

# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

CHENNAI | FRIDAY 20 | MARCH 2020

## WEATHER

**Max:** 35°C  
**Min:** 26°C  
**Rainfall:** Nil

**Forecast:** Hazy sunshine; air quality will be unhealthy for sensitive groups

## ASTROGUIDE

**Vikari:** Panguni 7  
**Tithi:** Ekadashi/ Dwadashi  
**Star:** Thiruvonam  
**Rahukalam:** 10.30 am to 12 noon  
**Yamagandam:** 3 pm to 4.30 pm

**PRAYERS**  
**Fajar:** 5.06 am  
**Jumma:** 12.23 pm  
**Asar:** 3.38 pm  
**Maghrib:** 6.20 pm  
**Isha:** 7.30 pm

**SUNSET TODAY 6.20 PM**  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.13 AM**  
**MOONRISE TODAY 3.34 AM**  
**MOONSET TOMORROW 3.17 PM**

## COUNTER POINT



We didn't hold MLAs hostage... they are under self-imposed quarantine!

## Market report

**GOLD**  
24 ct (1 gm): ₹4,060.00  
22 ct (1 gm): ₹3,879.00

**SILVER**  
Bar (1 Kg): ₹39,990.00

**INDICES**  
Sensex 28,288.23 pts  
Nifty 8,263.46 pts

**EXCHANGE**  
US\$: ₹75.10 Euro: ₹81.10



**WORLD | 11**  
**Game of Thrones star Indira Varma tests positive**



**SPORT | 15**  
**Call on IPL after April 15, says Riju**

**TABLOID**  
**Work in the time of corona**



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# 'Janata curfew' on Sunday

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 19

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday urged all citizens to observe a "Janata Curfew" on Sunday, March 22, between 7 am to 9 pm, as part of a social distancing step to prevent the spread of coronavirus in India. The PM also urged people to stay indoors as far as possible, work from home and not to indulge in the panic buying or hoarding of food items or other items, saying all essential items will be made available.

Incidentally, soon after it was announced Wednesday that the PM would address the nation on Thursday at 8 pm, people rushed to the markets to buy food and other items in panic, assuming that he will announce a complete lockdown in the country, forcing the Centre to issue an official denial on Thursday afternoon. A lot of regular supplies vanished from the markets as well as online stores.

"There would not be any shortage of essential items like food, milk, medicines, etc," Mr Modi said in his address, while urging people to not resort to panic buying. He requested citi-

## India reports fourth death

India reported its fourth coronavirus death on Thursday while the total COVID-19 cases rose to 173

There were more than 20 fresh cases in last 24 hours with Chhattisgarh and Chandigarh reporting their first Covid-19 patients on early Thursday



Four more persons have tested positive for the coronavirus affliction

**Even World War I and II did not affect as many countries as coronavirus has done. — PM Modi**

14 major temples to be closed for darshan, puja to go on

PAGE 2



Tirupati Balaji temple to be shut for devotees; Malls, theatres closed in AP

Indian tested positive in Iran died, says ministry of external affairs

PAGE 7

## Good and bad news on treating Covid-19

R. MOHAN | DC  
CHENNAI, MARCH 19

There is good news and bad news on treatment of the novel coronavirus - anti-retroviral drugs like Kaletra that had held promise as a potential treatment for the coronavirus did not work in one of the first major studies

in seriously ill patients, researchers from China reported in The New England Journal of Medicine. "No benefit was observed," the researchers wrote.

Indian doctors are, however, continuing with the anti-retroviral combo of HIV drugs Lopinavir and Ritonavir as the first line of treatment

in India as there may have been encouraging results after the Drug Controller of India had given the green signal. Some doctors have preferred using the anti-TB drug Tamiflu (Oseltamivir), also an antiviral, as their medicine of choice in this battle against Covid-19.

Turn to P2

## ALL LEGAL ROUTES CLOSED

# Nirbhaya convicts set to hang at 5.30 am

New Delhi, March 19: All legal routes to escape the noose closed Thursday for the four men convicted in the Nirbhaya gangrape case who were then just hours away from being hanged, seven years-three months after brutalising a young woman in a Delhi bus with a barbarity that shook the nation.

Mukesh Singh (32), Pawan Gupta (25), Vinay Sharma (26) and Akshay Kumar Singh (31), held guilty for

gangraping a 23-year-old physiotherapy intern in Delhi on the night of December 16, 2012 so savagely that she died of her injuries a fortnight later, would have been executed in Tihar Jail at 5.30 am on Friday. Their death warrants have been deferred by a court thrice on the grounds that they had not exhausted all their legal remedies and that the mercy petition of one or the other was before the president. — PTI

# SC directs floor test in MP by 5 pm today

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC  
BHOPAL, MARCH 19

Delivering a jolt to the 15-month-old Kamal Nath government, the Supreme Court on Thursday directed it to face a floor test by 5 pm on Friday and left it to the 16 rebel Congress MLAs, lodged in a resort in Bengaluru, to take a call on participating in the trust

vote. Delivering its verdict on the vexed issue, a division bench comprising Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and Hemant Gupta asked the Madhya Pradesh Assembly to reconvene for the trust vote and hold it by 5 pm on Friday. The Assembly had been adjourned on March 16 for 10 days "due to the coronavirus outbreak". — P6

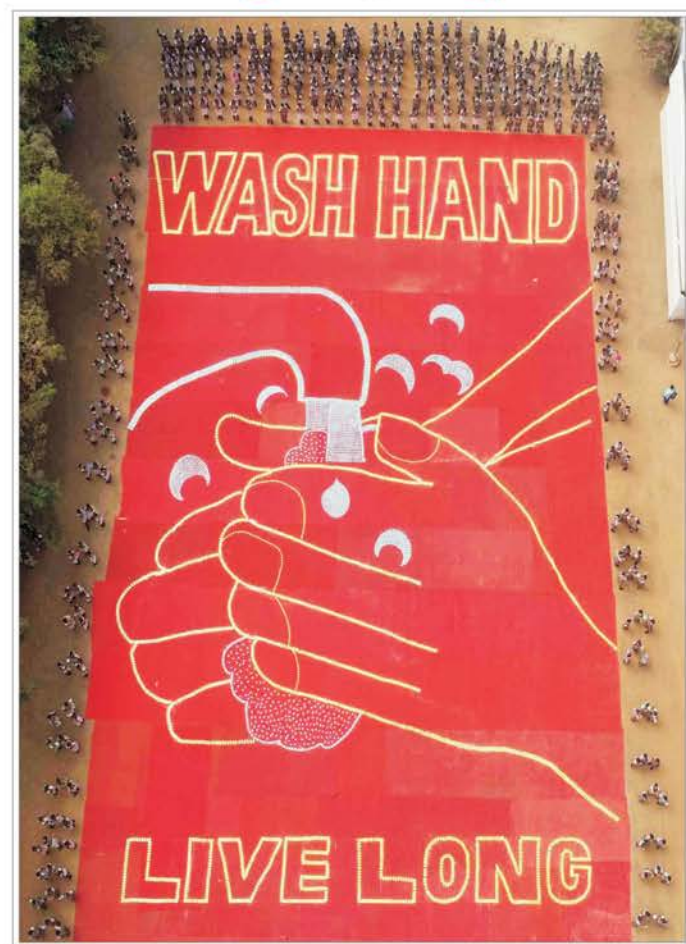
## Wash hands with Soap Live 100 Years

### Why soap is the best bet to beat corona



- ♦ Most people touch their faces once every 2-5 minutes
- ♦ Once the virus is on your hands, you are at high risk unless you can wash the active virus off
- ♦ Washing it off with just water is not enough as the virus is sticky and may not budge
- ♦ Soapy water is totally different. Soap contains fat-like substances known as amphiphiles, some structurally very similar to the lipids in the virus outer membrane
- ♦ The soap molecules "compete" with the lipids in the virus' outer layer, effectively "dissolving" the glue that holds the virus together
- ♦ The soap also outcompetes the interactions between the virus and the skin surface
- ♦ Soon the viruses get detached and fall apart on the combined action of soap and water
- ♦ Skin is quite rough and wrinkly, which is why you do need a fair amount of rubbing and soaking to ensure soap reaches very nook and cranny on the skin surface that could be hiding active viruses

Issued in Public Interest



Our students made a formation, with 25,000 soaps, of a hand wash image with the statement 'WASH HAND, LIVE LONG'

**EVERWIN GROUP OF SCHOOLS**  
ISO 9001 : 2015 Certified Institutions

♦ KOLATHUR ♦ MADURAVOYAL  
♦ MATHUR ♦ PERAMBUR



Rub hands palms to palms



Rub the back of each hand with fingers interlaced



Rub palms together with fingers interlaced



Rub with back of fingers to the opposing palms



Rub each thumb clasped in opposite hands



Rub the tips of fingers



Rub each wrist with different hands



Dry thoroughly your hands



WE SAID IT LONG BACK : Our Hand Wash Awareness Event on 14.10.2008

Let's adhere strictly to the directives by the Union and State Governments and save ourselves from COVID-19

SHORT STORIES

27 air passengers in isolation ward

R. VALAYAPATHY | DC TIRUCHY, MARCH 19

At least 27 air passengers who arrived here from Dubai, Singapore and Sharjah were quarantined and moved to an isolated make shift ward set up in the unused market complex of the agriculture marketing department at suburb Kallikkudi near here on Wednesday night, as part of the preventive steps against the spread of the new coronavirus. Official sources said these 27 air passengers were part of 324 passengers who came by two flights from Sharjah and Singapore and some of them had boarded the flights of Philippines, Afghanistan and Malaysian Airways. After landing, the special medical team screened them with thermal scanners and found 27 had cold and fever symptoms. All of them were quarantined and moved to the isolated ward at Kallikkudi, where they were put on round-the-clock observance, the sources added. The medical team collected blood samples from them and sent the same for clinical analysis. Already, 12 persons including few college students are under observation at the isolated ward at the Government medical college hospital here, the sources added. Meanwhile, the public health authorities quarantined 28 gypsies of Pazhanagudi Narikoravar colony, who returned from Kerala by train on Wednesday. They were put under round-the-clock observation and asked not to leave their homes for at least 15 days. They were also asked if they had any symptoms fever, cough and cold, and advised to immediately move to the hospital, the sources added. As many as 60 air passengers flying to Malaysia, who have been stranded here and staying at the airport premises for the last two days, following the cancellation of the Tiruchy-Malaysia flights due to the Covid-19 threat, are being taken care of by the Tiruchy district Makkal Neethi Maiyam (MNM) Katchi by accommodating them in a house near Tiruchy airport, the sources added.

Cops helpout in preventive steps

B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC OOTY, MARCH 19

The cops in the hills here have plunged into action to lend their hands for community reach in Covid-19 preventive measures. Encouraged by V.Sasi Mohan, the SP of Nilgiris, the police department here distributed hand sanitisers, face masks and other disinfectant materials to all the police stations in the Nilgiris to maintain police stations limits with good hygiene. This apart, the cops have joined hands with the respective civic body administrations across the hills to create awareness on Covid-19 and also help the civic administrations in the disease preventive measures. The cops have begun to visit the police quarters to have talks with the family members of the policemen to sensitize them on Covid-19 and to seek their support for prevention measures. The family members of the policemen are asked to adhere to the Covid-19 prevention measures being taken by the government as well as the district administration and to look after personal, family and public hygiene to fight Covid-19 threat.

# Fighting Covid with fewer testing kits

■ No coronavirus test kits made in India ■ Shortage caused by import stuck in airlines lockdown

T. SUDHEESH | DC CHENNAI, MARCH 19

Dearth of testing kits to diagnose coronavirus cases has now become a big challenge in determining Covid-19 cases in a quick manner. So far no companies in India sell the kit, and import of kits from abroad has been impeded because of the airlines being in lockdown and the travel bans imposed by the government for several nations.

Since the health ministry has a stringent testing policy ending up the country in among the lowest testing rates in the world despite the World Health Organisation urging all countries to intensify coronavirus testing to try to reduce the severity of the pandemic.

According to the data available with Tamil Nadu government, the number of samples tested in the state is just 320 so far. Out of which 232 were tested negative and three cases declared positive. The number of samples under process is 85.

The coronavirus, meanwhile, has so far caused three deaths in the country and infected at least 126 people. Many experts fear the number of infected people may be much higher, but the government has simply failed to detect them because of its limited testing facilities.

The state and Central governments have restricted coronavirus tests to only those with recent travel history to affected countries or those known to have come in contact with confirmed cases as well as with symptoms of the disease.

The number of the tests, according to the experts, is too low. Though the country has reached the stage of community transmission of the virus, the improvised testing facilities are the only way in preventing spread of Covid-19. Currently, according to the reports, only 50 to 60 private labs accredited by the National Accreditation Board for Laboratories (NABL) will be allowed to conduct the tests.

Dr V. S.Natarajan, a noted geriatric physician in the town, suggests that the government first address the issue of dearth of testing kits. The people will not go to the crowded government hospitals even though they have symptoms. So the private hospitals and laboratories where the testing facility is available should be given assent to diagnose the virus. Because testing is the only way to contain the spread of the virus', he told DC.

According to the health officials, there are two types of Coronavirus testing; first is blood-based and second swab-based. While the blood-based test is expected to cost around Rs 700, the swab-based one could cost around Rs 600.



A bhajji stall on Marina beach has no takers on Thursday.

THE SAMPLE COLLECTION

The throat or nose swab is collected from suspected persons with the sterile swab stick in Viral Transport Medium (VTM). Then it will be secured in a triple layer packing marked with the name, gender and identification number of the person.



THE PROCESS OF SENDING SAMPLES TO LABS

If it is sent to nearby lab equipped with testing facilities, it will be kept in triple layer packing. If it is sent to distant labs, it samples will be transported in thermocol box having facility of dry ice pack. When it reaches in virology labs, it will be shifted to the minus 80 deep freezer.



HOW TO CONFIRM NO CORONA

There are two types of tests to confirm the virus. First: Realtime Reverse Transcriptase PCR for testing of E-gene. It is being done with reagent kit. The RNA (Ribonucleic acid) will be separated from the sample that enters the medium. Then it will be kept in real time PCR machine for two hours. If the E-gene is not found in the sample during this process, it can be confirmed that it had not been infected by Covid-19. Only 40 such test can be done in a lab in a day.

HOW TO CONFIRM COVID 19

If the E-Gene is detected in the sample, one more test needs to be done to confirm the virus. This is the test for finding out RDRP, ORF1B genes. For this, separated RNA will be put in real time PCR for three hours. If this test finds RDRP, ORF1B genes, Covid19 can be confirmed.



HOW TO DISCHARGE A CORONA PATIENT

Once the virus confirmed, the sample will again be collected from the patient after 48 hours. The patient will be discharged only after the sample tested negative twice.



CHENNAI FIRM'S TESTING KIT AWAITS NOD

Chennai-based firm Triviron Healthcare Group, has claimed that they have manufactured Covid-19 testing kits with the support of Chinese expertise and the kits have been under validation process.

Dr GSK Velu, chairman and managing director of the group, told DC that said they would be able to sell the kit for Rs 500 it would be Rs 4,000 abroad. "We have approached the Union health ministry for the approval. We hope it will take a couple of weeks. Once we get approval, we can sell the

kits through our chain of 65 laboratories spread across the country," Dr Velu said, adding that they have the capacity to manufacture up to 750,000 tests kits per day. According to him, the kits were developed so that it can detect the virus though polymerase chain reaction (PCR) method. Kit is made within the indigenous infrastructure, though the technological know-how was adopted from China. That is reason why, he says, the price of the kit is very low compared to foreign kit.

## Good and bad news on treating Covid-19

From Page 1

There is, however, a silver lining in the hope that the experimental drug Remdesivir, a broad spectrum antiviral, could cure patients of coronavirus after a 79-year-old Italian man who had tested positive has been given the all-clear following treatment. This US drug developed in the fight against the Ebola epidemic may prove efficacious in treating those seriously ill in the current global virus pandemic too.

Doctors in India have been treating Covid-19 patients with a combination of drugs, including antiviral drugs used in the treatment of HIV. In fact, the governments of Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan were convinced that the combination of anti-retroviral drugs was working well on patients with Covid-19 symptoms. In the US, the most promising treatment has been with the Ebola drug, now considered the first choice as the remdesivir study is being undertaken with patients getting the drug at random.

A doctor in Seattle, the first epicentre of the virus outbreak in the US, said, according to a

report in the New York Times, that the next choice would be hydroxy-chloroquine, as long as the patient did not have abnormalities in heart rhythm, which would make the drug unsafe. For extremely ill patients suffering from intense inflammatory reactions, called a cytokine storm, some US hospitals are trying a drug called tocilizumab, an arthritis drug.

"Start Tamiflu when symptoms appear and stop if Covid-19 is negative," says Dr KK Aggarwal, president, Confederation of Medical Associations of Asia and Oceania and former head of IMA.

He goes on to elaborate, "It's not flu - It's a lung disease, not a stuffy nose disease. Clinically all have fever; 75% have cough; 50% weakness; 50% breathlessness with low total white count and deranged liver enzymes; runny nose only shows up in 4% cases; 20% need ICU care and 15% of them are fatal. Treatment is symptomatic though antiviral (remdesivir) and anti-HIV drugs (lopinavir/ritonavir) have shown some efficacy."



An expert conducts Covid-19 test in a lab.



Principal of Pachaiyappa's college guiding students on sanitizing their hands in Chennai on Thursday.

DHANVANTHRI HOMAM, MAHA MRITYUNJAYA HOMAM PLANNED IN SEVERAL TEMPLES IN STATE

# 14 major temples to be closed for darshan, puja to go on



J. V. SIVA PRASANNA KUMAR CHENNAI, MARCH 19

As part of a major initiative to prevent the congregation of scores of devotees in the temples 14 ancient temples spread across Tamil Nadu including three shrines in the metro, will totally restrict darshan for devotees till March 31. A decision to this effect was made by Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami who chaired a stakeholders meeting here on Thursday as part of the continuing efforts to contain the spread of the novel Coronavirus disease.

Although devotees will be barred for darshan, the temple priests will perform the daily pujas and connected rituals. The move comes close on the lines of the decision made by the Tirumala Tirupati

## KAPALI PANGUNI FEST POSTPONED

B. VIJAYALAKSHMI | DC CHENNAI, MARCH 19

Kapaleeswarar temple, closed for darshan from Friday, has postponed its Panguni festival. Speaking to DC, the temple

HR&CE official said, "The annual Panguni festival has been postponed.

The government is likely to take a call on the conduct of the festival after a couple of weeks." Daily rituals and pujas will be

performed and temple staff will work as usual, she added.

Rama, a devotee, said this is probably the first time the temple's biggest festival has been postponed.

Devasthanams authorities to close the Lord Venkateswara Swamy temple to devotees as a precaution to control the spread of the dreaded virus. On Thursday, Dhanvanthri homam was performed at the TTD Information Centre, T. Nagar, here (see pic), invoking the blessings of Lord Venkateswara to overcome the threat caused by the virus and for

universal well-being. "In accordance with the TTD's decision, the Lord's temples in T. Nagar, Vellore, Rajapalayam and Kanyakumari will be closed for one week from March 20. However, pujas and other rituals to Lord Venkateswara and Sri Padmavathi Ammavaru and other deities in the temples would be performed by the priests in ekan-

tham," says A. J. Sekar, president local advisory committee of TTD.

According to sources in Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (HR & CE) department, all the temples in the state have been asked to perform Dhanvanthri homam or Maha Mrityunjaya homam on Friday to get relief from diseases and to attain

a long life and good health.

Apart from Sri Parthasarathy Swamy temple, Andavar temple and Sri Kapaleeswarar temples in the city, Sri Meenakshi Amman temple in Madurai, Sri Subrahmanya Swamy temple in Tiruchendur, Palani Dhandayuthapani temple, Sri Ranganathaswamy temple in Srirangam, Samayapuram Mariamm temple, Thyagaraja temple in Tiruvarur, Sri Sthanumalayan Swamy temple in Suchindram, Thiruvannamalai Arunachaleswar temple, Kanchi temple and Tiruttani Murugan temple will close for devotees.

Mr. Palaniswami directed the officials to advise managements of big churches and mosques in the state to temporarily bar entry to pilgrims till March 31.

## SHORT TAKES

## Quarantine centre readied at TB sanatorium

Chennai: The state health department has established a 50 bedded quarantine centre at the TB sanatorium hospital in Tambaram here. On Thursday the department officials and staff, along with the railway authorities, commenced screening of passengers at Chennai Central, Egmore and Tambaram stations.

Help desks have been established by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare at the railway stations which are equipped with thermal screening.

"After my inspection @aichnairport, its decided that 16,000 passengers from 160 arrivals will undergo thermal screening by staff working in 3 shifts.

Awareness pamphlets for addl information & guidance will also be distributed. #airportscreening #vijayabaskar," health minister Dr. C. Vijayabaskar tweeted.

The minister, accompanied by Health Secretary Dr. Beela Rajesh and other officials, inspected Chennai domestic terminal, and later said this screening would be extended to other airports in the state.

Chairing a meeting of stakeholders here on Thursday, Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami had directed the officials to screen all passengers coming to Tamil Nadu by road or rail.

Surveillance should be stepped up in domestic airport terminals and disinfectants should be sprayed twice in places where people congregate in large numbers in urban and rural regions and thrice at airports, railway, bus and metro rail stations, he said.

The CM mandated continuation of medical counselling by health authorities for those quarantined at home. He mandated continuation of medical counselling by health authorities for those quarantined at home.

## 'Only critical cases should visit Jipmer'

Chennai: In the wake of the spread of coronavirus, the Centrally sponsored Jipmer in Puducherry on Thursday asked only patients with critical ailments and requiring tertiary care should visit the hospital. Making this appeal through a circular, Jipmer (Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research) said this was part of the precautionary steps to save patients from the spread of the novel Covid-19. the hospital every day for treatment. —PTI



COVID-19 AWARENESS

TN health secretary Beela Rajesh at coronavirus awareness programme for journalists in Chennai press club conducted by the state government and Omandurar medical college. —DC

## First time in century-old history, major sevas cancelled

## Tirumala temple shut for devotees' darshan

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUMALA, MARCH 19

The Andhra Pradesh government and the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) have on Thursday jointly taken a decision to seal the holy shrine and the entire hill temple town of Tirumala from tomorrow as a precautionary measure to contain the widely spreading Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

The hill town of Tirumala, which is always buzzing with hectic pilgrim activity, and has millions of devotees of Lord Venkateswara visiting each year, has been closed for all pilgrims as part of a state-wide and nationwide drive to contact Covid-19.

This is the first time in its history of nine decades that the TTD has decided to stall Srivari darshan and restrict pilgrims' entry to the sacred hill shrine. The closure would come into effect from Friday (12 noon) onwards for pilgrims. However, all daily kainkaryams would be performed for the main deity by Archakas as usual but in Ekantham (private) as per Agama sastras. Only the devotees

As a precautionary measure, both footpaths at Alipiri and Srivari Mettu were shut down from Thursday 3 pm onwards. Only devotees with time slot tokens were permitted to walk up to Tirumala

would not be allowed for darshan.

Anil Kumar, executive officer, TTD, along with additional EO A.V. Dharma Reddy, CV and SO Gopinath Jatti, Tirupati urban SP Ramesh Reddy, disclosed details to media-persons on the closure of the temple at a conference held at Annamaiah Bhavan in Tirumala on Thursday evening.

He said that TTD has decided to stop Srivari darshan for a period of seven days from now. The decision was taken after receiving directives from the YSRC government in view of a Covid-19 suspect, who visited Tirumala on March 18.

However, the TTD would allow only those pilgrims who have taken time slot tokens, VIP break darshan tickets and the Friday Arjitha Sevas for darshan, which were already issued on Thursday till 12 noon of Friday, he said.

Mr Singhal said that AP Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy held a review on measures being taken by various temple trust boards in the state to effectively tackle Covid-19 on Thursday.

Post the review, CM Mr Reddy and TTD Chairman Y.V. Subba Reddy and the state endowments department, resolved to suspend pilgrim worship at the Tirumala temple as well as at several other prominent temples spread across the state.

He said that the TTD board chairman would review all decisions depending on fresh guidelines from the state and central Governments after seven days.

"Temporarily, other local TTD temples like Padmavati Ammavari Temple at Tiruchanore, Govinda Raja Swamy Temple and others also would be closed. Even Brahmotsavams in the Kodandarama Swamy temple at Tirupati would be conducted on the side at a low profile. We have already cancelled the mass Sita Rama Kalyanam at Vontimitta on April 7," he said.

Meanwhile, to a query, Mr Singhal said that there

were very few precedents in temple history when such a decision was taken. "According to ancient records available with the TTD, this is the first time in 128 years that pilgrim worship would be suspended at Tirumala, which is believed to be nearly 2,000 years old. The last time the temple was completely closed down and even rituals were suspended, was in 1892 for unknown reasons, as per records available with the TTD."

As a precautionary measure, both footpaths at Alipiri and Srivari Mettu were shut down from Thursday 3 pm onwards. Only devotees with time slot tokens were permitted to walk up to Tirumala, he said, adding that as on Thursday, a total of 42,957 tokens had been issued to pilgrims and they would have darshan by the end of the day.

All reception counters, Kalyanakatta, Anna Prasadam complex and laddu complex are set to close down from 12 noon Friday.

He appealed to devotees to bear with the inconvenience and urged them to cooperate with the decision.

## Service industry pleads for relief

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, MARCH 19

The Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism & Hospitality (FAITH) has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the bleak scenario facing the industry as a consequence of the coronavirus pandemic.

"The tourism industry in India has reached dire straits today and is staring at mass unemployment and bankruptcies. We urgently seek your kind intervention," reads the letter, which makes a plea for concessions that alone can save the industry and millions of jobs," says the letter signed by Nakul Anand, chairman, FAITH.

The federation believes that around 70% out of a total estimated workforce of 5.5 crores (direct and indirect) could get unemployed and that the effect on job losses and layoffs has already begun throughout the country.

The federation also pointed out that the total



tourism business activity of India, estimated at \$28 billion+ in forex and upwards of ₹2 lakh crores in domestic tourism activity will be at risk through the year and in excess of ₹5 lakh crores of direct tourism industry and almost double that of total economic activity is at risk.

"With declining revenues almost all tourism businesses are running out of working capital. However, with the responsibility of staff and payment of their salaries, EMIs to tourism, advance tax, PF, ESIC, GST, excise and other state levies, bank guarantees, security deposits, this industry

needs your support now more than ever. This is a time of an unprecedented emergency and our request to you is for an equally befitting response for the tourism industry's immediate survival," the plea reads.

What the industry federation is seeking - 12-months moratorium on EMIs of principal and interest payments on loans and working capital from Financial Institutions (both banking & non-banking), doubling of working capital limits and on interest free and collateral free terms.

The Federation also seeks deferment for 12 months of all statutory dues whether GST, Advance Tax payments, PF, ESIC, customs duties at the Central Government level or at any state government level the excise fees, levies, taxes, power & water charges, bank guarantees & security deposits and deferment of all renewals, across the

tourism, travel, hospitality & aviation industry.

A support fund for 12 months on the lines of MNREGA to support basic salaries with 'direct transfer' to affected tourism employees.

The federation also requests that TCS (tax collected at source) on travel has been proposed in Finance Bill 2020 to be levied from April 1 not be introduced as it will displace business from India to overseas, which will lead to shutting down businesses of most Indian tourism companies.

The charter of pleas includes deferment of increase in any insurance premium for a period of 12 months, a complete GST Tax Holiday for the tourism, travel & hospitality industry, a 200% weighted exemption for 12 months on expenses to Indian corporates to hold exhibitions, conferences and incentive trips in India and restoration of 10% duty credit of SEIS scrips.

## 5 day-old girl killed in Madurai

A ARUL PALANI | DC  
CHENNAI, MARCH 19

In a shocking female infanticide, a five-day-old baby girl was killed by her mother and grandmother by feeding it with 'Erukam Paal' near Madurai. This is the second female infanticide in the region in a month. They resorted to the inhuman practice dejected over the birth of female babies repeatedly.

According to sources, Suresh (34) and Kavitha (27) of Ramanathapuram village in Mottanuthu near Andipatti have two girl children aged 10 and eight years. Meanwhile, Kavitha gave birth to a third girl child on February 26. The child suddenly died on March 2.

Kavitha and her mother-in-law Chellammal gave contradictory versions to the police during police inquiry. They allegedly admitted to killing the child

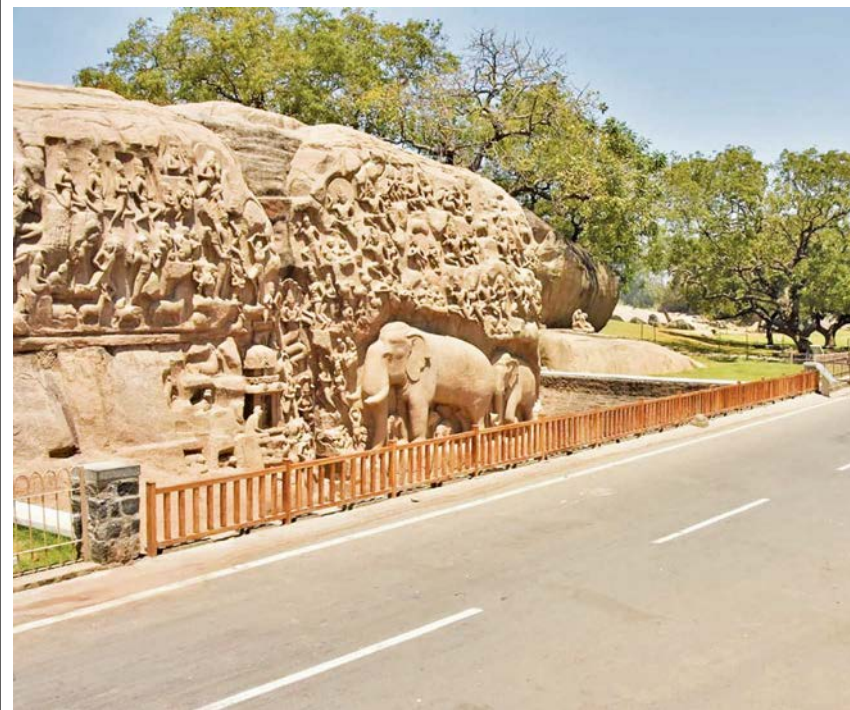
They buried body near their house. However, residents suspected of female infanticide and informed Andipatti tahsildar K Chandrasekharan. A police complaint was also lodged by the local village administrative officer (VAO). The body was exhumed for conducting an autopsy.

Police said Kavitha and her mother-in-law Chellammal gave contradictory versions to the police during inquiry. They allegedly admitted to killing the child. They

were arrested by the police on Thursday. Police said Suresh, who works in Kerala, was not in the village when the child was killed. It may be noted that the late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa had introduced the 'cradle baby scheme' in 1992 to end female infanticide and to protect girl children from the clutches of death. The unwanted female babies left in the cradle at government hospitals and primary health centres were given for legal adoption.

In 2010, the National Crime Records Bureau reported approximately 100 male and female infanticides, producing an official rate of less than one case of infanticide per million people.

## SHUTDOWN VIGNETTES



A deserted stretch in Mahabalipuram on Thursday.

—DC



Guindy Children's Park closed till March 31.

—DC

## Cheap sanitisers, masks on sale in Kanyakumari

M. ARULOLI | DC  
KANYAKUMARI, MARCH 19

Hand sanitisers and face masks produced by self-help groups will be available for public sale in Kanyakumari district from March 29.

Responding to the complaints about the inadequate availability of sanitizers and face masks, the Kanyakumari district collector has taken action to impart training for women's self help members, who produce face masks.

The public sale of the face masks produced by the women self help groups will begin on Friday (March 20),

according to the district collector, Prashant M Wadner.

Moreover, as many of the retailers could not keep up with the demand for hand sanitizers that resulted in high cost due to lack of adequate supply, the Kanyakumari district administration has brought in self help groups in the manufacturing of hand sanitizers. Around 10 self help groups initially identified for the manufacturing of hand sanitizer with the assistance of health department officials have been provided with Isopropyl alcohol, glycerol and Hydrogen peroxide, the major ingredients to produce

hand sanitizer. The Tirunelveli district administration too initiated a similar project of involving women self help group members in the production of face masks and hand sanitizers to meet the public demand.

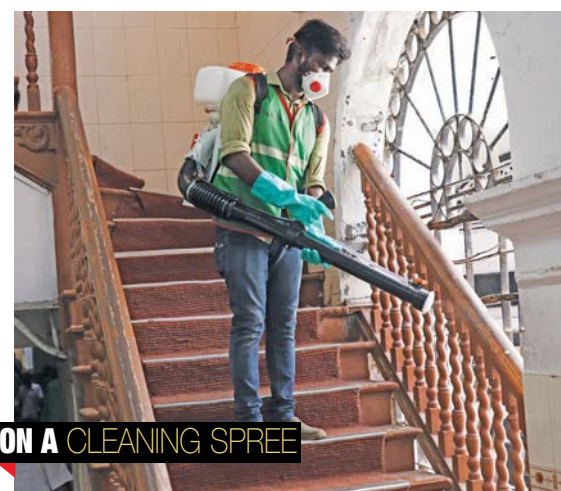
A single piece of "use and throw" face mask has been now sold for Rs 30 in the southern districts and hence the district administrations of Kanyakumari and Tirunelveli involve the self help groups to produce face masks and hand sanitizer that would be sold for public at the manufacturing cost, said a health department official.

## Pondy getting 1 lakh masks ready

Puducherry, March 19: The territorial administration is getting masks ready through self-help groups to meet the current demand for the protective cover in the context of measures to contain the spread of dreaded novel Covid-19. Announcing this to reporters here on Thursday, the Puducherry Collector T Arun said around 10,000 masks would be got ready daily

by the groups and soon one lakh masks would be available. Nearly five groups had been drafted for the purpose. He said the masks would be first distributed to the police personnel, health staff, workers of the ASHA unit and staff of the anganwadi centres. Arun said the DRDA and the National Livelihood Mission would be coordinating the preparation of the masks. The Puducherry Government

Engineering College and the Department of Excise would also get ready hand sanitizers. The college had held a meeting earlier with the officers of the Hindu Religious Institutions and Wakf Board and had directed all the temples, churches and also mosques in the Union Territory to make available hand washing facilities or sanitisers at their places of worship. —PTI



ON A CLEANING SPREE

A Chennai corporation worker sprays disinfectant to sanitize the surroundings of the secretariat in the city on Thursday. —DC

## End female infanticide, period

B. Vijayalakshmi

## Viewpoint

Female infanticide raised its ugly head again with the arrest of three people in a village near Usilampatti for killing their girl baby last week. Though TN's sex ratio has been improving, the recent cases, including the latest reported in Andipatti on Thursday, proves that the state has to do more to pro-

tect its girl children.

In the first week of March, a month-old girl was allegedly administered poisonous herbal juice by her parents and grandfather in a village near Usilampatti in Madurai district. Chekkanoorani police, who got a tip off about the missing baby, arrested the parents and the paternal grandfather who had gone missing. The three confessed to having killed the infant as they didn't want a second daughter. During the last few years, cases have been booked against scan centres in some districts which vio-



late the norms set under PCPNDT Act.

Such dubious scan centres have also been sealed. Incidents of illegal abortions also crop up. Activists say that not much has been done to arrest female foeticide and people even use

technology to hide the facts.

They say sex determination of foetus happens in areas where patriarchal mindset continues to dominate. And male child is still preferred in urban and rural areas.

The government must

deal sex determination and sex selective abortions with an iron hand.

In some cases, newborns are abandoned leading to their deaths. Village administrative officers (VAOs) and primary health centres (PHCs) should report such unnatural deaths so that cases can be registered by police.

The role of village health nurses has also been undermined. District authorities should conduct awareness campaigns at regular intervals in vulnerable areas against fake diagnostic centres and quacks and unscrupulous doctors

ready to perform female foeticide. In both the recent cases, the villagers alerted officials about the girls' death.

Cradle baby scheme and Centre's Beti Bachao and Beti Padao schemes play a pivotal role in ending female infanticide.

Also, government's incentives may turn out to be a succour for parents struggling to educate their daughters and get them married off.

Positive change in the mindset of people and integrated planning will go a long way in putting a full stop to female infanticide.

OTHER STORY

Rajinikanth lauds TN gov't's measures against spread of coronavirus

Chennai: Superstar Rajinikanth on Thursday welcomed the Tamil Nadu government's preventive measures against the spread of novel coronavirus in the state, and requested for financial assistance to persons whose livelihood may be affected during "this difficult situation." The veteran actor also called for public cooperation in preventing the spread of virus. "The preventive measures being taken by the state government to prevent the spread of coronavirus in Tamil Nadu are laudable. We the people shall also join the government and cooperate" to prevent its spread, he said in a statement uploaded on his official Twitter handle. The state government has announced a lock-down till March 31 to prevent spread of the virus, closing down educational institutions, malls, swimming pools and liquor bars among others, besides implementing various other measures including in the transport sector. Two persons have so far tested positive for the virus in the state. The actor further requested the government to provide financial assistance to people whose basic livelihood has been affected in this "difficult situation," but did not specify. It will greatly benefit them, he added. —PTI



Rajinikanth

Workers have been sensitised to prevent spread of virus' Industries not closed due to coronavirus, says CM

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, MARCH 19:

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami asserted that small industries across Tamil Nadu have not been closed due to Covid-19 epidemic, and said the labour secretary and industries secretary have issued necessary precautionary measures to prevent the spread of the virus.

"All industrial units in the state are functioning and the workers have been sensitised to prevent the spread of Coronavirus," Palaniswami said. Responding to a special call attention motion moved by the leader of the opposition and DMK president M. K. Stalin in the Assembly on Thursday, the Chief Minister said his government is engaged in rigorously screening all passengers who arrived from the virus-hit countries and quarantined the suspected cases.

The government was taking appropriate steps to contain the spread of the virus at the entry point. "The virus is not spreading through our people here," he emphasised.

"So, there is no need to panic. Small industries are continuously operating," Mr. Palaniswami said. Raising the issue, Stalin alleged that the small and medium industries faced closure owing to Covid-19 and said this has led to economic losses and unemployment. Listing out measures taken by the United Kingdom, Italy, New Zealand, Germany and other States in India such as Odisha, which have announced measures to benefit businesses suffering losses, Stalin sought to know if the AIADMK government would come up with similar measures.

Earlier, during Zero Hour, DMK deputy floor leader Duraimurugan said several commercial establishments, including malls, cinema halls and other establishments have been ordered to close until March 31 and this has caused economic losses. He claimed daily wage labourers have also been affected due to the disruption in businesses and urged the state government to consider tax holiday and extension in paying electricity bills.

Commercial taxes minister K.C. Veeramani said business in small industries continued to operate, as precautionary measures have been taken by the State government. Fisheries minister D. Jayakumar said GST Council would take a call on issues relating to imposition or deferring of tax.



Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami

CM renames sanitary staff as 'cleanliness workers'

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, MARCH 19

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami announced a slew of schemes in the Assembly on Thursday including establishing yoga centres and gymnasium in corporation parks to improve the health of people. He renamed sanitary personnel as 'cleanliness workers'. Making an announcement under rule 110 in the Assembly on Thursday Mr. Palaniswami said a scheme to install smart meters for 42 lakh electricity consumers to compute their power consumption would be implemented at a cost of ₹4,300 crore. This initiative to be implemented in Chennai in the first phase, is aimed at providing enhanced services to power users and at the same time cut down on technical and commercial losses and scale up revenue. This scheme would be implemented in other districts in the State in a staggered manner.

Mr. Palaniswami announced scheme to develop power distribution infrastructure, including upgradation of a 230 KV sub-station at Alagarkoil in Madurai to enhance two 110 kv substations into 230 kv facilities, to meet the increasing demand at an estimated cost of ₹1,998 crore.

To honour the work of the sanitary personnel and in deference to their long-time demand, they would now be called as cleanliness workers, Mr. Palaniswami said. About 64,583 sanitary workers are employed at 15 corporations, 121 municipalities, 528 town panchayats and 12,525 village panchayats.

Cooperative institutions in Tamil Nadu plan to disburse a substantially higher level of crop loans to farmers to the tune of ₹11,000 crore in the new fiscal year 2020-21, State Minister for Cooperatives, Sellur K Raju said.

This is much higher than the crop loans worth ₹8,500 crore disbursed during 2019-20, the Minister said, intervening in the debate on the demands for grants for departments under his charge and also while replying to the debate later.

Mr. Sellur Raju said that DMK walked out of the Assembly, dissatisfied with the Minister Sellur K Raju's lengthy response to a query raised by a DMK MLA. Mr. Masilamani, on the need for increasing the salary for ration shop salesmen.

"This is a huge achievement," compared to what the previous DMK government had disbursed, Mr. Sellur Raju said. During the last three years of AIADMK regime headed by Chief Minister, Edappadi K Palaniswami, the minister said the extent of crop loans by cooperative institutions disbursed was of the order of ₹23,562 crore to benefit 36.21 lakh farmers.

To protect small traders, vendors and pavement sellers from usurious interest rates, Mr. Raju said ₹921.85 crore had been disbursed as 'micro trade loans'. In the last two years, 'Pongal hampers' benefitted nearly two crore beneficiaries, minister said. The State Cooperatives department has won 28 National awards for its efficient functioning in last nine years, minister said, adding, the President of India had given national awards twice for achieving maximum loan assistance to differently-abled persons.

'One Nation, One Card' scheme from April 1: Min

D. SEKAR | DC CHENNAI, MARCH 19



Minister D. Jayakumar

The Tamil Nadu Government is making all preparations to implement the new 'One Nation, One Card' scheme in serving ration articles under the public distribution system (PDS), as designed by the Union Food Ministry ambitious scheme to make ration cards portable to migrant workers, from April 1.

This was disclosed by the State Food Minister, R. Kamaraj, in the Legislative Assembly on Thursday, intervening in the debate on the demands for grants for the Food and Consumer Protection department when an AIADMK member, V Radhakrishnan sought to know about the implementation of the new scheme.

Stating that the scheme was under pilot implementation in two districts of Thoothukudi and Tirunelveli from February 1 to February 29, Mr. Kamaraj said the 'One Nation, One Card' scheme was operational without any hitch. Of the nine lakh total cards in the two districts, as many as 9,000 ration-card holders had changed over from fair price shops in one district to the other. "Hence, we have decided to implement the scheme throughout the State from April 1," the minister added. Later, replying to the debate, Mr. Kamaraj said at 18 places across Tamil Nadu, the Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation (TNCSC) will build warehouses at a total cost of ₹62.25 crore.

New sophisticated machinery - colour sortex machines - to remove black rice particles from the white rice, will be purchased for all the 21 modern rice mills under the government at a cost of ₹18.90 crore, Mr. Kamaraj announced.

A new modern rice mill with a capacity to process 100 tonnes of paddy per day and with a capital outlay of ₹25 crore will be established at Athur in Salem district, the minister said. At Theni and Mettupalayam, two 500-tonne capacity each refrigerated storage houses for horticulture produce will be set up at a cost of ₹5 crore.

On the Food grains procurement front, the minister said, 18,38,262 tonnes of paddy had been procured this year throughout the state so far. Of that, the Cauvery delta districts alone accounted for 15 lakh tonnes of paddy benefiting 31.20 lakh farmers.

₹11K cr crop loans for ryots this year'

D. SEKAR | DC CHENNAI, MARCH 19

DMK WALKS OUT OF ASSEMBLY

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Earlier, members of the DMK walked out of the Assembly, dissatisfied with the Minister Sellur K Raju's lengthy response to a query raised by a DMK MLA. Mr. Masilamani, on the need for increasing the salary for ration shop salesmen.

"This is a huge achievement," compared to what the previous DMK government had disbursed, Mr. Sellur Raju said. During the last three years of AIADMK regime headed by Chief Minister, Edappadi K Palaniswami, the minister said the extent of crop loans by cooperative institutions disbursed was of the order of ₹23,562 crore to benefit 36.21 lakh farmers.

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Electric trains to power up Cauvery delta districts

G.SRINIVASAN | DC THANJAVUR, MARCH 19

From steam hauled engines using coal to electric engines now, the railways have come a long way. That the mainline, from Tiruchy to Chennai via Thanjavur, Kumbakonam, Mayiladuthurai, Chidambaram, Cuddalore and Villupuram will have electric trains from July 2020 once the final stretch of electrification is completed between Thanjavur and Mayiladuthurai in June, is good news for the people of delta districts.

That travel time will come down with speed increased after electrification, thrills people here, who still assert more needs to be done. "No doubt these are good things. But number of trains operated on main line should be increased if these facilities are to bear fruits," say cross-section of people of the delta districts.

The demand for more trains on main line has become louder now as they lost many trains which were operated earlier. A. Giri, adviser, Thanjavur District Rail Users Association, says that many trains running via Thanjavur and Kumbakonam on the main line when the track was meter gauge have been cancelled after conversion into broad gauge.

They include Chennai-Tuticorin Janata express, Tiruchy-Tirupathi daily express, passenger trains from Thanjavur to Chennai and Sengottah to Chennai, Thanjavur to Villupuram etc. These trains should be re-introduced. "As electrification is to be completed by June, there can be more day time trains to Chennai from Tiruchy via Thanjavur and Kumbakonam. Inter-city express trains can be operated," said Giri. "Survey for doubling the track along mainline has been completed by Southern railway. Doubling should be expedited," he said.

However, he added that there are some additions now

Voices get louder for more passenger trains



Electric sub-station at Thanjavur for railways.

Like Thiruchendur Express from Chennai, Janasathabdi, Mayiladuthurai-Mysuru Express, Uzhavan Express to Chennai during night from Thanjavur. Trains like Chennai to Sengottah and Nagore to Kollam should be re-introduced, he urged.

"With respect to Cholan Express, it has been made into a sleeper train and people are paying higher fare during day time. It was a chair car earlier and this status should be restored so that more people can travel paying less," said Giri.

He also said that an Antyodaya Express between Tambaram and Sengottah via Thanjavur was announced in railway time table in November 2017. This will be the restoration of erstwhile Sengottah fast passenger operated on meter gauge. But for the reasons unknown, it was not introduced, he lamented.

Now a new express train from Tambaram to Sengottah via Tiruvarur, Karaikudi finds a place in time table proposals.

Likewise instead of restoring the Nagore-Kollam express which was operated via Thanjavur, it has been proposed to operate bi-weekly train from Velankanni to Ernakulam via Tiruvarur, Karaikudi and Kollam.

With this, both Thanjavur and Kumbakonam will lose its connectivity to Sengottah which existed in meter gauge. V. Jeevakumar of Train Passengers Association, Thanjavur, said that after electric track is made operational in July, trains like Pallavan and Vaigai going on chord lines should be operated on main line so that people may reach Chennai quickly during day. "Infrastructure has been improved tremendously. But adequate trains should be introduced for the benefit of passengers," Jeevakumar said.

S.S. Palani Manickam, Thanjavur MP, representing the DMK, has raised the issue recently in parliament, Arguing strongly against privatisation of railways, which united India, provided employment to many and still remains a popular mode of travel for people, the MP appealed to operate more passenger trains instead of concentrating only on freight movement.

WEEKLY LONG-DISTANCE TRAINS THAT CROSS THANJAVUR

- Rameswaram to Varanasi Express which comes on Thursdays to Thanjavur, is a weekly train.
- Rameswaram to Bhubaneswar which comes on Sundays to Thanjavur, is also a weekly train.
- Rameswaram to Faizabad near Ayodhya, which comes to Thanjavur on Mondays, is also a weekly train.



The first bungalow annexed by southern railway at Thanjavur. Now it is functioning as a health centre.

Boat Mail connection to Thanjavur rail history

DC CORRESPONDENT THANJAVUR, MARCH 19

The British took over the reign of Thanjavur from Maratta kings in 1858. Great Southern Railway of India laid the railway line from Nagapattinam to Tiruchy, which was called "Trichinopoly" then in 1861. The track became operational in 1862. "It was a narrow gauge line. Land belonging to a 'Dargah' and a bungalow with compound wall belonging to Vellaiyan Nadar of Porayar was acquired by the railways.

"The bungalow can still be seen behind BSNL building near the railway station," reminisces S.P. Anthonisamy, son of Parisutham Nadar, former M.L.A. of Thanjavur and educationist.

The track was converted into a 'meter gauge' in 1875, said Anthonisamy while narrating the history of the famous "Boat Mail" or "Indo-Ceylon Express" running on that line. The train was operated from Chennai to Tuticorin (now Thoothukudi) (715-km or

444 miles) via Mayiladuthurai, Thanjavur and Kumbakonam. People used to go to Sri Lanka from Tuticorin after alighting from the train. That train used to reach Thanjavur at 5 am.

In 1914, Pamban bridge over the sea was constructed connecting the mainland with Rameswaram and Dhanushkodi and this changed the route of the train. "Boat Mail" then began to run up to Dhanushkodi which reduced the distance to 270-km (170 miles) and from Dhanushkodi people took a boat ride to Thalaimannar (35-km or 22-miles) on Northern coast of Sri Lanka and from there went to Colombo again by train. "Tickets for Colombo were sold at railway counters itself in those days," said Anthonisamy.

Air connectivity to Thanjavur, that added a new dimension, goes back to World War-II period. A military aerodrome was constructed to help landing of war planes then in 1940.

Tanks and canons were brought by these planes to

Thanjavur. "These tanks will be paraded to railway station to go to Nagapattinam to protect the port. These tanks were taken through 60-ft Mathakkottai road then," said Anthonisamy.

Another interesting feature was appointment of 'Air Raid Wardens' from among the public to guide and organise people during war times particularly when air strike was expected. A.Y.S. Parisutha Nadar, former M.L.A. of Thanjavur was appointed as Air Raid Warden. A siren was erected at Armed police grounds and it will make a siren two times 10 am and 5 pm. When sirens are sounded during War time, lights should be put off during night to prevent air strikes on cities.

"These sirens were used till 1967 and the sound can be heard two times 10 am and 5 pm," recalled Anthonisamy.

Lauding the yeomen services of Parisutha Nadar as 'Air Raid Warden' during World War-II, Britain had then conferred the Rao Saheb title on him..



Electrification completed tracks between Tiruchy and Thanjavur.

The main line (Tiruchy to Chennai via Thanjavur, Kumbakonam, Mayiladuthurai, Chidambaram, Cuddalore) remains neglected. It was a very popular and important line on which "Boat mail" was operated to help people going to Colombo in Sri Lanka by travelling in train from Chennai to Dhanushkodi and from their taking a boat to Sri Lanka. The line has important places every 40-km like Thanjavur, Kumbakonam and Mayiladuthurai among others; hence more trains should be operated on this stretch. More 'Demu' trains can be operated from Tiruchy to Thanjavur. Laying of new lines between Thanjavur and Ariylaur, Mannargudi and Pattukottai should also be expedited."

— S.S. PALANI MANICKAM, Thanjavur MP

Marathi-speaking Thanjavurians seek Mumbai rail link

G.SRINIVASAN | DC THANJAVUR, MARCH 19

With a large number of Marathi-speaking people living in Thanjavur which was under Maratta rule after the Cholas and Nayaks, there has been a demand for a direct train from Thanjavur to Mumbai for the past several years.

While Babaji Rajah Bhosale, hereditary trustee of palace Devasthanam and descendent of Maratta rulers of Thanjavur has taken up this demand along with the Marathi-speaking population with both Central, and State governments of Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, the demand has been echoed and endorsed

by Thanjavur Chamber of Commerce and Industry and various voluntary organisations like Rotary and Lions clubs.

According to Revanth Kumar of Rail Users Association, every major town in India has rail connectivity with Mumbai, except Thanjavur and Kumbakonam. "The demand is to operate a

train from Thanjavur to Mumbai via Kumbakonam, Mayiladuthurai, Tirupathi in Andhra Pradesh and Mantralaya in Karnataka to Mumbai. The idea is to connect pilgrim centres also by the train.

But this has not materialised so far. People go to Chennai and catch a train

from Thanjavur to Mumbai via Kumbakonam, Mayiladuthurai, Tirupathi in Andhra Pradesh and Mantralaya in Karnataka to Mumbai. The idea is to connect pilgrim centres also by the train.

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**IN BRIEF**

## 2 killed in car mishap near Jeeyapuram

**Tiruchy:** Two persons were killed on the spot when a car in which they were travelling capsized into a road side ditch near Jeeyapuram on the Tiruchy-Karur national highway near here last night. Police said the deceased were identified as Arumugam (38) of Ariyamangalam and Abdul Rahaman (26) of Sarkkaarpalayam. They were on their way to Coimbatore, when the mishap occurred. Jeeyapuram police are investigating. Vehicular traffic on the Tiruchy-Karur national highway was hit for a while.

## Second road accident in five weeks 5 including 4 youth killed near Avinashi

**S. KATHTHASAMI | DC TIRUPUR, MARCH 19**

At least five persons including four college students were killed when a car in which they were travelling rammied into a lorry near Avinashi in Tirupur district in the early hours of Thursday.

According to police, eight persons from Salem were on their way to Ooty by a car and they left Salem around 3am in the early hours. Seven of them were students of a private medical college in Salem and one Manikan-

dan. When the car was approaching Palankarai near Avinashi on Coimbatore-Salem bypass around 6 am, the driver lost control over the vehicle and rammied into a cement-laden truck, police said.

Under the impact of this gory mishap, V Elavarasan, 21, from Chinna Salem, R Rajeshkumar, 21, from Kallakurichi, K Venkatachalam, 21, from Kallakurichi, and Vasanth from Salem succumbed to injuries on the spot along with car driver Manikandan, 28, from Bhavani.

Police said three others Santhosh, Jayasurya and Karthi were rescued by Avinashi police and admitted to a private hospital in Avinashi. Tirupur district collector Mr. K Vijayakarthikeyan and top police officials rushed to the accident spot, supervised the relief operations.

He later visited the mortuary at Avinashi government hospital, where the bodies were kept. Avinashi police are probing. In February, the same area saw 19 people killed in a major KSRTC bus-container truck accident.



Greater Chennai Corporation staff demolishing an encroachment in Ashok Nagar on Thursday. —DC

## ₹14,500 recovered from mishap-hit beggar

**DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, MARCH 19**

A total of ₹14,500 was recovered from a 75-year-old beggar woman while she met with a road accident at Mannur Junction near to Sriperumbudur in Kanchipuram district on Thursday.

According to the police, the elderly woman was identified as Muthathi. She was knocked down by an unidentified vehicle. The police men who were engaged in vehicle inspection in the area called in a 108 ambulance in which she was rushed to the Sriperumbudur government hospital for treatment.

The hospital authorities during treatment found two bundles in the woman's possession. When it was opened, coins and currency notes were noticed. The woman revealed that the money was collected through begging.

Dr. Kamesh Balaji of the hospital who counted the money said ₹14,500 would be handed over to her after the treatment.

● **Elderly woman identified as Muthathi. She was knocked down by an unidentified vehicle.**

## City woman missing for four days at Vadapalani

**T. SUDHEESH | DC CHENNAI, MARCH 19**

A 28-year-old city woman, working in a private firm at Vadapalani, is missing since March 16.

The family, which filed a man missing case with M4 Red Hills Police soon after she was found missing, has so far received no clue on her whereabouts. She is the mother of a 5-year-old child.

Aswath Saru, the brother of the woman, said that she left home at 12 noon after a brief altercation with her husband. 'We have checked with nearby Vadapalani women's hos-

tel, and Waltax road hostels. Apart from this, I've checked Central railway station, Chennai with the help of Railway Protection Force (RPF). We have analysed the CCTV footage. I don't have my sis IMEI (The International Mobile Equipment Identity) number. So I gave her phone number to police', he said.

He said that the police investigation was too slow. 'I spoke to Mr. Jhawahar Inspector of Police at M4 Police. He patiently listened and promised swift action to trace my sister. But it has been day 4 since she disappeared. I have decided to give a petition to Superintendent of Police tomorrow,' he said.

Meanwhile, when contacted, M4 Police said they were actively searching to know the whereabouts of the woman. 'We are conducting the probe through telephone tower. The probe found that Ola cab service had received a call from the woman. We are trying to get her travel history', said a police official. However, the police refused to divulge into the reason for the fight between woman and her husband that led to her disappearance.

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**STAYING SAFE**



Corporation staff disinfect the interiors of the historic Athar Jamath Masjid as part of measures to contain coronavirus, in Coimbatore, on Thursday. —DC

## 143 under scanner in Thanjavur district

**DC CORRESPONDENT THANJAVUR, MARCH 19**

Continuous monitoring of 143 persons who have come to Thanjavur district from other countries is done by health staff as a preventive measure against Covid-19, the new coronavirus. Health department officials said that 240 persons came from other countries and out of them monitoring has been completed for 93 persons, even as remaining 143 are under monitoring.

Though these people, who have gone to other countries for employment and education were tested at the airports of the respective countries itself and allowed to return to India, where again they were tested in our airports, they are monitored as the virus manifests after 15 days.

Sources said Health department staff go to their houses and check them. Meanwhile, Muslims who were on a continuous sit-in agitation against the 'Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)' at Thanjavur and Kumbakonam have withdrawn their stir temporarily, in view of coronavirus threat. The district administration cancelled the monthly farmers' grievances day meeting to be held on Friday.

## Truck fire in K'giri guts vehicles and shops, 4 injured

**SANJEEVI ANANDAN | DC KRISHNAGIRI, MARCH 19**

At least four people, including a woman and two minor boys, are being treated in the Hosur government hospital for burns injury sustained by them after a mini-truck laden with gas material went up in flames near here.

Another eight vehicles and shops in the spot were also completely damaged in the fire mishap that occurred at around 10.30 am on Thursday at Alasanatham, two-km from Hosur bus stand in Krishnagiri district.

According to the witnesses, the mini-truck was transporting the flammable material filled in a metal cylinder having a storage capacity of around 450 kilos. The vehicle while at Alasanatham went up in flames due to the alleged leak of the gas material from a faulty cylinder. Later, the fire spread to other vehicles including four two-wheelers and one auto, and many shops in the mishap spot were completely damaged by the blaze.

As soon as the fire broke out, two teams of local people swung into action to control the flames and also to rescue people trapped inside the shops on fire. Four people including a woman with burns injuries were rescued by them.

They were identified as the migrant worker Samsudeen (25) from Assam, hotel owner E. Manjula (35), Vivek (4) and another minor boy. Both the minor boys were playing in front of the fire house and were injured. The Hosur fire control and rescue services department staff came to the spot and doused the blaze. The local police have registered a case and further investigation is on into the cause of fire.

## Woman official trapped by DVAC cops, dies in hospital

**DC CORRESPONDENT KARUR, MARCH 19**

In a shocking development, a 48-year-old woman staff of the Tamil Nadu rural development and local administration department, who was trapped by the vigilance and anti-corruption wing police, while reportedly accepting a bribe of ₹30,000 from a real estate businessman of Tiruppur district, at K. Paramathi Panchayat union office on Wednesday, died at the Government medical college hospital here, allegedly due to "police negligence".

Official sources said on Thursday that the woman official, Ms. Jayanthirani, was working as additional block development officer



Ms. Jayanthirani

(BDO) at K. Paramathi Panchayat union office. The DVAC had set a "trap" and allegedly caught her redhanded.

After completing their preliminary inquiries, she was produced before the Chief Judicial Magistrate, Ms. Marlarvizhi at her residence around 2245 hrs on Wednesday night, where the woman

officer complained of breathlessness and collapsed on the floor. Jayanthirani was rushed to the GMCH here where she died in the wee hours of Thursday.

The official's husband Madhukumar, former President of the Karur district BJP and State Secretary of the unorganised labour wing of the BJP, and other relatives told newsmen that when the woman official was brought to her house for further interrogation, she complained of breathing trouble and asked the police to be taken to the hospital.

But the police did not heed her request and "due to police carelessness, Ms Jayanthirani died," the deceased official's relatives alleged.

## Muslim outfits in central TN call off anti-CAA stir now

**DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUCHY, MARCH 19**

The over one month-long agitations by various Muslim organisations against the Citizenship Amendment Act, NPR and NRC initiatives, in various central districts of Tamil Nadu, were called off temporarily on Thursday, in the wake of threat of coronavirus spread.

According to the agitators, they have suspended their agitation until March 31 and thereafter plan to continue their protest, depending upon the unfolding developments.

## KVB's cautious foray into precious metals

**DC CORRESPONDENT KARUR, MARCH 19**

The private sector, Karur Vysya Bank (KVB) has announced the launch of its precious metals business here. In a release here on Thursday, bank's managing director and CEO, P R Seshadri, said the gems and jewelry business in India contributes about seven per cent of the country's GDP and 15 per cent of total merchandise exports.

India is the second largest consumer of gold in the world. Demand for gold in the country stood at about 700 tonnes during 2019. The gems

and jewelry business is an important part of India's economy. The bank is now in a position to enhance its support to this important industry, he added.

The bank, serves approximately 6,000 jewelers and jewelry manufacturers. In order to serve them fully, the bank now offers precious metals (gold & silver) to its corporate customers (B2B). "This will enable our customers to compete more effectively in this highly competitive industry," he said. The KVB delivered its first shipments to its clients in Coimbatore, and Chennai recently, the press release added.

**WORLD HOUSE SPARROW DAY**

## Sparrows find a nest in a tea shop

**B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC OOTY, MARCH 19**

Elderly citizens know well how house sparrow was a part and parcel of a family and a playing partner of the kids in the olden days. But, it is an old story. The changed human lifestyles, disappearance of tiled roofs, pollution and other eco-toxicological factors and radiation from mobile phone towers began to play havoc with the survival of the house sparrows, especially, in urban areas.

While conservation of house sparrows has become a challenging task, KMS Tea Shop, a popular tea stall near Katteri Park on the Ooty-Coimbatore NH at the entrance of Nilgiris, has



become a learning point in 'house sparrow conservation' as these birds which live in the nests set up in the tea stall premises, chirp and cheer the tourists, other passengers and customers to house sparrow conservation. Mr N. Robin, proprietor of KMS tea shop, said that he began placing nesting sites to attract sparrows about eight years ago by making

big size plastic bottles, PVC pipes and small bamboo poles as nesting places for them. "I made small opening near the mouth of the bottles/pipes/bamboo poles and covered them with dark paper/cloth and hanged them in the top of the roof. They would make perfect nesting site for the sparrows. There are about 30 such nests on my tea shop campus. Over the years hundreds of sparrows used these facilities.

My tea shop has now become a best nesting and breeding place for the sparrows as they thrive well here and teach conservation lessons to tourists and other passengers who drop in here," Mr. Robin added.

## 4-year-old boy drowns in farm pond

**DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, MARCH 19**

A 4-year-old boy drowned in farm pond at Uttaremur in Kanchipuram district on Thursday.

According to police, the victim has been identified as Jackson, son of Charles, R.N Kandigai. Jackson, who was playing nearby farm field, slipped into the pond. Seeing this, the family is trying to save.

However, they could not. Following this, fire and rescue team at Uththaramur reached the spot.

The body was fished out at 1 pm after four hour-long search. The body was handed over to the relatives after post-mortem.

## SRM student held with ganja

**DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, MARCH 19**

The Guduvanchery police on Thursday arrested a student of SRM University with 2 kg of ganja.

According to the police, the accused has been identified as Pranav Kumar, 21, of New Delhi. He is a fourth year B.Tech student. He was arrested from near the Thailavaram junction in Chengalpattu district based on a tip-off. When he saw police team led by inspector Ashokan, he

tried to flee. But the police caught him. Ganja was recovered from his bag. Subsequently, the police registered a case against the student and later produced him at Chengalpattu court and remanded to judicial custody.



Residents of Chinna Udaippu stage a road roko on the ring road in Madurai on Thursday, demanding that the district administration not to use Co-operative Training Institute as a quarantine facility. —KASI MANIKANDAN

## Nalini moves fresh plea for release sans Gov nod

**Chennai:** Just over a week after her plea for premature release was dismissed, Rajiv Gandhi assassination case life convict Nalini has moved the Madras High Court with yet another petition seeking a directive to the Tamil Nadu government to set her free immediately without the consent of the governor.

When the petition came up for hearing, a division bench of Justice N Kirubakaran and Justice R Hemalatha adjourned the matter to April 7. The court had on March 11 dismissed another petition by Nalini seeking premature release based on a September 9, 2018 recommendation of the state cabinet, holding that the governor's consent was mandatory to give effect to it.

The convict had then contended that she was under illegal detention because the governor had failed to order her release based on the cabinet recommendation.

When the petition came up for hearing, a division bench of Justice N Kirubakaran and Justice R Hemalatha adjourned the matter to April 7. The court had on March 11 dismissed another petition by Nalini seeking premature release based on a September 9, 2018 recommendation of the state cabinet, holding that the governor's consent was mandatory to give effect to it.



● **Convict had contended that she was under illegal detention because the governor had failed to order her release based on the cabinet recommendation**

● **Nalini claimed that the state governor has no discretionary power whatsoever and the 'failure' to act on the advice of the council of Ministers would amount to contempt of court**

petition, Nalini claimed that the state governor has no discretionary power whatsoever and the 'failure' to act on the advice of the council of Ministers would amount to contempt of court as per the Supreme Court order in Maru Rams case. The governor had not

acted in accordance with advice of the council of Ministers and it was unconstitutional, Nalini argued, adding she deserves to be released under Article 161, Constitution without the approval of the governor.

In all, seven people, including Nalini, were convicted by a special TADA court for their role in the assassination of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi on May 21, 1991 by an LTTE suicide bomber during an election rally at nearby Sriperumbudur.

They were sentenced to death, but later it was commuted to life imprisonment. Besides Nalini, the other life convicts are her husband Murugan, A G Perarivalam, Santhan, J a y a k u m a r , Ravichandran and Robert Pyas. —PTI

## Pondy CM welcomes PM's janata curfew

**Puducherry:** Puducherry Chief Minister and senior Congress leader V Narayanasamy on Thursday welcomed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal for observing 'Janata curfew' to show their resolve to take on the challenge posed by novel coronavirus and said all should respond to the call.

Speaking to reporters during a visit to parts of Puducherry town and neighbourhood for reviewing preventive measures to tackle coronavirus, he said the Prime Minister has made the appeal out of concern for the health of the people of the country.

"Modi's appeal to the people to observe voluntarily 'Janata curfew' on March 22 for 14 hours from 7 a.m. that day to counter threat of the infection is welcome. He has asked the people out of his concern for their health. We should all respond to the call," Narayanasamy said. He also listed the various steps Puducherry government had taken to adhere to the advisories of the central government to curb the spread of the coronavirus. In his address to the nation on Thursday night, Modi called for "resolve and restraint" to fight coronavirus and asked the entire country to observe 'Janta curfew' on Sunday. —PTI

SHORT TAKES

MINISTER: NO CHANGE IN JNU 'CHARACTER'

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 19

Rejecting suggestions and apprehensions that the "character" of Jawaharlal Nehru University could be changed or attempts are being made to change its character, Union human resource development minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank on Thursday asserted that 'stringent action' will be taken against those trying to change the character of the university. The minister also outrightly rejected allegations by a Congress MP that attempts are being made to 'infiltrate' non-academic members of an organisation in the academic council and the executive committee of the university as the Opposition party member sought to know why deprivation points were removed from the admission policy. The minister, while replying to supplementaries in the Rajya Sabha during Question Hour, said the university has informed that the benefits of deprivation points in all other courses, except a few, have been provided and it was done following UGC regulation after Delhi HC's directions.

ARMY TO GET ISRAEL'S NEGEV LMGs

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 19

Indian Army soldiers will soon get Israel's Negev light machine gun. The acquisition wing of the ministry of defence has signed a capital acquisition contract with Israel weapons industries for the procurement of 16,479 LMGs at a cost of ₹880 crore. There was a long-standing requirement of the Indian Armed Forces for a modern state-of-the-art LMGs.

The contracted Negev 7.62x51mm LMG is a combat-proven weapon, currently used by several countries around the globe. This LMG will greatly enhance the lethality and range of a soldier as compared to guns presently being used. Currently, Indian army soldiers use INSAS LMG with a calibre of 5.56x45mm. The provisioning of this operationally urgent and very critically needed weapon will boost the confidence of the frontline troops.

MAJOR ATTACK ON NAXALS IN THE OFFING

RAJNISH SHARMA | DC NEW DELHI, MARCH 19

Security forces are planning one of the biggest offensive seen in recent times against Naxal outfits in Chhattisgarh. The operation which is being described as the final assault on the Naxal infested regions of Chhattisgarh is expected to be launched in the next week to ten days. The biggest offensive would be launched in the Bastar region which has the highest presence of Naxal cadres.

Top security sources here claimed that Chhattisgarh Director General of Police, DM Awasthi, chaired a high level meeting on Tuesday with senior officials of the central para-military forces, intelligence agencies and the State Police to finalise the plan and strategy for the 'final assault' against Naxals in the State.

Export of ventilators, masks banned

New Delhi, March 19: The government on Thursday banned export of all ventilators, surgical/disposable masks and textile raw material used for making masks and coveralls with immediate effect in wake of the coronavirus outbreak. The export of all ventilators, surgical/disposable masks only, and textile raw material for masks and coveralls only, has been prohibited, with immediate effect, the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) said in a notification. The decision will shore up domestic supplies of these items amid the coronavirus outbreak, which has killed four people and infected over 170 in India.

However, the notification said items including gloves, ophthalmic instruments and appliances, surgical blades, gas masks with chemical absorbent for filtration against poisonous vapour and smoke, and biopsy punch can be freely exported. India had on January 31 banned export of all kinds of personal protection equipment, including clothing and masks used to protect people from any air-borne particles. However on February 26, the government removed eight items, including a certain kind of gas mask and surgical blades,

SC orders floor test today

MP Chief Minister to seek legal options to decide future course of action

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, MARCH 19



Congress leader Digvijaya Singh addresses a press conference in Bengaluru on Thursday.

Delivering a jolt to the 15-month-old Kamal Nath government, the Supreme Court on Thursday directed it to face a floor test by 5 pm on Friday and left it to the 16 rebel Congress MLAs, lodged in a resort in Bengaluru, to take a call on participating in the trust vote. Chief Minister Kamal Nath who convened the Congress Legislature Party meeting here late in the evening to take stock of the situation in view of the court verdict, told reporters that he would seek legal opinion to decide his future course

of action. Delivering its verdict on the vexed issue, a division bench comprising Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and Hemant Gupta asked the Madhya Pradesh Assembly to reconvene for the trust vote and hold it by 5 pm on Friday. The Assembly had been adjourned on March 16 for 10 days "due to the coronavirus outbreak".

The court held that the floor test should be decided by a show of hands by MLAs in the House and ordered that entire exercise be videographed to maintain transparency. While leaving it to the 16 rebel Congress MLAs, who hold the key to the survival of the Kamal Nath government, to decide if they would take part in the floor test or not, the bench directed the directors-general of police of Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka to ensure their security if they wanted to come to the Assembly (to vote). The verdict was on the lines of the recent directive by Madhya Pradesh Governor Lalji Tandon to

Chief Minister Kamal Nath to face a floor test in the Assembly to prove his majority after 22 Congress MLAs resigned recently. The judgment, which followed a two-day hearing in the case, was billed to end the week-long political crisis in MP triggered by the resignation of veteran leader Jyotiraditya Scindia from the Congress to join the BJP, and subsequent resignation of 22 Congress legislators loyal to him. Earlier, Assembly Speaker N.P. Prajapati in a petition filed in the Supreme Court sought two weeks' time to take a decision on resignation of the 16 rebel MLAs..

Gogoi takes oath as RS member amid protests

New Delhi, March 19:

Former Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi on Thursday took oath as a nominated member of Rajya Sabha amidst unprecedented scenes of opposition members shouting slogans and walking out of the House. This is the first time ever that the House has witnessed slogan shouting and walkout during oath taking. Gogoi, 65, who retired as the Chief Justice of India in November last year after a tenure of 13 months, took oath in English in the name of God. As his

name was called for oath taking, Congress and Left members started shouting slogans like 'Shame on You' and 'Deal'. Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu ordered that the slogan shouting will not go on record. As Gogoi took oath, Congress, Left and their allies shouted slogans and staged a walkout. Naidu said it was not fair to shout slogans. "It is very unbecoming of members of Parliament." "No, this is not the way. Nothing will go on record. (It is) very unfair, very unfair," Naidu said as Gogoi

completed his oath. After taking oath, Gogoi walked up to the chair to greet Naidu, who responded to his greetings with folded hands. Naidu said members have the liberty to express their views outside the House on the issue. "You know the Constitution. You know the precedent, you know the power of the President (to nominate a member to RS)," he said. "You should not do anything in House. Whatever views you have you are at liberty to express outside," he said.

GOVT, BIG PRIVATE FIRMS OWE ₹ 6 LAKH CR TO MSMEs: GADKARI

New Delhi, March 19:

MSME Minister Nitin Gadkari on Thursday expressed serious concern over non-payment of nearly Rs 6 lakh crore dues to micro and small enterprises by government and large private firms, and said the Centre is working to find a solution of this serious problem. Responding to a discussion in the Rajya Sabha on the working of the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME), Gadkari said he has also sent a proposal to the finance ministry suggesting measures for providing relief to micro, small and medium enterprises to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus outbreak. The minister announced that the government will revamp the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) within three months and make it more export-oriented. Gadkari also told the House that all banks, including scheduled, private and cooperative, as well as non-banking financial companies (NBFCS)

are now allowed to lend money to the MSME sector. He said loans sanctioned and disbursed under various schemes will be monitored through a central portal in his ministry. "The government undertakings procure products but do not pay for 3-4 months. MSMEs are on the verge of collapse. Passing a legislation is easy. There are 20,000-22,000 cases. As per my estimates, big industrialists, state and central government undertakings owe Rs 5.5 lakh crore to Rs 6 lakh crore to small industries," Gadkari said. "This is a serious situation. We are in discussion with the finance ministry and we will find out some solution to it... We have to give their payments within three months," he added. On concerns raised by various members about impact of the coronavirus outbreak on the MSME sector, Gadkari said the sector is facing a big challenge and he is aware of the problem. "I have sent recommendations to the finance minister," he said.

KONKAN RAILWAY CORPORATION LTD (A Government of India Undertaking) NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER... Chief Engineer, Konkarn Railway Corporation Ltd., invites Open Tender in Single Bid system through IREPS portal from eligible contractors for the following work.

PSPCL Punjab State Power Corporation Limited Regd. Office: PSEB, Head Office, The Mall, Patiala-147001... NOTICE INVITING TENDER... Tender Enquiry No. C-3990/20-21/PO-TCE-MM

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GOVERNMENT OF TAMIL NADU KOMARAPALAYAM MUNICIPALITY E-Tendering Notice Dated: 16.03.2020... School Toilets Maintenance works in Komarapalayam Municipality the Municipal Commission.

AP govt to seek CBI probe into SEC letter

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MARCH 19

The Andhra Pradesh government has decided to write to the Union home ministry requesting a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) inquiry into the controversial letter purportedly written by the State Election Commissioner (SEC) Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar to the ministry. AP Chief Secretary

Neelam Sawhney will write to the Union home ministry and sources said Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has spoken to concerned officials in the home ministry. Within a few minutes of the Supreme Court's decision on local body elections being deferred by six weeks on Wednesday as requested by the SEC, a five-page letter purportedly written by SEC Ramesh Kumar went viral on social media.

TENDERS / NOTICES

NORTHERN RAILWAY Invitation of Tenders through E-Procurement System Principal Chief materials Manager, Northern Railway, New Delhi-110001, for and on behalf of the President of India, invites e-tenders through e-procurement system for supply of the following items:-

CITY UNION BANK LIMITED Administrative Office, No. 24-B, Gandhi Nagar, Kumbakonam - 612 001. Phone: 0435-2402322, 2401622

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CITY UNION BANK LIMITED Administrative Office : No. 24-B, Gandhi Nagar, Kumbakonam - 612 001. Phone: 0435-2402322, 2401622

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IN BRIEF

**CISCE postpones Class X, XII exams**

**New Delhi:** In a last minute-decision, the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE) postponed class 10 and 12 examinations, which were to start from Thursday, in view of the coronavirus outbreak. With the class 12 sociology exam scheduled to be held at 2 pm, the announcement was made at 10 am. In an official order on Thursday morning, CISCE chief executive Gerry Arathoon said, "In view of coronavirus spreading across the country and with such uncertainty and speculation in air, the Council, in the interest of health wellbeing of student and staff, has decided to postpone ICSE and ISC examinations to be conducted between March 19 and March 31." "The revised dates will be notified in due course of time," he added.

**UGC tells varsities to postpone exams**

**New Delhi:** The University Grants Commission (UGC) directed all universities and affiliated colleges on Thursday to postpone examinations till March-end due to the novel coronavirus pandemic. The evaluation work will be suspended during the period too. "All universities and affiliated colleges should postpone exams till March 31 and suspend evaluation work. Further schedule should be decided following a review of the situation," the commission said in an order.

**Tourists barred from tiger reserves**

**Bhopal:** The Madhya Pradesh government on Thursday prohibited entry of tourists in the tiger reserves in the state, keeping in view the Coronavirus outbreak. The state government has also ordered the people who visited foreign countries in the recent past to report to local authorities to ensure their medical check-up. The authorities of places of worship have also been directed to ensure that there would be no crowding of devotees inside the premises. MP has not reported a positive Coronavirus case so far. The government had earlier declared all schools in the state closed till March 31.

**Mamata says no help from Centre**

**Kolkata:** West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday claimed that her government was not getting necessary assistance from the Centre for combating Covid-19 in the state and was dependent on its own resources to tackle the crisis. Ms Banerjee, who was attending a meeting of hospital representatives at the State secretariat, said the state was making all efforts to two lakh masks and 30,000 gloves. Dispensing reports that shops and markets would down their shutters as a preventive measure against the pandemic, the TMC boss also said those spreading rumours would be tracked and taken to task.

**24-YR-OLD TESTS POSITIVE IN CHHATTISGARH**

**RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, MARCH 19**

A 24-year-old woman in Raipur, Chhattisgarh has tested positive for coronavirus, making her the first confirmed covid 19 case in the state. The woman arrived in Raipur from London via Mumbai on March 15. She complained of cold and cough and was admitted to the Raipur branch of All India Institute of Medical Sciences two days later, authorities of AIIMS, Raipur said on Thursday. "The woman who studies in London landed in Raipur via Mumbai on March 15. She was admitted in AIIMS in Raipur when she complained of cold and cough. Her samples tested positive for infection on Wednesday evening," AIIMS, Raipur, superintendent, Karan Peepre, said. The woman, along with her parents, has been admitted to an isolation ward of the AIIMS hospital in Raipur, he added.

**Uneasy calm**



A view of the deserted Gateway of India in the wake of coronavirus pandemic in Mumbai on Thursday. The number of cases in Maharashtra rose to 49 on Thursday. The state's home minister warned that those fleeing quarantine will face action.

**826 random samples tested negative: ICMR**

**No community spread of coronavirus in India still, says Centre**

**DC CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs NEW DELHI, MARCH 19**

There is no evidence of community transmission of coronavirus in India as all samples collected randomly to check the spread of the Covid-19 disease have tested negative, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) officials said on Thursday. "This indicates that the virus is still not at community transmission stage. Such random tests will be conducted continuously to see how the virus behaves," said Mr Lav Aggarwal, joint secretary in union ministry of health. Community transmission takes place when a person tests positive for the disease but doctors are not able to trace the source of the infection. It indicates undiagnosed and often asymptomatic people are unknowingly

**TS adds one more to count**

**DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MARCH 19**

In an announcement laced with serious ramifications of the spiralling up cases of Coronavirus (Covid-19) in the city, and possibly elsewhere in the state, the state health department on Thursday called on everyone who visited the Galleria Mall in Panjagutta on March 11 to immediately quarantine themselves at home and "access healthcare immediately after the onset of Covid symptoms."

The health department on Thursday said that one positive case of Covid-19 disease from a neighbouring state had visited the Galleria Mall on March 11 and added that those who visited the mall on that day can contact the state Covid-19 helpline of 104 for further guidance and answers to any questions they may have. Interestingly, the state government said that it will continue to allow malls, supermarkets and other retail shopping establishments where people can shop for essential commodities and other daily needs to remain open. Meanwhile, the government announced on Thursday that there was another Covid-19 positive case in the state. This case is of a person who had travelled to Hyderabad from Dubai. With this, the number of COVID-19 cases in the state has risen to 14.

Several areas in Srinagar and the towns of Budgam and Pulwama witnessed a lockdown on Thursday after reinforcements from Jammu and Kashmir police and Central paramilitary forces were fanned out in the wee hours to erect barricades and lay Concertina razor wires on roads to restrict the movement of residents. This came after a 67-year-old woman from Srinagar's Khanyar area was tested positive for Covid-19, the Valley's first case. She had returned from a pilgrimage to Mecca earlier this week and was put in isolation. While surveillance had started in the 300-metre radius of her residence on Wednesday night itself, the authorities decided to impose restrictions in various other parts of J&K's summer capital including Khanyar from Thursday morning.

**LOCKDOWN IN SRINAGAR, VALLEY AREAS**

**YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, MARCH 19**

Several areas in Srinagar and the towns of Budgam and Pulwama witnessed a lockdown on Thursday after reinforcements from Jammu and Kashmir police and Central paramilitary forces were fanned out in the wee hours to erect barricades and lay Concertina razor wires on roads to restrict the movement of residents. This came after a 67-year-old woman from Srinagar's Khanyar area was tested positive for Covid-19, the Valley's first case. She had returned from a pilgrimage to Mecca earlier this week and was put in isolation. While surveillance had started in the 300-metre radius of her residence on Wednesday night itself, the authorities decided to impose restrictions in various other parts of J&K's summer capital including Khanyar from Thursday morning.

**INDIAN TESTED POSITIVE IN IRAN DIED: MEA**

**New Delhi, March 19:** The government on Thursday said one Indian who tested positive for coronavirus has died in Iran while the other citizens infected with the disease are being provided treatment and taken care of by the Iranian government. Noting that the virus tends to be more fatal for those whose immunity levels are low, a senior MEA official said the deceased, an elderly person, belonged to the vulnerable age group and had health-related complications. —PTI

**Let staff work from home, Centre to cos**

**New Delhi, March 19:** The government on Thursday advised companies to implement 'work from home' policy for their staff as part of encouraging "social distancing" to curb spreading of coronavirus infections. In an advisory, corporate affairs secretary Injeti Srinivas said the ministry is examining relaxations under the companies law that could be implemented in wake of the coronavirus outbreak. The corporate affairs ministry has already allowed companies to conduct board meetings through video conference and other

audio visual means till June 30. It would also come out with a web form for companies/LLPs to confirm their readiness to deal with the coronavirus threat. This is aimed at collecting details of companies and LLPs that adopt 'work from home' policy. Since companies/LLPs (limited liability partnerships) are major employers, especially in urban areas, their full participation and cooperation is most essential to fully realise the objective of social distancing as a means to contain the spread, morbidity and mortality due to the disease, he said.

**Centre mandates WFH for 'B' 'C' staff**

**New Delhi, March 19:** The Central government on Thursday allowed 50 per cent of its employees to work from home and the remaining to attend office every day besides implementing different time slots for working hours in its effort to further check the spread of the coronavirus disease. An order issued by the personnel ministry directed the heads of departments (HoDs) to ensure that 50 per cent of Group B and C employees are required to attend office every day and the remaining 50 per cent staff is instructed to work from home. "All HoDs are advised to draft a weekly roster of duty for Group B and C staff and ask them

to attend office on alternate weeks. While deciding the roster for the first week, HoDs are advised to include officials who are residing in close proximity to their office or use their own transport to travel to the offices," it said. The order further said the working hours for all employees who attend office on a particular day should be staggered. It suggested that three groups of employees be formed and asked to attend office during three time slots - 9 AM to 5.30 PM, 9.30 AM to 6 PM and 10 AM to 6.30 PM, the ministry said. "The officials who are working from home on a particular day as per the roster drawn up should be available on

telephone and electronic means of communication at all times. They should attend office, if called for any exigency of work," it said. These instructions shall not apply to the offices and employees engaged in essential/emergency services and those directly engaged in taking measures to control spread of COVID-19, the ministry said. The department of financial services (DFS) and department of public enterprises (DPE) may issue similar instructions regarding financial institutions and public sector undertakings, it said. The decision came after the personnel ministry on Tuesday asked all central government departments to take

precautionary measures. "Discourage, to the maximum extent, entry of visitors in the office complex. Routine issue of visitor/temporary passes should be suspended with immediate effect. Only those visitors who have proper permission of the officer who they want to meet, should be allowed after being properly screened," it had said. All government departments were asked to install thermal scanners as feasible as well as mandatorily place hand sanitisers at the entrances of government buildings. "Those found having flu-like symptoms may be advised to take proper treatment/quarantine etc.," the ministry had said. —PTI

**Kerala announces ₹20k-cr stimulus package**

**DC CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 19**

One more person tested positive for Covid-19 in Kerala on Thursday, taking the total number of cases who are currently under treatment to 25. As on Thursday, 31,137 people are under surveillance across the state including 30,927 under home quarantine. As many as 237 persons are in isolation wards in hospitals including 64 who were admitted on Thursday and 6,103 persons were brought under surveillance. Of the 2,920 samples sent for testing, 2,342 have been found negative. Meanwhile, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan



announced a slew of economic and financial assistance measures worth ₹20,000 crore to deal with the situation arising out of Covid-19. Of this, ₹2000 crore was set aside for providing loans by women self help

groups under Kudumbasree, consumer loans, rural employment guarantee scheme will be implemented. Two installments of social security pension will be disbursed this month, costing around ₹1,320 crore. Those who do not receive pension will be given ₹1,000 each as financial assistance. All families will be provided 10 kg rice free, 1,000 hotels will be opened by April to provide meals at ₹20. A health package of ₹500 crore will be implemented. After a high level meeting here, the paramilitary forces and armed forces have extended all help to the state government to meet any challenge in connection with Covid-19.

**STATE PREPARES FOR STAGE III OF CORONAVIRUS**

**DC CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 19**

Local bodies in Kerala have been asked to identify buildings, hospitals, schools, lodges, auditoriums where those with Covid-19 symptoms could be put under surveillance. The arrangements are being made to deal with the possible spurt in cases during stage III. Even a small lapse could prove disastrous, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan told elected office bearers of local bodies during a video conference. Opposition leader Ramesh Chennithala joined Mr Vijayan in the

● The Chief Minister said a large number of persons might be put under surveillance in the next stage. ● Facilities will be required to accommodate people who came to state as travellers video conference, sending out a message that the government and the Opposition are on the same page in dealing with the disease. The Chief Minister said that things were under control but the state needs to be fully prepared to meet any challenge. In case there is a spurt in cases the existing facili-

ties would not be enough to meet the requirement. Mr Vijayan said a large number of persons might be put under surveillance in the next stage. Facilities will be required for accommodating people who have come to state as travellers and those who do not have permanent homes here. The Chief Minister said 99 per cent of people under surveillance are in homes. The local bodies will have to take the responsibility of protecting them on a priority basis. Basic needs like food, medicines should be provided to people and the local bodies should ensure they do not have any problems.

**India bans all int'l flights from March 22**

**DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 19:**

The Centre on Thursday embarked on a series of measures aimed at quarantining the nation against the spread of coronavirus from abroad beginning with imposing a ban on the landing of all international commercial passenger flights from March 22 to 29. It also suggested voluntary control of movement by senior citizens and children. As per the decisions taken at a meeting of a group of ministers, no incoming scheduled international commercial passenger aircraft shall be allowed to disembark its passengers, foreigner or Indian, on Indian soil after 3.30 pm on March 22. The group comprised ministers of home, health, shipping, civil aviation and external affairs who reviewed the status of coronavirus cases and the steps taken by the government so far to prevent the spread of the contagion. The decisions were taken based on the recommendations given by a committee of secretaries chaired by the cabinet secretary. The health ministry also advised senior citizens and children below the age of 10 years to stay indoors in view of the spread of coronavirus. "In order to protect the most vulnerable of our population, all states shall issue instructions

**Several trains cancelled due to low occupancy**

**New Delhi, March 19:** The railways on Thursday cancelled 84 trains, which will not operate between March 20 and March 31, taking the number of trains cancelled in view of low occupancy and coronavirus pandemic to 155, officials said. Railway officials said the trains were identified on Wednesday night and the decision would be effective from March 20 to March 31. These include IRCTC operated two Tejas Express trains and one Humsafar Express train. "All passengers having tickets in these 155 trains are being informed about it individually. No cancellation fee will be taken for these trains. Passengers will get 100 per cent refund," an official said. Tourist specials like Maharaja, Buddhist, Bharat Darshan, and state specials have already been cancelled. wherein all senior citizens above 65 except for public representatives, govt servants or medical professionals should be advised to remain at home and avoid gatherings except for medical reasons," Aggarwal said.

**Punjab suspends public transport**

**Chandigarh, March 19:** The Punjab government on Thursday announced suspension of public transport services from Friday midnight, besides restricting public gatherings to less than 20, in the state, inching closer to a shutdown amid the global outbreak of coronavirus. It has also decided to shut marriage palaces, hotels, restaurants, banquets and dining places, except home delivery services and takeaways in the entire state. "Public transport buses, tempos

and autorickshaws will be suspended from the midnight of Friday," local bodies minister Brahm Mohindra here. These decisions were taken in a meeting of the seven-member Group of Ministers (GoM), formed by the Punjab government to review the situation triggered by the coronavirus outbreak on a daily basis. Earlier, it was restricted to 50 people. The minister further said the public dealing in the government offices will also be restricted. —PTI

## DECCAN Chronicle

20 MARCH 2020

### Huge Ayodhya meet a disaster in the making

Serhii Plokhly's magnificent book *Chernobyl: The History of a Nuclear Catastrophe*, about the 1986 nuclear reactor accident, describes in great detail its horrific aftermath. Four days after the accident — despite the radiation poisoning deaths and the deep crimson sky, at night, above reactor number 4 — the Soviet Union insisted that the May 1 parade must be held in Kiev as usual. (It's a political decision to ward off Western propaganda against the dying empire.) Much like that bizarre decision is Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath's obstinacy on holding a massive jamboree on the occasion of Ram Navami at Ayodhya, from March 25 to April 2 — during the potentially most dangerous phase of likely community spread of the coronavirus (Covid-19).

This celebration comes even though Ayodhya's chief medical officer Ghanshyam Singh requested the administration to postpone the event. (The administration told him to pipe down and denied he had ever said anything.) Some in the administration wanted to have the event telecast live by Doordarshan so that pilgrims didn't have to make the journey to what would likely become a gigantic petri dish of bacteria, but that was shot down by the saints' community, who will not even discuss the possibility of postponing the event.

Instead, officials say that lakhs of likely pilgrims are expected to wear masks, as if that were the one impenetrable shield that will save India from a virus that has already infected 2.2 lakh people worldwide, killing approximately 9,000 of them. That India has so far escaped a massive infection could be because of under-reporting; but Western health experts predict the next big explosion of infections and deaths would be in India, Russia and Africa, in that order. If a lakh people, at the very least, show up in Ayodhya, not only would they expose themselves to an infection — there would be a multiplier effect as they travel home by train and then mingle in their communities. It is a horror movie scenario.

Yet the Yogi Adityanath government wishes to go ahead because Ram Navami is seen as having significance coming after the recent judicial verdict handing the site of the former Babri Masjid over for the construction of the Ram Mandir. Ayodhya-based Mahant Paramhans nonchalantly says: "Lord Ram will protect his devotees" from the coronavirus. Indeed, Ayodhya's saints are planning a *yagna* (fire offering) to the gods to ward off the coronavirus. It may be noted that several big temples have already conducted this puja but to no avail — instead the number of cases are growing daily. Yet it seems hard for the lunatic fringe to shake off its superstitious beliefs.

The religious lot will not back down, and possibly Prime Minister Narendra Modi is caught in a tight situation having to choose between the holy men at the core of his constituency and his responsibilities as head of the government. We would hope that on this occasion better sense prevails, and that the WHO guidelines are followed rather than a swami's rituals.

### Why the snooping?

The government needs to do a much better job of explaining why it needed to direct the telecom operators to provide it with the call data records (CDRs) of all mobile users across the country, as it implicitly raises issues like an erosion of privacy and turning the country into a Big Brother surveillance society. The Congress and other Opposition parties, not surprisingly, tried to raise the issue of what they called a "sinsister" move in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday, seeking a discussion, though this was not allowed. The explanation given by the communications ministry, that there was no "infringement of privacy" as no individual data was collected and there was no tracking of any cellphones, simply does not hold water. If, as the government claims, the entire exercise was to "address numerous complaints regarding quality of service", including call drops, echo, "dark spots" and cross-connections, surely this could have been done without requiring access to users' individual data?

The Opposition parties, and some others, have warned that the move by the department of telecommunications could be a clear breach of the Supreme Court's ruling granting all citizens the right to privacy. There are clear rules in place about giving the government access to individual users' mobile phone and Internet records, mainly in cases involving national security or the investigation of crime. But blanket access to the records of all mobile phone users across the country seems excessive and heavy-handed. Also, the timing of some requests by the government, such as in Delhi in early February at the peak of the campaign for the Assembly elections, and certain other sensitive times, do raise additional concerns. The Cellular Operators Association of India has done well to red-flag this issue, which is of vital public interest, and the government needs to give the people a fuller explanation.

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Subhani

US AND CHINA IN A WAR OF WORDS OVER CORONAVIRUS

## India must bridge big gaps to tackle Covid-19



Saikat Datta

In 2003, as the Severe Acute Respiratory (SARS) virus dominated the headlines, Satish Chandra, a former Indian Foreign Service veteran who was then deputy national security adviser, was appalled by India's unpreparedness to deal with a pandemic threat.

As Covid-19 rages through the world and has thousands infected, India seems to have escaped the brunt so far. It managed to quickly lock down its borders and started screening passengers at international airports fairly early. With positive detections of the virus at around 150 at last count, it seems to be in control. But Chandra's initial efforts uncovered a host of issues that are yet to be addressed. His study also didn't focus on several key issues that have a major bearing on India's national interests.

Soon after the SARS virus became known, Chandra immediately called a meeting at the National Security Council Secretariat and marshalled the available resources to put together a paper on this. This was arguably the first Indian government study on how to deal with such kind of biological threats. "Basically, I was driven by anxieties on what could happen if the bird flu, which was transmitted between birds, shifted to humans. There were half a dozen such cases in China, and our rough estimate was that we could be looking at a global mortality rate of 60 per cent when a pandemic hit us," Chandra told me over the phone.

For most Indian researchers studying pandemics, 1918 is a significant year. The Spanish flu started in the West and hit India at a time when there was no mass commercial air

travel. Even then, nearly 20 million are estimated to have died from it in India. Chandra's paper focused on early detection and isolation, as well as the general state of medical preparedness. "At that time our focus was on Delhi and we took some help from the state government headed by Shiela Dikshit and experts from the National Institute of Virology in Pune. But this was 2003, and we didn't look at the corporate sector or the impact of such a pandemic on the global economy."

**Large gaps in countering pandemic:** The idea defence against any pandemic is a good vaccine research and development capability coupled with a robust pharmaceutical industry. In India, the key government institutes for vaccine production were shut down in January 2008 after a World Health Organisation report that they didn't meet global statutory standards. These were revived later and the Central Research Institute in Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh, even ramped up some of its facilities in April 2016.

But this is clearly inadequate by all accounts. Chandra also flagged the point that the pharmaceutical industry in India had shifted to China to save on manufacturing costs. "The Advanced Pharmaceutical Industry (API) is hugely dependent on China. I have been pressing for shifting the industry back to India, even if it costs us because this is a strategic necessity," Chandra said.

Today, the privately-owned Pune-based Serum Institute of India hopes to start human trials of a vaccine in six months. A firm in the United States has skipped the entire leg of animal testing and

jumped to human trials to beat the virus. However, everyone agrees that a successful vaccine is still 18-20 months away, if at all. This means Covid-19 will be around for a while, even though social distancing — where people are asked to stay at home and cities are locked down — may slow it down.

In India, health is a major structural problem. The Central health budget in 2020 is at ₹67,484 crores, that is less than one per cent of GDP. It was raised by a marginal 5.7 per cent from last year's budget by the Narendra Modi government. On any given day, India's public healthcare system struggles to deal with people who can't afford expensive healthcare. The lack of a decent medical insurance scheme for large swathes of the population leaves them vulnerable to diseases and epidemics. Add the high levels of malnutrition, where, according to a 2017 study, it kills 62.8 per cent of children below five. Worse, a pandemic or an epidemic also means that this inadequate infrastructure will be the first one to be hit as first responders to a crisis. Doctors and nurses will be at high risk, and hospital beds will dry up. Intensive care units, ventilators and other critical medical equipment to keep people alive will be woefully inadequate, leading to high mortality if the epidemic spreads.

Therefore, the debate over carrying out more tests to detect Covid-19 cases is a delicate one. Should India expend its limited supply of test kits to chase every citizen, or hold on to go

**In India, health is a major structural problem. The Central health budget in 2020 is at ₹67,484 crores, that is less than one per cent of GDP. It was raised by a marginal 5.7 per cent from last year's budget by the Modi government.**

after most likely candidates. There are no easy answers yet.

**A one-page ancient epidemic law:** Astonishingly, India has a one-page law with just four bare sections passed in 1897 to deal with such a crisis. As Abhimanyu Tewari, a practising Supreme Court lawyer has noted, this law was amended just once in 1956 and is completely out of date. "There is a complete lack of pre-planning in its purview. The state and Central governments come into play only after an epidemic has broken out," Tewari explained to me on mail. "The law makes no effort to designate appropriate authorities or administrative infrastructure prior to an emergency. Since health is a state subject, there is no provision to coordinate a national effort in the law." So if a state urgently needs ventilators that are available in another state, there is no legal provision to share or shift resources, he pointed out.

These are just basic requirements to deal with an epidemic as potent and widespread as Covid-19. There is no plan in place to also deal with the economic ramifications for such an event in India. While most corporates are now sending their workforce back home, for key sectors like the IT industry, there are major consequences since they also deal with sensitive data. For a vast majority of daily wagers, working from home is simply not an option. The 1857 law has no provisions for the private sector, which as Tewari pointed out, is an essential stakeholder in dealing with an epidemic of this magnitude.

The way forward is to set up a multi-disciplinary task force with objectives that can be implemented in a time-bound manner. Hopefully, when the next pandemic arrives, India can lead in process and substance in combating a global threat.

The writer is a journalist based in New Delhi and a founding partner of CSDR Consulting

### LETTERS

#### CONTAIN SPREAD OF COVID-19

Tamil Nadu is reported to have recorded its third Covid-19 case. The virus is spreading like wildfire. Nearly 200 cases have been reported in India. Body heat test alone is not sufficient. Disinfection of public places like streets, the public transport systems, hospitals, private vehicles etc., have to be taken on a war footing. Many more people from the affected countries are to be airlifted and brought to India in the coming days. They should not be allowed to escape tests for already panic is gripping the people. The government has to do more to contain the spread of the virus in the coming days and save people.

N.R. Ramachandran,  
Chennai

The global number of confirmed cases of the Covid-19 has reportedly crossed 1,10,000 in over 100 countries. Although India has been relatively less affected so far, no way we can relax. In the current situation the global outbreak could get worse, and if it does so, soon it could strike a telling blow in India also. This is why the Narendra Modi government must take a consensus approach to effectively manage the risks of Covid-19 in India. This is the time now to think about the capacity required to handle the crisis before things could go worse.

R. Sivakumar, Chennai

#### RAJINI'S POLITICAL CONCEPT

It's not too late in the day to comment on your editorial *Does Rajini mean business?* (March 14). Like King Canute who commanded the incoming sea waves to halt, Superstar Rajinikanth expects a political revolution before entering politics! His insight that government and party must be two separate domains, that he will choose a competent, honest man as chief minister and that he will only act as a bridge between the two, has come as a blow to his fans and a blessing to his opponents. Rajini's concept of clean politics sounds Utopian in a land where political corruption has been carried to a fine art. Even Rajini's fan club leaders are not entirely above corruption! Rajini who wants the system to change, is still a product of the same system in which he rose to superstardom. It was also the system that shamelessly nurtured black money and tax evasion. There are no ready-made solutions available to you in film business or politics. Napoleonic theory is that two thirds of a plan is your calculation and data and one third is always a leap in the dark. If Rajini procrastinates further it could be only taken as a strategy to avoid politics and use his glib fans as pawns on the chessboard of his superstardom.

Kangayam R. Narasimhan,  
Chennai

Rafia Zakaria



### Like Spanish flu, will C-virus trigger collapse of world order?

The year was 1918, before the First World War when the first case of the Spanish flu was reported from Kansas, United States. By the time it ended about two years later, the Spanish flu pandemic was believed to have infected at least 500 million people — a staggering one-third of the population of the whole world. The death toll was said to be around 50m.

The largest number of lives taken by the Spanish flu was in undivided India. More than 18m people perished from the disease there — this was the largest number of deaths in a single country. Mahatma Gandhi also contracted the Spanish flu along with millions of his compatriots.

By the time the Spanish flu struck the subcontinent in the 20th century, the British had ruled India for one and half centuries, without having invested anything in the country's health infrastructure. There was no network of hospitals and no real system that could deliver healthcare to the millions of ordinary people living under colonial rule. Hence, it is not

surprising there was also no way of saving millions of those who were infected by the lethal flu.

For the Indian masses, this experience only confirmed the belief that the British were not benevolent masters. If the British were so interested in making things better for the Indians, why did they fail to provide a basic healthcare system that could have saved thousands of lives? The lack of answers from British representatives was among the factors that sowed the seeds of political discontent in the subcontinent. It could be said that the struggle against the British colonialists was further strengthened by a global pandemic.

The fatality rates and patterns of mortality of the Spanish flu made its ravages even more poignant. Most of the people it killed were young adults — those who had their lives before them. Death often came with what is called a "cytokine storm", a reaction in which the body's immune system is overwhelmed, triggering a shutdown of the organs one after the other. The first to fail was the respi-

ratory system, the patient could no longer breathe and death would follow soon after.

What paved the way for increasing anti-British sentiment in India also caused political cataclysms in other parts of the world. According to history books, people of the time would associate the Spanish flu with the beginning of the First World War in Europe. The casualties of this world war would merge in popular memory with the casualties of the Spanish flu, the terrible sadness and feeling of loss of the two fusing into one indistinguishable whole.

Our current historical moment feels just as momentous as the days of the Spanish flu. There are similarities in the two diseases themselves. The COVID-19 is not just a dangerous strain of influenza; it also affects the respiratory system. It also provokes a cytokine storm that overwhelms the respiratory system first. Many patients find it difficult to breathe and have to be attached to a ventilator. Reports from the Netherlands and South Korea show that patients

can remain on the ventilator for several weeks before they are able to breathe on their own. That is, if they survive. Many don't and many others will not. The novel coronavirus has now spread to most countries of the world. The doubling of cases every few days has meant that the world at large has been forced to introspect and change its own behaviour because of the inefficacy of the existing containment measures.

As epidemiologists are fond of telling us, the life of a virus is the behaviour of the virus and the behaviour of the host. Since the virus's aptitude for surviving on surfaces and infecting sometimes without causing symptoms cannot currently be treated, human beings have had to change their behaviour instead. It is currently believed that if a large enough number of the human population alters its behaviour through self-isolation, there will be no new hosts for the virus. If there are no new hosts then the spread of the coronavirus, which has proven to be a master at travelling fast and furious-

ly, can finally be stopped.

Then there is the question of politics. The Spanish flu pandemic was closely followed by a world war and sweeping transformational change all over the globe. Similarly, the novel coronavirus will also claim its casualties in the collapse of systems and beliefs that have existed unchallenged for centuries. We might witness the fall of governments and the fall of great world leaders. It is a historic time, it is an uncertain time, and it is a deadly time. It is also a time that is desperate for human solidarity. If humans, particularly those who are young and healthy, alter their behaviour despite knowing that the virus is likely to spare them, then the old, the weak and the infirm have a chance at survival. It is a tall order for a world that pivots on self-interest. But humankind has accomplished great things in the past. It has survived and it has endured. Now is the time to remind oneself and everyone else of that truth.

By arrangement with Daun



# We'll soon find out how robust civilisation is



Matt Ridley

On Sunday, lonely as a cloud, I wandered across a windswept moor in County Durham and passed a solitary sandstone rock with a small, round hollow in the top, an old penny glued to the base of the hollow. It is called the Butter Stone and it's where, during the plague in 1665, coins were left in a pool of vinegar by the inhabitants of nearby towns and villages, to be exchanged with farmers for food. The idea was that the farmer or his customer approached the rock only when the other was at a safe distance.

Four modern coins were on the rock, anonymous offerings to the spirits of the moor. Never once in my six decades did I expect to be back in a 17th-century world of social and physical distancing as a matter of life and death.

There are no good outcomes from here. Many people will die prematurely. Many will lose their jobs. Many businesses will

go under. Many people will suffer bereavement, loneliness and despair, even if they dodge the virus. The only question is how many in each case. We are about to find out how robust civilisation is. The hardships ahead are like nothing we've known.

The British government has been unusual in ramping up its social distancing measures, rather than rushing them all at once. This resulted in a good deal of bafflement and criticism, some of it justified. The driving motive was concern that a resurgence of the virus after its initial suppression would be a disastrous outcome, because people would not allow themselves to be curfewed twice, so the timing had to be right. But the vicious experience of Italy has changed everything. So when the darned models revealed that a single "managed" peak here leading to eventual herd immunity might kill 260,000 people and overwhelm the National Health Service, the strategy shifted from "delay" to "suppress".

Successive waves of the dis-

ease mean successive curfews and successive body blows to the economy

The UK government is now effectively admitting that even if drastic curfews lead to successive waves of the disease, that may be the least worst outcome. It is still a daunting prospect. Successive waves mean successive curfews and successive body blows to the economy. If we clamp down hard now and the infection rate drops, then we might be able slowly and cautiously to restart the economy in the summer but have to clamp down again when the virus resurges. Each time we do this, it will be more painful, but at least the health service will be at least much better prepared, with more intensive-care beds, more isolation facilities, more ventilators, more and newer testing kits, more data on the efficacy of repurposed drugs.

Moreover, each time the virus re-emerges, there will be more immune people to help look after the sick. Once you've had the disease, and assuming the immunity you acquire is long-lasting (not yet certain), then you are in a special category of person who can be employed — or volunteer — for what would otherwise be risky work, and for looking after older people. Each wave of the disease can then be less awful.

One side-effect of the government's step-by-step approach is

**There are no good outcomes from here. Many people will die prematurely. Many will lose their jobs. Many businesses will go under. Many people will suffer bereavement, loneliness and despair, even if they dodge the virus. The only question is how many.**

that the people have got ahead of the authorities. Lots of people have been volunteering to give up gatherings, work from home if they can or travel less before being asked to. The chorus of complaint last week on the social media that the government was not doing enough is a sign that people are now telling the government what to do — which is how it should be in a democracy. A Prime Minister is being criticised for not ordering us to do things, but "advising" us. Better than the other way around. As the libertarian thinker Douglas Carswell put it on Monday: "Treat people as responsible adults and they will behave more responsibly".

Until this year I thought this kind of infectious pandemic could not happen today. The defeat of infectious diseases as a cause of death has been so complete as to seem invincible: plague, smallpox, cholera,

typhoid, measles, polio, whooping cough and many more eradicated or nearly so. The failure of terrifying new animal-derived viruses like Hanta, Marburg, SARS, MERS, ebola, swine flu, bird flu and zika to cause more than a local or temporary interruption of the march of progress left us complacent. (Only HIV went global.) The advance of science allowing the rapid reading of the genome of the new coronavirus gave us false confidence: we would know how to beat it by the time it got out of China. It seemed that only the most innocuous of common colds, and milder forms of flu, seemed capable of remaining ubiquitous. And coronaviruses are a common cause of the common cold, so (despite SARS) they seemed like pussy cats, not tigers.

It turns out that I and many others were badly wrong. The human race has been playing epidemiological roulette all along. It has taken Mother Nature a long time to put a bullet in the right chamber, combining high contagion with asymptomatic carriers and a significant death rate, but she has done it.

We now know that we should have been building far more preparedness for such an event. The World Health Organisation has been asleep at the switch. The Wellcome Trust did well to establish a Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness

Innovation in 2017 in partnership with the Gates Foundation along with the Indian and Norwegian governments, but it should have been started much earlier.

Against many risks, excess precaution is a mistake, doing more harm than good by preventing innovation — but not in the case of threats that can explode exponentially from small beginnings. Apart from a special hospital after SARS, and South Korea, which geared up to test people and gather data on a huge scale, the world had done far too little to get ready for this possibility. Everything now is catch-up. And we are trying to catch the fastest runner of them all: an exponential curve.

The number of cases outside China has increased tenfold roughly every 10 days. If it continues at this rate, in two months the virus will have infected 100 million people. A vast experiment is happening as different countries try different strategies, with some in Asia having notably more success than others in Europe. But to stop the virus gaining a permanent foothold in the human population will require every single one of those experiments to work.

In the long run, we will get through this. Effective drugs will be found. Methods for keeping the very sick from dying

will improve. The milder forms of the virus will probably out-compete the harsher versions. A vaccine may yet work — though it has come as quite a shock to find out just how little vaccine development has improved in recent decades. Genomics allows us to read viral genomes in a flash and make messenger — RNA vaccines, in which the body manufactures the viral proteins, doing away with the need to put killed or attenuated viruses into the body. None the less, a scientific paper that I failed to read last year warned: "The current state of vaccine development is an expensive, slow and laborious process, costing billions of dollars, taking decades, with less than a 10 per cent rate of success."

We must not despair or return permanently to autarky and localism. With the right precautions, an open, free-trading, free-moving, innovating world is possible without pandemics and is essential for raising living standards. All governments must both splash the cash and slash many of the things it does that are not urgent to alleviate human suffering, and there are a lot of them. But in the midst of our misery let us be thankful for one thing: unlike many plagues, this one spares children.

*By arrangement with the Spectator*

## Managing MLAs, resort politics: The brazen art of party-hopping



Bhopinder Singh

The oath or affirmation by a member of Parliament or a state Assembly is only to "bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of India" and not towards any specific partisan group or ideology, under which the said member was elected. At best, the language of the Third Schedule insists on the member that "I will faithfully discharge the office upon which I am about to enter" — again, without mandating any fidelity to a political party.

Arguably, the right to subscribe or switch to any political party or its ideology ought to be the free choice of an individual in a democratic framework, though it can lead to moral compromise. Therefore party-hopping by elected members was brought under constitutional restraints, as captured in the Tenth Schedule, popularly known as anti-defection law.

While this law was made to dissuade reckless opportunism, the fact that decisions on defection are referred to the Speaker or Chairman of the House, still makes it susceptible to political biases and individual interpretation. Even though the Assembly Speaker is ostensibly apolitical and "looked upon as the true guardian of traditions of parliamentary democracy", the track record of the Speakers across the national and state legislatures, has been suspect. Members of political parties in India switch party affiliations far more frequently than in other democracies in the West.

Outwardly, India is touted as the "world's largest democracy"; how-

ever on a more scientific basis, as per *Democracy Index* (which measures, among other parameters, political culture), Indian democracy is now ranked 51st and categorised as a "flawed democracy"! While this dismal ranking is essentially attributed to the "erosion of civil liberties" in recent times, the thriving culture of political poaching, turncoats and defections has also seen an unprecedented high. Government formation and breakup has been elevated to an art — that of "management". The maxim, no one is untouchable in politics, is a truism, without any accompanying "baggage" of morality, conscience or ethics. This has given rise to creative processes like political "horse-trading" and the hilarious native expression, *Aaya Ram, Gaya Ram* — coined after Gaya Ram, a member of the Haryana Legislative Assembly who changed political flags thrice within a fortnight! Later, Gaya Ram continued his party-hopping spree with much aplomb and the tradition dutifully continued with his son! Importantly, the Indian voter remains unconcerned and rather forgiving about an elected member's flighty moves from one party to the other.

Creative loopholes in the anti-defection law notwithstanding, a certain sense necessitating a scale or mass shift of loyalties has given a geographical context to the whole exercise — resort politics! An entourage of "loyal" elected members is shepherded into a resort (usually in a state with a favourable dispensation), wherein they are kept together, away from prying eyes and contact, under the hawk eye of the political managers to "protect" them from political counterpoaching. Not only are the optics a blot on free speech, thought and access to the elected representatives, it is even more sadly a reflection of the fickle "loyalties" and corruptibility of the members, who are feared for shifting loyalties for material considerations! The amounts

**The choice to leave a political party in cases where someone thinks the party no longer reflects their values is perhaps a more honourable option than to publicly state specific issues and try to change the 'system', or start a new political party or even rebel under the same flag**

publicly bandied about as pecuniary lures for elected members are often pegged at double-digit crores, enough to see someone through for the rest of their life.

Much like the infamous Afghan warlords who would brazenly and incorrigibly shift sides on account of receiving mysterious suitcases filled with dollars, our elected political warlords exhibit a similar fleet-footedness and openness that, therefore, warrants quarantining their physical presence. All political parties and their representatives, without exception (except perhaps the Leftist parties who tend to be more ideologically anchored), have taken part in such opportunistic moves.

The most abused justification for party-hopping is often "in order to honour commitment towards public service". Such meaningless grandiloquence is soon followed by a political reward in the form of spoils from the political war. In this melee of extraneous considerations, no region, race or individual can truly claim to be different from the other — from supposed ideologies and former peasants to even erstwhile-maharajas. While no one should be grudging their personal and political ambitions — as indeed the choice to leave a political party in cases where someone thinks the party no longer reflects their values is perhaps a more honourable option than to publicly state specific issues and

try to change the "system", or start a new political party or even rebel under the same flag — to jump to an alternative political platform that was supposedly an irreconcilable anathema to the conscience earlier ought to be embarrassing to one's personal value system.

Jumping ship by an elected member and rewarding the jumper by a political party makes both the individual and the receiving party complicit in questionable politics. This shows the irrelevance of personal affiliations, as also ideological commitments, where seemingly the ends always justify the means. The citizenry must always remember that loyalty and commitment are very personal attributes, and if an individual can compromise on the same (without believable reasons) vis-à-vis their parent party — then the same individual could easily compromise on their commitment to their own constituents. Political ambition is certainly kosher; however naïve attempts to paint a sudden U-turn as necessary to "serve the people" is plain chicanery. Many party spokespersons in television "debates" who wax eloquent about the virtues of their party and leadership are often history-sheeters as political turncoats; that their angst and ire can still arouse dangerous passions, is a sad testimony to political ignobility that prevails.

Today the names of Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, Ambedkar, Savarkar and so forth are invoked in order to suit any and every political narrative as ignorant masses are swayed by manufactured emotions — emotions that are actually insincere, uncommitted and rootless. While loyalty to country should always outweigh loyalty to a party, so should loyalty to one's own conscience and values.

*The writer is a retired lieutenant-general and a former lieutenant-governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry*

## Want kids to love reading? Don't tell them what to read



Anthony Horowitz

A few years ago, I was surprised to open a newspaper and read that the head teacher of a London public school had decided to ban my books from his library. He described the adventures of Alex Rider, which have sold around 20 million copies worldwide, in terms so derogatory that I have no mind to repeat them. Suffice it to say that the article quite put me off my cornflakes.

But the strange thing was that — once I had got past the sheer offensiveness of his language and a mindset that believed that banning books could ever have good connotations — I was actually quite sympathetic to his wider point of view. Everyone agrees that children benefit from reading, but we seldom discuss what exactly we would like them to read. I've always believed that a worthwhile children's book should encourage young readers to raise their game; it should enlighten and illuminate as well as entertain. And that is what I hope I've written.

Last week newspapers reported that J.K. Rowling and her Harry Potter series seemed to have fallen out of favour with secondary pupils, who were instead turning to titles such as David Walliams's *Gangsta Granny* and Mr Stink. Personally, I find Walliams' entertaining and I think Tony Ross, whose illustrations often take up most of the page, is a genius. If children like these books, it would be crazy to put them off buying them. But that said, Rowling reinvented modern children's literature, created a fully realised world that ignited the dreams of millions, and proved that a book with 600 pages could still be manageable. I read this news with a heavy heart.

The question is, if you take against the "farting granny" books (and there are plenty of other authors writing in this vein), if you reject teenage spies, vampires, ghosts and dragons, what are you going to offer young readers? Again I sighed when my own demon headmaster (there is an excellent series of that name, by Gillian Cross) suggested some of the titles he had read as a

boy: *Goodnight Mister Tom*, *Treasure Island*, *Just William*, the Jennings series, *Moonfleet*...

These are wonderful books. I was never too crazy about Stevenson and found the battles at the end of *Treasure Island* confusing and interminable, but I loved the others, and to them I would add the Willard Price adventure series, the *Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*, *The Silver Sword*, *The Just So Stories*... I'm sure all of these titles will be familiar to *Spectator* readers, particularly those of my age. The truth is that they made me the writer that I am.

The fact that they are still in print speaks both to the quality of their writing and to their continued relevance, and when I visit schools or talk at festivals I often mention them and recommend them. I can completely understand a parent — or teacher — who wishes to share their own childhood favourites with their children. But even so, I think they're making a mistake if they are too prescriptive — for two reasons.

The first is that choosing a book, finding what you like, is one of the greatest pleasures of reading. It was the peculiar genius of Roald Dahl to recognise that children's books should belong to children, not to adults, and he was the first modern author to speak their language, to share their sense of humour and their worldview. Before Dahl came along, and even when my own career was beginning, it often struck me that most children's authors were either distant or dead. I read what my parents had read or what they gave me to read.

The beauty of reading is that it's a journey. A

child may start in the foothills with spies or zombies but once they've acquired the habit of reading they will be on their way to higher ranges... Dickens and Austen or McCarthy and McEwan... I'm plucking at random some of the writers I love. And I began with Tintin!

The second reason is more pernicious. The world has changed since we were children, and the books we read no longer connect with a generation which does not drink fizzy pop or think of war as being glorious or scrump apples from the local farmers. It may be hard to identify with a young hero who pipes up "This is going to be perfectly splendid!", even if, a few pages later, he leads you through the wardrobe and into Narnia.

Modern children's writers connect with modern times. Look at Malorie Blackman whose brilliant *Noughts & Crosses* series goes to the very heart of what racism means, both emotionally and politically: the first book has just been adapted by the BBC. Or *The Hate U Give*, the eviscerating story of a police shooting, written by Angie Thomas when she was still in her twenties. Her mother once took her into a library to keep her safe from a neighbourhood shooting. Not all children's books need to be issue-based but writers from Patrick Ness (*The Knife of Never Letting Go*) to Meg Rosoff (*How I Live Now*) and Neil Gaiman (*Coraline* — a modern day *Alice in Wonderland*) have succeeded by making their fantasies relevant to a new generation of readers.

Nicolette Jones, a critic and commentator of Young Adult literature, is leading a petition to make storytime compulsory in primary schools. She adroitly summarises what's at stake: "Children who read achieve more, do better in all subjects, and experience better wellbeing, yet only 37 per cent of children aged six to 11 read for pleasure daily."

It's those words "for pleasure" that are the key. Reading for pleasure, whatever book they choose, is something that every child should experience. Watching a child browse in a library or bookshop always makes me smile. I write adventure stories, but I am aware that, in an increasingly prohibitive age, reading should be an adventure in itself.

*By arrangement with the Spectator*

**It was the peculiar genius of Roald Dahl to recognise that children's books should belong to children, not to adults, and he was the first modern author to speak their language, share their sense of humour and their worldview**

## How can we be truly happy?



Sant Rajinder Singh Ji

If we look at the words, "worldly life", what does that entail? Most people are leading their lives to achieve the same goal — happiness. To reach there, people engage in similar activities. They begin their life as children needing food, clothing, shelter, love, education, health, safety and friendship. After graduating from school, they look for a job or start a family and want to acquire items needed to live, such as a place to reside, transport and money to survive — whether for their families or to achieve their goals in life. The rest of their lives are spent in making sure they have enough

money. Worldly life is doing the things required to live in the world. Within that framework, people are searching for happiness. No one seeks to be miserable. Many believe that happiness comes from having more money. Other think happiness comes from having name, fame and power. However, studies show that even people who are rich, famous, powerful, or having all the material possessions they can possibly have are still not happy. They still seek something more. Even having everything which we think will make us happy can lead to unhappiness when we lose what we have. The fact is that nothing made of matter is lasting. It is all temporary and subject to decay or loss. Ultimately, we have to leave this world when our time is up and we

cannot take anything with us. How then can we be truly happy? The only lasting happiness comes from connecting to the treasures within us. Our spiritual essence is a drop of the power that created all, and that power is love, consciousness, bliss, and joy. When we tap into that power within ourselves, we can swim in the ocean of divine love, peace, and happiness. That puts us into a state of ecstasy and joy that lasts. We become connected with the source of all wisdom, bliss, ecstasy, fearlessness, connectedness with all life and spiritual love. Living in such a state enriches our life. Then, no matter what our outer circumstances, whether rich or poor, famous or unknown, having a high position in life or not, we are happy. Our outer circumstances are enriched by our inner

connection with joy and divine love. Then we can pass through the stages of life, fulfil our outer obligations to earn a living, support a family, have a job, help others, but do so in a state in which we are joyous, fulfilled, and peaceful.

Meditation and spiritual life provides this joy that bubbles from within us that helps us in our outer life. We also fulfill our true purpose of life, which is to know our self as a soul. We do not just have to live on hearsay but prove to ourselves through firsthand experience the existence of what lies beyond. If one is sincerely looking for spiritual awakening and knowledge of our soul, the Creator and spiritual realms within, it is available through meditation on the inner light and sound.

*Sant Rajinder Singh Ji, head of Sawan Kirpal Ruhani Mission, works towards promoting inner and outer peace. He can be contacted at [www.sos.org](http://www.sos.org).*



IN BRIEF

**Virus: Thai deploy 'ninja robots'**

**Bangkok:** Thai hospitals are deploying "ninja robots" to measure fevers and protect the health of overburdened medical workers on the frontlines of the coronavirus outbreak. First built to monitor recovering stroke patients, the machines have been quickly repurposed to help fight the disease, which has so far killed nearly 9,000 people around the world. They have helped staff at four hospitals in and around Bangkok to reduce their risk of infection by allowing doctors and nurses to speak to patients over a video link.

**Hokkaido lifts state of emergency**

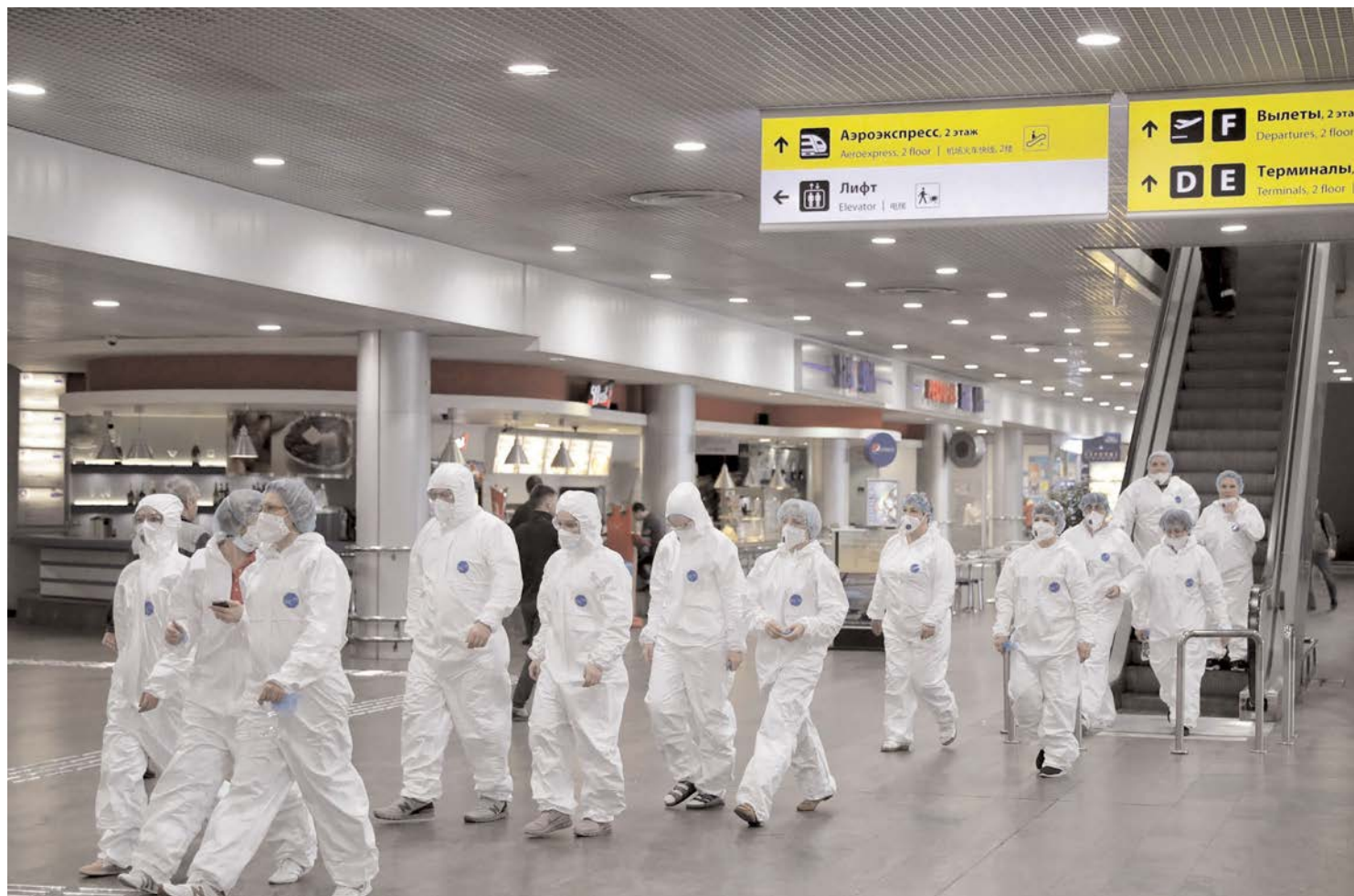
**Tokyo:** Japan's northernmost main island of Hokkaido on Thursday lifted a state of emergency declared last month over the new coronavirus, saying it sees signs of the outbreak tapering off. The governor of Hokkaido prefecture announced the emergency measure on February 28, as infections in the region grew. The call urged residents to avoid unnecessary outings, though it did not come with aggressive enforcement measures of the sort being implemented now in parts of Europe. Nearly 20 days after the declaration, there were signs the spread of the coronavirus is abating, governor Naomichi Suzuki said late Wednesday. "We were able to avoid the situation that we initially worried about, an explosive spread of the infection leading to collapse in the medical system and a failure to save lives," Suzuki said at a meeting.

**Sydney Film Festival called off**

**Los Angeles:** The 2020 edition of Sydney Film Festival stands cancelled amid the spread of coronavirus. The movie gala, which was scheduled to be held from June 3 to June 14, has been called off for the first time ever, reported Deadline. "It is with deep regret that, for the first time in its history, the Sydney Film Festival board and management must announce the cancellation of this year's festival". "The decision to cancel this year's Sydney Film Festival follows a review of the most up to date advice regarding ways to minimize the spread of the coronavirus, and the New South Wales Public Health (Covid-19 Public Events) order banning events of 500 people, which is in place until 14 June," chairperson Deanne Weir, CEO Leigh Small, and festival director Nashen Moodley said in a statement.

**COVID: DIGESTIVE SYMPTOMS ARE PROMINENT**

**Beijing, March 19:** The COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the novel coronavirus, may reveal digestive symptoms, including diarrhea, according to a new study that may lead to better diagnosis of the deadly disease in patients who do not show respiratory symptoms to the viral infection. The research, published in The American Journal of Gastroenterology, noted that nearly half of COVID-19 patients enrolled in the study presented digestive symptoms, such as diarrhea and loss of appetite, and cited them as their chief complaints. According to the researchers, who were part of the Wuhan Medical Treatment Expert Group for COVID-19 in China, patients with digestive symptoms had a longer gap between the onset of symptoms, and hospital admission than patients presenting only respiratory symptoms. In the study, they enrolled patients confirmed to have COVID-19 from three hospitals in Hubei province, and investigated the prevalence, clinical characteristics, and outcomes of COVID-19 patients with and without digestive symptoms. The scientists assessed the epidemiological history, demographics data, clinical characteristics, laboratory data, treatment programs, and outcome measures obtained from the patients' medical records, and followed their health outcomes till March 5. According to the study, 99 patients (48.5 per cent) were admitted to the hospital with one or more digestive symptoms as their chief complaint.



Russian medical experts walk to start their shift to check passengers arriving from foreign countries at Sheremetyevo airport outside Moscow in Russia on Thursday.

**UK to close schools, troops on standby as virus toll rises**

**PM Boris said that exceptions will be made for the children of key workers**

**London, March 19:** Britain announced Wednesday it would be closing schools in the coming days and placing 20,000 troops on standby in efforts to stem the spread of coronavirus, as the death toll topped 100. Prime Minister Boris Johnson had held off following the lead of other European countries because of the impact it would have on the workforce. But as the outbreak

spreads and the death toll reached 104, up from 71 in a day, he said schools would be closed indefinitely later this week. "After schools shut their gates from Friday afternoon, they will remain closed," he told his daily news conference. Exceptions will be made for the children of key workers — including healthcare staff, police and delivery drivers — and for the most vulnerable children.

Johnson earlier this week advised people to work from home and avoid unnecessary social contact and travel, warning the infection rate was starting to spike. On Wednesday he said this was having an effect but repeated advice for people with symptoms to self-isolate for between one and two weeks, depending on circumstances. "We will not hesitate to bring forward further and

faster measures," he added. On Wednesday evening the Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced that 20,000 military personnel were being placed at "higher readiness" to help public services as part of a "COVID Support Force". Defense secretary Ben Wallace said the armed forces "stand ready to protect Britain". The MoD said reservists would be called up and 150 military personnel trained

to drive oxygen tankers to support the health service, if needed. Speculation is rife that London in particular could soon be subject to more draconian measures, as the capital records the most number of cases. "We know London is ahead of the rest of us so we may see more stringent measures than even those that we have announced so far," Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said in Edinburgh earlier. — *Agencies*



Michel Barnier

**EU CHIEF BREXIT NEGOTIATOR TESTS POSITIVE**

**London, March 19:** The Chief Brexit Negotiator for the European Union (EU), Michel Barnier, on Thursday confirmed on social media that he has tested positive for COVID-19. Barnier is the lead on the next phase of negotiations on the EU's future trading relationship with the UK through the ongoing Brexit transition period after it left the economic bloc at the end of January. He had some of his officials in London for talks just last week, which could trigger concerns within Westminster of the further spread of coronavirus within UK government quarters. "I would like to inform you that I have tested positive (for) COVID-19. I'm fine, morale is good. I naturally follow all the instructions, just like my team," Barnier said in a Twitter video message. "For all those affected already, and for all those currently in isolation, we will get through this together," said the 69-year-old former French foreign affairs minister. Both Belgium, where the European Commission is based, and Barnier's native France have implemented strict social distancing measures. Coronavirus has now infected more than 200,000 people and killed more than 8,000 globally, with over 83,000 people having recovered from the infection, according to data from Johns Hopkins University. — *PTI*

**Pak reports first two deaths from Covid-19**

SHAFQAT ALI | DC ISLAMABAD, MARCH 19

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province reported Pakistan's first two deaths from the novel coronavirus while 338 patients are infected with the disease across the country on Thursday. Sindh remains the worst-hit province by the pandemic as 213 patients have been tested positive for coronavirus in it. 45 cases have been confirmed in Balochistan, 33 in Punjab, 23 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 15 in Gilgit-Baltistan, eight in Islamabad and one in Pakistan Administrated Kashmir.

Eight individuals who reached Sukkur from Taftan are tested positive for coronavirus and two more patients in Karachi have been diagnosed with COVID-19. The number of sufferers in the metropolis has reached 61. Meanwhile, one more patient in Sindh has recovered taking the count to three. Twenty-two more cases have been reported in Balochistan and all of them have been shifted to isolation rooms.

● **PAKISTAN'S** coronavirus cases sharply rose to 448 on Thursday, as the military said that measures are being taken to make the armed forces' medical facilities available for an "extreme emergency" situation.

● **RUSSIA REGISTERED** the first death of a patient infected with the coronavirus on Thursday, an elderly woman who had been hospitalised in Moscow, health officials said. The 79-year-old, who had tested positive, was hospitalised on March 13 and had several other conditions including diabetes and heart problems, the Moscow health department said in a statement.

● **SUB-SAHARAN Africa** recorded its first COVID-19 death, a high-ranking politician in Burkina Faso, as the head of the World Health Organisation urged the continent to "prepare for the worst".

**PAK CLOSES WAGAH BORDER WITH INDIA**

DC CORRESPONDENT ISLAMABAD, MARCH 19

Pakistan Interior Ministry on Thursday closed Wagah Border in order to curb the spread of deadly coronavirus in the country. According to the notification issued by the ministry, the border will remain shut for two weeks.

The notification further stated that the suspension of activities at the border is in the best interest of both Pakistan and India. The decision was taken after Khyber Pakhtunkhwa reported Pakistan's first two deaths from the novel coronavirus while 310 patients are infected with the disease across the country. Sindh remains the worst-hit province by the pandemic as 211 patients have been tested positive for coronavirus in it.



A sheet with a rainbow and writing in Roman slang reads "Come on", above an empty street in Rome. — *AP*

**Italy overtakes China in deaths**

**Rome, March 19:** Italy on Thursday overtook China's coronavirus death toll, with 427 new fatalities taking its total since the first case was registered in February to 3,405. China has officially reported 3,245 deaths since registering the first infection at the end of last year. Meanwhile, lockdown measures taken in Italy over the coronavirus pandemic will be extended beyond their original deadline," Conte told Thursday's edition of the Corriere della Sera newspaper. Conte referred to the closures of many businesses, "individual activities" and the shutdown of schools. — *AFP*

of most businesses and a ban on public gatherings in Italy, the European country worst hit by the pandemic, are due to expire on March 25. School closures and other measures, such as a ban on fan attendance at sporting events, are due to run on until April 3. "The measures we have taken... must be extended beyond their original deadline," Conte told Thursday's edition of the Corriere della Sera newspaper. Conte referred to the closures of many businesses, "individual activities" and the shutdown of schools. — *AFP*

**CHINA REPORTS NO NEW DOMESTIC CASES FOR 1ST TIME**

**Beijing, March 19:** China on Thursday reported no new domestic transmissions of coronavirus for the first time since the deadly virus surfaced three months ago, achieving a milestone in its battle against the pandemic that has brought the country to a grinding halt and caused an unprecedented global health crisis. While no domestic cases were reported, Wuhan, where the outbreak began, still has 6,636 people in hospitals including 1,809 in severe condition and 465 in critical condition, local health commission said. China now faces a greater threat of infections of imported cases, which jumped by 34 on Wednesday with large number of Chinese and foreigners arriving back to join their duties. While zero domestic cases is a major milestone, which heralds the end of domestically generated Covid-19 cases, China, however, continues to grapple with mounting death toll which climbed to 3,245 on Wednesday with eight more fatalities. — *PTI*

**VIRTUAL | WORLD Sites refuse to divulge traffic details but their usage is far from slowing Dating amidst virus: chat online, meet later**

**New York, March 19:** With governments clamping down on social interactions to contain the coronavirus spread, dating sites are discouraging dates and asking users to get to know each other virtually instead. "We don't know who needs to hear this, but now is NOT the time to go out with your date to a bar," leading match-maker OkCupid tweeted on Monday. "FaceTime, Skype, call, text, call, message on our app... all very romantic right now," it added. Dating sites contacted

refused to divulge their traffic since Covid-19 starting shutting down US cities this week but it appears their usage is far from slowing. Even if some academics would like them to suspend their activities entirely, "It's time to shut down Tinder and all online dating services," tweeted US writer Matt Stoller. "No more internet-enabled interactions among random people until the #coronavirus crisis has passed," he added. Joking about the coronavirus has become popular on dating sites,



Representative image

● **"WE DON'T KNOW** who needs to hear this, but now is NOT the time to go out with your date to a bar," leading match-maker OkCupid tweeted. "FaceTime, Skype, call, text, call, message on our app... all very romantic right now," it added. personally that's a turnoff," said comedian and author Lane Moore. She helped created the show "Tinder Live," in which she interacts with matches in real time, and thinks coronavirus could

be an "opportunity" for people to bond. "I'm talking to a guy right now who I met on Tinder Live and we're both talking about how this coronavirus COVID-19 stuff is impacting our lives so that can be a good way to know somebody," she said. Moore, from New York, says many of the men she meets on Tinder want to cut the conversation short and jump straight to meeting in the flesh. She thinks it's a good thing that now men are being forced to chat more first. "That's something that women have always wanted

because it's an opportunity to meet someone you like the first time but also try to make sure that they're safe," Moore explained. The dating site Coffee Meets Bagel (CMB) is proposing several different ideas for remote interactions, including an online video game date. "This is going to be important for us to think outside the box in crazy times like this," said CEO Dawoon Kang. CMB is also organizing an online group discussion, which it has never done before. — *AFP*

SHORT TAKES

**SPACEX PLANS FIRST MANNED FLIGHT TO SPACE**

Washington, March 19: Elon Musk's SpaceX will send astronauts to the International Space Station for the first time in May, NASA said, announcing the first crewed launch from the United States to the platform since 2011.

The tech entrepreneur's company will launch a Falcon 9 rocket to transport NASA astronauts Bob Behnken and Doug Hurley in a first for the space agency as it looks to cut costs.

"NASA and SpaceX are currently targeting no earlier than mid-to-late May for launch," the US space agency said in a statement Wednesday. In March, Musk's Crew Dragon capsule made a round trip to the ISS, which is in orbit more than 250 miles (400 kilometers) above Earth, with a mannequin on board, before returning to the Atlantic after six days in space.

Since the last US space shuttle mission in 2011, after 30 years of service, only the Russians have been going back and forth to the ISS. SpaceX has made the trip 15 times since 2012, but only to refuel the station. It is not the only private company servicing NASA: Boeing has also won a contract and is developing its own Starliner capsule.

**BIBI ACCUSED OF EXPLOITING VIRUS CRISIS**

Jerusalem, March 19: With the Israeli government enacting a series of emergency measures to stem the spread of the new coronavirus, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is facing growing accusations that he is exploiting the crisis to entrench himself in power and undermining the country's democratic foundations.

Amid a wave of sweeping restrictions that have put Israel in near shutdown mode, Netanyahu has managed to postpone his own pending criminal trial, authorize unprecedented electronic surveillance of Israeli citizens and block parliament from pressing ahead with legislation aimed at pushing him from office.

The moves, on the heels of the country's third inconclusive election in less than a year and under the shadow of Netanyahu's corruption indictment, sparked leading opposition figure Yair Lapid to tell Israeli citizens that they "no longer live in a democracy."

"There is no judicial branch in Israel. There is no legislative branch in Israel. There is only an unelected government that is headed by a person who lost the election."

You can call that by a lot of names, it isn't a democracy," he said in a recorded video. The new coronavirus has spread to more than 100 countries, infected more than 217,000 people worldwide and killed more than 8,700.

**KHAMENEI TO PARDON MORE PRISONERS**

Tehran, March 19: Iran's top leader will pardon 10,000 more prisoners in an apparent effort to combat the coronavirus, state TV reported Thursday.

As part of steps to curb the spread of the new virus that has killed more than 1,100 people in Iran, the country has already released 85,000 prisoners on temporary leave.

Separately, the United Arab Emirates added to its list of people barred from entering all residents who are currently abroad.

The decision impacts people whose homes, children, bank accounts and livelihoods are in the country, but who were traveling or outside the country.

The ban goes into effect at mid-day Thursday for at least two weeks. Only Emirati citizens are allowed to return. The UAE, which is home to Dubai and Abu Dhabi, has 113 confirmed cases of the virus. It announced it was suspending all new labor permits, including those for drivers and domestic workers, until "further notice."

The UAE is unique in that only about 10% of its population, or about 1 million people, are Emirati citizens. The other 90% are foreign residents who fuel its economy and keep the country running.

They hold the vast majority of jobs in construction, transportation, hospitality, sales, medicine, education and other key sectors. The Middle East has some 20,000 cases of the virus, with most in Iran or originating from Iran.

**Trump calls himself 'wartime president'**

US President Trump also deployed two navy hospital ships to fast track the coronavirus treatment

Washington, March 19: Describing himself as a "wartime president" fighting an invisible enemy, President Donald Trump invoked rarely used emergency powers to marshal critical medical supplies against the coronavirus pandemic. Trump also signed an aid package — which the Senate approved earlier Wednesday — that will guarantee sick leave to workers who fall ill. Trump tapped his

authority under the 70-year-old Defense Production Act to give the government more power to steer production by private companies and try to overcome shortages in masks, ventilators and other supplies.

Yet he seemed to minimize the urgency of the decision, later tweeting that he only tapped the Defense Production Act "should we need to invoke it in a worst case scenario

● **THE US** has approved the anti-malarial drug chloroquine for use as a treatment against the new coronavirus, President Donald Trump said on Thursday. They've gone through the approval process — it's been approved.

in the future." "Hopefully there will be no need," he added, "but we are all in this together!"

● **US PRESIDENT** Donald Trump has signed into law a sweeping multi-billion emergency aid package to help Americans mitigate the adverse economic impact of the fast-spreading coronavirus that has killed over 8,800 people, including nearly 150 in America.

er!" The pandemic was starting to show its effects in the job market.

The Labor Department reported Thursday that the number of Americans filing new claims for unemployment benefits surged last week by 70,000.

Trump's mixed messaging came as he took a series of other extraordinary steps to steady the nation, its day-to-day life suddenly and fundamentally altered.

The Canada-U.S. border, effectively closed, save for

commerce and essential travel, while the administration pushed its plan to send relief checks to millions of Americans.

Trump said he will expand the nation's diagnostic testing capacity and deploy a Navy hospital ship to New York City, which is rapidly becoming an epicenter of the pandemic, and another such ship to the West Coast. And the Housing and Urban Development

Department will suspend foreclosures and evictions through April to help the growing number of Americans who face losing jobs and missing rent and mortgage payments.

But as Trump laid out efforts to help the economy, markets plummeted. Gone were nearly all the gains that the Dow Jones Industrial Average had made since Trump took office.

— AP

**First 2 Congressmen test positive**

Washington, March 19: Two US lawmakers including a Florida representative on Wednesday became the first members of Congress to announce they have tested positive for the novel coronavirus.

Congressman Mario Diaz-Balart's office said in a statement that "just a short while ago, he was notified that he has tested positive for COVID-19".

The Republican who represents part of Miami follows that city's Mayor Francis Suarez, who announced that he had tested positive for coronavirus last week.

They are following CDC-specified self-isolation guidelines at their homes.

Diaz-Balart's diagnosis prompted a member of congressional leadership, the number two Republican Steve Scalise, to immediately self-quarantine as he had an extended meeting with his colleague last week.

"Fortunately, I am not experiencing any symptoms, and will continue working remotely on Congress's Coronavirus response" and remain in close contact with Trump

administration officials to ensure that swift action to address the crisis continues, Scalise said in a statement.

In the western state of Utah, Democrat Ben McAdams became the second congressman to announce he tested positive. After developing a mild cold Saturday evening when he returned from Washington, "my symptoms got worse and I developed a fever, a dry cough, labored breathing and I remained self-quarantined," McAdams said.

He was tested Tuesday, received a positive diagnosis Wednesday, and remains in isolation at home, he said.

The attending physician of the US Congress said in a statement released by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi that Diaz-Balart and McAdams "are ill, but in good condition." They are following self-isolation guidelines set forth by US health officials, he added.

Diaz-Balart said that he had entered into quarantine and was working from his Washington apartment.

**One arm distance**



Customers stand in line and keep distance in front of a fruit and vegetable stand at a weekly market in Berlin, Germany, on Thursday. In order to slow down the spread of the novel coronavirus, the German government has considerably restricted public life.

— AP

**S'pore confirms 32 new cases**

Singapore, March 19: Singapore on Thursday confirmed 32 new coronavirus cases, including 24 imported ones, taking the total number of infections in the country to 345. All the imported coronavirus cases were returning residents and long-term pass holders who had travelled to Europe, currently the epicentre of the virus, as well as to North America and ASEAN countries.

According to the health ministry, 15 of the 221 patients in hospitals are in critical condition. A total of 124 people have fully recovered and have been discharged from hospitals. Singapore authorities on Thursday said all students and school staff

returning from travel during the March holidays will be put on a leave of absence for 14 days upon their return.

This will apply to those who returned from overseas on or after March 14, according to a Channel News Asia report on Thursday.

Singaporeans, permanent residents, long-term pass holders and short-term visitors entering the country from 11:59 pm on Friday will be issued a 14-day stay-home notice, the Ministry said. Those serving a stay-home notice will have to stay at their place of residence at all times for 14 days after entering Singapore.

— PTI

**Virus cases in NY could reach 10,000 soon: Mayor Bill de Blasio**

New York, March 19: Mayor of New York Bill de Blasio has cautioned that the number of COVID-19 cases in the city could increase substantially to about 10,000 very soon and called for "urgent intervention" by the federal government to help slow down the trajectory of the coronavirus pandemic.

The United States has at least 8,736 cases of coronavirus and 149 deaths, according to state and local health authorities and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

New York is by far the worst-hit state, with more than 2,900 cases and 21 deaths. The city added nearly 1,000 cases of individuals infected by the virus in a span of just one day.

"So, a hundred plus new cases yesterday that is what I'm seeing as a kind of a gallop now. This morning, the latest news, 923 cases, but we're going to top a thousand today undoubtedly. We're going to be at 10,000 not so long from now," de Blasio said.

He said the exponential increase in the number of cases will put a strain on the city's hospitals, particularly the ICUs.

"This is something that



Bill de Blasio

needs urgent intervention by the federal government and I think we're all going to have to go deeper in changing our approach, which is why I think an honest conversation about shelter in place has to happen," he said, making a reference to a blanket quarantine being imposed on the city to control the spread of the virus.

The Mayor said he was considering issuing a "shelter in place order", a drastic and unprecedented measure that would impose a blanket quarantine on 8.6 million New Yorkers in order to control the rapidly growing number of coronavirus cases in the city. However, New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo said such a measure was unlikely to be implemented.

"The emergency policies

● **NEW YORK** is by far the worst-hit state, with more than 2,900 cases and 21 deaths. The city added nearly 1,000 cases of individuals infected by the virus in a span of just one day

● **THE MAYOR** said he was considering issuing a "shelter in place order", a drastic and unprecedented measure that would impose a blanket quarantine on 8.6 million New Yorkers in order to control the rapidly growing number of coronavirus cases in the city.

New Yorkers under mandatory or precautionary quarantine due to COVID-19.

Emphasising the need for social distancing to slow the spread of the virus, companies have asked employees to work from home, schools and colleges across the nation are closed.

de Blasio signed an Executive Order limiting restaurants, bars and cafes to food take-out and delivery.

Nightclubs, movie theatres, small theatre houses, and concert venues will all close with effect from March 17, a significant measure that will ensure social distancing.

New York City Subway tweeted that it had seen a decline of 3.7 million people in its ridership on March 17 as compared to the same day a year ago.

"We miss you, but for now, we'll say: thank you for not riding with us. You're keeping NYC safer," it said.

The coronavirus outbreak, that first originated in Wuhan in China, has killed 8,809 people and infected 218,631 across 157 countries and territories, according to a tracker maintained by Johns Hopkins University. — AP



Indira varma

**'GOT' STAR INDIRA VARMA TESTS POSITIVE**

London, March 19: "Game of Thrones" star Indira Varma has revealed that she has tested positive for coronavirus.

Her diagnosis comes two days after fellow "Game of Thrones" actor Kristofer Hivju also said that he tested positive for the COVID-19 infection.

Varma, who played the role of Ellaria Sand in the epic HBO series, took to Instagram on Wednesday to share the news.

"I'm in bed with it and it's not nice. Stay safe and healthy and be kind to your fellow people," she wrote. The 46-year-old actor was starring in the modern take of Anton Chekhov's play "The Seagull" in London's West End, alongside "Game of Thrones" alum Emilia Clarke.

— PTI

**HAND | WASH** **Outbreak has infected some 200,000 people and killed 9,000 across the globe**

**No soap, no water: Many lack basic safety**

Paris, March 19: As nations around the world fight the coronavirus pandemic with mass lockdowns and travel bans, UN experts warn that some three billion people lack even the most basic weapons to protect themselves: soap and running water. The outbreak has infected some 200,000 people and killed 9,000, scorching through populations across the globe after emerging in China late last year.

While Europe has become the centre of the battle against the virus, closing borders and

sequestering millions of people in their homes, concerns are rising for developing nations with fragile healthcare systems.

Countries across Africa and Asia have heavily restricted travel, imposed quarantines and closed schools, with fears for impoverished communities as infections begin to grow.

But one of the most fundamental practices individuals can adopt to shield themselves from COVID-19 — thorough hand washing — remains inaccessible for many millions. Using household survey



Representational only

data, the United Nations Children's Fund estimates 40 percent of the world's population, or three bil-

lion people, do not have the means to wash their hands at home. Sam Godfrey, UNICEF

chief of water and sanitation in east and southern Africa, said communities lack easily accessible running water, are unable to buy soap or do not realise its vital role in preventing illness.

"Even for the frontline workers, the health workers, there remains a challenge also in terms of understanding of the importance of hand washing," said.

With the first infections in the region often coming from those who have travelled internationally, Godfrey described the outbreak as "almost like a

rich man's disease for Africa, which, of course, will end up with the poor man suffering the most".

Those living in tightly-packed slums, as well as the large refugee populations in camps and urban areas in the Horn of Africa, are particularly at risk because they may be malnourished or have underlying health problems. And they often lack sanitation.

In sub-Saharan Africa, 63 percent of people in urban areas — 258 million people — lack access to hand washing, according to the UNICEF figures. — AFP

**IRAN SAYS 149 NEW VIRUS DEATHS**

Tehran, March 19: Iranian authorities on Thursday announced 149 new deaths from the virus, raising the toll to 1,284 in a country that is one of the worst hit by the pandemic.

While Thursday's death toll surpassed that of the previous day's — 147 were reported on Wednesday — the number of new cases has fallen, according to figures provided by Deputy Health Minister Raisi. A total of 18,407 people have contracted the disease in Iran, with 1,046 new cases confirmed in the last 24 hours.

**BRIEF**

## Bacon encourages fans to stay home

**Los Angeles:** Kevin Bacon, Hollywood's most interconnected star, wants his fans to stay at home to help prevent the spread of coronavirus. Bacon, who has a parlour game on himself based on the concept of 'six degrees of separation' where fans challenge each other to find the shortest path between an arbitrary actor and Bacon, said staying at home is the only option to protect loved ones. "Hi, folks. You know me, right? I'm technically only six degrees away from you," he said in a video posted across the different social platforms. "Right now, like people around the world, I'm staying home, because it saves lives and it is the only way we're going to slow down the spread of this coronavirus. Because the contact that you make with someone, who makes contact with someone else, that may be what makes somebody's mom or grandpa or wife sick." — PTI

## Jamie Foxx to direct drama *When We Pray*

**Los Angeles:** Oscar winner Jamie Foxx is set to direct faith-based drama *When We Pray*. The film, a joint production by Cinema Libre Studio and Hong Kong-based Fight to Fame Films, will be Foxx's second directorial venture after yet-to-be-released *All Star Weekend*. The actor is co-writing the script with Donald Ray Caldwell, reported Deadline. *When We Pray* follows two brothers who become pastors at different churches in the same community. While one brother develops his church into a modern, high-tech congregation, the other one follows a humbler path but soon finds his church in financial decline. — PTI



## Hugh Jackman closes his New York cafe

**New York:** Hollywood star Hugh Jackman has temporarily closed his cafe Laughing Man to avoid the risk of spreading the coronavirus. The 51-year-old actor felt it was the "right thing" to do in order to ensure the safety of the staff and guests. "We have made the decision to temporarily close the @laughingmancafe. We feel this is the best course of action to ensure the safety of our staff and community," he wrote on Instagram. "We also feel it is the right thing for the larger community of NYC. We want to be a place of healthy interaction and not a potential danger to you." Jackman also urged his fans to take care of each other as the world grapples with the virus. "This is a time when we find new depths to our motto ALL BE HAPPY and hope, more than ever, for it to help guide humanity." — PTI

## NEVER THOUGHT WILL MAKE TOP GUN SEQUEL: TOM

**London:** Hollywood action star Tom Cruise says he didn't want to do a *Top Gun* sequel for the longest time as they were unable to crack the idea for the story. The actor, who shot to international stardom after the release of Tony Scott's action drama *Top Gun*, said he had even told producer Jerry Bruckheimer to forget about making a part two to the 1986 original. "Everywhere I went, people would be like, 'Do *Top Gun*,' and I'm like, 'Guys, I don't know how to do it.' 'I don't know what the story is. I don't make movies just to make movies. I was like, 'Jerry, it's never going to happen'. I honestly never thought I would make it.'" Cruise told *Empire* magazine. And over three decades later, the 57-year-old star is set to reprise his role as Pete 'Maverick' Mitchell in *Top Gun: Maverick*. The film will be set in a world of drone technology and will explore the end of the era of dogfighting, with Cruise portraying a flight instructor. — PTI



# Playboy shuts its print edition

*Covid-19 effect: Magazine to continue online, with occasional special edition in print*

**New York:** Playboy is ending its US print edition after 66 years with the coronavirus forcing the men's lifestyle publisher to accelerate its move to digital. The magazine known for glossy nudes and promoting the 1960s sexual revolution said the spring edition arriving on newsstands this week would be the last in print, although some special editions may be printed. "As the disruption of the coronavirus pandemic to content production and the supply chain became clearer and clearer, we were forced to accelerate a conversation we've been having internally: the question of how to transform our US print product to better suit what consumers want today, and how to utilize



The magazine known for glossy nudes and promoting the 1960s sexual revolution said the spring edition arriving on newsstands this week would be the last in print, although some special editions may be printed

our industry-leading content production capabilities to engage in a cultural conversation each and every day, rather than just every three months," said a Medium post Wednesday by Playboy Enterprises chief executive Ben Kohn. "In 2021, alongside our digital content offerings and new consumer product launches, we will

bring back fresh and innovative printed offerings in a variety of new forms — through special editions, partnerships with the most provocative creators, timely collections and much more. Print is how we began and print will always be a part of who we are." Kohn said the company is growing as a digital company and that the

Playboy brand is more successful than ever before. We drive over \$3 billion in annual consumer spend worldwide," he said. "We reach hundreds of millions of eyeballs every year, across all genders. This past year, our focus has been on meeting audiences where they are." After its peak success in the 1970s, Playboy has struggled in the face of competition and a new digital landscape. It briefly ended nude pictures in 2016 and switched back a year later. Playboy magazine was founded by Hugh Hefner in 1953, and has since become a global brand, encompassing TV shows, merchandise, resorts, clubs, a record label and events. It has published

work from many acclaimed writers, including Joyce Carol Oates, James Baldwin, Margaret Atwood and Saul Bellow, but made headlines early on for its nude centerfolds and taboo-shifting role in the sexual revolution (although its claims to sexual empowerment didn't always sit comfortably). In 2016, the magazine experimented with no longer publishing full frontal nude pictures of women; internet pornography had made them "passe", and a PG-13 magazine would be easier to sell to advertisers and display on news stands. But by February 2017, Playboy had reversed the decision. Hugh Hefner died in September that year. — AFP



## Olga Kurylenko 'feeling better' after positive Covid-19 test

**London:** Ukrainian-born actor-model Olga Kurylenko, who recently tested positive for the novel coronavirus, says with fever "gone" she is feeling better. The "Quantum of Solace" star, who revealed her COVID-19 diagnosis early this week, gave an update on her health a day after revealing she was denied a hospital bed in London due to overcrowding in the city's hospitals. "Hello everyone! I'm feeling better today. My fever is gone! I hear people can't figure out where I currently am. I'm in London!" "How do I know it's coronavirus and not just a flu? I did a test for coronavirus which came back positive," Kurylenko, 40, wrote on Instagram on Wednesday. "What are the medicines that doctors prescribed as treatment? NONE! I was told to take paracetamol in case my fever was too high and if I was in too much pain," as she listed a number of vitamins and supplements she takes in an effort to boost her immune system. Kurylenko also posted her selfie wearing a surgical mask. She first revealed her positive COVID-19 test on Sunday. Actors Tom Hanks and Rita Wilson, who were the first Hollywood names to be tested with the deadly virus, are currently recuperating in self-quarantine after discharge from a hospital in Australia on Tuesday. — PTI



Buildings and La Sagrada Familia basilica are illuminated at night in Barcelona, Spain on Wednesday. — AP



Tourists look at a painting in London on Thursday. — AP



Visitors on a trajinera in the Xochimilco district of Mexico City on Wednesday. — AP



A visitor takes a picture of the "Fearless Girl" statue with a surgical mask placed on it in New York City on Thursday. — AP

# Weinstein sent to maximum-security prison in New York

**New York:** Harvey Weinstein was transferred to a state prison in New York on Wednesday as he begins to serve a 23-year sentence for rape and sexual assault in his landmark #MeToo case. The disgraced film mogul, who will turn 68 on Thursday, is locked up at the maximum security Wende Correctional Facility near Buffalo, according to state prison officials. He is known behind bars as inmate No. 20B0584. The prison, six hours by car from Manhattan, is likely just a temporary stop for Weinstein. While he's there, he'll be evaluated to determine which state prison facility meets his security, medical, mental health and other needs. Weinstein's spokesman called the move "harsh." Weinstein, convicted Feb. 24 and sentenced last week, had been splitting time between New York City's notorious Rikers Island jail complex and a Manhattan hospital. Weinstein left court in an ambulance after the guilty verdict and detoured to Bellevue Hospital, complaining of chest pains and high blood pressure. He later had a stent inserted to unblock an artery. After his sentencing, he returned with more chest pains. Weinstein, the Oscar-



winning producer of *Shakespeare in Love*, was convicted of raping an aspiring actress in 2013 and forcibly performing oral sex on a TV and film production assistant in 2006. His lawyers have said they'll appeal. Within hours of Weinstein's sentencing, prosecutors in Los Angeles announced they were beginning the extradition process to send him there for an arraignment on charges he raped a woman and sexually assaulted another in 2013. That's now on hold because of the coronavirus crisis that has shuttered courthouses and limited travel. For Weinstein, being sent to the Buffalo-area prison is an inauspicious homecoming. He attended college nearby and got his start in the entertainment business in the area as a concert promoter bringing the likes of Frank Sinatra and the Rolling Stones to town. — AP



An empty State Capitol Rotunda in Sacramento, California, on Wednesday. — AP

## SpaceX plans first manned flight to space station in May

**Washington:** Elon Musk's SpaceX will send astronauts to the International Space Station for the first time in May, NASA said, announcing the first crewed launch from the United States to the platform since 2011. The tech entrepreneur's company will launch a Falcon 9 rocket to transport NASA astronauts Bob Behnken and Doug Hurley in a first for the space agency as it looks to cut costs. "NASA and SpaceX are currently targeting no earlier than mid-to-late May for launch," the US space agency said in a statement Wednesday. In March, Musk's Crew Dragon capsule made a round trip to the ISS, which is in orbit more than 250 miles (400 kilometers) above Earth, with a mannequin on board, before returning to the Atlantic after six days in space. Since the last US space shuttle mission in 2011, after 30 years of service, only the Russians have been going back and forth to the ISS. SpaceX has made the trip 15 times since 2012, but only to refuel the station. It is not the only private company servicing NASA: Boeing has also won a contract and is developing its own Starliner capsule. — AFP



Elon Musk with a mannequin on board, before returning to the Atlantic after six days in space. Since the last US space shuttle mission in 2011, after 30 years of service, only the Russians have been going back and forth to the ISS. SpaceX has made the trip 15 times since 2012, but only to refuel the station. It is not the only private company servicing NASA: Boeing has also won a contract and is developing its own Starliner capsule. — AFP

# Thai 'ninja robots' to aid virus battle

**Bangkok:** Thai hospitals are deploying "ninja robots" to measure fevers and protect the health of overburdened medical workers on the frontlines of the coronavirus outbreak. First built to monitor recovering stroke patients, the machines have been quickly repurposed to help fight the disease, which has so far killed nearly 9,000 people around the world. They have helped staff at four hospitals in and around Bangkok to reduce their risk of infection by allowing doctors and nurses to speak to patients over a video link. "They can stand outside the room and communicate with patients inside through the robot," said Viboon Sangveraphunsiri of Chulalongkorn University. Later models will be designed to bring food and medicine to patients, and could also eventually be



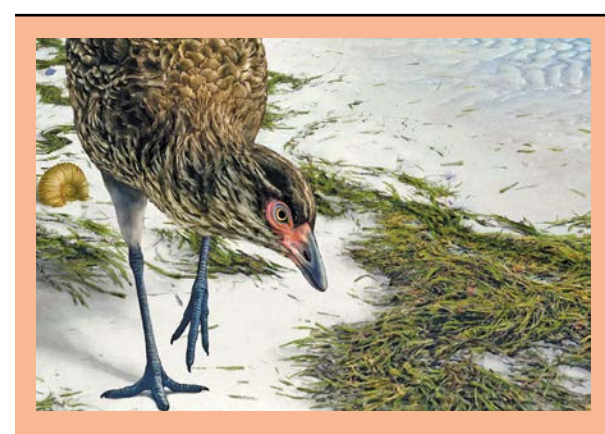
An engineering student configures a medical robot modified to screen and observe coronavirus patients at in Bangkok on Wednesday. — AFP

certificate. Officials have so far stopped short of imposing the full lockdowns seen in other countries in a bid to contain damage to Thailand's crucial tourism sector. But the government's reassurances that the pandemic is under control have not stopped bouts of panic buying in grocery stores. Doctors are also urging Thais to stay home to curb the spread of the virus. Meanwhile Bangkok's governor Asawin Kwanmuang is warning business owners that they face heavy fines, even jail if they disobey orders to close. And in an apparent warning to police, he said "the same applies" to those responsible for ensuring the ban is enforced. Thailand, the first country outside China to confirm a new coronavirus case, reported many new cases on Tuesday, bringing its total to 200. — AFP

# Wonderchicken: Scientists discover oldest fossil of modern bird

**London:** Researchers have identified the oldest fossil of a modern bird yet found, dating from the age of dinosaurs, a finding that may shed more light on avian evolution, and help understand how birds survived the extinction event which killed most large ancient reptiles. The fossil, described in the journal *Nature*, is nicknamed the 'Wonderchicken', and includes a nearly complete skull, hidden inside pieces of rock. According to the researchers, including those from the University of Cambridge in the UK, the fossil dates from less than one million years before the asteroid impact which eliminated all large dinosaurs. They said the 'Wonderchicken' fossil was found in a limestone quarry near the Belgian-Dutch border, making it

the first modern bird from the age of dinosaurs found in the northern hemisphere. The scientists believe the new fossil may help clarify why birds survived this mass extinction event at the end of the Cretaceous period about 66 million years ago, while the giant dinosaurs did not. Based on the finding, the scientists suggested that the 'Wonderchicken' is close to the last common ancestor of modern chickens and ducks. The study noted that the fossil did not look like that of a bird on first glance, with only a few small leg bone fragments poking out from a piece of rock. Using high-resolution X-ray CT scans, the researchers then peered through the rock to see what was lying beneath the surface. Just one millimetre



beneath the rock, they said they found a nearly complete 66.7-million-year-old bird skull. "The moment I first saw what was beneath the rock was the most exciting moment of my scientific career," said study co-author Daniel Field from the University of Cambridge. Field described the skull as a kind of 'mash-up' of a chicken and a duck. "This is one of the best-preserved fossil bird skulls of any age, from anywhere in the world," Field said. According to the scientists, the skull, despite its age, is clearly recognisable as a modern bird. They said it combines many features common to the group in the animal kingdom, called Galloanserae, that includes modern day chickens and ducks. "The origins of living bird diversity are shrouded in mystery — other than knowing that modern birds arose at some point

towards the end of the age of dinosaurs, we have very little fossil evidence of them until after the asteroid hit," said Albert Chen, another co-author of the study from Cambridge. "This fossil provides our earliest direct glimpse of what modern birds were like during the initial stages of their evolutionary history," Chen said. While the scientists colloquially refer to the fossil as the Wonderchicken, they have given it the name of Asteriornis, in reference to Asteria — the Greek Titan goddess of falling stars. "We thought it was an appropriate name for a creature that lived just before the end-Cretaceous asteroid impact," said study co-author Daniel Ksepka from the Bruce Museum in Greenwich, US. "In Greek mythology, Asteria transforms herself

into a quail, and we believe Asteriornis was close to the common ancestor that today includes quails, as well as chickens and ducks," Ksepka said. The researchers added that late Cretaceous fossil record of birds from Europe is extremely sparse, making the current finding more significant. "The discovery of Asteriornis provides some of the first evidence that Europe was a key area in the early evolutionary history of modern birds," said John Jagt, another co-author of the study from the Natuurhistorische Museum Maastricht in the Netherlands. According to Field, the fossil reveals that that early on, at least some modern birds were fairly small-bodied, ground-dwelling birds that lived near the seashore. — PTI

## quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	28,288.23	-2.01
Nifty 50	8,263.45	-2.42
S&P 500*	2,392.49	-0.23
Dollar (₹)	75.10	-1.07
Pound Sterling (₹)	86.589	2.07
Euro (₹)	80.633	1.06
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	40,718.31	0.07
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	26.67	7.19
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.410	1.778
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.101	-12.480

\* As of 10:00 pm IST

### Vivad Se Vishwas scheme notified

Taxpayers willing to avail the direct tax dispute resolution scheme 'Vivad Se Vishwas' can now submit their declarations on the income tax e-filing portal. The online procedure for making declarations under the 'Vivad Se Vishwas' scheme (VSVS) was notified by the Directorate of Income Tax (Systems) on Thursday. Taxpayers can submit the VSVS form from the Income Tax e-filing portal.

### Govt bans export of surgical masks, ventilators



The government banned export of all ventilators, surgical/disposable masks and textile raw material used for making masks with immediate effect. "The export of all ventilators, surgical/disposable masks only, and textile raw material for masks and coversalls only...has been prohibited, with immediate effect," the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) said in a notification. However, items like gloves can be exported.

### Don't lay off employees: CII tells members

Industry body CII, which has over 9,300 members, has asked its member companies not to lay off their employees, its president Vikram Kirloskar said. "We are requesting our members to hold on to their staff and not do layoffs as far as possible and take care of small service providers as far as possible," he said. Kirloskar said the industry has sought a moratorium on all loan repayments and cut in interest rates.

### Droom launches virus shield for vehicles

Droom, an online automobile marketplace, has launched the Corona Shield service to combat the coronavirus contagion and make vehicles virus-proof. The firm will offer its Antimicrobial Surface Protection shield for cars and two-wheelers, which were proven to be effective against SARS and other droplet-based viruses for up to four months. This treatment starts at Rs 499 for 2-wheelers and Rs 999 for passenger cars.

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## Forward contracts quote at 76.20; banks prop up Rupee breaches 75-mark vs dollar

FALAKNAAZ SYED  
MUMBAI, MARCH 19

The falling rupee on Thursday breached the 75-mark against the dollar for the first time, as foreign investors continued to dump domestic stocks and bonds to hoard dollars. However, after hitting a record low of 75.30 per dollar, the rupee trimmed losses as nationalised banks sold USD-INR futures contracts on behalf of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). Forex experts anticipate more pain ahead for the rupee amid fear of a global recession triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite ample liquidity measures taken by US central bank, the continuous scout for dollar around the world has weighed on almost all the counter currencies against the dollar. This has led to fears of an acute shortage of dollars, the world's most liquid currency and sent the dollar index to as high as 102.30 during the day. Policymakers across the globe have resorted to the emergency action as the rapid rise in cases of the virus infection threatens to lead the global economy



into a recession.

The safe havens are also not immune and have been weakening against King Dollar. The pound fell to its lowest level since 1985 as global financial markets were hit by growing fears of a recession. Further, emerging market nations have been slashing rates, which is likely to lower the carry advantage.

Since the start of this month, foreign investors have pulled out more \$10 billion from Indian stock and bond markets, the biggest withdrawal since the US taper tantrum of 2013. Emerging market currencies have been under tremendous pressure on account of outflows. For instance, since

the beginning of this month, the Indonesian rupiah was the worst hit and has lost 11 per cent against the dollar, followed by South Korean won (-6.6 per cent), Turkish lira (-4.8 per cent) and Thai baht (-3.55 per cent), while the Indian rupee has fallen by 3.4 per cent in March.

Market participants are of the view that the RBI will intervene at times of steep depreciation and has so far avoided aggressive selling in rupee against the dollar. At the inter-bank foreign exchange market, the local currency opened at 74.96. During the day, it saw a high of 74.70 and a low of 75.30. The rupee finally settled at 75.10

against the greenback, down 84 paise over its previous close. The rupee had settled at 74.26 against the greenback on Wednesday.

"Last week, when the rupee's spot rate in India was at 74-plus levels the Dubai Exchange (DGEX) was quoting the forward rate at 75 and today the rupee has touched 75. Today the NDF (non-deliverable forward) market is quoting the April month forward contract rate at 76.20. So the spread between the onshore and offshore is 50 basis points. So we can easily correlate between the two and anticipate that the rupee to depreciate further if the RBI does not intervene," said Darshit Purohit from IEA Global, a forex advisory firm.

The benchmark bond yields ended 11 bps higher at 6.41 per cent. Madan Sabnavis, chief economist at Care Ratings, said, "The RBI has gotten into the swap agreements with banks to sell dollars, which should curb volatility to an extent. But we should be prepared for anything - even further depreciation as the markets have become quite unpredictable these days."

## Nifty drops below 8000 pts as FPIs keep up selling

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD  
MUMBAI, MARCH 19

After sinking close to 8 per cent intra-day, benchmark Nifty-50 Index dropped below the 8000-mark on Thursday, as coronavirus cases kept on rising in the country, forcing more lockdowns and travel restrictions. The rupee fell to a new all time low of 75.30 per US dollar, leading to high-volume selling by foreign investors; as per provisional data foreign portfolio investors sold equities worth Rs 4,622 crore on Thursday.

The Nifty-50 dropped sharply in the early morning trade by 8.12 per cent, or 636.25 points, to 7832 on negative global cues with a spike in coronavirus cases and casualties across the globe. The index closed at 8263.45, down by 205.35 points, or 2.42 per cent. The Sensex too fell below the 27000-mark to an intra-day low of 26,714, dropping 7.46 per cent, but recovered sharply to close above 28K at 28288.23, shedding 581.28 points, or 2.01 per cent.

Investors lost another Rs 3.76 lakh crore as the BSE's market capitalisation fell to Rs 1,09,76,781.00 crore against Rs 1.13,53,329.30 crore on Wednesday.

The volatility index India VIX shot up to a new high of 73.34 and closed 12.89 per cent up at 72.19. With rising cases of coronavirus, volatility is likely to continue in coming days and any bounce



would be sold into, analysts said. Siddhartha Khemka, head-retail research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services, said, "Technically, there is no sign of reversal and we may see Nifty continue to fall towards 7,900 and then 7,500 levels."

On a day of high volatility NSE's Nifty Auto index suffered worst one-day fall by 6.09 per cent due to the sharp fall in Ashok Leyland (-25.49 per cent), Maruti (-9.22 per cent), Bharat Forge (-12.13 per cent), Mahindra & Mahindra (-8.70 per cent) and Eicher Motors (-5.00 per cent).

Private banks also continued to bleed with Nifty Bank index down by 2.41 per cent, led by heavy fall in Bandhan Bank (-11.32 per cent), Axis Bank (-9.60 per cent), ICICI Bank (-5.53 per cent), IndusInd Bank (-4.95 per cent). State Bank of India also fell 5.46 per cent, closing at Rs 203.45; it touched intra-day low of Rs 198.15 on the NSE.

### RBI asks staff to work from home

Mumbai, March 19: As the coronavirus infection spreads, the Reserve Bank has allowed a majority of its staff across its centres to work from home while ensuring unhindered business continuity.

The total strength of the central bank is close 14,000, of which around 4,000 are based in Mumbai.

The headquarters alone has around 2,000 people working from the two Mint Road offices, while others are spread across the CBD Belapur Tech Centre, BKC and Mumbai Central offices etc. The RBI has advised central office departments and regional offices to identify areas where people can manage work by being at home and those where the staff has to be present in office. —PTI

## ₹60K-cr RBI credit line for Yes Bank

New Delhi, March 19:

The Reserve Bank has opened an emergency line of credit of around Rs 60,000 crore to Yes Bank to meet any liquidity crisis in paying back its depositors as the bank has resumed normal operations from Thursday.

The additional liquidity arsenal is in line with Section 17 (4) of the RBI Act and also is a reaffirmation of the governor's statement on Monday that the central bank was ready to provide all the necessary liquidity support to Yes Bank.

The move comes after 16 years when a similar credit line was opened for Global Trust Bank in 2004.

The line of credit of about Rs 60,000 crore, however, comes with a caveat—the first such, the sources said. A senior central bank officer, who wished not to be named, said, "We've opened an emergency line of credit ready for Yes Bank worth Rs 59,000 crore to meet any eventuality on the liquidity front."

"The credit line is bal-

## Q4 earnings can be reported till June 30

ASHWIN J PUNNEN  
MUMBAI, MARCH 19

Markets regulator Sebi on Thursday allowed listed companies to defer the disclosure of fourth quarter (Q4) and annual earnings by 45 days and 30 days, respectively, to June 30. The regulatory move comes in the wake of the spreading coronavirus cases, which has led to the shutdown of business establishments across the globe.

According to prevailing norms, companies have to report their quarterly earnings within 45 days of the quarter end and annual earnings within 60 days. In case of any delay, the companies should report to stock exchanges the reasons, such as auditor resignation or court cases.

"It has been declared a 'pandemic' by the World Health Organization (WHO). Developments arising due to the spread of the virus have warranted the need for temporary relaxations in compliance requirements for listed entities," said Sebi in a press statement.

The Sebi has also relaxed compliance norms for submitting



governance report by one month and the quarterly shareholder pattern by three weeks.

Governance report for this quarter is due by April 15 but companies can now submit them by May 15, while for shareholder pattern the due date is April 21 but firms have been given time till May 15.

These steps follow the Ministry of Corporate Affairs' steps on Wednesday, relaxing norms for holding physical board meeting following the Covid-19 outbreak.

Analysts said the Sebi decisions are a great

relief to corporate India. Many companies have proactively announced work from home in the recent weeks and this extension will be helpful for them to focus on the current business exigencies. It will give time to financial market regulators and business leaders to assess potential accounting guidance or additional disclosure requirements due to Covid-19, they said.

Globally, regulators are also encouraging companies to disclose the likely impact Covid-19 will have on their businesses, earnings and revenues.

## Anil Ambani questioned for 9 hours

Mumbai, March 19: The

ED on Thursday questioned Reliance Group chairman Anil Ambani for about nine hours in connection with a money laundering probe against Yes Bank promoter Rana Kapoor and others, officials said.

The Enforcement Directorate has asked the businessman to appear before it again on March 30.

Essel Group chairman and Rajya Sabha MP Subhash Chandra, who skipped his first appearance on March 18 owing to his engagement in the ongoing Parliament session, has also been issued

a fresh summons to appear



before the investigative agency on March 21.

Officials said the statement of Ambani, 60, was recorded under the

Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

He arrived at the Enforcement Directorate office at Ballard Estate here around 9:30 am and left around 7 pm.

Ambani's nine group companies, which were reportedly under "stress", are stated to have taken loans adding up to about Rs 12,800 crore from the crisis-ridden bank.

Ambani was first called for questioning on Monday but he sought exemption from appearance on personal grounds. The ED then issued him fresh summons to appear on March 19. —PTI

anced against the bank's current account balance which is of same amount as of now," the official told PTI on Thursday—a day when the lender completes a full-day of normal services after the 13 days of

moratorium and curbs.

Though the bank has begun normal operations, many of its branches bore a deserted look, partly amid fear of coronavirus infection.

The bank resumed full

operations from 6 pm on Wednesday. PTI visited four branches of the private lender—two in the central suburb and two in Navi Mumbai, where hardly one to two customers were seen.

## IndiGo to cut staff pay, AI may follow suit

New Delhi, March 19: IndiGo CEO Ronojoy Dutta announced on Thursday that the airline was instituting pay cuts for senior employees and he would himself take the highest cut of 25 per cent amid the coronavirus pandemic that has hit the aviation industry hard.

Air India may also cut salary of employees by 5 per cent amid its growing financial woes, compounded by the pandemic.

In an email to employees, Dutta said with the precipitous drop in revenues, the very survival of the airline industry is now at stake.

"We have to pay careful attention to our cash flow so that we do not run out of cash."

"With a great deal of reluctance and a deep sense of regret, we are therefore instituting pay cuts for all employees, excluding Bands A and B, starting April 1, 2020," he said.

Band A and B are the lowest salary brackets, where most of the employees are.

"I am personally taking a 25 per cent pay cut, SVPs (senior vice presidents) and above are taking 20 per cent, VPs and cockpit crew are taking a 15 per cent pay

cut, AVPs, Bands D along with cabin crew will take 10 per cent and Band Cs 5 per cent," Dutta noted.

Sources said, "Air India is considering a 5 per cent pay cut to its employees, as it faces huge financial crisis due to the ongoing coronavirus outbreak, which has brought almost its entire international operations save the US, Canada and a few other markets, to the ground."

The national carrier has also decided to take off from flying its over 100 re-employed pilots on contract as part of cost cutting measures. —Agencies

## AI-enabled apps join Covid-19 tracking bid

### Apps can trace phones, photos of those who came in contact

SANGEETHA G  
CHENNAI, MARCH 19

As contagion fears aggravate, several healthcare related companies are introducing contact tracking features in apps to help social distancing. Some of the apps also have features that help detect and manage the illness.

GOQii, the smart-tech-enabled preventive healthcare company has launched this feature in

its app to help users track every movement, activity and also track those who have been in close contact with them.

In case of a positive detection, users can immediately backtrack every movement and individuals that one has come in contact with, in the last few days. This will ensure prevention, quick detection of virus carriers and thus curtail the spread of the virus. GOQii has specially



updated the app to help users self-track, to the level of keeping a tab on every person one must

have come in contact with.

This also includes those related to online services like Uber, Lyft, Ola, Amazon, Flipkart, Swiggy and Zomato. One can record the person's name, contact number as well as photographs.

Healthcare authorities and professionals can also leverage the artificial intelligence-based app to accelerate Covid-19 surveillance and interventions.

of GOQii.

The app also can track body temperature, weight, heart rate, blood sugar and other vitals as well as detect symptoms like cough, cold, difficulty in breathing and the like.

Bajaj Allianz General Insurance too has updated its 'Caringly Yours' app with 'Social Trackback' feature. This is designed to help individuals maintain a real-time database of the people they have interacted in-person. This will help authorities and individuals quickly track the details in case the user has been tested positive for coronavirus.

## Govt to curb panic buying, hoarding

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 19

With consumers resorting to panic buying of food and hygiene products, the government is all set to take strict action against hoarding of essential items against shopping platforms. The Centre has also cautioned supermarkets and large stores against bulk sale of goods.

"The suppliers, manufacturers as well as shop owners, mostly in the supermarkets and grocery stores across the country, have been strictly warned against such hoarding and black-marketeering activities, following which severe penalties will be imposed against them," said an official of the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution.

"Public spending on grocery items in several supermarkets and grocery stores is too high. The bulk sale needs to be restricted to the consumers; otherwise they may face an action," said the official. With growing con-

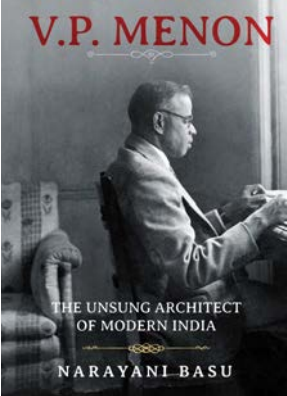


cerns over the spread of Covid-19, it has been observed that consumers in major cities have begun to stock up on essential, daily-use items, such as food-grains, pulses, edible oils and sanitary items like soaps and sanitizers. To prevent shortages of essential items, supermarkets like Reliance Fresh and Big Bazaar have capped the bulk sale of items.

"We have restricted bulk sale of daily-use items. For instance, we have capped the sale of rice to 5 kg and dal to 1 kg per day," said a counter person at a Reliance Fresh outlet in Faridabad, NCR.

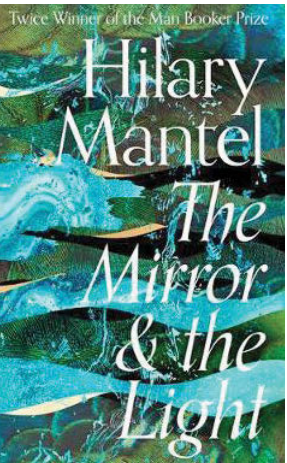
**INDIAN TOP 10 BESTSELLERS**

- NON-FICTION**
- V.P. MENON - THE UNSUNG ARCHITECT OF MODERN INDIA**  
Narayani Basu, Simon & Schuster, ₹799
  - DEATH - AN INSIDE STORY**  
Sadhguru, Penguin Ananda, ₹299
  - BACKSTAGE: THE STORY BEHIND INDIA'S HIGH GROWTH YEARS**  
Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Rupa, ₹595
  - ANIMOSITY AT BAY**  
Pallavi Raghavan, Harper Collins, ₹699
  - GANDHI'S HINDUISM: THE STRUGGLE AGAINST JINNAH'S ISLAM**  
M.J. Akbar, Bloomsbury, ₹699
  - REMNANTS OF A SEPARATION**  
Aanchal Malhotra, HarperCollins, ₹599
  - THE ANARCHY**  
William Dalrymple, Bloomsbury, ₹699
  - INDIA'S FOUNDING MOMENT**  
Madhav Khosla, Harvard, ₹599
  - THE EMPEROR WHO NEVER WAS - DARA SHUKOH IN MUGHAL INDIA**  
Supriya Gandhi, Bellknop Harvard, ₹699
  - A CHEQUERED BRILLIANCE**  
Jairam Ramesh, Penguin Viking, ₹999



**FICTION**

- THE MIRROR & THE LIGHT**  
Hilary Mantel, 4th Estate, ₹799
- WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING**  
Delia Owens, Corsair, ₹499
- THE FAR FIELD**  
Madhuri Vijay, 4th Estate, ₹599
- AMNESTY**  
Aravind Adiga, Picador India, ₹699
- THE CARPET WEAVER**  
Nemat Sadat, Penguin Viking, ₹599
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Margaret Atwood, Chatto & Windus, ₹799
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Bernardine Evaristo, Hamish Hamilton, ₹799
- A LONG PETAL OF THE SEA**  
Isabel Allende, Bloomsbury, ₹550



Bahrisons, New Delhi

# The aftermath of the war in 1971



**Taslima Nasrin**  
extract

The Hindus of the neighbourhood were slowly returning to their abandoned houses. They were coming back to their country from refugee camps in Calcutta, to the homes they had abandoned before the war. All their things had been robbed in the meanwhile. The empty courtyards that the pariahs and mongrels used to sleep in were suddenly full of the chatter of people. With my chin resting on the railings of our roof, I could see them returning. As if a tide had arrived on the Brahmaputra, as if flowers were suddenly blooming all over a desolate garden. None of the returned seemed to be perturbed by their missing things. They were happy simply to have got their homes back. Some houses had already managed to organize kiratans, etc., and women were ululating and lighting evening lamps. A graveyard had seemingly come back to life.

Around a week after their return, a group of *mutijoddhas* marched into the house through the black gate, guns on their shoulders, followed by fifteen-sixteen people from the neighbours, most of whom we recognised. I greeted them with a smile but none of them were in a mood to reciprocate, as if they were our mortal enemies. They walked from room to room, yelling loudly about stolen goods, telling the people who had come with them to pick up whatever they thought were their stuff.

The familiar faces from the neighbourhood took turns in taking away a number of our things: bronze utensils, a brass pitcher, chairs and tables. Mother had been putting oil in the sewing machine. The container remained in her hand as someone came and casually picked up the machine and walked away. Both Mother and I were left standing in shock.

After they were gone Mother sighed, 'Wages of sin! What can I say?' It was meant for Father; I knew. After returning from the village Mother had noticed some new things in the house and asked him about them. 'Did you buy these? If you did, why did you buy old stuff? What use will this broken old drum of molasses be?' Father, in the middle of tucking the socks he had just taken off inside his shoes, had not

replied. 'Or did you take these from the Hindu houses?' Mother had asked in disgust.

Father had not replied to that either. The drums had surprised me as well. It had been difficult for me to imagine that Father had nicked those things from someone else's house. This was the person who had given refuge to a Hindu boy called Pradip during the war. The boy, rechristened Alam, had stayed on in our house after the war and Father had employed him as a cashier in the pharmacy.

And this very same person had become greedy over things the Hindus had left behind! Back in '71 Dada, Riyazuddin and Imaan Ali had been living with us as well. Perhaps they were the ones who had done it.

Since I did not dare ask Father any questions, I had ended up asking Dada.

'Were you the ones who robbed the things from the Hindu households?'

Dada was seated on an iron chair watching the ducks and chickens in the yard. As if those birds were the most fascinating things in the world and no human being or their queries could catch up to their appeal. When I had broken the spell and repeated my question he had replied — 'The Biharis were bringing everything out on the streets and burning them. We had gathered some things from the road and brought home.'

'Who had? Had Father done it too? Tell me! I was not about to let Dada go without an answer.'

'It was us,' Dada had replied while throwing wheat at the ducks and chickens.

The answer had done little to reassure me.

On returning home, when he received the news of the raid on our house, Father went out and stood in the veranda, hands folded and elbows resting on the railings. Seeing him like that I wanted to believe he was repentant. I wanted to see his remorseful face. I had only ever heard the yelling, only ever seen the proud man. So much pride was bound to make someone inhuman.

After Dada returned home I informed him about the raid, 'They have taken away all the things that were looted.'

I informed Chotda as well. A pall of gloom seemed to descend over the house. Father remained stationed on the veranda.

Mother's voice finally shattered the silence, her words uttered from a careful distance so Father could hear.

'What was the need of stealing a drum of rotten molasses? Allah always punishes those who sin. In the middle of this I lost a bunch of my things. My sewing machine! I had saved money and bought it myself.'

When times were meant to be bad, they could get really bad. The day after the raid security personnel of the Rakkhi Bahini apprehended Dada from the road. These forces had been formed by Sheikh Mujib after Independence to put a check on terrorist activities. They were stationed at various places and could apprehend anyone they were suspicious of and beat them up. Even someone like my Dada who had no involvement in anything whatsoever. Father went to get

him out but returned empty-handed. After torturing him for fifteen days when the Rakkhi Bahini found no evidence that he was involved in any terrorist activities, they let Dada go. After returning from their barracks Dada became a vocal critic of Sheikh Mujib, even going as far as telling people that things had been better under Pakistani rule; at least the roads had been safe.

Even those who had been supporters of Sheikh Mujib were soon beginning to chatter. What sort of government was this that was using the Rakkhi Bahini to assault and oppress innocent citizens! The murmurs continued for a few years. Unrest among the people continued to rise as well. Sheikh Mujib formed a political party called Baksal and prohibited all other parties.

'What sort of government is this that lets its people die in a famine because they have no food?' Father said one day. Bearded men wearing fez caps materialized out of nowhere and began to clamour that such an Independence was of no value. The country needed to be put back under Pakistani rule. Boromama sighed and said he did not know which direction the country was headed.

'The government is doing things that did not happen even when Pakistan was ruling us. They are celebrating Shab-e-Baraat in Banga Bhaban with so much pomp. It never used to happen back when this was East Pakistan. Mujib attended an

Islamic conference recently. Russia helped us so much during the war and here Mujib is bent on making Bangladesh a part of the Islamic world. The government is even saying things against India. Would we have become free if India had not sent its forces?'

Then suddenly one day, quite abruptly, something happened that plunged the city into uneasiness again. People gathered on the roads to talk as if the world was about to come crashing down on them any moment. Some had radios stuck to their ear, faces dry, eyes threatening to pop out.

What was the matter again? The days of sticking close to the radio for news had come to an end back in '71, so what had happened again? Whenever things in the country were tense in any way everyone tended to switch on BBC radio for news. No one had too much faith on our own broadcasters.

Father too did as expected. I was asked to turn the knob of the radio to try and catch BBC, a big responsibility I felt very proud of having been given. Father never ordered me to do anything except studying, I was never usually asked to participate in anything else. Earlier it was either Dada or Chotda who were asked to turn the knob while I had to stand apart and watch. But that day Dada was away on a work trip to Sherpur for a couple of days. Chotda was not even living with us any more. Hence, the responsibility fell on me. I had almost found the BBC channel when Father asked me to stop. Words could be heard over the ether, broken fragments of half-truncated news.

Sheikh Mujib was dead.

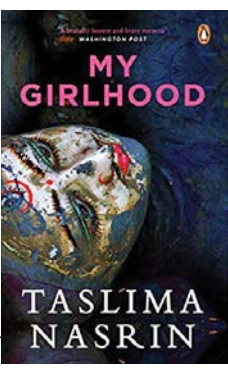
Not just him, nearly his entire family had been shot dead by assassins at his house on 32 Dhanmondi. How could it have happened? How was it possible? Father sat down heavily, pressing the veins on his temple. Chotda, had he been home, would surely have sought refuge in the veranda with his lips curled. Dada would have said, 'His two sons Sheikh Kamal and Sheikh Jamal had caused so much trouble for so many people in Dhaka University. They used to carry pistols! They had gone too far, how much could people tolerate!'

Mother was pacing the room uneasily and speaking from time to time.

'What sort of inhuman thing is this? They killed his sons, daughter-in-law, even his young grandson Russel. What had they done? Such brutality!'

'Will the country become Pakistan again?'

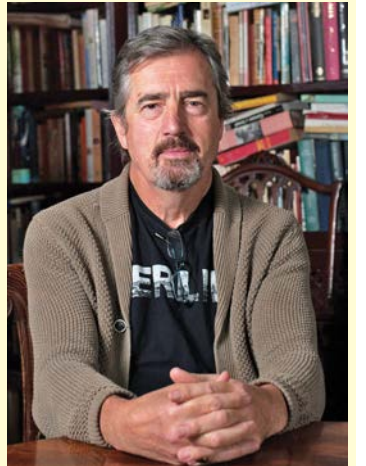
*Excerpted from My Girlhood with permission from the publisher, PenguinRandomHouse*



**MY GIRLHOOD**  
By TASILMA NASRIN  
PenguinRandomHouse  
pp.421; ₹599

# 'Irish writers don't talk to each other unless abusing'

**Robert Jackman**  
interview



Sebastian Barry

Sebastian Barry, Irish literary Laureate, is in London to promote his first play in a decade. He didn't plan on leaving it so long, he insists; it's just that finishing the play — *On Blueberry Hill* — took longer than he'd planned. How long? Most of the decade, he confesses.

In his defence, Barry has been rather busy publishing no fewer than three novels (including the Costa prize-winning *Days Without End*) in the time it took to finish one play. Why did *On Blueberry Hill* take so long then? Is it that he finds novels easier to write, or does he just enjoy them more? Neither, he says, insisting that, he's actually come to prefer writing plays to novels. 'I'm a prose writer who grew up in the theatre,' he says. His mother, Joan O'Hara, was a stage actress who went on to star in one of Ireland's longest-running soap operas. 'As a young child I just assumed everyone's mother was an actor,' he says.

He speaks of his admiration for the actors he's worked with on previous plays — Claire Bloom, Donal McCann and Sinead Cusack. Did he never want to act himself, I ask. His live readings, some of which can be found on YouTube, are brilliantly flamboyant, with Barry — a six-foot-something mountain of a man — unable to resist the temptation to put on bombastic accents or segue into Irish folk ditties. Are they the trappings of a frustrated thespian, or just a man trying to make book tours a bit more fun? The theatricality is deliberate, he admits.

It wouldn't be the first time Barry has taken inspiration from his family members. The vast majority of his novels are lifted from family folklore. He tells me about his two grandfathers: one a staunch nationalist who hated all things English; the other a Sligo Irishman who ended up serving in the Royal Engineers during the second world war. 'Both were completely Irish,' he says, yet they trod different, and seemingly irreconcilable, paths. One of the fondest memories of his childhood was seeing them shake hands, having bonded over their affection for him.

The stories keep coming. There's the great-uncle who fell foul of the IRA and ended up being murdered in Chicago ('followed there by Michael Collins's associates'). The great-grandfather — an Irish Catholic — who headed up the Dublin Metropolitan Police during the troubled Easter Rising period. 'The family was so ashamed of him that nobody marked his grave,' he says. Is there anything autobiographical in *On Blueberry Hill*? Yes, he says. His mother —

albeit indirectly. On paper, it's an all-male play, with everything taking place in a single prison cell shared by two men, Christy and PJ, who pass the time by swapping stories from their past. Many of these memories are actually Barry's own, in particular Christy's stories about his mother. 'It gives you a wonderful sense of freedom,' he says, to interrogate your own past through fictional characters.

How did it feel to receive the Irish Laureate? He's a great admirer, he says, of Michael D. Higgins ('If only we were so blessed with our Taoiseach as we've been with our presidents'). Did it help Barry to make peace with his own Irishness — a subject with which he's wrestled for much of his writing career? 'Of course in a moment like that you're going to be seduced into feeling pure citizenry,' he says. Yet he still bristles at being labelled an 'Irish novelist', insisting he doesn't really speak the language of Irishness.

Is there even an 'Irish canon' anyway, he asks. 'Our writers are like the old Irish kingdoms: they don't really talk to each other unless they're shouting abuse. People talk about traditions in writing, but when you look at what they call Irish writing, it's basically a bunch of mavericks doing everything they can to get away from each other. Look at Samuel Beckett. Look at Sygne. Look at Joyce running off to Zurich.'

He remains drawn instead to outsiders like himself, he says. One of his best friends is the historian Roy Foster, who has spent much of the past 30 years skewering the folies of Irish nationalism. Foster, he says, has been as influential on his thinking — certainly on the question of Irishness — as Yeats. Barry's eyes light up when he talks of him. He beams, too, when he talks about being back in the West End. 'When I heard the play was transferring I felt a happiness outside of any professional intent,' he says. Two decades ago he was writing plays to pay the bills.

*By arrangement with the Spectator*

# The hands that change history's course are bloody



**Sridhar Balan**  
meanwhile

On a visit to Mexico City, some years ago, we went to see the famous Diego Rivera mural, *Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Central Park*. The painting, done in the surreal style though Rivera did not identify himself with the Surrealists, portrays a number of people intimately connected with Mexican history and its evolution. It depicts the conquistador Hernan Cortes who was responsible for the Spanish conquest of Mexico along with the Mexican dictator Porfirio Diaz and also shows Rivera himself along with Frida Kahlo. While we spent some time gazing at the remarkable painting, a family asked, why Rivera chose to portray Cortes with blood on his hands. Why indeed? Rivera had portrayed Cortes thus because his conquest of Mexico was a bloody affair. He gave false promises to Aztec king, Montezuma or Moctezuma, and sacked Tenochtitlan and massacred its inhabitants. Later, Mexico had to wage its own war of liberation against the Spanish.

While Cortes claimed the territory of Mexico in the name of the Spanish king, most navigators who led expeditions to far off lands and sail uncharted waters were motivated by religion, and commerce along with territorial gain. While at Kozhikode for the Kerala Lit Fest, my colleague Dinesh and I resolved to make a

trip to Kappad beach where the Portuguese navigator and explorer Vasco da Gama had landed in 1498. We saw the area, a very pristine beach and a plaque, now weatherbeaten, which marked the approximate site of Gama's landing.

Vasco da Gama was to make three voyages to India between the years 1498-1524, the year in which he died. He died in Kochi and initially was buried there too before his remains were excavated and interred in Portugal. But as Keki Daruwalla has wonderfully recorded in his book *For Pepper and Christ*, a work of fiction on the voyages of Vasco, da Gama's hands were no less bloody. Daruwalla's book is a record of Portugal's attempt to find a sea route to India, sailing around the African coast and braving the treacherous monsoon winds and storms. The route to India was known to the Arabs and to the Venetians too who had been trading with India for years. The route to India was also known to another great power, the Chinese and we shall come to the role of China a little later.

What was the purpose of da Gama's voyages? As Daruwalla

has recorded, it was to find the lucrative spices, pepper and cinnamon initially. Pepper was considered to be "black gold". It was also to find Christian settlements and spread the word of god. Gama's ships carried priests to hear the confessions of the soldiers and to proselytize the unbelievers. The voyages were also meant to acquire land, for Gama knew that the might of the Portuguese king would only be acknowledged if Portugal retained a visible presence of its power.

Daruwala's book is equally an important record of the Arab contribution to da Gama's voyages and of life in Cairo under the Sultan's rule and the dreaded Muhtasib. The Muhtasib was the Sultan's representative and the controller of weights and measures in the souks of Cairo, but he maintained an absolute power over his people. To ensure his rule, the Muhtasib had a network of informers and spies to report any wrongs and "alleged" misdemeanours. Caught up in the tumultuous events of the time, are three friends, Ehtesham, Murad and Taufiq who try their best to keep out of the clutches of the Muhtasib. Ehtesham, an engraver

and painter, has to leave Cairo by way of Alexandria for he had committed the blasphemy of glass painting in a coptic church at the request of the abbot. Murad accompanied Ehtesham in his escape out of Cairo but the central figure in Daruwalla's narrative is Taufiq who had trained as a seaman under his father's guidance. While he had initially travelled to Calicut as a young boy on one of his father's ships, it's his recruitment as a pilot and navigator under the great Ibn Majid that trains him for a life at sea. His voyage with Ibn Majid is not to India but to Africa and it is at Mombasa that Ibn Majid and Taufiq meet up with da Gama. At da Gama's or the Captain-Major's request for a pilot, Taufiq is left behind on da Gama's ship to guide the Portuguese to India. They arrive at Kappad near Calicut on 20 May 1498 but find that the Zamorin or the Samudri Raja is away at his second capital of Ponnani. The Zamorin and da Gama finally meet and the Zamorin is already prejudiced against the Portuguese by the Arabs who describe da Gama as a pirate.

He is also singularly unimpressed by da Gama's gifts ostensi-

bly from the Portuguese king. It is during da Gama's second and third voyages to India that the might of Portuguese naval power is unleashed against the Zamorin and the people of Calicut. In the interim, da Gama's arch-rival, Pedro Cabral had undertaken a voyage to Calicut and clashes had broken out between the Portuguese and the Arab merchants. About 70 Portuguese were killed in the city and Cabral blamed the Zamorin and attacked the city.

Word of this reached Lisbon and da Gama set out for India to assert Portuguese power with Taufiq who had been kept in Portugal as his pilot. On his way, da Gama looted and burned a ship on pilgrimage from Mecca to Calicut with 400 people including 50 women on board. On reaching Calicut, he cuts off the Zamorin envoy's nose and ears and sends him back with a pair of donkey's ears sewn on. Da Gama bombards the city and opens fire on ships parked in the Calicut harbour. Those who jump into the sea are individually hunted down by the Portuguese in boats armed with spears.

Mortified and deeply anguished by all this, Taufiq escapes and reaches the town. Though he has his love waiting to marry him in spite of all the conflict, Taufiq decides on atonement. He has his left hand cut off by a local butcher for his complicity in bringing the Portuguese to India.

Our story does not end here. At the Kerala Lit Fest, a Chinese poet (and this was before the COVID-19 scare) came up to me possibly knowing of my interest in local history. He asked me if I knew about the great Chinese explorer, Admiral Zheng He who had come to Calicut and Cochin well before Vasco da Gama. He added his local and more popular name Sanbao. I

had indeed for Zheng He had made his voyages between the years 1405-33 and had travelled to South Asia, India, Ceylon, Java, Sumatra, Malacca, Indonesia and Africa. Some believe, Zheng's fleet circumnavigated the globe. He had the means to do so.

Outfitted under orders of the Yongle Emperor, Zheng's fleet consisted of 317 ships of about 28,000 men, with 60 treasure ships over 400 feet long. Zheng's ships could carry 2,500 tons of cargo and had staterooms and balconies. They were accompanied by hundreds of supply ships. The purpose of Zheng's voyages was to spread the Ming influence over the world and to accept tribute from the Middle Kingdom.

My friend's interest was to locate Zheng's grave in Calicut. Though some thought that Zheng had died in Calicut in 1433 during his last voyage, it is believed he died at sea and his body confined to the deep. His tomb at Nanjing in China is believed to be empty. I told my disappointed friend at dinner that one reason not many people remember Zheng was because China went into isolation after the Middle Kingdom. The entire Chinese fleet was destroyed.

Moreover, to be remembered, conquerors and explorers need to leave some visible reminders of their presence. The Chinese fishing nets in Kochi are perhaps the only example of Zheng He's presence.

Vasco da Gama, on the other hand, managed to establish a colony in Goa, which the Portuguese ruled till 1961.

*The writer is a senior publishing industry professional who has worked with OUP and is now a senior consultant with Ratna Sagar Books*



*Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Central Park*

SHORT TAKES



Matthew Wade

**Injured Wade out of County**

**Sydney:** Big-hitting Australian batsman Matthew Wade on Thursday abandoned plans to play with English county side Somerset after being advised to rest an injured knee.

The 32-year-old had been scheduled to pad-up for the first half of the English summer, but said Cricket Australia had told him to recuperate. "It's a big blow," said Wade, who is a regular in the Australian Test team. "I was looking forward to the challenge of playing county cricket... but after discussions with the Cricket Australia medical team, regrettably, it became clear that I wouldn't be in a position to join Somerset." The county season is due to start on April 12, but the coronavirus epidemic may force it to be postponed. The BBC said the England and Wales Cricket Board were due to meet on Thursday to discuss the situation. — AFP

**Warne's distillery produces sanitiser**

**Melbourne:** Cricket legend Shane Warne's distillery has started manufacturing hand sanitiser instead of gin to make up for the shortage of the alcohol-based solution and "save lives" from the clutches of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic has so far claimed over 9000 lives and infected more than 2,00,000 people across the world. Instead of making alcohol, Warne's company, 'SevenZeroEight Gin', has started producing "medical grade 70% alcohol" hand sanitiser on March 17 for two Western Australian hospitals. "This is a challenging time for Australians and we all need to do what we can to help our healthcare system combat this disease and save lives," said Warne in a statement. "I am happy SevenZeroEight has the ability to make this shift and encourage others to do the same." The coronavirus, which first originated in Wuhan in China's Hubei province, has crippled health care systems and affected economies across the world, besides bringing sports activities to a halt. Australia has so far reported 565 confirmed cases besides six deaths. — PTI

# Strike back

Test specialist Pujara finds the constant fuss over his strike rate a tad unfair

**New Delhi, March 19:** Cheteshwar Pujara finds the constant fuss over his strike rate a tad unfair and wants to clarify once and for all that he has got full backing of the team management which understands the "importance" of his style of play. In the age of slam-bang cricket, Pujara brings delight to the purists of the game by batting on and on without worrying too much about the strike-rate. But to appreciate someone who epitomises patience in Test cricket is may be asking for too much from the "millennials".

Last week, the soft-spoken 32-year-old from Rajkot found himself at the receiving end again on social media as he laboured his way to 66 off 237 balls in the Ranji Trophy final against Bengal. To his credit, he overcame fever and throat infection to share a game-changing stand with Arpit Vasavada, helping Saurashtra to their maiden title on the basis of first innings lead.

Whether it is playing for Saurashtra or India, Pujara is used to constant chatter around his strike-rate. "I don't think there is too much talk (on the inside). In media, it is described differently but the team management has been backing me on this completely. There is no pressure from the captain, coach or anyone else," Pujara, who is currently getting much-needed family time due to the COVID-19 outbreak, said.

"I just want to clarify that when it comes to strike rate people start pointing towards team management's take on it but there is no pressure on me at all. The team management understands my style of play and its importance." For someone who averages 48.66 in 77 Tests, perception counts for little. "The question that was asked on social media (during Ranji final) was 'why am I taking so long to score X number of runs?' Whether I pay attention to that, no, I don't. My job is to make sure that the team wins at all times.

"People have this tendency to pinpoint one person but it is just not about me. If you look at any Test series where I have scored runs and taken little bit of time, the opposition batsmen, most of them, have consumed same number of balls. "I know I can't be a David Warner or Virender Sehwag but if a normal batsman takes time there is nothing wrong in that." The entire batting unit had a tough time in New Zealand with the 0-2 loss in Tests marking the end of the international season. Pujara collected five half centuries this season, including one in New Zealand, but could not add to his 18 hundreds.

"People expect big knocks from me. I always challenge myself to score a 100 but to average close to 50 in Tests means you are scoring a half-century almost every second innings. "My standards are always high and I am not satisfied with the season that I had but I would not call it a bad one at all." It may be boring and



**Smiling assassin**



With all cricket action now grinding to a standstill due to coronavirus pandemic, the BCCI shared a throwback picture of MS Dhoni captioning it as: "Smile is the way to be". — Twitter

## India cannot look beyond MSD: Jaffer

**New Delhi, March 19:** Former India opener and domestic legend Wasim Jaffer has said that going into the T20 World Cup, Team India cannot look beyond veteran wicket-keeper batsman M.S. Dhoni, if he is fit and in form.

Jaffer, who announced his retirement from all forms of the game earlier this month, claimed Dhoni's inclusion could ease the pressure on K.L. Rahul or Rishabh Pant; who are currently sharing the gloves for Team India in limited-overs cricket.

"If Dhoni is fit and in form I think we can't look beyond him as he'll be an asset behind the stumps and also lower down the order. It'll take

exhausting for majority of the fans, batting time and wearing out the opposition excites Pujara the most.

Asked why they don't make it like him anymore, Pujara gave a practical response. "I don't think it is on the decline (art of batting time). There is value for it. May be the youngsters are not

inclined towards this format. It is a fact that there are more games in white-ball cricket. A youngster would want to play shorter formats because it is financially better.

"There is nothing wrong with that but they should understand that real cricket is Test cricket and you will be judged only on the performances in the five-day game." With uncertainty over the upcoming county season in the UK due to the COVID-19 outbreak, Pujara has no game time lined up in the near future. — PTI



Wasim Jaffer

the pressure of keeping off Rahul and India can play Pant as a batsman too if they want a lefty," Jaffer said in a tweet.

Dhoni, 38, last played for India at the 2019 World Cup in England where the Men in Blue were knocked out in the semi-finals. — Agencies

## India are the most talented team: Stoinis

**New Delhi, March 19:** Australian cricketer Marcus Stoinis said that Indian players not playing in the team are way more talented than him.

"India is the most talented team in the world. Hands down. The players not playing are way more talented than me," Stoinis said in the recently released documentary on the Australian team titled "The Test" on Amazon Prime. After their successful tour of Australia in 2018, winning Test series 2-1, ODIs to 2-1, and drawing shortest format 1-1, the Indian team were confident of hosting the Kangaroos in the home leg comprising of five-match ODI series.

India after taking the early 2-0 lead in the series faced three consecutive defeats and ended with the series loss 2-3.

"I love playing in India. I love the culture - its unmatched energy. It heightens all your senses. If you can harness all that excitement, that energy there is no way you can rock up there and not be motivated to play," he added.

The 30-year-old last played a match for Western Australia in Marsh Sheffield Shield. Before that, he played for Melbourne Stars in the ninth season of Big Bash League (BBL). He was the highest run-getter in the 2020 edition with 705 runs. — Agencies



Marcus Stoinis

## Call on IPL after April 15, says Rijiju

**New Delhi, March 19:** The Sports Ministry has made it clear that the fate of the 13th edition of the Indian Premier League can be decided only after the government comes out with a fresh advisory after April 15, keeping in mind the situation with regards to the coronavirus outbreak.

Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju reiterated that while it is the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) which decides on cricketing matters, the pandemic is something which has a direct effect on the lives of the citizens of the country.

"After April 15 the government will come up with new advisory and guidelines according to the situation. BCCI is a body that looks after cricket which is not an Olympic sport. But here it is not the question of the sporting event alone but a question of the safety of the citizens. In an event there will be thousands of spectators. So it is not just for the sports bodies or sports persons it is for every citizen of the country," he said.

The BCCI earlier put the IPL on hold till April 15



Kiren Rijiju

even though the tournament was set to start from March 29 after the government issued a travel advisory which made it clear that foreign players wouldn't be issued visas to come into the country. This was done in a meeting on March 11.

The Sports Ministry on March 12 made it clear that all sporting events should be cancelled in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak. And if it is unavoidable, the events should be held behind closed doors so as to avoid mass gatherings.

The Delhi government went a step further and said that there would be no IPL matches in the national capital till March 31. — Agencies

**CORONA EFFECT**

## Kiwis are kept in self-isolation after returning from Australia

**Auckland, March 19:** Amid coronavirus scare, the New Zealand team have been put under 14-day self-isolation after returning from Australia.

New Zealand Cricket (NZC) confirmed on Thursday that all the 15 players and support staff who returned from Sydney last weekend had gone into lockdown at home after following it strictly," stuff.co.nz quoted NZC public affairs manager, Richard Boock, as saying.

The Prime Minister advised all returning

travellers to self-isolate for two weeks amid the COVID-19 outbreak, even if they arrived in the country before Sunday night's cut-off.

"They [Black Caps players and touring staff] have all gone into self-isolation. We've passed on all the details about what self-isolation means and as far as we know they're all following it strictly," stuff.co.nz quoted NZC public affairs manager, Richard Boock, as saying. — Agencies

## ALL TESTS IN PSL RESULTED NEGATIVE: PCB

**Karachi:** The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Thursday claimed that all the 128 COVID-19 tests it conducted on the players, support staff, match officials, broadcasters and team owners involved in the PSL have come negative.

"It was absolutely critical for the integrity and credibility of the HBL PSL and the PCB that all players, support personnel, broadcasters and match officials, tested negative for COVID-19," PCB Chief Executive Wasim Khan said. — PTI

## ECB DISCUSSES WAYS TO SAVE COUNTY SEASON

**London:** The England and Wales cricket Board has discussed "contingency plans" to save the upcoming county season amid the rapidly-growing COVID-19 pandemic and suspended all recreational cricket, including pre-season friendlies and training.

According to a report in 'ESPNCricinfo', the ECB had a video call with county chief executives to discuss ways to ensure that the event's April 12 start can be stuck to. The meeting will resume on Thursday. — PTI

## Aussie cricketers risk massive financial jolt

**Melbourne, March 19:** Australia's ODI skipper Aaron Finch has said that his country's cricketers risk getting a massive financial jolt if the IPL and their home season are halted by the COVID-19 pandemic but they have to accept the situation as "we're all in this together".

Cricket Australia has already said that it may review the NOCs given to the players for IPL and now the government has imposed unprecedented travel restrictions, which are likely to jeopardise the Australian players' participation in the postponed T20 league.

The event which was to start on March 29, has now been set for April 15. "That's the risk you take when you have the revenue-share model, when the organisation takes a hit then so do we. We understand we're all in this together," Finch told radio station SEN.

"I'm sure in the long run, everything will be back to normal at some stage. It's just hard to say when." Prime Minister Scott Morrison has announced a blanket "do not travel overseas" advisory that will remain in place indefinitely, to help contain the coronavirus pandemic.

At least 17 cricketers have lucrative IPL contracts and a number of off-field positions are also at stake. Australia are also scheduled to host India for a Test series and the men's T20 World Cup later this year.

Finch, who was scheduled to join India skipper Virat Kohli at the Royal Challengers Bangalore, acknowledged the travel advisory and expressed helplessness in this extraordinary situation. "We've never seen anything

like this. That (travel advice) has changed over the last couple of hours. That could change in two weeks or three weeks, it's hard to plan anything," he said.

"But it's just about making sure everyone around you personally is safe and you're doing everything you can to stop the spread."

Pat Cummins had become the highest-paid cricketer during the IPL auction. — PTI



Aaron Finch

## If you take sport away, then I don't know what we have: Steyn on cancelled events

**Johannesburg, March 19:** Chilling at home after coming back from a coronavirus-forced "hotel arrest" in Pakistan, South African pacer Dale Steyn feels it's a pity that sporting events are being cancelled en masse due to the crisis as "if you take sport away, then I don't know really what we have."

Steyn, who returned from Pakistan due to the virus outbreak, said it's indescribable how the situation changed in a matter of hours. "It is actually such a pity that everything is being



Dale Steyn

blocked off, because in a country like South Africa, where we have all of our problems from the past — culture, religion, ethnic backgrounds — the one thing that brings everybody together is sport,"

Steyn told 'ESPNCricinfo'. "But now at the moment, you don't have that. In South Africa, we kind of like looking for things that unite people in big, big groups. When you don't have sport, it's like, oh, what do we fall back onto?"

"And I think Nelson Mandela was the first person to really say that: sport unites people in a way that nothing else does. And if you take sport away, then I don't know really what we have. We're gonna have to work it all out." — PTI

## SHORT TAKES

### WTA, ATP suspend season till June 7

**Washington:** All men's and women's professional tennis tournaments through June 7 are being called off because of the new coronavirus pandemic. The ATP and WTA announced on Wednesday that the entire clay-court circuit "will not be held as scheduled" — a day after the start of the French Open, also played on that surface, was postponed from May to September. The tours had said last week they would suspend play until late April or early May. The tournaments affected by the tours' suspensions include combined men's and women's events in Madrid and Rome. Also being scrapped are upcoming WTA tournaments in Strasbourg, France, and Rabat, Morocco, along with ATP events in Munich; Estoril, Portugal; Geneva; and Lyon, France. Both tours also said that their rankings will be frozen "until further notice." The International Tennis Federation also put a halt to its lower-tier events until June 7. — AP

### Jovic flouts rules, police picks him up

**Belgrade:** Real Madrid striker Luka Jovic is being investigated by Serbian authorities for allegedly flouting a mandatory self-isolation measure after returning home from a coronavirus-infected state, local media reported Thursday. The 22-year-old Jovic returned from Spain last week and was seen on the streets of Belgrade and pictured at his girlfriend's birthday party. Serbian state of emergency law introduced as an effort to stop the spread of the coronavirus calls for all those returning from states battling the virus to self-isolate for up to 28 days. Without mentioning Jovic, Serbian officials have blasted "millionaire" football players for flouting the measure. "The fact that they are known sportsmen, and that they are rich, will not stop them from being punished," Serbian Interior Minister Nebojsa Stefanovic said Thursday. — AP

### Italian boss hopes for May resumption

**Milan:** Italian football federation (FIGC) president Gabriele Gravina expressed his hope Italian League would resume on May 2 with a possible finish in July at the latest. All Italian sport has been suspended until April 3 as a result of the coronavirus pandemic which has killed 2,978 people in the country and forced the postponement of Euro 2020. "I don't even want to think that we won't start again, it would be a hiatus, it would worry me for our country," Gravina said. "We're working on the hypothesis of starting again on May 2 and completing the championships possibly going into July if we don't achieve it by June 30," he added. The FIGC president welcomed the postponement of the European Championship until 2021, stating as far as they were concerned "national championships have priority". — AFP

### MONACO F1 GP GETS POSTPONED

**Paris:** The Monaco Grand Prix was among three more Formula One races to be postponed on Thursday because of the coronavirus outbreak. The Dutch and Spanish GPs, scheduled for earlier in May, were also called off by governing body FIA. The first seven races of the season have now been postponed, with organisers saying they will only begin the 2020 championship "as soon as it's safe to do so." Regarding the latest postponements, Formula One and the FIA said they were taking these decisions "in order to ensure the health and safety of the traveling staff, championship participants and fans, which remains our primary concern." — AP



Greek actress Xanthi Georgiou (right) dressed as an ancient Greek high priestess stands by the Olympic flame during the olympic flame handover ceremony for the Tokyo Summer Olympics in Athens on Thursday. — AFP

# Put off Tokyo: Gopi

## Better to delay Games, says badminton coach

**New Delhi, March 19:** India's chief badminton coach Pullela Gopichand believes the Tokyo Olympics should be postponed given the unprecedented crisis that the world is facing due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The call to defer the Olympics, scheduled to be held in Tokyo from July 24 to August 9, is growing after most of the major sporting events were either cancelled or postponed due to the deadly outbreak.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC), however, said on Wednesday it expects the Games to begin on time. "I have my doubts about the Olympics. It is not like it is far away. The preparation has to start now. So, the IOC has to take a call now for everyone to relax," Gopichand said. "I think, in the present scenario, with the health scares and all the travel restrictions and all, it is a tough time and at the moment the whole world is thinking about health and safety for its citizens, so I think given the situation it is better if the Olympics are postponed," he added.

### OLYMPICS COULD BE DELAYED, ADMITS COE

World athletics chief Sebastian Coe admitted that the Tokyo Olympics could be moved to later in the year by the coronavirus outbreak, but said it was too early to decide. Olympic bosses acknowledged there was no "ideal" solution as a growing number of athletes expressed concern. "That is possible, anything is possible at the moment," said Coe when asked whether the Games could be postponed to September or October. "But I think the position that sport has certainly taken, and it was certainly the temperature of the room in the conversation I had the other day with the IOC and our other federations, is that nobody is saying we will be going to the Games come what may. But it isn't a decision that has to be made at this moment," Coe added. — Agencies



India's only badminton player, who has confirmed her Tokyo spot, P. V. Sindhu, in this file photo.

# World bodies support IOC

**Geneva, March 19:** Regional Olympic officials are rallying around the IOC and have backed its stance on opening the Tokyo Games as scheduled, as direct criticism from gold medalist athletes built amid the coronavirus outbreak.

Leaders of continental Olympic groups praised the IOC after a conference call on Wednesday to update them on coronavirus four months before the opening ceremony. "We are living through an unpredictable crisis and as such, it is important that we have one policy, expressed by the IOC, and we follow that policy in unison," the Italy-based European Olympic Committees said.

However, when the International Olympic Committee published an interview with its president, Thomas Bach it prompted a four-time

Many athletes are concerned about qualifying events being cancelled, but there were still four months to go until the games are set to be opened. We will keep acting in a responsible way in the interests of the athletes.

— THOMAS BACH, President of International Olympic Committee

Comments from Thomas Bach are "tone deaf". The instinct to keep safe (not to mention obey govt instructions to lock down) is not compatible with athlete training, travel and focus that a looming Olympics demands of athletes, spectators organisers. Keep them safe. Call it off.

— MATTHEW PINSENT, British Rowing great

Olympic champion to urge postponing the games.

Bach acknowledged that many athletes were concerned about qualifying events being cancelled, but noted that there were still four months to go until the games are set to be opened. "We will keep acting in a responsible way in the interests of the

athletes," Bach said. British rowing great Matthew Pinsent wrote on Twitter that the comments from Bach, his former IOC colleague, were "tone deaf."

"The instinct to keep safe (not to mention obey govt instructions to lock down) is not compatible with athlete training, travel and focus that a

looming Olympics demands of athletes, spectators organisers. Keep them safe. Call it off," Pinsent wrote.

### INDIAN OLYMPIC ASSOCIATION BACKS IOC

Skepticism is sweeping through the world but the Indian Olympic Association on Thursday backed the IOC's assertion that the upcoming Tokyo Olympics will weather the Covid-19 pandemic and be held on time without a glitch.

"The coronavirus is creating havoc throughout the world but we are hopeful it will be contained in one or two months. IOC is our parent body, we will have to abide by what the IOC decides. If the IOC says the Olympics will go on we will have to participate irrespective of any threat," a senior official said.

— Agencies

# European football in a huddle

**Geneva, March 19:** Top football leagues across Europe are searching for the earliest possible dates to resume games if the coronavirus pandemic allows.

They must make a plan, after governing body UEFA this week postponed its European Championship to 2021 to give clubs a chance to finish their seasons.

Italy's Serie A said it hopes to play on May 3. Romania's top-tier league says not before May 16. In Sweden, clubs asked to move their opening day back to June from April 3. On Thursday, the English Premier League's 20 clubs will discuss options to restart or

You have no idea if it is going to be possible to play football at the end of May or the middle of June or even afterwards. Liquidity is the major problem now.

— LARS-CHRISTER OLSSON, Chairman of the 29-nation European Leagues group

resolve the most valuable domestic competition in football world.

Still, any forward planning seems a win for hope over expectation during the near-total shutdown that threatens the finances of some leagues and hundreds of clubs.

"You have no idea if it is going to be possible to play football at the end of May or the middle of June or even afterwards,"

Lars-Christer Olsson, chairman of the 29-nation European Leagues group, told The Associated Press in an interview.

"Liquidity is the major problem now," Olsson, a former UEFA general secretary, said in a telephone interview from Sweden. As head of the leagues' group, Olsson is a member of UEFA's executive committee which decided

Tuesday to postpone Euro 2020. Clearing several weeks for club competitions to continue in late May and June and maybe an unprecedented move into July became Europe's top priority.

To achieve sporting integrity, European football wants to award titles, decide promotion and relegation places, and confirm entries to next season's Champions League and Europa League.

To avoid financial and legal peril, games are needed to fulfill broadcasting contracts that have kept the soccer industry booming even through the 2008 global downturn.

— AP

### ACCEPT PAY CUT, SCOTTISH CLUB INFORMS TEAM

**Glasgow, March 19:** Hearts have asked their players and staff to accept their pay being cut by half in order to stave off troubles brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Scottish Premiership club said.

Owner Ann Budge has taken the drastic cost-cutting measure amid financial fears that football will be out of action for months due to the pandemic. Currently sitting bottom of the Premiership, Hearts are the first British top-flight club to decide on wage cuts in a bid to stay afloat. — AFP

# Cosmopolitan 'B' register easy win

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, MARCH 19

Cosmopolitan Club 'B' comprising Lohith Aksha Bathirath and Deepak Senthil Kumar defeated Gandhinagar 'A' (Adith Prasad and Dhananjay Athreya) 6-2, 6-1 in the Zone A tie of TNTA Chennai City Club Tennis League Championship.

**Results: Zone A:** Cosmopolitan Club 'B' bt Gandhinagar 'A' 2-1 (Lohith Aksha Bathirath/Deepak Senthil Kumar bt. Aadith Prasad/ Dhananjay Athreya 6-2, 6-1; Prithvi Sekhar/Rishi Paventhan lost to Jeevan Nedunchezhiyan/Mohammed Riaz Ansari 4-6, 2-6; Vimalraj Jayachandran/Gokul Suresh bt. Arjun Mahadeva/Arjun Rathnam 4-6,7-5,6-3). Ransa Sports Club 'A' bt Anna Nagar 'K' Block 'B' 2-1 (Nishanth Panneer/Mohit R.S bt. Vijayakumar Rajasingh/Nishanth Madhivanan 6-4,6-2). **Zone B:** Cosmopolitan Club 'A' Beat Madras Gymkhana Club 'A' 3-0 (C Rameez Samad/ bt M P Shankar/Vignesh Bhasker 6-0,6-2; Salman Yasser Firdouse/G P Balaji bt. Ganesh Amarnath/Murali Padmanabhan 7-6(4), 6-4; K a r t h i k Kailash/Shivakumar Palani bt. Sundeeep Bathija/Niranjan Kumar 6-3,7-5); Presidency Club 'A' Beat Nungambakkam Tennis Club 'C' 2-1 (Sriram Raju /Prashanth Ganesh lost to Saran Anish/Siddharth Reddy 1-6,1-6; Manu Vergis/Abhinav Sanjeev Shanmugam bt Madhan Kumar/Arnold Inigo 6-1, 6-4; Manav Jain/ Arunadithya S S bt S a t h i s h k u m a r Venkataraman/Madhavan

G 2-6, 6-2 6-4). **Zone D:** Madras Cricket Club 'M' bt Madras United Club 2-1 (V Rangarajan/K Sundarajan lost to F Abdullah/Gautam Ganesh 1-6, 6-2, 3-6; Rahul Dodla/Prithvi Reddy bt Ali Asgher Shakir Abbas /Parkash Dorai 6-2, 6-2; M u k u n d Subramanian/Bharathguru N bt Mustafa Zainuddin/Siddiqui Akbar Seyed 6-1, 6-1). **Zone F:** Anna Nagar K Block 'C' bt IIT Madras 'B' 3-0 (V.T. K u m a r a n / K . Aravindakshan bt Rajesh Ravindran/Anuradha Banerjee 1-6,6-1,6-2; M.S. Venkatachalam/V.Samyuktha bt Mahesh Panchagnula/V.S Subramanya 6-1,6-3; Aslam Mohamed/ Ramesh Venkataraman bt M. Ramanathan/ Srikanth Vedantam 6-4, 4-6,7-6(4); Mylapore Club 'B' bt YMCA Nandanam Club 'B' 2-1 (Gopal Raja/Rudr Gutguttia Uttam bt K.N. P a n n i r s e l v a m / K . L Hemanth Kumar 6-1, 6-3; A. Yuvashri/V Sairamesh lost to Jaishankar S/Govindarajan Srinivasan 6-2,4-6,4-6; Sriganesh Raman/ RN Raghunathan bt Rajasekaran B/Loganathan Kesavan 6-7(3), 6-2, 6-4) Cosmopolitan Club 'C' bt Indiranagar Sports Club 'C' 3-0 (Tomy John/ R. Lokesh Balakrishnan bt R K r i p a Ramanan/Krishnamurthy Keshavamurthy 6-1,6-0; MGM Kaarthik/D. Manivannan bt Madhavan Mukund/Anand Mohan 6-3, 6-1; S Palaniswamy Raja / R Murugan bt Kumar Ramalingam/ Udaykumar 6-0, 6-0; Guhan Rajan /Subash Paramasivam bt R a m p r a k a s h Ravishankar/Rajesh Doraisamy 6-1,6-0).

# No trials, events, advises ministry

**New Delhi, March 19:** The sports ministry on Thursday advised all National Federations to refrain from conducting tournaments and selection trials till April 15 besides asking them to ensure that Olympic-bound athletes are isolated from anyone who is not a part of their training camp.

The directive has been necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic which has wreaked havoc on sporting events across the globe. The fresh advisory puts a question-mark on the upcoming Indian Grand Prix of athletics that is to be held on Friday.

"All sport organisations and their affiliate units are advised against holding any sports events, including competitions or selection trials till 15th April, 2020," the ministry said in a letter to the Indian Olympic Association and NSFs.

It also asked federations to not allow any non-camper athlete, coach or support staff in Olympic training camps without following proper quarantine protocols for the COVID-19 pandemic.

The ministry's two-point directive states: "No exposure to athlete be allowed from outside in the campus where training is underway. No coach, technical/support staff athlete etc presently not in training camp and not

● All sport organisations and their affiliated units were advised against holding any sports events, including competitions or selection trials till April 15, the sports ministry advised the Indian Olympic Association and NSFs via a letter.

staying in the training campus be allowed to interact or mingle with trainee athletes without following quarantine protocols."

### IOA STAFF TO WORK FROM HOME

The staffers at the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) will be asked to 'work from home' from the next week with the sports body set to suspend majority of its operations from its headquarters in the wake of coronavirus outbreak.

"The IOA will start work from home facility for its staff from Monday. We are currently ensuring that all back-up systems are in place for a smooth functioning from home. The coronavirus is becoming serious day by day and we can't risk our employees. Like any other professional organisation, we will go by the government's advisory on this matter. — PTI

# FEDERATION CUP PUSHED, INDIAN GP CANCELLED

**New Delhi, March 19:** The Athletics Federation of India on Thursday cancelled the Indian Grand Prix hours before it was to begin, paying heed to the government's directive to avoid conducting competitions till April 15 because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The event was scheduled to be held at NIS Patiala. Next month's Federation Cup National Senior Championships (April 10-13), a qualifying event for the Tokyo Olympics, has been postponed to a later date.

The development came after hours after the Sports Ministry advised all national federations to refrain from conducting competitions and selection trials till April 15 and ensure that Olympic-bound athletes are isolated from anyone who is not a part of their training camps. The directive has been necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic which has wreaked havoc on sporting events across the globe.

"The Indian GP at Patiala will not be held on Friday. It is unfortunate for the athletes but the health of Indian people is more important than sports. So, with regret we took the decision to cancel the first Indian GP on Friday," Volker Herrmann, High Performance Director of the Indian athletics said. — PTI

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