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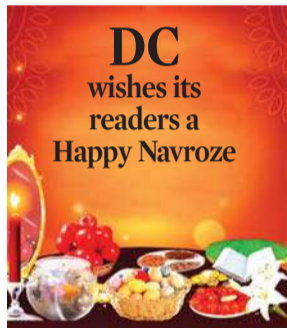
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WEATHER

Max: 36.2°C
Min: 20.3°C
RH: 46%
Rain: Nil
Forecast: Partly cloudy sky. Rain likely.
Max/Min temp. 36/21°C

ASTROGUIDE

Vikari: Uttarayanam
Thithi: Phalguna Bahula Dwadasi till 7.56 pm
Star: Dhanista till 7.40 pm
Variyam: 3.42 am to 5.29 am (next day)
Durmuhurtam: 6.23 am to 7.59 am
Rahukalam: 9 am to 10.30 am
HJRI CALENDAR
Rajjab 25,1441 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.20 am
Zohar: 12.33 pm
Asar: 4.44 pm
Maghrib: 6.33 pm
Isha: 7.41 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.27 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.18 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 4.30 AM
MOONSET TODAY 4.08 PM



IN BRIEF

Many MPs opt for self-isolation

New Delhi: Several MPs on Friday went into self-quarantine following the announcement by BJP MP Dushyant Singh and his mother former Rajasthan CM Vasun-dhara Raje that they were self-isolating themselves after attending a party last week with singer Kanika Kapoor who has tested positive for Covid-19. Mr Singh was among the 100 MPs who attended a breakfast meeting hosted by President Ram Nath Kovind.

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INSIDE

CITY.. PG2
Life remains the same for domestic helps
CITY.. PG6
Coronavirus crisis hits I-T collections

COUNTER POINT



Not food... please give me a mask or a soap!

All trains to come to halt tomorrow

India records 47 new cases in 24 hours; Modi holds video-conference with CMs

VINEETA PANDEY | DC
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, MARCH 20

India would come a halt on Sunday as train services have been suspended for a day in view of the 'janata curfew' announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. All mail and express trains will stop services from 4 am to 10 pm on Sunday while all suburban train services will be reduced to a bare minimum as well. "All passenger trains originating between midnight of March 21/March 22 to 10 pm of March 22 (approximately 2,400 services) shall not be run. However, the passenger train services already on run at 7 am hours on the day will be allowed to run to the destinations. Divisions should keep a watch and trains which are empty could be short terminated, if required," the railway order said.

While IndiGo, the country's largest airline by flights, has decided to operate only 25 per cent of its services, GoAir has voluntarily suspended all flights on March 22. The railways said people who find themselves stuck at stations due to the cancellation of connecting trains would be accommodated in waiting halls, waiting rooms and on the concourse. With the number of pos-

SEVERAL STATES suggested that the Centre urgently look at ways to augment testing facilities by roping in private labs and hospitals in larger numbers
CONSIDER ECONOMIC and other packages to support vulnerable sections, and advance the disbursement of funds for 2020-21 to the states.

itive novel coronavirus cases multiplying fast in India — 47 fresh cases were recorded in the last 24 hours, taking the total positive cases to 223 — Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday held a meeting with the chief ministers of several states in which it was suggested that the Centre urgently look at ways to augment testing facilities by roping in private labs and hospitals in larger numbers, consider economic and other packages to support vulnerable sections, and advance the disbursement of funds for 2020-21 to the states.

The meeting, held through video-conference, was attended by Union health minister Harsh Vardhan and top health ministry officials, was called to discuss ways to check the spread of novel coronavirus, capacity building of the states and extending

training to local health officials. Mr Modi said the next three-four weeks are crucial in the effort to contain the spread of the virus, and the most important measure of containment is "social distancing". "We are in a critical phase of tackling spread of the virus. There is no need to panic... No stone should be left unturned in our common endeavours to fight Covid-19," Mr Modi said. Mr Modi suggested that all chief ministers take steps to prevent black marketing and undue price rise of essential goods.

Dr Balram Bhargava, the director general of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), said that India is currently in Phase 2 of transmission and has the window to take action and minimise the risk of transmission to Phase 3. There was also a video conference of global health experts, organised by China, that an Indian team from New Delhi attended, while foreign secretary Harsha Vardhan Shringla participated in a conference call with counterparts from the US, Australia, the Republic of Korea, Vietnam, New Zealand and Japan.

Page 7: 223 positive cases; lens on another 6,700

3 MORE POSITIVE CASES TAKE TS' TALLY TO 19

BALU PULIPAKA | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 20

The unabated surge of Coronavirus (Covid-19) in Telangana continued, with the TRS-led state government on Friday reporting three more cases of the disease, taking the total cases so far in Telangana to 19.

Two of the three cases announced on Friday are from the 10-member group of Indonesian Islamic preachers who were brought to the city from Karimnagar. Eight other members of the group have already been diagnosed as Covid-19 positive before. The third positive Covid-19 case announced by officials on Friday is that of an 18-year-old girl, who recently returned from London.

The health department said that the girl was first admitted to a private hospital, that later referred her case to the government. After admitting her to the TB & Chest Hospital in the city, tests were conducted on her, which showed that she was a Coronavirus positive patient. "The public," the department said, "is requested to stay calm and not panic. State is taking all measures to contain the spread of the virus." The government, however, did not release any data on number of people tested on Friday, the number of pending results, something it has been doing from early days of discovery of the pandemic in the state.

There was also a video conference of global health experts, organised by China, that an Indian team from New Delhi attended, while foreign secretary Harsha Vardhan Shringla participated in a conference call with counterparts from the US, Australia, the Republic of Korea, Vietnam, New Zealand and Japan.

Page 4: Residents' association traces contacts

Kamal Nath quits, lotus rises in MP

DC CORRESPONDENTS
BHOPAL/NEW DELHI,
MARCH 20

Curtains came down on the 15-month old Congress government in Madhya Pradesh as Chief Minister Kamal Nath on Friday resigned from his post hours before a floor test mandated by the Supreme Court.

With the BJP gearing up to form its government in MP, former chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan seemed to be the front runner in the race for the post of chief minister. Mr Chouhan, who played a key role in keeping his flock of BJP MLAs together in the face of the threat by Congress to split the BJP Legislature Party (BJPLP) to save the Kamal Nath government after it was reduced to a minority, is billed to be elected leader of BJPLP in a day or two.

The Kamal Nath-led state government had been teetering on the verge of collapse after Jyotiraditya Scindia rebelled over a Rajya

THE STRENGTH of the ruling Congress in the Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly has reduced to 92 following the resignation of 22 Congress MLAs. The BJP has 107 MLAs in the House.

Sabha seat and joined the BJP. Following this, 22 MLAs loyal to him, including six ministers holed up in Bangalore resigned.

The strength of the ruling Congress has reduced to 92 following the resignation of 22 Congress MLAs. The BJP has 107 MLAs in the House. "I wanted that the Congress should not go to the palace (referring to Mr Scindia), but the palace should come to Congress. A Maharaja's hunger for power led to the collapse of my government". Mr Nath remarked while taking a dig at Mr Scindia for leaving the Congress, leading to the resignation of his loyalists from the House.

Page 8: Kamal Nath strayed his path: Scindia

CELEBRATIONS MARK DEATH OF 4 RAPISTS

SANJAY KAW | DC
NEW DELHI, MARCH 20

A large, boisterous crowd had assembled outside Tihar Jail in Delhi on Thursday-Friday night to bear witness to the hanging of the four men convicted of the gangrape and murder of a 23-year-old paramedic student, referred to as Nirbhaya (fearless), in December 2012. While a group of people chanted "death to rapists" outside, the executions were being carried out inside Tihar as per the guidelines under the Delhi Prison Rules, 2018.

Sources said bus cleaners Mukesh Singh (32) and Akshay Thakur (31), fruit-seller Pawan Gupta (25) and gym instructor Vinay Sharma (26) — the four men convicted of the brutal rape and murder of Nirbhaya — didn't put up any resistance when they were being taken to the gallows. Jail officials said the convicts did not show any sign of anxiety the night before their execution, though they all skipped breakfast.

Full coverage on Page 9

VIRUS | SCARE

Today's exam will take place as per schedule

No SSC exams from Monday

VUJJINI VAMSHIDHARA | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 20

The state government indefinitely postponed SSC examinations that were to be held from March 23 to 30, following a rebuke from the Telangana High Court on Friday. The exams on March 21 would take place as scheduled.

The court direction came over concerns of the spread of the Coronavirus. "What is the point in taking the risk of holding SSC examinations when the entire world is going through panic due to the Coronavirus pandemic?" asked the division bench of Chief Justice Raghavendra Singh Chauhan and Justice A. Abhishek Reddy, of the

I cannot imagine 30 students being confined for two hours in the examination hall... If a single child tests positive, leave the career and psychological impact, it will be the end for the child.

— JUSTICE RAGHAVENDRA SINGH CHAUHAN, CJ

state government.

The court was hearing a petition, as an urgent case, by Bala Krishna Mandapati seeking a postponement of the exams due to Covid-19. "All educational institutions across the country are closed... CBSE and ICSE have postponed examinations. The Prime Minister, yesterday, appealed to people to follow 'Janata Cur-

few'. When the PM appeals to people to refrain from going out, how can the state hold SSC exams, jeopardising the lives of young children? This court has even advised counsel not to congregate in the court halls," the CJ said.

"In Karimnagar, seven positive Covid-19 cases were identified. If, God forbid, one child is infected, what will be the fate of children and parents? If suppose a couple has only one child and that child is infected with the Coronavirus, what will be the fate of the couple?" Advocate General B.S. Prasad said the state government had taken precautionary measures, like sanitisers and masks, in exam-

ination halls to ensure the safety of students. Students who had cough and cold would be segregated.

"The exams are underway," he said. "At this stage, if examinations are postponed, it will have a psychological impact on students and their careers will be hit. The state is well prepared to hold exams."

In response, the CJ said: "I am sorry; I cannot imagine 30 students being confined for two hours in the examination hall. If one child falls prey, then the lives of all 30 are at stake and I will not allow this to happen. If a single child tests positive, leave the career and psychological impact, it will be the end for the child."



A public service message from Lifebuoy.

PREVENT THE SPREAD OF CORONAVIRUS*

Wash hands frequently with soap.

Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer for instant germ-kill when out of home.

Consult your doctor if you have cough, cold, fever or feel breathless.



*Washing hands with soap and water or use of an alcohol-based hand sanitizer is one of the World Health Organization (W.H.O.) recommended measures to help reduce risk of Coronavirus infection. *Please follow additional guidelines recommended by health authorities like W.H.O. & C.D.C./local health authorities.

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SHORT TAKE

WORKERS WANT EMERGENCY RELIEF FUND

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 20

As many as 50 crore workers are expected to suffer the impact of the economic slowdown caused by Covid-19 in India. The working people's charter (WPC), an alliance of trade unions and various organisations working mainly with informal but also formal and self-employed labour, based in Delhi, on Friday, demanded an emergency relief fund for workers and professionals of ₹50,000 crore and tax exemptions for the business class.

Workers from trade unions and representatives of various professional organisations in the formal and informal sectors are bearing the economic brunt of the infection, they stated.

The WPC has asked the central government task force to create a ₹50,000-crore emergency workers welfare fund. The fund can be added to the state relief packages for the benefit of the people.

With Kerala announcing a relief package for workers in all sectors, Uttar Pradesh is to support migrant workers. Other states have not yet declared any funds due to their fiscal capacity and on-going schemes.

A member of the WPC drafting proposal said, "We want relief in the current situation to help workers through the crisis. There will be a cumulative effect. Economic vulnerability of all sections must be accounted for by the state and central governments. There is a need for direct benefit and also indirect economic support in terms of tax exemptions. Businesses are suffering during the wedding and festival season and losses are not recoverable in next season."

Daily wage workers, street hawkers, domestic, construction and agriculture workers must be provided a minimum package relief of ₹10,000 per month demanded the WPC. Their contention is that street hawkers and vendors who have been issued municipal challans must be tracked and offered relief as they are not in registered government records.

The WPC has appealed to the central government to provide concession on cooking gas cylinders that range from ₹800 to ₹750 per cylinder and roll back prices on unsubsidised ones ranging from ₹1,450 onwards.

Utility bills of electricity, water and property tax are burdens on the middle class and relief of two months must be provided to them in the form of subsidised bills. Revised energy rates for high and middle class group and subsidise for middle and poor consumers is the demand.

The ripple effect of shutdown will be felt for the next three months and workers are going to have a tough time dealing with rents, fees of educational institutions, food and emergency health expenses, if any. The government providing relief was an urgent necessity and apart from the state governments, the central government must work out a comprehensive package, urged the WPC.

CONCESSIONS SOUGHT

- Fixed expenses for every household: rents, housing Loan, EMI, fees of educational institutions, utility bills of electricity, water, property and maintenance tax, food and health expenses.

- Immediate relief must be provided in utility bills, tax exemptions, gas connections.

- Other relief must be provided on a case-to-case basis.

₹10,000

per month proposed for economically backward classes, migrant workers and labourers who can be tracked through government schemes.

Employees rue work from home option

Many say distractions are inevitable. From the doorbell to kids playing, everything affects work

ADITYA CHUNDURU | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 20

Working from home (WFH) is no cakewalk according to many private sector employees who find themselves forced to stay away from their office desks. Though they are happy about their employers giving them the option of working from their homes, many companies haven't done so yet, they note that it is not without its challenges.

For instance, Rishabh, an IT employee from the city, said he has been having trouble with his productivity.

"My team has been working on an entirely new project since February. There are a lot of things we were supposed to finalise by now. But since we can't meet physically, our communication has been affected. We are unable to convince each other on what our priorities are," he said.

Many people said distractions are inevitable. From the doorbell to the children playing outside on the street, everything affects work.

Karthik, an IT employee, said official conference calls are full of sounds of babies crying and barking by dogs. "My manager has started scheduling calls at 9 am so that we can avoid some of the noise. I am not used to waking up that early," he chuckled.

The Covid-19 outbreak has been rough on non-IT sector employees.

Keerthi (name changed), a company secretary, said, "Work from home is a misnomer for us. Without physical documents, we can't do anything. My employer has been kind enough to let us stay at home, but work has stopped entirely. In fact, we have an office assistant going around handing papers to team members to process every day." She said her employer is glued to the TV to see how bad the situation is and whether he should close the office down for a few weeks, even though it would cause a considerable loss. Sowmya (name changed), who works at a content writing firm, said her work has stayed the same, but it has been affected. Having dealt with anxiety and depression for a few years, she misses going to her office where she finds some peace.

"Earlier, I would work two-three times a week from home where I live alone and go to the office the rest of the week. It was nice being able to see my colleagues and share a meal with them. Now I feel extremely lonely. I wonder how long I can go on without interacting with people," she said.

For many female employees, life has been exceptionally tough. Already expected to lend a hand in household chores, their extra time at home has not been great for them.

Swetha (name changed), an IT employee, said, "My in-laws don't acknowledge that I actually have a lot of work and can't stay idle. But since they see me home all the time, they think I am just idling away and ignoring household work," she added. "God forbid, they don't catch me browsing my phone when I am on a break. That draws disgusted looks from them."

Special trains for festival cancelled

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 20

Secunderabad Railway Station has never seen such a thin crowd a week before a major festival like Ugadi.

There were only a few passengers on Friday going to their native villages to observe the festival. Most people are going to observe the festival in the city.

A senior SCR official



Buses are running without passengers on the city outskirts due to deadly coronavirus scare.

— R. PAVAN

Life remains the same for domestic helps

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 20

While private sector employees are calling out their employers for not offering them work-from-home options, they are simultaneously asking their house maids to report for work like clockwork. Maids who *Deccan Chronicle* spoke to said that there is no change in their schedules.

Gayathri, a maid who works at three apartments in a complex in Nallakunta, said her workload had, in fact, increased

in the last 10 days. "All the people in these houses are staying at home the whole day. There are a lot more utensils to wash because of this," she said. It may be noted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his public address on Thursday night, appealed to people to not cut payments to domestic workers and daily wage labourers. However, this advice has, so far, gone unnoticed. Nagamma, another maid in the same area, said she had seen the prime minister's speech on TV. "I asked one of my employers to let me stay at

home for a week but she refused. She said she wouldn't be able to manage without me. However, I think I will stop working from Monday. It's okay if I lose my salary for that time," she said. Pallavi, another maid, said she was hoping her employers would take their health more seriously. "My husband (a security guard) told me some maids are infected with the virus in Mumbai. We are at a risk, and this is bad for our employers. I hope they let us skip work for a while," she said.

Gain for Internet service providers

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 20

This is a great time to be an internet service provider (ISP). Due to thousands of private sector employees working from home in view of the Covid-19 outbreak, ISPs have been getting higher than usual requests for new connections.

Just a few days after the first Covid-19 positive case was found in Hyderabad, a major ISP announced it would be upgrading speeds of all customers for the month of March.

A senior employee of another major ISP said requests for new internet connections have risen three-fold in the last two weeks. "Most of these requests are from the IT-sector dominated areas of Lingampally, Nallagandla and Hitech City," the employee said. She added that data usage figures have skyrocketed. "While it is too early to account for the numbers, we have been seeing consistently high usage by customers. This is the reason many are upgrading their accounts," she said.

Ugadi to be a low key affair due to Covid

KANJAN GARARI | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 20

The month of March involves travel to temples, dargahs and native places for Ugadi but all of it stands cancelled as people have decided to stay at home due to the coronavirus pandemic. Ugadi is on March 25.

Ugadi is a major festival which involves a large movement of people from cities to their native homes to celebrate. However, this year Covid-19 has forced all of them to celebrate the festival at home.

The marriage of Ram, on the ninth day of Ugadi, celebrated in Bhadrachalam, has no bookings this year. The celestial marriage will be performed by priests in the temple according to the rituals.

Thousands of people congregate at Bhadrachalam during the wedding ceremony but this year people have been told not to come.

Similarly, the closure of temples in Puri



Devotees during the Juma prayers at Macca masjid on Friday. Despite directives issued by religious leaders to avoid large gatherings in view of Covid-19 alert, there was no decline in attendance at mosques.

— P. SURENDRA

SELF-QUARANTINE, FOUR IRANIANS TOLD

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 20

The Ramgopalpet police identified four Iranian nationals who came to Nallagutta mosque for religious purposes and after having them checked by doctors for any possible symptoms of Covid-19, asked them to be self-quarantined.

The four men, along with four women who came with them from Iran, are now under home quarantine.

They all came from Khurasan, Iran to New Delhi on February 24 by flight.

The Ramgopalpet inspector T. Chanchala Babu said, "We came to know that they reached Hyderabad on February 29 and stayed at Mallepally Bada Mosque. On the morning of March 18, they came to Nallagutta and have been staying at the Nallagutta Mosque since then. To rule out any suspicion of Covid-19, we asked the Hyderabad District surveillance officer to check their health and found they don't have any symptoms." However, as a precautionary measure, they were asked to be self-quarantined, added Mr Babu.

Jagannath, Mangalore and Calicut have left tourists from the city disappointed as they reached there to find them closed.

P. Sudhakar Rao, director of Rao Tours and Travels, says, "March is an off season yet there are senior citizens who opt for travel to pilgrimage spots. Bookings were minimal

due to the fear of the virus and now with temples closed, those who have reached there are disappointed. Some of them are having problems returning as airlines has given last minute notice that flights are cancelled on this sector. These groups have to now opt for road or rail travel back to

Hyderabad." The tourism industry has seen its worst phase in 2020 and now they are experiencing the shutdown of public places and temples making it more difficult. For the month of May, bookings for Badrinath, Gangotri and Chardham have been made but people are

already calling in demanding refunds. They are not sure if they want to continue with their plans this season due to the spread and fear of the virus.

Summer holiday bookings in January and February were made at discounted prices but people are keen on refunds as they have to stay home.

MASJIDS TAKE STEPS TO CHECK CORONAVIRUS

ATHER MOIN | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 20

Imams invoked special supplications for protection against the Covid-19 epidemic in Juma prayers. In most mosques, sermons were delivered in Arabic and not Urdu and only before the Juma prayer, while imams shortened the prayers.

Though people are taking precautions to avoid the spreading of Covid-19, there was no decline in the turnout of worshippers at mosques for juma prayers.

There was no impact on the turnout of the worshippers at the historic Macca masjid, Shahi masjid at Public Garden, Jamia masjid, Azampura, Mallepally, Jamia masjid, Musheerabad, Jamia masjid, Secunderabad, Jamia masjid, Azzia, Mehdipatnam and other major mosques in Hyderabad.

However, this time, managing committees did not arrange prayer carpets on the roads and adjacent open places outside the mosques to avoid additional assembly. Unlike the usual practice, people avoided shaking hands after prayers.

People refrained from crouching at the feet of their mentors. Most of the people did their *wuzhu* (ablution) at home as requested by the ulema. In some mosques, the management committees provided hand sanitiser to the worshippers and distributed masks. The ulema and imams advised people to offer sunnan and nawafil (optional but spiritually beneficial) *rakats* at home.



People queue at the Secunderabad railway station on Friday to purchase tickets to travel to their native places in the wake of coronavirus pandemic.

— DEEPAK DESHPANDE

IN BRIEF

Churches urged to close on March 22

Hyderabad: The Telangana United Christians' Association has appealed to the Bishop of Medak Rt Rev Dr A.C. Solomon to close all church services on Sunday, March 22, for the janata curfew. T. Vinod Kumar, general secretary of TUCA, has asked that all churches to oblige and people to keep away to help control the pandemic.

UoH hostels, mess closed till April 6

Hyderabad: The University of Hyderabad (UoH) has decided to lock down its hostels and messes from Monday to April 6. The decision was taken at a meeting of the Vice Chancellor, deans and heads of departments as a preventive measure to contain the spread of Covid-19. All shops, eateries and establishments on the campus will be closed during this period. Students have been asked to vacate their hostels by Monday morning. None of the hostels will have working water and electricity supply from March 24. The university announced that the academic activity, including examinations would be reviewed and rescheduled after April 6.

2 KGH NURSES AMONG 10 HOSPITALISED

K.M.P. PATNAIK | DC VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 20

Two staff nurses of the King George Hospital here are among the 10 admitted into various government hospitals on Friday for showing symptoms of Coronavirus (Covid-19).

One patient in Vizianagaram with a travel history of visiting Tanzania and other African countries, has been admitted into district headquarters hospital. Venu Gopal Reddy, joint collector, Visakhapatnam, said that reports of four patients are awaited, besides that of the patient from Vizianagaram.

The two staff nurses are the first health workers in Andhra Pradesh to show primary symptoms besides being the first women suspects. Before the duo was hospitalised, only men have been admitted into hospitals.

Besides those hospitalised, 1,100 persons have been recommended for home isolation, including all people who have travelled abroad in recent times.

A survey is being conducted to identify people who travelled to foreign country to ensure they isolate themselves at home for 14 days, the joint collector said.

In Vizianagaram, 66 persons have been told to isolate themselves at home, an official from the health department said. In all, 200 people arrived in the district, who have travelled abroad and returned during last three days.

J. Niwas, district collector, Srikakulam, said that as on Friday, 238 people are under home isolation. So far swabs of three suspected patients have been sent to the virology department in Tirupati, and all of them were found negative for Covid-19.

Mr Niwas said that 90 isolation beds have been created in different government and private hospitals in the district. In view of the Janata curfew scheduled for Sunday, the famous sun temple at Arasavilli, near Srikakulam, would remain closed, he added.

● **1,100 PERSONS** have been recommended for home isolation, including all people who have travelled abroad in recent times

Freeway



Telugu Talli Flyover sport's a deserted look as people avoid venturing outdoor due to coronavirus scare in Hyderabad on Friday —P.SURENDRA

Govt fails to improve hygiene in fish market

No decision on importing fish from AP, Bengal, Maha

MADHY DEEKSHITH I DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 20

Even as researchers had found that the novel coronavirus had originated and spread through wet markets in China, the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) does not appear to have any plans to improve hygiene in fish markets in the city.

This apart, it has not taken any decision pertaining to the import of fish from neighbouring states including Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Maharashtra and others where covid19 cases have been on the rise. On the flipside, fearing that the consumption of red meat, especially chicken, will spread covid19, citizens have been opting for fish. The average consumption during weekdays has increased from 120 tonnes to 160 tonnes and during the weekend, from 350 tonnes to about

500 tonnes. According to the official records of the Telangana state fisheries department, on an average about 120 tonnes of fish per day are exported to Hyderabad from Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and West Bengal and the livelihood of about 10,000 fisherpeople depends on the markets in the city.

People have been thronging in huge numbers to fish markets since other meat markets began seeing a slump with fears of coronavirus infections. Surprisingly, the city has only two operational fish markets at Begum Bazaar and Monda market in Secunderabad, which were constructed by the City Improvement Board (CIB) in the 1930s, during the erstwhile Nizam rule.

Due to the lack of markets to sell fish, they are sold on the wayside and on bicycles travelling in the city's bylanes. While

reports in Wuhan suggest that the coronavirus spread like a wild fire from wet markets, the authorities in the city are still ignorant about the fact.

When queried whether the government was taking any measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus from neighbouring states through the import of fish, fisheries minister Talasani Srinivas Yadav told *Deccan Chronicle* that the government is yet to take a decision.

However, the minister said that the government would certainly stop imports from August or September. Commissioner of fisheries Dr C. Suvarna could not be reached despite multiple attempts to contact her.

"We have been already taking additional measures to curtail the spread of covid 19. However, we would have a special focus on fish markets and sellers," GHMC commissioner, D.S. Lokesh

Kumar, said. He said that he would immediately hold a review meeting and give necessary instructions to the corporation staff.

Interestingly, it was way back in February 2012, that ₹9.9 crore was sanctioned for construction of four modern fish markets at Begum Bazaar, Domalguda, Nakharam, and Kukatapally with the government asking GHMC to construct them within a year.

The National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB) had also assured GHMC that it would bear 90 per cent of the construction cost.

The NFDB had also released 50 per cent (₹4.4 crore) of the amount. Six years have gone by but the corporation has yet to build even one operational fish market. The only fish market for which construction began is in Begum Bazaar which is in its final stages of completion.

State collects data on all foreign returnees to TS

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MARCH 20

In order to check the spread of coronavirus, the state government is collecting the data of Indians and foreigners who have come from abroad, irrespective of whether they are self-quarantined or not, their health condition and also that of their family.

A special team is collecting information of people living in areas surrounding those where coronavirus-positive patients were identified. The Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation's entomology wing has taken up spraying of disinfectants in areas where people are in self-



A GHMC worker spraying disinfectant in city.

quarantine or where positive cases were identified.

The GHMC's entomology wing staff is spraying sodium hypochlorite in specific areas in all 30 circles by deploying 125 spraying teams each consisting of 18 members.

The Enforcement, Vigi-

lance and Disaster Management (EV&DM) wing of the GHMC, comprising 300 members, is also spraying disinfectants in various places in the city.

The corporation has also advanced its 'property tax parishkarams (PTPs)', programmes to resolve problems with property tax, to be held on Sunday. "In view of the serious situation arising out of the spread of coronavirus (Covid-19), a call was given by the Prime Minister to adopt 'janata curfew' to restrain the spread of coronavirus. Therefore the PTPs in all circle offices from 9.30 am to 1 pm on Sunday has been advanced to Saturday," the GHMC announced.

RAILWAYS SHUTS DOWN WAITING AREA TILL APR. 21

ADITYA CHUNDURU | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 20

South Central Railway (SCR) announced that it would be shutting down waiting rooms and dormitories at all its stations from Saturday to April 21. Customers with existing books would be refunded.

SCR also announced several new measures to prevent the spread

of Covid-19. At Secunderabad station, its employees, stationed at both entrances have started conducting thermal screening on travellers.

At ticketing queues, floor markings have been painted to guide travellers to maintain a safe distance from each other while in queue.

Meanwhile, cancellation of trains continued en masse.

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ANDHRA PRADESH

Elusive Covid suspect from Indonesia held, nine isolated

D. SIVA RAMI REDDY | DC KURNOOL, MARCH 20

As news spread that an Indonesian, who is a Coronavirus (Covid-19) suspect, was missing, it led to tense moments to the police and health officials here on Friday, and instead it led to nine bus passengers, his co-journeymen, being taken to the isolation ward at Kurnool government hospital.

Police at Veldhuri got information from RTC managing director that a Covid-19 suspect was travelling in a bus from Dharmavaram to Kurnool. They were told to intercept the bus and detain the passenger. But the Indonesian passenger got down from the bus at Dhone, much before the cops could reach it. When a sub-inspector of police intercepted the bus, it had nine passengers. All of them were taken to

the Kurnool government hospital for observation and kept in isolation wards. They all said that the Indonesian suspect was sneezing and coughing.

The police intensified their search for him and learnt that he was travelling by the Sampark Kranti Express (Tirupati-Nizamuddin Delhi). They alerted the security at Kurnool railway station to detain him. The health team and police nabbed him and took him in an ambulance to a government hospital. Dr Rama Giddaiah, district medical and health officer, said that the suspect has been kept in an isolation ward. Dr Giddaiah said that as of now, 187 people have been kept under house observation. Nearly 300 foreign returned people have been identified in the district, he said. The remaining 123 had

either given a wrong address or were not available in the district, he said. A door-to-door survey was initiated across the district and all houses were being checked to account for foreign returnees, he said. Influx of religious preachers from Indonesia and Vietnam is proving to be a major problem in Kurnool district, was the refrain of several officials.

They said that mosques in the districts were regularly engaging services of Indonesia-based clerics to preach and indoctrinate the congregations of religious Islamic scholars. It was learned that at least 10 Indonesian / Vietnamese origin religious teachers were found to have visited masjids in Kurnool district in last few days. A health official said that they were kept in isolation wards created in masjids.

4 VIETNAMESE KEPT UNDER ISOLATION

VADREVI SRINIVAS | DC KAKINADA, MARCH 20

Magam villagers in Inavilli mandal of Konaseema area in East Godavari district are living in fear after seeing four Vietnamese in the village. According to sources, the persons came to Magam from Vietnam on February 13 for erecting machinery for an aqua food processing Unit.

In the wake of the coronavirus scare, and presuming them to be Chinese, the locals informed the district officials. After receiving information, local doctors and police rushed to the spot and enquired about them. They were told that they were from Vietnam and had come on work.

Incidentally, though they have been in the village for the past one year, they have been to their native place once or twice during the period. They are residents of Mummidivaram village, which is the mandal headquarters.

Sub-Inspector Mr Pandu Dora advised the four not to move out from their room for 10 days.

The local primary health care (PHC) medical officer Dr Manga Devi said that they are healthy and people need not be worried.

Coronavirus nodal officer Dr Kiran said that when the returnees or foreigners stay beyond 14 days and are not having fever, cough or respiratory problems, there was no need to panic.

COVID | FEAR

Rapid Response Force's quick action saves many

APSRTC traces 7 from UAE

PATHRI RAJASEKHAR | DC NELLORE, MARCH 20

The Andhra Pradesh Rapid Response Team picked up seven youths who had returned from Abu Dhabi soon after they alighted at the RTC bus station in Nellore and shifted them to the quarantine ward in Government General Hospital in the city. According to joint collec-

● **THE YOUTH LANDED** in Chennai from Abu Dhabi early on Friday and reached Nellore at about 10.30 am. RTC regional manager Seshaiiah alerted Dr V. Vinod Kumar after inquiring about their travel history

Friday and reached Nellore at about 10.30 am.

RTC regional manager Seshaiiah alerted Dr Kumar after inquiring with them and learning that the group was returning from Abu Dhabi.

The Rapid Response Force shifted them to the Government General Hospital after one of them was found with coronavirus symptoms such as

running nose and soar throat.

Dr Kumar said three among the youths belong to Visakhapatnam and four to Srikakulam.

They had alighted at Nellore to board a bus to Visakhapatnam.

He said that medical officers were examining them and would take a decision on allowing them to proceed to their native places.



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SHORT TAKES

FAKE HAND SANITIZERS WORTH ₹56 LAKH SEIZED

M.K. ASHOKA | DC BENGALURU, MARCH 20

The Central Crime Branch sleuths have arrested two chemical businessmen for manufacturing duplicate hand sanitizers and hand rubs as there is sudden spike in their sales due to Covid-19. They seized duplicate hand sanitizers and other material used for manufacturing them worth ₹56 lakh.

The two have been identified as Raju (43), Chandu (64), Bhaskar Rao, Commissioner of Police said.

The police have conducted raids on two godowns owned by Jyothi Chemicals and Swathi and Co. They have seized 8,500 bottles of hand sanitizers packed in 100 ml, 120 ml, 200 ml and 500 ml plastic bottles.

They have also seized 8 cans of Isopropyl Alcohol containing 35 litres each, 4,500 empty bottles and 4,500 stickers.

The accused used 15 ml to 20 ml of Isopropyl Alcohol about one and half spoons and 10 to 15 ml of Brilliant Blue coloured to create 50 litres of hand sanitizers and hand rubs. Bhaskar Rao said that the chemical combination was hazardous for health. The accused sold 100 ml bottle for ₹170, 200 ml for ₹325, 500 ml for ₹620.

KERALA CANCELS SSLC, CLASS 12 EXAMINATIONS

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 20

The Kerala Government has decided to postpone SSLC (matriculation) and higher secondary examinations in the state in the wake of Covid-19 threat.

The examinations of eighth and ninth standard have also been cancelled. Earlier the government had cancelled exams of first standard to seventh standard.

The SSLC and Class 12 exams were under way with only three exams left for each class. However, in view of the rising number of cases of Covid-19 in the state, the government decided not to take any risk.

The decision was taken at a high level meeting presided over by Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Friday.

Some of universities in Kerala have also postponed its examinations.

Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kannur University and Calicut University have postponed all the examinations scheduled to be held from March 21. Examinations scheduled to be held on Friday afternoon session were also postponed till further notice.

Earlier, only the Kerala Agricultural University had cancelled examinations.

Though the Central government had directed UGC on Wednesday to postpone all exams till March 31, the state government had not taken a call. Even at the Cabinet meeting held on Thursday, the government took the position that there was no need for cancelling the exams at this stage.

ODISHA REPORTS 2ND CASE, 19-YEAR-OLD HIT

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 20

Odisha on Thursday night reported its second Coronavirus case after one of the 14 samples sent for testing yielded a positive result. State health and family welfare department of the Odisha government took to Twitter to inform about the second positive case in the state.

According to sources, 14 samples were sent to Regional Medical Research Centre Bhubaneswar for testing out of which one came out positive for Coronavirus.

As per the health and family welfare department, the second Coronavirus positive patient, a 19-year-old student, has a travel history to England.

Soon after the case was detected, steps were initiated to trace 46 persons who have come in contact with the patient. The state surveillance unit has initiated contact tracing, the health and family welfare department tweeted.

As per data provided by Subrat Bagchi, Odisha government's chief spokesperson for Covid-19, the 19-year-old youth was admitted to Capital Hospital here and he was doing well.

223 positive cases; lens on another 6,700

Centre has clarified that the death of an Italian tourist in Jaipur on Friday cannot be linked to Covid

From Page 1

On Friday, the total positive cases in India stood at 223, out of which 196 cases are active and 22 have been cured. Four deaths have been reported while one person, a foreign national, has migrated to his country.

Out of this 223, 191 are Indians and 32 foreign nationals. Health agencies are monitoring 6,700 contacts of positive cases while adding that "contact tracing is a constant effort".

In Bhopal, BJP workers crowded at party headquarters raising questions on the efficacy of government advisories on lockdowns and social distancing.

The Union health ministry has clarified that the death of an Italian tourist in Jaipur on Friday cannot be linked to Covid.

The tourist was among the 16 who had tested positive for Covid. "He was cured and discharged from hospital after testing negative twice following his treatment. This man was a chain smoker and he died of cardiac arrest during treatment for his heart ailment," said Union health ministry joint secretary, Lav Aggarwal.

The health ministry is also trying to ascertain how one patient with no foreign travel history contracted Covid. They, however, dismissed concerns of community transmission of the virus. Mr Aggarwal added that since the number of cases are on the rise, states with higher number of cases are being helped by teams from the Centre.

Several states have warned shopkeepers and distributors of criminal action if they hoard masks and sanitizers.

The government has given test license to 14 private companies for evaluation of the quality of Covid-19 testing kits. All these companies will evaluate the quality of testing kits and submit their data to the Drug Controller General of India. Star Health and Allied Insurance has launched a benefit policy to cover all those who test positive for novel coronavirus (Covid-19) and require hospitalisation.

Meanwhile, in the run-up to the "Janta Curfew" that is to be observed this Sunday, Delhi Metro announced that its services will remain closed and Delhi government said all its Delhi Haats and HoHo bus services of tourism department will remain shut till March 31.

The Delhi government issued an advisory for the private sector to allow their employees to work from home till March 31, while the Central government directed PSUs to enforce work from home for half of their non-executive staff with immediate effect.

As Maharashtra reported three fresh cases of Covid-19 on Friday, chief minister Uddhav Thackeray announced shutdown of non-essential services including private offices in Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur metropolitan regions effective mid-night on Friday.

Returning from London, the second Covid-19 patient landed at the



A new-born baby wearing a protective mask in the wake of coronavirus pandemic being weighed at Hailate Hospital in Kanpur on Friday.



People wearing protective masks shop at Kendriya Bhandar against the backdrop of coronavirus pandemic in New Delhi on Friday.

Another WB teen roams around with infection

DC CORRESPONDENT KOLKATA, MARCH 20

Another young Kolkata resident has been found with deadly Covid-19 virus, taking the total number of confirmed cases to two in West Bengal. Like the female bureaucrat's teenaged son who had returned from the UK recently, the second patient also roamed around the city for days till he was admitted to Infectious Diseases (ID) Hospital in Beliaghata on Thursday, only after the police alerted the state health department following a tip-off. His swab samples tested positive on Friday.

The 22-year-old son of a sanitaryware businessman from south Kolkata's Lake Road in Ballygunge is getting quarantined at an isolation ward. At least 10 members of his family have been kept in isolation at a quarantine centre in Rajarhat, according to sources.

Returning from London, the second Covid-19 patient landed at the

Kolkata Airport on March 13, five days ahead of the arrival of the first patient of the state.

Rattled by the trend of avoiding treatment and callous attitude of infected people, chief minister Mamata Banerjee warned that her government can now force suspected Covid-19 patients roaming freely to undergo quarantine. "As many people are not taking it seriously, a notification has been issued. They may not have the knowledge," she said.

"The Central government's notification has become a law now. Anyone can be in-home surveillance or isolation. They should not step out of home unless it is emergency. We do not want it to spread," she added.

The second victim was advised to stay in isolation at home by the team of doctors during his screening. But he roamed around the premises of the vast residential complex where he stays with his family, apart from visiting a restaurant and a shopping mall, one of his

neighbours revealed anonymously.

She added, "The government has the power to admit anyone in its quarantine centre on a complaint that the person, being a suspect does not stay in self-isolation." Returning from London the second patient landed at the Kolkata Airport on March 13.

A senior Trinamul Congress leader, who is a Member, Mayor-in-Council of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation and lives in the same high-rise disclosed that requests to the youth for taking precaution went in vain. Later the youth was seen at two shops of his father: one at S P Mukherjee Road and another Ishwari Ganguly Street in Kalighat.

On Thursday local residents alerted the Kalighat police station after growing suspicious about him to be a Covid-19 patient for coughing. The cops dialled the state health officials who convinced the suspect's family to admit him to ID Hospital.

Patient's father faces IMA music

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, MARCH 20

In a landmark decision, the Indian Medical Association (IMA) has permanently terminated the membership of the doctor-father of West Bengal's first Covid-19 patient for his "severe negligence" and "suppression of facts" about his teenaged son's infection of the deadly virus abroad.

Cracking a whip, the IMA has also suggested to the Medical Council of India (MCI) to cancel the paediatrician's registration which is mandatory for any doctor for practice. West Bengal state secretary of the IMA Dr Santanu Sen, who is also a Trinamul Congress Rajya Sabha MP, told this newspaper about the decision on Friday evening.

"The IMA has taken a decision to terminate the membership of the doctor permanently. The process has been started. The IMA has also sent a proposal to the MCI to consider the cancellation of

his registration for his negligence," he said, adding that the decision was taken on Thursday evening and it would be conveyed to the doctor based at Krishnanagar in Nadia soon.

The IMA's decision came after the 18-year-old boy's father gave a clean chit to his son and also himself about taking precautions.

On the counts of negligence, Dr Sen, who is also the immediate past president of the IMA, underlined, "It is a severe negligence on the doctor's part because he knew that his son was affected since he had come from abroad with a history of being contracted. While knowing it fully well, he never disclosed it."

"Rather the doctor suppressed the fact. Not only this, he also went back to his place at Krishnanagar after meeting his son. He has also seen so many paediatric patients. All of them are now in deep trouble. This is a serious offence. He can not do it," he added.

ARMY OFFICERS TOO TO WORK FROM HOME

PAWAN BALI | DC NEW DELHI, MARCH 20

Indian Army Chief Gen M.M. Naravane on Friday reviewed Army's preparation to contain Covid-19 within its ranks and issued a slew of instructions including reducing the strength of personnel working at headquarters.

At Army Headquarters, 35 per cent officers and 50 per cent JCOs and other ranks will work from home, adhering to home quarantine for one week from March 23. Next group will proceed on home quarantine on March 30. Inter-mixing of groups will be avoided.

In order to avoid crowding at entry and exit points, personnel attending office will adhere to staggered timings (0900 hours -1730 hours and 0945 hours-1815 hours).

To prevent the spread of the virus, leaves of all Army personnel, who are already on leave, has been extended till April 15. The Indian Army has taken several measures to counter the growing threat of coronavirus in India. These measures come after a jawan of the Ladakh Scouts regiment tested positive in Leh earlier this week.

No army officers on foreign assignment or on leave will come back to country till April 15. Posting of all personnel has also been deferred.

All conferences and seminars have been postponed till 15 April 2020. Service personnel attending courses which end before April 15, 2020, will be retained at the respective training institution. Temporary duty of all ranks will be rescheduled or cancelled till April 15, 2020.

Awareness campaigns will be run and precautions will be taken within the Army.

WELCOME | MOVE Air quality improves as people work from home, schools and colleges closed

Less pollution is a byproduct of lockdown

AKSHEEV THAKUR & SHILPA P | DC BENGALURU/MYSURU, MARCH 20

The partial lockdown of the city as mitigation measure against Covid-19 has resulted in clean air. With schools, malls closed and employees being asked to work from home, the density of traffic in the last 10 days in the bustling areas like Silk Board, BTM and city railway station, which often register a surge in the Air Quality Index (AQI) have registered "satisfactory" air

quality. The real time monitoring by the Central Pollution Control Board shows the downward spiraling of the AQI.

The AQI of Silk Board went from 111 on March 8 to 90 on March 20. Silk Board is notorious for long traffic snarls.

Out of the 10 air monitoring stations by the CPCB, the city railway station is the only one that is in the moderate range of 148.

The BTM layout that houses maximum number of paying guest accommodations witness huge traf-

fic snarls due to on-going metro construction huge number of vehicles plying in the area recorded the AQI at 54 on March 20.

A scientific officer at the KSCPB said, "Transportation to bad air quality. More than 40% of the air pollution is due to this sector in Bangalore. With a partial lockdown the natural ramification was clean air as the roads are empty and major construction projects by the government are also kept on halt."

The AQI between 0-50 is termed satisfactory and it

will have minimal impact on health, 51-100 is deemed satisfactory that may cause minor breathing discomfort to sensitive people, 101-200 is moderate and the health implication could lead to breathing discomfort to the people with lungs, asthma and heart diseases, 201-300 is poor causing breathing discomfort to people with prolonged illness, 301-400 is very poor and may result in respiratory illness on prolonged exposure, and 401-500 is severe that may affect healthy people and seriously

impacts those with existing diseases. Also, of the 202 people, who are being quarantined in Mysuru city, 39 persons persons are foreign nationals. Interestingly, the rest 162 persons are one who have returned from foreign destinations.

Mysuru DC Abhiram G Shankar who happens to be the chairperson of Mysuru Palace Board, has passed an order to continue the closure of Mysuru Palace till 31 of this month. Mysuru Palace has been closed from March 15. Mysuru Palace receives an average of over 65,000 foreigners a year.

report of two suspected Covid-19 cases, the results have come negative. Among them, 26 persons have completed 14 days quarantine period and 13 are continued to be quarantined.

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IN BRIEF

Pak police posts attacked, 2 killed

Peshawar: Some unidentified militants armed with automatic weapons attacked a police checkpoint in Pakistan's northwestern tribal region, killing two policemen, officials said on Friday. The militants struck the police checkpoint in Mamozai area of Upper Aurakzai tribal district, district police officer Nisar Ahmed said. Frontier corps troops retaliated, leading to a gunfight which left two policemen dead. Later, several policemen rushed to the spot and conducted a search operation to nab the militants.

30 Mali soldiers killed by jihadists

Bamako: "Around 30" Malian soldiers were killed and five more injured in a suspected jihadist attack on Thursday in the north of the country, the Army said. The attack took place early on Thursday at a military camp in Tarkint, north of Gao, an army official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. "The toll in the attack of #Tarkint (#Gao) has risen to around 30 deaths and five wounded," Mali's armed forces wrote on Twitter. Earlier, the Army had said that its camp in Tarkint was the target of a "terrorist attack", putting the initial toll at two dead and 10 injured. It is the deadliest attack on the Malian army in four months.

HYPERSONIC MISSILE TESTED, SAYS PENTAGON

Washington, March 20: The United States announced Friday it has successfully tested an unarmed prototype of a hypersonic missile, a weapon that could potentially overwhelm an adversary's defense systems. The Pentagon said a test missile flew at hypersonic speeds — more than five times the speed of sound, or Mach 5 — to a designated impact point. The test followed the first joint US Army and Navy flight experiment in October 2017, when the prototype missile demonstrated it could glide in the direction of a target at hypersonic speed. "Today we validated our design and are now ready to move to the next phase towards fielding a hypersonic strike capability," Vice Admiral Johnny Wolfe said in a statement. Hypersonic weapons can take missile warfare, and particularly nuclear warfare, to a new, and for many frightening, level: they can travel much faster than current nuclear-capable ballistic and cruise missiles, at different altitudes and with the maneuverability that makes them difficult to defeat with current missile defense systems.

NEW AI SYSTEM CAN PREDICT AIR POLLUTION

London, March 20: Scientists have developed a new artificial intelligence (AI) system which they say can predict air pollution levels hours in advance. The technology is novel for a number of reasons, one being that it has the potential to provide new insight into the environmental factors that have significant impacts on air pollution levels, said researchers at Loughborough University in the UK. The project focuses on using AI to predict PM2.5 — particulate matter of less than 2.5 microns in diameter — that is often characterised as reduced visibility in cities and hazy-looking air when levels are high. Particulate matter is a type of air pollutant and it is the pollutant with the strongest evidence for public health concern. This is because the particles are so small they can easily get into the lungs and then the bloodstream, resulting in cardiovascular, cerebrovascular and respiratory impacts, the researchers said. There are systems that already exist that can predict PM2.5 but the new research looks to take the technology to the next level, said Yuanlin Li from Loughborough University. The system predicts PM2.5 levels in advance — giving predictions for the levels in one hour to several hours' time, the researchers said. It interprets the various factors and data used for prediction, which could lead to a better understanding of the weather, seasonal and environmental factors that can impact PM2.5, they said.

24 Afghan soldiers die in attack on their base

Taliban insurgents opened fire on sleeping comrades

Kabul, March 20: At least two dozen Afghan security forces were killed Friday in an insider attack on their base in southern Afghanistan, officials said, as fighting raged in the war-weary country while efforts to start talks with the Taliban stalled. The pre-dawn attack in Zabul province comes as Afghanistan is grappling with several crises including an increase in Taliban violence that has thrown a supposed peace process into turmoil, mounting coronavirus cases, and a political feud that has seen two men claim the presidency. The attack in Zabul saw several "infiltrators" open fire on their comrades as they slept, according to provincial governor Rahmatullah Yarmal, in one of the deadliest attacks since the US signed a withdrawal deal with the Taliban last month. The pre-dawn raid targeted a joint police and army headquarters near Qalat, the provincial capital. "In the attack, 14 Afghan army forces and 10 policemen were killed," Zabul provincial council chief Ata Jan Haq Bayan said. He added that four other Afghan service members were missing. "The attackers had connections with the Taliban insurgents," Bayan said. They fled in two military Humvee vehicles, along with a pickup truck, weapons and ammunition. Yarmal confirmed the toll.



US Army shows large tents established by The 82nd Airborne Division to provide accommodations for up to 600 soldiers at Fort Bragg.

The Taliban did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Zabul province, bordering Pakistan, has long been an insurgent stronghold and was the holdout for former Taliban supreme leader Mullah Omar, who died in 2013. The Zabul attack comes just a day after Afghan Defence Minister Asadullah Khalid called on the Taliban to commit to a ceasefire as a way of tackling the novel coronavirus, which observers fear is spreading unchecked through the impoverished country. Khalid also said Afghan forces should assume a more aggressive "active defence" posture against the Taliban, who have continued attacks across the country since signing a deal with the US on February 29.

Pak doc who helped ISIS held in US for terror plans

Washington, March 20: A Pakistani doctor on Friday was arrested for allegedly trying to help ISIS and expressing his desire to conduct 'lone wolf' terrorist attacks in the US, officials said. Muhammad Masood, 28, made several statements to others between January and March, including pledging his allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS) and its leader, and expressing his desire to travel to Syria to fight for the terrorist group, according to Assistant Attorney General for National Security John Demers and Attorney Erica MacDonald for the District of Minnesota. Masood also expressed his desire to conduct 'lone wolf' terrorist attacks in the US, they said. He was arrested at Minneapolis-St Paul International Airport and made his initial appearance before Magistrate Judge David Schultz in the US District Court in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He has been ordered to remain in custody pending a formal detention hearing, which is scheduled for March 24. Masood is a licensed medical doctor in Pakistan and was formerly employed as research coordinator for a medical clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, under an H-1B visa. On February 21, Masood purchased a plane ticket from Chicago, Illinois to Amman, Jordan, and from there planned to travel to Syria. On March 16, 2020, his travel plans changed because Jordan closed its borders to incoming travel due to the coronavirus pandemic, according to the complaint. Masood made a new plan to fly from Minneapolis to Los Angeles to meet up with an individual who he

US, Pakistan agree to boost defence ties

Washington, March 20: US Defence Secretary Mark Esper on Thursday held a telephonic conversation with Pakistan Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa, and reaffirmed America's commitment to a long-term, mutually beneficial security partnership with the government of Pakistan, Hoffman said in a readout of the call. The US-Taliban peace deal, aimed at bringing lasting peace in war-torn Afghanistan and allowing American troops to return home from America's longest war, was signed in Doha on February 29.

5.9-MAGNITUDE QUAKE HITS TIBET NEAR NEPAL BRIM

Beijing, March 20: A 5.9-magnitude earthquake struck China's remote Himalayan region of Tibet close to Nepal on Friday, authorities said. The epicentre of the quake was located 28.63 degrees north latitude and 87.42 degrees east longitude, with a depth of 10 km, according to the China Earthquake Networks Centre. Tremors were felt in Tingri county of Xigaze city in Tibet near Mount Everest at 9:33 AM, the local government said, adding that no house collapse or disruption of traffic and communications were reported. The county government has sent officials to villages and towns to collect more information, state-run Xinhua news agency reported. Tingri borders Nepal to the south. Most areas of the county belong to the Mount Everest National Nature Reserve, it said.

Wedding cover



Palestinian groom Imad Sharaf (R) wears gloves and a face mask while accompanying his bride Baraa Amarnah after she left the beauty salon on Friday in the Palestinian Deheisheh refugee camp near the West Bank city of Bethlehem. The couple celebrated their wedding wearing masks and gloves as caution measures during the corona virus COVID-19 pandemic.

Nikki Haley resigns from Boeing

Washington, March 20: Indian-American Nikki Haley has resigned from the Boeing's board of directors over the major airline manufacturer's pursuit of federal assistance to mitigate its financial crisis due to the coronavirus pandemic. Two-term governor of South Carolina and former US Ambassador to the UN, Haley resigned from the board on March 16, according to a Boeing filing before the US Security and Exchange Commission (SEC). Haley had joined the

HALEY HAD joined the Boeing board on April 29 last year. She served on the Finance and Audit Committees. Boeing board on April 29 last year. She served on the Finance and Audit Committees. "A variety of approaches are currently under discussion among policy makers in the administration and the Congress, as well as the private sector, to address the near-term liquidity needs of the aerospace, travel, and

other sectors affected by the current COVID-19 crisis," the Boeing said in its filing before the SEC. "The Company is participating in those discussions and has informed the board about the options currently being considered. Ambassador Haley informed the company that, as a matter of philosophical principle, she does not believe that the company should seek support from the federal government, and therefore decided to resign from the board," the company said.

Korean Air 'nut rage' heiress fights brother in bitter succession feud

Seoul, March 20: The "nut rage" heiress who forced a plane to turn back over her macadamias is fighting a bitter battle — with activist shareholder support — against her brother for control of the family airline, highlighting resistance to reform in South Korea's chaebols. Cho Hyun-ah, 45, whose family control the Hanjin group that includes flag-carrier Korean Air, made headlines worldwide with her furious reaction when she was served nuts in a bag instead of a plate in first class. Cho Hyun-ah, 45, whose family control the Hanjin group that includes flag-carrier Korean Air, made headlines worldwide with her furious reaction when she was served nuts in a bag instead of a plate in first class. A series of scandals centering on abuse of subordinates rapidly made the Chos the South's most vilified billionaires. But now her struggle against brother Cho Won-tae could mark a watershed moment for the family-controlled conglomerates known as chaebols that dominate business in the world's



Cho Hyun-ah

CHO HYUN-AH, whose family control the Hanjin group that includes flag-carrier Korean Air, made headlines worldwide with her furious reaction when she was served nuts in a bag instead of a plate in first class. Cho Hyun-ah, 45, whose family control the Hanjin group that includes flag-carrier Korean Air, made headlines worldwide with her furious reaction when she was served nuts in a bag instead of a plate in first class. She has joined forces with an activist investment fund, Korea Corporate Governance Improvement (KCGI), which says better chaebol management will improve efficiency, employee engagement, and shareholder returns. Cho Won-tae inherited the chairmanship of the conglomerate's holding company Hanjin Kal after the siblings' father Cho Yang-ho — who led the

complex webs of cross-shareholdings between subsidiaries, and rapid promotions for family members. Lee said "Many are under the delusion they have 100 percent ownership." The Hanjin group was in financial trouble long before the coronavirus outbreak wreaked havoc on airline finances worldwide — subsidiary Hanjin Shipping was once one of the world's top 10 container lines, but went bankrupt in 2017. Korean Air has lost 1.74 trillion won (\$1.4 billion) in five years, according to KCGI's Lee, who accuses Cho Won-tae of "repeated strategic mistakes". But "you can't just run a company because you happen to be a grandson of its founder", said Lee Seung-hoon, KCGI's head of global business. Many chaebol families retain only a small ownership stake in their companies, but maintain control through

US, Mexico to shut border for 'non-essential travel'

Washington, March 20: The United States and Mexico are working on a plan to close their border to non-essential travel due to the coronavirus pandemic, the State Department spokesman said on Thursday. The move comes as similar measures are expected to come into force along the northern border with Canada by Saturday. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Mexico's Foreign Secretary Marcelo Luis Ebrard Casaubon spoke on "coor-

dinating a plan to restrict non-essential travel across our shared border in response to the COVID-19 pandemic." State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortigas said. "The two leaders discussed the importance of creating a uniform North American strategy to reduce public health risks to our communities and more effectively address rising challenges jointly." Pompeo tweeted that he had been working closely with Ebrard "on travel

restrictions that balance protecting our citizens from further transmission of Covid19." "Together, we can reduce public health risks and prioritize essential cross-border commerce and trade." In a tweet, Ebrard said he would reveal more details of the closure on Friday. The measure follows similar US moves to bar visitors from most of Europe, China and other parts of the world as its number of coronavirus cases surges.

UN REPORT People here enjoy a high quality of life with rates of inequality and poverty among the lowest

Finland found to be world's happiest nation again

Helsinki, March 20: Good cheer may feel in short supply as the world reels under a global pandemic, but experts at the United Nations on Friday declared Finland to be the world's happiest nation for the third year running. Researchers for the World Happiness Report asked people in 156 countries to evaluate their own levels of happiness, and took into account measures such as GDP, social support, personal freedom and levels of corruption to give each nation a happiness score. As in each of

the previous seven reports, Nordic states dominated the top ten, along with countries such as Switzerland, New Zealand and Austria. Luxembourg also edged into the tenth spot for the first time this year. The happiest countries are those "where people feel a sense of belonging, where they trust and enjoy each other and their shared institutions," John Helliwell, one of the report's authors, said in a statement. "There is also more resilience, because shared trust reduces the burden of hardships, and

thereby lessens the inequality of well-being." Meanwhile, the countries at the bottom of this year's ranking are those afflicted by violent conflicts and extreme poverty, with Zimbabwe, South Sudan and Afghanistan classed as the world's least happy countries. Finland's top spot in the happiness list has previously been met with raised eyebrows in the country whose population of 5.5 million is said to shy away from spontaneous demonstrations of joy, valuing instead the quiet and soli-

fore not impacted by the widespread restrictions imposed by many countries to stem the spread of the new coronavirus. However, the report's authors predict that the lockdown conditions many of the world's residents are now living under could, paradoxically, boost happiness in future. "The most frequent explanation seems to be that people are pleasantly surprised by the willingness of their neighbours and their institutions to work in harness to help each other," the team said.

Finland's residents enjoy a high quality of life, security and public services, with rates of inequality and poverty among the lowest of all OECD countries. The data for this year's World Happiness Report was collected in 2018 and 2019, and is there-



Finnish people with their national flag.

SHORT TAKES



Majid Haq

Ex-Scottish player Haq tests positive

Paris: Former Scotland off-spinner Majid Haq has announced on Twitter that he is recovering after testing positive for Covid-19.

The 37-year-old posted the news on Friday morning, saying he was being treated at Royal Alexandra Hospital in the Paisley area of Glasgow. "Looking forward to potentially getting back home today after testing positive with Coronavirus," Haq tweeted. "Staff at the RAH in Paisley have been good to me & thank you to everyone who has sent me messages of support. Insha Allah the Panther will be back to full health soon. #COVID19UK" Haq, who logged 54 ODIs and 21 T20Is for Scotland, last played for his country at the 2015 World Cup in Australia and New Zealand. He was Scotland's all-time leading wicket-taker in ODI cricket with 60 wickets until being passed in 2019 by fast bowler Safyaan Sharif. However, Haq has still been active in domestic cricket in Scotland, most recently captaining Royal High Corstorphine CC in the Cricket Scotland League Eastern Premiership for the 2019 summer. — Agencies

Multiple charges of breach on Umar

Karachi: Controversial Pakistan batsman Umar Akmal has been charged on Friday for two separate breaches of the Pakistan Cricket Board's Anti-Corruption Code. Umar, who was provisionally suspended on February 20 and barred from playing for his franchise, Quetta Gladiators in the Pakistan Super League, has been charged for failing to disclose corrupt approaches to the PCB Vigilance and Security Department (without unnecessary delay). He was issued the charge sheet on March 17 and has been given time to respond until March 31. This was a breach under 2.4.4 for PCB's anti-corruption code.

According to the Anti-Corruption Code Article 6.2, the range of permissible period of ineligibility for those charged and found guilty for a violation of Article 2.4.4 is a minimum of six months and a maximum of a lifetime. — PTI

Boards brace for losses

Cricket bodies stand to lose money if they don't allow cricketers into IPL in wake of Corona outbreak

New Delhi, March 20: When the mighty Indian cricket board decided this week that only the chief among its national selectors would travel business class, it merely confirmed straitened times for the game amid the coronavirus outbreak.

The uncharacteristic austerity by the world's richest cricket board follows its decision earlier this month to halve the winner's purse at this year's Indian Premier League (IPL), a cash cow with a brand value of \$6.8 billion.

The franchise-based Twenty20 league was scheduled to begin on March 29 but has now been postponed until April 15.

To many, a condensed tournament, possibly without foreign players, later this year looks like a more realistic prospect.

A curtailed or cancelled tournament would mean significant losses for the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), which gets around 40 billion rupees (\$532 million) annually from broadcaster STAR India and its central pool of sponsors.

"The loss at this stage is notional. The biggest loser in any economic dynamics is always its biggest gainer, which is BCCI in this case," SportzPower co-founder Thomas Abraham, whose company monitors sports business in India, told Reuters.

"For STAR India, it's also a loss of opportunity. It was building the India launch of its Disney+ OTT (streaming service) around the IPL."

A truncated tournament would necessitate renegotiation with Disney-owned STAR India, which was not available to share how it plans to dovetail the launch of its new platform with the IPL. Chinese smartphone maker Vivo, which bagged the 2018-22 title rights for 219 million rupees, is unlikely to suffer a big loss.

"They would have been preparing for new launches around IPL. They can still do it," Abraham said. Vivo did not elaborate if the truncation had disrupted their plans to leverage their tournament rights.

"In light of the global health risk ... we at Vivo



A file photo of IPL chairman Brijesh Patel (second from left) and Sourav Ganguly discussing with the league sponsors. — IPL

completely support BCCI's decision to postpone the series," Nipun Marya, Director of Vivo India's Brand Strategy, said in a statement.

"We shall continuously evaluate the situation as it progresses."

MONITORING SITUATION

The BCCI and IPL franchises also pay 20 per cent of a player's annual fee to his home board, which stands to lose that money if it does not allow the cricketer into the IPL due to fears about the coronavirus for example.

A shorter tournament will mean a smaller share from the shrunken central pool of revenues for the eight IPL franchises, not to mention a reduction in gate receipts.

Further afield, the Women's Twenty20 World Cup narrowly escaped the health crisis but the outbreak has cast a shadow over the men's event in Australia.

The International

Cricket Council (ICC), which runs the tournament, said it was monitoring the situation.

"We are planning for the event to go ahead as scheduled," it said on the tournament website.

Cricket Australia stands to lose some A\$300 million (\$174 million) should the coronavirus outbreak derail their home test series against India.

"We're in uncertain times, and it's difficult to project precisely what will transpire over the next number of months," CA chief executive Kevin Roberts said this week.

IN THE BALANCE

In England, the fate of the inaugural 'The Hundred' championship hangs in the balance after the epicentre of the pandemic moved from Asia to Europe, shutting down most sport on the continent.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) have invested heavily in promoting the competition in

the 100-ball format, which is scheduled to begin on July 17.

"It is clear that every industry, including cricket, will be impacted by this unprecedented situation," Tom Moffat, chief executive of the Federation of International Cricketers' Associations (FICA) said. "It's more important than ever for the cricket industry to work together collaboratively at this time."

Individually, top players from outside India risk losing IPL contracts worth millions of dollars if they are unable to travel or their boards deny them permission to play.

As far as FICA is concerned, Moffat said, the wellbeing of the players while the world deals with an international health crisis is far more important than cash.

"Governing bodies, employers, and leagues owe a duty of care to provide players with a safe workplace," he added. — Reuters

KP's awareness tweet in Hindi breaks internet

New Delhi, March 20: Former England captain Kevin Pietersen on Friday urged Indian citizens to follow government directions on self-isolation to contain the Covid-19 pandemic, posting a message in Hindi with some help from his former IPL teammate Sreevats Goswami.

The 39-year-old took to Twitter to say "Greetings India. Everyone is united in the fight against coronavirus and that everyone should listen to their government's instructions and stay at home for a few days. This is time to be smart."

"Namaste India, hum sab corona virus ko harane mein ek saath hai, hum sab apne apne sarkar ki baat ka nirdes kare aur ghar me kuch Dino ke liye rahe, yeh samay hai hoshiyaar rahene ka. App sabhi ko der sara pyaar," Pietersen tweeted in Hindi.

He credited Indian wicketkeeper-batsman Goswami for teaching him Hindi. Both have played for Royal Challengers Bangalore in the IPL.

Earlier this month, Pietersen visited the Kaziranga National Park in Assam to shoot a documentary on rhino conservation.

He had lauded India's efforts in a series of tweets. "The rhino population in India is BOOMING! Africa should take note! Face with monocle. Saving these iconic species CAN be done and IS being done here! Bravo, India!" — PTI



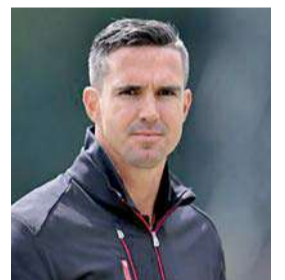
Kohli and Anushka bat for self-isolation

New Delhi, March 20: India's cricket captain Virat Kohli and his actor wife Anushka Sharma on Friday issued a joint appeal for self-isolation to combat the dreaded Covid-19 pandemic.

Kohli and Anushka posted a video message on Twitter, appealing everyone to stay at home, a day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed

the nation to advocate self-isolation. "We all know we are going through a very difficult time," Kohli said. "And the only way to stop the spread of Coronavirus is by acting together," urged Anushka.

As they took turns to speak, Kohli said, "We are staying at home for our safety and for everyone else's one." — PTI



Kevin Pietersen

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PK Banerjee passes away after 51 years of football

Kolkata, March 20: Pradip Kumar Banerjee, a footballing colossus of his time and a raconteur for life, died here on Friday aged 83, having dribbled and dazzled for a good part of his mind-boggling 51 years of service to the game.

He was suffering from respiratory problems due to pneumonia and had an underlying history of Parkinson's disease, dementia and heart problem. Banerjee, who was on life support at a hospital here since March 2, breathed his last at 12.40 pm.

He is survived by daughters Paula and Purna, who are renowned academicians, and younger brother Prasun Banerjee, a sitting Trinamul Congress MP.

Born on June 23, 1936 in Moynaguri on the outskirts of Jalpaiguri in West Bengal, Banerjee's family relocated to his uncle's place in Jamshedpur in Jharkhand (then Bihar) before partition.

The 1962 Asian Games gold-medallist's best days as a player coincided with Indian football's golden era. PK, as he was known, scored 65 goals in 84 appearances for the national team.

His contribution was duly recognised by FIFA which rated him as India's greatest player of the 20th century, bestowing him with the Centennial Order of Merit in 2004.

From his debut for Bihar in the Santosh Trophy as a 16-year-old in 1952 to a stint as Mohammedan Sporting coach 51 years later, Banerjee takes leave as one of India's greatest.

A member of the holy trinity, that also included Chuni Goswami and Tulsidas Balam, Banerjee was the last surviving scorer of the 1962 Asiad gold-winning team.

Another one his bright moments with the national team was a fourth-place finish at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, where India beat Australia 4-1.

In the final of the 1962 Asiad, India prevailed in front of a hostile crowd angered by chef de mission Guru Dutt Sondhi's remark that it was 'Jakarta Games', for barring countries like Taiwan and Israel.

Banerjee scored the opener in that game.

He was captain of the



P. K. Banerjee

● **From his debut for Bihar in the Santosh Trophy as a 16-year-old in 1952 to a stint as Mohammedan Sporting coach 51 years later, Banerjee was one of India's greatest.**

● **He was captain of the Indian team that last played the Olympics in Rome 1960.**

● **He retired as a player in 1967 and then went on accumulate a staggering 54 trophies as a coach.**

● **He pulled off a heist as Mohun Bagan coach when they famously held New York Cosmos 2-2 in an exhibition match starring Pele in 1977.**

Indian team that last played the Olympics in Rome 1960.

He retired as a player in 1967 after being laid low by recurring injuries. But then went on accumulate a staggering 54 trophies as a coach.

He pulled off a heist as Mohun Bagan coach when they famously held New York Cosmos 2-2 in an exhibition match starring Pele in 1977. The star of Indian football when the sport was at its peak, Banerjee never played for Mohun Bagan and East Bengal, representing Eastern Railways all his life.

Having struck gold as a player, Banerjee was made a

● **He was a practical coach who had a knack of explaining the strategy in a detailed manner. He was the one who handed me the captaincy at Mohun Bagan in the 1980s, I can never forget that. PK da was also the coach of the Indian team when I played for the national side.**

— VICTOR AMALRAJ
ex-Indian football captain

● **I am very sad that Indian football has lost a legend. The Telangana Football Association expresses its condolences.**

— G. P. PALGUNA
TFA secretary

● **It was so much fun to be around him, to listen to his stories. He was always cool and composed.**

— BHACHUNG BHUTIA
ex-Indian football captain

● **Heartfelt condolences on the passing of the great Indian footballer PK Banerjee! Have fond memories of meeting him on a few occasions and the positivity he spread. May his soul Rest In Peace!**

— SACHIN TENDULKAR
Former Indian cricketer

● **Lost a very dear person today .. someone who I loved and respected enormously.. someone who had so much influence in my career when I was a 18 year old boy .. his positivity was infectious .. may his soul rest in peace.**

— SOURAV GANGULY
BCCI president

joint India coach with G. M. Basha, and they delivered a bronze at the Bangkok Asiad in 1970.

Within a year at the helm, Banerjee guided India to a joint triumph at the Singapore Pesta Sukan Cup in 1971.

East Bengal won five CFL titles on the trot under his tutelage.

He also delivered at Mohun Bagan, guiding them to a treble — IFA Shield, Rovers Cup and Durand Cup — in 1977.

He was coach of the Mohun Bagan that famously held the then Soviet Union team, Ararat Yerevan, in the 1978 IFA Shield final. — PTI

Flame Game as torch in Tokyo

Higashimatsushima (Japan), March 20: The Olympic flame arrived in Japan to a scaled-down welcoming ceremony Friday as doubts grew over whether the Tokyo Games will go ahead on schedule with the coronavirus pandemic causing chaos around the world.

As the flame, enclosed in a special lantern, landed on a charter flight, a Japanese Olympic Committee member broke ranks to call for a postponement and Olympics chief Thomas Bach admitted "different scenarios" were under consideration.

"Of course we are considering different scenarios, but we are contrary to many other sports organisations or professional leagues in that we are four-and-a-half months away from the Games," Bach, the International Olympic Committee president, told the *New York Times*.

"For us, (postponement)



Japanese Olympic gold medallists Saori Yoshida (left) and Tadahiro Nomura light a Tokyo 2020 Olympic cauldron in Higashimatsushima with the Olympic flame, after it was transported from Greece on Friday. — AFP

would not be responsible now and it would be premature to start speculation or make a decision at a time when we do not have any recommendation from the task force," he added.

Reflecting the uncertainty caused by Covid-19, the flame's arrival at Matsushima Air Base in Japan's north was a muted

affair after organisers were forced to cancel plans to invite 200 schoolchildren.

Former Olympic judo champions Saori Yoshida and Tadahiro Nomura lit a ceremonial cauldron in front of a few dozen officials and guests.

"Children had planned to welcome the Olympic flame, but we decided to

scale it down, giving priority to their safety," said Tokyo 2020 chief Yoshiro Mori.

The nationwide torch relay begins on March 26, starting from the J-Village sports complex in Fukushima that was used as a base for workers during the 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster.

● **OLYMPICS 'SHOULD BE POSTPONED'**

Speculation has been growing over the Games, scheduled to start on July 24, after the Covid-19 outbreak closed sports competitions around the world and paralysed many countries, along with international travel.

The coronavirus has already disrupted the early stages of the torch's journey in Greece, with the lighting ceremony in ancient Olympia taking place without spectators.

Organisers then had to scrap the Greek leg of the

relay after large crowds mobbed Hollywood actor Gerard Butler as he lit a cauldron in the city of Sparta.

With borders shut in Europe Tokyo officials did not travel to collect the torch, with former Olympic swimmer Naoko Imoto representing Japan at the official handover.

As the flame landed, there are increasing clouds over the Games, with some athletes attacking the IOC for insisting there's no need for "drastic" action such as postponement or cancellation.

Japanese Olympic Committee executive board member Kaori Yamaguchi, a former Olympic judoka, was the latest prominent figure to call for a postponement, citing the difficulties faced by athletes.

"It should be postponed under the current situation where athletes are not well prepared," Yamaguchi told the *Nikkei daily*. — AFP

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