

OPINION 6
DOES ANYONE CARE?**WORLD 8**
CORONAVIRUS ATTACK ON US WORSE THAN PEARL HARBOUR, 9/11: TRUMP**MONEY 9**
STOCK MARKET ENDS IN RED

NEW DELHI, FRIDAY MAY 8, 2020; PAGES 12 ₹3



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DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

Bhopal redux! Vizag gassed, 11 die

Styrene gas leak suffocates thousands in their sleep in 5km radius of LG Polymers Plant; 3,000 taken ill, many on ventilators

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM/NEW DELHI

In a chilling reminder of the devastating Bhopal gas tragedy, at least 11 persons died and nearly 250 others were hospitalised following the leak of toxic styrene gas in LG Polymers' plant at Gopalapatnam on the outskirts of Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh on Thursday.

The gas started leaking around 2.30 am from a plant that was reportedly being restarted following relaxation of the Covid-19 lockdown. The leak was plugged and the plant brought under control some three hours later. But by then, the gas spread across at least five nearby villages, within a radius of five kilometres, affecting thousands of people, most of them in deep sleep.

A night shift maintenance worker had discovered the leak from a tank.

According to officials, at least 25 of those who have been hospitalised are in a critical condition and the possibility of the death toll increasing is not being ruled out. Unconfirmed reports said around 3,000 persons, including those admitted in hospitals, have fallen sick due to the poisonous gas.

Its impact on cattle and

verdure has not yet been fully assessed but several animals and birds in the vicinity have died. Discoloured, withering plants across the affected areas invoked haunting memories of the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy.

Scores of people fell like logs, listless and unconscious on roads and sidewalks, as the gas spread from the plant to the human habitations. Many people, who developed pneumonia-like symptoms after inhaling the gas, are on ventilators.

On the request of Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Jagannathan Reddy, his Gujarat counterpart Vijay Rupani gave orders to chemical companies in Vapi to send 500 kg of paratertiary butyl catechol (PTBC) chemical by road to Daman. The PTBC will be used to neutralise the gas leakage.

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Probing leak: S Korea's firm

Visakhapatnam: In a statement, South Korea's LG Chem Ltd's owner LG Chem said, "We are currently assessing the extent of the damage and are taking all necessary steps to protect residents and employees," said. The company said it is investigating the leak.



A man runs carrying a child affected by a chemical gas leak in Vishakhapatnam on Thursday AP



Smoke rises from LG Polymers plant, the site of a chemical gas leakage in Vishakhapatnam on Thursday AP

7 Raigarh paper mill workers fall ill from gas

PNS ■ RAIGARH

Seven workers fell ill, three of them seriously, after inhaling poisonous gas while cleaning up waste at a closed paper mill in Chhattisgarh's coal-rich Raigarh district on Wednesday, officials said on Thursday. They fell unconscious and were rushed to hospital. One worker has been put on ventilator at Raipur's MMI Hospital and his condition was stated to be critical.

The incident took place on Wednesday night at Shakti Papers Mill in a rural pocket, about 250 km from Raipur. However, the factory owner did not inform the administration about the incident, which came to light after the hospital authorities alerted the police on Thursday, said Superintendent of Police Santosh Kumar Singh. A case has been registered against the mill management.

The gas leak sparked panic in nearby areas housing about

60 poverty-hit families. A team of forensic experts are examining the site to ascertain the exact cause of the accident.

"Seven workers of the paper mill who were taking paper waste out of an open tank complained about difficulties in breathing and were rushed to a local hospital. Three of them were taken to Raipur for urgent medical attention," the SP told *The Pioneer* over phone.

He said the paper mill,

which is based in village Tetla, had been closed since late March this year when a nationwide lockdown was enforced in the wake of Covid-19. But the workers were undertaking cleanliness work without wearing safety masks in a bid to resume operation at the unit.

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel took serious note of the incident and directed the local administration to provide all possible help to the workers.

E-token launched to obviate queues for liquor in Delhi

SAPNA SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

To ensure social distancing during lockdown at liquor shops, the Delhi Government on Thursday launched e-token system for sale of liquor in the national Capital. Under the e-token system, customers would be given specific time for purchasing liquor.

The system will help maintaining social distancing and cut down on waiting time in long queues by specifying time for each e-coupon holder to buy liquor at a shop.

According to an official statement, the Government released a web link — *www.Qtoken.In* — where people will be designated specific time for purchasing liquor after they fill personal details. The e-tokens will be sent on the mobile phones of the registered persons, it said.

The people will require to

furnish address of liquor shop in their area along with their mobile number and other details, while applying for e-token on the web link.

The Delhi Government had allowed opening of 200 liquor shops run by civic bodies but only 50 opened due to overcrowding, the statement said.

Meanwhile, the Delhi Police has also urged the Government to extend the timings of the sale of liquor, hiring of private volunteers for crowd control, if needed, and opening of private liquor shops — except those located in markets, malls and commercial complexes. Currently, the shops are allowed to open from 9 am to 6.30 pm.

Delhi has 864 liquor shops while only 172 Government-owned shops have been allowed to operate following the MHA guidelines.



People violate social distancing norms as they stand in a queue to buy alcohol outside a wine shop at Jhandewalan in New Delhi PTI

72 inmates, 7 staffers test +ve at Mumbai's Arthur Road prison

PNS ■ MUMBAI

In a shocking development, as many as 72 prisoners lodged at the Arthur Road Central Jail and seven of its staffers tested positive for coronavirus on Thursday, after which the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) quarantined them and 100 others, including some jail officials and staffers, at an isolation facility outside the prison.

While State Home Minister Anil Deshmukh himself confirmed that 72 prisoners lodged at the Arthur Road prison tested positive for Covid-19, sources at the jail said that seven prison employees had been diagnosed positive for coronavirus.

"To ensure against the spread of coronavirus on the Arthur Road prison premises, we had made special arrangements for inmates there. The jail authorities had banned the entry and exit of anyone from the jail. But, still some inmates contracted the pandemic as

they were exposed to a Covid-19 affected staffer inside the prison," Deshmukh said.

Deshmukh was speaking to mediapersons at Palghar after reviewing the situation at Gadchinchale village where two Sadhus and one driver were lynched by a mob of villagers on the night of April 16.

Initial reports had said that a 45-year-old undertrial, who had been rushed to the JJ Hospital after he suffered paralytic attack, had tested positive for Covid-19 on May 2. When he was admitted to the hospital, he had been suffering from severe fever at that time. A swab sample taken from him tested positive for coronavirus.

Subsequently, the JJ Hospital doctors had taken swab samples of at least 150 prisoners; as many as 72 were diagnosed positive for the pandemic.

Subsequently, two prison guards, who were staying at a guest house near Byculla jail, tested positive.

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3 jawans die of Covid, 500 cases in paramilitary

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

Two BSF jawans and one CISF man died of Covid-19 even as paramilitary forces battled to contain the spread of coronavirus in their ranks. The number of positive cases in the Central paramilitary forces increased by 100 during the last 24 hours, taking the total to nearly 500.

The BSF on Thursday reported 41 new cases, taking the total count of active cases in its ranks to 193. The two deaths that it reported are the first in the BSF ranks due to corona virus infection.

A Head Constable of the CISF deployed in Mumbai died on Thursday morning. There are 32 active cases in the CISF across the country.

"A critically ill patient died who had contacted Covid while visiting clinics for his treatment. Other BSF man died on Monday (May 4) in Safdarjung Hospital, where he was admitted on May 3. From the normal ward he was shifted to ICU on May 4," a BSF spokesperson said.

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Bodies beside Covid patients: Probe on after video viral

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

A video showing at least four bodies wrapped in black plastic lying on beds next to Covid-19 patients undergoing treatment at the LTMG Hospital at Sion in north-central Mumbai went viral on Thursday. An acutely embarrassed Birhanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) ordered an enquiry into the shocking incident.

Within hours after BJP MLA Nitesh Rane posted on his twitter handle a chilling video that showed at least four bodies wrapped in black plastic lying on beds next to Covid-19 patients undergoing treatment at the Lokmanya Tilak Municipal General (LTMG) Hospital at Sion, a major political controversy broke out in the metropolis, with the Opposition BJP slamming the BMC and demanding an enquiry into the incident.

"Sion Hospital incident is extremely serious and shock-



ing. Patients who are being treated are lying beside dead bodies. This is utterly inhuman. Is there no one to care for Mumbai? Government must immediately look into this & ensure that it doesn't happen ever again!" former Chief Minister and senior BJP leader Devendra Fadnis tweeted.

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3,318 new cases, 61 deaths on Thursday

Peak in June, July, predicts AIIMS Director

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The deadly coronavirus causing Covid-19 continue to spread its tentacles across the country infecting over 56,325 persons while claiming over 1,846 lives till Thursday night. The country added 3,318 new cases and 61 more deaths during the day.

However, the worst is yet to come with AIIMS-Delhi Director Dr Randeep Guleria on Thursday ringing alarm bell as he said that as per the modeling data and the way India's Covid-19 cases are increasing, it is likely that peak can come in June and July.

"According to modeling data and the way our cases are increasing, it is likely that peak can come in June and July. But there are many variables. With



Health workers prepare to collect samples for Covid-19 swab tests at a roadside camp, during the ongoing nationwide lockdown to curb the spread of coronavirus, in Kolkata on Thursday PTI

time only we will know how much they are effective and the effect of extending the lockdown," said Dr Guleria.

Maharashtra has the highest number of cases — 17,914 — followed by Gujarat which added 388 cases to reach a total of 6,625 cases. Delhi reported 448 case for a total of 5,980 cases. Rajasthan reported 110 new Covid-19 positive cases on Thursday taking the total num-

ber of positive cases to 3,427 while 6 deaths took the death toll to 99.

Telangana reported 15 new cases on Thursday, taking the tally to 1,122 including 400 active cases and 29 deaths while in Madhya Pradesh, 114 more persons tested positive for the infection taking the total number of cases in the State to 3,252. Death toll stands at 193.

Continued on Page 2

CAPSULE

CHINA FLAUNTS FRENCH CONNECTION TO WUHAN

Beijing: China on Thursday said the bio lab in Wuhan, which is in the eye of the storm in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak, is a Sino-French cooperation project with its staff trained in France, even as it sounded ambivalent about agreeing for a WHO probe into the origin of the Covid-19 pandemic.

DELHI READIES 1,200 ROOMS FOR RETURNNEES

New Delhi: As the process of bringing back Indian nationals stranded abroad begins, the Delhi Government has arranged as many as 1,200 hotel rooms to quarantine the travellers for 14 days as per the protocol.

JEE-ADVANCED TO BE HELD ON AUG 23: HRD

New Delhi: The JEE-Advanced for admission to IITs will be conducted on August 23, the HRD Ministry announced on Thursday. The exam was earlier scheduled to be held on May 17.

354 Indians brought home from UAE in first 2 flights

Biggest evacuation operation begins

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As many as 354 Indian nationals, including 11 pregnant women and a pair of twins, returned home on Thursday in the first two flights from the UAE to Kerala as India began its biggest ever repatriation exercise to bring back its citizens stranded abroad amidst the international travel lockdown due to coronavirus pandemic.

According to the Ministry of Civil Aviation, the first Air India Express flight (IX 452) took off from Abu Dhabi to Kochi at 4.15 pm while the second flight (IX 344) took off from Dubai to Kozhikode at 5.10 pm. The first flight with



Air India Express crew members in protective suits pose for photographs before departing to the UAE to bring back stranded Indians in Kochi on Thursday PTI

177 Indians (including 16 children, 4 infants) landed at Kochi airport at 9.45 pm, while the second flight with 182 on board (including 13 children, 5 infants) landed after 10 pm.

Both the 189 seater Boeing 737s of Air India Express took off from Kerala with two pilots and four cabin crew members

on board each aircraft on Thursday morning. The Air India will operate 23 repatriation flights in the first week of Vande Bharat Mission.

The planes will keep last two rows of each aircraft vacant for any passenger showing coronavirus symptoms

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Coaches to be Covid centres at 215 rly stns

ACHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

With no let-up in the coronavirus cases in the country, the Government has zeroed in on 215 railway stations across the country where railway coaches will be converted into Covid-19 care centres for patients of suspected or confirmed viral infection.

Most of these stations have been identified in the States like Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Delhi, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh which are reporting high number of cases each passing days.

In the national Capital, New Delhi Railway Station, Hazrat Nizamuddin and Old Delhi railway stations have been selected for the conversion of coaches into the Covid centres for the health care of the patients whose numbers have already surpassed 54,000.



According to the officials in the Ministry, nine stations have been identified in Andhra Pradesh, while Assam has 13, Bihar (15), Chhattisgarh (2), Delhi (3), Goa (1), Gujarat (11), Haryana (4), J&K (2) Jharkhand (7), Karnataka (14), Kerala (3), Maharashtra (21), MP (14), Odisha (9), Punjab (7), Rajasthan (17), Tamil Nadu (10), Telangana (3), Tripura (1), UP (28), Uttarakhand (4) and in Bengal, 18 railway stations have been zeroed in.

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PoK now in IMD domain

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a first, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has included regions of Gilgit-Baltistan and Muzaffarabad as part of its Jammu & Kashmir meteorological sub-division as they are parts of India.

Muzaffarabad is part of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) while Gilgit-Baltistan is also under illegal Pakistani occupation. These cities of PoK have now found a place in the overall forecast of the northwest division.

It also reflects the changed status of Ladakh as a separate Union Territory. The IMD move comes days after the Pakistan Supreme Court's decision to allow the Islamabad to amend a 2018 administrative order to conduct general elections in the region.

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In U-turn, K'taka Govt allows spl trains to send migrants home

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Making a U-turn, the Karnataka Government has decided to deploy special trains from Friday to send back stranded migrant workers to their natives and sought approval of receiving States for the process, days after it abruptly withdrew a request sent to the Railways.

On Thursday, the Government wrote to Jharkhand, Bihar, UP, Manipur, Tripura, Bengal, MP, Rajasthan and Odisha conveying its decision and seeking their consent for receiving the workers, official sources said.

Eight special trains had ferried migrant labourers to their home States from the Bengaluru division before the cancellation.

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TO PREVENT OVERCROWDING

52% Indians want liquor to be delivered at home

New Delhi: As much as 52 per cent citizens want states to implement a solution for home delivery of liquor in red zones to prevent the spread of COVID-19 due to crowds at liquor vends.

Local Circles conducted a survey to understand from citizens how should the sale of liquor work in red zones in their opinion. The survey received 8,078 responses from various parts of the country. In response, 52 per cent citizens said the administrations should implement a solution for home delivery of liquor in red zones to prevent the spread of COVID-19 due to crowds at liquor vends.

Around 16 per cent said shop opening time should be extended while 23 per cent said police must be deployed to ensure social distancing. 9%

were unsure about it.

Local Circles said that in many places across India, queues as long as 1 km were seen in front of liquor shops with anxious tipplers gathered to buy their preferred brand. This has made residents living in these areas worried as people have been standing very close to each other, increasing the chances of the spread of COVID-19 virus.

In a late-night notification on Monday, the Delhi Government through the Delhi Excise (Amendment) Rules 2020, slapped a 70 per cent 'Special Corona Fee' on top of the MRP on liquor and also said that the unruly crowd might lead to complete sealing of the area.

On Tuesday, despite the increased prices, the queues

continued at the liquor shops.

According to Local Circles, each State Government amends their annual excise policy every year. So far, while no state explicitly allows or bans home delivery of liquor, it does not mean that it is allowed in the state.

The Chhattisgarh Government recently permitted online sale of liquor so that crowding at wine shops can be discouraged, with a customer allowed to buy up to 5 litres of liquor at a time and a delivery charge of Rs 120 applicable. Punjab is also seriously considering allowing home delivery of alcohol to prevent crowding. Before the lockdown, there were also many shops in Delhi and Gurgaon who would deliver alcohol in their area.

IANS

Coaches... PoK now in IMD domain

From Page 1

A detailed map has been prepared by the Union Health Ministry in coordination with the Union Railway Ministry according to which preferably an individual cabin will be assigned to each patient or maximum of two confirmed patients.

The State Governments have been asked to attach at least one Covid-19 dedicated hospital with each Covid-19 special train so that patient can be shifted there in case of emergency. Also, one basic life support ambulance with oxygen and ambubag will be stationed at the identified railway station.

Separate coaches for suspect and confirmed cases will be ensured to avoid cross infection, as per the guidelines issued by the Union Health Ministry.

The special train coaches, after formation shall be cleaned, and disinfected as per protocol for disinfection of quarantine facilities issued by the Health Ministry.

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The Gilgit-Baltistan Order of 2018 provided for administrative changes, including authorizing the Prime Minister of Pakistan to legislate on an array of subjects.

IMD Director General Mrutyunjay Mohapatra said that the IMD has been issuing weather bulletin for entire Jammu & Kashmir & Ladakh area. Mohapatra said they have been mentioning areas under PoK under its daily weather bulletin ever since the bifurcation of Jammu and Kashmir in the two union territories August last year.

Dr Kuldeep Srivastava, the head of the Regional Meteorological Centre confirmed that the IMD has started including Gilgit-Baltistan and Muzaffarabad, which are parts of PoK, under the Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, meteorological sub-division since May 5 that gives forecast for the northwest meteorological division of the IMD. The change in name started to get reflected from Tuesday in the daily forecast for northwest India, issued by IMD.

72 inmates, 7 staffers...

From Page 1

Known initially as the Mumbai Central Prison, the 94-year-old prison has a capacity to house 800 inmates. It is basically meant for housing under-trials. Being the largest and oldest prison, it currently houses anywhere from 2600-2700 prisoners, mostly under-trials.

In the past, several of the 1993 Mumbai serial blasts accused, including actor Sanjay Dutt, had been lodged at this prison. Even the 2008 Mumbai 26/11 attack's lone arrested accused Mohammed Ajmal Mohammed Amir Iman alias Kasab was here before he was shifted to Pune's Yerwada central Prison, where he was hanged on November 21, 2012.

In a related development, State Home Minister Anil Deshmukh said that in an effort to reduce the number of prisons in various jails of the State, his Government had decided to release on parole nearly 5500 prisoners who had committed "not-so-serious" crimes and had been sentenced to less than seven years' imprisonment.

"Earlier, to reduce the number of inmates in crowded prisons across the State, we had released 5,500 prisoners on bail. Now, the State Government has decided to release on parole another 5,500 prisoners who have not committed not-so-serious crimes and have been sentenced to less than seven years of imprisonment. With these moves, we will be able to reduce 11,000 inmates in jails across the State," Deshmukh said, while talking to media-persons at Palghar.

All visas, OCI cards for foreign nationals outside India remain suspended

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

All visas for foreign nationals and the OCI card visa free travel for Indian-origin people, who are not in the country, remain suspended till the restrictions on international travel to and from India remain in place, the Indian embassy here said on Wednesday.

However, for all foreign nationals inside the country whose visas have expired and cannot travel out of India due to the international travel restrictions, can apply for their visa extension without any additional fee, it said in a statement.

Visa free travel facility granted to Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) card holders who are not in India presently, will continue to remain in abeyance till prohibition on international air travel of passengers from/to India is lifted. The OCI card of a traveller presently in India shall remain valid, the embassy said.

The OCI is an immigration status permitting a foreign citizen of Indian origin to live and work in India indefinitely. The OCI was introduced in response to demands for dual citizenship by the Indian diaspora, particularly in developed countries.

All existing visas issued to nationals of any country who have not yet entered India, will remain suspended till prohibition on international air travel of passengers from/to India is lifted. Exceptions include Visa issued to diplomats, official passport holders, those in UN/international organisations, and those on Employment and Project visas, it said.

Highest single-day jump in city with 448 new cases



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The national Capital on Thursday witnessed the biggest single-day spike with 448 new Covid-19 cases.

With this, total corona case soars to 5,980 while 66 patients have lost their lives in the city. According to State health department, active cases stand at 3,983 while 1,931 patients have so far recovered.

Meanwhile, the Delhi Government also ordered to de-contain four more zones — Balaji Apartment, Shastri Market, Krishna Apartment and Abu Fazal Enclave. Thus, Delhi has now 87 containment zones.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT



A child shooing away a cow while waiting for his turn at a food distribution queue at Noida Sector 8, one of the Covid containment zones in Gautam Buddh Nagar, during the nationwide lockdown on Thursday

Himanshu Rawat | Pioneer

Centre says Odisha Govt to decide on Rath Yatra, allows chariot construction

New Delhi/Bhubaneswar: The Centre on Thursday said the decision of holding the Rath Yatra in Puri would be taken by the Odisha government keeping in mind the prevailing Covid-19 situation, but allowed construction of the chariots during the lockdown for the religious procession.

In a letter to the state government, the Union Home Ministry said construction of the chariots had been allowed in the 'Ratha Khala', which is situated on both sides of the Grand Road in front of the Jagannath temple office and the Sri Nahar palace in Puri, subject to fulfilling conditions.

The green signal from Delhi came a day after the state government had sought the ministry's consent for undertaking the chariots construction for the annual festival in the pilgrim town of Puri.

No religious congregation should take place in the 'Ratha Khala' and complete segregation of people engaged in the chariot construction should be ensured, the ministry said.

However, the decision of holding the Rath Yatra, which is scheduled for June 23, would be taken by the state government, keeping in view the conditions prevailing at that point of time, the letter said.

According to the guidelines issued for the ongoing lockdown, religious congregation is strictly prohibited.

The ministry said the managing committee of the Shri Jagannath Temple, following a meeting on Monday, urged for permission to construct the chariots in the 'Ratha Khala'.

The committee said no religious congregation takes place in the 'Ratha Khala' as it is a workplace and not a public place accessible to the general public.

However, for effective Covid-19 management, complete segregation of the 'Ratha Khala' will be done from the adjoining Grand Road and adjoining properties by erecting a cloth partition wall so that public can be effectively prohibited, the temple committee said. The committed added that the national directives for Covid-19 management would be fully implemented, according to the letter.

PTI

3,318 new...

From Page 1

Gujarat registered 388 new Covid-19 positive cases in last 24 hours with total touching 7,013 including 1,709 cured/discharged and 425 deaths.

Tamil Nadu's encounter with coronavirus has reached a crucial stage as the number of persons testing positive for the pandemic reached 5,369 on Thursday evening. Medical bulletin issued by the Directorate of Health and Family Welfare said 540 persons tested positive for coronavirus on Thursday.

Out of the 540 new cases, Chennai accounted for 316 persons making it the district with the highest number of Covid-19 patients. There are 2,644 patients in the metropolis. The day also saw two persons succumbing to the pandemic making the number of fatalities to 37.

Since last week, the number of persons testing positive for coronavirus increased by

leaps and bounds in Tamil Nadu. On April 30, the State recorded 130 persons while the next day it registered 203 patients. On May 2, there were 231 new cases while the next day saw 266 persons testing positive for the pandemic. On May 4, Tamil Nadu was bewildered when the Government announced that 527 persons tested positive on a single day. Since then the numbers increased steeply with 508, 771 and 580 respectively.

Union Health Minister Dr Harshvardhan said in comparison to other countries, India is in a better condition as the fatality rate is 3.3 per cent and recovery rate is 28.83 per cent. He also said there are 4.8 per cent patients in ICU, 1.1 per cent on ventilators and 3.3 per cent on oxygen support of the active cases.

Vardhan said, "The testing capacity has increased in the country and it is 95,000 tests per day with 327 Government laboratories and 118 private laboratories. Cumulatively, 13,57,442 tests have been done so far for Covid-19."

3 jawans die of Covid...

From Page 1

After his death, prior to post-mortem examination, COVID-19 test was done and result came positive by late night on Wednesday.

"Prahari pariwar is grief stricken with deaths of two BSF personnel during this pandemic. DG, BSF and all ranks mourn the untimely demise of the corona warriors of BSF. BSF fraternity conveys condolences and stands firm with the bereaved families," the spokesperson further said.

Braving the challenges of securing frontiers, working with civil administration and while shouldering other essential responsibilities, 41 new Covid-19 positive cases have been reported in the last 24 hours, he said.

Most of these BSF personnel have been aiding the police in internal security duties during this critical phase of Covid pandemic, he added.

With the tracing of primary, secondary and tertiary contacts of earlier detected cases, testing of all such listed, mostly asymptomatic contacts, was undertaken on priority after immediately putting them in quarantine, BSF officials said.

All instructions and protocols issued by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare are strictly followed. BSF establishments have set up well equipped quarantine/isolation centres as per the prescribed norms to prevent the contagion. The composite hospitals of BSF are dedicated COVID Health Centres (DCHC) and are diligently handling cases of BSF personnel, they added.

Bodies beside Covid patients: Probe on...


From Page 1

Taking a serious view of the incident, Mumbai Mayor Kishori Pednekar personally visited the BMC-run LTMG Hospital, held discussions with Dr Pramod Ingale, Dean of the LTMG Hospital, and ordered an enquiry into the incident.

Dr Ingale said that the inquiry ordered by the Mayor would be completed within 24 hours.

"A video clip showing dead bodies being kept on the trolleys in a ward of Lokmanya Tilak Municipal General Hospital where other patients are being treated is circulating on media. To understand the reality and confirmation of the facts, an inquiry committee has been constituted. Committee members have been instructed to submit the report within 24 hrs. Depending on the report, disciplinary action will be taken against the guilty," a statement issued by the hospital said.

Ironically enough, the LTMG Hospital authorities admitted themselves that there is already a guideline that the body of a deceased Covid-19 patient should be handed over to its family. "In view of guidelines of Government of Maharashtra, a circular was issued u/no. LTH/108/Dean (L) dtd. 2.5.2020 which stated that a dead body should be handed over to patient's relative within 30 minutes of death in the suspect Covid and Covid positive wards. But it is found that many a times relatives are not available to hand over the body or they are not willing," the LTMG Hospital said in its statement.



Government of India
Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment
Department of Social Justice & Empowerment

Applications are invited for scholarship for pursuing higher education viz. Masters degree and Ph. D abroad under the Central Sector Scheme namely National Overseas Scholarship (NOS) for Scheduled caste etc. candidate being implemented by the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India. The applications can be submitted through the portal "www.nosmsje.gov.in" only. In order to be eligible, the prospective candidate should belong to Scheduled Caste or Denotified Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribe or Landless Agricultural Labourers and Traditional Artisans category. The prospective candidate should be having minimum 60% marks in the qualifying examination. The qualifying examination for Master's degree is Bachelors degree and for Ph. D., it is Masters degree. The total family income of the prospective candidate should not exceed Rs. 8.00 Lakh in previous year. Applications or documents received through any mode other than the NOS portal are not acceptable. For details, refer to the scheme guidelines for selection year 2020-21 available at the NOS Portal.

DAVP 38101/11/0003/2021

Bhopal redux...

From Page 1

The consignment will be airlifted from Daman by Andhra Pradesh government, said Ashwani Kumar, Secretary to Gujarat Chief Minister Vijay Rupani.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Jagannmohan and assured him of all help and support. "I pray for everyone's safety and well-being in Visakhapatnam," he tweeted.

The chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) team of the NDRE, which is the 5th battalion stationed in Pune along with an expert team of National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI), Nagpur has rushed to Visakhapatnam.

"This is a chemical disaster and that is why the Commandant Anupam Shrivasta and his team of four personnel will be flying in from Pune to assess the situation on the ground and give any assis-

tance required," DG, NDRE, SN Pradhan said in Delhi.

Styrene gas affects the central nervous system, throat, skin, eyes and some other parts of the body, Pradhan said adding a special gas leakage team of the force is on the spot and checking on people who are feeling uneasy.

"What we understand is that this plastic factory was being re-started for operations and the gas leaked after an accident occurred," he pointed out.

The decision to dispatch the CBRN team was taken after the PM held a high-level meeting with Union Ministers Rajnath Singh and Amit Shah. Ministers of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai and G Kishen Reddy and senior officials in attendance took stock of the situation.

Immediately after the high-level meeting, Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba took a detailed review meeting along with the Secretaries of the Ministries of Home Affairs, Environment, Forest and Climate Change,

Chemicals and Petrochemicals, Pharmaceuticals, Information and Broadcasting; Members of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and Director General (DG), National Disaster Response Force (NDRF); Director General of Health Services (DGHS) and Director AIIMS, and other medical experts; to chart out specific steps to support the management of the situation on the ground.

PK Mishra Principal Secretary to Prime Minister was also present in the meeting. Jagannmohan, who rushed to Visakhapatnam upon learning about the incident, called on victims undergoing treatment at various hospitals in the city. He instructed the doctors and officials to provide the best possible treatment to the survivors. Addressing a Press conference, he announced an ex-gratia of Rs 1 crore to the kin of the deceased. Reddy said those on ventilators would be given Rs 10 lakh compensation and others

among those hospitalised would be given Rs 1 lakh. Those getting primary treatment would get Rs 25,000 as compensation. Those who have lost livestock also would be compensated at the rate of Rs 20,000 each.

Steps would be taken to shift the plant away from the city, he said and promised jobs to the kin of the deceased, he said even as the Gopalapatnam police lodged an FIR against the LG Polymers. Apart from the Chief Secretary Neelam Sawhney, ministers Kannababu, Avanti Srinivas, Krishna Das, AllaKalikrishna Nani and Botsa Satyanarayana are monitoring the situation.

Andhra Pradesh Industries Minister Mekapati Goutham Reddy said a probe would be initiated into the gas leak tragedy. "They will have to explain exactly what sort of protocols were followed, and what were not followed as it was shut down for 42 days due to the Covid -19 lockdown," he said.

Accordingly, criminal action will be initiated, he added. The

Minister said the gas at the LG Polymers chemical plant has been neutralised, and the situation is now under control.

Opposition leader and Telugu Desam Party president N Chandrababu Naidu appealed to the Central Government to send medical teams to immediately provide required treatment to the victims of the Visakhapatnam gas leak.

He demanded a thorough enquiry into the gas leak and wanted the plant to be shifted to SEZ for ensuring safety of the public. The NHRC and the Andhra Pradesh High Court took suo motu cognizance of the gas tragedy and issued notices to the State and the Centre. Styrene is used to make polystyrene plastics, fiberglass, rubber, insulation, pipes, automobile parts, printing cartridges, copy machine toner, food containers and packaging material among others. As per official website of LG Polymers, the company was established in 1961 as

"Hindustan Polymers" for manufacturing Polystyrene and its Co-polymers at Visakhapatnam, India. It was merged with Mc Dowell & Co Ltd of UB Group in 1978. LG Chemical considered India as an important market and in its aggressive global growth plan identified Hindustan Polymers as a suitable company for entering Indian market through 100 per cent takeover. Taken over by LG Chem (South Korea), Hindustan Polymers was renamed as LG Polymers India Private Limited (LGPI) in July, 1997.

सार्वजनिक सूचना

मेरे मुविकिल श्रीमती उषा पत्नी श्री जितेन्द्र शर्मा निवासी ए.15/ए.1, रोड सिंह इन्क्लेव, नॉव कलाला, दिल्ली-81 ने अपने पुत्र अजुज पुत्र जितेन्द्र कुमार एवं पुत्रक्यू पुतम पत्नी अजुज के दुर्घट्यवहार, कुसंगति गलत आचरण के कारण अपनी समस्त ख़त अवल संपत्ति से बेदखल कर अपने सभी पारिवारिक संबंध विच्छेद कर लिये है। गतिथ्य ने उसके किसी भी क़ुरब, व्यवहार, लेन देन मे मेरे मुविकिल का कोई दायित्व नहीं होगा एवं गतिथ्य ने अजुज व उसकी पत्नी पुतम अपने भले इुरे के लिए स्वयं जिम्मेदार है।

कमल किशोर रिजय, अधिवक्ता
 वैक्नर नं. 815, 8वीं मंजिल, पोलिनी कोर्ट, दिल्ली

India doing better than European nations: Jain

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Government is working continuously and monitoring situation 24x7 to contain coronavirus from further spreading, said Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain. He further said that the situation in India is much better than those of European countries.

Jain said that in Delhi, there are 3,925 active cases but only 84 patients are in 'Intensive Care Unit' (ICU) and the situation is much better than those of western countries.

"There are 5,532 positive Covid-19 cases in Delhi and 12 patients are currently under ventilators. On Wednesday, 428 cases were reported from Delhi," he said, adding that the situation in the national Capital is under control and the doubling rate of coronavirus cases in the city is currently at 11 days.

"One needs to be very careful as we may have to live with the Coronavirus for a certain period as it may stay for a longer period of time. We have to follow all rules, use masks and maintain social dis-



tancing at all times," he said.

Jain further said "We should not look into the cases in terms of absolute numbers but we should calculate the rate of growth with respect to the base value. Rate of growth of Covid-19 cases in Delhi was around 8 per cent on Wednesday, earlier the rate was 20 per cent then 15 per cent and then it became 12 per cent.

Till May 3rd, there was a lockdown and no movement of people was allowed but now the Center has permitted to send migrants back to their native places.

Talking about people who

attended Tablighi Jamat and quarantined later, he said for the people of Tablighi Jamat whoever has recovered and spent the designated time in quarantine can go to their respective states following the guidelines. "If any police investigation is going on against anyone then the police will take care of such issues," he added.

The Delhi Government is in constant touch with all the states regarding sending migrant labourers and stranded people back to their respective states, he said, adding that a list containing names of them has been shared with respective states and today a train with stranded people will leave for Madhya Pradesh.

The health minister further said that the liquor shops have been opened as per rules and the situation will be under control in two to three days.

Jain also said that the Delhi government is working proactively in the distribution of ration across the city from the very first day and ensuring that all the beneficiaries get their ration.

TACKLING CORONAVIRUS

GOVT REVISES GUIDELINES

Only paid quarantine facility for fliers arriving from abroad, says Govt

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Government on Thursday issued a "revised order" on guidelines for handling of passengers from abroad arriving at the Delhi airport.

As per the fresh guidelines, passengers will be quarantined in paid institutional quarantine centres for 14 days after the arrival as per the protocol. The earlier order issued on Wednesday had given an option of home quarantine or Government quarantine facility, which is free, as an option for passengers to undergo the mandatory 14-day quarantine.

There will be 20 medical teams — four each from three corporations and NDMC and four teams from RTRM Hospital — for the handling of passengers.

According to orders signed by Delhi Health Secretary Padmini Singla, The rooms would be paid quarantine facilities. As many as 850 rooms were in the luxury hotels, like Svelte, Le Meridien, Red Fox and ibis,

in aero city and other parts of the city, the official added.

While it is yet to reveal the number of passengers staying in Delhi but government has made arrangements for 1200 patients.

On Thursday, the Centre started the operation to bring back Indians stranded abroad due to the coronavirus lockdown. Air India and its subsidiary Air India Express will start the first phase of the mission and operate 64 flights in seven days to bring back 14,800 Indians from 12 countries.

They will be arriving at different cities, including Delhi.

On Wednesday issued a standard operating procedure (SOP) for handling the returnees at the Delhi airport. The detailed list of passengers with passport data, arrival date and time would be shared with the Delhi nodal official by the MEA-appointed nodal official a day in advance for better coordination with different states' resident commissioners and nodal officer.

1,093 held, ₹63.40L collected for lockdown violators in G'gram

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

As many as 1093 people have been arrested in the Gurugram district for reportedly violating the nationwide lockdown to curb the spread of coronavirus, police said on Thursday, adding a fine of ₹63.40 lakh was collected from the offenders.

"Till May 6, as many as 722 cases have also registered to violate Government orders during the coronavirus lockdown. Of this, the action was initiated against 265 persons under the Disaster Management Act," Commissioner of Police Muhammad Akil said.

Also, 654 vehicles were impounded and nearly 1415 challans were issued by the Gurugram police from March 23 to till May 6 to restrict the movement of people to ensure social distancing and lockdown. On March 23, section 144 was imposed in Gurugram followed by a complete lockdown.

The police reportedly registered more than 438 cases against people for stepping outside their residences with-

out wearing masks and also without proper reason.

The police control room (PCR) has also been receiving around 1,800 calls per day in connection with violation of lockdown, police said.

So far the police have acted against, autorickshaws, cabs, bike riders and pickups van for carrying people and several shopkeepers were booked for hoarding and black marketing in a different part of the Gurugram district.

"People are cooperating to ensure lockdown, but in some cases, people were found violating the norms and action were taken against them in accordance with the law," said Gurugram police commissioner Muhammad Akil adding that they are trying to cause minimum discomfort to residents but at the same time violation of lockdown will not be tolerated.

He said checkpoint has been installed across the city to ensure lockdown. "People involved with manufacturing and supplies of essential goods are exempted. Authorities are also issuing movement pass," said police chief.

Constable who died of Covid cremated

Kejriwal announces ₹1cr ex-gratia

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The 31-year-old Delhi Police constable, who died on Tuesday after being infected from the Covid-19 was cremated at Punjabi Bagh crematorium on Thursday. Meanwhile, the Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday announced an ex-gratia of ₹1 crore to the family of the constable who died of coronavirus infection.

Delhi Chief Minister in a tweet in Hindi said the family of the constable will be provided with an ex-gratia of ₹1 crore.

"He did not care about his life and kept serving Delhi people. He got infected with corona and passed away. I pay homage to his sacrifice on behalf of all Delhi people. An ex gratia of ₹1 crore will be given to his family," the CM said.

The constable Amit Kumar, a resident of Sonipat, Haryana, was posted at Northwest Delhi's Bharat Nagar police station.

Manish Agrawal, the Joint Commissioner of Police,

Northern Range, Vijanta Arya, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Northwest district and other officers of the district were present at the cremation to pay their last respects to the departed soul.

"Amit parents, brother, his in laws and other close family members were also there at the crematorium. The police officers and family members paid their respect by showering flower petals on the ambulance carrying the body," said a police official.

Joint CP Manish Agrawal interacted with the family members and conveyed solidarity with them in this hour of grief.

The Delhi Police constable died on Tuesday after he was infected with Coronavirus. It is said to be the first death of a Delhi police personal due to coronavirus.

Though the constable's Covid-19 result came after his death. Taking to twitter, Delhi Police Commissioner SN Shrivastava had expressed his condolence to the family and assured of all assistance.



"The sudden demise of late Constable Amit Kumar from PS Bharat Nagar has saddened the police fraternity. We stand by his family in this hour of grief and pray to the Almighty to provide strength to bear this loss. All assistance to his family will be provided," he had tweeted.

According to police, the constable fell sick on Tuesday morning following which he was examined at the Deep Chand Bandhi Hospital where he was given medicines.

"He was also tested for Covid-19 and his reports were awaited," police said. "Suddenly, on Tuesday evening, when he reported he was feeling uncomfortable, he was immediately taken to the Ram Manohar Lohia (RML) Hospital where he was declared brought dead," a senior police official said.

My son killed self after his friends made false Insta story on him: Father

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

Three days after the suicide case of a 17-year-old student of class 12th who died after falling off the 11th-floor balcony of his house in an upscale residential society in DLF Phase 5 on Monday night, the deceased's father filed a complaint against Instagram, the girl who posted a suspicious post on the social media platform and her friends.

"The teenager and her friends tortured my son on social media and because of this my son could not bear the trouble and jumped from the 11th floor," the victim Manav's

father Manoj alleged In the complaint.

Following this complaint, the cyber cell of the Gurugram police started a probe.

"The investigation team is scanning the deceased mobile and other electronic assets to ascertain the reason behind the suicide," said a senior police official on requesting anonymity.

The deceased's father Manoj further stated in his complaint that, "I don't want that such incident happens to anyone else. The government and other agencies along with social media are responsible for

preventing such unpleasant incidents from Instagram."

He also alleged that someone made an Instagram story and made false allegations on his son, making the story sensational for likes and comments.

"Because of which he broke down and took this step otherwise why don't my son take such extreme step," Manoj said in his complaint.

"The matter is under investigation. However, the reason behind the suicide yet to be known. The investigation team probing the matter from all different angles," said police spokesperson Subhash Boken.



A man searches the charred remains of various articles at a godown at Meena Bazaar near Red Fort in New Delhi on Thursday. Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

G'gram admin designates 6 pvt hospitals for virus treatment

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

As the Gurugram district reported 13 fresh cases of coronavirus on Thursday, the district administration designated 6 private hospitals for treatment of those who are affected by the Covid-19 epidemic. These hospitals have a total of 600 beds.

"These hospitals include Metro Hospital, Naraina Hospital, Signature Hospital, Columbia Asia Hospital, Park Hospital and W Pratiksha Hospital. All these private hospitals and their staff or manpower have been acquired," said Amit Khatri, the deputy commissioner of Gurugram.

"The District Collector

exercised the powers conferred by the movable and immovable property acquisition act 1973," read the order.

The ESIC Hospital in sector 9-A, which has 125 beds, was also designated for Covid-19 patients.

The order further stated that under the Covid-19 epidemic, the Midiore Hospital at Manesar has been designated a dedicated Covid Hospital but due to technical reasons, the hospital is taking time to implement.

"Keeping a close watch on this situation, the Civil Surgeon Gurugram Dr JS Punia requested to acquire these private hospitals with staff and manpower due to the requirement of 600 isolation beds with immediate effect,"

read the order.

"The demand for 600 isolation beds was requested by the Civil Surgeon to make 100-100 beds available in each of these 6 hospitals. These private hospitals have been keeping in view the public interest during the epidemic and these hospitals have been allotted to civil surgeons," Khatri said.

Meanwhile, the official up-scale Vipul Belmonte residential complex at Golf Course road was sealed after the emergence of two Covid-19 cases on Thursday.

The patients, a senior citizen couple, underwent Covid-19 test after the wife got a fever. The husband had recently visited the Azadpur vegetable and fruit wholesale market in Delhi.

Nation not prepared for communal disharmony during virus crisis: Court

New Delhi: The nation is not prepared for communal disharmony during the ongoing coronavirus crisis, a Delhi court said while directing the police to lodge an FIR against two women who allegedly made communally sensitive remarks and violated lockdown rules in central Delhi's Lal Kuan area.

The court's order came on an application filed by a local Waiz Islam who alleged that on April 16, in the Rogran locality of Lal Kuan, two unknown women attempted to disrupt harmony by imputing communally sensitive remarks.

They were carrying rods and roaming in the locality

freely in complete disregard of the lockdown, he alleged and claimed that he reported the incident to the police, but no action has been taken till date.

Metropolitan Magistrate Rishabh Kapoor directed the Station House Officer of Police Station Hauz Qazi to register the FIR for offences under sections 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant), 153A (promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language), 295A (malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feel-

ings) IPC and conduct the investigation of the case accordingly.

"The area of occurrence is a sensitive area which has already witnessed communal tension on previous occasion. Therefore, if the incidents like the one in question are not taken to law, it will lead to communal disharmony and disturbance in public peace and tranquillity, for which the nation is not prepared in the present time of on-going COVID crisis."

It further said that once a commission of cognisable offence is disclosed to the police, it is duty bound to reg-

ister the case.

Islam claimed in the application that the ladies allegedly caused public annoyance by smashing the doors of residences and shops in the vicinity and the alleged incident was captured on camera and uploaded on YouTube.

He further claimed that the area was a sensitive area as it has already witnessed a communal dispute regarding some parking issue.

The matter was reported to the SHO, Hauz Qazi Police Station on the same day but no FIR was registered, he claimed.

Following this, Islam said he informed the SHO on

WhatsApp and to the concerned DCP through e-mail, but no action has been taken till date.

The police told the court that the two women had been traced and it was found that they were feeding stray dogs on the streets as they worked with an NGO.

The police further said that one of them was carrying a stick in her hand and the people of the locality had a heated exchange with them, but no religious comments were passed by the women.

During inquiry no cognisable offence was found to have been committed, police said in

the action taken report.

The court noted that as per the allegations, the incident had occurred on April 16 when the nationwide lockdown was continuing in the country and the women were out in an area which was at a distance of 450 to 750 metres from their houses and they did not have any movement pass.

"It prima facie emerges that due to the alleged incident, offences under sections 188, 153-A and 295 A of the IPC have occurred, and such offences are cognisable in nature. Therefore, the investigation of the case deserves to be conducted by the police," it said. **PTI**

Sisodia directs officers to ensure smooth functioning of permitted economic activities

New Delhi: The Delhi Government has directed its officers to ensure smooth operation of permitted economic activities in the city after complaints about obstructions in opening of private offices and in works of self-employed service providers.

In a note to the Chief Secretary, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia instructed him to ensure the permitted activities in allowed hours of work begins at once.

"All district magistrates and deputy magistrates be accordingly instructed to give message to all enforcement officers to come with mindset of facilitators of permitted economic activities," Sisodia said in the note.

He said the Government has received complaints about private offices not being allowed to open in district centres like Nehru Place, besides offices of Chartered Accountants and lawyers. **PTI**

3 more cops test positive

New Delhi: Three more Delhi Police personnel, including a traffic inspector posted in Southern Traffic Range, tested positive for Covid-19, police said on Thursday.

The 59-year-old Traffic Inspector, who is incharge of Sangam Vihar area of Southern Traffic Range, felt body ache and mild fever on May 4 following which, he went to the government CGHS dispensary, Minto Road, where the doctor prescribed medicines and advised five-days rest, they said.

However, the official gave his swab sample to a private lab for Covid-19 test as a precautionary measure on May 6.

On Thursday, the result was received as positive, a senior official said.

He said the traffic inspec-



tor was residing along with his 22-year-old son and a 27-year-old domestic help at government quarters in Minto road area.

In Northwest Delhi, a 46-year-old head constable posted in Mahendra Park Police Station also tested positive for Covid-19. He has been living with his wife, two daughters and a son in the police colony, Narela. He was on medical leave since May 1, police said.

Also, an inspector posted with the Special Cell of Delhi Police has tested positive for Covid-19. He was deployed at the Lodhi Colony office of the Special Cell, they said.

Meanwhile, officials are tracing the people with whom the three police personnel came in contact so far so as to quarantine them, they added.

More than 30 Delhi Police personnel have tested Covid positive so far. **PTI**

World Punjabi Organisation donates ₹51L to DSGMC

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The World Punjabi Organisation (WPO) has donated ₹51 lakh to Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC) to support its charitable activities during the Covid 19 crisis for the service of mankind and humanity.

Vikramjit Singh Sahney, International President of WPO said that out of the total amount, ₹40 lakhs has been provided for meeting expenses relating to expenses of the religious preachers like Granthis, Ragis, and administrative staff while ₹11 lakh will be used in providing daily free food to needy persons in national Capital.

Earlier Vikramjit Sahney had distributed 10,000 Ration Kits for needy and deprived classes in various parts of the national capital to meet the ration needs of the migrant labourers and marginal sections of society.

Sahney, who is philanthropist himself has contributed ₹22 lakhs, while Taranjit Singh, President WPO Calcutta, and Chairman JIM University donated Rs 21 lakh and MS Kohli, President WPO Montreal Canada donated Rs 7.5 lakh.

DSGMC President Manjinder Singh Sirsa thanked Vikramjit Sahney and other WPO donors for their generous contribution in a time when Gurdwaras are facing a resource crunch due to lockdown.

Delhi Police lists virus testing centres for its personnel

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police on Thursday released a list of Covid-19 test facility centres and hospitals for its personnel in the national Capital.

According to the official communicate at Lok Nayank Jai Prakash Narayan Hospital, the police personnel can contact Station House Officer (SHO) Neki Ram and Sub-Inspector (SI) Yogender from IP estate police station while SHO Arun posted at GTB enclave police station can be contacted by police personnel for Covid-19 test at Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital Dilshad Gardern. "The official have deputed

SHO Sahadev Singh Tomar and SI Narendra Singh Rawat from North Avenue police station at Ram Manohar Lohia (RML) hospital while at AIIMS Inspector Jitender and Assistant Sub Inspector (ASI) Surender of Hauz Khas police station can be contacted" stated the letter.

"For Safdarjung Hospital, Inspector Raj Singh and SI Vivek Malik of Safdarjung police station have been deputed while at Lady Hardinge Medical College New Delhi, inspector Vikramjeet Singh of Mandir Marg police station can be contacted," the letter further stated.

"At Apollo Hospital, Inspector, Ajab Singh and ASI Ajay of Sarita Vihar police station whereas Inspector, Keshav

Mathur of Saket police station have been deputed at Max Hospital," the letter stated.

"A Covid-19 Testing Facility Center for Delhi Police personnel has been established in North West district at Prime Stay B&B, Haiderpur, Shalimar Bagh. A total of 35 number of Covid-19 test can be done in a day. The center also has temporary isolation facility for suspected covid positive cases," stated the letter.

"KG Tyagi, Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP), Shalimar Bagh and SHO, Shalimar Bagh police station Inspector Rajender are the 'Point of Contact' for any info regarding this facility," the letter further added.

Rajnath OK’s abolition of 9,304 MES posts

Aim is to make defence forces lean, cut down expenditure

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In the ongoing effort to make the defence forces lean and mean besides cutting down expenditure, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has approved the abolition of 9,304 posts in the Military Engineering Services (MES), which is responsible for creating military infrastructure. The cutting down of posts is part of the recommendations made a panel in 2017 to improve the functioning of the armed forces and rebalance defence expenditure.

The pruning of numbers in the MES mostly pertains to the civilian staff. Officials said here on Thursday most of the posts abolished are in basic and industrial workforce. Moreover, the minister’s nod is for abolishing 9,304 posts out of a total 13,157 vacancies, they said.

Giving details, officials said Singh approved the proposal of Engineer-in-Chief of Military



Engineering Services (MES) for optimisation of more than 9,300 posts in the basic and industrial workforce. It is in line with the recommendations of the Committee of Experts, headed by Lt General Shekatkar (retired), which had recommended measures to enhance combat capability and rebalance defence expenditure of the Armed Forces.

One of the recommendations made by the Committee was to restructure the civilian workforce in a manner that the work of the MES could be partly done by departmentally

employed staff and other works could be outsourced. The recommendation was aimed at making the MES an effective organisation with a leaner workforce, well equipped to handle complex issues in the emerging scenario in an efficient and cost effective manner.

The 11-member Shekatkar committee was appointed by late Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar in 2016 with a broad mandate and had made about 99 recommendations from optimising defence budget to the need for a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS). The panel had sug-

gested that if the recommendations are implemented over the next five years, it can result in savings of up to ₹25,000 crore in defence expenditure.

Realising the importance of having a lean and mean force to fight modern day warfare, the defence ministry approved the first batch of 65 recommendations pertaining to the Army were approved in 2017 by then Defence Minister Arun Jaitley.

Those reforms included redeployment and restructuring of approximately 57,000 posts of officers, Junior Commissioned Officers (JCO) and civilians.

The panel also stressed on optimisation of Signals establishments to include radio monitoring companies, corps air support signal regiments, air formation signal regiments, composite signal regiments, and merger of corps operating and engineering signal regiments.

It also called for restruc-

Indian Navy designs cheaper PPEs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Chipping in the national effort to fight coronavirus pandemic, the Indian Navy has indigenously designed and manufactured Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and this product is comparatively cheaper than those now available in the market. This product comes weeks after the Navy successfully manufactured handheld thermal gun to gauge body temperature.

Giving details about the

turing of repair echelons in the Army to include base workshops, advance base workshops and static/station workshops in the field Army. The panel also recommended closure of military farms and

PPE, officials said here on Thursday the product was tested by the Institute of Nuclear Medicine and Allied Sciences (INMAS), Delhi, a Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO), tasked with the testing and certification of PPE. The PPE was certified to be mass produced and used in clinical COVID situations, they added.

Shortage of PPE during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is of serious concern as it imperils the well-being and

availability of the Healthcare Workforce, apart from adversely impacting their security and morale. The PPE is required to meet stringent criteria on testing and the benchmarks of the same are set by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and the Health Ministry.

The naval PPE passed with 6/6 Synthetic blood penetration resistance test pressure. (the Indian government mandates minimum 3/6 and above level as per ISO 16603 standard) and is thus certified to be

mass produced and used in clinical COVID situations, officials said.

The outstanding features of the PPE are its simple, innovative and cost-effective design; thus it can be made by basic gown manufacturing facilities. The PPE is noteworthy for the innovative choice of fabric used, which gives the PPE its ‘breathability’ and penetration resistance rendering it both comfortable and safe for the user. The cost for this PPE is significantly lower than those commercially available.

and Navy, the panel recommended the establishment of a Joint Services War College for training for middle-level officers, even as the three separate war colleges — Mhow, Secunderabad and Goa —

could continue to train younger officers for their respective services. Similarly, the Military Intelligence School, Pune be converted to a tri-service intelligence training establishment was another proposal.

Policy on vehicle scrapping in the works, says Gadkari

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari on Thursday said the Ministry is pursuing the long-delayed vehicle scrapping policy to support the domestic automobile industry amid the covid-19 pandemic. He also set a target of constructing roads worth 15 lakh crore over the next two years which can engage more manpower to put back the economy on tracks.

“I have been trying to pursue the scrapping policy for the last two years. We need cooperation from other ministries, stakeholders. Have told the secretary to follow it up as soon as possible. This is one of the steps to boost the industry because it will reduce production,” Gadkari said in a video conference with the society of Indian automobile manufacturers (SIAM).

“I will find out what are the obstacles. We will clear it and go ahead,” he said.

The vehicle scrappage



policy, which awaits clearance from the finance ministry, aims to eliminate the fleet of old polluting vehicles and boost demand.

The coronavirus-led crisis has only made matters worse for the local auto sector that was already struggling due to weak demand. The imposition of the nationwide lockdown had halted all economic activities, adding to the woes of businesses.

The automobile industry continues to expect tepid demand in near term as it believes that normalcy in businesses may not be restored immediately even if the lockdown is lifted completely.

The proposed policy had got a fresh push in August last year even when the automobile sector reeled under slow-

down pressure. Separately, the road ministry had issued draft guidelines in October to set up vehicle scrapping centres in the country to protect the environment and promote a legally-backed dismantling and scrapping industry.

During the meeting in the presence of officials, Gadkari informed that he has set a target of constructing roads worth ₹15 lakh crore in the next two years. He said, his ministry is working overtime to clear all arbitration cases with concessionaires.

On the question of BS4 vehicles, he said, the government is bound by Supreme Court verdict on the same. However, on industry suggestion, he will get the matter examined afresh.

Regarding relaxations sought on other regulations, Gadkari stated that he will endeavour to provide relief wherever possible where industry is seeking extension of time.

India begins assessment of herbs’ based medicines’ Covid efficacy

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Reeling under the Covid-19 pandemic, India has turned towards its traditional medicines as on add-on intervention to see if it works against deadly contagion which has killed lakhs across the world.

On Thursday, the Ayush, Health and Science and Technologies Ministries joined hands to kick-start a clinical trial of traditional medicines based on herbs like Ashwagandha, Yashtimadhu, Guduchu Pippali on workers and those working in high-risk areas.

Dr Harsh Vardhan said that the study will draw a comparison between the impact of Hydroxychloroquine and Ashwagandha for the prophylaxes against SARS-COV-2 in the health care providers with increased risk during the Covid-19 outbreak.

It will also include the effectiveness of ayurveda formulation as an adjunct to ‘Standard of Care’ for the treat-

ment of mild to moderate Covid-19. A randomized, open-label, parallel efficacy, active control, multi-centre exploratory drug trial will take place, he said.

The population-based interventional studies on the impact of Ayush based prophylactic interventions will be carried out through four research councils under the Ayush Ministry and national institutes in 25 states across the country and several state governments covering approximately 5 lakhs population.

Union Ayush Minister Shripad Naik said that his Ministry is also studying the impact of Ayush advocacies and Ayush measures for prevention of COVID 19 among the population.

The Union Health Minister said that the Ayush Sanjivani mobile app developed by Ministry of AYUSH will be useful to generate data on acceptance and usage of AYUSH advocacies and measures among the population

and its impact in prevention of COVID 19.

Sanchit Sharma, Executive Director at AIMIL Pharma which is engaged in production of herbal products like Fifatrol and BGR-34 (developed with the help of government scientific research body, CSIR) welcomed the move asserting that many Indian herbs are already known for their immunity-enhancing property as well as managing various diseases.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi too have been at various platforms exhorting the use of Indian Traditional medicines to tackle the Covid-19 which has claimed over 1,700 lives in the country.

The Government is also launching Ayush Sanjivani application based study for impact assessment of acceptance and usage of Ayush advisories in its role in prevention of COVID 19 for generating data of large population with a target of 5 million people.

‘Amendments made in PM’s Research Fellowship Scheme to push research’



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Minister has also informed that, to boost research, a dedicated division is being created

HRD Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal ‘Nishank’ on Thursday announced that to boost research in the country various amendments have been carried out in Prime Minister’s Research Fellowship Scheme.

He said that after the amendments, now for the students from any recognised institute/ university (other than IITs, IISc/ IITs/NITs/IISERs/IIEST/CFIITs), the requirement of GATE Score is reduced to 650 from 750 apart from minimum CGPA of 8 or equivalent.

The Minister also informed that now there will be two channels of entries, one direct entry and lateral entry. In lateral entry, the students, who are pursuing PhD in PMRF granting institutions (completed 12 months or 24 months as per certain requirements) can also apply to become fellow under the scheme as per new guidelines.

Pokhriyal further highlighted that NITs, which appear in top 25 institutions as per NIRF Ranking (overall) can also become PMRF Granting institution.

The Minister hoped that the modifications will enable more students to avail of the benefit under the Prime Minister’s Research Fellowship Scheme.

The Minister has also informed that, to boost

research a dedicated Division is being created in the ministry with the name of “Research and Innovation Division”. This division will be headed by a director who will be coordinating research work of various institutions coming under MHRD.

Union Minister said that. “The Prime Minister’s Research Fellows (PMRF) Scheme has been designed for improving the quality of research in various higher educational institutions in the country. With attractive fellowships, the scheme seeks to attract the best talent into research thereby realizing the vision of development through innovation.”

He added that the scheme was announced in the Budget 2018-19. The institutes which can offer PMRF include all the IITs, all the IISERs, Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru and some of the top Central Universities/NITs that offer science and/or technology degrees.

Pokhriyal further said that the candidates will be selected through a rigorous selection process and their performance will be reviewed suitably through a national convention.

Starting Academic Year 2020-21, candidates can apply for PMRF through either direct entry channel or lateral entry channel.

‘Treating part of brain that controls blood flow, breathing might help Covid +ve’

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Coronavirus injures lungs. But targeting the part of the brain that controls breathing and blood flow might help patients with lung injury-induced respiratory disorders due to Covid-19, and speed the process of weaning patients from mechanical ventilators, researchers have suggested.

With respiratory infections like Covid-19 or other pulmonary infections, activation of the immune system is part of the normal, healthy response.

However, said the researchers in their study published in the Journal of Physiology, in some cases the inflammatory response is so powerful that it leads to further lung damage called acute lung injury (ALI) and in its most severe form acute respiratory

distress syndrome (ARDS).

Typical clinical care of patients with ALI and ARDS is focused on minimising further lung damage using specialised forms of mechanical ventilation.

The researchers also suggest that the injury is not limited to the lungs, but may also have a lasting impact on the central control of respiration. Thus, targeting the parts of the brain that regulate our breathing might be an important therapy for weaning patients from ventilatory support following their recovery from severe respiratory infections, ALI and ARDS.

This is important to understand during the Covid-19 pandemic as these patients may experience the same difficulties transitioning to breathing on their own.

Currently, ALI and ARDS

therapy focuses on the lungs to maintain gas exchange and minimize further injury. These researchers examined rats with lung injury and determined that the brain regions that control breathing are affected also.

In fact, the characteristics of the pathologic breathing pattern remain even when the lungs are removed. In addition, inflammation was evident in the part of the brain that generates the breathing pattern. This indicates that the lungs are not the only factor involved in breathing disorders in lung injury.

These scientists then examined what happens in conscious lung injured rodents when they introduced non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs within the central nervous system.

They found that this treatment reduced neural inflammation and minimised the

effects of lung injury. These findings suggest that brainstem circuits play a role in the pathophysiology and potential recovery of the respiratory system following lung injury and ARDS.

First author of the study Yee-Hsee Hsieh from Case Western Reserve University, Ohio said, “Clinical treatment for respiratory illness typically focuses on adopting ventilatory protocols that protect the lung from further lung injury and current research focuses on repair and restoration of pulmonary tissue and function.

“This study suggests we also need to address the role of the central nervous system and neuro-inflammation to completely treat acute lung injury and perhaps other lung diseases like Covid-19.”

Time extended for public comments on draft EIA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Following demand from the Environmentalists and Opposition amid Covid-19 pandemic, the Government has extended time from May 22 to August end for public comments on the draft Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) notification which proposes various relaxations for infrastructure projects while extending the validity of environmental clearance in various sectors by several years.

The draft notification which is expected to significantly overhaul the environmental clearance process for all infrastructure

projects in the country was issued by the Union Environment ministry on March 23 and almost the entire sixty-day period for public scrutiny of the draft coincided with the lockdown period.

The nationwide lockdown was imposed on March 25 and has been extended till May 17.

Former environment minister and Congress leader Jairam Ramesh had tweeted on May 1 that Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar had put out the draft EIA notification giving 60 days for public comments. “This deadline should be extended by 3

months at least due to covid 19 to enable better understanding of the changes proposed.” BJP MP, Rajeev Chandrasekhar also tweeted saying, “Dear Prakash Javadekar ji please extend 60-day time for comments on draft EIA notification 2020 given Coronavirus crisis. This deserves a good, robust public discussion of changes proposed.”

CK Mishra, secretary, environment said, “The time period for public consultations is likely to be extended till August.”

One of the main objectives of the draft is to bring those industries or

projects under regulation which have violated the EIA 2006 notification by starting construction work before environmental clearance is granted or by expanding capacity.

“Dealing with violation cases” is an entirely new section in the draft notification compared to the EIA notification 2006.

The draft increases the validity of the environment clearances.

The draft provides environment clearance validity for 50 years for mining projects, against 30 years in the present notification and 15 years for river valley projects against 10 years.

Speaker, Naidu discuss corona situation; role of MPs, Parliament



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Vice President and Chairman of Rajya Sabha M Venkaiah Naidu on Thursday held a meeting with Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla to discuss the situation regarding the COVID-19 disease in the country, role being played by Members of Parliament and the feasibility of holding meetings of Committees of Parliament through vide conferencing.

Both the Presiding Officers noted that the Members of Parliament are actively engaged in the fight against coronavirus besides initiating welfare measures and supporting various humanitarian initiatives being taken up by both the governments and civil society. They were happy to note that MPs are with the people whom they represent when they need them the most, according to a Rajya Sabha official.

Naidu and Birla also discussed the issue of feasibility of various Committees of

Parliament holding their meetings at the earliest in the prevailing situation and in the context of restrictions on travel across the country. They felt that if the situation does not allow regular conventional meetings of the Committees in the near future, alternative means of enabling such meetings may be explored.

Accordingly, they have directed the Secretaries General of both the Houses to examine in detail the pros and cons of Parliamentary Committees holding meetings by video conferencing by taking into considerations the present Rules of Business of both the Houses of Parliament, the practices and experiences of various countries in respect of such virtual meetings and the time required to enable secure technology platforms required for such mode of meetings. The report of the two top officials of Parliament will form the basis for a considered decision by both the Presiding Officers in the matter.

Tough task for States to test so many migrants, immigrants

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Already grappling with rising number of Coronavirus cases, the States like Maharashtra, Gujarat and West Bengal are now faced with daunting task of testing lakhs of migrant workers as well as immigrants who are gradually returning from abroad.

In view of the surge in number of migrant labour expected to reach the States in the days to come, Union Health Minister Dr. Harsh Vardhan exhorted the States that robust strategy and mechanism need to be drawn up for their testing, quarantine, and treatment of the positive cases.

Some States shall also see immigrants from abroad too. Flights are being on their way bringing stranded Indian from various countries.

An effective strategy also needs to be put in place for their testing, institutional quarantine and treatment, if needed, he said.

Authorities estimate around 300,000 jobless labourers have registered for the journey by train which are now being run daily as per the demand coming from the States.

They will have to be medically screened before they’re quarantined.

Dr Harsh Vardhan also suggested that along with the surveillance teams in the con-

tainment areas, community volunteers may also be identified at the ward-level to spread awareness about the preventive measures like hand washing, physical distancing etc., and who can also play an effective role in removing the stigma prevailing in the society.

The matter does not rest with just handling of the Covid cases. The Minister said that attention needs to be accorded to provisioning of non-COVID essential health services regarding immunisation drives, TB case finding and treatment, providing blood transfusion for dialysis patients, treatment of cancer patients, ANC of pregnant women, etc.

States were also informed that helpline number 104 in addition to 1075 can be used for Grievance Redressal for non-COVID essential services, and for informing regarding availability of these services etc. Adequate measures for prevention of vector diseases also needs to be taken, they were advised.

“Need to increase sampling and testing of SARI/ILI cases along with proper quarantine arrangements of the migrant workers coming from other States”

Dr. Harsh Vardhan has also asked the States to focus on more effective surveillance, contact tracing and early diagnosis to keep low fatality rate.”

Two suspended for spraying disinfectant on migrants in UP

Lucknow: Two employees of the Lucknow Municipal Corporation (LMC) have been suspended for allegedly spraying disinfectant on migrant workers at the Charbagh railway station, here.

Lucknow Municipal Corporation Commissioner Indramani Tripathi said on

Thursday, buses were being sanitised at the station and in the process the disinfectant was accidentally sprayed on migrants.

He said the employees responsible for the incident had been removed as they didn't follow the set protocols.

The controversy erupted on

Wednesday when a video clip, showing migrants workers being sprayed with disinfectant here, went viral on the social media.

The incident took place on Tuesday when migrant workers de-boarded Shramik Express trains at the station.

The migrants had been divided

into different groups to board buses to their home districts, when civic employees sprayed chemical on a family sitting on the ground.

LMC has confirmed the veracity of the video and said the civic staff committed mistake.

About a month ago, a similar incident was reported from the

Bareilly district where migrant workers were sprayed with disinfectant.

A viral video showed more than two dozen migrant workers sitting on the streets as sanitation workers wearing protective gear sprayed disinfectant on them.

Many in the group, mostly chil-

dren, had complained of burning sensation and irritation in the eyes after the incident.

The disinfectant used was sodium hypochlorite, a bleaching agent used widely in textiles and detergents sector. If used in a concentrated form, it can cause skin burning.

Thousands of migrant workers from different states are arriving at the Lucknow railway station since the Ministry of Home Affairs allowed inter-state travel for people stranded due to the Covid-19 lockdown across the country.

IANS

Black Thursday for TN as Covid cases jump to 5,409

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Tamil Nadu's encounter with coronavirus has reached a crucial and critical stage as the number of persons tested positive for the pandemic reached 5,409 on Thursday evening. Medical bulletin issued by the Directorate of Health and Family Welfare said that 580 persons tested positive for coronavirus on Thursday.

Out of the 580 new cases, Chennai accounted for 316 persons making it the district with the highest number of covid-19 patients. There are 2,644 patients in the metropolis. The day also saw two persons succumbing to the pandemic making the number of fatalities to 37.

Since last week, the number of persons testing positive for coronavirus increased by leaps and bounds in Tamil Nadu. On April 30, the State recorded 130 persons while the next day it registered 203 patients. On May 2, there were 231 new cases while the next day saw 266 persons testing positive for the pan-

dem. On May 4, Tamil Nadu was bewildered when the government announced that 527 persons tested positive on a single day. Since then the numbers increased steeply with 508, 771 and 580 respectively.

The main reason for the consistent and consecutive hike in the number of persons testing positive for the pandemic is the scant disregard the general public is showing towards the guidelines and prohibitory orders issued by the Government of Tamil Nadu. The Fruits and Vegetable Market at Koyambedu, Tamil Nadu's leading mandi (market) spread across 65 acres accounted for most of the coronavirus cases in the State. "Wholesale and retail businessmen crowded the market along with people who frequented for purchasing vegetables for household uses. There was no sign of any precautions like face mask or social distancing and it was known on April 26 itself that Tamil Nadu is in for a major crises," said Dr C V

Krishnaswamy, lead physician in Chennai. The Pioneer had reported about the unprecedented and uncontrolled activities of the people in the cluster during the last week itself and of a possible 'explosion' in the number of coronavirus cases.

Though the Government of Tamil Nadu is reluctant to accept the fact that coronavirus has become a pandemic propagated by community transmission, virologists of repute are of the view that the disease has entered the stage of community transmission. "One infected person in the community, unaware that he is infected, infects others in the community. If A was infected by a known contact B, in epidemiology we say B infected A. when contact is unknown we say 'someone in the community' infected A. Hence the term community transmission," writes Dr T Jacob John, former professor of virology, Christian Medical College, Vellore, in a scientific paper he authored about the present state of affairs.

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

There is a sense of nervousness prevailing all over Tamil Nadu every evening when it is time for the Directorate of Health and Family Welfare Department to release the medical bulletin carrying the number of patients tested positive for coronavirus in the State.

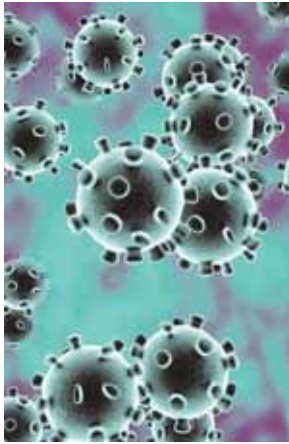
Even as people pray silently for a decrease in the number of patients and flattening of the corona curve, the news that comes out of the daily bulletin is that of unabated increase in people affected by the pandemic.

During the initial days of the breaking out of the covid-19 disease, Tamil Nadu was well behind its southern neighbor in the number of corona patients. But by the last week of March, Tamil Nadu was far ahead of Kerala in the number of covid-19 patients. Initially the increase was in the order of 70s, 80s and 100s. The last few days saw the number of patients increasing by 500 and 700 and racing towards the 5,000 mark.

After an initial hiccup

Kerala managed to contain the pandemic and by the first week of May has almost eradicated the coronavirus from the State. Till Wednesday evening, the State had 502 confirmed patients while 469 have recovered from the pandemic. The State saw 4 persons succumbing to the pandemic. Till date, Kerala has tested 35,000 samples, much below than that of Tamil Nadu. There were no positive cases recorded during the last four days in the State except one in Wynadu district in the Western Ghats.

Dr Nirmala Sanu George, advisor to the Sixth State Finance Commission who works closely with Kerala Minister for Health K K Shailaja said that the State could fortify itself against the corona virus attack through four factors. "We could bring in an attitudinal change among the general public and streamline the health system with free flow of information and data. The involvement of the Government staff as well as the members of the local bodies (the last mile connectivity) in taking the battle to the turf of corona virus and a well pre-



pared team of doctors and para medical staff, these are the factors which helped Kerala in containing the disease" said Dr Nirmala.

K Narendran, a health care professional with more than four decades of experience in corporate hospitals as administrator, said the two fronts which ruled Kerala alternately between them (the Congress-led UDF and the CPI(M) led LDF) ensured that the health care in the State always retained a minimum standard. "There is no scarcity of primary health

centres or hospitals. But we should thank the family physician system prevailed in the State for decades which laid the foundation for a strong treatment protocols. The super speciality hospitals and corporate hospitals are late entrants. We also have to acknowledge the role played by the Church in setting up hospitals in areas inaccessible even during normal times. Cynics may say it was for religious conversion and making profits. But the truth remains that some of the best hospitals and educational institutions in the State are run by the Church despite this criticism," said Narendran.

Dr Madhu, a physician with three decades of experience in the Government Service concurred with Narendran. "It was a synchronized operation by the government and private sector. Kerala has always been credited with cleanliness and sanitation and that could be one of the reasons for the containment of the pandemic in the State," said Dr Madhu who did not hide his anxiety over the return of expatriates from West Asian countries starting

Thursday. "Till date it was smooth. Our mortality rate was less compared to other States. Kerala has registered only four deaths till Thursday though 93 Keralaites had succumbed to coronavirus in West Asia, Europe and USA," said Dr Madhu who remained non-committal when asked about the return of the expatriate Keralites.

Credit is also due to K Karunakaran, A K Antony and Oommen Chandi, the former chief ministers along with Pinarayi Vijayan who all made health sector their top priority. Chandi is known for his catchword "Health cannot wait" during his days as Finance Minister.

Along with the family physicians in small towns, Kerala's rural areas were serviced by traditional physicians (vaidyan in Malayalam) who knew the health pattern of all their clients. Gone are the days of 1960s and 1970s when chief ministers like E M Sankaran Namboodirippadu and C Achutha Menon used to take the next available flights to Rumania and East Berlin for any medical treatment.

Vizag tragedy, a wake up call for Telangana Govt

PNS ■ HYDERBAD

Vizag gas tragedy should be a wake up call for Telangana State Government and more so for the department of factories to focus on industrial safety issues post lockdown.

Hundreds of polymer, plastic industries, especially in MSME sector are operating in GHMC limits.

Several of them were set in gross violation of the norms and located close to densely populated residential areas.

These factories remain shut for nearly two months due to corona lockdown and set to start operations anytime with the State Government relaxing lockdown norms since May 6.

There is an urgent need for department of factories to swing into action to assess the condition of machinery and safety measures in all the factories to avert Vizag-type tragedies.

The Government should allow factories to reopen only after taking up thorough inspection of factories and after certification by the department of factories that the condition of factories, machinery and safety measures are satisfactory.

Since the lockdown was imposed without any prior notice from March 22 and Government went on extending the lockdown till date without giving any scope for the managements of factories to take adequate safeguards by taking up overhauling, maintenance of machinery, factories, they pose the danger of malfunctioning and leakage of gases if factories are open in haste.

The Telangana High Court in March this year ordered state Government that over 200 polluting plastic units in Hyderabad's Kattedan industrial area must be shut down, as they were set up in violation of the rules but the Government is yet to act.

The court said that officials of the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) and Pollution Control Board (PCB) remained 'mute spectators' as illegal plastic units mushroomed in the area.

There are several industrial areas in GHMC limits. Though industrial areas were set up decades ago on Hyderabad city outskirts, the

rapid expansion of city over the years has made them part of residential zones as several colonies come up around the industrial areas. According to Centre for Science and Environment (CSE),

"This (gas leak incident) shows us that there are ticking bombs out there as the lockdown ends and industries start resuming activities. Therefore, an immediate directive must go to all units to ensure safety while resuming operations -- in case the lockdown continues, these safety precautions must not be negated,"

Vizag gas leak: Chaos at KG Hospital

Visakhapatnam: Utter chaos prevailed at the government-run King George Hospital (KGH) where about 160 people affected by the gas leakage from a chemical plant were brought in early on Thursday.

Already under stress due to Covid-19 situation, the doctors and other medical staff at the hospital have been making frantic efforts to provide medical aid to the gas leak victims.

Three of the 160 succumbed while undergoing treatment. KGH officials said they were mobilizing all the human resources and equipment to deal with the situation. They claimed that they have sufficient number of ventilators to tackle the emergency. At least 10 persons were put on ventilators while some others were being supported with oxygen.

About 70 people were shifted to various private hospitals in the city.

Families separated from

seven migrant workers from Jhalda block of Bengal's West Midnapore district cycled all the way back home from Bihar's Samastipur district and took shelter on tree tops as the local villagers did not let them in.

"We cycled back home hungry and tired. But the villagers would not allow us in and they forced us to move back to Jharkhand. But we again sneaked back crossing a river and took shelter on tree tops." However the local SDM said the seven workers were rescued and taken back to shelter homes.

each other in the utter confusion that prevailed after the gas leakage have frantically searching for their loved ones. People ran helter skelter after the leakage of Styrene from LG Polymers India plant in RR Venkatapuram near Gopalpatnam.

Municipal Commissioner Srijana Gummalla said the gas leaked from the plant around 2.30 a.m. Hundreds of people who inhaled the gas either felt unconscious or felt breathing problems, she said.

Shocking scenes were witnessed with people including women and children lying unconscious on the roads. People were seen rushing the victims to ambulances and private vehicles.

Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) officials threw water through mist blowers to subside the effect of the gas leak at Gopalapatnam area. **PNS**

Governor Dhankhar invokes Article 167

Seeks explanation from Didi on Govt appointing KMC board of administrators

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

A day after the Bengal Government put the Kolkata Municipal Corporation under a team of administrators chaired by State Minister and former Mayor Firhad Hakim, State Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar invoked Article 167 of the Constitution asking Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to explain why the decision was not referred to him and why he was kept in the dark.

Senior Trinamool Congress leader and MP Saugato Roy however said that it was not the prerogative of the Governor to raise a question or block the initiative of the State Government.

The Governor who has been involved in a letter war with the Chief Minister on a

host of issues including the alleged diluted implementation of lockdown in Bengal has expressed displeasure that he was kept completely in the dark and no information was shared with him regarding the appointment of a new team of administrators for KMC.

The five year term of the elected Kolkata civic body and 93 other municipal boards of the state ended in the first week of May requiring the State Government to appoint administrator in a situation when no election is possible due to corona pandemic situation.

The Governor also wrote a letter to Chief Secretary Rajiva Sinha to inform him about the procedures and circumstances that led to the new arrangement.

Replying to the situation Saugato Roy said "under Indian constitution the Government is not bound to take the Governor's clearance for appointing administrators through administrative orders," adding an ordinance could not be brought because "we were dealing with a Governor like Jagdeep Dhankhar who is known more for his non-cooperation than anything else."

Woman CMO tests +ve for Covid in Kashmir

PNS ■ JAMMU

A woman Chief Medical Officer (CMO) posted at Super Specialty Hospital Shireen Bag Srinagar was tested Positive for Covid-19 infection on Thursday possibly after coming in contact with a couple of attendants while a 32-year-old youth, died on last evening, shortly after he was tested positive at SMHS hospital.

Meanwhile, the total number of positive cases in Jammu and Kashmir Thursday rose to 793 with 18 fresh cases, 15 from Kashmir division and three from Jammu division.

Spokesman of Jammu and Kashmir

government, Rohit Kansal Thursday tweeted," J&K breaks the 3000 tests a day barrier- 3429 samples tested; 18 positives detected. Total positives now 793- Jammu 68; Kashmir 725. Our positivity rate 2.1%; Mortality rate 1.13%". According to the daily Media Bulletin on Covid-19, out of 793 positive cases, 449 are Active Positive, 335 have recovered and 09 have died. Moreover, 13 more Covid-19 patients have recovered and discharged from various hospitals of Kashmir Division. The Bulletin said that out of 37706 test results available, 36913 samples have tested as negative till May 07, 2020.

area before the operation was launched.

IG, Kashmir said, in the past we had busted around six hideouts of Riyaz Naikoo and this was his seventh hideout. The operation was launched in the area on Tuesday evening and the tight cordon was maintained by the security forces through out the night before launching the final assault on Wednesday morning to eliminate Naikoo. The house, where

he was hiding was blasted by the security forces.

Referring to surge in terror attacks on security forces in North Kashmir belt of Handwara, Vijay Kumar claimed, in two recent operations in Handwara, security forces' lost senior officers in action but they also managed to eliminate a dreaded Pakistani terrorist Haidar. He was back bone of Lashkar-e-Toiba outfit in North Kashmir,

he added.

Responding to a question whether terror groups are attempting to revive terror activities in Handwara, IG Kumar said, "we cannot say terror groups are regrouping in Handwara and trying to revive their bases in the dense forest areas".

He said, last year 35 terrorists were killed in different anti-terrorist operations while this year so far we have killed 9 terrorists in the region. He

BJP is anti-Bengal party, it has no love for our people: TMC

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

A day after Centre slammed the Trinamool Congress Government for blocking Indo-Bangladesh trade which was reopened a few days ago the Bengal ruling outfit on Thursday came out all guns blazing against the BJP Government for opening the border trade with the neighbouring country risking lives millions of in this part of the border in a pandemic situation.

Attacking the BJP for "trying to play politics with cadavers" to gain political mileage before the next year's State elections Minister Rajiv Banerjee and senior leader Samir Chakrabarty said the saffron outfit only wanted to win the elections and had no respect for the people of Bengal.

"BJP as a party is anti-Bengal. It has no love or respect for our State or its people. It is in search of dead bodies so as to play politics over them... The border with Bangladesh has been opened because they want the locals to get infected by the people coming from the other side ... so that they can play accuse Chief Minister Mamata

Banerjee for the rising number of deaths," said the leaders in a 15video press conference adding "with its rich political heritage Bengal has never seen a party that trades in cadavers. BJP is an anti-Bengal party".

Attacking the BJP-led Centre for targeting Bengal "because they want to the people's gallery to win political points an year ahead of the State elections," the TMC leaders said "the Centre should have focused on the BJP-ruled States like Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh where the situation is far worse than Bengal... Still they are targeting out State because they want political mileage.

Earlier the Home Ministry had written to the State Government for failing to comply with its orders facilitating the trans-border trade.

In his letter Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla said, "the unilateral action on the part of the West Bengal government to stop the cross land border movement of essential goods would have larger implications for the Indian government with regard to its legally binding international commitments....

After 44 days, Assam's water ferry services start

Guwahati: After one and a half months, Assam's Inland Water Transport (IWT) Department on Thursday resumed the passenger ferry services over River Brahmaputra adhering to all the Covid-19 and lockdown norms, top officials said.

IWT Department Director Pabitra Ram Khound said that from Thursday, the passenger ferry services would continue to operate daily. "All the Covid-19 norms including social distancing, wearing of face masks, hand-washing and sanitisation are being followed before moving the each vessel from the 'Ghats', Khound told iANS over phone.

Each vessel is carrying passengers amounting to only 50 per cent of the total seating capacity.

The ferry services, which had suspended in Assam when the first phase of the lockdown began on March 25, resumed from Guwahati to North Guwahati, Guwahati to Madhyamkhandia, Rajaduwar to Guwahati and Guwahati to Kuruwa routes.

The ferry services, operated by the IWT Department, had already started from May 4 in the Majuli (eastern Assam) and Jorhat route.

Assam Transport Minister Chandra Mohan Patowary on Wednesday has directed the IWT Department to resume its passenger ferry services in Guwahati. The Assam Inland Water Transport Department was set up in 1958.

IANS

Naikoo's killing to help contain terrorism in J&K: IG

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Inspector General of Jammu and Kashmir police, Kashmir range, Vijay Kumar on Thursday claimed by eliminating Chief Operational Commander of Hizbul Mujahideen, Riyaz Naikoo, the security forces have broken the back bone of pro-Pakistan terror outfit in South Kashmir.

Kumar also claimed that with the elimination of Naikoo,

the rate of recruitment of local cadre would certainly decline across South Kashmir. Since implementation of nation wide lockdown over 30 terrorists have been eliminated across Kashmir valley, majority in south Kashmir districts.

Addressing a media conference in Srinagar, Vijay Kumar told reporters, "the police officers were tracking the movement of Riyaz Naikoo for almost last six months". He said, the

police officers toiled hard to generate pin pointed intelligence about his presence in Beighpora area of South Kashmir's Pulwama district where he was eliminated in the six hour long operation on May 6.

Police sources claimed, the security forces had infiltrated into the OGW network of HM commander, Riyaz Naikoo and persistent follow up lead to specific input about his presence inside a house in Beighpora

area before the operation was launched.

IG, Kashmir said, in the past we had busted around six hideouts of Riyaz Naikoo and this was his seventh hideout. The operation was launched in the area on Tuesday evening and the tight cordon was maintained by the security forces through out the night before launching the final assault on Wednesday morning to eliminate Naikoo. The house, where

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Responding to a question whether terror groups are attempting to revive terror activities in Handwara, IG Kumar said, "we cannot say terror groups are regrouping in Handwara and trying to revive their bases in the dense forest areas".

He said, last year 35 terrorists were killed in different anti-terrorist operations while this year so far we have killed 9 terrorists in the region. He

said the attack on CRPF jawans in Wangan area of Handwara was carried out by two local commanders of LeT. He said we have identified them and soon we would be able to eliminate them.

Talking about their future strategy on tackling the increasing number of terror attacks on security forces, IG Kashmir said, the anti-terror operations will continue and there will be no slow down on them.

Memories of Bhopal

The gas leak at a chemical unit near Visakhapatnam shows why we never learn lessons and our laws mean nothing



Just when the nation is struggling to breathe as COVID-19 tightens its grip, the preventive lockdown because of it extracted a heavy price as gas leaked out of a shut chemical plant near Visakhapatnam and choked people in their homes. It seemed the ghosts of the Bhopal gas tragedy of 1984 revisited us as the leak affected over 5,000 people while they lay asleep in the wee hours at Gopalapatnam village. At last count, 11 had died but thousands are gasping for survival in hospitals. Toxic styrene escaped from an LG Polymers facility when its owners tried restarting the plant at midnight following the easing of lockdown restrictions for business and an alarm malfunctioned. Clearly no safety protocol or a cautionary approach was followed in the rush for reopening the unit. The gas came from two 5,000-tonne tanks that had been lying unattended and unmonitored during the 40-day lockdown. In such an uncalibrated scenario, gases do not remain inert, they react, cause a chemical reaction and generate heat that might have triggered the leak. An official from the owner firm himself accepted that there were 1,800 tonnes of styrene in the storage tank and that stagnation and changes in temperature might have resulted in auto polymerisation, which could have caused the sudden vapourisation of the gas. So negligence certainly cannot be ruled out. The Manufacture, Storage and Import of Hazardous Chemical (Amendment) Rules, 2000, list a number of chemicals that call for safe handling, including styrene. Even mild exposure to it results in irritation of mucous membrane and eyes and affects the gastrointestinal system. Long-term exposure impacts the central nervous system and leads to headache, fatigue and weakness. Therefore, a safety audit ought to have been conducted before resuming operations, considering that the plant was old and had considerable wear and tear. In fact, a no-objective certificate from the pollution control board should have been made mandatory before even attempting a re-opening. Though the scale of the leak was lesser than that of Bhopal, this was no less a serious industrial tragedy. It also showed that we still have not learnt lessons from our past. Although the industrial unit was located in the outskirts of the city, 20 villages thrived in a radius of five kilometres. It is too late to ask questions about why zoning separation wasn't done all these years. At least, given the risks opening an unmaintained facility entailed, authorities ought to have warned or evacuated residents. As a result of this negligence, we witnessed apocalyptic scenes of villagers rushing out of their homes as they were being asphyxiated and literally falling unconscious on the roads. Some were trapped in their houses, some tried jumping into the well and out of their balconies.

This too, like Bhopal, will remain in the news for a while and then be quickly forgotten. For the corporate owners and multinational giants, despite protracted legal battles, always manage to wriggle out of reparations or culpability, usually using their proximity to Governments of the day or negotiating new investment prospects. And chemical unit accidents keep happening with astonishing regularity. According to the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), 130 chemical accidents had been reported around the country in the last decade alone, causing 259 deaths and 563 serious injuries. The GAIL pipeline blast of 2014 claimed 15 lives while injuring over 40 others. The same year, at Bhilai steel plant, a gas leak killed six people and injured over 40. And in 2017, more than 470 school children were hospitalised in Delhi's Tughlaqabad area after they inhaled toxic fumes emanating from a factory nearby. It is because the law never takes its course that industrial safety standards in the country keep getting short-changed or flouted. The Environment Protection Act (EPA) came up in 1986 in the aftermath of Bhopal. The following year, soon after the oleum gas leak in New Delhi, a new chapter was added to the Factories Act, 1948, widening the scope of what constitutes risk. Further, the Public Liability Insurance Act (PLIA), too, came into effect to provide interim compensation to the victims in the event of an industrial disaster. Forty years on, pertinent questions arise today: Are these laws still relevant? Have they been used appropriately? Is there any need for more stringent laws? In the absence of an active regulatory regime, all the laws to tackle chemical disasters will mean nothing.

No enclosed spaces

Confined and conditioned environment of public offices and facilities can become the biggest super-spreaders of the virus



The uncertain nature of the Coronavirus pandemic has flummoxed governments across the world as they are faced with the unenviable task of opening up their gasping economies and keeping infections and deaths under check at the same time. Just how unpredictable this maverick virus is can be gauged from the fact that a study of cases in Taiwan, published in *The Journal of American Medical Association*, found household transmission to be the main source of infection, while *The Lancet* study of the US found that healthcare transmission was more than household transmission. So where does this leave us where our lockdown strategy is concerned? Well, if findings of 14 studies on the virus' transmission patterns across China, Iran, South Korea, Singapore, Iceland, France, Taiwan, Japan and the US are anything to go by, public enclosed spaces, too, can become a super-spreading environment. While some studies found that household contacts account for 10-20 per cent of the transmission, five to 10 per cent were traced to transportation, dining and entertainment. At the same time, the studies found that schools are not prominent transmission centres and children are unlikely to be the source of any household infection, unlike the bird flu where 54 per cent of transmission clusters identified kids as the source of infection. In the end, it all boils down to the fact that the Coronavirus is largely transmitted by close contact in densely populated spaces over a prolonged period. This basically means that enclosed public and mass living spaces make for a high-risk environment. This more than ever highlights the importance of social distancing and operating in ventilated open spaces.

So, maybe as we go ahead and start living our lives again along with the ever-present threat of the COVID-19, these two factors will be the guiding principles of our strategies and future architecture. They will forever change the way we watch movies, dine out, travel, shop, socialise, work in our offices and factories and so on. Some sectors like entertainment and dining out will suffer, travel will, too, as fewer seats on airplanes and trains will make the costs of tickets prohibitive. Maybe we will have to rethink our public transport-related strategies. The automobile sector will boom as will e-commerce, real estate might suffer as more firms encourage the work from home model while services will become more expensive. One thing is for sure, we can't hunker down forever as the tiny virus destroys economies, jobs and lives across the world. We just have to cope with preventive and adaptive strategies.

Does anyone care?

The BJP will do well to remember ISRO's journey, which started from launching a satellite on a bullock cart. Instead of being focussed on image management, it must solve people's problems



AJOY KUMAR

Ariane Passenger Payload Experiment (APPLE), a product of India's first geostationary experimental communication Satellite Project during 1977-83, was successfully launched by Ariane-1, from Kourou, French Guyana, on June 19, 1981. The journey to its successful launch was tricky though. In 1981, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) did not have mainframe computers and the satellite's antenna needed to be tested as problems were detected in certain links, specifically the telemetry, tracking and control links that were crucial to ensure regular communication with the satellite in space. It was, therefore, crucial to ensure that these links were functional before the launch.

But it could only have been done in a proper antenna range, with the satellite structure placed under a thermal blanket and the ISRO did not possess such infrastructure at that time. The satellite needed a non-metallic structure where it could be placed and where testing could be carried out. Since time was of the essence, such a structure could not be developed. So, there came an ingenious idea of placing the satellite on a bullock cart so that the test could be carried out. The bullock cart, which was hired at a nominal cost ₹150, provided a non-magnetic environment and enabled ISRO to carry out the antenna test in an open field.

The great thing about this story is that it underlines Indian ingenuity and ambition at its finest. The ancillary benefit, of course, is that it provides a lovely story behind an incredible Indian organisation and provides colour to the country's impressive space adventure. However, this is just an ancillary benefit. ISRO did not set out with putting a satellite on a bullock cart and then happened to successfully ensure proper testing of the satellite. The publicity that this story generated was a byproduct of what ISRO wanted to achieve, not a motivator.

Political parties today, especially the BJP Government at the Centre, would do well to remember this story. The clearest example of how "publicity" and "politics" is the primary motivation and the end result for this Government is that of the recent migrant crisis. As everyone is aware, millions of labourers from States across the country were suddenly left stranded after the nationwide lockdown came into force. Without pay, they were barred from returning to the comfort of their homes. Their families, too, had to face this emergency. This forced the migrant workers to walk thousands of kilometres under the sweltering summer sun. Some even hid inside cement mixers to try and reach their homes. However, our international evacuees did not have to endure such indignity when the lockdown started.

There have been no stories of individuals swimming across the English Channel to the shores of India but our migrants have



had to suffer that indignity. Then the Centre asked the States to look after the migrant labourers even as no provisions were made for their travel and return. This was further exacerbated by the fact that States such as Delhi did not receive any fund from the Centre to aid their fight against Corona. In the end, they were largely left on their own to ensure that the migrants are not adversely affected, even though the primary plea of the labourers has consistently been to return to their respective homes. Since inter-State transport falls under the Union list, the expectation was that the BJP Government at the Centre would take care of this concern.

However, in reality, what happened was that though certain special trains were made operational, the migrants were charged thousands of rupees. If any worker had that kind of money, would he/she be hiding in cement mixers or even attempt to walk home? It was this action that prompted Subramaniam Swamy, a BJP leader, to call the Government's idea to charge poor migrants for their journey home as "moronic." I hardly ever find myself in agreement with Swamy but these are strange times.

Thereafter, a political rival of the BJP said that the State units of the Congress would pay

“ WHY DOES IT ALWAYS TAKE BAD PRESS FOR THIS GOVERNMENT TO BE FORCED INTO GOOD GOVERNANCE? IT'S BECAUSE A LARGE PART OF WHAT IT DOES IS IMAGE MANAGEMENT. QUESTIONS (WHEN TAKEN) ARE EITHER REFUSED ON TECHNICALITIES OR OBFUSCATED AS IN THE PRESENT CASE OF THE MIGRANT TRAINS ”

for the tickets of the migrants. This generated negative publicity for the BJP and, therefore, the Government cleared that the railways would pay 85 per cent of the ticket prices with the States footing the remaining 15 per cent.

However, this face-saving move by the BJP did not come with any intention to help the migrants but to score political points or to rather prevent losing more political points. How do we know this? Well for starters, the Centre is not paying 85 per cent of the fare being charged to the migrants. Moreover, there is no order to that effect anywhere as on the date of writing this article. Instead, what the BJP is doing is media manoeuvring. The Indian Railways has always subsidised in general to keep the ticket prices low. The BJP wants us to believe that this subsidised fare amounts to covering 85 per cent of the cost and in asking the States to bear the remaining 15 per cent of the cost is actually asking them to pay the entire cost of the ticket.

Even in the Supreme Court, where the question cropped up before the Solicitor-General if the Centre was actually bearing 85 per cent of the fare, he said that he had "no instructions" to reveal what proportion would be shared by the Railways and the States. Why this uncertain-

ty to a rather straight forward question?

In fact, in Karnataka, the BJP went one step further and cancelled all the trains for migrants to relegate them to bonded labourers. BJP MP Tejasvi Surya even went on to tweet that such a move will help the migrants "restart their dreams." The moral flexibility on the show is almost admirable. However, after all the uproar and noise, the Karnataka BJP has apparently now reversed its decision, much like how it came out and said that it would "bear" 85 per cent of the ticket fare for migrants after it was pushed to a corner.

The question is: Why does it always take bad Press for this Government to be forced into good governance? It's because a large part of what it does is image management. Questions (when taken) are either refused on technicalities or obfuscated as in the present case of the migrant trains. The need of the hour instead is to focus on problem-solving by including the States and Opposition parties and being honest with the citizens. In doing so, the BJP would finally put the "bull" before the cart. It can learn a thing or two about it from ISRO.

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

SOUNDBITE

I have been warning the world about India's continuing efforts to find a pretext for a false flag operation targeting Pakistan.

Pakistan Prime Minister
—Imran Khan



We didn't realise that 'Stay home, stay safe' would be a luxury. But the irony of it should not be lost on us as many women battle the situation in their homes.

Actor
—Nandita Das



We went through the worst attack we have ever in our country. This is worse than Pearl Harbour. This is worse than the World Trade Center.

US President
—Donald Trump



In India, I feel there is still a big issue of accepting that there is some weakness when it comes to the mental aspects, but we generally term it as mental illness.

Indian cricketer
—MS Dhoni



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Rahul takes the lead

Sir — Last week, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi discussed the Coronavirus pandemic and its economic implications with former Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Raghuram Rajan. Now, Nobel laureate Abhijit Banerjee has spoken to the Congress scribe as part of a series of video conversations with experts on economy and health. Indeed, when life is becoming monotonous, Gandhi has brought some fresh air and constructive ideas. While Rajan said that ₹65,000 crore should be spent to support the poor hit hard by the crisis, Banerjee was of the opinion that India should take a cue from the US and pump more money into the hands of people to revive demand. He stressed on the need for a bigger stimulus.

Comparing India, which is the fifth largest economy in the world with a GDP of \$2.94 trillion, with the world's richest country is not justified. After holding discussions with two great economists Rajan and Banerjee, Rahul Gandhi must hold discussions with former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who brought about an eco-

Armed forces must stick to ethics

This refers to the article, "Maintain the fine line" by Bhopinder Singh (May 4). In a rare show, the Army, the Navy and the Air Force in consort saluted the Corona warriors by showering petals from the skies and sounding bugles from the seas. Undisputably true, the medical fraternity deserved unqualified appreciation and support because their unflagging pursuit is unparalleled in history. However, this flower and bugle show of the armed forces seemed to be a modified version of the clanging of plates and lighting of lamps, a continuum.

Steven Wilkinson, in his book, *Army and Nation: The Military and Indian Democracy since Independence*, had remarked that India had inherited a conservative Army, dominated by officers and troops, drawn disproportionately from a few "martial" groups. In his view, the structure of the Army, with castes and religions holding sway, was incompatible with the hopes for a new secular nation. This posed a threat to democracy as well. India averted this danger in the decades after independence. However, recent statements by the men in fatigues, such as "Indian Army is fully ready for a two-and-a-half front war" to intimidate China and the suggestion of shipping off Kashmiris to "deradicalisation camps," which was seen as an open threat to the



Indian Muslims, has created ripples. If made to please the political masters or to exhibit the prowess of the military, these unsolicited rants breached a carefully cultivated tradition. Interpretations of the words uttered and comments thereupon, even extreme, are unavoidable. The "fine" dividing "line" gets blurred when the ruling dispensation keeps enlisting the military for political mileage and/or the generals dare to exceed the brief, constantly.

Haridasan Rajan
Kozhikode

Out of service

Sir — This refers to the editorial, "Creation to preservation" (May 7). It is shocking that with India's unemployment rate standing at a record high of 27.1 per

cent for the month of April, the unemployment rate is four times higher than that of the US. Given the current situation with Corona cases crossing the 50,000 mark, there may be more pain in store. Just in case the lockdown is extended further, businesses will

have to either stay shut for a longer time or may have to operate on very low capacity. In both scenarios, demand would be low, which may worsen the job crisis scenario. The economy cannot any longer stay without big bang reforms. The Government needs to reopen more of such industrial units although with strict safety protocols.

Manisha
Via email

Liquor conundrum

Sir — It's intriguing that despite the Delhi Government levying a 70 per cent tax on the sale of alcohol, serpentine queues were seen outside liquor shops. In Mumbai, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) closed liquor shops after people failed to maintain social distancing norms. It will be worth watching if Delhi, too, would emulate the BMC. Sure liquor brings revenue but online deliveries should be encouraged now.

Sunita
Via email

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

China flaunts French connection to Wuhan lab

Ambivalent on WHO probe into origin of coronavirus

PTI ■ BEIJING

China on Thursday said the Cbio-lab in Wuhan, which is in the eye of storm in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, is a Sino-French cooperation project with its staff trained in France, even as it sounded ambivalent about agreeing for a WHO probe into the origin of Covid-19.

Accusing US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo of fabricating lies over the involvement of the virology lab in Wuhan, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying sought to deflect criticism over its role by highlighting its French connection.

“May be he still doesn’t know the P4 Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) lab is a China-French Government cooperation project and it followed international standards in its design construction and management,”

Hua told a media briefing here while responding to Pompeo’s allegations.

“The first batch of staff were trained at French labs,”

she said, adding that its equipment is tested every year by internationally recognised third parties.

In recent days, US President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Pompeo have claimed that the deadly virus originated from the Wuhan Institute of Virology in the central Chinese city of Wuhan, where the outbreak was first detected last December.

Hua again asked Pompeo to show “enormous evidence” he has to prove that the novel coronavirus originated from the lab in Wuhan. “He (Pompeo) contradicts himself. He is making lies to cover up other lies. It is an open secret,” she said.

About President Trump’s assertion that Covid-19 attack was worse than that of the Pearl Harbour attack in WW-II and September 1, 2001, terrorist attack, Hua said that in such a case the enemy is coronavirus, not China.

“If it can be compared to pearl harbour or 9/11 attack, so the enemy US faces is coronavirus. The US should work with China as a comrade in the

fight instead of enemy. Because only with the concerted efforts we can win this war against virus,” she said.

“But regrettably, we see some in the US officials shifting the blame which we believe is wrong,” she said.

While China contained the virus attack in over two months, the US being highly developed country has not succeeded yet, she said.

Since emerging in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in December, the coronavirus is confirmed to have infected 1.2 million Americans, killing more than 73,000.

Hua sounded ambivalent about China agreeing for an inquiry by the World Health Organisation (WHO) into the origin of the coronavirus.

Asked about reports that Chen Xu, China’s ambassador to UN institutions in Geneva, backed the WHO probe, Hua said, “we have never said we oppose WHO. We have been supporting WHO’s work. (We’re) Cooperating with WHO in an open and transparent manner including trac-



ing the origin.”

“At an appropriate time we will have a conclusion on that. But we oppose the US and some other countries trying to politicise this issue and conduct investigations on the presumption of guilt,” she said.

“So in the future if it is good for human beings to deal with similar pandemics in future Chinese side can do whatever it can to achieve good results and make all the contributions”, she said.

She reiterated that the issue of the origin of coronavirus is a scientific matter and should be assessed by scientists and professionals.

Besides attacking China over the coronavirus emanating from Wuhan, Trump is also deeply critical of WHO accusing it of siding with Beijing in mismanaging and covering up the spread of the virus. He also suspended over USD 400 million funding for the WHO pending an enquiry.

COUNTRY	TOTAL CASES	TOTAL DEATHS
USA	1,271,007	75,558
Spain	2,56,855	26,070
Italy	2,15,858	29,958
UK	2,06,715	30,615
France	1,74,191	25,809
Germany	1,68,765	7,322
Russia	1,77,160	1,625
Turkey	1,33,721	3,641

Coronavirus attack on US worse than Pearl Harbour, 9/11: Trump

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump has said the coronavirus outbreak has hit the US harder than the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor during World War II or the 9/11 terror attacks, pointing the finger at China.

Since emerging in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in December, the coronavirus has infected 1.2 million Americans and killed more than 73,000.

Speaking to reporters in the Oval Office of the White House on Wednesday, President Trump said, “We went through the worst attack we’ve ever had on our country, this is worst attack we’ve ever had.

“This is worse than Pearl Harbour, this is worse than the World Trade Center. There’s never been an attack like this,” he said during a meeting with

the nurses, who are on the frontline of the battle against the Covid-19.

“And it should have never happened. Could’ve been stopped at the source. Could’ve been stopped in China. It should’ve been stopped right at the source. And it wasn’t.”

The Trump administration is currently weighing punitive actions against China over its early handling of the global health emergency.

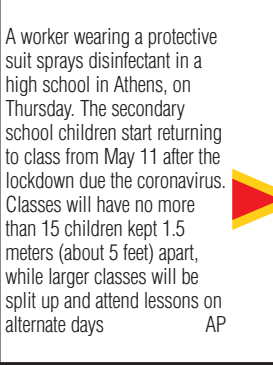
Washington is also pressing Beijing to allow American experts to probe the origin of the deadly virus, including if it escaped from a virology laboratory in Wuhan.

China has stoutly denied the allegations and ays the US wants to distract from its own response to the pandemic ahead of the November presidential election in which Trump is seeking re-election.

AROUND THE WORLD IN PICTURES



Translators each disinfect their own booths to protect against coronavirus, prior to a Press conference of European Commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis at EU headquarters in Brussels, on Thursday AP



A worker wearing a protective suit sprays disinfectant in a high school in Athens, on Thursday. The secondary school children start returning to class from May 11 after the lockdown due the coronavirus. Classes will have no more than 15 children kept 1.5 meters (about 5 feet) apart, while larger classes will be split up and attend lessons on alternate days AP



People with face masks to protect against the spread of the new coronavirus gather at a public park in Beijing, on Thursday. China’s Government declared the whole country now at low virus risk as its new cases fall to near zero and no new deaths have been reported from Covid-19 in more than three weeks AP



Pandemic started between Oct 6 and Dec 11 last yr: Report

London: A genetic study of samples from more than 7,500 people infected with Covid-19 suggests the new coronavirus spread quickly around the world after it emerged in China sometime between October and December last year, scientists said on Wednesday.

Scientists at University College London’s Genetics Institute found almost 200 recurrent genetic mutations of the new coronavirus — SARS-CoV-2 — which the UCL researchers said showed how it is adapting to its human hosts as it spreads.

“Phylogenetic estimates support that the COVID-2 pandemic started sometime around October 6, 2019, to December 11, 2019, which corresponds to the time of the host jump into humans,” the research team, co-led by Francois Balloux, wrote in a study published in the journal Infection, Genetics and Evolution.

Balloux said the analysis also found that the virus was and is mutating, as normally happens with viruses, and that a large proportion of the virus causing Covid-19 was found in all of the hardest-hit countries.

That suggests SARS-CoV-2 was being transmitted extensively around the world from early on in the epidemic, he said.

“All viruses naturally mutate. Mutations in themselves are not a bad thing and there is nothing to suggest SARS-CoV-2 is mutating faster

or slower than expected,” he said. “So far, we cannot say whether SARS-CoV-2 is becoming more or less lethal and contagious.” In a second study also published on Wednesday, scientists at Britain’s University of Glasgow who also analysed SARS-CoV-2 virus samples said their findings showed that previous work suggesting there were two different strains was inaccurate.

JUST ONE VIRUS TYPE CIRCULATING

A preliminary study by Chinese scientists in March had suggested there may have been two strains of the new coronavirus causing infections there, with more of them more “aggressive” than the other.

But, publishing their analysis in the journal Virus Evolution, the Glasgow team said only one type of the virus was circulating. More than 3.71 million people have been reported to be infected by the novel coronavirus globally and 258,186 have died, according to a Reuters tally. Cases have been reported in more than 210 countries and territories since they were first identified in China in December 2019. The genetic studies offer “fascinating” insights into the evolution of the virus, and emphasise that it is “a moving target with an unknown evolutionary destination”, said Jonathan Stoye, head of the division of virology at Britain’s Francis Crick Institute. **Agency**

Less than a million African tested for COVID

Johannesburg: Around 8,50,000 people across Africa — population 1.3 billion — have been tested for the coronavirus since the pandemic began. That’s according to the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Director John Nkengasong again tells reporters that “we are not testing enough.” The Africa CDC last month said it hoped to test 1 million people within four weeks and 10 million within about six months. But the supply of testing kits remains a challenge. **AP**

S Africa Parliament video call hacked with pornography

Johannesburg: A virtual meeting of South African lawmakers has been disrupted by hackers who flooded the video call with pornographic images.

In the the incident on Thursday, the hackers also hurled racial and sexual insults at the meeting’s chairwoman, Thandi Modise, who is the speaker of the National Assembly. South Africa’s parliament is closed and all its meetings are currently held by video conference calls as the country remains under strict lockdown restrictions to combat the spread of the coronavirus. A shocked Modise said that she had earlier warned about using the virtual meetings platform Zoom for the meeting. The parliamentary meeting later continued with a different link. **AP**

Trump admin urges US court not to block work permits to spouses of H1B visa-holders

Washington: In a major development, the Trump administration has urged a federal district court not to block an Obama-era rule allowing certain categories of spouses of H-1B visa-holders to work in the US.

In a submission before the US District Court, District Washington this week, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) argued that the American technology workers, who had challenged the 2015 ruling on giving work permits to H-4 visa-holders, have not been irreparably harmed by such work authorisation.

An H-4 visa is issued by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to the immediate family members (spouse and children under 21 years of

age) of the H-1B visa-holders, most of whom are Indian IT professionals. It is normally issued to those who have already started the process of seeking employment-based lawful permanent resident status.

The DHS, in its submission on May 5, said the argument by Save Jobs USA on behalf of American technology workers “only speculates about potential economic harm to its members, based on five-year-old affidavits”. In its lawsuit filed in 2015, Save Jobs USA had argued that the regulation issued by the Obama administration to provide employment authorisation for certain H4 dependent spouses harms their members, who are American technology workers. **AP**

Former Iraqi Intelligence chief approved as new premier

Baghdad: Iraq’s former spy chief was sworn in as Prime Minister by lawmakers early Thursday after weeks of tense political negotiations as the country faces a severe economic crisis spurred by plummeting oil prices and coronavirus pandemic. The majority of 255 legislators attending the session approved the Government plan and the majority of Cabinet ministers proposed by Mustafa al-Kadhimi, officially inaugurating him as Iraq’s sixth premier since 2003 and ending five months of a leadership void.

Legislators accepted 15 ministers and rejected five, among them the ministries of trade, justice, culture, agriculture and migration. **AP**

Israeli Parliament passes Bills for formation of Netanyahu-Gantz unity Govt

Jerusalem: Israel’s Parliament on Thursday approved amendments to two basic laws by a hefty majority, paving the way for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to form a fully functioning unity Government for the first time since December 2018.

The Knesset or Parliament voted by 71 votes to 37 to back the power-sharing deal between Netanyahu’s Likud and his main rival former military chief Benny Gantz’s Blue and White parties.

The bills were supported by the lawmakers in Netanyahu’s Center-Right bloc, except for the lawmakers of Yamina, who absented themselves, because it

Around the Globe

● Officials in the northwestern US state of Washington on Wednesday expressed concern over reports of people organising “Covid-19 parties” to intentionally spread the virus. “Gathering in groups in the midst of this pandemic can be incredibly dangerous and puts people at increased risk for hospitalization and even death,” warned John Wiesman, the state’s secretary of health. “Furthermore, it is unknown if people who recover from Covid-19 have long-term protection,” he said. “There is still a lot we don’t know about this virus, including any long-term health issues which may occur after infection.”

● Nearly a fifth of young children in the United States are not getting enough to eat since the coronavirus pandemic erupted, according to research out Wednesday highlighting the broader health impact of the crisis. The Brookings Institution report said a survey found that 17.4 percent of mothers with children aged 12 or under reported that their offspring were not eating enough due to lack of money. “It is clear that young children are experiencing food insecurity to an extent unprecedented in modern times,” said lead researcher Lauren Bauer.

● Most ethnic groups at greater virus risk: A new study into ethnicity and the coronavirus by Britain’s national statistics agency suggests that people from almost all minority ethnic groups — except Chinese and those identifying as “mixed” — are at greater risk of a coronavirus-related death than the white population. In particular, the analysis said that after accounting for age, black men are 4.2 times more likely than white men to die after contracting the virus, and black women are 4.3 times more likely to die compared to women of white ethnicity. The Office for National Statistics said people of Bangladeshi and Pakistani, Indian, and mixed ethnicities also had an increased risk of Covid-19 deaths.

● Moscow residents will be required to wear masks and gloves when using public transit and visiting public spaces starting Tuesday because of the coronavirus. The announcement by Mayor Sergei Sobyanin comes after the decision to reopen industrial plants and construction sites in the capital on that same day.

● Buddha Jayanti was celebrated in central Nepal’s Lumbini on Thursday, recalling Siddhartha Gautama’s teachings on world peace and spiritual awakening. This year the 2564th Buddha Jayanti, which is observed on the full moon day in Baishakh month of the Lunar calendar.

● About 66% of the coronavirus infection cases requiring hospitalisations in New York were people who were predominantly staying home, a trend described by the state’s Governor, Andrew Cuomo as “shocking”. Cuomo outlined the results of new hospitalisation data that was collected from hospitals in new targeted effort to further reduce number of new hospitalisations per day. The state received 1,269 survey responses from 113 hospitals over 3 days and found majority of individuals hospitalised were not working or travelling, predominantly located in downstate New York and were predominantly minorities, older individuals, non-essential employees and those that were staying at home.

Stock market ends in red; finance, FMCG stocks fall

IANS ■ MUMBAI

The Indian equity indices declined on Thursday with heavy selling in finance, banking and FMCG stocks.

The BSE Sensex fell below the 31,500-mark and the Nifty50 on the National Stock Exchange (NSE) ended just below 9,200 points.

According to analysts, surge in the number of coronavirus cases also weighed on the investor sentiments.

The Sensex closed at 31,443.38, lower by 242.37 points or 0.76 per cent from its previous close of 31,685.75. It had opened at 31,677.69 and touched an intra-day high of 31,705.25 and a low of 31,362.87 points.

The Nifty50 settled at 9,199.05, lower by 71.85 points or 0.78 per cent from its previous close.

Rahul Sharma, Head of Research, Equity99 Advisors, said: "Yesterday's pull-back



rally failed to sustain today as traders turned nervous as the number of coronavirus infections cases crossed 50,000 mark. Today's fall was led by selling banking and FMCG stocks. Kotak Mahindra Bank, Asian Paint and Titan led

the fall."

He noted that the rising number of coronavirus cases could force the government to further extend the ongoing lockdown and it could further put pressure on an already slowing economy.

Cash flow in small villages severely hit amid lockdown: Report

New Delhi: Cash flow in small villages across the country has been severely impacted during the lockdown period, as a survey by Smart Power India shows that 75 per cent respondents in villages receiving electricity through mini grid have reported low cash flow during the period.

The report further said that shops and commercial customers have been the worst-hit because of lockdown as only 21 per cent have agriculture as the main source of income.

Shops selling essential goods are also affected due to low customer footfall, reduced cash flow in rural and a broken supply chain, it said. The report also said that 80 per cent respondents claimed negative economic impact due to the lockdown. Around 4 per cent respondents haven't reported significant economic impact due to agri-based livelihood as main source, it said.

Transporters: Still facing movement problem

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Permitting trucks to move is just not enough and the government should ensure that truckers are not subjected to harassment at inter-state border check posts, transporters' body AIMTC said on Thursday.

It also demanded a rescue package for the road transport sector, saying the delay in its announcement was making transporters restive. "Permitting trucks to move is just not enough...We have been receiving reports of harassment on the ground level apart from extortion at border check posts. We urged the government to ensure seamless movement of vehicles carrying goods

and essentials," All India Motor Transport Congress (AIMTC) President Kultaran Singh Atwal said. He said that at Bengal-Assam borders - Barobisha of Alipurduar district and Bakshirhat in Cooch Behar Distt. (WB) and Dhubri district (Assam) — about 10 kilometres long queue of trucks still persists each side, which are stopped for screening.

This leaves drivers and helpers high and dry without food and water, he said.

AIMTC is the apex body of transporters representing about 95 lakh truckers and entities.

"The inordinate delay in announcement of rescue package for the road transport sector is making them restive as they are not finding the move-

ment of trucks alone as solutions to their problems," AIMTC said in a statement.

There has been strong undercurrent prevailing across the fraternity with augmenting financial strain on them, it said and added that repeated requests for direct or indirect financial to transport sector has not yet acceded to by the government.

"Increase of excise duty by the central government, by not passing on the benefit of crude oil to the transport sector, farmers and the common man and increasing of VAT by state governments, is like rubbing salt on raw wounds. It will only cause inflation and exert acute pressure on small operators as they cannot absorb

this," it added. The truckers' body said penalties on late submission of fees toward expired fitness, permit fees are still being charged though their validity has been extended by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways till June 30, 2020, vide advisory from MoRTH and recent tweet by Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari.

It said majority of the trucks are not on roads as the operating cost has increased exorbitantly with the diesel price hike and resumption of toll. The current scenario may lead to large scale shutting down of operations and loss of livelihood apart from sustained anxiety and depression among the fraternity, it cautioned.

Have requested FM to expedite tax refunds for firms: Gadkari

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari on Thursday said he has requested Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to expedite processing of tax refunds to businesses "anyhow" within eight days to ease the liquidity crunch being faced by MSMEs during the lockdown.

The Minister said he was constantly in touch with the Prime Minister and Finance Minister and there was "serious consideration" underway in the Government regarding unveiling of another financial package soon.

"GST and Income Tax refunds are not released for sev-

eral days. I have also recommended that anyhow, this should be processed within eight days so that it contributes to liquidity. We have...Communicated this to the Finance Minister," said Gadkari.

Addressing a webinar organised by the Indore Management Association, the minister for MSME and Road Transport and Highways said industries should keep a positive outlook and tap the opportunities that may arise after the COVID-19 pandemic is over.

He called upon the industry to ensure that necessary measures are taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Organisations should ensure that their workers and executives are taken care of by providing food, shelter and maintaining social distancing norms, he added.

Gadkari stated that all the stakeholders must adopt an integrated approach to come over the crisis while safeguarding the lives and livelihood of the people.

The minister emphasized that special focus towards export enhancement is the need of the hour.

He highlighted the need to focus on import substitution to replace imports with domestic production.

Gadkari added Japan has offered a special package to its

industries for taking out Japanese investments from China and moving elsewhere. He opined that the current scenario is an opportunity for India which should be grabbed.

Some of the major issues highlighted by industry participants included increasing provision of 10 per cent of working capital limit as additional funds to 30 per cent, benefit for labourers infected by COVID-19, relaxation in labour laws, deferring GST and advance tax, among others.

Gadkari assured the representatives of all possible help from the government. The minister said he would take up the issues with related departments.

FM: Economy set to revive as PSBs sanction ₹5L cr loans in Mar-Apr

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said that the Indian economy is poised to recover from the recent crisis brought upon by the coronavirus pandemic with the public sector banks (PSB) sanctioning loans worth Rs 5.6 lakh crore in just two months, March and April, to over 41 lakh accounts.

In a tweet, the office of Sitharaman said that the borrowers include MSMEs, retailers, farmers and corporate and the amounts would be disbursed once the lockdown is lifted.

"During March-April 2020, PSBs sanctioned loans worth Rs 5.66 lakh cr for more than 41.81 lakh accounts. These borrowers are from MSME, Retail, Agriculture & Corporate sectors, waiting for disbursal soon after #lockdown lifts. Economy poised to recover! @FinMinIndia @DFS_India," the tweet said.

In a series of tweets, her office has outlined the development in terms of loans given by public sector banks and the loan moratorium allowed by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

Another tweet said that for MSMEs and others, pre-approved emergency credit lines and working capital enhancements are being pri-

oritised by state-run banks.

Noting that it is a work in progress, the minister said that more than 27 lakh customers contacted from March 20 and 2.37 lakh cases sanctioned loans worth Rs 26,500 crore.

Observing that the there has been smooth credit flow to non-banking finance companies (NBFC) and housing finance companies (HFC), Sitharaman's office tweeted: "PSBs sanctioned loans worth Rs. 77,383 cr b/w Mar 1-May 4. Inclusive of TLTRO funds, extended total financing of Rs. 1.08 lakhcrore, ensuring business stability & continuity going forward. @FinMinIndia @DFS_India @PIB_India."

The Finance Minister, who is also leading the task force for the economic response to the pandemic said that PSBs have complemented to the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) moratorium on loan repayment.

Over 3.2 crore accounts have availed the three-month loan moratorium, said another tweet.

"PSBs complemented RBI on loan moratorium. Their effective communication & proactive actions ensured that over 3.2 cr. a/c availed 3-month moratorium. Quick query redressals allayed customer concerns. Ensuring responsible banking amid #lockdown @FinMinIndia @DFS_India."

MSME sector on verge of collapse, says Gadkari

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari on Thursday said micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) sector is on the verge of collapse and urged major industries to release the outstanding dues to such companies within a month.

He said the position of MSMEs was "worst" as they were now engaged in a "battle for their survival".

The Minister also noted that the pendency of dues owed to MSME units by the central government, state governments, public sector undertakings and major industries was "very high".

"My request to all of you, as members of major industries, if it is possible for you to at any cost release the payment within a month. Don't take more time than that otherwise the situation is very bad," the MSME minister said in an interaction via video-conference with the members of SIAM Institute.

"But still if anywhere you have a problem, please be positive about this sector, because this is really on the verge of collapse. Now it is a very important thing if you can help them, within a month if you can give their payment it will be good," Gadkari said. The minister said he was trying to introduce a scheme envisaging setting up of a "rolling fund" where the interest cost on the payments due to MSMEs shall be borne either by the supplier or the purchasing industry. Gadkari said the "rolling fund will be helpful for MSMEs to get their working capital". Last month, the minister had said the government will set up a Rs 1 lakh crore fund to repay outstanding payments to MSMEs owed by the central and State Government undertakings as well as major industries.

With 45% of national intake, southern states draw 10-15% revenue from liquor

Mumbai: The five southern states source 10-15 per cent of their revenue from excise duty on liquor but account for nearly half of the total consumption, a report said on Thursday.

The financial position of these states is precarious as the coronavirus lockdown completely dried up this crucial liquidity tap for them in April. Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala together consume as much as 45 per cent of all liquor sold in the country, the report by Crisil said. "The denizens of this quaint quaff as much as 45 percent of all liquor sold in the country annually. But not a drop was sold in April, and given the dire state of their revenues, these states have been anxious to make good the losses by opening up the vends," it said.

BSES consumers can get a rebate of upto ₹220 on their electricity bills

New Delhi: In support of the govt's measures to contain the spread of the COVID 19, some of BSES services, including meter reading and bill distribution have been curtailed. But this should not worry BSES consumers, as they can not only get both through self service, but also get a rebate while doing so. For bills raised till June 30, 2020, BSES consumers can get a rebate of upto Rs 220 in their electricity bills. All they have to do pay their bills within 7 days of bill generation and do 'Self Meter Reading' of their electricity usage. This will ensure, that apart from getting the rebate, they can also get electricity bill based on actual meter reading and not provisional reading.

PMGKAY providing free foodgrains to affected population

New Delhi: During the ongoing crisis owing to Covid-19 Pandemic, one of the most important initiatives of Government of India is the announcement of Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana providing free food grains to the affected population.

Under the scheme, for Rajasthan State about 6.69 Lakh Metric Tonnes (LMT) foodgrains are being distributed to the vulnerable sections of society across the country affected by the pandemic. Government of India has ensured that all priority households (PHH) under NFSA gets double their usual allocation during three months of April, May and June 2020 along with each Antyodaya Anna Yojana beneficiary getting an extra 5 Kg/month than their normal quota of 35 Kg per card per month.

There has been enthusiastic response from the State Governments against this scheme and a quantity of 4.81 LMT has already been lifted upto 06.05.20.



Shaheed Sukhdev College of Business Studies wins global laurels for India

New Delhi: Shaheed Sukhdev College of Business Studies (SSCBS), a college under the University of Delhi, and funded by GNCTD, takes immense pride to announce that it bagged the first position for India in the Global Case Competition at Harvard while representing the country at the International Finals of the prestigious event. This is a first-of-its-kind win for India. The competition commenced on 24 February with the launch of a preliminary round witnessing participation from over 140 teams from across the world. The preliminary round required all teams to prepare pitchbooks comprising in-depth financial valuation, financial analysis and strategic analysis of a hypothetical M&A scenario comprising Amazon and Netflix. The preliminary round finished on 21 March and was extremely intense, as only 10 out of the 140 participating teams would make it to the Final round.

SCOPE conducts webinar on Future of Work

New Delhi: "Every challenge presents with a new opportunity which can be replicated in the present crisis", said Mr. Atul Sobti, Director General, Standing Conference of Public Enterprises (SCOPE), the apex body of Public Sector Enterprises (PSEs) while addressing the SCOPE Webinar on "Future of Work in the New Normal (CPSE Perspective)".

Sobti added while Work from Home may become the new normal in times to come, but there would be equal number of challenges associated. However, by developing nimble and agile operating models and adopting new ways of working, the same can be resolved. The webinar was successfully organised' in association with Deloitte.

India smartphone market stares at minimum 12% shipment decline this year

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

As smartphone brands face a state of uncertainty as both supply and demand has been diminished in India, the industry will bear the maximum brunt in the second quarter (April-June period), leaving the sector with at least 11-12 per cent overall decline in shipments for the entire 2020, a new report said on Thursday.

According to CMR's 'India Mobile Handset Market Review Report for Q1 2020', the total smartphone shipments in India in the March quarter grew mere 4 per cent (year-on-year).

The first wave of 5G smartphones hit the market, accounting for 2 per cent of the overall smartphone shipments in Q1 2020.

The smartphone market grew modestly on the back of good consumer demand before the onset of COVID-19 hit the market.

"Going forward, we remain

cautious about the speed of recovery in India's smartphone market this year. We are keeping a close tab on the macro-economic factors and how it plays out from here on. Our best-case scenario suggests a decline of 11-12% in overall smartphone shipments for 2020," said Prabhu Ram, Head-Industry Intelligence Group, CMR.

At the beginning of the year, COVID-19 was merely a supply-side challenge confined to China and smartphone brands in India were able to tide over the initial wave of the crisis with enough inventory supplies.

"However, as COVID-19 cases in India crossed the 500 mark in late March, India went into a complete lockdown. For smartphone brands, this has put both supply as well as demand in a state of uncertainty. Q2 2020 will be where the industry will face the brunt of the pandemic and test the resilience of smartphone brands," Ram elaborated.

Metro Railway, Kolkata
Kolkata's Pride

EXECUTION OF ALL WORKS
The tender notice for e-Tendering is invited by **Chief Engineer/Con, Metro Railway** for the following work : **Name of work :** Execution of all works in connection with proof checking of conceptual designs, architectural drawing, detailed structural designs and allied works for construction of pedestrian subway connecting Bimanbandar Station of Metro Railway to Jessore Road on one side and NSCB Airport Terminal on other side by Cut and Cover method in connection with extension of Metro Railway from Noapara to Barasat via Bimanbandar (Airport). **Tender Value :** ₹ 13,09,380 (approx). **Cost of tender document :** ₹ 2,000. **Earnest Money :** ₹ 26,200. **Completion Period :** 06 (Six) months. **Date of Closing :** 10.06.2020 at 12.00 hrs. The tender document and other details can be obtained from the website **www.ireps.gov.in** The bidding for the tender is to be submitted through e-tendering on above website. Manual offers are not allowed against this tender and any manual offer if received shall not be accepted and will be summarily rejected.
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TENDER NOTICE
Office of the Executive Engineer, PCM-Dakpathar, UJVN Ltd., Dakpathar (Dehradun), invites sealed and separate tenders from interested bidders. Brief summary of tenders is given below:
Tender No. 01/EE/PCM-DKP/ITN/2020-21 : Annual upkeep and Gardening works related to Ichari Dam (Dehradun).
Estimated Value of Work (Excluding GST) : Rs. 7.01 Lakh Only
Earnest Money : Rs. 18,000.00 Only
Tender Fee (Including GST) : Rs. 590.00 Only
Date of availability of bid document on website : 06.05.2020
Last date for submission of tender : 28.05.2020 Up to 15.00 Hrs.
Date of opening of tender : 29.05.2020 At 11:00 Hrs.
For full & further details, kindly visit our website. The tender documents of the above works can be downloaded from the Nigam's website "www.ujvn.com".

Executive Engineer
Project Civil Maintenance-Dakpathar

Ref. No.: 268/Dated : 06.05.2020
"Avoid wasteful use of Electricity"

SEARCH FOR MISSING/KIDNAPPED
Priyanka

General Public is hereby informed that one lady namely **Priyanka, D/o. Santosh Kumar, R/o H.No.9/5, Indira Vikas Colony, Mukherjee Nagar, Delhi,** has been missing/ kidnapped from her house from the area of P. S. Mukherjee Nagar, Delhi since **17.03.2020** at about 9 am. In this regard a case vide **DD No. 23A, dated 18.03.2020** has been lodged in P. S. Mukherjee Nagar, Delhi. The description of missing/ kidnapped lady is as under- **Age:** 24 years, **Height:** 5'4", **Complexion:** Fair, **Face:** Long, **Build:** Medium, **Hair:** Black, **Wearing:** Blue colour jeans & top and sandal in her feet. If anyone having any clue/ information about this lady, kindly inform the undersigned.
Website: http://cbl.nic.in
E-Mail ID - cbc@cbl.gov.in
Fax No. 011-24368639
Ph. Nos.: 011-24368638, 24368641
DP/162/NW/2020

P.S. Mukherjee Nagar, Delhi
SHO
Ph.: 011-27654675, 8750870231



Living with the virus

Monitoring platforms that track the spread of the virus, passive vaccines, clinical trials and drone deliveries are a few of the spectrum of technologies used by Israel to fight against the pandemic. By TEAM VIVA

Researchers, business professionals and Rinnovators of various countries around the globe are using technology to alleviate the effects of the global health crisis.

From monitoring platforms that track the spread of the virus to finding passive vaccines to clinical trials to drone deliveries — these are a few of the different technology projects used by Israel to fight Coronavirus.

COVID-19 remote assessment and monitoring platform

It is a triage and monitoring platform that allows officials to monitor the progress of the disease and alerts health providers of patients at risk. A symptomatic Coronavirus heat map is leveraged to locate Coronavirus symptomatic patients, and track the path of the pandemic. The information provides data-based guidance on next steps for patients, providers and public health agencies.

Currently it is in-use with the Ministry of Health, the emergency services, and all major HMOs in Israel, with the Department of Health in the State of Odisha, India, and with the Department of Health in the State of Rhode Island. Diagnostic Robotics has partnered with Deloitte and Salesforce for seamless integration to all Salesforce customers and is a member of the COVID-19 Healthcare Coalition, alongside Amazon, Google, Mayo Clinic and others.

It provides an AI layer for the healthcare system, providing services to patients, providers and insurers. Their AI-driven personalised triage system guides the patients through their journey in the medical ecosystem, analysing their medical history and current medical case using AI and NLP technologies, with generic ability to integrate with multiple sensory output data.

The Israeli Ministry of Health has developed a COVID-19 strategy which includes daily nation-wide monitoring of Coronavirus related symptoms of the population using Diagnostic Robotics digital risk assessment and monitoring platform for COVID-19, screening eight million patients daily.

Drone deliveries

Drone technology company Flytrex, in partnership with EASE Drones, the Grand Forks Region Economic Development Corporation and the City of Grand Forks, announced the launch of its drone delivery service directly to backyards in Grand Forks, North Dakota. The initiative will provide food, medicine and other essential goods via drone to selected households.

The deliveries will be made in cooperation with the Northern Plains Unmanned Aerial System Test Site (NPUASTS), with takeoffs taking place across the street from a local shopping supercenter, where provisions will be purchased. “In this time of crisis and social distancing, drones provide the ideal solution to bolster delivery capacity while keeping citizens safe at home,” said Flytrex CEO Yariv Bash.

Power the video experience

Kaltura has emerged as the fastest growing video platform. Various companies are using it to build knowledge, improve team productivity and collaborate. It also engages viewers and facilitates the delivery of message more effectively. From executive messaging to live streaming of events, it ensures high quality, reliable playback for viewers and powerful, easy-to-use tools for producers. Kaltura also trains employees, faster, and more cost effectively.

Mobile sports training platform

Legend is an immersive mobile sports training platform that engages young athletes, by providing a virtual, AI driven, trainer. It enables the young athletes to train and compete with their friends and participate in the global community through unique daily and weekly workouts, challenges and competitions.

Plasma-Derived Immunoglobulin (passive vaccine)

Kamada is developing an anti-Corona (SARS-COV-2) immunoglobulin (passive vaccine) using its proprietary plasma derived FDA-approved platform technology, as a potential treatment for patients from the disease. The product is being produced from plasma donated by patients recovering from COVID-19, which is expected to include antibodies to the Coronavirus.

Clinical trials

Pluristem Therapeutics (NASDAQ, TASE: PSTI) is a leading regenerative medicine company developing a platform of novel biological products candidates. The company has reported robust clinical trial data in multiple indications and is currently conducting late stage clinical trials in several indications.

LET THEM FLUTTER, FLAP & FLOAT

From mother cows and buffaloes, whose calves are torn away, to the goats, whose throats are slit while they’re still conscious, and hens, which are crammed in small spaces — all these animals killed for human consumption deserve to have their stories told. Through her book, *For a Moment of Taste*, POORVA JOSHIPURA, Vice President of International Affairs, PETA, presents such stories of animal slaughter and exposes the role of meat, egg and dairy industries in the health crises while warning about ‘a ripe time’ for a deadly pandemic. By CHAHAK MITTAL

Ever wondered what brutal processes an animal goes through before finally being consumed by humans? And how, later, bit by bit, they go on to disrupt nature in various ways? Or how your one ‘spicy hamburger’ makes its way to your plate after using enough fossil fuel to drive a small vehicle up to 20 miles? What about that piece of pork you ate for dinner, producing which generated the same amount of raw waste as a city of 12,000 people? A 2019 report in the British medical journal, *The Lancet*, pointed out how consuming meat can have ‘dire’ consequences on the planet. It can wreck such devastation on the environment that the Union of Concerned Scientists has even listed eating meat as one of the biggest environmental hazards facing the earth.

Well, in the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic, this has made the world’s worst nightmare become more immediate. Many are now giving a thought to how meat, its markets and both its production and consumption can adversely impact the whole ecosystem. As per People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), when lands are used to raise animals instead of crops, a huge amount of water and soil is lost, trees are cut down to make land for grazing or factory-farm sheds, and untreated animal waste pollutes rivers and streams.

Poorva Joshipura, Vice President of International Affairs, PETA, (and former CEO of PETA India), through her book, *For a Moment of Taste*, presents stories of animal slaughter and exposes the role of meat, egg and dairy industries in the health crises. She warns about how it is “a ripe time for a deadly pandemic.” Well, that warning has already come to pass.

She hopes that the one who is at all curious about the origin of one’s food and the impact of its production on animals, human health and the planet, will find value in this book, published by Harper Collins, which presents a first-of-its-kind in-depth investigation of India’s food industry. Excerpts of interview:

Why did you name it as *For a Moment of Taste*?

Taste lasts in our mouths for just a moment, a few seconds at best with every bite. For those few seconds of joy, pandemics are caused, up to trillions of animals are killed each year, pollution and climate worsen and, eventually, we put our own health at risk. Those few seconds are simply not worth all this.

How did you research for the book? How long did it take for you to complete writing it?

I’ve been studying meat, egg and dairy production systems in India for the last 20 years. This includes personally conducting investigation of animal transport and slaughterhouses and overseeing numerous investigations of live animal markets, factory farms and more. I have also met pioneering medical doctors who help reverse conditions like heart diseases and diabetes through plant-based foods, and I keep up with the impact of the production of meat, eggs and dairy on the planet.

How does this subject have to be discussed now given that there is a global health crisis at hand?

In *For a Moment of Taste*, written before the COVID-19 crisis, I warned that the time is ripe for a deadly pandemic, say



experts. That dire event has come to pass. And sadly, it’s a matter of when — not if — the next pandemic will occur as long as live animal markets, factory farms and filthy slaughters are permitted to continue endangering both humans and animals.

The last few decades have seen a rise in infectious diseases in humans, of which 75 per cent originate from animals. This coincides with our increased interference in nature, including the official establishment of China’s wildlife trade since the late 1970s and our global intensification of farmed animals.

COVID-19 and SARS are both believed to have first infected humans through wildlife. The spread of these two and various other deadly bird flus — like the H5N1 and the H7N9 — have been linked back to the live animal meat markets in China. Many of the animals who end up there, like chicken, come from factory farms. The H5N1 bird flu kills 60 per cent of people who catch it, while the H7N9 bird flu killed about 39 per cent of people who caught the virus then.

In such markets, which abound in India too, animals are soaking wet from bodily fluids and crammed together in cages. Such conditions provide ample opportunity for disease to spread from one animal to another, including to humans, who come into their contact.

Butchering animals also poses a risk to humans. The Ebola virus and HIV in humans have both been traced back to killing wild animals for food. About Ebola, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said, “In Africa, human infections have been associated with hunting, butchering, and processing meat from infected animals.” HIV, on the other hand, is largely believed to have first infected humans through killing and eating or hunting chimpanzees.

Allegedly, the novel Coronavirus is said

to have been originated in China due to its wet markets. As per the year 2016, USA topped the list of most meat-consuming countries in the world. How do you think such meat markets in India and across the world can be dismissed to ensure lesser meat consumption and health pandemics in future? How is PETA ensuring the same?

Indeed, but zoonotic, i.e. of animal origin, diseases in humans don’t just start in China. The US CDC estimates that up to over 5,75,400 people worldwide died from H1N1 swine flu just during its first year of circulation. Its roots have been traced to a strain that existed in North Carolina pig farms in the US in 1998. In the decade before that, North Carolina’s pig population jumped from two million to 10 million, and the animals were crowded onto fewer farms.

According to Farm Animal Investment Risk and Return (FAIRR), over 70 per cent of the world’s farmed animals are now factory-farmed, and in the US, that figure is 99 per cent. Factory farms house pigs, chicken, cows, fish and other animals by the hundreds, thousands, or even millions — confining them to cages, crates, or stalls hardly any larger than their own bodies or in severely crowded tanks or sheds — to meet the demand for meat, eggs, and milk. Bob Martin, former executive director of the Pew Commission on Industrial Animal Farm Production, calls these farms “super-incubators for viruses.”

Antibiotics help factory farms, including fish farms, continue to exist since deliberately keeping genetically identical and stressed animals in jam-packed, filthy conditions means that diseases can spread quickly. Globally, antibiotics are used more heavily in animal agriculture than in human health. This antibiotic overuse makes factory farms perfect breeding grounds for superbugs and simultaneously risks rendering important drugs ineffective in humans who need them. It’s estimated that resistant infections kill more than 58,000 babies in India every year.

However, thanks to vegan advocates,

according to GlobalData, the number of American consumers identifying as vegan grew between 2014 and 2017 by 600 per cent.

Not only the consumption, but how do you think the ‘production’ of animal-based products impacts the environment?

Chapter 12 of *For a Moment of Taste* details the environmental toll of meat, egg and dairy production. To accommodate and rear 77 billion land animals alone for meat, eggs and dairy, farmers need to provide crops and water for the animals, land and water to grow the crops, farms to keep the animals, and so on. In contrast, humans eating plants directly instead of channelling them through animals is far more efficient and kinder to the planet.

A report released in 2010 by the UN Environment Programme’s International Panel of Sustainable Resource Management points out that as the global population swells towards an anticipated 9.1 billion people by 2050, diets based on meat, eggs and dairy will be unsustainable. It further stated that a global shift towards vegan-eating is necessary to protect the world from hunger and the worst impacts of climate change.

And while India has over 190 million hungry people and 163 million without access to safe water, a study published by National Academy of Sciences reveals raising animals for meat, eggs and dairy uses a staggering one-third of the world’s fresh water resources as well as one-third of the world’s global cropland as feed for animals.

In metros, people are waking up to the benefits of having vegan food and a plant-based diet. How do you think the change has come about?

Most people are kind but simply don’t know how animals are manipulated, mutilated, severely confined or killed for meat, eggs or dairy. Once they learn this and how consuming animal-derived foods can harm the planet and their health, they will choose to eat vegan (wholly plant-based) food. They are learning about animals through books like mine or *AnimalKind*, documentaries like *Earthlings* and *Forks Over Knives*, PETA India’s social media pages and other means.

Why are more and more chefs insisting on keeping their menus green?

They know what’s good for business! A recent article on a website run by Franchise India Holdings Limited, reads the number of vegans in India has risen by 360 per cent in the past decade.

Animals like fish are a good source of protein, eggs are high on vitamin B, etc. Given this fact, how can a global shift towards a vegan diet be ensured? Are the consumers and food production industries ready for their substitutes? How does the book address such contradictions about the idea of veganism?

You don’t need substitutes for cigarettes because they’re bad for you and you don’t need substitutes for meat, eggs and dairy in your diet for the same reason. Chapter 13 in *For a Moment of Taste* covers what doctors and nutritionists are warning us about animal-derived foods.

Fish contains significant levels of mercury, which is toxic and can be especially problematic for children in the womb and is a possible carcinogen. Studies published in various reputed

journals have found that eggs are in fact so unhealthy that consumers who ate the most eggs increased their risk of cardiovascular disease by 19 per cent and their risk of diabetes by 68 per cent. Diabetics who ate the most eggs increased their risk for developing heart disease by an incredible 83 per cent. Egg consumption has also been associated with colon, rectal, bladder and prostate cancers.

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics said, “Vegetarian, including vegan, diets are healthful, nutritionally adequate and may provide health benefits for the prevention and treatment of certain diseases. These diets are appropriate for all stages of the life cycle, including pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, adolescence, older adulthood and for athletes. Vegetarians and vegans are at reduced risk of certain health conditions, including ischemic heart disease, type-2 diabetes, hypertension, certain types of cancer and obesity.”

The meat market employs a considerable number of people in India, how do you think its reduction or a complete ban will impact the economy?

As per a recent report by GlobalData, 70 per cent of the world’s population are going meat-free — both in consumption and production. Abroad, farmers and food industries are responding to this change by transitioning to plant-based food production altogether or by getting involved in the vegan food business.

For example, in the US, big meat companies like Tyson, Smithfield, Perdue and Hormel are now selling plant-based burgers or other such products. Dairy companies abroad are also starting to invest in plant-based milk.

In India, many people are opting for jackfruit instead of meat during the Coronavirus crisis. And when chicken sales in India recently plummeted, PETA India sent chicken-meat chain KFC a letter suggesting that it can add a vegan chicken option to its menu as other KFC restaurants abroad have done the same. In India, GoodDot is among the companies offering meat-free chicken and other vegan meats.

As the demand changes, so does the supply.

In India, many religious activities and beliefs are linked to animal killing and consuming. What’s your take on this? How do you think the issue can be tackled in a society as complex and rigid as India?

No religion requires meat-eating and all religions call for compassion. Chapter 2 of my book examines why people eat animals while generally caring for them. We are often told since childhood that certain animals are our friends and others are food. But in some places, animals we commonly call friends, like dogs, could also be considered food. When we recognise the labelling of animals as food as merely a belief, rather than a truth, we can choose a different path.

Any anecdote or personal experience that you would like to share...

I would like to share a quote by Russian writer Leo Tolstoy, who said, “When the suffering of another creature causes you to feel pain, do not submit to the initial desire to flee from the suffering one but on the contrary, come closer, as close as you can to him who suffers and try to help.”

The new normal, or just abnormal

The Coronavirus might have changed life for the entire planet but one thing has not changed, our penchant for catch-phrases. The latest one made popular by political leaders, scientists and media columnists is ‘the new normal’; as in we will all have to adjust to it once we have dealt with the viral scourge. Or whether we go back to work with social distancing as a norm even as the virus continues, something will be the new normal. The problem is that neither you or I have any clue about what this ‘new normal’ will be. However, the Indian automotive industry, days removed from a month of zero sales, believes that it will involve a lot more digital activity.

Of course, this brings up the question about how on earth you can buy an expensive product, which requires registration and licenses, possibly even paperwork for loan sanctioning online? After all, it is one thing to buy a phone, yet another thing to buy, even select a car online. I spoke to Mercedes-Benz India’s Vice-President of Sales and Marketing, Santosh Iyer, to get some perspective. Mercedes-Benz India has launched a very comprehensive



Is going online a solution for selling and servicing cars?

online campaign called #MercFromHome during the lockdown. “First thing you need to understand is that there is still a major physical element as the car has to be registered by a dealer but we are trying to do a few things quite differently online. One of them is understanding that many people search online for cars after work hours, and it is important to engage with them and not just give them the information. So our online concierge is operational till midnight. The second is that we have to give full transparency with regards to deals and stock levels. So if you want a silver E220, you will know which dealer in your area has one and also the best deals. Earlier, buyers used to call up multiple



dealers to see what sort of deals they could get. Now they can just go online.”

Iyer admits that while Mercedes-Benz’ solution, developed by Roadster Technologies is a start, it will take some time to finally do the entire process online, which will need some regulatory changes. “But why won’t someone buy a product that he or she is fully aware of online? It may not be the

case with a new product but something like the C-Class or E-Class that has been around for a year, you might have tested your friend’s car or driven one abroad. And while you have some customisation options, most of our mainline assembled products are fairly standard,” Iyer told this columnist.

In an earlier chat Hyundai India’s Director of Sales and Marketing, Tarun Garg expressed

the opinion that while some customers would go in for online purchases, for mass market brands at least, online platforms will play a critical role in service and customer retention. “There will be a lot more transparency in service. You will be able to see the prices of components and consumables as well as labour online. You will also be able to see the position at the service centre and make all your bookings through the website or app.” In addition, with Hyundai India’s latest service promise, which plans a pick up and drop facility, you may not need to meet anyone from the showroom at all.

Working from home and online tests have become a reality for many of us during the past six weeks, a surreal world which we never thought would exist. Computers have enabled social distancing for those of us who can afford them as well as stable high-speed data. Things will not be the same again, as Iyer admits, “We don’t know how we will recover. Will it be a ‘V’ curve like the government wants or a ‘W’ curve or even a ‘L’ shaped flatline. I do know that different parts of the country will respond differently and the adoption of online buying will be

dissimilar in divergent markets in India. There is no ‘one size fits all’ solution to the country but it is the direction that we were headed in before the lockdown and the past few weeks have only reaffirmed that belief.”

On that front, it is hard to disagree with Iyer, the world was going online. A few years ago, one questioned why anyone would buy a two-lakh rupee computer or television online but over the past few days, online purchases are the only way one can ensure social distancing. And car companies had already started to ramp up their online portals, moving beyond information to offering second-hand certified cars as well as test-drive booking engines. In many other major automotive markets, the entire process from booking a car to getting loan sanctions and applying for registration can be done online, India is actually slightly behind the curve. One expects government policy, particularly with regards to loan sanctioning and registration to also evolve in India. The pandemic has not changed the direction that the automotive industry was moving towards, it has just accelerated it.

Hospitality — the very word encapsulates a whole set of emotions, many of which are sensorial. But when a pandemic has been raging, you know emotions have to be kept on hold in favour of practical decisions. And this is especially true for eating out, an essential element of the industry. For patrons, this was an activity to bond over, catch up, celebrate, unwind and more. While dining out has been on hold for more than a month, industry stalwarts are bracing for the time when they can reopen, as restaurants wouldn't be the same and the business is bound to remain affected for a long time to come. If you take into account the fact, the food service industry's market size was ₹4,23,865 crore and employed 7.3 million people in 2018-19 according to the National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI), the enormity of the situation would sink in.

FOOTFALLS DRIVE THE BUSINESS

Restaurant business, by its nature, thrives on people coming in and a dip in the numbers means that the proposition becomes untenable. Chef Vicky Ratnani, culinary directory, GIPL who also conceptualises restaurant menus and food concepts says, "The situation is very uncertain at the moment. We will see a decline in the number of people visiting restaurants during the initial months. However, it will gradually increase if we keep following the safety measures and make our customers feel secure and comfortable. Zorawar Kalra, founder, Massive Restaurants agrees.

Celebrity chef, TV show judge and food stylist Ranveer points out, "There would be an initial reduction in the influx of patrons, especially in the bars and night club spaces but house parties are going to get bigger."

However, Chef Sabyasachi Gorai, popularly known as Chef Saby is not very hopeful about the restaurant landscape even after it is allowed to be operational. While Saby did not eat out often, he did go to coffee shops or bars for a drink. He asks, "Would I go to a bar? First, will it open? If it does, would I have the feeling of safely sitting at a stool and caressing the table where someone sat before me? I would have apprehensions touching either. The whole fun of having a drink is chatting with bartender and if you stand a metre away, it would be a silly scenario. So, would you want to go?"

DISTANT SEATING

Restaurants are usually located in places where the footfalls and, by that reasoning, the rentals are high. So it is not surprising that ever square foot of space is utilised to break even. Ever noticed, how closely packed the tables are in the budget joints in central market spaces are? But now restaurateurs would have to take into account social distancing norms in seating to ensure adequate space between two tables.

Chef Entrepreneur Tarun Sibal says, "It's a given that a 100-cover restaurant will now be a max of 60 to 70 covers, ensuring, and practicing social distancing guidelines and protocols. Customers will not venture out to crowded places." Ratnani, places the figure at half of the existing levels.

Brar — who often hosts gastronomical experiences with the Doer's Club, an experiential platform — has a slightly more nuanced take. He says, "Globally, we are looking at 40 per cent of the cover capacity from the current trend, India's would



CRYSTAL GAZE ON DINING

From rigorous hygiene checks, social distancing norms and a focus on simpler dishes, eating out is bound to change in the post-lockdown world, says SAIMI SATTAR

be at least 50 per cent of the seating capacity."

WHAT'S ON THE PLATE?

Will our eating habits change post the lockdown? Will there be an emphasis on slow-cooked food, healthy and mindful eating or do we want to grab a meal and exit quickly so as to spend a minimum amount of time inside the restaurant?

Chef Saby says that there was already a major trend towards vegan and vegetarian food. "Covid has shaken people's faith on non vegetarian. Many feel that it can move to any domesticated animal. So the steaks and grills would take a backseat. The prices are already prohibitive. So, a switch to vegetarian is likely."

More than the ingredients, Brar feels the methods would be more in focus. "The dishes being cooked and ordered would be simpler, the menus, on the whole, will be smaller and simpler where dishes use lesser ingredients. Also, typically because when you are running a restaurant to half capacity and with lesser staff, you'd look

to reduce inventory and overhead costs and definitely reduce wastage."

Sibal on the other hand is more focussed on the service. He says, "We will see the initiation of contactless dining where various touchpoints like a menu, bill and more will be eradicated. This will be done digitally. We will also see smaller menus, dishes that are suitable for delivery, automation in the kitchen, less manpower so on so forth."

Kalra too focusses on the safety element of food. "There will be fewer chefs working in the kitchen as we aggressively maintain social distancing. This might make us compress the menu slightly but that is the need of the hour is safety. We all took a lot for granted and this current scenario has made us realise a lot and value a lot."

WILL DINING-OUT BE A NORMAL ACTIVITY?

Do you remember the last meal you ate at a restaurant before the shutdown? Or the second last? Well, that is how much

we took eating out for granted. It was as normal as breathing. But then, like all other things, there will always be a pre and post pandemic era.

Sibal says, that post Covid, there will be new rules of engagement and there won't be a single mantra that will work. "Two schools of thoughts are prevailing, one suggesting that the consumer will become extremely conservative and the other suggesting that the disease has given a new meaning to life and people would want to make the most of what they have. As food and eating out gives joy to people and creates memories for a lifetime, I am optimistic that if we survive the onslaught, we will come back stronger within a year."

SAFETY FIRST

Washing hands frequently, sanitising and maintaining hygiene are some of the actions that have become second nature to us, now in all our interactions. In food, it cannot be overemphasised. Ratnani says, "All the safety guidelines and hygiene protocols will be revisited. The chefs and owners will push their staff for personal hygiene and work practise ensuring that each employee wears masks and gloves. Hand sanitisers will be provided at every table while thermal probes will be installed to check the temperature before people enter a restaurant. Takeaway will probably play a bigger role in the near future."

Brar agrees and adds, "The hot and cold food temperature logging and recording standards will be revisited as will the personal hygiene of the server and chef."

Kalra has mapped out a large plan for his restaurants like Farzi Cafe, Masala Library and more. "Our aggressive and dynamic plan for safety include extensive screening of all employees and guests within the restaurants, maintaining all social distancing norms not only of the front team but in the kitchen as well. There will be fewer chefs working in the kitchen. Deep cleaning will take place



daily. We are also contemplating putting up live cameras so anyone across the globe can log on to our website to see how we are operating. Sanitisation will be given utmost importance using high-tech instruments for surface cleaning and ultra violet-enabled technology to ensure cleanliness especially during table turnovers. Staff training and awareness has already begun over zoom calls."

Sibal says safety protocols would vary depending on the establishment and format but will be stringent. "From guest management, floor control, safe distancing, medical checks of staff, deep cleaning every week, fumigation and sanitisation drills all will come in play," he says.

SEA CHANGE IN CHOICES

With lesser money in the pocket, high concerns about safety and less inclination to venture out into crowded places, dining will undergo a sea transformation. Brar feels that the shift would be towards affordable luxury. The industry, now, instead of waiting for people to come to them will now go to their homes. Restaurants will look to cater to more house parties, as also doing more meal kits." Saby has been brainstorming with others in the industry about the viability of food trucks that serve hot and fresh food by taking the restaurant experience to one area one day and another the next.

Ratnani, who has been the host of a number of popular food shows and has been associated with the Doers Club twice, says, "Customers will most likely rely on takeaway more than dining at the restaurant and avoid travelling for food for the first few months."

Sibal foresees a spiral in pizza deliveries and in order to attract customers, "Restaurants will boast about hygiene rating and food safety procedures. Coffee shops, casual dining restaurants will be the flag bearer for the resurgence as guests might take more time to be back to luxury restaurants, clubs, and high-end bars. Street food will also take a huge hit, as the humble *gol-gappa* cart might be a thing of the past, as quality and hygiene will swing it for consumers. This also means that there will be an opportunity for street food to come into mainstream dining concepts."

Kalra sees a re-jig in the way the business will operate. "New projects will have to be put on hold for some time while every single cost would be controlled. So the ones that are not related to the guests experience will have to be revisited. Most costs will go down except for food which will probably go up because the

main concern would be safety and hygiene standards which needs more investment. Packaging will have to be far better and superior. There will be no compromise on the food preparation and delivery aspects."

WILL THE POCKET FEEL THE PINCH?

With more expensive ingredients, investments on safety equipment and disposables as well as reduced covers, the likely outcome is a price spiral. Ratnani believes it will depend on the restaurant if they wish to push prices up or not. Brar thinks that the costs would be brought down and this would reflect in simpler restaurants, simpler decor with smaller menus and courses.

Sibal believes that costs are bound to go up as the same real estate and infrastructure will now be utilised for a lesser number of guests. "Also, the additional cost of technology and safety procedures will add its weight to the cost," he adds.

Saby on the other hand points out that it will take at least six months to an year for a restaurant to start again. "This is as good as starting new as all the old stocks of groceries would have to be thrown out or donated to food banks, beers drained. This along with having to pay the employers and rents needs something around ₹50-60 lakh."

WINDS OF CHANGE IN THE INDUSTRY

Like all businesses, the industry is suffering during the lockdown and stares at uncertainty when it opens up. Ratnani says, "Every single person would have to come forward and work together to revive the industry. Cost-consciousness will be a main factor and unnecessary expenditure would have to be controlled while maintaining consistency in quality. The menu would be short, simple and creative which will be important for customer retention and there could be a huge shift in attention towards home deliveries and takeaways."

Brar thinks that the entire industry would surely have to re-jig itself. "There's going to be real-estate corrections, profitability figures are going to look very different. A large sum would have to be parked away for contingencies, insurances as also for health and safety regulatory compliances. High rentals won't be viable anymore."

Sibal feels that the ones that survive will become stronger, leaner and effective. "A cut in the overall salary brackets of the employees is on the cards."

One thing is for sure, dining will not be there.

R E C I P E S



SHEER KHURMA

WHAT YOU NEED

- Full cream milk: 150 ml
- Thin *Sevijan* (Vermicelli): 30 gm
- Sugar: 30 gm
- *Chironji*: 10 gm
- Raisins: 5 gm
- *Pista*: 5 gm
- Dry dates (Julienne): 1
- Cashew nuts: 5 gm
- *Ghee*: 10 ml

METHOD

● Heat a pan, add 5 ml *ghee* and roast the vermicelli on medium flame till its golden brown, and keep it aside.

● Add the remaining *ghee* in the pan and fry all the dry fruits till it turns golden brown, and keep it aside.

● In a separate pan, start reducing milk by simmering it for about 10-15 minutes.

● Add the roasted vermicelli and cook on a medium flame till it thickens. Keep stirring occasionally to avoid sticking at the bottom of the pan.

● After it thickens, add the sugar and stir it for two to three minutes.

● Finish it by adding fried dry fruits.

● Serve it hot.

Courtesy: Md Shahid Hossain, Executive Chef, Taj Krishna, Hyderabad.



BOTTLE GOURD TIKKI

WHAT YOU NEED

- Bottle gourd (grated): 150 gm
- Oats: 50 gm
- Boiled potato: 50 gm
- Turmeric: ½ tsp
- Coriander powder: 1 tsp
- Cumin powder: 1 tsp
- Dry mango powder: 1 tsp
- Ginger garlic paste: 1

tbsp

- Green chill (chopped): 5
- Coriander (chopped)
- Salt as per taste
- Bread crumbs (for coating)
- Oil for frying

METHOD

● Take grated bottle gourd in a bowl and remove all excessive water from it.

- Mix all the ingredients together.
- Make sure the dough is not watery. If so, you can add more oats.
- Now make small balls of it, approximately 40 to 50 gm each, and gently flatten it.
- Now coat the breadcrumbs to the flat *tikki* and shallow fry till golden brown.

Courtesy: Vini Shivkar, Lecturer, ITM IHM.

COCONUT RICE PUDDING

WHAT YOU NEED

- Milk: 2 cups
- Water: 2 cups
- Rice: 25 gm
- Sugar: 10 gm
- Coconut milk: 1 cup
- Cinnamon powder: 1 gm
- Mango: 1
- Mint leaf (for garnish)
- Salt to taste

METHOD

● Stir together milk, water, rice, and sugar in a medium saucepan over medium flame.

● Bring to a simmer and cook, stirring often, until thickened, for about 22 minutes.

● Add in coconut milk, cinnamon powder, and salt; cook, stirring occasionally, until creamy, for about 10 minutes.

● Serve it topped with chopped mango and mint leaf.

Courtesy: Chef Zohab Ali Qureshi, Executive Chef, Cross Border Kitchens.



CHOCOLATE CAKE

WHAT YOU NEED

- Biscuit: 2 packets
- Milk: 1 cup
- Baking powder: ¾ tsp

METHOD

● Crush biscuits and grind them well in a mixer.

● Then add ¾ tsp baking powder, mix well.

● Further, add 1 cup milk, mix well (add 1 tsp sugar, optional).

● Grease the cake tin with butter or oil and pour the batter in the tin.

● Bake it in microwave for five minutes.

● Garnish with choco-chips or add chocolate syrup on the top (optional).

Courtesy: Socialkhor.

CHICKEN BURJI QUESADILLA

WHAT YOU NEED

- Cooking oil: 1 tbsp
- Garlic (chopped): 1 tbsp
- Green chilli (chopped): 1 tbsp
- Ginger (chopped): 1 tbsp
- Onion (chopped): 10 gm
- Tomato (chopped): 15 gm
- Capsicum (chopped): 15 gm
- Lemon juice: ¼ tsp
- Fresh coriander (chopped): 1 tbsp



- *Garam masala* powder: ½ tsp
- *Chaat masala*: ¼ tsp
- Red chilli powder: ¼ tsp
- 30 Gram Grated Mozzarella Cheese
- Butter: 2 tbsp
- Del Monte eggless mayonnaise: 2 tbsp
- Del Monte pizza pasta sauce: 1 tbsp
- Del Monte tomato ketchup
- Salt and pepper to taste

METHOD

● Cut leftover chicken into

small dice.

● Heat oil in a pan, add chopped garlic, ginger, green chilli and saute on high flame for 30 seconds.

● Add onion, tomato, capsicum and saute it for four to five minutes. Add *garam masala* powder, red chilli powder and chicken, cook it for two minutes.

● Add pizza pasta sauce to it and saute it on low flame till the oil separates the *masala*.

● Season it with salt and

pepper, lemon juice and finish it with coriander.

● Spread eggless mayonnaise on a leftover *roti* then place the Quesadilla mixture, *chaat masala*, grated mozzarella cheese on one half of the *roti*.

● Fold another half of the *roti*, apply butter.

● Toast both the sides of *roti* on a non-stick pan.

● Serve it with tomato ketchup.

Courtesy: Del Monte.

Football's coming back

DFL confirm May 16 as return date for Bundesliga

AFP ■ BERLIN

Bundesliga clubs were racing on Thursday to get ready for the restart of the season in nine days' time, amid concerns about whether the players will stick to the strict hygiene guidelines implemented to ensure the campaign is completed. Twenty-four hours after Chancellor Angela Merkel's Government gave the German Football League the green light to return, the league said it will resume the season on Saturday, May 16. The Bundesliga will be the first top European football league to restart matches since the outbreak of the coronavirus forced lockdown measures to be imposed across the continent.

All games will be played without spectators.

The opening day's key game is between second-placed Borussia Dortmund and arch-rivals Schalke in the Ruhr derby at Dortmund's Signal Iduna Park — but instead of being roared on by an 81,000 crowd, the teams will play in an empty stadium. France has already ended the Ligue 1 season, with football in England, Spain and Italy still suspended.

The situation gives "German football a huge head start", according to Eintracht Frankfurt sporting director Fredi Bobic.



Bayern Munich striker Robert Lewandowski trains during team's training session

FC Bayern/Twitter

Until Merkel gave the go-ahead, clubs had still been training in small groups. On Thursday, Dortmund, who were four points behind leaders Bayern Munich when the league was halted in mid-March, held full team training for the first time in seven weeks. "We have had very constructive talks with the local health authority about it," a club spokesman said. Borussia Moenchengladbach also

resumed team training, despite announcing on Thursday that one of their backroom staff had "a very weak" positive test of the coronavirus and had been quarantined. "The coaches and the team have worked under unusual conditions over the past few weeks. Everyone is happy team training is permitted again," said Borussia's sporting director Max Eberl. The Bundesliga wants to complete the last nine rounds of matches before June 30

to secure around 300 million euros (\$325 million) in television money.

'STARTING FROM ZERO'
However, it is a step into the unknown.

"One must not forget, we are now in a situation that we do not know," admitted Bayern Munich chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge.

"We're all starting a bit from zero. One cannot rule out that there are one or two surprises."

The worry is that an outbreak of the coronavirus in the league could again halt the resumed season, this time for good.

There were 10 positive cases from 1,724 tests of players and staff at the top 36 clubs in the first wave of testing.

The onus is firmly on the players to follow the hygiene guidelines, including avoiding contact at all times.

Hertha Berlin striker Salomon Kalou, 34, was suspended earlier this week by his club for posting a video on social media where he shook hands with team-mates.

Kalou issued an apology, but politicians pointed to the Ivory Coast forward as an example of how not to behave during a pandemic which has so far claimed over 7,000 lives in Germany.

Germany captain Manuel Neuer has said Bundesliga footballers have a "enormous responsibility" to be role models.

To drum home the point, German daily *Bild* translated "Follow The Rules!" into 28 languages for the 278 foreign players in the league.

'WARNING'
"I was horrified," Dortmund CEO Hans-Joachim Watzke told *Bild* when asked about the Kalou video.

"I will tell our players again that we have a big responsibility."

"Hertha did the right thing. Such individual cases have to be sanctioned harshly."

A similar message will be the mantra at Bayern.

"I hope that the Kalou video remains an isolated case and we have received a bit of warning with it," added Rummenigge.

Bayern will also have a tough fixture as they resume their search for an eighth consecutive title.

Bayern travel to Berlin on Sunday, May 17, where Union will not be able to rely on the usual cauldron-like atmosphere of their home ground.



Dybala gets corona all-clear

TURIN: Juventus star Paulo Dybala revealed on Wednesday that he has been given the all-clear six weeks after contracting coronavirus, but Serie A rivals Torino confirmed that one of their players had tested positive.

"Many people talked in the past weeks ... but I can finally confirm that I am healed. Thank you once again for your support and my thoughts on all who are still suffering from it. Take care," tweeted the 26-year-old Argentina forward.

Dybala was diagnosed on March 22, along with his girlfriend Oriana, who recovered sooner from the disease.

Dybala on Wednesday also posted a picture of himself on *Instagram* with his arms outstretched looking at the sky: "My face says it all, I'm finally cured from Covid-19."

But city rivals Torino revealed that an unnamed player had been diagnosed with Covid-19 during testing of players and staff as Serie A teams return to individual training this week.

"During the first medical tests carried out on the Torino FC players, a positivity to Covid-19 emerged," the northern club said in a statement. **AFP**

I also feel pressure like everyone else: Dhoni

PTI ■ CHENNAI

His ice cool demeanour is the stuff of legends but former India skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni has no qualms conceding that he is not immune to pressure and fear.

Dhoni, lending support to *MFORE* — an initiative offering mind conditioning programs to achieve peak performance in sports — offered his perspective on the issue of mental health.

"In India, I feel there is still a big issue of accepting that there is some weakness when it comes to the mental aspects, but we generally term it as mental illness," Dhoni was quoted saying in a press release. "Nobody really says that, when I go to bat, the first 5 to 10 deliveries my heart rate is elevated, I feel the pressure, I feel a bit scared because that's how everybody feels — how to cope with that?" the World Cup-winning icon asked.

"This is a small problem but a lot of times we

I wasn't unlucky, Dhoni made it count: Parthiv on playing in MSD era

NEW DELHI: Out-of-favour wicketkeeper-batsman Parthiv Patel does not consider himself unlucky to have played in the same era as Mahendra Singh Dhoni as he knows that the former captain grabbed his opportunities way better than him. Patel led Gujarat to the 2016 Ranji Trophy title. His last Test appearance for India was in 2018, while the last time he played an ODI for the country was way back in 2012.

"I don't see myself as unlucky to be playing in the Dhoni era. I started my career before him, and I had the

opportunity to perform before him," the 35-year-old Patel said during an interaction with *Fever Network's 100 hours 100 stars*.

"Dhoni came in to the team because I did not have a couple of good series and I was dropped. I know people can say it just to gain sympathies that I was born in the wrong era. But I don't believe that," he added.

"Whatever Dhoni has achieved was something very, very special and he achieved because he made sure of the opportunities he received. I don't feel unlucky at all," Patel asserted. **PTI**

Highlighting the importance of a mental conditioning coach, Dhoni said: "Mental conditioning coach should not be the one who comes for 15 days, because when you come for 15 days you are only sharing the experience."

"If the mental conditioning coach is constantly with the player, he can understand what are the areas which are affecting his sport," Dhoni, who led Chennai Super Kings captain to three IPL titles, said.

MFORE has been founded by former Indian batsman S Badrinath and Saravana Kumar.

AFP ■ LAUSANNE

Football's lawmakers this week are set to announce a "temporary" change to the laws of the sport allowing teams to make up to five substitutions in games when the sport resumes after the coronavirus-induced suspension.

The proposal to help teams cope with likely fixture congestion in a packed calendar was made by world governing body FIFA and is expected to be validated by the International Football Association Board (IFAB) this Friday.

The IFAB said last week that it was working with FIFA on a "tem-

porary dispensation of Law 3 (The Players) allowing competitions to give teams the option to use a maximum of five substitutes on up to three occasions during the match, plus at half-time."

Limiting the number of occasions on which teams can make changes would remove the incentive to do so purely for time-wasting purposes.

A sixth change may also be permitted in matches that go to extra time.

Currently teams can make three substitutions during games, although since 2018 teams have been allowed to make a fourth sub-

stitution in extra time.

Leagues will not be obliged to implement the change, a source said, but they will be free to do so as soon as they restart.

The IFAB's objective is to "protect players' health" when matches do resume, with a fixture schedule that could be even more packed than usual potentially leading to an "increased risk of injuries."

While the measure is intended to be temporary, it could be maintained for the whole of the 2020-21 season and right through to the next European Championship, which was postponed by a year until June and July 2021.

Battle b/w two strong bowling attacks: Burns on Ind-Oz Test series

MELBOURNE: Australian opener Joe Burns on Thursday said that his team's much-awaited home Test series against India later this year is primarily set to be a battle between "two incredibly strong bowling attacks".

Virat Kohli and Co Are scheduled to play four Tests in Australia in December-January.

"I look at Australia and India as having two incredibly strong bowling attacks and that's what's going to be so exciting watching the two teams go at it," Burns told reporters in a video conference on Thursday.

India's attack would be spearheaded by Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Shami, while Australia's pace attack would be



led by world No1 Pat Cummins.

Burns view is in sharp contrast to the focus of the overall hype, which is the batting of the

two sides. India boast of the peerless Virat Kohli and a marauding Rohit Sharma, while Australia have been bolstered by

the return of Steve Smith and David Warner.

"I think both teams are going to have a lot to play for with the number one ranking and their positions in the world Test championships," he said.

In the latest ICC Test rankings, Australia regained the world's No1 status after overtaking India. However, they are placed second in the ICC World Test Championships points table, behind leaders India.

"That's what's motivating us at the moment in terms of all the training we're doing with an eye looking forward to a huge summer against the Indian cricket team," he explained.

As a specialist opener, Burns

said his role will be to negate the new ball Indian bowlers early in the Test.

"I guess as an opening batter, that's why it's so exciting for myself. There's going to be a huge challenge this summer and a big role to play in nullifying the Indian bowlers, especially early in a Test match, the morning of day one with the new ball."

"They are obviously world class team. You look at the world ranking, they were number one and now we have got to number one, so I know that series will be anticipated by everyone and as a player this is a sort of series you want to play in and do well in." **PTI**

MS was always open to chat with players: Nehra

FIANS ■ NEW DELHI

Former India pacer Ashish Nehra has said that MS Dhoni was always open to a chat with his players after a match and his hotel room would always be open for them after the games.

"People think that Dhoni doesn't talk much. That is not the case. His room would remain open in the night after matches. Anyone could walk in, order food and discuss cricket," Nehra said while speaking to former India opener Akash Chopra on his show *Aakash Vani*.

"Be it in CSK or in the Indian team, Dhoni would pass on the message on what he thinks a player needs to do during a conversation and that would be enough for the players to get the drift," added Nehra who played a lot of cricket under Dhoni's captaincy both for India and at Chennai Super Kings in the Indian Premier League (IPL).

Nehra also spoke on Sourav Ganguly, saying he was a leader who used to back his players to the hilt.

"Dhoni had senior players around him when he took over and the challenge was how to manage them. Dada had a team of juniors and he backed them to the hilt. He would go all out to back his players," said the former left-arm pacer.

Current WI team better than 2016 WT20 winners: Bravo

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

All-rounder Dwayne Bravo is in awe of the current West Indies T20 team's batting depth, saying it is better than the 2016 World Cup-winning side and can intimidate any opposition.

"In the last series in Sri Lanka, we had a team meeting, and coach Phil (Simmons) put the team down, the list, and he put it down in batting order, and he had my name down at No 9," Bravo told *ESPNcricinfo*.

"And I said to the guys, I said listen, I don't think I was ever involved in a T20 team when I am down to bat at No 9."

"I'm just in awe of our batting line-up, and I said to the guys, I said listen, I think this team is actually better than our World Cup-winning team, and that is no joke, because at the end of the day, you have batting all the way down to No 10."

Bravo, who returned from international T20 retirement in December last year to strengthen West Indies' title defence, said the batting resources of this "intimidating" team has reduced his role to a specialist bowler.

"It's an intimidating team, it's a team to intimidate the opposition, and that excites me. So I will just do my part as a bowler, try to control the back end of the innings, especially closing off the innings with death bowling, which has been, in the past, a bit of a concern for us," said Bravo, who made his international comeback in January against Ireland.



Windies T20 skipper Kieron Pollard at nets. WI/Twitter

"You saw how Oshane Thomas did with his pace in Sri Lanka. Then you have Sheldon Cottrell, now a leader of the attack, Kesrick Williams on the bench, so things starting to look bright again, things starting to look good again."

Bravo also was effusive in his praise for skipper Kieron Pollard, who had taken over the reins of limited over teams last year.

"He loves to win (Pollard). That's the most important thing, and as a captain, he'll

Holder wants to contribute in all formats

PTI ■ KINGSTON

Star West Indies all-rounder Jason Holder says he might be leading the Test side but doesn't want to be "pigeonholed" in just one format and is determined to make a name for himself in all the three formats.

"I don't want to just

segregate myself and pigeon-hole myself to one particular format," Holder, who has been the captain of the Test side for the last five years besides leading the side in 86 ODIs, was quoted as saying by *windiescricket.com*.

"Yes I'm the captain for the Test team but as I've crossed formats for a num-

ber of years, I think my sole focus has been on West Indies cricket, ideally in all three formats not only in Test cricket."

"I think West Indies cricket is so diverse in many different ways and for us as players, we've got to understand each and everyone of us has a part to play in this whole puzzle," he added.

do anything to win, in the right way and the right spirit, and he's very determined to win, to make a difference," he said.

"I remember when they approached him to take over, I said to him, it's going to be a good challenge, a big one, a tough one, but now is the best time. You get both teams at the bottom of the table. There's only one way you can go, which is up, right?"

"I said now is the right time, you build a team and you create a dressing-room environment where everyone is on the same page."

Pollard has represented West Indies in 113 ODIs and 73 T20Is, scoring 3619 runs and taken 88 wickets. The 32-year-old all-rounder remains a huge figure in limited over cricket, having played in several leagues across the globe, including the IPL.

Bravo described Pollard as a "figure-

head" and someone who commands respect across the globe for his achievements.

"I think what Pollard has is his honesty, which is the most important thing. You have leaders in the past sometimes that said, okay, well, I don't get involved in selection, I had no say, you know, they give all types of excuses and stuff, and the system will be able to manoeuvre them and control them, but Pollard, you can't control him," Bravo said.

"... The players also respect him, because of whatever he has done and achieved in the white-ball format, especially in T20 cricket. So if someone like Pollard is speaking in the dressing room about T20 cricket, we all have to listen, because he's played the most games, he's had success, and he's highly respected around the world."

Cancellation stares Australian Open

SYDNEY: Tennis Australia conceded on Thursday that January's Australian Open faces cancellation under a worst-case scenario, but said it was looking at a range of options in hope the Covid-19 crisis eases.

The season-opening Grand Slam is scheduled to take place in Melbourne from January 18-31, more than eight months away, and Tennis Australia said it would abide by whatever restrictions were in place at that time.

"We've certainly made no secret about the number of scenarios that we're looking at," a spokeswoman said.

"We're hoping for the best but planning for everything."

Possibilities range from cancellation to imposing quarantine on overseas players and allowing only Australian fans into the event.

"We have to look at all the angles because a lot of the decisions will be beyond our control and related to Government guidelines and restrictions," she said.

"We do need to have all the protocols in place to ensure everyone's safety." **AFP**

