

ANALYSIS 7 MUCH ADO ABOUT GOGAI

MONEY 8 RETAILERS ROLL OUT STEPS TO ENSURE SOCIAL DISTANCING

SPORTS 11 ONLY WAR HAS CANCELLED OLYMPICS

VIJAYAWADA, WEDNESDAY MARCH 25, 2020; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer



CHIRU TO MAKE HIS SOCIAL MEDIA DEBUT

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DELHI GOVT TO GIVE RS 5,000 TO CONSTRUCTION WORKERS: KEJRI

GOVT BANS EXPORT OF SANITISERS, ALL TYPES OF VENTILATORS

HAVE GRAIN STOCK TO LAST FOR 6 MONTHS, DON'T PANIC: BHUJBAL

EC DEFERS RAJYA SABHA POLLS SCHEDULED FOR MARCH 26

The Delhi government will give Rs 5,000 to construction workers as their livelihood has been affected due to coronavirus outbreak, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced on Tuesday.



The government on Tuesday banned export of all sanitisers and ventilators with immediate effect in wake of the coronavirus outbreak.



As Maharashtra is in lockdown for tackling the coronavirus epidemic, Food and Civil Supplies Minister Chhagan Bhujbal assured on Tuesday that the state has enough foodgrain stock to last for six months.



The Election Commission has deferred the Rajya Sabha polls scheduled for March 26 in view of the coronavirus outbreak, an official statement said on Tuesday.



The Pioneer wishes its readers, advertisers, suppliers and agents a happy Ugadi. As our offices will remain closed today (25-03-2020), there will be no issue of the newspaper tomorrow (26-03-2020).

— RESIDENT EDITOR



Postponement of polls saved many lives in AP

2



Pune-based firm develops testing kit for faster results

8

TODAY ALMANAC Month & Paksham: Phalguna & Krishna Paksha Panchangam: Tithi: Ekadashi: 05:58 am (Next Day) Nakshatram: Uttara Ashadha: 02:49 pm Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start any important work) Rahukalam: 01:53 pm - 03:23 pm Yamagandam: 06:24 am - 07:54 am Varjyam: 07:12 pm - 08:57 pm Gulika: 09:24 am - 10:53 am Good Time: (to start any important work) Amritakalam: 07:56 am - 09:40 am Abhijit Muhurtham: 11:59 am - 12:47 pm

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER Forecast: Partly cloudy Temp: 36/23 Humidity: 45% Sunrise: 06:16 Sunset: 06:27 Current Weather Conditions Updated March 23, 2020 5:00 PM

21-day nationwide lockdown

'ONLY WAY TO FIGHT CORONAVIRUS', SAYS PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has announced a complete lockdown across the country for 21 days from Tuesday midnight, asserting that social distancing is the only way out for the country in its decisive battle against the coronavirus.



COVID-19: Suspension of Railway services to be extended till April 14

NEW DELHI: After Prime Minister Narendra Modi's announcement of a 21 day lockdown across the country, the Indian Railways on Wednesday announced that its suspension of all passenger services will continue till April 14 in the wake of coronavirus outbreak.

PM'S KEY MESSAGES IN BRIEF

- India under complete lockdown from 12.00 AM from 25/03/2020 for 3 weeks
- Pls stay where you are
- Pls consider these weeks seriously, else we will go back 21 years in terms of economic growth
- Current advice is based on experience gathered from countries which were already severely affected by coronavirus
- Social distancing is applicable from PM to every other citizen of India
- Stay @ home & try to adopt innovative way to work from home or keep yourself engaged
- Lockdown will be more serious than Janata curfew
- All plans will be in place to ensure essential supplies are not impacted
- Rs.15,000 crores is earmarked to ensure medical/health infrastructure is improved to ensure coronavirus-infected citizens are treated well
- Health Infrastructure improvement should be priority for all state governments
- Don't fall for rumours and false news
- Pls take medicine as advised by treating doctor and do not try medicines or other processes on your own
- Have patience and follow instructions provided by government

'No need for panic buying; essential items, medicines will be available'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Allaying apprehensions, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said people need not panic about availability of essential commodities and medicines during the 21-day nationwide lockdown as the Centre and various state governments will work together to ensure this.



Amid reports of panic buying at various places following his announcement of the 21-day complete lockdown across the country, Modi requested people to refrain from "panic buying."

AP govt postpones Class X exams

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government on Tuesday put off the annual public examinations of Class X, scheduled to begin on March 31, by two weeks in view of the coronavirus threat.

This isn't the time for politics: Naidu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Leader of the Opposition N Chandrababu Naidu on Tuesday called upon the people to avoid all touchpoints in public places because of their potential to spread the deadly Coronavirus.



This is necessary to close all possible gaps in preventing community transmission of the dreaded virus, he said. Addressing a press conference, Naidu advised Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy to duly follow the Central government's advisories on awareness.

TDP asks Centre to waive taxes on face masks

VIJAYAWADA: TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu on Tuesday demanded that the Centre should waive taxes on sanitary essential products like face masks and hand sanitiser required for containing the spread of coronavirus.

Savings A/c: Minimum balance charges waived

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Giving relief to citizens amid the coronavirus outbreak, the government on Tuesday removed charges on withdrawal of funds from other bank ATMs and also exempted account holders from maintaining minimum balance.



Announcing the initiatives, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said these concessions will continue for three months till June 30. All banks, including private sector ones, will waive off minimum balance and ATM fees for the next three months.

Tokyo Olympics postponed to 2021

PNS ■ TOKYO

The IOC announced a first-of-its-kind postponement of the Summer Olympics on Tuesday, bowing to the realities of a coronavirus pandemic that is shutting down daily life around the globe and making planning for a massive worldwide gathering in July a virtual impossibility.

Coronavirus cases in India rise to 519

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The number of coronavirus cases in India rose to 519 on Tuesday, according to Health Ministry data.

been cured, discharged or migrated. The figure includes 43 foreign nationals and the nine deaths reported so far, the Health Ministry said.

from Maharashtra (two), Bihar, Karnataka, Delhi, Gujarat and Punjab.

Kerala has reported the highest number of COVID-19 cases so far at 95, including eight foreign nationals, followed by Maharashtra which recorded 89, including three foreigners, according to the ministry data.

AP reports eighth positive case

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh reported its eighth confirmed COVID-19 case on Tuesday with a 25-year-old man, who returned from London on March 19, testing positive for the virus.

ed positive on Tuesday, the medical and health department said in a bulletin.

ted to hospitals across the state.

'Newspapers do not spread Covid-19'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Well-known physician Dr Samaram on Tuesday ruled out coronavirus spreading through newspapers and terming such rumours as a "joke". He clarified that the virus spreads from person to person and at no stage of printing a newspaper is vulnerable that it can spread the virus to others.

are putting in place all precautions," the doctor said. Referring to unnecessary propaganda on social media, he said that the print and electronic media is playing a crucial role in helping and safeguarding people's health. Dr Samaram exhorted those who stay indoors during the lockdown to learn facts from newspapers and TV channels and not take to social media in an attempt to dispel myths.

Noticing that home quarantine of all those who are returning home from abroad is not being effectively implemented due to various intractable reasons, people of at least two villages in Adilabad district have hit upon a novel idea. They have started living in tents pitched on the outskirts, far away from locations harbouring foreign returnees who have given the go-by to rules. Although the authorities in the state have directed all those

who have returned from foreign countries to stay put in their homes for 14 days even if they show no symptoms of Covid-19, not every such returnee is serious about doing his or her bit to check the spread of the disease. While some people are observing home quarantine, be it self-imposed or medically mandated, there are others who deliberately give it a slip, if the case registered against Mancheril DSP is any indication. At a time when city folks are wittingly violating rules and do

TACKLING 'COVIDIOTS'

Villagers start living in tents on outskirts



People placing boulders and debris across the road leading to the thanda

PIN POINT
No one could have possibly imagined the extend of damage that would have caused to Andhra Pradesh and its people had elections to the local bodies gone ahead as per the schedule announced earlier. Initially, the ruling party, especially its supreme YS Jaganmohan Reddy, berated the State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar, even going to the extent of accusing him of favouring Telugu Desam Party president N Chandrababu Naidu because of the 'caste' factor. However, the Chief Minister has adopted a softer tone after the Coronavirus began making its presence felt in the state. If indeed the elections had gone ahead as scheduled, the number of infections could possibly have gone upto lakhs, not thousands, since people would have been

Postponement of polls saved many lives in AP

crammed together in polling booths, and exposed to the deadly virus. Naturally, the voters would have turned up in their thousands at the polling booths across the state, after being 'treated properly' by the two principal players on the political scene in AP, who are bent upon proving they are the dominant force. The political situation in the state is such that both these parties are willing to do whatever it takes to prove that the people are with them. In the end, the SEC's stated reason behind his decision to postpone the polling has turned out to be the correct one, as not only the people of AP, but also of the country, in fact the entire world, remain at great peril due to the outbreak of this deadly pandemic. The SEC's decision also

The SEC's decision also proved that however pure his intentions may have been, the Chief Minister, or any government functionary across the country, cannot always be right in his or her decisions

proved that however pure his intentions may have been, the Chief Minister, or any government functionary across the country, cannot always be right in his or her decisions. The Jaganmohan Reddy government initially did not quite grasp the danger the virus posed, if one takes into account its insistence that the polls go ahead as scheduled. To buttress his argument, Jagan pointed out that the state stood to lose the nearly Rs 5,000 crore funds

assured by the 14th Finance Commissioner in the event of elections for the local bodies not being held by the end of March, 2020. Now with people gradually realising the danger posed by Covid-19, even the staunchest supporter of Jagan is thanking the Almighty for the postponement of the elections. Even the tone and tenor of the YSRCP leaders on the issue of local bodies polls appears to have changed. Initially, the governments



M D RATNA KUMAR
Senior Journalist

Janata curfew followed by total lockdown. However, had the two CMs been serious about the looming danger from the beginning, the attitude of the people too wouldn't have been as casual as it was. It was extremely worrying to see numerous people come out onto the streets at 5.00 pm on the day of Janata curfew to "express solidarity" with doctors, nurses and other health workers treating those affected by Coronavirus. This defeated the very purpose of the Janata curfew and the concept of social distancing that needs to be strictly followed to flatten the rapidly rising curve of Coronavirus infections. The people should realise that lockdowns are for their own safety and well being and the government gains nothing

from such drastic actions. The government also gains nothing from the closure of places of worship. Whichever faith one may be, it is time to pray for the well being of the nation and the world. Being forced not to go to a temple, mosque or any place of worship is heart-wrenching for many, but unavoidable. Controlling public action strictly is quite possible in the absence of Democratic rule in countries like China where it took nearly four months to arrest the spread of the deadly virus. But is this possible for a country like India where politics rules everything? Government here has to take the opposition into confidence on matters involving such a major issue like Coronavirus. It's hard in general for ruling parties in India

to get the backing of the Opposition on key issues. The situation is such that the Government of India has to take very tough measures to arrest the spread of the virus, including strict enforcement of the law. People naturally resist strict measures, but this time, it would be for their own well-being. It can be safely assumed that both the Central and state governments will have a tough time ensuring social distancing. Citizens, irrespective of caste and creed, had been engaged in praying to the Almighty to keep the lethal Coronavirus away from their Motherland! Let us add one more small prayer to this. Let us pray that the prayers of everyone are accepted and the Blessings of the Almighty shower upon this great nation soon.

CAPSULE
NOVA introduces tele-consulting facilities
VIJAYAWADA: In its endeavour to continue extending medical counsel and support during these challenging times, Nova IVF Fertility introduces tele-counselling services across all its 25 centres in the country. The introduction of this special service comes at a time when access to medical care is a challenge, with States across the country under lockdown. Speaking on the introduction of tele-consulting services, Shobhit Agarwal, CEO, Nova IVF, said, "Under the present circumstances it is increasingly becoming difficult for patients to physically reach out to doctors not only for their follow up consultations but also for many, who wish to do their first consultation. By leveraging the tele-consult technology, we are enabling the virtual interface of patients with their doctors. As India's leading network in IVF space it was important for us to provide all possible support in these uncertain times. We are not restricting this service to Nova's patients but to the community at large."

Corona dashes mango growers' hopes

CH PRADEEP
VIJAYAWADA
Mango growers, who are on cloud nine, due to bumper harvest with timely rains, were devastated by the pandemic Covid-19. The virus not only shattered various businesses across the globe but also mango growers in Krishna district, as they are feeling the heat as the yield is ready for sale. Nuzvid, Gampala Gudun, Visannapeta and surrounding areas are the hub of delicious mango varieties like Totapuri, Bangenapalli, Pedda Rasalu and Chinna Rasalu. Every year during mid March, April and May, the mouth-watering mango quality from Krishna district will be exported to a few countries and to a few north Indian States. With the Covid-19, hopes of mango growers were shattered in the district, as they are clueless with the shutdown announced by the government. With timely flowering besides good weather conditions, growers are expecting a good yield. Ch Srinivasulu, additional director, horticulture department, Nuzvid, spoke to The Pioneer and said out of 24,000 hectares in this area, 25 per cent was Totapuri mangoes,



and growers already sold their produce to north Indian States and other places, as the yield has come early. He said that during this season, the department has supplied fruit cover to mango growers. The cover protects the fruit from spots and scars that enable the fruit to grow spotless, which has a good demand for exports. At this juncture, it would be difficult to say what has to be done next, as the whole State is under lockdown on account of the pandemic Covid-19. This year as everything has fallen in place the good yield is good. However, during the harvesting time, the virus has shattered everything. Kalyan, a trader from the mango market in Vijayawada, said that full-fledged mango marketing will begin from Ugadi. Till now, 2,000 tonnes of mangoes, which include Bangenapalli, Pedda Rasalu and Chinna Rasalu, are being sent to various places in north India and 2,000 tonnes is ready packed in boxes worth Rs 1 crore. As the government has announced the lockdown, traders are clueless what to do with the stock. M Siva Ramaiah, a mango farmer, said that this year

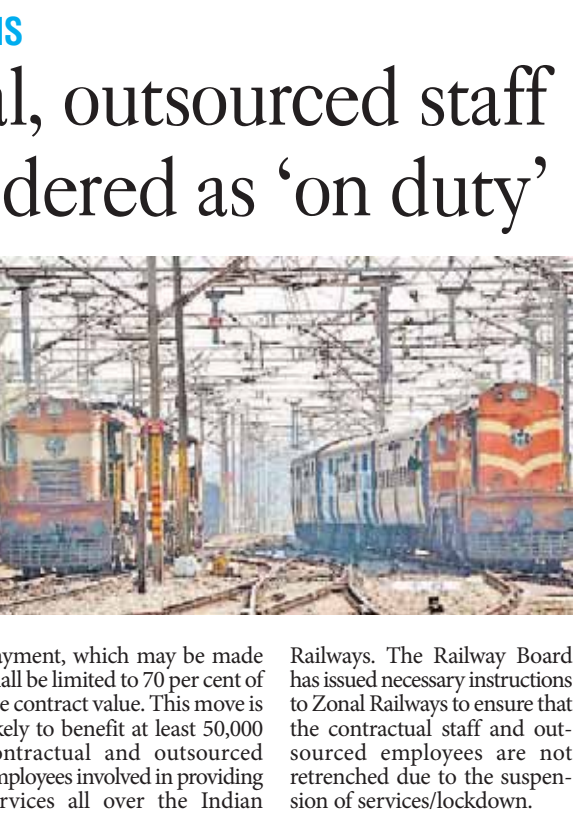
M Siva Ramaiah, a mango grower, said that this year mango yield is good compared to previous years due to timely rains. As the mango business is about to begin, the government has announced lockdown. "Cutting and packing of mangoes should start by now and if the lockdown continues for a few more weeks, fruits will ripen further on the trees and fall. Mango growers are waiting for the virus to subside and the government to lift the lockdown," he said. mango yield is good compared to previous years due to timely rains. As the mango business is about to begin, the government has announced lockdown. Cutting and packing of mangoes should start by now and if the lockdown continues for a few more weeks fruits will ripen further on the trees and fall. Mango growers are waiting for the virus to subside and the government to lift the lockdown.

Cops crack whip against violators



A policeman cracking a passerby for violating lockdown norms in Machilipatnam on Tuesday
PNS VIJAYAWADA
Police cracking the whip against erring vehicle users for violating prohibitory orders imposed by the government in the wake of coronavirus outbreak. A video in which a youth was being lathicharged by police in Machilipatnam here on Tuesday went viral for allegedly flouting the norms. Krishna District Superintendent of Police M Ravindranath Babu warned people not to venture out. Meanwhile, authorities made repeated announcements pertaining to the closure in across the district. Police are trying to prevent people from coming onto the roads. But when some of them are not obeying their orders, they are using the lathis. Additional Superintendent of Police M Sattibabu supervised the implementation of the lockdown. According to the WHO, the number of cases worldwide has surpassed 3,30,000 while the number of deaths have exceeded 14,000.

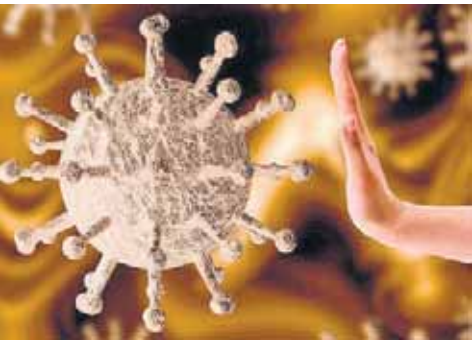
SUSPENSION OF TRAINS
Contractual, outsourced staff to be considered as 'on duty'
PNS VIJAYAWADA
In a bid to reduce the hardships and protect the interests of contractual and outsourced staff engaged in providing services such as On-Board House Keeping services (OBHS) in trains, sanitation, pantry cars, stations, offices and other commercial activities, the Ministry of Railways has decided that such staff will be treated on duty and will be paid accordingly till the expiry of suspension of services/lockdown, or as advised by the Central government in this regard. This is applicable on contracts awarded on a manpower basis. For contracts awarded on the lumpsum basis (i.e., not on manpower basis), a maximum



payment, which may be made shall be limited to 70 per cent of the contract value. This move is likely to benefit at least 50,000 contractual and outsourced employees involved in providing services all over the Indian Railways. The Railway Board has issued necessary instructions to Zonal Railways to ensure that the contractual staff and outsourced employees are not retrenched due to the suspension of services/lockdown.

'Self-isolation need of the hour to combat virus'

PNS VIJAYAWADA
The State government is fully equipped to control the spread of coronavirus, said PV Ramesh, additional chief secretary to the Chief Minister. Explaining the measures initiated by the government, Ramesh said that the role of people is very important in managing the pandemic, where self-isolation and maintaining social distance plays a prominent role. Speaking to the media here on Tuesday, he said that since the reports of Covid-19 outbreak have emerged, Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy has been closely monitoring the situation. In regard to this, a high-powered Task Force headed by the Chief Secretary has been constituted, which is constantly monitoring the situation in every district across the State. He further appealed to public not to panic over the disease and stigmatise the foreign returnees. "So far, seven positive cases have been registered across the State and one of them was recovered. Through the door-to-door survey, are able to identify around 14,000 foreign returnees, where 53 of them are under hospital isolation. All the hospitals are fully equipped with all the required facilities, ICU's and ventilators," he said. "People urged to stay indoors and not to venture out unnecessarily. In case any person has symptoms of cough, cold and fever, all they have to do is to call 104 or the district helpline to seek medical advice. They can take simple medication like Paracetamol of 650 mg but not to go for Ibuprofen or Aspirin or any other complex medications. Persons with asthma and chronic ailments have to be extra careful and seek medical advice upon having any slight symptoms. Essential commodities will be made available all day long for the convenience of the public," he added. Ramesh said unlike other States, Andhra Pradesh is able to monitor the situation at ground-level effectively through ANMs,



nurses, Asha workers and village volunteers. Public has to cooperate with the government and act according to the instructions. Following are the District Helpline numbers - Srikakulam - 6 3 0 0 0 7 3 2 0 3, Vizianagaram - 08922-227950 and 9494914971, Visakhapatnam - 9666556597, East Godavari - 8841361763, West Godavari - 08812-222376, Krishna - 9491058200, Guntur - 0 8 6 3 - 2 2 7 1 4 9 2, Prakasam - 7729803162, SPSR - Nellore - 9618232115, Chittoor - 9849902379, YSR Kadapa - 08562-245259, Anantapur - 08554-277434, Kurnool - 9441300005, State Control Room - 0866 2410978, Health Advisory Helpline- 104. Jaganmohan Reddy, has been so effective that they have thus far collected the data of 12,000 foreign returnees across 13 districts, have been tracking them and sending the information to officials concerned. "The hard work of the village volunteers has drawn the appreciation of the Chief Minister. There is no need for attaching stigma to the returnees and their family members. They are also being told about the importance of self-isolation and the 14-day incubation period," Venkataramaiah said.

Permission accorded for media vehicles

PNS VIJAYAWADA
Vijayawada Municipal Commissioner V Prasanna Venkatesh appealed to denizens that stern action will be taken for violating the instructions imposed by the department to prevent the pandemic Covid-19 from spreading further. People can come on to the streets to buy essentials from 6 am to 9 am, provisions stores, fruit shops, Rythu Bazaars, Kaleswararao Market will be opened during that time. He said that people should note that from 4 am to 8 am, milk and dairy products will be available. ATM vehicles will be permitted from 5 am to 9 am to fill cash in machines. From 7 am to 7 pm, takeaway hotels were accorded permission, while vehicles of police, fire, electricity, revenue, VMC, medical and health departments will be permitted to ply on roads. The Commissioner said that special permission was given for the print and electronic media, oil and gas filling and mobile communication vehicles. Jewellery, malls, electronic shops, cloth stores, fancy shops, hardware, furniture, bakery and icecream parlours, readymade garment shops, hotels and restaurants, food courts, iron and steel, glass and plywood shops, mobile shops, automobile, Auto Nagar will remain closed.

'Jagan's foresight helped keep cases in AP low'

PNS VIJAYAWADA
Advisor to the Andhra Pradesh Government Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy on Tuesday said that the state government has been successful in keeping the deadly Covid-19 at bay by strictly implementing an action plan over the last three days. The impact of the virus in the state is minimal because of the measures initiated by Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy with foresight, Sajjala said. Addressing media at the YSRCP office here, he said



Jagan has been reviewing the situation regarding Coronavirus on a daily basis and obtaining reports from officials both in the morning and evening. "The CM is taking all mea-

asures so that normal life is not affected. Because of his foresight, the number of Covid-19 cases in AP is less compared to other states. The state is not affected by the virus as much as the neighbouring Telangana or Kerala or Rajasthan have been affected," Sajjala said. He said that as soon as the news about the pandemic spread, Jagan put the official machinery on the alert and got a survey conducted with the help of volunteer system to assess the number of persons returned from abroad. "The government was able to obtain meaningful information in spite of there being no list supplied to it by the immigration department. Providing information to health department, he ensured that diagnostic tests are conducted on the foreign returnees in time. Because of these precautions, the state government is fully geared to meet the Coronavirus threat. The credit in reining in Coronavirus goes to Jagan," Sajjala said. He said that the YSRCP government is living up to the expectations of the people of the state by reining in the virus.

Village volunteers to create awareness on 'dos and don't'

PNS VIJAYAWADA
Transport and I&PR Minister Purni Venkataramaiah on Tuesday said that a massive exercise would be taken by village volunteers to raise awareness among the people of the state on the 'Dos and Don'ts' with regard to Coronavirus, thereby making the best use of the existing system. Speaking to the media here, the Minister said publicity material depicting the precautions, symptoms and information on whom to contact, phone numbers and other details would be displayed through all available forms and avenues. Stickers would be pasted on the doors of each house by village and ward volunteers, who could collect more data than the Centre on the number of foreign returnees. They would carry out this task and also distribute pensions on April 1 at the doorstep of the beneficiaries, the Minister said. He said that the Village Secretariat system, introduced by Chief Minister YS

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Governor extends Ugadi greetings

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan on Tuesday extended Ugadi greetings to the people of Andhra Pradesh with an appeal to stay indoors and observe social distancing in the wake of the Coronavirus threat.

In a message, Harichandan said: "On this happy and auspicious occasion of 'Ugadi', the Telugu New Year Day, I extend my heartiest greetings to the people of Andhra Pradesh and to the Telugu people living all over the world."

Pointing out that Ugadi is a festival of joy and hope, the Governor prayed that the New Year brings with it new cheer and a bright future. "I am confident that 'Sri Sarvari Nama Samvatsaram' will usher in peace, prosperity, harmony and happiness to all people and sections of society," Harichandan said.

Ministers tell officials to implement lockdown strictly

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Following instructions from Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy, a Group of Ministers comprising Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas (Nani), Muttamsetti Srinivas and Kurasala Kannababu visited Visakhapatnam on Tuesday and held a review meeting with the district officials.

Later speaking to the media, Minister for Health Alla Nani instructed the officials to implement the lockdown strictly and appealed to the public to remain indoors as a precautionary measure.

"In Visakhapatnam, the spread of the virus is in the second stage and it has to be controlled. So far, three positive cases have been registered in Visakhapatnam and the district officials have identified Seethammadhara, Gajuwaka, and Anakapalle as high-risk zones, as these places have more numbers of foreign returnees. Strict action will be taken against those who defy the rules and come on roads without a valid reason."

In the view of the Covid-19 pandemic, hundreds of beds have been made available for treating the cases in isolation at VIMS Visakhapatnam, KGH, and also the district hospitals.



Ministers Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas (Nani), Muttamsetti Srinivas and Kurasala Kannababu having a word with Visakhapatnam District Collector Vinayachand on Tuesday

All these hospitals are equipped with ventilators and an additional 200 ventilators will be arranged in ICUs, the Minister said.

He added: "So far, through the house-to-house survey by village volunteers, we were able to track 14,038 foreign returnees across the State and 1,364 of them are from Visakhapatnam district alone. The Government of India has also sent us the list of the foreign returnees and we shall track them. For every 10 foreign returnees, one official will be given the responsibility of monitoring them. Compared to other States, the number of cases in Andhra Pradesh is way less, because of the effective precautionary steps taken by the government."

Minister for Agriculture

Kurasala Kannababu said that there is no need for people to panic and the government was making all efforts to fight the pandemic. "All people have to do is to maintain social distance and stay safe," Kannababu said, adding that strict action will be taken against those inflating the prices of commodities and black-marketing in the view of lockdown.

"All essential commodities like rice, vegetables, dairy products will be available for the public. For safety reasons, all the rythu bazaars have been shifted to open grounds and stadiums. People are requested to come out only during emergencies. The Chief Minister has already announced that all the BPL families will be receiving one month of free ration and Rs

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- So far, three positive cases have been registered in Visakhapatnam and district officials identified Seethammadhara, Gajuwaka, and Anakapalle as high-risk zones, as these places have more numbers of foreign returnees
- Strict action will be taken against those who defy the rules and come on roads without valid reason, ministers said

1,000 each." Minister Muttamsetti Srinivas stated all the pharma industries and other important institutions have been directed to minimise the work force and take safety precautions in the workplace. "While the State government is making so many efforts to control the pandemic, opposition parties are playing cheap politics. We urge them to cooperate with the government in controlling the situation rather than politicising it," he said.

Officials keeping tabs on foreign returnees: Nani

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Civil Supplies Kodali Sri Venkateswara Rao alias Nani convened a review meeting with Gudivada DSP N Satyanandam on the action being taken by police personnel in the wake of lockdown announced by the government. Speaking on the occasion, the minister said that police should take strict action against people, who ignore the instructions given by the government to control the pandemic.

The minister enquired about the check posts set up under the Gudivada limits with police. "As the virus effect is severe, people should feel responsible and stay at home and cooperate with the government and the authorities till March 31, as the lockdown is in force. Private vehicles should be used only in an emergency," he said.

People should cooperate with the police by following the instruction imposed by them, he suggested. Every vehicle should be checked thoroughly at the check post and seize the vehicle, if they notice that the vehicle is plying frequently, he said.

Nani said that the government has been taking precautionary measures to control the spread of the virus.



Minister for Civil Supplies Kodali Sri Venkateswara Rao alias Nani enquires with DSP N Satyanandam in Gudivada on Tuesday about the shutdown

Teams are formed by volunteers, ASHA workers, ANMs to educate people on coronavirus and the door-to-door survey is being carried out, he informed

Collector, contract tracing teams, police, rapid response teams and the medical department is monitoring the activity.

Teams are formed by volunteers, ASHA workers, ANMs to educate people on coronavirus and the door-to-door survey is being carried out, he informed. People should not move in groups as Section 144 was in force till March 31.

The paramedical team is tracing the foreign returnees and if any persons, who had come from abroad should come voluntarily, give their details and undergo tests pertaining to the virus, he said.

Teams were formed at village, division and district level to contain the virus with the instruction of the District

21-day nationwide lockdown

Continued from Page 1

March 31, and Modi's announcement extended it everywhere and for two more weeks after this month.

Modi folded his hands a few times to emphasise his request to citizens to adhere to his call, saying it is applicable to everyone from the prime minister to a citizen in a village. Even countries like Italy, France and the US with world class infrastructure have been left helpless due to the spread of the disease despite their relentless efforts, he said, emphasising the gravity of the situation. Some people suffer from this wrong mindset that only infected persons need to follow social distancing, he said, warning that such a view can endanger lives of others and their families.

This is the only ray of light, he asserted. "To save India, to save every Indian, there will be a complete ban on people from stepping outside their houses from 12 midnight today," he said. "Lockdown is being imposed on every state, union territory, district, village, mohalla and street," he added.

The lockdown will be like "curfew" and more stringent than the 'janata curfew', which the country had observed on Sunday, he said, adding it will have an economic cost but saving people's lives is of the paramount interest in his government. A lockdown in most of the country was already in place till

Savings A/c: Minimum balance charges waived

Continued from Page 1

With regard to the commerce ministry, the finance minister said extension of time-limits for various compliance and procedures will be given.

Besides, she said all SIPs for SPF Shrimp Broodstock and other agriculture inputs expiring between March 1 and April 14 has been extended by 3 months. She said the delay up to 1 month in arrival of consignments will be condoned. Rebooking of quarantine cubicles for cancelled consignments in AQE, Chennai, will be without additional booking charges, she said adding that the verification of documents and grant of NOC for quarantine would be relaxed from 7 days to 3 days.

Public flock to buy veggies at Rythu Bazaars

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

People stepped on to the streets right from the morning on the second day of lockdown in Vijayawada on Tuesday. Police maintained a strict vigil to restrict the movement of people in groups. However, most of them in the city confined themselves to indoors to prevent the pandemic Covid-19 from spreading further.

Earlier, the State and Central governments have announced total lockdown in the State and country in the wake of the virus from spreading further. Meanwhile, trains, public transport and others were cancelled. To monitor the situation and restrict the crowd, the district administration has



Denizens stand in a queue to buy vegetables at an open Rythu Bazaar in Vijayawada on Tuesday, while a policeman keeping tabs on the crowd

taken a very important decision to shift the Rythu Bazaars to open places.

The PWD Rythu Bazaar was shifted to the Indira Gandhi Municipal Corporation Stadium and hundreds of peo-

ple thronged it and purchased vegetables and other essential commodities.

People bought vegetables, which would last for a few days in the wake of lockdown, though vendors sold the veg-



etables double the price. Due to the threat of spreading Coronavirus, the government has suggested for isolation and asked them to avoid gatherings. In this backdrop, shifting of Rythu

Bazaars to an open stadium welcomed by consumers. The Vijayawada Municipal Corporation, revenue and marketing departments have successfully maintained the activity without problem.

2-yr jail for spreading virus intentionally

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The AP Government on Tuesday announced that anyone intentionally spreading the dreaded Coronavirus, putting lives of people in danger is liable to be sent to jail for two years as per Section 270 of the IPC.

In a press release, DGP Gautam Sawang said that if anyone violates quarantine and roams about, he or she can be sentenced to undergo six months in jail as per Section 271 of the IPC. Punishments are also to be awarded under the Epidemic Diseases Act 1897. Violating government orders would invite punishment up to a month in jail as per Section 188 of IPC.

Naidu, family give Rs 10L for virus-hit

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu on Tuesday announced that head his family would donate Rs 10 lakh, while MLAs and MLAs of his party would donate their one month's salary to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund as part of their efforts to help those badly affected by the lockdown implemented to fight the dreaded Coronavirus.

Chairing the Telugu Desam Legislative Party meeting via videoconference from his residence here, Naidu called upon the people to confine themselves indoors.

The TDLP passed a resolution demanding the government announce ex-gratia of at least Rs 5,000 for all individuals from BPL families who are



forced to stay at home giving up their livelihood for the future of the country. Naidu said that it was the responsibility of the government to ensure they are compensated.

He stressed the need for creating awareness among the people about the way the virus spreads. Naidu requested all leaders of the TDP to effectively use social media to convey to the people in their region to 'Stay Home and Stay Strong'.

Coronavirus cases in India rise to 519

Continued from Page 1

Karnataka has reported 37 cases of coronavirus patients, while cases in Telangana rose to 35 including 10 foreigners. Cases in Rajasthan increased to 32, including two foreigners.

Uttar Pradesh has 33 positive cases, including a foreign national. Gujarat also has 33 positive cases including a foreigner.

Cases in Delhi stand at 30, including one foreigner.

In Haryana, there are 28 cases, including 14 foreigners, while Punjab has reported 29 cases.

Ladakh has 13 cases, while Tamil Nadu has reported 15 cases, including two foreigners.

West Bengal reported nine cases while Andhra Pradesh



has eight patients. Both Madhya Pradesh and Chandigarh reported seven cases each so far.

Jammu and Kashmir has four cases, so has Uttarakhand, including one foreigner.

There are three cases each in Himachal Pradesh and Bihar while there are two cases in Odisha. Puducherry, Manipur and Chhattisgarh have reported a case each.

AP reports eighth positive case

Continued from Page 1

Over 200 vehicles in which the people were roaming on the roads were also seized, he said. "The restrictions on account of the lockdown will only increase and we will deal very firmly with those who willfully violate the prohibitory orders. It is only in public interest that the lockdown has been imposed," the DGP told reporters. The DGP said while inter-state movement of vehicles and people has been stopped, inter-district borders within the state too would be shut. In many villages across the state, the villagers themselves used various methods to seal all entry and exit routes to their respective villages to ensure "nobody goes out, nobody comes in."

Villagers start living in tents...

Continued from Page 1

Good things also spread. In no time, the people of the Andu thanda followed suit, just to be on the safe side. According to village sarpanch Jadav Lakhan, this is a precautionary measure taken by some families in the village. MPTC member from the region Vijay Singh said that the path had been chosen to keep coronavirus at bay. Elsewhere in Adilabad district, several villages have adopted resolutions imploring others not to visit their villages for a period of about 70 days. They have also put up 'No entry' boards at the village entrance. Some resourceful ones have even put up thorny fences and stacked up boulders across the roads to prevent unauthorised entry.

The medical officers tested their samples and prescribed them home quarantine for 14 days. One of them, belonging to Yemaikunta, did not care to have a special room to observe home quarantine. On top of that, his family members started mingling freely with reluctant villagers. This soon prompted the discerning ones among the families in the thanda to take steps to keep themselves aloof from the foreign returnee and his family members.

There are 120 families in Yemaikunta. Of them, 25 families literally joined hands, pitched tents on the outskirts, and started living there with their kith and kin.

TDP asks Centre to waive taxes...

Continued from Page 1

order to render services to different sections of people by eliminating physical contact to the maximum possible extent. The government should actively extend such online services to farmers who are suffering losses in agriculture, horticulture, aqua and poultry sectors due to COVID-19, the Telugu Desam Party chief added.

On holding of the Budget session, he asked the state government to consult legal and medical experts before conducting the assembly session in view of the coronavirus pandemic.

He warned that any "wrong decision in this time of great human health crisis would prove to be a historic blunder." The state government was mulling to hold assembly session to pass the budget by month-end.

The Kerala government has already announced Rs 20,000 crore package and two months pensions for the beneficiaries, he added. "Naidu appealed to the Centre to waive taxes on all required sanitary products, especially masks and hand sanitiser," the statement said. The Centre has declared face masks and hand sanitiser as essential commodities. To stop the spread of the disease, Naidu urged people of the state to cooperate in ensuring sanitation and hygiene in villages, towns, municipalities and corporations. He also stressed on the need for the government and organisations to use online digital platforms more effectively in

This isn't the time for politics, says Naidu

Continued from Page 1

"This is not a time for the State government to criticise the Opposition but it should rather focus on sensitisation of every individual to save himself and his family, thereby save the community from the impending danger," the former Chief Minister said.

He stressed the need for governments and organisations to use online digital platforms more effectively in order to render services to different sections of people by eliminating physical contact to the maximum possible extent.

The government should actively extend such online services to farmers who are suffering corona-inflicted losses in agriculture, horticulture, aqua and poultry sectors.

Pointing out that Rajya Sabha elections were indefinitely postponed to ensure social distancing, Naidu asked the AP government to consult legal and medical experts before conducting Assembly session at a time like this.

He cautioned that any wrong decision in this time of a health crisis would prove to be a historic blunder. Naidu said that Rs 20000 crore were postponed just two days ahead of polling which reflects the seriousness of the virus outbreak.

He appealed to the Centre to waive taxes on all required sanitary products especially masks and hand sanitisers.

People should cooperate in ensuring sanitation and hygiene in villages, towns,

municipalities and corporations. Doctors should be given ID cards to go and render their services during lockdowns, the TDP supremo appealed.

Naidu demanded a special package and compensation to the rural agricultural labourers under Section 7 of the MG National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA).

Cash compensation of 25 per cent should be provided for those workers who lost up to 30 days of work and 50 per cent for those who lost more than 30 days of work under NREGA, he said, adding that the Kerala government already announced Rs 20,000 crore package and two months pensions for beneficiaries.

Kesineni Nani pokes fun at PV Ramesh

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP MP Kesineni Nani has suggested sending additional chief secretary in the CMO PV Ramesh as an advisor to Italy accusing him of speaking in different tongues on reining in coronavirus. In a tweet, Kesineni noted that the other day PV Ramesh advised people to consume paracetamol 650 mg every six hours and now advising people to sanitise hands with hand sanitiser for every one hour.

In that case, where is the need for imposing lockdown on the State and observing 'Janata Curfew', he wondered. Retweeting the video showing municipal corporation personnel feeding the poor on roadside, he accused the government of closing down



Anna Canteens without weighing pros and cons. Had the Anna canteens been allowed to function, this kind of a situation would not have arisen at all, he said.

The poor would have got quality food without having to sacrifice their self-respect, he said. He advised the government to weigh consequences at least 100 times before undertaking even a minor task.



AP gov't postpones Class X exams

Continued from Page 1

Even last night the Chief Minister's Office announced the exams would be held as per the revised schedule from the 31st, despite the state being under a complete lockdown. The CMO later withdrew the statement. The Education Minister said on Tuesday afternoon that the exams were being postponed due to coronavirus which has affected seven people in the state so far.

Twenty-five years ago, late P Kamala Manohar Rao, in his report to the government of undivided AP on streamlining Tribal Development, strongly recommended for a "Single-Line Administration". Though a number of schemes for the welfare of tribals has been drawn up and scores implemented, most of the key suggestions made by Rao are as pertinent today.

Telangana-born Manohar Rao was the first Director of Tribal Welfare when it was created in 1966 and continued in the post till he retired in 1975. He was entrusted with the task of Tribal Development as part of Administrative Reforms Committee of Rustomjee and Associates in 1985.

In his report titled "Streamlining of Tribal Development Administration" Rao recommended a single-window approach and a decentralised multi-functional organ-

Multi-functional approach to tribal welfare

isation for tribal development. His report was a comprehensive document and for all those who wish to look at problems of Tribals in perspective, it is very interesting reading.

The Telangana government gives priority to the welfare of Tribals by implementing number of schemes. These include among others; Micro Irrigation, residential schools and colleges, study circles, overseas scholarships, Kalyana Lakshmi, subsidies under Economic support, Aasara pensions, ST special development fund through ST Sub Plan, making Thandas as Gram Panchayats etc.

ASCI former principal Dharani P Sinha, commending the report wrote: "If one wants to get results in tribal areas there is no alternative other than creat-

The TS govt gives priority to the welfare of tribals by implementing number of schemes. These include among others; Micro Irrigation, residential schools and colleges, study circles, overseas scholarships, Kalyana Lakshmi, subsidies under Economic support, Aasara pensions and others

ing a decentralised administration with integrated multi-functional approach." Late Prof C Von Fuel Haimendorf, in his December 1985 letter to Rao, praised his efforts. Congratulating Rao for his brilliant analysis, Haimendorf agreed that there was an urgent need for a thorough revision of the administrative machinery in the tribal areas. Prof. Haimendorf expressed the hope that Rao's

realistic proposals would be accepted by the State Government, the implementation of which would greatly benefit the tribal population of the State.

Rao recommended that the Girijan Cooperative Corporation to be combined in itself credit, commercial and welfare functions as a central bank as well as to function as a marketing organisation. He wanted it to have a



VANAM JWALA NARASIMHA RAO
CPRO to Chief Minister

project review and control mechanism and an independent status as Tribal Cultural Research and Training Institute. Another suggestion refers to changes in the administrative structure at the secretariat level which includ-

ed constitution of a State level high power committee to advise the Chief Minister on tribal affairs. At the directorate level and district level also, Rao made many outstanding suggestions.

Rao, born on December 20, 1919 as a postgraduate student in 1947 was identified by Haimendorf to work among the Tribals. He joined service in the Social Welfare Department of Nizam's Government. Rao evolved an integrated programme of development for weaning away Tribals from the extremist movement launched by the Communists in the Telangana tribal belt, in collaboration with Haimendorf, who was then adviser to the government to Hyderabad on Tribals in 1949. They were successful in restoring peace in that area.

Haimendorf was responsible for starting the social service department for the welfare of Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes and at that time Rao was appointed as trainee organiser. Rao was instrumental in implementing the Hyderabad Tribal Areas Regulation Act, 1949 in Warangal district. It was Rao, who worked out a strategy for bifurcation of the tribal welfare and social welfare departments. The original tribals used to live on hill-tops, forests, caves and under trees. They were scared on seeing the civilized people and used to literally run to their hideouts.

The report by Rao, whose long association with tribes and tribal development administration for about four decades could have been an answer to several problems. Rao was motivated by

Haimendorf in the tradition of applying anthropological knowledge to field situations. As observed by Rao in his report, it requires a constant effort for creation of delivery system attuned to the ideals and objectives set forth in the constitution and the plans. Traditional administrative systems cannot adequately handle the new development tasks. It requires application of skills and technology in various fields and calls for rigorous coordination and integration of skills and technologies in various sectors. The report, which contains several original proposals based on the study of various commission reports, is as pertinent today if the government designs a policy to enable Tribals reap benefits. Rao remains to this day what Verrier Elwyn called one of the greatest field-oriented philanthropists of this century, the "rara avis" (Exceptional Person) of sociologist-administrators, who are, indeed a vanishing tribe.

COVID-19 OUTBRAK

Need to tackle spread of pessimism and negativity, PM tells journalists

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said it is imperative to keep the fighting spirit of the people up as the country tackles the spread of coronavirus, and emphasised the need to tackle the spread of pessimism, negativity and rumour-mongering.

Interacting with senior journalists from the print media via video links, he also said the citizens need to be assured that the government is committed to countering the impact of COVID-19.

He said it is critical to improve social cohesion to safeguard national security.

During the interaction, Modi asked the media to act as a link between the government and people and provide continuous feedback at both national and regional levels.

"He underlined the importance of social distancing, asking media to generate awareness about its importance, inform people about the lockdown decision by states, and also highlight the impact of spread of the virus through inclusion of international data



and case studies about other countries in the papers," a statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office said.

According to the statement, Modi underlined that "it is imperative to keep the fighting spirit of the people up".

The prime minister also "emphasised that it was important to tackle the spread of pessimism, negativity and rumour mongering. Citizens need to be assured that the government is committed to countering the

impact of COVID-19," the statement said. The prime minister thanked the participants for the feedback and reminded them of the social responsibility towards the less privileged. Modi said the media has played a praise-worthy role in disseminating information to every nook and corner of the country. He said that the network of media is pan-India and spread across cities and villages.

This makes the media all the more significant in fighting this

challenge and spreading correct information about it at micro level, he said.

He said that newspapers carry tremendous credibility and the local page of a region is widely read by people.

It is, therefore, imperative that awareness about coronavirus is spread through articles published on this page. It is essential to inform people about where the testing centres are, who should get tested, whom to contact to get tested

Newspapers carry tremendous credibility and the local page of a region is widely read by people. It is, therefore, imperative that awareness about coronavirus is spread through articles published on this page, said Prime Minister Modi

and follow home isolation protocols. This information should be shared in newspapers and web portals of the paper, the prime minister said. He also suggested that information like location of availability of essential items during lockdown can also be shared in regional pages.

The journalists and stakeholders from print media appreciated the role played by the prime minister in communicating effectively and leading the country from the front.

2002 B'DESH MOSQUE BLASTS

Bangladesh national held in Maharashtra

PNS ■ MUMBAI

A 42-year-old Bangladeshi national wanted in connection with three blasts at a mosque in Bangladesh in 2002 has been arrested from Navi Mumbai in Maharashtra, police said on Tuesday.

Acting on a tip-off, the crime branch of neighbouring Thane Police arrested Mophajjal Hussain alias Mopha Ali Gazi alias Maphizul Mandal, hailing from Satkhira in Khulna state of Bangladesh, from Cidco bus stop on Thursday while he was trying to go to Turbhe in Navi Mumbai, an official said.

He was staying in Turbhe since the last few months and was doing odd jobs there.

He was involved in the crude bomb blasts, one inside and two outside the mosque in

Bangladesh, Thane crime branch police inspector Nitin Thakre said.

One person was killed and many others injured in the triple blast, which took place at Ilisur in the jurisdiction of Colarua police station, he said.

Hussain had lost his right hand when the crude bomb exploded while he was placing it outside the mosque, he said.

He was subsequently arrested and awarded life imprisonment by a court. However, he was later granted bail on medical grounds and released in 2004 following which he absconded and sneaked into India from the border along West Bengal where he did some petty jobs. He later came to Mumbai and was working at some construction sites in the metropolis and Navi Mumbai, he said.



SHORT READS



Entire West Bengal brought under lockdown till Mar 31

KOLKATA: Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday extended the ongoing lockdown in force in Kolkata and other urban areas of West Bengal to the entire state till March 31 to contain the coronavirus outbreak. "After assessing the situation, it has been decided that the ongoing lockdown will be extended to the entire state from 5 pm today," Banerjee told a press conference. The lockdown in Kolkata and several urban agglomerations had begun on Monday and was scheduled to continue till March 27 midnight.

'Explore feasibility of making essential items in COVID fight'

NEW DELHI: The Railway Board has issued instructions to all its production units to access feasibility of manufacturing items like simple hospital beds, medical trolleys for hospitals and quarantine facilities, and IV stands to contribute to the fight against the coronavirus pandemic. The order has been issued to all general managers of production units to use the manufacturing facilities at Chittaranjan Loco Works, Chittaranjan; Integral Coach Factory, Chennai; Rail Coach Factory, Kaapurthala; Diesel Loco Works, Varanasi and Rail Wheel Factory, Yelehanka to manufacture essential items which can be utilised for the treatment of affected people by this pandemic. "Railway Board has issued necessary instructions to the general managers of these production units to explore the feasibility of manufacture of items like simple hospital beds (without mattress), medical trolleys for hospitals and quarantine facilities, IV stands, stretchers, hospital footstools, hospital bedside lockers, washbasins with stands, ventilators, PPEs like masks, sanitisers, water tanks etc.

Centre asks states to release funds

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As coronavirus cases surge, the Centre on Tuesday asked all state governments to release funds for setting up of additional medical facilities like hospitals, clinical laboratories and isolation wards to combat the pandemic. The move came as the number of coronavirus cases in the country crossed 500. "The centre has asked all the state governments to deploy fiscal resources for establishing additional medical facilities such as hospitals, clinical labs, isolation wards, expanding and upgrading existing facilities to combat the challenge posed by COVID-19," an official statement said.

Woman tests positive for Covid-19 in Noida

PNS ■ NOIDA (UP)

A 47-year-old woman with no recent history of foreign travel has tested positive for COVID-19 here, taking the number of coronavirus cases in Gautam Buddh Nagar district to nine, officials said on Tuesday.

The husband and the daughter of the woman have been quarantined, while their housing society has been completely sealed -- no entry or exit allowed except in emergency cases, the administration said.

"A new positive case for coronavirus has been detected.... The society has been temporarily sealed from 2 pm of March 24 till 10 am of



March 26. Entry into or exit from the society will not be allowed during the period," District Magistrate B N Singh said.

According to officials, the woman has no history of foreign travel but her husband is an auditor and one of his London-based clients had recently visited him.

Centre should have taken coronavirus threat more seriously, says Congress

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Tuesday alleged that the government is criminally culpable of not defining specifications of personal protection equipment for doctors and health workers till March 2, with party leader Rahul Gandhi saying the country should have taken the coronavirus threat more seriously.

Gandhi had said on February 12 that the government should take the coronavirus threat seriously and must address the issue immediately, failing which the country and its people may suffer.

"I am feeling sad, because this was completely avoidable. We had time to prepare. We



should have taken this threat much more seriously and have been much better prepared," he said on Twitter.

Gandhi also retweeted a post of a doctor Kamna

Kakkar, who said she is frustrated in view of shortage of N95 masks and took a swipe at the beating of 'thalis' and applause on the call given by Prime Minister Narendra

Modi. Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala alleged that the government is criminally culpable of not defining specifications of personal protection equipment for doctors and health workers till March 2 and demanded answers from the prime minister.

"Dear PM, the government is criminally culpable of not defining 'Specifications' of Personal Protection Equipment for Doctors-Health Workers between 1st Feb-2nd March, 2020; Permitting export of PPE material, Masks, Ventilators upto 19th March. Nation needs to know," he said on Twitter.

Parents want schools to remain closed, curtail summer vacation

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With the number of coronavirus cases rising in the country, several parents want schools to not reopen soon and have suggested that academic loss if any can be reduced by curtailing the summer vacation. Several schools, which are already offering classes through digital modes of learning, say a decision in this regard will be taken only after March 31 once a review of the situation is done and also if the lockdown is curtailed. According to a survey by online platform LocalCircles.com, 81 per cent parents are in favour of schools being shut through May and reopening on June 1. Over 10,000 parents were interviewed for the survey.



are eased, schools should not reopen for at least a month. Kids are very sensitive and their safety should be of utmost concern," Ritvik Ahuja, an architect by profession said.

Another parent PK Shukla, said, "Schools are already con-

ducting online sessions, assignments are being done online. I am sure with technology at hand, lot can be managed so there is not going to be much academic loss".

Echoing similar concern, Shweta Babber, an IT profes-

Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas across the country have already announced advanced summer break and will reopen on May 22

sional said, "The loss of the number of days in the academic calendar can be made up by not giving any summer vacation this year". The classes and examination have been suspended in all schools till March 31.

Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas across the country have already announced advanced summer break and will reopen on May 22.

Covid-19: TN CM announces special payout for govt doctors

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Doctors, nurses, paramedics and sanitary workers involved in treating COVID-19 patients in isolation at government hospitals in Tamil Nadu will get a special payout of a month's salary to honour them, Chief Minister K Palaniswami told the Assembly on Tuesday.

Lauding their work while legislators stood up and applauded after his appeal, the Chief Minister said doctors, nurses, paramedics and cleanliness workers are working with a sense of dedication, even risking their lives.

"We are duty bound to appreciate them," he said adding they would get a special payout of one month salary.

Days ago, Palaniswami had



Lauding their work while legislators stood up and applauded after his appeal, CM said doctors, nurses, paramedics and cleanliness workers are working with a sense of dedication, even risking their lives

rechristened Tamil Nadu's sanitary workers as 'cleanliness workers.' The Chief Minister said air ambulance service would be started at a cost of Rs 10 crore to transport critical patients to hospitals. To further develop four State-run hospitals, including the Government Hospital for Thoracic Medicine at Tambaram Sanatorium here

and upgrade King's Institute of Preventive Medicine and Research's lab to Bio safety Level-III, a total amount of Rs 110 crore will be spent in the current fiscal, he said.

Palaniswami said a robotic surgery centre will be set up at a cost of Rs 34.60 crore at the state run multiplicity hospital here at the government estate.

Govt cautions people about fraudsters in name of COVID-19

NEW DELHI: The government on Tuesday cautioned people about attempts being made by fraudsters to steal confidential data of phones and computers by circulating malware in the name of coronavirus. A home ministry spokesperson advised people not to fall in the trap of such fraudsters. "Beware of fraudsters circulating malwares in the name of coronavirus. Such apps/links, if opened, may steal confidential data from your phone/computer," the spokesperson tweeted. The cyber fraudsters are circulating the malware link about a so-called coronavirus app like Spymax, Corona Live 1.1. Sometimes cyber criminals are also taking advantage of rising coronavirus concern for collecting charity, the spokesperson said.



COVID-19 OUTBREAK

Fourth death in Maharashtra, 107 +ve cases

Mumbai: A 65-year-old man who arrived here from UAE via Ahmedabad passed away due to COVID-19 late on Monday night, while the number of positive cases shot up to 107 in the State with 10 new cases, officials said here on Tuesday.

travel, arriving from UAE to Ahmedabad on March 15 and then to Mumbai on March 20. The victim also had complaints of high blood pressure coupled with uncontrolled diabetes and passed away late on Monday after a few hours of treatment. The new coronavirus positive cases in Maharashtra detected since last night include three from Pune and one from Satara.



Passengers stranded at the airport take rest after no local transport was available following Government's imposition of lockdown in the State amid coronavirus pandemic, in Chennai on Tuesday

Mumbai Police confiscates 2.5 mn masks worth ₹15 cr

Mumbai: In a major swoop, Mumbai Police have seized three truckloads of 2.50 million masks worth ₹15 crore hoarded illegally and busted a four-member gang, Home Minister Anil Deshmukh said here on Tuesday.

The seizure came after a tip-off received by Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh last week on a gang hoarding the heavy-demand masks for exorbitant prices

(Crime) Akbar Pathan said the four accused were produced before a magistrate and remanded to police custody till March 27. Since one consignment was found near the Mumbai Airport Cargo Complex and another in a warehouse in Bhiwandi, Pathan said the investigations will focus on whether attempts were underway to export the masks to other seriously affected countries where they are in huge demand.

B'luru civic body deploys drones to fight COVID-19

Bengaluru civic body has deployed drones for spraying disinfectants over all the areas of the city to combat coronavirus, a top official said on Tuesday.

Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) Commissioner B.H. Anil Kumar. Powered by six propellers, the drones have a capacity to lift 15 litre disinfectants provided by the civic body to spray in places when there is more human density.

Goa Opp raises doubts about zero virus case

The Congress in Goa on Tuesday raised doubts about repeated claims made by the State Government of zero COVID-19 positive cases, in absence of a single testing laboratory, in the coastal State.

seems under control, even though the government failed to establish a basic virology laboratory to test COVID-19 in Goa, a Chodankar said in his statement.

Four more positive cases in Gujarat, total now 33

Gandhinagar: With four more new coronavirus positive cases reported in Gujarat, the total such cases in the western State climbed to 33 on Tuesday, as the authorities decided to put the entire State under lockdown.

Gujarat is the only state in the country which has a list of 27,000 passengers, the residents who returned from abroad since March 1.

cases in Gujarat, we have recent blood samples of six patients after a week's treatment for testing and they have been found stable," added Ravi.

With 3 more testing +ve, J&K cases mount to six

At least three new positive cases of coronavirus were reported from Srinagar and Bandipore districts of Kashmir valley while one patient from Srinagar fully recovered, bringing the total tally of active cases in Jammu & Kashmir to six on Tuesday.

Tuesday tweeted, two more cases reported positive in Srinagar. One has confirmed travel history outside India. Full details regarding the second being ascertained.

ready by Wednesday evening. The OPD services at GMC and its associated hospitals shall remain suspended w.e.f 25.03.2020 till further orders.

Manipur woman tests positive, first in N-E

Imphal/Agartala: Manipur reported its first case of coronavirus as a 23-year-old woman who returned from the United Kingdom tested positive, making it the first case in the North-East region of India, an official said on Tuesday.



A deserted Hawa Mahal area during the lockdown in the wake of coronavirus pandemic in Jaipur on Tuesday

Astrologers say corona result of Jupiter's asymmetric movement

Though medical scientists are yet to come out with answers to doubts about coronavirus which has claimed millions of lives across the globe, astrology has the answer for what caused the pandemic.

"There is a law which governs the movement of planets from one Raasi to another. The established pattern stands disturbed and this is the reason behind the pandemic," said Panickar who usually shuns the media.

phase is known as Vasundhara Yogam, as per the Vedas. What is worrying is the fact that this phase has been aggravated by Kala Sarppa Yogam which also is an indicator of bad times," he had said.

Railways to produce hospital beds, stretchers, IV stands

New Delhi: To meet the growing requirement of essential medical items in the wake of coronavirus epidemic, the Indian Railways has decided to manufacture at its production units hospital beds, stretchers, IV stands, ventilators, etc.



and quarantine facilities, IV stands, stretchers, hospital footstaps, hospital bedside lockers, washbasins with stands, ventilators, PPEs like masks, sanitizers, and water tanks.

WB extends lockdown to whole State till March 31

The Bengal Government on Tuesday extended the ongoing Corona-induced lockdown to the entire State and till March 31. Earlier the measure was taken for only urban municipal areas and till the midnight of March 27.

mon people." Banerjee who on Monday held an all-party meeting inviting suggestions from the political parties on Tuesday announced a one-time help of ₹1,000 for the workers in unorganized sector.

Economic pandemic

Very few Indians can sustain a prolonged shutdown but can the Government jumpstart the economy once India reopens?



Truly speaking, the press conference held by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman offered no relief package when much was desired considering the stressed times due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. All that it offered were announcements of deferments for tax compliance issues. Undoubtedly, this was much-needed. Such concessions, coupled with reductions in interest penalties and extension of some schemes and the fact that there will be no minimum balance or debit card charges over the next three months in banks, is welcome. However, the country and its citizens were expecting something more: They wanted a relief package.

From large corporations to daily-wage labourers, everyone was expecting some measures on the part of the Government to mitigate the economic impact of COVID, some sort of a relief package, some numbers or a liquidity measure. This was a fine-print press conference, an obvious one after the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) extended the financial year to June 30. Sure, there were some positives pertaining to the bankruptcy and insolvency code as account departments across firms are not functional. While the Government managed to pat itself on the back for the Unified Payment Interface (UPI), it was necessary to implore the public to not go to the banks. It is becoming increasingly clear that March 31 is not an expiry date to the Wuhan contagion's spread in India. This will only show just how successful the lockdown, the biggest across the world, has been in controlling the spread of the disease. Fighting the outbreak is crucial but the economic policies of the Government have received much criticism, too. As it is even before the pandemic struck, the Indian economy was already in the grip of a slowdown. Post the spread of the disease, forecasts have reached a new low. Oxford Economics slashed the country's January-April growth forecast to three per cent, a number not seen even during the worst of the global financial crisis. The main equity gauge slumped by a record 13.2 per cent and the rupee weakened past 76 a dollar for the first time ever. Foreign investors have already started selling Indian assets at an unprecedented pace. It is also very likely that the lockdown, at least in some form or the other, will carry on till mid-April. And even when India reopens for business, trains and planes will take weeks to get back to their normal schedules. As far as foreign travel is concerned, it appears that a few commercial flights will operate to international destinations till the middle of the year until the disease subsides in Western Europe and the US. This will hurt both Indian immigrants abroad and their families back home. Meanwhile, there will be a lot of tragic stories, of children being unable to attend their parents' funeral, for example.

What is clear, however, is that an extended lockdown will lead to a lot of shock for the economy, and not in a good way. While some State Governments are providing free rations, limited financial help for daily-wage labourers and the homeless as India's migration to urban centres reverses, it may be impossible to reach the countless millions who have gone back to Bihar and Jharkhand. How much money can Governments provide? Where will the money be spent? Can India even afford to give money out like that when the very survival of certain sectors of the Indian economy — aviation and travel being top of the radar — are at stake? This will not be an easy task for the Narendra Modi Government. It is fate that has determined that he is our Prime Minister during this crisis. How he handles this further will not just determine the course for the next few years but for the next three decades.

Back to the people

Omar Abdullah is free and used his appeal, that at one time was considered incendiary, to calm his people amid virus fears



Yes, former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister and National Conference (NC) leader Omar Abdullah has been released from detention. But the circumstances surrounding his release are just as hazy as his arrest. In the dark shadow of COVID-19, Omar decided that though it was a different Kashmir he was returning to, there was a bigger question of life and death at the moment and so spread the Government's message of social distancing and quarantine. If the Government's charges for booking him after

the abrogation of Article 370 — that his messages were divisive and could incite people and youngsters — are an estimate of his appeal, then Omar certainly proved how the Government bungled in underestimating his positive net worth. For he used the same appeal to ask his people to be calm in the time of a global pandemic and follow protocol, politics could come later. Clearly, NC chief Farooq Abdullah, who was released earlier and Omar, both of whom had been allies of the BJP Government, and not too troublesome ones at that, could have been used to normalise the bridge with civil society in Kashmir despite its changed status as a Union Territory. And by equating the old political leadership with terrorists, when in fact the Abdullahs were much of a filter, the Modi Government cannot walk the talk of ushering in development in Kashmir. It still needs the mediatory presence of local parties but has blunderously pushed them away. In their absence, the ruling BJP could not conduct the panchayat and local-level polls successfully, although it has been hoping to build a new narrative ground up with candidates friendly to it. Such was the boycott then that over 12,000 panchayat seats continue to be vacant. Panchayats have made it clear that any electoral process would have to be preceded by the release of jailed NC and People's Democratic Party (PDP) leaders. Clearly, without traditional politicians, the BJP is finding it extremely difficult to re-engage with people. Already payments are pending for work done under MGNREGA scheme over the last several years. And in the trough of COVID-19, the Government might face more ire locally. Neither has the BJP been able to raise an alternative front or a political climate. It may have encouraged the formation of the Jammu and Kashmir Apni Party (JKAP) drawing rejects from PDP and NC, but it cannot generate reassurance, least of all credibility.

Besides, the Modi Government has failed to justify why it used the Public Safety Act (PSA) to book Omar. The law was passed in 1978 by Sheikh Abdullah, who founded the NC. Over the years, it has been used indiscriminately to curb dissent, invoked most frequently against separatist leaders and protesting teenagers. One can understand the dynastic hatred involved in arresting Omar under a law passed by his grandfather. But beyond the theatrics of a "great fall," it is the dossier of charges against him that defied reason and bordered on the ridiculous. Omar's ostensible crime was the capacity to influence people and his ability "to convince his electorate to come out and vote in huge numbers even during the peak of militancy and poll boycotts." If this swaying ability, something that the Atal Bihari Vajpayee regime used to build a bridge over the conflict, is not an asset, then one wonders what is. If his persistent calls to resolve the conflict through democratic processes are not Centrist, then one wonders what separatism is. For these abilities, which the current regime could have used to transition to a new narrative, have been wasted away. Omar, the genial, quiet and engaging fighter, once seen as a puppet prince, will now be Kashmir's face of quiet resistance. The captivity has given him the halo he needed.

Foreign policy put to test

For Nepal, balancing India and China is challenging; expecting it to also balance America and Beijing would be walking a tightrope. For India, regaining space lost to China will be a long haul



ASHOK K MEHTA

Igo to Nepal twice a year. Once during Holi and the other on Tihar (Nepali *bhai dooj*) that comes after Dussehra. The normal format is: Fly to Kathmandu, spend two to three days there, then fly to Pokhara for a two-week trek and then revival. The pre-Holi Kathmandu weather this year was a spoilsport — cold, bleak and rainy — amid the Corona scare, though Nepal had registered just one case and that figure remains intact even today. Just this week, Nepal went into total lockdown till March 31. One-third of its population of 30 million people works abroad, mainly in the Middle East, South-east Asia and India. Their earnings account for nearly one-third of its gross domestic product (GDP) of \$35 billion.

Many Nepalese wear face masks throughout the year in Kathmandu and elsewhere due to garbage and pollution. Everything appeared normal at the Tribhuvan International Airport, including the temperature gun aimed at people. The country has for the moment cancelled its inaugural Sagarmatha Sambad, a three-day conference on climate change, which Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali said would be postponed to October. He also said he was pleased with India-Nepal relations now that the Foreign Secretary-level Kalapani dialogue is about to start shortly and the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) report appeared on the horizon.

My lecture at Nepal's Institute for International Cooperation and Engagement on a holiday (Saturday, March 6) was well-received. It was preceded by a presentation on the Coronavirus and the world economy. The theme of my presentation was: "India-Nepal Relations: Mind the Gap — Where China Fits in." *The Kathmandu Post*, the capital's leading English newspaper, was recently stung by a stern rebuke by the Chinese Embassy for reproducing a syndicated column on Coronavirus by a former US Ambassador, who was critical of China. While this intrusion was condemned by the Nepalese media, not a word was said by the Prime Minister KP Oli-led Government.

During the royal rule, the Chinese used to say that they do not interfere in the internal affairs of the host Government. This is now a thing of the past. That the Chinese assault on freedoms guaranteed by the Nepalese Constitution went officially unresponded was not surprising. Any similar affront by India would have attracted loud and collective protests by the media and the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP), which is inarguably pro-China. Clive Hamilton's *Silent Invasion: China's Influence in Australia* and Jonathan Manthorpe's *Claws of the Panda: Beijing's Campaign of Influence and Intimidation*



in *Canada* are books reflecting on China's global outreach and blatant intrusions.

Like in the rest of the world, politics is on long pause in Nepal. Reason: Oli's health and the spread of Coronavirus. The main topic of discussion after Oli received his second kidney replacement is his political rejuvenation. Unless his health deteriorates, rendering him dysfunctional, he will continue to lead the country by remote control. Fortunately, the Coronavirus epidemic appears controlled for now and life goes on happily without fear or scare throughout Nepal.

I arrived in Pokhara a day before Holi on an Air Buddha flight, which took all of 25 minutes. The only BMW in Pokhara, belonging to Nepali Congress' Buddhiman Gurung, drove me to Lameahal, 15 km east of Pokhara. Holi is celebrated on the 6,000 ft high newly-built Manithan temple at An Phu village, where the *bhale* (male chicken) or *boka* (male goat) are sacrificed till the brown hilltop turns red. The *pujari* (priest) has to first persuade *bhale* and *boka* to accept becoming the sacrificial offering before their beheading by the *khukuri*-wielding priest. Side by side, dry colours mix freely with local dance and

drinks as tribal Gurungs bring out their best. From Lameahal, one has to cross the Seti river on a swing bridge, climbing about two hours to reach An Phu top, which makes for a healthy daily trek.

Meanwhile, with regime change in the Oli-led NCP unlikely till next elections in 2023, it is the latent power struggle between Oli and party president Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda that is making the gossip. Given Oli's uncertain health, Prachanda has played his cards cleverly to ensure that sooner than later, the power hierarchy in Kathmandu could look like this: Madhav Kumar Nepal, former Nepal Prime Minister, Jhalanath Khanal, the President of Nepal, and Prachanda, the undisputed president of the party. The opposition Nepali Congress in Nepal, like Indian National Congress, is on a decline. Nepali Congress (NC), which was split into three factions — SB Deuba, RC Poudyal and KP Sitaula — has two additional wings: The Koirala legacy and Ganesh Man Singh groups. Both NCP and NC will have their first and 14th general conventions in 2021.

While in NC, Deuba remains the top leader, other parties have opted for joint or

collective leadership to avoid infighting. For example, the royalist Rashtriya Prajatantra Party, which merged recently, has three presidents. The Rashtriya Janata Party (RJP) has a six-member presidium led by Mahanta Thakur. The Samajwadi Party (SP) has a triumvirate leadership — former Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai, Upendra Yadav and Ashok Rai. The RJP and SP, who together rule number two province, are considering merger after unification talks. They have been pressing the Oli Government to amend the Constitution, incorporating pending issues of the Madhesis, *janjatis* and marginalised communities.

Two years on, the Opposition parties are complaining that the ruling NCP is besieged by scandals — gold, wide-bodied aircraft, NCell and a close aide of Oli, Banskota — and misgovernance but have no alternate vision plan to offer. While China will ensure the NCP stays united and the Government does not fall, India is loath to be seen as having favourites or indulging in regime change. The Government is seized with matters like the US-sponsored Millennium Challenge

Corporation (MCC) and the Indo-Pacific, which are seen as means of challenging China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and containing it. Die-hard communist members of NCP are unwilling to countenance this. For Nepal, balancing India and China is challenging enough; expecting it to also balance the US and China would be walking a tightrope.

For India, regaining space lost to China will be a long haul. In the meantime, it can invest in improving its declined image, damaged by the blockade of 2015, which gave rise to anti-Indianism and filip to China. It has chosen a competent and promising Ambassador, Vinay Kwatra, for the job. On March 18, when I was at Pokhara airport bound for New Delhi, one of my Nepalese friends made this irresistible offer: "Mehtaji, why don't you stay in Lameahal till the Coronavirus dries up?" Back in Noida, I am confined to Ram Vihar instead of climbing to An Phu top and breathing a daily dose of crisp Himalayan air.

(The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander IPKF South, Sri Lanka and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff.)

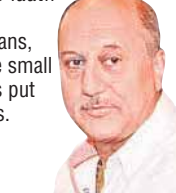
SOUNDBITE

The Government must take lessons from Italy. There will be massive economic pain. But it is possible to handle the economic consequences than the loss of numerous lives.



Congress leader — P Chidambaram

Basically, *bhagwaan ne laath maari hai and bola hai ki* behave like humans, don't become god. One small virus called Corona has put everyone in their places.



Actor — Anupam Kher

China and India are the only two countries with that large a population. We would like to share our experience and provide necessary assistance to the Indian side.



Chinese spokesperson — Geng Shuang

So happy that Omar Abdullah's unconstitutional detention has been revoked. It is about time the Government restores the democratic rights of people in the region.



Congress leader — Priyanka Gandhi

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Justice prevails

Sir — This refers to the editorial, "Finally, a closure" (March 21). Over the last couple of months the four men convicted in the Delhi gang rape case had filed numerous curative and mercy petitions in a final effort to commute the death sentence; three of them had even approached the International Court of Justice in hopes of relief.

However, all of them were finally hanged to death last Friday, thus bringing to an end one of the darkest chapters in the history of India. It is impossible to imagine how much the woman's family must have suffered for the last seven years awaiting the delivery of justice. One hopes that this serves as a warning to those who view women as a commodity and consider them to be less than human.

Shahin Ahmed
Mumbai

Grease the wheels

Sir — This refers to the editorial, "Finally, a closure" (March 21). At long last, justice has been delivered

As a responsible citizen, stay at home

For a country accustomed to decrying every legislation enacted by the ruling Government, it was, perhaps, for the first time that the entire nation was on the same wavelength as that of the Prime Minister. Following his call to observe *janta* curfew, people stood by him and stayed indoors in order to stall the community spread of Coronavirus. Terming the voluntary exhibition of solidarity "successful" would, however, amount to a sacrilege of sorts. A sense of achievement can be said to have been attained only when the scourge of the contagion is totally wiped off. Until then, quantifying such efforts to restrict the spread of the virus is uncalled for.

Of course, the nation would have derived some satisfaction from the fact that most citizens voluntarily came forward to be a part of the mission to try and break the transmission chain of Coronavirus. However it remains to be seen whether the public is willing to accept the *janta* curfew as something more than a token acceptance of the extensive and exhaustive campaign against the virus undertaken by the Government. The Coronavirus threat is as good as a "national emergency" and not a "forced national holiday." A day after the Prime Minister's call, people flocked the streets the very next day. With newer strains of virus putting the world in



jeopardy every other day, it has virtually become a fight for survival for human beings. Hence, every individual must learn the nuances of preventing and safeguarding oneself against the risks of the lethal disease. It has been said that social distancing is the best precautionary measure. Hence, public participation by way of physical distancing and adoption of the prescribed measures gain all the more significance. Staying at home is, thus, imperative.

Pachu Menon
Margao

in the 2012 Delhi gang rape case. All four men, who were convicted of the gruesome crime that led to the death of a 23-year-old paramedic student, were hanged on March 20 in Tihar jail. It took seven long years to provide a sense

of closure to the family of the woman. However, in cases which are as grisly as this, it is important for strict punishment to be meted out at the earliest. This might lead to a decline in the number of crimes

NR Ramachandran
Chennai

No more umpire abuse

Sir — The spread of the Coronavirus pandemic has wreaked havoc. All major sporting events are either being postponed or cancelled. It doesn't make any sense to play professional sports without spectators. More than anything else, there will be no one to doubt the umpire's eyesight or abuse them. It only took a worldwide crisis to achieve this.

Dennis Fitzgerald
Melbourne

Break the chain

Sir — It's praiseworthy that the Government has been doing its bit to combat COVID-19 but people should not be misled by any kind of superstition. The beating of *thali* will not stop this virus. Instead, every citizen must be made to understand that the only way to tackle this deadly disease is by staying indoors to break the chain.

Shaily Chakraborty
Via email

Send your feedback to:
letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

India's lost opportunity

It is possible to convert all homes into learning centres through the use of communication technology. But we were not ready for it



CB SHARMA

Health and education are the main concerns of all families and Governments during calamities. Governments which can think, plan and lead their country during difficult times are sure to survive any disaster. The world is passing through a great crisis right now due to the Coronavirus pandemic. Hospitals are being flooded with patients and schools have been closed. This is no time to find fault but it is definitely an opportune time to assess how prepared India was for this situation. And what we should do now, so that once this crisis is over the country is ready for a similar situation, if and when, it arrives.

What is in short supply during a crisis is professionals and experts. For now, healthcare professionals are in short supply and also teachers, because children can't reach school and teachers can't reach homes of the learners. In terms of medical facilities, we can convert school buildings into hospital wards but how can we turn every household into a classroom? By no means can we multiply the number of teachers and arrange doorstep educational facilities. But it is possible to convert all households into learning centres through the use of modern communication technologies. Thankfully we are able to maintain electronic communication right now and this can be used to beam academic lessons to all households. This is the time to review some of the initiatives we took in this direction.

In 2002, during the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Government, it was decided that we needed to launch a satellite for education as schools, teachers and related facilities were in short supply. As a consequence in September 2004, we launched a satellite exclusively for education known as Educational Satellite (EduSat). The cost of a satellite is massive and it is not an easy decision to dedicate one solely to education. But India definitely needed to do this because of the large number of learners, who could make use of it in the absence of good teachers in institutions established in different parts of the country. The satellite had a life of seven years but it died in 2010 and we could not even use ten per cent of its capacity.

In 2015, once again, the then Human Resource Development (HRD) Minister Smriti Irani took two initiatives. One was starting a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) platform known as SWAYAM and the second was a bouquet of Direct To Home (DTH) educational channels known as Swayam Prabha. Both the platforms cover content from pre-school to doctoral studies. Both have a larger participation than any other platform of any other country but still it is not able to fill the gap it was expected to, in the present crisis. A large number of Secondary school students are watching channel number 27, Parinri and Senior Secondary students are watching channel number 28, Sharda of the Swayam Prabha DTH channels. However, compared to the number of learners, who are confined to homes, the viewership is minuscule. The broadcast is backed by a live question-answer session where the teacher answers queries of the students when they call on the toll-free numbers that have been provided to facilitate this.

This was the foresight of the leader and had we pursued with our efforts and hooked up all Secondary and Senior Secondary learners to these platforms at that time, we would not have had to worry about closing down our schools, at least for academic transaction.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi wanted India to reach out to learners in all the States and also our neighbouring countries through satellite and he had mentioned this in his speech in Parliament. In keeping with the PM's wish Irani also initiated the Bharat Vani project where-in textbooks were developed in 100 mother tongues of India. And in keeping with Modi's wish to provide content to the learners in South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries in their own language, Irani responded by forming a task force to develop learning material in text and media formats and many more. Our satellite broadcast reached 95 per cent of our landmass and also our neighbours. If we develop material in languages like Nepali, Bengali, Tamil, Urdu and so on, we would be beaming good content to not only our citizens but also to learners in SAARC nations. This was the best time to not only help our own schoolchildren but also children in the South Asian countries, stay back home and continue their studies. By not pursuing the Bharat Vani project, we have lost the opportunity to be of help to our students, neighbours and failed our PM's mission. The National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), the largest open school in the world, has in the last five years developed e-content which is available on the SWAYAM and has four 24x7 DTH channels. We could have filled the gap, which has been created by the closure of the schools across country due to Covid-19. Language and location would have been no barrier. The NIOS broadcast and live classes are becoming popular by the day. But it had massive potential and it could have played a larger role if we had prepared distance/open schooling through dual mode schooling. It is a missed opportunity and it is too late to do anything now. However, we must learn from our mistakes and take these initiatives to their logical conclusion once the Coronavirus threat is over. (The writer is Chairman, National Institute of Open Schooling)

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

THIS ISN'T THE FIRST TIME (IOC PRESIDENT) BACH HAS PUT HIS OWN MOTIVES ABOVE THE ATHLETES' WELFARE AND THE OLYMPIC MOVEMENT.
 —BRITISH CYCLIST
CALLUM SKINNER



IT IS MIND-BOGGLINGLY COMPLEX TO MAKE A CHANGE (CANCELLATION) AFTER SEVEN YEARS OF PREPARATION FOR THE WORLD'S BIGGEST SPORTING EVENT.
 —MICHAEL PAYNE
 IOC'S FORMER HEAD OF MARKETING

Much ado about Gogoi

There are many other judges who retired from the Bench and who later took up political postings offered by the parties in power



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

Ranjan Gogoi, the newly sworn-in member of the Rajya Sabha, is the cynosure of all eyes as well as the favourite whipping boy, at the moment, depending on which side of the fence people are on.

His critics say that the decision of the former Chief Justice of India (CJI) to accept the nomination to the House of Elders by the President of India is an act against all ethics mentioned in the Constitution of India. Since this writer is no authority on the Constitution, let the experts discuss the issue and quote the relevant portions from the Indian Constitution which show beyond doubt that Gogoi has cocked a snook at the founding fathers' vision.

Those who support Gogoi point out that there were instances of retired judges of the Supreme Court getting nominated to the Rajya Sabha in the past and there is nothing "official" about the former's decision to take up the offer of the Government of India.

Given Gogoi's extensive knowledge and experience of the law, he does qualify to be a notable who can contribute valuably to the Upper House. Also, he is not the first retired Chief Justice to have benefitted from the executive's generosity. There have been others like him who have propped up by several regimes as a reward for services that were "friendly" to them. There's enough counter-logic going around as to how Justice S Fazl Ali was the first Supreme Court judge to be made Orissa Governor in 1952 and was the beginning of the Congress' endorsements of judicial luminaries that continued till the party was in power.

From Assam itself, there's the example of Justice Baharul Islam, who began as an advocate in the Assam High Court in the early 1950s and went on to serve a decade-long term as Rajya Sabha member.

As far as controversial rulings go, then the Congress suitably accommodated former Chief Justice Ranganath Misra, who gave a clean chit to the Rajiv Gandhi-led Congress in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots case. After his retirement, he was made the first chairman of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and was even elected to the Upper House on a Congress ticket in 1998. The examples are so many that at one time, there was much debate over how judges should not be encouraged to take up the offer of the Government's post-retirement benefits, like heading commissions of inquiry, simply because that could cloud their impartial judgments and colour their opinions in sensitive cases.

One wonders, why then is there such discomfort over Gogoi's induction in the Rajya Sabha? Is it that there's much criticism of Gogoi because he was at one time considered a "rebel" judge and, therefore, now looks like a test case of how the institution of the executive superseded that of the judiciary and a one-time warrior appeared to have fallen in line? For the uninitiated, Justice Gogoi and three of his brother judges shot into national prominence on January 18, 2018, when they staged a press conference in the national Capital, which was described as extraordinary by the "pundits" in the media. The judges cautioned the nation by giving "advance information" about the threat faced by the nation and the judiciary. Gogoi had specifically made a reference to the selective allocation of sensitive files. Therefore, there was a sense of expectation built around him, one of them being that he would ensure the indepen-



“THE EXAMPLES ARE SO MANY THAT AT ONE TIME, THERE WAS MUCH DEBATE OVER HOW JUDGES SHOULD NOT BE ENCOURAGED TO TAKE UP THE OFFER OF THE GOVERNMENT'S POST-RETIREMENT BENEFITS, LIKE HEADING COMMISSIONS OF INQUIRY, SIMPLY BECAUSE THAT COULD CLOUD THEIR IMPARTIAL JUDGMENTS AND COLOUR THEIR OPINIONS IN SENSITIVE CASES. ONE WONDERS, WHY THEN IS THERE SUCH DISCOMFORT OVER GOGOI'S INDUCTION IN THE RAJYA SABHA?”

dence of the judiciary. The four senior-most judges of the apex court led by Gogoi warned that democracy was in peril. "Unless this institution of the Supreme Court is preserved, democracy will not survive in this country," warned J Chelameswar, a colleague of Gogoi, during the press meet, who, too, has retired.

I remember many Opposition leaders waxing eloquent on the four judges who held the extraordinary press conference. Immediately after the meet, a Left leader went to the residence of Chelameswar (through the back entrance).

Nothing discernible happened after this extraordinary washing of dirty linen in public. The then Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra retired on October 2, 2018, and Ranjan Gogoi was sworn in as the new Chief Justice. The rebel judges or the "young Turks" of the Supreme Court retired one by one and all are living happily ever since.

People living in South India are not fortunate enough to get the latest news on the "palace intrigues" taking place in the power corridors in New Delhi. Gogoi retired on November 17, 2019 and Sharad Bobde was sworn in as the new Chief Justice of the country. This is an ongoing process as the judiciary, too, works on the principle "me today, you tomorrow." Justice Bobde, too, would be retiring once he reaches the magical figure of 65, the age for super-annuation.

The issue is whether the former Chief Justice of India was right in accepting the Rajya Sabha nomination offered by the President of India so soon after his retirement. Well, there are no records to show that Gogoi was even remotely connected with any political party till the day he retired from service. He is the son of KC Gogoi, former Chief Minister of Assam who was a Congress

leader. Ranjan Gogoi's career at the Bench began in 2001 when he was appointed as a judge of the Guwahati High Court in 2001 and culminated with his appointment as the country's 46th Chief Justice in 2018. But there were many legal wizards in the Supreme Court who had stints in politics before their elevation to the Bench and till this day one is yet to hear about the ethics practised by these gentlemen.

VR Krishna Iyer, a noted judge who became a pioneer of judicial activism in India and has ever since been eulogised for his concerns for human rights and the poor, was appointed as a judge of the Kerala High Court in 1968. Before entering the precincts of the judiciary, Iyer was a full-fledged politician, a Communist by precise. He was the Home Minister in the EMS Namboodiripad-led Communist Government of 1957, which was dismissed by Jawaharlal Nehru following the liberation struggle waged by the Congress in association with the powerful Church and the Muslim community. It was during the tenure of Iyer as Home Minister that Kerala saw the first-ever police firing on cashew company workers agitating for their rights.

Iyer, who was defeated in the next Assembly election, was elevated to the Bench in 1968 at the instance of Namboodiripad. This has been mentioned by Iyer himself in his autobiography *Wandering in Many Worlds* (Longman Pearson 2009). "EMS Namboodiripad sent his Cabinet colleague, Gauramma, to persuade me to accept the offer. She pleaded that State power was a necessary tool for transformation of India into a socialist republic. She pressed home this point and left," writes Iyer on page 159. The book hit the shelves across the nation in 2009 and Gauramma is yet to react to what Iyer

has written.

The Communists and the Congress were hands in glove, though it was invisible to most. Iyer's was not a one-off inclusion of a professional politician into the Bench. We have the case of Kurian Joseph, who as a student of the Sree Sankara College, Kalady was the leader of the student wing of the Kerala Congress (Mani), and had the backing of the party all through his career. He was one of the judges who took part in the "extraordinary press meet" along with Gogoi to warn the nation that democracy was in danger.

Joseph has reportedly said that Gogoi compromised the noble principles of the independence and impartiality of the judiciary by accepting the nomination to be a MP. "According to me, the acceptance of nomination as member of Rajya Sabha by a former CJI has certainly shaken the confidence of the common man on the independence of the judiciary, which is also one of the basic structures of the Constitution of India," Joseph has been quoted as saying.

Let's accept what Joseph has said about Gogoi, but we have had many judges and Chief Justices in the past, who, had no hesitation in accepting the crumbs thrown at them post-retirement. Joseph's predecessor from Kerala, KG Balakrishnan, had no qualms in accepting the post of the Chairman of the NHRC. There are many judges who retired from the Bench who later took up political postings offered by the parties in power. HR Gokhale, Baharul Islam are just some of the names that come to the mind. We cannot expect every judge to be like MN Venkatchaliah and SH Kapadia, synonyms for justice and propriety.

(The writer is Special Correspondent, The Pioneer)

Together we can beat the Coronavirus

Experts say that quarantine is one of the most effective ways of containing an epidemic. Therefore, it is imperative that more than the steps taken by the Government, we impose self-restrictions at an early stage to limit the COVID-19 spread and help each other in this trying time



KALYANI SHANKAR

Most of India is in a lockdown as the country collectively tries to prevent the deadly Coronavirus from spreading into the community. We began the exercise to beat the virus on March 22 with the unprecedented voluntary 7 AM to 9 PM "Janta (public) Curfew" in response to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's televised appeal to people to stay indoors.

Given our numbers, a whopping 1.3 billion people, it was by far the biggest social-distancing exercise in

the world against the Coronavirus outbreak.

The country has been in a lockdown ever since and the Prime Minister gave a hint of what was to come when he said that India should be prepared for a long haul. Modi tweeted on Sunday night, "Today's #JantaCurfew may get over at 9 PM but that doesn't mean we should start celebrating. Do not consider it a success. Today the countrymen have declared we are capable, if we decide we can beat the biggest challenge together."

India stands at the tipping point, having reached Stage-III of the pandemic as confirmed by Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on March 22. From here it could take a flat curve like Korea or an upward curve like Europe. The "Janta Curfew" was Modi's idea of mobilising public support to fight the Coronavirus through extended lockdowns soon afterwards. It was a bid to create

greater awareness in the country about the danger of the pandemic and remind everyone of their duty towards the nation.

All epidemics evoke fear and panic since they result in fatalities and the Coronavirus is no exception. However, in its management, four elements are important: Science; the public healthcare system; political will and public support. Where science is concerned, human trials of the Coronavirus vaccine have already begun and doctors are experimenting with the use of various drugs that already exist to fight the pandemic. However, in India, much more needs to be done on the public healthcare front, which is not equipped to handle a medical emergency of this scale. As far as political will and support is concerned, Modi's appeal and the subsequent lockdowns by various State Governments across the nation show that we are doing well on this front. And the fact that the Prime

Minister's appeal for the "Janta curfew" and the subsequent lockdowns received overwhelming support across the spectrum shows that people are behind the Government, too.

India was never as united as it is today. Several Chief Ministers, Members of Parliament, political parties, sports personalities, film stars and TV celebrities came on board to make the "Janta Curfew" and the lockdowns that have followed it, a success. The support for the Union Government also came from unexpected quarters, including the Congress and other Opposition parties.

Even religious institutions don't seem averse to the Government's measures, as temple authorities across the country have come on board and closed temples in an unprecedented move. Priests in a temple in Varanasi decided to put masks on the idols and posters have

been put up urging devotees to refrain from touching the idols. Even most churches across India are shut and most Sunday services were either suspended or held online. This is quite a feat given that this is the Holy Lenten month for Christians across the globe and churches are usually full at this time of the year.

Now that the country is in a lockdown, the question is what lies ahead? The challenge before the Modi Government is formidable. Many nations have announced support for their economies and businesses and people who are losing out on their livelihoods. The UK proposes to spend 330 million pounds and the US close to a trillion dollars. Even European countries like France, Spain and Italy are getting ready to spend billions of euros. The Modi Government, too, will have to mobilise all the resources at its disposal to keep the country pandemic-free and also ensure that the

livelihoods of people are safeguarded. The Centre and the States will have to focus on how to deal with lakhs of people who will be in dire straits due to the lockdown. This is particularly so in the case of construction workers, taxi and auto-rickshaw drivers, daily-wage earners, domestic help, small business enterprises and so on. The Government has to think of a huge economic package to tide over the present crisis. The more drastic the precautionary health measures, the greater will be the fallout on the economy. Modi has announced an economic task force under the Finance Minister but they are yet to come up with welfare schemes, though Nirmala Sitharaman did extend the last date of filing income tax returns on Tuesday. However, some States like UP, Telangana and Delhi have come out with relief packages.

Also, at a time like this, the people have to realise that pursuing one's

own self-interest is not done and each citizen also has to think of public interest. While we all have the legal right to buy as much hand sanitiser and face wipes we can find, what about the welfare of the society in which we live? India believes in *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the whole world is one family) so now is the time to prove this with our behaviour.

Experts say that quarantine is one of the most effective ways of containing an epidemic. Therefore, it is imperative that more than the steps taken by the Government we impose self-restrictions at an early stage to limit the Coronavirus spread and help each other in this trying time. As Dr Paul, head of the medical task force at the Centre, commented in a TV show, "The Coronavirus is a once-in-a-century epidemic and has to be fought as such." Indeed desperate times need desperate measures. (The writer is a senior journalist)

CAPSULE



P-notes investment rises to Rs 68,862 cr till Feb-end

New Delhi: Investments through participatory notes (P-notes) in the domestic capital market rose to Rs 68,862 crore at the end of February, making it the second consecutive monthly increase. The investment comes at a time when broader market witnessed significant downturn amid fears of recession due to the coronavirus outbreak. P-notes are issued by registered foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) to overseas investors who wish to be part of the Indian stock market without registering themselves directly. They, however, need to go through a due diligence process. According to the latest data from Sebi, the value of P-note investments in Indian markets -- equity, debt, hybrid securities and derivatives -- stood at Rs 68,862 crore until February, while the same was at Rs 67,281 crore at the end of January. Of the total Rs 68,862 crore invested through the route, Rs 53,902 crore was invested in equities, Rs 14,739 crore in debt, Rs 144 crore in the derivatives segment and Rs 77 crore in hybrid securities.

Finance Ministry and regulators monitoring developments

New Delhi: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday said regulators and her ministry are monitoring developments and volatility in stock markets. She said the developments on stock markets are monitored thrice a day. The government is working on an economic package to deal with the hardships caused by the lockdown to control the coronavirus crisis and the same will be announced soon, she said adding different sub-groups have held sectoral discussions.

RLDA invites bids to lease out 2 plots in Jammu

NEW DELHI: The Railway Land Development Authority (RLDA) has invited bids for leasing out its two plots at Katra in Jammu and Kashmir with reserve price of over Rs 14 crore each. RLDA has invited RFP (Request for Proposal) to lease two plots at Katra for commercial development. The combined plot is spread across 15,352 sq metre and is located near Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra railway station. The plot is proposed to be leased out in two parts with a reserve price of Rs 14.18 crore and Rs 14.97 crore, RLDA said in a statement. "Nestled in the hills, this scenic property can be developed as a destination wedding farmhouse or a 3 or 5 star hotel. The region is a prominent tourist destination. Hence it will offer a good return on investment to real estate developers," said Ved Prakash Dudge, Vice-Chairman, RLDA.

COVID-19

Retailers roll out steps to ensure social distancing

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Big retailers, which are presently dispensing only essential items amid the lockdown, are taking precautionary measures like restricted entry and marked lines to maintain social distancing to avoid coronavirus infection at their stores.

Some stores as Reliance Fresh, More, Walmart and Metro Cash & Carry are even screening body temperature of their customers before allowing them entry into the store. Metro Cash & Carry India said it is pre-packing loose commodities to avoid infection at its stores and is ensuring plenty of cash tills and mobile checkouts to reduce the billing time. It has also introduced a token system to avoid large gathering at stores.

Several retailers like Future, DMart, and Walmart have marked special lines on their shop floors to maintain social distancing. They are also regularly sanitising the stores and disinfecting all touchpoints which include trolley and basket handles.



Several retailers like Future, DMart, and Walmart have marked special lines on their shop floors to maintain social distancing. They are also regularly sanitising the stores and disinfecting all touchpoints which include trolley and basket handles.

"We are managing the queue in such a way that people are standing away from each other," Avenue Supermarts CEO and Managing Director Neville Noronha told PTI. "We are calling out the

colour as yellow, green and then 20 to 30 people are walking inside the store. When these people out from the store, then we call the next colour," said Noronha. Metro Cash & Carry MD & CEO Arvind Mediratta said: "We have initiated a token system to manage the customers and avoid a large gathering inside the store. The tokens are properly sanitized with disinfectants and then handed over to customers."

Walmart India, which operates in cash & carry format, has also marked lines and is only permitting one person per membership card. "We have marked the floors of our Best Price stores with yellow stripes and boxes to designate enough space for each member to maintain safe distance from each other," said a Walmart India spokesperson.

He further said: "The stores are also equipped with contactless thermometers for conducting temperature checks.

Sensex recovers 693 pts amid corrective measures

PNS ■ MUMBAI

A day after the historic rout, equity benchmark Sensex bounced back to close 693 points higher on Tuesday as investors noted governments across the world taking prompt economic measures to offset the financial damage from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Indian equities followed an improved investor sentiment in Asia after the Federal Reserve announced limitless bond-buying programme to support the US economy.

Meanwhile, Indian Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said an economic package to help through the coronavirus lockdown was in works even as fresh cases of virus spread reported

from various parts of the country.

After gyrating 1,823.97 points, the BSE barometer gave up some gains to end 692.79 points or 2.67 per cent higher at 26,674.03. It hit an intra-day high of 27,462.87 and a low of 25,638.90.

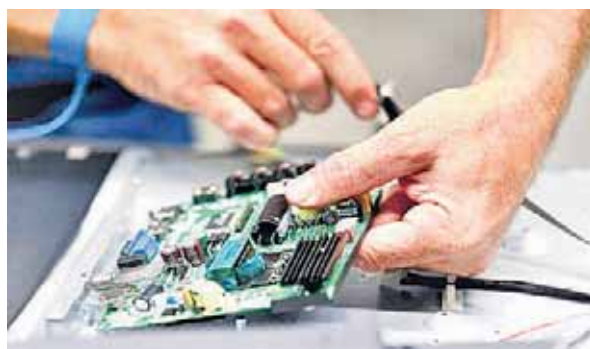
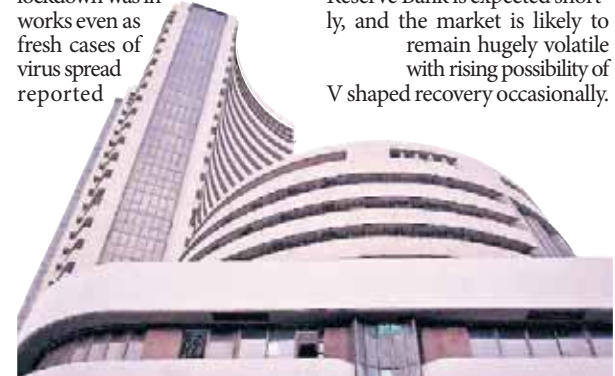
Similarly, the NSE Nifty settled 190.80 points, or 2.51 per cent, down at 7,801.05.

Top gainers in the Sensex pack included Infosys, Bajaj Finance, Maruti, HUL, HCL Tech and Reliance Industries, while M&M, IndusInd Bank, ITC, PowerGrid and L&T were among the losers. According to experts, a major package from the government of India and the Reserve Bank is expected shortly, and the market is likely to remain hugely volatile with rising possibility of V shaped recovery occasionally.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said an economic package to help through the coronavirus lockdown was in works even as fresh cases of virus spread reported from various parts of the country

The US Fed is now leading from the front with its historic package which includes open-ended purchase of securities, direct loans to companies, purchase of corporate bonds, lending against student loans and credit card loans, they said.

The Federal Reserve on Monday announced it will buy unlimited amounts of US Treasury debt -- essentially printing money for the economy -- as well as new steps to lend directly to small- and medium-sized companies that have been among the hardest-hit as economic activity dries up.



Coronavirus: TVS Electronics halts manufacturing

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

TVS Electronics on Tuesday said it has suspended operations at all its manufacturing plants and offices with immediate effect until March 31 in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic and in compliance with advisories by various authorities.

The company said the outbreak has affected supplies of some components to its manufacturing facilities and volume of business in service segment. "...in view of the widespread COVID-19 pandemic and to ensure health and safe-

ty of the company's employees and their families, customers and various stakeholders, the company has decided to halt operations at all its manufacturing plants and its offices with immediate effect until March 31, 2020, in line with the instructions of the central or state governments or local authorities," TVS Electronics said in a regulatory filing. On the impact of the outbreak, the company said: "COVID-19 has affected the supply of some components to our manufacturing facilities and volume of business in 'Servicetec' segment.

Centre asks states to allow vet clinics to function

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amid complete lockdown in many states to prevent the spread of coronavirus, the Centre on Tuesday directed state governments to allow normal functioning of veterinary hospitals and clinics.

However, veterinarians and related officials should ensure strict personal hygiene and avoid public gathering, the Union Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fishery Ministry said in a directive. "...it is requested that veterinary hospitals and dispensaries in the state, including private veterinary clinics, veterinary pathologies, animal shelters etc. function in the normal course and the veterinary services be considered in the list of 'Essential Services,'" the ministry said. It is necessary to ensure continuous emergency services in the animal husbandry and veterinary sector, especially in emergent animal health situations, it said.

CONSTRUCTION COMPANIES

One month's lockdown can erode 8-10 pc of Q4 revenue

PNS ■ MUMBAI

A nationwide lockdown to contain the COVID-19 pandemic will adversely impact construction companies and a month's lockdown can erode 8-10 per cent of their fourth quarter revenue, a report says.

According to ratings agency India Ratings, fourth quarter of every fiscal typically accounts for 30-35 per cent of the annual revenue of construction companies, of which a month's lockdown can erode 8-10 per cent.

The agency believes that construction activities across cities like Mumbai Metropolitan Region, Delhi, Pune, and Bengaluru are likely to be stalled or progress at a significantly slower-than-anticipated pace for a major portion of March 2020 which may continue in April as well. Companies with ongoing significant construction works in such cities are the ones likely to be the most affected, as they are turning out to be the epicentre of the outbreak, the agency said. In addition, "continued



Companies with ongoing significant construction works in such cities are the ones likely to be the most affected, as they are turning out to be the epicentre of the outbreak, the agency said.

expenditure in the form of overheads and finance charges is also likely to affect the profitability of construction companies, owing to a lower base for absorption of these overheads," the agency added.

"Many large and established construction companies are facing corporate insolvency resolution process. The coronavirus will seriously impact the revenues of the construction

companies and almost all of them will face huge financial losses in the months to come," an authorised representative of Shapoorji Pallonji Group told PTI. He further noted that all site activities in Mumbai and the rest of Maharashtra have come to a grinding halt as material supplies have stopped, and key subcontractors were unable to arrange resources for the construction activities.

'Unprecedented collapse' for eurozone businesses

PNS ■ BRUSSELS

Businesses in the eurozone suffered "an unprecedented collapse" this month because of the novel coronavirus pandemic, according to a closely watched indicator released Tuesday by IHS Markit.

Provisional data showed that the slump in activity in the 19-nation zone in March was "far exceeding that seen even at the height of the global financial crisis," with the company's PMI survey diving to 31.4 for the month.

A reading below 50 points indicates a contraction. In February, the index had stood at 51.6. The latest reading is the lowest since IHS Markit started its PMI survey in 1998.



Mahindra Logistics appoints V S Parthasarathy as Chairman

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Mahindra Logistics (MLL), a part of the USD 20.7 billion Mahindra Group, on Tuesday said it has appointed V S Parthasarathy as its non-executive director and Chairman of the board with effect from March 25.

Parthasarathy takes over from Zhooben Bhiwandiwalla, who stepped down as non-executive director and Chairman of the board of Mahindra Logistics on Tuesday, the company said in a statement.



Bhiwandiwalla continues in his role as President- Mahindra Partners and Group Legal and Member of the Group Executive Board of Mahindra

& Mahindra. Parthasarathy is currently the Group CFO and Group CIO of Mahindra & Mahindra and will continue till March 31. "From April 1, 2020 he will take charge of the newly created Mobility Services Sector of the Mahindra Group. He is a Member of the Group Executive Board of Mahindra & Mahindra, and on the Board of several listed Mahindra Group companies, as well as other entities including Smartshift Logistics Solutions where he is the Chairman," the company said.

Minister Pradhan asks PSUs to ensure uninterrupted supply of essential goods

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Petroleum and Natural Gas and Steel Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Tuesday held a review meeting with the top management of PSUs under the administrative control of his ministries to take stock of the situation amid the coronavirus outbreak, sources said.

The minister chaired the meeting via video-conferencing in which the heads of ONGC, GAIL, SAIL, RINL, NMDC, MOIL and KIOCL, among others, participated,

sources said. In the meeting, he reviewed the status of supplies of petroleum products in the country, operations of refineries, and functioning of important sites at steel plants, a source said.

One of the sources said the minister was working from home on Tuesday.

Pradhan also enquired about measures being

taken by the management for the employees and their families to protect them from the spread of coronavirus.

The minister also directed the chiefs to take necessary steps to make sure that supplies of essential goods for the employees and their families are not affected during the lockdown.

The CMDs have also been asked to ensure supply of essential goods at plants and sites are also not affected. On Monday,

The CMDs have also been asked to ensure supply of essential goods at plants and sites are also not affected

the steel ministry held a meeting with the management of PSUs under its control to take stock of the situation amid the coronavirus outbreak, and asked them not to reduce production.



Pune-based firm develops testing kit for faster results

PNS ■ MUMBAI

In what may go down as an important solution in India's fight against coronavirus, Pune-based Mylabs Discovery Solutions has created an indigenous solution to test patients for COVID-19 that can halve the time taken for results.

The molecular diagnostic company, which received statutory approvals late on Monday from authorities, can manufacture over 15,000 testing kits per day from its facility at Lonavala in Pune district and the same will be ramped up to 25,000 kits per day, its co-founder Shrikant Patole told PTI.

Citing the experience in South Korea, the World Health Organisation has been stressing on the importance of tests to fight the pandemic, which has



so far claimed nine lives in India. Though around 500 people have been tested positive for the virus in India so far, experts are bracing for a sharp increase fearing it may have spread across and also point out to a low level of testing in the country. Patole explained that the company is able to shorten the

test time to 2.5 hours with the 'Mylab PathoDetect COVID-19 Qualitative PCR kit' as against the prevalent 6-8 hours because its team has created a solution that does both the screening and confirmation jobs simultaneously.

Its team of 25 scientists started working on the solution six

Patole explained that the company is able to shorten the test time to 2.5 hours with the 'Mylab PathoDetect COVID-19 Qualitative PCR kit' as against the prevalent 6-8 hours because its team has created a solution that does both the screening and confirmation jobs simultaneously

weeks ago, fearing that the crisis may eventually hit India, he said, adding that the company had started as a trading firm in 2012 and diversified into research in 2016.

The test for COVID-19 will also pick up positive cases among asymptomatic patients, Patole said, adding that the approvals from the National Institute of Virology, Indian Council of Medical Research and Central Drugs Standard

Control Organization (CDSCO) were received after a test sampling on patients at Mumbai's Kasturba Hospital which is the nodal location for treating Coronavirus cases.

He did, however, specify the sample size where the kit was used to confirm results.

The Mylab kit was selected along with a solution offered by a German company for the tests.

Patole explained that till

now, India has been using kits prepared by the state-run National Institute of Virology (NIV), also based in Pune, but it was the fears over the increase in numbers which made private sector interventions in manufacturing necessary. The testing kits done by NIV are costing up to Rs 4,500 per sample if we include both screening and confirmation. Patole said, claiming that Mylabs is confident of selling the kits at a fourth of that cost.

He said allowing private labs to conduct tests is essential given the potential threats.

Patole also said that its kit can work within the infrastructure for testing available with Indian diagnostic labs, and does not require any new machinery, which the most imported.



Spot gold markets remain shut due

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Spot gold markets in India remained shut on Tuesday due to lockdown in major states to prevent spreading of Covid-19, according to HDFC Securities. The central and state governments in the country have decided to lock down

several districts from where Covid-19 cases have been reported in order to break the chain of transmission. Meanwhile, in the international market, gold and silver both were trading with gains at USD 1,574 per ounce and USD 13.70 per ounce, respectively.

Vijayawada

UGADI, A CULTURAL EXTRAVAGANZA

Ugadi, the Telugu new year celebrated by both the states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, is one festival the Telugus look forward to. SHIKHA DUGGAL speaks to people across all age groups to find how they're ringing in the new year this time

A day of festival in our lives brings with it, a sense of rest from everyday work and rush. It reminds us to put aside our workload and daily chores for a while and celebrate and feast as a family. Religious ethnicity associated with every festival gives us a moment of leaning towards the spirituality of Almighty. Ugadi, celebrated widely in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh with pomp and fun is one such festival. It's a cultural mix of religion, agriculture harvesting, folklore and food.

A local from Hyderabad, Vijaya Lakshmi, 84, recalls the time she celebrated the festival with her parents. During her childhood, her parents would wake her up and apply oil for a refreshing bath. Soon after, all the kids in the household were served the traditional Ugadi Pachadi. "My parents enlightened me about how Ugadi Pachadi relates to the various stages of our life. Life is a mixture of happiness and sadness, you have to face the challenges life throws at you," she explains.

"I would wear my new pair of clothes made of cotton and visit the Hanuman temple with my family to pray for



a prosperous new year," she recalls. A sumptuous lunch including *Pohlis* or sweet *rotis*, tamarind rice, *vadas* and *payasam* would be served. "I still cherish those times with my mother," she adds. Another important aspect of Ugadi, Lakshmi says, is the relevance of the *Panchanga* calendar recited by the priest of the temple who

"My parents enlightened me about how Ugadi Pachadi relates to the various stages of our life. Life is a mixture of happiness and sadness, you have to face the challenges life throws at you. I would wear my new pair of clothes made of cotton and visit the Hanuman temple with my family to pray for a prosperous new year.

84-YEAR-OLD VIJAYA LAKSHMI

would list the catastrophes or well-being prospects of the year. "Ugadi, for many, is a festival of authentic food. Ugadi Pachadi a sign of *Shadruchulu*, is the most vital dish we look forward to. The origin of this dish, with a blend of six flavours, makes me embrace the fact that our lives are also a mix of various flavours," says Prashanthi Vennam, a homemaker

"With the festival coinciding with Gudi Padwa, a festival celebrated by people of Pune, a bunch of south Indians and marathis attend cultural parties in the U.S marking the celebration of the onset of a new year.

VENKAT SAI, AN INDIAN RESIDING IN THE USA

er who celebrates this festival with all its rituals. Rice mixed with sour, raw mango gives *Mamidikaya Pulihora*, her daughters' favourite dish of Ugadi. "I prepare rice grated with *chana dal*, chopped mangoes, peanuts and green chillies with a pinch of asafoetida. Both my daughters love the smacking flavours," she says. The festive occasion ends with a sweet dish called *Bobbattu* made of tasty bread stuffed with *toor dal*.

For budding psychologist Aishwarya, Ugadi is a time of making new resolutions for the new year. "My resolution last year was to do my bit to have a dust-free environment around me," she says. Ugadi, for Aishwarya, is a time for her to look back on the past year and make better plans for the coming year. "I love tasting everybody's 'Ugadi Pachadi' and judging the best one of them all," she laughs.

An Indian residing abroad hasn't forgotten his roots and culture. Venkat Sai ensures that he raises a toast to Ugadi, even when away from home in the United States of America. "With the festival coinciding with Gudi Padwa, a festival celebrated by people of Pune, a bunch of south Indians and marathis attend cultural parties in the U.S marking the celebration of the onset of a new year," informs a Venkat Sai.



"My resolution last year was to do my bit to have a dust-free environment around me. I love tasting everybody's 'Ugadi Pachadi' and judging the best one of them all.

AISHWARYA

UGADI festivities a sombre affair this year

Ugadi, which is the Telugu New Year, is usually marked with great fervour by devotees thronging temples across most South Indian states. This year though, the mood is quite sombre as temples wear a deserted look. In light of the Covid-19 scare, Ugadi has become a quiet affair this year, writes RACHEL DAMMALA



"One of the most important elements of decor are the mango leaves, which are brought into the city from villages. Since the state government is only allowing transport of essential commodities, we will get only limited mango leaves this time.

UDAYA SREE

"The import of some grains and pulses that are important to make most of the Ugadi delicacies could be a problem due to the curfew. Since local markets can't stock up so much food, this year's Ugadi will not be the same



SATYAVENI

Temple officials and authorities in Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh, have dissuaded devotees from visiting temples. Events like *Sparshadarshanam*, *Arjitha Sevas*, *VIP darshanams* and public gatherings like *Gramotsavam* (processions of god and goddess), *Prabhotsavam*, *Veerachara Vinyasam*, *Agnigunda-pravesam* have all been cancelled considering the Covid-19 scare. The Telangana state government has decided that Ugadi and Sri Rama Navami festivities would be held by the government and devotees would not be allowed inside temples. Even the famous Tirumala Tirupathi Devasthanams (TTD) has shut its doors for devotees since

Friday as a precautionary measure to check the spread of the virus. The famous *laddus* which were prepared are now being distributed free of cost among the temple staff. The *Pioneer* speaks to some people from different walks of life on what they feel about how the festival is going to be this year. "Ugadi is always that time of the year, where all relatives gather and spend some quality family time by having lunch together, playing games and making merry. We are definitely going to miss that this year," laments Navaneetha, a teacher. Satyaveni, a business development manager at Cyient, said that the import of some grains and pulses that are important to make most of the Ugadi delicacies could be a problem due to the curfew. "Since local markets can't stock up so much food, this year's Ugadi will not be the same," she tells us.

Around the same time last year, Hyderabad was bustling with many events being held in Shilparamam and other venues. This year, however, all events have been called off. Railways and bus services too have been stopped so people can't even visit their villages. Tourism as a whole, has been badly hit, since temples have all shut. Gold sales too, which are usually at the peak during Gudi Padwa and Ugadi, will remain muted, much to the disappointment of jewellers. "One of the most important elements of decor are the mango leaves, which are brought into the city from villages. Since the Telangana state government is only allowing transport of essential commodities, we won't get mango leaves in the city, even if we get they are going to be very limited," informs Udaya Sree, a homemaker. And it's not just here in India. Ugadi is going to be a lonely affair

for folks in the United States and other countries too. Telugu communities in America come together every year to ring in the new year. But this year, all events have been cancelled. Ramya Lingaa, an IT-professional in the US is torn between celebrating Ugadi all by herself and coming home, but finally decided on doing the latter. Jeevraj Dirasam, an accountant working for an automobile company in Muscat, misses home. "I have no choice but to stay back here and have a lonely Ugadi," he says.



Telugostavam — an event of and by Telugites in the city, is as Telugu as it can get. Right from donning traditional clothes to indulging in arts and crafts of our region, the event aims to help the Gen Z learn about and practice, Telugu culture and tradition, reports V SATEESH REDDY

Of Telugu culture and TRADITIONS

TELUGOSTAVAM IS AN ATTEMPT TO GENTLY REMIND THE FORGOTTEN ECSTASY OF TELUGU TRADITIONAL CELEBRATIONS AND FESTIVALS

scrumptious traditional food, encourage telugu folklore, promote customs and music of and by Telugus.

Speaking to *The Pioneer*, Sankalp of Hyderabad Foodies Club, says "We have been conducting the Telugostavam event for the last three years in Hyderabad. It is unfortunate that we had to call off this year's event due to the Coronavirus pandemic." The event is an attempt to gently remind the forgotten ecstasy of Telugu traditional celebrations and festivals. "It is a celebration of pure 'Teluguness' in true spirit. It also brings the essence of traditional Telugu celebrations — best of festive food, entertainment and a memorable evening," he tells us. The organisers serve all authentic Telugu dishes right from

Vankaya Masala to Kakarakaya to curries like *Pootarekulu* and *Sunundalu*. "Every year for the Telugostavam event, participants turn up in traditional dresses that adds to the beautiful environment. We also set up pottery workshop for visitors. We encourage and get people to share stories about the famous 'Parrot Prophecies'. We also have people narrate the actual story behind Ugadi and more," informs Tummalala Srinivas Sampath,

Managing Director, The Spicy Venue.

"An event of this kind was a long-standing vision and we are happy that it's growing with each year. It is very important to keep our current and forthcoming generations updated on our culture and rituals. This festival provides a great opportunity to do just that. 'This is our humble attempt to strengthen the Telugu bond,'" he adds.

Every year, the organisers encourage and promote a Telugu band, that performs at the venue for the guests. They indulge the audience in ancient and the latest Telugu hits. Some of the bands that took part until now are Capriccio and Merakee, among others. The proceedings from the event are donated to orphanages in the city. "For the last three years, we have been donating to orphanages. It gives us great joy to be able to help those in need. Thus, through the event, we help promote Telugu culture and get a chance to be of some help to the needy," Sampath shares.



Rajini, Suriya, Karthi, Vijay Sethupathi donate for daily wage workers

Superstar Rajinikanth has donated Rs 50 lakh for the wellbeing of daily wage workers of South Indian film industry in the time of complete shutdown owing to the coronavirus pandemic, according to reports. Several other top star of southern cinema including Suriya, Karthi and Vijay Sethupathi, besides many filmmakers have pitched in, too. Given the recent outbreak of COVID-19, theatres across Tamil Nadu have been closed, and shoot of films, television serials and advertisements are on hold as well. The Film Employees Federation of South India (FEFSI) president RK Selvamani earlier issued an appeal through a press release requesting the South Indian film fraternity to provide financial help to



the daily wage members of the federation who don't have an income right now. Within a few hours Suriya, Karthi along with their father Sivakumar donated Rs 10 lakh. It was later reported that actor Sivakarthisheyan too donated Rs 10 lakh. Now, it is said that superstar

Rajinikanth has donated 50 lakhs, while Vijay Sethupathi has donated 10 lakhs for the welfare of FEFSI members. Actors Parthipan and Prakash Raj have provided several rice bags weighing 25 kg each. Ever since RK Selvamani had put a request, Kollywood celebrities are leaving no stone unturned to help FEFSI members in need. In fact, it is these members who worked incredibly hard for the success of their films. Due to the lockdown, the shooting of Rajinikanth's *Annaathe*, which is directed by Siruthai Siva, has been put on hold. The film was reportedly scheduled to release in Diwali 2020, given the delay in shooting we are unsure if films will stick to their stipulated release dates.

BIG B, KATRINA to play father-daughter in new film?



Amitabh Bachchan and Katrina Kaif could star as father and daughter in an upcoming slice-of-life comedy. The film is to be directed by Queen helmer Vikas Bahl according to a report in *Mumbai Mirror*, and is tentatively titled as *Deadly*. "The film is tentatively titled *Deadly*, as the story is centred around a funeral. Katrina loved the basic premise, which essentially traces the protagonist's journey of self-discovery with humorous undertones, and gave an instant go-ahead to Vikas," the newspaper reported a source as saying. The source added that Katrina, who has primarily enthralled fans as a mainstream star over her nearly 17-year-old career, is looking to experiment with new genres now and the project fits the bill at this point. The makers have reportedly approached Bachchan with an offer for the central role, and an official announcement of the project will be made soon as he gives a confirmation. Incidentally, Katrina's Bollywood debut film *Boom* (2003) also starred Big B as a protagonist. She also had a cameo in the Big B-starrer *Sarkar* (2005) and featured with Bollywood icon Big B and superstar Aamir Khan in *Thugs Of Hindostan* (2018). Recently, Big B and Katrina played father and daughter in a new advertisement.



BEN AFFLECK, Ana de Armas quarantine together

Hollywood star Ben Affleck and Spanish actress Ana de Armas have quarantined together after their romantic getaway. The rumoured couple got back to Los Angeles after a cost time together in scenic Costa Rica and Cuba and Costa Rica. Now, they have quarantined themselves together at home. "Ana is very happy with Ben," a source told *Us Weekly*, according to a report in *aceshowbiz.com*. The source added: "She loves spending time with him and they have great chemistry and a lot of fun together." The rumours of the two started when they were spotted together in her hometown of Havana, Cuba in early February. The pair, who met during the filming of their upcoming psychological thriller movie *Deep Water*, continued their romantic getaway in Costa Rica. While on their getaway, the two stars engaged in liberal PDA, and were seen sharing kisses with each other. Onlookers watched as Affleck, known for his comicbook role of Batman in *Justice League*, seemed to be "blissfully happy and giddy" in the company of Armas, the new Bond girl in the upcoming *No Time To Die*. The source added: "He can't stop smiling and laughing. He is clearly very into Ana." The insider went on to explain that the pair "have been staying at their home on the beach relaxing" and "coming out for sunset walks each day and look very happy together." Affleck has made no attempt to hide the relationship. When Armas, 31, posted photographs on social media, Affleck joked that he ought to get credits because some of the pictures were clicked by him.

FUN

ARCHIE

ARCHIE

BAD, CAN I HAVE AN ADVANCE ON MY- NO! BENCH BUNNY! BENCH BUNNY!

AND NO, NO, NO AND NO?

WELL? NOT ONLY DID I NOT GET AN ADVANCE ON MY ALLOWANCE, I GOT AN ADVANCE ON HIS TURNDOWNS!

CALVIN AND HOBBS

OK, YOU'VE ALL READ THE CHAPTER, SO WHO CAN TELL ME WHAT'S IMPORTANT ABOUT THE BATTLE OF LEXINGTON?

ANYONE?

CALVIN, HOW ABOUT YOU?

HARD TO SAY, MA'AM. I THINK MY CEREBELLUM JUST FUSED.

GARFIELD

LOOK AT THIS

A THANK YOU NOTE FROM THE GUY WHO OWNS THE PIZZA PARLOR

SENT FROM HIS VILLA IN THE SOUTH OF FRANCE!

THE VILLA THAT GARFIELD BUILT

REALITY CHECK

SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA PLAY-BY-PLAY. I DON'T KNOW HOW THEY CAN ACCOUNT FOR THAT POOR PERFORMANCE. PETE BUT HOPEFULLY THEY CAN PICK THINGS UP IN THE 2ND MOVEMENT.

I AGREE, FRANK- AND WAS IT JUST ME, OR DID THE VIBES IN KEEP COMING IN REALLY TOO LATE? LET'S GO UPSTAIRS-

NANCY

I'M GOING TO CATCH A WHALE TODAY!

AND NO ONE WILL AFTER TODAY, BECAUSE I WILL HAVE CAUGHT HIM!

NO ONE HAS EVER BEEN A WHALE IN OLD HICKORY LAKE! EVER!

SPEED BUMP

ACTUALLY, I HATE THE TASTE OF FISH, BUT THE OILS JUST SO DAMN GOOD FOR YOU.

GINGER MEGGS

WHAT DID YOU DO EVERY NIGHT WHEN YOU WERE GROUNDED, MATE?

WELL, WITH NO TV OR INTERNET, THERE WASN'T MUCH ELSE TO DO... IT GOT PRETTY DESPERATE. IT EVEN GOT TO THE POINT WHERE I DID THE UNTHINKABLE...

GINGER, NO!

YUP... HOMEWORK.

CROSSWORD

SUDOKU

Yesterday's solution

8	6	3	7	5	1	4	2	9
4	1	7	9	2	8	3	5	6
9	2	5	3	4	6	7	8	1
7	3	2	8	9	4	1	6	5
6	4	8	1	3	5	2	9	7
5	9	1	6	7	2	8	4	3
2	5	9	4	1	3	6	7	8
1	8	4	5	6	7	9	3	2
3	7	6	2	8	9	5	1	4

Rules

- Each row and column can contain each number (1 to 9) exactly once.
- The sum of all numbers in any row or column must equal 45.

ACROSS

- The body's covering
- Don't go
- A woodwind instrument
- The sound of an explosion
- An unusual or exciting experience
- A thing with wheels that is fun to ride on
- A word for rabbit
- A large bird of prey
- See-through
- Time of darkness
- Sickness with a high temperature
- On a trip
- Stubborn
- Follows eighth
- Think the same way as someone else
- A large hairy animal
- An animal with horns
- Large plant
- Use this in a camera
- Grass plant

DOWN

- The body's covering
- Don't go
- A woodwind instrument
- The sound of an explosion
- An unusual or exciting experience

SOLUTION

F	L	E	E	C	E	S	T	O	P
A	N	O	O	B	T	A	I	N	E
E	N	T	O	B	E	R	G		
I	G	N	I	T	E	S		I	
S	H	G	R	C	L				
H	B	R	A	V	E	R			
I	S	E	E	A	D				
V	A	N	I	S	H				
O	S	L							
R	O	W	S						
P	I	T	T	E	O	N			

A love story in Kashmir

Dulquer, who is the lead actor in the film asked filmmaker Hanu if he can make the film in Malayalam as well and the latter is comfortable with the idea, finds

NAGARAJ GOUD

In what is a first for a Telugu filmmaker, Hanu Raghavapudi will be making his next with Dulquer Salmaan in both Telugu and Malayalam languages. It was on the insistence of the Malayalam heartthrob that the filmmaker agreed to make the film in Malayalam as well, thus marking his Mollywood debut.

A source says, "The film is a period romantic drama with a pan-India appeal and Dulquer wasn't keen on missing his home turf audience while pleasing the Telugu audience with it. So he asked if Hanu is comfortable with the idea of directing it in Malayalam as well. The latter had no issues as such."

The source adds the film was supposed to go in front of the cameras in May but with Covid-19, it may be deferred to June or July. "The film is set in 80s Kashmir and major part of the filming will take place there. If the mak-

ers don't get required consent to shoot there, they may cheat it with Himachal Pradesh like most filmmakers do. There's a major schedule in Hyderabad as well. Like the male lead, the female lead too has a lot of significance in the film. In fact, she will be the heart of the film and Hanu is keen on a familiar yet very young face for the part."

Swarna Dutta will be shepherding the venture under her Swapna Cinema in association with Vyjayanthi Movies, while Vishal Chandrasekhar will provide the musical accompaniment.



Chiru to make his social media debut

Unlike his peers like Kamal Haasan, Rajinikanth and Mohanlal, Megastar Chiranjeevi doesn't have a social media account but that is going to change from today — on the occasion of Telugu New Year Ugadi. In a video announcing his arrival on social media on Tuesday, the Megastar said he wants to use the platform as a way of sharing his thoughts with his fans and people at large.

A source close to the actor told us that his public relations team has been asking him to join the social media bandwagon for the last three years but he didn't entertain the idea back then. "Of late though, he has been very expressive with his views on varied issues, ranging from politics to epidemic like Covid-19. So he decided that it'd be better if he communicates using right platforms. From Ugadi, fans and people will get to interact with him on his brand new Twitter and Instagram accounts," added the source.

On the work front, Chiru will be next seen in Koratala Siva's *Acharya*. He had to stop the shooting in Hyderabad some-time back due to Covid-19.

— NG



OF LATE, THE ACTOR HAS BEEN VERY EXPRESSIVE WITH HIS VIEWS ON VARIED ISSUES. SO HE DECIDED THAT IT'D BE BETTER IF HE COMMUNICATES USING RIGHT PLATFORMS

Venky hikes his fee

With his last two films — *F2-Fun & Frustration* and *Venky Mama* — doing well at the ticket counters, victory Venkatesh has hiked his fee. He was charging somewhere around Rs 5-6 crore earlier per film but we now hear, he is demanding Rs 10 crore.

A source says, "F2's phenomenal success is solely attributed to his performance in it, while *Venky Mama*, riding on his shoulders, grossed more than Rs 50 crore. So it's natural for him to demand a hike in view of his market pull."

Another source states the Venky's new pay structure didn't go well with leading producer Dil Raju, who is repeating him for *F3*, to be directed by Anil Ravipudi. "Raju wanted Venky to come down from Rs 10 crore but the actor wasn't in a mood to budge. There was a point where the producer considered another A-lister instead of Venky, but in the end Raju managed to sign on the Raja star for somewhere between Rs 8.5-9 crore. Moving forward though, Venky will be charging Rs 10 crore per projects except for films made under his home banner Suresh Productions, where he will share profits."



T town's helping hand

Actor Nithin, who is basking in the success of *Bheeshma* on Monday, has announced Rs 10 lakh each to governments of both Telugu states, as they fight Covid-19. He met Telangana CM K Chandrasekhar Rao at Pragathi Bhavan on Tuesday and handed over the promised sum.

Other industry personalities too have come forward to help film employees who depend on daily wages to make their ends meet. Actor Sivaji Raja informed that he will be distributing masks and vegetables that grew in his farm house in the outskirts of Hyderabad to poor colonies that are next to his farm. The former MAA president has also indicated that he will supply essentials like rice, lentils and cooking oil to MAA members who are in need for the next 15 days. He added members in urgent need of essentials can contact him.

Similarly, Shankar, president of Telugu Director's Association noted that the association will be distributing food essentials for the needy film employees from April 1. Distributor B Prashanth Goud announced donating essentials worth Rs 1,000 for 500 families, with the distribution beginning already. Employees in need can contact 9398131493 to avail the benefits. 3G Love producer Pratap announced Rs 1 lakh for AP CM relief fund.



“Humanity is waging a war against coronavirus right now. The world is in a danger.

Our culture tells us how to value health and it is important for us to maintain social distance and defeat the pandemic. As we enter a New Year, we should eliminate the dark and welcome light and feel it. Only when someone is happy, does he think of entertainment. As we are living in fear, it's better to postpone entertainment. We should discuss cinema only after the situation settles down.

PRODUCER
RAVI KISHORE



Ravi Kishore hints at *Red* postponement!

While films like *Uppena*, *Nishabdham* and *Aranya*, which have been scheduled for April 2 release have been postponed, there has been no word yet on Ram-starrer *Red*, which is to release on April 9. On Tuesday though, film's producer and Ram's uncle Sravanthi Ravi Kishore dropped hints at a probable postponement of the investigative thriller, which sees his nephew in dual roles for the first time.

The veteran producer said, "Humanity is waging a war against coronavirus right now. The world is in a danger. Our culture tells us how to value health and it is important for us to maintain social distance and defeat the pandemic. As we enter a New Year, we should eliminate the dark and welcome light and feel it. Only when someone is happy, does he think of entertainment. As we are living in fear, it's better to postpone entertainment. We should discuss cinema only after the situation settles down."

Directed by Kishore Tirumala, *Red* features Nivetha Pethuraj and Malavika Sharma as leading ladies, while Mani Sharma has composed music.

THE FILM IS AN INVESTIGATIVE THRILLER, WHICH SEES RAM IN DUAL ROLES FOR THE FIRST TIME