

OPINION 6
HYSTERIA IN A
TIME OF VIRUS**MONEY 9**
MARKETS MARCH
HIGHER FOR 3RD DAY**SPORT 12**
SERIE A RESUMES
ON JUNE 20

NEW DELHI, SATURDAY MAY 30, 2020; PAGES 12 ₹3

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*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

More lockdown but fewer curbs likely

Modi, Shah discuss CMs' views: Social distancing must but need to push up economic activities

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Two days before lockdown 4.0 ends, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday discussed about the views of Chief Ministers on further opening up several sectors of economy with strict social distancing norms if the lockdown were to be continued beyond May 31.

For the past three days, the Home Minister was collecting inputs and suggestions from all Chief Ministers. Highly placed officials say the Centre may give more power to the States to decide on opening up the economic activities and defining containment zones.

Many Chief Ministers have reportedly preferred the continuation of the lockdown, but there is a near consensus on opening up many sectors as well as malls and public trans-

ports, including metro services.

While all Chief Ministers urged the Home Minister to speed up economic activities and gradual return of public life, they also expressed their apprehension about being flooded with surge of patients when the country relaxes the strict lockdown norms.

As per sources, two special Covid-19 panels set up by the Centre have submitted their recommendations for the exit strategy. The panels have suggested that the Centre should do away with all lockdown curbs except keeping schools, colleges, movie halls and religious places closed till situation improves.

The panel has also recommended not to reopen inter-State travel and said that the efforts should be directed towards strengthening containment measures in the



Migrants shift to a shelter home in a village before leaving for their native places in special buses, arranged by the Rajasthan Government in Jaipur on Friday PTI

worst-hit districts.

The worst-hit 13 districts are: Municipalities of Mumbai, Chennai, Delhi/New Delhi, Ahmadabad, Thane, Pune, Hyderabad, Kolkata/Howrah, Indore, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Chengalpattu (Tamil Nadu)

and Thiruvallur (Tamil Nadu). These 13 districts are having 70 per cent of the positive

cases in India. The Centre and the States of these 13 cities have already decided a plan on the geographical definition of containment zones.

The Home Minister also apprised the Prime Minister of the outcome of the talks between the Cabinet Secretary and 13 Municipal Commissioners and District Magistrates from the sensitive cities.

The Central Government is expected to announce its decision on the lockdown within the next two days. Prime Minister may speak up on this on May 31 scheduled "Mann Ki Baat", said officials.

At present, the current lockdown rules prohibits opening up of hotels, malls, public

transports in containment zones. There is expected to be a dilution on this and shops inside the malls and hotels may be allowed to open with limited number of entries.

Meanwhile, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday said all religious places will be allowed to open in the State from June 1 but not more than 10 people can pray at a time.

"Temples, Gurudwaras, Mosques and all religious places in the State are closed. They will open from June 1 but not more than 10 people will be allowed at any given point of time. No assembly would be allowed in religious places," Mamata said.

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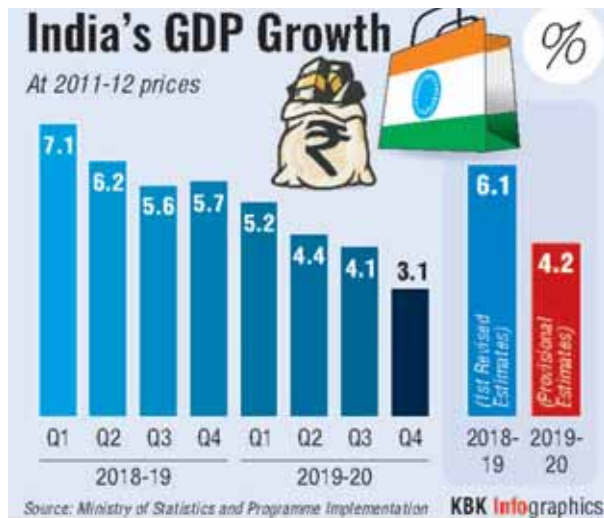
Yearly GDP growth rate 11-yr low; 3.1% in Jan-Mar quarter

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The coronavirus-led disruption of Indian economy slowed down the GDP to 3.1 per cent in January-March and to an 11-year low of 4.2 per cent for the full fiscal 2019-20 amid a drop in consumption and investment. The slowdown is also result of overall economic deceleration even before the Government imposed a lockdown to curb the spread of Covid-19 infections from March 25, 2020.

The GDP is expected to continue on the downward journey and gain speed in the next few quarters.

The GDP growth stood at 5.7 per cent in the corresponding quarter of 2018-19, according to data released by National Statistical Office



(NSO) on Friday.

The Indian economy grew at 4.2 per cent during 2019-20

as against 6.1 per cent in 2018-19.

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Delhi wants lockdown 5.0 as Capital sees 82 deaths on Fri

AAP Govt suggests Centre to keep all public places shut

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As lockdown 4.0 ends on Sunday, the Delhi Government recommended to the Union Home Ministry for lockdown 5.0 as the number of Covid cases in the national Capital rose by 1,106 with total tally touching 17,387 and 82 people dying on Friday.

The Delhi Government believes that places where large gatherings take place, like cinema halls, should remain closed. "Schools and colleges should also remain closed," said Health Minister Satyender Jain.

The Delhi Government wants to speed up all economic activities and for this the Government had allowed DTC to resume operations



Medics in protective suits carry the body of a Covid-19 casualty for cremation at Nigam Bodh Ghat in New Delhi on Friday PTI

keeping social distancing, bus station hygiene, sanitisation of buses, autos and cabs in mind.

While the decision on metro is pending but the City Government wants DMRC to start its operations. During discussion with Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Delhi

Chief Minister is reported to have requested for the resumption of Metro services.

"The Delhi Government has put a request before Centre for Delhi Metro. The Central Government will take the call," a Government official said.

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CAPSULE

QUAKE HITS ROHTAK, TREMORS FELT IN DELHI

New Delhi: A medium intensity earthquake of 4.5 magnitude hit Rohtak in Haryana on Friday, tremors of which were felt in the national Capital, the National Centre for Seismology said.

LOCUST SWARMS POSE THREAT, SAYS DGCA

New Delhi: Aviation regulator DGCA issued guidelines for stakeholders like pilots on how to deal with locust swarms, saying they pose a threat to aircraft in the critical landing and takeoff phase of a flight.

RAIN BRINGS MERCURY DOWN IN DELHI

New Delhi: Light to moderate rain lashed the national Capital on Friday, bringing the mercury several notches below normal. Strong winds swept across the city and a few areas reported hailstorm. The Safdarjung observatory recorded 3.5 mm rainfall and a maximum of 37 degrees Celsius.

India surpasses China in coronavirus cases, deaths

Delhi, Haryana, K'taka, and U'khand report biggest single-day spike, Mumbai reports highest with 2,682 new cases

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Friday overtook China in terms of corona-related fatalities and raced towards 5,000 death count even as the number of fresh cases saw third straight day of spikes with Maharashtra, Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh registering huge numbers.

India has reported a total of 1,73,458 coronavirus cases and 4,980 deaths till Friday after it reported 8,101 infections and a massive 269 death count from across the country on Friday. China which had reported the first Covid-19 case in December last year has registered over 82,995 cases and around 4,634 deaths.

Data shows 10,652 people have been treated and discharged so far. The recovery

rate stands at 42.89 per cent. According to the Ministry's website, more than 70 per cent of the deaths are due to comorbidities.

On Friday, Delhi, Haryana, Karnataka, and Uttarakhand reported biggest single day spike as Covid-19 continued to spread viciously across the country.

Maharashtra continue to remain headache for the health authorities, as it contributed another day of big spike recording 2,682 positive cases on Friday, with Mumbai alone contributing a total of 35,458 cases to the States tally. Coronavirus has infected a total 62,228 people in the financial capital of the

country. The fatalities in the State have shot up to 2,098.

Tamil Nadu, after slipping to the third position on Thursday, again disturbingly surged ahead on Friday to acquire second slot among the worst hit States. It witnessed high number of coronavirus cases at 874 taking the total

count to 20,246 cases on Friday. At least 9 people have died due to coronavirus infection in the State taking the death toll to 157.

Delhi recorded its biggest spike in Covid-19 tally in second consecutive day at 1,106 fresh cases while the number of active coronavirus patients stood at 17,387. It witnessed 82

deaths bringing the total fatalities to 357 in the State.

The national Capital had recorded over 1,000 cases in a day for the first time on Thursday since the outbreak.

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Covid-19

TOTAL CASES: 1,73,458

DEATHS: 4,980

RECOVERED: 82,468

STATES	TOTAL CASES	DEATHS	RECOVERED
Maharashtra	62,228	2,098	26,997
Tamil Nadu	20,246	157	11,313
Delhi	17,386	398	7,846
Gujarat	15,944	980	8,611
Rajasthan	8,365	184	4,855
Madhya Pradesh	7,645	334	3,927
Uttar Pradesh	7,445	201	4,410
West Bengal	4,813	302	1,775
Andhra Pradesh	3,330	60	2,234
Bihar	3,359	15	1050

BENGAL MINISTER TESTS CORONA +VE

Kolkata: West Bengal Fire Services Minister Sujit Bose has tested positive for coronavirus, making it the first such case in the Mamata Banerjee-led State Cabinet, a well-placed source in the Government said on Friday. Bose has been advised to undergo home quarantine after his test results came.

Bejan Daruwala dies of lung infection

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Renowned astrologer Bejan Daruwala died at a private hospital here on Friday evening, his family said. He was 90.

While speculation was rife that Daruwala was admitted to Apollo Hospital here a few days ago after he tested posi-

tive for coronavirus, his son Nastur denied it, saying his father was being treated only for pneumonia.

According to his website, Ganesha Speaks, he had predicted that Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Moraji Desai, Narendra Modi will be Prime Minister.

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Bats die of brain haemorrhage in searing heat in UP, Bihar

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Deaths of large number bats due to brain haemorrhage, caused by excessive heat in the last few days in Delhi, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh have sparked fears as bats are suspected to be linked to the origin of coronavirus in Wuhan in China.

The forest department officials suspect that bats are dying due to rise in temperature and non-availability of water as the heat has dried up the lakes and ponds in several parts of the country.

The post-mortem report of the Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI) in Bareilly said



bats died due to brain haemorrhage, caused by excessive heat in Gorakhpur's Belghat area early this week.

IVRI Director RK Singh said there were no traces of coronavirus or rabies in the dead bats. "The bats have a high immunity level and are not affected by any pathogen —

virus or bacteria — though they can be carriers of the virus," he said.

Principal Chief Conservator of Forest, Delhi Government, Ishwar Singh told *The Pioneer* that severe heat-wave could be the reason behind death of bats but due to coronavirus pandemic. The carcass of these bats will be sent for postmortem to know the exact reasons of the death, he said.

The Animal Husbandry Department of the NDMC has picked up the bat remains from the Motilal Nehru Marg area in Delhi to know the exact reasons of the death.

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Priest, son found dead near temple in UP's Sambhal

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In yet another sensational incident in Uttar Pradesh, a priest and his son were found dead outside a temple in Rasoolpur Sarai village under the limits of Nakhasa police station in Sambhal district on Friday.

The local residents suspected that the two were murdered, but the local police claimed that investigation pointed that both the priest and the son committed suicide due

to depression and illness. They sent the bodies for post-mortem and were waiting for report before heading further with the investigation.

Reports said that some local residents reached the Shiv temple in Rasoolpur Sarai village for darshan on Friday morning when they found the priest missing. As they went nearby to look for him, they were shocked to see both the priest and with his son both were lying dead.

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Delhi's exit points jammed as NCR cities seal borders after Covid spike

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM/NEW DELHI

All exit points of Delhi on Friday saw traffic snarls after all adjoining NCR cities, latest being Gurugram, sealed their borders with Delhi following a spike in the coronavirus cases in the national Capital.

Commuters were caught unawares on Delhi-Gurugram border on Friday morning as the Haryana Government on Thursday night decided to seal its border with Delhi. Vehicles were stuck in bumper-to-bumper jam for around 3 to 4 km ever since the barricades were placed around 8 am.



Traffic jam on Delhi-Gurugram road on Friday PTI

Movement of vehicles involved in supply of essential services was allowed after the border was sealed. Those with

passes issued by the Government were also allowed to move.

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Trump says he likes ‘great gentleman’ PM Modi

Washington: Reflecting upon his love and affection for India and the good rapport he has with its leader, US President Donald Trump has said that he likes Prime Minister Narendra Modi and termed him a "great gentleman".

Prime Minister Modi is one of the few world leaders, including Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel, with whom President Trump enjoys a close friendly relationship.

They talk with one another frequently, and their conversations normally do not appear in the public domain.

"I like Modi. I like your prime minister a lot. He is a great gentleman. (He is doing a) great job," Trump told White House reporters in an Oval Office exchange on Thursday.

For the second time in less than a fortnight, he confirmed of having spoken to Modi.

Neither the White House nor the Prime Minister's Office

has issued readouts of the two telephonic conversations, but from Trump's public remarks, it appears that he and Modi talk to each other regularly.

Responding to a question, Trump acknowledged that he knew he was popular in India.

"I know (I am popular in India). They (people) like me in India. I think they like me in India certainly more than the media likes me in this country," he said.

From the very start of his presidency, Trump has gone out of his way to show his love and affection for Modi and India.

After the historic 'Howdy Modi' event in Houston last September and 'Namaste Trump' rally in Ahmedabad this February, Trump has not let any opportunity go without praising Modi.

"I just got back from India, right? I just beat COVID," he said.

The two leaders like each other a lot, given their frequent conversations and twitter

exchanges.

Same is the case with other members of the president's family, who are genuinely in love with India and the Indian-Americans. Be it First Lady Melania Trump; the president's daughter and senior presidential advisor Ivanka Trump; son-in-law Jarred Kushner, also a presidential advisor, they all frequently tweet on India and Indian-Americans.

The president's son Donald Trump Jr, along with Kimberly Guilfoyle, advisor to Donald J Trump for President, Inc. And National Chair of the Trump Victory Finance Committee, also echos Trump's love for India and Indian-Americans.

"So much so, Prime Minister Modi praised Jared Kushner, saying that everything Jared does is positive, while addressing a crowd of 110,000 people at a rally for Trump in India," said Al Mason co-chair of the Trump Victory Indian American Finance Committee. **PTI**

N-E DELHI RIOTS

‘Pinjra Tod’ activist Narwal arrested, booked under UAPA

New Delhi: The Delhi Police's Special Cell on Friday arrested 'Pinjra Tod' activist Natasha Narwal and booked her under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for alleged conspiracy in the northeast Delhi riots in February, police said.

Narwal, along with another JNU student Devangana Kalita have already been arrested in another case, being investigated by the Crime branch, related to communal violence in northeast Delhi and are in judicial custody till June 11.

The two women are associated with 'Pinjra Tod' group, a collective of women students and alumni of colleges from across Delhi and are currently lodged in Mandoli jail here.

"We had enough evidence against Natasha Narwal in connection with a conspiracy case associated with the northeast Delhi riots that is being investigated by the special cell. So, we have formally arrested her with the permission from the court," said a senior police officer who did not wish to be identified. **PTI**

Respect collegium system but can't act as post office: Law Min

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Union Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad on Friday asserted that he respects the Supreme Court collegium system but the ministry would not act as a post office and will exercise its role as a stakeholder.

Prasad was delivering the concluding speech during the Prof. N.R. Madhava Menon Memorial Lecture Series organized by Akhil Bharatiya Adhivakta Parishad on 'Legal & Digital Challenges for India Post Covid'.

Talking about the issue of the entry of all devotees to the Sabarimala Temple, the law minister said Prof. Menon took a very tough stand on Sabarimala.

"He (Menon) said courts should be reluctant to interfere with the faith of people. If the faith is obnoxious, arbitrary, patently unconstitutional, it should go... But if you start being judgemental on faith and that too at the instance of people who have no connection whatsoever

with faith, then you are treading upon roads slippery," Prasad said.

He said Prof Menon was very firm that the collegium system is no more relevant and needs to be replaced as it has outlived its utility.

"We all know that the NDA government came up with the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) for appointment of judges. It was unanimously passed by both houses of parliament and more than 50 per cent of Vidhan Sabhas. Yet the Supreme Court quashed it.

"We respect the SC judgement but one thing I would like to flag and debate about it. The SC has held that in the judicial commission, the law minister is also a member, therefore the appointees from that process may not be fair and objective when litigation comes against the government. But if this is the reasoning then I have serious reservations as a student of law which I have said in the past," Prasad said.

Uttarakhand sees biggest single-day spike of 216 cases, total now 716

Dehradun: Uttarakhand reported the biggest single-day spike of 216 cases on Friday, taking the total number in the state to 716.

Out of the 13 districts in the state, 11 have reported fresh cases with Nainital registering the maximum number of 85 cases, followed by Dehradun where 72 new cases were detected.

Almora reported 21 cases, Bageshwar and Tehri eight each, Udhm Singh Nagar, Pauri and Haridwar five each, Uttarkashi four, Rudraprayag two and Pithoragarh one.

Most of the new patients have a travel history outside the state, especially Maharashtra, it said.

A total of 102 patients have been discharged after being cured. Five people have died of the disease and three have migrated out of the state, it said.

However, authorities said the cause of death of all five of them is not coronavirus. **PTI**

Mathura admin readying for possible locust attack

Mathura: Insecticides and pesticides will be sprayed on crops and vegetation to prevent a probable attack of desert locusts in the district, an official said on Friday.

Nearly 1,500 spray vehicles have been earmarked for the purpose, District Magistrate Sarvagya Ram Mishra said.

India is currently battling the worst desert locust invasion in more than 20 years. The crop-destroying swarms first attacked Rajasthan and have now spread to Punjab, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh.

Though at present the locusts are swarming in pockets of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, their coming to the district can not be ruled out, Mishra said. "A meeting with agriculture officers, agriculture scientists and other officers to discuss how to counter the locust attack was held," he said. He said sufficient stock of insecticides and pesticides has been stored and its sale to other districts has been banned. **PTI**

India, China capable of resolving border issue, Beijing rejects Trump’s help offer

From Page 1

In a surprise move, Trump on Wednesday offered to "mediate or arbitrate" the raging border dispute between India and China, saying he was "ready, willing and able" to ease the tensions, amid the continuing standoff between the armies of the two Asian giants.

Reacting for the first time to the US president's offer, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said, the two countries did not want the "intervention" from a third party to resolve the current military standoff.

"Between China and India we have existing border-related mechanisms and communication channels", Zhao told a media briefing here when asked about Trump's offer.

"We are capable of properly resolving the issues between us through dialogue and consultation. We do not need the intervention of the third party", he said.

"We have informed both India and China that the United States is ready, willing and able to mediate or arbitrate their now raging border dispute. Thank you!" Trump tweeted on Wednesday.

He reiterated his offer on Thursday while speaking to reporters at the White House.

Responding to a question on his tweet, Trump renewed his offer, saying if called for help, "I would do that (mediate). If they thought it would help" about "mediate or arbitrate, I would do that," he said.

India on Wednesday said it was engaged with China to peacefully resolve the border row, in a carefully crafted reaction to Trump's offer to arbitrate between

the two Asian giants to settle their decades-old dispute.

"We are engaged with the Chinese side to peacefully resolve it," External Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Anurag Srivastava said, replying to questions at an online media briefing.

President Trump has previously offered to mediate between India and Pakistan on the Kashmir issue, a proposal that was rejected by New Delhi.

At the Chinese Foreign Ministry briefing on Friday, the spokesman said "China's position on the China-India boundary question is consistent and clear".

"We have been implementing the important consensus reached by leaders of both the countries, observing the bilateral agreements and have been committed to safeguarding territorial sovereignty and security, stability and peace in the border area", Zhao said.

He reiterated his earlier comment that "Now the overall situation in the China-India border area is stable and controllable", he said, once again indicating a conciliatory tone amidst the tense situation along the border.

On Thursday, an op-ed in a state-run newspaper also reflected Beijing's stand on the offer of mediation by President Trump.

The Global Times said China and India does not need help from the US to resolve their current border frictions at the border, pointing out that the leadership of the two countries successfully solved the Doklam standoff in 2017 with "concerted efforts and wisdom".

"China and India successfully solved their Doklam faceoff with concerted efforts and wisdom. The two informal summits between the leadership of the two sides, one in the Chinese city of Wuhan in 2018 and the other in the Indian city of Chennai in 2019, set the tone to maintain peace and tranquility along the

border," it said.

Several areas along the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh and North Sikkim have witnessed major military build-up by both the Indian and Chinese armies recently, in a clear signal of escalating tension and hardening of respective positions by the two sides even two weeks after they were engaged in two separate face-offs.

India has said the Chinese military was hindering normal patrolling by its troops along the LAC in Ladakh and Sikkim and strongly refuted Beijing's contention that the escalating tension between the two armies was triggered by trespassing of Indian forces across the Chinese side.

India has said that all Indian activities were carried out on its side of the border, asserting that India has always taken a very responsible approach towards border management. At the same time, it said, India was deeply committed to protect its sovereignty and security.

MEA Spokesperson Srivastava on Thursday said India is committed to the objective of maintenance of peace and tranquillity along the Line of Actual Control and that Indian troops take a very responsible approach towards border management.

"The two sides have established mechanisms both at military and diplomatic levels to resolve situations which may arise in border areas peacefully through dialogue and continue to remain engaged through these channels," he said at an online media briefing. The India-China border dispute covers the 3,488-km-long Line of Actual Control. China claims Arunachal Pradesh as part of southern Tibet while India contests it.

Both sides have been asserting that pending the final resolution of the boundary issue, it is necessary to maintain peace and tranquility in the border areas.

Modi-US Prez didn’t discuss China, India...

From Page 1

"I can tell you; I did speak to Prime Minister Modi. He is not in a good mood about what is going on with China," the US President said during an interaction in the White House.

"They have a big conflict ...India and China. Two countries with 1.4 billion people (each). Two countries with very powerful militaries. India is not happy and probably China is not happy," Trump said when asked if he was worried about the border situation between India and China.

The President also said "they like me in India. I think they like me in India more than the media likes me in this country. And, I like Modi. I like your prime minister a lot. He is a great gentleman."

New Delhi rejected the US President's offer to mediate with India and China stating India was engaged with China on the diplomatic level to peacefully resolve the issue.

Efforts are now on at the diplomatic and military level to defuse tension on the LAC in Eastern Ladakh with four stand-offs are now on for the last 25 days. More than seven rounds of talks at the local commander level of the armies have already taken place to find an amicable solution but of no avail.

"Our engagement on the diplomatic front continues both in Delhi

as well as in Beijing," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Anurag Srivastava had said on Thursday. The two nations have signed several protocols on maintaining peace and tranquility at the border and there are many agreements.

Asked about the tweet to arbitrate, Trump said if called for help, "I would do that (mediate). If they thought it would help" about "mediate or arbitrate, I would do that," he said. The US President's earlier offers to mediate between India and Pakistan on Kashmir were firmly rejected by New Delhi, more than once.

On the situation in Ladakh, sources said at present, the two armies are in an eyeball-to-eye ball confrontation. Moreover, the Chinese troops have intruded three kms into the Hot Springs area in Galwan valley. Besides building barracks and bunkers, the Chinese have also bolstered their troop strength and increased aerial vigil by helicopters.

India has also ramped up its troops at the four face-offs besides keeping all its advanced landing grounds in readiness to handle additional landings and take-offs of transport planes ferrying soldiers and logistical back up. These measures are in place in the eventuality of a long haul as no breakthrough in the situation is in sight as of now, sources said.

The Army top brass also reviewed during the two-day commanders' conference here on Thursday the situation at the LAC in the backdrop of the Chinese aggressiveness.

Bejan Daruwala dies...

From Page 1

Gujarat Chief Minister Vijay Rupani expressed grief over Daruwalla's death. "Saddened by the demise of renowned Astrologer Shri Bejan Daruwalla.

I pray for the departed soul. My condolences. Om Shanti," he tweeted.

Senior state Congress leader Arjun Modhwadia mentioned in his tweet that Daruwalla "died due to Covid-19".

"Saddened to hear demise of renowned astrologer Wizard Shri Bejan Daruwalla ji @Bejan_Daruwala due to Covid19. Unfathomable loss to the world of Indian Astrology," he said.

Though born into a Parsi family, Daruwalla was a Lord Ganesha devotee. It was Ganesha who had taught him that timing is "everything in astrology and in life", he once said, adding "By timing I mean the right person at the right place and time".

He also said that he combined the principles of Vedic and Western astrology, I-Ching, Tarot, numerology, the Kabbalah and even palmistry to make predictions.

He wrote for a number of newspapers, magazines and also appeared on TV including on foreign networks.

Ajit Jogi no...

From Page 1

Hospital Director Dr Sunil Khemka said on May 10 that oxygen had not been reaching Jogi's brain for some time, causing brain damage. The condition is called hypoxia. Jogi's neurological activities were almost nil though his heartbeat was normal and blood pressure was controlled by drugs. Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted: "Shri Ajit Jogi Ji was passionate about public service. This passion made him work hard as a bureaucrat and as a political leader. He strived to bring a positive change in the lives of the poor, especially tribal communities. Saddened by his demise. Condolences to his family. RIP"

Jogi, who quit the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) to join politics in 1986, was an MLA from the Marwahi assembly seat. He became the first Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh when it was carved out of Madhya Pradesh in November 2000.

Delhi’s exit points jammed as NCR cities seal borders...

From Page 1

The traffic queues were also witnessed on Delhi-Sonipat border (GT Road) as the Haryana police did not allowed vehicles without passes to cross the borders. The traffic snarls were also seen at Noida and Ghaziabad borders after Uttar Pradesh police allowed only essential services and valid movement pass holder to enter the area.

Taking to twitter, the Delhi Police issued alert to commuters taking the route to plan their travel accordingly. "Traffic is moving very slow in the carriageway from Delhi towards Haryana due to checking by Haryana Police at Singhu border," the Delhi Traffic Police tweeted from its official handle.

In another tweet, the Delhi Traffic Police alerted commuters that the UP Police has blocked the route from Ramprastha Red Light to Ghaziabad and asked them to avoid using this route.

This is the second time when the Haryana Government has taken such a decision to curb corona cases in districts like Gurugram, Faridabad, Sonapat and Jhajjar. In the last three days, 121 cases of Covid-19 were reported in Gurugram.

Bats die of brain...

From Page 1

The area is known for fruit bats and butterflies as former Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit had developed "a nature trails", house of bats, butterflies and birds at her bungalow 3 Motilal Nehru Marg.

Earlier this week, panic gripped Gorakhpur's Belghat area after over

Priest, son found dead...

From Page 1

They immediately informed police. According to the police, prima facie it appears to be a case of suicide. "Bodies of priest Amar Singh and his son Jaiveer Singh were recovered from a Shiv temple in Rasoolpur Sarai village in Sambhal district. Prima facie it appears to be a case of suicide. Bodies are being sent for post mortem," superintendent of police Yamuna Prasad told reporters after the investigation. He said that information has been received that Amar Singh was sick for the past few days and his son Jaiveer Singh was mentally challenged. "We are investigating the matter and further action will be taken accordingly," Prasad said.

300 bats were found dead in a mango orchard. Even as the authorities rushed to the site to collect carcasses and send it for medical examination rumours on social media linked it with coronavirus outbreak, albeit without any scientific basis. In Bihar, a large number of bats were found dead near Ara in Bhojpur district. The swab samples of the dead birds are being sent to Patna for testing.

Delhi wants...

From Page 1

Meanwhile, Government on Friday added 82 coronavirus deaths to the overall toll, taking the total to 398. While 13 out of 82 have been reported in last 24 hours, 69 deaths occurred in the last 34 days. Dy CM Manish Sisodia and Jain stressed on home isolation. "80-90 per cent of infected people are recovering in home quarantine. Not mandatory to be admitted in hospitals for patients with no or mild symptoms," said Sisodia. 7,846 +ve patients have recovered with 50 per cent, said Jain.

India surpasses China...

From Page 1

In Gujarat, in the last 24 hours, 372 new cases of COVID-19 and 20 deaths were reported. The total tally of positive cases rises to 15,944 including 8,609 cured/discharged, death toll is 980 deaths.

In Karnataka, 248 people have been tested positive for coronavirus on Friday, taking the total number of cases in the state to 2,781 while death toll stands at 48. Similarly in Uttar Pradesh, 275 new Covid-19 cases and four deaths were reported, taking the total number of cases in the state to 7445.

In States like Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Odisha the migrant influx has started pushing up Covid numbers. Madhya Pradesh has reported 7453 cases while In Haryana, 217 new Covid-19 cases were reported on Friday, taking the total number of positive cases to 1,721. In Rajasthan, 298 fresh Covid-19 cases have been reported, taking the total number of cases in the state to 8,365 and death toll at 184. With 9 new positive cases for COVID-19 in Himachal Pradesh - five from Hamirpur and four from Kangra districts, total positive cases in the state rises to 290 including 208 active cases.

The number of COVID-19 cases has gone up to 4,813 in West Bengal up by 277 fresh cases while 85 new cases were reported in Andhra Pradesh and 90 in Bihar. Jammu and Kashmir registered 128 cases for a total of 2164, while Odisha added 63 new cases.

Haryana reported its biggest single day of spike, adding 217 new cases for a total of 1,546 coronavirus cases so far while Kerala added 62 new cases for a tally of 1,151 cases. A total of 936 people have been infected with the virus in Assam and 448 in Jharkhand.

82 die of virus in 24 hours

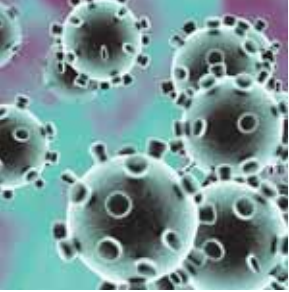
1,106 new corona cases, total tally reaches 17,387

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Government on Friday added 82 coronavirus deaths to the overall toll, taking the total to 398. While 13 out of 82 have been reported in last 24 hours, 69 deaths occurred in the last 34 days.

Government's reaction came after the allegations on Delhi Government for under-reporting fatalities. Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia and Health Minister Satyender Jain stressed on the home isolation.

"80-90% of infected people are recovering in home quarantine. Not mandatory to be admitted in hospitals for patients with no or mild symptoms," said Sisodia. 7,846 corona-infected patients have recovered, Jain said and added that the recovery rate is now at 50 per cent.



Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Saturday said that 13 deaths reported in the National Capital due to Coronavirus in the past 24 hours.

Manish Sisodia said that 69 old corona related deaths have also been added in our health bulletin that occurred in a span of past 34 days.

The coronavirus cases count in the national capital witnessed a record jump of 1,106 in a day, taking the total tally to 17,387 while the death tally has reached 316.

"Fifty two cases were reported from Safdarjung hospital. The rest were from other hospitals. So the health bulletin will reflect 82 deaths, but out of

these- 18 deaths have happened in the last 24 hours and the rest 69 deaths have happened in the course of the last 34 days," he said.

The death cases reported to the Government late so the data updated accordingly, he added.

Stressing the need to maintain personal hygiene and social distancing to keep Coronavirus at bay, Sisodia said that there is no need to panic as situation is under control.

More than 50 per cent people in Delhi have recovered and huge portion of corona affected people is recovering through home isolation, he said.

Advising residents not to panic over rising number of Coronavirus cases, he said "It is important to keep ourselves safe from the disease by wearing masks and practising social distancing and there is no need for us to panic. It is worth mentioning that around 80 to 90 per cent of infected people are recovering in home quarantine," he said.

Kejriwal releases video on home isolation process, precautions

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Government on Friday released a video explaining the process of home isolation and the precautions patients, caregivers and neighbours need to take.

The video was introduced on social media by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who said, people need not panic when someone in their neighbourhood is found COVID-19 positive.

The video seeks to build confidence among people who might be neighbouring someone, who is found COVID-19 positive but is not symptomatic. In the short film, a family has been shown and how a

caregiver takes care of a man when he is found Covid-19 positive.

The instructional video also talks about use of sodium hypochlorite for the purpose of sanitisation at home, especially the room in which the asymptomatic patient is staying during the self-isolation period.

It also shows, how a doctor on call provides counselling to patients who are home quarantined.

Kejriwal earlier in the day had tweeted, "My Delhiites do not worry if you contract corona. Most of you can be treated in home quarantine itself. Still, if you need to be admitted to hospital, we have full preparations for it. I pray to the god for your good health and happi-



ness".

"Corona patients who have no or mild symptoms can recover at their home. They need not get admitted to hospital," he tweeted.

His deputy Manish Sisodia

during a virtual Press conference in the afternoon also said people need not visit hospitals unless there are symptoms of this virus infection, and added 80-90 per cent recovery was registered, among cases where

Total number of Covid-19 positive patients under home isolation here stands at 4,227, according to Delhi health bulletin shared on Thursday

patients were home quarantined.

Total number of Covid-19 positive patients under home isolation here stands at 4,227, according to Delhi health bulletin shared on Thursday.

4 more NDMC staffers test corona +ve, total 13

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With four more staff of New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) tested positive on Saturday, the total number of staff in the civic body diagnosed with Coronavirus reached to 13 till now.

A senior NDMC official said that one accounts of NDMC headquarter Palika Kendra and one beldar working in Shaheed Bhagat Singh Place (Gole Market) tested positive.

Incidentally, the civic body had sealed the entire building on Thursday after six COVID-19 positive cases reported in a single day.

The official said that civil engineering department (building maintenance division) and public health department are carrying out an extensive disinfection drive in Palika Kendra and Shaheed Bhagat Singh Place offices. This disinfection drive will continued carry out for three times a day for next two days," he said.

The Covid-19 cell of NDMC is being intimidated the district authority to carry out the contact tracing as per standard operating procedure (SOP) for the staff of Palika Kendra and Shaheed Bhagat Singh Place.



It is also directed to all people who were in close contact with affected person or employees to observe home quarantine procedure and report to district authority in case they become symptomatic.

Gambhir's SUV stolen from outside his residence

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Sport Utility Vehicle (SUV) of East Delhi's Bharatiya Janta Party's (BJP), Member of Parliament (MP) Gautam Gambhir got stolen from outside his house here in Central Delhi's Rajinder Nagar.

According to Sanjay Bhatia, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Central district, Deepak Gambhir, the father of the MP, told police that he owned a Toyota Fortuner car.

"On Thursday around 3.30 pm, the car was parked in front of the house. On Friday morning, it came to know that the car was stolen," said the DCP.

"A case under relevant section of law has been registered. Further police team is also scanning CCTV cameras in the area to identify the accused and to know the crime sequence," said the DCP.

Several hotels turned into Covid hospitals

SAPNA SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi hotels have been attached with hospitals with an aim to improve health infrastructure in the ongoing battle against novel coronavirus even as cases recorded every day have gone above thousand in Delhi.

On Friday, in a fresh order, Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD) said that in continuation of previous order dated May 16, 2020 to augment Covid hospitals facility by 1000 beds, the following hotels - Hotel crown plaza, Okhla phase -2, Surya, New Friends Colony (NFC), Siddhartha, Rajendra Place, Jivitesh, Pusa Road and Sheraton, Saket have been requested by District Magistrates and given to attached hospitals - Batra, IP Apollo, BLK, Sir Ganga Ram and Max respectively for converting them into extended



Covid hospitals wherein medical services shall be provided by the attached identified Covid private hospitals.

According to the order, the attached private hospital is required to provide sufficient manpower (nurses & doctors) as per norms.

"The attached hospital is also required to provide oxygen supply, either in the form of oxygen concentrator or oxygen cylinder, in the extended COVID Hospital in case a patient requires oxygen support, the order read.

According to Delhi health department official," The attached hospital shall provide all consumables like PPE Kit, N95 Mask, gloves, medicines and equipment like pulse-

oximeter, thermometer, oxygen concentrator/ cylinder, etc. They shall also make necessary arrangements to provide resuscitation Y services (equipment, drugs and medical consumables) in the extended COVID Hospital A in case there is a rapid deterioration in the clinical condition of the patient."

The Delhi Government's order came when Covid infected cases 1106 recorded in past 24 hours.

"The linked private Hospitals are required to take over full Hotel indicated against their name as requisitioned by concerned District Magistrate, Government of NCT of Delhi under DDMA. The hotel shall provide regular hotel services including rooms, housekeeping, disinfection & food for the patients etc at the price not greater than Rs 5000/- for Five star Hotel and Rs 4000/- Four/Three star hotel per day," the order read.

Govt to double Covid beds

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In order to deal with the rising cases of Coronavirus, the Delhi Government is aiming to double the number of beds in the coming days in comparison to the number of patients right now.

Addressing the media, Delhi health minister Satyender Jain said that the national capital has more than 5,000 beds for coronavirus treatment. "Of these 1,400 beds are in private hospitals and 3,700 in government hospitals. The number of patients currently on the ventilator is 28 and we have more than 300 dedicated ventilators available currently in Delhi," he said.

Our aim is to double the number of beds in the coming days in comparison to the number of patients right now, Jain said.

Jain also said that there have been 17,386 positive cases up till now in Delhi. "As many as 1,106 cases of coronavirus have been reported in the last 24 hours in Delhi. At least 7,846 people have recovered so far and 351 of them recovered on Thursday," he said.

There have been 398 deaths recorded so far in the national capital due to Covid-19," said Jain. The health minister also informed that the health bulletin will reflect 82 new deaths out of which 13 were



reported in the last 24 hours while the rest 69 deaths have happened in the course of the last 34 days.

Jain advised everyone to be cautious of the disease. "We should practice social distancing, wear masks, and wash our hands with soap and water. Isolate yourself in a room to recover if you think you are infected. Although it takes two weeks to recover but most of the people are recovering without any medical intervention," he added.

"We get a lot of panic calls too. But if the symptoms are not severe and you are overall asymptomatic, you should confine yourself to an isolated room and quarantine yourself. Other family members should maintain a safe distance and keep their homes (and self) sanitized," Jain said.

He also informed that the health bulletin will reflect 82 deaths out of which 13 were reported in the last 24 hours while the rest 69 deaths occurred in the course of the last 34 days.

Covid welfare cell for policemen

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In yet another step to prevent its personnel, officers and their families from Covid-19, the Delhi Police Commissioner, SN Shrivastava, has set up 'Covid Welfare Cell' across the 15 districts in National Capital.

According to Anil Mittal, the Additional Public Relation Officer (APRO), Delhi Police, a good practice initiated in one of the district of setting up a Covid Welfare Cell has been replicated in all the 15 districts of Delhi Police for a standardized and effective mechanism in order to ensure a positive



feeling of being looked after well by all police families whose members are exposed to risk of infection during performance of duty at Covid Hospitals, Covid Care Centres,

Quarantine Facilities and Containment Zones apart from regular policing of investigation and patrolling.

"So far more than 25,000 families have been contacted and it is being done on regular basis for reaching out to each family. A Welfare Cell under the direct supervision DCP office has been created for reaching out to all the police families of the personnel who are posted in the districts. The families members are being contacted on telephone to share with them all the preventive steps being taken by the organization for the safety of their

family members," said Mittal.

"Their concerns and issues which need intervention are being addressed on regular basis so that there is no fear of corona pandemic and instead each and everyone in the police family is provided with correct information and positive steps to create positive energy in their personal lives," said Mittal.

"Delhi Police is fulfilling its responsibility in ensuring that all men and women in Delhi Police and their families are emotionally stable and professional competent as corona warriors," he added.



DELHI POLICE
SHANTI SEWA NYAYA



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The survey findings indicate that even after the lockdown lift, the situation will remain difficult for the hospitals and nursing homes as patients will hesitate from visiting hospitals. Hospitals are working towards adapting to modern healthcare techniques and are providing consultation through telemedicine, but the problem related to OPD footfall will remain for some time. "The other challenge of increase in cost of operations is also a major concern given more stringent hygiene and containment requirements post Covid," said the NATEALTH President.

उपनिदेशक (वि०/या०)
मण्डी परिषद, प्रयागराज।

TN crosses 20K mark, 874 more afflicted

62 test +ve in Kerala

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

With 874 persons testing positive on Friday, the number of persons afflicted with coronavirus in Tamil Nadu reached 20,246. The only consolation for the authorities is the number of patients discharged from various hospitals in the State. Friday saw 765 persons getting cured and discharged from hospitals and this made the total number of active cases in the State as 8,776.

Nine persons were declared dead on Friday and the fatalities reached 154 all over the State. The efforts by the Government to contain the pandemic continued without

any hold back as 71 laboratories were working round-the-clock to test the samples. According to the medical bulletin issued by the Tamil Nadu Government, 11, 334 persons were tested on Friday which took the total number of persons tested till date to 4,66, 550. Chennai continued to be the epicenter of covid-19 in Tamil Nadu with 13,662 persons testing positive till date. There are 6,353 active cases in the district which is closely followed by Chengalpattu (545). There are districts like Namakkal, Nilgiris and Perambalur which do not have even a single coronavirus patient. Dharmapuri, which succeeded in containing the pandemic reported three cases on Friday.

62 persons tested positive

for coronavirus in Kerala on Friday, according to Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan. Speaking to reporters at Thiruvananthapuram, the chief minister said that the hike in coronavirus cases was mainly due to expatriates and persons from other States who returned to Kerala.

“Out of the 62 tested positive today, 33 were from foreign countries, and 23 from other States. Number of hotspots in the State increased to 101,” said the Chief Minister. But he had some news of comfort to the people of the State. “The instances of virus in every 100 tests done in Kerala is 1.7 per cent and this is the best in the country,” claimed Vijayan. He also ruled out the possibility of community/social transmission in the State.

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

While the Jammu & Kashmir Government is still contemplating whether to allow pilgrimage to the Amarnath cave shrine for a shorter duration in the second week of July this year, the total number of coronavirus cases are spiraling up without showing any declining trend, especially in Kashmir valley.

The Government, which is tied up with containment efforts to check the further spread of deadly virus, is already under pressure from several quarters to allow annual pilgrimage to the cave shrine for a limited period of atleast two weeks.

The final decision in this regard is expected to be taken during next week by the Chairman of the Shri Amarnath Shrine Board after holding threadbare discussions with members of the board and taking in to account the feed-

128 new cases in State, 36 from Jammu and 92 from Kashmir

back from the Union Home Ministry.

Earlier, Shri Amaranth Shrine board authorities had decided to suspend the yatra this year but later recalled their decision claiming the final decision would be taken after taking a fresh review of the prevailing circumstances.

Due to heightened security concerns, the authorities in Jammu & Kashmir cannot take a unilateral decision as it has to ensure safety and security of the pilgrims during the yatra period.

Secondly, till the time lockdown guidelines are relaxed and smooth movement of pilgrims is permitted the pil-

grimage cannot take place even for a limited period of time. A senior government functionary said, “we are waiting for the centre to take a final call on the issue of holding annual pilgrimage to the Amarnath cave shrine”.

“Once we receive a green signal, other yatra logistics, clearing yatra track, setting up temporary shelter points, arranging refreshment, registration of pilgrims as per the guidelines can be initiated”.

On the other hand, another famous shrine of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi is also awaiting final nod from the union govt to restart yatra for local pilgrims. Shri Mata Vaishno Devi yatra was suspended on March 18, 2020 ahead of the nation wide lockdown from March 23.

Meanwhile, on Friday, one more patient died due to Covid-19 in Srinagar while 128 new cases were detected in

Jammu and Kashmir, taking the total tally to 2164 cases. Out of these, the total number of active cases are 1261, 332 in Jammu division and 929 in Kashmir division.

According to the media bulletin, out of 128 new positive cases, 36 were reported from Jammu division and 92 from Kashmir division.

All the 36 cases from Jammu were returnees. Highest number of 14 cases were reported from the border district of Poonch while seven cases were reported from Jammu, and six each from Kathua and Rajouri districts.

In Kashmir valley, the highest number of 27 cases were reported from Srinagar, followed by 19 cases from Kulgam, and 18 from Kupwara. According to media bulletin, 76 percent active cases in Kashmir valley are localised in only four districts of Srinagar, Kulgam, Anantnag and Kupwara.

No respite from domestic returnees in Karnataka

IANS ■ BENGALURU

There is no respite from domestic returnees with respect to Covid-19 in Karnataka. As many as 92 per cent of the 178 cases in the past 19 hours were returnees, mostly from Maharashtra, raising the State's tally to 2,711, an official said on Friday.

“New cases reported from Thursday 5 p.m. to Friday noon, 178,” said a health official. Among the 164 domestic returnees, 156 or 95 per cent returned from Maharashtra, India's largest COVID suffering state.

Recently, Karnataka saw a major spike in cases in Udupi, Yadgir, Bengaluru Urban, Kalaburagi and Raichur.

Raichur suffered 62 infections and Yadgir, 60, both constituting 69 per cent of the cases in the past 19 hours.

A 35-year-old man from Bengaluru is suffering from Influenza Like Illness (ILI).

A 68-year-old woman from Davangere is also suffering from the same condition.

One more patient, a 32-year-old man from Chikkaballapura, is also suffering from ILI.

A 68-year-old man from the same place is suffering from Severe Acute Respiratory Infection (SARI).

Meanwhile, 35 patients were discharged in the past 19 hours, 30 from Hassan, three from Uttara Kannada and one each from Chikkamagaluru and Mandya.

Among the cases, 1,793 are active, 869 discharges and 47 deaths.

Religious places, offices to open from June 1 in Bengal

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Amid eyebrows raising in the medical fraternity and the opposition circles the Bengal Government has decided to safeguard “Jaam” and operationalise “Jahan” even as Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday declared that the State will be fully functional from the first week of June with the opening of both religious places and public offices.

“While temples, mosques, churches and gurudwaras will open from June 1, the public and private sector will become fully functional from June 8,” she said adding not more than

10 persons will be allowed entry in religious places.

Public and private sector offices too will begin work with full staff strength, she said allowing public transport to ferry passengers to their full capacity. Buses which were allowed to carry only 20 people earlier will now be able to ferry passengers to its full sitting strength, she said reminding, “no standing person will be allowed.”

Tea gardens and jute mills too will start functioning with full capacity from June 8, she said. When asked if sudden opening of the system will neutralize the good effects of the 68-day lockdown a fuming

Chief Minister said if the Railways could send in “Corona Expresses” (read trains bringing infected migrant workers) packed with people then where was there a harm in opening the State. “We have reports that the Railways is sending trains, heaving with migrant workers. In one seat, three-four persons are travelling for 48 hours, 72 hours. So I thought then what is the harm in opening up religious places. From June 1, religious sites and places can open up in Bengal.”

She however said that “no mass congregation or no big festival would be allowed to be organized” in the State till further orders.

“Already Bengal has received 5-6 lakh migrant workers many of who already have come via road. And the Railways have sent another 75 thousand of them in trains ... many of these people are carrying corona infection... so much so that the people have started running away when a train is entering the Howrah station saying ‘look Corona Express is coming,’” she said.

She said that but for the irresponsible attitude of the Railways which too have a “social responsibility towards the citizens of the country” Bengal Government had been successfully controlled the proliferation of the virus.

“We were successful in controlling the spread of corona virus in the last two months, but now it is increasing as a lot of people are coming from outside. The Railways is sending migrants in crowded compartments. In the name of Shramik Special trains they are running ‘corona express’ trains,” she said.

The decision to open up the State came amid rising number of cases and a lot of frown both from the medical and political fraternity.

Senior doctors wondered whether social distancing norms could be followed in case of a full relaxation of lockdown norms and said “the

entire good effects of the lockdown would be compromised if we open up now.”

Another senior virologist predicted “a massive increase in the number of cases in the coming weeks and Bengal will find it difficult to bury its dead people if the decision is not changed right away.” CPI(M)'s Md Sal'im said, “it seems Mamata Banerjee is competing with the Modi Government in haphazard implementation of plans. While on one hand the sudden imposition of the lockdown brought great miseries to the poor people of the country now its sudden lifting will finish the advantages of the lockdown.”

He also asked “how the people will be transported to their offices and back at a time when the local trains are closed. And if the local trains are started where is a guarantee of social distancing?”

State BJP president Dilip Ghosh attacked Banerjee for taking knee-jerk decisions even as he asked “for reasons did we implement the lockdown for the past two months. Was it because we will sacrifice its good effects? Will the Chief Minister be able to control the rising cases if they start to multiply in the coming weeks? “Who will take the responsibility of the families that will suffer now?”

Masood relative involved in foiled Pulwama like attack

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Investigating teams of Jammu & Kashmir police on Friday claimed to have identified owner of the Santro car which was likely to be used by the suicide bomber to target a security convoy or any other vital installation in Kashmir valley.

The car was believed to have been fabricated by an IED expert, identified as Mohd Ismail alias Fauji Bhai of Jaish-e-Mohammad terror outfit. He is believed to be a close relative of Jaish-e-Mohammad Chief, Maulana Masood Azhar. His name had also figured during investigations in the Pulwama terror attack. Police is currently working on the vital leads to track down the footprints of active Over Ground workers who may have provided logistics support to the IED expert Fauji Bhai while fabricating the vehicle borne IED.

Though, no formal statement was issued by the Jammu and Kashmir police but officers privy to ongoing investigations revealed the owner of the explosives-laden car which was intercepted in Rajpora area of Pulwama on Thursday, has been identified as Hidayatullah Malik.

According to police officers, Malik is a resident of Shopian and had joined the Pakistan-backed terror group Hizb-ul-Mujahideen in July 2019. Some of the close relatives of Malik have also been detained by the police to piece together the details of the conspiracy hatched by the top commanders of different terror outfits in Kashmir valley.

Meanwhile, DG CRPF , Dr A.P Maheshwari , Friday commended the role of CRPF in foiling a major terrorist attack in Pulwama, and has also announced a cash reward of Rs 10 lakh for the CRPF team involved in the Operation. Complimenting the role of CRPF, DG CRPF also announced award of Commendation Disc and certificates to the deserving CRPF Officers and Men involved in the Operation.

According to CRPF spokesman, DG CRPF appreciated the synergy amongst the Forces in handling the security situation in Kashmir.

Zulfikar Hasan, Special DG J&K Zone, CRPF met with the CRPF team of officers and men involved in the operations , presented the cash reward on behalf of the DG and lauded the exemplary efforts put in by the personnel.

JMB terrorist Abdul arrested in Bengal

PNS ■ KOLKATA

The Special Task Force of Kolkata Police had a major success on Friday when it arrested Jamat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh terrorist Abdul alias Boro Karim. He was hiding near Suti town of Murshidabad district bordering Bangladesh, the STF which carried out a joint operation with Murshidabad Police said.

Karim was allegedly involved in a 2018 blast at Bodh Gaya in Bihar sources said without ruling out his involvement in the Khagragarh blast in Burdwan district of Bengal too. The Khagragarh blast killing two JMB militants had occurred on October 2, 2014.

The Bodh Gaya blast had taken place near the Mahabodi Temple on January 19, 2018, hours after Buddhist spiritual leader Dalai Lama had left the area.

“He had provided shelter to JMB leaders from Bangladesh, who were directly involved in the Bodh Gaya blast. He was arrested this morning from Suti police station area of Murshidabad district,” a senior officer said adding a number of documents and other things have been recovered from him.

“He is among the top three JMB operatives wanted in India. We have been looking for him for quite some time. He will be produced before a local court today and we will seek his police custody,” an official said adding, the terrorist had earlier given the cops a slip but this time they could manage to arrest him.

FAMOUS PALKHI TRADITION

Maha Govt to fly or take palkhis by bus to Pandharpur

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Having cancelled the traditional Annual “Palkhis” (palanquin processions) from Alandi and Dehu in Pune district to Pandharpur owing to the Covid-19, the Maharashtra Government on Friday decided to take the holy ‘Padukas’ (foot prints) notably of Sant Dnyaneshwar and Sant Tukaram from Warkari sect directly to the temple town in Solapur district in western Maharashtra.

At a meeting held between Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar and the organising committee in Pune on Friday, it was decided that there would not be palanquin processions from Alandi and Dehu Pune district to the Vithoba-Rukhmani temple in Pandharpur in view of the continued spread of coronavirus in many parts the state.

In the past, palanquin processions would begin from Alandi and Dehu and go through Pune, Sangli, Satara & Solapur districts. The whole pilgrimage would take 21 days. Numerous palakhis take the main Tukaram and Dnyaneshwar palakhis along the way.

Devotees from from all over Maharashtra and nearby areas would set out for Pandharpur, wearing holi basil beads and sing the glories of Vithoba and songs like “Gyanba

Tukaram”, commemorating the saints. Upon reaching Pandharpur on the auspicious Ashadhi Ekadashi day, the devotees would take a holy dip in the sacred Chandrabhaga river or Bhima river before offering prayers at the the Vithoba-Rukobai Temple.

In consultations with the deputy Chief Minister, the organisers decided to discontinue the “Palkhis” (palanquin processions) which would in the past see more than at least four lakh Warkaris, the people who would under annual pilgrimage (wari) from Alandi and Dehu to the temple town of Pandharpur in Solapur district.

During the meeting, Pawar assured the organisers that the State Government would ensure the “palkhis” would be taken to Pandharpur on the day of Dashmi either via Helicopter or via State-run MSRTC buses.

This is for the first time in the nearly 800-year-old tradition of Palkhis,palanquin processions will not be taken by foot from the twin temple towns of Alandi and Dehu to Pandharpur.

As part of the decision taken by the State Government, palkhis of Sant Dnyaneshwar, Sant Tukaram, Sant Nivrutinatn, Sant Sopankaka, Sant Muktabai and Sant Namdeo will be taken directly by either road or air on the dashmi day.

NC rejects J&K delimitation commission, won’t take part

Jammu: A day after Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla had nominated the Associate Members of Delimitation Commission for the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir, one of the leading mainstream political party in Kashmir valley, National Conference on Friday rejected the entire process saying that the party's three members of Parliament will not participate in it.

MoS PMO, Dr Jitendra Singh and Members of Parliament, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, Mohammad Akbar Lone, Hasnain Masoodi and Jugal Kishore Sharma were nominated as associate members of Thursday by the Lok Sabha Speaker.

In a statement, the NC, spokesman said: “With reference to the recently announced Delimitation Commission announced by the Government of India, Jammu & Kashmir National Conference today rejects this process and its three members of Parliament will not participate in the said commission.”

The party added: “This delimitation commission is a product of the J&K Re-organisation Act 2019, which the JKNC is challenging in and out-side the Supreme Court. Participating

in this delimitation Commission will be tantamount to accepting the events of 5th August 2019, which the NC is unwilling to do.”

“According to the Constitution of J&K, the constituencies of J&K were to be delimited in 2026 with the rest of the country. The constituencies in the State were last delimited in the ‘90s. Thereafter, an amendment was made in the constitution of J&K unanimously passed in the State Assembly in which all the regional parties, Congress and BJP voted for this amendment to go with the delimitation with rest of the country in 2026. Therefore, the Constitution of the delimitation commission is unwarranted,” the statement added.

The commission has been constituted to delimit the constituencies of Jammu and Kashmir in accordance with the provisions of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act 2019.

According to section 60 of Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act 2019, the number of seats in the Legislative Assembly of Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir shall be increased from 107 to 114.

Land acquisition to be made easier in UP

Lucknow: Continuing his efforts to promote industrialisation in the state, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has now issued directions to amend the revenue code which will make it easier to acquire land in the state.

The amended code will make it possible to lease agricultural land for industrial units and industrial parks. The Land Acquisition Act of 2013 will also be amended to simplify the procedure for acquiring land within a distance of 1 km on either side of an expressway. This will also provide for additional means of revenue generation for the industrial development authorities. According to a government spokesperson, the state government will also develop an electronic city near the Jewar International Airport for which a large land parcel will be acquired.

“At a meeting between the Chief Minister and senior officials, it also was decided to auction the lands of closed public sector units. A legal verification the land will have to be carried out for the purpose,” he said. If a revenue village comes under an industrial development authority, it has been decided that the public land in these gram sabhas will be vested with the respective authority.

Under the Industrial Development Zone Act, allotment of a plot will be cancelled if a unit is not set up there after a stipulated period of time.

Meanwhile, it has also been decided that land of closed units under the Industrial Development Department and plots allotted to closed units of other departments, such as sugar mills and Central government undertakings, will be acquired for the land bank.

IANS

Maha sees record 116 deaths, 2,682 more cases

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra, which is the worst coronavirus-affected State in the country, notched another dubious feat on Friday, as a record 116 people died of pandemic and 2,682 others tested positive, taking the total number deaths to 2,098 and infected cases jumped to 62,228 in the State.

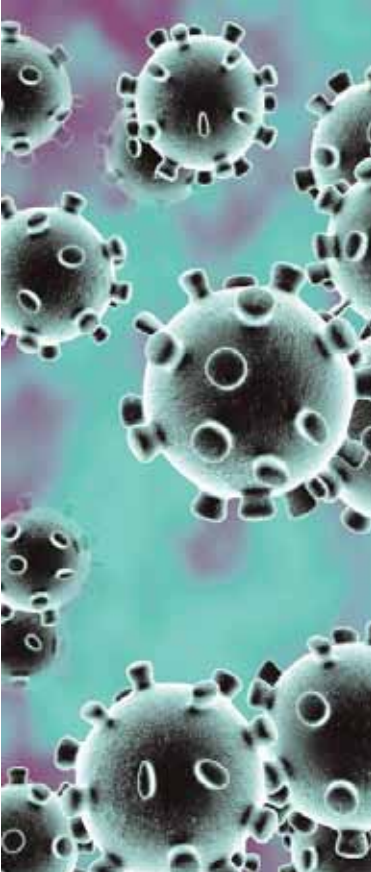
The coronavirus displayed its ferocious face on the fourth consecutive day, as it claimed 116 deaths and left 2,682 others infected in various parts of the State.

There have been a total of 403 deaths in Maharashtra during the last four days. On May 26 (Tuesday) the state had witnessed 97 deaths, while there were 105 deaths on Wednesday and 85 deaths on Thursday. Friday's death toll is 116.

With the latest fatalities, the death toll crossed 2,000 mark to reach 2,098. With the total infected cases standing at 62,228 and 8,381 patients having been discharged from various hospitals, the state health authorities pegged the active cases at 33,124.

Of the total deaths reported on Friday, Mumbai accounted for 38, while there were 17 deaths in Jalgaon, 13 in Pune, nine in Navi Mumbai, seven in Dhule, five each in Aurangabad and Malegaon, three each in Bhiwandi, Mira-Bhayandar, Nashik, Solapur, Kolhapur, two each in Raigad and Amaravati.

Of the dead, 77 were men while 39 were women. Forty eight of them were aged over 60 years, 55 were from the age group 40 to 59 years and 13 were aged



below 40 years.

“Seventy five out of 116 patients (65%) had high-risk co-morbidities such as diabetes hypertension, heart disease, etc,” a State health bulletin said.

Out of the total deaths reported today, 46 deaths occurred in the last two days and the rest are from the period May 16 to May 26 2020.

With new fatalities and infections, the total number of deaths increased to 1173 and infected cases rose to 36932 in Mumbai.

Out of 4,33,557 laboratory samples tested, 62,228 were positive for Covid-19 until Friday.

There are 2941 active containment zones in the State currently. Total 17,600 surveillance squads worked across the state on Friday and surveillance of 67.68 lakh people.

According to the key observations made in the report on Friday, patient doubling time for the state is now 15.7 days from 11 days in the last week. The recovery rate in the state is 43.38 per cent.

The mortality rate in the state: 3.37 per cent. Currently, 5,35,467 people are in home quarantine and 35,967 people are in institutional quarantine

Meanwhile, considering that the monsoon is around the corner, prevalence of other epidemic diseases other than Covid-19 also will possibly increase. On this background, the health department has started its preparation.

For Malaria, insecticide spraying has been planned in sensitive districts and swachhta surveillance is going on in the state for water quality.

Considering the increasing number of Covid-19 patients, the bed capacity is being increased as per the requirement in the three-tier system of Covid-19 health facilities.

Balancing act

India was quick to brush off US mediation on Ladakh. Besides, we can't afford to rub China the wrong way in the pandemic era



India finds itself in a peculiar situation, caught between the US and China over border tensions in Ladakh. While its strategic proximity to the first is a source of deep discontent for a hegemonic Asian power, the maverick support from US President Donald Trump, who offered to mediate in the crisis, has meant double trouble. Trump has made many mediation efforts on India's behalf at international fora before but the timing of this one in a post-pandemic world is different. More than India, it is a message to China. The US, which has made no bones about China fudging the scale and potency of the Wuhan contagion and is in a punishing mood, threatening to boycott it economically, is building an international coalition of opinion against the Middle Kingdom. It is, therefore, drawing India to be a part of this anti-China narrative, knowing full well that we could end up being among the top worst-hit nations and would have much to be suspicious about our eastern neighbour. In that sense, the US is feeding off India's weakened position, courtesy its plunging economy and a soaring public health crisis, as much as China is. The heightened tension at Ladakh is China's way of reminding India that it could light up the Himalayan border easily if we fell into the US trap of building a global campaign against it or block trade and investment here. In fact, given that we cannot end our import dependence on China overnight considering its manufacturing edge over ours, particularly when the pandemic has paralysed our economy, we just have to engage with China one on one. India, therefore, has rightly distanced itself, maintaining that it would solve issues with its neighbours through dialogue and diplomatic mechanisms rather than external intervention. China, too, which is used to speaking in a forked tongue, has already indicated diplomacy as a way around the impasse. India is well familiar with this blow-hot-blow-cold intimidatory tactic though the escalation this time is in sync with Chinese depredations in the region against neighbours. Clearly, Xi Jinping wants to justify the need for his muscular leadership by positing the world as an enemy out to finish China as he faces a fall in GDP, about 25 per cent unemployment, a plunging economy and the suppressed rage of a people, who will never know the damage the virus has done to them.

So what should India do? As Doklam has taught us, standing down is not always the way. Indian troops are now favourably placed in many positions and border infrastructure has been fairly ramped up over the last decade. Improved road corridors mean that we can now service requirements and replenish supplies even better. This is what has been exasperating the People's Liberation Army (PLA), which realises that its edge in the region is gradually being blunted and thinks that India might have ambitions in the Aksai Chin. So India should remain firm on legitimate positions. At the same time, it must step up diplomacy and keep at it rather than diverting itself to scaled up military conflicts as China is still a powerful neighbour. In fact, diplomacy, though requiring high-level intervention, may just work as the tussle this time is over areas that are not really disputed since 1962 and quite distant from the Line of Actual Control (LAC). Of course, this doesn't mean that China won't attempt transgressions and territorial intimidation to arm-twist us during crises. At the same time, if China rakes up the long Himalayan boundaries, we should pose a counter-weight by tying up with Southeast Asian nations and build pressure against Chinese expansionism in the South China Sea. We should discuss shared threats in the Indian Ocean region with Vietnam, Philippines, Australia, Indonesia and Malaysia. Diplomatically, we could circle China by galvanising the threat perception from it in the region and strengthening a security alliance. One can do this with increased diplomatic engagement without appearing too aggressive and risking a Chinese hitback. In fact, we must be prepared for more hostilities as India builds self-sufficiencies. India has stalled it from ambushing our economy by amending its foreign direct investment (FDI) rules to mandate Government approval for all investments from "border" countries and prevent hostile takeovers. We have already cancelled orders for Chinese test kits as they were faulty and have switched to South Korea and other nations. We are supporting a global impartial probe into the Wuhan contagion and though "vocal for local" may not have any scale now, China will not sit easy with the discomfort over 5G trials and a future shrinkage of its market in India.

Hell before healing

The dismal conditions at quarantine centres across the country are more killing than the disease itself



The word "quarantine centre" has become the colonial equivalent of "kaala paani" or confinement in the dreaded prison on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, where our freedom fighters were condemned to die in pitiable conditions. Now we are condemning COVID-19 patients as untouchables and leaving them to their fate if the horror stories of conditions at isolation zones are anything to go by. According to the Government's guidelines, each quarantine centre must have rooms/dormitories separated from one another with water, food, telephone, laundry and

sanitation services. But the reality is so different that the Allahabad High Court actually took suo motu cognisance of the unhygienic and inhuman conditions at various quarantine centres in Uttar Pradesh after an engineer succumbed to the infection at one but not before apprising his wife of his plight. More lives could have been saved had the conditions enabled recovery than worsening the health of patients. This is not an isolated case. There are reports coming in from across the country of unhygienic conditions, soiled sheets, a few dirty toilets for scores of people, no social distancing, no privacy, shortage of food leading to people fighting over it, flies, mosquitoes, snakebites, staff behaving in a rude manner, treating people like untouchables and throwing food packets at them, lack of medicines for those who have diseases like diabetes and heart ailments and disinterested doctors ignoring their duty. No wonder then that there have been reports of people trying to flee quarantine centres, not reporting their conditions and committing suicide. Even doctors have been up in arms about the sorry state of affairs. With the Government exiting the lockdown in a graded manner and the country seeing a surge in cases coupled with increasing testing, the pressure on these centres is bound to increase. How then will it deal with the situation?

The Government should increasingly consider home quarantining people as the public healthcare infrastructure is obviously overwhelmed. Plus, it can also think of roping in the private sector healthcare providers or hotels, which can be turned into quarantine centres for those who can afford to pay. There can be different budgets to suit different pockets. This will free up Government facilities and money for the millions who cannot afford to pay. Desperate times call for desperate measures and it is time we began looking for out-of-the-box solutions to deal with this unprecedented situation. Corporates can be asked to foot the bills of the centres and make the expense part of their CSR. The Government should have created the infrastructure during the lockdown period. The fact that it could not reflects poorly on it.

opinion06

Hysteria in a time of virus

The Corona pandemic has been killing far fewer people compared to road accidents and other causes. It has indeed brought out the best and the worst in humanity



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

Watching the public's and the Union and State Governments' response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the devastating progress of the cyclone Amphan, I was reminded of Charles Dickens' famous sentence in *A Tale of Two Cities*, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way — in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only."

There are parts of the sentence that are generally relevant to the times we live in India but not to the specific context we are talking about. Some parts do apply. For example, it is "the best of times" in terms of the courage, compassion and generosity shown by a number of people to help migrant workers, rendered unemployed by the lockdown. One of them is Pappan Singh Gehlot, a mushroom farmer in Delhi's Tigipur village, who has bought air tickets worth ₹68,000 to enable his migrant workers to return to their village in Bihar. He has also given each of them a cash advance of ₹3,000 so that they do not face any hardship on return, besides getting them medical certificates needed to fly. According to reports, Gehlot, who has been taking care of their food and accommodation since the lockdown began on March 25, did not want them to walk home given the risks, including those of accidents, involved. Interestingly, one of the reports has quoted him as saying that he had made several attempts to send them back to their home States by a Shramik Special train but could not manage to do so.

Another shining example is that of Akshay Kothawale, a 30-year-old auto driver in Pune, who is spending the ₹200,000 he had saved for his wedding to feed migrant workers and those in distress in the streets. With the help of his friends who have chipped in, he is feeding 400 people every day besides ferrying senior citizens and pregnant women to clinics.

Another example is that of the alumni association of the Bengaluru-based National Law School raising funds to charter an Air Asia Boeing A-320 aircraft to send 169 migrant workers and five children home from Mumbai to Ranchi in Jharkhand. According to Sheyl Trehan, one of those involved in the



venture, it was carried out in cooperation with Priya Sharma of the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences of IIT, Mumbai.

There are many other examples of individuals and NGOs going out of their ways to help migrant labourers and urban poor. They, however, constitute a small slice of the population. The overwhelming majority could not care less or are hostile. The indifference is manifest even in the case of the havoc wrought by the super-cyclone Amphan, which has devastated huge tracts in West Bengal and parts of Odisha. West Bengal bore the brunt of it. There were not more than 86 deaths thanks to the State Government's excellent work in evacuating people. The physical damage has been crippling. The Sunderbans, the world's largest mangrove forest and a wildlife sanctuary, has virtually been destroyed. Hundreds and thousands of people have been rendered homeless. Crops over thousands of square kilometres have been lost. According to the Kolkata Municipal Corporation, over 5,000 trees have been uprooted in the city — the figure may have been as high as 10,000 if the adjacent areas are included. Hundreds of lamp posts have been destroyed. Yet, having satisfied their voyeuristic instincts

in front of television sets, the overwhelming majority outside West Bengal and Odisha is now obsessed with COVID-19 and the threat the pandemic poses to them.

And this despite the fact that COVID-19, the first case of which was reported in India on January 30, 2020, has been killing far fewer people compared to road accidents and other causes. Thus, according to the latest figures, there have been over 166,000 cases, 71,196 cures and 4,706 deaths. This means, on a rough average, over 36 deaths per day since January 30. In sharp contrast, there are on an average 1,214 traffic accidents and 377 deaths from such mishaps, every day. There were 5.45 crore cases of, and 28 lakh cases of deaths from cardiovascular diseases in India in 2016.

It is this hysteria worked up over the COVID-19 pandemic which is one of the main reasons making this "the worst of times" in terms of the cruelty arising therefrom, and also the hypocrisy laid bare by the mismatch between official expressions of concern for migrant workers and their inhuman treatment on the ground. It is not just the fiasco of the efforts to take them home by special trains earmarked exclusively for them. It is also the widely

manifested attitude of not being sympathetic to the terrible suffering of migrant workers on highways, roads, airports, railway stations and inter-State borders — and regarding them as untouchables to be consigned to the peripheries of their villages or neighbourhood by locals fearing them spreading infection. And this despite wide dissemination through media of the fact that COVID-19 infects one only through close personal contact and home quarantine is good enough. Even single women and children are not spared!

The basic reason is fear and, in its fundamental sub-stratum, that of death. This is understandable. There is neither cure nor as yet a vaccine for COVID-19. Exaggerated fear, in the teeth of the availability of information, which shows its lack of basis, is, however, irrational and unwarranted. Like all fears, it should have been countered by an application of will. This has not happened. Instead, the majority of people in this country has been enveloped by a wild terror that has had the better of their humane instincts and rationality.

This leads to two other segments of Dickens' observation, "It was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness," and "it was the spring of hope, it was the

winter of despair." It is the age of wisdom in the sense that the people are beginning to realise that what many had taken for granted — that humans are the masters of the universe — is not true and that rationality is a fragile attribute. It is the age of foolishness in that the majority cannot still apply reason in a time of crisis. The hope lies in the shining conduct of a minority and the compassion and courage shown by even people from the most disprivileged sections, the despair from the selfishness and worse of the majority and the attitude of the Union and most of the State Governments to the plight of migrant workers.

It is a remarkable commentary on the state of affairs that the Supreme Court, on Thursday, had to forbid the railways and the State Governments from extracting train or bus fares from stranded migrant waiting to return home. The railways had to provide them with food and water during train journeys, while the States from which they were boarding would have to take care of their meals and water during bus journeys. One only wishes the order came earlier.

(The writer is Consultant Editor, The Pioneer, and an author)

SOUNDBITE

The Government's silence about the border situation with China is fueling massive speculation and uncertainty at a time of crisis. It must come clean and tell India exactly what's happening.

Congress leader
—Rahul Gandhi



This pandemic has reminded us that not everyone has the luxury to stay at home, and we have to be mindful and try helping in whatever way possible.

Actor
—Huma S Qureshi



Have a big conflict ... India and China. Two countries with 1.4 billion people (each). Two nations with very powerful militaries. India is not happy and probably China is not happy.

US President
—Donald Trump



At this stage, we cannot say that there is community spread of COVID-19 in Kerala. But, we are on the brink of community spread as cases have gone up.

Kerala CM
—Pinarayi Vijayan



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Reforms in PDS

Sir — This refers to the article, "Pandemic and PDS" (May 28) by Santosh Biswal and Uttam Chakraborty. It needs to be clarified that the exercise of State-wise coverage within the overall national coverage of the National Food Security Act (NFSA) was done by the erstwhile Planning Commission using 68th round of NSSO Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (2011-12).

The estimation took into account the monthly per capita expenditure of States and the inter-State price differentials to arrive at the consumption cut-offs for rural and urban areas for each State/UT. This was thereafter used to arrive at the percentage of persons falling below that cut-off level of expenditure separately for rural and urban areas. These percentages were then applied on the 2011 population Census to arrive at the number of persons in each State/UT both in rural and urban areas. This yielded the eligible population in the rural and urban areas in each State/UT.

The Planning Commission methodology is such that the coverage under NFSA is higher for those States/UTs, where the size of

Private hospitals must share the burden

This refers to the editorial, "The cost of care" (May 29). The Supreme Court has rightly questioned private hospitals for not giving free COVID treatment to affected patients. It is a fact that the growing number of cases has crippled Government hospitals. There is a need for private hospitals to coordinate with the Government to tide over the crisis. The Bench, headed by Chief Justice SA Bobde, has asked the Government to identify and prepare a list of hospitals where COVID patients can be treated free of cost.

At least the private hospitals can waive consultation, laboratory and ward charges for patients. The cost of medicines can be borne by them, too. In Government hospitals, too, at least 25 per cent of the cost of treatment and medicines should be borne by the patients. Then people will be careful enough to stay away from infected people. Since the Government has been bearing the treatment cost, some people are not following

the population below the cut-off level of expenditure is relatively large in proportion to their total population *vis-à-vis* those States where the proportion was smaller. Thus, while the all-India coverage is up to 75 per cent of the rural and up to 50 per cent of the urban population, this percentage is much higher for the less developed States/UTs. For instance, in Assam 84.17 per cent of the rural population and 60.35 per cent of the urban population is covered under

NFSA. Further, as per Section 10 of the Act, most States have evolved their own exclusion/inclusion criterion under targetted Public Distribution System (PDS).

The authors are seemingly attempting to highlight the problems in PDS but not noticing the technology-driven reforms and solutions already implemented by the Centre in collaboration with all State/UT Governments. They surprisingly miss out on the following facts regarding PDS reform:

■ Coverage of 67 per cent beneficiaries under NFSA is not a distant dream. Around 81 crore people are already covered under the Act to receive subsidised food-grains through PDS on a monthly basis. ■ Ration cards/beneficiaries data in all States/UTs have been completely digitised and available on respective State/UT portals. Foodgrains are also being distributed through electronic Point of Sale devices in most of the States/UTs.



the guidelines. In many places, COVID warriors have also been attacked. Also, it is unfair to expect private hospitals to attend only to COVID patients. Those suffering from other diseases should not be neglected. As things stand now, other patients have been badly neglected with some fatalities as well.

KV Seetharamaiah
Hassan

■ "One nation, one ration card" is already enabled in 17 States/UTs. ■ So far, 146 LMT foodgrains have been delivered to NFSA beneficiaries during April and May 2020 under regular NFSA and Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PM-GKAY). Further, distribution is also under progress. ■ Also, the "Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan" is being implemented to reach out to all such people who may not have NFSA or State ration cards, including migrants/stranded migrants but are in need for temporary ration.

A proper review of the above initiatives on a factual basis should have been done before naming some States as "doubly disadvantaged." This is a lack of proper understanding of facts and ongoing reforms, which often leads to unsubstantiated criticism of the PDS of having imaginary in-built inequity. The Government always welcomes further improvement in the system and is open to any constructive criticism as it helps in improvement of the system for the benefit of the poor.

Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

Build cyber resilience

As cyber attacks soar, a data recovery plan must be fully integrated within the business and align with its cloud strategy



RIPU **BAJWA**

During these extraordinary times, when the world is fighting against the deadly COVID-19 pandemic, other threats like the danger of catastrophic cyber attacks have fast mushroomed alongside. As business leaders come face to face with rising cases across the world and in India, the need to be prepared with better data security solutions arises. The World Economic Forum’s *Global Risks Report, 2020* ranks cyber attacks as the second risk of greatest concern to businesses in the coming decade. As the tools of the Darknet become more sophisticated and accessible, cyber attacks are becoming increasingly borderless — taking advantage of jurisdictional constraints of regional authorities.

According to an industry research by Frost & Sullivan, 46 per cent of Indian organisations that are in the process of digital transformation have encountered a security incident in 2019. In fact, as per another industry report released recently, India witnessed a two to three-fold increase in the number of cyber attack incidents during the ongoing lockdown that began on March 25.

As it is, cybercrime constitutes a serious problem for India even outside of crisis periods. India was among the top five most targeted countries in the world by cyber criminals in recent years, reflecting the significant amount of work still outstanding in strengthening the nation’s cyber defences. Though it is a positive development that more than 550 million Indians have connected to the Internet in recent years, fuelled by rural growth, this comes with its own set of problems. The rapid proliferation of Internet users and of the Internet of Things (IoT) has also left the country’s public and private sectors vulnerable. We are seeing more and more large-scale data loss and the rise of ransomware attacks — so business resilience planning is key to survival.

Why medium-sized businesses must act now: Reacting in real time to a cyber attack is already too late. Managing the risk requires agility, meticulous alignment across the business and testing to maintain awareness. It is all about being proactive rather than reactive. Cyber resilience is more important than ever as medium-sized businesses assess their risk of being attacked, whether at the hands of criminals or as collateral damage in cyber warfare. Any data loss can put the nails in the coffin for unprepared businesses. While today’s business leaders may hope to evade the hit-list, it is a matter of “when” not “if” an attack happens.

Defending against catastrophic data loss: Defending a medium-sized business from the worst-case scenario and mission-critical data loss requires cyber security expertise and a holistic approach to resilience. Awareness needs to be built across the business — this is not just a technical problem. Synergy between technology and business processes is where true resilience is attained. Learning on cyber experts when it comes to planning and implementation will help businesses identify key applications, recovery times and objectives.

Every arm of the business needs to understand where its most sensitive data and services are parked and the level of risk around them. To understand the level of risk, an agile approach is needed because risk changes along with the business landscape. For this reason, regular scans and analysis of the internal landscape are essential to understand these changes and the impact.

Protecting a huge portfolio of assets is not easy, especially as it expands. But every business must understand what its DNA is — that’s the critical 10-15 per cent of data that must be protected at all costs. This is the lifeblood of an organisation and, in the event of a cyber-attack, is the difference between its life and death. It is business-critical and must be decided upon with a holistic view. For some organisations, this can often lead to analysis paralysis — the desire to save it all. In the same way that we would only carry our most essential belongings from a burning home, businesses must decide upon their most prized data so that it can be protected and used to recover the business in the aftermath.

There is a cure: The good news is this process can be simplified by data protection and cyber-security services that enable organisations to establish policy-driven automated workflows to move business-critical data into an isolated environment and lock it down in less than five steps. This is called a cyber-vault, the ultimate protection for a business’ DNA.

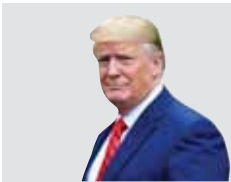
In the event of an attack, this data will help businesses to recover. When responding to cyber incidents and working to bring critical systems and data back online, accuracy and simplicity matter. A cyber recovery plan must be fully integrated within the business and align with its cloud strategy.

Businesses are increasingly aware of the dangers of a cyber attack but they need to truly invest in cyber resilience in order to shore up the gaps in the ever-changing work environment. And cyber security expertise is vital. The clock is ticking, it’s not a matter of “if” but “when” and businesses need to be prepared.

(The writer is Director and General Manager, Data Protection Solutions, Dell Technologies)

WE CAN’T ALLOW SOME PLATFORMS TO HAND-PICK THE SPEECH THAT AMERICANS MAY ACCESS. THIS WILL BE A BIG DAY FOR SOCIAL MEDIA AND FAIRNESS.

—US PRESIDENT
DONALD TRUMP



THE PRESIDENT IS TRAMPLING THE FIRST AMENDMENT BY THREATENING THE FUNDAMENTAL FREE SPEECH RIGHTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS.

—PRESIDENT OF NETCHOICE
STEVE DELBIANCO

The perfect blend

Blended finance combines public sector and philanthropic monies as catalytic capital to raise multiples of private sector monies, which help scale up the flow of funding to sustainable projects



SOURAJIT
AIYER

SANDEEP
BHATTACHARYA

As sustainability becomes mainstream, it is becoming a well-acknowledged fact that the planet just does not possess the resources required for us to maintain our current consumption patterns and emulate the aspirational lifestyles of the West. The estimated growth in global population to 10 billion in the not too distant future is an added headwind. This situation has meant that driving efficiencies in resource usage is fast coming into public discourse to reduce the carbon footprint. This is translating into necessary assets that would need funding. Such examples abound, like fuel-efficient cars, migration of public transport to e-vehicles, high-speed rail in place of airlines, urban Mass Rapid Transit trains substituting fuel-run vehicles, micro grids for far-flung communities instead of diesel generators and so on.

While these assets, which are typically part of large-scale transformational projects, are funded either by the Government or by concessional loans from development financial institutions, public capital is not going to fulfil the need for the trillions of dollars of investment the planet requires to scale up projects that would usher in the desired sustainability goals.

However, the biggest challenge to bringing private capital at scale is the fact that most projects do not offer commercially-viable returns, owing to high upfront costs, long payback, remote location of some projects, nascent technologies and in certain cases, political uncertainties, weak institutional frameworks and so on.

This is where blended finance has come up as a solution in this context. It combines public sector and philanthropic monies as catalytic capital to raise multiples of private sector monies, which help scale up the flow of funding to sustainable projects, while yielding substantial economic benefits to all stakeholders.

The blended finance structure addresses the projects’ perceived risks, thereby helping increase the size and number of funding opportunities. It comprises funding, which may or may not be concessional, supported with one or more elements like guarantees, political risk insurance, performance insurance, outcome-based funding, interest subvention, concessional or off-market local currency hedging, project preparation grants and so on.

This combination makes the projects’ terms viable for private sector capital and for the project developer, who otherwise may not have met the criteria without the assistance these supporting mechanisms bring in.

Among the emerging markets, India is leading the way by developing successful blended finance models. These are worth emulating in other markets that have a similar development profile as India in order to bring blended finance to a global scale.

In India, the Government’s Viability Gap Funding (VGF) model is one such success-story. Launched in 2004, it supports projects under the Public Private Partnership (PPP) mechanism. VGF grants were made essentially for infrastructure projects where private sector sponsors were selected via competitive bidding. The grant was disbursed at the construction stage after the private sector developer made an equity contribution towards the project. This grant is typically 20 per cent of the project’s capital cost and is allocated from the Government’s budget.

The Government then went a step ahead by defining the norms of how VGF would apply to utility-scale renewable energy projects, specifying

“IN THE END, COMPULSIONS LIKE CLIMATE CHANGE, GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS, SUBSTITUTING THE IMPORT COST OF FOSSIL FUELS AND DRIVING ECONOMIC GROWTH THROUGH ‘GREEN SECTORS’ WILL NECESSITATE AN URGENT SCALE-UP IN SUSTAINABILITY PROJECTS. TO ACHIEVE THIS, INNOVATIVE MECHANISMS TO RAISE DEDICATED GREEN CAPITAL WILL HOLD THE KEY, ESPECIALLY AS INDIAN BANKS CANNOT ALWAYS FUND THE LONG MATURITIES THAT SUSTAINABILITY PROJECTS ENTAIL. WHILE BLENDED FINANCE CANNOT SOLVE ALL THE ISSUES, IT CAN CERTAINLY ADDRESS SOME OF THE BARRIERS



the role of the Solar Energy Corporation of India in terms of evaluation, disbursement and monitoring.

Another example is that of cKers Finance and Rockefeller Foundation. Inked in 2018, their partnership involves an investment by Rockefeller in the Delhi-based sustainable energy Non-Banking Financial Company (NBFC) to build a \$50 million asset financing portfolio for scaling up India’s decentralised renewable energy segment (DRE).

The Rockefeller investment would help cKers provide funding access at reasonable rates and terms to build the sustainable energy portfolio about 10 per cent of which would be in mini-grids. While the national grid has reached almost all places in India, the quality of supply remains erratic and thus DRE solutions like micro and mini-grids hold value.

Then there is the US-India Clean Energy Finance (USICEF) programme, which supports distributed solar power projects through grants specifically for early-stage project preparation support. Managed by the Climate Policy Initiative, it is a partnership between India’s renewable energy ministry, the US’ Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) and others. Developers apply to the USICEF, which maintains an empanelled list of service providers (legal and professional services consultancies and so on) and engages them with the grant.

The project preparation support makes these developers investment-ready to raise funding from OPIC and other like-minded firms. The average grant is only about \$0.1 million or so but this is a significant challenge for the developers given their small scale and the limitations they face in resources and talent acquisition.

This programme, with a total \$3.5 million grant committed so far, has supported several rooftop solar, small ground-mounted and solar home system projects across more than a dozen Indian States. Last is the “pay for success” outcome funder model. Grameen Impact Investment, a Mumbai-based impact NBFC, launched social impact bonds addressing women’s livelihood and

empowerment, youths’ skill-development and clean energy. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) spending by organisations in India has risen exponentially in recent years, mostly towards health and education. However, India’s Human Development Index score, which includes mostly health and education indicators, has hardly improved.

While CSR is only one component of India’s social sector spending, this does give some indication that actual achievement of outcomes is perhaps found wanting at times. The outcome funder model attempts to close this gap. The pre-defined outcome metrics are independently verified by third-party evaluators for on-ground achievement, only upon which the outcome funder (a philanthropy or CSR fund) would meet the enterprise’s interest and/or principle obligations — thus “pay for success.”

This ensures that the philanthropic resources are leveraged in a manner that will help achieve outcomes far more than what direct spending could possibly do.

Other blended models abound globally, each of which can potentially be replicated in India. The US-India Catalytic Solar Finance Facility used catalytic, first-loss capital to create risk-mitigation facilities. The Grid Solar Fund, which funds off-grid solar companies, raised \$10 million in political risk insurance from OPIC to attract investments from the private sector.

Climate Investor One Fund raised blended capital at about 1.7 times multiple with a tiered-structure, which bifurcates capital into first-loss, subordinated equity and debt with credit guarantee to make lenders comfortable. Denmark’s Climate Investment Fund raised blended capital at over 1.7 times multiple, by using a preferential model where losses are shared equally by public and private investors but the latter enjoy a preferential return and a catch-up option.

At the same time, a preferential model based on share classes was less effective. The Global Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Fund, which paid principal and interest in batches between its A and B share classes, could raise

blended capital only at about 0.8 times multiple.

Models apart, another merit of blended finance is that it can cover areas traditionally unserved by conventional funding, like US’ Prime Coalition, which invests in early-stage clean energy technologies, the Africa Clean Energy Facility, which focusses on project preparation and expects to raise a multiple of about 20 times its grants and IFC-GEF’s China Utility Energy Efficiency Programme, which helped local banks lend for energy efficiency.

Blended finance can also mobilise commercial bank participation as seen in Dutch bank FMO’s Guarantco that grants partial credit guarantees to local banks, Indonesia’s Sarulla geothermal project that used a political risk guarantee from Japan’s JBIC and a guarantee letter from the Indonesian Government to bring in commercial bank funding, German KfW and ResponsAbility’s Global Climate Partnership Fund that refinances green lending schemes of local banks or Africa Development Bank’s Facility for Energy Inclusion that combines commercial capital for small-scale energy access projects.

In the end, compulsions like climate change, greenhouse gas emissions, substituting the import cost of fossil fuels and driving economic growth through “green sectors” will necessitate an urgent scale-up in sustainability projects. To achieve this, innovative mechanisms to raise dedicated green capital will hold the key, especially as Indian banks cannot always fund the long maturities that sustainability projects entail. While blended finance cannot solve all the issues, it can certainly address some of the barriers. The models discussed in this article have already shown demonstrable value which makes them worth emulating. Most of them can be potentially replicated and scaled up further to fund India’s multitude sustainability challenges. Emerging markets with similar challenges to India should also take note.

(Aiyer is Consultant, South Asia Fast Track Sustainability Communications and Bhattacharya is India Projects Manager, Climate Bonds Initiative)

Climate change lessons from the Corona crisis

We clearly need to speed up research and testing of the various potential techniques for geo-engineering now



GWYNNE **DYER**

Human beings respond well to a familiar crisis, especially if it is also imminent. They don’t do nearly as well when the threat is unfamiliar and still apparently quite distant. Consider our response to the current Coronavirus threat. Countries in East Asia with recent experience of similar viruses like SARS and so on immediately responded with “test, track and isolate” drills, plus instant lockdowns if the virus had already

gained a foothold in the population. Other countries, just as rich and well-educated, had the same information but they waited several months before taking emergency measures that upset the comfortable routine of their lives. So the US, UK and France all ended up with death rates per million more than 50 times higher than China, Korea and Japan.

The same applies to global heating, except that in this case we are all Americans. None of us has prior experience of a genuine climate crisis and although we have known enough about what’s going to happen to justify urgent action for 30 years now, we have done nothing decisive about it. We have lots of “clean” technology but total demand for energy has grown so fast that we are still getting a steady 80 per cent of our energy from fossil fuels. Realistically, this is not going to change much. We are who we are,

shaped by millions of years of evolution and our ancestors didn’t do long-term planning; they had to concentrate on acute short-term problems. A truly serious response to the climate threat will, therefore, come only when it is starting to hurt. Unfortunately, by then it will probably be too late.

The Earth system — the biosphere, atmosphere, the oceans, the rocks, all the components that govern the climate — plays by its own rules. It will absorb new inputs like warming for a long time while changing as little as possible: It is a “homeostatic” system. We are still benefiting from this feature now: A full degree Celsius of warming already and not much to show for it except hotter summers, shorter winters and bigger storms. But when the pressure on the climate system gets too great — reaches a tipping point — it is liable to charge off in

unpredictable directions at high speed.

“Non-linear change”, they call it and we won’t like it a bit. Hundreds of millions, maybe billions, will start to die. Then we will be ready to make great changes to save ourselves but it will be too late. Human systems will be collapsing under the impact of famines, wars and endless waves of refugees. And besides, once the climate hits non-linear change, it is almost impossible to bring it back. We’re stuck with wherever it ends up, whether that new state will support a large human civilisation or not.

How far ahead is this calamity? We probably have at least a decade or two. Will we end all our greenhouse gas emissions in that time? Probably not. Cutting our emissions isn’t enough. We have to stop all of our emissions before we push the climate system over the edge and we don’t even know precisely where the edge

is. Every bit of emissions we can cut now gives us a little more time before we reach the edge, but the global population will still be going up and people in the poorer countries will still be increasing their energy use. (It’s their turn and you can’t deny them that.)

So, the crisis almost certainly will arrive and then we will finally be willing to make radical changes. What we will desperately need at that point is more time. That’s why we will need geo-engineering. This is not a cure; it is a way of temporarily counteracting the warming caused by our emissions of greenhouse gases by reflecting a small part of the incoming sunlight in one way or another. In fact, you could say that it is “positive” geo-engineering, as opposed to the large-scale “negative” geo-engineering we have been doing for the last two centuries by dumping huge amounts of warming gases into the atmosphere.

When we are finally ready to act decisively on global warming, we will need a window of time to make the changes that are required to preserve this global civilisation and the biosphere it now dominates. Only geo-engineering can create that window. We don’t need to start geo-engineering now. It would be wonderful if we never have to do it but that would take a miracle. We cannot know how long we would have to go on doing it, either: Long enough to get the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere back down to a safe level, certainly, which would be at least a matter of decades. But even without knowing the answers to these questions, we clearly need to speed up research and testing of the various potential techniques for geo-engineering now.

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



LOW SPIRITS ON THE HIGH STREET

Shops shutting, jobs lost, massive commercial landlords wiped out. The future of our community hubs looks bleak. Building a replacement will require more public intervention and tax breaks for firms which employ and procure supplies locally. It won’t be easy but it is an opportunity. *(The Guardian editorial)*

WESTERN COUNTRIES WARNED

Hong Kong internal matter, don't interfere: China

Beijing: China has lodged diplomatic protests with the US, the UK, Canada and Australia for “interfering” in its internal matters by criticising its new security law for Hong Kong and also warned America of countermeasures if it did not stop the “frivolous” political manipulation over the issue.

China's parliament on Thursday overwhelmingly approved a new controversial security law for Hong Kong, a move that critics say threatens the fundamental political freedoms and civil liberties in the semi-autonomous territory, also a major global trading hub.

The security legislation bans secession, subversion of state power, terrorism, foreign intervention and allows mainland China's state security agencies to operate in Hong Kong.

“China's decision to impose the new national security law on Hong Kong lies in direct conflict with its international obligations under the principles of the legally binding, UN-registered Sino-British Joint Declaration,” the joint statement released by the four countries said.

The proposed Chinese law would undermine the “one country, two systems” frame-

work, the four allies said in the statement, referring to the arrangement under which Hong Kong, a former British colony, was handed back to China in 1997.

Reacting to the four countries' statement, China's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Zhao Lijian told a media briefing on Friday that China has lodged diplomatic protests with the four countries.

Hong Kong is part of China and the central government has the right to establish a national-level legal system to implement ‘one country, two systems’, Zhao said.

It is China's internal affair and no foreign country has the right to interfere, he said.

Separately, the Trump administration informed the US Congress that Hong Kong was deemed no longer suitably autonomous from China.

The assessment by the US State Department is a crucial step in deciding whether the city will continue to receive preferential economic and trade treatment from the US as spelt out by the 1992 US-Hong Kong Policy Act.

About US President Donald Trump's plans to

impose sanctions on Hong Kong, Zhao reminded Washington about its extensive trade and commercial interest in the city and said China would retaliate with counter-measures.

Hong Kong after returning to China fully leveraged its position as an international business hub.

“It is a financial trade and shipping hub. It is an important area for US investments,” Zhao said. The US has 85,000 nationals in Hong Kong and has over 1,300 companies in the city. American firms have over 300 regional headquarters and 400 regional offices in Hong Kong, he said.

In the past decade, the US trade surplus to Hong Kong reached USD 297 billion, he said.

“Safe, sound and stable Hong Kong serves the interest of the US. We welcome US business communities to continue making more progress and success in Hong Kong.”

“The US should see clearly and stop interfering in Hong Kong. If the US insists on intervening, China will take all necessary countermeasures,” Zhao said. **PTI**

Protest in Hong Kong

Hong Kong: Dozens of people protested in a mall in Hong Kong on Friday following a vote by China's ceremonial parliament to approve legislation that could severely restrict opposition political activity and civil society in the Asian financial center.

The protesters chanted slogans in the main atrium of the mall in the high-end Central district, some draping banners over the balconies with slogans such as “Independence for Hong Kong.”

Police waited in vans parked prominently outside the mall but did not attempt to break up the gathering. Hundreds of people have been arrested during recent demonstrations that seek to revive the momentum of protests that shut down large parts of the city during the second half of last year.

China's National People's Congress on Thursday voted to approve the bill that will now be sent to its standing committee for final approval.

Details of the final version of the law aren't known, but

China says it will prohibit separatist activities and actions that might threaten the Communist Party's monopoly on political power in mainland China.

Beijing and its supporters in Hong Kong are defending the legislative move against criticism from foreign countries, including the U.S., which has threatened to revoke special trade privileges granted to the former British colony when it was handed over to China in 1997 under a “one country, two systems” framework in which it was guaranteed its own political, legal, social and legal institutions for 50 years.

In Beijing, foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said China would not tolerate any interference in what it considers a strictly internal matter.

“We advise the U.S. Side to have a correct understanding of the situation and stop interfering in Hong Kong affairs and China's internal affairs. If the U.S. Insists on jeopardizing China's interests, China will definitely take all necessary measures to fight back.” **AP**

UK to extend visa rights for HK unless China ‘steps back’

London: The UK government has said that it is open to extending the visa rights of British National Overseas (BNO) passport holders in Hong Kong to offer them a path to the country's citizenship unless China “steps back” from a new security law in the former British territory.

China's parliament on Thursday approved the new law which would make it a crime to undermine Beijing's authority in Hong Kong.

An estimated 300,000 BNO passport holders in Hong Kong currently have the right to visit the UK for up to six months without a visa. These passports were issued by the UK to people in the region before the transfer of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty in 1997.

“In relation to BNO passport holders, currently they only have the right to come to the UK for 6 months,” said UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab. “If China continues

down this path and implements this national security legislation, we will change that status. And we will remove that six-month limit and allow those BNO passport holders to come to the UK and to apply to work and study for extendable periods of 12 months and that will itself provide a pathway to future citizenship,” he said.

According to reports, the proposal has the backing of Indian-origin Home Secretary Priti Patel, with details yet to be fleshed out.

Some British MPs want the UK government to go further and offer automatic citizenship to BNO holders in Hong Kong. Conservative Party MP Tom Tugendhat, chairman of the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee, said BNO holders should have an automatic right to live and work in the UK.

“We must move faster in recognising the rights of the most entrepreneurial people in

Asia, and speak out for those who we know so well back in the region. We should also build partnerships that can defend the rule of law worldwide,” he said.

Raab's intervention followed a strongly-worded joint statement by the UK, US, Australia and Canada condemning Beijing's proposed new law.

“China's decision to impose the new national security law on Hong Kong lies in direct conflict with its international obligations under the principles of the legally-binding, UN-registered Sino-British Joint Declaration,” the joint statement said.

“As Hong Kong's stability and prosperity are jeopardised by the new imposition, we call on the government of China to work with the Hong Kong SAR Government and the people of Hong Kong to find a mutually acceptable accommodation that will honour China's international obligations under the UN-filed Sino-British Joint Declaration,” it said. **PTI**

Trump calls Minneapolis protesters ‘thugs’, vows action

Washington: President Donald Trump on Friday threatened to take action to bring the city of Minneapolis “under control,” calling violent protesters outraged by the death of a black man in police custody “thugs” and saying that “when the looting starts, the shooting starts.”

Trump tweeted after protesters torched a Minneapolis police station, capping three days of violent protests US over the death of George Floyd, who pleaded for air as a white police officer knelt on his neck.

He said he spoke to the state's Democratic governor, Tim Walz, and “told him that the Military is with him all the way. Any difficulty and we will assume control but, when the looting starts, the shooting starts. Thank you!”

Trump didn't clarify what he meant — Walz has already activated the National Guard — but the tweet drew another warning from Twitter for his rhetoric, with the social media giant saying he had “violated the Twitter Rules about glorifying violence.”

The move came a day after Trump signed an executive



A protester carries a US flag upside, a sign of distress, next to a burning building in Minneapolis on Thursday

AP

order challenging the site's liability protections.

Trump, who has often remained silent in the aftermath of police-involved killings and has a long history of defending police, has been uncharacteris-

tically vocal this time, saying earlier Thursday that he felt “very, very badly” about Floyd's death and calling video capturing his struggle “a very shocking sight.”

But his language grew more

aggressive as violence boiled over in Minneapolis on Thursday night. “These THUGS are dishonoring the memory of George Floyd, and I won't let that happen,” he wrote shortly before 1 am. **AP**

Minneapolis police station torched

AP ■ MINNEAPOLIS

Cheering protesters torched a Minneapolis police station that the department abandoned as three days of violent protests spread to nearby St Paul and angry demonstrations flared across the US over the death of George Floyd, a handcuffed black man who pleaded for air as a white police officer knelt on his neck.

A police spokesman confirmed late Thursday that staff had evacuated the 3rd Precinct station, the focus of many of the protests, “in the interest of the safety of our personnel” shortly after 10 pm. Livestream video showed the protesters entering the building, where fire alarms blared and sprinklers ran as flames were set.

7 shot at Louisville protest over fatal police shooting

Louisville (US): At least seven people were shot in Louisville as protesters turned out to demand justice for Breonna Taylor, a black woman fatally shot by police in her home in March.

Louisville Metro Police confirmed in a statement early Friday that there were at least seven shooting victims, at least one of whom is in critical condition. The statement said there were “some arrests,” but police didn't provide a number.

“No officers discharged their service weapons,” police spokesman Sgt. Lamont Washington wrote in an email to The Associated Press. Washington said that all seven were civilians.

Around 500 to 600 demonstrators marched through the Kentucky city's downtown streets on Thursday night, the Courier Journal reported. **AP**

Malaysia's Mahathir ousted from party amid power struggle

Kuala Lumpur: Malaysia's former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has been ousted from his ethnic Malay political party in the latest twist of a power struggle with his successor, but he has vowed to challenge the move.

The 94-year-old Mahathir, along with his son and three other senior members, were expelled from the Bersatu party on Thursday.

The party has been split into two camps since intense political wrangling led Mahathir to resign the premiership in February and the king to appoint fellow party member Muhyiddin Yassin as his replacement despite Mahathir's objections.

Mahathir's son Mukhriz Mahathir had since challenged Muhyiddin as party president in a vote that's been postponed by the coronavirus pandemic.

“The unilateral action by Bersatu's president to sack us without valid reason is due to his own fears in facing party elections as well as his unsafe position as the most unstable prime minister in the history of the country's administration,” a joint statement by Mahathir and the four others read.

Mahathir co-founded Bersatu with Muhyiddin in 2016, and the party joined an alliance that won a stunning victory in 2018 polls, leading to the first change of government since independence.

The ruling alliance collapsed after Muhyiddin pulled Bersatu out to work with the former government, which has

been accused of massive corruption.

Mahathir, a two-time prime minister, resigned in protest. Mahathir has said he still has the majority support of lawmakers and has called for a no-confidence vote against Muhyiddin.

The vote has been delayed amid the pandemic but could be held at the next sitting of Parliament in July.

In their statement, Mahathir and the other expelled members said the move was illegal and they may take legal action to challenge their termination and ensure Bersatu isn't used as a vehicle for those crazy for power.

Party letters sent to the five said their membership had ceased as they sat with the opposition bloc during a half-day Parliament sitting on May 18.

But the letter was signed by a lower official who Mahathir's group and others said had no power to remove them.

“All eyes are on Mahathir's next move,” said Oh Ei Sun, a senior fellow at the Singapore Institute of International Affairs.

“Muyhiddin would be gravely mistaken if he thinks this will slow down Mahathir's relentless onslaught to not so much unseat him, but topple the present ruling coalition.” Muhyiddin had earlier tried to reconcile with Mahathir, but failed.

The current government includes the party of ex-Prime Minister Najib Razak, who is on trial on charges related to a massive financial scandal. **AP**

Twitter again flags Trump's tweet, says it violated rules about ‘glorifying violence’

Washington: A defiant Twitter on Friday flagged a fresh tweet from Donald Trump for violating its rules about “glorifying violence,” hours after the US president signed an executive order aimed at stripping social media giants like Twitter and Facebook of legal immunity for the content posted by third-party users.

The move came after Trump tweeted that “when the

looting starts, the shooting starts” in reference to the ongoing unrest in Minneapolis following the death of George Floyd, a handcuffed African American man who pleaded for air as a white police officer knelt on his neck.

Twitter had earlier added fact-check links to two of Trump's tweets, enraging Trump.

“These thugs are dishon-

ouring the memory of George Floyd, and I won't let that happen. Just spoke to Governor Tim Walz and told him that the Military is with him all the way. Any difficulty and we will assume control but, when the looting starts, the shooting starts. Thank you!” Trump tweeted.

Twitter flagged the tweet, which is now only visible if one clicks on Twitter's flag. **PTI**

Trump feeling ‘absolutely great’ after taking HCQ: WH

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump is feeling “absolutely great” after taking a two-week dose of antimalarial drug hydroxychloroquine and will take it again if he thinks he is exposed to the coronavirus, a top White House official has said.

Hydroxychloroquine sulfate was first synthesised in 1946 and is in a class of medications historically used to

treat and prevent malaria. It is approved by the US Food and Drug Administration to treat malaria, rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, childhood arthritis, and other autoimmune diseases.

The drug is not FDA-approved for the treatment of COVID-19 but it has been identified as a possible treatment for the infection and the US government has requested its immediate availability.

Trump has called hydroxychloroquine a “game-chang-

er” drug in the fight against the coronavirus.

“I went to him just before coming out here and I asked him that. And he said, ‘he's feeling perfect’, he is ‘feeling absolutely great’ after taking this regimen. And, he would take it again if he thought that he was exposed,” White House Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnaney said on Thursday when asked how the US president was feeling after taking the antimalarial drug.

S Africa has virus testing backlog of nearly 100,000

AP ■ JOHANNESBURG

South Africa says it has a backlog of nearly 100,000 unprocessed tests for the coronavirus, a striking example of the painful shortage of testing kits and reagents across Africa as cases steadily rise.

“This challenge is caused by the limited availability of test kits globally,” the health ministry said in a statement overnight putting the backlog at 96,480 as of Monday.

Priority is given to processing tests from patients admitted to hospitals and health workers, it said.

South Africa has conducted more tests for the virus than any other country in Africa — more than 655,000 — and has the most confirmed cases with 27,403.

One of the latest people to die in South Africa was an employee with the National Health Laboratory Services.

“We understand this tragedy will certainly test you,” the ministry said in a message to her colleagues, adding that the government is committed to providing proper protective gear.

That, too, faces shortages across Africa. More than 3,400 health workers on the continent had been infected as of a week ago, according to the World Health Organisation.

The widespread shortages, especially in testing materials, have jolted African authorities into facing uncomfortable truths: Richer countries are elbowing them out in the race to obtain crucial supplies, and the continent relies almost entirely on imports for drugs and other medical items.

“We have to have Made in Africa products,” the director of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, John Nkengasong, told reporters Thursday.

Minorities in Pak's KPK allowed to worship at religious places

Peshawar: Minority communities like Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province were allowed on Friday to hold prayers and worship at their religious sites by following social distancing and other measures enforced to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

Several provincial governments banned gathering of more than five people for worship in religious places to stop the spread of the coronavirus, which has infected over 64,000 people and killed 1,346 in the country so far.

Succumbing to pressure from the headline clerics, the Imran Khan government last month allowed conditional congregational prayers in mosques during the month of Ramadan.

The government on Friday allowed minority communities like Sikhs, Hindus and Christians to worship and hold prayers under standard operating procedures (SOPs) notified by the Provincial Government of KPK against COVID-19. **PTI**

UN urges \$2.4 billion to help Yemen cope with war and virus

United Nations: The U.N. Humanitarian chief urgently appealed for \$2.4 billion to help millions of people in Yemen cope with the conflict and COVID-19, saying programs are already being cut and the situation is “alarming.”

Mark Lowcock told a UN briefing on Thursday that the United Nations received \$3.2 billion last year for Yemen because countries in the region — including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates who are involved in the conflict — stepped up.

This year, the U.N. Has appealed for about \$3.4 billion but as of Wednesday it had only received \$516.6 million, just over 15%. The Saudis pledged \$525 million in early April and Lowcock said he hopes it will quickly be turned into cash.

The United Nations and Saudi Arabia are co-hosting a video pledging conference for Yemen on Tuesday and Lowcock said he has been on the phone with Persian Gulf leaders in recent days but does-

n't know what they're going to do. The collapse in oil prices because of the pandemic may be spurring internal discussions, he said.

Lowcock said he expects high-level representation at the conference, and asked: “Is the world ready simply to watch Yemen fall off the cliff?” Yemen's conflict started with Houthi Shiite rebels backed by Iran capturing the capital, Sanaa, in 2014.

The following year, a Saudi-led coalition backing the government intervened to battle the rebels and curb Iran's influence in what has turned into a stale-mated regional proxy war. Since then, more than 100,000 people — fighters and civilians — have been killed.

Lowcock and the heads of 10 other U.N. Agencies and several U.N. Officials and humanitarian organizations issued a joint statement Thursday saying “COVID-19 is spreading rapidly across the country already experiencing the world's largest humanitarian crisis.” **AP**

France reports highest single-day rise in virus cases

Paris: France has reported more than 3,000 new daily virus infections in the biggest such one-day rise in more than three weeks - and the first major increase since France started gradually reopening May 11.

The new figure was not included in the government's daily virus press release Thursday night, but was put on a government virus tracking website.

The national public health agency and Health Ministry didn't provide a reason for the rise Friday.

It comes as testing has become more easily available in France, though it is unclear whether that is part of the reason.

The French government has gradually increased the number of tests it is conducting after widespread criticism early in the pandemic that it was not testing widely enough. Scattered virus outbreaks have been reported since France's reopening began, notably in some schools that were subsequently shut down. **AP**

Debate over \$600 in jobless aid to intensify as claims rise

Washington: A debate in Congress over whether to extend \$600 a week in federal-provided benefits to the unemployed looks sure to intensify with the number of people receiving the aid now topping 30 mn — one in five workers.

The money, included in a government relief package enacted in March, is set to expire July 31. Yet with the unemployment rate widely expected to still be in the mid-teens by then, members of both parties will face pressure to compromise on some form of renewed benefits for the jobless.

Democrats have proposed keeping the \$600-a-week payments through January in a \$3 trillion relief package that the House approved this month along party lines. Senate Republicans oppose that measure. They have expressed concern that the federal payments would discourage laid-off people from returning to jobs that pay less than their combined state and federal unemployment aid now does. **AP**

Around the Globe

Kathmandu: Nepal on Friday registered its highest single-day surge in coronavirus cases with 170 new infections, taking the COVID-19 tally in the country to over 1,200, the health ministry said.

Moscow: Russia has reported the highest daily spike in coronavirus deaths once again on Friday, with health officials registering 232 deaths in the last 24 hours, which bought the country's total to 4,374.

Tokyo: Tokyo will remove shutdown requests on more businesses in June when theaters, cinemas, fitness gyms and retailers can reopen after a coronavirus state of emergency ended this week.

Ankara: Turkey Worshipers in Turkey have held their first communal Friday prayers in 74 days after the government reopened some mosques as part of its plans to relax measures in place to fight the coronavirus outbreak.

Jakarta: The number of coronavirus cases in Indonesia has surpassed 25,000 with more than 1,500 virus-related deaths as authorities are stepping up to lift large-scale social restrictions next week.

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HRITHIK ROSHAN

So proud of you Pashmina. You are a special soul and an extraordinary talent. Your brightness and warmth lights up every room you walk into. Sometimes I wonder where you get that magic, but most times I thank god for you. We are lucky to have you and I'm sure the world is going to feel the same way very soon.



PANKAJ TRIPATHI

I am an actor. Our main aim is to help cinema and our performance reach out to maximum. Of course, the experience on big screen is different, people watch it together, in a community. On a small screen, you watch it alone. It's not like that theatres won't open. We have seen big things before and (theatres) have come out of it too.



KIRTI KULHARI

I am not really a birthday person. This lockdown has given me time to introspect and understand a lot of things and one thing that I have been contemplating on since quite sometime is self love and the lack of it in most of us. I hope this time makes some change in the way we look at ourselves and the way we love ourselves.



ADAH SHARMA

I hope we all come out of this as more grateful, kinder people who are conscious about the environment. Once we begin shooting, all of us will be responsible and take the necessary precautions ensuring safety of oneself and the people around us. From slicing watermelons to reading scripts, this lockdown has been quite productive.



WILL SMITH

Playing Genie in *Aladdin* was terrifying. Robin Williams did absolutely brilliant, memorable and nostalgic job in his film. So when I am looking at a role and especially something that has historic and nostalgic value, I ask myself, 'is there any meat left on the bone?'

IMMERSIVE 45 MINUTES

'I AM A BIT EXTRA'

Girl meets boy. The two fall in love...rewind. Girl meets boy and they set animals free at a pet market. The unusual, the quirky, the socially awkward and the ones who don't fit in were some of the characters that MEGHA RAMASWAMY found missing in the Indian film landscape. With *What Are The Odds?*, the director tried to plug in the gap and the audience responded wholeheartedly. Within a week of its debut on Netflix, it climbed to number 5 and then number 2 while spawning fan clubs across the country. In conversation with the director, who earlier made documentaries like *Newborns*, *Bunny* and *The Last Music Shop*, it is evident that she takes up projects that she completely identifies with. While discussing the film with SAIMI SATTAR, she pauses frequently, searching for the right word and wants to understand a nuance better before answering a question. Excerpts:

❑The film is trending on Netflix. Did you believe something like this was possible?
Not at all. The response has been amazing and the film has its own fan clubs and all that now. (Laughs, which even over the phone line sounds overwhelmed). But I don't belong to this world, so it is very new and exciting for me.

❑Were you planning an OTT release or a theatrical one and shifted because of the pandemic?
I am the writer and director and the producer had not masked the fact from me that it would not be the most comfortable theatrical release. I was told that I would have to make peace with big theatre release in Taipei, China, Taiwan, Los Angeles film festivals. It was important to get a worldwide release and Netflix has an outreach of 180-190 countries.

❑OTTs have given a platform for different kinds of stories being told...
Of course, a culture of serious audience has come about because of these platforms. For example, a series like *Wire* or *Mad Men* happened because these platforms were available. It really nurtures your tastes as an audience. It makes them creative (pauses) and opinionated. The reaction is immediate, personal and relies on word of mouth. It isn't a rehearsed audience which says "see this" or "do that". It is very passionate and creates its own bright guys. That's the relevance of OTT, as of now. Earlier, we had to rely on the review of a critic and wonder if "we should we buy a ticket?" But now it is as simple as turning on the TV.

❑Are we making an impact globally through films as we see younger directors doing the rounds of international festivals now?
Of course, there are younger directors like Rima Das. There is this burst of creativity. We aren't making films just with a Third World narrative based in villages to get to the festivals. There is Rhythm Jahnavi, Kabir Mehta and Kabir Singh Choudhury who are just killing it with their originality. They are ground breakers. I love their edgy content. It is no longer that only Satyajit Ray can go to Venice. Moreover, while earlier we heavily relied on bigger festivals but now smaller ones are also picking up in terms of audience. Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles



(IFFLA) is such great festival where the programmers are championing South Asian and Indian cinema.

❑So what you are saying is that we've broken stereotypes...
There are no stereotypes that are working. It is a rude term. We do not have the smugness or the right to call anything stereotype. All types of writing is based on people's experiences and as a culture we should be respectful towards that. It might be a stereotype for us but may be not for them. We need to be harsh on these terms in this changing world. This is a 90s terms but it doesn't matter any more.

❑Most coming of age films about adolescents talk about falling in love but this film is different.
The protagonist has this great sense of discomfort and, at the same time, compensating confidence. And it is possible to be both at the same time. That is the true innocence of childhood. When you are 14-15, you are hormonally and mentally scattered. We tried to say through the character of Vivek (played by Yashasvini, last seen in *Delhi Crime*) that young women can be this too. They don't have to walk in a certain way or wear spectacles. Anti-social

people can wear a yellow coat and strut about like she does as she wants to be noticed. The kids watching this film are relating to this. This narrative is allowing the character to have a gamut of emotions.

❑Did the idea of the film come from your own growing up years?
It did. I felt very alienated as a kid. I didn't know how to behave in a certain way. I am a single child and I am socially awkward. I try to overcompensate by saying something... (gives a nervous laugh) absolutely stupid. This made me a bit extra. I always wondered why there were no films about children like us. In films, 14-15-year-olds were falling in love and having romances. Romance *kuch nahi hota* when you are



14-15. It was like a series of embarrassing incidents one after the other where I was falling in one gutter hole after another. I felt that this teenage angst, rebellion stupidity and inventiveness had to be honoured. The beauty of the character is that she can be clumsy, feisty, vulnerable, a great companion, sensible and volatile — at the same time. All that makes her what she is. It is not a typical girl meets boy story... I didn't want to make that film. This starts off as a regular girl meets boy story and all that trope and we built on it. We've embraced the absurd and that's the beauty of it all. People finally understand that it is okay to be absurd. There is so much space for imagination and the world needs it to keep sane, little hopeful and happy.

❑The film employs magic realism. How does that help the storytelling?
It is not just this film. I've done it in other films too. Just that this one has been seen by a wider audience. I've made hybrid documentaries that still follow the rules of magic realism. On a bigger scale, I will always be doing this. There was everything — films about ghouls, crime — but not about young women. They are undermined and treated disrespectfully. It is almost like let's give them something dumb and populist. With *What Are The Odds*, we've proved them wrong.

❑How did you select the cast?
Very organically. I follow a lot of independent musicians. I saw Yashasvini playing a guitar, ukelele it is called, at some point. She was singing and the rest of the crew too agreed that we had our lead. She had done a side role. What is the technical term for it? I don't know the word. Supporting role, it is called. I don't know since I don't come from this world. I feel girls like Yashasvini should be leading films because the youth needs relatable women. They don't need only girls who look as if they've just stepped out of the salon. She is relatable, clumsy, angry, wears her heart and brain on her sleeve. She is also vivacious and just fits the role.

Karanvir brings the calm to the storm till the time he also becomes like her in the film. He does a very non head boy thing even though he comes across as an uptight guy. But the duo get each other. It is their little rebellion. It is strangely predictive of the times too. (Chuckles) They are freeing animals in the pet market. And if you remember, the virus began with a

❑Did children being stuck at home during the lockdown power its success?
That's a very ruthlessly exploitative thing to say about a ruthless time in the

world and I would rather keep away from the question because I don't want people to think that it is working for us. What about those kids who do not have a TV and can't watch the film? If I am talking about children being happy about the break, then I am talking about a particular kind of children. But what about kids being beaten up at home?

❑How did Abhay Deol come on board?
We were introduced by a friend as he was looking to produce something. And we had this character, Val. The more we interacted with him, the more we thought he should be our Val. When he agreed to produce it, we asked if he would also act in the film. He said, "That's not necessary. Cast who you want." And we chimed, "We want to cast you." It is so gracious of him as he is there for 15 minutes. The ensemble cast also had geniuses like Sulbha Arya, a legend, who gave us so much love, understanding and blessings.

❑Your banner is called Missfit films...
It is M-I-S-S-F-I-T. Miss fit. It is to honour young women who feel misplaced and we would like to hold space for them as they navigate through films. And we love to deal with narratives around younger people in particular. We hear all of them. Straight, queer, gay — everyone.

❑OTT changed the way films are being viewed...
It has domesticated entertainment. It no longer entails a trip to multiplex. There are theatrical films and OTT films and there is room for both. A cinema watching culture needs to thrive with both. *Roma* was released directly on Netflix by one of the greatest directors in the world. Some of the best directors are doing shows for OTT. It is not the smaller platform any more.

❑What were your learning experiences from your past films, *Newborns*, *Bunny* and *The Last Music Store*?
I was living in a very small world where I was very content but the gates have opened to write and direct series with the success of *What Are The Odds?* It gives me the privilege of affording enough support to other people in this system. So, now I can run my company and hire young writers. Being independent means doing everything yourself.

❑The absence of censorship on OTT has been criticised due to explicit content. Do you agree?
There shouldn't be censorship. All kinds of content make a culture. For example, films by Carlos Reygadas have a lot of nudity but what would arthouse cinema be without his contribution? Censoring anything shows that there is something which is not right in country.

❑What is Cause Effect?
It is a little outfit under Missfit. We try and do pro bono, campaign driven work with NGOs and raise funds. It is a community driven initiative where we ask people for money. I've done a campaign with Dr Kailash Satyarthi for it too.

❑Future plans?
Up next is *Reshma Aur Shera*, few series and a book adaptation. I am working with Jeetu Mohandas about which I am very excited.

CONVERSATION 30 MINUTES

In the name of love

Actor SARGUN MEHTA tells AYUSHI SHARMA that there are a zillion reasons for people to feel there's not enough fondness in a relationship but if you both want to be together, you will find a way



filled with love. It's about a relationship that has gone bad but we still wanted to give it a happy ending. We were like no matter what, your relationship does deserve a second chance or any amount of chances that you think are right. Ravi and I were going to share screen space after almost 10 years. It's not that we didn't get any offers but there was nothing worth it. This song just felt right.

❑It deals with the downfalls of a relationship and its upheavals. Did you relate to it?
I did relate to the song but not from the perspective of the relationship that Ravi and I share. This is not exactly what we are as a couple, which is why we were undecided initially. We wanted to discuss if we want to show this side of our relationship or not. At times dur-

ing the shoot, Ravi got angry that this is not us. We tried to cut away from it emotionally as much as possible because we didn't want to get too absorbed in the story. But every relationship goes through this. It can go bad, you get possessive or there can be more distance or proximity between two people.

There are zillion reasons that people can feel there is not enough love in a relationship. But if both of you want to fix the problem and want to be together, you will find a way.

❑How was it shooting with your partner with whom your journey has been smooth?

Yes, the journey has been very smooth. I think this was the first time I didn't see Ravi only as an actor or as a co-actor, I saw him as a director too. On the first day, I had my take on everything or tried to figure out what we wanted to do. But later, I realised that too many people spoil the broth. So he took charge. Everything was in his head, he directed all of it. I didn't want to mess with it so I completely surrendered to him as an actor. I thought this is the right way to do it. I saw him as a director for the very first time and I absolutely loved him. I have always said that he's a great actor but I didn't know he was such a great director too.

❑From small screen to Punjabi films and now album songs, how challenging was this switch?
I don't know if it was challenging. I remember there was a time when I had an offer to move to another medium but I felt that I wasn't ready for it. When I saw my first Punjabi film, I decided that this is what I wanted to do. Like this is home and I would be able to make my place here. It just felt

like it was a calling. When you just sit down and think about what you really want in life, mysteriously the universe really works to get that for you. Whatever I demanded — the kind of projects I wanted to do, how I wanted to make my debut or with which actor — everything just fell into place. I don't think that I literally lifted a finger for all this to come together. I have seen a number of rejections as well. There were so many people telling me that I won't be able to make it. But I had faith in myself and the universe.

❑Do you think the Punjabi film industry competes with other new age regional cinema?
It definitely does. Not only does it compete, I think in a lot of places it's even better. We are an evolving industry and when you are growing, you try to make a space for yourself. You try to make really good content and you are okay with doing a lot of experiments. That's where Punjabi cinema is, it's experimenting with content. I really think we are making some great films.



CAUSE 45 MINUTES

SCENE 1: CONNAUGHT PLACE, NEW DELHI

The iconic Delhi locale is choc-a-bloc with shoppers, diners and people who come in to savour the beauty of its columned colonial architecture. On any given day *chaat-walas*, handicraft vendors and ice-cream carts jostle for space. But a sweep of the camera and we witness the silence of the centre of India’s capital.

SCENE 2: PANDIT DEEN DAYAL UPADHYAYA JUNCTION, UTTAR PRADESH

The station, a getaway to East India, contains the largest railway marshaling yard in Asia. However, we see one of the busiest stations in the country without a soul in sight.

SCENE 3: GATEWAY OF INDIA, MUMBAI

On any given day, the most famous monument of the commercial capital is a place where neither the photographer nor the tourist gets a moment to enjoy the view in peace. But now, it stands silent just like the docks around it.

When the lockdown was announced on March 24, documentary filmmaker Bharat Bala realised that it was an important time in the history of the country and felt that it was his responsibility to capture it. “I knew that it is the most unprecedented thing unfolding in front of our eyes. It is in one way historical and in another, disturbing.” People in the West, both America and Europe have filmed the time extensively. Bala says, “In the next five years, we would be flush with interesting documentaries from those places while India would have nothing.”

He felt that the content from TV news was transitory in nature and there was “nothing emotional, deep or like a canvas which tells the story of what a lockdown is like. Where are these 1.3 million people?” he asks.

So the creator of some of the really iconic works like AR Rahman’s *Vande Mataram* got down to work. Over a period of 55 days, a team of 117 people filmed extensively for 100 hours across 16 states to preserve the time for posterity.

Even under normal circumstances when permissions are hard to come by, during lockdown this must have been some feat. Anticipating the question, Bala himself pipes up and says, “How did we do it? It was a



nightmare, almost impossible.” Getting permissions from the Police was difficult but essential as filming on the streets is not allowed without it. “Somehow when the intent is there, things do happen and they did happen,” chimes in Bala, upbeat at the thought of what he has accomplished.

A central core team sat in Mumbai while crews spread across the country. Footage started pouring in from early morning to late in the night as the core team was sitting at a studio in Mumbai and giving directions to the crews in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Tamil Nadu, Kerala Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Delhi, Kashmir, Assam and more. “It was a mammoth exercise. A cameraperson in Assam would send a WhatsApp video and then I would set the frame and check the lens. Doing it remotely was bizarre. Sometimes they would send footage and I would say, “This is great but what about this? And they would go there and shoot again.”

Bala credit his robust research team which knew exactly what was required for the film. “They were constantly updating what we were getting and, at the same time, specifying what we wanted from each place. In that sense we had to be instinctive in planning. It was crazy,” says the filmmaker over the phone.



Bala wanted to get a large picture from a variety of places. So the teams panned out to places like the Mumbai’s CST Station, which is like the Grand Central of New York, and could not even spot pigeons. Some of the busiest airports were stark, with not a soul in sight. “Highways, airports, schools, colleges, streets and bazaars everything has been docu-

mented for posterity so that we should not forget this time. We also saw the Ganges clean and pristine in Haridwar and Rishikesh which was captured in a cinematic way,” he says.

Bala believes that it would be a record for all of us of what the nation and its people went through. “Otherwise you just look down your window and see *apna gali mohalla*

khalai hai (our streets and locality are empty) but then you see the entire country from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and realise that everything has stopped. Even Tsunamis, cyclones or other disasters couldn’t do that. Not even wars, as only the border areas were severely affected. Given the size of our country, with our federal structure, it was not easy

to bring everything to a standstill.”

The idea behind the four-minute film, called *Uthenge Hum*, is to convey that no matter what happens we will rebound. “That is the resilience of the poorest mother of India. She might have lost her husband at night but the next day she would get up and feed her children,” says he about the film which he feels is an honest effort.

The voice over by actor and the-atre person, Seema Biswas, in the film represents the migrant woman. “When she says *Uthenge Hum* it seems like a mother, who has her feet on the ground, is saying the words.”

And we all hope so too... that we bounce back resilient, more compassionate and better versions of ourselves from these difficult times.

CELEB TALK 30 MINUTES

As the pandemic unfolds, people around the world have found themselves in isolation to help contain the outbreak. While women continue to hold up more than half of the sky, the increase in workload and the surge in domestic violence has made women more vulnerable even inside their homes. It is high time we break the stigma around reporting abuse.

Against this background, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women and the South Asia Foundation (Madanjeet Singh Foundation) have joined hands to support director and actor Nandita Das in the production and launch of a short film — *Listen to Her*.

The film focuses on two important issues that many women are grappling with — an unprecedented increase in their workload and at times, being locked down with their abusers. It aims to inspire women to speak up and for us to add our voice to end the silence around these issues. The film also creates public awareness of helpline numbers so survivors can seek immediate assistance.

In India, the National Commission for Women has recorded more than a two-fold increase in the number of cases of gender-based violence during the lockdown period. As we find ways to help the migrant population, daily wagers, health workers on the frontline, we also need to find ways to support women who are battling within their homes. Society simply cannot thrive if half the population lives in fear of being abused, physically as well as mentally.

“The film was a spontaneous response to the irony of “stay home, stay safe” for millions of women in India and around the world. This pandemic has taught us that our lives are so deeply intertwined, and so it is imperative we respond to the issues around us. I wanted to tell a simple story of a woman overburdened and a woman abused, both,

The battle within homes

Actor, director and social advocate NANDITA DAS’s short film *Listen to Her* aims to inspire women to speak up around issues like domestic violence, which has surged during the lockdown



impacting each other. The film is adding its voice to encourage women to speak and for us to listen. Creatively speaking, it was a challenge to shoot during the lockdown. But was worth the experiment,” says Nandita.

“There will be a before and after COVID-19, and

this should apply to gender equality too. There must be a redefinition of masculinities, where men share responsibilities with women in dignity, respect and non-violence. UNESCO, together with its sister UN Agencies, UNFPA, UNICEF, and UN Women, felt it was impor-



tant to support Nandita in making this film possible,” shares Eric Falt, director and representative, UNESCO, New Delhi.

Argentina Matavel, representative, UNFPA India says, “COVID-19 has forced us to re-visit some very important conversations about gender, be it violence, equal participation at home or simply pre-defined roles for men and women. Today it is the pandemic, tomorrow it may be something else. Gender equality is no longer a contested matter, it is both complex and simple. It is a societal transformation that will be a reality when each individual looks at the other with fresh eyes, as if looking into a mirror, and then, treats them with dignity and respect, recognising that their own humanity is only complete with the full existence of the other.”

The film poignantly depicts the ironic realities of what it means for women to ‘stay home, stay safe’ amid the pandemic. “On one hand, women and girls are compelled to heavy lift the increased caregiving responsibilities, juggling with many different pieces of life and work. On the

other, many of them encounter a surge in domestic violence reported not only in India but across the world. The complex interplay of gender within the larger socio-economic impact of the crisis must be factored into the response and recovery of the COVID-19 pandemic,” says Dr Yasmin Ali Haque, representative, UNICEF India. Nishtha Satyam, deputy representative, UN Women India, shares, “The pandemic has challenged all we knew about the dynamics of economics and power, both inside the home and outside. While many of us have had the privilege of home, a safe space, many women have long dreaded the four walls of home, a private chamber that reminds them of the horror and terror of physical, emotional and psychological abuse. Across the world, the dread now lies exposed, along with the inescapability of it.

The pandemic has upended several assumptions about contemporary world order and equality. UN Women is proud to support this initiative which contributes to bring to light on the importance of ending violence against women and girls.”

Daringly different

Actor JYOTHIKA says that there are several layers to her character in her recently released film, *PonMagal Vandhal*, which deals with a pertinent social message

♦Tell us something about your next film PonMagal Vandhal.

It is a thriller with a difference. You can also call it a contemporary courtroom drama. I am very close to the subject which has been tackled in the film by director, J J Frederick, who has also written it. The film has a very pertinent social message with which each one of us can relate to instantly. It is a film which will make every woman proud.

♦You have shared screen with five different actors who are also directors. How was the experience?

I have been lucky that I got an opportunity to work with five actors who are also goods directors, including K Parthiepan, Thiagarajan, Pandiarajan, Pratap Pothan and K Bhagyaraj. It was Frederick’s vision and idea to cast five different actors who are also directors. It was a learning experience for me, I learnt how they prepared their dialogues and delivered them clearly with precision and clarity.

♦You play a lawyer in the film. To put it in a context, at home, are you a lawyer or a judge?

At home, I am never a lawyer because I am always a judge. If you compare me with my earlier films, you will realise that I have really come out of my shell. I am now under the blue sky. Today, I can do any kind of role. I am blessed that I am being approached by many directors with subjects that are daringly different.

♦How difficult was it to act with directors like Parthiepan and K Bhagyaraj?

It was a big challenge to deliver my dialogues in front of Parthiepan because they were lengthy and the film is basically a courtroom drama. But thankfully, I was prepared as I was given the script three months ago. It is to the credit of director Frederick that he filmed four single shots each of five minutes. You would not believe that he, who is in his 20’s, has not only written the subject well but also made his debut with this film. In the first narration itself, I was hooked to the subject and said yes to it. It has



a lot of layers, thrills, twists and a smashing climax.

♦What are the factors that influence your decision while choosing a role?

I always see what the screenplay of a film offers and want characters that are not only intelligent but also dignified to the core. I want to play real life characters, which the audience can easily identify with. I will agree to do a film only if I am sure that people will talk about my role and the film even after 20 years. If you play a cop’s role, you can easily pad up your scene with action but when you set out to play a lawyer, you cannot resort to action and have to deliver your lines with perfection. Considering the fact that I have never ever gone to a court till date, I should thank the director for having done all his home work with perfection.

♦The film is being released on an OTT platform, Amazon Prime Video. What do you think are the pros and cons of this platform?

Id say, there are only pros and no cons. Especially, in the last few months after the Coronavirus scare, the number of people watching films and series on OTT platform has shot up considerably. Though, all said and done, I will not deny that

had the situation been different, it would have been a joy to see its release in theatres and the reaction of the audience. OTT release is a big celebration as filmmakers will be able to reach as many as 200 countries. However, it is not a permanent solution, it will only help for the time being. If we wait to release *PonMagal Vandhal* in theatres, there is a long queue. It will take at least a year for the hero-oriented films to release, the heroine-oriented ones will get their chance only after two years.

♦Why do you prefer to work only in your home productions?

After 36 *Vayathinile*, I have mostly acted in my home productions because it allows me to be in my comfort zone. It is important now as I have to strike a balance between my career, home and kids. Also, when you do not know how the audience is going to respond to your film, it is better to invest in your own film.

♦You seem to opt to act under new directors...

Working with newcomers is good as they do not follow the typical pattern. They belong to a new genre and their working process is very different from mine. If I work only with the same directors, I may end up becoming stagnant as an actor. The character of Venba that I play in *PonMagal Vandhal* is the most challenging that I have ever played in my career, perhaps because of the direction.

♦Are you open to act in web series in the near future?

I am not sure. Nothing in my life, including acting in films, had been planned till today. I feel good cinema should live. If I don’t get good offers in films, who knows, I may take up acting in web series too.

♦How keen are you on entering politics?

Like my sister Nagma, I don’t want to take up politics because I believe that you can do far greater work for the masses even if you are not in politics. Every actor has a social responsibility and should not just depend on the government.

India series venue depend on circumstances: CA



Adelaide Oval will host India vs Australia's Day-Night Test during 2020-2021 Border-Gavaskar trophy

ICC/Twitter

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Cricket Australia has not ruled out the possibility of the Covid-19 pandemic forcing a change in the schedule for India's tour of the country with the board still keeping the door open for hosting four Tests in "as little as one venue".

Cricket Australia (CA) on Thursday announced that India will play the Tests at Brisbane (December 3-7), Adelaide (December 11-15), Melbourne (December 26-30) and Sydney

(January 3-7) respectively.

However, CA chief executive Kevin Roberts said the schedule could change depending on the travel restrictions due to the health crisis.

"That (schedule) assumes that state borders are open to domestic travel. It may be that circumstances dictate that when the time comes maybe we can only use one or two venues, we really don't know any of that yet," he told reporters on Friday.

"There is a lot of variables based on whether we have four venues in four states or as lit-

tle as one venue in one state. There's endless scenarios and possibilities..."

Soon after the schedule announcement, Western Australia Cricket Association (WACA) chief Christina Matthews had lashed out at CA for choosing Brisbane over Perth as one of the venues for the high-profile Test series.

Roberts said that the Gabba didn't get a Test during India's tour of Australia two years ago and to strike a balance, Perth was overlooked this time around.

‘Very high risk’ of T20 WC being postponed

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Cricket Australia on Friday conceded that there is "very high risk" of this year's T20 World Cup being postponed and the body is bracing up for huge revenue loss because of that.

Speaking to reporters, CA chief executive Kevin Roberts admitted that the fate of T20 World Cup, to be hosted by Australia in October-November this year, is uncertain because of the global travel restrictions in place due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"We have been hopeful all along that it could be staged in October-November but you would have to say there's a very high risk about the prospect of

that happening," Roberts said.

He said CA is staring at a revenue loss of around A\$ 80 million.

Even if the tournament goes ahead as per plan, it is likely to be held in empty stadiums because of the social distancing norms and CA is well aware of it.

"The likelihood of significant crowds is very slim — ordinarily that would deliver well over A\$ 50m revenue to CA.

The T20 World Cup is a big question and that's a factor of perhaps A\$ 20m.

"And it's likely that our bio-security measures that we need to put in place to deliver the season will cost in the order of A\$ 10m," he said.

"If Perth received the India Test (this year) it would mean that Perth would have hosted two England Tests (for Ashes) and two India Tests over the eight-year cycle for a total of four ... Whereas Brisbane would have only hosted two. So that would have created an imbalance over the cycle of the Future Tours Programme," he said.

"And in the national interest and ensuring we take high-profile Test matches to cricket

fans in Queensland, it was a more well-balanced solution. Assuming, of course, that we could get full crowds in play, that's when this schedule was determined.

"The more balanced solution was to play the India Test in Brisbane, meaning over the eight-year cycle it would see Perth hosting three Tests against India and England and Brisbane also hosting three Tests against India and England."

Laxman lauds Rohit's ability to handle pressure



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian batting great VVS Laxman says the ability to remain calm under pressure is the reason behind Rohit Sharma's success as a captain in the Indian Premier League.

The 33-year-old led Mumbai Indians to four title wins, one ahead of Chennai Super Kings' Mahendra Singh Dhoni, making him currently the most successful skipper in the history of IPL.

The 45-year-old Laxman recalled how Rohit evolved both as a batsman and skipper since playing his first IPL with Deccan Chargers. "He became a leader in the Deccan Chargers team.

When he came in the first year, he was a youngster who just played the T20 World Cup, made his International debut for India," Laxman told *Star Sports* show *Cricket Connected*.

"I think the way he was batting in the middle order, under pressure because the team didn't do well in the inaugural IPL edition in 2008 ... Rohit was a standout performer for us."

Rohit is placed third in the list of most run-getters in IPL history, having scored 4898 runs in 188 matches at an average of 31.60 with a highest score of 109 not out.

"In each and every match, with each and every success, his confidence level was just growing, he was getting into the core group, helping the youngsters, voicing his opinion and those were early signs," Laxman said.

"But for me, most importantly was handling the pressure because not once in those tough situations when he was batting did it show, and he has evolved and blossomed. That's why he's one of the most successful captains in IPL history."



Kompany turns down offer to assist Pep

AFF ■ BRUSSELS

Vincent Kompany has turned down an offer from Manchester City to become Pep Guardiola's assistant coach, according to various Belgian media reports on Friday.

The former City captain is under contract as player-manager of Anderlecht until 2022, having left the Etihad Stadium last year following a trophy-laden 11-year spell in England.

Kompany, who has never concealed his desire to one day be City manager, said he wanted to stay at Anderlecht.

City boss Guardiola has been looking for a new assistant since Mikel Arteta left Manchester to become Arsenal manager last December.

Police want Liverpool title clincher at neutral venue

AFF ■ LONDON

British Police want at least six Premier League matches and any Liverpool title clincher to be played at neutral venues when the season resumes in a bid to avoid supporters gathering outside stadiums.

Premier League chiefs have set June 17 as the date for the top flight to restart following the coronavirus delay.

They hope to play the majority of the matches behind closed doors on a home and away basis at clubs' usual stadiums.

However, police are concerned about the issue of hardcore fans potentially flouting social distancing rules by congregating wherever their team play.

With Liverpool two wins away from clinching their first English title for 30 years and other relegation and European qualification issues to be decided in the remaining 92 fixtures, there is potential for police resources to be stretched if matches draw crowds outside grounds.

Police bosses have spoken to the Premier League about games



they consider especially tricky and the matches they requested to take place at neutral grounds are Manchester City vs Liverpool, Manchester City vs Newcastle, Manchester United vs Sheffield United, Newcastle vs Liverpool and Everton vs Liverpool.

"Our discussions with the Premier League throughout this process have been positive, with

Serie A resumes on June 20

AFF ■ ROME

Italy's Serie A was given the green light on Thursday to resume on June 20 after a three-month absence as one of the countries hardest hit by the coronavirus pandemic begins to ease restrictions.

Sports Minister Vincenzo Spadafora said that the Government's Technical and Scientific Committee (CTS) had agreed to the health protocol proposed by Italian football chiefs.

"Italy has started to return to normal life again, it is only right that football should do the same," said Spadafora.

"The federation assured me that it had a Plan B and a Plan C.

"In light of these considerations, the championship can resume on June 20."

Italian football federation (FIGC) president Gabriele Gravina told the minister during the video conference there would be a play-off sys-



Juventus' Cristiano Ronaldo trains during team's training session Juve/Twitter

0 on March 9.

Italian football now faces a scheduling nightmare, for matches which will take place behind closed doors.

"I'm happy and satisfied," said Gravina.

"The restart of football represents a message of hope for the whole country."

Lega Serie A will now meet to examine the different calendar hypotheses for the remaining Serie A and Italian Cup matches, amounting to 127 in total.

Most teams have 12

league games left to play, but there were four postponed fixtures.

Spadafora suggested that the Italian Cup could be concluded the week before the return to Serie A action.

The semi-final return leg matches between Inter Milan and Napoli and AC Milan and Juventus, could be played on June 13-14 with the final on June 17.

"I also hope to be able to send a positive signal to the whole country by taking advantage of the week from June 13 to 20 to conclude the Italian Cup," he added.

FA Cup final on Aug 1

LONDON: The FA Cup final is set to take place on August 1 after the English Football Association announced provisional dates to finish the competition on Friday.

After the Premier League revealed they plan to resume the season on June 17, the FA Cup has now returned to an English fixture list.



The FA Cup was halted before the quarter-finals because of the pandemic, but tournament organisers hope to complete it alongside the Premier League.

The four matches in the last eight will be played over the weekend of June 27 and 28, with no decision reached yet on whether these will be played on a home-and-away basis as normal or at neu-

tral venues. Leicester take on Chelsea, Newcastle face holders Manchester City, Sheffield United play Arsenal and Norwich meet Manchester United.

The semi-finals will be played on July 11 and 12, with the intention being for those matches and the final to be played at Wembley as usual.

All the ties will be behind closed doors. **AFF**

'Fans could return for 20-21 season'

LONDON: Premier League chief executive Richard Masters said on Friday that fans could be allowed to attend top-flight matches in the 2020-21 season on a "phased basis".

"No one knows when matches will move away from the behind-closed-doors model and it is right to have contingency plans in place, but there is optimism at the Premier League and at clubs that we will see fans back

in the stadiums next season and it may happen on a phased basis," Masters told *Sky Sports News*. "Hopefully it will be a huge morale boost and that is what we've been working towards."

"We've got some incredible fans in this country and we all know the Premier League as we know and love it won't be fully back until we have fans back through the turnstiles." **AFF**

Eng name 55-man training group

LONDON: World Cup-winning skipper Eoin Morgan, and the pace duo of James Anderson and Jofra Archer are among 55 England players who have been asked to resume outdoor training to prepare for cricket behind close doors.

The England and Wales Cricket Board has added 37 names to the list after 18 bowlers resumed individual training last week, focussing on Test cricket.

Alex Hales, Liam Plunkett and Joe Clarke are some big names who do not feature in the 55-man list for the time being.

The ECB confirmed that the



players have been asked to return to training, "as England Men prepare for the prospect of behind-closed-doors cricket, subject to UK Government clearance."

The Board said it continues to work closely with its county partners to provide a safe and efficient return to practice for players. Other big names who have been asked to resume training include Moeen Ali, Jonny Bairstow, Stuart Broad, Jos Buttler, Adil Rashid, Tom Curran, David Willey, and Sam Billings among others.

The ECB said squads for

specific formats will be announced in due course.

"The pool of players will give selectors strong options when it comes to selecting squads across formats further down the line, as we move closer to our aim of playing international cricket this summer," ECB Performance Director Mo Bobat said in a statement.

"We will need to continue to work closely with our medical team and government to ensure that our return to training and play activities are in line with best-practice guidelines," he added. **PTI**

Dahoud out for rest of season



DORTMUND: Borussia Dortmund midfielder Mahmoud Dahoud has been ruled out for the rest of the season with a knee injury, the Bundesliga club announced on Friday.

The 24-year-old was replaced by Axel Witsel in the 85th minute of Dortmund's 1-0 defeat by title rivals and league leaders Bayern Munich on Tuesday.

Dahoud has made 14 appearances for Lucien Favre's men in all competitions this season.

The Syrian-born player joins Erling Braut Haaland, captain Marco Reus, Nico Schulz and Dan-Axel Zagadou on the sidelines ahead of Sunday's trip to bottom club Paderborn. **AFF**

UEFA considers 'all options' for CL format

AFF ■ NYON

UEFA is studying "all the options" for the format of this season's interrupted Champions League, amid reports on Friday that European football's governing body is considering moving the final from its scheduled venue in Istanbul.

The Turkish city was due to host the final this Saturday at the Ataturk Olympic Stadium, but the tournament was suspended in mid-March at the last-16 stage because of the coronavirus pandemic.

UEFA still hopes to conclude the competition by the end of August, but



with major changes to the format likely and games set to be played behind closed doors.

"We are looking at all

the options regarding the calendar and the format of the competition in the working group involving the clubs, leagues and

national associations," a UEFA spokesman said.

"No decision has been taken yet but there should be at the Executive Committee meeting on June 17."

According to a UEFA document, August 29 could be chosen as the new date for the final.

The *New York Times* reported on Friday that the final would be moved from Turkey but that Istanbul could be chosen as host of a future final, when it is safe for fans to travel from abroad in large numbers.

Changes could also be made to the format of the Europa League, the final of which was due to be played in the Polish city of Gdansk this week.



Federer tops list of world's highest-paid athletes

AFF ■ NEW YORK

Roger Federer topped the 2020 Forbes magazine list of highest-paid global athletes announced on Friday, leading the lineup for the first time with pre-tax earnings of \$106.3 million.

The Swiss tennis legend, a men's record 20-time Grand Slam singles champion, becomes the first player from his sport atop the annual list since its 1990 debut, rising from fifth in 2019.

Federer's haul over the past 12 months included \$100 million from appearances fees and endorsement deals plus \$6.3 million in prize money. His previous best showing was second in 2013.

Portuguese football star Cristiano Ronaldo was second on the list at \$105 million, \$60 million in salary and \$45 million from endorsements, with Argentine football hero Lionel Messi third on \$104 million, \$32 million of that from sponsorship deals.

Messi and Ronaldo, who have traded the top spot three of the past four years, saw their combined incomes dip \$28 million from last year due to salary cuts when European clubs halted play in March.

Brazilian footballer Neymar was fourth overall on \$95.5 million, \$25 million from endorsements, while NBA star LeBron James of the Los Angeles Lakers was fifth on \$88.2 million, \$60 million of that from endorsements.