

BOARD, JEE EXAMS PUT OFF | 1ST POSITIVE CASE IN ARMY | INDIA ON RIGHT PATH: WHO

PM to address nation today, random tests to include more pneumonia cases

Second batch of results to check for community spread by ICMR also negative

ABANTIKA GHOSH & KARISHMA MEHROTRA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

INDIA IS looking at expanding the pool of random testing samples for COVID-19 to include patients with atypical pneumonia, which presents symptoms slightly different from pneumonia. WHO country representative Dr Henk Bekeidam told *The Indian Express* that India does need to test more, and is already moving in that direction by looking at atypical pneumonia patients.

On Wednesday, the number of positive cases rose to 151. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address the nation on Thursday at 8 pm to talk about steps being taken against the virus. This was announced at a review meeting he chaired on Wednesday evening.

The government also ordered the CBSE, National Institute of Open Learning and all higher education institutions to postpone ongoing examinations for 10 days. Following the order, the CBSE postponed Board examinations scheduled from March 19 to March 31, including re-exams scheduled for students in Northeast Delhi affected by the recent riots. The Board will announce the new schedule by **CONTINUED ON PAGE 4**



Amidst coronavirus fears, Marine Drive in Mumbai wears a deserted look on Wednesday. Prashant Nadkar

One COVID-19 positive infects 1.7 in India, lower than in hot zones

Climate to lockdown may be factors but scientists say don't know exact reason yet, figure may change

AMITABH SINHA
PUNE, MARCH 18

ONE REASON for the relatively slow increase in the number of novel coronavirus patients in India, as of now, could be the fact that every infected person has been passing on the virus only to another 1.7 people on an average. This is remarkably lower than what has been observed in the worst-affected countries, a study by scientists at the Institute of Mathematical Sciences in Chennai shows. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 4**

INFECTION TABLE (Reproduction number in countries/regions that have had the most infections)

Qatar	3.06 (+/- 0.44)
Switzerland	2.96 (+/- 0.26)
Spain	2.74 (+/- 0.1)
Iran	2.73 (+/- 0.22)
Germany	2.58 (+/- 0.14)
New York	2.49 (+/- 0.29)
Italy	2.34 (+/- 0.14)
Japan	2.16 (+/- 0.25)
Hubei, China	2.14 (+/- 0.18)
California	2.13 (+/- 0.09)
Washington	2.06 (+/- 0.51)
South Korea	1.80 (+/- 0.17)
Diamond Princess ship	1.70 (+/- 0.12)
UK	1.65 (+/- 0.17)
France	1.39 (+/- 0.09)

255 Indians in Iran plus 21 more abroad positive; 600 others flown back



Photo released by the Office of Iranian Presidency of a Cabinet meeting being held in Tehran on Wednesday

SHUBHAJIT ROY & ADIL AKHZER
NEW DELHI, SRINAGAR, MARCH 18

THE GOVERNMENT Wednesday confirmed that 255 Indians in Iran were infected with coronavirus, apart from 12 Indians in the UAE, five in Italy and one each in Sri Lanka, Hong Kong, Kuwait and Rwanda.

In a written reply, the government told the Lok Sabha

Wednesday, "The Indian Embassies in respective countries are in touch with the Indian citizens regarding appropriate medical attention, in cooperation with local authorities."

Sources said there was no change in the government position that they will bring back only those Indians who test negative for COVID-19. In line with this, on Wednesday, 195 Indians who don't have the infection were brought back by **CONTINUED ON PAGE 4**

CORONA COUNT

151 CASES **3** DEATHS

14 RECOVERED

Taken for test, youth back from Sydney jumps to death at hospital

SOMYA LAKHANI & ASTHA SAXENA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

A 25-YEAR-OLD man allegedly committed suicide by jumping off the seventh floor of New Delhi's Safdarjung hospital, where he had been brought Wednesday night to be tested for coronavirus. The man, who hailed from Balachaur in Punjab, had arrived from Sydney on an Air India flight, that landed at IGI Airport in the evening.

Additional DCP-I (Southwest) Ingit Pratap said the man was taken to the hospital from the airport. Police received a PCR call at 9.39 pm.

DCP (Southwest) Devender Arya said, "It was informed by the nodal officer that he was admitted only as a suspected coronavirus patient. Preliminary enquiry has revealed he had been living in Sydney for a year. He had a headache and was brought to the hospital."

The Health Ministry, in a statement, also said the man was taken to the hospital after he complained of a headache.

"Patient reached around 9 pm and was taken to the seventh floor for admission and evaluation. When doctors reached the room, he wasn't inside. At the same time, another doctor coming out of the building observed a body on the floor around 9.15 pm," the Ministry said in a statement.

Safdarjung and RML are the two main hospitals where those found in the country are taken for testing if an infection is suspected. Ten people have tested **CONTINUED ON PAGE 4**

CDR collection: Govt comes under fire for 'surveillance' bid, says fixing call drops

HARIKISHAN SHARMA & PRANAV MUKUL
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

THE GOVERNMENT came under attack in Lok Sabha Wednesday for seeking call data records of all mobile subscribers across pockets of the country, with the Congress calling it a "matter of great concern" and demanding adjournment of business in the House to discuss the matter.

The *Indian Express* reported Wednesday that cellphone operators had red-flagged 'surveillance' after local units of the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) sought call data records of all mobile subscribers across several pockets of the country for specific days over the past few months.

In an official statement, the Ministry of Communications said: "There is no infringement of privacy of any person. No personal details are collected. There is no tracking of any phone number." It said data of calls had been sought to address "numerous complaints" regarding "quality of service of Telecommunications Network, call drops, echo, cross connections, incomplete or poor caller experience".

In a notice of adjournment motion sent to the Secretary General of Lok Sabha, Congress MP Manickam B Tagore said: "Elevating questions of surveillance and alleged violation of

BUSINESS AS USUAL
By UNNY



Cellphone operators red-flag 'surveillance' after Govt wants call records of all users

COAI to DoT Secy: Local units asking for CDRs in several states including Delhi with 'numerous VVIP zones'

PRANAV MUKUL
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

INDIAN EXPRESS: A notice of adjournment motion sent to the Secretary General of Lok Sabha, Congress MP Manickam B Tagore said: "Elevating questions of surveillance and alleged violation of consumer privacy pointers mandated by the Supreme Court, the federal government has been searching for call knowledge **CONTINUED ON PAGE 4**

The *Indian Express* report on March 18

consumer privacy pointers mandated by the Supreme Court, the federal government has been searching for call knowledge **CONTINUED ON PAGE 4**

INSIDE



GLOBAL TOLL MORE THAN 8,000

GURGAON MALLS SHUT, 4 NEW CASES IN NCR

TN SAYS 'DOMESTIC' CASE; HOSPITALS PUT OFF SURGERIES

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STATE OF ECONOMY

17 state budgets, 1 story: Stressed fisc, deep cuts in expenditure

UDIT MISRA, NUSHAIBA IQBAL & HARISH DAMODARAN
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

AS THE coronavirus outbreak keeps the nation on edge, among the countless unknowns it has brought, there are only a few certainties. One is the fact that it's the states, more than the Centre, that constitute the first line of defence in what could rapidly become a full-blown public health emergency.

How well manned and managed these states will be a function largely of their finances. An analysis of 17 state budgets

by the Express Research Group reveals that it's not going to be easy.

For, these states may be starting at an actual revenue shortfall closer to Rs 3 lakh crore this fiscal vis-à-vis the numbers projected at the time of their last budgets. And it is states that account for nearly 69 per cent of the total government expenditures on health.

An analysis of the budgets reveals the following key trends across several states:

■ All states, barring Assam, found their revenue receipts plummet through the current financial year. Bihar, for instance, saw its revenue receipts fall by



around Rs 25,500 crore — roughly a fall of 14 per cent over the Budget Estimates.

■ The fall in state revenues is largely due to a decline in the total taxes collected (a fraction of which is shared with the states) by the central government. This, in turn, is due to a slowing economy.

■ Less money in hand made states cut back on their total spending in the current financial year. Worse still, most states have budgeted meagre increases in expenditure for the next financial year (2020-21).

■ Some states, namely Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Assam, even propose to cut expenditure in 2020-21. For instance, Assam's total expenditure next year will fall by 4 per cent even though it expects its economy to grow by over 9 per cent.

■ Spending cuts disproportionately affect capital expenditure, that is, money spent on building assets such as hospitals. For health care provisioning, this

is bad news since, on average, most states spend only about 5 per cent of their total money on health — a far cry from the 15 to 16 per cent (on average) states spend on education.

■ Assam, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh typically spend the most on health while Bihar, Karnataka, Punjab and Haryana spend the least (as a proportion of their total expenditure).

■ States facing Assembly elections in the next 12 months saw a flurry of sops and freebies (such as free electricity) being announced — both BJP and non-BJP states did this. A notable **CONTINUED ON PAGE 19**

EXPLAINED Why state budgets matter

STATES, TAKEN together, spend one-and-a-half times more than the Centre and employ five times more people. Their financial health is more important in determining not just overall economic growth but also ability to provide services like healthcare. This is more so as the cost of COVID-19 pandemic looms.

DEEPTIMAN TIWARY
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

AT LEAST FIVE of seven big businessmen summoned by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in connection with the Yes Bank probe have cited different reasons — personal and professional — for their inability to appear before the agency.

While Anil Ambani of Reliance and Kapil Wadhawan of DHFL skipped the summons on Monday and Tuesday, respectively, Subhash Chandra of Essel Group and Naresh Goyal of Jet Airways failed to appear before the agency on Wednesday. Sameer Gehlot of Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd, summoned for appearance on Friday, has also written to the ED, expressing his inability to make it, sources said.

Anil Ambani cited "personal reasons" for his inability to appear before the ED on Monday, and has now been called Thursday.

Wadhawan and Gehlot both pointed to the threat of coronavirus and expressed their inability to travel and appear before the agency. In a communication to the ED, Gehlot said he was in the UK and all flights had been cancelled due to the coronavirus threat. Wadhawan had on Tuesday written to the ED that it was not advisable for him to travel due to the spread of virus.

According to sources in the ED, Naresh Goyal said he was tending to his sister who was suffering from cancer and hence could not honour the summons. He did not respond to messages sent by *The Indian Express*.

On his part, Subhash Chandra **CONTINUED ON PAGE 4**

PAGE 1 ANCHOR

KAVITHA IYER
MUMBAI, MARCH 18

URMILA MAURYA, in her early thirties and a mother of three, can put into practice none of the protective measures against COVID-19 that are advised by the World Health Organisation. The family of five lives in a 10x10 ft room in Janata Nagar, at the farthest edge of Mandala, a slum of about 4,000 shanties. "Wash our hands frequently?" she says, only a little incredulous. "Sometimes I have to skip bathing to save water for cooking."

Mandala is a creek-side slum

sprawl along Mumbai's eastern suburbs, but its conditions are almost exactly the same as those in dozens of other slum colonies across the city. In each of these colonies, the measures that other Mumbaiers are putting in place are entirely impractical.

While Maharashtra has seen 45 cases of infections and a death from coronavirus, there has been no evidence of community transmission. But in slums such as these, with population densities among the highest anywhere in the world, social distancing is an impossibility. Though few have history of foreign travel, common to most of

the cases in India, the slums are home to taxi-drivers, autorickshaw-drivers, vegetable vendors, carpenters, scrap-purchasers, delivery boys, waiters, domestic helps and employees of hotels, hospitals, stores, and more, making them extremely vulnerable in case the virus spreads beyond local transmission.

Mandala is one of Mumbai's shanty colonies with neither household water connections nor community water standposts. Of three public toilets located within 1 km from Janata Nagar, one has been locked for months. A slab collapse in another toilet killed three residents



At Mandala slum, Mumbai. The city now has 45 cases. Kavitha Iyer

in 2017. With nearly 6,000 people using a single toilet block, hundreds of men and children defecate in the small open space adjoining Janata Nagar.

The Mauryas live in a lane between this open ground and a fetid creek, beyond which lies the Deonar dumping ground, home to all of the financial capital's garbage, occupying an area the size of 70 football fields, where toxic, compacted garbage stands about 10 stores tall. The wind brings the dump's odours into these homes.

Social distancing, hand-washing, respiratory hygiene, early medical care are all quite

impossible, say Urmila and her neighbour Sumari Kanojia.

Currently the biggest worry for slum-dwellers, who have all watched hand hygiene videos on WhatsApp in the past week, is access to clean water.

In Mandala, Nooran Khatun has five sons and three daughters. The one boy with a steady income from a garage was laid off last month. Her husband goes door-to-door collecting scrap, and customers are negotiating tougher deals for their waste than ever before. With such a large family, Nooran spends at least Rs 100 a day on water.

The water comes from a

filthy hose-like pipeline that snakes along the edge of the open-toilet *maidan* before it reaches the bylanes of Janata Nagar, where an assortment of plastic drums and the ubiquitous blue plastic jerry cans keep vigil outside homes. "There's no predicting when the water will be available through the pipe, sometimes it's after two-three days," she says.

The residents of Janata Nagar pay Rs 20 for 105 litres (three jerry cans of 35 litres each), which adds up to Rs 190 for 1,000 litres, mostly through illegal connections from the main **CONTINUED ON PAGE 4**



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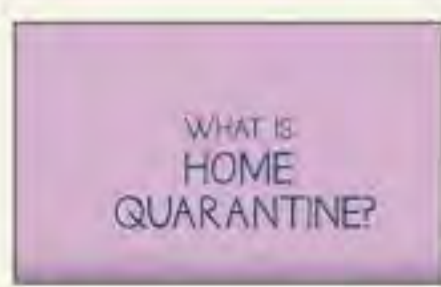
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VIDEO OF THE DAY



CYBERSECURITY IN THE TIMES OF CORONAVIRUS: HERE'S HOW TO STAY SAFE

As more people are opting to work from home due to the coronavirus outbreak, they are also coming in the crosshairs of cyber attackers out to make a quick buck. Experts claim to have already seen a steady spike in the number of phishing scams linked to coronavirus, targeting both consumers and industries.



CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

CAN THOSE WITHOUT SYMPTOMS HAVE IT? Doctors suggest only those with symptoms need to get checked

EXPRESS AUDIO
Why Kerala is changing its Coronavirus response?

NEW EPISODE EVERYDAY

On the latest episode of the 3 Things podcast, we detail why Kerala is switching gears from containment to mitigation of COVID-19, and how it's leading by example

Gujarat: Class 10 answer sheets found from roadside, police action against 6

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
RAJKOT, AHMEDABAD, MARCH 18

THE GUJARAT government has ordered an inquiry after three bags containing answer sheets of Class 10 examination of the Gujarat Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Board (GSHSEB) and a few loose answer sheets were recovered from the roadside near Gondal and Virpur towns of Rajkot district on Wednesday morning.

Police action has also been initiated against six persons responsible for the transportation of the sheets to the evaluation centre. The incident comes a day after Class 10 examinations got over and officers said prima facie the bags were "lost" while being transported to evaluation centre.

The bags were spotted near Santoshmata temple on National Highway 27 on the outskirts of Gondal town by Bhavesh Jadav, driver of High Bond Cement company staff bus, police said. Noticing that the bags contained answer sheets, he took them with him in the bus and reported the matter to factory manager Ashok Fald, who, in turn, alerted the media.

On getting information, RS Upadhyay, district education officer (DEO) of Rajkot, rushed to the spot and took possession of the bags. Meanwhile, more loose answer sheets, many of them damaged, were spotted near Ravi Hotel on NH-27 near Virpur village, around 15 km south of Gondal. Many of them were spotted drifting with the wind on the highway. Authorities collected those answer sheets also after being alerted by the public.

"We do not know the exact number of answer sheets recovered yet. GSHSEB officers have recovered three bags and a few loose answer sheets from near Gondal and Virpur. They are preparing a report on the recovery. If they register a complaint, we shall register an offence," said Rana Bhojani, police sub-inspector of Virpur.

Education Minister Bhupendrasinh Chudasama said: "An inquiry committee has been constituted to investigate the reasons and the manner in which these answer sheets were recovered from the road. Also, to probe if it was an intentional attempt to tamper with the answer sheets and how many sheets were recovered..."

Kafeel Khan detention: top court transfers petition to HC

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

THE SUPREME Court on Wednesday transferred to the Allahabad High Court a petition filed by the mother of Gorakhpur doctor Kafeel Khan challenging his detention under the National Security Act.

"We consider it appropriate that the matter be taken up by the Allahabad High Court. The record of the matter be transmitted to the High Court forthwith," a bench of Chief Justice S A Bobde and Justices BR Gavai and Surya Kanta ordered when the plea came up before it.

Aligarh police had booked Khan in December last year, claiming that his address to Aligarh Muslim University students against the NRC and CAA had instigated riots in the city.

FROM PAGE ONE

ED summons

cited his commitment to attendance in the ongoing session of Parliament. He is a member of Rajya Sabha and was present in the House on Wednesday during a discussion on two pieces of legislation dealing with Unani medicines and homoeopathy.

On Monday, Chandra said he was willing to appear before the ED. Responding to a query from The Indian Express, the Essel Group had said, "Essel Group wishes to confirm that the Enforcement Directorate has requested Dr. Subhash Chandra's presence on 18th March 2020, to make a statement on the information which is already available with them. Dr Chandra will certainly be present to make the statement and will be more than happy to extend any support or co-operation requested by ED." He did not offer any comment on his non-appearance before the ED on Wednesday.

Wadhawan denied that he was not cooperating with the probe, and said the agency was in possession of all necessary documents and had questioned him at length when he was last in its custody. He was granted bail in another ED case involving DHFL on February 21.

ED sources, however, said, Wadhawan, had gone incommunicado and was not traceable. The agency is now preparing to get a non-bailable warrant issued against him for non-cooperation as he has ignored three summons so far.

"He did not appear on the given date and when the agency tried to reach him, he was not contactable. He is also not to be contacted at his known locations. We will move court for cancellation of his bail in due course," an agency official said.

In his letter to ED on March 17, Wadhawan said, "I am apprehensive that a false record is being built to suggest that I am not cooperating with your investigation. I have repeatedly expressed my willingness to cooperate but would like to understand the basis on which I am now being summoned in relation to a matter which has been fully investigated (including while in your custody), complaint filed, cognizance taken and bail granted."

ED is investigating two cases of money laundering against Wadhawan: one related to DHFL finances and the other related to the group's dealings with firms owned by Rana Kapoor's family. In his letter, Wadhawan denied the allegations.

The ED had summoned all five—along with Gautam Thapar (Avantha Group) and Peter Kerker (Cox & Kings Group)—in connection with its probe into the affairs of Yes Bank where it has already arrested the bank's promoter Rana Kapoor and has questioned his wife and daughters.

On March 10, The Indian Express reported that Yes Bank's exposure to 10 corporate houses amounted to around Rs 34,000 crore. Subhash Chandra's Essel Group has borrowings of around Rs 8,000 crore from Yes Bank, Wadhawan Group Rs 4,700 crore, IL&FS Group Rs 2,500 crore, Jet Airways Rs 1,100 crore, Kerker Group (Cox & Kings) Rs 1,000 crore and Avantha Group Rs 500 crore.

CDR collection

records (CDRs) of all cell subscribers throughout a number of pockets of the nation is a matter of great concern."

Though his notice was not allowed by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, Congress members tried to raise the issue in the House.

Soon after the House assembled at 11 am, Congress member Manish Tewari tried to raise the matter: "Speaker Sir, this is contempt of the Supreme Court." But

the Speaker did not let him speak on the matter. During Question Hour too, he tried to raise the matter of surveillance.

When Telecom Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad was replying to a supplementary question asked by RSP member N K Premachandran on the voluntary retirement scheme in BSNL, Tewari stood up and asked: "Why is there mass surveillance of telephones going on? Why is it happening? Why are you violating the Supreme Court judgment? Why are you violating the right to privacy? Please answer." Prasad did not respond to his questions.

Earlier, outside the House, Tewari said: "The reports which have emerged in the public space are extremely disturbing because the government has decided that it will carry out mass surveillance against the citizens of India."

"A sinister, pre-meditated, orchestrated plot has been put in place in order to unleash a mass surveillance programme on the citizens of India, which is an absolute transgression of the Right to Privacy guaranteed by the Supreme Court in a 9-0 judgment," he said.

"We strongly condemn and we deprecate this assault on the fundamental freedoms which have been provided in the Constitution and have been interpreted by the Supreme Court of India. An 'Orwellian state' is sought to be created and we would ask the government, we would hold the government to account that in violation and transgression of the rules, which were tightened by the then UPA government in 2013, with regard to obtaining call detail records, with regard to electronic interception of telephones and with regard to cyber communication. Why and how are these things being violated with impunity on a daily basis," he said.

In an official statement, the Ministry of Communications said: "There is no infringement of privacy of any person. No personal details are collected. There is no tracking of any phone number."

"Numerous complaints are received regarding quality of service of Telecommunications Network, call drops, echo, cross connections, incomplete or poor caller experience. DoT in coordination with Telecom Service Providers has been endeavouring to identify the problem areas of dark spots or the areas without sufficient Telecom Tower coverage which result in Network issues and call drops. Various measures such as erection of additional mobile towers, placement of cell on wheels, drive tests etc. have been undertaken to address the mobile tower deficiency and coverage," it said.

"Big data analytics techniques can be used to identify such calls and the accurate information of call drops in specific areas. DoT will be better equipped to take up such cases and areas with the Telecom Service Providers based on actual data. For this purpose, total data of calls made during any particular time period from the identified cell phone tower locations from where the complaints are received is collected to enable analysis. However, this data is anonymous and does not contain names of either the maker or receiver of calls," it stated.

In a statement, Rajan Mathews, Director General of Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI), which had raised the issue with DoT, said: "We are pleased to note that the DoT has in a statement issued today, reiterated its purposes behind such data requests...the telecom service providers are keen to point out that we work in close cooperation with the DoT on, among other things, issues pertaining to network quality especially on is-

PM Modi to address nation today

the end of the month after "re-assessment of the situation".

The National Testing Agency, too, put JEE (Main), scheduled to be held on April 5, 7, 8 and 9, on hold. JEE (Main) is the entrance examination for admission to National Institutes of Technology.

Random sampling of atypical pneumonia cases would be an expansion from random tests being done currently of patients in ICU with severe respiratory illnesses and influenza-like symptoms, to check for community transmission.

In an interview, Dr Bekeedam said, "I understand that India is already considering increasing the scope to include atypical pneumonia patients, people showing signs of severe acute respiratory infection. This is something similar to what was done at the time of SARS." Dr Bekeedam served in China at the time of SARS in 2003.

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) on Wednesday said 300 more of the 1,020 random samples it had taken in March for testing across the country for commu-

nity transmission had tested negative. On Tuesday, it said the first batch of results for 500 samples were negative. The results of the remaining 220 samples will be available on Thursday.

Earlier, another batch of random tests, done until February 29, had come out negative.

At the review meeting Wednesday, PM Modi stressed on actively engaging with individuals, local communities and organisations to check COVID-19. He also expressed his gratitude to all those at the forefront of combating the virus, including state governments, the medical fraternity, paramedical staff, armed and paramilitary forces, and aviation and municipal staff.

The US's Centers for Disease Control (CDC) defines atypical pneumonia as showing up slightly different from typical pneumonia in chest X-rays, and responding differently to the antibiotics used for typical bacteria. During the 2013 SARS outbreak, the WHO had issued a global alert on atypical pneumonia.

One COVID positive infects 1.7 in India

In Wuhan in China, where the novel coronavirus originated, every person transmitted the virus to 2.14 persons on an average. In Iran, this number, referred to by scientists as R0 (R-naught or reproduction number) was 2.73, while in Italy, it has been 2.34, according to the study by Soumya Easwaran and Sitabhra Sinha.

If the same rate persists, India is likely to have around 200 positive cases in the next five days, Sinha told *The Indian Express*. "However, at the upper end of this projection, the number can go up to as many as 500," he said.

R-naught is a frequently used mathematical metric to estimate how contagious an infectious disease can be. It can help in making projections for the number of people likely to be affected by such a disease and is often used to decide on the kind of policy interventions required to halt the epidemic.

A less than one value for R-naught would mean that disease would not take the form of an epidemic. Any value more than one indicates an exponential rise in the number of patients. Significantly, this number is applied only in cases of outbreak of new diseases, in which the entire population is

equally susceptible to being infected.

There could be several reasons for a low R-naught. The climatic conditions might not be conducive for a long enough survival of the virus, or patients might have been isolated promptly thereby restricting their interaction with others, or lockdown measures might have been implemented efficiently, reducing the possibility of general public coming in contact with infected people.

But Sinha said that in the absence of any supporting data as of now, all these reasons could only be speculative. "Right now, we do not know the exact reason for low R-naught. May be a week from now on, when the impacts of government measures start getting reflected in the data, we would have some idea," he said.

R-naught is also a dynamic metric, and is sensitive to the kind of interventions made to contain the spread. "The steps that the government has been taking in the last couple of weeks may force a change in this number in the coming days. The impact of these steps is not yet evident. As we keep adding more data points to our analysis, this number would

likely change," Sinha said.

A higher R-naught is not the only factor that could lead to a rapid growth in the number of positive cases. A wider base of infected people with the same R-naught would also have the same effect.

So, if more people coming from abroad had tested positive for the virus—considering them to be the first point of transmission in the community—the growth in the numbers would have been much higher even at the same current rate of R-naught of 1.7.

"So tomorrow, if we discover that there are some cases of community transmission, we will see the numbers rise rapidly even if they were still passing on the virus to only 1.7 people on an average," Sinha said.

Data from other countries show that there was a very rapid rise in number of positive cases once the infected number of people had reached 100.

Countries like Iran and Italy had more than 500 positive cases in less than three days after reaching the figure of 100 while others like Spain, France, Germany, the United States, Switzerland, Sweden and few others took a couple of more days to traverse that distance.

India, on the other hand,

themselves tested)?.. The incubation period ranges from two to 14 days. If someone has long incubation but tests negative, doesn't that give a false sense of security and the test is meaningless?... And, in this process, in a huge country like India, I'm not able to test people who genuinely may need testing because I'm wasting it on futile testing. Secondly, right now, we are stressing on home quarantine. But, if I test an individual who is asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic and he is positive, he would be requesting to be put in a hospital... In a country like this, how many isolation beds, how many places does the government have for this?"

Gupta said the government was sticking to the strategy deployed during the Zika virus outbreak in Jaipur: "We did aggressive, house-to-house testing, even for asymptomatic individuals. That kind of aggressive containment strategy will be enforced wherever we see community transmission. For the whole country, I cannot put in place those aggressive measures."

touched the 100-figure mark on March 15, and in the next three days the number of infected people had risen to 152.

This relatively slow rise has led many to raise concerns about the possible under-reporting of cases in India, and the health apparatus missing out on infected people in the community because of the rather rigorous criteria for testing suspected cases.

Sinha, however, said at least the low R-naught number for India did not seem very unusual. "If we plot the R-naught numbers of other countries against the latitudes in which they are situated, India more or less fits into the curve," he said, suggesting that how far the country was located from the equator might have some correlation with how fast the virus was spreading. But he said there was no indication, yet, that this was linked to temperature. "We do not have any evidence yet that temperature might be playing a part. As of now, we are unable to explain this correlation," he said.

There are other things, Sinha said, that change with the change in latitude, like the duration of sunlight. "We are still exploring the likely impact of these," he said.

The Indians flown back from Kuala Lumpur had got stuck there after India on Monday banned the entry of passengers from EU countries, Turkey and the UK from March 18 till March 31, also closed its doors on those coming in from Afghanistan, the Philippines and Malaysia with immediate effect.

In the Philippines, the Indian Embassy is reaching out to stranded Indians at Manila airport, providing them sanitisers and food.

In Jaisalmer, a Defence spokesperson said all those brought back from Iran and quarantined were stable.

Mumbai

water supply line along the main road. In contrast, in Mumbai's housing societies, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's water tariff is Rs 5.22 per 1,000 litres, among the cheapest in megacities across the

globe. In the slums, where household incomes range between Rs 8,000 and Rs 15,000 a month, water for a large family could cost Rs 2,500-Rs 3,000.

As for healthcare, Sumari says there are several "jhola-chhap" doctors in Mandala, and only a couple with genuine medical degrees. The closest municipal health post is at Lallubhai Compound, nearly 3 km away, or Shatabdi Hospital in Govandi, 5 km away.

"At least two million people in slum colonies across 17 municipal wards are suffering from acute difficulties in accessing clean water," says Sitaram Shelar of Paani Haq Samiti, which on Wednesday wrote to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and Municipal Commissioner Praveen Pardeshi demanding that at least temporary arrangements be made to provide clean water and sanitation to these communities.

At least 54 slum communities in Mumbai require this urgent intervention during the health crisis, say urban planners. Shanty-dwellers here have no municipal water supply despite a 2014 Bombay High Court order that said water is a basic amenity to be provided even to communities encroaching on public land.

"Between 2017 and now, we have filed water connection applications for 8,000 families. Only 400-odd families have got the connections," says Shelar. Two hundred of these pending applications are from Mandala.

The Housing and Land Rights Network, a group of several organisations working with India's urban poor, is also set to ask governments for measures to protect the homeless and slum-dwellers.

In Mumbai, various groups met on Wednesday evening to draft a set of demands to be presented to the state government. "Preventive measures at the community level have not begun yet," said Shweta Tambe of Habitat and Livelihood Welfare Association, one of these organisations. "This is going to be critical in a city like Mumbai where (population) densities are so high in the slums."

Meanwhile, worry and a lack of awareness brought many slum dwellers to local clinics.

In an Antop Hill slum, Najma Khatun says she decided to visit a doctor after finding out about the new disease from her workplace and from WhatsApp forwards. "I was coughing, so I dropped everything to see the doctor," she says.

A house-keeping staffer at a gymnasium, Najma expects to be paid for March but is unsure if she'll have a job in April if the gym lockdown continues. Neither is any cleaning-disinfecting operation underway in the public toilets in the vicinity nor any awareness drives for slum-dwellers regarding preventive and protective measures. All Najma has heard from the municipality is the Do-Not-Fear-Corona advertising campaign by the BMC.

Man jumps

positive for coronavirus in Delhi so far.

Pratap said doctors from Safdarjung had advised police personnel to "maintain a distance of at least five metres from the body". A police officer said, "We are wearing masks, gloves and maintaining distance as advised by doctors, and figuring out the most appropriate way to shift the body to a mortuary." Inquest proceedings have been initiated in the matter.

A senior doctor at Safdarjung hospital told The Indian Express, "He complained of headache, breathlessness, and was scared." His sample has been collected, but is yet to be sent for testing.

His family has been informed, and the post-mortem will be conducted soon, said police.

BRIEFLY

DEC 16 GANGRAPE-MURDER

Convict claims wasn't in Delhi, plea dismissed

PRITAMPAL SINGH & ANAND MOHAN J
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

THE DELHI High Court Wednesday dismissed the December 16 gangrape-murder case convict Mukesh Singh's plea seeking a stay on his death penalty on the ground that he wasn't in Delhi at the time of the incident, and said "this frivolous plea has only been taken to delay execution of the sentence".

Upholding the trial court order, Justice Bijesh Sethi observed: "This court is of the opinion that there are no grounds to interfere in the detailed and reasoned order of March 17, 2020, passed by the trial court." "There is nothing on record to suggest that trial stands vitiated because material evidence was concealed. There is, thus, no infirmity, illegality or irregularity in the trial court order," the court said.

Mukesh had moved the HC Wednesday, stating that "denial of calling of records, explanation and examination of effect of evidence is denial of justice and is also cruelty".

Justice Sethi noted in his judgment, "I have given my thoughts to the contention of counsel for the petitioner (Singh). No fraud has been played upon the court. A fair and proper trial has been conducted by the Additional Sessions Judge (of the trial court), where fair and proper opportunity was given to the petitioner to

CONVICT'S WIFE SEEKS DIVORCE

Patna: The wife of Akshay Thakur, the death-row convict in the December 16, 2012, gangrape-murder case, filed a divorce plea at a family court in Bihar's Aurangabad, saying she "did not want to be known as the widow of Thakur". The matter will be heard on Thursday. Senior advocate at the Patna High Court, Tuhin Shanker, said: "It is just a gimmick to delay hanging... A relative of Thakur said as other accused had been taking all possible legal options, they were also advised to take a chance with the divorce plea. ENS

cross-examine all prosecution witnesses and to give his statement under Section 313 CrPC."

Standing Counsel (Criminal) Rahul Mehra and advocate Chaitanya Gosain, appearing for the state, opposed the petition and submitted that it deserves to be dismissed with heavy cost.

Mehra submitted that present revision petition (against the trial court order) is misuse of the process of law and has been filed to delay the execution of the sentence, which is fixed for March 20.

A Delhi court Tuesday had

junked a petition filed by Mukesh's lawyer M L Sharma, seeking a stay on execution of the death warrant.

The High Court also rejected Sharma's claim that Mukesh was arrested in Rajasthan's Karoli and it was impossible for him to commit the crime in Delhi and flee to Karoli, observing that "in any event, it is settled proposition of law that any irregularity in the arrest has no bearing on the trial".

The four convicts — Mukesh, Akshay Singh Thakur, Pawan Gupta, and Vinay Sharma — are to be hanged at 5.30 am Friday.

The execution of their death warrants has been deferred thrice so far due to delays caused by the convicts in trying to exhaust all legal remedies. Meanwhile, a Delhi court will hear the application on stay of death warrants on behalf of the other three convicts Thursday. The application was moved by their counsel A P Singh before Additional Sessions Judge Dharmender Rana, who told the lawyer that he "has come at the 11th hour". Singh stated that he has submitted Akshay's second mercy petition, a curative petition on behalf of Pawan and a divorce petition filed on behalf of Akshay's wife as grounds for stay on execution. Singh also mentioned two pending criminal appeals and a writ petition.

On Wednesday, hangman Pawan Jallad, who reached Tihar Tuesday, carried out a dummy hanging of the four convicts.

Part of exchange programme, four Noida students stranded in Poland

SUKRITA BARUAH
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

WITH TRAVEL from the European Union to India banned, four students from Noida, who visited Poland as part of an exchange programme, are now stranded in Warsaw.

The students from Noida's Birla Institute of Management Technology (BIMTECH) had gone to the University of Warsaw in mid-February for a semester-long exchange programme. They were to return only in July but after the coronavirus outbreak, they booked tickets to India for March 15.

The students said their flight was cancelled, after which they booked a flight for March 16, which was then rescheduled for the 17th.

Hours before the travel ban came into force on March 17, the



The students along with other Indians stuck in Warsaw

students said they were not allowed to board the plane.

"We had gone to the airport to board our Aeroflot (a Russian airline) flight via Moscow on Sunday, but we were told we could not board it as it was only taking Russian citizens due to

travel restrictions. After contacting the Indian Embassy, we were informed of a flight on the 16th, which we booked, but that was rescheduled and then on the 17th, we were not allowed to board. The Embassy has told us we had not been given permission by the

Directorate General of Civil Aviation," said Pranav Praveen, one of the students.

At the airport, students said they have not been allowed to return to their dormitories in the university either and have been placed in quarantine at an alternate accommodation. The university has also suspended classes till April 14.

With the travel ban coming into force from March 18, a Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson said there can be no exceptions and there are thousands of such cases of students in Europe.

"I don't know what went wrong with their earlier flights. There must have been a misinterpretation at the airline counters. Now that the restrictions are in place, the only option for them will be to wait it out. This is something nationals of all countries are doing," said the spokesperson.

JNU students' body rejects CCTVs on campus

New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) Students' Union has condemned the administration's decision to install CCTV cameras on campus. The students' body alleged that "such a decision impinges upon the students' right to privacy and free movement, and therefore should be struck down and withdrawn immediately". However, the administration insisted that the installation is necessary. "In view of several law and order incidences, it has become imperative to install CCTVs at public places including hostel gates," said Registrar Pramod Kumar. ENS

ASI nabs two robbers

New Delhi: Two men were arrested by an assistant sub-inspector of the Delhi Police while they were trying to rob a man of his mobile-phone, officials said on Wednesday. ASI Ravinder said he heard two rounds of firing when he was returning home. He stopped his bike and caught one of the accused, while the other was nabbed by the victim, they said. PTI

BJP on lookout for next Delhi unit chief

ABHINAV RAJPUT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

THE BJP has begun the process to choose its next state president, for which it sought opinions from MPs, MLAs, morchha heads and other office-bearers on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Current BJP chief Manoj Tiwari had offered to resign after the party won just eight out of the 70 seats in the recent Assembly polls. He was, however, asked to continue till the next chief is appointed.



Tiwari had offered to resign after BJP's poor showing in recent polls

Party sources said meetings were chaired by BJP national general secretary P Murlidhar Rao and its women's wing chief Vijaya Rahatkar with several leaders, during which they were asked to suggest names for the top job.

The names suggested include that of senior leaders such as Anil

Jain, Pawan Sharma, Ashish Sood, and Maheish Giri. A senior BJP leader said most MPs, except for Harsh Vardhan, have shown an interest in the post, including Parvesh Sahib Singh, Gautam Gambhir, Meenakshi Lekhi, Vijay Goel, Ramesh Bidhuri and Tiwari.

Rao and Rahatkar will submit the opinion of state leaders to the central leadership, which will announce a new chief by next week.

A BJP MP said he was called to Deendayal Research Institute at Jhandewalan Wednesday and asked to suggest a name. "I told them to elect someone who has

the potential to deliver 36 seats in the next assembly polls," he said.

Sources said most leaders asked the central office-bearers to not experiment further in Delhi and give the local community an opportunity. Tiwari, who was appointed to the post in November 2016, saw quick success. Under him, the party won the 2017 MCD polls, overcoming the massive anti-incumbency of two terms to leave the Congress and AAP behind. Some party members have suggested that Tiwari should be given a chance until the upcoming civic body polls.

Office of the Director
DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN & CHILD DEVELOPMENT
1st and 2nd Floor M.S. Building,
Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Veedhi, Bengaluru-560001

No: DWCD/ICDS/REV-9(A)/2019-20 Date: 16-03-2020

NOTIFICATION
Application for the post of Technical Consultant
(Health & Nutrition) -1 Post under Poshan Abhiyaan Programme.

The Department of Women and Child Development invites application from eligible candidates for the post of Technical Consultant (Health & Nutrition) Under Poshan Abhiyaan Scheme. Educational Qualification and experience: Details available in the website. Age limit: Below 65 Years.

The post is purely on contract basis for 11 months. Eligible candidates are requested to submit their resume along with required documents before 5.30 PM on 27.03.2020 to the Director, Women and Child Development Department, 1st Floor, M.S. Building, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Veedhi, Bengaluru-560001 personally or by post or through e-mail: directorwcd01@gmail.com For further details please visit department website: www.dwcd.kar.nic.in (What is new) section.

Sd/- Director
Dept. of Women and Child Development
Bangalore

DIPR/DDU/2851/2019-20

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NOTICE OF RECORD DATE FOR INTERIM DIVIDEND

Notice is hereby given that the Company has fixed Friday, 27th March, 2020 as the Record date for the purpose of payment of interim dividend for the financial year 2019-20, if declared by the Board of Directors in its meeting scheduled to be held on Thursday, 19th March, 2020.

The Members whose names appear in the Register of Members/ Beneficial owners as on Record date i.e. 27th March, 2020 shall be entitled to receive Interim dividend, if declared by the Board.

Place : New Delhi For NTPC Limited
Date : 18th March, 2020 Company Secretary

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davp 21205/11/0017/1920 Secretary UGC

DELHI POLICE
SHANTI SEWA NYAYA

Together, we can defeat Corona Virus
HELP US TO HELP YOU

To prevent spread of Corona Virus disease, Delhi Police makes a fervent appeal to general public to :

- Remain indoor, as far as possible, do not come outside unnecessarily.
- Avoid activities which involve close contact with more than 5 persons at any place.
- Please do not assemble at any place for protest, dharna, rally or any other activity, whether in close space or outside, till 31st March, 2020.
- Delhi Police will not issue any No Objection Certificate or permission in respect of such gathering.
- No license/permission will be issued for public entertainment activities; an order to this effect is being issued.

All members of public are appealed to cooperate in containing the spread of dreadful disease.

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At Gurgaon's Ambience Mall, Wednesday. Mall officials said all shops in the complex will be shut from today. Amit Mehra

UNTIL MARCH 31

Gurgaon shuts down malls

SAKSHI DAYAL
GURGAON, MARCH 18

THE GURGAON administration Wednesday directed all shopping malls in the district to remain closed until March 31 as a precautionary measure against the coronavirus outbreak. The move comes three days after the Haryana government directed all schools, colleges, gyms, clubs, cinema halls and theatres in the state to remain shut until month-end.

The order, issued in the evening, also restricts any gathering in Gurgaon to a "maximum of 50 persons".

District Magistrate Amit Khatri has directed several other activities to be "suspended" until March 31, including "the opera-

tions of weekly bazaars, shopping malls, except pharmacies, medical establishments, grocery stores and supermarkets". This decision was made earlier in the day at a meeting involving officials from the district administration, Additional Chief Secretary (ACS) of Health and Family Welfare, Rajiv Arora, who was also appointed nodal officer for COVID-19 Wednesday morning, and representatives of hospitals, restaurant associations, and National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM).

Although the order directed that the direction be adopted with immediate effect, malls in the city continued to operate Wednesday evening.

An official from the MG Road Mall Association said, "Malls have just received the notice, so from tomorrow we will close down. Right now, there are customers in malls. If we start to suddenly close, it may create panic. We don't want that, so we will stop entry for customers and shopkeepers from tomorrow." He added that employees will continue to be paid.

At Ambience Mall, too, officials said shops would be closed from Thursday. "We have just received the order, and will implement it from tomorrow. Everything at Ambience will be closed until March 31, except Big Bazaar and the medical facility we have for customers, until further directions," said an official.

At shops, meanwhile, confusion prevailed among employees, with many saying they have not received any direction from mall authorities or the companies they work for. "We have all heard of the order, but the people at the mall have not told us how they will implement it, neither has the company; so we do not know whether we have to remain open tomorrow," said a salesperson at a clothing store in Ambience Mall.

Wednesday's order also directs spas, multiplexes, bars, and lounges to remain shut. In addition, it directs that all restaurants having in-dining facilities restrict "capacity to less than 50 seats". It also directs public dealings at government offices to be minimised.

Although salons, beauty parlours, and grooming centres have been allowed to continue their operations, the DM has directed

their owners to decontaminate and sanitise their premises "frequently and regularly", and ensure availability of hand sanitisers at entry gate. Private cab operators have similarly been directed to decontaminate and sanitise their cabs and ensure hand sanitisers are available in their vehicles.

While the Haryana government had on Sunday prohibited gatherings of more than 200 people across the state, with two cases of coronavirus emerging in Gurgaon since, the DM reduced this figure to 50.

The DM further stated: "Any person contravening this order shall be punishable u/s 188 of IPC. Commissioner of Police, Gurugram shall implement this order."

NCR records 4 new cases, all returned from abroad

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, GURGAON, NOIDA, MARCH 18

FOUR MORE people tested positive for coronavirus in Delhi-NCR on Wednesday — two in the capital, and one each in Noida and Gurgaon. A 22-year-old woman with a travel history to London and a 38-year-old woman with a travel history to Saudi Arabia tested positive for COVID-19 in Delhi. Both patients have been admitted to Safdarjung hospital. The woman with a travel history to London is a resident of North Delhi and the other resides in East Delhi.

The health department has initiated contact tracing of both patients. While 33 contacts have been traced for the 22-year-old patient, 100 contacts of the other woman have been traced so far. Till date, 1,91,653 passengers landing from COVID-19 affected countries have been screened at Delhi airport and placed under surveillance. A total of 5,323 passengers were screened on

Wednesday. Medical teams have been deputed from Delhi government at the airport for the screening of passengers. As many as 11 suspected cases were admitted to Lok Nayak hospital Wednesday night. One suspected patient has been admitted at GTB hospital.

Haryana health department officials said a Gurgaon resident, who has been admitted at Safdarjung hospital since March 9, tested positive on Wednesday.

"His sample was taken in Safdarjung, Delhi. His report was positive... He is 44 years old and a resident of Gurgaon. All the measures have been taken as per protocol. Eight samples have been taken for lab confirmation," the department's official report said. Officials said the man, who stays in Sector 50, had returned from London on March 7 and presented viral-like symptoms. Although he initially stayed home, he went to RML hospital in Delhi to get himself tested, from where he was referred to Safdarjung hospital.

Additional Chief Secretary, Health and Family Welfare, Rajiv

Arora, who is also the nodal officer for COVID-19 in Haryana, said initial reports of another person say he is suffering from COVID-19, but confirmation from the National Institute of Virology (NIV), Pune, is awaited.

In Noida, a 26-year-old man tested positive. He and his wife travelled to Indonesia and returned more than a week ago. The patient was admitted to Government Institute of Medical Sciences and has been under observation for the last four days. His wife's reports are awaited, officials said. He works at a prominent MNC in Noida and is a resident of Sector 41.

As the patient has been in isolation for the past four days, he came into contact with fewer people compared to other cases in the district, officials said. "Sanitisation is on at the residence. The area around it will also be looked at thoroughly. Other companies and societies in the vicinity are also carrying out cleaning," said Dr Anurag Bhargava, CMO Gautam Budh Nagar.

City businesses feel pinch, talk of salary cuts, layoffs

SOMYA LAKHANI & SOURAV ROY BARMAN
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

THE ECONOMIC toll of coronavirus, which has forced shutdowns across industries, is now being felt in the capital, with several businesses deciding to go for salary cuts and, if the situation persists, layoffs.

Restaurateur Priyanka Sukhija, who employs over 1,100 people across India, has shut all his bars, lounges and restaurants till March 31, including 14 places in Delhi. "Footfall was down 40%, so we took the call, also for the staff's safety. For the first 10 days, we will likely do a 25% salary cut. If this persists, we will be forced to do a 50% salary cut. If the shutdown stretches beyond a month, we may not be able to afford to keep our staff," said Sukhija.

Restaurateur Riyaz Amlani, who runs social co-working spaces across major cities, said that on Tuesday night, the National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI) decided that "shutting down restaurants was the best solution to ensure safety of staff". "Business at my outlets is down by 60%. It's best to shut down for four weeks, than letting this spread and bear harsher consequences later," he said.

Some business owners are asking staff to take "long leaves now instead of during summer vacations". Sumit Gulati, founder of Spice Market restaurant and cloud kitchens 'Call Chotu' and 'Nayi Dilli ke Paranthi', said, "Employees will not face pay cuts. We are offering long leaves to staff now instead of summer (May-July)."

At a popular non-veg eatery in East Delhi, delivery personnel wore a worried look as they sat idly outside the restaurant. "Business started suffering 10 days ago. In the last four-five days, it's less than 50%. People are unsure about eating non-veg food, and we sense that employers may have to sack some of us," said a 33-year-old delivery personnel.

Delivery personnel, who have maximum exposure, have been instructed to remain outside the kitchen and their temperature is



Employees wearing facemasks at a Khan Market shop, Wednesday. Praveen Khanna

being checked everyday before their shifts, added Gulati.

Karan Tanna, co-founder of Ghost Kitchens, said precautionary measures, including thermal screening employees every alternate day, use of sanitisers and contactless handover of food parcels to aggregator riders, have been adopted by the firm. Delivery kitchen Instapizza, in a statement, said the firm is taking "extraordinary steps" to ensure its kitchens remain safe. "We have been fortunate none of our team members have displayed symptoms so far. We are ready to step up and allow all team members to self-quarantine with pay. We have also reduced staff at each outlet at any given time to reduce clustering and have divided them into shifts," it said.

With several bars shutting down across Delhi-NCR until March 31 and a general dip in large events and gatherings after CM Arvind Kejriwal announced that "gatherings of more than 50 people are not allowed", another workforce that has taken a hit is that of bouncers.

Ajay Sharma, who runs Young Bouncer Club in Rajouri Garden, said, "I employ 40-45 bouncers and other staffers. We have had no work for 10 days as people are not holding parties or events. Bouncers are paid per event. Each bouncer would make roughly Rs 25,000 a month. Now, we are staring at a bleak future. I will have to let many of them go if things don't improve."

At Nehru Place, Ravinder Singh, who works at RB Security,

said "there has not been a single bouncer request in the last 10 days."

Salons and gyms across the capital are facing similar worries, with the former seeing a dip in business, and the latter a complete shutdown. Uday Raj Anand, who runs Crush Fitness, said, "We have to look for another business model online but that can't happen overnight. For the next two weeks, we are ensuring our trainers get up-skilled and take up fitness certification courses. We are also creating digital content for our clients and doing Skype-based training. For now, we won't do pay cuts, and we may even pay from our pockets, but if this continues, we will have no option but to let go some staff."

At Fitness Junkie Gym in East Delhi, manager Shivam said the sudden closure on Monday sent trainers and clients into a tizzy. "We don't know what our fate is as the gym owner is not in Delhi right now. Clients keep calling to ask if these 15 days will be 'adjusted' later. We don't know if we will even have jobs," he said.

At Looks parlour in Khan Market, a manager said "there has been a 70% dip in business in the last few days". "We are sanitising equipment, chairs, stairs, door knobs, wearing masks and gloves ourselves. People are only coming in for hair-related services, and are avoiding facials, threading and waxing," he said.

At an upscale Green Park parlour, one staffer said, "Everyone is sitting idle, why will owners retain so many people if there is no work?"



HC trying out video proceedings

New Delhi: The Delhi High Court Wednesday said it was holding trial runs to carry out proceedings through video conferencing in the wake of its restricted functioning due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Jails suspend family meets

New Delhi: Prisons in the capital have suspended family mullaqat of inmates from March 19 to 31, to ensure the virus doesn't spread to prison complexes.

Breathalyser tests stopped

New Delhi: In the wake of the coronavirus outbreak, Delhi Traffic Police has suspended breath analyser tests in cases of suspected drunk driving, till further notice. ENS

High tension in Noida high-rises, officials begin contact tracing

AMIL BHATNAGAR
NOIDA, MARCH 18

WITH NOIDA recording its fourth coronavirus case on Wednesday, the administration is working to trace anyone the four people came in contact with, even as their families were put under home quarantine. With panic spreading among residents of several high-rises in the area, health officials are also taking feedback by visiting each house within 1-2 km radius of the localities where the patients lived.

"As soon as a patient tests positive, our first measure is to take samples of family members and those who came in immediate contact. Once those are sent, we begin tracing other persons who live in the vicinity and seek information about their health and travel history. More quarantine facilities are being set up and we urge people to get in touch with us if they show symptoms. We are currently tracking thousands of people in the high-rise localities," said Dr Anurag Bhargava, CMO, Gautam Budh Nagar.

Residents said the team of medical officials are enquiring about the number of family members and any flu-like symp-



A visitor is screened by a guard at a high-rise in Noida. Abhinav Saha

toms exhibited by residents. Teams have been visiting the societies since Tuesday to create a logbook of residents.

Society associations have meanwhile barred maids and domestic helps from visiting homes for the next few days. Delivery staff are being allowed till the common area or the lobby, and entry via staircase or the elevators has been stopped.

Some residents also claimed that as news of people testing positive spread, there was panic buying of essential items in the area. "Our society has a shopping complex from where most of us get daily supplies. In the last two days, items like flour, pulses, milk have been getting over faster since people are buying in bulk. No one wants to go to a shop far away," said a resident.

As law colleges shut, profs and students make move to virtual

PRITAM PAL SINGH
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

FOLLOWING A notification from the Bar Council of India (BCI) to shut down all law colleges in the country till March 31 in view of the rapid spread of COVID-19, e-engagement between law professors and students has moved to the next level.

Dr Rashmi Salpekar, Dean of the Vivekananda School of Law and Legal Studies, said they have started conducting online classes, soon after IP University advised suspension of all classes till March 31.

"Though the faculty had been coming to college and conducting e-engagement from the campus after the BCI advisory, it would now be done by respective faculties from their homes," said Dr Salpekar.

She said, "Study material in the form of video lectures, audio lectures, Powerpoint presentations, and detailed notes are being shared with students. Faculty are preparing and sharing videos for their classes scheduled during the two weeks. Additional reading material from reference books is also being shared with students."

As per the BCI, about 1,300 colleges across India will be re-

quired under the advisory to operate under the e-engagement provision.

Professor IM Ahmedabad, said, "There are several free apps for recording lectures, videos and conducting classes online. Three popular and free live video streaming (social) apps with recording facilities are YouTube Live, Facebook Live, and Google Duo," adding, "LinkedIn also has a live video facility in addition to Twitter, Instagram, etc".

Vice Chancellor of O P Jindal Global University, Dr C Raj Kumar, said they are conducting online classes through webinars using Microsoft Teams. He said, "We are working hard to ensure the university and its students don't suffer due to this massive crisis."

To safeguard students' interest amid the closure of universities and suspension of classes across the country till March 31, Professor (Dr) G S Bajpai of National Law University in Delhi said the varsity has developed a program by the name 'NLU Delhi's e-PG Pathshala courses' whereby students may avail digital high quality, curriculum-based interactive content in 16 courses of Law with over 500 modules, as entrusted by the MHRD and UGC.

DAY AFTER PLACING SOME STAFF UNDER QUARANTINE

IIT-Delhi tightens entry norms, asks hostelers to pack bags and leave

ARANYA SHANKAR
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

IIT-DELHI Wednesday decided to restrict entry to the campus by shutting all but one gate and issued orders asking all students, except international students, to vacate their hostel rooms. This comes a day after the institute asked eight staff members and two guests to self-quarantine after it was found a person, who tested positive for COVID-19, had

stayed in one of the institute's guesthouses. IIT-D has also kept five students who returned from the US on March 10 in isolation within the campus for 14 days as a precautionary measure.

"The Dean of Students said they were taken to RML Hospital yesterday, and doctors asked them to stay in isolation for 14 days. We have kept them in some one-room apartments on campus," said Professor V K Aggarwal, chairman of IIT-D's hospital advisory committee.

A student with a travel history to Norway was also sent for a check-up to RML Tuesday but was sent back without any advice for self-isolation.

In a circular issued Wednesday, security officer Sandeep Sharma said, "Keeping in view the increasing cases of COVID-19, it has been decided... to close the gates of the institute with immediate effect until further orders." The gates which have been shut include the Mehrauli gate (Shani Mandir),



and exit from the main gate, and domestic workers can enter on showing their identity cards issued by IIT-D, the circular said. In a separate notice, Assistant Registrar Mukesh Chand said, "It has been decided that all students, except international students, will have to leave the hostel positively by March 19."

The institute earlier asked most students to vacate hostels, but made exceptions for PhD students (except those who are in their first year of research)

Auto-rickshaws and cabs would only be allowed to enter

A hostel leaving the campus. Tashi Tobgyal

On Tuesday, IIT-D officials wrote to all faculty members, saying they tried to get the eight contractual staff and two guests tested for coronavirus but got no response from the helpline number. Asked if the tests were conducted Wednesday, Aggarwal said he had not received any information yet. He said it was not possible to quarantine staff members in the institute due to a lack of support infrastructure. When contacted, RML Hospital did not respond to queries on the matter.



वर्ष तीन काम बेहतरीन



गन्ना मूल्य भुगतान

रु. 92,522 करोड़ रिकॉर्ड
गन्ना मूल्य भुगतान

कृषक कल्याण

• रु. 36,000 करोड़ से 86 लाख लघु एवं सीमान्त किसानों का फसल ऋण मोचन • प्रधानमंत्री किसान सम्मान निधि योजना में प्रदेश के सभी किसान आच्छादित, 2 करोड़ 4 लाख किसानों के खाते में रु. 12 हजार करोड़ हस्तांतरित • 4 करोड़ मृदा स्वास्थ्य कार्ड एवं 1.11 करोड़ किसान क्रेडिट कार्ड वितरित

खाद्यान्न

• राशन कार्ड पोर्टेबिलिटी लागू • ई-पॉस मशीन से खाद्यान्न वितरण • खाद्यान्न के न्यूनतम समर्थन मूल्य में लागत का डेढ़ गुना बढ़ोत्तरी

सिंचाई

• बाण सागर परियोजना सहित 8 परियोजनाएं पूर्ण
2 लाख 16 हजार हे. अतिरिक्त सिंचन क्षमता वृद्धि

बिजली

• सभी 1 लाख 4 हजार 636 राजस्व गांव एवं 2 लाख 60 हजार 110 मजदूरों का विद्युतीकरण • जनपद मुख्यालयों में 24 घंटे, तहसील मुख्यालयों में 20 घंटे और ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में 18 घंटे बिजली आपूर्ति • सौर ऊर्जा सेक्टर में 1535 मेगावाट के रु. 7500 करोड़ के प्रस्ताव स्वीकृत • उजाला योजना में 2 करोड़ 60 लाख 80 हजार एल.ई.डी. बल्ब वितरित

शिक्षा

• स्कूल चलो अभियान में इस वर्ष 1 करोड़ 81 लाख बच्चों का नामांकन • 'ऑपरेशन कायाकल्प' के तहत 92 हजार विद्यालयों में बुनियादी सुविधाएं • बालिकाओं को स्नातक तक निःशुल्क शिक्षा • नकलविहीन परीक्षाएं • एन.सी.ई.आर.टी. पाठ्यक्रम लागू • 3 नये विश्वविद्यालयों की स्वीकृति • 45,383 प्राथमिक अध्यापकों की भर्ती पूर्ण एवं 69,000 अध्यापकों की भर्ती प्रक्रिया अन्तिम चरण में • 5,987 माध्यमिक शिक्षकों के नये पदों का सृजन

चिकित्सा एवं स्वास्थ्य

• आयुष्मान योजना में 1 करोड़ 18 लाख गरीब परिवारों को रु. 5 लाख का चिकित्सा बीमा कवर • मुख्यमंत्री जन आरोग्य योजना में 10 लाख 56 हजार परिवारों को 5 लाख रु. का बीमा कवर • जे.ई./ए.ई.एस. के रोकथाम से बीमारी में 75% एवं मृत्यु दर में 90% कमी • रायबरेली एवं गोरखपुर में एम्स की स्थापना • 7 नये मेडिकल कालेज में शिक्षण प्रारम्भ • 5 जिला चिकित्सालयों का मेडिकल कालेज के रूप में उच्चीकरण • 8 नये मेडिकल कालेज का निर्माण प्रगति पर • 13 नये मेडिकल कालेज की स्थापना की स्वीकृति • अटल बिहारी वाजपेयी चिकित्सा विश्वविद्यालय का निर्माण प्रारम्भ

मुख्यमंत्री आरोग्य मेला

• प्रत्येक रविवार को सभी प्राथमिक स्वास्थ्य केन्द्रों पर मुख्यमंत्री आरोग्य मेला का आयोजन • रोगियों को निःशुल्क चिकित्सा सेवाएं उपलब्ध

मुख्यमंत्री सामूहिक विवाह योजना

• रु. 250 करोड़ का प्रावधान, अब तक 1 लाख से अधिक गरीब कन्याओं का विवाह • अनुदान राशि रु. 35 हजार से बढ़ाकर रु. 51 हजार

डिफेन्स एक्सपो

• लखनऊ में डिफेन्स एक्सपो का सफल आयोजन • 70 देशों के 3000 से अधिक निवेशकों द्वारा प्रतिभाग • 200 से अधिक एम.ओ.यू. हस्ताक्षरित • डिफेन्स मैनुफैक्चरिंग कॉरिडोर में रु. 50,000 करोड़ का निवेश • 5 लाख लोगों को रोजगार मिलेगा

एक जनपद-एक उत्पाद

• जनपदों के विशिष्ट उत्पादों को प्रोत्साहन • रु. 8875 करोड़ से अधिक के ऋण वितरित • 5 लाख से अधिक लोगों को रोजगार

नये भारत का नया उत्तर प्रदेश



- प्रधानमंत्री आवास योजना (ग्रामीण एवं शहरी) में 30 लाख से अधिक आवास निर्मित कर देश में प्रथम
- ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में 2 करोड़ 61 लाख शौचालयों (इज्जतघर) का निर्माण कर देश में प्रथम
- गन्ना एवं चीनी उत्पादन में देश में प्रथम स्थान
- सौभाग्य योजना में 1 करोड़ 24 लाख घरों को निःशुल्क विद्युत कनेक्शन देकर देश में प्रथम
- उज्वला योजना में 1.47 करोड़ परिवारों को निःशुल्क गैस कनेक्शन देकर देश में प्रथम
- गेहूँ, गन्ना, आलू, हरी मटर, दुग्ध, आम एवं आवला उत्पादन में प्रथम स्थान
- सूक्ष्म, लघु एवं मध्यम उद्योगों में प्रथम स्थान
- कौशल विकास नीति लागू करने वाला पहला राज्य
- ई-प्रासिक्युशन प्रणाली में प्रथम स्थान
- डी.वी.टी. के माध्यम से किसानों को अनुदान के भुगतान में प्रथम स्थान
- देश का सबसे बड़ा एथेनॉल आपूर्तिकर्ता प्रदेश

बजट 2020-21

- प्रदेश के इतिहास का सबसे बड़ा बजट
- बजट का आकार
- 05 लाख 12 हजार 860 करोड़ 72 लाख रुपए
- कृषि, शिक्षा, स्वास्थ्य, रोजगार, अवस्थापना, महिला कल्याण एवं सामाजिक सुरक्षा पर विशेष फोकस

कानून-व्यवस्था

• अपराध और भ्रष्टाचार पर जीरो टॉलरेंस • संगठित अपराधों में भारी कमी • लखनऊ एवं नोएडा में पुलिस कमिश्नर व्यवस्था लागू • महिलाओं को त्वरित न्याय हेतु 81 मजिस्ट्रेट स्तरीय न्यायालय एवं 81 अपर सत्र न्यायालय • 218 नए फास्ट ट्रैक कोर्ट गठित • प्रत्येक जनपद में साइबर सेल का गठन

पारदर्शी प्रक्रिया से सरकारी नौकरी

• 3 लाख युवाओं को भ्रष्टाचार मुक्त पारदर्शी प्रक्रिया से सरकारी नौकरी

निवेश

• प्रथम और द्वितीय ग्राउण्ड ब्रेकिंग सेरेमनी व अन्य माध्यमों से लगभग रु. 3 लाख करोड़ के निवेश से 33 लाख से अधिक लोगों को रोजगार

सड़क, मेट्रो एवं एयर कनेक्टिविटी

• नोएडा इन्टरनेशनल ग्रीनफील्ड एयरपोर्ट के लिए भूमि अधिग्रहण • 11 एयरपोर्ट्स का विकास कार्य प्रगति पर • अयोध्या में अन्तर्राष्ट्रीय एयरपोर्ट हेतु रु. 500 करोड़ का प्रावधान • लखनऊ मेट्रो का अमौसी से मुंशी पुलिया तक संचालन • कानपुर एवं आगरा मेट्रो रेल परियोजना का कार्य प्रगति पर • 11318 किमी. मार्गों का चौड़ीकरण एवं सुदृढीकरण • तहसील मुख्यालयों व विकास खण्डों को 2 लेन मार्ग से जोड़ने का कार्य गतिमान

स्मार्ट सिटी

• लखनऊ, कानपुर, प्रयागराज, वाराणसी, आगरा, सहारनपुर, बरेली, झांसी, मुरादाबाद, अलीगढ़ में रु. 20 हजार करोड़ की परियोजनाओं का क्रियान्वयन

नमामि गंगे

• 15 परियोजनाएं पूर्ण, 19 परियोजनाएं प्रगति पर।
• कानपुर के सीसामऊ, बिनगवां, जाजमऊ नाले को टैप कर एस.टी.पी. में शोधन
• माँ गंगा की निर्मलता एवं अवरिलता के प्रति जागरूकता हेतु गंगा यात्रा का आयोजन

पर्यटन

• प्रयागराज में 'दिव्य कुम्भ-भव्य कुम्भ' का सफल आयोजन • अयोध्या में दीपोत्सव, मथुरा में कृष्णोत्सव, वाराणसी में देव दीपावली तथा बरसाना में रंगोत्सव का आयोजन • काशी विश्वनाथ मंदिर कॉरिडोर के लिए रु. 207 करोड़ • रु. 133 करोड़ से अयोध्या का पर्यटन विकास

मुख्यमंत्री कन्या सुमंगला योजना

• बेटियों के बेहतर भविष्य के लिए रु. 1200 करोड़ का प्रावधान
• अभी तक 2 लाख 60 हजार से अधिक बालिकाएं लाभान्वित

मुख्यमंत्री आवास योजना

• 50,740 निःशुल्क आवास आवंटित • 27,764 आवास मुसहर, 4,666 आवास वनटांगिया, 81 आवास थारू जनजाति तथा शेष अन्य पात्र व्यक्तियों को आवंटित

समाज कल्याण

• 46 लाख 96 हजार वृद्धजन को पेंशन • 23 लाख 49 हजार 898 निराश्रित महिलाओं को पेंशन • विधवा पेंशन में 21 लाख 69 हजार 898 महिलाओं को पेंशन • 10 लाख 55 हजार 513 दिव्यांगजनों को पेंशन • श्रमिकों के बच्चों एवं अनाथ बच्चों हेतु सभी 18 मंडलों में अटल आवासीय विद्यालय का निर्माण प्रारम्भ • प्रधानमंत्री मातृ वन्दना योजना से 24 लाख माताएं लाभान्वित

एक्सप्रेसवे

• 341 किमी. लम्बे पूर्वांचल एक्सप्रेसवे का तेजी से निर्माण • 297 किमी. लम्बे बुन्देलखण्ड एक्सप्रेसवे का निर्माण प्रगति पर • मेरठ से प्रयागराज तक गंगा एक्सप्रेसवे के निर्माण का निर्णय • 92 किमी. लम्बे गोरखपुर लिंक एक्सप्रेसवे का निर्माण प्रगति पर

Capital prepares for possibility of schools remaining shut

SUKRITA BARUAH
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

THE DELHI government is considering the option of keeping schools in the capital closed beyond March 31 and is planning how to sustain teaching and learning in that case.

Due to the coronavirus outbreak, the Delhi government had so far ordered the closure of all schools in the city till March 31. The academic disruption caused by this closure has mostly been limited, as almost all schools' final exams were underway or nearly completed, after which they were going to close for an end-of-year break.

However, the new academic school year is due to begin on April 1, and the government is preparing for the possibility of extending the closure of schools beyond that if the situation does not stabilise by then.

On Wednesday, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia wrote to the Education Secretary that he will hold a "brainstorming session" on March 26 with a group of senior education department officials, heads and teachers of government, municipal corporation and private schools, and the Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights.

"In case we need to close the schools any further, we must have an alternate plan in place so that the academic loss of children, due to prolonged closure of schools, can be minimised. Participants are expected to come up with ideas of learning-support activities for children at their respective homes with the help of parents and technology, to the extent feasible," read Sisodia's note.

The *Indian Express* had reported how some schools are sending online learning material to their students even now, and how high-end schools such as The British School have begun virtual learning through collaborative software.

However, a senior education department official said the teaching-learning plan will have to consider the resource limitations of a bulk of the students.

"The online learning possibilities are limited in the homes of many government and municipal corporation school students, who come from low-income households," the official said.

Ridership in public buses down 2.8 lakh

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

THE DAILY average ridership in the capital's public buses have come down by around 2.80 lakh in March, when compared against figures recorded in February, as per data obtained from the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) and Delhi Integrated Multimodal Transit System (DIMTS).

While DTC has a fleet of around 3,700 buses, there are over 2,300 buses under the cluster scheme managed by the DIMTS.

Delhi Metro has also registered a dip in ridership in March. The drop in bus ridership is not as sharp as the one recorded by the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation

(DMRC), reflecting the varying social compositions that Metro and bus passengers represent.

As per DTC data, between March 1 and March 15, leaving out Holi, around 30.82 lakh people on an average availed DTC services. Between February 15 and 29, the daily average ridership was 32.30 lakh daily.

When contacted, DIMTS said the average daily decrease in footfall in cluster buses is "1.40 lakh due to riots and curfew in Northeast Delhi, outbreak of coronavirus, and Holi".

Delhi Metro has registered a daily average of 46.53 lakh journeys in March so far, as against the average of 57.13 lakh recorded in February, the DMRC said in a statement Monday, attributing the dip to "natural factors" and coronavirus-related restrictions.



The fresh standard operating procedure has reportedly cut the time between arrival and leaving for quarantine to roughly three hours. Express

After day of chaos, some order at IGI

SHIVAM PATEL
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

AFTER MORE than 400 travellers from Paris and Frankfurt had to wait over eight hours at the Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA) as authorities scrambled to quarantine them, a meeting was held Tuesday by the special secretary of the Union health ministry, Sanjeeva Kumar, to review the situation.

The meeting discussed drawing up a fresh standard operating procedure (SOP) for passenger quarantine, and had all stakeholders in attendance — including representatives from the Delhi government and the Bureau of Immigration.

In the next 24 hours, the new SOP became operational at IGIA, officials said, which has cut the time between arrival and leaving for quarantine to roughly three hours. It also mentions exploring the possibility of "home quarantine stamps" for passengers, as done by Maharashtra. The decision on this would be taken by the Delhi government, officials said.

The problem that arose Monday was caused after about 405 passengers from Paris and Frankfurt arrived at the same

time around 9 am, according to officials. This increased the pressure on staff who were screening them for COVID-19 symptoms at a dedicated pier at Terminal 3.

Passengers were then sent to quarantine facilities run by the state governments in Delhi and Gurgaon, and screened for a second time there. Many did not find the facilities suitable and refused to get off the buses that took them, causing further delays, officials said.

Under the new SOP, the Ministry of Civil Aviation would instruct Delhi airport authorities to stagger the arrival of flights from COVID-19 affected countries.

After arriving at the airport, travellers would be brought to counters set up by the Airport Health Organisation (APHO) at a pier in Terminal 3 for initial thermal screening. Passengers showing symptoms of COVID-19 would be isolated here and sent to designated hospitals for further treatment.

Asymptomatic passengers would then move to immigration counters, form batches of 30 after clearance and be escorted through luggage belts and customs by a five-member team — headed by the CISF and including representatives from the air-

port, airlines and Delhi Police.

Airport operator DIAL would provide them refreshments as they move into a triage area — set up at a disused staff canteen at Terminal 3 — to be screened again by medical officers and para-medical staff deputised by the Delhi government.

Those without any risk factors would be sent for home quarantine after they sign a declaration to remain under quarantine for 14 days or face penal action. They would also be linked to an Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) system of the Delhi government.

High-risk passengers identified for quarantine would then be taken to either a paid quarantine facility in a hotel room or at the state government-run facilities, based on their choice.

The quarantine facilities at present comprise about 180 fixed price rooms at three premier hotels in Aerocity and the government-monitored facilities.

The Delhi, Haryana and UP governments have set aside centres for quarantine with a total capacity of 1,000 beds — 600 at various locations in Delhi, and 200 each in Gurgaon and Noida. The Noida facility is expected to become operational by Thursday.

At Haryana manufacturing units, working from home not an option as sales slump

SAKSHI DAYAL
GURGAON, MARCH 18

EVEN AS employees at several multinational corporations and IT firms in Gurgaon have started working from home as a precautionary measure against COVID-19 in the last few days, this isn't a viable option for those in the manufacturing sector.

Officials at manufacturing units, however, said several measures have been taken to protect employees and make them aware of precautions they can take at a personal level.

While some organisations are focusing more on physical precautions, such as providing sanitisers and masks, others are also emphasising on mental health of workers and providing them "counselling".

"We have been taking several proactive actions in the manufacturing sector for almost 10 days. We began with counselling of workers and staff, including extensive counselling on maintaining personal hygiene. Their living conditions outside the factory are not very hygienic, so we guided them on what to avoid and how to enforce personal cleanliness," said Animesh Saxena, CEO of Neetee Apparel LLP, which has a manufacturing unit in Udyog Vihar.

On physical measures taken, he said, "When workers come into the factory, we conduct a thermal check of their temperatures and make them clean their hands with sanitiser. Liquid soap and sanitisers have been provided at convenient places. Masks have also been made available."

At Maruti Suzuki, a company spokesperson said a slew of measures have been taken, including replacement of the biometric attendance system with a punch card system. Employees are also being requested to avoid large meetings and events, and to extensively use tele- and video-conferencing facilities.

"Access to sanitisers within the premises is in abundance, and face masks and sanitisers are also being made available at discounted rates. We are also carrying out frequent cleaning of all public areas, furniture, door han-



At Maruti Suzuki, employees have been advised to extensively use video-conferencing facilities. Express

dles, washrooms, canteens, and vehicles ferrying company staff," said the spokesperson.

At Honda Motorcycle Scooter and India (HMSI), while officials could not be contacted for comment, members of the workers' union said apart from stopping biometric punching, workers have been asked to wear uniforms at home instead of changing on the premises.

"Earlier, we would change into our uniforms in the locker room; now we have to wear the uniform at home so there is no gathering in the locker room. Masks were in use in a lot of departments earlier too, but now they are trying to make that 100%," said union president Suresh Gaur.

Deepak Maini, general secretary of the Gurugram Industrial Association, claimed measures such as providing sanitisers and masks were being taken at the industry level as well.

"Most of our members are from the garment and automobile industry, who cannot work from home, so we have told them to take as many precautions as possible. We have asked them to provide masks to workers, and have given 10,000 masks to our members at a cost of Rs 2 each. We are also providing gel-based sanitisers at a cost of Rs 250 each to members. We have been doing this for the last 15 days," he said.

Despite operations continuing as usual so far, officials from these manufacturing set-ups said they are concerned about the future. Many called the virus a "double whammy" for them — it has increased costs due to the precautionary measures being

taken for employees and has also adversely affected their finances by causing a fall in business.

"Manesar is a big export hub of garments and textiles. In the last four-five days, a big crisis has emerged with buyers canceling many orders. Europe — a big export market for textiles and apparel from India — is on a lockdown, so malls and stores there have been closed," said Saxena.

"This is peak season for our exports from India, but orders from there have been either placed on hold or cancelled. This can create a major job crisis — if factories don't have work, they will start letting people go," he said.

Manmohan Gaiind, vice-president of Manesar Industries Welfare Association, reiterated this. "Business has gone down drastically. We have a lot of exporters, and they are very worried whether the orders they are manufacturing right now will be shipped or not, because the situation in the West is full of panic."

Officials also said the "confidence" of their workers has been affected. "So far, factories were working in capacity. But most workers are migrants, who have been getting calls from their families to return home. So many are concerned," said Saxena.

Gaiind added, "Fear of the unknown is gripping the minds of people. All kinds of rumours are going around. It has a huge impact on the confidence of workers."

HMSI employees' union president Suresh Gaur also said fear among workers is increasing every day. "But everyone continues to go to work. There is little choice. We all need the money."

DELHI JAL BOARD: DELHI SARKAR
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER (N) -II
NEAR TRANSPORT AUTHORITY MAIN BURARI ROAD DELHI- 84
NIT No. 113 (Item No. 1) (2019-20) E.E. (North)-II

S. No.	Name of Work	Estimated Cost (Rs.)	Date of release of tender in e-procurement solution	Earnest Money (Rs.)	Tender fee (Non-refundable)	Last date/ time of receipt of tender through e-procurement solution
1.	Providing and laying 450/500 mm dia sewer line from Trenchless Technology for making separate out fall for E,F,A,B and K-Block Model Town in AC-18, Model Town under E.E. (North)-II. (Re-Invite) I.D. 2020_DJB_169800_1)	27,07,704/-	18.03.2020 02 PM onward	54,200/-	500/-	Technical bid will be received: 08.04.2020, 3:00 PM & opening of Financial bid after completion of technical bid & confirmation of EMD from Bank.

Further details in this regard can be seen at <https://govtprocurement.delhi.gov.in>

ISSUED BY P.R.O. (WATER)
Advt. No. J.S.V. 928/19-20

Sd/-
(S.K. SINGH)
EXECUTIVE ENGINEER (N)-II

HIMACHAL PRADESH, PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT
01905-272269 Fax:- 272862, Email: ee-dhar-hp@nic.in

INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)

No: PW-DPD-CB-Tender/2020-29577-79 Dated: 17.03.2020

The Executive Engineer, Dharampur Division, HPPWD Dharampur, Dist: Mandi (H.P.) on behalf of Governor of H.P. invites the Item Rate Bids, in Electronic Tendering Systems from the Eligible Class of Contractors Registered with HPPWD for the work as detailed in the Table.

Sr. No.	Name of Work	Estimated Cost (In Rs.)	Starting Date for Downloading Bid	Earnest Money (In Rs.)	Deadline for Submission of Bid
1.	Construction of New Civil Hospital at Sandhole Tehsil Dharampur, Dist: Mandi (H.P.) (SH: Building Portion and WS and SI, Rain Water Harvesting Tank and Septic Tank)	13,23,73,018/-	29.03.2020	5,00,000/-	03.04.2020

The Bidders are advised to note other details of Tender from the Department website: www.hp-tenders.gov.in.

Executive Engineer,
Dharampur Division, HPPWD Dharampur, Dist: Mandi (H.P.)
on behalf of Governor of H.P.

GOVERNMENT OF HIMACHAL PARDESH PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER NATIONAL HIGHWAYS, BLOCK-D, NIRMAN BHAWAN, NIGAM VIHAR, SHIMLA-171002

Notice Inviting Bid

Bid No. PW-CE-NH-CTR-Tender Notice/EPC-18/2020- Dated: 17.03.2020

RFP for Upgradation of Kullu-Manali section of NH-21 (now NH-3) from Km. 272.00 to Km. 309.345 (designated chainage) on EPC Mode in the State of Himachal Pradesh under NHDP phase-IVB: Regarding Maintenance of Bypassed sections of National Highways. (Tender Job No. EPC 18/2020).

The Ministry of Road Transport & Highways through Chief Engineer NH HPPWD Shimla is engaged in the development of National Highways and as part of this Endeavour, it has been decided to undertake Upgradation of Kullu-Manali section of NH-21 (now NH-3) from Km. 272.00 to Km. 309.345 (designated chainage) on EPC Mode in the State of Himachal Pradesh under NHDP phase-IVB: Regarding Maintenance of Bypassed sections of National Highways (Tender Job No. EPC18/2020) through an Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC)/Contract.

Himachal Pradesh Public Works Department through Chief Engineer NH HPPWD Shimla now invites bids from eligible contractors for the following project:

Site	NH No.	Tender Job No.	Name of Work	Estimated Cost (Civil Cost Excluding GST)	Completion Period	Defect Liability Period
Himachal Pradesh	21(now NH-3)	EPC-18/2020	Upgradation of Kullu-Manali section of NH-21 (now NH-3) from Km. 272.00 to Km. 309.345 (designated chainage) on EPC Mode in the State of Himachal Pradesh under NHDP phase-IVB: Regarding Maintenance of Bypassed sections of National Highways.	Rs. 4.87 Crores	09 Months	03 years

The complete BID document can be viewed / downloaded from official portal of e-Procurement portal of MoRT&H (<https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app>) from 17.03.2020 (1800 Hrs. IST) to 17.04.2020 (upto 1100 Hrs. IST). Bidder must submit its Technical Bid & Financial Bid at (<https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app>) and also Technical Bid at (<https://bims.gov.in>) on or before 17.04.2020 (upto 1100 Hrs. IST). It is mandatory to submit the Technical Bids on (<https://bims.gov.in>) also. Bids received online shall be opened on 18.04.2020 (at 1130 Hrs. IST).

Bid through any other mode shall not be entertained. However, Bid Securing Declaration, Document Fee Receipt Deposited through Bidder/ NTRP only. Power of Attorney and Joint Bidding Agreement etc. shall be submitted physically by the Bidder on or before 18.04.2020 (at 1100 Hrs. IST). Please note that the Chief Engineer, NH, HPPWD, Shimla-2 reserves the right to accept or reject all or any of the BIDs without assigning any reason whatsoever.

Officer in-charge
For and on Behalf of Governor of HP
Chief Engineer, National Highway, Nirman Bhawan
HPPWD, Shimla-171002
Phone/ Fax 0177-2629416, E-mail: ce-nh-hp@nic.in

Chief Engineer (NH)
HP.PWD. Shimla-2.

ODISHA BRIDGE & CONSTRUCTION CORPORATION LIMITED
CAD-1134 (A Government of Odisha Undertaking)
No: File: Date: 17.03.2020
Notice: SMT-1671

NOTICE INVITING TENDER
Bid Identification: 19/Tender/OBCC/2019-20 Dated: 17.03.2020

- Name of the Work:** "Construction of Jagannath Ballav Pilgrim Centre, Market Complex and Shree Setu along with extension of Musa River at Puri on Turn Key basis".
- Period Completion:** Thirty months.
- Date and time of availability of bid document in the portal:** 5.00 P.M. of 24.03.2020.
- Last date/time for receipt of bid in web portal:** 27.04.2020 till 5.00 PM.
- Further details can be seen from the e-Procurement portal "<https://www.tendersodisha.gov.in>"

Sd/-
Managing Director
Odisha Bridge & Construction Corporation Limited
OIPR-34106/11/0051/1920

INVITATION FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST
GOVERNMENT OF JHARKHAND POLICE HEADQUARTERS, RANCHI

Jharkhand Police intends to insure the lives and limbs/body parts of its police personnel like Bomb disposal squads, who are engaged in Bomb disposal duty other than anti-naxal operations in the State. The number of such personnel is approximately 130. The Insurance Cover for them is proposed to stay from 00.00 hrs. on date 30/03/2020 and is proposed to remain valid initially for a period of one year and is proposed to be extended for a period of one year more depending on the suitability of the chosen Insurance Company.

As per existing rules, Jharkhand Police is authorized to pay a maximum annual premium of Rupees 2,360/- (Rs Two Thousand Three Hundred Sixty only including service tax) per personnel covered under this insurance scheme. However, bid will be finalised in favour of the bidder who quotes the highest Capital Sum Insured per personnel.

Expression of Interest is invited from the bonafide and reputed companies engaged in insurance of lives and limbs/body parts. The 'Expression of Interest' should contain the Capital Sum Insured, detailed terms and conditions and procedure for settlement of claims.

The Minimum coverage proposed is as below:-
Capital Sum Insured (CSI): Rs- 35,00,000/- (Minimum Rs.- Thirty five Lakhs)

Benefits/ Coverage	% of capital sum Insured
A. Death	100%
B. Permanent total disability	100%
C. Loss of two limbs, loss of sight of two eyes or loss of one limb & loss of sight of one eye.	100%
D. Loss of one limb or loss of sight of one eye.	50%
E. Permanent Partial Disablement%	In accordance with IRDA Norms as per Annexure-A
F. In case of Hospitalization in private or Government Hospital due to injury, all expenses of Hospitalization	Rs 15,00,000/- (Minimum Rs. - Fifteen Lakhs sum) Maximum preferably cashless system.

The 'Expressions of Interest' are expected to be submitted to the D.I.G (Budget) in the Office of the D.G. & I.G. of Police, Jharkhand on or before 25/03/2020 by 15:00 hrs, after which no proposal would be accepted. 'Expression of Interest' will be opened in presence of the representatives of respective bidding Insurance Companies in the office chamber of the D.I.G (Budget) in the office of the D.G. & I.G. of Police, Jharkhand, Ranchi on the 25/03/2020 at 16:00 hrs. The final award may involve a process of negotiations after opening of the 'Expressions of Interest' regarding clarification on the various points raised in such 'Expressions'. The 'Expressions of Interest' is also can be seen on Jharkhand Police Website www.jhpolice.gov.in.

Additional Director General of Police (Mod)
Jharkhand, Ranchi

LOST NOTICE

I, Pradeep Jolly, S/O Late Shri K.L. Jolly, declare that I have lost my share certificate no 31 dated 17th February 1986 for one share of face value Rs 100 for my membership of Gitanjali Cooperative Group Housing society Ltd., Vikas Marg Extension, Karkardooma, DELHI-110092, in relation to my Flat No. A-202 in the said society. Any body who finds this certificate is kindly requested to return the same to me. I may be contacted at my Mobile No. 9810001651.

NORTH WESTERN RAILWAY
E-Tender Notice

Div. Rly. Manager, N.W.Rly. Bikaner for and on behalf of President of India invites open E-Tender for the following works up to 15.00 hours on 31.03.2020 as below:- Tender No.: E-152 Name of Work with its Location: Strengthening of sub structure of Bridge no. 28 at Km 487-8 by jacking to make them fit for 25T-2008 loading on BTI-SOG section under ADEN-I/HMH Approx. Cost of Work : Rs. 11177606.56/- Earnest money Rs.: Rs. 205900.00/- Note : Other term & condition will be shown on N.W.Rly website www.ireps.gov.in 300-DH/20 Please join us on <https://www.facebook.com/NWRailways>

SALUTE THE SOLDIER

05.06.1958 - 19.03.1990

On 18.03.1990, Naik Jokhan Prasad Prajapati posted at Carnak Bunder, Mumbai Division, Central Railway was performing store depot guarding duty, noticed some suspected intruders trying to enter in carriage and wagon workshop. On being challenged by Naik Jokhan Prasad Prajapati, intruders choose to run toward main line and in the pursuit of these criminals, in spite of knowing the fact that chasing criminals on running track in Mumbai sub-urban area could be lethal for him too, Prajapati fearlessly opted to chase escaping criminals, unfortunately one bypassing fast local train hit him from the back, caused grievous injuries which turned fatal and led to his Martyrdom on 19.03.1990.

"Remembered with pride DG and All Ranks of Railway Protection Force personnel"

Punjab Water Supply & Sewerage Division, Ludhiana
E-mail: eeprasadivn2ldh@gmail.com

No. 1166 **CORRIDGENDUM** Date: 16.03.2020

Name of work: Construction of Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs), Pumping Stations, ETPs for Dairy Complexes, Rehabilitation of existing STPs & Main Pumping Stations for abatement of pollution in Buddha Nallah, Ludhiana including Operation & Maintenance for a period of 10 years (on DBOT basis) under AMRUT scheme.

Cost of Project: Lump Sum (including 10 years O&M)

In continuation of the e-tender notice no. 17/PWSSD/LDH of 12/2019, which was published in "Hindustan Times", "The Tribune" & "Indian Express" is now extended as per below schedule:-

Important Date and Time Schedule:
Last date & time for On-line Submission: 31-03-2020 upto 5:00 PM
Date & time of Opening of Technical Bid: 01.04.2020 at 11:00 AM
For detailed terms and conditions refer to web site <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in>

Executive Engineer
Punjab W/S & Sew. Divn., Ludhiana

GOVERNMENT OF JAMMU & KASHMIR DIRECTORATE OF FLORICULTURE SRINAGAR KASHMIR
Tel. 0194-2474234, Fax: 2482032,
E-mail: kasflori@rediffmail.com
SUB: EXTENSION NO. 01

In view of poor response, the last date for submission of bids invited vide this office e-tender Notice No. 35 of 2020 dated: 28/02/2020 for supply of Hybrid Seedlings (Summer and Winter) is hereby extended as per details given below:

1	Period of Downloading of Bidding Document	18.03.2020 from 01.00 P.M. to 26.03.2020 upto 02.00 P.M.
2	Bid Submission Start Date	19.03.2020 from 10.00 A.M.
3	Bid Submission End Date	26.03.2020 upto 02.00 P.M.
4	Date and Time of Opening of Tenders	28.03.2020 at 11.00 A.M.

Other terms and conditions shall remain same as laid down in the aforesaid Tender Notice.

By order
Sd/-
Accounts Officer
(Member Secretary)

No: DFK/GS-480/7369-70
Dated: 17.03.2020
DIPK-NB-2400/19

9 GOVT & POLITICS

SC invokes special powers, removes Manipur minister

Court says went out of way to give Speaker time on 2017 disqualification petition

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, GUWAHATI,
MARCH 18

MARKING A first, the Supreme Court Wednesday removed Manipur Minister Thounaojam Shyamkumar Singh, against whom disqualification petitions were pending before the Speaker since 2017, from the state cabinet and restrained him "from entering the Legislative Assembly till further orders".

A bench of Justices R F Nariman and S Ravindra Bhat said it was "constrained" to invoke the court's extraordinary powers under Article 142 of the Constitution, "given the extraordinary facts" in the case.

Singh became an MLA in 2017 on a Congress ticket before switching to the BJP to become Minister for Town Planning, Forest and Environment, and Horticulture and Soil Conservation, in the coalition government headed by N Biren Singh.

The apex court's ruling came on an appeal against a Manipur High Court order on a petition seeking directions to Speaker Y Khemchand to decide the disqualification pleas within a reasonable period of time.

On January 21, a three-judge

Supreme Court Bench headed by Justice Nariman had asked the Speaker to decide the disqualification petitions within four weeks. The deadline was not met, and on March 3, Additional Solicitor General Madhavi Divan, appearing for the Speaker, had submitted that a detailed petition would be filed in ten days.

On Wednesday, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta urged the court to defer the hearing till March 28, saying the Speaker would give a ruling that day. However, Senior Advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for the appellants, requested the court to decide the matter without further delay.

The apex court, while delivering its order, said it "went out of our way to give the Hon'ble Speaker a chance to perform his functions under the Tenth Schedule to the Constitution of India" and decide the matter.

The anti-defection law, referred to as the Tenth Schedule, was added to the Constitution through the Fifty Second (Amendment) Act, 1985.

On September 8, 2017, while hearing the matter, the Manipur High Court had stated that it cannot pass any order as the question of whether a High Court can direct a Speaker to decide on a disqualification petition within a

time frame is pending before a Supreme Court Bench.

On January 29, 2018, the appellant again moved the High Court, which concluded on July 23, 2019, that the Speaker is a quasi-judicial authority who is required to take a decision within reasonable time — much less than five years, the prescribed term of the House.

The High Court held that if the remedy provided in the Tenth Schedule is found to be ineffective due to deliberate inaction or indecision on the part of the Speaker, it cannot be denied jurisdiction to issue an appropriate writ.

The High Court, in this matter, found grounds for disqualification under the Tenth Schedule but stopped short of issuing directions as the question was pending before the Supreme Court.

On January 21, the Supreme Court said the "Parliament may seriously consider amending the Constitution to substitute the Speaker of the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies as arbiter of disputes concerning disqualification which arise under the Tenth Schedule with a permanent Tribunal headed by a retired Supreme Court Judge or a retired Chief Justice of a High Court, or some other outside independent mechanism, to ensure that such

disputes are decided both swiftly and impartially, thus giving real teeth to the provisions contained in the Tenth Schedule, which are so vital in the proper functioning of our democracy".

The court had said that "the Speaker, in acting as a Tribunal under the Tenth Schedule, is bound to decide disqualification petitions within a reasonable period", which "will depend on the facts of each case...".

Article 212 of the Constitution bars courts from inquiring into proceedings of the Legislature. In this case, however, prompted by the fact that the Speaker's conduct has been called into question on several occasions, the court invoked Article 142, which allows the Supreme Court to pass any order necessary for doing complete justice in any cause or matter.

In November 2016, a two-judge bench of the Supreme Court, comprising justices R K Agarwal and Nariman, while hearing a similar case involving the Telangana Speaker, had referred the issue to a Constitution Bench.

In the Manipur Assembly election of 2017, the Congress won 28 seats and the BJP 21. With support from rebel MLAs and other parties, Biren Singh was able to form a BJP-led government.

Govt in SC: NRC necessary for sovereign country

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

IN ITS first legal response before the Supreme Court on a nationwide National Register of Citizens (NRC), the central government has said that it is a "necessary exercise for any sovereign country".

Responding to a batch of petitions challenging the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019, B C Joshi, Director in the Ministry of Home Affairs, submitted in an affidavit on March 17 "that the preparation of a national register of citizens is a necessary exercise for any sovereign country for mere identification of citizens from non-citizens".

The petitions had also challenged Section 14A of the Citizenship Act, 1955, which provides legal backing for the NRC, on the grounds that it suffered from excessive delegation of powers to the executive and is therefore arbitrary.

The provision states that the central government "may compulsorily register every citizen of India and issue national identity card to him" and "may maintain a National Register of Indian Citizens".

With the new citizenship law and the proposed NRC sparking protests across the country, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said in December that the government had not held any discussions on a pan-India NRC.

In its affidavit, the government put on record that its powers to bring in a nationwide NRC have existed in the statute books since 1955.

"It is submitted that as per the existing statutory regime, there are three classes of persons residing in India — Citizens,

illegal migrants and foreigners on valid visas. It is therefore, the responsibility entrusted on the Central Government, on a combined reading of the Foreigners Act, The Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920 and the 1955 Act to identify/detect illegal migrants and thereafter, follow the due process of law," the affidavit said.

The government cited the Foreigners Act, 1946 to claim that it had "absolute and unfettered discretion" to expel foreigners and "an unrestricted right to expel remains".

"It is submitted that the assertions of the Petitioners that the requirement for registration of citizenship have been delegated to the executive are erroneous as the National Register of Citizens does not create any embargo on any form of citizenship. It is submitted that the delegation has been only of the procedure to be adopted while conducting the said exercise," the affidavit said.

The government cited examples of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh, where citizenship cards are issued. "It may not be out of place to mention that as per information available in open sources in many countries, there is a system of maintaining register of their citizens. In fact, national identification cards are issued based upon the exercise of identification of citizens in these countries," the affidavit said.

Defending the validity of Section 14A of the Citizenship Act, the government said that through the provision, the Parliament gives the government powers to only frame rules on procedure to be followed for maintaining NRC and not to set criterion or requirements of citizenship of Indian nationals.

Agreeing, the court said, "we see much substance in the above submissions of the learned Additional Solicitor General. We therefore direct that the Election Commission shall impose the Model Code of Conduct four weeks before the notified date of polling."

The SC said the "present development activities which have already been undertaken shall not be interrupted till the Model Code of Conduct is reimposed", and added that "however, if the State Government wishes to undertake any fresh developmental activities, they shall do so only with the prior permission of the... Election Commission".

The order added that "in no circumstance, the state government shall be prevented from taking necessary steps to curb the menace of coronavirus epidemic."

Senior Advocate Shekhar Naphde, appearing for the Commission, said Andhra Pradesh is not entitled to move this Court by way of filing a writ petition under Article 32 of the Constitution of India.

On this, the court said it was not inclined to go into this question due to the emergent circumstances. It left the question open for determination in an appropriate case.

DELHI CONFIDENTIAL



MINISTER AT IGI

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS Minister S Jaishankar went for a round of IGI Airport in New Delhi late Tuesday night. Tweeting some pictures of him in a mask, he wrote, "India works because countless Indians do. Night or day, rain or shine. Went tonight to meet our immigration, health, security and airport officials @DelhiAirport who are responding to COVID challenge.... Thank them for their exceptional effort in these difficult times. That too, with great courtesy and a warm smile."

GAUMUTRA'S OPPN TOUCH

GAUMUTRA (COW URINE), which is often endorsed by BJP leaders, found an unlikely champion Wednesday as the Rajya Sabha discussed Bills for setting up two different commissions for Indian systems of medicine and homeopathy. Congress MP from Karnataka Oscar Fernandes extolled cow urine for its healing powers and narrated the story of a driver he met in an ashram near Meerut, who claimed that gaumutra had helped him cure his cancer. As Fernandes spoke on gaumutra he also mentioned that his party colleague Jairam Ramesh often pulled his leg for his belief in its healing powers.

HOUSE WORK

RAJYA SABHA Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu did not adjourn the House on Wednesday after the passage of two Bills on setting up two different commissions for Indian systems of medicine and homeopathy. Although the legislative business concluded close to 6 pm, which is usually the end of a working day for Upper House, Naidu insisted that the discussion on the working of the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises should be taken up. On hearing feeble protests from some of MPs, Naidu reminded everyone that most commercial places are closed as precaution and that members would not have much to do outside the House.

GIVING IT ALL

AS THE country grapples with the spread of COVID-19, heroes have emerged in the fight against the virus. Principal Secretary (Health), Odisha, Nikunja Dhal is one such hero. Barely 24 hours after his father's death, Dhal was back in office. Dhal was previously a joint secretary in the Union Health Ministry.

Defence council finalises proposal for 83 Tejas jets

SUSHANT SINGH & KRISHN KAUSHIK
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

THE DEFENCE Acquisition Council (DAC), chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, has paved the way for procurement of 83 Tejas Mk-1A Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) from Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), Bengaluru, by finalising contractual and other issues related to the biggest deal for the indigenous combat aviation industry — charting a path for the Indian Air Force (IAF) of the future. The proposal now awaits the Cabinet's nod.

HAL is expected to deliver the first LCA Mk-1A to the IAF three years after the deal is signed. Production will start by 2023 and a full squadron delivered by 2025 if a contract is signed soon. The delivery of 83 aircraft is expected to be complete by 2029.

The order is crucial for maintaining the strength of fighter squadrons in the IAF which is down to 30 against an authorised 42 squadrons. Even if these Tejas Mk-1A supplies happen on time, IAF will be left with an alarmingly low 26 squadrons by 2021, rising to 30 by 2027. The IAF last had 42 fighter squadrons in 2002 — each squadron generally has 18 aircraft.

The proposal, worth Rs 38,000 crore, will now be placed for consideration of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS). The DAC had approved the procurement of 83 Tejas jets in November 2016, and one year later, the Indian Air Force had also issued a single-vendor tender to HAL in December 2017.

It had been pending for over two years over cost negotiations, with HAL initially asking for around Rs 50,000 crore for the

83 indigenous fighters.

IAF had objected to the high price cited by HAL, arguing that it was asking for Rs 463 crore for each Tejas Mk-1A whereas it supplies the more modern Russian Sukhoi fighter jet at Rs 415 crore per aircraft. The price was also around Rs 100 crore more than the earlier version of Tejas, leading to prolonged and often acrimonious negotiations between IAF and HAL.

The order for 83 Tejas Mk-1A is seen to be critical for the HAL to prevent a complete halt of production at its facilities. As per current contracts, HAL's order books will run out beyond 2021-22 and this order will allow the public sector facility to continue its production.

With the induction of 83 aircraft, IAF will have a total of 123 Tejas fighter jets, making up six of its squadrons.

The IAF had placed an order for 20 Tejas fighters in the Initial Operation Clearance (IOC) configuration on HAL, 16 of which have been inducted in the No. 45 squadron of the IAF, starting July 2016. The next order placed by the IAF is for 20 fighters in Final Operation Clearance (FOC), which underwent test flying on Tuesday for the first time in Bengaluru.

This procurement is seen as a major boost to 'Make in India' as the aircraft is indigenously designed, developed and manufactured with participation of several local vendors apart from HAL.

The Tejas indigenous fighter project was first conceived in 1984, benchmarked against the Mirage-2000, with a view to replace IAF's ageing Mig-21 fleet. The order for first 20 Tejas Mark I (IOC) was placed in 2006, and the jet inducted in the IAF in 2016.

HC sets aside 'Leave India' notice served to Polish student

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, MARCH 18

THE CALCUTTA High Court on Wednesday set aside a "Leave India" notice to a Polish student by the Union government for allegedly participating in an anti-CAA rally here.

Justice Sabyasachi Bhattacharyya directed the Central government not to give effect to the notice served on the student, Kamil Siedczynski, who studies at Jadavpur University.

The high court had earlier restrained the Central government from giving effect to its "Leave India" notice to the Polish student until it passed an order on his petition.

Justice Bhattacharyya had restrained the government from giving effect to the notice till March 18.

Hearing the petition filed by Siedczynski, the court passed an order on Wednesday setting aside the notice.

"We have won hands down today. The court has quashed the Centre's 'Leave India' notice to the Polish student. Now, he can stay here and complete his study," said a counsel, who appeared on behalf of the student.

Siedczynski is pursuing a Master's degree in the Department of Comparative Literature at Jadavpur University.

He was served the notice, dated February 14, by the Foreigners' Regional Registration Office (FRRO), Kolkata.

The notice said he should leave India within 14 days of receiving it. Since he received the notice on February 24, he was required to leave the country by March 9. In his petition before the high court, the student prayed for a restraining order.

Bihar polls: Manjhi sets deadline for Grand Alliance committee

SANTOSH SINGH
PATNA, MARCH 18

WITH ASSEMBLY polls approaching in Bihar, the Jitan Ram Manjhi-led Hindustani Awam Morcha (Secular) [HAM (S)] has issued a March 31 deadline to the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD)-led Grand Alliance in the state for setting up coordination committee.

The deadline comes in the backdrop of a meeting Manjhi held with Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Tuesday and an earlier meeting the HAM(S) chief

held with poll strategist Prashant Kishor.

HAM (S) spokesperson Danish Rizwan told The Indian Express: "We have long been asking RJD to set up a coordination committee of Grand Alliance partners to discuss joint press conferences, meetings and number of seats, but RJD is not paying heed. We have now set deadline of March 31 for the RJD to form the coordination committee."

Asked about Manjhi's meeting with the CM, Rizwan said the two leaders discussed the open-

ing of a Dalit hostel and the revamp of a block in Manjhi's village. He dismissed reports of HAM (S) merging with the ruling JD (U)-led NDA alliance.

RJD spokesperson Mrityunjay Tewari told The Indian Express: "Manjhi's demand for a coordination committee is not justified. We have valued him, gave him three seats to contest in Lok Sabha, made his son an MLC. He must not try to exert pressure on us. We are the largest party in the alliance and other constituents must respect us."

RAJYA SABHA ELECTIONS



Former Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi arrives at IGI airport on Wednesday. He was nominated to the Rajya Sabha by President Ram Nath Kovind on March 16. ANI

37 win unopposed, keen contest awaited in Rajasthan, MP

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

WITH 37 candidates getting elected unopposed to Rajya Sabha with the deadline for withdrawal of nomination for Rajya Sabha elections ending on Wednesday, BJP and Congress candidates in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Jharkhand are headed for a contest on 18 remaining seats for which elections are to be held.

The likes of NCP chief Sharad Pawar, Union minister Ramdas Athawale and Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman Harivansh Narayan Singh got elected unopposed on Wednesday. Senior leaders such as Digvijaya Singh, Jyotiraditya Scindia, Shibu Soren and K C Venugopal now have to contest the polls, scheduled for March 26.

Among these, contests in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat will be keenly watched after several Congress MLAs rebelled in these states, providing a headroom for

the BJP candidates to elbow ahead in a tight contest.

The contest in Madhya Pradesh is under spotlight since it is bound to have a bearing on the stability of the Kamal Nath-led Congress government in the state, where both parties have fielded two candidates each for three seats up for grabs. While the Congress had fielded former chief minister Digvijaya Singh, the BJP had nominated Scindia. Each party has fielded an additional candidate: Sumer Singh Solanki (BJP) and Phool Singh Baraiya (Congress).

With 22 Congress MLAs reportedly rebelling against the government, the contest has become interesting.

Likewise, the resignation of five Congress MLAs has made the contest in Gujarat a tricky affair for the party, as it has fielded two senior leaders — Shaktisinh Gohil and Bharatish Solanki — for the four seats up for grabs. The BJP, with an eye to force a contest, has fielded three candidates in Abhay Bharadwaj, Ramlaben Bara and

Narhari Amin.

In Rajasthan, BJP has queered the pitch for Congress national general secretary Venugopal by fielding an additional candidate. Both parties have fielded two candidates each for three seats up for grabs in the state.

In Jharkhand, the Congress has fielded an additional candidate — Shahzada Anwar — making BJP state president Deepak Prakash's election bid a contest. In the process, JMM chief Shibu Soren will have to wait for a contest to secure his berth, as there are a total three candidate in fray for two seats going to the polls.

There will also be contests for four seats in Andhra Pradesh and one seat each in Manipur and Meghalaya on account of additional candidate being in the fray.

Of 37 seats on which candidates got elected unopposed, the BJP has bagged seven and allies JD(U) and AIADMK two seats each, with BPP winning one seat. The Congress, Trinamool Congress and Biju Janata Dal have won four seats each.

SC asks Centre, J&K to inform by next week if Omar being set free

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

THE SUPREME Court on Wednesday asked the Centre and Jammu and Kashmir administration to inform by next week whether former chief minister Omar Abdullah would be released. Abdullah has been detained since the abrogation of special status to the erstwhile state in August last year.

A bench of Justices Arun Mishra and M R Shah told the counsel appearing for the Centre

that Abdullah's sister Sara Abdullah Pilot's plea against his detention will be heard on merit if he is not released soon. "If you are releasing him, then release him soon, or we will hear the matter on merits," the bench said.

The observations came after counsel for the Centre and J&K administration informed the court that Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, who was appearing in the matter, is arguing in another court.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for the petitioner, said the court should fix a short date.

To this, the bench said only six

benches are functioning due to the ongoing arrangement in the apex court and it does not know when the next turn will come. "Probably next week we are sitting and the matter will be taken up at that time," the bench said.

The J&K administration had said that freeing Omar will pose imminent threat, a claim disputed by Sara on Monday. In her rejoinder, Sara said that on scrutiny of Omar's verified Facebook account, she was shocked to discover that the social media posts, purportedly attributed to him, were not made by him.

MP FLOOR TEST SC says no to rebel MLAs' plea to appear, prove they are free

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

THE SUPREME Court on Wednesday said no to 16 rebel Madhya Pradesh Congress MLAs' proposal to allow them to appear before the court, or to meet the Registrar General of Karnataka High Court, to prove that they are not being held captive and had resigned on their own.

The decision came even as the court wondered how to ensure that the MLAs were free to make their own decisions.

"We do not want to take over the role of the Governor... We do not want to put our judicial officers into this," a bench of Justices D Y Chandrachud and Hemant Gupta said while turning down the suggestion.

The bench was hearing a petition by former chief minister and BJP leader Shivraj Singh Chouhan seeking a direction to the Assembly Speaker to conduct the floor test within 12 hours.

Justice Chandrachud said, "Their argument is the MLAs have been whisked away. We can't compel an MLA to do something, but we also are bound by Constitution to ensure that they are free to take their decisions."

He referred to the affidavits submitted by some MLAs who have filed application seeking implementation in the matter. Some of these affidavits referred to it as a petition instead of application.

"Look at the way the affidavits have been signed... they are depositing to the veracity of the writ petition... It appears that these af-

fidavits were prepared for an Article 32 writ petition... These are sufficient points to ensue the court to be alert," Justice Chandrachud observed.

"We are not saying they are held captive. (The) point is how do we allay the apprehension," he remarked.

Appearing for the MLAs, senior advocate Maninder Singh said it could have been a mistake and added that he will file a fresh affidavit. Singh said the MLAs are not being held captive and the fact that they had filed affidavits proved this. They had also addressed a press conference (on Tuesday) and stated that they were not being held captive, he added.

He claimed that Congress leaders are trying to approach the MLAs and their families and "trying to do horse-trading".

Appearing for the MP Governor, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said the court could watch those interviews. But the bench was not inclined to do so.

Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, representing the Speaker, said the MLAs were given time to appear before the Speaker so that it can be verified whether the resignations are voluntary.

But senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for Shivraj Chouhan, said the MLAs do not want to come before the Speaker, and that attempts are being made to lure them.

Justice Gupta said the Speaker could reject their resignations if the MLAs were not appearing before him.



Singh after meeting the DGP in Bengaluru on Wednesday. PPT

Digvijaya to seek HC nod to meet Congress MLAs

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE BENGALURU, MARCH 18

FORMER MADHYA Pradesh CM and Congress leader Digvijaya Singh has decided to approach the Karnataka High Court to seek permission to meet party MLAs from MP who are staying at a resort on the outskirts of Bengaluru.

The Congress leader's decision came after he was prevented from entering the Ramada resort near Bengaluru by the Karnataka police, who are protecting the MLAs on their request. Singh was detained on Wednesday morning when he tried to enter the resort along with local Congress leaders, including state Congress chief DK Shivakumar.

"As a Congress candidate for the Rajya Sabha elections to be held on March 26, it is my right to approach my voters. A public

place is where I can meet anyone. If the guests at the Ramada Hotel did not want to meet me they could have stayed in the hotel rooms. Why did the Karnataka Police stop me?" Singh said after he was detained. "Under what law was I stopped? Why was I picked up and why did police misbehave with me?"

A Congress delegation including Singh also met the state police chief with a request for permission to meet the Congress MLAs.

"I hope the Supreme Court will provide access to meet MLAs in a free environment. I will await the decision of the Supreme Court and High Court and take a decision on staging a dhama. I will take a call on a hunger strike after a decision from the High Court and Supreme Court," he said.

"I have moved the Karnataka HC to seek permission to meet the MLAs," he said.

Floor test looming, Kamal Nath gov't makes slew of appointments

MILINDGHATWAI BHOPAL, MARCH 18

FORMER MEMBERS of Parliament, unsuccessful poll contestants, those who helped the Congress in the 2018 Assembly elections, and spokespersons. All of them are among the beneficiaries of a slew of appointments made by the beleaguered Kamal Nath government to statutory and constitutional bodies over the last few days.

With the Supreme Court hearing a plea by BJP leader and former CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan seeking an immediate floor test, the state government has filled the vacant posts of chairperson of the Madhya Pradesh State Commissions for Women, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes and Youth, which had seen intense jockeying among the hopefuls in the past.

The government has also appointed two members of the state Public Services Commission (PSC) and the chairman of the Madhya Pradesh Private University Regulatory Commission (MPPURC).

Besides, there have been a slew of transfers, including those of IAS, IPS and state services officers, after the Nath government realised this month it had a rebellion on its hands.

While the honorarium given to chairpersons and members of the commissions is not high, varying from Rs 10,000 and Rs 15,000, there are incentives like a huge office, government accommodation or rent, vehicles and staff. Ministerial status is an added attraction.

However, members of the PSC draw around Rs 2 lakh per month, and the chairman of MPPURC draws around Rs 2.17 lakh per month, in addition to other perks.

Even as the Opposition BJP called on Governor Lalji Tandon to scrap the appointments made by "a minority government", the Congress on Wednesday granted the status of cabinet minister and minister of state on some appointees. However, speculation remains that the Governor could throw a spanner in the works.

Those who have been appointed to various bodies include the following:

SHOBHA OZA, 55, was made chairperson of the state women's commission, a post lying vacant for over a year.

Oza was once the Mahila Congress chief and the in-charge of media cell of the Pradesh Congress Committee. A post graduate, she unsuccessfully fought Assembly polls from Indore in 2003 and 2008.

"Posts had to be filled. How would the commission function without the chairperson? There is nothing unethical about the appointment because the government has proved its majority in the past," she said.

The chairperson's tenure is for three years.

GAJENDRA RAJUKHEDI, 55, was made chairman of the state ST Commission. A three-time Lok Sabha member from Dhar, he said the BJP's allegation about the appointments being illegal does not warrant a response. The Congress did well in the tribal-dominated Dhar district, winning six out of the seven seats in the 2018 Assembly elections.

DR ANAND AHIRWAR, 55, was appointed as chairman of state SC Commission. He won the Lok Sabha election from Sagar in 1991, and was the only NSUI activist to get the ticket. He credits the ticket to former PM Rajiv Gandhi. He was in-charge of all Assembly seats in the Bundelkhand region of MP in 2018. Ahirwar, who has a PhD in political science, says he was the youngest member in the 10th Lok Sabha.

The tenure of the chairperson is for three years.

JP DHANOPIA, 60, has been named as the chairperson of the state OBC Commission.

He was the in-charge of the Congress's legal cell for 10 years, and also served as a spokesperson. He admits the party "did not even give me a councillor's ticket", but Kamal Nath was impressed by his work in the organisation and rewarded him. "Many

people appointed during BJP rule are still working. The Kamal Nath government is not vindictive," he said.

The tenure of the chairperson is for three years.

RAMU TEKAM, 32, has been named as a member of the PSC. He had unsuccessfully contested the last general elections from Betul. The president of the youth wing of the MP Adivasi Vikas Parishad, Tekam said, "I will try to do justice to the post because I will have to interview qualified people. I was selected on merit. Why should the BJP be bothered? It's the CM's prerogative whether he fills the post after two months or 15 months."

The tenure of a member is for six years.

RASHID SUHAIL SIDDIQUE, 52, has been named as a member of the PSC. He was former assistant solicitor general and a standing counsel for the Central government. He has never contested any election but was chairman of the Jabalpur Development Authority and general secretary of the state Congress unit for three terms. "I am qualified. When the Cabinet clears something, it's binding on the Governor. The appointment would have been illegal had it been backdated and made by the government after losing the trust vote. I had applied much before," he said.

ALOK CHANSORIA, 59, has been appointed the chairman of MPPURC. He unsuccessfully contested the 1998 general elections from Jabalpur. 'Nehru's Literary Works' was his first book and he cites 'Emotions of Shakespeare's Tragedies: An application of Bharatmuni's Rasa-Bhava theory and Aristotle's theory of Katharsis on Hamlet and Othello' as his best work. He has held a number of positions like the chairman of state text book corporation.

The appointment is for six months.

ABHAY TIWARI, the chairman of the Congress IT Cell, has been named chairman of the MP Youth Commission. The BJP has alleged that Tiwari was involved in a criminal case. Tiwari did not respond to multiple phone calls.

HARYANA GOVERNMENT TENDER NOTICE. Table with columns: SR. NO., NAME OF BOARD/CORP./AUTH., NAME OF WORK NOTICE TENDER, OPENING DATE, AMOUNT (APPROX.) IN Rupees, WEBSITE OF THE BOARD CORP./AUTH., NODAL OFFICER OFFICE/CONTACT DETAILS/EMAIL.

HARYANA WAQF BOARD. NOTICE INVITING BIDS. The Haryana Waqf Board invites bids from the prospective lessees under Rule (6) of the Waqf Properties Lease Rules, 2014 as amended by the Waqf Properties Lease (Amendment) Rules, 2015 waqf properties located in Faridabad, Nuh (Mewat), Sonapat, Narnaul, Ambala, Bhiwani, Yamuna Nagar, Panchkula, Kaithal, Hisar, Sirsa, Rohtak, Tahana & Jhajjar. Includes a table with columns: S.No., Area description & location of the waqf property, Purpose of lease, etc.

SJVN Limited. NOTICE INVITING APPLICATIONS (NIA). SJVN Limited invites e-Applications for "Empanelment of Bidders for Engineering Procurement & Construction (EPC) and subsequent Operation & Maintenance (O&M) of Wind Power Projects for SJVN Limited anywhere in India".

TAMIL NADU HOUSING BOARD - MADURAI CIRCLE. AMENDMENT TO TENDER NOTICE No: 10/2019-20. Due to administrative reasons, the due date for submission of tender documents mentioned in the advertisement published on 13.02.2020 & 12.03.2020 in The New Indian Express regarding Tender Notice, Revised Tender value EMD and withdrawal of Tender as follows.

GOVERNMENT OF MAHARASHTRA PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT. Office of The Executive Engineer. Multistoreyed Bldgs. Construction Division, Administrative Building, 1st Floor, R.C. Marg, Chembur, Mumbai-400 071. Includes details for E-TENDER NOTICE NO. 20 of 2019-2020.

Ummidwaro ke Suncharyo. Karayalaya Sivivil Sajan, Hissar. Jila EDS Kendrolo Program, Hissar. Includes details for the tender and contact information.

MP gov't carves out 3 new districts to woo legislators

MILINDGHATWAI BHOPAL, MARCH 18

GIVEN THAT every vote would be crucial in a floor test in the Madhya Pradesh assembly, the Kamal Nath government is continuing its efforts to win over legislators, including one belonging to the BJP, by giving in-principle approval to create three new districts on Wednesday.

Maihar, Chachauda and Nagda will be carved out of Satna, Guna and Ujjain districts. While Maihar is represented by BJP MLA Narayan Tripathi, Chachauda and Nagda are represented by Congress legislators Laxman Singh and Dilip Singh Gurjar, respectively.

Tripathi, who has met Chief Minister Kamal Nath four times since the political upheaval began early this month, was the only BJP MLA missing when the Opposition party paraded its members before Governor Lalji Tandon on Monday. Tripathi did not respond to calls for comment.

Former Chief Minister and senior Congress leader Digvijaya Singh's younger brother, Laxman Singh, has been very vocal about Chachauda being made a new district. In October, he sat on dhama outside his elder brother's house in Bhopal, an agitation many thought was staged to preempt an announcement that was going to be made anyway. However, over last few months, Laxman Singh, who was once elected on BJP ticket to Lok Sabha, had given mixed signals, embarrassing his party.

On Tuesday, he caused a flutter by changing his Twitter profile and dropping Congress from it. A day later, the name of the party was back on his profile, followed by a tweet thanking the CM for the new district and congratulating the people of the constituency. Congress MLA from Nagod Dilip Singh Gurjar had been demanding a separate district for more than a decade.

Haryana Waqf Board. Table with columns: Sr. No., Name of the Circle/District Waqf Office, Name of the Estate Officer, Address & Tel. No. Includes details for various waqf properties and offices.

Ummidwaro ke Suncharyo. Karayalaya Sivivil Sajan, Hissar. Jila EDS Kendrolo Program, Hissar. Includes details for the tender and contact information.

Ummidwaro ke Suncharyo. Karayalaya Sivivil Sajan, Hissar. Jila EDS Kendrolo Program, Hissar. Includes details for the tender and contact information.

11 IN PARLIAMENT BUDGET SESSION

FROM THE GALLERY

HEATED DISCUSSION AS LS TAKES UP UT BUDGET

CORONAVIRUS FEARS

J&K corruption over, more transparency: Sitharaman

Adjourn Parliament session: Congress

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

THE LOK Sabha Wednesday saw a heated discussion during the debate on the budgetary provisions for Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh with members from both sides trading charges before disposing of financial business.

As Opposition members across party lines attacked the government over curtailment of democratic rights of people of Jammu and Kashmir, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman countered the offensive with her ministerial colleagues Jitendra Singh and G Kishen Reddy chipping in.

"The cash supplementary side of the grants includes additional expenditure on account of enhancement in dearness allowances, increase in number of pensions, etc. These are things for which we seek the permission of the House for clearing the grants," Sitharaman said. "Corruption," she claimed, "has ended. Things have become more transparent in Jammu and Kashmir after abrogation of Article 370."

She criticised the Congress for having failed to resettle Kashmiri Pandits when it was in power.

Former minister and senior Shiv Sena leader Arvind Sawant created an embarrassing situation for members of the Congress and NCP when he strongly argued in favour of the abrogation of Article 370. Hailing PM Narendra Modi for the "bold step", he said it was the fulfilment of "the dream of Hindu Friday samrat Balasaheb Thackeray". He lamented that "grief is not expressed here (in the House) when small children pelt our jawans with stones". "You are our ally," he told Congress members, "but the Shiv Sena has not given up its line. Nor has Uddhav Thackerayji". "Nobody speaks when



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Lok Sabha on Wednesday. PTI

our jawans are martyred... In Jammu and Kashmir, the Tricolor is not unfurled. It is burnt... A terrorist, if killed, is made into a hero."

Jitendra Singh said the decision to reorganize the erstwhile state was taken after due diligence and that the results were visible within 48 hours, including the reduction in prices of commodities such as cement.

The minister argued that the current administration did not believe in offering alibi about the situation and that people had been detained for security reasons.

Singh said only over 300 people were under detention, which he said was the lowest in 30 years. He said 40,000 people have died in the last 30 years in J&K but many politicians were only worried about a few families.

Singh argued that only mobile internet was suspended in the region and that broad-

band was working even during the worst phase starting August 2019 till recently.

Citing data of the Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Congress's Anandpur Sahib MP Manish Tewari said there was a loss of \$2.4 billion in the last seven months.

The agriculture sector alone, according to him, had lost Rs 10,000 crore during this period.

Tewari, who had initiated the discussion, said, "There is no economic progress if there is no peace. The decisions of August 5th and 6th (2019) have disrupted social amity. Open your ears and listen to the voice of Jammu and Kashmir. A serious situation is developing and the budget of Rs 1 lakh crore will not have an impact."

Saugata Roy of the Trinamool Congress said the situation in J&K was "worse than an internal emergency".

He alleged that thousands of people had been arrested in J&K under Public Safety Act and other provisions.

"The calm (in the region) is deceptive. People are angry and silent. One doesn't know what shape it will take. People of Valley will bear the burden. There is no political activity. The Centre is happy but people are humiliated," Roy said. "I demand an immediate release of (former CMs) Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti... I demand that a date be set for holding Assembly elections in J&K," he said.

DMK's A Raja said the discussion on J&K Budget in Parliament was only ceremonial and lacked its true spirit as the discussion was not being done by Kashmiris. "A state cannot be prosperous unless social harmony is maintained."

BJP member Jagadambika Pal said Article 370 was removed to facilitate implementation of all laws made in the Parliament.

KRISHN KAUSHIK
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

THE ISSUE of precautions against coronavirus loomed large over Rajya Sabha on Wednesday. As the House gathered, three members of the TMC — Derek O'Brien, Sukhendu Sekhar Ray and Nadimul Haque — walked in wearing masks.

As soon as the session began, Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu warned the members that "no masks are allowed inside the House". Asking the three to remove the masks, Naidu said they were senior members and aware of the rules.

Finding an opportunity, Congress member M V Rajeev Gowda said, "It is a matter of concern that when we are advising everyone to practice social distancing, Parliament is continuing to function."

"We should be setting an example and preventing it. We meet people from everywhere across the country and we are probably most at risk within Parliament, and the House of Elders with extremely senior people are also at risk. So, I would urge the government to set aside other issues and focus on whether the Parliament sittings can be postponed or the Session can be adjourned and postponed. The virus does not know that we are MPs. The virus does not care about MPs," Gowda said.

Deputy Leader of the Opposition Anand Sharma, agreeing with his party colleague, said, "We are telling the entire country for social distancing, and if we do not do it here, it does not make any sense."

Congress members also mentioned that two members of the House, Minister of State for External Affairs V Muralidharan and India's Sherpa for G20 Suresh Prabhu are under self-quarantine, even though both have been tested negative.

However, Naidu said that it was not up to him. "After all, it is the decision of the government and then of the House," he said.

Union minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi de-

fended the move to continue with the session, saying there is a "passion" in the country to fight coronavirus. "If we don't demonstrate the passion to fight coronavirus sitting in this House, and if we panic, it will not be in country's favour," he said, adding that it is not a "political fight" but a "humanitarian fight".

Coming back to the issue after the laying of papers, Naidu again iterated that masks need to be taken off. At this point, senior Congress leader P Chidambaram intervened and stated that it would be "unfair" to ask members who are feeling vulnerable to remove their masks.

Agreeing with Chidambaram, Naidu said that the House was "setting a precedent". He said he was okay with members who feel vulnerable "and they make their own preventive arrangements". The Chairman added, "Outside normally, people have been advised and some people are feeling that they are vulnerable and they are wearing it."

Naidu also informed the House that the Parliament complex has been sanitised, hand sanitisers have been kept at various places, and all necessary arrangements will be made from time to time. He said that members can convey any more suggestions in this regard to the secretariat or the Chair.

TMC's Haque raised the issue of private operators charging exorbitant rates to Indians stuck in other countries due to coronavirus.

Congress member Ripun Bora raised the issue of paucity of hand sanitisers and masks in the country. "There is an acute scarcity of soaps, masks, and sanitisers. Some unscrupulous traders are taking advantage of the situation and charging exorbitant rates for the soaps, sanitisers and masks from the public." He asked the government to monitor the situation.

Demanding more COVID-19 tests in the country, AAP's Sanjay Singh said that South Korea has tested over 1.5 lakh people, while in India, only 6,700 samples have been tested. He asked the government to take the aide of private industry to have more testing facilities.

DIGVIJAYA SINGH DETAINED

RS adjourned briefly as Chair bars Congress from raising issue

KRISHN KAUSHIK
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

RAJYA SABHA proceedings were adjourned for several hours on Wednesday morning after an uproar by Congress MPs as they were not allowed to raise the issue of former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Digvijaya Singh's detention in Karnataka.

Singh was detained on Wednesday morning while he was on a protest in Bengaluru accusing the police of not allowing him to meet the 22 rebel MLAs that have been staying at a resort in the city.

Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu, who is also the chairman of the House, did not allow the party to raise the issue saying they had not given a notice on the matter.

The ruckus began as Zero Hour was coming to an end. Congress member MV Rajeev Gowda tried to raise the issue. "Sir, there is an urgent issue, we need the protection of the House," he said. But Naidu refused. Gowda then mentioned that a member of the Rajya Sabha, who is a former chief minister, has been detained in a BJP-governed state, but the issue was not allowed to be placed on record. Naidu, denying Gowda and his other party

Sources in the Congress said several questions were listed regarding the Delhi riots and on the issue of detention centres

colleagues permission, said members "have to give notice. You can't speak as and when you want to speak, whatever it is", he added. He added that since news of the detention broke out in the morning, the party could have given a notice, but it did not. "If there is an official communication to me, then I will react," he said.

"You had enough time since the it happened. You never bothered to give notice. Suddenly, you want to disrupt the House. I will not allow this tendency to continue," Naidu said. Congress members got up again after the Question Hour started and stormed the Well of the House.

The Vice President then blocked the telecast of the proceedings and barred from publishing what was being said. He then adjourned proceedings for till after 2 pm.

Congress leaders later told *The Indian Express* later they raised slogans of against the BJP in the Well.

However, some Congress leaders felt that storming the Well had backfired.

Sources within the party said several questions for oral responses from the government were listed regarding the Delhi riots in February and on the issue of detention centres in Assam. They added that these questions could have been raised to corner the government, but the House was adjourned without any questions being taken up.

Bills passed in RS for new regulatory bodies to cover traditional medicine

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

THE RAJYA Sabha passed two Bills Wednesday for setting up separate commissions for homoeopathy and other traditional systems of medicine.

While the National Commission for Homeopathy will replace the existing regulator — Central Council of Homoeopathy — the National Commission for Indian System of Medicine (covering Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha and the Tibetan system of medicine) will come in place of the Central Council for Indian medicine.

Aside from setting up the new bodies, the two legislations aim to ensure availability of quality medical professionals of Indian systems of medicine and homoeopathy and also the adoption of the latest research.

Speaking before the passage of the two Bills, AYUSH Minister Shripad Yesso Naik said there was a global demand for research collaboration on traditional systems of medicine and that Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) have been signed with 14 countries on this front.

He also emphasised that under the Narendra Modi government, the AYUSH ministry has been utilising the entire budget allocation for traditional medicine, which wasn't the case earlier.

Earlier, during the discussion, several MPs, while supporting the two Bills, had objected to the exclusion of yoga and naturopathy from the ambit of the National Commission for Indian System of Medicine. To this, Naik assured the House that the government would bring a separate legislation to cover yoga and naturopathy.

Many members of the Opposition also questioned the government on why it hasn't implemented all the suggestions made by the standing committee on the provisions of the National Commission for Indian System of Medicine Bill.

Samajwadi Party leader Ram Gopal Yadav asked why the recommendations on including one member each from the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha on the governing boards of the two new bodies was ignored. Yadav was the head of the Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare, that scrutinised the Bill. The JD(U)'s Kahkashan Perween raised the issue of exclusion of naturopathy and yoga.

The parliamentary panel had also suggested that there should be an appellate tribunal for both commissions, which wasn't accepted either.

Amar Patnaik of the BJD said the Bills lack vision on several aspects — including scientific research in the field. Congress member Jairam Ramesh called for the integration of medical education, in which all systems of medicine are taught to students in the first two-and-a-half years and students can then choose their specialisation.

He also said that Indian systems of medicine need to focus on research and clinical systems of documentation to progress.

(WITH PTI INPUTS)



VENKAI AH UNDERGOES COVID-19 SCREENING

Vice-President Venkaiah Naidu undergoes thermal screening at Parliament House on Wednesday. The Rajya Sabha Secretariat has stepped up measures against the spread of coronavirus. From Wednesday, the RS Secretariat has made scanning of all staff mandatory. Anil Sharma

BJP RS member to move resolution for removal of 'socialist' from preamble

LIZ MATHEW
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

A BJP member of the Rajya Sabha is set to move a resolution in the House on Friday, seeking the removal of the phrase "socialist" from the preamble of the Constitution, arguing that the word is "redundant" in the current scenario, and that the word should be dropped to create space for "economic thinking without a particular thought".

The preamble of Constitution declares India to be a sovereign, socialist, secular and democratic republic.

Rakesh Sinha has given a notice, seeking the Chairman's permission to move the resolution to drop the word "socialist" on Friday during the time allotted for Private Members' Bill, and his notice was admitted on Wednesday. A copy of every resolution which has been passed by the House is forwarded to the minister concerned and the minister can bring a law in the same line.

The terms "socialist" and "secular" had been inserted in the preamble later, to qualify the character of the Indian republic, as part of the 42nd amendment which was passed during the Emergency.

Many groups have sought to restore the original preamble. In 2015, controversy was sparked by a government advertisement on Republic Day, which featured the preamble with the words "secular" and



Sinha: 'In the present socio-economic developmental context, socialism is a completely redundant word'

"socialist" missing.

When Sinha was asked why he did not object to the word "secular", he told *The Indian Express*, "There could be many views on the word secularism. Some may feel that it is still required, although secular character is entrenched in our culture, civilisation and in the deeds. But in the present socio-economic developmental context, socialism is completely a redundant word."

Pointing out that the word "socialist" was inserted in the Constitution by the 42nd Constitution Amendment Act, 1976, when the country was under Emergency and fundamental rights were suspended, Sinha said the move was made without any discussion or debate in Parliament.

"The word is not required at all because the Constituent Assembly had discussed it in detail and Dr B R Ambedkar had made it clear and the Assembly had agreed to settle the issue," Sinha said.

He said K T Shah had proposed the words "federal secular socialist Union of States, but Ambedkar had contested the proposal.

"Ambedkar had argued that the Constitution is just a mechanism to regulate the work of the various arms of the states, and that the matters like how the policy of the state and the society's organisation in the social and economic side should be matters which must be decided by people according to the time and circumstances. He argued and won the argument that it should be left to people to decide," Sinha said.

Ambedkar contested that the directive principles expect the state to be egalitarian and that the socialist principles were already embodied in the Constitution.

Sinha argued, "You cannot tie a generation to a particular way of thinking. Besides, the Congress party which ruled the country for seven decades has changed its direction from being socialist to welfare to neo-liberalism. Its new liberal policies adopted in the 1990s have negated its own earlier positions."

According to him, it showed that there should always be a scope of evolution in the thinking process based on time and context, as well as on the requirement of people.

Another reason for Sinha to take a position that the word should be dropped from the preamble are the policies of the current dispensation, led by Narendra Modi.

"The Narendra Modi government with its number of initiatives has restored welfare politics... Orthodoxy is not applicable to vibrant society," he said.

12 THE OUTBREAK NATION

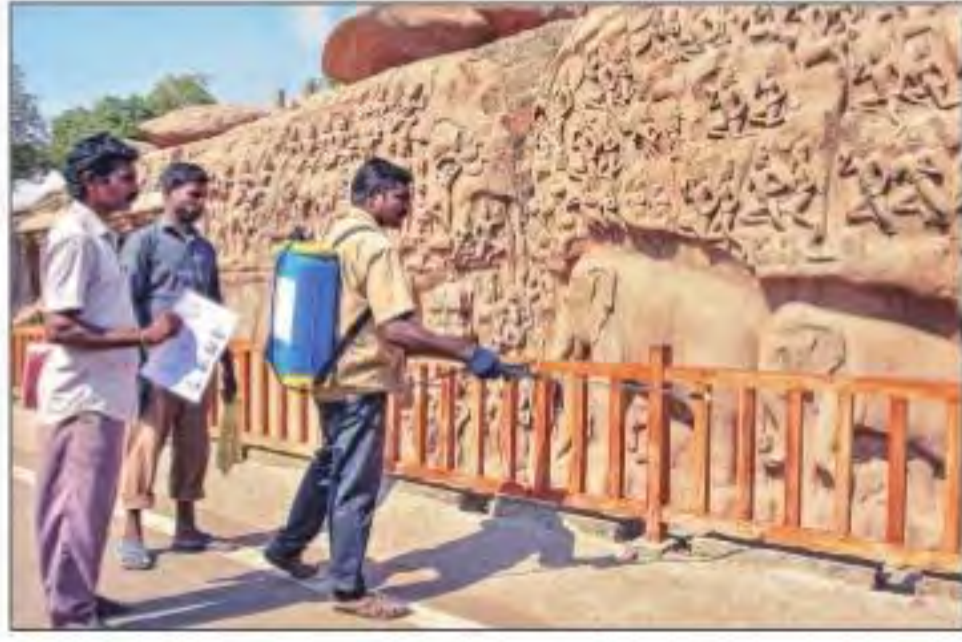
TN reports second positive case, hints it is 'domestic'

ARUN JANARDHANAN
CHENNAI, MARCH 18

TAMIL Nadu on Wednesday reported its second coronavirus case, with Health Minister C Vijayabaskar saying the 20-year-old was a "domestic case".

Vijayabaskar said the youth came to Chennai by train from Delhi on March 12 and officials were trying to trace all those he had been in contact with in recent days, while indicating that he had no history of foreign travel. "All I can say is that the first positive case in the state was imported since that patient had visited Oman. This is a domestic case," the minister said on Wednesday evening.

Preliminary contact tracing



A worker sprays disinfectant at Mahabalipuram in Chengalpattu district on Wednesday. PTI

shows the 20-year-old, a hair-dresser, left his native Rampur on March 7 for New Delhi, and

boarded a train to reach Chennai on March 12. He hoped to find work in Chennai. Two days later,

on Tuesday, he came to Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital in the city with symptoms of COVID-19, and his samples were taken. "I received a message from the Dean (of the hospital) that he has tested positive. Now we will be tracking the epidemiology link," Vijayabaskar said.

The 20-year-old is currently in the isolation ward of the hospital and is stable.

"It may be local transmission during the journey to Chennai or he may have got infected in Delhi," an official said.

Replying to a question, Vijayabaskar said the state's first COVID-19 patient, who tested positive on March 7, had been discharged and was currently under home quarantine for two weeks.

7 new cases in Telangana

Hyderabad: The number of coronavirus cases in Telangana reached 13 with a group of seven Indonesians and a youth, who returned from Scotland, testing positive for the virus on Wednesday.

The number of COVID-19 cases in the state stood at six after the Scotland-returned youth tested positive for the virus.

However, it went up to 13 after a special media bulletin on COVID-19 issued by the state government late on Wednesday night stated that seven Indonesians, who came for religious activity, tested positive.

An Indonesian citizen, who is part of the group, had already tested positive for the virus on Tuesday.

The Indonesians have been kept in isolation since March 16, the bulletin said.

The Indonesians visited Karimnagar in the state and the administration has initiated measures to identify those who came in contact with them. PTI

Three new cases, Sec 144 in Rajasthan

HAMZA KHAN
JAIPUR, MARCH 18

THREE NEW cases of novel coronavirus were confirmed in Jhunjhunu, taking the total number of positive cases in the state to seven.

Health Minister Raghu Sharma said that the three are from the same family and had returned from Italy on March 8. After they reported that they were unwell, their samples were sent to Jaipur, where novel coronavirus was confirmed Wednesday. Sharma said that all three are being brought to Jaipur for treatment.

Of the seven cases in the state, three have tested negative after treatment.

Meanwhile, Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot has issued directions to impose prohibitory orders across the state till March 31 in view of COVID-

19, officials said Wednesday. The CM also issued directions for imposition of curfew in 1-km radius of the patients' residence for the next two days.

Chairing a meeting on COVID-19 at his office, Gehlot authorised District Magistrates and subdivisional officers to issue necessary directions to impose prohibition on gatherings under Section 144 of the CrP.

The CM also appealed that religious and public places should advise people to not gather in one place. While schools and colleges had been shut earlier, the CM issued directions that parent-teacher meetings should be stopped and the admission process do away with the presence of parents and their children. Moreover, private and public libraries are to be shut till March 31. Gehlot issued instructions that those arriving from abroad should be taken to the hotels nearby and screened there.



A devotee uses hand sanitiser at a Bikaner temple. PTI

Rajasthan HC defers civic polls

Jaipur: The Rajasthan High Court Wednesday deferred elections for the six newly-formed municipal corporations in the state for six weeks in wake of the COVID-19 outbreak. A Jaipur bench of the court deferred the polls saying the coronavirus outbreak has been declared a pandemic by the Centre and the state's resources should be used to contain it. The bench said, "Taking into consideration the totality of the facts and circumstances, we consider it appropriate to permit the State Election Commission to postpone the ensuing elections of Municipal Corporations in terms of undertaking given before this Court for a further period of six weeks." ENS

Advisory being issued to states: Rijju

New Delhi: Union Minister Kiren Rijju on Wednesday said a strict advisory is being issued to all states to take action after some incidents of racial remarks against people belonging to the Northeast in some parts of the country were reported in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak. Rijju said the issue was taken up with the North East division in the Ministry of Home Affairs. "Some incidents of racial remarks against North-East people have emerged in some parts of India in the wake of Coronavirus due to cultural ignorance, prejudice and lack of understanding..." he tweeted. PTI

NDA bans tours, outdoor hikes

Pune: The National Defence Academy (NDA) has suspended all educational tours, outdoor hikes and other mass activities for cadets along with restrictions on the entry of outsiders to the campus. Cadets will also not be allowed visitors, be it parents or others, till further orders as a precautionary measure against COVID-19. ENS

Bengal bureaucrat's son skipped testing for 2 days

RAVIK BHATTACHARYA & ATRIMITRA
KOLKATA, MARCH 18

THE FIRST positive case of coronavirus in West Bengal is the son of a bureaucrat posted in the state Secretariat Nabanna, who was told twice to go to the Infectious Diseases (ID) Hospital after flying down from London on March 15, but delayed it. Consequently, among those officers put in home isolation on Wednesday, till their test results come out, were several senior officers of the department with which the youth's mother is associated.

Health officials are also trying to track down all the people that the 18-year-old, hospitalised on March 17, met over two days across Kolkata. His parents and the family's two drivers have tested negative but are being kept in quarantine, while a doctor and two health workers at MR Bangur Hospital, where the youth first went, as well as the family's domestic help are isolated at home.

On Monday, the mother of the youth attended office at Nabanna and participated in a meeting with senior officers. The area around her office has been sealed, and the building is being sanitised.

Her second office at Writers' Building (the old Secretariat) has also been sealed.

Speaking at a programme at Nabanna on Tuesday, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said, "If anyone comes from foreign countries, they are welcome. But the disease is not welcome. Please go for tests voluntarily. Even if you get a declaration that you are well, go into isolation for 15 to 27 days... Be it a VIP or commoner, everyone coming from abroad should go in for tests. No one should use their influence to avoid testing."

Mamata said the 18-year-old showed "reckless behaviour". The CM also announced that the shift of government officials at Nabanna will end at 4 pm, "so that they can go home early and relatively easily".

According to Health Department sources, when the 18-year-old arrived in Kolkata on March 15, he did not have fever as per airport thermal scanners but had a cold. While he reportedly did not tell the medical team about his condition, he was told to visit ID Hospital as a precautionary measure.

ID Hospital Superintendent Ashish Manna said, "He came to Kolkata on 15th. On the 16th, we got the information but he did not

visit the hospital. On 17th morning, he came. We quarantined him and sent samples for tests. On 17th evening, the samples tested positive. We are constantly monitoring him and he is being given medication. He is stable."

A senior Health Department official said, "There was some unnecessary delay. We are now tracking people who came in contact with him on the flight from London as well as during the following two days."

At the posh housing complex in South Kolkata where the family lives, residents as well as staff, such as drivers, guards and domestic helps, are in panic.

A member of the housing association said, "The family did not tell us. We heard on TV that a bureaucrat's son had tested positive, and suspecting they may be residents of our complex, one of us called the mother, and she confirmed it... Due to their callousness, more than 500 families have been left vulnerable."

The housing association has reached out to officials, carried out sanitisation and is trying to identify those who may have come in contact with the family through CCTV footage.

FULL REPORT ON www.indianexpress.com

Darjeeling restricts tourists' entry till April 15

Kolkata: Following an appeal by Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA), the Darjeeling district administration on Wednesday restricted the entry of tourists in Darjeeling hills from March 19 to April 15, to contain the spread of COVID-19.

In a notification, the administration also appealed to clubs and institutions within the district to refrain from holding any events, which require large gatherings of people, and maintain social distancing. Darjeeling — a major travel destination in West Bengal — will be shut for tourists.

Earlier in the day, GTA chairman Anit Thapa urged tourists not to visit Darjeeling in view of the COVID-19 outbreak.

GTA is an Autonomous District Council for Darjeeling and Kalimpong areas of the state. "We will also increase checkpoints to focus on entry of tourists," said Thapa.

ENS

Karnataka govt extends social distancing measures till March 31

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
BENGALURU, MARCH 18

THE KARNATAKA government on Wednesday decided to extend till March 31 the social distancing measures that had been introduced on a trial basis on March 14.

Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa announced the extension of curbs on large gatherings and closure of malls, theatres, gyms, clubs, conference halls in the state Assembly following a special meeting of the state cabinet. "Even Trump has issued orders for social distancing in the US. We will study the situation and decide," Yediyurappa stated ahead of the cabinet meeting on COVID-19 situation. "For immediate expenses, Rs 200 crore will be provided."

Earlier, officials had said that three more patients had tested positive, taking the total number of cases in the state to 14.

A special task force compris-

ing four senior ministers and the state Chief Secretary will oversee the handling of the situation, Yediyurappa said.

The state government has decided to go in for measures like tracking of mobile phones and stamping of persons required to be in social isolation and home quarantine following their return from COVID-19-affected countries or after coming in contact with affected persons. Medical Education Minister K Sudhakar said, "We will track through mobile phones. We have to obtain permission from the Home Department. We are exploring all forms of technology that will help keep a watch," he said.

"It is noted that a few passengers under home quarantine are not following instructions... Therefore, it has been decided to stamp the back of palm of left hand of such passengers... which will indicate the last day of quarantine," Health Commissioner Pankaj Pandey said.

Kerala urges religious leaders to control crowds at places of worship

SHAJU PHILIP
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 18

IN AN effort to check the spread of coronavirus, the Kerala government on Wednesday urged religious leaders to reduce turnout at places of worship, and said religious leaders have promised support.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan told media that the situation in the state is under control but things can worsen any time. "There is a large crowd at prayers and religious gatherings, which should be avoided in the present scenario. Religious heads have agreed to reduce the crowd, and they have given full support for the government's initiatives," he said.

Let the rituals be held, but people should keep away, Vijayan said.

He said the crowd at Sree

Kurumba Bhagavathy Temple in Kodungallur, where festival would begin this week, should be reduced. Temple office-bearers have promised support, it was informed.

After Vijayan held a discussion with religious leaders through video-conferencing, the Catholic Church issued a circular stating that mass service could be abandoned as part of crowd control measures and bishops of respective diocese can decide on that. The Church also dropped the pilgrimage to St Thomas shrine at Malayattor, in Ernakulam, for the next two weeks.

Besides, several mosques have announced stopping of public namaaz in the present evolving situation.

Meanwhile, a UK citizen who is reported to have tested positive for COVID-19 was on Wednesday administered a combination of Ritonavir and Lopinavir, used for treatment of HIV, it was learnt.

Doctor among two fresh cases in UP, total 17

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
LUCKNOW, MARCH 18

Two new novel coronavirus cases were reported in Uttar Pradesh on Wednesday, taking the total number of COVID-19 positive cases to 17. A resident doctor at King George Medical University (KGMU) here, and a Noida resident, who had recently returned from Indonesia, tested positive.

With this, eight cases are in Agra, four in Noida, three in Lucknow, and two in Ghaziabad. The doctor had been attending the two coronavirus patients admitted to the hospital. After he started showing symptoms on Tuesday, the samples of 14 people who are part of his team were sent for testing along with his specimens.

"After symptoms were seen in him, we tested the whole team involved in infection control, and all 14 samples among them have been confirmed negative," said the hospital's Chief Medical Superintendent Dr SN Shankhwar. "He has been kept in isolation now. On how the virus might have reached him, all precautions were taken by him but infection is such that it can reach anywhere. There is no absolute way to stop the spread. The Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) kit was used by the doctor."

The hospital's spokesperson, Dr Sudhir Singh, said in a statement that all undergraduate academic classes and examinations, including MBBS, BDS, BSc Nursing and paramedical exams, had been suspended till April 2.

"All teachers, residents and workers have been barred from taking leaves," he added. "The time for OPD registration has been reduced from 12.30 pm to 11 am. All departments have been directed that all teachers, residents, nursing staff and workers should be prepared as they call can be called and put on duty to deal with the epidemic."

Dr Singh said 46 samples had been tested in the hospital since Tuesday. Only the doctor's samples had tested positive, while 27 had tested negative. The results of 18 specimens are awaited.

WITH INPUTS FROM SAGAR RAJPUT

After Khandu tweet, police mediation, housing society allows cancer patient

NEERAJ TIWARI
MUMBAI, MARCH 18

AFTER THE intervention of Mumbai Police and the Arunachal Pradesh government, a cancer patient from the North-Eastern state, who was denied accommodation by a Mulund housing society amid the COVID-19 fear, has been allowed by the society to stay there.

On Monday, 74-year-old Rinzin Yangzom arrived in Mumbai along with his daughter Tesring from Arunachal Pradesh for his cancer treatment at Tata Hospital. They were to stay at Mulund's Sainath Estate in a flat



Rinzin Yangzom arrived in Mumbai along with his daughter Tesring from Arunachal Pradesh for his treatment. Express

owned by Bombay Sarvodaya Friendship Centre, which provides accommodation to patients coming from outside the city.

While Rinzin had stayed on the premises during his earlier visit to the city, society members this time objected and did not al-

low them entry. "I called trust member Anil Hebber and told him about it. He called the secretary of the building, asking them to allow us to stay. They, however, said they cannot allow us on the premises as they were following guidelines issued by the BMC and police," Tesring said.

They were then moved by Hebber to a guesthouse run by the Arunachal Pradesh government in Vashi. Hebber tweeted about the "discrimination" the duo faced. Society members had then filed a complaint at Navghar police station against Hebber that he was allowing people to stay in flats under the guise that they were patients.

TABASSUM BARNAGARWALA
MUMBAI, MARCH 18

FACED WITH violations of the mandatory 14-day home quarantine for arriving international travellers, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has asked Mumbai Police to track their movements through GPS location of their phones to make sure they stay at home.

The idea has been inspired by the South Korean government, which is using a mobile app to track suspected and confirmed COVID-19 patients, and has managed to control the outbreak

noticeably by this and other measures. In Mumbai, passengers flying in from abroad will be screened at the airport and made to fill a form with his or her phone number and address. "We will be taking help from police to track their movements through GPS location of their mobile phones," said additional municipal commissioner Suresh Kakani.

Kakani added that while international passengers are counselled to follow home quarantine rules and not come in contact with their wider community — followed up with a daily phone call by health workers, "nothing has succeeded" in

ensuring they remain in quarantine. The coronavirus takes seven-eight days to develop symptoms, and home isolation is advised for 14 days to ensure an infected person does not transmit the virus to others.

Since Monday passengers are also being stamped on their first at the airport with a line saying "Proud to protect Mumbaikars. Home quarantined" with the date until which they have to remain in home isolation. "It has been difficult to make people understand the importance of home quarantine. We received several complaints from societies that a resident had stepped out. We had to again go and

counsel these people," said Dr Vikas Singh, assistant medical officer in BMCL ward.

When contacted, joint commissioner of police (law and order) Vinoy Kumar Choubey refused to confirm whether they will track movements through GPS location, but said, "We are helping the BMC keep track of people quarantined and home quarantined."

While the move to track cases raises privacy concerns, the Epidemic Act, 1897, allows a government-designated officer to take measures necessary to contain the epidemic.

13 THE OUTBREAK NATION



A horse trainer wears a face mask in Ahmedabad. Javed Raja

Goa election commission: Disinfect poll booths

Panaji: With Goa scheduled to hold zila panchayat elections on March 22, the State Election Commission has called for polling booths to be disinfected. All government servants deployed for counting of votes and EVMs have been asked to wash their hands after each round of counting. "Ensure that all polling stations are sanitised and mapping of the polling booths shall be done with disinfectants like phenyl, Lysol, Dettol. Adequate provisions for washing hands at above mentioned centres should be made available," the advisory issued by State Election Commission Secretary Melvyn Vaz says. **ENS**

Uttarakhand govt shuts Secretariat

Dehradun: The Uttarakhand government on Wednesday ordered the closure of the state Secretariat and directed its employees to work from home but remain available over the phone. The Secretariat will remain closed till March 24, but officials and employees can come to their offices if there is any "very important work". The state government has also directed officials in the Secretariat, Divisional Commissioners, District Magistrates and the heads of departments and offices (excluding departments related to essential services) to allow employees to work from home. **ENS**

Assam shuts all bars, pubs

Guwahati: The Assam government on Wednesday ordered the closure of all bars and pubs in the state with immediate effect. An order issued by the Excise Department said, "All IMFL 'On' shops are to remain closed upto 31st March 2020 with immediate effect and until further orders." All saloons and beauty parlours have also been ordered to shut. The entry of common people in the state secretariat was also prohibited on Wednesday, and the state government also prohibited the entry of visitors to the ministers' colony till March 31. **ENS**

License for diagnostic kits

Ahmedabad: The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation on Tuesday granted a Gujarat-based molecular diagnostic company, CoSara Diagnostics Private Limited, the test licence to manufacture COVID-19 diagnostic test kits. The Centre is also looking at 60 accredited private labs to conduct COVID-19 tests. **ENS**

Hospitals defer elective surgeries to let doctors focus on corona cases

ASTHA SAXENA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

SEVERAL MAJOR hospitals in the national capital, as well as some in other parts of the country, have decided to cancel elective surgeries and reduce OPD (out patients) timings to ensure there is no community transmission, and doctors can instead focus on the coronavirus outbreak.

Elective surgeries are planned, non-emergency procedures.

Delhi's prominent hospitals are also sending messages asking people to avoid visiting hospitals unless it is an emergency.

Safdarjung Hospital has decided to cancel all elective surgeries until further notice, and reduced OPD timings. Medical Superintendent Dr Balvinder Singh said, "Staff have to be available for COVID-19 patients. We have decided to defer elective surgeries as of now and reduced OPD timings to 8.30 am-10.30 am."

The 1,600-bed hospital, which on average sees 12,000 OPD patients every day and performs more than 1 lakh major surgeries every year, has received most suspected and confirmed cases of



Dr Amarinder Singh Malhi of AIIMS asked non-emergency patients to stay away. Courtesy: Prasar Bharati News Services

COVID-19 so far.

At AIIMS, the authorities have decided to send an advisory to OPD patients on their registered phone numbers, requesting them to postpone OPD appointments. It states, "In view of the increasing threat of corona infection, you are requested to postpone your appointment at AIIMS if it is not urgent in nature. This is for your safety and good health."

On average, AIIMS caters to

15,000 patients every day.

On Wednesday, an AIIMS resident doctor, Dr Amarinder Singh Malhi, posted a picture holding a placard that read, "I stayed at work for you. You stay at home for us."

The picture was shared, among others, by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who tweeted: "Well said, Doctor! Also a shout-out to all those working to make our planet safer and healthier..."

Dr Malhi, 37, from AIIMS's

Department of Cardiovascular Radiology, told *The Indian Express*: "I did it because I felt there are several patients in the hospital who carry infection. If more people visit, there are high chances of community transmission."

A resident doctor from Safdarjung Hospital also shared a photo of himself with a placard issued by the Resident Doctors' Association, which read: "Patients with diabetes, COPD and other chronic diseases are at increased risk of contracting the virus..."

At a meeting between resident doctors of Safdarjung, the medical superintendent and officials from Union Health Ministry on Wednesday, it was decided that a fever screening centre will be set up in the hospital's old casualty ground floor for all patients with upper respiratory tract infection.

A doctor who attended the meeting said: "A questionnaire is being prepared to screen patients. In case of positive findings, patient will be referred to RML Hospital as a suspected case of COVID-19. In case negative findings, they will be allowed to enter the new emergency block. Routine surgeries would be deferred."

On Tuesday, Delhi's Lok Nayak

Hospital had canceled all elective surgeries and reduced OPD timings. Maharaja Agrasen Hospital in Delhi has also shut its general OPD from March 20 to 31.

In other states:

■ At Pune's Sassoon General Hospital, the largest government hospital in Maharashtra, authorities said elective surgeries have been rescheduled.

■ Dr Aditya Kelkar, director, National Institute of Ophthalmology, Pune, said there is a 50-per cent reduction in number of surgeries such as cataracts.

■ At Mumbai's Aditya Jyot Eye Hospital, only emergency procedures such as retinal detachment, infection or accident cases are being taken for surgery. "We are practicing social distancing even among doctors and the staff. Only urgent procedures are being operated on, hospital director Dr Suresh Natarajan said.

■ Even as there has been no confirmed case in Gujarat so far, some dental clinics have decided to postpone elective dental surgeries following the Indian Dental Association's advisory on Tuesday.

— WITH INPUTS FROM ENS
PUNE, MUMBAI & AHMEDABAD

Day after ICMR asks private labs to do tests free, they reach out to govt

PRABHARAGHAVAN
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

PRIVATE DIAGNOSTIC testing firms have reached out to the government and sought clarifications following the Indian Council of Medical Research's (ICMR) appeal that they perform testing for novel coronavirus "at no cost".

Some members of the private sector diagnostic firms have sought clarity on whether the government could provide them with the ingredients required to perform these tests for free or at a subsidised rate in order to allow them to perform these tests for free, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

Diagnosing COVID-19 for free without such relaxations may not be a viable model for these firms, as they will have to bear logistics, manpower and testing costs on their own, according to some representatives of private labs.

ICMR chief Balram Bhargava had on Tuesday said that firms would have to procure certain ingredients - known as reagents - to perform these tests on their own. This includes importing the probes, which the government is getting from Germany.

"The limiting step for engaging labs is the probes," Bhargava said. He said probes procured by the government would be distributed among the government's own testing labs, and that private firms would have to procure their own.

"ICMR strongly appeals that private laboratories should offer COVID-19 diagnosis at no cost," the latest strategy of Covid-19 testing in India released on Tuesday stated.

An executive of a private diagnostic lab said on the condition of anonymity: "We are asking for a few clarifications. We are trying to find out what they mean by a free test. We have asked (ICMR) if they can give us the reagents - the primers, probes and the sample that is extracted.

EXPLAINED

Cost of corona tests

THE COST of performing the first test is around Rs 1,500 and the second test to confirm whether the patient has COVID-19 costs an additional Rs 3,000, the government has said.

Then we will do the testing, and we will do it completely free."

"Talks with the government are going on," this executive said.

An executive with another diagnostic facility said the firm is seeking similar clarity from the government.

Healthians, a doorstep diagnostic firm, plans to engage at least four of its network labs in the country that match the government's criteria for COVID-19 testing facilities. However, the firm feels that with the manpower and logistics costs involved, including protective gear that the person collecting the sample will require, the cost of some elements of the test should be subsidised or made free to ensure viability.

"I don't think this is a viable model right now, because if you look at the cost of the test, it is quite high. There is a manpower deployed, you need the reagents (like primers and probes) and there is no subsidy provided for that at this stage," Healthians CEO Deepak Sahni said.

He said, "We can assure that we will be working round-the-clock, use our manpower and extend all possible support. However, the reagents and supplies could be given by the government. That way, the labs can at least go into a no-profit or zero-margin model to perform these tests, because the costs will already be involved in the manpower and in collecting the samples."

CAPF, Army boost measures to check spread of COVID-19

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

THE CENTRAL Armed Police Forces (CAPF) have cancelled all non-emergency leaves of its personnel and asked them to get into "battle mode" to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

In a four-page directive issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), personnel have been asked to avoid meetings, not give administrative work to medical staff, postpone routine medical examinations to test fitness, allocate more finances for disinfectants and not spread unscientific information on social media, among other measures.

Calling COVID-19 "the most infectious virus the world has seen in recent times", the directive says, "The only thing that is likely to slow the exponential growth and spread of the infection is measures for prevention of community transmission... There is a need to get into battle mode and plan ahead, not only in theory but through practical demonstration and drills."

Laying emphasis on the need to cut travel risk, advisory says, "All non-emergency leave of any kind may be cancelled forthwith... Avoid international or domestic, air, bus or train travel for at least one month except when it is essentially required. Long-distance travel is biggest cause for spread."

The advisory says all administration works by medical staff that can be postponed, like AME, recruitments, DPC medical exam, review medical boards etc, should be avoided. It has also called for the cancellation or postponement of all meetings and boards for at least a month,

Soldier in Leh tests positive

New Delhi: A 34-year-old soldier in Leh, who was on casual leave between February 25 and March 1, has tested positive for COVID-19. The soldier's father had returned from Iran on February 27 and was put under quarantine starting February 29 at the Ladakh Heart Foundation. The soldier continued to help the family after joining work as his father had been quarantined.

On March 6, the father tested positive for COVID-19 and the soldier was quarantined from March 7. The soldier tested positive for the virus on March 16. He has been isolated at SNM Hospital, and his sister, wife and two children are also quarantined. **ENS**

except for those which are essentially required.

It has even advised them to avoid gathering at the canteen, a routine at all field formations.

Meanwhile, the Army, which had earlier issued several advisories in line with the Health Ministry's advisories, has taken more stringent steps after it confirmed its first positive COVID-19 case on March 16.

The Army has banned all official foreign travel for its personnel, and has also advised against personal travel outside the country. Further, any of its personnel returning from abroad will be put under mandatory quarantine as per the guidelines of the Central government.



A LONELY PRAYER

Only one priest for evening aarti at Varanasi on Wednesday. Anand Singh

15,980 isolation beds, 37,326 quarantine beds: Health ministry

ABANTIKA GHOSH
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

WHILE THE total number of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) cases rose to 151 on Wednesday, with 14 fresh cases being reported, data collected by the health ministry has revealed that currently there are 15,980 isolation beds and 37,326 quarantine beds available.

For a country with an estimated population of 135 crore, this means that there is one isolation bed for every 84,000 Indians, and one quarantine bed for every 36,000 Indians. Officials said the data is still being compiled.

The new COVID-positive cases were reported from Delhi, Haryana, Karnataka, West Bengal and Puducherry.

Stepping up social distancing measures, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, in a letter to the principal secretaries and secretaries in charge of transport, transport commissioners of all states/UTs, has called for minimising transport numbers, saying that refund of fare may be considered against advance bookings.

Meanwhile, Dr Indu Bhushan, CEO, National Health Authority, tweeted that "eligible beneficiaries of #AyushmanBharat #PMJAY can avail free of cost treatment for influenza like illnesses. For COVID-19 testing/ treatment is available free-of-cost at government designated testing centres & public hospitals for all."

According to data compiled by the Health Ministry, the isolation beds include 8,900 in the states and Union territories, 591 in AIIMS and other institutes of national importance, 150 in Safdarjung Hospital, 127 in hospitals under the Ministry of Coal, 200 in those under the Ministry

of Steel, 1,100 in Railways hospitals, 400 in ESI hospitals, 3,135 in government medical colleges and 1,375 in the private sector.

The quarantine beds include 4,350 in facilities operated by the armed forces, 1,000 of the Labour Ministry, 11,934 under the central government, 13,458 in states and Union territories, 1,004 of the Railways, 5,140 under the Home Ministry and 440 under SAIL.

While 14 COVID-positive patients have been discharged so far, three deaths have been reported - a 63-year-old man from Mumbai with travel history to Dubai, a 76-year-old man from Kalaburagi in Karnataka who had returned from Saudi Arabia, and a 68-year-old woman in Delhi.

The government has banned the entry of passengers from Afghanistan, Philippines, Malaysia, European Union countries, Turkey and the UK till March 31.

Goa minister says first positive case recorded, later rescinds statement

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
PANAJI, MARCH 18

GOA HEALTH Minister Vishwajit Rane on Wednesday said that the state had recorded its first case of COVID-19. Minutes later, however, he took back his statement, saying that health officials had been the victim of a hoax.

Addressing the media, Rane said that a Norwegian national, who had arrived in India on February 6 and had travelled to Delhi, Assam, Agra and Meghalaya before coming to Goa on February 20, had tested positive for COVID-19. Rane said the patient had been put in an isolation ward.

Minutes later, however, Rane called for the announcement to be pulled back. "It was hoax news... Calling the hospital and saying the call is from a notified

lab (is wrong)," Rane told reporters. "We are trying to locate the number of the person who tried to create panic in Goa."

Meanwhile, former Goa minister Francisco "Mickky" Pacheco accused the BJP-led coalition government of "pushing" him into a quarantine facility to ensure he doesn't campaign for the March 22 zila panchayat polls.

According to Health Minister Vishwajit Rane, a "prominent politician" travelled from Dubai to Goa via Bengaluru. On that flight was a 67-year-old woman who eventually tested positive for COVID-19 in Bengaluru.

"Around her, there were prominent people, who were there. A team has gone to trace and quarantine them. It is important to quarantine them. Everybody is equal. It is to do with the lives of the people," Rane told reporters.

'India does need to step up testing, it is on that path'

WHILE INDIA is yet to adopt the World Health Organisation's prescription of "test test test" against the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19), **DR HENK BEKEDAM**, WHO's representative in India, tells **ABANTIKA GHOSH** that the response has been "comprehensive and robust". Excerpts from the interview:

How has India fared on its COVID-19 response so far?

India's response has been comprehensive and robust. Right from the onset, the government has taken things very seriously, as reflected in the high-level of political commitment, including by the Prime Minister himself.

Massive efforts are being made towards containing the spread, including strengthening surveillance, laboratory capacity, contact tracing and isolation.

There are concerns that India's testing base is too low and we may be missing cases. The WHO SEARO (South-East Asia Regional Office) regional director has said as much. What's your opinion?

India does need to step up testing, and it is on that path. What is important is that since mid-February, India has included testing for patients having severe acute respiratory illness from the surveillance

system - these are people who have no travel or contact history. Some results have already come out negative, other results will be out by end of the week.

There are two things: one is increasing capacity, the other is increasing scope. I understand that India is already considering increasing the scope to include testing of atypical pneumonia patients. This was one of the lessons from SARS (2003).

On the issue of capacity, the government is already expanding capacity substantially. There are also several tests on the commercial side, which I understand ICMR is now evaluating. Once they are validated, there will be an increased role for the private sector in testing.

Between lockdown and testing, which is the more effective way of controlling



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INTERVIEW
WITH **DR HENK BEKEDAM**
WHO'S REPRESENTATIVE IN INDIA

spread of infection?

The most effective way to deal with an outbreak is to act as soon as possible. We still hope that India is in the early part of responding to an infectious disease, and has the advantage of learning from the world. We also welcome the government's call for social distancing as a preventive strategy. Effective implementation of this strategy will go a long way in controlling the spread of the virus, along with hand-hygiene, coughing and sneezing etiquette. We hope these steps will result in flattening the curve. In China, in all provinces outside Hubei, they flattened the curve mainly by community intervention strategies like these.

Even though 17 states/UTs have confirmed cases, containment strategy is the main approach. All states are imple-

menting this strategy. Also, what India has done very well is contact tracing and isolation. Thousands have been tracked, isolated and tested when required.

Is there any move internationally to bring down testing costs or to make the test faster?

The test in India, from what I understand, is available without cost. It is a new virus, so we need to develop tools, diagnostics, medicines and vaccines to fight it. South Korea has now reduced the testing time to 4-5 hours. The development of vaccines takes time.

There are vaccines in the works in Australia, the US, and some other countries which will take at least another year before the public can use them.

Now ICMR has isolated the

virus. I am excited about India engaging in research on vaccines and better diagnostics. This includes serological testing which will be important to get a better idea about the outbreak.

It is important to understand that the throat swab procedure is risky if the PPE (personal protective equipment) is not done right. I lost a colleague in Vietnam during the SARS outbreak. Doctors need to be very careful while collecting swabs.

Globally, is there an end in sight?

I am quoting my Director General: This pandemic is one of the first pandemics that can be controlled. Singapore, China and South Korea are good examples. I would end by saying let's all work together and do our bit to fight this new disease and flatten the curve.



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

The Gogoi betrayal

To ordinary citizens in troubled times, his actions say: Judges will not empower you, they are diminished men



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

TALKING IS KEY

Information is the best defence, countries need to share experiences to effectively combat COVID-19

LAST WEEK, WHEN it declared the COVID-19 outbreak as a pandemic, the WHO called for international cooperation to contain the rapidly spreading virus. The outbreak has led to a few notable attempts at cooperation, transcending national borders. China has sent medical experts to Italy and Iran. The Chinese government has, on more than one occasion, acknowledged the help it has received from Japan — especially, donations of masks and protective gear. The EU has pledged 10 million euros to support research on the novel coronavirus. European leaders have also agreed to set up a 25 billion-euro investment fund and relax rules governing airlines to curb the economic fallout of the pandemic. And on Sunday, a video conference of SAARC leaders stressed on a joint effort by South Asian countries to combat the COVID-19. However, with the death toll from the virus touching almost 8,000, global cooperation remains far short of what is required to contain the public health emergency that disregards borders. Countries are, by and large, fighting their own battles. Even worse, the threat posed by COVID-19 seems to have exacerbated isolationist tendencies, with China and the US engaged in pointless squabbling over the virus's origins.

Quarantines, social distancing and travel bans are necessary. By all accounts, these slow down the spread of the disease and mitigate the burden on national healthcare services. But these measures must be accompanied by large-scale information sharing between nations. China initially downplayed the level of the crisis. However, within a month of the outbreak, it shared the virus's genome sequence. This has given a fillip to global efforts to develop an anti-coronavirus vaccine. However, such a vaccine is not likely to be market ready before mid-2021. Meanwhile, nations have to take lessons from each other's experiences. But once the outbreak spread beyond Asia, the US and much of Europe made no effort to understand how South Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore — even Kerala in India — had managed to contain the effects of the virus. Weeks passed before effective tracking and monitoring methods were put in place.

Methods to test the presence of coronavirus have diverged across nations. South Korea, for example, quickly tested large parts of the country's population. The Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the US, in contrast, initially applied a narrow view to those who required testing — only people who had recently traveled to China or had contact with someone infected qualified. All US citizens showing symptoms of COVID-19 infection were brought within the ambit of testing as late as March 4. Given such differences in testing protocols, comparing one country's case count with another's is almost impossible. The lack of common global standards on testing could compromise the fight against COVID-19. To evolve such a standard, countries need to talk and share experiences. In the long run, information is the best defence against COVID-19 — not just isolation.

BREACH OF TRUST

In bypassing established protocol to seek call details of citizens en masse, government violates SC guidelines

THE CELLULAR OPERATORS Association of India has reported mass requests from the government for mobile call detail records (CDRs), a serious departure from the stringent protocol established by the UPA government following an uproar in 2013 after prominent politicians were found to be under unauthorised surveillance. Records have been sought for all consumers on certain dates in parts of Delhi, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Kerala, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Punjab. In the case of Delhi, records were sought for the last three days of campaigning before assembly elections, while the anti-CAA protests were at their peak. Requests were delivered by local offices of the Department of Telecommunications, taking advantage of a condition in licences granted to operators, which permits the DoT to inspect their CDRs, which go back one year.

These requests depart from established protocol and international expectations on multiple counts, and amount to a serious breach of privacy. While a CDR request is supposed to be sanctioned by the home secretary and handled by a police officer of the rank of SP or above, DoT offices were used. The requirement to report CDR requests on a monthly basis to the district magistrate was not complied with. Most importantly, no reason was offered for snooping on the traffic of citizens. It is generally understood that communications surveillance must be specific and purposive, and must not trespass on the privacy of the innocent. Indiscriminate mass surveillance of communications invades the privacy of all citizens to the detriment of public trust. In this case, it was for purposes which are not verifiably honourable, since the government has chosen not to reveal them.

CDRs are all metadata and no content. They do not reveal any words uttered or messaged, but combining the metadata with phone location data reveals a lot about connections between specific people and the actions that they take. If data is available at scale, as was the case here, it is possible to build a multi-dimensional map of human activity, and correlate it with real events. This would disturb the balance of information power between the citizen and the state, and amount to a breach of privacy. If the government needs CDR data for a legitimate purpose, it should have no objection to following the rule-book scrupulously. And if there is a reason for sidestepping protocol in a sensitive matter, it should explain why.

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

Sport without an audience? It's no blueprint for future, just a practical step for anxious times

FOOTBALL COACH PEP Guardiola has an unshakeable belief in playing the beautiful game in a beautiful way. His views on playing football inside closed doors: "You have to ask whether it is worth playing football without the spectators." Yet he agrees that in these trying times, sports must rearrange the field, or rather the stands. More so for the year-long leagues, hurtling into the home stretch of their annual engagement. Leagues can't afford to postpone the schedule by even six or seven months, let alone by a year, like the European or COPA Championships. For them to culminate meaningfully, and for the respective sports to not plunge into a financial gorge, the events have to be held. Doing it behind closed doors is the most pragmatic solution.

Spectators are the oxygen for sports — there has been a concerted drive to make sports spectator-friendly, tweaking the game to woo more audience. But in these desperate times, closed-door sport is not one of the options, but the only option. Just imagine the chaos it would unleash if the English Premier League remains uncompleted. Liverpool might be runaway leaders, but what of the other leagues, the relegation battle, the promotion tussle of the lower divisions, player contracts, and the transfer window?

Gate sales account for nearly 14 per cent of the revenues of European football clubs, but most of the big clubs have them insured. Less so for broadcasters and sponsors, for whom the swathe of cancellations has already left deep holes, with an average dip of 10 per cent in advertorials. The EPL telecast rights are worth 9.2 billion pounds, Star Sports, the host broadcaster of the IPL, coughs up around Rs 3,300 crore annually. Clubs and franchises have commercial contracts based on brand exposure, matches being broadcast and/or dependent on spectators in the stadium. Closed-door action is no blueprint for the future, just a practical step in anxious times.

WE SHOULD BE deeply grateful to Justice Ranjan Gogoi. His conduct has disabused us of any illusions we might harbour about the legitimacy of the Indian Supreme Court. The government, in a brazen contravention of all propriety, has given him a nomination to the Rajya Sabha. He has been shameless enough to accept it. In doing so, he has not just cast doubt on his own judgement, character, and probity; he has dragged down the entire judiciary with him.

The authority of the Supreme Court of India rests squarely on two things: The cogency of its reasoning, and the integrity of its judges. Justice Gogoi's track record as justice was to take a wrecking ball to the Indian Constitution and smash it to smithereens. He, inter alia, made redundant important constitutional lodestars: Habeas corpus, non-discriminatory citizenship, the evidence act, federalism, free speech. He was more executive-minded than the executive in corruption cases. His reasoning in the Ayodhya case was infinitely worse than the Allahabad High Court. His ad hominem remarks were fit for authoritarian memes. His penchant for sealed covers, even as allegations floated over what meaning "covers" might have from him, made a mockery of transparency. He assigned cases to benches in ways that seem to rig the game. And then he committed the ultimate sin: Became a judge in his own cause. He was Chief Justice and should have known better.

This is the shining star of the judiciary the government has rewarded. A justice who feigned ignorance of the basics of constitutional law could hardly be expected to follow convention, propriety or conflict of interest. There is no explicit prohibition against judges accepting Rajya Sabha nominations. But the presumption against these kinds of appointments was strong; indeed, Justice Gogoi himself had authored a judgment which acknowledged that post-retirement jobs could bring the judiciary into disrepute. The very fact that a judge accepts such an appointment could cast doubt on his judgements. It would signal that the judiciary is not independent, but lives for crumbs thrown by the executive.

A paper by Shubhankar Dam, Madhav Aney and Giovanni Ko, and earlier work by Shylashri Shankar, collected systematic data

The government is ruthless in its aims. It thinks all constitutional forms are just that: Forms that we should expose as being powerless. It will, no doubt, as it does, use ambiguous precedents set by previous governments, in cases like Baharul Islam, and Ranganath Misra to justify its actions. But that is specious reasoning: Misra did, retrospectively, cast doubt on his own work as an inquiring judge in the 1984 riots case. But he formally joined the Congress and was given a nomination nine years after retirement, when the Congress was in the Opposition. It will be ironic to use Indira Gandhi's actions as a justifying precedent for anything pertaining to the judiciary.

to show how judges proactively become pro-executive as they near retirement. It is often thought that the solution to this problem requires explicit prohibition on any post-judicial appointment, including commissions of inquiry. The solution is not that simple; after all, there are many positions that require judges to be appointed. Moreover, in financial terms, the incentives are not that clear-cut. Most Supreme Court judges, apart from their pensions, can easily make a lucrative living on the arbitration circuit. Many do so.

The problem is much deeper than that of incentives. Even powerful people become habitually disposed to be on the right side of the ruling dispensation, they like being in circuits of power, and so the sources of ideological abdication are more subtle. Increasingly, even more so than in Indira Gandhi's days, deep ideological infiltration of the judiciary, where it is expected to march in lockstep with the overall ideological aims of the government, cannot be ruled out. Justice Gogoi's actions never had the cogency of reasoning; now he has given more explicit reason to doubt his integrity.

Think of the number of potentially interesting justices whose careers have been derailed by mere inuendo, most recently Justice AP Shah and Gopal Subramaniam. Think of the arbitrary transfer of Justice S Muralidhar. Now set Justice Gogoi's nomination to the Rajya Sabha against this background. Here is a Chief Justice whose record is unmatched in the annals of constitutional perfidy. Here is a Chief Justice who was accused of sexual harassment. The train of developments in that case casts a deep cloud over Justice Gogoi. And yet, or perhaps because of this, the government chooses to reward him with a Rajya Sabha seat. We live in an era where integrity and innocence can be destroyed by a mere whisper. But great crimes done to protect the executive have the imprimatur of virtue attached to them.

The government is ruthless in its aims. It thinks all constitutional forms are just that: Forms that we should expose as being powerless. It will, no doubt, as it does, use ambiguous precedents set by previous governments, in cases like Baharul Islam, and Ranganath Misra to justify its actions. But that is specious reasoning: Misra did, retrospectively, cast doubt on his own work as an

inquiring judge in the 1984 riots case. But he formally joined the Congress and was given a nomination nine years after retirement, when the Congress was in the Opposition. It will be ironic to use Indira Gandhi's actions as a justifying precedent for anything pertaining to the judiciary. Let us concede that previous regimes have not been the strictest about the propriety of giving executive rewards to constitutional functionaries. Yet Justice Gogoi's nomination to the Rajya Sabha is in a different league, in light of his judicial history and the alacrity with which he has been rewarded.

But why blame the government? This government's greatest success has been to show that it is the government we deserve. If someone who has held the office of Chief Justice, with all the world's protections and perks, is willing to crawl to the government's tune, for a position that, incidentally, happens to be drastically lower than that of a Chief Justice in the order of precedence, what can one say? What can one say of a legal culture - where judges usurp great power in appointments, and senior counsel enjoy possibly the maximum social immunity Indian society affords to any profession — that has no effective way of sanctioning this kind of behaviour? The call for more laws is often an evasion. Those parts of the government which have the maximum autonomy, protection and prestige, folded the fastest. No parchment barriers can ultimately hold against a contagion of venality or ideological commitment. The government is brazen. But the point of its brazenness is to show how small we are.

Justice Gogoi's actions are not simply a case of one bad apple. His actions will now cast doubt on the Court as a whole; every judgment will now be attributed to political motives. In an era where ordinary citizens are struggling to safeguard their citizenship rights and basic constitutional standing, Justice Gogoi's actions say to us: The Law will not protect you because it is compromised, the Court will not be a countervailing power to the executive because it is supine, and Judges will not empower you because they are diminished men.

The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express



KARTIKEYA TANNA

PROTESTING TOO MUCH

Justice Gogoi is best placed to be a non-partisan conduit between legislature, judiciary

EARLIER THIS WEEK, the President of India nominated former Chief Justice of India, Ranjan Gogoi, to the Rajya Sabha. This led to a flurry of criticism from many quarters, with some calling it a blot on the independence of the judiciary and others insinuating that Gogoi was being "rewarded" for his recent judgments: Gogoi was a part of many Supreme Court benches that ruled on several landmark cases including Ayodhya, Rafale, and human rights in Jammu and Kashmir after the revocation of Article 370. His critics are insinuating that these judgments, seemingly favouring the BJP, fetched him a post-retirement job in the form of a nomination to the Rajya Sabha.

This charge is bizarre. It suggests that the higher judiciary must never hand down a judgment that even remotely favours the ruling party. The Ayodhya ruling, which handed over the possession of the disputed plot in Ayodhya to the Hindus for a temple to be constructed, was based on the community having a greater possessory title to that piece of land. Moreover, it was a unanimous verdict — Justice Gogoi was just one of the five judges on the bench.

That said, it is vital to examine the uniqueness of Gogoi's appointment to the Rajya Sabha. His appointment is an Article 80 appointment. Article 80 of the Constitution requires the President to nominate 12 members who possess special knowledge or practical

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experience in literature, science, arts and social service. The President does so with the aid and advice of the council of ministers.

However, these are independent appointments to the Rajya Sabha. The 12 members are not required to follow party whip in the House. Gogoi hasn't joined the BJP, or any political party for that matter, in order to be nominated to the Upper House. Gogoi can, therefore, criticise the Modi government, if he so chooses. He can also vote against the government. There is nothing that the Modi government, or the BJP, can do about it. If the BJP or the Modi government wanted to "reward" Gogoi, it would have offered him the party membership before nominating him to the Rajya Sabha.

Many BJP members and supporters have pointed out that the Congress has rewarded judges in the past. For example, a former CJ, Ranganath Misra, was nominated to the Rajya Sabha in 1998. He was the first CJ to enter the Rajya Sabha after retirement. His entry differed from Gogoi's nomination in one critical aspect — Misra actually joined the Congress party before he was sent to the Rajya Sabha. It was not an Article 80 appointment. This meant that in all parliamentary matters before the Rajya Sabha, he had to follow the whip of the Congress party. He could not take an independent stand without consequences. Misra had headed a one-man commission

set up by the then Rajiv Gandhi government to probe the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. His report, which was widely criticised, gave a clean-chit to the Congress party.

Justice Abhay Thipsay, a former judge of the Bombay High Court, who presided over contentious cases such as the Best Bakery case and the Sohrabuddin encounter case — some of the rulings were reversed on appeal — joined the Congress after his retirement. Justice Baharul Islam was a Rajya Sabha MP from the Congress before he was appointed to the judiciary. After retirement, he rejoined the party.

Gogoi's appointment, therefore, isn't even remotely comparable to what the Congress has done in the past. What Gogoi chooses to do with his role as an independent MP in the Rajya Sabha is to be seen. One hopes that Gogoi's appointment to the Rajya Sabha will add great value to judicial and constitutional vetting of laws enacted by the Parliament. His role in joint parliamentary committees and inputs in the drafting of Bills would be critical in avoiding deadlock with the judiciary.

Far from being "rewarded" or made to toe the BJP party line, Gogoi's appointment should be welcomed. He is best suited to be a vital, non-partisan conduit between the legislature and judiciary.

The writer is an advocate licenced in India, England & Wales and New York



MARCH 19, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO

J&K COMPLAINT
THE JAMMU AND Kashmir chief minister, Sheikh Abdullah, said in the state assembly that the Congress (I) was "conspiring to overthrow" his government in the state and declared his determination to "fight back" with the support of his party and the people. The Kashmir leader charged the Congress (I) with having evolved a "strategy" to dissolve the state assembly on the pretext of "deteriorating law and order situation" by creating "disruption in every field through own party men."

NO BENGAL BANK
THE CENTRE DOES not favour West Bengal's proposal to open a bank of its own. The pro-

posal was contained in the budget speech by Ashok Mitra, the state finance minister. The opposition to the proposal is mainly on the ground that if the states were allowed to operate their own banks, the financial transactions would become partisan, particularist and parochial. The states will vie with each other to attract deposits and accounts; the nationalised banks which transcend state considerations and boundaries at present will be reduced in activity and scope.

NUCLEAR DOUBTS
THE US AMBASSADOR to India, Robert Goheen, said that his government has sought clarifications from India about Indira

Gandhi's statement in regard to nuclear policy before it could take action on the Indian applications for enriched uranium for Tarapur. The prime minister had said in the Rajya Sabha that India would not hesitate to carry out nuclear explosions in the "national interest". Goheen said that India had made two applications for licences for 20 tonnes of uranium each which would be enough for two years. He said while the applications were "clearable" within the grace provisions of the US legislation, the matter was still subject to approval by the US Congress and subject to the assurance from India that the nuclear fuel would not be used for development of nuclear devices.

A travelling spectre

Crowded mass transport systems, including local trains, are more vulnerable to Covid-19. We need to regulate and restrict their use



SWATI PIRAMAL

THE CROWDED LOCAL train is Mumbai's lifeline. The city's supply chain of essential commodities and its residents are heavily dependent on this mode of transport. The local trains, used by more than 7.5 million commuters daily, are being sanitised in a bid to control the spread of coronavirus. Special efforts are being put in to ensure cleanliness and hygiene in all passenger interface areas and components in coaches, including door handles, side handles, grab handles, seats, windows, partitions, etc. In the long-distance trains, disinfection of toilets and washbasins are also being ensured.

That said, travelling in the local trains could be the easiest way to contract the virus. The Mumbai locals, which are known to carry commuters 2.6 times more than its capacity, are famous for people breathing down each other's necks, literally. An infected person travelling on a local train in Mumbai can potentially infect millions.

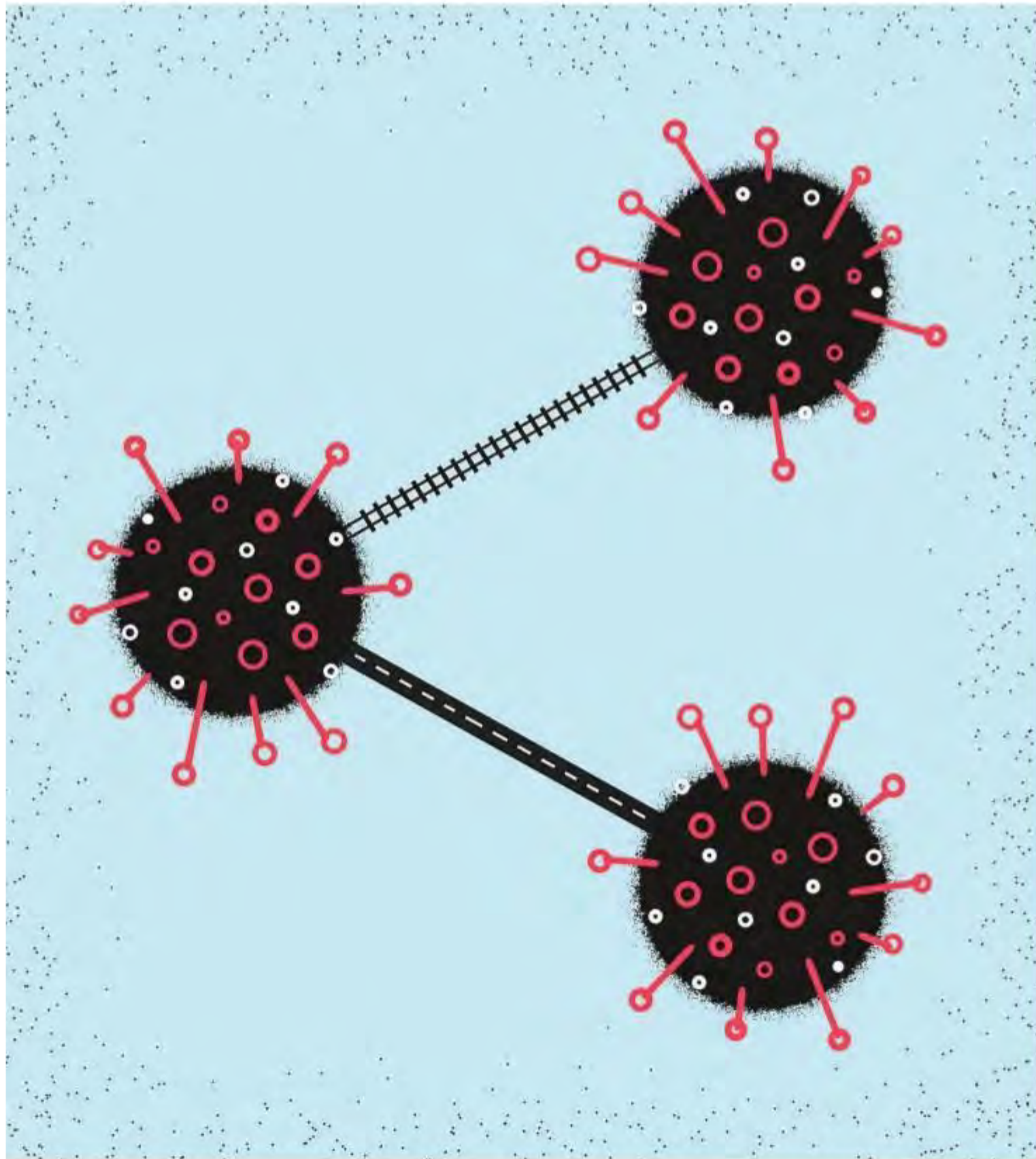
What are other countries doing with their mass transit systems? What can we learn from their experience? Is mere disinfection of the trains enough?

In the face of the coronavirus outbreak, health officials are advising citizens to avoid crowds whenever possible, and people are increasingly worried about being in close contact with strangers. For those who use public transit, this concern is top of the mind. Health experts know that Covid-19 causes respiratory problems. This virus is similar to the common cold and other respiratory viruses, which usually spread through exposure to tiny droplets from a sick person's cough or sneeze. Scientists have been planning for a pandemic for decades and transport hubs are widely regarded as infection hotspots, with virus transmission rates up to six times higher for those using public transport systems. Airplanes, trains and buses (and the stations and airports you must travel through) provide in many respects the perfect environment for droplet-spread diseases such as coronavirus (Covid-19) to thrive.

Most cities with large transit systems, such as in the US, are doubling down on deep cleaning their subway cars, buses, turnstiles, and handrails. The London Underground, which serves roughly 1.2 billion passengers annually, is a particular hotspot. Many mass transit companies have set up pandemic response teams. If the outbreak gets significantly worse, it is up to transit and local officials to use their discretion and shut down the system or reduce service.

Authorities in Wuhan, China, the epicentre of the outbreak, closed all transportation hubs in an unprecedented quarantine, stopping all trains, ferries, buses, and planes from leaving the city when the disease started to take hold in late January. This drastic step, in retrospect, appears to have been most effective in slowing the spread of the virus.

What measures can individuals and companies take to reduce risk and effectively slow the spread of the virus? Individuals can consider commuting during non-peak hours, using transport other than mass transit systems, or working from home. Many major companies have asked employees to work from home or instituted a staggered work-from-home plan. If you feel sick or belong to the category classified as "at higher risk" of contracting the coronavirus (older adults, people with chronic medical conditions, etc), staying at home or self-quarantining is the best thing to do. Generally speaking, close contact with people in crowded spaces (whether that be a subway, airplane, or office) makes a person more susceptible to



CR Sasikumar

catching the virus.

Previous research has shown that using public transport can increase a person's risk of catching a respiratory infection (the flu or common cold), since "buses and [trains] are crowded with people sitting and standing in close proximity" to one another. Herd immunity (we often say that Indians have great immunity) to other infections may not hold true for the coronavirus since it's a new virus strain.

Preliminary data from China suggests that household contact was an important means of transmission outside of Wuhan — prolonged contact with a sick person increases the risk of transmission. The time spent commuting and the density of people commuting are important factors in assessing if public transportation constitutes a risk for the disease's transmission. Because public transit naturally requires people to share space with others, it goes against the "social distancing" practices health officials have recommended, such as closing of schools, encouraging remote work, and postponing or cancelling mass gatherings like sporting events, concerts, or religious meetings.

According to a 2005 survey conducted in eight regions affected by the 2003 SARS outbreak, six locales — Hong Kong, Spain, Poland, Denmark, Great Britain, and the Netherlands — deemed public transportation the riskiest place to be in during a pandemic, in comparison to entertainment places, shops, hospitals, workplaces and schools. Countries such as Italy, Iran, Japan, and South Korea have seen a dip in ridership, in part because schools, businesses, and even entire cities

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have shut down. Cities are still operating some train and bus routes, in addition to thoroughly sanitising them.

Some transit systems are using technology to monitor at-risk individuals. Taiwan's metro agency installed an infra-red tool to measure people's body temperature before allowing them to enter a train, barring anyone with a temperature above 38 degrees Celsius (or 100 degrees Fahrenheit) from riding. A Chinese tech firm recently developed an algorithm for Beijing subway officials to identify commuters not wearing a mask or wearing it improperly, and Hong Kong's railway operator rolled out a robot to disinfect trains, in addition to deploying cleaning staff.

To contain the risk of spread on public transit, Canadian health authorities recommend that users practise impeccable "hand hygiene". This means using an alcohol hand sanitiser or washing one's hands afterwards, and being mindful not to touch one's face. Commuters are also advised to follow "cough hygiene", which means not to cough directly into one's hand and then touch things, or to stifle the cough in one's elbow.

For Mumbai, the pandemic response team on the local trains must use technology and quick response to prevent transmission of the virus. Health workers, police and security, utility and supply chains for food and medicines need to be considered as high priority travellers while travel restrictions could be imposed on others.

The writer is vice-chairperson, Piramal Enterprises, and an alumnus of the Harvard School of Public Health

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Considering the fact that worshippers are in such close proximity during daily prayers in mosques, it is incumbent on religious leaders and the state to come up with a strategy that protects people's health and lives until the threat of the virus subsides." — DAWN

Not so smart meters

Prepaid power is not the silver bullet to solve problem of discom finances



ASHWINI K SWAIN

THE UNION Finance Minister, while presenting the Budget 2020-21, urged states and union territories to replace all conventional electricity meters with prepaid smart meters over the next three years. Mentioning it in the budget speech was a symbolic nudge to an issue that has already gained traction. Last year, the Central Electricity Authority and the Ministry of Power (MoP) had envisaged a complete switch to prepaid smart meters.

Smart meters are the third pillar of the proposed technology-driven transition in electricity systems globally, in addition to renewable energy and energy storage technologies. Prepayment is an additional feature of these meters that has gained prominence in India, based on two hoped-for outcomes. First, prepayment is seen as a remedy for the financial ailments of the electricity distribution companies (discoms), thus solving a long-standing problem. Second, consumers are expected to be empowered to plan consumption in an efficient manner, and be able to choose the supplier and tariff plan in a future multiple supplier system. Both are virtuous goals.

But will prepaid smart meters deliver on these promises? Is prepayment an effective disciplining technique? What are the political consequences of such a technological shift, given the barely concealed political context of electricity provision in India? There are at least three reasons to doubt the wisdom of a rush to smart meters and prepayment.

First, prepaid meters address only a small part of the problem of discom finances - non-payment of billed amounts. In fact, discom losses have two additional components: Line losses in the distribution network, and theft outside the meters, neither of which will be helped by smart meters. Moreover, non-payment accounts for the smallest share of discom losses - about 2.5 per cent in the 21 per cent AT&C loss (based on the power ministry's claim that the Ujwal Discom Assurance Yojana has improved collection efficiency to 97 per cent). This is far lower than theft, which is estimated to account for half of discom losses on an all India basis. Further weakening the case for smart meters is that bulk of the non-payment is by state government departments. Instead of imposing stricter discipline on a small number of (predominantly government) defaulters, the Centre is choosing to impose prepayment on all customers. This is unlikely to be either effective or efficient.

Second, smart meters will require access to network and support architecture to transmit and store data. There is no clarity on the network costs, who will bear it, and

the impact on the electricity bills of the poor. Prepayment will imply elimination of security deposits, which offer cheap working capital. Both factors impose costs on discoms. On the positive side of the ledger, prepaid meters will reduce meter-reading and billing costs, and working capital requirement. Ultimately, they will reduce the cost of supply and the retail tariff. For example, the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission allows 1 per cent rebate for prepaid meter users. How these various cost factors balance out, and whether transitional financing is needed, does not seem to have been considered adequately.

Third, prepaid smart meters are advocated as pro-poor, but the poor may, in fact be the first to suffer. The pro-poor argument is that prepaid meters allow payment in small, affordable fragments, offer a sense of disciplined autonomy and control over consumption, and thus, relieve the poor of the debt they accumulate with the discom. However, poor agriculture-dependent households currently treat electricity dues as a credit option that is accumulated during the lean period and paid in the harvesting season. In a prepaid system, their choice is between exercising disciplined autonomy to stay in the dark when they cannot pay for electricity or finding ways to bypass the meter to access electricity. The latter accounts for a substantial block of discoms' losses; prepaid meters could increase the incentive for theft. The supposed gains of autonomy must be balanced against the fear of being left in the dark and the resultant impetus to bypass the meter.

Prepaid meters invert the order between consumption and payment, but are unlikely to address the fundamental problem: Weak accountability between discoms and consumers. Non-payment is often observed as a consumer response to poor quality supply. Several studies claim stronger consumer willingness to pay for better supply quality. Prepayment offers the promise of future consumption, but not the security that electricity will be available on demand. Prepayment in the current tariff structure does not eliminate the discoms' incentive to prioritise their affluent consumers over the poor.

The likely outcome is an unjust accountability structure where consumers are accountable for their consumption, but are not rewarded with any additional avenue to hold the discoms accountable. Experiences in Sub-Saharan Africa suggest that prepaid meters tend to have a reifying effect, particularly on the poor. Electricity problems that were blamed on the corrupt and incompetent utility staff are now attributed to the meter itself.

The Centre's push for smart meters may be an important ingredient for transitioning to a 21st century electricity-system. However, let us not pretend it is the silver bullet to solve the long-standing problems of discom finance and losses, and accountability and governance in the Indian electricity system.

The writer is a fellow at the Centre for Policy Research

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WRONG MESSAGE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'R Gogoi, MP' (IE, March 18). It seems that the government doesn't care much for the freedom and independence of the judiciary. It also seems that judges have lost sight of their "dharma" as protectors of justice and truth. Former CJI Ranjan Gogoi adjudicated some of the seminal cases of recent times. By nominating him to the Rajya Sabha less than five months after retirement, the government has not sent the right message.

K Thacker, Mumbai

BEYOND TOKENISM

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'From movement to party' (IE, March 18). Political parties that were formed to represent Dalit interests in the past have had a mixed record. In most cases, these parties were a one-person show. The new leaders failed to be role models for young Dalits. They also courted controversies. Many Dalit leaders today pay lip service to Babasaheb Ambedkar's ideas and philosophy.

Tarsem Singh, Mahilpur

HOPE FOR VALLEY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Incomplete step' (IE, March 16). The release of former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Farooq Abdullah after seven months of detention is a welcome move. The Centre has not offered any reason for its decision, but the move could be seen as part of a strategy to deal better with the situation that has emerged after the scrapping of Article 370 in August 2019. There is a political vacuum in Kashmir after the detention of most leaders of regional

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

To encourage quality reader intervention, The Indian Express offers the Letter of the Week award. The letter adjudged the best for the week is published every Saturday. Letters may be e-mailed to editpage@expressindia.com or sent to The Indian Express, B-1/B, Sector 10, Noida-UP 201301.

political parties. The lockdown and the restrictions on communication and the internet aggravated the situation. Some of these have been gradually relaxed, but normalcy in the Valley is not possible without the restoration of the political process. This calls for the release of all detained leaders and engagement with them.

Amjadullah Abuzar, Bajpatti

CHANCE IN CRISIS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Drawing together', (IE, March 17). The recently concluded extraordinary video conference of SAARC leaders on the COVID-19 pandemic signals the fact that the governments in the region are giving utmost urgency to dealing with the situation. The crisis is an opportunity to revitalise our public health capacity at the national as well as regional level. Regional initiatives like cooperation in the field of health research need to be taken up.

Sudip Kumar Dey, Kolkata



HITESH JAIN

Virus and opportunity

Social distancing, work from home, provide a template for paper-less courts

IN THE past few days, "corona" is a word that has dominated every discussion. But this crisis also presents an opportunity. It has given us a glimpse into how we may solve overcrowding problems in the future, whether in terms of traffic, in healthcare facilities or the courtroom. If social distancing and working from home is a way to cope with the coronavirus epidemic, could these form the basis for technology-guided solutions in the future as well?

A couple of years ago, I spoke at an event about the concept of paperless and people-less courts. This is an achievable and realistic goal. We just have to change our attitude. The legal curriculum has to change. Future generations of lawyers should study not only legal subjects but also technology and management. We have to think out of the box and change mindsets.

Paperless courts have been a topic of discussion in the last few years, and we can see

some steps being taken in that direction. But old habits die hard.

Just as continuous legal education is part of a lawyer's routine, adaptation to technology must also become a professional goal. By using video evidence, video-conferencing and telepresence technologies effectively, a paper-less and crowd-less court can indeed become a reality. By leading from the front in this area, India will be also doing its part to combat global warming. With the reduction or near elimination of paper, and a reduced crowd at courts, there will be a significant reduction in the carbon footprint of the country.

Technology can be indeed a solution for the legal fraternity while dealing with both contentious and non-contentious matters. We must invest in virtual courtrooms and I am convinced that, barring a few exceptions, hearings can be conducted on a virtual basis. This will eliminate paper and it will elim-

inate crowding. But it will certainly not eliminate work and the workplace. In the era of high-speed internet and other advanced technologies, we can change our future and create opportunities for everyone. Virtual courtrooms and case management, and the use of technology, data science and artificial intelligence will address the issue of judicial delay that has clogged our legal system. The rule of law will be upheld in the true sense when the justice delivery system will become efficient, people-friendly and citizens can receive legal redress in a time-bound manner.

We have an opportunity to transform the relationship between the law and the community by increasing access to justice, removing the disadvantages engendered by increasing inequality.

But most of all, we can address the increasing demands of people. The administration of justice will need a new approach,

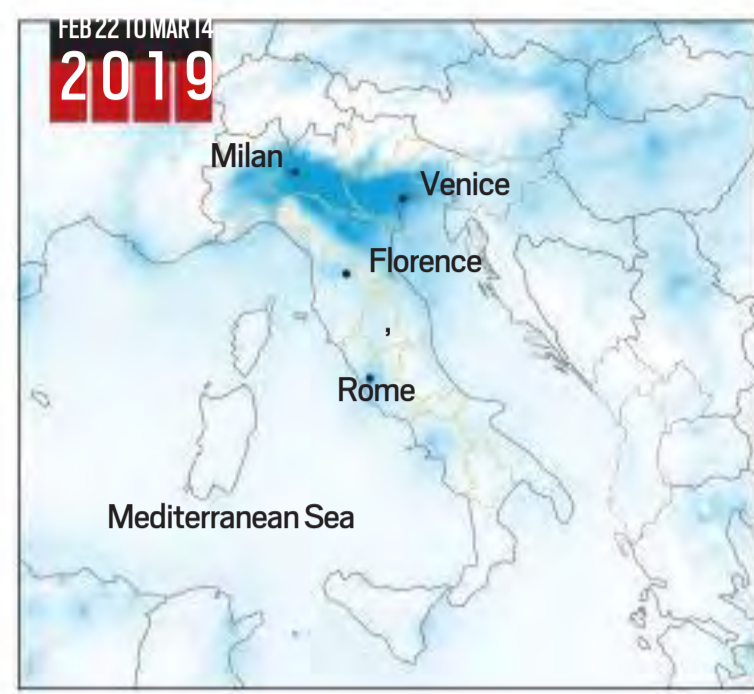
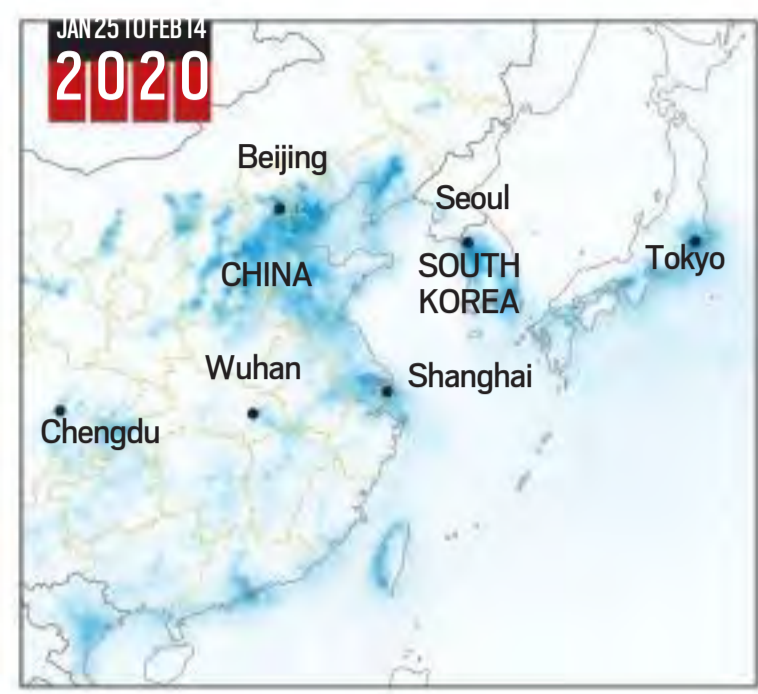
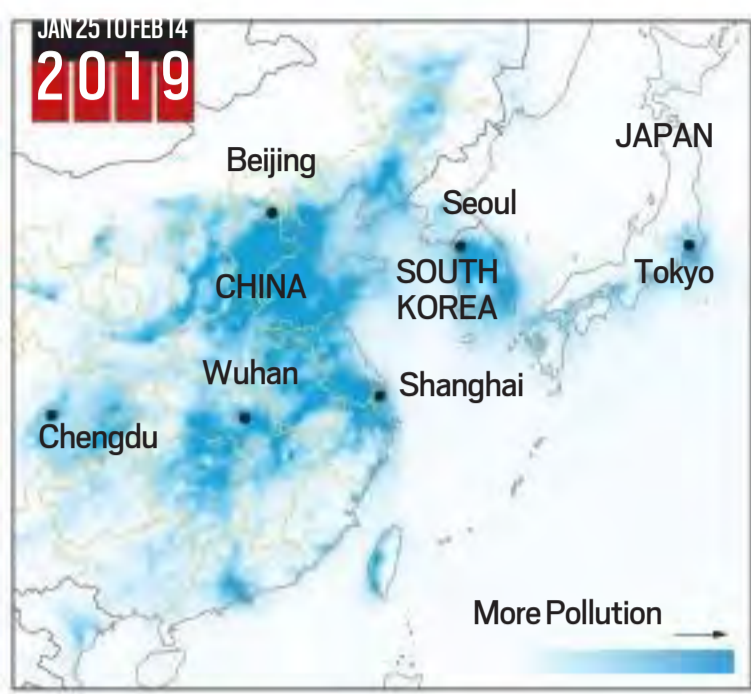
new strategy and more empowered decision-making in the digital world. Most of all, the adaptability and agility of the modern judiciary in leading a court system that keeps pace with the rapidly changing demands of society will be on test.

COVID-19 has forced people to maintain social distance, work from home - a minimum number of people, purely based on need, come to the court. But this can be extended beyond the current crisis. Let's convert this crisis into an opportunity. Let us debate and explore the possibilities of how we can change in the future.

If 2020 will be dominated by the effects of the coronavirus, the year should also be one when we learnt from the crisis. We owe this to New India. Let's challenge the status quo.

The writer is a senior lawyer based in Mumbai and managing partner, Parinam Law Associates

TELL-TALE SIGNS OF PANDEMIC LOCKDOWN, VISIBLE FROM SPACE



AS THE coronavirus sweeps through the world, shutting thousands of factories and locking down millions, the impact is visible from space. A satellite that detects traces of human activity — tailpipe emissions, fossil fuel burned in power plants and other industrial activities — shows striking reductions in pollution over China and Italy. Both countries have taken unprecedented measures to limit the movement of people in order to slow down or contain the spread of the disease. Even in South Korea, where the lockdown is not that severe, pollution levels are falling. "It's the first time in history we've seen something like this," said Marco Percoco, a transportation economist at Bocconi University in Milan, referring to the speed and size of the pollution declines.

The New York Times, using Sentinel-5P satellite data processed by Descartes Labs. Pandemic infection and death numbers from Johns Hopkins University dashboard; Our World In Data, using WHO data.

CHINA
MARCH 18

Confirmed cases	81,102
Total deaths	3,241
Total recovered	69,755

INFECTION AND DEATHS: On January 25, the global death toll was 41, all of them in China. By February 14, 1,383 people had been killed, all but two of them in China. An average 65 new deaths occurred daily in China from January 25 to February 14, peaking at 254 deaths on February 13 before falling to just 13 on February 14. China got some grip on the number of daily deaths thereafter.

ITALY
MARCH 18

Confirmed cases	31,506
Total deaths	2,503
Total recovered	2,941

INFECTION AND DEATHS: The first two deaths in Italy occurred on February 23, and the toll jumped to 29 a week later on March 1. On March 10, with 463 people dead, Italy shut all schools and colleges. On March 15, the government put the whole country under an unprecedented quarantine lockdown. On Tuesday, all retailers except pharmacies and supermarkets were shut down.

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

What is herd immunity?

UK has retracted under criticism after suggesting it would allow COVID-19 to pass through the population, so that 'herd community' could be achieved. What is this concept, why was the strategy questionable?

KAUNAIN SHERIFF M
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

LAST WEEK, the UK's Government Chief Scientific Adviser Sir Patrick Vallance hinted at a strategy that would allow the novel coronavirus to infect 60% of the country's population so that a degree of "herd immunity" could be achieved. Following widespread criticism, and with Imperial College London projecting a dire scenario if the pandemic remains uncontrolled, the UK has now retracted — and is looking at self-isolation for the elderly.

What does herd immunity mean?

Herd immunity refers to preventing an infectious disease from spreading by immunising a certain percentage of the population. While the concept is most commonly used in the context of vaccination, herd immunity can also be achieved after enough people have become immune after being infected.

The premise is that if a certain percentage of the population is immune, members of that group can no longer infect another person. This breaks the chain of infection through the community ("herd"), and prevents it from reaching those who are the most vulnerable.

However, the discussion on herd immunity to fight COVID-19 in the UK has not been based on this conventional definition. The UK government had wanted the entire population to be exposed to the novel coronavirus infection, so that the majority could develop immunity to COVID-19.

How does herd immunity work?

The scientific principle is that the presence of a large number of immune persons in the community, who will interrupt the transmission, provides indirect protection to those who are not immune.

To estimate the extent of spread and immunity, epidemiologists use a measure called the 'basic reproductive number' (R0). This indicates how many persons will be infected when exposed to a single case; an R0 of more than 1 indicates one person can spread the infection to multiple persons.

Scientific evidence shows that a person with measles can infect around 12-18 persons; and a person with influenza can infect around 1.2-4.5 persons, depending on the



Almost empty fruit and vegetables aisles in a London supermarket on Wednesday. Across the world, panicked customers are trying to stock up on food for fear that the coronavirus pandemic will force governments to order shutdowns. Reuters

season. On the basis of the available evidence from China, and according to various experts, R0 COVID-19 ranges between 2 and 3.

There are three ways in which an infection can spread in a community. The first scenario looks at a community that is not immunised. When two infectious cases, both with an R0 value of 1, are introduced, there is a possibility of the entire community being infected, with a few exceptions.

In the second scenario, there may be some persons who have been immunised; and only these immunised persons will not be infected when at least two infectious cases are introduced in the community.

The third scenario is when the majority of the community is immunised. So, when two infectious cases are introduced, the spread can take place only in exceptional cases, like in the elderly or other vulnerable persons. Even in such a situation, the immunised persons protect the non-immunised by acting as a barrier — which is herd immunity.

When do we know that a population has achieved herd immunity?

It depends on multiple factors: how effective the vaccine for a given disease is, how

long-lasting immunity is from both vaccination and infection, and which populations form critical links in transmission of the disease. Mathematically, it is defined on the basis of a number called "herd immunity threshold", which is the number of immune individuals above which a disease may no longer circulate. The higher the R0, the higher the percentage of the population that has to be immunised to achieve herd immunity.

Polio has a threshold of 80% to 85%, while measles has 95%. With the current data for COVID-19, experts have estimated a threshold of over 60%. That means more than 60% of the population needs to develop immunity to reach the stage of herd immunity.

Why is herd immunity as a strategy against COVID-19 questionable?

It is very risky to seek herd immunity by allowing a large proportion of the population to get infected. Such a strategy at this stage, experts have underlined, would be based on many unknowns and variables.

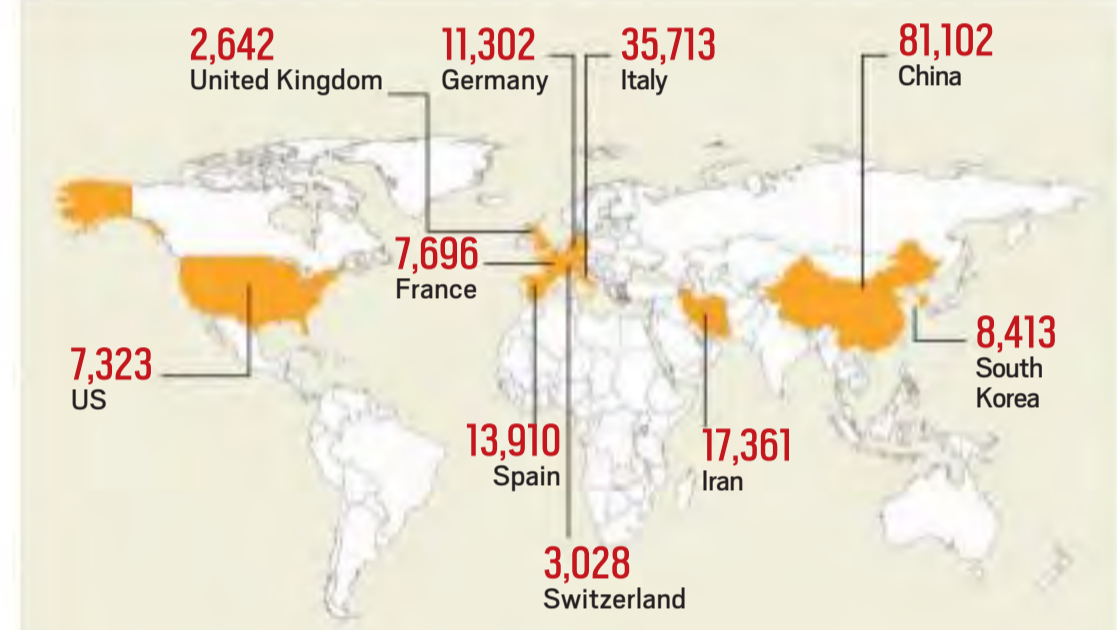
To begin with, much about the behaviour of the pathogen is still unclear. There isn't enough statistically significant data to estimate conclusively how many persons can

get the virus from a single infected person. Second, it can take months, or even longer, to build group immunity to COVID-19. During that time, the need is to protect people who are at greater risk; the numbers so far indicate that people above 55, especially those with co-morbidities like cardiovascular disease and hypertension, are the most vulnerable.

Third, while herd immunity may come about from a pandemic because the people who survive may develop immunity — they also may not — it is important to note that for COVID-19, we still don't know whether one can become immune to the virus. Nor is it clear whether a person who develops immunity will remain permanently immune.

The UK's original strategy to achieve herd immunity would put a huge burden on the healthcare system. Allowing the virus to pass through the population means a surge of patients, putting pressure on existing ICU and emergency beds. The UK was looking at 60% of the population getting infected, which could have happened rapidly. Epidemiologists stress "flattening the curve" — slowing the spread of an infection over a large population — and this cannot be achieved by allowing the virus to pass through the entire population.

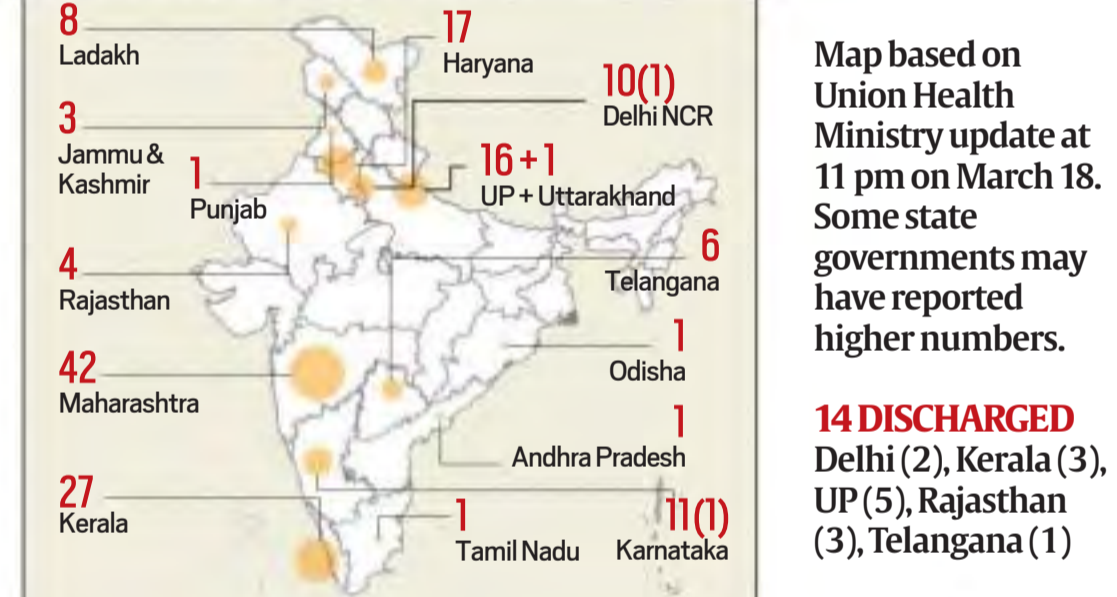
CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK
DAILY GLOBAL AND INDIA COUNTS



TOTAL CONFIRMED: 211,853 DEATH COUNT: 8,724

Source: Johns Hopkins University; map updated at 11 pm on March 18

CORONA COUNT: 151 (3 DEATHS)



Map based on Union Health Ministry update at 11 pm on March 18. Some state governments may have reported higher numbers.

14 DISCHARGED Delhi (2), Kerala (3), UP (5), Rajasthan (3), Telangana (1)

Have a question on the COVID-19 outbreak and what you should/should not do? Write to explained@indianexpress.com

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FACT CHECK, GROUND REALITY

Does ibuprofen make COVID-19 worse? Some warnings, some uncertainty

TABASSUM BARNAGARWALA
MUMBAI, MARCH 18

ON TUESDAY, the World Health Organisation (WHO) advised patients suffering from COVID-19-like symptoms to avoid the anti-inflammatory drug ibuprofen, unless prescribed by doctors. This followed an article published in *The Lancet Respiratory Medicine* suggesting that certain drugs, including ibuprofen, may make patients more vulnerable to COVID-19, as well as a warning by France's Health Minister that such patients should avoid painkillers like ibuprofen and aspirin.

WHO spokesperson Christian Lindmeier told reporters in Geneva that investigations into the possible adverse impact of ibuprofen were ongoing. "In the meantime, we recommend using rather paracetamol, and do not use ibuprofen as a self-medication. That's important," Lindmeier said. But if ibuprofen has been prescribed by healthcare professionals, the spokesperson added, "then, of course, that's up to them".

What is ibuprofen

It is an anti-inflammatory drug that is easily available with chemists in India, and can be purchased without a doctor's prescription. Common medicines that contain ibuprofen include Brufen and Combiflam tablets. Ibuprofen, a non-steroid, is used for relief from joint pain, migraine, fever, body ache, and even pain during the menstrual cycle. Its function is to reduce pain, swelling, and fever by suppressing substances that produce swelling in the body. Other non-steroid anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAID) include aspirin, cortisone, naproxen and diclofenac.

What the study flagged

Writing in *The Lancet Respiratory Medicine*, a team of scientists has suggested that consumption of ibuprofen increases the number of certain enzymes that could worsen COVID-19 infection, caused by the virus SARS-CoV-2.

"Human pathogenic coronaviruses (severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus [SARS-CoV] and SARS-CoV-2) bind to their target cells through angiotensin-converting enzyme 2 (ACE2), which is ex-



Common medicines like Brufen and Combiflam contain ibuprofen. AP

pressed by epithelial cells of the lung, intestine, kidney, and blood vessels," they wrote. ("Are patients with hypertension and diabetes mellitus at increased risk for COVID-19 infection?"; Lei Fang, George Karakiulakis, Michael Roth; *Lancet Respir Med* 2020, published online on March 11)

ACE2, an enzyme also found in bats, is SARS-CoV-2's entry point into the cell. The research cited a study that observed that ACE2 expression increases in hypertensive and diabetic patients, making them more vulnerable to severe infection. Drugs like

ibuprofen and thiazolidinediones, used to treat type-2 diabetes, too increase ACE2 expression.

"We suggest that patients with cardiac diseases, hypertension, or diabetes, who are treated with ACE2-increasing drugs, are at higher risk for severe COVID-19 infection and, therefore, should be monitored for ACE2-modulating medications, such as ACE inhibitors or ARBs," the authors of the paper said.

Warning and dispute

French Health Minister Olivier Véran, a neurologist, posted on Twitter on March 14: "Taking anti-inflammatory drugs (ibuprofen, cortisone, ...) could be a factor in worsening the infection. If you have a fever, take paracetamol. If you are already on anti-inflammatory drugs or in doubt, ask your doctor for advice." (Translated from the French)

In the UK, *The Mirror* reported that a

four-year-old girl infected with COVID-19 had suffered from vomiting, shaking, and high-grade fever after being administered ibuprofen.

The French Minister's concerns have, however, been disputed. Dr Muge Cevik, infectious diseases researcher at the Infection and Global Health Research Division at the University of St Andrews, Scotland, wrote on Twitter the same day: "Deeply concerned about this bold statement by the French MoH with no reference to the claim, which is causing public concern. There's no scientific evidence I am aware of that ibuprofen cause worst outcomes in #COVID19."

In India, caution from doctors

Dr Om Shrivastav, infectious diseases expert at Mumbai's Jaslok Hospital, said this is currently observational evidence, and scientific evidence on ibuprofen's effects is yet to be collated and ratified. "There appears to be some amount of increased mortality in patients of coronavirus. People are going into cardiac and respiratory failure," he said.

Dr Pravin Amin, Intensive Care Unit spe-

cialist at Breach Candy Hospital in Mumbai, said they would avoid prescribing ibuprofen in coronavirus patients until further studies are done, and replace the treatment of fever and body pain with paracetamol. "It is too early to predict anything. But there is speculation that a few cases in the west have shown worsening outcome when this drug is used. It is possible patients had some form of reaction," Dr Amin said.

Dr Tanu Singhal, infectious diseases expert, said ibuprofen is known to cause kidney damage and gastric ulcers in elderly people. "Ibuprofen is not a great drug and we avoid it. There is scientific evidence that it causes adverse effects in treated chickenpox patients. In hypertensive and diabetic patients, the drug can worsen health, but again, there is no evidence with respect to coronavirus," she said. Dr Singhal said that Mumbai's Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital, where she is a consultant, will avoid using the drug.

Anup Kumar Yadav, director of National Health Mission, Maharashtra, said they have been informed about the reports from France, and that the drug would be avoided.

Bombay HC relief for US teen stranded in Dubai after Indian mission refused visa

OMKAR GOKHALE
MUMBAI, MARCH 18

THE BOMBAY High Court on Tuesday directed the Union government to issue fresh visa to a 19-year-old US citizen stranded in Dubai, who was on way to Mumbai to be with her family.

The girl, who holds an Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) card, was on a flight to Mumbai after her university in Boston, USA, asked students to vacate the campus and return home in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

A division bench of Justices S J Kathawalla and R I Chagla passed an order after granting an urgent hearing on Tuesday to a plea filed by the girl's mother.

The petitioner-mother, through senior counsel Dinyar D Madon, argued that the 19-year-old was refused permission to board her connecting flight to Mumbai by an airline due to a travel advisory issued by the Indian government last week to tackle the virus outbreak, and the Indian diplomatic mission in

Dubai "arbitrarily" and "wrongfully" refused her request for visa.

Her mother is an Indian citizen; the petitioner was born in the US and is an American citizen. The girl completed her graduation in Mumbai and is pursuing higher studies in the US.

It was submitted that the student, who was asked to vacate the campus at Tufts University as part of precautions, had advanced her travel plans and left Boston on March 12 to reach Dubai on March 13. She was supposed to board a connecting flight from Dubai at 11.20 pm the same day, but Emirates Airlines did not allow her to board the connecting flight to Mumbai, citing the travel advisory issued by India on March 11, imposing restrictions on foreigners travelling to India effective from March 13.

Airline officials told her that she was travelling past the deadline, the court was told. As per schedule, the girl would have landed in Mumbai early March 14 morning with transit in Dubai. About her port of departure (that is Boston), the

court noted, "This obviously is much before the deadline as per the travel advisories issued by the respondent (government)."

The government's advisory stated that foreigners intending to travel to India should apply to the nearest Indian mission for visa on compelling grounds.

With the teen stranded in Dubai, her mother approached the Indian mission there and requested them to grant her visa. But the authorities there refused, the counsel submitted.

Madon argued that she was boarding at Dubai only as a transit passage and it should not have been considered her 'port of departure'. He also submitted that the Indian Embassy in Istanbul had issued visa to OCI-holders stranded in Istanbul, their transit halt, who had not even taken a flight from their port of departure before the deadline on compelling grounds. "It would be arbitrary to treat the petitioner's daughter differently by another Indian diplomatic mission in Dubai, or the respondents by denying her a visa on compelling grounds despite

she having departed from United State before the deadline," Madon argued.

Representing the Centre, advocate Rui Rodrigues did not contradict the petitioner's claims regarding the advisory and said that the authorities were not at fault, as the airline did not permit her to board the transit flight from Dubai.

After hearing the submissions, the court held that the passenger in transit would not fall within the word 'port of departure', and that the Indian mission in Dubai could have acceded to the student's request, which "unfortunately" was refused.

Observing that compelling case has been made by the petitioner's mother, the bench directed the government through the immigration bureau or the diplomatic mission in Dubai to issue a fresh visa to 19-year-old to enable her to arrive in Mumbai and be with her family.

The court also clarified that the relief has been granted based on peculiar facts of the case and cannot be treated as precedent in other matters.

Ensure uniform policy to provide nutritional food to kids, lactating mothers: SC

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

THE SUPREME Court on Wednesday sought to know what was being done to provide nutritional meals to children and lactating mothers in view of the closure of schools and anganwadis to check the spread of COVID-19.

"While dealing with one crisis, the situation may not lead to creation of another crisis," a bench of Chief Justice of India S A Bobde and Justice B R Gavai said, adding that "in that view of the matter, it is necessary, that all the States should come out with a uniform policy so as to ensure, that while preventing spread of COVID-19, the schemes for providing nutritional food to the children and nursing and lactating mothers are not adversely affected".

Taking suo motu cognizance, the bench said many states had issued directions to close schools and anganwadis to deal with the crisis. It noted that the mid-day meal scheme, under which nutritional food is supplied to children, should be implemented through various schools, and that anganwadis, in addition to supplying nutritional food, should also implement the scheme to provide nutritional food to lactating and nursing mothers.

"Non-supply of nutritional food to the children as well as lactating and nursing mothers may lead to large-scale malnourishment... Such malnutrition may affect their immunity system and as such, such children and lactating and nursing mothers would be more prone to catch the infection," the bench said.

It issued a notice to the Secretary of Union Ministry of Women and Child Development, and Chief Secretaries/Chief Administrators/ Administrators of States and Union Territories and asked them to file their response in one week's time.

Govt asks CBSE, varsities to postpone exams for 10 days

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

THE UNION government on Wednesday ordered the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), National Institute of Open Learning (NIOS) and all institutions of higher education to postpone ongoing examinations for ten days following the COVID-19 outbreak in the country.

Following the order, CBSE has postponed board examinations scheduled between March 19 and 31. This includes re-examination for students in Northeast Delhi affected by the recent riots. The Board will announce a new exam schedule by the end of the month after a "re-assessment of the situation".

The National Testing Agency (NTA), too, put the JEE (Main), scheduled to be held on April 5, 7, 8 and 9, on hold. "We will announce fresh dates soon," NTA Chief Vineet Joshi told *The Indian Express*. The JEE (Main) is the entrance examination for admission to National Institutes of Technology.

According to a senior official in the HRD Ministry, the

Wednesday order is binding on all institutions of higher education, irrespective of whether they are run by private management, the Centre or state government. "UGC will issue an order tomorrow (March 19) to this effect," the officer said.

The HRD Ministry has also requested state governments to reschedule the ongoing state board examinations for Class X and XII students. "For now, Uttar Pradesh has put all examinations on hold till April 2. Other state governments will take a call on our request after approval from authorities concerned," the officer added.

However, the ICSE and ISC Board examinations will go on as per schedule.

The Chief Executive and Secretary of the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examination (CISCE), Gerry Arathoon, told *The Indian Express*, "We haven't received any orders from the government yet. We have eight papers left for the Class XII students and six for the Class X students, which should finish by March 31 and 30, respectively."

Earlier in the day, CISCE had

announced that all examiners would evaluate answer scripts from their respective homes. CBSE, meanwhile, has suspended evaluation work till March 31.

The HRD Ministry's order comes in the wake of increasing cases of COVID-19 infection. The total number of reported cases has now crossed 150. There have been three COVID-19-related deaths.

The government has said that steps are being taken to ensure "safety and security" of students appearing for exams and their teachers and parents. The CBSE had already issued detailed instructions on precautions to be taken.

"Since JEE Mains may require travel by examinees to different towns and the dates may clash with rescheduled CBSE and other Board exams therefore, JEE Mains should be rescheduled and the new date of JEE Mains will be announced on 31.03.2020..." the ministry order states.

On Wednesday, the ministry also held a meeting with State Open Universities to plan for all higher education institutions to move classes online till they are closed.

Kashmir records first case, restrictions on public transport in Srinagar

ADIL AKHZER
SRINAGAR, MARCH 18

KASHMIR REPORTED its first COVID-19 case on Wednesday after a patient from Srinagar tested positive for the virus, officials said.

J&K government spokesperson Rohit Kansal confirmed the same in a late-night tweet. "Jammu & Kashmir First positive case in Kashmir- Khanyar, Srinagar. History of foreign travel. Arrived on 16/3/2020. Put in Isolation. Surveillance started in 300m area. Request all to cooperate. Also immediately self-report any symptoms," he posted.

Health Department sources said the patient is a woman who had a travelled to Saudi Arabia for pilgrimage.

Meanwhile, authorities in Srinagar have imposed restrictions on public transport in Srinagar from Thursday. Srinagar Deputy Commissioner Shahid Chaudhary tweeted, "There will be restrictions on public transport, assembly of people and some other measures, in #Srinagar from tomorrow. Steps are being taken in view of a positive case detected. Further updates to follow. #Coronavirus."

Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC) mayor Junaid Azim Mattoo asked all residents of Srinagar to stay at their homes from Thursday. "I request ALL Srinagarites to STAY at their homes from tomorrow morning and venture out ONLY when absolutely necessary. Those with ANY flu like symptoms should immediately home quarantine themselves. Report for screening/testing if symptoms," he said in a series of tweets.



PREVENTIVE MEASURES

A Srinagar Municipal Corporation employee fumigates houseboats and shikaras on the banks of Dal lake. Shuaib Masoodi

J&K bans inter-state buses, Vaishno Devi board shuts yatra

ARUN SHARMA
JAMMU, MARCH 18

TAKING MORE stringent measures to check the spread of COVID-19, the Jammu and Kashmir administration on Wednesday asked all "foreign tourists or visitors" to not visit the Union Territory and suspended movement of all inter-state buses to and from J&K.

The Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board has also closed the yatra to the shrine.

"All foreign tourists and visitors coming to J&K will be quarantined," said UT spokesperson Rohit Kansal. "Similarly, one hundred per cent quarantine will be imposed for all visitors from the Union Territory of Ladakh."

A total of 2,802 people are under observation in the UT, Kansal said, adding that 2,128 are under home quarantine and 28

in hospital quarantine.

A total of 145 samples have been sent for testing, and 118 of them have tested negative, while report in 24 cases is awaited. Only three cases have been reported positive in the UT so far, he added.

Earlier in the day, an order by Transport Commissioner Pardeep Kumar said that "no inter-state bus service shall ply on inter-state routes with immediate effect till further orders".

"The buses belonging to the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, which are presently outside the UT, shall not carry any passenger from outside the UT while returning back," it added.

Meanwhile, the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board asked pilgrims to "not plan their visit till the situation normalises completely". It said that the decision has been taken in view of the advisories issued by the Union Ministry of Health and

Family Welfare and the J&K government. "However, Pooja, Aarti and other rituals shall be held at the Holy Cave Shrine as usual," it said in a statement.

The management committee has also banned the entry of devotees at the Chandi Mata temple in Baderwah's Chinote area till April 4. On similar lines, other religious leaders are also advised to suspend all religious gatherings and functions, at least till March 31, said Kansal.

The J&K administration has also made self-declaration mandatory for all the people travelling in the train between Banihal and Qazigund. "Please ensure that all the inbound and outbound passengers coming through train up to Banihal and going back shall necessarily file the self-declaration form, with the details," read a letter written by Jammu Divisional Commissioner Sanjeev Verma to the Ramban District Magistrate.

60 % of train tickets cancelled in March: Rly chairman to Parliamentary panel

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

OVER 60 per cent of train tickets were cancelled in March due to coronavirus, the Railways Board chairman informed a parliamentary panel, which came down hard on him for a "shoddy presentation" on the steps taken to tackle the outbreak, sources said.

The Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture had convened a special meeting with the railway and aviation ministries, seeking an update on the precautions taken by them in view of the virus.

Railway Board Chairman V K Yadav was pulled up by the panel for "shoddy presentation" on the preparedness of the national transporter in the wake of Covid-19 outbreak. Officials who attended the meeting, however, said the panel was not as critical



Union Railway Minister Piyush Goyal

as was being portrayed.

"The Railway Board chairman was unprepared and made a shoddy presentation at such a sensitive time," a member of the panel said. The meeting was attended by 20 MPs.

"While the aviation and tourism officials came with presentations with slides, the Railway Board Chairman did not. He just read out from some papers he was carrying," said an MP.

Sources said the panel members instructed Yadav to prepare a detailed report on the steps taken by the Railways to prevent the spread of the virus.

Meanwhile, Yadav informed the committee that over 60 per cent of tickets were cancelled this month due to coronavirus. He also said any non-essential travel should be avoided.

He also said that the railways has prepared pamphlets on dos and don'ts which are being given to passengers. But the panel asked him what he intended to do about illiterate passengers who cannot read such pamphlets.

"Neither you nor the railways is prepared," a senior member reprimanded Yadav.

The railways has issued advisories to all zones to restrict gathering of crowds at platforms, sanitised coaches, issued set of guidelines for its catering staff and even cancelled 85 trains

across zones.

Railway Minister Piyush Goyal also held a high-level meeting on Tuesday and formed a response team comprising executive directors from the Railway Board.

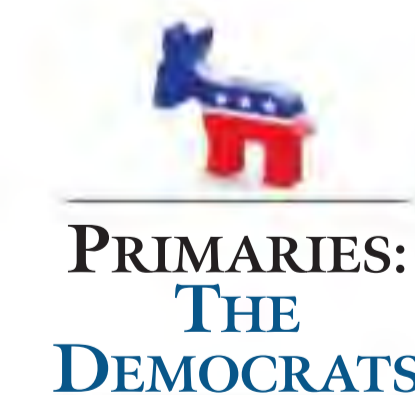
This team will coordinate all COVID-19 preparedness activities, monitor progress through online dashboard and other forums, resolve issues of railway zones/PUs, issue advisories and media briefs and prepare position for review meetings at various forums.

One nodal officer from each railway zone will serve as point of contact for all COVID-19 preparedness measures and will be in constant touch with the COVID Response team of Railway Board.

Online monitoring system has also been created to do real time monitoring of the efforts across the country.

THE WORLD

Democratic primaries: Biden sweeps 3 states, Sanders comeback 'unlikely'



NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK, MARCH 18

JOSEPH R Biden Jr easily defeated Senator Bernie Sanders in three major primaries on Tuesday, all but extinguishing Sanders's chances for a comeback, as anxious Americans turned out to vote amid a series of cascading disruptions from the coronavirus pandemic.

Biden, the former vice president, won by wide margins in Florida and Illinois and also carried Arizona, sweeping the night and achieving a nearly insurmountable delegate lead.

FLORIDA, ILLINOIS, ARIZONA: DELEGATE COUNT*		
	JOSEPH R. BIDEN JR.	BERNIE SANDERS
Votes	2,217,605	1,120,363
Delegates	266	135
Total delegates	1,165	880

*Source: NYT, counting in progress at time of report

The emphatic outcome could greatly intensify pressure on Sanders to end his campaign and allow Democrats to unify behind Biden as their presumptive nominee.

The routs in Florida and Illinois, two of the biggest prizes on the national map, represented both a vote of confidence in Biden from most Democrats, and a blunt rejection of Sanders's candidacy by the kind of large, diverse states he would have needed to capture to broaden his appeal beyond the ideological left.

Sanders has struggled since his first presidential campaign

in 2016 to win over black voters in larger numbers and to persuade voters who do not share his ethos of democratic socialism that he can be trusted to lead the party into the general election.

In a gesture to the gravity of the moment, Biden used much of his brief victory address — via a balky live stream from his home in Wilmington — to discuss the virus and to reassure the country.

"We'll get through this together," Biden said, trying to project a presidential bearing to a rattled nation. He only

fleetingly mentioned Tuesday's results, noting he had "a very good night," before directly speaking to Sanders's youthful supporters, a voting group he is trying to court.

"I hear you, I know what's at stake, I know what we have to do," Biden said. "Our goal as a campaign, and my goal as a candidate, is to unify this party and unify this nation."

Advisers to Senator Bernie Sanders said on Wednesday that he was reassessing his presidential campaign.

Faiz Shakir, Sanders's campaign manager, said the Vermont senator was considering his options but also suggested a decision on how to proceed was not imminent.

In a subsequent email to the campaign's supporters, Shakir gave a blunt appraisal of its recent performance and provided an update on its next steps.

"No sugarcoating it, last night did not go the way we wanted," Shakir wrote.

Trump named Republican nominee with little contest

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WASHINGTON, MARCH 18

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump has won the Florida and Illinois Republican primaries, making him the party's presumptive nominee in the November presidential election.

"Congratulations to Donald J. Trump on officially becoming the presumptive Republican nominee for President!" Republican Party chairwoman Ronna McDaniel tweeted on Tuesday.

The 73-year-old White House incumbent did not face any meaningful competition for the Republican nomination, and the Florida and Illinois results were considered a foregone conclusion.

"Our party is united, our grassroots movement is fired up, and we are ready for FOUR MORE YEARS!" the Republican Party chairwoman said.

18 THE OUTBREAK THE WORLD

TOP OF THE WORLD



Justin Trudeau

CANADA

Measures could last for weeks, months: Trudeau

Ottawa: Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has urged Canadians to hunker down for possibly weeks or months of business closures and home-stay to prevent the spread of new coronavirus. His government is also considering using the Emergency Measures Act, an extremely rare measure. "We don't know exactly how long this is going to take," Trudeau said. "But we will be there, standing together to support Canadians in order to get through this extremely difficult time." Officials said the number of cases in Canada has risen to nearly 600, including eight deaths.

BANGLADESH

First death reported, total cases at 14

Dhaka: Bangladesh on Wednesday reported its first death due to the novel coronavirus pandemic while four new infections were detected, taking the number of cases in the country to 14, a senior health official said. The 70-year-old man was suffering from diabetes, kidney ailments and hypertension and had contracted the virus after meeting an overseas returnee. "The patient had been in intensive care where he died," Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) director Meerjady Sabrina Flora told reporters. The official also confirmed the detection of four more cases.

SRI LANKA

Govt gets loan of \$500 mn from China

Colombo: China has provided \$500 million loan to Sri Lanka from its development bank to help the country's economy. The \$500 million loan would be released early next week to bolster the official reserves of the country, Sri Lankan ministry of Finance said. China's Central Bank has felt the urgent need to support economic activity with the rapid global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and its possible further spread in Sri Lanka, a statement said. The bank also reduced policy interest rates due to the virus impact.

475 deaths in Italy — highest one-day toll

Underestimated virus threat, says EU chief, as global toll crosses 8,700

AGENCIES MARCH 18

ITALY ON Wednesday reported 475 new deaths from the novel coronavirus, the highest one-day official toll of any nation since the first case was detected in China late last year.

Total deaths in Italy have reached 2,978, more than half of all the cases recorded outside China, while the number of infections reached 35,713. The previous record high of 368 deaths was also recorded in Italy, on Sunday.

Meanwhile, a silent surge in fatalities in nursing homes, where dozens of patients a day are dying untested for the virus, suggests the real total may be higher. Strict testing rules mean only patients hospitalised with severe symptoms are normally being swab tested.

While no detailed data is available, officials, nurses and relatives say there has been a spike in nursing home deaths in the worst affected regions of northern Italy since the virus emerged, and they are not showing up in coronavirus statistics.

"There are significant numbers of people who have died but whose death hasn't been attributed to the coronavirus because they died at home or in a nursing home and so they weren't swabbed," said Giorgio Gori, mayor of the town of Bergamo.



Migrants stand on a rooftop as they demand medical attention at a foreign internment centre in Madrid. Reuters

The European Union sealed off its borders on Wednesday to try to put the brakes on the ferocious spread of the coronavirus pandemic, as the number of deaths on the continent soared past the toll in Asia.

The number of people infected worldwide crested the 200,000 mark and deaths topped 8,700, with the number of people now recovered at more than 82,000, according to a tally kept by Johns Hopkins University.

Meanwhile, the president of the European Commission admitted Wednesday that political leaders "underestimated" the magnitude of the danger posed by the coronavirus.

"I think that all of us who are not experts initially underestimated the coronavirus," Ursula von der Leyen told Germany's Bild newspaper in an interview. "But now it is clear that this is a virus that will keep us busy for a long time yet." "We understand that measures that seemed drastic two or three weeks ago, need to be taken now," she added.

Spain cases top 13,700 with close to 600 deaths

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA MADRID, MARCH 18

THE NUMBER of people infected by COVID-19 in Spain soared past 13,700 on Wednesday with the number of deaths rising to almost 600, government data showed.

"We have 13,716 cases in Spain, which is 2,538 more than yesterday, which implies an increase of 18 percent," said Fernando Simon, the health ministry's emergencies coordinator. Over the same 24-hour period, the number of deaths rose to 598, an increase of 107, a government statement showed, giving a higher figure than that initially announced by Simon.

Madrid remains the worst-hit area, accounting for 5,637 cases, or 41 percent of the total infections in Spain, while the number of deaths there rose to 390 deaths.

Spain has been under partial lockdown since Saturday night, allowed to leave their homes only to go to work, buy food or visit a pharmacy or hospital.



IN CUSTODY: Police officers in protective suits detain a migrant who is suspected of having COVID-19 at an infection clinic in Belgrade, Serbia. Reuters

Australia declares biosecurity emergency

SWATI PANDEY & COLIN PACKHAM SYDNEY, MARCH 18

AUSTRALIAN PRIME Minister Scott Morrison on Wednesday declared a "human biosecurity emergency" and said the country's citizens should abandon all overseas travel because of the coronavirus epidemic that he warned could last at least six months.

The formal declaration gives the government the power to close off cities or regions, impose curfews and order people to quarantine, if deemed necessary to contain the spread of the virus.

The upgrade in official advice to an unprecedented "Level 4: Do not travel" to any country in the world, was accompanied by a ban on any non-essential indoor gatherings of more than 100 people.

"Life is changing in Australia, as it is changing all around the world," Morrison said during a televised news conference. "Life is going to continue to change, as we deal with the global coronavirus. This is a once in a hundred year type event."

Australia has recorded more than 500 coronavirus infections and six deaths, a relatively small number compared to other countries, but officials are growing increasingly concerned about the prospect of an exponential rise in cases. REUTERS

104 die of COVID-19, Boris says UK must act as 'wartime' govt

ADITI KHANNA LONDON, MARCH 18

THE UK must act like a "wartime" government and do whatever it takes to support the country's economy, Prime Minister Boris Johnson has said as Britain's death toll from the COVID-19 rose to 104 and the number of cases stand at nearly 2,000.

London is described as the hotspot of the pandemic as the virus rapidly spreads across different parts of the UK, which remains in semi-lockdown.

"We announced the steps that we did - advising against all unnecessary contact - steps that are unprecedented since World War II. They will have an effect on the spread of the disease," said Johnson in his daily briefing related to the pandemic from 10 Downing Street on Tuesday.

The current death toll in the UK stands at 104, as per AFP, with half of England's fatalities reported in London alone.

"We must act like any wartime government and do whatever it takes to support our economy," he said, as UK Chancellor Rishi Sunak unveiled a massive 330-billion pounds bailout package for businesses.

Johnson told Parliament that

EXPLAINED Pressure on frontline staff

The UK government's move to prioritise testing of its NHS staff comes after heavy criticism of the lack of available tests, especially for frontline medical workers. A total of 44,000 tests have been carried out in the last few weeks, as per reports, with the goal to test 25,000 people per day soon. This, as many pointed out, would require keeping the NHS workforce safe.

the necessary steps are being put in place to ramp up tests for coronavirus, with the country's frontline medical staff to be prioritised. "We are prioritising NHS staff for the obvious reason that we want them to be able to look after everybody else with confidence that they are not transmitting the disease," Johnson said. PTI



A passenger in protective wear at the airport in London. AP

147 NEW DEATHS, ITS BIGGEST JUMP SO FAR

Iran defends response as toll crosses 1,000

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA TEHRAN, MARCH 18

IRAN SAID its novel coronavirus death toll surpassed 1,000 on Wednesday as President Hassan Rouhani defended the response of his administration, which has yet to impose a lockdown.

The COVID-19 outbreak in sanctions-hit Iran is one of the deadliest outside China, where the disease originated.

Rouhani's government says the virus has killed 1,135 people out of 17,361 cases of infections since it first emerged in the Islamic republic a month ago.



Teheran's Grand Bazaar is nearly deserted. AP

"Some ask why the government isn't intervening, but I think we have intervened significantly," the president said.

"Great things have been done (including) measures no other country has taken," he said in televised remarks after a weekly meeting of his cabinet.

"We will get past these hard days," added Rouhani, who was flanked by ministers wearing face masks.

Official said the virus has killed 147 more people, a new single-day record in the virus-stricken country. The health ministry said 5,710 people have overcome the virus.

One person who recovered was a 103-year-old woman, state media reported, despite overwhelming evidence that the elderly are the most at risk.

The woman had been hospitalised in Semnan for about a week, IRNA news agency said. But she was "discharged after making a complete recovery", Semnan University of Medical Sciences head Navid Danayi was quoted as saying.

Iran is yet to impose any lockdowns but officials have repeatedly called on the public to stay home for the approaching Iranian New Year holidays.

Since it announced its first two deaths in the holy Shiite city of Qom on February 19, Iran has taken a series of steps to contain the virus.



Officials in Moscow. Reuters

Russia feeding disinformation to sow panic in West: EU paper

ROBIN EMMOTT BRUSSELS, MARCH 18

RUSSIAN MEDIA have deployed a "significant disinformation campaign" against the West to worsen the impact of the coronavirus, generate panic and sow distrust, according to a European Union document seen by Reuters.

Pushing fake news online in English, Spanish, Italian, German and French, the Russian campaign uses contradictory, confusing and malicious reports to make it harder for the EU to communicate its response to the pandemic, the report said.

The Kremlin denied the allegations on Wednesday, saying they were unfounded and lacked common sense.

"A significant disinformation campaign by Russian state media and pro-Kremlin outlets regarding COVID-19 is ongoing," said the nine-page internal document, dated March 16, using the name of the disease that can be caused by the virus. REUTERS

World at war with coronavirus, says Trump; US death toll hits 115

AGENCIES WASHINGTON, MARCH 18

THE WORLD is at war with the invisible army of the new coronavirus, US President Donald Trump said here, and asserted that we will win.

The president repeated the expression multiple times on Tuesday, telling the nation that he was using all available resources to combat the challenge posed by the virus. The number of deaths due to the in the US has reached 115, with the outbreak spreading to all 50 states.

"The world is at war with a hidden enemy. WE WILL WIN!" Trump tweeted in the afternoon.

"We have to get rid of this, we have to win this war and ideally quickly," he told reporters at a White House news conference.

Trump on Wednesday said his administration will invoke the Defence Production Act, a move which will see rapid expansion of domestic manufac-



Children play at the US Supreme Court, after a notice to halt all building tours, in Washington. Reuters

turing of key medical supplies and equipment, including masks and gloves.

The Act, which was passed by Congress in 1950 at the outset of the Korean War, allows president to expand industrial production of key products for national security and other vital issues of national importance.

NO NON-ESSENTIAL TRAFFIC: US, CANADA CLOSE BORDER

■ US President Donald Trump announced on Wednesday that the border with Canada was being closed to all but essential traffic

■ Canada had already closed its borders to most foreigners. The move on Wednesday would allow trade to continue, but will restrict movement for things like vacations

■ Canadian PM Justin Trudeau said the measure would continue to allow the crossing of trucks and trains carrying goods like food, fuel and parts for manufacturers. NYT

Medical system lacking, says North Korea's Kim

ASSOCIATED PRESS SEOUL, MARCH 18

NORTH KOREAN leader Kim Jong Un acknowledged that his country lacks modern medical facilities and called for urgent improvements, state media said Wednesday, in a rare assessment of the North's health care system that comes amid worries about the coronavirus in the impoverished country.

Outside experts say a coronavirus epidemic in the North could be devastating due its chronic lack of medical supplies and outdated health care infrastructure. Kim's comments were made during a ceremony

I FELT AS IF I DIDN'T MATTER, SAYS 63-YEAR-OLD JANITOR

They are asked to battle virus, but who protects them?

JOHN ELIGON & NELLIE BOWLES SAN FRANCISCO, MARCH 18

THE RUMOUR unsettled Deborah Santamaria.

A fellow janitor at 555 California Street, a 52-story office tower in San Francisco's financial district, told her he heard that a floor of the building was being closed because a worker had contracted the novel coronavirus. At 63, Santamaria counted herself among those most vulnerable to a virus that had killed thousands worldwide

and was rapidly spreading across the US. Her supervisor at Able Services, the contractor that employs her, reassured her that nothing was wrong, she said.

It was not until five days later that a news article appeared saying that Wells Fargo had temporarily evacuated its offices in the building after an employee had tested positive for the coronavirus.

The bank had notified building management, which alerted the cleaning contractor. But according to the employees and their union representatives, no one had told the janitors. "I felt as if I didn't matter,"



Santamaria (63) was told nothing was wrong. NYT

said Santamaria, who earns \$22 an hour.

While many Americans are fleeing their offices to avoid any

contact with the coronavirus, low-wage janitors are sometimes being asked to do the opposite. Although millions of Californians have been ordered to shelter in place, janitors are still being asked to go into offices to battle the invisible germs that threaten public health, even as those germs, and the new, powerful cleaning solutions they are being asked to use, may endanger their own health.

Janitors wonder why they are left in the dark when companies go to great lengths to ensure that the tech, finance and other workers occupying the buildings

they clean are aware of the most remote possibility of coming into contact with the virus. It shows, they say, how disparities play out in a public health crisis — how their lives sometimes seem to be valued less than those of people with resources and power.

"None of our families should be treated as second-class citizens," Olga Miranda, the president of the Service Employees International Union Local 87, said. "How are we supposed to know that the companies respect us when they're not even telling us what's going on in the building," she said. NYT

19 STATE BUDGETS



The state of state finances

FROM PAGE ONE

17 state budgets, 1 story: Stressed fisc, deep cuts in expenditure

exception was Bihar, which seems to have run out of money with its fiscal deficit becoming three times the permissible limit. ■ Lastly, the latest budgets further underscore the weak credibility of state budget numbers. Data shows that there is huge (and consistent) gap between what the states promise they will earn in revenues and spend in the budget and what they actually do. There isn't a single state that is an exception to this rule. A sharp fall in the revenues of the states curtails their expenditure. And there are four broad reasons why state expenditures matter increasingly more for the wellbeing of the whole Indian economy. One, over the past few years, states, taken together, spend one-and-half times more than what the central government spends through its budget. For instance, in 2017-18, the last year for which the final/actual numbers are available for all 31 states and Union territories, their aggregate budgetary expenditures were at Rs 29.25 lakh crore as against Rs 21.42 lakh crore of central government expenditure. So contrary to public perception, the combined effect of state budgets matters more than the central government budget. Two, states employ five times more people than the Centre. Their ability to create jobs crucially depends on their ability to spend. Three, each rupee spent by states has a higher "multiplier" effect on the domestic economy. In other words, Rs 100 spent on building physical infrastructure (such as a road) by the states manages to generate more economic activity than Rs 100 spent by the Centre. Lastly, state-level expenditure on social schemes is considered more efficacious towards achieving goals of poverty alleviation and realising India's demographic dividend. That's why translating talk of fiscal stimulus to boost growth or effectiveness of government in delivering essential public goods into action depends on the finances of states. As their revenues plummeted this year, most states have been forced to cut expenditure in the current financial year. Some have had to project a cutback in the next financial year as well. Most states have blamed lower devolution of tax revenues from the Centre for their current woes. Indeed, while presenting the state budget for 2020-21, Karnataka Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa lamented the Rs 11,887-crore revenue loss from the Centre's lower tax transfers as well as compensation against GST collection shortfalls. This, he pointed out, had created "an inevitable situation" of his government having to "cut down the expenditure of many departments" in the current financial year from April 2019 to March 2020. Yediyurappa's statement is telling. Not just because coming from the CM of a state that is ruled by the same party at the Centre. It also captures the stressed financial positions of most state governments today. For the 17 major states have come out with their budgets for 2020-21 — the budgets of Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh are still awaited — there's a yawning gap between the total revenue receipts originally projected for 2019-20 (also called budget estimates or BE) and the most recent revised estimates or RE. The shortfall, arising from the RE being lower, works out to Rs 105,636 crore. This is almost comparable to the Rs 112,660-crore difference reported for the Centre in 2019-20, going by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's latest Union Budget for 2020-21 (see table). In the coming days, one can expect states to rely more on their own revenue sources rather than Central or goods and services tax (GST), whose collections have suffered in a slowing economy and may take a further hit amid the uncertainty unleashed by COVID-19. The one source they will certainly tap is petro-products, which are outside the purview of GST. In the current crude crash scenario, some states have already taken the lead in hiking the value added taxes on transport fuels. And more are likely to join.



Illustration: Suvajit Dey

Potemkin Budgets

Be it raising revenues or spending money, there is wide gap between what states promise to do in any given year and what they actually do, report UDIT MISRA, NUSHAIBA IQBAL and HARISH DAMODARAN

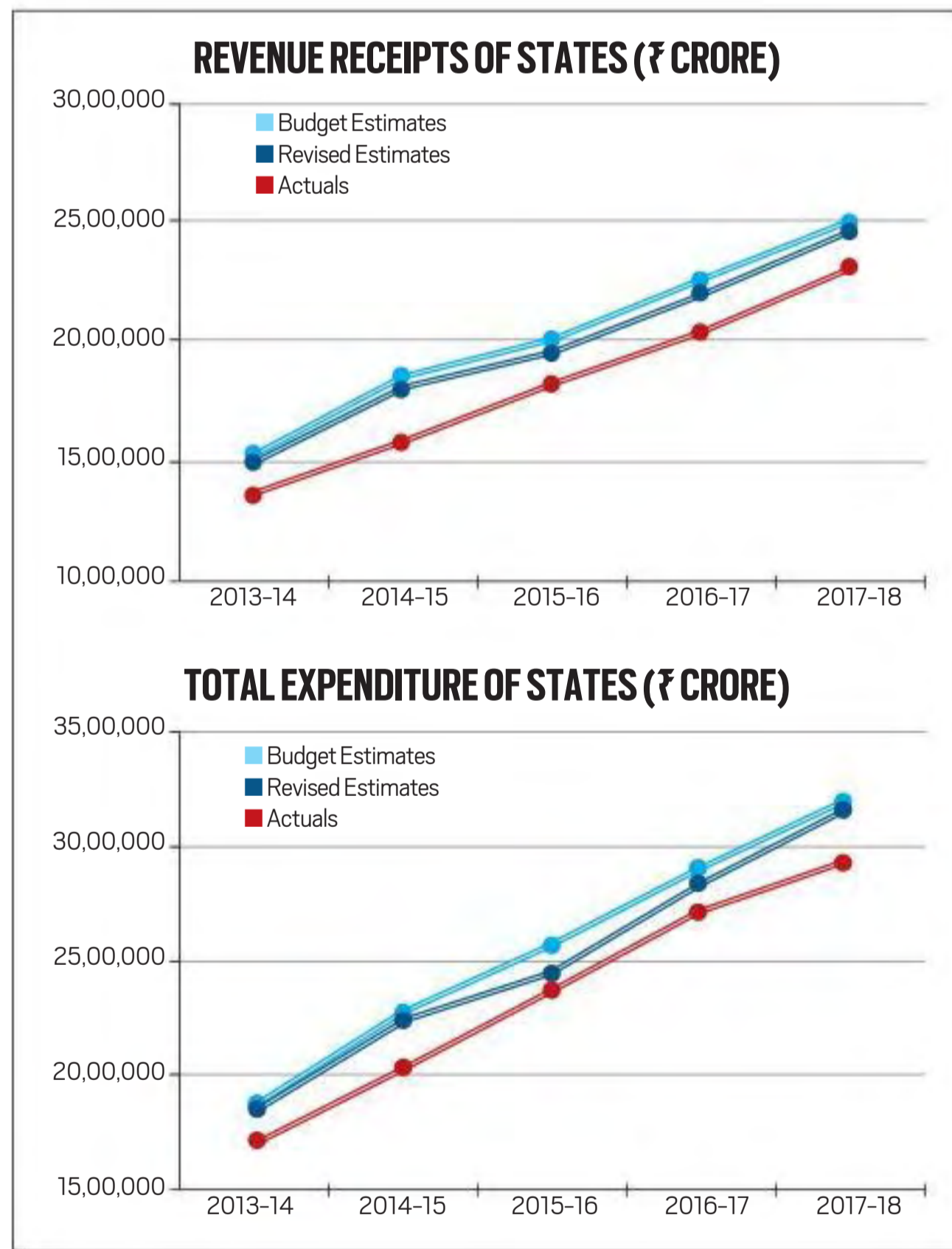
NOT MANY believe budget numbers at the time of their presentation. Finance Ministers are always tempted to make optimistic revenue and disinvestment projections for the upcoming fiscal. When these don't get realised, the axe inevitably falls on expenditures, with all departments being told to forgo allocations or restrict their spending, especially in the third and fourth quarters.

Thus, the 2019-20 Union Budget unveiled last July had forecast the Centre's gross tax revenues at Rs 24.61 lakh crore and disinvestment receipts at Rs 1.05 lakh crore, whereas the revised estimate (RE), made when the 2020-21 budget was presented on February 1, revealed these to be short by Rs 2.98 lakh crore and Rs 40,000 crore, respectively.

The problem of "Potemkin budgets" is, however, more serious when it comes to the state governments. In their case, it isn't simply about the RE numbers turning out different from the budget estimates (BE). The accompanying charts show that the gap in the states' revenue receipts as well as total expenditures is not limited to just the REs over BEs. Instead, the real divergence is in respect of the "actual" numbers, which are far below the REs and BEs for both revenues and expenditures.

Thus, the aggregate revenue receipts of states for 2017-18 in the RE stood Rs 45,109 crore lower than the BE. But the shortfall in "actual" revenue receipts — which would have been known only when the 2019-20 budgets were presented — was even higher, at Rs 136,477 crore, vis-à-vis the RE. The discrepancy between "actuals" and RE was all the more, at Rs 252,808 crore, for expenditures. And this is a consistent pattern seen in all years.

A classic example here is Bihar. For 2019-20, its budget had assumed a fiscal deficit of Rs 16,101.05 crore, amounting to 2.81 per cent of the gross state domestic product (GSDP). But when Bihar finance minister



Sushil Kumar Modi presented his budget for 2020-21 on February 25, the fiscal deficit in the RE for 2019-20 was reassessed at Rs 58,343.44 crore or 9.45 per cent of GSDP.

That may appear to be a massive slippage, except that for 2018-19, too, the fiscal deficit in the RE was pegged at 4.62 per cent, as against the BE of 2.17 per cent. When the

"actual" number for 2018-19 came out in the latest budget, the fiscal deficit was found to be only 2.68 per cent of GSDP.

"Every year, Bihar's RE fiscal deficit is in the 5-9% range, but the final deficit is always below the 3% threshold," a Credit Suisse Equity Research note of March 5 has pointed out.

A danger with "Potemkin budgets" that some economists highlight is the prospect of unrealistic revenue targets leading to aggressive pursuing of targets by tax authorities. There are reports of companies, for instance, being asked to pay advance tax based on projected incomes more aligned to the taxman's punishing targets than the actual sales growth registered by them. The pressure to meet revenue demands, then, results in corporates becoming cautious and conserving liquidity that might otherwise have been deployed in their own businesses.

A second collateral damage is on government spending itself. When departments know that the budgeted revenues are unlikely to materialise, they wouldn't go all out in implementing any scheme bound to suffer funding cuts in the latter part of the year. The same lack of enthusiasm will be shown by contractors who undertake irrigation, road and other public works. If payments are going to be delayed, or even not come, why would they bid at all in projects? Again, taking Bihar's case, the state government's total expenditures for 2018-19 was Rs 176,990.27 crore in the BE and Rs 190,918.72 crore in the RE. But the "actual" figure of spending turned out a mere Rs 154,655.14 crore!

The final casualty of not-so-credible budget numbers is, of course, interest costs. State governments today are borrowing at 7-7.2 per cent annually for 10 years, which is way above the core consumer price inflation of 4 per cent. High real interest rates, a result of the markets not believing revenue projections, will only add to their debt problems.

REVENUE RECEIPTS: REs FALL SHORT OF BEs (₹ crore)

	BUDGET ESTIMATES	REVISED ESTIMATES	DIFFERENCE
Bihar	176,747.64	151,332.18	-25,415.46
UP	391,734.40	370,265.45	-21,468.95
Kerala	115,354.71	99,042.58	-16,312.13
Tamil Nadu	197,721.17	191,860.88	-5,860.29
Gujarat	154,732.00	149,827.00	-4,905.00
Maharashtra	314,640.12	309,880.56	-4,759.56
Haryana	82,219.41	77,580.73	-4,638.68
Karnataka	181,862.96	177,255.48	-4,607.48
Punjab	785,09.70	73,975.08	-4,534.62
Chhattisgarh	797,46.00	75,696.01	-4,049.99
Odisha	115,266.00	111,785.25	-3,480.75
Uttarakhand	38,956.00	35,503.00	-3,453.00
ALL STATES*	25,26,427.69	24,20,791.42	-105,636.27
CENTRE	19,62,761.00	18,50,101.00	-112,660.00

*17 states that have come out with budgets.

Milking oil

States are likely to utilise the current crash in global crude prices to shore up their precarious finances

SINCE THE start of this calendar year, benchmark Brent crude prices have fallen from \$68 a barrel to below \$30 a barrel. But that has come at an opportune time for states to hike value added tax/sales tax on petrol and diesel, thereby also partly insulating them from subpar GST revenue collections and uncertainties triggered by the novel coronavirus.

Karnataka and Maharashtra are the two states that have taken the lead in their latest budgets. The former has raised its sales tax from 32 per cent to 35 per cent on petrol and from 21 per cent to 24 per cent of petrol. The latter has imposed an additional Re 1 per litre VAT on both transport fuels, which, according to Maharashtra's finance minister Ajit Pawar, will help garner an additional Rs 1,800 crore in the coming fiscal.

Between 2014-15 and 2017-18, Centre's excise duty revenues from petro-products (which are outside the GST's purview), rose to Rs 229,716 crore, exceeding the correspon-

ding VAT/sales tax revenues of Rs 185,850 crore for states. This happened as the Centre took advantage of the then crash in global crude prices — the average cost of oil imported by Indian refiners fell from \$ 105.52 per barrel in 2013-14 to \$ 46.17 in 2015-16 to increase the specific excise duties on petrol and diesel. The states did not resort to similar hikes. Also, since their VAT/sales tax rates are mostly charged on an ad valorem basis — as a percentage of price, as against a fixed Rs per litre specific excise duty levied by the Centre — their revenues did not go up commensurately.

This time, though, the states may not want to miss out on the opportunity from the renewed collapse of oil prices to mobilise additional resources. A Re 1 per litre increase in the price of these two transport fuels can, thus, generate additional revenues totaling Rs 13,800 crore per year. That is a bonanza for both the Centre and the states, which will last as long as Brent crude rates remain at the existing lows.

Electoral priorities dominate the budgets of five key states facing Assembly polls

THE BUDGET for 2020-21 were more crucial for the five states — Assam, Bihar, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala — that will hold Assembly elections within the next 12 months. Apart from the wide geographical variation, these states also represent wide variation in terms of the political parties ruling them — from the Left Front government in Kerala to the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party in Assam. Not surprisingly, the Budgets clearly reflected the political priorities and the economic realities of each state. That is what explains the stark differences in the Budgets of not just Kerala and Assam but also Assam and Bihar (two states where the BJP is part of the government albeit with quite dissimilar levels of control).

As such, while Assam, where the BJP dominates the ruling coalition, saw a budget peppered with sops for specifically targeted sections of the society, Bihar, where it is the junior partner, witnessed a rather staid Budget with

hardly any new scheme being announced. Assam Budget is full of sops and freebies. For instance, in 2018-19, in the lead up to the Lok Sabha election, Assam government gave Rs 5,000 each to over 7 lakh tea garden workers — one of the disgruntled set of voters. In 2020-21, in the lead up to the Assembly polls, tea garden workers will receive Rs 3,000 each. Similarly, there appears to a conscious decision to woo women voters through one scheme or the other.

Assam could do it as it is the only state that saw its revenue receipts go up (by over Rs 9,000 crore) during the current financial year. Bihar's uneventful Budget, in contrast, was a reflection of its economic realities. Of all the states analysed, Bihar faced the biggest compression of revenue receipts between BE and RE — over Rs 25,400 crore — in FY20. Yet, on paper, it hopes to achieve the biggest expansion in expenditure between BE and RE — over Rs 17,000 crore. But this has left its fiscal

deficit at close to 10 per cent of its gross state domestic product — more than three-times the permissible limit. It is clear that Bihar will have to cut back its expenditure quite sharply in the January to March quarter to stay within the fiscal responsibility bounds.

Much like Assam (although not to the same extent), other states too have tried to come up with as many new initiatives as possible such as free electricity (WB), regularising residential encroachments on poramboke (unmeasured) lands (TN), and enhanced pensions (Kerala).

A crucial commonality among all these states is the high level of youth (15 to 29 years) unemployment — Kerala (36%), Assam (27%), Tamil Nadu (26%), Bihar (22%), and West Bengal (13%). Not surprisingly, all states, barring Bihar (where "jobs" did not find mention in the whole speech), initiated schemes to boost self-employment opportunities for the youth.

States spend 5% of their money on healthcare; 15% on education

THE CORONA virus outbreak has brought the issue of government expenditure on health into sharp focus. At the state level, there is a clear trend: As a proportion of their total expenditure, states spend only 5 per cent on health while choosing to spend three-times more (15 per cent) on education. Clearly, on average, states prioritise education over health. In 2017-18, Assam, Kerala and Chhattisgarh spent most in excess of the national average on both sectors. In sharp contrast, Haryana and Punjab spent lower than national average on both counts.

According to UNDP's Human Development Index, which ranks countries on health, education and income, India ranks an embarrassing 129 out of the 189 countries considered.

The most significant departure from the national trend is in Delhi where the government spent 11.6 per cent of its money — more than twice the national average — on health. On education, Delhi spent 24.3 per cent — 60 per cent more than the national average.

Classifieds

PERSONAL

I, Sanjay Kumar S/o Giri Raj Prasad, R/o - H.No.434, Sector 22A, Gurgaon Opposite Rotary Public School, Gurgaon-120215, have changed my name to Sanjay Jain for all the future purposes. 0040534869-2

I, Vipul Saxena, S/o Jagdish Chander Saxena, R/o-H.No.92, Village, Badarpur, New Delhi-110044, inform that my father's name wrongly written in my class-10th certificate, as Jagdish Chander & Jagdish Chander Saxena both are one & the same person. 0040535997-3

I, Soniya Kinger w/o Vikram Madan, R/o 3/4, Vegetable Market, Block No.3, Moti Nagar, New Delhi-110015 have changed my name to Sonia Madan 0040535972-1

I, Rehana Parveen W/o Mohammad Abdullah, R/o-A-30, Gali No.-9, Village Wazirabad, Delhi that informed, namely Rehana Parveen & Rehana Praveen both name is, same person 0040535997-1

I, Rakesh Kumar, S/o Late Shri.Daya L/O-Block J-9, First Floor, Saidulajab Extension, IGNUO-Road, Delhi-110030, have changed my name to Rakesh Kumar Yadav. 0040535979-4

I, Jasvinder Singh Viridi S/o Manjeet Singh Viridi R/o:WZ-4/1A/2, Sant Garg, Gali No-10, MBS-Nagar, Tilak-Nagar, New Delhi-18 inform that Jasvinder Singh and Jasvinder Singh Viridi are One and the same Person. 0040535979-5

I, Gaurav Saxena, S/o Late-Ashok Kumar Saxena, R/o H.No.32.G.F., Pragati Vihar-1, near Govindpuram, C-Block, Ghaziabad, have changed my name to Gaurav Saxena. 0040535997-2

I, Singh Simarjeetkaur W/O Govind Singh R/O Gurudwara Dashmeh Darbar, Behind Telephone Exchange, Palghar, Maharashtra-401404 have changed my name to Simarjeet Kaur 0050163981-1

I, Shivam S/o Late Shri Omkar R/o-H.No-1759, Gali No.1 Shyam Gali Ghonda-Maujpur Delhi-110053, have changed my name, from Veeru to Shivam for all future purposes. 0040536036-4

I, Shakuntala Devi D/o Bale Ram Saini R/o-272/4 Uday Park, Masjid-Moth South-X-Part-2 Delhi-110094, have changed my name to Shakuntala Saini. 0040536020-7

I, Shabi Uddin Ahmad S/o Sala Uddin Ahmad R/O-Flat.No.G-3, Plot.No.916, Shalimar Garden Extn.1st, Sahibabad, Ghaziabad, U.P.201005 changed my name to Shabi Uddin Ahmad. 0040536020-4

I, Saima Naz W/O, Mohd Danish R/o T-235 Idghar Road Quresh Nagar Delhi-6 have changed my name to Saima Naaz for all purposes. 0040535982-1

I, Reeta Singh W/O Jagat Singh R/o-167, Block-No.12, Aliganj, Lodhi Road, Delhi-110003 have changed my name to Reeta Rawat. 0040536020-3

I, Ravindra Singh S/O Ompal Singh R/O-RZ-536, Gali No.24, Tughlakabad Extension, N.Delhi-110019, have changed my name to Ravinder Choudhary permanently. 0040536020-5

I, Ravinder Kumar S/O Rajpal R/O-H.No.214, Khari Manajat, Sonipat, Haryana inform that my mother name wrongly written in my Army (No.15347788Y Rank-NK of Unit-71 Engr. Regt.C/o-99 APO) Record as Santosh Devi instead of Santosh 0040536002-8

I, Ravinder Kumar S/O Rajpal R/o-H.No.214, Khari Manajat, Sonipat, Haryana inform that my mother name & D.O.B wrongly-written in my Army (No.15347788Y Rank-NK of Unit-71 Engr. Regt.C/o-99 APO) Record as Santosh Devi & 20.09.1956 instead of Santosh & 01.01.1956 0040536002-9

I, Ravinder Kumar S/O Rajpal R/o-H.No.214, Khari Manajat, Sonipat, Haryana inform that my father D.O.B wrongly-written in my Army (No.15347788Y Rank-NK of Unit-71 Engr.Regt.C/o-99 APO) Record as Rajpal & 08.03.1953 instead of Rajpal 01.01.1954. 0040536002-10

I, Rakesh Kumar Batra S/O Shri.Lok Nath Batra H.No-576, Dr.Mukherjee Nagar, Delhi-110009 Have Changed My Name To Rakesh Batra. 0040536002-6

I, Pritam Roop Rai S/o Balbir Singh R/O-109/14 Multani Mohalla, Gandhi-Nagar Delhi-31, has changed my name to Pritam Singh, for all purposes 0040535979-7

I, Prem Chandra S/O Roshan Singh R/O-Uttam Nagar, K.K.Nagar, Sikandra, Babarpur-Sikandra, Agra, Up-282007, Have Changed My Name To Prem Chandra Yadav. 0040536036-3

I, Pratibha Kumari D/O Prem Chandra Yadav R/O-Uttam Nagar, K Nagar, Sikandra, Babarpur, SIKANDRA, Agra, Up-282007, Have Changed My Name To Pratibha Yadav. 0040536020-8

I, Sirri Bhagwan Alias Sirri Bhagwan Panchal S/o Bale Ram R/o Flat No-202, Orchid Valley Society, Railway Line CGHS, Plot No-11, Sector-19B, Dwarka, New Delhi-110075,, have finally changed my name to Sirri Bhagwan Panchal 0070703296-1

I, Sarbjit Singh Lauhka S/o Amarjit Singh Lauhka R/O CL-268, Sector-II, Salt Lake City, Bidhannagar, West Patel Nagar, New Delhi-110008 have changed my name to Sandeep Harjai for all purposes. 0040535951-1

I, Sandeep S/O. Suresh Harjai R/O 29/57, Second Floor, West Patel Nagar, New Delhi-110008 have changed my name to Sandeep Harjai for all purposes. 0040535951-1

I, Rakesh Kumar S/O Shiv Narayan R/O-104, Tyagi-Mohalla, Jatnika Road-110043 Have Changed My Name To Rakesh Kumar, For All Future Purposes. 0040536036-1

I, Rajesh Sharma S/o Sh.Om Parkash Sharma R/O 8783/4, Multani Dhandra, Pahar Ganj, New Delhi-110055 have changed my name to Rajesh Kumar Sharma for all purposes. 0040535942-3

I, Rahul Kumar Jha, S/o Shri.Subodh Kumar Jha R/-H-80, Third-Floor, Kalkaji, New Delhi-19, have changed my name to Rahul Kumar, for all purposes. 0040535979-2

I, Pramod Kumar Gandotra B308 Ila Apartments Vasundhara Enclave Delhi Chander Noida To Pramod Gandotra, My Spouse Veena Gandotra 0050163920-1

I, Nisha Singh W/o Rahul Sood R/o A-648 Palam Vihar Village-Choma Gurgaon Haryana have changed my name to Nisha Sood After-marriage 0040536036-5

I, Babita, W/O Parveen Kansal, R/O BE-356-A, Gali-1, Hari Nagar, Delhi-110064, have changed my name to BABITA KANSAL. 0040535973-1

I, Mukesh Kumar S/O Bishan Swarup Gupta R/O 2A/5, First Floor, Sector-2A, PNB Road, Vaishali, Ghaziabad-201010, Uttar Pradesh have changed my name to Mukesh Kumar Gupta. 0040535980-1

I, Mohd. Aiman S/O Mohammad Aslam R/O 838, Chandni Mahal, Darya Ganj, New Delhi-110002, have changed my name to Mohammad Aiman, for all purposes. 0040535952-1

I, Mohammad Nawabuddin/ Mohd Nawab S/O-Mohammad Saed R/O-7524/C, Quresh Nagar, Sadar Thana Road, Sadar-Bazar, Delhi-110006, Have Changed My Name To Nawab Qureshi For All Future Purposes. 0040536036-10

I, Malti Lakra W/O Sanjeev Lakra R/O Flat No. 13046, Tower-3, Block-E, GH-07, Crossings Republic, Ghaziabad, UP-201016 have changed my name to Malti Dagar. 0040535980-2

I, Jasneet Bhatia, W/O Mandep Singh Malhotra H.No.Wz-1, 2nd-Floor, Gali.No-10, Virender-Nagar, Delhi-110058, Have Changed My Name To Jasneet Kaur Malhotra. 0040536002-1

I, Mohd. Naushad Siddiqi R/O-B-40, Block-B, Abul-Fazal-Enclave Part-I, Jamia-Nagar, Okhla, New Delhi-110025, have changed my name to Zahera Jabin Siddiqi, for all future purposes. 0040536020-6

I, Harnoor Kaur D/o Harshpal Singh R/O-22/51, Road No.51, Punjabi Bagh-West Delhi. changed my name to Harnoor Kaur Dhanjal. 0040536036-2

I, Gurdeep Singh S/O Daljeet Singh R/O-Wz-G-58, First Floor Sant-Nagar Extension, Tilak-Nagar, Delhi-110018. Changed my Name To Gurdeep Singh Chawla. 0040536002-4

I, Gautam Mundepi R/O H No.21a Gali No.1 Sidhanti Enclave Jain Road have changed my minor son's name from Gaurav to Gaurav Mundepi for all purposes. 0040535993-1

I, Dharmendra S/o Ramesh Chand R/O 101-A, Radhey Shyam Park Extn. Delhi-110051 have changed my name to Dharmendra Sachdeva for all purposes. 0040535978-1

I, Danish S/O Samiuddin R/O-5413, 4th Floor, Basti Harphul Singh, Delhi Sadar Bazar, Delhi-110006 have changed my name to Mohd.Danish. 0040536020-2

I, Chitrangan Naik R/O-B-27, 3rd-Floor, South-Ganeshnagar, Delhi-110092, have changed my name to minor daughter name from Padmaja Naik to Padmaja Nayak, for all future purposes. 0040535979-6

I, Aman Kumar S/O Om Prakash R/O-B-103, Shiv-Mandir Road Swarop Nagar, Delhi-42 Have Changed My Name To Aman Mannan. 0040536002-2

I, Adhayan Agrawal S/O Sh. Pravin Agrawal R/O-A-14, Antriksh Apartment Sec-14, Rohini, Delhi-85 have changed my name to Adhayan Agrawal for all purposes. 0040535950-1

I, Tinku S/O Dalchand R/O S-109/208, Kumhar Basti, Mohammad Pur Village, RK Puram, Delhi-110066, have changed my name to Tejas Singh 0070703292-1

I, Sonu S/O Sh.Satpal Singh R/O RZCD-101, Cad Block, Mahavir Enclave, Palam Village, South West Delhi, Delhi-110045 have changed my name to Sonu Sisodia for all purposes. 0040535942-1

SITUATION VACANT

OTHERS
HINDUSTAN Antibiotics Ltd., Pimpri, Pune Wishes to Appoint C & F Agents, Volume Distributors & Liaison Agents For Various States In India. For Details Visit Our website www.hindustanantibiotics.com 0070703244-1

LOST & FOUND

I, Rajan Gogna S/o Dharam Jit Singh Lost my Property Original Allotment Letter, Convince Deed Payment Challan Possession-Letter of proper No.BH-30 East Shalimar Bagh Delhi-88, finder Contact-9999946284. 0040536036-8

I, Shakti Singh, S/O Lt.Sh.Samar Singh P/O-A-130 st.no-1 shakarpur Delhi-92, have lost my original certificate/ marksheet class-10th year-2015 Rollno-2154788 CBSE-Panckula and class-12th (2017) Rollno-3017261703 (Haryana-Board). 0040536020-10

I, RIYA Mariya mathew D/o Mathew pk R/O-7-11 Rajpura-khurd extn. maidangarhi N.D-68 have lost my original/certificate class-10th year-2015 Rollno-8187114 (CBSE-Delhi) 0040536036-7

GPA executed on 05/06/1991, by Dinesh Kumar Gulati in favour of Smt. Shanti Sapra, Registered as Doc. 195 in Book No.-4, Vol. 1 on 13/06/1991 with Sub-Registrar is misplaced. Person who finds this document is requested to return the same at contact details:- Ashok Gupta, N-10, Satyawati Nagar, Delhi-110052. Mobile: 9205881402. 0040535977-1

LOST & FOUND

I, Jam Mamta Sharma W/o Pankaj Sharma R/o E-169 Kh.No.209 F/F Mandir Marg Chhajpur Barabar Shahdara Delhi-32 returning from market to my home, after making a set of photocopy of my property papers, whilst lost my one of original Prop. Document which is safe deposed dated 31st Oct 2010 from Ravi Bharose Aggarwal in favour of Aditi Aggarwal and Gayatri Jain Reg. Pnr. - Book No.1 Vol. No. 878 on Page 19 to 26 Dated 4 Nov 2010. Please take necessary action toward the lost title deed to avoid any misuse in future. 0040536002-3

I, Farha Haroon D/o Haroon Jamali R/O 9199, 2nd Floor, Gali Zamir Wali, Nawab Ganj, Azad Market, Delhi-110006 have changed the name of my minor son from Mohd.Saif Haroon to Maahir Haroon for all purposes. 0040535942-4

I, Azim Qader S/o Mohd.Zakir R/O 496, Gali Tike, Churiwala, Jama Masjid, Delhi-110006 have changed my name to Mohd.Azim Qader for all purposes. 0040535942-2

I, Avdhesh Kumar S/o Shiv Balak R/O 54, Raipur Jalaun, UP-285130, have changed my name to Pankaj Kumar 0070703290-1

I, Anil S/O Kasturi Lal R/O F-201, Sudershan Park Delhi-15, have changed my name to Anil Kumar. 0040535979-1

I, Ahmad Miyan S/O Mahbub Miyan R/O Aigari, East Champaran, Motihari, Bihar-845401, have changed my name to Ahmad Hussain 0070703300-1

I, Sanjeev Kumar S/O Harish chandra malhotra Add-R-99 and r-100 r-block vani-vihar garden-nagar d.k.mohan uddam delhi-110059, Changed My Name To sanjeev malhotra. 0040536002-7

I, Indu Sharma W/o Sankalp Sawhney R/O-E-40 (T.F.) Vishnu-Garden Delhi. have changed my name to Indu Sawhney. 0040536020-1

I, Lal Singh S/o Santan R/o Village Behnotta, Po Leswin, Teh Churah, Chambha, HP-176316, have changed my name to Ronit 0070703295-1

I, Rahul Pal S/O Mr. Hari Prasad, Sadarpur colony sector-45, Noida, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar, Uttar Pradesh-201301, have changed my name from Rahul to Rahul Pal for all purposes. 0040535967-1

I, Vikram Walia S/O Jagdish Walia R/O Dup No-56, Improvement Trust Colony, Scheme No-5, Jail Road, Gurdaspur, Punjab-143521, that name of my wife has been wrongly written as Jyoti Walia in my Passport J3992618. The actual name of my wife is Deepak Jyoti 0070703298-1

I, Shabnam Khatoun R/O Flat No. G4, Khushi Apartment, RZ-2002/25-26, Opp: Tara Apartment, Tughlakabad Extn, New Delhi-110019 have changed my name to Shabnam Parveen 0070703306-1

I, Malati Kumari W/o Siya Sharan Prasad R/O Plot No-998, Sector-1, Vasundhara, Ghaziabad, UP-201012, have changed my name to Usha Prasad 0070703304-1

I, Monu S/O Telu Singh R/O Ambetha Chand, Saharanpur, UP-247451, have changed my name to Manveer Rana 0070703289-1

I, Khiani Sapna Mohanli W/o Manoj Chhadwani R/O 1 GA 17, Gaiji Nagar, Sawaena Rural, Udaipur, Rajasthan-313002, have changed my name to Ridhika Chhadwani 0070703299-1

SITUATION VACANT

REQUIREMENTS:
ADMISSION COUNSELOR
Min. Qualification should be graduate with 3 years experience in reputed field & fluency in English.
TELECALLER
Min. Qualification should be graduate & fluency in English.
Walk-in-Interview
21st March, 2020
from 11 am at
Send your resume at
E-mail: jobs.delhi@iimhr.org
Call: 011-30418900, 9818007542, 9910028889, 9810906140

PUBLIC NOTICE
I, Nauman Ansari S/O Mohammad Abdul Gafur Ansari R/o Flat No 802, Ujja Vihar, Sec-45, Fardibaad informs that in my 10th certificate my name, my father name and my mother name has been wrongly written as Nauman Ansari, Abdul G Ansari & Ishaat Ansari respectively and in my passport my father name and my mother name has been wrongly written as Abdul Gafur Ansari & Ishaat Naseem Ansari. The actual name of mine, my father name and my mother name is Nauman Ansari, Mohammad Abdul Gafur Ansari & Ishaat Naseem Ansari respectively. 0040536020-10

I, Riya Mariya mathew D/o Mathew pk R/O-7-11 Rajpura-khurd extn. maidangarhi N.D-68 have lost my original/certificate class-10th year-2015 Rollno-8187114 (CBSE-Delhi) 0040536036-7

GPA executed on 05/06/1991, by Dinesh Kumar Gulati in favour of Smt. Shanti Sapra, Registered as Doc. 195 in Book No.-4, Vol. 1 on 13/06/1991 with Sub-Registrar is misplaced. Person who finds this document is requested to return the same at contact details:- Ashok Gupta, N-10, Satyawati Nagar, Delhi-110052. Mobile: 9205881402. 0040535977-1

PUBLIC NOTICE
It is informed that our client Smt. Roopa Pathak W/O Sh. Hardesh Pathak R/O SK-1/20, First Floor, Sindhara Kalan, Chowk No.2, Delhi, has served all her relations with her son namely Mayank Pathak and his wife Smt. Priyanka and disclaimed them from all her movable and immovable properties. Her client shall not be responsible for any acts and deeds of her disowned son and daughter-in-law, henceforth.

PUBLIC NOTICE
General Public is hereby informed that Sh. Sandeep Kumar & Smt. Meena are only owner in possession of DDA/LIG Flat No. 7, 1st Floor, Plot No. 1, Sector-14, Dwarka Phase-1, Delhi (hereinafter called 'Property'). That one of the above documents of the property is original Re-conveyance Deed dated 20/07/2006 regd. as Sl. No. 2584 with DDC, Delhi as missing for which a missing notice was served on 18/12/2019. In this regard, a missing notice was issued w.e.f. 12/03/2020 dated 17/03/2020 any person desiring in any way with the property or the said missing document will do so as Home/Investor own part as the same shall not be considered legally null and void. Anybody aware of any such person possessing any right, title or interest on his behalf of said lost document or having found its possession in the name of any person shall please inform the undersigned at the following contact details:- Gaup & Associates, Advocates, Floor: 03, Tower: 3, Anand Park Phase-I, Saket, New Delhi-110017. Email: gaupandassociates@gmail.com with in 7 days this Notice publication.

PUBLIC NOTICE
My Client Sh. Mahavir Prasad S/o Sh. Ganpat Rani & his wife Mani Devi W/o Sh. Mahavir Prasad Both R/o H.No. 54, Gali No.-4, D-Block, Mango Park, Delhi-31, have jointly disclaimed their son Sh. Pawan S/o Sh. Mahavir Prasad from all his movable, immovable properties of my clients & severed their all relations with them. My clients shall not be responsible for their acts, conduct & deeds in future whatsoever. Anybody dealing with above said persons are doing so at their own risk.

PUBLIC NOTICE
My Client Sh. Mahavir Prasad S/o Sh. Ganpat Rani & his wife Mani Devi W/o Sh. Mahavir Prasad Both R/o H.No. 54, Gali No.-4, D-Block, Mango Park, Delhi-31, have jointly disclaimed their son Sh. Pawan S/o Sh. Mahavir Prasad from all his movable, immovable properties of my clients & severed their all relations with them. My clients shall not be responsible for their acts, conduct & deeds in future whatsoever. Anybody dealing with above said persons are doing so at their own risk.

PUBLIC NOTICE
It is for general information that I, DAYAL SINGH S/O SHEESH RAM R/O Flat No. A-6, Flat No. GF-2, Ground Floor, Block-A, Birj Vihar, Chander Nagar, Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh-201011, declare that the name of my father has been wrongly written as SHISH RAM SINGH in my Educational Certificate. The Actual name of my father is SHEESH RAM respectively which may be amended accordingly.

PUBLIC NOTICE
My Client SHRI BABU RAM S/O OF SHRI NAVAL R/O 400, S-BLOCK, MANOJ PARK, DELHI-110083, have declared his son VIJAY KUMAR, from his entire movable and immovable properties, and have severed all relation from VIJAY KUMAR due to his misconduct, bad behavior, bad company and bad intentions. Any person dealing with VIJAY KUMAR and especially shall be doing so at their own risk, cost and responsibilities. My client shall not be responsible in any manner for any kind of legal-litigation, act, deed done by him.

PUBLIC NOTICE
It is for general information that I, MUKIM AHMAD son of Shri JAMIL AHMAD, residing at B-278, Dakshinpur, Dr. Ambedkar Nagar, South Delhi, Delhi-110062, declare that the name of mine has been wrongly written as MUKIM AHMAD in Statement Cum Certificate of Secondary School Examination-2019 of my minor son SOHIL aged about 15 years. The actual name of mine is MUKIM AHMAD respectively, which may be amended accordingly. It is certified that I have complied with other legal requirements in this connection.

PUBLIC NOTICE
IT IS HEREBY NOTIFIED FOR GENERAL PUBLIC THAT MY CLIENTS SHYAM SUNDER KAPOOR S/O SH. W.L. KAPOOR AND SMT. SHASHI SUNDER KAPOOR S/O SHYAM SUNDER KAPOOR BOTH R/O. A-1505, JAIPURA SUNRISE GREEN, INDRAPURAM GRAMDAHSERVAESESE GROVER & SMT. SAVITRI GROVER W/O JANKI DASS GROVER, S-99 GREATER KAILASH-I, NEW DELHI-48, HEREBY DISOWN, DIS-INHERIT AND SEVERE ALL THEIR RELATIONS WITH THEIR SON AMIT, DIS-INHERIT, FOR ALL INTERESTS AND PURPOSES, AND MY CLIENTS ALSO DISOWN FROM INHERITING ALL OR ANY OF THEIR PROPERTIES AND, MY CLIENTS HEREBY DECLARE THAT THEY SHALL NOT BE RESPONSIBLE FOR ANY OF HIS ACTS AND DEEDS. ANYBODY DEALING WITH HIM SHALL DO SO AT HIS/HER/THEIR PERIL.

PUBLIC NOTICE
General Public is hereby informed that my clients namely Sh. Man Singh S/O Sh. Tara Chand and Smt. Lata W/o Sh. Man Singh R/O 7024-1, Mata Rameshwari Narain Nagar, Karol Bagh, Delhi-110005, have severed all kinds of relations with his sons namely Jaiwan and Sumeet further debarred from his all movable and immovable properties due to his disrespectful and disgraceful attitude and behaviour with my clients. My clients shall not be responsible for any acts and deeds in future whatsoever.

PUBLIC NOTICE
My Client Shri Bikram Singh Rawat son of Late Sh. Faten Singh Rawat & Smt. Purni Devi w/o Bikam Singh Rawat both r/o H.No. 130, Ground Floor, Street No.-5, Block-A, Kausikh Enclave, Baran, Delhi-110084 have declared & disowned their son name Sh. Nareesh Rawat and his wife Smt. Pinki Rawat. Now they have no right, title, interest or claim of any nature whatsoever in the properties (movable & immovable) & assets of my clients. Anybody dealing with the aforesaid persons shall be doing so at his own risks & consequences & my clients shall not be liable for any acts & deeds of the aforesaid persons. Sg. -Z. Rehman (Advocate) (M) 9811498700

PUBLIC NOTICE
General Public is hereby informed that my client Sh. Mahender Kumar Sharma S/O Sh. Pritam Kumar Sharma R/O RZ-52, Gali No-3, Durga Park, Nasir Pur, Delhi-110045 has debarred his son Sh. Rupender Sharma S/o Sh. Mahender Kumar Sharma and his wife and children with immediate effect from all his movable and immovable properties due to his unfaithful, dishonest, disobedient and bad behavior towards my client and other family members, my client and other family members will not be responsible for his and his family's any kind of liabilities, dealings Acts, Civil or criminal proceedings, obligation, financial transactions claims etc. my client has severed all relations with him and his wife and children.

PUBLIC NOTICE
General public is hereby informed that my clients, Shri Satpal Monga, S/O Late Pyarelal Monga, and Smt. Manju Monga, W/O Shri Satpal Monga, Flat R/o E-1 (Third Floor), Moti Nagar, New Delhi, have disowned their son, Saurav Monga, and their daughter, Divya, Deepika, who live at F-64 (Ft), Moti Nagar, New Delhi, due to their highly disrespectful, disobedient, egotistic and abusive habits, and in particular drinking and gambling habits of Saurav. They hereby disinherit anything from the movable and immovable properties of my clients. Anyone dealing with them shall do so at their own risks, costs and consequences.

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PUBLIC NOTICE

Know all men by these presents that my Client Sh. Ranjit Singh S/o Sh. Rajoo Ram Singh R/o 491/16 Bungalow Road Kania Nagar Delhi 110007, has severed all his relations with his son Sh. Prakash Singh and his wife Ms. Sonal Bala, on account of his disrespectful and misconduct. My client has debarred and disowned them from his all movable and immovable properties and he shall not be accountable and answerable to any act or omission done by any or both of them. My client shall not be responsible in any manner whatsoever for their conduct.

SEARCH FOR MISSING
Sleepers in feet, has been missing from the jurisdiction of P.S. Lodhi Colony, New Delhi. In this regard a DD No. 15A, dated 17.01.2020 has been registered at P.S. Lodhi Colony, New Delhi. Sincere efforts have been made by the local police to trace out the male but no clue has come to light so far. If any one having any information about him please inform undersigned. Website : <http://cbi.nic.in> E-mail : cic@cbi.gov.in Fax: 011-24338639, 24368841 Ph. No.: 011-24338638, 24368841 DP/35/SD/2020 Ph: 011-24620283, 24611753

PUBLIC NOTICE
My clients Jyendra Kumar Jain S/o Sh. Satek Chohan Jain Resident of-204, New Cosmopolitan CGHS Plot 33, Sector-10, Dwarka, has debarred and disowned their son Sarthak Jain S/O Jyendra Kumar Jain and their daughter in law Anushka Jain Sarthak Jain Both resident of E-107-1, Patak Extn. Near Ramphal Chowk Sector-7, Dwarka New Delhi and their daughter Ms. Surbi Jain D/o Rink Jain and Late Sh. Harish Jain And Ms. Bhavya Jain D/o Mrs Rinko Jain and Late Sh. Harish Jain, both are resident of Wz-88A, Dayal S/O, Road, of Baroda Wall Gali, Uttar Nagar, New Delhi, from his all movable as well as immovable properties whatsoever present in any state/city. Their behaviour towards my client was unkind, cruel, harsh and insensitive due to which this step has been taken by my client. My client, thus, is not responsible for any action of their son, daughter in-law and daughters including their liability, loan or any kind of borrowings from any other person/company/inst. My clients shall deal with them, they do so at their own risk, cost and consequences and my clients shall not be responsible for any of their above named son, daughter-in-law and daughter in any manner whatsoever.

PUBLIC NOTICE
I, Nishu Singh W/o Rahul Sood R/o A-648 Palam Vihar Village-Choma Gurgaon Haryana have changed my name to Nisha Sood After-marriage 0040536036-5

PUBLIC NOTICE
General Public is hereby informed that Sh. Sandeep Kumar & Smt. Meena are only owner in possession of DDA/LIG Flat No. 7, 1st Floor, Plot No. 1, Sector-14, Dwarka Phase-1, Delhi (hereinafter called 'Property'). That one of the above documents of the property is original Re-conveyance Deed dated 20/07/2006 regd. as Sl. No. 2584 with DDC, Delhi as missing for which a missing notice was served on 18/12/2019. In this regard, a missing notice was issued w.e.f. 12/03/2020 dated 17/03/2020 any person desiring in any way with the property or the said missing document will do so as Home/Investor own part as the same shall not be considered legally null and void. Anybody aware of any such person possessing any right, title or interest on his behalf of said lost document or having found its possession in the name of any person shall please inform the undersigned at the following contact details:- Gaup & Associates, Advocates, Floor: 03, Tower: 3, Anand Park Phase-I, Saket, New Delhi-110017. Email: gaupandassociates@gmail.com with in 7 days this Notice publication.

PUBLIC NOTICE
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PUBLIC NOTICE
I, Nishu Singh W/o Rahul Sood R/o A-648 Palam Vihar Village-Ch

21 ECONOMY

GOLD	RUPEE	OIL	SILVER
₹40,241	₹74.26	\$30.16	₹35,948

*Indian basket as on March 17, 2020

SENSEX: 28,869.51 ▼ 1709.58 NIFTY: 8,468.80 ▼ 498.25 NIKKEI: 16,726.55 ▼ 284.98 HANG SENG: 22,291.82 ▼ 971.91 FTSE: 5,029.85 ▼ 265.05 DAX: 8,452.75 ▼ 486.35

*International market data till 1900 IST

INDEX SWINGS 2,489 PTS INTRA-DAY TO CLOSE SESSION AT 28,869 — DOWN 1,709 PTS

Sell-off continues: Sensex plunges to 3-year low

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
MUMBAI, MARCH 18

BEARS TIGHTENED their grip on stock markets sending the Sensex crashing below the 29,000-level and the Nifty50 plunging by almost 500 points on Wednesday as the coronavirus pandemic raised worries over a major global economic slowdown. Standard & Poor's move to lower India's growth forecast and the Supreme Court's refusal to provide relief to telecom firms on the AGR issue further hit sentiment.

The 30-share Sensex, which swung 2,489 points intra-day, closed 1,709.58 points, or 5.59 per cent, lower at 28,869.51 — well below the three-year low mark. The Sensex has closed below the 29,000-mark for the first time

EXPLAINED

Banking, financial scrips hit the most

MARKETS WITNESSED tremendous selling pressure in continuation of the prevailing corrective phase. It opened with an uptick but a sharp fall in the index majors wiped out all the gains and pushed the benchmark lower in no time.

The global mayhem combined rising coronavirus cases in India triggered the initial fall, which further worsened with the Supreme Court's stance on AGR dues. The fall was widespread but it was banking and financial pack which was hammered badly.

The broader NSE Nifty plummeted 498.25 points, or 5.56 per cent, to end at 8,468.80.

With Wednesday's fall, the Sensex has fallen 9,275 points, or

24.31 per cent, in March.

Earlier in the day, S&P Global Ratings lowered India's economic growth forecast to 5.2 per cent for 2020, saying the global economy is entering a recession amid the

coronavirus pandemic. The agency had earlier projected a growth rate of 5.7 per cent during the 2020 calendar year.

Banking and telecom stocks came under heavy selling pressure after the Supreme Court pulled up telecom companies for doing self-assessment of the Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) dues fixed by the apex court in its verdict on October 24 last year.

"Indian markets ended at 3-year lows, with the Nifty below the 8,500 mark, in tandem with Asian and European markets after agencies warned of a global recession following the impact of COVID-19. At the same time, rising infections in India and associated disruption in businesses led to India's GDP growth forecasts also being downgraded," said Vinod Nair, head of research at

Geojit Financial Services.

Markets witnessed tremendous selling pressure in continuation of the prevailing corrective phase. It opened with an uptick but a sharp fall in the index majors wiped out all the gains and pushed the benchmark lower in no time.

"The global mayhem combined with rising coronavirus cases in India triggered the initial fall, which further worsened with the Supreme Court's stance on AGR dues. The fall was widespread but it was banking and financial pack which was hammered badly," said Ajit Mishra, VP-research, Religare Broking Ltd.

"This will also affect the government's fiscal maths, which was already tight. Additionally, with the Supreme Court not providing any respite to telecom players, the banking stocks which have expo-

sure to the telecom sector were most impacted today. Nifty bank Index fell by around 7 per cent," Nair said.

Joseph Thomas, head of research, Emkay Wealth Management said, "The frontline indices were down by close to 5.5 per cent in a market hit by the likely adverse impact of the pandemic. This is at a time when it was negotiating a critical juncture in the already existing economic sluggishness. Markets will continue to mirror the developments overseas till some comfort on the spread of the pandemic is received. It is too early to say when the feeling that the asset prices are lower than their intrinsic value would start coming in." The pressure in the banking space has raised fresh concerns, which might cascade in the following sessions, too.

Health policies to cover coronavirus-related illnesses on the cards

GEORGE MATHEW & SUNNY VERMA
MUMBAI/NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

WITH CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) spreading, insurance companies are toying with the idea of launching coronavirus-specific cover as proposed by the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI).

While insurance industry sources said most health policies cover coronavirus-related hospitalisation claims, provided hospitalisation is for more than 24 hours, there could be a case for a specific cover to tackle the disease as the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared the virus attack as a pandemic. Earlier this month, the regulator asked insurance companies to design products covering the costs of treatment for COVID-19 in the country.

50% fall in travel insurance policies

Mumbai: The global impact of the coronavirus pandemic has hit the travel insurance business, with Indian insurers suffering a 50 per cent fall in travel insurance policies.

"We have witnessed a 50 per cent decline in travel insurance business. This is because people have cancelled their travel plans and airlines across the world have cut down the number of flights. There's a big fall in travellers to Europe and US," said an official of an insurance firm. In case of overseas insurance, companies are proving cover for OPD and hospitalisation expenses for customers infected abroad. **ENS**

SECTOR WATCH PHARMACEUTICAL

Stretched supply chains: Directive to Indian Missions to explore alternative API sources

PRABHA RAGHAVAN
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

INDIAN MISSIONS outside the country have been asked to explore the possibility of sourcing raw material for medicine production in their respective countries, *The Indian Express* has learnt. While China has slowly begun to ease restrictions on Hubei, the epicentre of the novel coronavirus (SARS-COV-2) outbreak that has caused a global pandemic, India is still working to reduce its dependence on the neighbouring country for crucial drug ingredients.

India depends on China for nearly 70 per cent of its import requirements of bulk drugs, but the COVID-19 outbreak in the neighbouring country forced it to speed up efforts to cut this dependence.

Hubei contributes around 18 per cent of the pharma products supplied from China to India, *The Indian Express* has learnt. Earlier this month, the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) imposed restrictions on exports of 13 such APIs and the formulations made from them, in a move to preserve supplies while India waits for Hubei to resume operations.

These products include APIs like paracetamol, vitamin B6 and B12, progesterone, acyclovir and erythromycin salts. While China is India's go-to destination for these products, Hong Kong, Belgium, France, Japan, the Netherlands, the US, Italy, Egypt, Canada and Thailand also export these ingredients here.

However, countries like Italy have also been reeling under the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak, and would therefore not be the best supplier in the short term, according to some experts. These alternative sources would also only be able to supply APIs like those to make antidiabetic and anti-hypertensive drugs, they said.

"Every company will be examining alternative sources beyond China. This is important for a diversified supply chain and healthcare security," said Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance secretary general Sudarshan Jain.

"The key issue is fermentation-based products like antibiotics and vitamins, where China has dominance globally," he said. "We have to build self-reliance in this space and we have the capability. The ecosystem should help us to move forward," he said. The government has announced norms for faster environmental clearances, which is a "step in the right direction," said Jain.

At the same time, India, which once had the technology to manufacture fermentation-based APIs, would have to set up fresh capabilities with updated technology to be able to do so. This would take at least two years, according to some industry experts.

Six missions in countries, including those in the US and Hong Kong, are learnt to have shared a list of potential suppliers in their nations with Export Promotion Councils and work is underway to fix meetings, sources said.

This development comes in addition to a panel formed by the Department of Pharmaceuticals (DoP) earlier this year to regularly review the availability of stock of Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs), Key Starting Materials and the medicines made from these key ingredients. The fast-spreading virus caused China to shut down operations earlier this year in areas like the Hubei province, squeezing supplies of various types of key drug ingredients to India, especially those used to make certain crucial antibiotics and vitamins. According to pharmaceutical industry executives, most of the world is dependent on China for these specific ingredients, known as fermentation-based APIs.

Between 2017 and 2019, India doubled its overall imports of raw materials used to make antibiotics, according to data from the Chemicals and Fertilizers Ministry.

US crude hits 18-year low, Wall Street slumps

REUTERS
LONDON, MARCH 18

OIL PRICES fell for a third session on Wednesday with US crude futures tumbling to an 18-year low as travel and social lockdowns sparked by the epidemic knocked the outlook for demand.

US crude was down \$2.51 cents, or over 9 per cent, at \$24.44 per barrel by 1219 GMT, having earlier fallen to \$24.42, its lowest since mid-2002.

Brent crude was trading down \$1.39, or nearly 5 per cent, at \$27.34 a barrel, after dropping to \$27.31, its lowest since early 2016.

Wall Street resumed a steep



A notice in an Iceland store window in Northwich. Reuters

slide on Wednesday while bond markets rushed to price in the sheer scale of government support programmes and handouts announced over the past 24 hours, all aimed at softening the economic shock of coronavirus.

Wall Street's main indices

slumped at the open as growing signs of coronavirus damage to corporate US saw Tuesday's sugar high over sweeping official moves to protect the economy fade fast.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 1,048.69 points or nearly 5 per cent at the open to 20,188.69, while the S&P 500 opened lower by 92.69 points, or 3.7 per cent at 2,436.50. The Nasdaq Composite dropped 432.47 points or nearly 6 per cent.

The British pound plunged to its lowest levels in over three decades on Wednesday barring a flash crash in October 2016. Against the dollar, the pound plunged 1.7 per cent to \$1.1852, its lowest level since October 2016.

Airlines look to cut costs as virus hits biz; suspend foreign ops, reduce allowances

PRANAV MUKUL
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

WITH THE COVID-19 disease continuing to spread across India, airlines in the country are starting to feel the heat from the plummeting demand for flights. To this extent, several airlines have initiated cost-reduction measures to maintain cash-flows at a time when their cash-generators — airplanes — remain grounded. These measures include suspending international operations, reducing allowances for staff, and asking them to take leaves without pay.

"As a result of the significant reduction in flying, Indian carriers may initially ground around 150 aircraft (including almost all of the international fleet), with this number expected to increase as more domestic operations are curtailed over the coming weeks. If the decline in traffic continues to be severe, the majority of the fleet could be grounded by April," CAPA said.

"By extension, the reduced

scale of operations could impact the requirement for around 30 per cent of airline staff and up to 50 per cent of ground handling staff. For first couple of months this could potentially be handled through mandatory leave and leave-without-pay initiatives for 1-2 months. But should the situation continue beyond a few weeks, it will quickly result in short-term retrenchment — with the prospect of re-employment once the situation improves. And an extended downturn will inevitably lead to significant redundancies," it added.

On Tuesday, Air India announced cost-reduction measures withdrawing entertainment allowance to executive pilots, in addition to cutting layover allowances for cabin crew. In addition, it has temporarily reduced the fuel reimbursement deduction for all its officers by 10%. Air India has cancelled several of its flights to destinations including China, Europe, West Asia and Southeast Asia.

Vistara on Wednesday announced that it will suspend its international operations from March 20 to March 31, in addition to temporarily adjusting its domestic capacity for March and April in view of reduced demand. GoAir, which has also suspended its international flights till April 15, has initiated a temporary rotational leave-without-pay programme to help the company counter the short term reduction in capacity, while ensuring that only a cross section of the employees stay away from the workplace, so it could ensure business continuity.

In line with global examples, sector experts have batted for sops from the government to aid the sector. "What Indian government can do to help airlines: 1. Pass on crude oil price reductions immediately 2. Reduce or defer taxes 3. Make loans or credit lines available 4. Defer payments for fuel and aeronautical charges 5. Suspend route dispersal guidelines (RDG) or allow RDG pooling," said Sanjiv Kapoor, former chief strategy and commercial officer, Vistara.

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Trump presses for \$1 trillion stimulus package

REUTERS
WASHINGTON, MARCH 18

THE TRUMP administration pressed on Tuesday for enactment of a \$1 trillion stimulus package, possibly to include \$1,000 direct payments to individual Americans, to blunt the economic pain from a coronavirus outbreak that has killed over 100 people in the country.

With cases of the respiratory illness reported in all 50 states and the total number of known US infections surging past 6,400, millions of Americans hunkered down at home instead of commuting to work or going to school.

New York Mayor Bill de Blasio said he was weighing whether to order the city's 8.5 million residents to "shelter in place" at home, as state and local officials escalated "social distancing" policies by closing schools, restaurants and theaters to curb the spread of the virus.

'RBI may cut key rates'

Fitch Solutions said it expects the Reserve Bank of India to cut key interest rates by 175 basis points during the fiscal year starting April 1

5.4%: India's real GDP growth will pick up slightly to 5.4 per cent in 2020-21, from the earlier estimate of 4.9 per cent in the current fiscal

REASON
The fall is due to sharp fall in global oil prices from about \$50 per barrel to about \$30 due to a price war between Russia and Saudi Arabia



Outlook: The RBI is likely to implement steep monetary easing as soon as possible over the coming meetings to support growth

Source: Fitch Solutions/PTI

Virus cases to surge: Fitch Solutions said the number of coronavirus cases in India is likely to surge given the high population density in its cities and poor healthcare access

WhatsApp launches virus info hub

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

WHATSAPP HAS announced a dedicated coronavirus information hub, which will be in partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

health ministries around the world for them to provide updates right within WhatsApp," Will Cathcart, head of WhatsApp said in a statement.

What is the WhatsApp Coronavirus Information Hub?

The WhatsApp coronavirus information hub will be available at whatsapp.com/coronavirus and will give "simple, actionable guidance for health workers, educators, community leaders, non-profits, local governments and local businesses" who are using the app to stay in touch with their friends and family.

The website will offer "general tips and resources for users around the world to reduce the

spread of rumours and connect with accurate health information." The hub asks people to use trusted sources such WHO's website or rely on the official websites of their national health ministry.

The website also asks users to think before forwarding messages on the topic of coronavirus. It asks users to verify the facts with other trusted official sources or fact checkers and to not forward message if they are not sure about the veracity.

The recommendations in the hub will show how groups can make the most of WhatsApp features. Information will be distributed by UNDP to those coordinating local efforts to contain the spread of the virus and spread awareness about the pandemic.

FIGHTING COVID-19

Emirates staff to take unpaid leave

Dubai/Manila: Emirates is asking pilots and crew to take unpaid leave and rival Qatar Airways laid off about 200 staff in Doha this week. **REUTERS**

'25 million may become jobless'

Geneva: The pandemic will increase global unemployment, leaving up to 25 million more people out of work, the United Nations said. It added workers globally stood to lose up to \$3.4 trillion in income this year. **AFP**

ADB announces \$6.5 bn package

New Delhi: The Asian Development Bank (ADB) on Wednesday announced a \$6.5 billion package for its developing member countries to fight the pandemic. **PTI**

Canada sets out \$56.4 bn package

Toronto: The Canadian government on Wednesday announced a \$56.4 billion aid package to tackle the virus. **AP**

Take into account impact of disruptions caused by virus while auditing: ICAI

KARUNJIT SINGH
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

ACCOUNTING AND auditing regulator — the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) — is set to come out with an advisory note for its members to take into account the impact of the coronavirus while preparing or auditing financial statements. The president of the ICAI, Atul Kumar Gupta, said it was necessary that auditors paid special attention to the impact of coronavirus on businesses.

The novel coronavirus, which has infected over 2,00,000 people

and led to the death of over 8,000 people globally is expected to have a strong negative impact on GDP growth in the country especially the tourism, aviation, hospitality and trade. There have been three deaths and a total of 134 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in India as of Wednesday, according to the Health Ministry.

"We will be coming out with an advisory note to members, on taking into account the impact of the disruptions caused by the coronavirus outbreak," Gupta told *The Indian Express*.

"It may be the case that an exporter of a perishable goods is not able to export these goods," said

Gupta adding that it is important that the net realisable value of such stock is reflected accurately in the books of a company.

Gupta also said that some companies may also have to create contingent liabilities on their books for failure to meet obligations under a contract and that auditors need to ensure that such liabilities are reflected in the company's balance sheet.

Gupta said the coronavirus had negatively impacted many businesses and that it was important that this be reflected in their financial statements to give a true and fair view of companies.

'SELF-ASSESSMENT CAN'T BE PERMITTED EVEN IN WILDEST DREAMS'
SC slams Centre, warns telecom operators over AGR dues: Payment timeframe of 20 yrs unreasonable

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

3 KEY POINTS

1 The Supreme Court said all managing directors of telecom companies will be personally responsible and held for contempt of court for any such future write-ups hiding the truth

2 A Bench of Justice Arun Mishra, Justice S A Nazeer and Justice M R Shah refused to take up the Centre's plea for allowing telcos to pay AGR dues in 20 years, saying the application will be taken up after two weeks

3 The Bench said it will summon the secretary and desk officer of the DoT who permitted telecom companies to do self-assessment of AGR dues

"Exercise of self-assessment of AGR dues by telecom companies cannot be permitted even in wildest dreams," it said.

The court said serious fraud was being committed by telecom companies by asserting to do self-assessment of AGR dues and that its judgment was final and to be followed in letter and spirit.

"We will be party to fraud if we allow self-assessment of AGR dues by telecom companies," the bench said, adding, it cannot permit encroachment of its powers by allowing self-assessment.

The court also said that newspaper articles will not be able to influence its decision and it will draw contempt proceedings against the managing directors of telecom companies if they publish "fake news" against court on payment of AGR dues.

"Any future newspaper article hiding truth from public on telecom case will make MDs of telcos personally responsible," the bench said.

The SC had on October 24 last year ruled that the statutory dues need to be calculated by including non-telecom revenues in AGR of telecom companies. It had upheld the AGR definition formulated by the DoT and termed "frivolous" the nature of objections raised by the telecom service providers.

the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) who permitted telecom companies to do self-assessment of AGR dues.

'Stressed NBFC sector relying more on banks for borrowings'

Facing difficulties in raising money from the capital market, NBFCs are relying more on banks to meet their funding requirements, according to Care Ratings



Investments in corporate debt paper of NBFCs held steady at ₹1 lakh crore in January 2020, and the percentage share fell to 6.2% as against 6.5% in November 2019 and 7.7% in July 2018

● NBFCs ARE STRUGGLING TO RAISE FUNDS FROM THE CAPITAL MARKET DUE TO HIGHER COST AND LACK OF AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS

34.7%
Banks' lending to non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) registered a growth of 34.7 per cent from September 2018 to January 2020

₹7.37 LAKH CRORE
Banks' advances to NBFCs stood at Rs 7.37 lakh crore as of January 2020 compared to Rs 5.47 lakh crore in September 2018. The figures do not include funding made available to NBFCs by banks

● NBFCs' BORROWING PROFILE HAS CHANGED SIGNIFICANTLY FROM CAPITAL MARKET INSTRUMENTS TO BANK BORROWINGS

via securitisation route (direct assignment and pass through certificate), which amounted to Rs 1.70 lakh crore in 2018-19 alone

4.7%
The percentage share of funds deployed by mutual funds in commercial papers (CPs) of NBFCs in January 2020 stood stable at 4.7 per cent of debt AUMs (lowest since July 2018), while the amount held was Rs 0.7 lakh crore

Borrowing from MFs through CPs and corporate debt stood at ₹1.69 lakh crore as at end-January 2020 from ₹2.25 lakh crore in September 2018

Source: Care Ratings/PTI

₹8,415 CR OF YES BANK'S AT-1 BONDS WRITTEN DOWN AS PART OF REVIVAL

Despite being ineligible in offer document, retail investors were sold ₹1K cr of AT-1 bonds

Over 20 individual investors reveal they were lured into breaking their FDs and investing in the bonds

SANDEEP SINGH & SUNNY VERMA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

EVEN AS Yes Bank sold its unsecured perpetual subordinated Basel III compliant additional tier 1 (AT-1) bonds worth nearly Rs 1,000 crore to retail investors, a close look into the offer documents of the two bonds issued in 2016 (Rs 3,000 crore) and 2018 (Rs 5,415 crore) by the bank shows that the application form did not have retail and high net worth individuals (HNIs) as an investment category. In fact, the offer document said that resident individual investors are not eligible to participate in the offer.

Both the offer documents for 2016 and 2018 read, "The following class of investors are not eligible to participate in the offer: Resident Individual Investors, Foreign Nationals, any related party over which the Bank exercises control or significant influence, Persons resident outside India (except FPI & NRI), Venture Capital Funds, Alternative Investment Funds, Overseas Corporate Bodies, Partnership firms formed under applicable laws in India in the name of the

Yes Bank ops resume; all banking services available for customers

Mumbai: Yes Bank on Wednesday said it has resumed operations, and all its banking services are available for its customers now after the Reserve Bank of India lifted the moratorium. "Our banking services are now operational. You can now experience the full suite of our services. Thank you for your patience and co-operation," the lender tweeted. "We have made adequate precautions... all our ATMs are full with cash all our branches have adequate supply of the cash," Yes Bank Administrator Prashant Kumar said on Tuesday.

Yes Bank branches will open one hour earlier at 08:30 hours from March 19 to 21, 2020. **ENS**

partners, Hindu Undivided Families through Karta..."

According to the offer document, the ten categories of investors that were eligible to invest in the bonds were 1) financial institutions 2) insurance companies 3) provident, gratuity, pension & superannuation funds 4) regional rural banks, 5) mutual funds, 6) companies, body corporates 7) trusts, association of persons, societies 8) FPIs 9) NRIs and 10) scheduled commercial banks or co-operative banks.

Even as the bonds were not meant to be sold to resident indi-

viduals, Yes Bank branch officials sold it to individuals through various financial institutions.

Several individuals that *The Indian Express* spoke to said Yes Bank officials lured them into breaking their fixed deposits (FDs) and invest in these bonds stating that the bond offered 10.5 per cent and was equivalent to FD, as the money was getting invested into bank's bonds itself.

Documents accessed from the investors show that Yes Bank branch officers acted as agents on behalf of large financial institutions which then sold these bonds to retail investors in

the secondary market. Madhu Patni, a Gurgaon-based retired senior citizen, said while she was looking for an FD which provides monthly interest income, the Yes Bank branch officers coaxed her into buying these bonds explaining that these are at par with FDs. She said each bond was worth Rs 10 lakh and she was given a total of seven bonds worth Rs 70 lakh having 10.50 per cent annual coupon. While the sale of bonds in her case was arranged by the Yes Bank branch, their seller is Reliance Financial Ltd.

Email sent to Yes Bank did not elicit any response. Discussions with over 20 individual investors reveal that they were sold AT-1 bonds as being similar to FDs but offering higher rate of return. Sajal Sethi, a Delhi-based businessman, said he along with his family bought bonds worth Rs 1.5 crore and there seems to be no recourse now.

"Even in December, we went to Yes Bank branch, asking our bonds to be redeemed. But the branch officials kept assuring us that there is no reason to worry," Sethi said. "It's only later that we realised that these bonds do not

have any maturity date and are perpetual," he said.

A senior citizen from Noida, who asked not to be named, said many of his family members have in aggregate bought 48 bonds worth Rs 4.8 crore, and are now in tatters as they cannot get their money back. "We were looking for assured interest income. And this was pitched to us as that. We never realised a bank will not pay us our money back."

Ashish Garg, a Noida-based service professional, said he was sold these bonds at a premium by the bank, which said these were for select customers and a minimum of five bonds need to be bought. "Yes Bank sold us Rs 10 lakh worth of bond at Rs 10.50 lakh," he said. "In January, when the branch officers told me that bonds can be redeemed only at a discount, as there were no buyers, I said you pay me 70 per cent of the value. But even that did not come through," Garg added.

These investors said that till January, they were regularly receiving interest payments on these bonds, but they never realised that these "can be written down fully."

NCLT approves another 90-day extension for Jet insolvency process

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

THE INSOLVENCY process for grounded Jet Airways will be extended for another 90 days till mid-June. The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) on Wednesday allowed the extension which was sought by the airline's resolution professional.

The 270-day deadline for the insolvency process ended on March 15. FE last week reported that the process had come to a standstill without concrete resolution plans from potential buyers.

At least three parties were understood to be interested in the airline which has now been grounded for a year. Last month, a Russian government-backed fund showed interest in the airline at the eleventh hour. As a re-

The 270-day deadline for the insolvency process ended on March 15 and the process had come to a standstill without concrete resolution plans from potential buyers

sult, the committee of creditors (CoC) to the debt-laden airline called for a third round of expressions of interest. The Colombian Synergy Group, which had earlier submitted an informal plan conditional on assurance of the airline's slots in London and Amsterdam, did not take things forward. Jet Airways ran out of funds to continue operations in April

BRIEFLY
Consulting agency to boost Startup India

New Delhi: The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) will rope in a consulting agency to support it in effective and on ground implementation of initiatives for startups. The department has floated a notice inviting request for proposal (RFP) from interested agencies.

Volkswagen drives in T-Roc SUV in India

New Delhi: Volkswagen India on Wednesday said it has launched new SUV T-Roc in the country at an introductory price of Rs 19.99 lakh (ex-showroom). The model comes with 1.5 litre petrol engine mated to a seven-speed DSG gearbox.

RIL takes over some debt liabilities of Jio

New Delhi: Reliance Industries Ltd Wednesday said it has taken over some of the debt liabilities of Reliance Jio Infocomm following approval from the Ahmedabad Bench of the NCLT. The company neither disclosed the name of the creditors nor the quantum of liabilities.

Create SWF to save equity market: Garg

New Delhi: The government should create a Sovereign Wealth Fund (SWF) by transferring its stake in PSUs as well as some unlisted firms to stabilise the Indian equity market and reorganise the disinvestment programme amid the coronavirus pandemic, according to former finance secretary Subhash Chandra Garg.

Karan Bajwa is India MD for Google Cloud

New Delhi: Google on Wednesday said it has appointed former IBM executive, Karan Bajwa as managing director of Google Cloud in India. He will be responsible for driving all revenue and go-to-market operations for Google Cloud's portfolio that includes Google Cloud Platform and G Suite, a statement said. Google Cloud's field sales, partner and customer engineering organisations in India will also report to him. **PTI**

Pradhan: Subsidised LPG price hiked by ₹35.55 in 5 months

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

THE PRICE of subsidised cooking gas (LPG) has been hiked by Rs 35.55 per cylinder in the last five months, Union Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said Wednesday.

As per government policy, LPG all over the country is available only at market price. However, households are entitled to buying 12 cylinders of 14.2-kg each at a subsidised rate in a year.

The government transfers the subsidy amount directly into the bank accounts which the beneficiaries use to buy LPG at the market price. The subsidised LPG price has gone up by Rs 35.55 per cylinder since October.

In a written reply to a question in the Rajya Sabha, Pradhan said domestic subsidised LPG in Delhi was priced at Rs 538.95 per cylinder on October 1, 2019, and this month it costs Rs 574.50.

He did not give any reason for the price increase. While non-subsidised or market priced LPG has varied from month to month based on benchmark international rates, subsidised LPG prices have been raised every month by Rs 4 per cylinder plus taxes.

These rates, however, are no longer published by the oil market companies. To the question of whether state-owned oil marketing companies had stopped publishing subsidised gas prices, he said the price of non-subsidised domestic LPG is available at the websites of oil companies.

In reply to another question, Pradhan said non-subsidised LPG cylinder costs Rs 805.50. Household consumers are getting a subsidy of Rs 231 per 14.2-kg cylinder, he said.

COMMERCE MINISTER ON EXPORT PROMOTION SCHEMES

'India under no obligation to implement WTO's dispute panel recommendations'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

INDIA IS under no obligation to implement the recommendations of the WTO's dispute panel on its export promotion schemes, which was challenged by the United States, as new Delhi has appealed against that order at the higher level, Parliament was informed on Wednesday.

A dispute settlement panel of World Trade Organization (WTO) in its report issued to members on 31 October 2019 has ruled that India's export-related schemes (including SEZ scheme) are in the nature of prohibited subsidies under the Agreement on Subsidies and

"Due to non-functioning of appellate body (of the WTO's dispute settle mechanism), the appeal has been kept in suspension. Till the appeal is disposed of, India is under no obligation to implement the recommendations of panel"

PIYUSH GOYAL
COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY MINISTER

Countervailing Measures and are inconsistent with WTO norms.

The panel has given a timeframe of 180 days for withdrawal of Special Economic Zone (SEZ) scheme.

India has appealed at the WTO's appellate body against this ruling.

"Due to non-functioning of appellate body (of the WTO's dispute settle mechanism), the appeal has been kept in suspen-

sion. Till the appeal is disposed of, India is under no obligation to implement the recommendations of panel," Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said in a written reply to the Lok Sabha on Wednesday.

In a separate reply, the minister informed Parliament that India is involved in 15 trade disputes, mostly against the US, at the WTO at present.

"Currently, India is involved

in 15 disputes at the WTO, in which it is complainant in 4 and respondent in 11," he said.

The disputes where India is a complaining party are countervailing duty by the US on Indian steel products; measures by America concerning non-immigrant visas; renewable energy programmes of the US; and import duties imposed on steel and aluminium products by America.

Disputes at the WTO where India is a responding party include prohibition by the country on import of poultry and poultry products filed by the US, and import duties on certain information and communication technology (ICT) goods filed by the European Union, Japan and Taiwan.

RBI to inject ₹10,000 crore liquidity into market via OMO tomorrow

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI, MARCH 18

THE RESERVE Bank will inject liquidity of Rs 10,000 crore through open market operations on Friday to maintain financial stability in the system in the wake of coronavirus outbreak in the country.

"With the heightening of Covid-19 pandemic risks, certain financial market segments have been experiencing a tightening of financial conditions as reflected in the hardening of yields and widening of spreads.

"It is important to ensure that all market segments remain liquid and stable, and function normally," RBI said in a release on Wednesday.

Accordingly, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has decided to conduct open market operations on March 20, 2020 (Friday) in the

RBI receives ₹27,096 crore bids in 5th LTRO

Mumbai: The RBI Wednesday said it has received Rs 27,096 crore of bids in the fifth long-term repo operations (LTROs) conducted for an amount of Rs 25,000 crore with a tenure of three years.

Earlier this week, the RBI had announced to conduct additional LTROs for up to a total amount of Rs 1 lakh crore at the policy repo rate after reviewing the current financial conditions and to further improving monetary transmission. **PTI**

form of purchase of an aggregate amount of Rs 10,000 crore of gov-

ernment securities through a multi-security auction using the multiple price method, the release added.

It will purchase securities with coupon rate of 8.20 per cent (maturity February 15, 2022); 7.37 per cent (April 16, 2023); 7.32 per cent (January 28, 2024) and 7.72 per cent (May 25, 2025).

RBI said there is no notified amount against any of these securities within the aggregate ceiling of Rs 10,000 crore set for the operation.

The result of the auction will be announced on the same day and payment to successful participants will be made during banking hours on March 23, 2020 (Monday).

Successful participants should ensure availability of requisite amount of securities in their SGL accounts by 12 noon on March 23, 2020 (Monday), it added.

HSBC picks Noel Quinn as new CEO

REUTERS
LONDON, MARCH 18

HSBC SAID on Tuesday it appointed Noel Quinn as chief executive officer, handing the insider and interim boss the reins of Europe's biggest bank and ending months of speculation an external candidate could get the role.

Quinn, who joined HSBC in 1987, took interim charge of HSBC last August after the shock ousting of John Flint and has been auditioning for the permanent job since, despite media reports that chairman Mark Tucker preferred an external candidate.

Unicredit boss Jean Pierre Mustier and incoming UBS Group Ralph Hamers were among those reported to have caught Tucker's eye.

EU underscores desire to settle aircraft subsidy issue with US

ANDREA SHALAL
WASHINGTON, MARCH 18

THE EUROPEAN Union on Wednesday emphasised its desire to negotiate an end to a long-standing dispute with the United States over aircraft subsidies even as Washington raised duties on Airbus aircraft by 50 per cent.

European Trade Commissioner Phil Hogan underscored the EU's desire to negotiate a settlement when he spoke with the top US trade official on Monday, two days before the tariff increase went into effect, an EU spokesman said.

"The EU had made concrete proposals related to existing subsidies and future disciplines

in this sector and the Commission negotiating team will follow up actively with their US counterparts in the coming days," the spokesman said.

The US government Wednesday cast aside concerns about the impact of higher tariffs on US airlines already hammered by a drop in air traffic due to the coronavirus outbreak, and proceeded to hike duties on EU-built aircraft to 15 per cent from 10 per cent.

The tariff increase will not be paid by Airbus, but by US airlines. A spokesman for US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer had no immediate comment on the EU statement, or the timetable for further talks on the issue. **REUTERS**

THE NHS AND COVID-19

Is it ready?

Britain's NHS is well suited to dealing with crises but it is overstretched

WHEN BORIS Johnson addresses the nation about the threat posed by COVID-19, he likes to be flanked by a Praetorian Guard of mild-mannered scientific advisers. Chris Whitty, the government's chief medical adviser, and Sir Patrick Vallance, the chief scientific officer, have become unlikely stars thanks to their calm bedside manner. The prime minister's aim is to show that the government is following the best available advice—in part to offer reassurance and in part, surely, for insurance if things do not go according to plan.

Over the past few weeks, the advice has mainly been about how to stop the spread of the virus, with Britain taking a more laissez-faire approach than some other countries. More than 27,000 tests have been carried out, with 459 positive results and eight deaths. Attention is now turning to the NHS. International comparisons made before the current threat suggest that Britain is among the best prepared countries for a pandemic, thanks to its testing infrastructure and contingency planning. But some have also pointed to the health system as a relative weak point. In his budget on March 11th, Rishi Sunak announced £5bn (\$6.4bn) extra for the health service to help deal with the virus, with more to come if needed. It will have as many "millions...or billions" as it requires, the chancellor assured MPs.

Whether more money will be enough is not yet clear. The NHS is far from the monolithic organisation, caring for people from "cradle to grave", of popular imagination. In reality, it is an enormously complex network of intertwined and sometimes competing bodies. Yet at times of crisis there are well-established lines of instruction, and hospitals are used to working together. "There are many disadvantages to centrally organising a health-care system for 60m-plus people," says Helen Buckingham of the Nuffield Trust, a health think-tank. "An advantage is that, when you need to do command-and-control, you can, and you can do it quickly."

NHS England has established a dedicated team to handle its response to the virus. It is in daily contact with all 223 NHS providers, which range from ambulance to mental-health services, keeping tabs on such things as levels of protective equipment and whether providers have enough space to quarantine those who are infected. An advisory group for emergencies, made up of various experts, provides ministers with a single source of information. Across the country local resilience forums, which include representatives from health services, local authorities, the army and others, meet in peacetime, meaning that connections are already established. "We know each other's faces, we know each other's foibles," says one attendee.

Their task would be easier if the NHS were not already so stretched. In January just 82% of people requiring emergency treatment were seen within four hours, against a target of 95%. A report last year estimated that there were some 100,000 vacancies



Britain's PM Boris Johnson and Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak leave after a news conference on the COVID-19 situation, in London on Tuesday. Reuters

across the health service. Staff shortages could quickly be exacerbated by COVID-19. If schools are closed, lots of workers will have to stay at home to look after children. The government is preparing emergency legislation to protect the employment of those who volunteer to help out. Recently retired medics may be brought back and trainees brought in. The majority of COVID-19 patients will be asked to recover at home.

Two areas are of particular concern. Alison Pittard, dean of the Faculty of Intensive Care Medicine, notes that Britain has historically spent relatively little on intensive care. It has fewer beds than other countries in Europe, with just 4,048 in England, of which three-quarters are already full. The NHS hopes

vastly to increase capacity. But doing so will require looser rules on staff numbers and lots of new equipment, which there is limited time to buy. "You can't share a monitor, you can't share an oxygen pipe," says Dr Pittard. The other worry among health wonks is social care, which is already running on empty.

Staff shortages could quickly be exacerbated by COVID-19. If schools are closed, lots of workers will have to stay at home to look after children. The government is preparing emergency legislation to protect the employment of those who volunteer to help out. Recently retired medics may be brought back

If lots of carers are unable to work, it will be even more difficult to get people out of hospital. If conditions deteriorate in care homes, there could be more hospitalisations.

Officials hope the health service will be able smoothly to reallocate resources. Most people are not aware of the "degree to which

hospital capacity can be flexed pretty significantly," says Chris Hopson, chief executive of NHS Providers, a membership group. Lots of hospital traffic is either elective surgery, which can be delayed, or people who have had surgery and can be discharged rapidly if necessary, he adds. So far, NHS England has not said when or if it will consider such moves, although it has put in place measures to reduce workload. Health-care leaders have also asked the government to consider whether they might adopt more radical measures, like not allowing those blocking beds a choice of care home, to free up space in a worst-case scenario.

Speaking on March 5th, Dr Whitty, the chief medical officer, said that "depending

on how high the peak is, this could be anything from a rather bad winter but in spring and summer...to huge numbers way over-topping the ability of the NHS realistically to put everyone in beds." Vigorous tracing of those who potentially contracted the virus in its early stages was put in place partly to push the peak back to a time when the NHS is not under typical winter pressure. The weeks and months ahead will push an already stretched health service to its limits. Officials will be praying that their preparations are enough to ensure it is not pushed beyond them.

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THE OTHER 40%

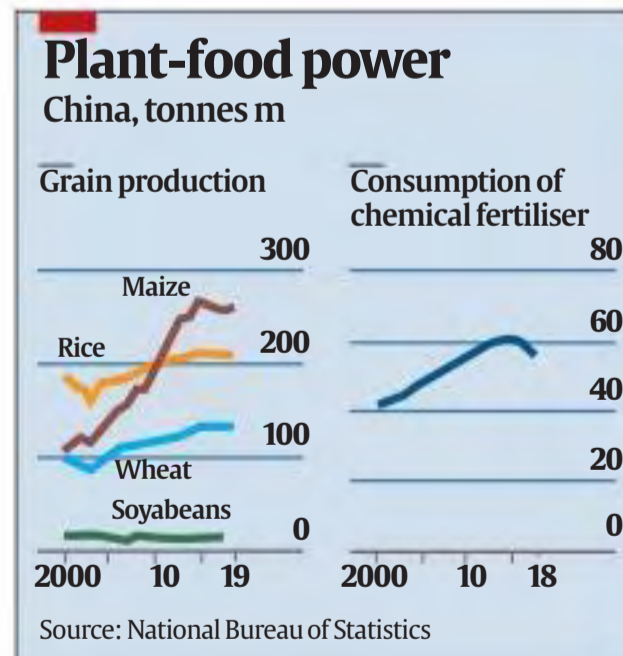
Planters, plagued

COVID-19 is making it harder to grow food in China

NEXT TO a row of idle tractors on the edge of a field in Zhaoquanying, a village on the outskirts of Beijing, sits a row of wheat farmers. Like almost all Chinese when outdoors these days, they are wearing face masks because of the epidemic of covid-19. Their gaze is fixed on their smartphones because, they say, there is not much else to do. "The ground is still too hard," says one. "But we're ready to plant when the time is right." As the weather warms, that day is imminent. It is one that they, and many government officials, have been worrying about.

In mid-February, at the peak of the coronavirus outbreak, some of China's agricultural experts said it was "unclear" whether spring planting could happen on time. They worried that massive disruptions to transport caused by virus-containment measures could affect the delivery of inputs such as fertiliser on which farmers rely (see chart). They also feared that quarantine controls would prevent seasonal workers from getting to farms where their labour is needed for planting. On February 25th China's president, Xi Jinping, and the prime minister, Li Keqiang, issued instructions on the need to "stabilise" agriculture. They called for an "all-out effort" to ensure that the epidemic did not affect the planting of vital crops.

Much of China's economy shudders with uncertainty about the damage caused by COVID-19. But many firms still hope they can recoup at least some of their losses. Some cancelled events will be rescheduled. Some of the cars or refrigerators that were not sold during the shutdown will be snapped up when things return to normal. Farmers, however, cannot accept any disruption. To avoid a total loss for the season, they must start their spring planting soon. At stake is not only the welfare of the 40% of China's people who



live in the countryside and depend on agriculture, but the stability of the national food supply.

In the two months since the outbreak began, China has already felt COVID-19's impact on supplies of some food. Restrictions on the movement of people have left labour-intensive slaughterhouses understaffed, squeezing meat production. This follows the severe damage already done to pork supplies by an outbreak of African swine fever, an animal disease that struck China in 2018 and led to the loss of 40% of China's pigs. Pork prices have tripled since early last year.

Fertiliser freeways

In response to the leadership's calls, local officials have been pulling out the stops to ensure planting proceeds. They have set up "green channels" for lorries carrying agricultural necessities so they do not get delayed at checkpoints and toll booths (tolls have been waived on all highways since February 15th). Bureaucrats have a strong incentive: promotions, they have been told, will depend



Medical workers from outside Wuhan listen to a speech at the Wuhan Railway Station before leaving the epicentre of the COVID-19 outbreak, in Hubei province on Tuesday. Recovery will be slower in Hubei — it is one of the country's main sources of chemical fertiliser. Reuters

on how effectively they ensure that farmers can do their work this spring. Officials have been trying to make life easier for farmers in other ways, too, such as by reducing land-use fees and directing state-owned banks to give them loans on easy terms.

In Zhaoquanying, together with a faint scent of manure, there is a hint of optimism in the air. The farmers say their wheat planting will go ahead as usual. In the nearby village of Hongtongying, some vegetable farmers have just taken delivery of several lorry-loads of plastic film for use on the

greenhouses they erect over their fields. The shipment arrived on time from the eastern city of Hangzhou, some 1,300km (800 miles) away. Everything else they need is already in place, they say. Still missing, however, are migrant workers from other provinces, who have been held up by epidemic-related travel restrictions. "They'll get here when they can, but until then we will manage," says one of the men.

Recovery will be slower in Hubei, the province hardest hit by COVID-19, and that is no small matter. It is one of the country's

main sources of chemical fertiliser. Last year it produced nearly a tenth of China's rice. But agricultural experts say most of China's farmers are likely to muddle through the busy season ahead. The government has made clear that spring planting must be carried out without delay, says Thomas Luedi of Bain & Company, a consultancy. "They built two hospitals in about a week," he notes, so they can probably get the grains sown on time, too.

To avoid a total loss for the season, farmers must start their spring planting soon. At stake is not only the welfare of the 40% of China's people who live in the countryside and depend on agriculture, but the stability of the national food supply

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24 TALK

ART, MUSIC, STYLE, FOOD



LOVE IN PRESENT TIMES
Photographer Arina Voronova has placed posters across Manhattan and Brooklyn showing couples from different ethnic backgrounds and sexual orientation kissing with their face masks on. *The Act of Love* is her way of spreading hope and peace.

SNAP SHOTS



Tribute to Italy

U2 FRONTMAN Bono has written the song *Let your love be known* for Italians under lockdown. He posted the song as a homemade video on U2's official Instagram page, along with the caption: "For the Italians who inspired it... for the Irish... for ANYONE who this St Patrick's Day is in a tight spot and still singing. For the doctors, nurses, carers on the front

line, it's you we're singing to." Written an hour before the recording, in memory of the victims of coronavirus, the lyrics chronicle him walking past an empty Dublin and shines light on isolation. Italy has witnessed over 2,500 deaths and has become one of the worst-affected countries due to the lethal virus.



Stamp of Approval

IN THE midst of the coronavirus outbreak, actor Amitabh Bachchan shared a photograph of his hand bearing a 'Home Quarantined' stamp on Twitter on Tuesday. The *Sholay* actor accompanied the post with the message, "T 3473 - Stamping started on hands with voter ink, in Mumbai keep safe... remain isolated if detected." The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation thanked Bachchan for helping spread a word on home quarantine. Actor Dilip Kumar, 97, too announced that he has been under isolation to avoid infection.



Rule Reversal

AMERICAN SINGER Katy Perry has won a copyright case related to her 2013 single *Dark horse*, after a US judge ruled that the hit was not copied from Christian rapper Marcus Gray's 2009 song *Joyful noise*. The plagiarism charges involved damages of \$2.8m that Perry's team no longer has to pay to the rapper. The judge stated that the note combination in the song was not of any particular unique combination to come under copyright protection. Perry's lawyer said that it was "an important victory for music creators and the music industry."

Life with a Kettledrum

Author Gunjan Veda on her latest book, documenting the art and music of Dalit communities and the need to reclaim lost traditions

SURBHI GUPTA

IN MAPADA, a village of 120 Dalit households in Balangir district of western Odisha, writer Gunjan Veda meets 97-year-old Bishwanath Baghel. He tells the story of his life in the Ganda Bajaa, an instrumental music orchestra that has men belonging to the Ganda or Pano communities, who play at weddings, funerals and religious rituals. She also meets 60-something Tula Bivhar, a member of the Murri Bajaa orchestra, who plays the mohuri, an oboe-like wind instrument made of a hollow bamboo pipe. It is one of five instruments that the orchestra plays, apart from the dhol, which is the leading instrument. Made of a tree trunk, it has strips of cow hide running through it, while the tassa, also a drum, made of clay and strung with goat skin on the top, is played with wooden sticks. Nissan, the oldest of the lot, is made of wooden and iron sheets and resembles a melon cut into half. Accompanying them is the dafl, jhang or iron cymbals, and jhumka as the rattle. But the musicians are considered to be "polluted" for they engage with instruments made of animal skin.



Hunting the Phaanse Pardhi way in Ranjangaon, Maharashtra; Gunjan Veda *Noopur Chaturvedi (above)*

"While they are considered impure, their music is not. It marked all important events in the life of the community, and the rhythmic beats were used to invoke the goddess, yet the Ganda were not allowed to enter her sanctum," writes Veda, in her book *The Museum of Broken Teacups* (Yoda-SAGE Select, Rs 525), where she documents stories of various artists, artisans and "everyday heroes" in Dalit communities living in "the forgotten lanes of Indian villages and towns", along with those of students, teachers, and activists who've changed their lives against all odds.

Public policymaker and international development strategist Veda's book *The Museum of Broken Tea Cups* uses the symbol of the used, broken teacups, or the rampatars, that upper caste houses keep outside for Dalit workers, to recognise the cultural contribution of Dalit communities in the society. She was approached by Dalit

bards, and meets vocalist Rekha Dewar in Kuskuda village, 50 km from Bilaspur in Chhattisgarh, who has been taking the musical tradition forward. In Kanpur, she meets the 85-year-old Gangaprasad Naqqarwadak, who plays the naqqara, a kettledrum instrument similar to the nagada. In Telangana, she meets the Madiga community and its dappu players, and learns how the drum is made using cow skin membrane. She also writes about the traditions of Nautanki in Uttar Pradesh, Yashagana of Andhra Pradesh, Tamasha of Maharashtra and Bhavai in Gujarat. She makes the stories personal and writes them as postcards or letters to the readers from each village and town that she has visited in the course of her travels.

A thread that joins all these together is the exploitation and shame attached to it, and almost all the children Veda spoke to "don't wish to carry the burden of the art form with them. For them, it is an identity marker that they wish to shun," says Veda. But the future lies in reclamation and not ostracisation, says Veda. "In parts of Tamil Nadu, the Thappu or Parai drum has been reclaimed and has become the instrument of equality as not only Dalit children but children from all castes are learning the instrument. And I think that is the way forward," says Veda.

The archive includes photographs, recordings, films, letters, and artwork

Soul Songs

Harry Belafonte's archive finds its way home

WHEN HARRY Belafonte turned 93 on March 1, he celebrated with a tribute at the Apollo Theater in Harlem, New York, which ended with a thunderous audience sing-along to a riff on his star-making 1956 hit, *The banana boat song*, complete with rapper Doug E Fresh beatboxing over its famous *Day-O!* refrain.

An equally momentous celebration is how the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, a division of the New York Public Library, has acquired Belafonte's personal archive — a vast maze of photographs, recordings, films, letters, artwork, clipping albums and other materials. It illuminates not just his career as a musician and actor, but as an activist, who knew everyone, from Marlon Brando to Martin Luther King Jr.

"Everything you touch has a story and tells a story," said Kevin Young, director of the Schomburg, "And it's a story not just about Belafonte, but about black history, black activism and black arts, all of which he's central to."

Belafonte was the first solo singer to have a million-selling album (*Calypso*) and the first African American to win an Emmy (*Tonight With Belafonte*).

NYT

CALENDAR

CROSSWORD 4069



- ACROSS**
- 1 Alarming trouble on the border (8)
 - 5 Improve people a lot (4)
 - 9 and 12 Down: There's no danger in keeping it (3,2,5,3)
 - 10 Small number performing 24 hours — twelve actually (7)
 - 11 and 14 Across: It's inclined to attract sightseers in Italy (7,5,2,4)
 - 13 Value fools to a point (6)
 - 14 See 11 Across
 - 17 On balance, an average boxer (12)
 - 20 Royal house set out in words (7)
 - 21 Where to spend the rest of your life (2,3)
 - 22 Toy that gives you endless repetition (2-2)
 - 23 One who lays about a boat crew to increase the effect (8)
- DOWN**
- 1 Space to turn round and berth (4)
 - 2 Wrongly retorts they are cads (7)
 - 3 It needs quite a lot of tots to fill this (7,5)
 - 4 A shade partly drawn in good weather (6)
 - 6 Provide a finale to the second half of the show (5)
 - 7 The crack of dawn? (8)
 - 8 Existing expenditure (4,2,6)
 - 12 See 9 Across
 - 15 Monks and nuns may dwell this way (7)
 - 16 Choose not to go straight? (6)
 - 18 Man who is smart and fashionably dressy in the extreme (5)
 - 19 A retreat East of Suez (4)

Solutions Crossword 4068: Across: 1 Brainless, 8 Tutor, 9 Cutting, 10 Eponym, 11 Dearth, 12 Elephant, 15 Martinet, 18 Income, 20 Tallow, 21 Tallest, 22 Sense, 23 Defendant. Down: 2 Rouge, 3 Intern, 4 Luncheon, 5 Stop up, 6 Etonian, 7 Brimstone, 11 Dramatist, 13 Estimate, 14 Ireland, 16 Ironed, 17 Scaled, 19 Mason.

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBS by Bill Watterson



MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



DAY TODAY BY PETER VIDAL

- ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)**
Your stars are now approaching a more creative formation than has been experienced for about four months, possibly twelve. You'll be ready to make the most of gifts and talents that you've completely forgotten about. It is also likely that other people will now be prepared to come to your rescue.
- LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)**
The only way to make sense of life at the moment is to realise what astrologers have always known that what people say is not necessarily the same as what they do. In fact, the two are often completely different. That could account for a someone's extravagant claims or offers.
- TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21)**
Your current planetary activity will probably put you on the spot at work, or even create a little bother over plans which you thought had been signed and sealed. You may have no choice but to complete what has been started and fulfil all the promises you've made.
- SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)**
A fantastic relationship between Venus and Jupiter could put the final seal on a new friendship or romantic connection. What is needed now is a determination to succeed, to actually make things work. You may need to call on one of your practical friends for help in the meantime right now.
- GEMINI (May 22 - June 21)**
Mercury, the planet responsible for your thoughts and plans, appears to be hiding its more logical qualities behind a curious refusal to behave. That could be one reason why partners may now be reluctant to reach agreement or meet your standards and requirements.
- SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 22)**
Once in a while challenging aspects act in your favour. In other words, difficult events are sent to help you. You may allow yourself to show your feelings, even if it means shedding a tear or two, especially if it's for happiness. Partners should respect your openness.
- CANCER (June 22 - July 23)**
For about the next forty-eight hours your financial prospects will be reaching a monthly peak. This doesn't mean that everything will be easy, but that this is nevertheless an auspicious moment to settle matters such as domestic purchases or property deals.
- CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)**
You are obliged to honour all past commitments or obligations at the moment, even if you only have a dim recollection of why they were made in the first place. Some sort of personal sacrifice may be necessary, but what you give up now will be repaid many times over in the future.
- LEO (July 24 - Aug 23)**
This promises to be a memorable phase for all intensely personal matters. You will probably do yourself a power of good by realising that abandoning certain commitments doesn't mean that you're reckless or irresponsible. Instead, it indicates that you've got a better idea of your own needs.
- AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)**
You've got some very mature decisions to make very soon. Hopefully you will stand aside over the next couple of weeks and allow associates to play more of a dominant role. If you attempt to stand in their way for no good reason, you may come off worst.
- VIRO (Aug 24 - Sep 23)**
Recent surprise developments in home and family arrangements have exposed only the tip of a very deep iceberg. During the last few weeks you have probably imagined that all was going to continue as before, but your hope now must be that it will be better.
- PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)**
A very peculiar planetary set-up is happening the stakes in every professional and worldly ambition. This is no time to take refuge behind your traditional passivity. You must know exactly what you are doing, and what you are about, especially if you're expecting other people to believe in you.

JUMBLED WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given clue.

___ is supreme and unconditional; ___ is nice but limited. - Duke Ellington (4,_,4)

DGOEE EPRULL
 DLVIO ISVYKV

Answer: Love is supreme and unconditional; like is nice but limited. SOLUTION: GEODE, DOLLY, PUTLERS, SKIVVY

SUDOKU 4153

Difficulty Level 2s
Instructions
To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

Difficulty Level
1s = Very easy; 2s = Easy; 3s = Medium; 4s = Hard; 5s = Very Hard; 6s = Genius



SOLUTION SUDOKU 4152

25 SPORT

The only thing I can think of is that rather than the players welfare n feelings, financial reasons were given more importance. Otherwise there was no other reason for the All England Open2020 to go on last week."
SAINA NEHWAL

'Scrapping Games now would be foolish if world pulls through in 2 months'

MIHIR VASAVDA
 NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

THE INTERNATIONAL Olympic Committee (IOC) 'will not react to media or political pressure' and will rather 'wait and see how the global health situation evolves' before taking any decision in relation to the Tokyo Olympics, according to an executive credited for transforming the Olympic movement into a multi-billion-dollar enterprise.

On Wednesday, the clamour to reschedule the Games in the wake of the Coronavirus outbreak grew after the IOC's athletes commission member Hayley Wickenheiser launched the most vocal attack so far, calling the decision to go ahead as scheduled 'insensitive and irresponsible'.

There have been voices of dissent among the athletes as well, including Indian badminton player Parupalli Kashyap, who wrote on Twitter: "IOC is encouraging us to continue training... and how? Where? Ur joking right".

However, Michael Payne, who was IOC's first marketing and broadcast rights director



Payne was IOC's first marketing and broadcast rights director.

and stayed in that role for two decades, said the Olympics have a history of overcoming crisis and 'risk management is a key part of the planning for the Games for both, the IOC and the Organising Committee.'

"There have been numerous different crises over the years that have always made

You've learnt over the years not to be rushed into a decision just because of a sort of moment and it looks like that only because it may look different tomorrow."

MICHAEL PAYNE

the final countdown very challenging. Even if you take the most recent Games (winter), two years ago in PyeongChang... three months before those Games, the political situation on the Korean Peninsula was very, very uncertain with President (Donald) Trump and Kim Jong-un talking of a nuclear war," Payne told *The Indian Express* over phone from Costa Brava, where he is in quarantine amid a growing number of cases in Spain. "They went on to be a very, very successful Winter Games."

He added: "As evidenced from PyeongChang, we don't suddenly react to whatever media or political pressure there is of the day. In this case, the Games are four months

away... How foolish would you look if you would have suddenly called off the Games today and in two-and-a-half months' time, the world is pulling through it."

In the aftermath of the virus outbreak, world sport has virtually come to a grinding halt, with extreme quarantine measures and travel restrictions. After the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared Coronavirus a pandemic, there has been speculation over the fate of the Tokyo Olympics, scheduled to begin on July 24.

No cancellation talks

However, Thomas Bach, the Olympic body's president said that the executive board, which recently met, did not even mention the words 'postponement' or 'cancellation'. It is a line taken by the organisers in Tokyo as well. On Tuesday, the IOC added: "With more than four months to go before the Games there is no need for any drastic decisions at this stage, and any speculation at this moment would be counterproductive."

However, the pressure has been growing on the IOC after UEFA, earlier this week, post-

poned the European Championships by a year. "UEFA only postponed the European football championships yesterday and those are two months away," Payne, 61, said. "So you've learnt over the years not to be rushed into a decision just because of a sort of moment and it looks like that only because it may look different tomorrow. And that is not in any way to belittle the crisis. I'm in quarantine myself."

Payne joined the IOC in 1983 and ran its marketing department for more than 20 years. Back then, he says, the Olympics faced an existential crisis after the US boycotted the Moscow Games and the Soviets pulling out of Los Angeles 1984. The period brought the Olympic movement on the verge of bankruptcy.

"There was no mechanism to finance the Olympics. And if you could, by chance, persuade somebody to stage the Games, then four months out, one or other of these super-power leaders would scream boycott and half the countries wouldn't turn up," Payne, who went on to head Formula One's marketing division, said. "Most of the commentators at the time were writing the Olympic

movement's obituary. Thankfully, right now we are not dealing with an existential challenge - it's not in any way to dismiss the gravity of the current crisis."

Billions are now splurged on the Olympics in the form of television rights and sponsorships and that money is riding on cancellation or postponement of the Tokyo Games. Payne, who brokered IOC's deals with Chinese giant Alibaba, China Mengniu Dairy and Coca-Cola, insists TV companies do not have a say in 'sporting decisions'. He, however, said the sponsors may have logistical concerns with the event just 19 weeks away.

The Olympic brand, though, will not be impacted, he feels. "When the world comes through this, the (Japan) Prime Minister had a very clearly in a statement said Japan wanted to stage a perfect Olympic Games to celebrate the world winning the war against this virus. And in that sense, that sort of celebration of humanity and coming together would make the Olympic brand even stronger," Payne said. "The only question is do you need to ensure that the world can come together and celebrate."

Nets legend Durant and 3 teammates test positive

SOPAN DEB
 MIAMI, MARCH 18

KEVIN DURANT, one of the biggest stars in the N.B.A., is one of four Nets players who tested positive for the coronavirus, he told *The Athletic* on Tuesday. "Everyone be careful, take care of yourself and quarantine," said Durant, who described himself as feeling fine. "We're going to get through this."

At least seven N.B.A. players have tested positive for the virus. On Tuesday, the Nets announced that four of their players had tested positive, though they did not name the athletes. The team said only one of the four had shown symptoms. "All players and members of the Nets travel party are being asked to remain isolated, closely monitor their health and maintain constant communication with team medical staff," the team said, adding that it was notifying anyone known to have had contact with the players, including N.B.A. opponents.

It is not clear how many Nets employees have been tested for the virus, or how they were able to procure those tests, given that health officials all over the country have struggled to find tests for the general public and themselves.

In addition, the guidelines issued by the New York City Department of Health state that it "strongly recommends against testing persons with mild illness who can be safely managed at home, unless a diagnosis may impact patient management."

According to the Nets statement, three of the four players did not show symptoms of the disease. A spokesman for the Nets declined to provide specifics about how the team got the tests. This issue of unequal access to testing arose last week, after reports that 58 members of the Jazz franchise were also tested within hours of Gobert's positive test.

Mike Bass, a spokesman for the N.B.A., suggested that players might be a priority for testing because of their heavy travel and contact with large groups across cities. "Public health authorities and team doctors have been concerned that, given NBA players' direct contact with each other and close interactions with the general public, in addition to their frequent travel, they could accelerate the spread of the virus," he said in a statement.

"Following two players testing positive last week, others were tested and five additional players tested positive. Hopefully, by these players choosing to make their test results public, they have drawn attention to the critical need for young people to follow C.D.C. recommendations in order to protect others, particularly those with underlying health conditions and the elderly."

Last week, Donovan Mitchell and Rudy Gobert of the Utah Jazz were revealed to have tested positive for the coronavirus, as was Christian Wood of the Detroit Pistons. The Nets last played the Pistons and the Jazz on January 14, but it would be difficult, if not impossible, to pinpoint how players have become infected because of how frequently the 30 teams in the league play. **NYT**



Kevin Durant has been sidelined since June 10 last year after he tore his Achilles tendon. File

SHAHID JUDGE
 MUMBAI, MARCH

TEJASWIN SHANKAR queues up in front of the 'performance table' - the special place in the Kansas State University cafeteria dedicated to organising food for the college's athletes. The 21-year-old has to follow procedure, collect his box of food and head home immediately—there is no avenue for him to have his lunch or dinner on campus. The college, after all, is in lockdown. And the high jumper has no choice but to take trips to the performance table for meals. He had tried getting food elsewhere, but the protein-rich milk and eggs, staple to his diet, have been sold out at his local grocers since the coronavirus scare hit the United States.

At the St John's University in New York, Aditya Vashist is allowed to make a few trips to the sports centre of his college to collect tennis balls or other training equipment whenever required, but not train on campus. The college is shut and in the process of getting sanitised. So every day, the 20-year-old from Bikaner makes his way to the public courts near his apartment along with his teammate Udayan Bhakar. On an ordinary day, the 20 courts are crowded to the point that there may just be four or five vacant. Now, amid the pandemic scare, there are at least 15 courts available for use.

Further south, at the Northern Arizona University, 19-year-old freshman Sanjana Ramesh was looking forward to US college sports' showcase event—the men's and women's basketball conference finals. But the season got cancelled.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) last week decided to cancel the season as a precaution to the coronavirus pandemic, causing the greatest disruption to an NCAA season in history. This, however, was a necessary step. "This decision is based on the evolving Covid-19 public health threat, our ability to ensure the events do not contribute to the spread of the pandemic, and the impracticality of hosting such events at any time during this academic year given ongoing decisions by other entities," said an NCAA statement.

Along with the sporting season, colleges themselves have decided to shut down and conduct classes online. It's a decision that has left Shankar, Vashist and Ramesh alone, fending for themselves.



For long, the NCAA has been an assembly line that provides athletes with training, facilities, and a sense of competition under the near cut-throat rivalry that exists at the college level. It is tools like these that have attracted the Indian trio, and several others, to pursue their sports grooming on American soil.

"There have been many players from India who have gone through the US college system and made good careers because of it," says Vashist. "In one place you get to train under coaches, work on your fitness, and also get a glimpse of what lies ahead. How you have to stay fit, what all must you do to get better, and just how to be more professional in what you do."

Participation at the NCAA level also puts an athlete in front of an array of scouts (for team sports like basketball) and sponsors (Nike, Adidas, et al), who may sign up the player once they graduate. For basketballers, especially if you're an international student, this is the most prominent route to enter the NBA.

With the season getting cancelled, the future of several budding athletes has been thrown in disarray. "It is a loss in terms of development. I still get to train but missing opportunities like our post-season and watching NCAA tournament affects development as well," says Ramesh. "I am still lucky to be training here but it's hard because tournaments and training camps which scouts watch are cancelled. This affects international players because college coaches and scouts have never seen them



LO NELY PLANET: High jumper Tejaswin Shankar trains at the Kansas State University; bottom: Aditya Vashist is bereft of hitting partners at St John's University. File



before while they were playing at the school-level."



College campuses all over the United States have been closed as a precaution for the pandemic. The seven-day spring break has been extended by a week, following which, classes will resume online. It's a situation that has encouraged students to leave campus and go home, wherever in the world it may be.

This solution - send students home and conduct classes online - works for those in the college for academic pursuits. For those on sports scholarships, it's a different problem. "If I try to go back to India, there is a possibility that I may contract the virus during the journey," says Shankar, the national high jump record holder. "Even if that doesn't happen, I'll have to go into quarantine when I reach India, so that means I cannot train for two weeks."

In Vashist's case, access to tennis courts in the US is much easier than in India. Near his apartment in New York are public tennis courts

that have been near-deserted ever since the coronavirus scare hit the US. India's highest ranked player in the NCAA circuit - now placed 65, though he had gone up to 40 - goes to the courts every day with his teammate, armed with an 'outline' his coach gave him once the NCAA season was declared cancelled.

"The warm-up is for 30 minutes, which includes a lot of running and sprints. Then we get on court and practise our shots. Forehands down the line, inside out, cross court, then the same for the backhand side, then the serve. Once that's done, we play sets," he explains.

"In a way, it's kind of a different approach for us because now we get to spend more time on court. During college, because of assignments and homework, we'd probably spend about two and a half hours in training per session. Now we're on court for four, five hours. The only disadvantage is that the coach cannot be here to help. But he keeps in touch over the phone."

Shankar, however, is yet to design a concrete plan on how to maintain fitness and match sharpness away from the university



If I try to go back to India, there is a possibility that I may contract the virus during the journey. Even if that doesn't happen, I'll have to go into quarantine when I reach India, so that means I cannot train for two weeks."

TEJASWIN SHANKAR
 NATIONAL HIGH JUMP RECORD HOLDER

campus. In fact, the city of Manhattan in Kansas, where his university is situated, is near-empty. "Sunaan sa jagah ho gaya. College campus now has a ghost town kind of feel to it," he says.

"Everybody here had started to panic when the outbreak happened. When the season was cancelled, I thought I'd just go to the supermarket to get some milk and eggs, but everything was sold out. In the panic, people bought out all the toilet paper, frozen and canned foods, milk and all. And there's no scope of a new stock coming soon. I've heard stories of people stealing stuff from the janitor's supply closet as well."

Instead, he's been forced to spend most of his time in his apartment, watching all he can on Netflix and playing *Call of Duty* with his roommate.



As Vashist rose through the NCAA rankings, he got a call-up to be a hitting partner for a player at the US Open last year. The Indian

stands at a height of 5-foot-8, not among the taller players on the college circuit. "Lots of them are over six-feet and have big servers, so that was a struggle for me when I started here," he says.

It just so happened that at the US Open, he got the chance to be the hitting partner for World No 13 Diego Schwartzman, who is an inch shorter than Vashist. "He told me how he deals with the big servers, on the need to work on the agility to make the returns, on anticipating and building up speed," Vashist says. "So those are the things I had worked on and was looking to test myself this time. That won't happen for now."

Similarly, Shankar was gearing up to compete at an NCAA meet in New Mexico when he got news of the season being cancelled. "They had a very nice track there and I was looking to target a height of 2.3 metres-plus (which would have been a national record)," he laments. "Ajeeb feeling haan. We worked the entire year towards this, but now it won't be happening."

Ramesh, meanwhile, still in her first year at college, was looking to experience her first glimpse of the level at which athletes compete in the March Madness.

All three have been thrown off course because of the season being cancelled. And all chances of getting back to competing at meets remains doubtful, for this year at least. It has caused a stir in the NCAA circuit, as tournaments have been called off shortly before the start of a match - just as it happened when players from the University of Michigan and Rutgers University were ushered off court just before their match could start.

For those players in their final year of college, as Shankar puts it, there is no closure to a college career dedicated to shaping their individual sporting capacities. For the Indian trio though, there is at least a year left (three more for Ramesh) in their college careers to improve before they think of turning professional. But in this day and age where only the fittest survive, a year lost keeps them that much further from being ready for the pro challenge.

INPUTS FROM SHIVANI NAIK AND ANDREW AMSAN

Not an open and shut case

Roland Garros' postponement has triggered widespread criticism from other Grand Slam tournaments and players

AFP/REUTERS
LONDON, MARCH 18

THE GLOBAL tennis calendar has been thrown into further chaos after a decision by French Open organisers to postpone the Grand Slam, with players and rival tournaments critical of the apparently unilateral move. The event at Roland Garros, traditionally the second major of the season, was on Tuesday moved from a May 24 start date to September 20.

Organisers said strict confinement measures imposed by the French government to tackle COVID-19 had made it impossible to continue with preparations. FFT (French tennis federation) president Bernard Giudicelli said: "We have made a difficult yet brave decision in this unprecedented situation, which has evolved greatly since last weekend."

But the new dates mean the tournament would start just one week after the US Open, if that event remained in its original slot.

The rescheduled French Open would also clash with the start of the Asian swing and the Laver Cup team competition, due to take place in Boston from September 25 to 27.

The men's ATP tour and the women's WTA tour are both currently suspended due to the coronavirus pandemic. British doubles player Jamie Murray queried the apparent lack of coordination at the top of the game. "Strong Move by French Open/FFT to move to end of September," he tweeted.

'Excusez Moi?'

It also caught WTA chief Steve Simon by surprise, as well as former US and Australian Open champion Naomi Osaka. "Excusez moi???" tweeted Osaka, while Romania's Sorana Cirstea took issue with the method of communication. "What??? Again finding out through twitter..." she wrote.

The revised dates will leave players contesting a clay-court Grand Slam in the middle of the traditional hard-court season, with limited opportunities to adjust to the slower surface. Roland Garros will also now clash with a number of tournaments, including the Laver Cup, where Europe's top players take on a World team. Roger Federer has already committed to the event and Rafael Nadal — the 12-time French Open champion — is another key figure at the tournament.

"This announcement came as a surprise to us and our partners — Tennis Australia, the USTA (US Tennis Association) and the ATP," said Laver Cup organisers.

"It raises many questions and we are assessing the situation. At this time, we want our fans, sponsors, broadcasters, staff, volunteers, players and the great city of Boston to know that we intend to hold Laver Cup 2020 as currently scheduled."

Halep donating equipment

Wimbledon champion and world number two Simona Halep said she was donating money to pay for medical equipment in Romania as the country deals with the coronavirus pandemic. In a message posted on her Facebook page, the 28-year-old said she hoped to help hospitals in Bucharest and Constanta and encouraged people to follow self-isolation guidelines. "Unfortunately, we are going through a very difficult period that we could hardly have imagined a few months ago," she said.

"On the other hand, it is the perfect opportunity to show that we know how to be supportive and responsible with our lives and those around us. While we are at home, doctors and medical personnel make huge efforts to treat and save each life by exposing themselves for the general good. Let us strictly follow the instructions from the authorities and thus contribute to solving this problem of nature that is dramatically affecting our lives."



The French Open will begin six days after the US Open final, leaving players to contest the clay court Grand Slam in the middle of the hardcourt season. Reuters

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

What the French Open rejig means for players

SHAHID JUDGE
MUMBAI, MARCH 18

THE FÉDÉRATION Française de Tennis made the unexpected decision of postponing this year's French Open from its usual spot, in at the end of May to a week after the US Open. It's a move that has not gone down well with the players who have been reeling because of an already altered calendar year. *The Indian Express* looks at why this move has left the players concerned.

Why has the French Open been pushed back to September?

The ATP and WTA tours have been suspended for a period of six weeks because of the outbreak of the coronavirus. The World Health Organisation (WHO) recently declared Europe as the new epicentre of the pandemic, putting the clay season, which starts in April and ends with the French Open on June 7, in doubt. As a result, the organisers at Roland Garros took the decision to shift the event to September.

Why are the players upset at the change?

The proximity of the US Open to the new dates of the French Open has been the main concern. The main draw of the French Open

will start on September 20, which is just a week after the US Open men's final that will take place on September 13. In the week between the two majors is the qualification round for the French Open and also Group 1 and 2 Davis Cup ties.

This rescheduling of one of the four majors of the year causes disruption to the players' individual schedules, which have already been affected by the suspension of the tour due to the coronavirus outbreak.

One of the tournaments clashing with the new dates is the Laver Cup, of which 12-time French Open Rafael Nadal has been a keen participant, and a Premier 5-WTA event in Wuhan. Furthermore, the players were allegedly not informed about the decision to shift the elite event until after the change was made.

"These are really rough times, unprecedented times, and this just goes against the whole idea of the tour working together. We have a calendar. We have discussions and negotiations between the Grand Slams and the ATP. We are always trying to make it work for everybody, and they just haven't consulted the ATP, the players or the other tournaments. It's just a very selfish move. They are basically doing a power play right now, and it's quite arrogant," Canadian player Vasek Pospisil, who is a part of the Players'

Council told *The New York Times*.

Why does the close proximity to the US Open matter?

Players do not get much time to physically recover for the French Open, especially those who reach the latter stages of the US Open. Also, since Roland Garros will now be scheduled in the middle of the hard court season, players will not have the option of playing in clay court events to warm-up for the major.

Why does the French Open need a clay court season build up?

Usually, the clay court season lasts for two months, ending with the French Open. The surface plays much different from the hard and grass courts, in that the ball drops in pace when it hits the surface and bounces higher, making for longer rallies.

What players, however, try to get used to during the clay court swing is sliding on court. It is very difficult to come to an immediate stop on a clay court, so players slide to a halt. They rush to the ball, stop running a few meters short and play their stroke on the slide. This is different to the hard court where players have to run to the exact spot to meet a ball since sliding is not easy on hard courts.



We have discussions and negotiations between the Grand Slams and the ATP. We are always trying to make it work for everybody, and they just haven't consulted the ATP, the players or the other tournaments. It's just a very selfish move. They are basically doing a power play right now, and it's quite arrogant.

VASEK POSPISIL,
ON THE FRENCH OPEN RESCHEDULING

Wimbledon on schedule despite virus fears

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
LONDON, MARCH 18

WIMBLEDON ORGANISERS are still planning to play the Grand Slam this year, despite the coronavirus chaos that led the French Open to be pushed back until September. Wimbledon is scheduled to run from June 29 to July 12, but All England Club chiefs are aware the sporting schedule has been decimated by the deadly pandemic.

French Open bosses on Tuesday revealed the clay-court event will move from its scheduled spring slot to September. The year's second Grand Slam was due to begin on May 24, but will now run from September 20 to October 4. A roof has been installed over Roland Garros' centre court, Philippe Chatrier, with floodlights on the three other main courts, enabling play to go on later.

Wimbledon remain hopeful that play at the grass-court tournament will be able to go ahead if the spread of the virus is slowed. But Richard Lewis, chief executive of the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club, insisted they would put public safety first.

"At the heart of our decision-making is our commitment to the health and safety of our members, staff, and the public, and we are grateful to the government and public health authorities for their advice and support," Lewis said. "While we continue to plan for The Championships at this time, it remains a continuously evolving situation and we will act responsibly, in the best interests of wider society." "We thank our members, staff, players, partners, contractors and the public for their patience and trust as we continue to navigate this unprecedented global challenge."

Laver Cup on schedule

Laver Cup organisers say the exhibition event will go ahead in September as planned despite the French Open moving to the same dates as the implications of the French Tennis Federation (FFT)'s shock gambit began to reverberate on Wednesday. In a move that stunned the tennis world, French Open organisers on Tuesday postponed the clay-court Grand Slam at Roland Garros from May until late September because of the coronavirus pandemic. The switch has placed the tournament a week after the US Open final and results in clashes with ATP tournaments in Metz, St. Petersburg, Chengdu, Sofia and Zhuhai as well as WTA events in Guangzhou, Seoul, Tokyo and Wuhan.

US Open could get delayed

THE US Tennis Association acknowledged Tuesday that developments in the coronavirus pandemic could dictate moving the US Open, now scheduled to start in August.

But the American federation said it wouldn't determine any new date for its flagship Grand Slam without consulting the other major championship organizers, the International Tennis Federation and the ATP and WTA tours.

"We recognize that such a decision should not be made unilaterally," the USTA said in a statement — a veiled jab at the French Tennis Federation. The chosen dates, one week after the current scheduled conclusion of the US Open, caught the ATP and WTA by surprise. They conflict with the Laver Cup in Boston, where Europe's top players are scheduled to take on a World team.

Roger Federer has already committed to the event. "The USTA is continuing to plan for the 2020 US Open and is not at this time implementing any changes to the schedule," the USTA said.

US PGA Championship called off amid Covid-19 scare

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
LOS ANGELES, MARCH 18

THE US PGA Championship, scheduled for May 14-17 at Harding Park in San Francisco, has been postponed, the second 2020 Major golf championship to be derailed by the coronavirus pandemic. The PGA of America said on Tuesday they hoped to reschedule the event at Harding Park later in the year.

The news came after Augusta National Golf Club announced that the Masters would not be held April 9-12.

The decision by the PGA of America to postpone the PGA Championship comes as millions of San Francisco residents have been ordered to stay home in a bid to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

Six counties in the San Francisco Bay Area and the city of Berkeley were part of a lockdown effort after data showed 258 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with four deaths as of Monday.

"Throughout our evaluation process, we have been committed to following the guidance of public health authorities and given the coronavirus shelter-in-place order in effect in San Francisco, postponement is the best decision for all involved," said PGA of America chief executive Seth Waugh. "This is a reflection of a thoughtful process." Waugh added.

"We are and have been working in concert with Commissioner Jay Monahan and

our partners and friends at the PGA Tour to find an alternative date that works for all. We are all very hopeful for a great outcome. "We are also in dialogue with Mayor (London) Breed and her team at the City of San Francisco and look forward to hopefully bringing the 2020 PGA Championship to TPC Harding Park at a date this summer when it is once again safe and responsible to do so." The postponement means a delay for Brooks Koepka's bid for a three-peat. The American lifted the Wanamaker Trophy in 2018 and again last year. Only one man has won three consecutive PGAs, when Walter Hagen captured four straight in a match-play format from 1924-27.

Shortly after the PGA Championship was postponed, the US PGA Tour announced it was extending its own tournament moratorium.

The US tour had announced on March 12 it was cancelling or postponing four weeks' worth of events on all six of its tours through April 5 — the last Sunday before the Masters. Now it will be on hiatus at least up to the May 10.

"With the most recent recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control, the World Health Organisation and the Office of the President of the United States, the PGA Tour will now cancel four additional events: RBC Heritage (April 13-19); Zurich Classic of New Orleans (April 20-26); Wells Fargo Championship (April 27-May 3); and AT&T Byron Nelson (May 4-10)," the tour said.



The postponement means a delay in Brooks Koepka's bid for a three-peat.

'Meaningful conclusion'

The US Golf Association on Tuesday announced cancellation of its first two amateur championships of 2020, the US Women's Amateur Four-Ball and the US Amateur Four-Ball.

In addition, the USGA has cancelled the first stage of qualifying for the US Open and qualifying for the US Women's Open. Both of those Major championships remain scheduled for June.

The US Women's Open is set to be held at Champions Golf Club in Houston June 4-7 and the US Open, the third men's Major on the calendar, is set for June 18-

21 at Winged Foot.

The US PGA Tour said it would work with its own tournament organisers as well as other governing bodies to sort out a schedule for 2020 once play resumes.

"As we receive more clarity in the coming weeks, the tour will be working with our tournament organisations and title sponsors, in collaboration with golf's governing bodies, to build a PGA tour schedule for 2020 that ensures the health and safety for all associated with our sport and a meaningful conclusion to the season," the PGA Tour said.

Europe's Harrington optimistic

Ryder Cup will go ahead despite virus. European captain Padraig Harrington expects the Ryder Cup to go ahead in September despite the sporting chaos caused by the coronavirus.

The European Tour and PGA Tour has suspended tournaments until May. But Harrington believes the eagerly anticipated clash between Europe and the United States remains on schedule to take place in Wisconsin from September 25-27. "September is a long way off so there's no change to the situation at all at this stage," the three-time Major winner said.

"I know there's been some rumours and they had to put out a statement to say there's been no change, but there's definitely no change." It has been reported that the European Tour will hold a board meeting next week, with a Ryder Cup steering committee due to talk a week later.

Chelsea open up hotel to healthcare staff

London: Chelsea will provide free accommodation to staff of Britain's National Health Service in a hotel at the club's Stamford Bridge stadium during the coronavirus pandemic. The Premier League club's owner, Roman Abramovich, will fund the service that will allow medical professionals in London a chance to rest if they are unable to travel home or face long commutes.

The scheme will be put in place for two months, but could be extended if needed. There have been 1,950 confirmed cases of coronavirus and 71 deaths in Britain.

"It was decided the best way Chelsea can assist the NHS is to provide accommodation for NHS staff. Mr Abramovich will be covering the costs of providing the accommodation," Chelsea said in a statement. "Many of the medical staff will be working long shifts and may not be able to travel home or would otherwise have to make long commutes. Local accommodation helps maintain the health and well-being of these crucial personnel at this critical time."

Chelsea do not know when they will next return to the pitch, with the Premier League suspended until at least April 4, although that date is set to be pushed back at a meeting of Premier League clubs on Thursday.

But in the absence of football, the Blues are the latest club to make an offer of community support at a time of crisis.



The scheme will be put in place for two months, but could be extended if needed.

Liverpool players contributed to a \$48,000 donation from the club to help keep local foodbanks running. Aston Villa and Brighton were among the clubs to donate food prepared for last weekend's matches to homeless charities. Fourth-tier club Stevenage are preparing a community care-line that will help isolated local residents over 70 with day-to-day needs such as delivery of food and prescriptions. AFP