, the Home Ministry asked chief secretaries and DGPs of all States to take action to allay apprehensions and maintain peace and tranquility, and inform people about the availability of food, medicine and other essential commodities. Meanwhile, the Home Ministry has asked State Governments to check the spread of rumours about shortage of food and other essential commodities.

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

In several cities, including Delhi and NCR, vendors

were found selling fruits and vegetables on their carts. Petrol pumps were open and supply of LPG gas cylinders was operational. Mother Dairy outlets too were open. Safal, the fruits and vegetable brand of Mother Dairy group, has announced that all its outlets will be operational at full capacity.

Officials of Agriculture Produce Marketing Committees (APMCs) claimed that there was no shortage of fruits and vegetables. In Delhi, trading at the Azadpur Mandi, Asia's biggest wholesale fruits and vegetable market, has come down by 50 per cent in the last two days in the absence of curfew passes to traders.

Meanwhile, top e-commerce sites Flipkart and Amazon have temporarily suspended their services. Flipkart has listed all products as "out of stock" on the search page.



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

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

several States, including Bengaluru, Delhi, Mumbai and Gurgaon, Ranchi, Ghaziabad, Faridabad, Noida and States, such as Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat.

In Jharkhand, the Government has released rate

chart of various essential commodities after reports of a few ration shops providing commodities at a higher price while some others selling them in the back market taking advantage of the lockdown prompted by the coronavirus pandemic.

*Continued on Page 4*

## 606 infected; 1st death in MP, TN

Toll 12; highest cases 128 in Maha, 106 in Kerala, Delhi sees 5 fresh cases

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

On the first day of the three-week nationwide lockdown, the count of confirmed coronavirus cases shot up from 519 on Tuesday to 606 on Wednesday while death toll touched 12 in the country with Maharashtra reporting the highest number of cases at 128, followed by Kerala with 109 cases. Delhi registered five fresh cases. Of the total 606 cases, 42 are cured ones. So far authorities have denied community spread of the disease.

Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu registered their first death on Wednesday. A 65-year-old woman in Ujjain and a 54-year-old man in Madurai died of Covid-19. In its updated figures released on Wednesday morning, the

<b>STATEWISE DEATH TOLL</b>	Himachal: 1
Maharashtra: 3	Gujarat: 1
Karnataka: 1	Delhi: 1
Punjab: 1	Bihar: 1
Madhya Pradesh: 1	West Bengal: 1
	Tamil Nadu: 1

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

Health Ministry stated that the second death reported in Delhi was Covid-19 negative.



Five more persons tested positive for COVID-19 in Delhi, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal

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

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

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

*Continued on Page 4*

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

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

The Government has not yet finalised the package and discussions are ongoing between Prime Minister Narendra Modi's office, the Finance Ministry, and Reserve Bank of India (RBI), said both the sources, who asked not to be named as the matter was still under discussion.

One of the sources, a senior Government official, said the stimulus plan could be as large as ₹2.3 trillion, but final numbers were still in discussion.

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

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

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

*Continued on Page 4*

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

"The Government has decided to provide 7 kg per

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

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

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

*Continued on Page 4*

## 25 Sikhs massacred in Kabul gurdwara attack

ISIS takes responsibility

PTI ■ KABUL

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

The ISIS terror group, which has targeted Sikhs before in Afghanistan, claimed responsibility for the attack on



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

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

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

*Continued on Page 4*

## Prince Charles tests COVID-19 +ve

Now in self-isolation

PTI ■ LONDON

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

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



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

In keeping with social distancing advice during the pandemic, Charles has been noticeably using "namaste" as

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

His wife Camilla, 72, was

## Indian cases may reach 13L by mid-May: Foreign study

PTI ■ PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India could face between 100,000 to 13 lakh confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus by mid-May if the current trend in the growing number of COVID-19 cases continues, according to a report by an international team of scientists. The report, compiled by COV-IND-19 Study Group, an interdisciplinary team of



researchers, said while India seems to have done well in controlling the number of confirmed cases compared to other countries like the US and Italy

in the early phase of the pandemic, the country is critically missing a key component in this assessment — the number of truly affected cases.

This factor depends on the extent of testing, the accuracy of the test results, and the frequency and scale of testing of people who may have been exposed but do not show symptoms, the researchers, including Debashree Ray from

Johns Hopkins University in the US, said.

"So far, the number of people tested in India has been relatively small. In the absence of widespread testing, it is impossible to quantify the magnitude of community transmission," in other words, estimate how many are infected outside health care facilities," the scientists wrote in the report.

*Continued on Page 4*

## Ram Lalla idol shifted to temporary structure

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Amid chanting of hymns and shlokas, the idol of Ram Lalla and other deities were shifted from the makeshift temple atop garbhagriha (sanctum sanctorum) to a temporary structure near Manas Bhawan in Ram Janmabhoomi premises on the first day of Navratri on Wednesday.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and saints from Ayodhya were present when the idols were shifted to the new location at Brahma muhurt.

The chief minister presented a cheque of Rs 11 lakh for the construction of a grand Ram temple at Ayodhya.

Before shifting the idols, the saints and priests held a brief Vedic ritual at and around 4 am. Later, the idol of Ram Lalla was shifted to the new temporary temple and Yogi Adityanath, who is also Mahant



Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh state Yogi Adityanath offers prayers in front of an idol of Ram Lalla after they were shifted to a temporary temple on the first day of the Hindu festival of Navratri, in Ayodhya, on Wednesday.

AP

of Gorakshnath peeth, placed it on a 9-kg silver throne brought from Jaipur.

The idols would remain in the bullet-proof temporary temple till the proposed Ram temple is constructed. The makeshift temple is around 250 metres away from the old

makeshift temple which was made after the demolition of Babri mosque on December 6, 1992.

The idols were put inside the disputed site on the night of December 22, 1949 and placed below the middle dome of the Babri Mosque after Isha

prayers. The chief minister told reporters that the construction of the grand Ram temple would commence soon.

Among others present on the occasion were members of Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust and all senior saints and members of Ayodhya movement.

Trust general secretary Champat Rai told media persons in Lucknow on Wednesday that rituals to shift Ram Lalla started around 2 am and the idols were placed on the throne at the new temple during Brahma muhurt at 4 am. Around 15 priests from Delhi, Prayagraj, Mathura, Kashi and Ayodhya started the rituals from Monday morning and it culminated on Wednesday morning.

Rai said that while darshan at the new temple was started from 7 am on Wednesday.

*Continued on Page 4*

## CAPSULE

**NPR, FIRST PHASE OF CENSUS POSTPONED**

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

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

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

*Continued on Page 4*



# DGP asked to provide security to medical staff

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

Reacting to reports from various parts of the state on doctors and medical staff being pressured by landlords and neighbours to vacate houses for treating coronavirus patients, Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Awanish Awasthi directed Director General of Police HC Awasthi to initiate stern action against such persons.

He also stressed on extending security to doctors and medical staff in case they sought assistance.

In a letter to DGP on Wednesday, Awasthi wrote that it had come to notice that doctors and medical staff engaged in treating coronavirus patients were being harassed by their neighbours.

“In some cases, landlords are pressurising them to leave the rented premises. I have been directed to ask you to stop such incidents from taking place and to provide security to doctors and medical staff if needed,” Awasthi said.

Meanwhile, DGP HC

**“IN SOME CASES, LANDLORDS ARE PRESSURISING THEM TO LEAVE THE RENTED PREMISES. I HAVE BEEN DIRECTED TO ASK YOU TO STOP SUCH INCIDENTS FROM TAKING PLACE AND TO PROVIDE SECURITY TO DOCTORS AND MEDICAL STAFF IF NEEDED”**

Awasthi said that 6,044 barriers had been erected across the state to enforce complete lockdown. He said on Wednesday, over two lakh vehicles were checked and fines amounting to Rs 10 lakh was realised from errands and 49,074 vehicles were challaned by the police.

Besides, he said, 3,679 vehicles were seized and 2,089 persons were booked for violating prohibitory orders.

Earlier, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath appealed people to not panic, after the announcement of 21-day lockdown across the country by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Yogi said that the state had earmarked 10,000 vehicles for

home delivery of essentials, if needed.

“I appeal to you to not go to markets to buy essentials as it is in the interest of the safety of you, your family and friends. We have enough stocks of all essentials like milk, vegetables, medicines. People should not go out and should practice social distancing,” Yogi said.

Meanwhile, the UP government issued new guidelines to be followed by people during lockdown. People providing essential services will be issued permits from local administration to facilitate their movement.

## Sufficient oil, LPG stock in UP: IOC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

State-level coordinator of oil industry and Executive Director of Indian Oil Corporation, Uttiya Bhattacharya, said on Wednesday that there was sufficient stock of petrol, diesel and LPG cylinders in Uttar Pradesh.

The IOC official said in Lucknow that all PSU oil companies were working relentlessly during the tough times to maintain uninterrupted supply of fuel and LPG cylinders through their retail outlets and distributors.

He said that oil companies had ensured that sufficient stocks of petrol and diesel were available at all retail outlets and LPG cylinders at the distributors' end.

The oil companies have requested the state authorities for direction to district magistrates for the issuance of necessary passes for ensuring hassle-free distribution of the essential commodity to common people.

Bhattacharya said that at present there were 2,178 LPG distributors for catering to around 4.03 crore active customers and 7,128 retail outlets to cater to general demand of petrol and diesel in Uttar Pradesh.

He said that PSU oil companies were operating 32 oil terminals and depots for making petrol and diesel available in the state.

There are 26 LPG bottling plants in UP to ensure that cylinders reached every consumer of the state.

The oil companies supply 7.9 lakh cylinders per day across the state on an average and the supply chain is ensured by around 27,000 delivery boys. This work force is available at the distributors' end and customer attendants at retail outlets are the backbone of supply of the essentials.

The IOC official appealed to the public to cooperate with delivery boys and customer attendants to ensure smooth supply across Uttar Pradesh.

# Akhilesh donates ₹1 crore from MPLAD fund for corona fight

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

Urging people to maintain calm in the ongoing war against coronavirus, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav advised them to maintain social distancing while forming queues at shops for purchasing items of daily needs as this would go a long way in curbing the spread of the deadly virus.

On the first day of the 21-day nation-wide lockdown to contain coronavirus spread, Akhilesh also announced to sanction Rs 1 crore from his MP Local Area Development Fund for purchase of protection kits, corona testing kits and medical items for all doctors

and health workers of Azamgarh Medical College.

Earlier on Tuesday, Bharatiya Janata Party leaders and Union ministers had also chipped in with their contributions from their local area development funds. Also toeing the line, SP Rajya Sabha member Jaya Bachchan too announced to give Rs 1 crore from her MPLAD Fund to Kannauj Medical College for purchase of medical equipment and related items for containing the virus spread.

Akhilesh said that in such an exigency the government should ensure that people queuing up for purchases were at a safe distance from each other for which stand marks be



made out. He also said that the common man should also be reassured that there was no lack of supply of essential commodities.

The SP chief said that every citizen needs to shed all dis-

crimination and differences while being separate socially and unite emotionally against coronavirus.

“These 21 days will play a historic role in shaping of a pleasant future of India. I appeal to everyone to help and cooperate with fellow individuals and departments working towards this,” Akhilesh said.

Meanwhile, Samajwadi Party general secretary and Rajya Sabha member Ramgopal Yadav also wrote to Firozabad and Etawah district administrations to issue Rs 1 crore from his MPLAD fund to fight coronavirus and specified that from the fund, masks and sanitisers be bought in adequate quantity.

# Pvt sugar mills offer to produce hand sanitisers to meet demand

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

With sharp rise in the demand for hand sanitisers owing to spread of coronavirus, private sugar mills in the state have sought drug licence to manufacture the product at their captive distilleries.

All major private sugar companies like Balrampur Chini, Birla, Dalmia and Dhanpur have already applied for the licence while several others are in the process of following suit.

The sugar companies have already proposed to manufacture more than 15,000 litres of hand sanitisers a day in their distilleries across UP. Of these, Dhanpur and Birla would produce an estimated 5,000 litres and 4,000 litres respectively, whereas Balrampur, Utam and Daurala groups have proposed to produce 2,000 litres each of hand sanitiser.

“The process of granting licences to these units has been expedited owing to the contingency due to coronavirus outbreak. The movement of goods — hand sanitiser raw material and finished goods — has been

exempted from restrictions imposed due to lockdown,” a senior UP Sugarcane department official said.

Secretary of UP Sugar Mills Association (UPSMA), Deepak Gupta, said that of the 94 private sugar mills, about 40 had captive distilleries both in big groups and standalone mills.

Meanwhile, some sugar companies have proposed to produce only hand sanitisers in bulk and supply it to other firms for bottling and marketing. Besides, sugar mills have firmed up contracts to supply ethanol/ethyl alcohol/extra neutral alcohol (ENA) to external sanitiser units inside and outside the state.

Last week, Indian Sugar Mills Association

(ISMA) had written to the Centre assuring it that the domestic sugar industry would supply adequate quantity of ethanol or extra neutral alcohol (ENA) as per requirement for use in the manufacture of hand sanitisers.

Recently, local drug manufacturers had claimed that isopropyl alcohol (IPA) used in hand sanitisers was being

blackmarketed in the state and thus inhibiting their plans to increase production.

UP Drug Manufacturers Association (UPDMA) president Prashant Bhatiya said that IPA was being sold for Rs 360 per litre in the black market in UP against its normal price of Rs 95 per litre.

Hand sanitisers could also be effectively manufactured with ethanol/ethyl alcohol/ENA as advised by World Health Organisation (WHO). Bhatiya alleged there were bottlenecks in the supply of ethanol from state distilleries as well.

The UPDMA has already written to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to facilitate availability of raw materials in the state and pledged to manufacture hand sanitisers on a ‘war footing’ to meet the growing demand.

The UP government has urged surgical mask and hand sanitiser production units operating in the state to augment production by working in three shifts a day even as new units were promised speedier approvals.



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath holding a meeting with senior officials to review the coronavirus situation at his official residence in Lucknow on Wednesday

# Do we have enough clean water to wash away corona scare?

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

Doctors and experts suggest hand washing and social distancing as effective ways of preventing the transmission of coronavirus, but the question remains whether Indians, particularly the poor, have access to adequate clean water for washing.

“At a time when the entire world is fighting with its back to the wall against coronavirus, it is appropriate to ask a pertinent question. Do we have enough access to clean and safe water, considering the fact that hand washing has emerged as one of the most effective ways of controlling the virus spread?” asked Centre for Science and Environment Director General Sunita Narain.

A 2014 WHO report, ‘Preventing diarrhoea through better water, sanitation and hygiene’, said that around 1.9 billion people across the world used non-potable or faecally-contaminated water for drinking, cleaning and other activities. As per Indian government’s own submission in

**“We have carried out a survey in Jal Nigams and Jal Sansthans of Jhansi, Kanpur, Banda, Fatehpur, Prayagraj, Agra, Bareilly and Lucknow and found that demand for water has gone up in these areas”**

the Lok Sabha in 2018, diarrhoea is the leading killer among water-borne diseases, accounting for about 60 per cent of all deaths.

Manish Mishra, who had launched a campaign Right To Water (RTW), said that India had been lucky so far that the virus had not spread to rural areas.

“If coronavirus reaches villages, it would be catastrophic. They (villagers) do not have access to clean water. They drink contaminated water and wash hands with

the same. Their level of hygiene is no secret. The situation in water scarce area like Bundelkhand could be more pathetic,” he said.

Convenor of Jal Jan Jodo Abhiyan, Oraí, Dr Sanjay Singh said that on an average, a person used 70-75 litres of water in urban areas and the demand could go up to 125 litres.

“We have carried out a survey in Jal Nigams and Jal Sansthans of Jhansi, Kanpur, Banda, Fatehpur, Prayagraj, Agra, Bareilly and Lucknow and found that demand for water has gone up in these areas,” he said.

Senior Director of Water and Wastewater Management, Suresh Rohilla, said, “Going by the WHO’s prescribed measures, to get a germ-free hand, a person takes 30-40 seconds and uses approximately four litres of water with a flowing tap and two litres when the tap is closed. Assuming each person in these days needs to wash hands at least 10 times a day, a family of five would need 100-200 litres water every day just to wash

hands”

Sunita Narain added, “There is another concern – the increased use of water will naturally lead to generation of more waste water. Keeping in mind that 85-90 per cent of water used in a household gets discharged as waste water, the more water we use, the more sewage we discharge. And bulk of waste water is not intercepted or treated or cleaned. We are adding to the pollution challenge of our waterbodies. It will mean higher cost to clean water for drinking.”

Narain pointed out that coronavirus spread had taught that humans were as weak as the weakest link in the chain. “The contagion needs us to ensure that everybody has access to public health so that nobody is left out and nobody can be the virus carrier. Providing access to clean water is the biggest preventive health measure we can take,” she said.

Experts like Dr Sanjay Singh said that 70 per cent of water was used in agriculture, 15 per cent in industry and 12-15 percent was put to domestic use.



Gates of temples remained closed in the state capital on the first day of Navratri on Wednesday because of lockdown due to nation-wide coronavirus spread

# Follow guidelines to fight corona: Rashid to Muslims

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

Imam of Aishbagh Eidgah, Maulana Khalid Rashid Firangi Mahali, appealed to Muslims to strictly follow the guidelines issued by the Central and state governments and World Health Organisation to prevent the spread of coronavirus. He advised the community to follow social distancing while offering prayers.

“For Friday prayers, only the Imam and person giving azaan should offer prayer at the mosque. The rest should offer zohar ki namaz. I appeal to Muslims to strictly follow social distancing and pray at their homes for some days,” the Maulana said in a statement issued in Lucknow on Wednesday. Firangi Mahali said that in Prophet Muhammad’s time, there was incessant rain and extreme cold and the Prophet asked Muslims to offer prayers from their homes. He said during Prophet’s time there was no epidemic yet he had asked people



to pray from their homes because of public concern. The Maulana said that coronavirus was a deadly epidemic and any infected person would not only pose threat to himself but also for his family, community and people living in the neighbourhood. He also said that the infected person could also be a threat to the nation and the world.

# Declining power demand hits UPPCL revenue

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

The lockdown to contain the spread of coronavirus has resulted in sharp decline in the energy demand owing to the continuing industrial and commercial shutdown.

The revenue of UP Power Corporation Limited and its four subsidiaries is expected to be adversely affected and this will further worsen their already precarious financial condition.

At a pan-India level, the power demand has already fallen by more than 20 per cent to 1,21,937 megawatt from 1,54,045 MW.

All-India Power Engineers Federation (AIPWF) chairmen Shailendra Dubey said the energy demand had fallen considerably in the country, and this posed a serious challenge to the commercial viability of these discoms, most of which are state owned and operated.

“We have written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Union energy minister and sought

moratorium on the payment under the power purchase agreements (PPA) signed with the power generating companies during the entire lockdown period, since the energy requirement has gone down significantly and these payments are elements of a fixed cost for the discoms,” Dubey said here on Wednesday.

“If the relief is not extended to the power distribution companies urgently, they would not be able to pay salaries to their staff since the power consumers, especially those belonging to the lower strata, have not been paying their electricity bills due to the lockdown,” he added.

Following the gradual lockdown announced across different states, the energy demand has fallen due to the total shutdown of high power consuming industrial and commercial sectors and railways operations, thus affecting the major source of discoms’ revenues.

According to the Northern Region Load Dispatch Centre

(NRLDC) website, the power demand in the region has drastically fallen by more than 11,000 MW— from 41,253 MW to 30,563 MW — in five days. The power supply on Tuesday stood at 6,950 lakh units compared to 8,660 lakh units on March 20.

“In Punjab, power demand came down to 2,900 MW on Tuesday from 5,000 MW last Friday, with the power supply getting reduced to 700 lakh units from 1,050 lakh units. There is a sharp dip of 350 lakh units per day consumed by Railways, industry and commercial establishments as well and the daily revenue loss is estimated at Rs 20 crore a day for Punjab State Power Corporation Limited (PSPCL),” Dubey said.

Similarly in Haryana, power supply on Tuesday stood at 850 lakh units against 1,175 lakh units on March 20. The power demand fell to 3,800 MW from 5,800 MW over the past five days with the state discom witnessing revenue loss of nearly Rs 18 crore a day.

## NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY Notification No.29/2020 Important Notice for Rail Passengers

IT IS NOTIFIED FOR INFORMATION OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC DUE TO MEASURES TAKEN IN THE WAKE OF COVID-19, IT HAS BEEN DECIDED THAT THE CANCELLATION OF ALL PASSENGER TRAIN SERVICES SHALL BE EXTENDED TILL THE 24.00 HRS OF 14.04.2020, I. ALL ORIGINATING MAIL/EXPRESS TRAINS AND PASSENGER TRAINS FROM N.E. RAILWAY SHALL REMAIN CANCELLED TILL 24.00 HRS OF 14.04.2020.

CPRO/T-96 Dy. COM/Chg., Gorakhpur About any passenger amenity complain SMS on Mobile No. 09794845955

“Never travel on roof and foot boards”

## NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY Important Notice

All tenders of North Eastern Railway - Stores Department-Headquarters Office due to open between 24.03.2020 to 15.04.2020 (lapsed & not opened, or Live), except tender number 28190989A, 28180704 & 28190615A due on 25.03.2020, 08.04.2020 & 08.04.2020 respectively have been postponed to 15.04.2020. The closing time of tenders shall remain the same.

CPRO/S-76 Secy. to PCMM/Gorakhpur About any passenger amenity complain SMS on Mobile No. 09794845955

“Never travel on roof and foot boards”

Although every possible care and caution has been taken to avoid errors or omissions, this publication is being sold on the condition and understanding that information given in this publication is merely for reference and must not be taken as having authority of or binding in any way on the writers, editors, publishers, and printers and sellers who do not owe any responsibility for any damage or loss to any person, a purchaser of this publication or not for the result of any action taken on the basis of this work. All disputes are subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of competent court and forums in Lucknow only. Readers are advised and requested to verify and seek appropriate advice to satisfy themselves about the veracity of any kind of advertisement before responding to any contents published in this newspaper. The printer, publisher, editor and any employee of the Pioneer Group will not be held responsible for any kind of claim made by the advertisers of the products & services and shall not be made responsible for any kind of loss, consequences and further product-related damages on such advertisements.



# Arrangements in place for home delivery of essentials



PNS ■ LUCKNOW

After Prime Minister Narendra Modi's stress on the gravity of the situation in view of the COVID-19 pandemic, the speed with which the virus spreads and special emphasis on 'Jaan hai to jahaan hai', the state capital presented a completely deserted look on Wednesday with residents choosing to stay indoors.

It was eerily quiet in several localities with people even avoiding to step out to get the essentials. Almost all shops across the city remained closed.

Divisional Commissioner Mukesh Meshram said the lockdown was much more effective on Wednesday.

In a reassuring message to the residents, he said: "Shops selling essential commodities will remain open from 6 am to 11 pm and arrangements have been made for home delivery the doorstep of people under lockdown."

The district administration officials said they expected panic buying after PM's address on Tuesday night.

ADM, Trans-Gomti, said directions have been issued that it is the responsibility of shop-owners to ensure that one person at a time enters the shop at a time and that social distancing is maintained.

He added that the administration has worked on a system of home delivery so that people do not step out of their homes. "We do not want them to step out for anything," he stressed. Asked whether people were in danger of contract coronavirus with delivery boys supplying items of needs, he said they would be wearing gloves and masks and their hands would be sanitised before they are pressed into service. "It would be a better

## Shops selling essentials to remain open: DM

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

District Magistrate Abhishek Prakash on Wednesday clarified that all the shops selling essential commodities will remain open from 6 am to 11 pm. Apart from these shops, petrol pumps, emergency services and medical stores near hospitals will remain open round the clock. The District Magistrate also directed all the managers of malls to allow opening of stores and godowns of Big Bazaar, Family Bazaar, Spencer's,

proposition as people who receive the packets can sanitise the same and themselves too. In a shop, a person will not carry the sanitiser and when you are taking it from the counter and move around, there is a possibility of getting infected," he added.

Meanwhile, under the directions of the District Magistrate, civil defence personnel have fanned across all parts of the city to ensure that social distancing is maintained.

Amarnath Mishra, a civil defence volunteer, said: "We are working in all the 13 divisions of the city under the directions of the District Magistrate." This civil defence team has worked out an innovative manner in which the social distancing can be maintained. The team has drawn circles one metre apart in front of the shops so that people can maintain social distancing.

Mishra said they had seen this way of maintaining social distancing in other parts of the

Marts and Super Marts so that they can carry out home delivery. He said that only the store workers and the delivery persons are allowed to come to the stores and sales will not be open for general public. He also directed them to follow proper norms for general hygiene and social distancing.

The DM made arrangements of 8000 delivery men who could be contacted through calls or mobile apps for delivery of essential commodities at home. He also released a list of their contacts.

country and decided it should be done here as well.

"We have done this at Hasanganj, Wazirganj, Chowk, Saadatganj, Chowk, Mahanagar, Indira Nagar, Gomti Nagar and other areas," he added. He said that 1,800 volunteers of civil defence were helping people in maintaining social distancing. He said they wear masks and carry their own sanitisers.

Meanwhile, kirana shop-owners said that they had downed the shutter because of constant reminders from the officials to not allow crowds. A grocery owner in Gomti Nagar said he was not sure when he would open his shop. "I am still confused, but today I have not opened the shop," he said.

However, several vendors continued to take advantage of the situation by charging exorbitant rates. A buyer said he was shocked that he had to purchase ladyfingers at Rs 100 per kg. "Ladyfingers used to



(Clockwise from top) A road in Alambagh wears a deserted look on the first day of 3-week lockdown on Wednesday; people queued up at a shop to purchase items of daily use; and security personnel on duty being given fruits

cost Rs 60 per kg before the lockdown, but the vendors have increased the rates to almost double the original cost," he complained.

**POLICE HAVE TOUGH TIME**

Meanwhile, people loitering around without any purpose are giving a tough time to the police trying hard to enforce complete lockdown in view of the coronavirus pandemic. Despite repeated appeals on social media and other platforms, youths continue to wander on city roads, apparently for fun. There were also reports of people confronting security personnel.

In Madaion, a man defied lockdown and dropped names on being stopped by cops on

Wednesday morning. Acting tough, the police lodged a case against him on the instructions of senior officials. The Commissioner of Police again warned of legal action against those violating the lockdown.

As per reports, a car bearing a plaque with UP Government Secretariat embossed on it was stopped at a barricade at Keshav Nagar crossing around 9.30 am on Wednesday. Asked for the reason for movement on road, the occupant started yelling at the cops and threatened to get them punished by their bosses. The police initiated no action against him and he was let off. However, some media-persons passed the informa-

tion to senior police officers. Sources said the senior officers came down heavily on the Madaion police and asked them to track down the offender. "It was only then that the police swung into action and later, sub-inspector Mohammed Ahmad lodged a case against the person," the sources said.

The police said the registration number of the car had been noted down and the offender later introduced himself as Mahendra. Details are being verified," the police said.

There were incidents of verbal spat of people with cops reported from Ashiyana, Hazratganj, Indira Nagar, Chinhat, Alambagh and other areas Wednesday.

## IITR hands over first batch of sanitisers to Div Commissioner

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Director of Indian Institute of Toxicology Research (IITR) Alok Dhawan handed over 350 litres of hand sanitiser to Divisional Commissioner Mukesh Meshram at latter's office on Wednesday. Meshram said IITR is one of the premier research centres with commitment to supporting the community.

"The first batch of hand sanitisers has been received today. It will be supplied to people engaged in essential services, working at ration shops and in medical profession," he said. Dhawan said the sanitiser

has been made by IITR as per the WHO-formulated standards. He also mentioned that the support received from Sanganeria Foundation for Health and Education and Ultra International, New Delhi, to IITR as part of their corporate social responsibility.

The IITR team was led by principal scientist R Parthasarathi and also consisted of research scholars — Sushmita Tiwari, Anshika Gupta, Meetal Sinha, Abhishek Mishra, and Ankit Kumar working in the Centre for Innovation and Translational Research which is recently funded by BIRAC-BioNest.

## 'COVID-19 scare to bring about change in perception regarding foreign travel'

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Tourism experts and analysts foresee that the coronavirus scare will bring in a huge change in the perception of Indians regarding foreign travel and tourists from abroad. Chairman of Tours and Travel Association, Uttar Pradesh, Prateek Hira said this scenario would not change until a vaccine emerges for the flu.

He said that with most of the tours and travel agents and other stakeholders, looking at a likely recovery from the current situation by June 30 this year, feel that what will imminently follow is an economic depression. "When this happens, people will not have

**'As far as Indian tourists are concerned, they would not be opting for the popular South-East Asian countries as destinations, including Thailand and Malaysia which have been popular destinations for Indians**

disposable incomes; be it those within the country and those outside. This will impact travel tourism majorly," he said. He added that what he also foresees is a kind of xenophobia setting in the Indian psyche.

"Most of the Indians feel that this is an imported virus and taxi drivers have refused these tourists along with hotels when this recently broke out. If

this happens, tourism will not survive," he added.

He said as far as Indian tourists are concerned, they would not be opting for the popular South-East Asian countries as destinations, including Thailand and Malaysia which have been popular destinations for Indians. France and Italy are totally out of the window as far as Europe

is concerned. The United Kingdom has also been badly affected. The same is the case with the United States. Fear psychosis will work largely in hitting the industry," he said. He added that the demography of tourists coming into India would change.

He said that one thing which is certain that the Chinese travellers who were welcomed because of loads of money which they used to spend would no longer be welcome. "The Buddhist tourist route in Uttar Pradesh will be impacted because even when the coronavirus scare had started, the tourist groups staying at Shrawasti were told to leave," he added.

## Cancellation of trains extended till April 14

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Lucknow division of Northern Railways and North-Eastern Railways extended the cancellation of trains till April 14. A spokesman said the Union Ministry of Railways extended the cancellation of passenger train services till April 14. As per the Railway Board's order, freight trains will continue to run to ensure supply of essential commodities.

"The step has been taken in continuation of the measures taken in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic. All

Mail/Express trains will remain cancelled till April 14," the spokesman said. Following the instructions, booking of all types of tickets for journey up to April 14 will remain suspended. CRIS and IRCTC have been asked to disable all reserved/unreserved booking for this period. Also, all counters for booking of tickets for reserved/unreserved class at all railway stations and outside will remain closed until April 14. The railways is feeding the data of cancelled trains in its system in coordination with train operating system to enable refunds in PRS.

## No community transfer in city so far: KGMU V-C

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In what could be a comforting news to city residents, Vice-Chancellor of King George's Medical University Dr MLB Bhatt said that there has been no case of community transfer of the coronavirus in Lucknow so far. On what the community transfer means, Dr Bhatt said: "It is a situation when the origin of the virus in a person is not known. It means that he or she has no travel history to countries affected by the virus and they have not been in contact with any other person having tested positive for COVID-19. As far as India is concerned, the maximum community transfer cases are in Maharashtra and Kerala. Till now, we have seen no such patient here," he added.

Dr Bhatt said that in phase 1 of the epidemic, all the patients got the virus from outside while in phase 2, patients who come from outside of the country infect people. There are 15 per cent of the cases in India as the source of the virus is not known because the patients did not have a travel history and they did not come in contact with a positive case," he said.

He said that there was no case of community transfer in Lucknow was confirmed after a mammoth exercise which was carried out by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). "Over 2,500 fever cases were

checked randomly across the country to find any proof of the community transfer but no one was found positive. In Lucknow, we also participated in this exercise and carried out the tests on 50 random people and they were found negative," he added.

Asked whether the change of weather made any difference to the coronavirus, the KGMU Vice-Chancellor said it is a new mutant virus identified in the world and its behavior in changing weather is not known.

"However, most of the viruses of this family subside in summers and more crucially, during harsh summers. It is true that droplets of infection do not survive and this is the reason we expect that the weather may make a difference in a tropical country like India, but this is largely a speculation and we have no scientific research to back it," he added.

He pointed out that the other thing which the public should know is that this virus survives in the human body whose temperature is 37 degree centigrade.

"So, it is expected that at this temperature, it will keep on surviving. Within the human body and animals, there are plenty of opportunities for nutrition and hence it keeps on replicating and growing. Outside the human body, it is expected that the virus may die, but one cannot say this for sure," he added.

## Educationists see lockdown with deep concern

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Educationists in the city are watching the lockdown with deep concern and hoping that things improve after April 14, or else they will have to chalk out other strategies to manage courses and other affairs. Vice-Chancellor of AKTU Vinay Kumar Pathak said he has already started looking into what other foreign universities have done in this regard.

"Foreign universities are assessing their students only as satisfactory and unsatisfactory," he pointed out. He said they are thinking in terms of what happens if the lockdown persists and the situation does not improve.

"There are lots of queries coming in from students and we have to see what can be done but at this point of time, I have no answers. We are not a small university as we have over five lakh students. There are students who have been selected for jobs but there have been no exams, which will result in late joining. We are also concerned with how the

syllabus will be covered. At this moment, we are puzzled to say the least," he said. However, he added that all the sectors have been affected and how successful the lockdown is something that needs to be seen.

However, Vice-Chancellor of Lucknow University AK Rai said it is something which they can manage. "We will think in terms of cutting down on the leaves of teachers," he said. He added that he is not so apprehensive about the situation. Rai said they have started asking the teachers to upload their contents on the website of Lucknow University from where the students can access the same. "This is neither smart class nor online class; the teachers have to simply place their content online in word files and in power-point presentation. Soon, we will also provide the students with email IDs to post their queries so that teachers can reply to them. Even I have uploaded my lecture on the website and reminders have been sent to the teachers through messages," he pointed out.



Rickshaw-pullers, having nowhere to go amidst the coronavirus pandemic, seem to be wondering what lies ahead

Pioneer



**RESERVE BANK OF INDIA**  
DEPARTMENT OF SUPERVISION  
8-9, Vipin Khand, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow-226010  
U. P. Civil Secretariat Primary Co-operative Bank Ltd., Lucknow

**Press Release**  
**Directions under Section 35A of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 (AACS) – U. P. Civil Secretariat Primary Co-operative Bank Ltd., Lucknow**  
The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has extended the Directions issued to the U. P. Civil Secretariat Primary Co-operative Bank Ltd., Lucknow for a further period of six months from March 26, 2020 to September 25, 2020, subject to review. The bank has been under directions since September 25, 2018 vide directive DCBS.CO.BSD-IV/D-1/12.28.029/2018-19 dated September 19, 2018 issued under sub-section (1) of Section 35A of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 (AACS).  
The validity of the directive, which was last extended up to March 25, 2020 has further been extended for a period of six months from March 26, 2020 to September 25, 2020 vide directive No. DoR.CO.AID/D-64/12.28.029/2019-20 dated March 19, 2020, subject to review. A copy of the directive dated March 19, 2020 is displayed at the bank's premises for the perusal of public.  
The modification of the directive by the Reserve Bank should per se not be construed as improvement or deterioration in the financial position of the bank. The Reserve Bank may consider modifications of the directive depending upon circumstances.  
**Lucknow**  
**March 26, 2020**  
**Regional Director**



# Liquor businessmen ask govt to bail them out

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The deadly coronavirus outbreak and consequent lockdown is likely to affect the liquor business beyond repair in Uttar Pradesh. The businessmen have asked the state government to bail them out by easing terms and conditions. General secretary of Liquor Sellers' Welfare Association (LSWA) KL Maurya said liquor businessmen's irreparable loss could be covered to a certain extent by relaxing the existing terms and conditions. He said he has written to the Excise Minister to ease the terms and conditions on renewal, sale of liquor and other issues related to our business.

Maurya said several shopowners dealing in desi liquor, Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) and beer could not receive goods due to janata curfew on March 21 and total lockdown since Tuesday midnight. "The shop owners should be given grace in getting the 'load' after the lockdown ends," he said.

He said some of the shopowners opted out of the trade



this fiscal and they were the worst-affected due to the lockdown. "Such shop owners have to vacate the shops by March 31 after selling the entire goods they had. During the lockdown, it is not possible for them to pay extra duty for vacating the shop if they have to do that after March 31. The Excise department should waive this fee," he demanded.

Maurya said the shop owners had already deposited yearly licence fee, which is about Rs 3,000-15,000 per day, depending on the value of a shop. "In adverse situations like curfew, riots or other law and order issues, the District Magistrate

orders shutdown for some days. This time, we will have to close the shops till the lockdown period of 21 days till April 14. This way, we will suffer a huge loss on two fronts; one, we will not sell the liquor; and two, we have to pay the licence fee as well," he pointed out. He said the government should not charge the licence fee for the lockdown period.

Media incharge of LSWA Divesh Jaiswal said, "The liquor business is going to suffer a huge loss first time in its history. The losses can be estimated from the fact that every day, about Rs 1.5 crore liquor is sold in Lucknow only."

# Mentally-challenged youth found dead

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A mentally-challenged youth, who went missing few days back, was found dead under mysterious circumstances in Mohanlalganj area on Wednesday. Police sent the body for autopsy after the identity of the deceased was ascertained by his father.

As per reports, some residents of Hulas Kheda locality in Mohanlalganj felt a putrid smell emanating from a pond in the village and alerted others. A huge number of people flocked to the scene and police also came to know about it. The police reached the scene and the body was fished out. The deceased was identified as Sunil Kumar Rawat (20) of Hulas Kheda. His father Pyare Lal told the police that Sunil went missing eight days back. "Sunil was said to be mentally-challenged. We searched for him at every possible place but could not find him. We were thinking that he might have gone to some other city," Pyarelal said, adding he was not sure if his son was killed.

A spokesman said the body had been sent for autopsy, report of which was awaited.

We have yet to find out if there were wounds on the body," he added. However, locals suspected foul play and said the police should investigate the case seriously. "It appears that Sunil was done to death and the body was dumped into the pond," they suspected.

The villagers said Sunil was not seen loitering around the pond on the day he went missing. "All the villagers were aware that Sunil was missing. If any of us had seen Sunil roaming around the pond, we would have informed his parents," they said.

Meanwhile, an 18-year-old boy lost his life after his bike rammed into road divider and he got his head smashed in Chinhat on Wednesday morning. Police said the boy was driving the bike in a rash manner.

As per reports, the youth, identified as Shiv Pratap Singh of Matiyari in Chinhat, was going to his fields in Kewadi village of Barabanki on his bike. Around 9:30 am when he reached Faizabad road in Matiyari, Singh lost control of the bike as a result of which the vehicle rammed into road divider and he suffered grievous head injuries.

# ECHO at SGPGI inaugurated



PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Health Minister Suresh Khanna inaugurated project ECHO (Extension of Community Health Outcome) at SGPGI on Wednesday. A comprehensive training in management of COVID-19 was provided by the SGPGI faculty, including the director Prof Dheeman.

Doctors said that 51 medical colleges of the state would be connected to SGPGI. The minister congratulated SGPGI on the feat and gave a message for prevention and management of COVID-19. He also visited the isolation ward for coronavirus patients.

The director said that the Trauma Centre at SGPGI has been converted into Rajdhani

COVID Hospital. "It will have the facility of 210 beds, including 80 ICU and 130 isolation beds. A task force committee has been formed to look after functioning of the hospital. The SGPGI director explained the functioning of ECHO. He said that the programme would be used for capacity building of doctors and the paramedical staff from all 51 colleges.

# LDA extends last date for registration

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The late date for submitting the application forms for registration under the housing scheme in Gomti Nagar Extension has been extended to April 30 from April 27 while that for flats remaining unsold to May 15 from April 30. This was disclosed by Lucknow Development Authority(LDA) secretary MP Singh. A team of staff is engaged in completing their work even as the state government has declared a three-week lockdown in view of the coronavirus outbreak.

LDA secretary said only 7 per cent staff was called for emergency duties to complete the file work and clear the pending work. The rooms were thoroughly sanitised n Tuesday evening to ensure those coming the office do not get the infection. The staff

members were seen wearing masks, as per instructions of the Vice-Chairman.

The main gate and other entry points were locked and security guards were deployed to check the visit of outsiders. Homebuyers have been asked not to visit the office as the application forms have to be submitted online.

They are also required to download the brochures and forms from the websites as the last dates have been extended. The LDA secretary said chief financial controller RK Singh has also been informed about the revised dates to update the records. He added that even money deposit and other formalities can be completed online. Interestingly, the staffers will not be eligible for overtime payment and the purpose for calling them on emergency duties is to clear the pendency.

# Man found feasting on corpse, held

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Close on heels of a cannibalism case reported from Bijnor, yet another such incident surfaced in Meerut where a man was found feasting on a corpse and arrested by the police. The items recovered from him suggested that he worked as a tantrik and might have been involved in such acts for a long time.

A case was registered and the accused was being interrogated.

As per reports, retired sub-inspector Brahm Singh of Kazimabad hamlet of Partapur (Meerut) died on Monday and was cremated on Tuesday. Later in the evening, when one of the kin went to the cremation ground, he was shocked to find the half charred body removed from the pyre and a man eating it. He later informed others who rushed there and nabbed the man.

Later the police were called and they took the man into custody.

A search of the man's belongings revealed clothes of little girls, shoes, lemons and other items, commonly used by tantriks.

The accused was identified as Shis Singh aka Zakir Singh of Gauripur area of Sultanpur district. He told the police that he was engaged in tantra sadhana and hence he took the corpse and ate it.

Earlier on March 9, a man was arrested from Bijnor, for attempting to cook human flesh in Tikkopur village. The accused had asked his wife to cook a severed hand of a corpse but she fainted on seeing it.

The woman later woke up and found the husband cooking the flesh himself and alerted neighbours after which he was arrested.

The man identified as Sanjay brought the flesh from a cremation ground on Ganga banks. The man had also attacked his father and was believed to be mentally unstable.

## BOY SODOMISED, KILLED IN SITAPUR

Even as the country was under lockdown to check the spread of coronavirus, a boy playing outside his house was kidnapped, sodomised and later killed in Sitapur on Tuesday.

As per reports, the 11-year-old



boy from Reosa in Sitapur was playing outside his house on Tuesday afternoon and suddenly went missing. When his family members noticed, they inquired from neighbours and later launched a search for the missing boy. In the evening, the family was shocked to find his dead body in a land tract owned by Chandu.

The victim was found with a muffler around his neck suggesting that he had probably been strangled to death. However, the family

members rushed him to a primary health centre where a doctor pronounced him dead upon arrival.

It is suspected that he had been sodomised before being murdered.

The police later said that the perpetrator was probably acquainted with the victim and hence he murdered him to conceal his role in the sexual crime. A case was registered and the body was sent for autopsy. Investigations are on.

## JAIL INMATES STITCH 1.25 LAKH MASKS

Meanwhile, in a noble gesture, the inmates lodged in different jails of Uttar Pradesh, including undertrials lodged for heinous crimes, facilitated the government in its efforts to meet the shortage of safety kits for the public, doctors and para-medical staff. Sources said that in the last one week since rapid spread of coronavirus, the jail inmates stitched over 1.25 lakh masks across the prisons in UP. The inmates lodged in Lucknow and Mathura jails, on the other hand, are engaged in making sanitisers.

# Cong MLC donates his salary for fight against coronavirus

**Lucknow (PNS):** Leader of Congress Legislative Party in the UP Council, Deepak Singh, has donated his entire salary for the fight against coronavirus the problem is tackled. In a letter to the principal secretary of UP Legislative Council on Wednesday, MLC Deepak Singh said that as of now, Uttar Pradesh was battling the coronavirus and a lockdown was also in place which everyone should respect and remain self-quarantine to stop further spread of coronavirus. Singh said his entire salary till the situation becomes completely normal be donated to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund or the Legislative Council Chairman's fund to aid the health workers and the poor people, labourers, farmers, shopkeepers in these trying times.

The Congress leader disclosed that he had also provided Rs 10 lakh from the MLAs Local Area Development fund and also distributed soaps worth Rs 2 lakh from his personal expense. Singh said that soon all the Congress legislators would make similar donation to help the government in fighting the situation.

# DAY AFTER RUSH, GOVT ENSURES SUPPLIES

According to the rate-chart, pulse has been fixed at ₹75 a kg, wheat flour between ₹22 and ₹32 per kg, mustard oil is priced between ₹90 and ₹95, rice between ₹20 and ₹24 each kg, refine oil between ₹75 and ₹80 and channa priced at ₹60 a kg.

PM Modi's announcement of a 21 lockdown from Tuesday midnight to combat the spread of coronavirus as the only way out to break the coronavirus transmission chain, led to panic-buying of essential items in different parts of the country. Vegetables, fishes, meat and eggs were sold at double the normal price.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath-led Uttar Pradesh was the first State to announce home-delivery of essential items. Yogi said that more than 10,000 vehicles have been identified for delivering the essentials.

Despite the curfew, people in Punjab and Union Territory of Chandigarh moved out of their homes to buy essential items on Wednesday morning claiming that the authorities failed to ensure their home delivery as promised. While the authorities have fixed different time slots in all districts for the delivery of essential commodities at doorsteps, people at several places complained that they did not get the items especially groceries, fruits and vegetables.

The Goa Government is mulling a volunteer service for delivery of essential goods during the 21-day lockdown. The Jammu and Srinagar administration also decided for home delivery of public distribution system (PDS) ration to 1.60 lakh families in Srinagar and it will start from March 28.

# UP STARTS DELIVERY OF ESSENTIAL ITEMS

for coronavirus.

With this, 38 persons have so far tested positive for coronavirus and 11 of them have recovered and have been sent home.

"We are expecting that three to four patients would recover in a day or two," Principal Secretary (Health) Amit Mohan Prasad said.

Addressing media persons on Wednesday, Prasad said that a three-tier medical system had been planned in which 2-3 primary health centres would be attached in an area to make it a Covid hospital in rural areas in the first level. He said district hospitals would be at the second level while medical colleges and

other big hospitals would form the third level for treating critical patients.

"Besides community centres, schools and colleges in rural and urban areas would be taken for quarantine purpose. The government has set up a toll-free number — 18001805145 — in the state where people will get medical assistance related to coronavirus at their homes" Prasad said.

The principal secretary made it clear that OPDs in hospitals had been suspended but emergency services were operational with ambulances of 102 and 108 to ferry any patient in case of an emergency.

# INDIAN CASES MAY REACH 13L BY MID-MAY

"Thus our current estimates are at best underestimates for India based on early phase data," they said.

According to the report, it is essential for India to adopt "draconian measures" to act before the growth of COVID-19 infections starts to accelerate in the country. Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced on Tuesday a total lockdown for 1.3 billion people in India for 21 days, warning that the nation may go back by 21 years and many families could be devastated if we don't abide by the lockdown rules.

In their analysis, the scientists used data on the number of reported cases in India up to March 16, and applied tools of modelling disease transmission.

They estimated the theoretical number of infected at any given time, and compared projections for India against the US and Italy. The scientists, including those from Delhi School of Economics in New Delhi and the University of Michigan in the US, noted in a blog post on the platform Medium, that the estimates may change as stricter restrictions and measures are adopted by India.

India, according to the researchers, has the most overstretched healthcare system where it is hard to provide care even when the patient volume flowing into hospitals is "normal".

Citing World Bank data, they said the number of hospital beds per 1,000 people in India is only 0.7, compared to 6.5 in France, 11.5 in South Korea, 4.2 in China, 3.4 in Italy, and 2.8 in the US.

Owing to this, the scientists said, the predicted surge in the number of cases may make it impossible for the healthcare providers in India to support the sheer volume of cases.

The report also identified the most vulnerable groups of population in India. Citing multiple studies, the researchers said the number of people in the country with-

out an insurance policy stretched to about 1,100 million as of 2014, with the number of men and women with hypertension, one of the major risk factors for death from COVID-19, being more than 300 million people.

Without enforcing any intervention in the country, the scientists predicted that the number of cases may exceed the estimated capacity of hospital beds in India, which stands at 70 beds per 100,000 Indians.

They cautioned that the critically ill COVID-19 patients — about 5-10 per cent of those infected — will require ICU beds, which make up between 5 and 10 per cent of bed capacity in Indian hospitals.

The scientists, however, said their estimates came with limitations, including the uncertainty arising from model assumptions of population size, accuracy of the diagnostic tests for COVID-19, and heterogeneity in the implementation of government-initiated interventions.

The number of coronavirus infected cases in India so far is 562, while the death toll due to COVID-19 in the country is revised down to nine, according to Health Ministry data.

# 606 INFECTED SO FAR; 1ST DEATH IN MP

Gujarat, Assam, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Goa, Karnataka, MP and Jammu & Kashmir are also setting up hospitals dedicated for the management of Covid-19.

A total of 118 laboratories have been included in the ICMR network of COVID19 testing while private labs have started collecting samples.

As the cases continue to soar, the GoM called for preparedness on behalf of the States which need to devote adequate resources for creating dedicated COVID-19 hospitals, equipping the medical institutions with PPEs, ventilators and other essential equipment.

The Centre has also asked the States to ensure that essential services and supplies remain open. These include hospitals, medical shops and establishments engaged in manufacturing of medicines, vaccines, sanitisers, masks and medical devices.

Highlighting the critical importance of social distancing as an effective strategy for prevention of COVID-19 and limiting the spread of the disease, Dr Harsh Vardhan, said, "We are fighting an infectious disease. In order to protect ourselves and others, it is highly important that we follow all the protocols, guidelines and directions issued by the Government, failing which may lead to legal actions u/s 188 of IPC."

## FROM PAGE 1

Amidst reports that doctors treating Covid-19 patients were facing harassment by the people, Dr Harsh Vardhan also asked people not to ostracise medical staff who are on the forefront of this health emergency and serving to save lives from the deadly infection.

# CENTRE LIKELY TO UNVEIL ₹1.5 LAKH CR STIMULUS

"The RBI will have to buy bonds like other central banks in the world," the first official said. The second official added the Government could also use the central bank's ways-and-means facility — an overdraft facility the RBI offers to the state — if it faces a cash crunch.

The Finance Ministry declined to comment on the plan and the RBI did not immediately respond to an e-mail requesting comment.

Agency

# 80 CRORE INDIANS TO GET WHEAT AT ₹ 2/KG, RICE ₹ 3/KG TILL JUNE

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, he added.

Javadekar said that all essential commodities supply shops will be open, requesting the public to avoid rush and keep social distancing, showing photos of certain shops methods to make people in line at safe distance.

# RAM LALLA IDOL SHIFTED

pilgrims would not be allowed as there was total ban on entry of outsiders in Ayodhya due to lockdown across the country in the wake of coronavirus outbreak.

A programme is on the anvil to organise a major bhoomi puja of Ram temple on April 30 in which Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh chief Mohan Bhagwat are likely to be present.

The temporary temple where the idols of Ram Lalla and other idols have been shifted has been made of eco-friendly wood procured from Germany and Estonia by Ghaziabad-based company Nature Homes.

"We are extremely happy that we were given the task of completing the structure for one of the most revered temples in the country. We have successfully completed it within the deadline by adhering to guidelines and precautions like Vaastu details, ventilation, strength to withstand high

temperatures and natural calamities among others. Every detailing of the structure was designed and implemented by our company," commented founder of Nature Homes, Saurabh Sood, in a statement issued in Lucknow on Wednesday.

The structure, which is 21 by 14 feet in dimension, is a double-layer insulated structure, energy efficient and made of 100 per cent natural wood.

"The structure is designed to withstand extreme weather and climatic conditions and can withstand an earthquake of upto 8-9 on the Richter scale. It can also withstand wind of more than 150 kms velocity," Sood said.

# PRINCE CHARLES TESTS COVID-19 +VE

"It is not possible to ascertain from whom the Prince caught the virus owing to the high number of engagements he carried out in his public role during recent weeks," Charles last met 93-year-old Queen Elizabeth II "briefly" on March 12, who has been based at Windsor Castle for nearly a week now. "Her Majesty the Queen remains in good health and is following appropriate advice," Buckingham Palace said.

Prince Charles' last public event was a reception and dinner in aid of the Australian bushfire relief effort on March 12, which took place at Mansion House in London.

Earlier that day, he had attended an investiture ceremony at Buckingham Palace in London, where he also greeted recipients with a 'namaste' due to concerns building around the spread of the pandemic. This comes as Britain entered its second day of a national lockdown. Police are patrolling the streets to enforce the lockdown. According to the Johns Hopkins coronavirus tracker, there are 428,405 confirmed cases across the world, 19,120 deaths.

In the UK, the number of confirmed cases are 8,167 and the death toll increased by 87 to 422.

# 25 SIKHS MASSACRED IN KABUL GURDWARA

"All four suicide bombers who attacked Dharamshala, a Sikh worship area in PD1 of Kabul, were killed after nearly six hours of fighting. Afghan special forces confirmed," it said in a tweet.

The Ministry said in a statement that 80 people, including women and children, were rescued from the gurdwara.

The ISIS terrorist group, which has tar-

geted Sikhs before in Afghanistan, claimed responsibility for the latest attack.

The group issued a statement confirming that its members carried out the attack on Sikhs in Kabul city, Khaama Press News Agency reported.

Photos from the blast scene showed security forces carrying wounded people away on stretchers. Some Afghan media outlets shared videos of the family members of victims waiting outside a city hospital in tears.

Police in Kabul said that at least 11 children were rescued from the gurdwara. Sikh lawmaker Narendar Singh Khalsa told reporters that up to 150 people were praying inside the gurdwara when it came under attack. Khalsa, the only representative of the Sikh community in Afghanistan said he received a call from a worshipper inside the gurdwara, informing him about the attack.

"I rushed over to help. There were about 150 worshippers inside the gurdwara at the time of the attack," he was quoted as saying by the official Bakhtar News Agency. "Afghan forces have cleared the first floor of a Sikh worship area in PD1 of Kabul. A number of people have been rescued who were trapped inside the building," said Interior Ministry spokesman Tariq Ariyan. President Ashraf Ghani condemned the attack on the gurdwara, TOLONews reported.

"The attack on the religious sites shows the extreme weakness of the enemy, religious sites should not be vulnerable to attacks and violence," it quoted Ghani as saying. The president's spokesperson described the attack as "yet another heartless, cowardly terrorist attack on a worshiping place in Kabul. The Afghan government strongly condemns today's senseless attack on Dharamshala Sikh temple.

"Our hearts go out to the families of the victims of this heinous act," the spokesperson said.

Former president of Afghanistan Hamid Karzai strongly condemned the attack on the gurdwara and expressed his condolences to the victims' families.

Earlier, the country's main militant group, the Taliban, denied involvement in the attack. Taliban spokesperson Zabiullah Mujahid said in a statement that the militant group had no link with the attack in Shor Bazar area of Kabul.

In New Delhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said he was saddened by the attack on the gurdwara.

The Ministry of External Affairs also strongly condemned the terror attack and said the targeting of a religious place in the midst of the COVID-19 outbreak reflects the "diabolical mindset" of the perpetrators and their backers.



# PM: Endure hardship for 21 days to defeat corona

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# EC’s indelible ink to stamp quarantined

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# Armed Forces to enforce social distancing at headquarters

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

Army Chief General M M Naravane last week had

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

Giving details about the ongoing efforts to look after the Indians evacuated from foreign countries, officials said the batch of 273 pilgrims from Iran included 149 women and six children.

The evacuees, who were transferred on IA Flights from Delhi to Jodhpur were screened on arrival at Jodhpur airport and then taken to the Army medical facility which has been designed isolation as well as mental and physical wellness which includes various activities including sports.

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

in these facilities.

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

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

# Fresh push to strengthen rural banking

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

The Cabinet also approved

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

“This location has become a bottleneck and is affecting the train working badly causing delays and detentions and also reducing the wagon turn round. Flyover at Aligarh going over the existing Delhi-Howrah main line is an operational necessity and is essentially required to remove the bottleneck to traffic movement. By construction of flyover connecting Aligarh to Harduaganj the delays and detentions will be avoided,” said Government.

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

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Asserting that indebted-

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

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

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

Vivek Tankha, a Rajya Sabha member from Madhya Pradesh, of the Congress thanked the prime minister and the government of India for relaxation in MPLADS rules permitting MPs to use public funds in the war against coronavirus. “This battle is everyone’s responsibility,”

Tankha said. He said the parliamentarians will now be able to help the administration in providing assistance to the needy ones.

# India terms terror attack on Kabul gurdwara diabolical

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

Stating this in an official

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

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

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

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

# NIA chargesheets 1 for ₹2.2 cr transfer

Feb 2019 sophisticated arms interdiction case of Bihar

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

The accused Santosh Kumar has a number of aliases including Santosh Singh and Umesh Kumar and is a resident of village Horli Chhapra under District Ara, Bhojpur, Bihar.

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

Prasad, Varenghow Kaborngam and Clearson Kabor travelling in a SUV.

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

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

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



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

by the Jharkhand Government.

Earlier two Chargesheets were filed against six other accused persons--- Suraj Prasad, VR Kaborngam, Clearson Kabor, Tripurari Singh Mukesh Singh and Ningkhan Sangtam on

August 3 and November 22 last year.

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

# NPR, Census updating process deferred due to virus lockdown

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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



## Total lockdown

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



Maybe it came a little too late in the day, considering it was the world's biggest social experiment with war-time precision and a huge gamble by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, but India is now in a three-week nationwide lockdown to save its 1.3 billion people. A sombre-looking Modi announced a total lockdown as the days ahead were "crucial to break the cycle of transmission" of COVID-19. Many experts have suggested that a tidal wave of the quickly invasive virus was coming but this protocol would halt it in its

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

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

## Virus of racism

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



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

UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet may have called on member-states to stop discrimination triggered by the virus but in multi-cultural US, too, intolerance has reached manic levels of absurdity. People have been spraying air-fresheners and disinfectant cans on people of Asian origin, never mind that they are bonafide US citizens. A Vietnamese art curator was dropped by an exhibitor at a UK art fair who claimed her participation would be seen as "carrying the virus." We live in a globalised world, where people and societies are constantly colliding and merging with each other, travelling everywhere and, therefore, will always be at a risk of exposing themselves to every kind of contagion, biological, social and economic. It is not that the Chinese set out on a nihilistic mission to destroy the world and dominate crumbling economies, risking the huge loss of lives of their own. Or anybody else's for that matter. The West, though multi-cultural, has often found a scapegoat for its ills in "otherising" the so-called Brown races. Post-Corona, there is a real danger of insularity dictating the course of protectionist politics already at play. But what of Indians turing on fellow Indians? Soon, we might all become vectors. Does that mean we abandon each other? This crisis will only be won by the united spirit to heal, not training guns at each other.

# Tibet gets back to work

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



CLAUDE ARPI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On March 3, charter flights were being arranged to bring

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

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

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

This was not a good sign.

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

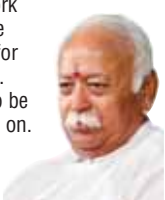
Only time will tell. But the speed at which it has resumed the construction of infrastructure projects in Tibet is certainly ominous. A Chinese website published a photo feature. Its caption read: "Multiple rocket launch systems attached to an artillery brigade under the PLA Xizang Military Command fire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

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

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

## SOUNDBITE

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



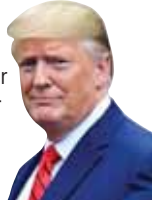
**RSS chief**  
—Mohan Bhagwat

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



**Actor-politician**  
—Prakash Raj

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



**US President**  
—Donald Trump

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



**Chief of Defence Staff**  
—Bipin Rawat

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Fight fake news

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

**MN Musaeed**  
Mumbai

### Strengthen healthcare

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

### What it will take to fight COVID

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

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

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

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

**Nimai Charan Swain**  
Bhubaneswar



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

**Haridasan Rajan**  
Kozhikode

### Utilise your time

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

**Kumud Agrawal**  
Via email

### Stay calm, composed

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

**Kanika Nayan**  
Via email

Send your feedback to: [letterstopioneer@gmail.com](mailto:letterstopioneer@gmail.com)



FIRST COLUMN

## Every dark cloud has a silver lining

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



GWYNNE DYER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

# Is India a gardening State?

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



PRASENJIT BISWAS

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# Respect environment and invest in it

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



KOTA SRIRAJ

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(The writer is an environmental journalist)



## FOREIGN EYE



### A TOUGH DECISION TO MAKE

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

(The Guardian editorial)



# Sensex, Nifty log best day in over 10 years

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Receding uncertainty in domestic markets following defined lockdown announcement and assurance of domestic stimulus by the government boosted investor sentiment, said Narendra Solanki, Head-Equity Research (Fundamental), Anand Rath.

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

# ONGC gas output drops as shut factories refuse supplies

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

With the unprecedented nationwide lockdown shutting down factories, ONGC has been forced to cut natural gas production by up to one-tenth as customers refused to take supplies because of business disruption.

Oil and Natural Gas Corp (ONGC), which produced 64.5 million standard cubic meters of gas per day till earlier this week, has reduced the flow to 59.8 mmcmd on Wednesday, and will further cut by another 3 mmcmd on Thursday, sources aware of the development said.

The company has received requests from customers for reduction in gas supplies of around 7.7 mmcmd.

Besides this, another 4-5 mmcmd supply reduction requests have been lodged with the gas transporter GAIL.

The sources said these customers are largely small companies whose business has been completely shut because of the lockdown, and city gas distributors who have seen volumes vanish after CNG vehicles went off-road.

In the most far-reaching measure undertaken by any government to check the spread of coronavirus pandemic,

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday evening announced a three-week-long nationwide lockdown. The lockdown meant offices and factories, barring those involved in essential supplies business, are shut and people asked to stay at home.

Some states like the national capital Delhi had last week declared lockdown and now this has been extended nationwide.

While factories across sectors have been shut down following the lockdowns, the ones seeking stoppage or reduction in gas intake are mostly in the Gujarat region.

Out of the 7.7 mmcmd gas reduction request received by ONGC, 6 mmcmd has come from the Hazira region, the sources said, adding the remaining reduction was sought by factories in Andhra Pradesh and adjoining areas.

Besides, GAIL has been piled with requests for cut in supplies for another 4-5 mmcmd along its Hazira-Vijaipur-Jagdishpur pipeline.

It is the principal transporter of natural gas in India and also ships gas produced by ONGC.

GAIL would accommodate 4-5 mmcmd of reduction by cutting the use of imported

liquefied natural gas (LNG) and fuel sourced from fields other than of ONGC, they said. Gas is used as a fuel in a variety of industries — from glass to fertilizer plants. Large factories such as fertilizer plants continue to use gas as they have been classified in essential commodities.

The demand for gas has also been hit by all vehicles, barring ones used by law enforcement agencies and that used in maintaining essential supplies, going off-road. This meant vehicles run on compressed natural gas (CNG) too have gone off-road in cities ranging from Delhi to Mumbai

to Ahmedabad. Lesser CNG vehicles meant lesser need of gas and so city gas distributors too have sought a reduction in the volumes they used to take from GAIL/ONGC, the sources said.

Indraprastha Gas Ltd, the company that retails CNG to automobiles and piped cooking gas to households in the national capital and adjoining cities, has already shut two-third of its CNG dispensing pumps in view of the demand constraints.

The sources said more factories and businesses are likely to be impacted by the shutdown in the coming days.

# RIL shares zoom nearly 15 pc; reclaims most valued firm tag

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Reliance Industries Limited on Wednesday zoomed nearly 15 per cent, reclaiming the tag of the most valued domestic firm by market valuation surpassing TCS.

RIL's scrip jumped 14.65 per cent to close at Rs 1,081.25 on the BSE. During the day, it advanced 22.25 per cent to Rs 1,152.

On the NSE, it rose sharply by 13.84 per cent to close at Rs 1,074.

The sharp rally in the shares helped the company's market valuation zoom Rs 87,576.98 crore to Rs 6,85,433.30 crore on the BSE.

The heavyweight stock was the top gainer on both the key indices. Meanwhile, there were media reports that Facebook Inc was in talks to buy stake in the company's telecom unit, Jio.

In traded volume terms, 1,176.09 lakh shares of the company were traded on the BSE and about 3.34 crore shares on the NSE during the day.

RIL went ahead Tata

Consultancy Services(TCS) in market cap ranking during the morning trade following a sharp rally in its share price.

The market valuation of TCS was at Rs 6,57,492.85 crore at close of trade on the BSE. Tata Consultancy Services had on March 18 went past Reliance Industries Limited to become the most valued Indian firm by market valuation.

The BSE benchmark index closed 1,861.75 points higher at 28,535.78. RIL was the biggest contributor in the market rally.

# Cabinet extends tax rebate for garment exporters

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Wednesday approved the continuation of the scheme for Rebate of State and Central Taxes and Levies (RoSCTL) on export of garments and made-ups from beyond March 31 till it is merged with the Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products scheme.

“The continuation of the RoSCTL scheme beyond March 31, 2020, is expected to make the textile sector competitive by rebating all taxes/levies which are currently not being rebated under any other mechanism,” an official statement said.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi here.

“The rebate of state and central taxes and levies on export of garments and made-ups (RoSCTL) scheme for apparel and made-ups will be continued with effect from 1 April, 2020 without any change in scheme guidelines and rates as notified by Ministry of Textiles till such time that the RoSCTL is merged with remission of duties and taxes on exported products (RoDTEP),” the statement said.

The RoSCTL scheme provides rebate on all embedded taxes on exports. Under the

scheme, maximum rate of rebate for apparel is 6.05 per cent, while for made-ups, this goes up to 8.2 per cent. The made-ups segment comprises home textiles products such as bed linen, curtains, pillows and carpets. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had in September last year approved the Remission of Duties or Taxes on Export Product (RoDTEP) to incentivise exporters at an estimated cost of Rs 50,000 crore to the exchequer. She said RoDTEP will replace the existing incentive schemes and “will more than adequately incentivise exporters than the existing schemes put together”.

## NIFTY 50

SCRIP	OPEN	High	LOW	LTP	CHANGE
NIFTY 50	7735.15	8376.75	7714.75	8317.85	516.80
RELIANCE	963.80	1151.55	963.25	1074.00	130.60
HDFCBANK	770.45	867.45	755.25	863.00	95.30
KOTAKBANK	1140.00	1324.00	1125.00	1290.00	137.10
UPL	257.00	301.35	252.00	292.00	29.95
MARUTI	4439.00	5159.40	4310.10	4960.00	473.55
GRASIM	390.40	458.70	385.00	442.00	41.90
ADANIPORTS	223.20	266.50	223.20	255.60	23.85
HDFC	1476.00	1655.60	1476.00	1655.60	150.50
AXISBANK	293.50	363.75	286.00	331.50	28.35
BAJAJFINSV	4450.00	4920.00	4400.00	4902.00	404.25
LT	799.20	775.00	661.00	769.00	61.10
TITAN	687.00	897.70	784.80	881.90	65.80
NESTLEIND	12800.00	14520.00	12800.00	14380.00	901.65
HINDALCO	88.95	97.20	88.05	94.60	5.85
ICICIBANK	284.00	334.15	281.60	315.15	18.65
TATASTEEL	267.05	295.00	267.05	288.95	17.05
INFRATEL	139.30	151.90	136.30	150.75	8.80
BHARTIARTL	406.55	438.25	405.00	424.90	20.85
BAFINANCE	2450.00	2700.00	2400.00	2604.45	126.25
ULTRACEMCO	2968.20	3290.00	2910.00	3155.00	136.90
TECHM	500.90	542.85	507.05	525.00	21.50
ZEEL	119.30	129.75	114.00	124.00	4.85
SBIN	178.00	195.25	176.45	190.60	7.40
BPCL	252.60	276.95	252.60	272.85	10.00
ASIANPAINT	1446.55	1605.35	1446.00	1580.05	55.20
NTPC	78.00	80.00	75.00	80.35	2.80
BRITANNIA	2364.60	2511.60	2317.10	2436.20	71.50
INFY	597.00	635.00	565.70	607.00	17.20
SUNPHARMA	332.00	350.80	329.55	343.80	8.80
HINDUNILVR	2010.05	2138.95	2001.65	2078.00	50.15
HERFOTOCOI	2560.00	1683.50	1525.30	1664.80	37.05
TATAMOTORS	67.75	71.70	67.25	70.10	1.55
VEDL	62.70	65.00	62.35	64.20	1.40
DREDDYT	2827.25	2948.90	2795.70	2917.00	59.05
EICHERMOT	1730.00	14800.00	13705.00	14501.10	292.60
M&M	263.40	288.35	245.40	274.25	5.25
POWERGRID	148.50	156.95	148.35	149.80	2.50
TCS	170.00	181.00	168.00	173.20	28.85
SHERCEEM	16800.00	17947.35	16551.45	16980.00	0.00
JSWSTEEL	145.00	156.00	142.55	146.55	-0.00
CIPLA	378.90	394.90	374.00	375.20	-2.25
BAJAJ-AUTO	4917.00	1989.00	1866.60	1925.00	-12.15
HCLTECH	432.00	468.00	417.75	436.00	-6.05
ONGC	61.20	63.00	60.00	61.40	-1.10
ITC	151.00	152.00	139.00	147.05	-2.65
GAIL	77.90	79.20	74.15	74.85	-1.60
WIPRO	147.00	188.00	170.20	172.50	-3.85
COALINDIA	126.00	129.25	123.70	124.25	-3.60
IOC	77.80	80.95	77.00	77.25	-2.45
INDUSINDBK	292.00	324.00	281.15	301.95	-10.40

## NIFTY NEXT 50

SCRIP	OPEN	High	LOW	LTP	CHANGE
NIFTY NEXT 50	18504.40	19502.70	18462.45	19364.00	643.90
ICICIPRULI	247.00	330.75	248.15	312.40	57.95
ICICIGI	855.50	995.00	846.40	989.00	138.05
SRTRANSFIN	460.00	580.00	453.00	560.00	75.00
L&T	47.00	56.10	46.85	55.05	6.25
INDIGO	825.00	1053.80	825.00	1030.00	113.65
PEL	627.10	697.95	626.00	685.20	61.85
HDFCLIFE	390.00	440.00	385.60	430.00	38.70
HINDZINC	125.00	139.15	123.45	138.20	12.00
UBL	832.50	915.30	832.50	910.00	77.50
MOTHERSUMI	56.00	61.20	55.00	60.80	4.95
PEC	79.95	86.90	79.90	86.50	7.00
SBILIFE	530.00	630.00	530.00	587.00	40.75
GODREJIND	8160.00	9600.00	8060.00	8950.00	592.55
BANKBARODA	53.10	59.95	52.80	59.20	3.80
BERGEPAINT	409.65	454.95	405.25	450.00	25.10
GODREJCP	450.00	478.00	438.30	470.55	26.10
NIACL	78.50	85.05	75.65	82.50	4.25
IBULHSGHN	85.10	97.00	83.20	95.00	4.80
DMART	1798.70	1899.10	1760.20	1899.10	90.40
GICRE	81.50	90.00	81.50	90.00	4.25
BAJAJHLONG	1525.00	1678.50	1514.50	1587.60	61.65
NMDC	63.00	67.50	62.60	65.90	2.55
OFSS	1561.00	1650.00	1561.00	1650.00	58.05
MCOWELL-N	450.85	518.95	442.65	467.30	15.60
DLF	120.00	127.40	114.55	124.60	3.80
ADANTRANS	177.00	195.55	176.95	192.00	5.75
SIEMENS	1018.80	1066.65	1010.15	1047.70	28.90
AUROPHARMA	316.00	342.00	316.00	334.00	7.85
HDFCARM	2026.00	2130.00	1962.00	2063.00	36.85
DABUR	403.65	412.05	391.05	405.20	4.00
PGHH	9299.90	9480.00	8755.50	9075.10	39.75
CONCOR	270.00	287.90	263.00	280.00	0.65
BIOCON	267.95	286.00	265.05	271.55	0.55
IDEA	3.35	3.45	3.30	3.35	0.00
DIVISLAB	1900.00	1974.00	1881.10	1914.00	-5.95
NHPC	18.80	19.30	18.70	18.95	-0.10
COLPAL	1131.00	1142.85	1105.00	1118.00	-6.00
PETRONET	175.00	183.30	174.00	176.00	-0.95
MARICO	251.80	262.50	245.50	247.75	-1.55
PIDILITIND	1265.00	1316.30	1185.55	1256.00	-19.10
PAGEIND	16891.00	17049.00	16474.85	16565.00	-326.90
AMBUJACEM	139.00	144.45	138.00	138.70	-3.45
ASHOKLEY	35.75	36.50	33.70	34.40	-1.15
HAVELLS	476.15	495.95	465.60	473.40	-16.55
BANDHANBNK	163.00	165.00	152.20	155.05	-6.00
HINDPETRO	180.00	186.65	175.00	177.60	-6.95
ACC	928.00	939.50	895.15	911.50	-36.25
LUPIN	581.00	599.25	558.10	562.25	-29.95
CADILAH	270.00	281.50	262.55	263.55	-14.90
PNB	36.00	36.35	33.15	34.15	-2.15

## BSE 500

Script	Open	High	Low	LTP
RELIANCE	951.00	1152.00	951.00	1081.25
KOTAKBANK	1131.10	1321.00	1120.00	1294.00
HDFC	1495.00	1651.95	1478.05	1643.55
HDFCBANK	770.00	867.95	755.70	855.55
ICICIBANK	287.00	330.35	281.55	317.15
SBIN	179.70	195.20	176.40	189.95
GRASIM	391.00	458.00	380.00	443.65
BAFINANCE	2473.80	2698.45	2401.00	2585.90
INDUSINDBK	294.00	324.00	281.15	301.20
AXISBANK	297.00	356.20	285.00	326.90
MARUTI	4305.00	5158.40	4305.00	5042.30
ICIT	707.90	773.00	661.05	766.55
LCIGIGI	879.90	994.10	844.40	978.75
INFY	593.00	634.80	566.00	605.95
HINDUNILVR	2020.00	2139.10	2002.60	2076.60
OTC	150.00	151.90	139.00	147.35
BEROIRLTY	399.65	405.00	336.00	400.00
TCS	1700.00	1810.00	1681.00	1752.20
TATAMOTORS	68.90	71.70	67.10	70.20
TATASTEEL	268.00	294.40	267.00	285.65
INDIACEM	87.50	97.00	86.60	95.85
BAJAJFINSV	4499.95	4919.00	4420.05	4824.60
MPHASIS	677.45	758.25	670.00	725.00
ASIANPAINT	1500.00	1605.10	1450.00	1594.05
BPCL	1389.15	1621.95	1350.00	1350.00
HDFCLIFE	391.90	440.85	384.80	433.75
INDIGO	855.00	1056.95	844.00	1022.00
TITAN	800.00	897.85	784.55	883.50
BANDHANBNK	165.00	168.10	152.35	154.65
APOLLOHOSP	1199.00	1221.80	1070.75	1160.00
BLBANK	148.75	170.50	148.35	161.55
IBULHSGFIN	88.00	97.00	83.00	95.20
RADICO	238.00	275.00	220.00	258.10
ONGC	62.45	63.80	60.00	61.50
HARTIARTL	400.00	437.00	400.00	425.85
ASTRAZEN	2070.00	2298.10	2035.50	2298.10
SUNPHARMA	335.00	350.50	330.00	347.05
BPCL	254.00	276.90	252.45	273.50
ESCORTS	595.00	659.75	585.00	648.40
MUTHOOTFIN	499.85	609.25	499.85	598.35
MAANAPPURAM	82.00	105.25	81.00	102.15
JBULFOOD	1175.00	1366.00	1175.00	1340.00
DLF	118.35	127.40	114.50	124.00
VEDL	64.00	65.00	62.25	64.30
BANKBARODA	52.15	59.95	52.15	58.20
HDFC AMC	2033.00	2126.50	1963.60	2040.05
LD&FMC	46.50	55.95	46.55	55.25
ICICIPRULI	249.60	325.00	247.38	318.45
IDEA	3.36	3.45	3.26	3.34
PVR	1268.00	1378.00	1260.00	1378.00
ADANIEN	127.00	134.50	125.20	134.50
IPMILLIND	1273.00	1315.20	1186.05	1268.95
INFYFINANCIL	63.55	68.90	61.10	68.00
ASHOKLEY	36.00	36.60	33.70	34.45
NESTLEIND	1300.00	1450.00	1300.00	1443.70
CIPLA	378.00	394.70	374.20	376.70
WIPRO	176.00	187.50	170.40	175.15
BMRF	50010.00	57500.00	50010.00	56251.25
JUSTDIAL	297.00	297.00	265.00	272.00
SBILIFE	539.90	592.25	535.35	586.95
ADANIAPORTS	938.75	960.25	925.25	958.10
SNITTECH	98.45	1281.85	984.50	1231.85
SRM	2611.00	2838.40	2492.20	2668.20
MRF	27.00	28.60	24.50	27.75
BIOCON	165.00	285.90	265.00	272.05
HEROMOTOCO	1618.00	1682.95	1526.85	1666.00
BRITANNIA	2362.00	2510.60	2340.00	2450.05
BATAINDIA	1074.85	1186.95	1041.10	1130.00
INDALSTEL	81.45	94.85	81.45	92.40
PEL	625.00	697.50	625.00	683.25
GODREJIND	290.00	298.60	275.85	285.50
BALKRISIND	720.10	858.90	707.25	853.05
FEDERALBNK	39.00	41.55	35.70	38.35
ZEE	118.00	129.90	114.00	125.70
IOC	78.80	80.85	77.05	77.95
SKSTRANSFN	477.95	580.70	461.05	567.60
IGL	315.00	349.30	300.10	342.60
LICHSGFIN	188.00	220.00	186.00	210.10
ULTRACEMCO	3020.00	3270.50	2913.15	3282.65
DDREDDY	2858.00	2946.35	2797.70	2836.70
PNB	35.80	36.35	33.15	34.30
COALINDIA	127.50	129.00	123.75	124.50
LUPIN	592.00	598.95	558.50	565.50
HINDPETRO	176.40	186.45	175.60	177.25
ICLITECH	439.00	467.70	417.75	448.35
POWERGRID	147.50	156.85	147.50	150.50
HINDALCO	89.40	97.15	88.90	94.75
SAIL	21.00	22.75	21.00	21.75
MININDTDR	750.00	857.80	750.00	801.00
GAIL	395.30	413.00	391.10	404.60
JSJSHISAR	77.00	78.95	74.35	74.60
BERGEPAINT	32.00	34.60	30.00	34.40
TATACONSUM	414.80	454.00	407.90	451.60
GRANDWELL	250.50	282.00	249.05	276.70
MR&MFN	416.35	455.00	407.50	441.00
CCCL	161.20	172.80	146.80	166.15
CGCEL	178.50	178.50	166.75	174.40
JSWSTEEL	25.00	28.95	24.80	27.65
AUROPHARMA	147.35	155.80	145.00	147.50
VOITAS	325.00	340.00	318.40	333.50
AAVAS	478.00	502.75	449.20	479.90
CANBK	846.00	900.00	845.75	899.00
PETRONET	79.00	86.75	77.95	83.35
NTNPC	171.00	183.00	171.00	176.20
MOTHERSUMI	77.45	80.15	75.35	80.45
CHADALHC	55.00	61.50	55.00	60.65
SHANKARA	280.00	290.00	257.30	264.05
SHANKARA	257.40	270.00	244.55	244.55



# GLOBAL DEATH TOLL ABOVE 19,000

AFP ■ PARIS

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

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

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

Many countries are now only testing cases that require hospitalisation.

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

Like Italy, Spain now has

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

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

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

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

## ‘We are collapsing’: Virus pummels medics in Spain, Italy

AP ■ MADRID

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Health services staff members protest outside the Txagorriku hospital AP

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Spain's experience has been reflected elsewhere.

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

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

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

## Italian village where virus is deadlier than war

AFP ■ VERTOVA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

AFP ■ MADRID

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

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

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

With authorities stepping up

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## China lifts lockdown in Wuhan

PTI ■ BEIJING

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

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

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

the city with a population of over 11 million.

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

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

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

## Iran Prez warns of tough new measures

AFP ■ TEHRAN

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

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

## Psychologists to study mental health social impacts of COVID-19

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

## Air pollution in Italy falls since start of lockdown

AFP ■ COPENHAGEN

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

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

weeks, compared with the preceding four weeks, the EEA said.

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

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

The lockdown in Italy began in certain northern areas on February 23 before it was

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

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

## Putin postpones public vote on reforms

AFP ■ MOSCOW

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## UN urges prisoner releases to avoid virus contagion

AFP ■ GENEVA

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

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

## Paris region cuts public transport further in virus fight

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

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

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

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



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

time by Easter, which is on April 12.

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

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

“Easter is our timeline, what a great timeline that

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

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

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

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

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

AFP ■ SURABAYA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



# BE GROUNDED

Students are required to have knowledge, skills and competencies in agriculture and technology, says DR RANA SINGH



## SKILLS

The students are required to have optimum knowledge, skills and competencies in the domain of agriculture, technology and allied areas. They should have a strong passion in the field of agriculture and allied technologies.

The students are required to have an optimal blending of domain knowledge as well as knowledge about the emerging technologies in the domain. A qualification from an institute of repute is not just an option but has become mandatory to enable one to penetrate the Agriculture sector. Technology skills and engineering skills optimally integrated with the domain knowledge of agriculture would be an added advantage.

The job opportunities in the domain of agriculture technology will also, increase with the increase in the rate of growth of population in India and

## SCOPE

The job opportunities in the domain of agriculture technology will also, increase with the increase in the rate of growth of population in India and

**Job opportunities in agriculture technology will grow with the increase in the rate of growth of population in India and abroad opening a plethora of career options to choose from**

abroad. There are a plethora of career options to choose from.

Agriculture Scientist, Agriculture Equipment Manager, Agriculture Equipment Maintenance Manager, Agriculture Portal Developer, Agriculture Software Developer, Agricultural App Developer, Plant Protection and Quarantine Manager, Agricultural Pesticides Manufacturing Manager, Agriculture Research and Development Manager, Agricultural Product Marketing Manager, Agricultural Supply Chain Manager, Agricultural Equipment Maintenance Manager, Agricultural Products & Services Manager, Agricultural Product Patenting Manager, Agricultural Software Services Manager, Agriculture Technology Research Manager, Agriculture Manager, Agriculture Technological Products E-Commerce Portal Developer, Agriculture Technology Development

Manager, Agriculture Technology Accelerator / Centre Manager, Agriculture Technology Incubation Centre Manager, Agriculture Technology Commercialization Centre Manager, Agriculture Equipment Designer, Agriculture Equipment Electrical Services Manager and various other allied positions.

## REMUNERATION

Agriculture Technology has been offering a decent salary start. The sincere students passing out from the programme may expect a salary in the range of 2.5 lakh to 6 lacs. The MNCs may also offer a good salary in the range of 3 to 9 Lacs. The students are advised to focus on availing the internship opportunity and focus on experiential learning. The students should also focus on acquiring strong technology and information technology skills.

The writer is vice-chancellor of Sanskriti University

# ‘Doors opening for allied healthcare workers’

The country’s healthcare sector is on a growth trajectory offering plenty of lucrative options in radiography, says ARUNA SINGH

Have you ever noticed people in hospital gowns who escort patients for an X-Ray CT-Scan or chemotherapy? They are the one who operate the machine for you and later interpret the results for doctors. The word used for them are radiographers. They are equipped with the technological skills to handle imaging equipment and the interpersonal skills necessary for patient care. Educational and licensure requirements vary by state and profession, though completion of a certificate or two-year degree programme is common for radiologic technologists. Today, India’s healthcare sector on a growth trajectory, the career opportunities for such allied healthcare workers with expertise in diagnostic science have never been better. Services of diagnostic professionals can be essential for medical treatments and their demand is on the rise.

**Nature of work:** Radiologic technologists perform medical imaging exams and administer radiation therapy treatments. With the help of various imaging technologies, these professionals take pictures of a patient’s body for radiologists, who will then interpret the images. Radiologic technologists often specialise in a particular exam technique, such as mammography or bone densitometry. These professionals can also assist oncology teams in delivering radiation therapy to cancer patients. The technicians work in hospitals, clinics, imaging centers, private physician offices or even mobile imaging service centres.

**Opportunity:** You could specialise in dozens of clinical areas ranging from prenatal care to orthopedics. You could manage an entire radiology department, including its budget and personnel. You could teach, inspiring new generations of radiologic technologists, or you could perform research that leads to breakthroughs in diagnostic imaging or radiation therapy. With additional education, you could become a radiologist assistant, expanding your capabilities by serving as a radiologist extender. The boundaries of your career in radiologic technology are determined only by your own abilities and interests.

**Skills:** Good communication skills, a focus on detail, and careful attention to procedure are essential to success as a radiology technician. Physical strength is needed to position patients, and at times, to lift them onto examination table. As with health care professionals in general, empathy, cultural sensitivity, and high ethical standards are necessary as well.

**Eligibility:** The curriculum for radiologic technology and related programmes includes coursework as well as a series of supervised



**Aruna Singh**  
Principal, Delhi Paramedical and Management Institute

clinical exercises where students learn how to position patients and perform procedures. A background check, immunisations, and a physical examination may be required prior to entering these programmes. Applicants can pursue certificate courses, diploma courses, as well as bachelor’s course in the field of radiology. Duration of the diploma course is one-year and two-year, eligibility is 10+2 preferably with Physics, Chemistry and Biology/Math or equivalent in any stream from a recognised Board or university.

**Remuneration:** The average starting salary ranges between ₹7,000-₹10,000 per month in Government/private hospitals. However, earnings are more in private practice as compared to salaried jobs. A large aging population in need of imaging to diagnose and treat medical conditions should keep demand strong for radiologic technologists. The Bureau of Labour Statistics predicts employment growth of about nine per cent between 2014-2024 for this profession, and 17,200 new positions will need to be filled.

Opportunities are also there in Middle-eastern countries. In these countries radiographers get salaries between ₹30,000-₹50,000 per month. In the UK, the average starting salary of a newly qualified radiographer is around £17,000 per year which is much more than what it is in India.

We are living in a time where there is no dearth of disposable income amongst middle class Indians; the pleasure-seeking principle has modified the lens through which an individual explores the possibilities open to him. There is an explosion in the demand for hedonistic attributes of products and services associated with essential necessities.

The mushrooming of SMEs (small and medium scale enterprises) brought on by an increasing trend towards entrepreneurship, has led to a greater demand for graphic and communication designers to design their web pages and develop out-of-the-box communication design strategies for their promotional content on social media.

**A growing demand for designers:**

Hence, there is a growing demand for designers in almost all major disciplines of design — spatial design, architecture, communication design, graphic designing and fashion designing. Having a flair for design is an essential attribute but it needs to be backed by a sound technical education in that particular discipline. You need to have a conceptual understanding of the dictums of that pedagogy, along with a study of what has worked in the past, what has not, and knowledge of evolving global and local trends.

A qualification from an institute of repute is not just an option but has become mandatory to enable one to penetrate the design community. Immersing oneself for a few years through the rigours of a design

## MINDIT

college, delivering outcomes under the pressure of project deadlines and working in teams, imparts the requisite skill-set and training for entering the design ecosystem.

During the tenure of your studies, you will get several opportunities to volunteer and participate in seminars, lectures, workshops, events and master classes. Never forfeit these opportunities to network with industry professionals. You can leverage them to your advantage by making contacts with professionals to procure projects and find mentorship.

**Freelance projects:** After you have

understood the fundamentals of design in the first year and assessed your own designing sensibilities, you will be able to take on freelancing projects by the time you enter second year. These will help build your portfolio and be a point of connect with the design industry before you get absorbed finally.

**Internships:** An opportunity to intern with a good design studio can lay the brickwork towards a rewarding career. Ensure that you add significantly to your design portfolio during your internship. Displaying your talents and dedication to

your internship project can result in the much coveted offer from the company, after you graduate.

**Academia:** All those of you who are passionate about teaching, can enter the world of academia by gaining an in-depth industry exposure of 6 to 10 years as a professional or as an entrepreneur. After having worked for a decade or so, you will come to understand the nuts and bolts of the industry and its workings.

**Getting the required exposure:** There are many design exhibitions and art fairs held in the various metropolises of India, each year. India Art Fair (IAF) is conducted in Delhi each year; it features both veterans and upcoming artists. Amazon India Fashion Week (AIFW) is another exhibition where

upcoming fashion designers and established players participate each year. India Interior Retailing - Conference, Awards and Exhibition is another exciting event, usually held in October in Delhi. The UXINDIA was held at Hyderabad in 2019. That was a great platform where graphic and communication designers of India and the world had converged to discuss new ideas and trends. Try to optimise the opportunities that present themselves to you and attend as many events as possible. Such kind of exposure will stretch your imagination beyond the confines of the college walls and enable you to come up with ingenious yet commercially viable ideas.

The writer is Dr Jitin Chadha, Director, Indian Institute Of Art and Design



application form.  
**Application deadline:** May 1, 2020.

**The SciencesPO American Foundation invites applications for Stephen M Kellen UG funding** for international students in France and Germany. The Stephen M Kellen scholarship covers two years of tuition fees at Sciences Po and the living allowance of \$6,000 per year. All nationalities are eligible to apply.

**Eligibility:** The candidate must be admitted to Sciences Po’s dual BA with Freie Universität Berlin. The grant is awarded to a student who exemplifies the values promoted by Stephen M. Kellen: Excellence – as reflected in academic achievement. Vision – as demonstrated through a written submission on a selected topic. Generosity – as shown in a commitment to service to others.

**English Language Requirements:** Language requirements are: French B2, German B2 or English B1.  
**How to apply:** Send the following to [scholarship-at-usscpo.org](mailto:scholarship-at-usscpo.org): Completed application form, Personal statement describing the motivation for studying in the city of Berlin (1,000) in English, Essay on an Actuality theme (2,000 words) in English.

**Application deadline:** June 30, 2020

**The University of Leeds invites applications for scholarships for the academic year 2020-2021.** These opportunities are open to pursuing a master’s degree program in the UK.

There are ten scholarships of up to £12,000 offered by the campus.

**Eligibility:** Must hold a First Degree at undergraduate level equivalent to at least a UK Upper Second Class Honours degree. Should either have graduated with the appropriate First Degree or be in their final year of study. All given supporting documents must be scanned and ready to upload with an online application. Required documents include degree certificate, academic transcripts and scanned copies of any UK visa/permits you currently hold or have previously held if you are applying as an international student.

**Language requirement:** Applicants must ensure that they are able to meet the English language requirements in order to be able to study at the university.

**How to apply:** Apply for a relevant taught programme of study and be in receipt of a Student Application Number then complete the online

## DIGITAL MARKETING AT IGI AVIATION SERVICES

Location: Delhi  
Stipend: ₹5,000-₹6,000 per month  
Link: [internshala.com/i/3073660](http://internshala.com/i/3073660)  
Application deadline: April 2, 2020

## HUMAN RESOURCES (HR) AT IGI AVIATION SERVICES

Location: Delhi  
Stipend: ₹7,000-₹8,000 per month  
Link: [internshala.com/i/3073661](http://internshala.com/i/3073661)  
Application deadline: April 2, 2020

## DIGITAL MARKETING AT YMGRAD

Location: Delhi  
Stipend: ₹6,000-₹12,000 per month  
Link: [internshala.com/i/3073662](http://internshala.com/i/3073662)  
Application deadline: April 2, 2020

## BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT (SALES) AT D'WELL RESEARCH

Location: Work From Home  
Stipend: ₹3,000-₹5,000 per month  
Link: [internshala.com/i/3073663](http://internshala.com/i/3073663)  
Application deadline: April 3, 2020

## EVENT MANAGEMENT AT DAY DIAMOND

Location: Bengaluru  
Stipend: ₹5,000 per month  
Link: [internshala.com/i/3073657](http://internshala.com/i/3073657)  
Application deadline: April 3, 2020

## IOS APP DEVELOPMENT AT SUREBOT TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS

Location: Bengaluru  
Stipend: ₹10,000 per month  
Link: [internshala.com/i/3073658](http://internshala.com/i/3073658)  
Application deadline: April 3, 2020

## CONTENT WRITING AT SATTVA CONSULTING

Location: Bengaluru  
Stipend: ₹15,000-₹18,000 per month  
Link: [internshala.com/i/3073659](http://internshala.com/i/3073659)  
Application deadline: April 3, 2020

## STUDY ABROAD

‘Germany’s higher education has something for everyone’

Want to study abroad? Take up courses in engineering and science in Germany, says SUKHJIT SINGH ANAND

The German higher education is one of the best in the world. Whether it’s cars or education, people everywhere recognise Made in Germany as a seal of quality. One can benefit from Germany’s long and

famous university tradition especially in the fields of engineering and science. A German university degree is highly respected by employers around the world.

The country’s higher education system has something for everyone. There are almost 450 State-accredited universities with some 15,000 degree programmes in Germany. The universities offer degree programmes in every possible subject and academic level.

Around 12 per cent of students at German universities come from foreign countries. One can make friends from around the world, become acquainted with different countries and expand horizons.

Germany due to its aging population is in huge need of young work force. More than 35% of their population is above 55 years. Going to Germany at a young age, getting

familiar with their culture and language makes one the most deserving candidate. Germany in general is in need of five lakh engineers and IT professionals.

The wages being offered are unmatched to India. As a fresh engineering graduate an individual gets nothing less than ₹2.5 lakh per (month approximately) and as a post graduate you can earn at least ₹3 lakh per month.

German student visa is Schengen Visa hence allowing you access to the 26 Schengen or EU countries. Thus providing an opportunity to explore the entire European culture while studying and adding a new dimension in ones personality. The visa also allows working for 20 hours per week as a part time job when pursuing the degree programme.

You are permitted to work for 120 full days or 240 half days in a year.

This visa also allows multiple entry and exits in Germany. Once the study programme gets over irrespective of the university, course and location the student is allowed to get a 1.5 years of job seeking visa. Three-year of full-time job makes the student eligible for a Permanent residency as well.

The writer is Managing Partner, The Calculus (www.thecalculusgroup.com)

## IN BRIEF

### ONLINE CLASSES FOR THEIR REGULAR STUDENTS

With the motto of not letting Corona Virus(Covid-19) affect studies, the JK business school started their online session(Classes) for their students through G-suite to resume classes and fight against Coronavirus. This initiative helped the students in not hampering their education and syllabus due to college shut down. With the help of online classes, students are able to complete their courses and also clearing the doubt in real-time.

Through G-suit students are getting online presentations, classes,

assignments and can clarify their doubts in real-time. All classes are recorded and shared with students.

Prof (Dr) Sanjeev Marwah, Director, JK Business School said: “We have started online sessions. In this technological era we are using technology as a solution. It will help everyone to be safe and also not compromise with their studies. Our faculty are available any time for solving the query of students, they can be reached through phone calls or video calls other than the online session.”

### CONVOCATION CEREMONY AT TKWSIBF

The TKWs Institute of Banking and Finance (TKWSIBF) held its convocation ceremony for the students of one-year PG diploma and three-year advanced diploma at India International Centre.

The programme was launched by the chief guest RK Dubey, former chairman of Canara Bank, Rajendra Goel, Chairman of

TKWs, Harpreet Kalsi, Asia Head of Sunlife Financial, Ujala Bedi, Director of Navjyoti India Foundation, and Yusuf Hashmi President of ISACA by lit the lamp in front of Goddess Saraswati.

To become a \$5 Tn economy, India needs a robust banking sector with a new age ideology. In the first decade, TKWSIBF has produced

1,000 future bankers who are bringing change in the way banks and financial companies are working.

“In the next 10 years, we will work to help our alumni grow into leadership roles and influence the model of banking in the entire nation,” Prof Amit Goyal, TKWSIBF’s founding director said in his address at the event.

### IIT KANPUR-LA TROBE VARSITY RESEARCH ACADEMY

The IIT Kanpur-The La Trobe University Research Academy will boost both organisations’ research capabilities and bring together experts to create a globally recognised centre for research.

The academy will be based in Kanpur, with a strong presence at La Trobe’s Australian campuses for visiting research academy staff and up

to 40 PhD students, who will be eligible to apply for scholarships. Speaking at the launch, IIT Kanpur Director, Professor Abhay Karandikar said: “We are excited about the setting up of the research academy as it will facilitate a close partnership between two universities, strengthen our research ecosystem and lead to on-ground translation of this work.”



## Trend Slazer

### Arjun recalls mother on death anniversary

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

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

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



### 'It is unimaginable for me, as a parent, to think of being separated from my children

during nation lockdown. While the world talks about humanity, I think it represents more than just an idea, especially for parents sharing custody of their kids and how to keep their kids close to them without infringing on the right of the other.'

—Hrithik Roshan



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

### Tom to bring back Meghan Markle

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

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

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

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



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

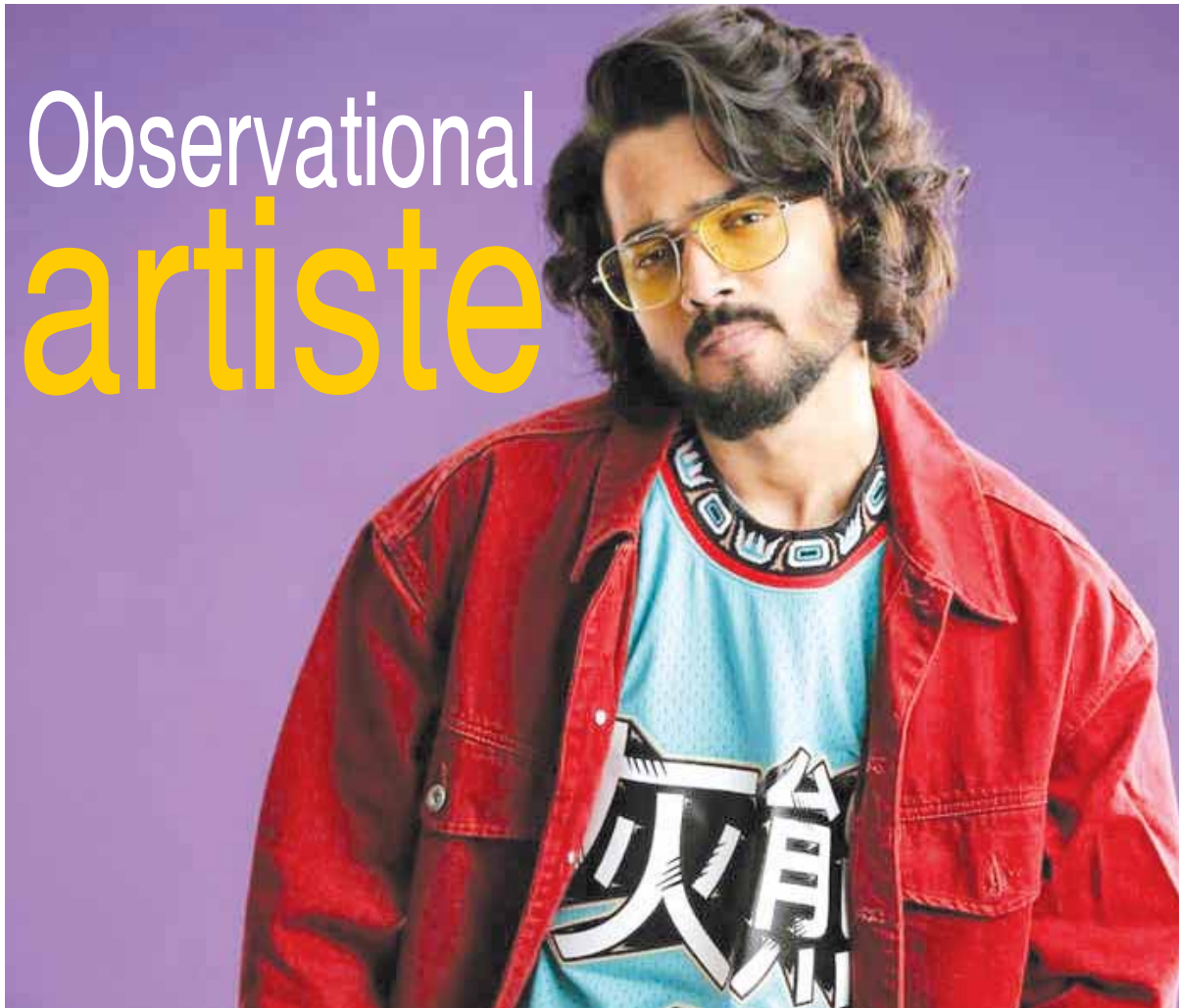
SAIMI SATTAR

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

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

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

## Observational artiste



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Bollywood supports 21-day lockdown

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

—JANS



## The senior hour

Stores around the world are setting up special shopping timings for old citizens amid Coronavirus fears

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—AP



# Rescheduled Oly need sacrifices from all stakeholders: Bach

# Coaches back to drawing board

AFF ■ LAUSANNE

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

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

The IOC’s role, Bach said, was “to make the Olympic dreams of athletes come true”.

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

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

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

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

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



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

German said.

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

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

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

## Tokyo postponement will have ‘no impact’ on Paris 2024: organisers

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

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

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

“It was the best decision for the athletes, for all the players in the Games,” added Estanguet.

“I believe that the Games must stay in their place.

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

“We are advancing on our schedule independently of that of Tokyo.”

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Indian athletics has not produced an Olympic medalist till date.

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

“I don’t think we can start doing anything before September or October. Then the seven-eight months before the Olympics (in 2021) may not be enough. Had it been 2022, it would have been better,” he added.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# BWF looking at possibility of freezing rankings

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Badminton World Federation (BWF) on Wednesday said it might freeze the world rankings for a while as it works on a “fair solution” to the Olympic qualification process after the COVID-19 pandemic forced a postponement of Tokyo Games.

There have been growing calls to freeze the world rankings after cancellations and postponements wrecked the sport’s calendar. Indian shuttlers Saina Nehwal, B Sai Praneeth, Parupalli Kashyap and H S Prannoy have been leading the way in expressing concerns.

“For our athletes, we will review any impacts on the Olympic and Paralympic qualification system to ensure a fair solution is found to qualify players for the postponed Games,” the BWF said in a statement.



“BWF, in the short-term, is also looking into the possibility of freezing World Rankings until international tournaments

start again.

“However, we are still working on the technical solution to ensure the freezing and eventual unfreezing of World Rankings works fairly for all players and we will announce this shortly.”

Shuttlers in the singles competition have to be inside top-16 of world rankings to qualify for the Olympics. In doubles, a country can field one pair if they are in the top 16 and two if both pairs are in the top eight.

## BAI postpones National Badminton C’ships

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

“Now that the government has extended the

lockdown, we have decided to postpone the 84th Senior nationals badminton C’ships and 75th Inter State — Inter Zonal. It is unfortunate that the tournament couldn’t be held as planned but it is a grave situation and fighting this disease is the priority,” BAI General secretary Ajay Singhania said.



## Olympic postponement ‘wise & great’ decision

IAN S ■ TOKYO

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe heard from US President Donald Trump during phone talks that the decision to postpone the Tokyo Olympics for one year was the right one, Japan’s top government spokesperson said on Wednesday.

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

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

Abe and Trump confirmed they would work closely to realize the games in a “complete” way as “proof that humankind has beaten the virus,” Suga also said, adding that the two leaders also pledged to work together to tackle the global coronavirus pandemic.

## IOA, Sports Ministry to revise preparation plans

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

“I am holding discussions and there would be meetings scheduled with the Federations after the locked-down in India is over. Athletes’ safety is our utmost priority now.

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

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

## Shreyas eagerly awaits representing India in Tests

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Test cricket is ultimate test of batsmanship and Shreyas Iyer is now “eagerly waiting” to don the India whites having cemented his place in limited overs format.

The stylish right-hander has already made a mark as a No 4 in white ball formats and there is a lot of buzz that once India again play Tests at the end of the year, he might replace a big name in that Indian middle order.

Asked about his Test ambitions, Shreyas during an interactive session on Twitter said: “It is the ultimate test. It’s every cricketer’s dream to play Test cricket. I’m eagerly waiting for my opportunity to represent my country in whites also.”

Shreyas, who is also the skipper of Delhi Capitals in the Indian Premier League, and has worked with Ricky Pointing, also said that the freedom which the former Aussie skipper gives to a player was unbelievable.

“He is an outstanding coach to work under and the amount of freedom he gives you is mesmerizing,” added the stylish *Mumbaikar* when asked about Ponting’s coaching style.

Shreyas also had words of gratitude for his India teammate and senior pro Rohit Sharma.

“(Rohit) is a very good personality to be around. He’s very motivating, caring towards his teammates,” said Shreyas about Sharma.

He was also asked one word for his skipper Virat Kohli and he replied, “Relentless”.

He also said that cricketing icon Sachin Tendulkar, former England batsman Kevin Pietersen, former South African batsman Ab De Villiers, Rohit Sharma and Kohli were his role models.

The middle-order batsman also picked former India pacer Zaheer Khan as his all time favorite India bowler and Jemimah Rodrigues as his favorite women’s cricketer.



## Kohli & boys handed customised indoor workout routines



Virat Kohli with strength & conditioning coach Nick Webb

IAN S ■ NEW DELHI

With the government calling for a lockdown to fight the coronavirus outbreak, the Indian cricketers are all home and spending time with their families. But strength and conditioning coach Nick Webb in consultation with physio Nitin Patel has customised routines for Virat Kohli and boys to ensure they stay in top shape despite the pandemic induced break.

Sources in the team management said that

the duo of Webb and Patel have made player specific routines for all the contracted players to ensure that they can continue to stay in shape.

“All the players, irrespective of whether they play red-ball cricket or white-ball cricket or all formats have been given fitness routines which they are to follow and give updates to Webb and Patel from time to time. The routines have been created keeping in mind the demands of the players. So, for example, a bowler will have been given exercises which work to make his core and lower body strong. Similarly, a batsman has been given exercises which also work on his shoulders and wrists,” the source explained.

The source further added that the routines have been made keeping in mind the workout patterns of the players.

“So, for example, someone like a Kohli loves to train with weights as well. So, his routine would have weights involved like the clean and jerk and deadlifts and other exercises. While another player might be more comfortable doing free-hand exercises, so in that case, he has been given more free weight functional training options,” the source pointed.

## Kane ‘will be off’ if Spurs don’t win trophies

LONDON: Tottenham forward Harry Kane will leave the club next year if they fail to win a trophy in that time, Premier League all-time top-scorer Alan Shearer has warned.

Kane is yet to lift silverware in his career despite an eye-catching goalscoring record for both club and country.

The England captain has not played since January due to a serious hamstring injury and was on the losing side as Tottenham lost to Liverpool in last season’s Champions League final.

That is the closest the 26-year-old has come to major honours and Shearer feels it may be time to move on if that does not change in the coming months.

“My guess is, if he doesn’t win anything in the next 12

months then he has to leave,” Shearer told the *Match of the Day: Top 10* podcast.

“He’ll do another year, I think, and if nothing comes in terms of trophies, then he’ll be off.”

Shearer sits at the top of the Premier League scoring charts with 260 goals.

Asked if Kane, currently on 136 goals, could one day overtake his tally, the former Blackburn and Newcastle striker said: “It depends on his fitness, where he is and what success he’s had at whatever club he’s at — whether that’s at Spurs or somewhere else.

“It’s going to be hard for him. He’s on 136 and there’s a lot of ‘ifs’ being asked — if he stays fit or if he stays in the Premier League. It’s going to be tough, but it’s going to go one day.”

AFF

## Feverish fans fuelled virus at Italy CL match



Atalanta players celebrate at end of CL round of 16, first leg match against Valencia at San Siro AP

AFF ■ MILAN

Ecstatic fans cheering and hugging at the Champions’ League game between Atalanta and Valencia in February boosted the spread of the coronavirus, the mayor of the worst-hit Italian city said on Tuesday.

Bergamo, in the northern Lombardy region, is now Italy’s worst-hit province, with nearly 6,728 infections.

Its football team Atalanta had been

having a stellar season, with a historic Champions League qualification. Its game against Spanish rival Valencia on February 19 at the San Siro stadium in Milan had been feverishly awaited by fans.

Atalanta pulled off a stunning 4-1 victory — each goal met with shouts of glee, fans clutching at each other in excitement.

Bergamo Mayor Giorgio Gori told foreign journalists the match was “among the sad explanations” for the

## FIFA monitoring COVID-19 threat in India



NEW DELHI: World football governing body, FIFA, on Wednesday said it is monitoring the developments arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic in India, which is scheduled to host the Women’s U-17 World Cup in November.

FIFA said it is also exploring “alternative solutions”.

In India, the pandemic has affected over 600 people besides 10 deaths.

“FIFA is currently monitoring developments regarding the coronavirus outbreak in India to decide the future of the U-17 Women’s World Cup which is slated to be held in the coun-

try in November,” the apex body said in a statement.

“With public health and safety in mind, FIFA is also working with the Local Organising Committee to identify any potential impact on preparations for the FIFA U-17 Women’s World Cup India 2020, as well as finding alternative solutions to upcoming events that were planned in India in the lead up to the tournament,” it added.

Sixteen teams will take part in the World Cup, of which only three have sealed their berths.

India has qualified as the host nation, while North Korea (winner) and Japan (runner-up) progressed from the Asian qualifiers.

FIFA is also working with representatives of all confederations regarding dates for their respective qualifying tournaments.

The World Cup is scheduled to be held from November 2 to 21. PTI