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DECIDED NEXT WEEK

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10 VIVACITY

# Centre provides ₹1.7L cr succour to poor

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



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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

The economic package to help migrant workers, labour-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

tributed is estimated to be ₹16,000 crore.

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

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

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said.

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

"Wage earners below

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

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

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



ARCHANA JYOTI/TN  
RAGHUNATHA ■ NEW DELHI

With just around 25,000 samples tested from around 24,000 individuals so far, India with a billion plus population has to go a long way in assessing the true extent of coronavirus spread.

The test size is being considered as one of the lowest in the world on population yardstick. Various reports as well as the World Health Organisation (WHO) has been insisting on "test, test and test" asserting

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

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

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

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

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

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## India has over 1-yr foodgrain reserve

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

Sources said 58.49 million tonnes of grains can enable the



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

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

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

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

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### CUSHION AGAINST FINANCIAL PROBLEMS

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

## 88 new cases, highest single day hike

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

"It has been decided that scheduled international commercial passenger services shall



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Detailed report on P8

## Community kitchens to feed poor, migrant labourers in UP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

After ensuring supply of essential commodities to people at their doorsteps so that they stayed indoors during the 21-day lockdown across the state, the Uttar Pradesh government on Thursday launched the much-needed community kitchen to feed the poor and stranded people.

"On day one, we prepared over one lakh food packets and distributed them among the needy in the state. Around 15 NGOs and other groups are helping the government while

religious groups and other outfits have also offered to join the movement. In the first phase, Lucknow, Agra, Noida and Ghaziabad have done good work in community kitchen," said Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Awanish Awasthi in Lucknow on Thursday.

The additional chief secretary said that doorstep delivery was working efficiently and on Thursday, seven lakh litre milk was distributed through packets and the supply would be increased to 15 lakh litre in the next three days. He said that at present, 6,902 mobile vans and

e-rickshaws along with 11,668 carts were supplying the essential commodities to the people.

"Our priority is the urban areas. In Lucknow, there are 3,190 mobile vans, while 1,952 vans are operational in Kanpur," he said. Awasthi said that Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath had also directed that public address systems be fitted on government vehicles so that people could be made aware of the government decisions.

Speaking on the lockdown violators and blackmarketeers,

Continued on Page 4

### BEING HUMANE!



Despite being under stress maintaining law and order, UP police personnel extended their humane touch when they came to know of several people walking home to their villages from the national capital in Bulandshahr. The migrating poor were located, handed food packets and relief material and then vehicles arranged to drop them near their villages.

### Five more test positive in UP

Lucknow (PNS): ive more people have tested positive for novel coronavirus in Uttar Pradesh — three in Noida and one each in Baghpat and Agra.

With this, there have been 43 confirmed COVID-19 cases in the state so far.

A man and his wife had tested positive for coronavirus in Noida two days back and their daughter had also tested positive along with two members of their company, he said.

Those who tested positive in Agra and Baghpat are males. The man who tested positive in Baghpat had travelled to Dubai.

## Serving humanity is serving God: Yogi Adityanath

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that the government's first priority was to protect the poor and the daily wage earners as the lockdown would financially hit them very badly because "as a sanyasi, I believe that serving humanity is serving God".

"I am a chief minister but before that I am a yogi and a sanyasi. My background is connected with Hindu mutt which is dedicated to manav sewa. Nar Sewa, Narayan Sewa' is the mantra of Hindu philosophy. I have seen the dedication of mandirs and mutts towards



serving humanity, particularly the poor and the downtrodden," the chief minister said in a free-wheeling interview to this reporter in the state capital.

"Therefore, when we talked about lockdown to contain the spread of coronavirus, my first thought went towards these daily wage earners and I wondered how they would make their both ends meet if restrictions were imposed. I have seen how mutts make arrangements to provide free food to the poor without looking at one's caste, creed and colour. So, I told the officials to first chalk out plans for the poor and then go for lockdown," Yogi said, tapping softly the armrest of the sofa he was sitting on at his 5, Kalidas Marg official residence in Lucknow.

The chief minister said

that at that juncture he had two options; one to seek help from the Centre and second, arrange funds for the poor. "We opted for the second option. I asked the officials to make all arrangements so that no one slept empty stomach," he said, elaborating on the 'Nar Sewa Narayan Sewa' project his government has launched.

The Uttar Pradesh government has launched a scheme under which daily wage labourers are given ₹1,000. The money was transferred to the accounts of 20 lakh daily wage earners through DBT.

"Our government is giving

a maintenance allowance of ₹1,000 to street vendors, rickshaw-pullers, e-rickshaw drivers, construction workers and porters who have lost employment because of the lockdown. People have been asked to stay indoors. Railway stations and airports have been shut down because of coronavirus. Buses are off the road. This means rickshaw-pullers, e-rickshaw operators and tempo drivers have no work. It is the responsibility of the state to provide relief to these people and this money (maintenance allowance) will come handy for them," Yogi said, adding that the government support would

continue till lockdown.

The chief minister said that the government was providing free ration to poor people having below poverty line (BPL) ration cards, destitute, old age pension holders, construction workers and daily wage workers who were not entitled for ₹1,000 benefit.

"They will get 20 kg of wheat and 15 kg of rice. District magistrates have been issued directives in this regard and sufficient funds have been sent to all districts," he said.

In 2017, during floods, I had adopted a model, which proved successful, where food packets were distributed among

the flood ravaged people. I asked why can't we do the same now and also give to the people food packets having rice, flour, oil and other basic things. Thus, we made a plan to distribute food to over 1.60 crore poor families who have anyto-daya card or are very poor," he said.

Yogi takes a pause, looks around the long hall having sofa sets along the wall which has big pictures of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Ram Nath Kovind. The side table has a memento presented by members of minority community while at

Continued on Page 4

### CAPSULE

#### MARKET CLOCKS BEST 3-DAY RALLY IN YEARS

Mumbai: Equity benchmarks surged for the third straight session on Thursday, logging their best three-day gains in years.

#### PAK FORCIBLY MOVING +VE PATIENTS TO POK

Mirpur: Amid strong protests by locals, the Pakistan Army has started to move Covid-19 positive patients from Punjab province to Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) and Gilgit Baltistan — the two most marginalised areas.



# 12 committees formed to implement action plan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has set up 12 committees of top officials to implement the action plan formed for winning the war against coronavirus.

The chief minister's office will oversee the work of all the committees through IGRS, CM Helpline and coordinate with them. All the committees will monitor the entire situation 24 hours a day, the chief minister said.

The government is working on a war footing to ensure that there is no shortage of essential commodities, the chief minister said, adding that their priority was the section of society that earns and eats daily and also those who get wages for the number of days they work.

"Workers, street vendors, hawkers and rickshaw-pullers etc. come under the section of those who work and earn every day. Rs 1,000 each is being sent to their accounts. Employers have been instructed not to cut anyone's wage," the chief minister said.

Yogi has directed all district magistrates to provide foodgrains along with Rs 1,000 to those who are deprived of this benefit till now.

"The police and administration together should make the lockdown effective in the larger interest of the people. Also, be very strict against black marketing and hoarding. Take stern action against the blackmarketeers," the chief minister said and added that if necessary, action be taken against them under the NSA (National Security Act).

During this time, complete arrangements for clean water, sanitation and sanitisation will be ensured from the city to the village and government institutions, especially police stations, jails, police lines and police training centres.

# Yogi interacts with people

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath continued his interaction with people and monitored arrangements for doorstep delivery of essential commodities and food to the needy so that no one starved in the state.

On Thursday morning, Yogi interacted with 60,000 gram panchayats across the state and informed them about the steps taken by the government for the 21-day lockdown to counter the spread of coronavirus.

The interaction was held from the chief minister's official residence at 5, Kalidas Marg in Lucknow, where officials participated while maintaining social distancing.

Official sources said that the chief minister informed the village heads that over 14,000 volunteers were working round-the-clock to distribute essential commodities at people's doorstep and more than 12,000 vans and carts had been engaged across the state to distribute the essential commodities.

Yogi Adityanath said that community kitchens had been started at



hostels and other places so that stranded people did not have to go without food owing to the lockdown.

However, the chief minister directed district authorities to keep

a close tab on the prices and supply of essential commodities and warned that those found involved in black-marketing or hoarding would be sternly dealt with.

has issued an order to amend the rules for use of MLA Local Area Development fund for testing, screening and other facilities for fight against Covid-19.

The principal secretary (rural development) has sent the order to the district magistrates of all the districts. The amount of money of MLA LAD fund will be made available to the Medical and Health department at the district level itself.

The chief minister said that there should be no shortage of fodder for

animals and milk supply should be maintained. The government is also ensuring that every household gets milk and commodities for daily needs.

The chief minister said that potato, mustard, peas and gram crops of farmers were ready and wheat was also getting ready. The officials have been asked to make proper arrangements for the purchase and storage of these crops.

"There will be no shortage of funds in this war against coronavirus," Yogi said.

# COVID-19: Fear of job loss real and unnerving

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

With everything locked down, fear has already started setting in among people working in all sectors about losing their jobs. A senior officials working with a reputed store said with no sales, everybody is fearful of repercussions in terms of large-scale retrenchment. "I fear losing my job as the company may be thinking in terms of cost cutting," he said. An airhostess working with a private airlines said the scene is rather bleak. "The aviation industry has also been majorly affected and if the three-week lockdown is extended, I am worried about how many will be left with jobs," she said.

A young man who joined a private company only few months ago said the fear of job loss is real and unnerving. "I don't see any hope because how are people going to make up for the losses. This lockdown may be extended and the first to get the axe are probably the fresh entrants like

me, and and it's a great concern for me," he said.

Some students in final years at universities and colleges said job search would be the toughest for them as economic depression looms large.

### IIA SUBMITS STATUS PAPER, REPRESENTATION TO GOVERNMENT

The Indian Industries Association IIA submitted a status paper and representation to the Central government on Wednesday regarding the condition of MSMEs in the current lockdown situation and also gave their suggestions.

IIA executive director DS Verma said that in view of the lockdown and complete shutdown of industries in affected districts from March 18 and now in the entire country from Tuesday midnight, MSMEs will be subjected to irreparable loss unless supported by the Central and state governments.

"Uncertainty looms large due

to shutdown of the industries. In case of prolonged shutdown, MSMEs may not be able to recover from the shock even after COVID-19 is controlled, unless the government extends liberal and urgent relief to MSMEs. He said that IIA has made the following suggestions:

For MSMEs, bank EMIs can be deferred for at least six months or more, subject to the impact of COVID-19. MSME's should be allowed additional working capital up to 30% for six months without any additional charges. Considering the unprecedented impact of the pandemic, no enterprise that cannot be called a habitual offender, be declared NPA, post COVID-19 circumstances.

RBI should issue mandatory instructions to do away with credit rating for the next six months so that MSMEs can get finances on lower interest rates.

TDS for payment of salaries and services should be suspended for six months.

## SP workers distribute relief material

**Lucknow (PNS):** Samajwadi Party said it had started distributing relief material to the poor people affected by the lockdown imposed to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

The SP said it had started the relief operation on the directions of party president Akhilesh Yadav.

SP spokesman Rajendra Chaudhary said here on Thursday that the party cadre was maintaining social distancing while distributing relief to the poor people who were mostly migrant labourers returning from Delhi and Punjab. He said the labourers were stranded as all public transport had been suspended follow-

ing the 21-day nation-wide lockdown imposed by the Centre. He said the Samajwadi Party was discharging its duty as a responsible opposition party in the hour of crisis.

The SP spokesman said the relief material was specially being distributed at highways and roads connecting two cities as many people were travelling on foot towards their villages and towns.

Earlier, the SP president Akhilesh Yadav said that the government should immediately make arrangements to transfer cash assistance into the bank accounts of the people of the country.

# Man kills father, woman throws kids in well

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

A youth battered his father to death and later ended his life in Aligarh while a woman threw her three children in a well in Sonbhadra and escaped.

In Aligarh, Pawan Sharma of Mohalla Ganj of Tappal used to live with his wife and two children. His father, Veerpal Sharma (55), also lived in the neighbourhood but worked at a dhaba in Mumbai. Due to the lockdown in Maharashtra, Veerpal had returned home last Sunday.

On Wednesday night, Veerpal had a tiff with his son Pawan over a trivial issue. The dispute took an ugly turn when Pawan went to his father's house and battered him with a stick till he died.

When the neighbour's learnt about the attack, they informed the police. When the police reached Pawan's home early Thursday morning, he locked himself in a room fearing arrest.

The police assisted by locals managed to break open the door only to find Pawan hanging from the ceiling fan. A case was registered and the bodies were sent for autopsy.

In Sonbhadra, two minors drowned after a woman pushed three of her children into a well. While one was saved by the police, the other two were not so lucky.

As per reports, Devanti Devi of Koharmara Tola of Pindari gram panchayat used to live with her in-laws and three kids as her husband Vijay worked in

Chennai. The family members went to attend a function on Wednesday but Devanti returned home with her children slightly ahead of others.

Around 10 pm on Wednesday, she reached her neighbours' home crying and told them that her kids had fallen into a well in Bijipur area and later fled the village. When the neighbours reached the well, they heard cries of the children. The informed the gram pradhan about the incident and he called the police.

The police rescued Annu (6), while Anuj (3) and Deepanshu (1) drowned.

The kids were rushed to a hospital where the latter two were pronounced dead upon arrival. Annu was discharged after treatment. The police were trying to track the whereabouts of absconding Devanti.

## UP Cong chief urges govt to help stranded workers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

With a large number of people working in other states being forced to take a long walk with spouses and small kids to return to their native villages in Uttar Pradesh, UP Congress chief Ajay Kumar Lallu demanded that the government identify such people and arrange food and transport for the stranded work force.

On Thursday, Lallu said that a large number of people working as construction workers, labourers etc. had embarked on a walk for hundreds of kilometres to reach their native places as public transport had been suspended due to

the lockdown.

"In the absence of transport, these hapless workers have no option but to trudge for long distances in the hope of making it to their homes and families. Pictures of men, women and small children undertaking the arduous journey without food, water and shade is heart wrenching," Lallu said, referring to interviews being aired by some news channels on Thursday.

"I demand that the Union and UP governments identify such people and provide food, water and other facilities especially for children. Besides, the government should also arrange for their safe return to their homes. But before that, they should also be tested free of cost for corona-virus," the Congress leader suggested.



A police vehicle is being sanitised in Lukcnow on Thursday

Pioneer

## Mason ends life after being denied entry into home

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A Mathura-based mason ended his life after his family refused to allow him to enter his parental house in Bareilly due to coronavirus scare.

The police sent the body for autopsy and were probing the death.

As per reports, Ravi Singh of Badhariya hamlet of Sirsa (Bareilly) used to work as a mason in Mathura. Due to lockdown imposed to prevent the spread of coronavirus, Ravi returned to his Bareilly home on Wednesday evening.

Since he had symptoms of flue with fever and congestion, his wife refused him entry into the house and asked him to first take a bath and clean himself. Upset by his wife's behaviour, Ravi left his home.

Late in the evening, an inebriated Ravi called up his wife and told her that he was going to end

his life. Taking him for being drunk, the wife did not take the threat seriously. But when Ravi did not return till late in the night, she and her family members along with neighbours started looking for him and informed the police about it. Efforts were also made to contact him over his cell phone, but it was switched off.

After searching through the night, the family members finally found Ravi's body hanging from a tree in Katka Bharat jungles on Thursday morning.

The police later rushed to the spot and sent the body for autopsy and started investigation.

Meanwhile in Ballia, a man and his son were detained by the police after being found carrying the body of a girl to immerse it in a river to carry out the last rites.

Surendra Verma of Tengarhi hamlet of Ramgarh and his son Nilesh were detained by the police for carrying the body of the 17-year-old girl on Thursday morn-

ing. Verma said that the deceased was her daughter Priti and had died of illness. He also gave her medical history and said that she was being treated for neurological problems in Varanasi Medical College. He also produced medical documents to buttress his claim.

Verma said that she fell ill two days back and was taken to a community health centre (CHC) where doctors asked him to take her home. However, on Thursday morning, she fell ill and complained of breathlessness and they were taking her to Varanasi but she died on way.

He said that instead of taking

back the body to home, they decided to immerse it in the river Ganga as the last rites. Verma said that he and his son were waiting for other family members when the police arrived.

Suspecting the death to be due to coronavirus, the police sent the body for autopsy.

# Unable to withstand nature's fury, farmer immolates self

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

Unable to withstand the calamities of nature over a long stretch of time, a farmer in Banda decided to put an end to his miseries by immolating himself on Wednesday.

Ironically, while the Banda district administration claimed to be looking into the suicide motive, the police dismissed it as an "outcome of a family feud".

As per reports, Hargovind Chaturvedi (60) of Gumanganj area of Nairaini (Banda) owned a land holding of 25 bighas and had taken a bank loan of Rs 1 lakh for the present crop season. But recent untimely rains and hailstorm had wreaked havoc on the standing crops in his field, forcing him to worry about ways to repay the bank loan on time.

To add to his woes, the recent lockdown to prevent the spread of coronavirus aggravated his plethora of problems. Unable to cope up with his miseries, Hargovind finally decided to put an end to them on Wednesday night and doused himself with kerosene

and set himself afire. His family members somehow put out the fire and rushed him to a nearby primary health centre where he succumbed to the burns soon after.

Sub-Divisional Magistrate Vandita Srivastava told local media persons on Thursday that she was not aware of the incident and assured of inquiring into the details. However, SHO of Nairaini police station, Girendra Singh, said that the victim committed suicide "due to a family dispute".

A case was registered and investigation is underway. Meanwhile in Jalaun, a boy was killed after being trapped inside a thrasher on Wednesday night. Businessman Rajendra, who used to work at his establishment in Hamirpur, returned to his native village in Jalaun due to the lockdown. On Wednesday night, he was helping his brother to harvest crop with a thrasher when his son Satyam (7) suddenly got caught. Before they could stop the machine, the boy was chopped to pieces in the machine and killed. A case was registered and the body was sent for autopsy.

## UPPCL waives service fee on online payment

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Power Corporation Limited (UPPCL) will waive the money charged by banks on online payment of power bills through credit or debit cards.

This was announced by Energy Minister Shrikant Sharma in Lucknow on Thursday.

The UPPCL in its order said that from now on, the power corporation would pay the money charged by banks from consumers for using debit or credit cards for paying their power bills online.

It also said that consumers could download the app from Google Playstore or go directly by linking through <https://bit.ly/2UpjQqK>, to pay their bills online.

Consumers can also pay their electricity bills through UPPCL website [www.upnenergy.in](http://www.upnenergy.in), while urban consumers can directly go to

THE UPPCL IN ITS ORDER SAID THAT FROM NOW ON, THE POWER CORPORATION WOULD PAY THE MONEY CHARGED BY BANKS FROM CONSUMERS FOR USING DEBIT OR CREDIT CARDS FOR PAYING THEIR POWER BILLS ONLINE

<https://bit.ly/2WBPeVB> and rural consumers to <https://uppcl.mpower.in/wss> to pay their bills.

The UPPCL also said that consumers could also contact toll-free number 1912 for any assistance.

Besides, consumers could get guidance in this regard from a video



on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1Wbf0Mla4I> ) to know how they could pay their power bills online, it added.

In a bid to simplify the process of bill collection, the UPPCL had introduced the system of online payment of bills in April 2012.

मध्यौचल विद्युत वितरण निगम लिमिटेड, प्रधान कार्यालय-4 ए, गोखले मार्ग, लखनऊ। तिथि विस्तारण सूचना
मॉविओनिओ के अन्तर्गत विभिन्न सामग्रियों के क्रय हेतु आमत्रित अघोषितखित निविदा विशिष्टियों में ई-टेंडर वेबसाइट पर निविदा प्रस्ताव अपलोड/जमा किये जाने एवं निविदा प्रस्ताव का भाग-1 खोले जाने की तिथि को अपरिहार्य कारणवश निम्नानुसार विस्तारित किया जाता है :-
क्र.सं० 1, क्रय/कार्य का विवरण : 11KV Disc Insulator (Polymer) 45 KN & 70 KN, ई-निविदा संख्या : मेडको / 2486 / 2020, निविदा ई-टेंडर वेबसाइट पर अपलोड करने की विस्तारित तिथि एवं समय 23.04.2020 को 13.00 बजे, निविदा भाग-1 खोलने की विस्तारित तिथि एवं समय : 24.04.2020, समय : 14.00 बजे। क्र.सं. 2, क्रय/कार्य का विवरण : 11KV 3x185 SQ MM XLPE Cable, ई-निविदा संख्या : मेडको / 2487 / 2020, निविदा ई-टेंडर वेबसाइट पर अपलोड करने की विस्तारित तिथि एवं समय 22.04.2020 को 13.00 बजे, निविदा भाग-1 खोलने की विस्तारित तिथि एवं समय : 23.04.2020, समय : 14.00 बजे। क्र.सं. 3, क्रय/कार्य का विवरण : 33KV 3x120 SQ MM XLPE Cable, ई-निविदा संख्या : मेडको / 2488 / 2020, निविदा ई-टेंडर वेबसाइट पर अपलोड करने की विस्तारित तिथि एवं समय 21.04.2020 को 13.00 बजे, निविदा भाग-1 खोलने की विस्तारित तिथि एवं समय : 22.04.2020, समय : 14.00 बजे। निविदा की अन्य सभी नियम एवं शर्तें यथावत् रहेंगी।
अधीक्षण अभियन्ता, (साओप्र०-ग्रथम) मॉविओनिओ, 4-ए, गोखले मार्ग लखनऊ। पत्रांक - 69, दिनांक - 26.03.2020, मॉविओनिओ, हेल्यलाईन नं० - 18001800440, "राष्ट्रहित में बिजली बचाए"



# Don't step out, call police for help: Commissioner

## Dist admn looks to streamline home delivery of essentials

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Commissioner of Police (Lucknow) Sujeet Pandey appealed to people to remain indoors unless they have some emergency. "In case you have some medical emergency or any other requirement to venture out, dial the police control room number (112). We will come to you for your help and try and solve your problem," he said.

Pandey also appealed to the public to help the police and district administration officials. "All the foodstuff, fruits, medicines and other things will remain available at the shops. Do not panic. The chain of supply of foodstuff and other things has been established. Doctors, paramedical staff and employees related to essential services have been issued passes. We are facilitating their movement to their duty points. Have patience, the shops will remain open from 6 am to 11 pm. When you go to a shop, follow social distancing," he said.

Meanwhile, the Gudamba police registered a case against a shopowner for overlooking their instructions on maintaining thin presence of customers at his shop on Thursday.

As per reports, the police were informed about huge crowd at the shop of as grocer, Aman Kumar, at Unity City crossing on March 23. A team reached there and asked the shopowner to ensure thin presence of customers. He was also briefed about the norms to be followed in view of the coronavirus pandemic. A little later, a team again reached there again and found the crowd present there.

"A case was registered against the shopowner for following police's advice," the Gudamba inspector said.

However, the shopowner said he was closing the shop when the police reached the scene and he was following

their advice but still he was booked.

Meanwhile, police lent a helping hand to street urchins and daily-wage workers stuck in different parts of the city on Thursday. In Chinhaat, a team led by inspector Kshitij Tripathi gave food items to daily-wage workers while in Ghazipur, sub-inspector Satish Yadav fed the daily-wage workers of Hardoi after being informed that they were starving.

A traffic homeguard, Ram Babu Yadav, distributed fruits and biscuits among street urchins. Similarly, a team led by DCP (Central) Dinesh Singh, ADCP CN Sinha and ACP AK Mishra offered food to rickshaw-pullers and pavement-dwellers in Charbagh railway station premises.

Besides, a team led by JCP Naveen Arora conducted checking drives at shops, medical stores and clinics in Gauri Bazaar locality under Sarojini Nagar on Thursday and made people aware about social distancing. He asked the shopowners to stay one metre apart.

Meanwhile, on the fourth day of lockdown on Thursday, the district administration focused on streamlining of home delivery of essentials. The system started with some hiccups but the district administration officials insisted that it would start functioning smoothly by Friday afternoon.

Many residents who tried the numbers of shops released by the administration said the lines meant for door-to-door delivery were either busy or there was no response. Officials said the system had just been introduced and would take some time.

By late afternoon, delivery boys became visible in the city as they said the best way to contact them is through mobile apps. Some shops opened in the city and there were crowds that were apparently now following the social distancing guidelines. Milk and medicine



(Clockwise from top) Police personnel at a shop following complaints of overcrowding; a cop sitting outside a shop to ensure social distancing; barricades put up on a road in Barabirwa; and security personnel on duty getting refreshments

Pioneer

shops remained open but local kirana store owners remained indoors.

People still opted for local stores for getting essential commodities because they admitted they are not tech-savvy.

Divisional Commissioner Mukesh Meshram said most of the stores selling essentials remained open and he personally took stock of the situation. He admitted that there was some problem initially in home delivery because one of the brand names had given a wrong contact number, but it

was later corrected. "The door-to-door delivery system has started working in some parts of the city. We will also be asking Residents Welfare Association representatives to pick up the essentials from markets. Social distancing was also observed by some shopkeepers in some places," he said. ADM, Trans-Gomti, who is also the mandi incharge, said that the door-to-door delivery system would start functioning properly by Friday. He advised people not to buy vegetables at exorbitant rates.

"I have personally visited the mandis and there is sufficient stock for supply. I advice people not to buy vegetables thinking what lies ahead, because we are adding the option of vegetables to door-to-door delivery in the next two days and these veggies will become cheaper. At this time, Lucknow has extra vegetables because vehicles that were stopped yesterday are in city today. Similarly, there is no dearth of any rice or pulses," he said. The ADM said people should also understand that



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this is not the time to opt for luxuries and that essentials are more than enough.

He further pointed out that it's only panic buyers who are making calls to check out whether the numbers meant for door-to-door delivery system are functional.

"I myself received these complaints and specifically asked if those making the calls are seriously looking for supplies, and they told me that they were checking on whether this could be an option in future," he pointed out.

He said that the stores have just opened and things would be streamlined soon. He stressed that people should not step out because it is not known from where they can catch the virus. He added that the stores were by and large open. "There are some stores which were not open because the owners live in other parts of the city while others are genuinely scared of the coronavirus spread. However, there are stores where owners are hoarding the supplies to increase the rates and we will

be conducting the raids shortly," he added. Head of the Physics department at Lucknow University Poonam Tandon said she has been calling the contact numbers since morning but getting no response. A travel agent said he would continue to opt for local stores because he is not tech-savvy. A resident from Chowk said they prefer local stores to home delivery. "However, the store closest to my house has run out of stock and I have to go for ordering online," he added.

## Bootleggers on the move to cash in on lockdown



Bootleggers in custody of Chinhat police

Pioneer

PRABHA SHANKER ■ LUCKNOW

With liquor shops closed under the lockdown in view of the coronavirus pandemic, bootleggers and manufacturers of illicit liquor are out to mint money by serving Bacchus lovers their choice of drinks. The Lucknow police have been briefed about their tasks and teams are keeping a close watch on such elements.

On Thursday, a woman identified, as Kusum Singh of Unnao, was arrested in Mohanlalgarh while carrying ten bottles of Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) and nine bottles of illicit liquor. Arrested near a grocer's shop in Mohanlalgarh, she was allegedly going to serve it to those who had placed orders through mobile.

In Kakori, the police arrested Ram Chander aka Sushil for carrying five litres of illicit liquor while in Ashiyana, Shubham Kumar Gautam of

Devi Kheda was arrested for carrying five litres of country-made liquor. On the other hand, the Chinhat police raided a place where illicit liquor was being manufactured, and nabbed two manufacturers on Thursday. Those arrested were identified as Vikas of Chinhat and Gopi of Indira Nagar. The police recovered 20 litres of illicit liquor from each one and also recovered huge quantity of raw material used in distillation of liquor.

After the coronavirus cases were detected in Lucknow and other parts of the country, shops, malls, markets and other crowded places were declared unsafe for public gathering. Following this, the Central government announced total lockdown asking the state governments to get these places closed. In compliance of the order, the state government ordered closure all these establishments except the grocery shops, medical stores.

"The lockdown also caused closure of liquor shops. There are hundreds of shops selling liquor, desi liquor and beer in the city. The sale of liquor in Lucknow itself is said to be Rs 1.5 crore per day. Now as these shops are closed, alcohol lovers are looking for alternative modes of getting their quota, giving an opportunity to bootleggers and manufacturers of illicit liquor," sources said.

General secretary of Liquor Sellers Welfare Association (LSWA) KL Maurya said those shops are closed, blackmarketing may exploit the lockdown period in their favour by selling liquor bottles at high rates. "The government should detect such persons and act tough against them," he said. A police spokesman said teams are keeping a close vigil on those involved in such practices and teams are conducting raids. He added that the police officials have been briefed about their tasks.

## KGMU VC asks people with virus symptoms to visit nearby hosps

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Isolation ward facilities are available at all the hospitals and those who are suspecting that they have contracted the coronavirus should seek help from the closest hospital rather than flocking to one centre. Vice-Chancellor of King George's Medical University Dr MLB Bhatt told this reporter that it is necessary in the interest of patients.

"It is the best for patient to have least movement. If they take vehicles, stretchers or wheelchair, there is a chance that they will transmit the infection. If they suspect they have coronavirus and they visit a hospital, they can infect others," Dr Bhatt said.

The KGMU Vice-Chancellor said it would be better for a COVID-19 suspect to call the team of CMO who

would visit his or her house to collect the samples. He emphasised that it is important for people to follow guidelines.

Asked about the facilities available at the KGMU isolation ward, Dr Bhatt said: "Apart from the medical facilities, the patients are allowed to use smartphones with internet. We have deputed a team of psychiatrists so that if the patients feel depressed or there are other issues in isolation, they can consult the counsellors," he added. He said though they are currently managing the disease, they will carry out a research also on the patients admitted in the hospital. "We have 21 coronavirus positive patient and we will carry out an analysis of the trend, their age and exposure as far as the virus is concerned, and compare it to other patients of Uttar Pradesh," he said.

## Confined to homes, people discover the 'chef' in them

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

From tapping their kitchen gardens to changing their diet plans and reducing the number of meals a day, city residents have come up with innovative ideas in terms of rationing as uncertainty looms large in view of the lockdown due to coronavirus pandemic.

Most of the people have turned vegetarians even as they say they are discovering the 'chef' in them as they download recipes from the internet. They say innovative ways are important in times of panic and daily scramble for necessities.

Abhishek Mishra, a student of mass communication, said they are limiting their movement by using tomatoes, chillies and brinjals which they have grown in their backyard. "We are also growing green

tea hence we pluck these leaves and put them directly in water to cut down on the regular tea consumption. We have also grown caraway seeds plants and we are using its leaves for meals," he said.

AK Pant, a retired forest official, said they are taking it easy and eating whatever is in stock, keeping in mind that it is important not to step out in these times. "We currently have potatoes and onion in our diet and we have given up on green vegetables. If a vegetable vendor passes by, it is fine otherwise we will not take any pains to get the veggies. If there are no vegetables, we will manage with pickles. Similarly, if one commodity goes out of stock, we switch to whatever is available," he said.

Almas, a housewife, said they would have meat and

chicken frequently but this is not the case now. "We have smoothly shifted to being vegetarians. We have 'daal-chawal' for lunch and chapatis and veggies for dinner. We make curd in the house and also pick up vegetables from the kitchen gardens," she said.

Rashmi Johri, a government official, said they are following the simple funda of focusing on lentils and pulses. "We make curry out of gram flour and are using lentils as vegetables. One can easily soak moong and chana daal and prepare them as ordinary vegetables," she said. Besides, she said she is using lentils to make panakes. "Make flour of lentils and mix them with water and one can churn out delicious panakes," she said.

Atul Raizada, working for a telecom company and staying

away from family, said he has reduced his meals from thrice a day to twice a day. "It's a brunch for me in the morning and early dinner and with no maid, this arrangement helps in keeping the utensils few and ration budgeted. I have stocked frozen peas and buttermilk and it is a repeat meal of 'kadhi' for me which is easy to cook," he said.

Vandana Mohan, a school teacher, said she has given up eating on her favourites such as eggs, noodles and pasta so that ration can last longer.

Pooja Saxena, a corporate employee, said she has downloaded many recipes from the internet and made potato the 'king of vegetables' in her house. "I am making potato-stuffed samosas, kachoris, honey-chilly potato and potato pea curry. I have also discov-

ered the chef in me and realised that the children are eating their meals with more interest than earlier," she added.

Pragati Saxena, a housewife, said no one feels very hungry and no one is stepping out. "In order to save my time in cooking, I have resorted to the simplest dish, 'khichdi'. If there is any vegetable which is available, I add to it. This is not the time to think in terms of anything lavish because we do not know what lies ahead," she said.

Abubakar of 'Idres' biryani fame said he is carrying out all innovations using vegetables since meat is not available. "I am not missing the non-vegetarian dishes because priorities are different now and I try to bring in new flavours as I cook my meals everyday," he said.

## DM releases list of medical stores for door-to-door delivery

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

District Magistrate Abhishek Prakash on Thursday released a list of medical stores for door-to-door supply of medicines. He also released a revised list of essential goods for home delivery. The District Magistrate also issued directions in view of the problem of maintenance and supply of essential commodities being faced by group housing societies and multi-storey residential apartments. He appointed the LDA Vice-Chairman as the nodal officer for the district to issue passes to people and vehicles for carrying out the maintenance work. He also directed the officials to identify the colonies which are not under the jurisdiction of LDA so that they can be also covered.

Meanwhile, the district administration on Thursday extended help to families of labourers residing near Shaheed Path. Rubbishing

## Cantt Board forms task force

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Lucknow Cantonment Board is ensuring that there is no disruption in essential services such as health & sanitation, water supply, streetlighting, hospitals etc. A special task force has been formed to sanitise the Cantonment area through spray machines. The task force is sanitising the Cantt area on a daily basis using

alcohol-based solution.

Posters and banners have been pasted in the Cantt area for awareness. Pamphlets have been distributed in the area to spread awareness. Announcement has been made to make the general public aware and follow government's instructions regarding lockdown. Cantt Board is ensuring compliance of government instructions and proper lockdown in Cantt.

reports of a team sent to the place on the basis of the screenshot of a tweet, District Magistrate Abhishek Prakash said there was no such tweet available.

"I do not know from where the screenshot came from. However, a team was still sent to the spot on Wednesday which the screenshot indicated, but no one was found

there". The DM said that they resent the team again on Thursday and found some construction labourers, who said that they had food for a few days and thus food packets were given to them," he said.

The DM said 15-20 people were found in that part and they were not from Chhattisgarh as the so-called screenshot had mentioned.



## Chandauli police rescue 16 workers

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chandauli police came to the rescue of 16 workers walking along the Varanasi-Samastipur railway track in an attempt to reach their village in Samastipur (Bihar).

Superintendent of police of Chandauli, Hemant KutiyaI, said that the labourers hailing from Bihar's Samastipur and Chhapra left for their homes in trains from Kerala's Calicut before the nation-wide lockdown. ]

They reached Jhansi from where they had to board another train to reach Samastipur. But upon their arrival at Jhansi, train operations were suspended due to the nation-wide lockdown. They somehow managed to reach Varanasi from Jhansi but could not get any transport to Bihar.

They later walked along railway tracks to reach Chandauli's Kuchman station sans food or water and decided to walk along the tracks to their homes at Samastipur and Chhapra. On being informed, a police team rescued the workers. They were medically checked and fed. The SP said that arrangements were being made to ensure their safe transit to their destinations.



Bhuiyan Devi temple in Indira Nagar being sanitised on Thursday in view of the coronavirus outbreak

## 80 per cent of LDA colonies sanitised

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Eighty per cent of Lucknow Development Authority (LDA) housing schemes have been sanitised in the last 24 hours. Besides, 1.25 lakh metric tonne of garbage has been collected since Monday. LDA secretary MP Singh said its officials chalked out a strategy to keep its residential schemes safe from the dreadful coronavirus. He said the authorities are using equipment of private agencies for sanitisation. These agencies are assisting the LDA administration free of cost, he added.

Planners have been constituted for all eight zones under the LDA jurisdictions. One team has been assigned to collect garbage while others are sanitising the residential colonies. Each team consists of four employees. He added that more teams would be pressed into service in each zone for door-to-door garbage collection. Singh claimed that the administration is capable enough to complete the sanitisation drive on a war-footing to keep the coronavirus scare at bay.

## Gang of thieves busted; 2 held



PNS ■ LUCKNOW

With the arrest of two persons on Thursday, the Ghazipur police claimed to have busted a gang that had burgled five shops in Mulayam Nagar market area in the past.

Those arrested were identified as Chhote Lal and Rahul, both of Barabanki. The mastermind of the gang, Sunil Shetty of Barabanki, and a juvenile offender, also said to be an active member of the gang, evaded their arrest when the team raided the place in Ghazipur on the intervening night of Wednesday and Thursday.

The accused confessed to their crime and disclosed that they worked under the leadership of Sunil Shetty, who used to give them tips on executing theft. They said they had conducted an intensive recce of

Mulayam Nagar market locality before striking at five shops.

The police recovered Rs 4,000 in cash and tools used for breaking into shops and houses from the accused. The theft had taken place in the intervening night of March 20 and March 21, which caused the traders to criticise police as they accused them of not carrying out night patrolling. Later, a shopowner, Amit Gupta, lodged a case in this connection. Also, Iram Tabassum of Shanti Nagar lodged a case of theft at her house. The thieves used jacks to lift the shutters of shops and decamped with cash and other items.

Meanwhile, the Chinhat police arrested two thieves who were involved in several cases reported during the past few months. Those arrested were identified as Aman Valmiki of Aliganj and Jang Bahadur of Chinhat. Police recovered two stolen mobile phones, a grinder, a drill machine and 55 grams of smack from their possession. Chinhat SHO Kshitij Tripathi said Aman used to take smack before committing the crime and he was said to be a drug addict. "He was also challaned under NDPS Act (use of psychotropic substance)," the SHO said.

## Caddie ends life

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A 26-year-old man working as a caddie at Lucknow Golf Club under Gautampalli police station ended his life at his house on Thursday morning. Police have yet to find out the reason why he committed suicide. The youth, identified as Dinesh Kumar of Martinpurwa, took the step on the intervening night of Wednesday and Thursday.

Deceased's mother Gyanwati informed the police about the incident around 4 am on Thursday. The police said Dinesh was found hanging from the ceiling with an electric wire tied around his neck.

## Sunni Waqf Board issues advisory to mutawallis

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Amid efforts to contain the spread of coronavirus, Uttar Pradesh Sunni Central Waqf Board on Thursday directed its mutawallis (caretakers) and other committees and individuals concerned to take effective measures to stop crowds from gathering in mosques, madarsas and dargahs coming under the Waqf.

In a statement issued in Lucknow, the UP Sunni

"Dinesh had locked the doors from inside before taking the extreme step. He did not respond to the calls made to wake him up after which I peeped inside through the slits of the doors, only to find him hanging," Gyanwati told the police. Police said Dinesh was unmarried and worked at Golf Club, but failed to state the reason behind the suicide. Locals suspected foul play claiming that Dinesh apparently had no reason to end his life. "He was hale and hearty and had no big responsibility to shoulder," they said. A police spokesman said the body had been sent for autopsy and further investigation was underway.

# National Capital silenced

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

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

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

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

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

thing they tell you they haven't. Some private individuals like Arjun and Ambika Pandey are distributing food packets and other doing so with fruit, but in these times, small private contributions can never catch up to state machinery.

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

the bus station, although it must be noted that the air in this area, usually thick with diesel fumes is strangely clean. Among those left behind by India's economic growth of the past few decades, there is confusion and helplessness, but they are beginning to understand the gravity of the situation, but they know that they are, as the saying goes, caught between a rock and a hard place. At popular destinations for local outings such as India Gate and Red Fort, the emptiness looks like the set of an apocalyptic movie rather than sites in an Indian city. There are some private vehicles around, but those are few and far between, mostly carrying officials and mediapersons.



But we face an enemy whom we cannot see, whom we do not know how to defeat, indeed nobody in the world knows how to defeat.

Earlier in the day, the Chief Minister, Arvind Kejriwal announced that there were 36 patients for SAR-CoV 2, the so-called 'Wuhan Virus' in the

capital, but he also highlighted the risks that healthcare workers face with one virus-infected patient who returned from Saudi Arabia infecting a Mohalla Clinic doctor who subsequently passed it onto his family. The dangers are ever present. Those in the know are pinning some hope on various

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

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

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

Consumer Affairs Secretary Pawan Agarwal on Thursday said the retail price of 2-ply and 3-ply surgical face masks remain the same. The rates will remain in force up to June 30. The Consumer Affairs Ministry had notified MRP for 2 ply and 3 ply "surgical" face masks at ₹8 and ₹10 per piece, respectively on March 21. But for 3 ply melt blown face masks, it had said MRP would at the rate that prevailed as on February 12.

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

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

The Ministry has also asked the State Governments to remove any bottlenecks and ensure continuous availability in supply of raw materials — Ethyl Alcohol, ENA (extra neutral alcohol) and ethanol to manufacturers of hand sanitizers. The permission has been given under the Drug Prices Control Order. Most of them have commenced production and others are likely to commence production in a week's time," Agarwal added.

State Governments have also been asked to give permission to distilleries on a priority basis to produce sanitizer in bulk, which can then be packed and bottled.

### FROM PAGE 1

### CENTRE PROVIDES ₹1.7L CR SUCCOUR TO POOR

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

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

### 88 NEW CASES, HIGHEST SINGLE DAY HIKE

He said social distancing is the strongest counter of the pandemic.Goa and Kashmir reported first coronavirus death. A 65-year-old man hailing from Hyderpora area, Srinagar, died on Thursday, becoming the first fatality in Jammu & Kashmir due to coronavirus while Maharashtra reported its fourth fatality.Dr Gangakhedkar dismissed claims that lack of travel or contact history of a Hyderabad positive case reflected that India was in the community transmission stage. "If we can't figure out how one-two people got the virus it just means that we have not done enough to trace the history," Dr Gangakhedkar said.Lav Agarwal, Joint Secretary, Union Health Ministry, said we can consider we are in community transmission stage only when there are about 20 to 30 per cent cases with no clue on how they got the virus."If India enters that stage, we will not hide it. We will tell people so that we can step up the level of alertness and awareness," he said.The Health Ministry officials also dismissed international studies saying India may face a staggering number of cases in the near future as doomsday predictors.On being asked about the predictions of a University of Michigan study, which said India could face between 100,000 to 13 lakh confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus by mid-May, Dr Gangakhedkar said there would be many doomsday predictors, but if the current lockdown is successful then we may not even see the current numbers budge. Agarwal said, "If we collectively work for it and follow guidelines issued by the government, we will soon be able to say that we have proved all these predictions wrong." He said social distancing has been able to help break the chain of Covid-19 spread. "While the numbers of Covid-19 cases are increasing, the rate at which they are increasing appears to be relatively stabilising. However, this is only the initial trend," he said.A senior Home Ministry official said the Government is working to ensure the supply of essentials. "The

Government is taking steps to ensure that production, supply or distribution of essential goods and services do not get affected during coronavirus lockdown. States are working to provide food and shelter to migrant workers," Punya Salila Srivastava, Joint Secretary, MHA said.The Health Ministry said 17 States have started work on earmarking hospitals for dedicated treatment of Covid-19 patients. Forty-five people have been cured so far.As per data by the Health Ministry, Maharashtra has reported the highest number of Covid-19 cases so far at 128, including three foreign nationals, followed by Kerala which has recorded 118 cases, including eight foreign nationals.

### AS CORONA TESTING RATIO TOO LOW, ASSESSMENT HAS LONG WAY TO GO

To ensure availability of testing kits, the Government through the ICMR has sought price quotes for the supply of 10 lakh antibody kits (serological test) for diagnosis of COVID-19. It will also procure 7 lakh RNA extraction kits, for a method which is currently used for the testing of the virus in the country. Since, the clearance of the company manufacturing these kits will take its own time, experts say that India is already too late in ramping up its efforts to contain the deadly disease.

Meanwhile, on the suggestions of the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI), the ICMR has given nod to labs at Virology Department of the All Indian Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS), Delhi, National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), Delhi, KEM, Mumbai, NICED, Kolkata and Nimhans in Bangalore to validate the testing kits. The DCGI had pointed out that the country's only lab, NIV-Pune that has been assigned for validation of kits will not be able to do job with cent per cent accuracy because of the load to test the kits hence, more labs should be asked to do the task.

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

In addition to over a 100 Government laboratories that have been approved for the COVID-19 testing, the Union Health Ministry has roped in close to 30 private laboratories with over 17,000 collection centres all over the country to carry out COVID-19 tests based on the ICMR protocols.

The laboratories are in the process of procuring the test kits and readying themselves for scaling up testing capabilities. The

ICMR has also indicated that it might go for parallel contracts to more than one vendors to ensure timely supply.

Once community transmission is documented, the testing strategy will undergo changes to evolve into stage-appropriate testing strategy, the ICMR has said. Advisory for testing are being reviewed and updated periodically. Now let's take a look at Maharashtra which has recorded the maximum number of positive cases. Amid reports that Maharashtra lacks enough testing facilities for Covid-19, State Medical Education Minister Amit Deshmukh does not quite agree with it.

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

According to Deshmukh, the State currently has a capacity to test 2,000 Covid-19 samples in 14 Government-run laboratories across the State. "Before the outbreak of coronavirus, we had three laboratories National Institute of Virology (NIV) in Pune, Kasturba Hospital in Mumbai and IGMCM Hospital in Nagpur that had the capacity to carry out 800 Covid-19 tests. We have now added 11 more medical college-com-hospitals across the State for carrying out the necessary tests. Together, we have the capacity to 2,000 samples in these 14 Government-run labs," Deshmukh said.

The 11 Government institution labs where Covid-19 testing has now been allowed are BJ Medical College-hospital, Pune, GSMC Hospital, KEM Hospital, Grant Medical-JJ Hospital, Haffkine Institute, all in Mumbai, AFMC college-hospital, Pune and Government medical college-associated Hospitals at Miraj, Akola, Aurangabad, Pune, Solapur and Nagpur.

In addition, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) on Wednesday granted permission to nine private laboratories in Maharashtra to undertake coronavirus tests. They comprise: HN Reliance Foundation Hospital and Research Centre, Kokilaben Dhirubai Ambani Hospital Laboratory, Thyrocare Technology Limited, Metropolis Health Care Limited, iGenetic Diagnostic Pvt Ltd, SRL Limited, Suburban Diagnostics (India) Pvt Limited, all in Mumbai, AG Diagnostics Pvt Limited, Pune and InfeXn Laboratories, Thane (west).

"I reckon that these private laboratories can together undertake 2,000 Covid-19 tests a day. If we put the capacities of the Government and private hospitals together, we have total capacity to undertake 28,000-30,000 coronavirus tests in a seven-day week. This is more than sufficient cases considering that we are currently testing referral

Covid-19 samples from various hospitals across the State," Deshmukh said.

iGenetic Diagnostics, which was one of the pathology labs with NABL accredited centers located in Mumbai, elsewhere in Maharashtra, Delhi and Bengaluru that have been permitted by the ICMR to undertake Covid-19 test, says it can carry out 500 tests in a day. "We can carry out 500 Covid-19 tests in a day. We will collect samples from the homes of patients on the basis of prescriptions. We will carry out tests at the Government-prescribed price of Rs 4,500 per test. We have taken this initiative to support the Government in all its efforts to control the spread of this disease" iGenetic Diagnostics' founder-CEO Arunima Patel said. Meanwhile, according to a medical bulletin put out by the Public Health Department of the Maharashtra Government on Wednesday evening, as many as 2,988 people have - since January 18 --been hospitalised in various isolation wards across the State owing to them developing symptoms such as fever, cold, cough etc. Of the total admissions, 2,531 laboratory samples were negative and 122 have tested positive for coronavirus.

### INDIA HAS OVER 1-YR FOODGRAIN RESERVE

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

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

In 2018-19, around 57 million tonnes of wheat and rice was distributed in the country through the ration shops network. That included grain for schemes such as National Food Security Mission (NFSM), Mid-day Meal Scheme, Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) and the Annapurna Yojana, apart from the needs of defence forces.

In the case of oilseed, one problem is that processing has to be quick, as they need to be converted into the edible form. This could mean some supply disruption. Even so, the oilseed stock with the Government is around 1.1 mt. Of this, 800,000 tonnes is groundnut seed and the rest is of mustard. Mustard seed's conversion into oil is easier and quicker than groundnut's.

The Centre allowed poor households applicable under public distribution scheme to lift six months of grains in one go. The move will not only ensure that ensure rural families have enough to survive but will also

keep a check on price rise. India has enough grain stock to supply to its citizens for more than one year.

### COMMUNITY KITCHENS TO FEED POOR, MIGRANT LABOURERS IN UP

the additional chief secretary said that six FIRs had been registered against blackmarketeers across the state so far.

In another decision, the government has amended the rules of Local Area Development Fund and now legislators can donate their quota for medical purposes to fight coronavirus through respective district magistrates.

Meanwhile, Awasthi said that three positive cases of coronavirus were reported from Noida and a fourth from Baghpat on Thursday, taking the tally of COVID-19 patients to 42 in UP. There are eight labs which are working round the clock to test suspected cases in the state.

"The chief minister also asked district officials of Noida, Ghaziabad, Agra and other districts to track people coming on foot to UP. "Such people should be provided lodging and fooding," he said.

On lockdown violation, the additional chief secretary said that police had registered 2,892 FIRs under Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code against violators across the state while 8,649 had been challaned and fine of Rs 1.44 crore was realised from them.

Awasthi said that the chief minister directed all district magistrates and district police chiefs to carry out joint patrolling in their respective districts.

### SERVING HUMANITY IS SERVING GOD: YOGI

one corner there is a fresco of Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar presented by Ambedkar Maha Sabha.

"Look, the world is in the grip of fear. The UP government had started making arrangements since January. Isolation wards were identified in each district and within a day or two we will have over 10,000 isolation beds across the state. The bureaucracy has been asked to stand up to the challenge," he said, adding that people were listening to him and this was the time officials too worked as directed.

Why do people listen to you, Is it because you are a chief minister or a sanyasi?

Smile returns on the face of the chief minister. "This is the 'sanskar' of Bharat where 'sanyasi' holds an important place. But when people see the aacharan (conduct) of 'sanyasi' and his dedication for the masses, their affection for him increases," Yogi said.



# Rajnath reviews future action plan

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

## Paramilitary forces told to set up pan-India facilities

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

antine suspected coronavirus patients.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

Farmers, daily wagers, poor women, people with disabilities

## Opp welcomes Central package to tide over coronavirus crisis

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

and this relief package," he said.

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

Derek O'Brien.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Sonia writes to PM Modi, suggests remedial measures against corona

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

The Congress chief also

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## IT Ministry issues work from home protocol for Govt employees



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Guidelines for e-doctors to reach out to needy

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

Telemedicine here.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Skype/ email/ fax etc.

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

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

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

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

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

Assamese, Bangla, Gujarati, Malayalam, Odia, Marathi, Kokborok, Mizo, Bodo, Nepali, Tamil, Punjabi, Telugu, Kannada, Urdu and Sanskrit, the books cover all genres of fiction, biography, popular science, teacher's handbook, and major books for children and young adults.

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

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

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

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

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



PAPER WITH PASSION

## Humanitarian crisis

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



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

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

## Data crunch

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



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

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

## Force majeure

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



AJOY KUMAR

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

ing with the customers.

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

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

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

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

to reach their villages.

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

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

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

## SOUNDBITE

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

**Indian cricketer**  
—Mithali Raj



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

**Megastar**  
—Amitabh Bachchan



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

**Top US scientist**  
—Anthony Fauci



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

**NC leader**  
—Omar Abdullah



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Lockdown imperative

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

**Varun Dambal**  
Bengaluru

### Myths vs facts

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

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

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

### Misreading Kashmir

This refers to the editorial, "Back to the people" (March 25). The Kashmir Valley has been subjected to violation of citizen rights for close to eight months now. There has been a blanket hold on the press and newspapers. Internet services still stand suspended. The cavalier promulgation of Section 144 and its unending nature is a poor reflection on governance. Only a Government that is ill-equipped to manage even transient socio-political aberrations would be transfixed into a freeze mode as this. We have brought on damage to the region's economy and worse, our national fabric.

It has now dawned on the Government that the absence of the Abdullahs from the scene is not so inconsequential to the new narrative it has designed for the Kashmir palimpsest. Without elected leaders, there can be no engagement with the people, who have been erased and forgotten for so long. Either it runs an inanimate State with mounting disillusionment or gathers its wits and acumen to infuse the real meaning of integration of the State with the pulse of the nation, with or without Article 370



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

**R Narayanan**  
Navi Mumbai

### Beef up tracking system

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

**Shambhavi**  
Via email

### For the sake of existence

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

**Manisha**  
Via email

Send your feedback to:  
letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

## COD a boon for everyone

The Govt will be able to improve efficiency and citizens will be saved from the unnecessary hassle of visiting various offices



DINESH TYAGI

Recently, students of a college in Delhi University, while being acquainted with the "Digital India" initiative of the Narendra Modi Government, were asked how many of them had gone to a Government office for availing services. About 90 per cent of them raised their hands. When they were asked how many of them would like to go back to the Government office for availing its services, the response was a big, resounding "No" from almost all of them. Asked to give a reason for this response, many of them cited long queues, uncooperative staff, being made to run from one counter to the other, rudeness, tardiness and the lackadaisical attitude of Government servants, as some of the factors that would prevent them from going back. And this was not just restricted to departments run by State administrations, it also included offices run by the Central Government.

The writing on the wall is clear. Given a choice, no one, particularly the new generation, wants to visit Government offices to get the simplest of work done. The experience of visiting a Government office, even if it is equipped with computers and air conditioners and other modern amenities, has not been very good for common citizens, particularly the younger generation, which is short on time and patience and has gotten used to getting what they want at the click of the mouse or a tap on a touchscreen. Apart from this, the inconvenience of travelling from their place of residence or work to the Government department, the time required to be spent on getting the job done, procedural ambiguity and availability of alternatives for such service delivery, play a major role in putting people off Government offices.

Today, there are various products being purchased through endless e-commerce platforms and services being availed through technological platforms where citizens need not visit the brick and mortar shops/offices. In view of these emerging technological advancements, the expectations of citizens have enhanced significantly and they are willing to pay for services delivered to them at their doorstep and the convenience of making payment at the time of delivery of services, which is called Cash on Delivery (COD).

In fact, it was Flipkart, which after its launch in 2007, revolutionised e-commerce through its COD payment model. Thanks to the COD model, Flipkart's products reached far-flung areas of the country. People, who did not have the facility of online banking or credit cards, were the ones who propelled the COD model.

A Nielsen Global Connected Commerce Survey report says that about 83 per cent of shoppers in India favour utilising cash for all their online purchases. Customers also hesitate to input card information because of different online frauds and hacking. It says that the larger part of the payment made by buyers for online stores like Flipkart, Amazon and so on, was COD, where 72 per cent were from significant urban communities and 90 per cent from small towns.

The online retail sector is booming and COD is a major contributor to this. Despite the fact that e-wallets and internet banking services are on the rise, the COD payment model is still preferred by a large section of society. Payment choices like internet banking, credit and debit cards and e-wallets cater to just 30 per cent of online purchases as compared to COD. One sector, which could further boost the COD payment model, is the delivery of Government services. Citizens generally require birth certificates, domicile/residence certificates, caste certificates, income certificates, ration card, election card, school/college certificate, marriage certificate, land records, land registration documents, various permissions/licences for doing business and organising social functions/events and so on. Filing Government challans or taxes, getting various licences are some other services that could be delivered at home.

Citizens should be able to avail services through online processes where they can attach various documents as required by the Government and the Government/institutions concerned should send the certificate/licences/documents to their residence/office after finishing the verification and other due processes. Citizens are willing to pay the courier charges and "fee" as prescribed by the Government.

COD for Government-to-Citizen (G2C) services is one business model which can do wonders for both the Government as well as the people. While the Government will be able to cut costs in terms of office set-ups and improve efficiency, citizens will be saved from the unnecessary hassles of visiting Government offices.

The COD payment model from delivery of G2C services would have multiple advantages in terms of reduced carbon emissions as people won't have to drive to the service centres. There will be massive time saving and fewer man-days lost as well. It will cut graft and the system of touts as officers/staff will process the applications on a "first come, first serve" basis and reduce undue favouritism. The COD payment model for G2C services will redefine the process and character of Government services and bring out the "service" part in the true sense. COD for G2C services will be a game-changer for enhancing transparency in Government service delivery.

(The writer is CEO, Common Service Centre, SPV)

I WOULD JUST LOVE TO HAVE THE COUNTRY  
OPENED UP AGAIN AND RARING  
TO GO BACK TO NORMAL BY EASTER.  
—US PRESIDENT  
DONALD TRUMP

POINTCOUNTERPOINT



WE URGE BUSINESSES TO LISTEN TO PUBLIC HEALTH  
OFFICIALS ON SOCIAL DISTANCING. WE'LL RETURN TO  
WORK WHEN WE SAFELY AND RESPONSIBLY CAN.  
—NEIL BRADLEY  
US CHAMBER OF COMMERCE'S CHIEF POLICY OFFICER

# What can we do for India?

Citizens are very conscious of the fundamental rights guaranteed by our Constitution. However, are we equally aware of our duties towards our nation, especially during a crisis?



CHITTARVU RAGHU

The Prime Minister had appealed for a "Janta (people) Curfew" on March 22 in a bid to prevent the deadly Coronavirus from spreading into the community on a larger scale. At that time, Narendra Modi's appeal got an overwhelming response from all citizens and we stood together to do his bidding. Unfortunately post the Janta Curfew, people are not taking the 21-day lockdown announced by Modi seriously and are coming out of the homes.

For instance, in Hyderabad's Hi-tech City, where most of the highly-educated software professionals reside and software companies are located, there was a major traffic jam on March 25 and the streets were filled with people. Similar violations of the curfew are being reported from other parts of the country, like Delhi, Noida, Chandigarh and so on. This is despite repeated warnings by the Government about the need for social distancing to stem the spread of the Coronavirus.

We have witnessed the impact of the virus in Italy and the US due to the lack of social distancing, despite constant reminders by the Governments there on the importance of doing so. Citizens of India, and the world at large, are very conscious of the fundamental rights as guaranteed under the respective Constitutions of their countries. However, are we equally conscious of our duties towards our countries? As the citizens of India, we are obligated to abide by the fundamental duties contemplated under Article 51A of our Constitution. Article 51A was incorporated into the Constitution by the 42nd Amendment in 1976 and came into effect from January 3, 1977. The Article contemplates fundamental duties that citizens of the country are obligated to follow. These include abiding by the laws and the directions issued by the State in the interest of the public. These are all constitutional obligations cast upon the citizens to help in the promotion of the spirit of patriotism and for upholding the unity of the country.

Pursuant to the same, we performed our fundamental duty when we responded to the call for the "Janta Curfew". Post the March 22 curfew, we still continue to have obligations towards the nation's security and the health of its people. We should not only enjoy the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution but we are also obligated to adhere to the fundamental duties.

The Government has got every right to give appropriate directions in such times of calamities and we are obliged to follow the same. In case we do not discharge our obligations in relation to our fundamental duties/obligations as contemplated under Article 51A, the State would be entitled to register cases against us under various provisions of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), more particularly under Section 269 and 270 of the IPC.

Section 269 says that, "Whoever unlawfully or negligently does any act, which is and which he knows or has a reason to believe to be, likely to spread the infection of any disease dangerous to life shall be punished with imprisonment up to six months."

Section 270 of the IPC also implies that, "Whoever maliciously does any act, which is and which he knows or has reason to believe to be, likely to spread the infection of any disease dangerous to life, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term, which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with both."

The Government may also invoke the Epidemic Disease Act, 1887, for better prevention of spread of dangerous epidemic diseases. The

IT IS TIME  
FOR US TO  
REALISE THE  
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IT IS NOT A  
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CONSTITUTION  
OF OUR  
COUNTRY



Central Government may take measures as warranted and any violation of the same constitutes an offence under Section 188 of the IPC, which stipulates that any disobedience of an order promulgated by a public servant is an offence and shall be punished with imprisonment for a month.

In case State Governments are unable to channelise financial resources, in the light of the present calamity which obviously has an enormous adverse effect on the country's economy, the Central Government may invoke Article 360 of the Constitution and impose financial emergency. The cost of the COVID-19 lockdown in India has been pegged at ₹9 lakh crore or four per cent of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP), according to a report by British brokerage Barclays. A report by Nomura had said that as over 75 per cent of the Indian economy will be shut down during the 21-day period, the lockdown will lead to a direct output loss of approximately 4.5 per cent.

At present, almost 80 per cent of the major financial centres of the country have been locked down, including commercial cities such as Bengaluru, Mumbai, Pune, Hyderabad, Kolkata and so on. The US dollar is at an all-time high against the Indian currency i.e., equal to ₹75.62.

Most of our economy is dependent on small businesses and also the daily-wage earners. In the light of the total lockdown of the country, the State has to take care of the daily-wage workers who are deprived of their livelihood during this period as it would be impossible for them to survive without it.

In fact, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a series of financial relief and welfare measures on Thursday for the farmers, the poor, widows, daily-wage and migrant workers as

the country prepares for a long lockdown. The Government announced a ₹1.7 lakh crore Prime Minister Gareeb Kalyan Yojana. Sitharaman announced that the relief package would include direct benefit cash transfers, free Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) to families living Below the Poverty Line (BPL), grains and pulses for the poor while the middle class would be able to withdraw funds from their Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) account. The Government will pay EPF contribution, both of the employer and employee, for three months for all those establishments with less than 100 employees out of which 90 per cent earn less than ₹15,000 per month. It also announced collateral-free loan doubled to ₹20 lakh to 63 lakh women self-help groups that will help seven crore households.

The Government also announced insurance of ₹50 lakh for medical professionals who are on the Coronavirus frontline. As of now, the Government is fulfilling its responsibilities towards the citizens.

However, Article 360 says that if the President is satisfied that the situation has arisen whereby the financial stability or credit of India or any part thereof is threatened, he/she may declare a financial emergency.

During this period, the executive authority of the Union is empowered to give directions to the States to follow the same. Any such direction may also include a provision requiring the reduction of salaries and allowances of all or any class or people serving a State or the Union Government.

A provision requiring all Money Bills and other Financial Bills to be reserved for the consideration of the President after they are passed by the Legislature of the State is also there. A proclamation issued under Article 360

shall remain in force for two months unless before the expiry of the period it is approved by both the Houses of the Parliament. Once approved, it remains in force until revoked by the President. Till now no such financial emergency has been imposed under Article 360 and the Government is doing all it can to mitigate the financial woes of the people that have been brought upon them by the lockdown. However, this may not be the case in the long run as the Coronavirus cases across the country are rising exponentially on a daily basis.

State Governments across the country are preparing quarantine centres in preparation of the expected onslaught of the virus if we are unable to contain the contagion. In these circumstances it may become necessary for the Central Government to take the appropriate decision to invoke Article 360 of the Constitution or else the State Governments may face a severe financial crunch.

The Modi Government has taken the lockdown decision in the nick of time although it could have done it a bit earlier. And all the citizens are obligated to heed the advice and warnings given by the State and Central Governments in this regard by confining themselves to their homes and only come out in case there is an emergency and for buying essential items.

It is time for us to realise the seriousness of the pandemic and follow the social distancing and lockdown instructions given by the Government to the letter. If we expect our Government to respect our fundamental rights then we have to perform our fundamental duties, too. It is not a one-way street. It is mandated by the Constitution.

(The writer is an Advocate in the Andhra Pradesh and Telangana High Courts)

# COVID-19 will hit the farm sector

If sowing is delayed in the *Zaid* season or farmers miss this window because of late delivery or seeds or no seeds at all, we are possibly looking at a famine-like situation emerging and also extreme feed shortages coupled with food price inflations later this year



INDRA SHEKHAR SINGH

Humanity is besieged by the deadly Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) at the moment. However, more than the virus, its manifestation has gained notoriety in the world. As economies plummet, fear reigns over minds, streets and homes. Sneezing and coughing have become a reprehensible act in these times. The Indian Government, like others around the world, and the World Health Organisation (WHO) are trying very

hard to contain this global pandemic. But the threat surrounds us. A major world power like China has fallen prey to this disease. Iran, Italy and now the US are being ravaged by it and it is only a matter of weeks, if not days, before it hits the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) nations and India, with its full might. As of now we have 694 confirmed cases and 14 deaths in the country but this number is going up daily. As a safety measure, the Union Government has announced a 21-day lockdown across the country. It is a commendable step to curb the spread of the virus.

But ahead of the curve, black markets were already trading new commodities — masks, soaps, disinfectants and so on. People continue to hoard supplies. Very soon black markets will load up on essential medicines, foods and so on and as the desperation level and death toll rise, the agrarian sector and seeds will be

devoured by the Coronavirus mayhem, too.

Farming is the backbone of our economy and most of our agriculture today depends on quality seeds and the organised seed sector. Our food production is also dependent on availability of human resources or farm labour and free movement of agricultural products — including seeds, fertilisers and so on. Both are restricted at this time. The US has shut its borders followed by the European Union (EU) and the world has cancelled visas and restricted the movement of people.

Even when the lockdown in India is lifted, the current environment of fear can only herald decreased availability of farm hands in the near future. There will be a rise in farm wages for this season and we may see the cost of production of foods rising. The threat is even greater in the poultry sector, as prices of chicken in Delhi have



nosedived. People are falsely conjoining avian flu with COVID-19 and this is leading to greater losses in the poultry sector. Even before the 21-day curfew began, the workers were reluctant to work on poultry farms due to the rumours.

The global seed sector is deeply dependent on a global supply chain of production regions and no one country is a seed sovereign by itself. The freezing of ports and seeds shipments will derail agricultural productivity later this year. Small and

medium seed traders and small seed companies may also be at risk, as they don't store vast stocks of seeds. They rely on the international and domestic shipments before each season. A disruption will be detrimental to their business.

World over, March and April are a very important time for planting spring crops such as maize, sunflower, soybean, canola, spring wheat and barley, open field vegetables and so on, north of the Equator and autumn crops to the south. In India too, we will see the sowing of *Zaid* season crops soon. If sowing is delayed in the *Zaid* season or farmers miss this window because of late delivery or seeds or no seeds at all, we are possibly looking at a famine-like situation emerging and also extreme feed shortages coupled with food price inflations later this year.

The International Seed Federation (ISF) has sought to assuage fears citing the European

Food Safety Authority (EFSA), Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Bundesinstitut für Risikobewertung (BfR) statement: "There is currently no evidence that food, including seed, is a likely source or route of transmission of the virus. Transmission via surfaces, which have recently been contaminated with the virus is, nonetheless, possible through smear infections. However, this is only likely to occur during a short period after contamination, due to the relatively low stability of Coronaviruses in the environment." What this means is that there is no evidence yet and seeds may not be a gateway.

These are tough times and call for courage and truth. We need to make informed and scientific evidence-based decisions so that COVID-19 doesn't evolve into another monster which threatens not just our health but also our agriculture. The Indian Government and other Governments

of the world should not impose any restrictions on agrarian products, including seeds. Seed companies and exporters should take responsibility for the health and safety of workers involved in the shipments. Port authorities have strenuous months ahead due to the massive work of screening shipments and people and they should be aided in this. The virus spreads from person to person, so the latest WHO directives should be broadcast and people and workers need to be made aware of them. Shipments of seeds anyways have a very low risk of spreading viruses and hence should not be stopped or delayed. The world must come together in this time of crisis. We need to become conscious and alert as this pandemic affects each one of us. We have to fight not only the Coronavirus but fear itself.

(The writer is Director, Policy and Outreach, National Seed Association of India)



# Sensex soars, investors cheer stimulus move

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Extending its speedy recovery for the third straight session, equity benchmark Sensex surged by another 1,411 points on Thursday after Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a stimulus package worth Rs 1.70 lakh crore to cushion the impact of the coronavirus lockdown in the country.

The 30-share BSE barometer rallied 1,410.99 points or 4.94 per cent to settle at 29,946.77. It surged over 1,564 points during the session.

Similarly, the NSE Nifty finished 323.60 points, or 3.89 per cent, up at 8,641.45.

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

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

In an effort to cushion the economic blow of the 21-day lockdown in wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, Finance Minister Sitharaman announced a slew of measures to help citizens survive the crisis.

## Exchanges cut trading hours for commodity trading

**New Delhi (PTI):** Leading stock exchanges BSE and NSE on Thursday cut down trading hours for commodities derivative segment till 5 pm, instead of current practice of allowing it up till mid-night, in the wake of coronavirus pandemic.

The trading will begin at 9 am and close at 5 pm and the new timings will be effective from March 30 till April 14, the exchanges said. In separate statements, commodity exchanges — MCX and ICEX — announced about the reduced trading hours. Commodity markets trade between 10 am to 11.50 pm, while equity markets close at 3.30 pm. “In view of the novel COVID-19 outbreak, the nationwide lockdown of 21 days and pursuant to discussions with Sebi, it has been decided to revise the trading timings,” said BSE and NSE circulars.

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

The scheme will be implemented with immediate effect. “This is a package for lockdown impacted segments,” said V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services, adding that the government is prioritising.

Industry-specific measures are likely to be announced in the next package. This can go a long way in implementing the lockdown,” he said.

According to traders,

volatility remained during the day as March derivatives contracts expired.

The Indian rupee appreciated 57 paise to 75.37 against the US dollar in intra-day trade.

Meanwhile, bourses in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Tokyo and Seoul ended significantly lower. Benchmarks in Europe were also trading in the red.

International oil benchmark, Brent crude futures fell 2.15 per cent to USD 26.80 per barrel.

The number of COVID-19 cases climbed to 649 in India and the death toll rose to 13, with one death reported each from Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh, according to the Health Ministry.

## ‘Enough stock with FCI; govt monitoring PDS distribution’

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has enough foodgrain reserves to feed the poor amid the nationwide lockdown to contain the spread of coronavirus, Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan said on Thursday.

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

“FCI godowns has sufficient reserves to meet the demand and officials are keeping a close watch on distribution of foodgrains,” Paswan said in a tweet.

Senior FCI officials have been asked to monitor the supply situation 24X7, he added.

According to official data, the government currently has total 58.49 million tonnes of foodgrain in the FCI godowns. Out of which, rice constitutes 30.97 million tonne and wheat 27.52 million tonne.

The foodgrain stock, however, is much higher than the required norm of maintaining a reserve of about 21 million tonne as on April 1.

# Mega bank consolidation on track; to take effect from April 1: FM

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Thursday said the mega bank consolidation plan is very much on track and will take effect from April 1 despite the onslaught of coronavirus pandemic throwing the country out of gear. The Union Cabinet earlier this month approved amalgamation of 10 public sector banks into four global size lenders, beginning next financial year.

Asked if the government is considering extending the deadline for merger of public sector banks, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said “at the moment there is nothing on that”.

Banking Secretary

Debasish Panda said the merger process is very much on track and expressed hope that the banking sector would be able to meet the challenges thrown by the pandemic.

“That is very much on the track. It’s parallel activity going on. As far as fund transfers etc are concerned, necessary arrangements will be made,” Panda said.

The statement assumes significance as there has been demand from some quarters for deferring the deadline due to coronavirus outbreak.

All India Bank Officers’ Confederation (AIBOC) on Wednesday requested Prime Minister Narendra Modi to defer mega merger exercise of banks in view of coronavirus

outbreak.

Banking services across the country are impacted due to COVID-19 as the lockdown is being observed across the country. Following the consolidation, there will be seven large public sector banks (PSBs), and five smaller ones. There were as many as 27 PSBs in 2017.

As per the mega consolidation plan, Oriental Bank of Commerce and United Bank of India will merge into Punjab National Bank; Syndicate Bank into Canara Bank; Andhra Bank and Corporation Bank into Union Bank of India; and Allahabad Bank into Indian Bank.

The merger will result in creation of seven large PSBs

with scale and national reach, with each amalgamated entity having business of over Rs 8 lakh crore and it would help create banks with scale comparable to global banks and capable of competing effectively in India and globally.

In addition, consolidation would also provide impetus to amalgamated entities by increasing their ability to support larger ticket-size lending and have competitive operations by virtue of greater financial capacity.

Last year, Dena Bank and Vijaya Bank were merged with Bank of Baroda. Prior to this, the government had merged five associate banks of SBI and Bharatiya Mahila Bank with the PSB.

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

E-commerce companies Paytm Mall, Amazon and Flipkart have temporarily stopped taking orders for non-essential items due to restrictions imposed during the nationwide lockdown to stop the spread of coronavirus. The companies had

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

“Paytm Mall has decided to help users buy essential products including household staples, healthcare, hygiene, personal safety products on its platform.

The company would temporarily not take any new orders for products that fall in the non-essential categories including fashion, mobile, and accessories, white goods and electronics among others,” Paytm Mall said in a statement. The company said it is working closely with government officials and logistics

partners to ensure ease of deliveries and quick service. “Paytm Mall is proactively talking to a number of new suppliers in the country who can immediately provide hand sanitizers, preventive ayurvedic medicines as well as other products that help in combating the spread of coronavirus,” the company said.

NIFTY 50						
SCRIP	OPEN	High	LOW	LTP	CHANGE	
NIFTY 50	8451.00	8749.05	8304.90	8641.45	323.60	
INDUSINDBK	316.35	451.95	311.65	440.00	138.70	
IT	787.75	842.30	754.15	842.30	76.55	
BAJFINANCE	2637.30	2936.50	2565.05	2825.25	239.65	
BHARTIARTL	426.50	493.45	420.25	465.00	35.90	
HEROMOTOCO	689.90	1827.95	1645.60	1785.00	117.35	
BAJAJ-AUTO	1998.20	2133.90	1934.00	2078.90	132.15	
POWERGRID	150.60	161.70	147.25	160.30	10.05	
HDFC	1689.50	1843.45	1671.20	1755.00	108.95	
INFRATEL	150.45	169.00	147.00	157.00	9.50	
KOTAKBANK	1300.00	1390.00	1252.80	1372.95	82.80	
ITC	150.00	159.40	143.25	156.80	9.45	
TITAN	895.00	947.80	872.30	937.00	56.20	
BAJAJFINSV	4975.00	5554.80	4825.20	5135.00	304.70	
BRITANNIA	2471.55	2668.80	2417.30	2600.00	148.60	
UPL	398.00	330.80	290.20	310.55	17.75	
ASIXBANK	235.95	399.00	332.00	346.00	19.20	
ONGC	61.85	65.60	59.65	65.00	3.45	
INFY	615.00	660.85	612.10	640.00	33.80	
HDFCBANK	870.10	937.70	841.00	898.00	41.25	
ICICIBANK	322.00	364.40	314.25	331.50	14.60	
HINDUNILVR	2089.00	2250.00	2060.00	2179.00	90.85	
NSTEINDLE	14699.70	15100.00	14051.55	15000.00	555.90	
GRASIM	439.95	484.00	423.95	468.00	16.65	
CIPLA	383.90	394.00	380.50	390.00	13.55	
WIPRO	176.95	186.80	172.50	180.60	5.90	
BPLCL	275.00	286.40	268.50	281.95	8.25	
M&M	277.85	294.00	273.10	286.00	8.15	
ZEEL	65.60	69.20	63.50	65.85	1.65	
YEDL	125.05	133.15	119.00	128.00	2.50	
TCS	1831.60	1832.05	1722.55	1785.00	34.70	
SBIN	191.55	201.00	185.10	193.25	3.35	
EICHERMOT	14630.00	15166.00	14500.00	14757.45	240.85	
ASIANPAINT	1650.00	1650.00	1574.00	1617.05	23.90	
TATAMOTORS	71.45	73.50	68.30	70.95	0.70	
SREEL	17450.00	18050.00	17107.60	17599.65	161.40	
ULTRACEMCO	3230.00	3385.00	3153.60	3256.00	27.40	
DREDDYD	2975.20	3066.55	2879.25	2940.00	18.00	
HINDALCO	97.50	97.60	92.25	95.00	0.45	
IOC	78.00	78.70	74.65	78.20	0.35	
NTPC	82.00	82.20	76.40	79.10	-0.10	
COALINDIA	126.00	127.00	119.20	123.90	-0.60	
ADANIPORTS	257.65	260.10	241.50	252.90	-2.70	
MARUTI	5024.45	5120.00	4750.00	4950.00	-55.95	
RELIANCE	1095.80	1116.90	1042.35	1069.00	-13.25	
JSWSTEEL	151.00	157.45	144.50	149.90	-1.90	
TECHM	539.35	564.90	513.00	519.90	-6.80	
TATASTEEL	290.00	295.50	280.10	281.05	-5.75	
SUNPHARMA	365.00	368.00	336.10	338.80	-8.85	
HCLTECH	461.10	466.75	441.10	445.70	-11.90	
GAIL	75.50	76.10	72.20	73.05	-2.50	

NIFTY NEXT 50						
SCRIP	OPEN	High	LOW	LTP	CHANGE	
NIFTY NEXT 50	19714.50	20713.50	19490.75	20459.85	1066.85	
BANDHANBNK	160.80	224.35	158.00	220.00	65.25	
ASHOKLEY	35.45	44.50	33.80	44.30	9.85	
PEL	696.00	1019.00	683.05	816.00	134.15	
NIALCL	83.00	97.40	82.80	95.90	13.40	
SRTANSFIN	589.00	680.40	556.00	651.00	84.00	
DLF	126.10	147.00	121.65	140.00	16.20	
ICICIGI	1000.00	1181.90	997.05	1094.75	109.80	
HDFCLIFE	448.00	487.00	434.00	479.70	45.40	
BAJAJHLNG	1630.00	1753.95	1605.00	1753.95	159.45	
CONCOR	284.00	314.35	275.00	314.35	28.55	
OFSS	1660.00	1790.75	1659.55	1767.00	139.25	
MARICO	251.80	271.00	249.15	267.95	19.80	
AUROPHARMA	346.90	365.00	339.00	360.00	26.35	
PEC	86.05	94.20	83.00	92.90	6.65	
PETRONET	177.00	191.00	177.00	189.00	13.35	
BERGEPAINT	449.95	494.00	449.00	482.00	32.20	
NMDC	67.40	71.35	66.00	70.60	4.65	
ACC	921.80	980.00	896.00	980.00	61.80	
MOTHERSUMI	61.05	65.65	59.00	64.50	3.90	
GODFREYCP	479.20	513.45	475.00	500.40	29.90	
DABUR	415.00	433.95	400.55	429.00	23.80	
BOSCHLTD	9288.15	10089.00	9006.95	9700.00	487.90	
SHILIFE	603.50	665.00	595.35	618.00	30.15	
DMART	1980.00	1994.05	1950.00	1944.05	94.95	
GICRE	90.40	94.50	90.40	94.40	4.40	
COPAL	1136.60	1182.00	1117.00	1172.05	50.20	
PAGEIND	16858.00	18270.55	16300.00	17351.35	741.75	
HDFCAMC	2089.00	2250.00	2050.00	2125.25	86.30	
HAVELLS	475.25	507.40	474.10	493.00	19.35	
MCDOWELL-N	476.00	501.00	463.55	484.20	18.65	
PGHIL	9124.00	9712.55	8950.00	9490.00	361.95	
SIEMENS	1070.00	1139.00	1069.90	1089.00	39.75	
BIOCON	274.80	284.65	270.60	280.70	9.05	
AMBUJACEM	141.25	146.60	136.55	143.30	3.95	
ICICIPRULI	312.60	368.00	312.60	329.05	8.60	
UBL	890.00	967.95	883.25	898.55	16.15	
HINDZINC	142.00	145.00	138.10	140.00	2.05	
ADANITRANS	197.60	197.60	186.45	191.00	0.60	
PIDILITIND	1314.95	1328.80	1252.60	1265.10	-6.00	
HINDPETRO	179.00	183.90	175.00	176.05	-1.35	
IBULHSGFIN	95.05	104.00	88.15	94.30	-0.75	
IDEA	3.40	3.40	3.25	3.30	-0.05	
L&TH	56.10	59.85	52.25	53.40	-0.90	
INDIGO	1000.00	1147.40	949.45	994.05	-17.05	
CADILAHCH	267.10	271.00	252.80	259.00	-4.70	
LUPIN	566.50	569.10	542.40	555.00	-11.50	
DIVISLAB	1937.35	1980.00	1874.00	1878.00	-50.05	
NHPC	34.55	35.80	33.20	33.30	-1.00	
PNB	19.25	19.35	18.05	18.30	-0.65	
BANKBARODA	59.20	60.05	54.75	55.80	-2.40	

## BSE 500

Script	Open	High	Low	LTP
LT	782.20	843.20	754.50	839.90
JSWSTEEL	152.00	157.05	144.80	149.70
AXISBANK	337.00	398.00	332.35	342.65
SBIN	191.65	201.00	185.20	192.85
INDUSINDBK	318.80	451.80	313.25	436.95
HDFCBANK	874.50	941.10	841.15	913.40
ICICIBANK	325.00	364.70	314.75	332.00
RELIANCE	1090.00	1117.15	1043.15	1074.75
BAJFINANCE	2655.00	2889.90	2571.70	2794.35
HDFC	1678.00	1842.85	1674.40	1749.90
KOTAKBANK	1300.00	1419.15	1255.05	1389.00
MARUTI	5051.00	5119.95	4751.00	4880.50
INFY	615.95	650.50	614.00	646.30
PEL	717.90	1018.80	686.25	819.15
ITC	150.00	162.05	143.30	157.20
BAJAJFINSV	5000.00	5548.25	4829.55	5147.00
HINDUNILVR	2099.00	2284.25	2061.00	2217.20
UPL	1815.00	1880.00	1723.00	1806.70
INDIGO	1010.00	1130.00	967.00	1008.90
TATAMOTORS	71.70	73.50	68.30	70.80
ASIANPAINT	163.95	224.20	158.00	215.65
ADANIPOR	1647.80	1690.00	1572.90	1629.70
BAHARTIIL	434.00	494.05	420.60	478.00
TATATEEL	289.00	295.55	280.10	285.75
IBULHSGFIN	96.00	104.00	88.25	95.10
ASXSHLEY	35.80	44.70	33.80	43.75
EMAMILIFE	160.00	163.90	153.10	159.65
HDFCLIFE	455.00	498.20	434.65	477.30
ICICIPRULI	315.00	366.20	313.60	329.15
ONGC	61.50	65.55	59.70	64.80
APOLLOHOSP	1233.85	1320.60	1130.00	1216.00
TITAN	885.00	959.40	872.60	928.45
RRLBANK	170.00	177.10	155.10	165.25
SRILANKA	338.00	346.40	310.25	314.35
THYROCARE	540.00	550.00	515.05	532.95
HCLTECH	455.00	471.50	441.00	451.55
SUNPHARMA*	361.00	368.40	335.00	338.55
PVR	1325.05	1447.95	1255.65	1278.60
JUSTDIAL	272.00	298.60	255.10	292.80
VBL	561.10	615.30	561.00	598.10
L&THT	55.80	60.75	49.75	53.65
DLF	122.40	147.00	121.95	138.10
JBULFOOD	1345.00	1419.30	1302.95	1343.85
M&MFIN	171.00	181.00	156.40	162.85
HDFCAML	2129.95	2255.00	2051.15	2146.25
ESCORTS	647.00	683.95	634.00	663.80
BALKRISIND	834.80	919.00	808.00	817.60
LICHSGFIN	212.00	252.10	207.45	228.60
VEDL	66.00	69.25	63.60	65.90
BANKBARODA	59.50	60.10	54.90	55.95
M&M	294.00	299.55	270.55	287.50
RADICO	264.50	285.50	251.10	269.70
NITITECH	1299.90	1375.95	1152.50	1168.85
GHCL	73.05	76.75	71.55	76.75
ULTRACEMCO	3235.00	3393.75	3160.00	3237.60
IDEA	3.38	3.39	3.25	3.27
PIDILITIND	1300.00	1330.00	1250.00	1268.75
MALNAPURAM	106.00	106.00	95.55	102.10
COALINDIA	125.70	127.30	119.25	123.35
IOC	77.95	78.55	74.65	78.05
BPCIL	276.00	286.15	268.85	282.40
FEDERALBNK	39.60	44.10	37.75	41.80
RECLTD	85.00	90.25	79.00	87.75
DELTACORP	56.70	56.70	56.30	56.70
SBILIFE	608.90	662.40	597.00	618.20
BATAINDIA	1198.00	1276.75	1127.15	1229.20
NTPC	81.00	83.85	76.50	80.60
ADANIANT	134.35	151.75	132.50	140.50
EICHEMOT	14609.70	15235.85	14532.95	14829.80
IBREALT	36.90	40.65	36.85	39.85
HERMOTOCO	1690.00	1836.00	1646.15	1805.30
IGL	351.40	368.10	342.55	361.80
DABUR	412.00	433.80	401.00	426.40
DRREDDY	2951.00	3067.35	2880.90	2943.15
MPL	301.30	330.75	291.00	313.35
NESTLEIND	5799.90	60799.00	54900.00	55343.30
POWERGRID	14890.00	15642.55	14059.50	15035.70
SRTANSRPL	156.00	161.70	147.45	158.65
SRTANSRPL	597.00	680.00	557.00	652.50
AUROPHARMA	340.05	364.90	340.00	361.40
ICICIPI	985.00	1174.50	985.00	1093.55
CIPILA	384.50	394.10	381.10	386.65
JINDALSTEEL	92.40	95.45	87.40	89.00
GODREJIND	290.00	300.00	290.00	295.10
UBL	940.00	967.15	884.40	894.75
BRITANNIA	2499.00	2664.05	2420.70	2593.70
SAIL	22.35	23.05	21.60	21.80
MOTHERSUMI	61.05	66.70	59.05	65.10
MGL	783.90	867.70	755.00	860.75
HAVELLS	479.90	506.95	475.10	491.35
INFRATEL	161.00	165.10	148.05	157.20
ZEEL	125.70	133.00	119.05	128.80
TECHM	539.00	564.00	513.60	515.75
ACC	76.25	77.00	72.20	73.00
BEEL	911.00	978.30	896.95	969.10
ADANIAPORTS	63.00	68.50	61.25	67.20
LUPIN	250.00	260.30	241.55	248.20
BAJAJ-AUTO	574.95	574.95	543.10	558.15
PNB	1977.00	2138.00	1935.00	2111.95
MINDTREE	35.50	35.80	33.25	33.45
MINDTREE	879.90	879.90	773.95	838.25
BIOCON	275.00	284.60	270.70	282.95
MUTHOOTFIN	617.70	629.00	582.65	606.50
WIPRO	175.45	185.55	172.80	183.35
DMART	1990.00	1998.85	1952.00	1998.85
PAGEIND	16700.10	18295.00	16355.20	17749.35
UJJIJIAN	164.40	181.95	155.75	164.55
BERGEPAINT	451.60	494.10	442.00	478.20



# G20 nations to inject \$5 tn into global economy

## Modi pitches for new crisis management protocol

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

AFP ■ RIYADH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ BEIJING

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

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

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

Xi’s statement came amid growing international criti-

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

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

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

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

## Around the Globe

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



## VIRUS TOLL OVER 21,000

AFP ■ MADRID

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

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

Amid squabbling between the leaders of China and the US over who is to blame, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres called for the world to act together to halt the menace.

“COVID-19 is threatening the whole of humanity,” he said. “Global action and solidarity are crucial. Individual country responses are not going to be enough.” The global lockdown — which also took in India’s huge population this week — tightened further on Thursday as Russia announced it was grounding all international flights, while Moscow’s mayor ordered the closure of cafes, shops and parks.

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

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

whole,” ratings agency Moody’s said.

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

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

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said richer nations needed to offer support to low and middle income countries. The devastating effect on poorer nations was laid bare on Thursday when the Philippines announced that nine frontline doctors had died after contracting COVID-19.

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

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



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AP ■ MADRID

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

## Spain toll over 4,000

AFP ■ MADRID

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AP ■ WASHINGTON

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

Though it may seem crass, the federal government

actually has long made a calculation when imposing regulations, called “the value of a statistical life,” that places a price tag on a human life. It has been used to consider whether to require seat belts, airbags or environmental regulations, but it has never been applied in a broad public health context.

The question is now an urgent one given that Trump in recent days has latched on to the notion that the cure for the pandemic should not be worse than the disease and argued that “more people are going to die if we allow this

to continue” if the economy remains closed. He has targeted a return to a semblance of normalcy for the economy by Easter Sunday, April 12.

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

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

## Taking aspirin may not reduce dementia risk

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

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

## US grants Iraq shortest sanctions waiver yet for Iran gas

AFP ■ BAGHDAD

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

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

crippled by years of conflict and poor maintenance.

“This is the final extension,” one source at the Iraqi president’s office told AFP.

The source said Washington had been frustrated that Iran was meddling in the Government formation process in Iraq. Adnan Zulfri, who has had close ties with US officials since the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, was nominated on March 17 and has a month to pull together his cabinet. “The US did not want to put Zulfri in a difficult position by not renewing the waiver,” a second senior Iraqi official told AFP, confirming the 30-day extension.

The official said Baghdad had prepared a checklist at the beginning of the last 45-day waiver period of ways the country could decrease its reliance on Iranian oil. “But we haven’t been able to accomplish any of them because of the circumstances,” the source said.

Iraq has been hit by a cocktail of crises in recent weeks, including the government formation stalemate, collapsing oil prices and the novel coronavirus pandemic.

## In drastic move, Italy shuts most factories to halt virus

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

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

AP



## TrendSlazer

### Kishen Kanhaiya is special to me: Anil

Actor **ANIL KAPOOR** said that his 1990 release *Kishen Kanhaiya* has a special place in his heart.

The actor reminisced about the **Rakesh Roshan** directorial as it completed 30 years. The actor said that he is glad to see “the love and appreciation that the film has received.”

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

The film will air on Zee Bollywood tomorrow.



### ‘Samisha Shetty Kundra completes 40 days today. The first milestone for a mother and her

**child, as per Hinduism. It only makes me realise that there are so many other things we should be grateful for even if some things don't go as planned. For next 20 days, I'm going to document one thing that I'm grateful for every day.'**

—**Shilpa Shetty Kundra**

### Actor HRITHIK ROSHAN

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

Hrithik tweeted, “In such times, we must do what we can to ensure the safety of the most fundamental caretakers of our city and society. I have procured N95 and FFP3 masks for our BMC workers and other caretakers.”

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



### Miley suffers anxiety in isolation

Hollywood singer **MILEY CYRUS** said she suffered a panic attack as she self-isolated in her mansion amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 27-year-old revealed how the time she spent locked away in her home triggered a number of issues.

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

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



# LIFE IMITATES FILMS

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



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

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

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

As per the data released by various sources, the film is becoming one of the most popular pandemic genre movies of 2020.

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

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

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

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

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

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



## Tiring effect

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

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

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

### DETERMINING THE AGE OF A TYRE

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

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

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

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

### AVOID USED TYRES

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

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

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

### MAKE SURE YOU'RE GETTING FRESH TYRES

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

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

### LEARN TO LET GO OF OLD TYRES

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

—AP

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

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

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

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

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

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



## Corona doesn't spread via tears



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

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

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

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

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

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

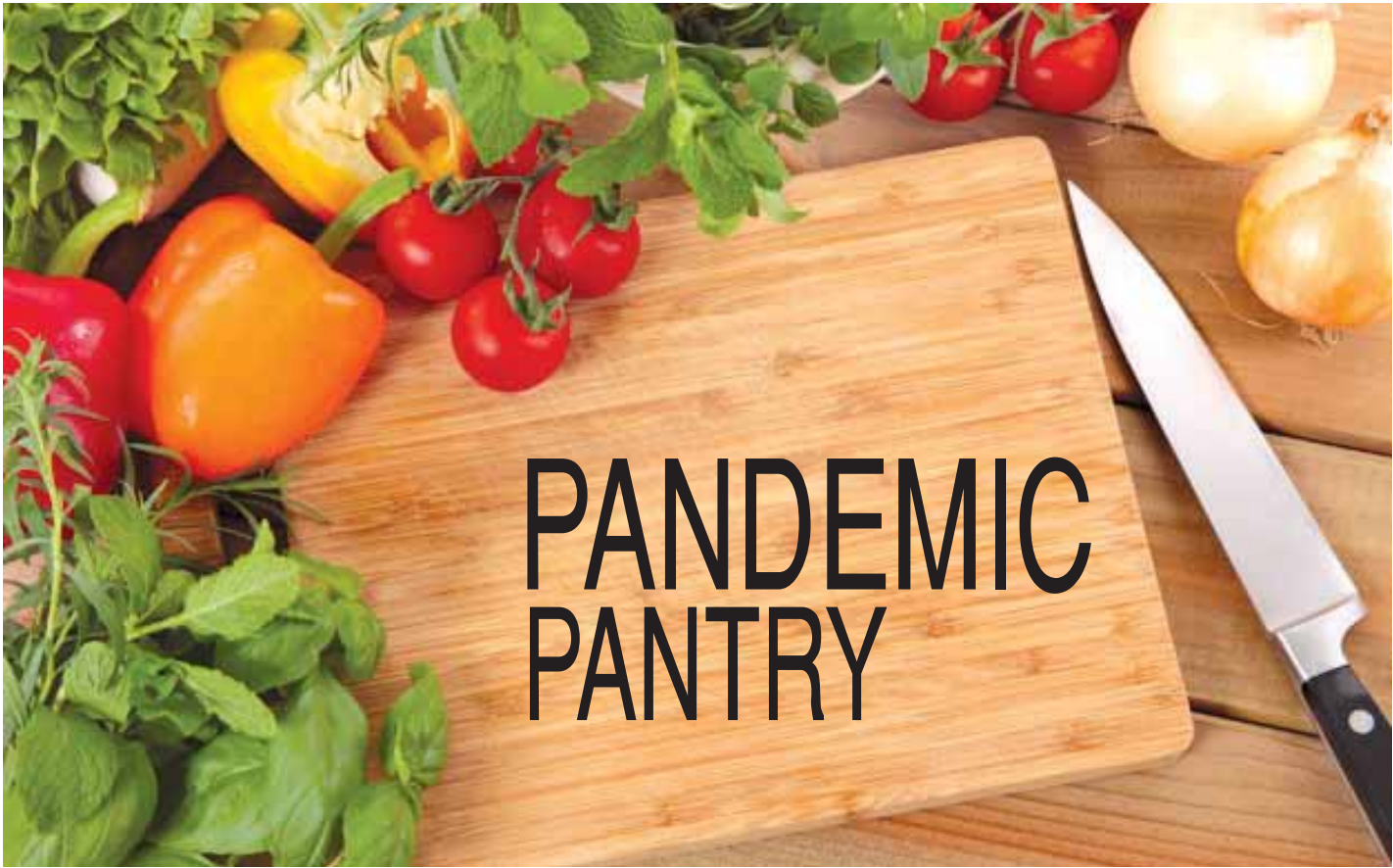
The study also revealed that you can also become infected by touching something that has the virus on it — like a table or doorknob — and then touching your eyes.

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

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

—IANS





# PANDEMIC PANTRY

The virus has sent a nation of restaurant-goers back to the kitchen

Last Tuesday night in Tennessee, bluegrass musicians David and Virginia Blood were busy making sandwiches. In Pittsburgh, real estate agent Michelle Bushee was stirring a pot of homemade black-bean chilli in her kitchen instead of shepherding curious buyers through potential dream homes. Marty Prudenti, whose nights are usually spent working backstage at New York City’s Lincoln Center, was in his Long Island backyard grilling burgers for his twins. And in Texas, Babette Maxwell — who would otherwise have been running at least one of her three teenage sons to sports practices or school events — was Googling recipes to engineer home-made versions of her boys’ favorite Taco Bell items.

Throughout the the globe, lives have been radically upended by the COVID-19 pandemic. There is worry and washing of hands. But one bright spot is emerging from self-quarantine and mandatory working from home: In this nation that so often dines out or gobbles processed food on the run,

people are suddenly cooking a whole lot more.

Before the coronavirus emerged, Kim Bierly often worked late at her office and then met her husband for a quick dinner at one of the restaurants in their central Pennsylvania neighbourhood. If they didn’t eat out, they’d reach into the refrigerator and choose something packaged to heat up.

“I’ve always enjoyed cooking,” Bierly says. “But it was being saved for weekends. And by the time you get to the weekend you had all the other things you need to do. So it would be something quick or something prepared.”

Now working from home, she’s pulling out old recipes — the kinds of things she remembers her mother making, like stuffed pork chops or a bubbling pot of chicken and noodles. “I think we need comfort right now,” she says, “and food is comfort.” Unavoidably, these home-cooked dishes come with a side of stress. We’re trying to protect ourselves from germs at the grocery store, and may wonder whether supermarket shelves will become emptier in the coming weeks. But those worries are encouraging people to get creative by trying new ingredients and sharing advice on how to use unfamiliar vegetables or cuts of meat bought out of necessity.

What can you do with the canned foods that have been idling since last year at the back of your kitchen cab-



inets? Facebook groups like Pandemic Pantry have sprouted up as gathering places for strangers to share advice.

Michael Volpatt, owner of the gourmet Big Bottom Market in Sonoma County, California, tackled the subject of canned goods on a recent installment of the impromptu cooking show he began hosting from his kitchen on March 14. Scrolling through Facebook while gathering ingredients to make himself dinner that night, Volpatt noticed the Facebook “Live” button on his phone screen. With his store closed, he realised it was a way to connect with friends and customers, and not be alone while preparing his meal. “Hey everybody,” his first broadcast began. “I’ve never done Facebook Live before. But I figured since I’m kind of staying at home and going to do some cooking later on, you’re going to join me.”

A growing audience now watches and comments nightly as he prepares everything from his mother’s marinara sauce to pot pies made with his Big Bottom Market biscuit mix, which appeared on Oprah’s Favorite Things list in 2016. “It’s heartwarming,” Volpatt says, “and it takes a lot of the awkwardness of this whole experience away.”

Returning to old recipes and learning new ones can be both a necessity and a welcome distraction during this strange time. “Cooking brings back good memories,” Bierly says, “like standing there at the pot on my stove, cooking the spaghetti and thinking of when my mother used to do that.”

Food Network president Courtney White says her channel has seen a double-digit ratings increase in the past week, as viewers watch marathons of comfort food-focused shows like Guy Fieri’s “Diners, Drive-ins and Dives.” FoodNetwork.com has also had a double-digit increase in visitors and page views, White says. And many of the channel’s chefs have been broadcasting informally from their home kitchens via social media, while viewers pepper them with questions in real-time.

Alone at our stoves, we’re realising how good it can feel to make dinner from scratch by using just a few ingredients consciously and carefully. Families are also getting their kids involved.

“Now, more than ever, we hope you’ll find moments of peace when gathering around the dinner table,” the co-founders of the retail chain Savory Spice wrote in a website post to their customers over the weekend. “We hope you’ll find moments of joy when preparing food with your little ones. We hope the simplicity of a home cooked meal is a quiet reprieve from the chaos outside.”

—AP



## What’s for dinner?

While you are cooking food at home, the menu combination should be easy to prepare and satisfying

Just about now, you might be tired of cooking and eating what’s in your refrigerator. We are all used to asking what’s for dinner? What are we in the mood for — pizza, sushi, Mexican? And then going to a restaurant to get it.

Now, with the Coronavirus forcing many of us to stay home more, it’s time to look at mealtime and cooking at home a little differently. Instead of asking, ‘What I am in the mood for?’ I am looking more closely in my pantry and my refrigerator and letting my ingredients dictate what I make.

For example, a few months ago, I was lured to purchase a big bag of mixed unsalted nuts because they were labeled “Omega-3 Nut Mix.” I thought I would eat a handful of “anti-oxidants” a day for my health but they have gone largely uneaten. So, this week, I mixed up my favourite sweet and savory spices with both brown and white sugar and made my baked Sugar and Spice Candied Nuts. Sure, the sugar adds a few more calories but now they are a delicious and welcome nibble instead of sitting unused in the pantry.

Likewise, I had a head of broccoli in the refrigerator that needed cooking. I couldn’t bear the thought of steamed broccoli so I decided to roast it simply with olive oil and kosher salt at 400 degrees Fahrenheit until the tips were deeply caramelised. Broccoli is addictive roasted this way, as is cauliflower, and any leftovers are delicious the next day with a drizzle of balsamic vinegar and good olive oil.

If you have a pork tenderloin and a package of bacon in your fridge or freezer, you can make a simple two-ingredient main dish. A bacon-wrapped pork tenderloin dresses up your pork preparation with few ingredients and only a little more effort. If the bacon is room temperature, it will stick to itself as you overlap each piece and wrap the tenderloin. I do this with beef tenderloin as well. The smoky flavour and fat of the centre-cut bacon both protects and bastes the lean meat as it roasts. I grill mine indirectly but you can roast it in a 350 degree Fahrenheit oven set on a rack in a sheet pan. When the bacon-wrapped tenderloin is done, sprinkle it with your finishing salt and carve into thick slices to enjoy the benefit of the bacon crust.

Finally, while you are cooking dinner at home, think about each meal in simple terms: a main (usually an animal protein, or a bean or hearty vegetable dish), a green or other non-starchy vegetable, and a starch. That menu combination is easy enough to prepare and still very satisfying. During this time of uncertainty, ease and comfort are equally important. If you are making a stew or a pot of gumbo that has vegetables and protein in it, all you need to add is a starch like rice or fresh, hot cornbread.

And enjoy the cooking. A friend of mine at Traeger Wood Fired Grills sent an email this week and reminded me that ‘good food equals good mood.’ Pass it along!

—AP

## R E C I P E S

### SHEKUBURA

#### WHAT YOU NEED

##### For the dough:

- Wheat flour: 1 kg
- Unsalted butter (cut into large chunks): 400 gm
- Egg yolks: 5
- Sour cream: 250 gm
- Sugar: 1 tbsp
- Salt: ¼ tsp
- Vanilla powder (optional): ½ tsp
- Dry yeast: ½ tsp
- Lukewarm milk: ½ cup

##### For the filling:

- Skinned hazelnuts: 500 gm
- Pound walnuts: 200 gm
- Granulated sugar: 700 gm
- Ground cardamom mixed with frangelico: 2 tsp both

#### METHOD

- Put the flour and the butter in a large mixing bowl. Using your hands, rub them together until you obtain fine crumbs. In a small bowl, using a spoon, mix the eggs yolks, sour cream, salt and vanilla powder.

- In another small bowl, put the yeast, one tablespoon flour and one tablespoon sugar. Fill it with ¼ cup of lukewarm milk. Let it stand for about two minutes. Then add the egg-sour cream mixture and yeast mixture to the flour-butter mixture.

- Using your hands, mix the ingredients until fully incorporated and a rough and inconsistent dough is obtained. Transfer the dough to your work surface. Put the remaining ¼ cup of lukewarm milk in a separate

bowl. Constantly wetting your hands with milk, knead the dough for a few minutes to make it smooth.

- Shape the dough into a ball. Put it back in the bowl, cover with plastic wrap and leave aside to rest for about 30 minutes.

- To prepare the filling, if you are using already skinned nuts, grind them finely in a food processor. In a mixing bowl, combining the ground nuts with sugar. Add the ground cardamom, frangelico and vanilla powder (optional). Mix until fully incorporated.

- To skin hazelnuts and walnuts at home: Place raw hazelnuts in a large frying pan and roast over medium heat stirring frequently until the skin cracks and begins to flake off after 10 minutes.

- Working with small batches of



nuts at a time, place them on a kitchen cloth and rub with it to remove the skins. Most of the skins will come off although some will still cling to the nut (especially on walnuts).

- To skin almonds at home: Put the almonds in a pot and pour boiling water over them to barely

cover their tops. Let the almonds sit in the water for about two minutes (do not keep them there for too long, or they will lose their crispiness and will be too soft). Drain off the water, pat them dry and slip the skin off by squeezing the almonds between your thumbs and fingers.

### SHORGOGHAL

#### WHAT YOU NEED

##### For the dough:

- Active dry yeast: 2¼ tsp
- Warm water: 1 cup
- All-purpose flour: 6 cups
- Salt: 2 tsp
- Milk (at room temperature): 1 cup
- Egg (at room temperature): 1
- Clarified butter: 7 ounces

##### For the spice filling:

- Fennel seeds: 2 tsp
- Cumin seeds: 2 tsp
- Turmeric: ½ tsp
- Salt: 1 tsp
- Ground black pepper: ¼ tsp
- All-purpose flour: 2 cups
- Clarified butter: 4 ounces

##### For the butter spread:

- Clarified butter (*ghee*): 0.5 litre

##### For the top:

- Egg yolks: 2

- Nigella sativa seeds (can substitute poppy seeds): 1 tsp

#### METHOD

- In a small bowl, dissolve the yeast in warm water and let it stand until frothy for 10 minutes. Sift the flour into a large mixing bowl. Add the salt and mix well. Add the yeast mixture, milk, egg, and butter and mix the ingredients with your hands.

- Scrape the dough onto a lightly floured surface and knead until smooth and elastic for 10 minutes. If the dough is still sticky, add more flour and knead. Put the dough back into the large mixing bowl, cover with a kitchen towel or plastic wrap and let rise for one and a half hours in a warm spot, until it doubles in bulk.

- To prepare the spice filling, toast the fennel and cumin



seeds (or anise seeds) on a hot skillet for about two minutes, until their aroma rises (toasting will intensify their aroma and flavour). Grind the spices in a spice grinder or with a mortar and pestle. In a medium mixing bowl, combine all the ingredients for the filling except the butter. Stir to mix. Gradually add the melted butter and rub with your fingers until you obtain fine crumbs. Set aside.

- Melt the butter and set aside to cool and keep two large baking sheets ready.

You will need a large work surface divided into two sections: one to roll out the dough and another to assemble the layers. Sprinkle some flour onto one half of the work surface on which you will roll out the dough. Generously oil the other half of the workplace (or sprinkle with flour, too).

- To prepare the dough layers, shape the risen dough into a log and divide into nine equal pieces. Shape each piece into a ball. Work with one ball at a time and cover the rest with a kitchen

towel.

- Using a thin, long rolling pin, roll out one ball into a 20-inch circle that is about 1/16-inch thick. When you roll the dough, from time to time sprinkle it with flour and spread all over the circle to prevent it from sticking to the rolling pin and for easier rolling. Wrap the rolled-out circle around the rolling pin and unwrap on another side of the work area.

- Drizzle five to seven tablespoons of the butter spread onto the circle and spread over with your hand. Roll out the second dough ball and place on top of the first layer. You can roll it out into a smaller circle. Now, with your hands, hold the edges of the second layer and very gently stretch in all directions (first one side, then the other) to fit the

bottom circle, then stretch them together until a large

rectangle is obtained.

Continue rolling up the remaining dough balls in the same fashion, placing them on top of each other, brushing with butter (except the final layer, which should not be buttered) and stretching with your hands. Again, roll the subsequent balls smaller than the first one — you will stretch them after you have placed them on the previous buttered layer.

- Each stretched layer should be almost see-through. Take care not to tear the layers when you stretch them.
- Once all the layers are ready, gently pull the sides of the layered rectangle to stretch as far as it can go. The thinner and wider the layers, the flakier it will be.

Courtesy: Azerbaijan Tourism Board (ATB).

### BLUEBERRY OATMEAL COOKIES

#### WHAT YOU NEED

- All-purpose flour: 1½ cup
- Baking powder: ½ tsp
- Salt: ½ tsp
- Unsalted butter: 1 cup
- Light brown sugar: 1 cup
- Eggs: 2
- Vanilla essence: 2 tsp
- Oats: 3 cup
- Blueberries: 1 cup

#### METHOD

- Preheat oven to 350 degrees C. Adjust the oven racks to the middle position and line baking sheet with parchment paper.

- Whisk the baking powder and salt in a small bowl. Set aside.

- Cream together the butter and sugar on medium speed until light and fluffy. For about three minutes.

- Beat the eggs, one at a



time, and then mix in the vanilla.

- Stir the mixture with a rubber spatula. Then stir the oats and blueberries.

- Using two heaping tablespoons per cookie, roll the dough into balls and place them onto a cookie sheet, spacing them at least two inches apart.

- Bake until the cookie edges are just turning golden brown about 20 minutes.

- Cool the cookies on the baking sheet and then transfer to a wire rack. Store cookies in an airtight container.

Courtesy: Del Monte.



# Rohit still hopeful on IPL 2020

FIANS ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

@mipaltan/Twitter

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

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

## 'ITCHING TO PLAY'

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

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

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

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

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

## Stokes continues IPL preparations despite cancellation threat

PTI ■ LONDON

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

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

"That hasn't changed yet so I have to think I will be playing on April 20." The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) had said last week that the county season would not start until at least the end of May, while England's tour of Sri Lanka was also postponed due to the dreaded disease. And given the current circumstances, a cancellation of this year's IPL looks inevitable.

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

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



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

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

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

**'SHORTENED IPL'** England wicketkeeper-batsman Jos Buttler is hoping for at least a cur-

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

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

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

## Mithali wants women's IPL next year

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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



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

Velocity, IPL Trailblazers and IPL Supernovas.

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

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

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

the process.

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

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

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

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

## ICC to discuss contingency plans

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

"The England versus Sri Lanka series got postponed but

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

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

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

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



## Shooter Rajput presses reset button

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

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

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

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

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

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

During dry practice, the shooter fires a fireman (on an object hung on a wall) without live ammunition. Rajput secured his Tokyo quota in Rio de Janeiro last year when he gunned down a Silver in the men's 50m rifle 3 positions event.

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

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

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

## Wimbledon fate to be decided next week

AFP ■ LONDON

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

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

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

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

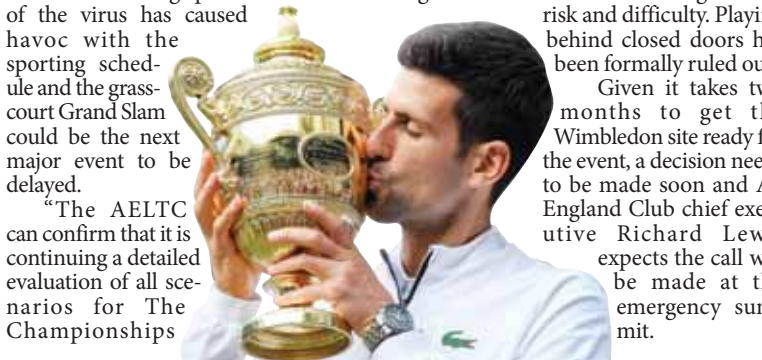
"An emergency meeting of the AELTC Main Board is scheduled for next week, and in preparation we are communicating closely with the LTA, and with the ATP, WTA, ITF and the other Grand Slams." Pressure is growing on the All England Club

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

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

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

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



## Delaying Olympics will involve 'massive' costs, say organisers

AFP ■ TOKYO

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

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

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

remarks at the first meeting of the taskforce.

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

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

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

Those costs could still



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

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

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

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

Tokyo 2020 staff "will experience difficulties they have never experienced

## Italian football chief ready to finish season in August

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Ronaldo is world's best footballer right now: Pele

FIANS ■ RIO DE JANEIRO

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

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

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

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

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

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

