

DECCAN Chronicle

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India enters Stage III

14-day quarantine needed to stop spread, not 14-hour shutdown

KANIZA GARARI | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 21

Has India reached Stage III of the Coronavirus (Covid-19)? Stage III denotes community transmission; in India's case this refers to an infection not caught abroad but caught from someone else, locally.

Doctors say "yes", but the Central government has not yet confirmed it. The government's data indicate the first peak of infections on March 4 and since then there is a steady rise. On March 21, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare records 283 Covid-19 positive cases.

Clusters in Maharashtra, Telangana, Kerala and recently Rajasthan show that asymptomatic carriers outnumber symptomatic, indicating that the virus is in the community though people are not being tested. Epidemiologists say mass quarantine, with complete closure, is necessary to prevent further spread.

A single-day shutdown on Sunday will not help. More than two weeks of complete quarantine is required.

A senior doctor said that suspected transmission is behind the ICMR decision to test randomly.

The number who entered India from West Asia and Europe, February onwards, is high. They came before airport screening began. This conclusion is derived from the Dubai cluster in Maharashtra, the Indonesian cluster in Telangana and the Italian cluster in Rajasthan. Kerala's spread is by fami-

CONTAINMENT PROCESS STARTS IN SECUNDERABAD

The health department initiated a Coronavirus 'containment process' in Secunderabad which will take 2-3 days. It follows the discovery that Patient no 20 (diagnosed with Covid-19 on Saturday) was the son of Patient No 14 (diagnosed on March 19).

The process is like the one in Karimangar recently after cases were confirmed among the 10 Indonesian preachers. Official teams have visited homes in a three km radius and checking on residents' health. A notification under Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, was issued to impose physical containment procedures, if required. This would isolate a village, ward, colony, or settlement.

ly members returning from abroad. These travellers' histories show that the spread is to contacts and locals. "Contact tracing" is a Herculean task and by the time the contacts are traced, multi-clusters have already developed.

Experts also believe that there have been more than four deaths in India but there is underreporting to prevent panic.

Trauma and multi-organ failure are the given causes of such deaths, not the virus.

With nearly 300 +ve cases, states head for lockdown

SHASHI BHUSHAN
With agency inputs
NEW DELHI, MARCH 21

With the number of coronavirus infected people in the country rising by 60 in 24 hours for the second consecutive day, several states announced stringent measures to implement the first nation-wide lockdown on Sunday with the aim to contain the spread of coronavirus.

The decision taken by most state governments to put complete or partial curbs on movement of people and public transport for the lockdown is linked to

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal for social distancing on Sunday from 7 am to 9 pm. It is, however, not clear how a lockdown of 14 hours will help contain the virus that has till now infected 283 people across the country, with the largest number of new cases being reported from Maharashtra on Saturday.

With 12 new cases in a day, the total number of coronavirus cases in the state shot up to 64. A shutdown has been already ordered in Maharashtra's major cities like Mumbai, Pune, Thane and Nagpur. Maharashtra

Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray ordered that all workplaces in Mumbai, and in the greater Mumbai Metropolitan Region as well as in Pune, Nagpur and Pimpri Chinchwad will remain closed till March 31 to rein in the spread of novel coronavirus.

So far four deaths were reported, one each from Delhi, Karnataka, Punjab and Maharashtra. The Union health ministry on Saturday denied reports of community transmission of coronavirus.

■ Page 8: Local transmission will be announced: Centre

1st secondary transmission in TS stokes fear of spread

BALU PULIPAKA | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 21:

Fear over the spread of the Coronavirus in Telangana proved real on Saturday with the state government announcing the first case of a secondary infection: the Covid-19 passed from an original carrier who arrived in the city from abroad, to his son who had

no international travel history.

The government announced two fresh cases of Covid-19 in Telangana (including the secondary infection), taking the disease tally to 21.

Till Friday, the state government was reassuring people that Telangana was free of any local transmission of Covid-19, and that

all cases till then were of the disease contracted abroad and brought back.

This changed on Saturday. Secondary transmission is now real threat that could pose a challenge to the government's efforts in containing the disease.

■ Page 4: Patient No. 20 is secondary contact

NPR turns doubtful starter

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 21

The Coronavirus pandemic has forced the home ministry to look at re-scheduling the Census 2021 and the National Population

Register (NPR), for which the first phase is to be conducted between April and September.

In many states work for the Census has to start in April but home ministry officials feel that adequate

number of government officers who work as enumerators and other Census functionaries may not be available. "We are monitoring the situation and no final decision has been taken," said a senior official.

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IN BRIEF

Railways relax refund rules

Hyderabad: The Indian Railways has relaxed refund rules for reserved tickets generated through its reservation counters to avoid crowding of stations. The relaxation is for journeys commencing from March 21 to June 21. Cancellation rules for e-tickets will remain the same. Passengers can get refunds across counters on submission of ticket up to three months from date of journey, instead of the existing three-day period. Passengers can also file TDR (ticket deposit receipt), or cancel through 139 during the same period.

IT techies to hold online hackathon

Hyderabad: Software professionals' body Telangana Information Technology Association (TITA) will be holding an "online hackathon" for the youth to come with solutions for problems arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. The hackathon will be launched on Sunday to coincide with the Janata Curfew. It will be held by TITA in association with Telangana Innovation and Incubation Centre (TIIC). TITA president Sundeep Kumar Makthala said the event is for people to come up with solutions for various problems such as lack of awareness about the virus. It will continue until March 28. "We have apps that remind us to drink water. We can also have such things to remind about care to be taken while fighting the pandemic. This could even be a simple nudge to wash the hands," he said.

Covid-19 action group formed

Hyderabad: A Covid-19 action group has been formed by non-government organisations to help civil society, which appealed to the government to give supplementary facilities due to economic crisis. Distribution of grains through ration shops and also soaps must be given to people for basic hygiene, it said. A specialised Covid-19 command and control centre along with a 24x7 call centre must be set up which not only monitors the situation but also provides immediate information to the public with regard to nodal and health centres, special wards and treatment facilities. Creating awareness on good hygiene, production of masks and sanitisers in bulk with the help of self-help groups and mobilising and coordinating of food and relief material were discussed by the group. The group comprised Mr Amir Ullah Khan, member of the Sudhir Commission on Muslim reservations, Mr Mujtaba Hasan Askari of Helping Hand Foundation, Mr Zahid Qadri of Help Hyderabad, Dr Irfan Ali Motiwala of the Jaferia Institute of Social Medicine and Dr Farooqi of SalamahTrust.

RESIDENTS TO ABIDE BY JANATA CURFEW

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 21

Gated communities and resident welfare communities across the city seem to have taken Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call for "janata curfew" seriously. Many of them sent out messages on their WhatsApp groups, asking residents to declare paid leave for their maids and domestic help. A few of the apartment complexes declared that they would not allow delivery men inside. Mahesh, a resident of an apartment complex in Kondapur, said, "There was a message on the apartment's WhatsApp group. It asked residents to stay indoors and away from common areas. We were asked to cooperate."

Swetha, a resident of an apartment complex in RTC crossroads, said the resident welfare complex has asked the residents to not invite guests to their homes on Sunday.

"Also, all residents returning from overseas have been asked to quarantine themselves for 14 days," he said. Another apartment complex in the locality cancelled Ugadi and Ramanavami celebrations. One apartment complex in West Marredpally asked senior citizens with no one around to care, to send messages on the community WhatsApp group for any assistance.



The Madannapet vegetable market witnessed a huge rush on Saturday in view of the janata curfew on Sunday.

— P. SURENDRA

Provisions fly off shelves as people jostle in panic buying

Residents fear crackdown on movement of people or total shutdown

SANJAY SAMUEL
PAUL | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 21

Many supermarkets in the city witnessed a scramble for available stocks on Saturday with people lining up in large numbers right from morning and purchasing essential commodities in the wake of fears of a crackdown on movement of people or a total shutdown of the city as coronavirus impact makes itself felt more and more in the city and the State. This rush for buying, incidentally, gave birth to a new word (noun to be more precise) to the urban dictionary 'COVIdiot'. This is to imply a stupid person who hoards groceries, needlessly spreading Covid-19, fear and depriving others of their basic supplies.

The Divisional Manager of Big Bazaar at Kachiguda, B. Abishek told *Deccan Chronicle* that the past one week has seen more and more purchasers crowding the food and grocery aisles. "Many people are buying rice, pulses and processed food items, which is unprecedented. House-care items such as mops, scrubbers, disinfectants, liquid soaps are also in high demand. Consequently, sales in other sections of the store have nosedived," he said.

Madhavi, a salesperson at More Supermarket in

● THE PAST one week has seen more and more purchasers crowding the food and grocery aisles, a Big Bazaar official said.

Himayatnagar, said food counters in the store were quickly getting emptied and the staff has to restock them more often than any time in the past. Such scenes were replicated in super markets across upscale areas like Banjara Hills.

Prof Michael Preethan, English HOD at St Mary's College, said that at two major supermarkets he had been to on Friday, the shelves of the food items and the basic daily use of pulses and grains were empty. "People are stocking up their carts, with more stuff than what they can possibly use. And the shocking part is they are crowded together, without maintaining proper distance, throwing asunder all safety precautions because no one is maintaining the minimum recommended distance with the other person," he said.

Danish Dar, an engineer by profession, said in Sun City and Hyderabad, most of the supermarkets are full of people. The food shelf in most outlets were nearly empty. It was ditto in Attapur and Rajendranagar.

No late-night weddings to be held in Old City

ATHER MOIN | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 21

Police in the Old City has imposed restrictions on late night weddings in the wake of Covid-19.

Wedding hall managers were asked not to take fresh bookings. People are either postponing nikah ceremonies or solemnising them in the mornings, considering restrictions imposed by the law-enforcing agencies.

Usually, in Hyderabad, Muslims arrange wedding ceremonies in the evening hours. In rural areas people still organise marriages in the morning.

Police has instructed wedding halls to ensure that the ceremonies are finished before 10 pm.

Teams of cops have been given the special marriage hall watch. In a few places, police have locked down function halls open after 10 pm. People are advised postponement of weddings to avoid the spread of coronavirus until normalcy is restored and asked to restrict invitees to 200 for weddings already underway.

To avoid congregations, people have started solemnising nikah ceremonies in mosques with limited invitees.

A nikaah was solemnised after the noon prayers in the Shahi Masjid, Public Garden. Delivering the nikaah sermon, Moulana Ahasin bin Mohammed al-Hamoomi exhorted making nikaah ceremonies low profile and simple as it is a pure canonical act which need not show extravagance. He insisted that people follow the rulings of Islam in the ceremonies which are beneficial for an individual and for society. He also advised the gathering to follow virus protocol, avoid unnecessary congregations and maintain cleanliness.

Four function halls booked

DC CORRESPONDENT
NIRMAL, MARCH 21

The police has registered cases against the owners of the four function halls and families for having more than 200 guests in their marriages, violating the norms issued by the state government in Nirmal

and Khanapur towns.

Nirmal circle inspector John Diwakar said they the police had registered cases against the owners of the three function halls on Thursday for violating the norms prescribed in the GO 4 issued in connection with the coronavirus infection. It is learnt that

the Khanapur police registered a case against a function hall where more than 200 guests attended a marriage. The bridegroom was Pradeep, sub-inspector of the Kubhera police station. Khanapur police said they had registered a case following the complaint.

Fear makes people avoid currency

T.S.S. SIDDHARTH | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 21

Currency notes that may have been counted using saliva can spread novel coronavirus. Perhaps people are taking the digital route for making payments to avoid coronavirus. This could be the reason why the number of digital transactions, especially in tier-2 and tier 3 cities, is on the rise.

Speaking to *Deccan Chronicle*, Sunil Khosla, head of digital business, India Transact Services Limited (ITSL) said: "In March, the number of online transactions has increased by 10 per cent over February. Most of the payments are for home essentials from mom and pop stores, among others."

Earlier, digital and online payments were for flight tickets, food and hotels. But since aviation and hospitality sector are down due to coronavirus, the money going online must be for purchase of home needs, Khosla remarked.

However, this has not stopped people from carrying cash. There are many people who are into panic withdrawal of money from ATMs. The fear could be over the virus affecting banking operations too.

● In March, the number of online transactions has increased by 10 per cent over February. Most of the payments are for home essentials from mom and pop stores, among others. The use of the company in January and February was almost the same. But the usage now is already 10 per cent higher"

— SUNIL KHOSLA
Head ITSL

ice restaurants. "Now purchases are being made from regular mom-and-pop stores too, which may weed out cash from the equation," Khosla felt.

Earlier, digital and online payments were for flight tickets, food and hotels. But since aviation and hospitality sector are down due to coronavirus, the money going online must be for purchase of home needs, Khosla remarked.

However, this has not stopped people from carrying cash. There are many people who are into panic withdrawal of money from ATMs. The fear could be over the virus affecting banking operations too.

SAD | SAGA He lost everything in Oz bushfire, now Covid fear delays his return
Endless woes of city doctor in Australia

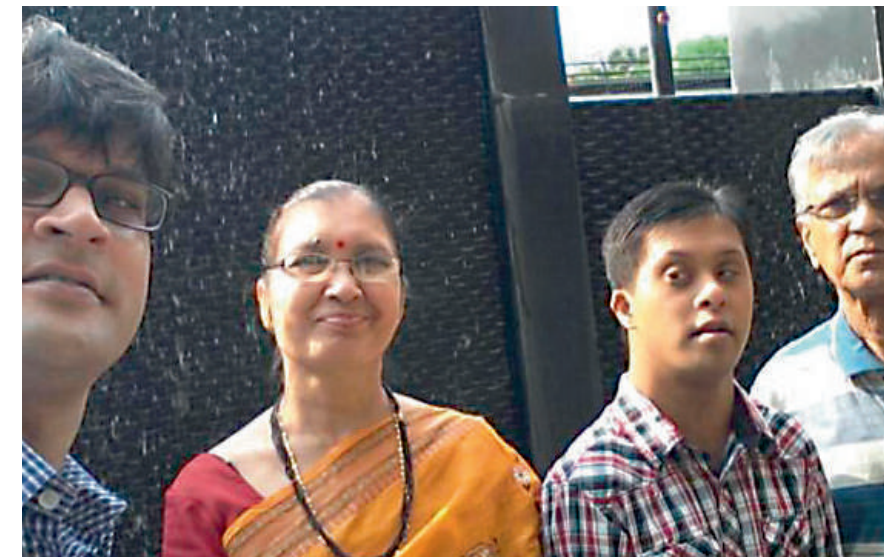
VIKRAM SHARMA | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 21

It was just before Christmas last year when personnel of the Australian police urgently knocked on the doors of a resident of Bega Valley district in New South Wales, some seven hours away from Sydney. Evacuate now, the personnel told him.

The resident, a doctor, quickly gathered whatever belongings he could, dumped them in his car and left. Within a matter of hours, the deadly bushfires in Bega Valley swallowed his house and all that remained was ashes.

The doctor, Akash Raj Saxena, who hails from Hyderabad, was shattered and so was his family back in the city.

"I will return but it may take a couple of months more," he told them even as he tried to pick up the pieces.



Dr Akash Raj Saxena with his family in happier times.

with the Indian High Commission in Australia have proved futile.

"I had booked my ticket to India for April 4 and was looking forward to return to Hyderabad. But the worldwide coronavirus outbreak has ruined my plans. Over the last fortnight, I have repeatedly tried to get in touch with the Indian High Commission but no one is answering or even

getting back despite leaving several messages. I don't know what to do now," Dr Saxena told *Deccan Chronicle* over phone from Australia.

Still trying to come to terms with the massive loss he suffered in the bushfire, Dr Saxena says he is lucky to be alive despite the bushfires ruining everything around him.

"While the Indian gov-

RTC drivers, the unsung heroes

ADITYA CHUNDURU | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 21

A handful of drivers from the Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TSRTC) have had a crucial, but silent, role to play in the state government's war against Covid-19.

This past week, they have ferried hundreds of people landing at Rajiv Gandhi International Airport (RGIA) from abroad to isolation wards in various parts of Telangana. And they have been doing this round-the-clock.

According to people on location, around 15 Corporation drivers from the Mehdiapatnam depot have been deputed exclusively for that work. Doing 12-hour shifts, they make trips to isolation wards in Vikarabad, Doolapally and other districts.

Srisailam, a driver of one of the Vajra buses, said that he was terrified when he first arrived at the airport. There was commotion, and there were policemen and health officials everywhere. One particular sight had an impression on him.

"I saw a person being made to walk out of the airport in a full plastic suit. He stepped straight into an ambulance and was taken away very quickly. Later, my colleagues told me that this person had exhibited fever symptoms and was being treated as a suspected Covid-19 case. I will never forget that sight."

Most drivers said they had not informed their families about what they were doing. PR Reddy said his family was terrified of letting me report for duty.

"Even my relatives called up, rebuked me and asked me to drop out. After the first day, I stopped telling them where I was going," he said.

Srisailam said his family was treating him with suspicion.

"When I go home after work, my family is not letting me inside immediately. They give me a bucket of hot water where I have to soak the clothes I am wearing. After that, I have to take a bath. Only then am I allowed inside," he said.

Unfortunately, for all the risks involved and putting their life in peril, they have not been given sanitisers or masks.

Salim contended that this could be to prevent them from panicking. "We have been instructed by our superiors to stay away from the people we transport and wash our hands and face every hour," he said.

That the buses have a locked cabin for the driver does give the men some peace of mind. However, they said anxiety haunts them.

They have indeed seen some interesting things in the past few days.

Salim said, "A few days ago, a young girl who had just landed from Germany or somewhere was asked to sit in my bus. The poor girl was terrified when she heard she was being sent into isolation. It took an official and some policemen took at least 15 minutes to convince the young girl. I noticed that they had to do this while maintaining some distance from her."

Salim, Srisailam and Reddy said that senior officials, including the regional manager, were coming to check on them regularly. They have been getting ₹100 a day for their food.

"We are being taken care of very well," said Reddy. When asked what they thought of their work, the drivers said their fear was outweighed by their pride.

"I am happy that after the doctors and policemen, we are playing a part in keeping Telangana safe. I know there is a risk in what we are doing right now but it will help the state. That's all I need to know," said Salim.

CLOTH MERCHANTS TO SHUT SHOPS FROM MARCH 22-24

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 21

The Secunderabad Cloth Merchants Association on Saturday announced that its members will keep their shops shut from March 22 to March 24 to prevent people from gathering in numbers for shopping.

"With the Central and state governments initiating measures to control public gatherings, the association has decided to do its part. Since our market is a floating public

area and as per the directions of the government, the managing committee of the association has decided to close all shops in the market for three days," association president Prakash Ammanabolu said.

The association chief requested all the members to ensure that all shops in the market remain closed for three days so that cloth merchants can play their part in avoiding public gatherings and prevent the spread of coronavirus.

down. "There was complete blackout here for major part of January. By mid-February, when things started looking normal came the news of coronavirus by the month-end and now everything has gone haywire," Dr Saxena says.

He says that he has not yet given up his efforts to contact the Indian High Commission.

"I lost my mother four years ago and my father is old now. My brother also does not keep well. I have to be in Hyderabad at least by June otherwise things will get very difficult for me here and my family in Hyderabad," he said.

Dr Saxena says that while the situation due to coronavirus is getting worse in Australia, it has come as a double blow for people like him who suffered heavily due to the bushfire and now due to the killer virus.

"With reports now emerging that coronavirus cases could explode in India in the near future, I am worried about when I would be home. Though I am making efforts from my side, I am keeping my fingers crossed," he says

WEATHER

Max: 35.7°C
Min: 22.0°C
RH: 29%
Rainfall: Nil



Forecast: Partly cloudy sky, rain or thunder showers. Max/Min temperature 32/22°C

ASTROGUIDE

Vikari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Phalguna Bahula Trayodasi till 10.08 am
Star: Shatabisha till 10.26 pm
Varjyam: 5.37 am to 7.24 am (Monday)
Durmuhurtam: 4.47 pm to 5.35 pm
Rahukalam: 4.30 pm to 6 pm
HIJRI CALENDAR
Rajjab 26.1441 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.19 am
Zohar: 12.33 pm
Asar: 4.44 pm
Maghrib: 6.34 pm
Isha: 7.41 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.27 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.27 AM
MOONRISE 5.10 AM
MOONSET TODAY 4.57 PM

COUNTER POINT



Not mummy, it's Dad... it's his precaution for coronavirus!

IN BRIEF

Liquor shops to be closed today

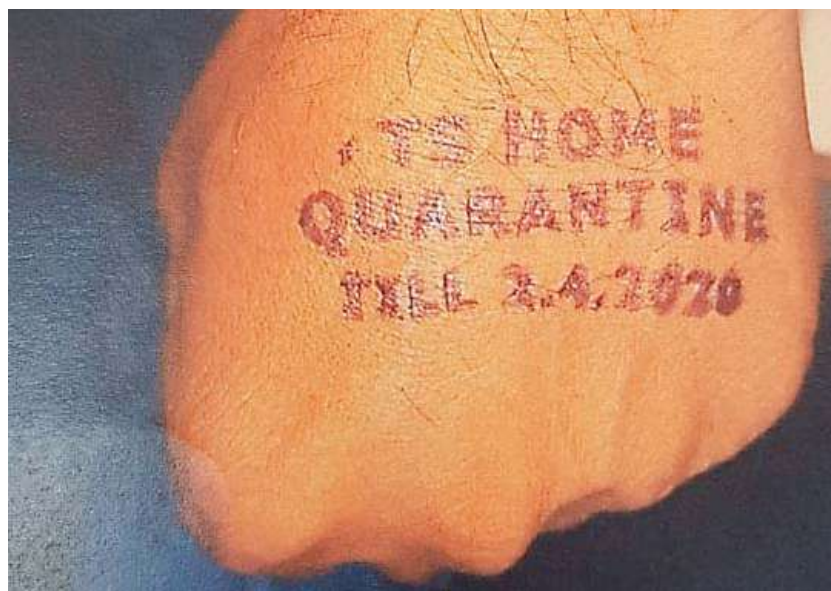
Hyderabad: The Telangana Wine Dealers Association on Saturday appealed to all the liquor shop owners in the State to voluntarily close their liquor shops on Sunday in view of "Janata Curfew" programme to combat the spread of coronavirus. The Telangana Wine Dealers Association president D. Venkateswara Rao in a statement on Saturday said the closure of shops would help social distancing and stop virus from spreading.

6 held for fake news on Covid

Peddapalli: The Godavari police on Saturday arrested six persons who were allegedly posting fake news on social media platforms about coronavirus. They were identified as Cherala Ratan Kumar (20), Sheelam Prem Kumar (30), Maram Mahesh (30), Sudamalla Ramesh (32), S.K. Ankoos Miya (53) and group admin Durgam Srinivas (32). Ratan Kumar, after creating a fake Telugu newspaper logo posted a message that two persons from Godavari had tested positive to Covid-19. He circulated it on various social media platforms across various groups. On reading the message, the panic-stricken people tried to find the veracity of the news only to realise that they were fabricated. After investigation police nabbed Ratan Kumar along with the five others.

DGP urges people to 'self-curfew'

Hyderabad: Following a call from Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Director General of Police M. Mahendar Reddy, Hyderabad city police commissioner Anjani Kumar and Cyberabad police commissioner V.C. Sajjanar appealed to public to make 'janata curfew' successful in a message Mr Kumar urged the public of "impose self-curfew in accordance with the call given by Prime Minister Narendra Modi." He requested the people to stay at home, spend time with family and dear ones and maintain personal hygiene. He added, "you can contribute to efforts of breaking the chain of infection. I am hoping that the city will show unity for this cause and bring safety to their family and each and every person of the city." Cyberabad police commissioner V.C. Sajjanar appealed to make the janata curfew successful. "By not coming in contact with the virus for 14 hours we can break the chain of Covid-19 spreading," he said.



The civic body has procured indelible-ink based home quarantine stamps to emboss on hands of returnees for spotting them easily

Shadow teams to monitor returnees

20k international passengers arrived here since March 1, 13k are from city

MADHY DEEKSHITH | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 21

Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) will be playing "big brother" as it has been tasked with monitoring "how abouts" of nearly 13,000 individuals, who are residents of Hyderabad but have returned from abroad.

Of the 20,000 international passengers, who have arrived at the Rajiv Gandhi International Airport since March 1, 13,000 are from the city, as per data shared by the Immigration Department with GHMC. To keep track of this large number of individuals, the corporation has formed 250 shadowing teams that will monitor whether the foreign returnees are observing home quarantine rules. The civic body has procured indelible-ink based home quarantine stamps to emboss on hands of returnees for spotting them easily.

For effective tracking, the shadow teams include field-level officials from revenue wing including bill collectors and staff from town planning, engineering and sanitation wings who are familiar with the area layout, which is otherwise befuddling in most parts of the city. The shadow personnel will be wearing personal protection equipment as a matter of abundant precaution.

GHMC commissioner D. S. Lokesh Kumar said the corporation's special teams, in coordination with disaster response teams (DRTs), will make individual visits to check with neighbours of quarantined individuals and inquire if the foreign returnees are following the quarantine protocol. The civic body, on instructions of central and state governments, has published home quarantine protocol in English, Urdu and Telugu, which are handed over to international passengers at the time of their arrival. It is

Police traced 180 global passengers

DURGA PRASAD SUNKU | DC
HYDERABAD MARCH 21

With its extensive network in the city, the Hyderabad city police on Saturday said it was actively involved in identifying and tracing the locations of foreigners who are currently in the city in the wake of the current serious concerns over spread of coronavirus. The city police is also working with the GHMC on this front, city police commissioner Anjani Kumar said on Saturday.

According to police department official, "every morning at around 8, we get all the details from the Special Branch about Indians and foreigners who arrive in the city as well as the localities they are living in. Each and every police station gets this information from the Special Branch, so we can keep tabs on their movements."

Among the 180 individuals traced by the police so far, are members of teams of preachers from different countries who have been staying at some places of prayer in the city. On Saturday, the Panjagutta police along with doctors, conducted a medical check-up for foreigners staying at a five star hotel in Banjara Hills. On Friday Ramgopalpet police identified eight Iranian nationals staying in a mosque and directed them to be stay quarantined.

Meanwhile, addressing a press conference, Rangareddy District Collector Amoy Kumar said, "48 special teams have been formed in the district to trace and track those with international travel history. They have so far identified 40 members who came from other countries and quarantined them. The teams are monitoring the 357 municipal wards and 560 villages in the district and creating awareness on the disease."

He also appealed to people to inform authorities if they come across anyone who has recently returned from abroad or newly arrived foreigners.

● Of the 20,000 international passengers, who have arrived at the Rajiv Gandhi International Airport since March 1, 13,000 are from the city, as per data shared by the Immigration Department with GHMC. mandatory that individuals receiving them follow the protocol to contain the spread of Covid-19.

The corporation commissioner said if the special teams identify any coronavirus symptoms among the quarantined people, they will immediately shift such individuals to the nearest isolation ward. 108 ambulances with special

equipment will be stationed at different locations in the city for the purpose. "For the first home quarantine violation, the shadow team will warn the individual. If the second violation is noted, they would be immediately shifted to the nearest isolation ward," Lokesh Kumar warned.

At the same time, as and when a coronavirus positive case is reported, GHMC will take up special sanitisation activities in the particular area at regular intervals. The same measures will also be taken at places where public congregate," the commissioner added.

The other respondents were the joint director, State Epidemics Cell; Union health secretary; director, National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme, New Delhi; additional director and state programme officer; Directorate of Health.

No quarantine in Manuu: Students

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 21

Students and staffers of the Maulana Azad National Urdu University on Saturday opposed a state directive to develop a quarantine facility on the campus for Covid-19 patients. With a campaign on Twitter named "No Quarantine in MANUU", the students urged the government not to take over the campus where students and staff members have lived for years. The students questioned the

government on the potential health risks for the students and staff.

The students said that the University situated in Gachibowli was not suitable to isolate those returning from Covid-19 affected countries and that there are better facilities that could serve the purpose. While one student in a tweet said "MNCs are very close to the campus, and Old Mumbai Highway, airport and railway station is just 20 km away from the University, it can risk lives of thousands".



USE ACs SPARINGLY, URGES CIVIC BODY

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MARCH 21

Worried over the possibility of coronavirus spreading in its offices through air-conditioning systems, the municipal administration and urban development officials were on Saturday advised to

use air conditioners sparingly in their cabins.

The department issued a circular saying all heads of department (HoDs) under the control of MA&UD are informed that there is every possibility of Covid-19 surviving or entering through vents of air conditioners.

INDIAN INSTITUTES OF SCIENCE EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

(Autonomous Institutions under MHRD, Government of India)

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- Kishore Vaigyanik Protsahan Yojana (KVPY)
- JEE (Advanced)

For more information, please visit <http://www.iiseradmission.in>

Application Procedure

1. Applications for admission are to be submitted online only at www.iiseradmission.in
2. Instructions for filling the application form and other relevant details are available on the website.
3. Applicants are advised to go through the FAQ section in the website carefully before filling up the form.
4. A non-refundable application fee of ₹2000 (₹1000 for SC/ST and PD candidates) is applicable.

Important Dates	SCB	KVPY	JEE (Advanced)
Application portal opens on	23 March 2020	24 April 2020	1 June 2020
Last date for online applications	30 April 2020	22 May 2020	15 June 2020
IISER Aptitude test	31 May 2020		

All inquiries must be addressed to: **Chairperson, Joint Admissions Committee 2020**
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Website: <http://www.iiseradmission.in>

HC makes PIL of DC 'dirty facilities' report

VUJJINI VAMSHIDHARA | DC
HYDERABAD, MARCH 21

The Telangana High Court has suo motu (on its own) taken up as a public interest litigation (PIL) a news report published in *Deccan Chronicle* on Friday (March 20), highlighting the pathetic conditions and facilities prevailing in various quarantine premises in the state which were opened by the government to house international passengers for the mandatory 14-day quarantine.

Justice P. Naveen Rao addressed a letter to the Chief Justice seeking its intervention in calling for the records pertaining to the number of notified premises used as quarantine premises. Headlined 'Quarantine

DC IMPACT

facilities dirty', the report highlighted the lack of basic facilities in the quarantine premises, where two to three passengers and in some places as many as five were put up in a single room. Poor unhygienic conditions were made worse with bed-bugs, cockroaches and mosquitoes all over the rooms, defunct toilets, lack of running water, inadequate supply of drinking water were highlighted in the report.

Justice P. Naveen Rao opined that if such a pathetic situation prevailed in the quarantine premises, the very purpose of establishing them would be lost. He also stated that hostels and housing facilities, which were being used as quar-

antine premises, would not be conducive to house students and employees after the present grim situation ceases. Considering it, CJ Raghavendra Singh Chauhan directed the Registry to convert the report as suo motu taken up PIL.

The Chief Secretary, principal secretary of health, commissioner of health, Vaidya Vidhana Parishad, director of public health and family welfare, principal secretary of municipal administration, GHMC commissioner were made respondents to the PIL.

The other respondents were the joint director, State Epidemics Cell; Union health secretary; director, National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme, New Delhi; additional director and state programme officer; Directorate of Health.

PREVENTION IS THE CURE

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends use of Sodium Hypochlorite at 0.5% (equivalent 5000ppm) for disinfection of frequently touched surfaces in home or healthcare facilities.

4 WAYS TO PROTECT YOUR HOME

1. Use household cleaners to clean all high-touch surfaces like counters, door knobs, switches, bathroom fixtures.
2. Wipe in one direction only to avoid re-contaminating the surface as you wipe.
3. The surface must stay wet with disinfectant long enough and dry naturally to kill the viruses.
4. Put the seat down take a step back and then flush the toilet.

DOMEX FLOOR CLEANER HAS >0.5% SODIUM HYPOCHLORITE AS ACTIVE.

*Extracted from FMO released by WHO on Coronavirus prevention. Please use as recommended on pack, do not mix the two products.

IN BRIEF
PATIENT NO. 20 IS SECONDARY CONTACT

From Page 1

A media bulletin on Saturday afternoon confirmed the secondary contact as Patient no 20, a 35-year-old male from the city. He was Patient no 14's son, who was confirmed with the disease on March 19. Patient 14 had come from Dubai on March 14 and developed Covid-19 symptoms on March 17. The government had on March 19 announced that he tested positive, and said all his contacts were traced and placed under home quarantine. It had also said that the details of his co-passengers on the flight to Hyderabad were awaited.

There has been no update since March 19 on the passengers or how many were placed under quarantine and how many of them were tested.

The second patient confirmed for Covid-19 on Saturday is a 33-year-old male working for MSC Cruises on board cruise ship MSC Bellissima. The government did not say when he came to the city.

UTTAM SAYS STAY AT HOME TODAY

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MARCH 21

Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) president N. Uttam Kumar Reddy on Saturday appealed to people to take all precautions to prevent the spread of coronavirus in the state.

Mr Reddy, in a message on social media platforms, said that coronavirus is proving to be an epidemic with the rise in number of cases every day.

He said there was no treatment for this virus, therefore, at this stage, prevention is the only cure for coronavirus.

The TPCC president appealed to people to follow the guidelines issued by the government to prevent the spread of the disease. He said that people should stay at their homes unless it was necessary to go outside. "We can overcome this challenge only if we are united, alert and cautious," he added.

He also appealed to the people to observe the "janata curfew" on Sunday from 7 am to 9 pm that was announced by the government of India. He said that no one should go out and stay at their homes, except for emergencies.

The TPCC chief noted that the government has ordered closure of all establishments and firms till March 31. While this has been done as a precautionary measure, it has badly hit the daily wage earners, vendors and other small business firms. He demanded the government to supply rice and essential commodities for free to the white ration card holders, the poor and other needy people.

He said that the government should come to the rescue of middle class people who might not be able to pay their EMIs on time next month due to continuous closure of establishments. He said that the government should ensure that all banks and other financial institutions postpone the EMIs without levying any fine or interest.

The TPCC president appealed to the workers of the Congress to take all precautions and ensure that their relatives, friends and neighbours do the same. He said, "with joint efforts and a strong will, all Indians will collectively beat the coronavirus by preventing its spread further."

KCR extends PM's 'janata curfew' today to 24 hours

Buses, Metro Rail to remain suspended all of Sunday, buses from other states will be stopped at border check posts from 6 am today

S.A. ISHAQUI | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 21

Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao on Saturday called on people to observe the "janata curfew" for 24 hours in the to express solidarity with those fighting Covid-19 in the country.

Addressing a press conference at Pragathi Bhavan, the CM said that Telangana state will observe a shutdown for 24 hours starting at 6 am on Sunday. This 24-hour shutdown proposal modifies the call given by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to participate in the 'janata curfew' from 7 am to 9 pm.

He said emergency services and essential commodity outlets will continue to function, including hospitals, medical shops, and petrol pumps. Vendors of vegetables, milk and fruits will also be allowed.

Stating that there will be no restrictions on the media to keep people informed about developments in the state, the Chief Minister directed police not to curtail movements of media personnel.

He appealed to people to observe 'janata curfew' with the same spirit they displayed during separate Telangana movement and observe the total shutdown. He urged people to come out at 5 pm, along with the entire nation, and clap in appreciation of medical fraternity, police, sanitation workers and others who are working to keep others safe.

Mr Rao said, "The people of Telangana must stand together and express their solidarity in fighting this virus. We need to take tough decisions during such tough times. Spare 24 hours and stay at home to save the world. It is everyone's social responsibility," he emphasised.

The CM announced that the public transport network, including TSRTC, Hyderabad Metro Rail and other public transport services, will remain suspended for 24 hours. Five buses per depot and five Metro trains will be kept ready to meet any eventualities.

He pointed out that buses from other states will be stopped at the inter-state border check



Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao speaks to the media regarding measures against the coronavirus infection in Hyderabad on Saturday. He is flanked by DGP M. Mahendar Reddy (left), health minister Etala Rajendar and Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar (right).



A facsimile of a Covid-19 notice designed for pasting on a house with a positive case. It bans entry of outsiders.

posts from 6 am on Sunday.

Mr Rao said, "We request people to refrain from going out except in emergency. Even in case of emergency, they must maintain a distance of at least a metre from others. People below 10 years and above 60 years are advised not to go out of their homes for at least two to three weeks."

He pointed to the idiom trending on social media pertaining to coronavirus that says Covid-19 has utmost self-respect and it would not enter into the body of anyone without an invitation. The Chief Minister said, "It appears true. Don't invite it into your bodies. Maintain self-restraint, self-discipline and self-control. These are the only ways to fight the virus best."

Ready to spend ₹10, 000 cr to combat Covid-19: KCR

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MARCH 21

Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao on Saturday said that as many as 20,000 people had arrived in the State from foreign countries since March 1. Of them, 11, 000 have been traced and were asked to self-quarantine under the supervision of health and police officials.

Giving out statistics during a press conference, he said that with an increase in Covid-19 positive cases from Maharashtra, which has more than 500-km of border with Telangana state, the government was considering plans to close down the inter-state border after consultations with their Maharashtra counterparts.

Stating that as of now the situation is not alarming in the state, he said that the government is also making contingency plans to arrange for door delivery of essential commodities, in case of emergency-driven shut-down.

He explained that of the 11,000 who have been traced, 700 are suspected to bear Covid-19 symptoms and they are under

medical observation. All these foreign returned were identified after the Karimnagar episode wherein Indonesians were found with positive symptoms of Covid-19. The government duly alerted district collectors, superintendents and commissioners of police and officials of municipal and panchayat raj departments.

He said that "My appeal to all foreign returned individuals is to approach the authorities, who will test and keep them under observation. If anyone shows symptoms of the virus then they will be treated at government cost."

Maintaining that the state was not poor, Mr Rao announced that they are prepared to spend ₹10,000 crore to combat Covid-19 and protect the people of the state.

He said that the government has set up 52 check posts across inter-state borders and 78 joint teams with medical and police department officials were deployed at the check-posts and an expert team has been constituted to monitor the situation at global level and make sugges-

tion for improving precautionary measures. He announced that the Prime Minister has accorded permission to make use of the lab facilities at Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology in Hyderabad to test for the presence of coronavirus.

Referring to the 'janata curfew' call given by Mr Modi, he said that some social media 'idiots' were heckling the Prime Minister. He asked DGP Mahendar Reddy to book such mischief-mongers and take stern action against them.

While appealing the people stay at their homes on Sunday, he asked the people not to force their domestic helps to come for work on Sunday and nothing will happen to the rich people if they clean their homes for a day.

On the situation in Karimnagar, he said 55,000 people were checked and Karimnagar was found to be 'safe'.

Stressing the need to safeguard doctors, he said masks, suits and testing kits have been made available in hospitals besides which were 500 additional ventilators.

High drama on Rajdhani Express: couple escaping quarantine held UP family fled Vikarabad facility, was made to detrain at Kazipet

ANUDEEP CEREMILLA | DC WARANGAL, MARCH 21

A couple returning home from Indonesia escaped a quarantine centre at Vikarabad and boarded the Rajdhani express only to be identified and made to get off the train at Kazipet on Saturday.

The couple from UP was returning from Bali, Indonesia. They landed at the Rajiv Gandhi International Airport in Shamshabad late on Friday night and, following procedure, underwent thermal screening and were taken to the quarantine centre in Vikarabad.

They were advised by the doctors to remain in isolation till April 5. Unwilling to remain isolated, the couple somehow escaped from the facility and boarded the Hazrat Nizamuddin-bound Rajdhani express at Secunderabad on Saturday morning.

However, the quarantine stamps on their hands gave them away. The TC in the train noticed their stamps and confronted them. Not receiving a reasonable answer from them, he alerted the higher offi-



A couple from Uttar Pradesh that had fled quarantine in Vikarabad is being escorted out of the Kazipet railway station on Saturday. The couple was detained from the Rajdhani Express.

cial. By that time, the train has already left Secunderabad. The medical officials advised the couple to get off at the Kazipet station which is near the MGM hospital in Warangal.

Medical officials in Warangal were alerted about the arrival of the couple. An ambulance and a medical team were

ready by the time the train arrived. The couple was immediately made to wear protective suits and shifted to the MGM hospital. The superintendent of the hospital, Dr. B. Srinivas Rao, said the couple were brought to the MGM Hospital and after preliminary tests were taken to the Gandhi Hospital in Hyderabad.

All the passengers travelling with the couple in Coach B3 were made to move to other coaches. After the couple got off the train, the coach was sanitised before the train continued its journey. The train halted at Kazipet for close to one hour and the passengers were left anxious about their own health.

PASTOR FROM KERALA SENT TO QUARANTINE

DC CORRESPONDENT WARANGAL, MARCH 21

A 62-year-old pastor working in a church in Oorugonda, Damera mandal, Warangal urban district, while returning from his hometown in Kerala, was picked by the officials who have been taken with identifying people arriving from other places.

He was taken to the MGM Hospital where he underwent tests. His health condition seemed to be normal with no fever, cough or breathlessness, according to hospital sources.

The doctors at MGM Hospital advised home isolation for 12 days. He was also asked to immediately consult the hospital in case he develops any symptoms of Covid-19.

The pastor travelled to Kerala on March 1. He returned to Oorugonda on March 19 by the Ernakulam Bellary Express, according to the sources.

IT sector must aid support staff: KTR

HARLEEN MINOCHA | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 21

Amidst the Covid-19 scare, representatives from global tech companies like TCS, Infosys, Wipro, Tech Mahindra, Cognizant, Google, and Cyberabad Security Council met IT minister K.T. Rama Rao at Pragathi Bhavan on Saturday, to discuss the way forward.

The industry representatives apprised the minister about how the IT & ITES industry is ensuring the safety and security of its employees while it continues to deliver the best to clients across the globe in trying circumstances.

They informed the minister of the various screening and sanitation measures being undertaken to ensure the safety and well-being of their employees.

Mr Rama Rao took the opportunity to dispel the worries and concerns of the IT sector and outlined the various measures that the Telangana state government is taking to contain the spread of the virus and expressed satisfaction at the various measures the IT industry captains are taking to ensure the well-being of the employees.

The minister said that the government will share situation reports with the industry, and they can make decisions based on these reports.

Minister K.T. Rama Rao appealed to IT industry representatives to report to the government about employees who have come back from overseas trips. He said that IT employees should be vigilant about fake news.

In an appeal to look out for the support staff at the companies, the minister said, "It is important to take care of departments like housekeeping, security, and unorganised sector staff. The industry should come together to help the unorganised support staff and ensure they don't face financial difficulty."

Mr Rama Rao appealed to industry representatives to take precautions and report to the government about employees who have come back from overseas trips. He said that IT employees should be vigilant about fake news and misinformation being spread on social media.

The IT industry representatives appreciated the Telangana government's proactive approach in containing the spread of Corona virus and thanked the IT Minister for the constant support extended to the industry in the state.

<p>SHRADDANJALI</p> <p>PADAMATI ANJAMMA REDDY W/o Late Padamati Chittha Reddy DOD: 12.03.2020 You will be dearly missed, we love you Inserted by: Daughter - R. Chennu Devi Son-in-law - R. Jagan Reddy & Family Members, Ph : 9700979004 (S/1920/D02020)</p>	<p>OBITUARY</p> <p>Shri. DILIP LOMATE EXPIRED ON 21.03.2020 FUNERAL Today 22-03-2020, 10AM from Residence - TILAK NAGAR NALLAUNTA TO AMBERPET Crematorium. Ajay Lomate - 9703748970</p>
<p>1st DEATH ANNIVERSARY</p> <p>Sd. SUKHBIR SINGH (Retd. Private Secretary to Spl. Secretary of CM Govt. of AP) Your loving memories will remain in our thoughts and hearts forever. Inserted by: Sons-Sd.Sudheer Singh, Sd.Sarjit Singh, Sd.Ajit Singh Daughter - Gurmeet Kaur Grand Sons - Sd. Akarsh Singh, Sd.Samarjeet Singh Grand Daughter - Aarshita Singh</p>	<p>2nd ANNIVERSARY</p> <p>FOND MEMORY</p> <p>SIDDHARTH. H. BAHUT AAI GAYI YADE MAGAR ISS BHAR TUMHI AANA LOVE YOU PAPPY & MISS YOU MOM (S/1920/D02017)</p>
<p>2nd ANNIVERSARY</p> <p>FOND MEMORY</p> <p>SIDDHARTH. H. LOVE YOU & MISS YOU DAD, BIGGIE & CHUTKI (S/1920/D02018)</p>	<p>2nd DEATH ANNIVERSARY</p> <p>"Blessed are the dead who are in the Lord Jesus Christ" Rev 14:13</p> <p>Late Mrs. Y. STELLA JAMES W/o Late Mr. Y. James DOD: 22-03-2018 "Your life was a blessing. Memory was a pleasure, loved beyond words and will continue to remain in our hearts forever. We miss you a lot!" Inserted by: Family Members, Near & Dear</p>
<p>8th ANNIVERSARY</p> <p>BALKI SURYA PRAKASH RAO Your memories will remain in our hearts for ever Inserted by: FAMILY MEMBERS Ph : 9885808959</p>	<p>14th ANNIVERSARY</p> <p>Smt. MALI RAMBAI DOD : 28-03-2006 Your ethics, values and guidance have touched our lives profoundly, deeply missing you Inserted by: Son : Malli Pradeep Kumar MALI VEERESH & SON WHOLE SALE CLOTH MERCHANT Shop No. 2-1-35, Tobacco Bazar, Sec.bad. Ph:(S) 27812669, 27846727, (R) 43662030 FURNISHINGS ANNEXE Shop No. 2-1-29, Tobacco Bazar, Sec'bad.</p>
<p>16th ANNIVERSARY</p> <p>Safe in the Arms of 'JESUS'</p> <p>P.G.RATHAN RAJ No matter how many years go by, the pain of your death never diminishes. Love you papa Deeply missing you Wife: Manikyan Rathan Raj Sons, Daughters-in-law, Daughters, Sons-in-law, Grand Children & Sisters', Brother's Family USA Ph:9701336114/9705286042</p>	<p>17th ANNIVERSARY</p> <p>Late Shri P.B. LINGAM DOB: 10.02.1919 DOD: 22.03.2003 P. NARSAMMA DOB: 31.01.1931 DOD: 22.03.2019 Daddy you will remain always in our hearts forever. We miss you very much. Your ever loving wife Son: P.L.S. Prakash (Picket) Daughters-in-law, Sons-in-law, Daughters, Grand Sons, Grand Daughters (S/1920/D02035)</p>

IN BRIEF

Youth held for kidnapping minor

Hyderabad: The Chandrayangutta police arrested a 19-year-old accused of abducting a minor girl and sexually assaulting her on Saturday. Identifying the accused as Syed Abrar Mohammed, a student residing in Mehdiapatnam, police said he took her to Gulbarga and sexually assaulted her. Police said they had booked a case of kidnap based on a complaint from the victim's father and investigated it. The police traced the girl to Kalaburagi (Gulbarga) in Karnataka. The team went to the town, apprehended Abrar and rescued the minor girl and brought them to the city. Abrar has been sent to judicial custody.

Man ends life after quarrel

Hyderabad: A person committed suicide reportedly after a quarrel with his wife under LB Nagar police station limits on Friday night. The deceased, Syed Anwar, worked as a private security supervisor and is survived by his wife and two children. He committed suicide at his residence by hanging with the help of a chunni. Police said Anwar was addicted to alcohol. On Friday night he and his wife quarrelled about his addiction. Upset over the same, he committed suicide. Police shifted the body to Osmania General Hospital for autopsy and later handed it over to the family members.

HAJ PILGRIMS TO LEAVE FROM JULY 9

ATHER MOIN | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 21

The Telangana State Haj Committee stated that the Haj pilgrimage for people from from Telangana state would begin on July 9 and their return was scheduled between August 13 and September 3. The last date of remittance of the second advance instalment of ₹1.2 lakh by the provisionally selected Haj pilgrims is extended up to March 31. Mr Mohammed Masiullah Khan, chairman Haj Committee, said training camps will be held for selected pilgrims in April, due to the outbreak of coronavirus. He advised the pilgrims to pay the second instalment on or before the last day.

2.8L LADDUS GIVEN FREE TO TTD STAFF

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, MARCH 21

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams on Saturday distributed nearly 2.8 lakh Srivari laddus free among its regular and contract employees at Tirumala on Saturday. Following the closure of the Lord Balaji temple to pilgrims on Friday, the TTD was left with the Srivari laddus and about 1,000 Kalyanotsavam laddus. The temple administration decided to distribute the most sought after prasadam among its employees, ahead of Ugadi.

The employees thrilled by this gesture felt the laddu was an Ugadi gift from the temple management. As many as 10 laddus were given to each permanent employee and five to each contract staffer.

The TTD prepares nearly 4 lakh laddus, each weighing 175 grams, everyday and maintains a buffer stock of nearly 3 lakh laddus. Srivari prasadam or Tirupati laddu is highly revered and a must take-home for devotees.

Elsewhere in Tirumala, few people were seen on the second day of the shutdown. Rows of lamps burnt brightly at Akilandam in front of the Srivari temple. Regular pujas are being performed.

VIP calls, journo help MBS Jewellers' Suresh escape

Journo's kin halts cop team, turn off lights, helps jeweller flee from home

VIKRAM SHARMA | DC HYDERABAD MARCH 21

High drama prevailed outside the residence of a journalist in Banjara Hills after a group of policemen arrived at the house following specific information about the presence of an accused in a cheating case.

While the police team was bogged down by repeated calls from certain senior IPS officers and a senior politician who ordered the team not to proceed with the arrest, the inmates are said to have cut off the power supply of the house temporarily and made the accused flee the place.

The accused in question is Suresh Gupta, promoter of MBS Jewellers. Gupta's name surfaced in the CBI vs CBI case involving the CBI director Alok Verma and his second in command Rakesh Asthana.

Gupta, a partner in Aashi Realtors, is accused in a case of cheating to the tune of ₹110 crore. The Kolkata-based SREI Finance had lodged a complaint against Gupta with the Central Crime Station

(CCS) of Hyderabad police.

Around 7.30 pm on Friday, a team from the Central Crime Station led by ACP S.V. Harikrishna arrived at the house of the journalist. The team had specific information about the presence of Gupta.

The journalist in question was earlier an accused in another cheating case in Cyberabad.

When the police tried to go inside, the inmates did not cooperate and started to threaten the team that they would proceed against them legally. Though the team did not have a search warrant, it is not mandatory for them when they have specific information.

As the ruckus was going on, the ACP received multiple phone calls from senior IPS officers including some holding key posts who ordered the team not to proceed with the arrest and "leave Suresh Gupta."

Even as the team was trying to deal with the phone calls from officers in support of Gupta and taking legal opinion on whether they can proceed

● **WHEN THE** police tried to go inside, the inmates did not cooperate and started to threaten the team that they would proceed against them legally

● **ACCORDING TO** the police, SREI Finance lodged a complaint with the CCS against Gupta more than two weeks ago

● **IN THEIR** complaint, they stated that Gupta had taken a loan of ₹110 crore but had defaulted. As per the MoU with SREI, Gupta was supposed to mortgage two properties for the loan

at 7.30 pm went on till midnight after which the ACP and his team returned empty handed.

According to the police, SREI Finance lodged a complaint with the CCS against Gupta more than two weeks ago.

In their complaint, they stated that Gupta had taken a loan of ₹110 crore but had defaulted. As per the MoU with SREI, Gupta was supposed to mortgage two properties for the loan — one property at Miyapur and the another in Koti. However, Gupta mortgaged only one property (the one at Miyapur) and subsequently defaulted.

SREI Finance sold the Miyapur property and recovered a major part of the dues. Gupta reportedly registered the Koti property to another party, while actually he was supposed to mortgage it to SREI Finance.

Following this, the company lodged a complaint against Gupta. The CCS has registered a case of cheating and criminal breach of trust.

Since the time of registration of case, Gupta has

been absconding.

Well known for his top political connections, Gupta has had a criminal past. He was the prime accused in the MMTC gold purchase fraud to the tune of ₹200 crore in which he was arrested by the CBI a few years ago.

Thereafter his name surfaced in the CBI vs CBI fiasco wherein it was alleged that Gupta, through controversial meat exporter Moin Qureshi, had paid huge bribes to then CBI Directors A.P. Singh and Alok Verma to hush up the case against him.

The Enforcement Directorate is also probing Gupta. For most part of 2019, Gupta was not to be seen in Hyderabad as he was staying in the UK even as ED was sending summons to him.

When contacted, ACP Harikrishna said that they are on the lookout for Gupta. When asked about the dramatic developments at the journalist's house, he just chose to say that though they had gone there and surrounded the house, the accused was not there.

Discom says no power outages

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MARCH 21

The Telangana Southern Power Distribution Company Limited (TSSPDCL) which supplies electricity to the city and some districts on Saturday said it has taken all steps to ensure uninterrupted power supply to all consumers. Since electricity is a very important service in times of a crisis, as the one state is facing in combating coronavirus spread, the power utility said all breakdown and repair services will continue as they have been in the past.

In a press release, TSSPDCL chairman and managing director G. Raghuma Reddy, said that while taking up any work, all precautionary meas-

ures will be put in place for worker safety and health including sanitisation procedures.

While hand sanitisers will be provided by TSSPDCL, employees who prefer to wear a mask must procure them at their own cost, he said.

Every worksite will follow strict hygiene and sanitisation standards and officials have been instructed to ensure adequate supply of operation and maintenance materials as well as health safety materials.

Any employee who may display any symptoms of Covid-19, will immediately be admitted to the nearest quarantine facility and the district medical and health officer will be informed of such instances, he said.

Navroze celebration



Parsis greet each other in front of the Fire temple in Secunderabad after celebrating Navroze on Saturday. — R. PAVAN

What Covid? TRS local body members partying in camps

NARENDER PULLOOR | DC NIZAMABAD, MARCH 21

Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao's daughter K. Kavitha's certain cakewalk win in the Nizamabad MLC byelection is turning controversial with around 500 elected representatives from rural and urban local bodies of undivided Nizamabad district caught on camera partying in Moinabad on the outskirts of Hyderabad as part of a camp. Videos of the free flow of liquor and their consumption by the participants have gone viral on social media on Saturday.

Reportedly, municipal corporators, councillors, zilla parishad and mandal parishad territorial committee members have been camping in resorts at Shamirpet and Moinabad for the past two days. The byelection for the Nizamabad MLC seat is scheduled for April 7.

Of 824 votes, the TRS has a comfortable majority with 504 votes. In addition, its ally MIM has 28 and a majority of 66 independ-

Narsing Rao withdraws MLC papers for Kavitha

DC CORRESPONDENT NIZAMABAD, MARCH 21

TRS candidate L. Narsing Rao withdrew his nomination for the MLC byelection from the Nizamabad local authority constituency here on Saturday.

ents may also support the TRS candidate. Congress has 141 and BJP 85 voters respectively.

As a precautionary measure, some TRS MLAs have shifted their respective local body representatives to camps to prevent poaching by Opposition parties. Of the nine Assembly constituencies in the composite Nizamabad district, the voters (elected representatives) have been kept in camps in three to four

places in and around Hyderabad. Reportedly, women candidates went for camps along with their husbands and children.

Non-availability of elected representatives when preventive measures against coronavirus are underway in villages and towns has turned into a major topic in Nizamabad Municipal Corporation and other municipalities and mandals in Nizamabad and Kamareddy districts.

Reacting to this at a press conference here on Saturday, Nizamabad MP D. Arvind from BJP said that TRS has a comfortable majority but "because of Kavitha's insecurity, the voters have been shifted to camps."

Some elected representatives from Armoor and Nizamabad rural Assembly constituencies have sent selfie videos to their family members with them in clear drunken condition.

ANDHRA PRADESH

Jagan to do U-turn on TD defections

S.N.C.N. ACHARYULU | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 21

AP Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy is likely to change his stand on defections. He hopes to start 'Operation Aakarsh' soon to attract Telugu Desam Legislative Council members.

According to top sources, key persons in the Central government have advised Mr Reddy to 'manage' the TD's MLCs instead of abolishing the AP Legislative Council.

Through that, they informed him, in the coming days, YSRC's strength in the Council will increase and TD's strength will decrease. In the next two years, YSRC will get the majority and politically it will help the party in providing opportunities to some of its leaders to become MLCs.

In the 58-member AP Council at present, the TD has 26 members and the YSRC nine. The other Opposition and independent members are 20 and four seats are vacant.

2 students sent to social service

VUJINI VAMSHIDHARA | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 21

The Telangana High Court directed two first-year BTech students from the National Institute of Technology, Warangal, caught for consuming ganja on the campus, to do social service activity for a period of two months.

They are to work on weekends at Sri Ramakrishna Seva Samiti, Circuit House Road, Hanamkonda, and during lunch time take part in narayana seva — feeding the poor — so that they are exposed to the realities of life and understand how privileged they are.

Justice Tadakamalla Vinod Kumar was dealing with two petitions filed by the students, challenging the NIT order, which suspended them for an academic year for consuming ganja in the hostel and imposed a ₹1 lakh fine.

One of the petitioners apologised and expressed his repentance. The petitioner approached the court saying that their lives would be jeopardised if the suspension was implemented.

The NIT said discipline was to be maintained in the institution. It told the court that another two

students were expelled for supplying ganja.

Justice Kumar opined that though such acts don't need to be commended, balance has to be struck between the act and the punishment.

The court commented that the students who are at a tender age, with newfound freedom and independence after school, admitted to a premier institute, would find themselves in a different space altogether. The sudden freedom and various distractions make them vulnerable to experiments and these cannot be seen as willful wrongdoing.

Adopting a reformatory rather than retributive approach, Justice Kumar argued that the student petitioners are still teenagers and if they are moulded right, would go on to become skilled professionals for the benefit of society. Kumar, cut down the punishment of suspension for one academic year to the end of the semester.

The court did not permit the students to live in the NIT hostel and directed them to undergo a THC (Tetra Hydro Cannabinol) test on a fortnightly basis till the end of academic session 2019-2020.

RAILINGS SET TO REGULATE CROWD IN CHARMINAR

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MARCH 21

As a measure to curtail gathering of groups around Charminar, the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) has decided to put in place a new barricade system spread over an 80-metre radius and not allow any hawkers in this buffer zone.

The area to be enclosed by the new system will be around 32, 500 square feet while the perimeter of the fence will be 840 feet. The railing system sections, to be connected with chains, will have wheels for adjusting the buffer zone as and when needed.

According to GHMC sources, though procured under the Charminar Pedestrianisation Project, the railing system is now being viewed as a good way to curtail hawkers from cramming up the area around the structure, especially during the Covid-19 crisis. A sample boundary railing has been procured. The corporation is to get 200 such sections at an estimated cost of ₹5 crore. The railing was inspired by Qutb Shahi architecture. The designs will match the stone railings constructed during the Nizam reign.

The civic authorities said public movement near Charminar has already been restricted. They said that in order to ensure free movement of tourists, the Corporation has decided to remove the fencing at the ticket counter within the iconic structure.

"Once the railings are fixed, the Corporation can easily regulate the movement of hawkers and this can safeguard the people," they said.



The new railings in Charminar to control crowd. — DC

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22 rebel MP Congress MLAs join BJP

BJP would gain majority in the Assembly if the party can secure victory of nine of them

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY I DC BHOPAL, MARCH 21

Exactly 11 days after they resigned from the Assembly, leading to the collapse of the 15-month-old Kamal Nath government, 22 rebel Congress MLAs of Madhya Pradesh were on Saturday inducted in the BJP. The former lawmakers were flown from Bengaluru, their abode during the crisis period, to Delhi in a chartered flight in the afternoon. They were received by Mr

Jyotiraditya Scindia, who switched his allegiance to the BJP from the Congress recently, at his residence in Delhi, before being inducted in the BJP by party president J.P. Nadda.

"All of them volunteered to join the BJP in the interest of the people of Madhya Pradesh. The MLAs will now explain why they quit the Congress and joined the BJP", Mr Scindia, who was present on the occasion, said.

Besides Mr Nadda and Mr Scindia, Union ministers

Narendra Singh Tomar and Dharmendra Pradesh and BJP national general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya and senior party leader Narottam Mishra were present. "Our family is now expanded with induction of the 22 former MLAs," Mr Mishra said.

The 22 had sent their resignation letters to MP Assembly Speaker N.P. Prajapati and Governor Lalji Tandon from Bengaluru on March 10. The Speaker first accepted the resignations of six of them

on March 16. The other resignations were accepted on March 19, bringing down the strength of the Congress to 92 and sealing the fate of Kamal Nath government.

The former MLAs were most likely to contest by-elections from their respective Assembly constituencies as BJP candidates in the coming days. The BJP would gain majority in the House if the party can secure victory of nine of them. That would increase its strength in the 230-member MP Assembly from the

current 107 to 116. A total 24 Assembly seats will go in for by-elections. Two Assembly seats had fallen vacant earlier following death of legislators. Meanwhile, sources said the election of leader of the BJP Legislature Party may be put on hold till the Rajya Sabha elections, scheduled to be held on March 26.

"The BJP will stake claim to form government after the RS elections. We are now focused on the RS elections. No schedule has so far been finalised for holding the

BJP Legislature Party meeting to elect its leader," a senior leader disclosed to this newspaper here, requesting not to be identified.

Sources said the Central BJP leadership was yet to finalise the name for the top post. Former chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Union minister Pralhad Patel, Mr Tomar, Mr Vijayvargiya and Mr Mishra currently in the race for the post. "The party may spring a surprise by choosing former chief minister Uma Bharti," sources said.

EX-MINISTER EKKA CONVICTED FOR MONEY LAUNDERING

New Delhi/Ranchi, Mar 21: Former Jharkhand minister Anosh Ekka was on Saturday convicted by a Jharkhand court for laundering over ₹20 crore funds, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) said.

Ekka was being probed in connection with the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) case against former Jharkhand chief minister Madhu Koda and others.

The agency said the quantum of sentence for Ekka will be pronounced by the special PMLA court in Ranchi on March

31. "The court convicted Anosh Ekka for being guilty of offences of money laundering to the tune of ₹20,31,77,852 as defined under Section 3 of the PMLA and punishable under Section 4 of the PMLA," the ED said in a statement.

Ekka was minister of rural development, transport, panchayati raj and building construction in the cabinet of former CM Koda between March 12, 2005 and December 19, 2008. The case pertains to the money-laundering probe involving Koda and others. — PTI

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IN BRIEF

TWO UP BJP MPs QUARANTINE THEMSELVES

Gorakhpur, March 21: Two BJP Members of Parliament from Uttar Pradesh went into self-quarantine after party MP Dushyant Singh and his mother former Rajasthan chief minister Vasundhara Raje said they were self-isolating themselves as they had attended a party last week with singer Kanika Kapoor who has tested positive for Covid-19.

BJP MPs Ravindra Shyamnarayan alias Ravi Kishan from Gorakhpur parliamentary constituency and Kamlesh Paswan from Bansgaon constituency who came in contact with Singh, MP from Rajasthan, during a breakfast hosted by President Ram Nath Kovind on March 13 said they have gone into self-isolation.

Both the leaders said they were facing no health issues but have isolated themselves as precautionary measures.

"Yes, I am living in isolation at home (in Mumbai) to avoid public contact," Ravi Kishan confirmed, adding that he is not allowing his family members to come close to him.

When contacted, Paswan, who has quarantined himself at his Delhi residence, said, "I will step out once Dushyant's reports come out to be negative. Till then, I am avoiding all public contact".

The UP police have booked singer Kanika Kapoor for negligence and committing acts that are likely to spread disease dangerous to life after she attended at least three gatherings in Lucknow, including a party where political leaders were present, and tested positive for the new coronavirus, an official said.

The FIR was registered based on a complaint filed by the Lucknow chief medical officer.

Devotees continue to flock to worship places

Office-bearers of temples, churches booked by govt

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 21

District administrations in Kerala cracked down on temples, church and mosque authorities for violating restrictions on mass gathering at pujas, namaz and prayer meetings.

Cases were registered against temple office bearers in Idukki and Kannur district respectively. The police registered cases against the office bearers of two mosques in Wayanad district for allowing big gatherings.

The collectors have warned religions bodies against violating the norms and putting people in danger in the wake of the covid-19 pandemic.

In view of the covid-19 spread, the Thrissur district administration has imposed prohibitory orders in Kodungallur taluk from March 29. One of the reasons for the restrictions imposed is to discourage large gatherings of devotees in Kurumba Devi temple in Kodungallur for the famous kavatheendal ritual on March 27.

In Idukki district, a case was registered against a temple administrative officer of Vallikavu temple in Peruvanthanam for allowing a large gathering for a puja in the temple. Separate cases were registered against office

bearers of the Thrichambara temple office bearers for allowing more than 200 devotees for a function held on Friday evening.

In Thrissur district, cases were registered against the parish priest, vicar and other church officials of the Catholic Church in Ollur for allowing a mass gathering for a special prayer meeting.

A police team arrived at the church to stop the prayer meeting.

Travancore Devaswom Board which manages many temples in the southern districts of Kerala, including the famous Sabarimala hill shrine, has decided to take stern measures in view of certain temples violating the instructions given by the state government in connection with covid-19.

Devotees will not be allowed in major temples under the Travancore Devaswom Board till March 31.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said Tamil Nadu government has assured that vehicles coming with essential goods to Kerala will not be stopped at border check post.

The matter was raised by Kerala chief secretary with his Tamil Nadu counterpart following reports that officials were intercepting goods vehicles at the border check posts.

Kerala count 52 with 12 new cases

DC CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 21

Twelve new cases of Covid-19 were confirmed in Kerala on Saturday taking the total number of cases to 52 including the three students from Wuhan who recovered fully from the infection.

Of the 12 cases, 6 are from Kasargod, 3 from Ernakulam and 3 from Kannur. Over the last two days, 24 cases have been reported. All confirmed cases are Gulf returnees.

At a press conference, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said the confirmed cases do not suggest community spread as of now. The cases reported so far pertain to people who returned from abroad and their close contacts including family members.

As on Saturday 53,013 persons are under surveillance in the state including 52,705 under home quarantine and 228 are in isolation wards in hospitals. As many as 70 persons were admitted to hospitals today.

Of the 3,716 samples sent for testing, 2,566

have been found negative.

The Chief Minister expressed concern over a section of people including members of religious bodies continuing to violate the instructions on avoiding mass gatherings in places of worship.

"We are repeatedly appealing to them to comply with the government instructions. If they continue to violate the norms the government will be forced to take stringent measures including prohibitory orders as it is the question of the safety of people at large," he added.

Mr Vijayan said the reckless and irresponsible behaviour of the infected person who returned from Gulf, has already peculiar situation in Kasargod district.

"Since the man is not cooperating fully, the route map prepared as of now of places visited by him is partial. All methods are being used to get more information about his movement through counselling. But there is still some lack of clarity. Also his attitude raises suspicion. We are probing the matter," he said.

Oppn seeks relief package for daily wagers, labourers

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 21

As India is bracing itself for a prolonged lockdown to contain the outbreak of coronavirus, Opposition leaders, including Congress president Sonia Gandhi and NCP chief Sharad Pawar, have asked the government to provide an economic package to help stave off the huge financial repercussions of the pandemic.

Mrs Gandhi said that after demonetisation and slowing down of Indian economy, Covid-19 has been a huge setback to millions of daily wage earners, MGNREGA workers, ad-hoc and temporary employees, labourers, farmers and those in the unorganized sectors.

"Even for regular employees, reports suggest that massive layoffs and retrenchments. The government has to put in place a broad based social protection measures including direct cash financial help to these sections".

She sought a comprehensive relief package for all businesses, especially the Micro, Small and Medium businesses which are under a huge stress on account of

● **BJP MP SUBRAMANIAN SWAMY** asked the government to think about an economic emergency to tide over the crisis against the backdrop of Covid-19

Covid-19. The Congress president said that Covid-19 has also impacted the biggest employment generator, the agriculture sector. She urged the government to consider a special relief package for the agriculture sector also.

On similar note, the former Congress president and Wayanad MP Rahul Gandhi said that the viral pandemic has hit India's already sinking economy. "Small, medium enterprises and daily wage labourers are affected the most. Clapping will not help them. An economic package with cash transfers, tax breaks and loan waivers is the need of the hour," he tweeted.

Congress ally and Nationalist Congress Party chief Sharad Pawar was more specific. He reminded the government that the GST returns were due by March 22 in Maharashtra and around the same period in other parts of India too.

Besides this, the Income Tax returns are also due to be filed by March 31, he added.

"Keeping the #Covid_19 pandemic in mind and the current lockdown due to the same, I earnestly urge @PMOIndia & @IncomeTaxIndia, @GST_Council to consider extending the dates of filing all the above mentioned returns by at least one month without levying any interest and penalty," he said.

Congress MP Rajiv Gowda said that the Prime Minister should immediately announce a financial relief package to those most vulnerable to the Covid-19 triggered economic distress. "With crude oil price crash, government can use new funds from tax-excite duty hike on petrol. And release delayed MGNREGA payments ASAP!," he tweeted.

BJP MP Subramanian Swamy asked the government to think about an economic emergency to tide over the crisis. "Is now declaration of Economic Emergency becoming inevitable? Government must put doubts at rest," he tweeted.

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SHORT TAKES

BIHU FESTIVITIES CANCELLED IN ASSAM

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, MARCH 21

In view of the outbreak of coronavirus, the Bihu committees, mostly of Guwahati have voluntarily decided to cancel cultural programme of the upcoming Bohag Bihu season. Altogether 26 Bihu committees have announced that they are not going to host any Bihu function this year.

Bohag Bihu, which is also called Rongali Bihu, is one of the most popular festivals of Assam. It is also a major source of income for singers, musicians, actors and everyone else associated with the entertainment industry in the state. The Bihu celebrations that start from mid-April continue for a month.

The decision to cancel the cultural programmes was taken in order to avoid mass gatherings.

"We have cancelled all the cultural programmes to avoid mass gathering. Because tens of thousands gather to enjoy Bihu functions. If possible, only the rituals will be observed on the Sankranti morning. The decision was taken at a meeting at New Guwahati Bihu Committee auditorium in the presence of representatives from 26 Bihu committees of Guwahati. We should take care of the health of the citizens as well as the artistes," said Mr Kailash Sarma, a functionary of Latasil Bihu Committee.

NOVEL WAY TO PROTEST DURING JANATA CURFEW

AKSHEEV THAKUR | DC BENGALURU, MARCH 21

Amidst the lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic, the women protesters at Bilal Bagh, the epicentre of anti-CAA, NPR, NRC protests in the south, have reduced the numbers congregating and placed posters saying "I am here", on the chairs that symbolically speak for their presence.

The protesters have also stated that on the day of the Janta Curfew announced by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 22, they will shout anti-CAA slogans from their balconies in defiance of his call to clap and bang utensils in support of health care professionals.

However, there are no plans to completely call off the protest. The organisers have advised protesters to carry their own sanitisers and maintain hygiene.

"Ours is a protest, a symbolic one, protecting thousands of people, irrespective of their religion/caste. This is Bilal Bagh. This is our family. And our family will protect the country," Saqib Idrees, one of the organisers posted on Instagram.

The venue has turned into a mask-making centre. The protesting women made 1,000 hand-made masks and have been distributing them to hawkers, policepersons and civic workers.

FIR FILED AGAINST THREE FOR HIDING COVID-19

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, MARCH 21

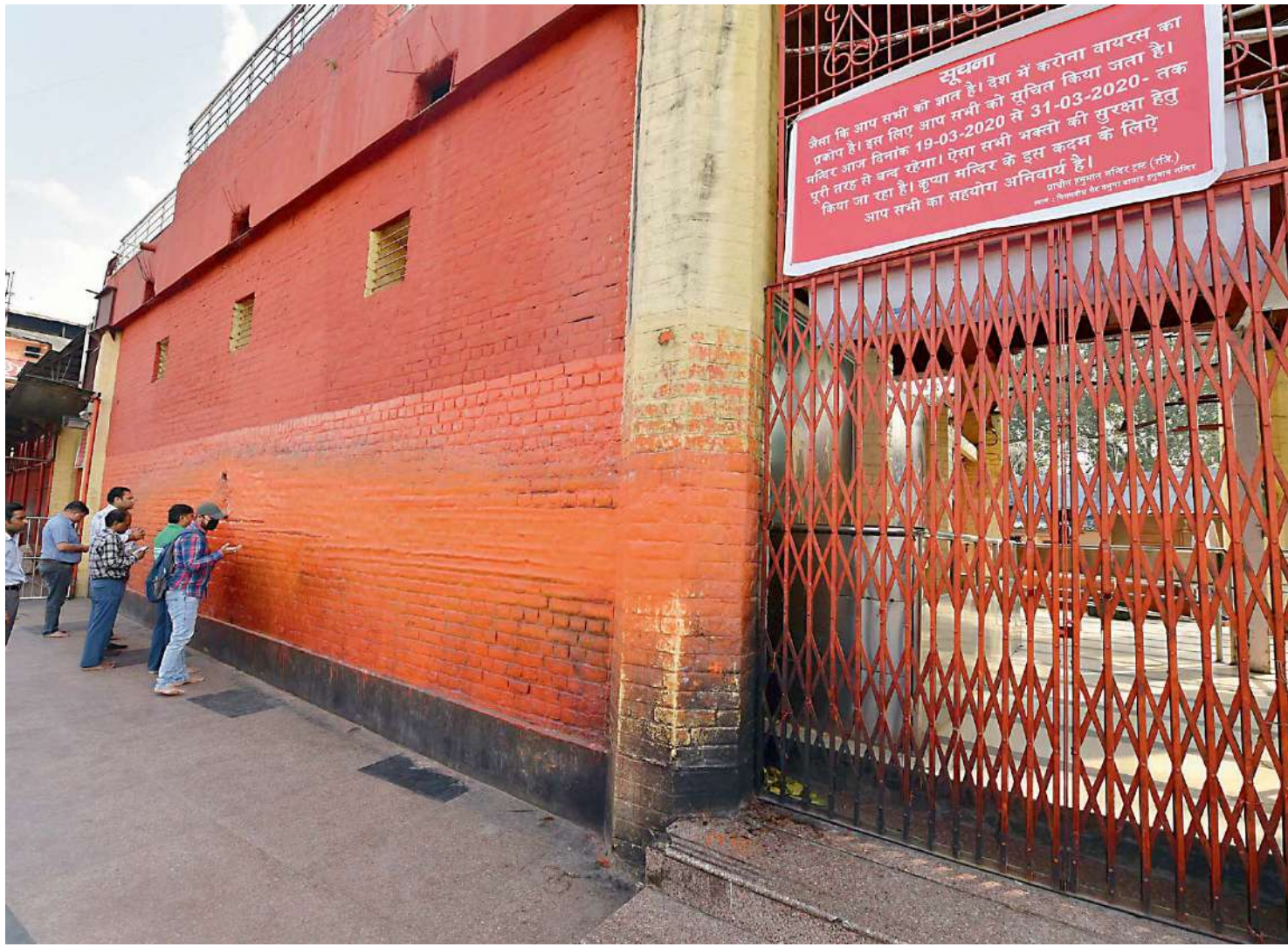
Police on Saturday filed an FIR against three persons, residents of district headquarters of Jabalpur, for hiding that they tested positive for Covid-19. A case has been registered against Mahesh Agrawal and two of his family members, who tested positive for Coronavirus on Friday, for hiding about their infection.

The Agrawal family members had returned from Dubai. The three people were admitted in the isolated ward of local government hospital, a senior officer of Jabalpur district administration said on Saturday.

Another person of Jabalpur who had returned home from Thailand last fortnight also tested positive for Covid-19.

Meanwhile, the local district administration declared lock down of Jabalpur city for two days following the disclosure. The district headquarters of Narasinghpur was locked down for 14 days following reports that the four people who tested positive for Coronavirus had earlier visited Narasinghpur.

In Chhattisgarh, the government declared closure of all government offices, barring those dealing with essential services, till March 30.



Devotees offer prayers outside a closed gate of a Hanuman Mandir after it was shut for visitors amid concerns over the spread of coronavirus, at Yamuna Bazaar in New Delhi on Saturday. — PTI

Clash in prison leaves one dead

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, MARCH 21

A prisoner was shot dead while three others reportedly suffered bullet injuries at Dum Dum Central Jail, one of the largest prisons in West Bengal, after the police allegedly opened fire on them after a large number of inmates went on the rampage to protest a ban on meeting family members.

The measure was implemented to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic.

Taking advantage of the situation many of them even tried to escape by scaling the boundary wall. The victim, Kamalesh Mahato, 28, was arrested by the Khardah police in North 24 Parganas two years ago under Narcotic Drugs & Psychotropic Substances Act case. He died in police firing, his family members alleged.

The Presidency Central Jail in Alipore of south Kolkata also witnessed similar protests in the afternoon when the prisoners got into a verbal duel with the jail authorities over the restrictions

in the afternoon. Waking up to the two incidents, the Mamata Banerjee government in the evening removed senior IPS officer Arun Kumar Gupta from the post of director general of correctional services which covers the prisons. He has been replaced by IPS officer Peeyush Pandey.

On Friday the state correction services department had decided to stop the daily visits of the inmates' family members to avoid the spread of the Covid-19 virus. The prisoners were also told that they would not be allowed to meet their family members daily as part of the precautionary measures, sources revealed.

On Saturday morning the undertrial prisoners in ward no 1 started protesting the decision. When the jail superintendent and other prison officials tried to pacify them, they demanded the release of the convicted prisoners on parole, according to sources. But the prison authorities rejected their demand. This led to an altercation between the two sides.

Covid-hit India braces for a 'janata curfew'

Trains, buses not to ply; air travel also likely to be hit

From Page 1

NPR, Census may be postponed

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 21

When asked whether cases of community transmission have been found, Union health ministry's joint secretary Lav Agarwal said that people will be informed when that happens.

No passenger train will originate from any railway station in the country from midnight to 10 pm on Sunday, while all suburban train services have been restricted to a bare minimum. Metro services in Delhi, Mumbai, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu will remain suspended on Sunday while buses services have been curtailed or suspended in many states.

Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu suspended the operation of government bus services while Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal announced that only 50 per cent of the buses will ply in the national capital during the "Janta curfew" on Sunday.

In a statement, Tamil Nadu chief minister K. Palaniswami appealed to the people of the state not to venture out of their homes unless it is essential.

"Government buses and metro rail services will not operate on March 22 in the state. Private transport operators and owners of mini-buses too have been asked to extend support and not operate their vehicles on that day," Mr Palaniswami said.

Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath said, "A call for Janta Curfew was given. Please stay in your homes. Metro trains, roadways buses and city buses will not operate."

Air carriers like IndiGo, GoAir and Vistara have announced that they will be curtailing domestic operations on Sunday. Traders' body Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) has announced that they will keep their establishments shut across the country on Sunday.

Describing it as the need of the hour, Union home minister Amit Shah asked everyone in the country to support the Janta Curfew. In a series of tweets, Mr Shah also asked citizens to express gratitude to those who are working round the clock to keep the country safe amid the pandemic.

Union home secretary Ajay Bhalla asked chief secretaries of all states

The Coronavirus pandemic has forced the Home Ministry to look at re-scheduling the Census 2021 and the National Population Register (NPR), for which the first phase is to be conducted between April and September.

In many States work for the census has to start in April but Home Ministry officials feel that adequate number of government officers who work as enumerators and other census functionaries may not be available.

"We are closely monitoring the situation and no final decision has been taken," said a senior official. "But if the present situation continues then it is possible

— NARENDRA MODI Prime Minister

to ensure that the "Janta Curfew" is observed properly. Odisha government announced a near total shutdown in five districts and eight prominent towns for a week, beginning Sunday morning. These districts are Khurda, Ganjam, Cuttack, Kendrapara and Angul, while the towns include Puri, Sambalpur, Jharsuguda, Balasore, Rourkela, Bhadrak, Jajpur Road and Jajpur.

The Bihar government has ordered shutting down of bus services, restaurants and banquet halls across the state till March 31. Municipal and panchayat elections scheduled to be held in April-May in Arunachal Pradesh have been put on hold.

Archbishop of Goa Filipe Neri Ferrao cancelled the Sunday mass at all churches in support of the Prime Minister's call for "Janta curfew" to fight the pandemic.

that in places like Delhi, Meghalaya, Lakshadweep and Andaman and Nicobar Islands, where the census was to be pushed back. In any case the first phase is to be completed in six months, between April and September.

Both Delhi and Odisha have asked the Centre and the Registrar General of India to defer the census. The second phase is scheduled to start from next February. Sources said a final decision was expected next week.

There is a growing view in the Ministry that not only would government machinery be busy with the Coronavirus, but a door-to-door would unnecessarily expose census officers to infection.

Prominent Islamic seminary Darul Uloom Deoband in Uttar Pradesh said it will remain closed on March 22 and asked its students not to venture outside. Maharashtra's Akola district administration also ordered a lockdown from March 22 to 24.

In West Bengal, the Mamata Banerjee government ordered all restaurants, bars, pubs, nightclubs, amusement parks, museums and zoos to remain shut till March 31.

Karnataka chief minister B.S. Yediyurappa has urged citizens not to venture out immediately after the end of curfew time as it will nullify the measure. The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), meanwhile, revised its strategy to fight the spread of the new coronavirus saying all hospitalised patients with severe acute respiratory illness, shortness of breath and cough will now be tested for Covid-19 infection.

The new ICMR guidelines also said even asymptomatic direct and high-risk contacts of a confirmed case should be tested once between Day 5 and Day 14 of coming in contact with the infected person. Till now, only those individuals who undertook international travel in the last 14 days and developed symptoms were being tested for the infection as per the guidelines.

ARMY SOUNDS ALERT AGAINST ADVERSARIES

PAWAN BALI | DC NEW DELHI, MARCH 21

The Indian Army has issued advisory to its personnel that "our adversaries" are sending mails, Whatsapp messages on the theme of Coronavirus to hack and compromise email and phones of defence personnel.

"Targeted campaigns on the theme of "CoRoNA Virus" are being undertaken by our adversaries with the primary aim of compromising email/ other accounts and to infect official/ personal IT assets of defence personnel," said the advisory.

It said that in these campaigns various messages in the form of phishing e-mails, SMSes and WhatsApp messages related to "CoRoNA virus" are being circulated to the environment. These messages are embedded with malicious attachments, links, documents and appear to originate from a genuine looking spoofed source.

"Any such "CoRoNA virus" themed message/ e-mail with or without attachments should not be opened and treated with due caution," said the advisory. It asked the army personnel not to access such message/ e-mail and delete it immediately if received.

Last year, the army had prepared a detailed dossier for its men detailing the various tricks employed by spies of neighbouring countries to trap its men.

It had warned against honey-trap by Pakistan spies who create fake female profiles on the social media like Facebook, Twitter or Instagram.

It has advised its men to change the privacy settings on Facebook and other apps to "only friends".

Globally also there have been reports of increase in phishing attacks with emails being sent by hackers offering "confidential" cure developed for Coronavirus or "tax rebates" as people are worried about the impact of virus on their health and on their business.

ALL INDIA COORDINATED RESEARCH PROJECT ON FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE STATE ANIMAL DISEASE INVESTIGATION LABORATORY, JAIL ROAD, JAHANGIRABAD - BHOPAL (M.P.)

No. 1615 / AICRP / FMD/BPL/19-20 Date: 13/03/2020

WALK-IN-INTERVIEW

Name of position: Young Professional - II
Name of the Project: ALL INDIA COORDINATED RESEARCH PROJECT ON EPIDEMIOLOGICAL STUDIES ON FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE.

Name of PIO: Dr Sunil Parnam, Joint Director(DI) & Principal Investigator.
Position At: FMD Network Center AICRP on FMD, State Animal DI Lab, Bhopal, MP.

Number of Position: 01 (One)
Mode: Purely on Contract.
Essential Qualification: Master degree in Microbiology/Biochemistry /Biotechnology /Life sciences
Desirable experience: 1. Application of enzyme- immunoassays. 2. Working in diagnostic laboratory.
3. Computer applications & Data Handling. 4. Experience in handling & collection of samples from field animals.

Age Limit: 21 to 45 years for men (Relaxation for SC/ST/OBC/Women etc as per rules)
Emoluments YP II: Rs. 25,000/-pm fixed (as per ICAR rules.)
Date Time & Venue: 16/04/2020 On 11:00 AM at Conference Room at State Animal DI Lab, State Veterinary Hospital Campus, Jail Road, Veterinary Campus, Jahangirabad, Bhopal (M.P.)

Desirous applicants may appear for a Walk In Interview on the aforesaid date time & venue along with a typed written application in plain paper showing details bio-data, passport size (latest) photograph & all original certificate together with their self attested photocopies. No separate call letter for interview shall be issued. The position is purely temporary on contractual basis up to the end of March 2021 or co-terminuses with the project, whichever is earlier and the Institute will not be held responsible to give regular appointment at this Institute after expiry of the project. No TADA will be admissible for attending the interview. There can be a practical test also hence candidate should be prepared for staying up to the evening.

Sd/- Joint Director (DI), State Animal D.I. Lab, Bhopal (FMD Collaboration Center: Bhopal)

G-24193

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

Extension of Last Date for receipt of applications for Member Secretary, DAF & BJRNf

In continuation to the Ministry's advertisement no. davn 38101/11/0044/1920 published in newspapers on 22.02.2020 for inviting applications to the post of Member Secretary, Dr. Ambedkar Foundation & Babu Jagjivan Ram National Foundation on contract basis, it is hereby notified that the last date for receipt of the applications for the said post is hereby extended till 31.03.2020. The other terms and conditions of the said circular will remain unchanged and may be seen in the advertisement displayed on the website of the Ministry on 4th February, 2020

davn 38101/11/0049/1920

म.प्र. राज्य लघु वनोपज (व्यापार एवं विकास) सहकारी संघ मर्यादित

सुदोर्स कॉन्प्लेक्स, इंदिरा न्हिऊंज, 74, बंगले, भोपाल (म.प्र.)

दूरभाष : 0755-2674349, 2760585, फॅक्स : 0755-2552628

संग्रहण वर्ष 2020 में संग्रहित होने वाले तेन्दूपत्ते के अग्रिम विक्रय हेतु निविदा के निरस्तीकरण की सूचना

संग्रहण वर्ष 2020 में संग्रहित होने वाले तेन्दूपत्ते के अग्रिम बाटों के निवर्तन हेतु दिनांक 23.03.2020 से आमंत्रित Online निविदा एतद् द्वारा निरस्त किये जाते है एवं संशोधित तिथि दिनांक 01.04.2020 से 04.04.2020 निर्धारित की जाती है।

वर्ष 2020 में मध्यप्रदेश में संग्रहित होने वाले तेन्दूपत्ते के अग्रिम बाटों के अग्रिम विक्रय हेतु ऑफर से विक्रय की निरस्तीकरण की सूचना

संग्रहण वर्ष 2020 के अग्रिम तेन्दूपत्ते के निवर्तन हेतु दिनांक 13.04.2020 से 17.04.2020 को प्रत्येक दिवस में आमंत्रित ऑफर एतद् द्वारा निरस्त किये जाते है एवं संशोधित तिथि दिनांक 16.04.2020 से 20.04.2020 निर्धारित की जाती है।

म.प्र. माध्यम : 97216/2020 प्रबंध संचालक

CENTRAL RAILWAY MATERIALS MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT e-PROCUREMENT AT NOTICE No. : e-12/2020, Dt. 19/03/2020

Description	Qty.	T.O.D.
Cow Catcher Assembly	100 Nos.	30/03/2020
Thin walled electron beam cable	10936 Mtr.	30/03/2020
Thin walled electron cable	10167 Mtr.	30/03/2020
Thin walled electron cable	7245 Mtr.	30/03/2020
Gearcase	39 Nos.	30/03/2020
Commutator .. Traction Motor Armature	99 Nos.	30/03/2020
Set of items for POH	134 Sets	30/03/2020
Lead acid batteries of 110 v	52 Sets	30/03/2020
Thin walled cable	14400 Mtr.	30/03/2020
Energy-cum-Speed Monitoring Unit	15 Sets	31/03/2020
Set of sensors for SI unit.	49 Sets	02/04/2020
Centre Axle Box	73 Nos.	02/04/2020
Rotary switch 500 Amps	166 Nos.	02/04/2020
Set of 1 finishing varnish	542 Sets	02/04/2020
110V Capacity lead acid battery	30 Sets	02/04/2020
LED based Loco. Warning Light	341 Sets	03/04/2020
B.L. Switch Box	152 Nos.	03/04/2020
End Axle Box	122 Nos.	03/04/2020
Set of auxiliary contactor	243 Sets	03/04/2020
Set of Water Tank Assembly	62 Sets	03/04/2020
Graphited grease no "0"	238.602	03/04/2020

Regarding detailed notice containing EMD, Quantity Restrictions and Tender Conditions please visit www.reps.gov.in Principal Chief Material Manager

All India Security Helpline 182 * Dial 139 for any Rail-related enquiry

Mediating the way out of sexual harassment?

Several researches have shown that less than 50 per cent of sexual harassment cases get reported. Victims don't even turn up before the internal committees set up under the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 in companies, including the IT industry.

The victims, women as well as men, in the IT industry who put up or quit for not being able to lodge a formal complaint can soon be able to have an option of 'mediation', which can offer them an informal and confidential platform to resolve harassment of any kind.

IT companies welcoming it

The trend seems to be a big step towards giving sexual harassment victims another option along with existing formal mechanisms. Many big and small IT companies have agreed to adopt 'mediation' as an option for victims of sexual harassment, explains Rajesh Athihalli, co-founder of Metis Posh Consulting Service, which offers solutions to managements to help victims of sexual harassment in the corporate world.

Navya Ramachandra, a senior analyst working in Manyata Tech Park, agrees that 'mediation' would definitely help. "HR department has communicated to us over mail on the availability of 'mediation' facility. Presently, we are given a portal called 'home buds'. If we report harassment, immediate action will be taken. However, 'mediation' would help victims in all fields," she said.

Nirmala Menon, founder and CEO of Interweave, which offers diversity inclusion solutions to corporate and IT companies, says more and more companies are taking their investigations a lot more seriously.

"14 years ago, there were giggles and smiles when the subject of sexual harassment awareness was brought up among IT companies. They understood sexual harassment as something physical like molestation or rape. When you explain that 'long hand shakes', 'unwarranted looks', or a 'dirty joke' could also amount to sexual harassment, they begin to appreciate the nuances a lot more," she explains.

'Huge section of women wants it'

"Victims of sexual harassment felt that it was their fate and left the company or changed their teams. Many didn't come back to work. For those who want their problems to be solved very confidentially, 'mediation' is the way. There is a huge section of women who want it," explains Jayaprada H.V., co-founder, Metis.

"Mediation is not a part of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, also known as the POSH Act, and it does not come under internal committee formed to look into such matters within organisations. It is something the company can do as an additional forum for women, who do not want to go the formal way," she maintains.

As many as 15 lakh software professionals work in the Silicon City. The number of technocrats in the country is around 40 lakhs. The IT industry is dealing with sexual harassment cases presently under the POSH Act, predominantly by forming Internal Committees (IC) within the company. "Mediation is very new, people are still not aware. We introduced 'mediation' as an amazing service. It is still catching up in India and it does not mean financial settlement", Jayaprada elaborates.

As many as 15 lakh software professionals work in the Silicon City. The number of technocrats in the country is around 40 lakhs. The IT industry is dealing with harassment cases presently under the POSH Act.

IT industry in Silicon City is shedding the traditional method as far as handling of sexual harassment cases is concerned. It is adopting 'mediation' as option to deal with such cases. M.K. Ashoka looks at the trend and gets us an all-round perspective.

Mediation recognised by law

Rukmani Menon, director and mediator at CAMP Arbitration and Mediation Practice Private Limited, a mediation centre recognised by the ministry of law & justice, explains, "It is a collaborative mode of dispute resolution facilitated by a neutral third party. As compared to other modes of dispute resolution like litigation and arbitration, it is cost and time effective."

In the West, 'mediation' is a highly preferred mode of dispute resolution for all types of disputes, including commercial disputes. In India, most of the states have 'Court Annexed Mediation Centres' under the aegis of their respective high courts. These centers are successfully resolving disputes referred by courts.

According to Ms Menon, the POSH Act contemplates filing of a complaint before the internal committee by the victim. The handbook on POSH released by the ministry of women and child development refers to both informal and formal processes to deal with such cases.

"The informal process is at the first instance and is to be available



before a written complaint is filed. This is nothing but mediation. Often when the complaint is not grave, parties would prefer to opt for the informal process. The parties should be given a choice as to the process they wish to follow. If they opt for the informal process and it does not result in closure, the victim can opt for the formal process. In most western countries mediation is successfully used to resolve such cases and it falls under the category of 'workplace discrimination disputes,' she says.

Mediation for those not wanting written complaint

Presently, the POSH Act provides a formal mechanism to solve a sexual harassment complaint. The law does not permit working on cases which do not come in a written format. That means only if a woman writes and gives a written complaint, the cases would be handled. 'Mediation' gives women who do not want to give a written complaint the informal mechanism through which their issues could be solved.

"It is completely done by a third

Mediation, highly preferred in the West, is a collaborative mode of dispute resolution facilitated by a neutral third party. As compared to other modes of dispute resolution like arbitration, it is cost and time effective.

party. We don't allow anybody from the company to be a part of the mediation. We don't even entertain management members. The most important prerequisite for mediation is the approval of victim and alleged harasser. Management will be informed. Mediation happens between the third party, who is neutral party, victim and the alleged harasser," Jayaprada maintains.

Informal mechanism only if victim wishes

Nirmala says, "Our law provides for conciliation, but only a complainant can request for it. Mediation is not mentioned as an option in our law as of now."

It is argued that conciliation and mediation overlap a great deal but conciliation has more authority to it as the internal committee (equivalent to a Civil Court) is the facilitator in arriving at a solution that works for both parties.

Moreover, conciliation is typically used for cases where the complaint is generally in the nature of a misunderstanding or a cultural mismatch without malice.

Such cases could be resolved through an honest conversation and apology with the help of the internal committee. In the West, cases are often settled out of court with monetary compensation, but in India, it is always a non-monetary settlement in the conciliation stage.

"For cases which are of a serious nature, we always recommend a formal investigation," she opines.

Men to benefit from gender neutral policies

The industry is also inching towards recognising the agony of men charged with false allegations and bringing in a 'gender neutrality' policy.

IT companies in Silicon City have now started working towards safety of every employee, including men, in the organisation from sexual harassment. Today, a lot of companies are ensuring a gender neutral policies, since many false cases have been registered against men and they have also been sexually harassed. Almost all the big IT companies have a gender neutral policy today, including Wipro, and IBM.

Sidharth Ved, who works in a reputed IT company, agrees that companies are no longer giving women employees an upper hand in sexual harassment cases. Even in training session, the examples of a woman harassing a male employee is given to show the change in the mindset. He says that recently a manager was accused of sexual harassment after he put a woman employee on a performance test. Angered by this, she lodged a false complaint which was detected by the committee.

"While sexual harassment can happen to men or women, women are targeted more due to several socialised messages like 'Boys will be boys', 'you can't do anything', 'don't get into trouble', 'pretend you did not see/hear anything' etc. As a result, many hesitate to report. For men, too, reporting is not easy. Given the macho image that men are expected to project, not being able to handle the attention of a woman makes you less of a man. And of course, as we can imagine the LGBT+ community is particularly vulnerable," elaborates Nirmala Menon, CEO of Interweave firm.

Often, when awareness sessions are conducted, IT professionals say that they tend to focus on women. This, they say, lead to several male employees also seeking a similar policy for them.

"Why do you think men are not sexually harassed? We are also sexually harassed but we seldom complain," says a trainer for IT companies. All companies are now realising that everyone, irrespective of gender, should feel safe in a company which will help them become more productive.

A gender neutral sexual harassment policy could include harassment by one man against another man, and not just a woman employee harassing her male counterpart. It also covers sexual harassment by a woman employee against another woman.

"We are very passionate about creating a safe working environment. Today, we go beyond certain things in the law. The law has prescribed basic minimum needs to be set up. There are many companies whom we give what is required. Interestingly, there are a lot of companies now seeking if we could do something more," explains Jayaprada S.N., co-founder of Metis.

That's how gender neutral places are becoming a norm now. Almost every other workplace we are working with, want to make it gender neutral. We want to make workspaces secured for women but we want to extend it for men too. A lot of companies have been requesting us to do so, she adds.

Compliance of POSH Act difficult in IT companies, claims NCW chief

National Commission for Women chairperson Rekha Sharma recently expressed her reservations that internal committees to handle sexual harassment cases are not working up to the mark. She had also stated that as many as 30 per cent of sexual harassment cases are false. Talking to Deccan Chronicle, she elaborated on her observations.

Q. You have stated that 30 per cent of the cases of the sexual harassment are false. Why is this happening? How to tackle the trend?

A majority of instances of sexual harassment, whether at the workplace or elsewhere, happen in places or situations where evidence is difficult to come by. In a workplace, sexually coloured remarks and physical

advances can be made behind closed doors, where there are no witnesses, no recordings, no video footage, and nothing but the word of victim against the word of the perpetrator. In such cases, the complaint will not be termed 'false' or 'malicious', and the respondent will not be held guilty of sexual harassment.

For a complaint to be considered false or malicious, the IC needs to specifically show that the complainant intentionally and maliciously filed a complaint that she knew to be untrue. In this manner, the law does not seek to establish a balance between the possibility of misuse and the preservation of an individual's right to file complaints.

One of the issues that can tackle such situation perhaps is to establish different policies to redress gender

related complaints and complaints of sexual harassment at workplaces. By adopting this, women may not need to have always colour of sexual harassment in complaints to redress their gender related differences.

Q. You have observed that internal committees in IT companies are not working up to the mark — Can you elaborate on this?

Though there are a number of organisations conscious about the need to adopt appropriate policies and comply with the provisions of the POSH Act, the most pressing concern I have found is the lack of training on legal knowledge among the Internal Committee (IC) members for conducting of an inquiry.

Members of IC are usually found unable to conduct inquiries or appre-

ciate evidence and draft appropriate reports or recommendations. As is seen by the numbers, the rate of women participation in the Indian workforce is very low and only around 16 per cent of the senior level jobs in organisations are filled up by women. The absence of women in senior positions of companies has a direct effect on the implementation of the POSH Act.

Thus, the issue of gender disparity in the IT companies is one glaring hindrance, but it is not the only one. As far as the IT sector is concerned, most of these companies are mostly situated in foreign countries. Hence, it remains a challenge to approach the higher authorities for compliance of POSH Act, especially when the complaints are against the senior-most people.



DECCAN Chronicle

22 MARCH 2020



Mayank Tewari

Off the beaten track

Amid siege outside, love finds a way in

When you are quarantined with your parents, is it house arrest? I ask because for the last two weeks or so, having abandoned my wife in Mumbai, I have been with my parents in Ghaziabad. The reason is my father's respiratory illness, a condition that is hard to manage because of his bouts of depression and feelings of hopelessness. My mother and I agree that the isolation of the Intensive Care Unit was too much for his fragile (he's 74) and detective (he was a cop) nature to bear. Even though I call it house arrest, my time with my parents is the best I have ever had. In the last fifteen years this is the longest I have stayed with them and finally I have been able to accomplish the two basic human needs without having to fret or fight: to love and be loved in return.

My father wakes up every morning and complains about his lack of sleep. I chide him parentally. There's always a positive side to things and best to focus there, I tell him. My mother cracks a joke and we all sit down for tea.

Thursday night was particularly special. My parents and I watched the Prime Minister's address to the nation where he announced a citizen curfew for today and goaded simple-minded people like my parents that the curfew needs to be celebrated at five of clock with clapping and/or beating of a steel plate. For a moment I wondered if I was in China. But my father lauded Modi and reminded me of the merits of a democratically-elected leader who can actually lead.



Thursday night was particularly special. My parents and I watched the Prime Minister's address to the nation where he announced a citizen curfew for today.

Later that night I found it hard to sleep. I watched the final season of *Breaking Bad* for the umpteenth time and around two am began the process of tossing and turning during which my mind shuttled between memories of the past, hopes for the future, and the painfully frustrating wait for day-break. When I got back from my walk, I found my mother reading the papers. Suddenly she looked up and asked: did you see people on your walk? I hadn't given much thought to the empty roads but when she mentioned it, I said, yes, the roads were empty. Go to the balcony and look out. I did. All around me windows were shut, parks were empty. The eerie silence reminded me of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, a day-time horror movie I love.

What does this remind you of, I asked my mother. The blackouts during the wars, she said. It is a war, I said. For a moment, both of us were silent. The whole world is under arrest, my mother said suddenly. Will they find a cure? I am not sure, I said, but I read somewhere that Indian doctors have treated the disease with anti-retroviral drugs used to treat HIV. I had responded off handedly, without thinking too much. What happened to AIDS, she asked. You did so much work around it. I recall you would read tomes all night, meet doctors, and try to convince anyone who would listen, that something really fishy was going on in the name of AIDS.

I was surprised to hear her talk like that. I had wiped those days from my memory. In my early 20s, when the HIV/AIDS narrative was peaking globally, I invested time and energy researching all aspects of the HIV/AIDS research and was enamoured by the dissent view of some remarkable scientists including the Nobel Laureate Dr. Kary Mullis, who was famously discredited by the scientific community after he questioned the conventional hypothesis that HIV is the cause of AIDS.

Those were rough days. I would land up at AIDS conferences which suspiciously took place in five-star hotels and were attended by leading advertising gurus, celebrity speakers, and maybe one or two doctors. I asked uncomfortable questions. If condoms are essential for containing HIV infections then how was it possible that both the HIV infection rate and condom sales were declining? I witnessed strange incidents. UN officials would quote highly-inflated figures of AIDS deaths in India and when questioned persistently would claim that the figures were a printing error. The long and short of the story is that HIV/AIDS left me bitter and brittle. I drank a lot, smoked a lot of weed, and fought with my parents.

Around that time, I moved out of my parent's home and never returned for more than a week. My mother's memory of those days is tinged with pain and regret. Pain for what we did to each other and regret for what we could not. I teared up a bit.

Just then my father woke up. I hugged him like I do everyday now, and the three of us sat down for tea. You know what, my mother began, all said and done, you can't question the establishment anymore. This is also a kind of virus, she said. I looked at my old parents, and finally saw the validation I had been searching for all my life. And just like that we went on with our day.

Mayank Tewari is the writer of *Newton, Accidental Prime Minister, and Bard of Blood*

Subhani



Caste and class in the time of coronavirus



Pooja Satyogi

No More Mansplaining

We might be in the midst of an unprecedented crisis, and if European figures of coronavirus are anything to go by, there is much to be alarmed about. Not so long ago, Joshua Lederberg, Nobel laureate for medicine, coined the phrase, "emerging and re-emerging diseases", to contend that the world was now in a phase in which vulnerability to epidemics — AIDS, Ebola, cholera, plague, TB, dengue — was greater than it had ever been.

Historians of medicine like Professor Frank M. Snowden, Yale University, continue to argue that diseases manifest as well as thrive on the faultlines created by demography, poverty, environmental degradation, warfare, mass transport and societal oversight. New vulnerabilities, he argues, rather than being accidental, are a plausible result of the kind of social that we inhabit.

Medical and public health scholars agree that demography, sub-standard housing, poverty, inequality, inadequate access to health care, lack of education are all determinants of epidemic disease.

With respect to infectious diseases, scholars like Snowden argue, it is women who bear a disproportionate burden because of susceptibility to infections, care work, feminisation of poverty and unemployment. Precautionary measures like "social distancing" or even the symbolic "Janata curfew" have to

be understood by indexing them to the everyday socialities that we inhabit.

In the many discussions on news channels, following the Prime Minister's address to the nation, political analysts have remarked on the question of the daily wage labourer, who would, out of necessity, not be in a position to miss a day of work.

Is it possible to imagine distancing, social or merely physical, without putting in place adequate provisions for this person? The call to the "fellow citizen" to show self-restraint and resolve to fulfil duty in the service of the nation seems iniquitous given that the experience of citizenship is not democratic for all citizens.

This is precisely why an analyst's invocation of Shaheen Bagh on a news channel, following the PM's address, as likely to cause a community spread of the coronavirus is misplaced for it underlines the everyday risks that people are willing to take to make ends meet and to aspire for a better future for themselves. Contagion is but one risk among many.

I want to focus a bit more on a different kind of daily labourer, the female domestic help, whose work has not only been impacted by social distancing but her experience of being distanced for reasons of caste practices of social distancing.

In interviews conducted with domestic helps from a gated community in an Indian city, the stories that emerged are illustrative of how

notions of contagion and pollution intersect. What I offer here are two vignettes from ongoing research on labouring and surveillance in gated communities.

For my informant, Nafisa, the last week has seen interruption in her daily work. In three out of five houses she works in, she has been asked to come bi-weekly. Her employers fear that she might be contagious but their fears of contagion have not led them to take on the responsibility of doing domestic chores on their own.

To Nafisa's utter horror, when she went to do dishes at one of the homes she works at, not only had the dishes not been done for three days at a stretch, the kitchen stank and there were cockroaches in the dirty utensils. She said to me, "They think I will bring disease, I felt like they would make me sick. These people think that we are dirty, but I will tell you that most of these people are filthy."

At another house, where she went as a temporary worker to do the dishes, the dishes had again not been done for two-three days. Here, the lady of the house refused to pay her more than the stipulated Rs 50, which is the payment for one day's work. Nafisa was asked to sanitise the house in a backward movement as she exited the house.

For another informant, Khadija, the only work that two of her employers have made her do

The female domestic help's work has not only been impacted by social distancing but her experience of being distanced for reasons of caste practices of social distancing

this week is cleaning of the toilets and bathrooms. In the middle class understanding of contagion, a potentially contagious person — the domestic help — cannot contaminate the toilet, the hotbed of bacteria, and the toilet is not pestilential for an already noxious body.

When we do begin to study how social distancing worked in the context of coronavirus at a later stage, we would have to take on the burden of explicating that sociality (and proximity) is restricted not just to gyms, malls, cinema complexes, public transport, schools, universities, museums, restaurants, sporting and religious events, airports, trains, wedding ceremonies, parties, hugging, shaking hands and bars.

Epidemic control measures, individual or collective, can attach themselves to existing social hierarchies, making some bodies carry a disproportionate responsibility for the spread of contagion. In the context of coronavirus, social distancing cannot mitigate the effects sub-optimal healthcare facilities, housing and city planning which makes it a class privilege.

For the Indian middle class, meanwhile, the ethic and care of the self that social distancing requires does not include taking responsibility for their own household chores. Can this moment be taken advantage of to address and re-organise the gendered division of labour that exists in households and families?

Pooja Satyogi teaches at the School of Law, Governance and Citizenship, Ambedkar University, Delhi. Her areas of research include policing, security studies, feminism, cultural anthropology and South Asian politics.

LETTERS CORONAVIRUS

Sunday vegetable markets must be banned due to coronavirus. These markets also sell meat in the most unhygienic manner and out in the open. Also, it is extremely crowded on Sundays and that poses a severe threat of infection spreading in crowded areas. People are also trying to hoard vegetables and other items. In the best interest of the nation, I request people to avoid going to these markets or if possible the authorities should ban it till the time danger is less.

Swathi Reddy
Manikonda

The number of coronavirus cases is rising even after the closure of schools, colleges and places. It is creating panic among people, especially students and their parents. Maximum measures must be taken to contain the virus now or we may face the situation in which Italy and Iran find themselves in right now. Given the populous Indian cities, the virus can spread easily. Therefore, reopening of schools and colleges must be postponed till the situation is under control.

Thangella Shreya
Hyderabad

There seems to be a strong link between coronavirus and dietary habits of the Chinese people. With human intestines more suitable for vegetarian and fully cooked food, it is time the whole world unite to know the true cause of the virus. The Chinese government should take precautions after creating such a deadly virus that has derailed the economy world over.

Lalitha Sagarika
Hyderabad

When coronavirus cases subside, the economic crisis that followed will be blamed on the infection and many of us will happily lap it up.

C.S. Farouqui
Hyderabad

Thousands of people are losing their lives daily due to coronavirus. Though the number of affected cases is less when compared to other countries, we must be vigilant. When the government is spreading awareness, there are some who are spreading panic as if the end of the world has come. Government should take severe action against them. The crucial thing is to remember that overpowering this pandemic is not the responsibility of government alone. Everyone has a duty.

K. Manoj Kumar
Hyderabad

More Plan outlay for States demanded

NEW DELHI, March 21 STATE after State demanded increased Central assistance to finance larger plans when the National Development Council began a two-day session to finalise the Rs 24,855 crore revised

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle At the end of the day, Planning Commissioner Deputy Chairman D.R. Gadgil expressed the hope that the Draft Plan document would be finalised tomorrow.

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi presided over the five-hour meeting and Dr. Gadgil set the tone for the discussions.

Misappropriation of information — but is it bureaucratic or 'cultural'?

From Malaysia, not India

In an otherwise grim scenario created by the coronavirus pandemic, Delhi saw some comical moments. "Government sources", who were dishing out alerts and nuggets of information to the media, erred in passing along a nugget without checking on the "reference material". A "National Security Council, Prime Minister's Office" release was sent out, but as it turned out, it came from the PMO of either Malaysia or Singapore. "Sources" were quick to tell media houses to "withdraw" the "inaccurate" and "fictitious" press release. But there were many red faces in the corridors of power.

Scare to Motilal Vora

The coronavirus scare has hit everyone including parliamentarians. A thermal scanner has been placed at the entrance of Parliament house. When nonagenarian Motilal Vora was checked, the machine showed his temperature as 107 degrees! Panic set in even as the stooping Vora looked every bit hassled and worried.

Paramedics and security staff was in a tizzy too. However, some bright spark used a different scanner which showed the politician's temperature to be normal. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

Erudite Adhir

The Congress leader in the Lok Sabha, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, has an interesting educational qualification. As per his Lok Sabha website profile, Adhir is an "under-matric, honorary doctor of human-leather. Educated at Ishwar Chandra Vidyalaya and Sri Sharda Institute of Indian Management Research". The self-confessed social reformer is a prolific author too, having written five books. One title is in English, *Between Two Silences*, while the other four are in Bangla. Adhir credits himself with promoting Indian traditional wisdom in the hinterland along with science and scientific innovations.

Sonia's blessings

Having lost power in Madhya Pradesh, former chief minister Kamal Nath



By WAQYANAWIS

wants to shift base to Delhi. However, there are many, including Sonia Gandhi, who

want Nath to stay on. By her calculation Nath alone is capable of checking Digvijaya Singh who, in Congress circles, is seen as the primary reason for Jyotiraditya Scindia's exit. Nath's son Nakul is Lok Sabha MP from Chhindwara. Buzz in the MP Congress is that the son is not happy with the way the Scindia episode was handled and somehow he too holds Digvijaya responsible for the fall of Nath regime. There are sons galore in MP politics: Digvijaya's son, Jaivardhan, was a minister in the Nath cabinet. Shivraj Singh Chouhan's son, Kartikeya, a law graduate from Symbiosis Law School, Pune, was seen holding several public gatherings during the 2018 state Assembly polls.

Jumma vs virus

The Muslim community is sharply divided over collective prayers, particularly on Fridays, in the wake of the coronavirus scare. While most West Asian countries have suspended or curtailed "jumma prayer", in India it is leading to a heated debate. The Central government's attempts to persuade religious leaders have the

potential of becoming a red rag. A sharp Shia-Sunni divide is emerging in places like Lucknow where the Shia clergy are open to defer jumma community prayers for a couple of weeks, but their Sunni counterparts are digging their heels in. In Delhi, the Shaheen Bagh anti-CAA stir is showing no signs of closure even though many see some merit in abandoning it now.

Rudy's gripes

While the BJP seems to be doing extremely well across the length and breadth of the country, some party leaders, particularly former Union ministers, are craving a role that is nowhere in sight. Rajiv Pratap Rudy and Vijay Goel have been ministers in the Atal Behari Vajpayee and Narendra Modi eras, but are now sitting it out. They can be often heard grumbling how their suggestions and recommendations relating to civil aviation, etc, are going unheeded.

The writer is a keen observer of the goings-on in backrooms of power

Shaheen Bagh should see the big picture



Pavan K. Varma
Chanakya's View

Sometimes, when a global crisis occurs, as we are now seeing with the Corona pandemic, it should compel people to behave differently. This is because to continue with past practice, as though nothing needs to change, is suicidal. PM Narendra Modi, in an address to the nation, has reiterated the serious nature of the problem, and outlined what needs to be done by ordinary people in the joint effort to contain and defeat the virus. A key aspect of this endeavor is what is now called "social distancing". In practice this means that large meetings — or even a few dozen people — should not take place, period.

While the government is working to enforce this — schools, colleges, malls, cinema halls, even offices partial-

It is good that Muslim clerics have appealed to community members to spend the Shab-e-Meraj, the night when Prophet Muhammad is believed to have ascended to the heavens, in prayers at home and not in mosques. That night falls today

refusal to cancel the Awadha Ram Naumi mela. I am relieved, however, that he has done so now. If a diehard Hindutva votary like Adityanath can cancel a festival so popular among Hindus, keeping in mind the larger goal of containing the coronavirus, why can't the protesters at Shaheen Bagh, most of whom — but not all — are venerable Muslim ladies, call of their protest for the moment, and recongregate, if necessary, when the medical crisis is behind us?

Equally, why can't Muslim clerics instruct their religious brethren to temporarily forsake the gathering in mosques on Fridays, and offer *namaz* at their own homes? After all, major Hindu temples — like those at Tirupati, Siddhivinayak and

Puri — have closed their doors, even when thousands of devotees used to visit them every day. I understand that religious faith and practice are very important to believers, but sometimes there are occasions when larger national — and even international — imperatives require enlightened decisions for the larger public good, including that of the believers themselves. The flock may not wish to change established religious practice, but it is precisely at this time that the leaders of the religious community must come forward and persuade it to take the right decision given the circumstances prevailing.

The anti-CAA-NRC protesters at Shaheen Bagh have the sacrosanct right to protest. This is guaranteed by the Constitution, and by the fundamental tenets of a vibrant democracy. The attempt to demonise them — as some leaders of the BJP and the ultra-right — are consistently attempting to do, is wrong. The grit and determination of the elderly ladies at the protest site is also worthy of both respect and admiration. In voicing their opinion against the CAA-NRC they are in no way being anti-national, or seditious. The

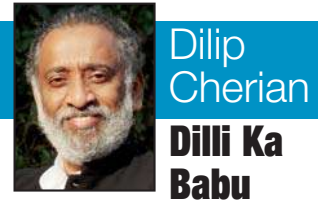
protestors have braved freezing winter nights and stuck to their convictions. However, the fight against the corona virus, where large congregations of people, especially in close proximity, poses a serious threat, and can advance community spread of the disease, requires the protesters to heed the call of greater public interest. CM Arvind Kejriwal has said that gatherings of more than 50 people should not be held. This instruction needs to be followed. The protesters at Jamia have done so. Those at Shaheen Bagh need to follow suit.

We live in highly polarised times, which the ruling dispensation has verifiably contributed in creating. But some matters should not be automatically seen from the secularism versus anti-secularism debate. Those who believe in secularism as an article of faith, must also have the courage to say to those very minorities for whose interests and protection they are fully committed, that they must act responsibly, in the interests of a larger goal that is pivotal for humanity as a whole. As President Kovind has rightly tweeted: "The coronavirus strikes beyond man-made dis-

tinctions of religion, race and region. We suddenly realise that in the face of a grave mortal threat like the present one, we have but one identity — we are human beings."

It is good that Muslim clerics have appealed to community members to spend the Shab-e-Meraj, the night when Prophet Muhammad is believed to have ascended to the heavens, in prayers at home and not in mosques. That night falls today, on Sunday. Some religious leaders of the Christian community too have issued statements discouraging the faithful from church congregations on Sunday. It is time now for Shaheen Bagh to be put on hold, especially since two of its lead organisers have been tested positive for the virus. Equally, Friday congregations at mosques should be forthwith suspended, and Muslim religious leaders should play the lead in enforcing this. Religion teaches us to serve god by serving humanity. This basic lesson needs to be internalised by all.

The writer, an author and former diplomat, is a member of the JD(U). The views expressed are personal.



Dilip Cheria
Dilli Ka Babu

AUDIO 'DISTURBANCE'?

The controversial audio clip in which Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is seen reprimanding State Bank of India Chairman Rajnish Kumar and other top bank officials will now be investigated. Sources say that the bank is considering filing an FIR over the leaked audio clip. The leak, the bank officials feel, was "mischievous" and an "unauthorized recording" and the incident should be properly investigated.

While the bank employees' association criticized the FM's statement, the ministry has sprung to her defence. Officials at the Finance Ministry said that the minister was justified in expressing legitimate concerns over the functioning of state and local SBI officials who did not resolve the issues faced by Assam's tea garden workers. The audio clip was reportedly made during Sitharaman's interaction with SBI officials at the Guwahati Financial Inclusion Conclave last month.

However, the clip appeared on social media almost a month later, leading many to suspect that the aim was to create a controversy. Any guesses why the Bank babus are triggering this now?

TRANSFER CONFUSION

The story behind Karnataka IPS officer Isha Pant's two transfers within four days, which drew the nation's attention, is likely a tale of a power struggle within the Bengaluru City Police.

Sources say that the confusion was triggered by the state government when it issued multiple transfer orders of IPS officers, including Isha Pant, who was DCP, South-East zone. Initially, she was asked to join the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) as the Superintendent of Police (SP), but three days later, another order was issued by the BJP-ruled state government, whereby the earlier order was revoked, and she was reinstated in her earlier post.

However, hours later, in a fresh order, Pant was posted as DCP, Command Centre, located at the City Police Commissioner's office. She replaced Jinendra Khanagavi, who is now posted at the Internal Security Division as an SP. She was replaced by 2015 batch IPS officer Srinath Mahadev Joshi, who will now helm affairs at the Bengaluru South-East division. His previous role was as the Superintendent of Police in Chitradurga.

According to sources, it is widely believed that Pant's second transfer was allegedly initiated at a BJP minister's insistence.

BOOST FOR APPRAISAL SYSTEM

The 360-degree evaluation system initiated by the Modi sarkar as a necessary administrative reform has got a boost after the Delhi High Court refused to strike it down after a senior bureaucrat had filed a petition seeking its review.

The appraisal system was introduced in 2015 and made vetting of senior bureaucrats much more stringent, however, a section of babus had criticized it for being opaque and non-transparent, unlike the annual confidential reports (ACRs) system that it replaced.

According to sources, the senior babu who challenged the appraisal system, in his review petition, had mentioned that he was overlooked for empanelment thrice and had sought a copy of his appraisal report.

The 360-degree appraisal system, also known as Multi-Source Feedback Guidelines (MSF), has now got the back of the High Court. The court has accepted the government's position that "MSF guidelines were not meant to be placed in the public domain. They were to serve as internal guidelines for the Committee of Secretaries/Empanelment Committee when it decided to empanel additional secretaries".

Love them, hate them ignore them at national peril, is the babu guarantee and Dilip's belief. Share significant babu escapades dilipcherian@hotmail.com

Corona wave has beaten the 'Modi wave'



Nilofar Suhrawardy

Something is missing somewhere. Coronavirus was very much in the air when President Donald Trump visited India. Yet he and Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not maintain distance. What else can be said about more than one hug displayed by them? At present, this symbolic gesture is known as hug diplomacy. But thanks to coronavirus, it wouldn't be surprising if it loses its cordiality and is more strongly associated with cold diplomacy. Whether or not this happens, Modi would have to restrain himself from indulging in this diplomatic practice of his, going overboard in hugging heads of other countries. Otherwise, it would be fairly comical if he moves forward with open arms and the other leader moves backwards, ducks him or does something else to avoid his hug.

Ironically, till date, he has primarily reserved his hug diplomacy for foreign leaders. And that too with a wide ear-to-ear smile. In contrast, the same hug is hardly given to leaders at home, including the closest of his political associates. Even the smile is not visible as often for them as it is when he shares the stage with leaders of other countries.

At present, however, given the dynamism with which coronavirus has crossed practically all borders and barriers, his Indian colleagues are perhaps grateful for not being the targets of his hugs. It matters little to them whether or not he smiles at them. They probably are extremely grateful for his choosing to always maintain a certain distance from them. Of course, this distance may have earlier been viewed primarily as a sign of his political arrogance. But now, they probably view it as a useful, corona-safe distance.

Seriously, corona-invasion is gradually adding a new meaning to ways of life, politicking and also international relations. Almost everything but the corona-panic, coverage accorded to it by media as well as other means of communication, has suddenly slowed down. Staying at home also means spending more time glued to the small screen, whether it is the television, laptop or mobile phone. The alacrity with which messages are being exchanged regarding precautions, dangers, myths and so forth about this virus beats importance given to any other issue.

It beats even the peak reached by the Modi wave. Yes, this was primarily confined to India. Comparatively, the corona wave has been in headlines across the world for more than several weeks now. Also, a new importance has certainly been gained of how helpless human beings can suddenly be, when hit by what they cannot combat. Or rather, they can, but only by being extra cautious about hygiene, maintaining a distance from each other and remaining in isolation till this corona danger passes away.

On the one hand, 'medical' advice being circulated is about maintaining a distance from corona-positive cases. On the other, the negative approach being displayed towards corona patients cannot be ignored. While abroad, most patients have not kept their names under wraps; such is not the case in India. The old stereotyped mentality of treating corona patients as almost untouchables has surfaced here.

There is a difference in keeping a distance from them and in attaching a stigma to their being afflicted by this virus. But, sadly, this seems to be practiced here. At least, this is suggested by the 'negative' approach being displayed towards whoever may be a corona patient. One such person, who has been cured, was interviewed on television, with his face hidden. Clearly, this was suggestive of his not being willing to reveal his identity to others. This is not the question of simply his privacy but the fear of the 'stigma'.

It may be recalled, decades ago, a similar stigma was associated with tuberculosis

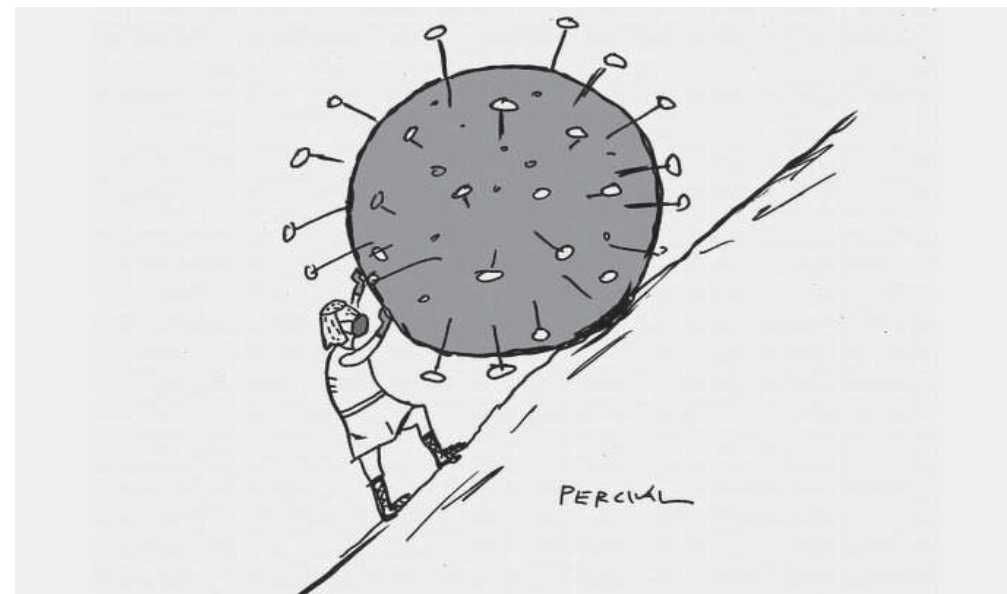
patients. Well, one cannot do anything about ailments which are communicable. At the same time, no patient invites any disease by his/her choice. Why attach a "stigma" to corona patients? Why view them only through a negative perspective as if they are totally responsible for the spread of this virus? Of course, there are a few odd cases of corona patients having cared little for passing on the same virus to others. Think of it from another angle. India has the second largest population in the world. Do you think it is possible to check each and every person, whether he/she is corona-positive/negative? Not at all.

In rural areas, while 'news' about a fever and/or virus has spread, awareness about it being communicable and maintaining a distance has not yet had much impact. Also, how much distance can the poor living in one-room houses really maintain from each other? They cannot probably afford masks and sanitisers for all members of the family.

It would perhaps make sense if some attention was paid to how the poor cope with this virus if it struck them. At present, they seem fairly safe and also confident that they won't be infected. When questioned on his concern about this virus, a local electrician replied, "We don't have anybody coming from abroad. It is only the rich and those returning from other countries who are being affected." Should he be agreed with or not?

The same question can be posed for March 22, declared as 'janata curfew'. The corona wave is certainly in the air but is not being viewed through the same lens by all. Interestingly, for all his concern about cleanliness (Swachh Bharat Abhiyan), Modi has not yet tagged coronavirus with it. Why?

The writer is a journalist with specialisation in communication studies and nuclear diplomacy. She is also the author of several books.



Remember 1918? Covid-19 in India a fait accompli



Aakar Patel

The population of India in the first census of 1872 was 206,162,360. Meaning 20.61 crores on the subcontinent, including what is today Bangladesh and Pakistan. In 1881, this rose by 23 per cent to 25.38 crores. Some of this was due to an increase in population and some due to the increase in territory controlled by the British, which kept expanding over the years. In 1911, the population grew by seven per cent over the decade to 31 crores. However, in 1921, after 10 years it remained at 31 crores.

Why did the population not grow over an entire decade? The answer is an H1N1 virus which is called the Spanish influenza. This was an epidemic like the coronavirus and it killed off the entire population growth of a decade in India. Around 1.5 crore people and most likely more than that were killed by it.

The flu came to India from Europe, where it broke out in military hospitals towards the end of the First World War. We don't know how it originated but it is possible that it was transferred from birds or animals being slaughtered for the armies' messes. Indian regiments which fought for the British empire returned to Bombay

after Germany surrendered in 1918 and the fighting ended. They brought the virus with them, just as those coming from abroad have brought the coronavirus.

Many nations had fought the war including the United States and so the returning soldiers took the disease around the world. It is thought that 25 per cent of the world's population was infected and probably killed around 10 per cent of those infected.

These are very high rates of both transmission and of fatality and that is what we are faced with in the coronavirus. The problem with a new virus is that it has no cure. There is no medicine that can be taken and it has the ability to spread very rapidly as we are seeing in India today. Person A is infected and may or may not show symptoms, he passes them on to the people he has been near, and they pass the virus on to the people they come in contact with. And all this happens in the same day. There is no decrease in the lethality of the virus as it passes from one person to another and the virus does not dilute.

There are ways in which the chain of the spreading can be halted and that is to end contact between all people as far as possible. This ensures that those who are infected have the time for the disease to pass through their system. Some survive and others will not. But the isolation ensures that even those who are infected keep the disease to themselves. The point of isolation is not the benefit of the patient but the others around him.

China halted the spread of coronavirus through lockdowns of entire cities. People were banned from trav-

elling outside their homes. The government ensured that food was supplied to each home by trained people. In Europe, it is not possible for democratic states to order or enforce absolute shutdowns like China. This is the reason that the spread of the virus in Italy and now Spain is faster and the death rate higher than in China. Of course Europeans have been practising social distancing and self quarantine as we have seen in the videos, but this is not as effective as a total lockdown.

On Friday, in Italy (which has a population of less than Gujarat) 627 people died and another 6,000 cases of coronavirus infection were recorded. Just in one day. And unless the chain is broken, or the virus itself mutates into something less infectious and less lethal, the infection spreads exponentially. We are familiar with exponential growth through the story of the man who asks the king to give him one grain of rice for the first square of the chessboard, then double it with each square. That sequence produces 1,2,4,8,16,32,64,128,256,512,1024 and 2048 by just the 12th square. Now assume that these are people and the 1 represents the first infected person entering the country. By the time you reach the 64th square, everybody has been infected except a few. This is what will happen with coronavirus.

The Prime Minister said we should break the chain of transmission for a few hours on one day, Sunday. This is not a solution. The fact is that India has no defence against coronavirus. One third of all Indians live in one room. Another one third lives in two rooms. They cannot self quarantine or

isolate and if infected they will pass it on to others. It is impossible for India to control an epidemic. We do not have the state capacity of China to deliver food by trained and protected individuals to each home and order everyone to stay at home. That will not happen in India.

We also do not have the healthcare to save those who will be infected and can be saved medically because we do not have the capacity there either. India spends four times on defence what it does on health. Last year, the government gave only Rs 3,200 crores to Ayushman Bharat (what is called Modicare). We spent Rs 59,000 crores only on 36 Rafale fighters. India has 70,000 hospital beds and only a few ventilators.

Those infected who might be able to be saved in another country will die in India. This is a fact and we will learn of this very soon as we confront a disease that will kill not in numbers alone but a fraction of the population. The world will notice that India cannot spread the contagion and there will be consequences of that which we shall soon see and they will not be good for us.

The good thing about India, which perhaps no other country has, is our fatalism. We are so accustomed to extreme deprivation, misery and loss that there will be no revolution, no social upheaval as hundreds of thousands of people will die. Those of us that survive this plague will carry on just as the survivors of the Spanish influenza did a century ago.

Aakar Patel is a writer and columnist

Mumbai cop's memoir exonerates him



M.R. Venkatesh
review

September 30, 2015. That was when Rakesh Maria's most eventful term as Mumbai Commissioner of Police was to end. With his son Kunal studying in the US around that time finding "his soulmate" in Deeksha, a Mumbai girl, Maria and his wife were doubly happy that he could now at least have some time for the family, get down to organising his son's wedding after that date.

Maria confides he even wrote as early as August 1 that year to both the home secretary and the principal secretary to the chief minister that on completion of his term as commissioner, he preferred a "quieter non-executive posting". But bang came a case under the Arms Act registered at the Khar police station on August 21, 2015. It was about a young woman, Sheena Bora, allegedly killed by her own mother. It became an instantly sensational one, more so as the mother, Indrani, had married an enterprising media baron, Peter Mukerjee.

While his investigation team worked very hard on this to unravel the horror, Maria writes that with less than five weeks left for his term as Commissioner, he wanted to ensure there were no slip-ups. Maria himself interrogated Indrani, "in the presence of all officers" concerned and later Peter Mukerjee too; but trouble began when the media started reporting that Maria "knew" the Mukerjee couple, implying some sluggishness in the probe. He himself writes that he did not.

It was like instant culling for a decorated police officer who stood tall in handling some of the biggest serial blast cases the country has seen after Independence. Maria was shunted out as DG Home Guards, though officially on promotion. It was the "perfect

At 614 pages, this is a monumental memoir from Rakesh Maria who muses that in the age of the Internet, 'all versions [of the truth] will coexist in different forms and it will be for the reader to sift facts and separate the grain from the chaff'

stepping stone to retirement" but what pained him most was the "unceremonious exit" from the Commissioner of Police office.

The Maharashtra government's communication that he would still be "heading the Sheena Bora murder case" did not stop media speculations. And another twist came when the government shortly later decided to transfer the case probe to CBI. All this happened when Maria's team was in the process of filing the charge-sheet.

When bouquets are near, brickbats are not far away, more so if one had been placed in some of the key posts in the police force like Rakesh Maria. Was he not the same "controversial commissioner" who walked the streets to supervise the security arrangements for Yakub Memon's funeral, he rhetorically asks the reader: It is to drive home that in the age of the Internet, "all versions will coexist in different forms and it will be for the reader to sift facts and separate the grain from the chaff".

At 614 pages, *Let Me Say It Now* is a monumental memoir from the former Mumbai top cop, Rakesh Maria.

Maria handled some of the most challenging investigations, including the 1993 serial blasts and the November 26, 2008, terror attacks

on Mumbai. Yet, by the end of January 2017, when he retired as DG Home Guards, his cup of woes was full. Written in the lucid style typical of a "Bandra boy", his memoir aims to set the record straight, while reminiscing about his policing days, especially during communally charged settings. It shows how actors and those acted upon suffer, often disproportionately to their karma.

Maria's father was born and brought up in Amritsar and had attended the Hindu College in Lahore. His father was passionate about music and had come to Bombay to work in the good old Hindi film industry in the early 1950s. Bombay being a "mini-India" resulted in a cosmopolitan upbringing for Maria.

A good chunk of Maria's memoir is devoted to the 1993 serial blasts, how he and his team, armed with perseverance and luck, cracked just in time Tiger Memon's involvement in the blasts, followed by his "discovery of Sanjay Dutt's involvement". Even the "Bombay underworld got divided on religious lines" after the Babri Masjid demolition; till then it was big and large "secular"; Maria offers. "The serial blasts completed the divide," observes Maria. Maria also traces the origins and evolution of the Indian Mujahideen.

However, the 26/11 terror attacks on Mumbai were of a totally different order. The chapter, "It Was War", is graphic and riveting. The account also highlights problems associated with the handling of the post-blast situations, the complexities of command and control, deploying limited manpower to different locales at the quickest possible time, as the terrorists by then had chosen their targets including the CST railway terminus and iconic Taj Mahal Palace Hotel, and also attending to the

injured among others. Mind-boggling multi-tasking, in a word! Maria was then Joint Commissioner of Police (Crime) and in command at the control room.

Maria, who personally interrogated Ajmal Kasab, one of the jihadi youth captured live to tell the story, writes: "Kasab had said that they were 10 in all. But we could not take his word for final...The conspiracy against India had to be unraveled completely, and evidence gathered meticulously...The onus was yet again on the Mumbai police." It was after three days he stepped out of the control room on November 29, to attend the funeral of Hemant Karkare and he lent a shoulder to his bier.

The heartburns and factionalism within the police force - sample the allegations by the late ACP Kamte's wife accusing Maria of "inept handling" of the control room - has prompted him to marshal all the facts to refute those charges. In fact, the Maharashtra government-constituted Pradhan Committee report, which many thought was "biased against Gafur (then Mumbai Police Commissioner)", "however created a template for a future police structure to avert, handle and tackle terror attacks in the Urbs prima". Coming from two professionals with a deep understanding of police working, "the Report is an important document," writes Maria.

Maria's chance snoops into cricket spot fixing, the controversy kicked up by former IPL boss Lalit Modi's brief meeting with him in London, which he has explained here to refute misconceptions, how a team man like him became victim of a media sting operation and his reflections on the media's role all add zest to his breath-taking story.

'No feeling is final' in this string of 12 brilliant war stories



Devi Kar
review

Seeking the truth is not easy in any circumstances — least of all in the midst of war and chaos. Pick up this book of stories based on the experiences of a European war correspondent in the Middle-East, only if you have a strong

mental constitution. There is an abundance of blood and gore, of saliva and alcohol, of sex and drugs, of gunshots and explosions and easy killings. The images are such that a sensitive reader will be driven to tears or filled with nausea and bile — a rocket-struck school with bent jungle gyms, roasted cars, abandoned toys, a dead pet dog and blood everywhere. A Jewish reporter cannot bear to hear Jewish songs or even the Jewish national anthem and he is called a "self-hating Jew" as is the Hungarian reporter with him. In another story the journalist is irritated by Christmas because he sees no signs of Christ having saved the world.

The Hungarian photo-journalist is a master story teller. He has a fortune on his head as has other foreign journalists. He is no less than a frontier soldier and is in close proximity with death, round the clock. Even inside a popular restaurant where people are dining and chatting, violence hangs heavy in the air. Even when he is driving on a busy city road, he knows that death is not very far away. The thick, black, greasy smoke curling upward in the distance signals destruction and the erasure of life. It is horrific to imagine whole Bedouin villages being obliterated in mudslides but even more horrifying is the thought of "five-hundred-dollar stone age Palestinian rockets being knocked out by thirty thousand-dollar Israeli missiles".

Contrasts are sharply drawn, creating a sinister environment. While battle is raging without, in the Ghaza strip, the Waldorf Astoria in Jerusalem with its Art Nouveau clocks, plasma television sets and bath-tubs for two, seem quite obscene luxuries. One minute a group of reporters are mourning the loss of an old buddy and the next they are eyeing his vacant position, his expensive camera and even his grief-stricken girlfriend. An expensive electronic toy is pulled out of a dead soldier's backpack to be given to a child who is waiting for his soldier-dad to return home with a Robodog which is the current craze among children. Post-death opportunities are many.

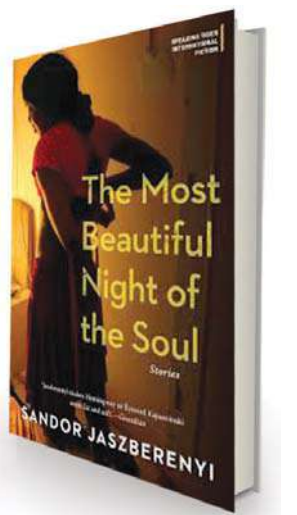
Diversity is to be found in plenty. There are atheist Marxists, intensely religious Sunnis, Shiites and Yazdis who worshipped the peacock. There are cheap Chinese rifles and American ones that had been left behind and there are Russian-made vests. But "in the Kingdom of God there is no room for infidels". The Isis is hated by many and the Peshmerga fiercely defend their part of Kurdistan. When you read the story of the trial of an Isis teenager, your emotions will experience a roller-coaster ride and your heart won't stop beating even after you reach the unexpected ending. You realise the truth of the words that "no feeling is final".

In these stories you come face to face with post-traumatic disorders: disorientation, hallucination and relentless insomnia. Drugs help up to a point but they cause damage too. The prostitutes who help to forget and de-stress, are portrayed with both skill and tenderness. Their raw physicality is graphically and pleasingly described and then suddenly and shockingly the practice of female genital mutilation is brought home to the reader.

Death is all-pervasive in these stories. The heaps of bodies and the mass graves remind the reader of the harsh truth that 'a single death is a tragedy but a million deaths are a statistic'. It is fitting that in the last poignant story a little boy tries his best to chase death away. The question that haunts the reader throughout, is that why a man should bear so much suffering just to be able to take some pictures.

Each one of these twelve stories manages to generate an astonishing range of feelings in the reader and this is probably why they make such compelling reading.

The writer is a veteran school educator based in Kolkata



THE MOST BEAUTIFUL NIGHT OF THE SOUL

by Sandor Jazberenyi
Speaking Tiger, ₹450

There is an abundance of blood and gore, of saliva and alcohol, of sex and drugs, of gunshots and explosions and easy killings. The images are such that a sensitive reader will be driven to tears...

'My award will help regional writing'

"Everything in this story is real and fictional," reads the preface in acclaimed Malayalam author

Benyamin's new novel in translation, *Al Arabian Novel Factory* (Juggernaut, translator Shahnaz Habib). The literary thriller, featuring a "secret" and "dangerous" novel within a novel, is set in the aftermath of the Arab Spring in an unnamed middle Eastern city. It is the companion novel to *Jasmine Days*, which won the inaugural JCB Prize in 2018. Though originally released in Malayalam in 2014, it speaks uncannily to present times in India, with its themes of state repression and public fear. But **BENYAMIN** cuts through its heaviness with a charming lightness and dazzling quirkiness. At the Kerala Literature Festival in January, Benyamin spoke candidly to **NEHA BHATT** about how he likes to change his style with every book, why it was important for him to write them as twin novels, and how translations have changed the fortunes of his novels and craft.

Tell us a little about what led to *Al Arabian Novel Factory* and *Jasmine Days*? Why did you write them as twin novels? Both of them are all about the Arab revolution. I was in the Gulf for 20 years and I met many Arab people. Initially I thought they were all living there happily. But after about 10 years of knowing my friends, they revealed to me that they do have democratic



ambitions. All of a sudden, the Jasmine revolution started in Tunisia, Egypt, and in Bahrain too, where I lived. That's when I realised how frustrated they were, with thousands of people demonstrating on the streets. They broke the code and started talking against the government. Unfortunately, the protests were suppressed. That's when I thought I should write about it. That was the idea behind both the books.

It was planned as a single novel. But when I collected the material from many areas I knew that I could not include it all in a single novel. Then I separated the material: the incidents and experiences from the period of the revolution went into *Jasmine Days*, and the period after the revolution into *Al Arabian Novel Factory*. In Malayalam, it was published as twin novels and released together, but in English, it was released one after the other. You can read either novel first and then the other, there is a connection between the two.

So you moved back to Kerala and then wrote the novels here. You were already known



for writing the bestselling *Goat Days*. What did *Jasmine Days* winning a major award in translation change for you? After winning the JCB award I got so many readers from outside India, from Europe and Latin America especially. Earlier, it was mainly the critics who told you what to read but these days readers tend to also look for books that have won an award. This is perhaps the first time that a regional book won a major award in India. The award has helped the translation process very much. Now publishers are looking for new books not only from Malayalam but other regional languages. It will help regional writing and I'm happy about that.

You're mischievous with your writing and plotting. Talk to us about how you developed your style? It's my duty to keep readers with

me till the end of the book, so I use many techniques to keep them engaged. It takes 3-4 years to get clarity on the novel, to decide from which character's perspective I will tell the story. My style develops along with the novel, and every book must be different from the precious one.

Reading *Al Arabian Novel Factory* is a bit surreal, given how much of it seems applicable to the situation in India today. What do you make of it? When I wrote it, I never thought those things will happen in India. I chose to come back here because I thought it is the most freedom giving country. But all of a sudden everything changed, there is fear everywhere and no one is willing to speak openly. But I am thinking positively. Our youth is bold and strong, the kids are on the streets, and I am with them.

What kind of working relationship do you share with your translators? I do not interfere much because it is an entirely different process of transforming the text from one culture to another. A translation into English must address a world reader and elaborate on things that a Malayalam reader already has knowledge about. In the final stage, when they share it with me, I may make some corrections. If they have any doubts, I clear them. Otherwise I give all the freedom to them. I was so happy with Shahnaz Habib, who is in New York and knows what a global

reader is. The two books she translated have done very well.

Has the success of your translated novels changed the way you write in Malayalam? Do readers respond to your books differently, depending on the language they read them in? Nowadays I think I should think about readers in other languages as well. If I use a word or an idiom in Malayalam, I do think about how it will translate or how it will be communicated to a world reader. It does affect my writing now. Readers in Malayalam connect with me as the writer of *Goat Days* and compare the new novels to it. English readers read more openly. The twin novels have been better received in English, because they came out at the proper time. In 2014, when they were released in Malayalam, readers thought the events in the books were happening somewhere else and were not related to their lives. But now, the novels are reading well, very differently from when it was first released.

What are you working on at the moment? Does the current socio-political moment in India inspire you to write? The current situation might come into our books after 10 years. It will lie in our mind for some time. Nowadays I am trying to write about the travels of Malayalis. It is a fictionalised account of the community and their travels around the world, their migration, their suffering.



Hachette has dropped plans to publish a memoir by **Woody Allen**, the Oscar-winning film director who has been accused of sexually abusing Dylan Farrow, his adoptive daughter. The memoir was called, *Apropos of Nothing*. It was scheduled to be published in April. The decision to kill Allen's book deal came on the heels of a staff walkout at Hachette's New York office. Critics are divided on the wisdom of the move as an editor is reported to have opined, "It was really good." Allen, 84, denies the accusations by Farrow, which were the subject of two investigations. He was never charged.

Horrors of boarding school return to haunt a group of middle-aged friends



John Self
review

James Scudamore is now a force in the English novel," says Hilary Mantel on the cover of *English Monsters*, which, given that it's his fourth book, has the whiff of a backhanded compliment ("Have you lost weight?"). But despite its less exotic setting than his earlier novels, there is a reach and scope here that makes me think Mantel might be right.

This is an English public school story (come back!) that gives us four decades in the life of Max Denyer. Max's jet-setting parents leave him in the care of the sort of sparky grandfather of whom Roald

This is an English public school story (come back!) that gives us four decades in the life of Max Denyer. Max's jet-setting parents leave him in the care of the sort of sparky grandfather of whom Roald Dahl would approve before sending him to an unnamed public school...

Dahl would approve (gadgets, projects, home-made cider vinegar: "Electric jolt. Scalp ripple. Stomach fire") before sending him to an unnamed public

school to "baste me with opportunities and watch me rise".

This institution — more barracks than school, more prison than barracks — has the usual spread of penis pranks and bastard masters, and the writing in this part is puckish, full of controlled colour and — being set in 1987 — plenty of madeleines for the middle-aged: ZX Spectrums, ghetto blasters, the ubiquity of Dire Straits.

The rest of the book follows Max and his friends into the next three decades, with revelations of what happened at school, including the usual surprises. These sections are slow, but this aids plausibility, as the

characters are unpeeled and the damage inflicted on them starts to bite. Max, it seems, is less damaged than those who attracted a certain teacher's attention; and then it turns out that perhaps he isn't.

English Monsters shares interests with Scudamore's previous novel *Wrecking* — institutions, mental health — and one of its weak links too: a narrative sometimes too fragmented to build the drive that the epic scale demands. It flicks back and forward and makes a case for viewing life as a long game, even if the phrasing ("The past was where it was at") isn't quite Faulknerian.

The title is from Henry V, when the king confronts his traitorous henchmen ("See you, my princes and my noble peers, / These English monsters"), so loyalty is a theme — why do we feel attached to those who hurt us? — and the pages bubble with quiet rage about an elite education system that wrecks even those it elevates. Victory and surrender, Max reminds us, are not moments in time but processes, and I finished *English Monsters* with the sense that Scudamore is here for the long haul.

By arrangement with the Spectator



ENGLISH MONSTERS
by James Scudamore
Penguin, £16.99



SHORT TAKES

ZIMBABWE ANNOUNCES 1ST VIRUS CASE

Johannesburg, March 21: Zimbabwe has confirmed its first case of the coronavirus as the pandemic reaches a health system that has nearly collapsed amid an economic crisis.

The southern African nation's health minister, Obadiah Moyo, said the infected man lives in Victoria Falls, one of the most visited tourist destinations in Africa. Moyo said the 38-year-old had travelled to Britain on March 7, returning home via neighbouring South Africa on March 15.

He put himself in self-quarantine upon arrival and later called his doctor after realising "he was not feeling too well," the minister said. Zimbabwe days ago declared a national disaster, and some of its citizens have openly dreaded the pandemic's arrival.

Already public hospitals lack basic items such as gloves. Relatives of patients are expected in some cases to even provide buckets of water. Doctors at public hospitals recently went on strike for months, saying their pay of roughly \$100 a month was not enough to get by. Zimbabwe's government has said it is "well prepared" to deal with COVID-19 cases. — AP

GREECE GETS 500,000 MASKS FROM CHINA

Athens, March 21: A plane from China carrying 500,000 masks to help Greece combat the coronavirus outbreak landed at Athens International Airport on Saturday.

Health Minister Vassilis Kikiliias was among those at the airport to receive the load which was donated by the Chinese public electricity company State Grid and Greek electricity supplier Admie, in which the Chinese firm holds a 25 percent stake.

The load consisted mainly of FFP2 masks which will be distributed principally to hospitals, airport officials said.

Beijing and Athens have been building important commercial relationships for over a decade, especially after the sale of most of the terminals in the port of Piraeus (near Athens) to the Chinese shipping giant Cosco.

With its health system suffering from chronic problems and its economy still creaking after a long-running debt crisis, Greece is facing a shortage of medical equipment, especially masks.

Covid-19 has killed ten people in the country in the past nine days while 495 cases have been recorded, with screening tests being mainly carried out on those suspected of carrying the virus.

After the first death, on March 12, the government adopted strict measures to limit unnecessary movement, ranging from the closure of educational establishments, parks and entertainment facilities to the banning of gatherings of more than 10 people. — AFP

AFRICAN PREZ DEFY OWN TRAVEL BANS

Ouagadougou, March 21: Africa's cases of the coronavirus rose above 1,000 on Saturday while two heads of state appeared to defy their own travel restrictions to attend another president's inauguration.

Angola announced its first cases, meaning at least 40 of Africa's 54 countries are now affected. Congo reported its first death; Burkina Faso reported two new ones. Somalia said it's lifting its ban on international flights for two days so stranded citizens can come home.

And Ethiopia's electoral authorities discussed the virus' effect on a major national election later this year. Angola closed its air, land and sea borders this week, but Namibian media showed President Joao Lourenco at the inauguration of Namibian President Hage Geingob.

Also in attendance was President Mokgweetsi Masisi of neighboring Botswana, which this week suspended international travel by all government employees. Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa also was there.

He announced a national disaster even before his country confirmed its first virus case on Friday. On Saturday, his country announced the first case in the capital, Harare. Burkina Faso now has the most virus deaths of any country in sub-Saharan Africa. — PTI

Abandoned tourist spots



Members of the Rome Local Police check the documents and the self-declarations of motorists on the Via Pontina, in Rome, during the country's lockdown aimed at stopping the spread of the Covid-19. (R) Pigeons stand on an empty central square, close to Rennes' city hall in Rennes, western France on Saturday. — AFP



WHITE HOUSE STAFFER TESTS POSITIVE FOR CORONAVIRUS

Washington, March 21: A staffer in the team of US Vice President Mike Pence has tested positive for the coronavirus, making him the first White House personnel to have been infected by the deadly disease that has so far claimed the lives of 230 people in the country.

"This evening we were notified that a member of the office of the Vice President tested positive for the coronavirus," Katie Miller, Press Secretary to Vice President, said in a statement. Neither President Donald Trump nor Vice President Pence had close contact with the individual, she said.

"Further contact tracing is being conducted in accordance with CDC guidelines," Miller said.

This is the first case of a White House staffer being tested positive for the deadly virus. Last week, Trump had tested for the coronavirus but the result was negative.

The White House has instituted strict provisions for entry of individuals within its premises. Members of the presidential physicians' team and secret service take temperature of every individual who enters the premises.

The seating arrangements in the White House briefing room has been rearranged to maintain social distancing. — PTI

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New York turns into US Covid-19 epicentre

Officials reported that state was closing in on 8,000 +ve cases

New York, March 21: New York State's long-feared surge of coronavirus cases has begun, thrusting the medical system toward a crisis point.

In a startlingly quick ascent, officials reported on Friday that the state was closing in on 8,000 positive tests, about half the cases in the country. The number was 10 times higher than what was reported earlier in the week.

In the Bronx, doctors at Lincoln Medical and Mental Health Center say they have only a few remaining ventilators for patients who need them to breathe. In Brooklyn, doctors at Kings County Hospital Center say they are so low on supplies that they are reusing masks for up to a week, slathering them with hand sanitizer between shifts.

Some of the jump in New

● **STATE OFFICIALS** have projected that the number of coronavirus cases in New York will peak in early May. Both the governor and Mayor Bill de Blasio have used wartime metaphors and analogies to paint a grim picture of what to expect.

● **OFFICIALS HAVE** said the state would need to double its available hospital beds to 100,000 and could be short as many as 25,000 ventilators. As it prepares for the worst-case projections.

York's cases can be traced to significantly increased testing, which the state began this week. But the escalation, and the response, could offer other states a glimpse of what might be in store if the virus continues to spread.

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo on Friday urged residents to stay indoors and ordered nonessential businesses to keep workers home.

State officials have projected that the number of coronavirus cases in New York will peak in early May. Both the governor and Mayor Bill de Blasio have used wartime metaphors and analogies to paint a grim picture of what to expect.

Officials have said the state would need to double its available hospital beds to 100,000 and could be short as many as 25,000 ventilators.

As it prepares for the worst-case projections, the state is asking retired health care workers to volunteer to help. The city is considering trying to turn the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center in Manhattan into a makeshift hospital.

"The most striking part is the speed with which it has ramped up," said Ben McVane, an emergency room doctor at Elmhurst Hospital Center in Queens. "It went from a small trickle of patients to a deluge of patients in our departments."

At Elmhurst, a 545-bed public hospital that serves a large population of undocumented immigrants and low-income residents, coronavirus patients have begun to crowd out others. Protective gear is running low. Doctors are worried there will be a shortage of ventilators.

Outside the facility, at a tent housing a new mobile-testing site, a line snaked around the building on Friday, a sign of the demand on testing and how much worse the influx could become. — Agencies

First virus deaths in Singapore

Singapore, March 21: Singapore on Saturday reported its first coronavirus deaths, including a 75-year-old Singaporean woman, the health ministry said, as the country announced a slew of measures to prevent the spread of the deadly disease that has infected 385 people in the island nation.

Singapore on Friday confirmed 40 new Covid-19 cases, including 30 imported infections, taking the total number to 385 in the country. The two fatalities included the woman and a 64-year-old Indonesian man who died on Saturday, the health ministry said. The woman was linked to the cluster at the Life Church and Missions Singapore and had a history of chronic heart disease and hypertension, reported the Channel News Asia.

She showed the Covid-19 symptoms on February 9 and was admitted to the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID) on Feb. 23 for pneumonia and tested positive for the disease on the same day.

She developed serious complications and died at about 7.50am. The man, who had a history of heart disease, was admitted in a critical condition at NCID on March 13, after arriving in Singapore from Indonesia and passed away at 10.15am.

Prior to his arrival in Singapore, he had been hospitalised in Indonesia for pneumonia. While we all know that there will be fatalities in Covid-19 patients, "We are deeply saddened by their passing," Health Minister Gan Kim Yong said. "I know Singaporeans will be worried and anxious. We must take courage and not give in to our fears. We have announced a series of safe distancing measures yesterday and we must all take the nec-

● **France reported 78** more deaths from the coronavirus over the last 24 hours, bringing the total death toll from the outbreak in the country to 450 people. Top French health official Jerome Salomon said that 12,612 people were now confirmed by tests in France to have been infected with the coronavirus.

● **Turkey recorded five** more deaths from the novel coronavirus, bringing the overall total to nine, as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan urged people not to go out for "non-essential reasons".

UAE REPORTS 1ST TWO DEATHS DUE CORONAVIRUS

UAE, March 21: The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has announced the deaths of two coronavirus patients, the first such fatalities to be reported in the country.

The Ministry of Health and Prevention said in a statement late on Friday that one of the two individuals was a 78-year-old "Arab national" who had come from Europe. The cause of death was a heart attack, coinciding with complications from Covid-19, the disease caused by the virus.

The second patient was a 58-year-old "Asian national" and resident of the UAE, who had prior chronic illnesses, including heart disease and kidney failure, which "further complicated" their ability to fight the virus.

Essary precautions to keep ourselves and our families safe," he said. — PTI

Jordan goes on virus lockdown

Amman, March 21: Air raid sirens echoed across Jordan's capital Saturday to mark the start of a three-day curfew, the latest mass lockdown in the Middle East aimed at containing the coronavirus, which has claimed another 123 lives in Iran, home to the region's worst outbreak.

The latest deaths bring Iran's overall toll to 1,556 amid 20,610 confirmed cases, according to figures released by the Health Ministry. Iran has faced widespread criticism for its lagging response to the outbreak, which has even infected and killed some senior officials.

In one of the strictest

measures yet, Jordan has ordered all shops to close and all people to stay off the streets until at least Tuesday, when it plans to announce specific times for shopping. Authorities have already arrested 392 people accused of violating the curfew, said Amer Sartawi, a spokesman for the Public Security Directorate. He warned that anyone violating the orders would face legal action.

Several countries in the Middle East have closed schools, universities and nonessential businesses. Many are threatening fines or jail time to those caught violating the decrees. — AP

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP THROWS TANTRUM OVER VIRUS QUESTION

Washington, March 21: Donald Trump has thrown an extraordinary temper tantrum on live television, lambasting a reporter who challenged him for raising hopes about a coronavirus treatment.

States ask Trump to deploy military to help fight coronavirus pandemic. Peter Alexander, White House correspondent at NBC News, asked the US president: "What do you say to Americans, who are watching you right now, who are scared?"

Erupting in anger, Trump unleashed a tirade: "I say that you're a terrible reporter. That's what I say. I think it's a very nasty question and I think it's a very bad signal that you're putting out to the American people."

The outburst came at Friday's White House coronavirus taskforce briefing, at which Trump announced a restriction on non-essential travel across the US-Mexico border as well as stricter controls on undocumented migrants.

'Disinformation campaign' over virus, US blames

Washington, March 21: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has blamed Russia, China and Iran for spreading "disinformation" on COVID-19 and carrying out coordinated efforts to "disparage" America's efforts towards containing the fast-spreading coronavirus pandemic.

Speaking at the White House on Friday, Pompeo described the disinformation campaigns as being "pretty diffused" and urged Americans to ensure that they are getting their information from a reliable source and not a "bad actor" trying to create and flow information that they know is wrong.

"I wanted to talk about the disinformation the people are seeing both on Twitter and around the world. Some of it coming

from government, some of it coming from other individuals," Pompeo told reporters.

He identified three countries for these "disinformation campaigns". "It is pretty defused unfortunately but we have certainly seen it come from places like China and Russia and Iran where there are coordinated efforts to disparage what America is doing and our activity to do all of the things that President Trump has set in motion here," Pompeo said.

The Secretary of State acknowledged that to combat the fast-spreading pandemic was a "tough fight". A total of 230 people had died in the US due to the fast-spreading coronavirus pandemic by Friday evening. — PTI

VIRUS | IMPACT

Saw it as a physical and mental challenge, shared images online

Frenchman runs marathon in balcony

Paris, March 21: In the age of confinement, Elisha Nochomovitz figured out a way to run a marathon anyway - back and forth on his balcony. That's right. He ran 42.2 km (26.2 miles) straight, never leaving his 7-meter-long (23-foot) balcony.

He saw it as a physical and mental challenge, but he also shared the images online as a way "to extend my support to the entire medical personnel who are doing an exceptional job," he said from his apartment in Balma, a suburb of the southern French city of Toulouse.

Like athletes who ran around their Wuhan apartments or cyclists who found ways to train in their locked-down Abu Dhabi hotel rooms, Nochomovitz wanted to show others that it's possible to stay fit as virus containment measures tighten around the world.

He also wanted to lighten the mood. "It was about launching a bit of a crazy



Elisha Nochomovitz running in his balcony as the city is in lockdown due to virus outbreak on Saturday in Southern French city of Toulouse. — TWITTER

challenge and bringing a bit of humor, to de-dramatize the confinement situation," he said.

He didn't exactly make record time. It took him six hours and 48 minutes.

He got nauseous, and got worried the neighbors would complain about the pounding of his footsteps.

Technically the French authorities still allow people to go outside for "indi-

vidual sports" like running, if they sign a special form explaining why.

But the number of joggers in French streets has multiplied in recent days, amid exceptionally balmy

weather. And that has authorities worried that too many people are still out in the streets, threatening efforts to contain the virus.

"If everyone thinks the same way and does the same thing, we'll all find ourselves outside and that won't help anything, and the message that we need to stay confined at home will have had no impact," he said.

Nochomovitz had been training for a marathon, and said "I needed to assure myself that I could still run 40 kilometers whatever the condition."

He lost track of how many laps he did, but his pedometer kept track while his mind wandered. "I thought about many things, what's going to happen, when I see that the world has stopped, sports, economy, finance," he said. "We learned in history about wars between nations, men and weapons, but this is something that is beyond us." — AP

SHORT TAKES

INDIAN STUDENT DEVELOPS SANITISER ROBOT

Dubai, March 21: Motivated by the motto "stay safe and be clean" amid the coronavirus scare, a grade seven Indian student in the UAE has created a robot that dispenses sanitiser detecting a hand from a range of 30cm.

Siddh Sanghvi, a student of Spring Dales Schools in Dubai, said his mother showed him a video where people were touching the hand sanitiser's bottle to clean hands and getting infected, it was reported.

"But this defeats the purpose because coronavirus can be spread by touching contaminated surfaces," the paper quoted him as saying.

"So, I thought why not create something using the STEM technology, where the machine can dispense the sanitiser automatically, without bringing your hand in contact," added the young inventor.

SYDNEY BEACH SHUT AS CROWDS IGNORE WARNING

Sydney, March 21: Authorities closed Sydney's Bondi Beach Saturday after huge crowds flocked to the popular sunbathing spot despite a government ban on large gatherings due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The temporary measure comes after photos of mostly young beachgoers packed on the famous sands were widely shared online, drawing howls of protest in the media and from officials.

"What we saw this morning here on Bondi Beach was the most irresponsible behaviour of individuals that we've seen so far," New South Wales state police minister David Elliott said.

"This is not something we are doing because we are the 'fun police'," he told a beachside news conference.

The ban could be extended to other beaches if social distancing rules are not followed, he warned.

Non-essential outdoor gatherings of more than 500 people have been barred as officials seek to stem the spread of the virus. Australia has nearly 1,000 confirmed cases of Covid-19.

STOP PANIC BUYING, BRITAIN TELLS SHOPPERS

Sydney, March 21: The British government on Saturday urged people to stop panic-buying during the coronavirus crisis, claiming there was enough food for everyone.

With supermarket shelves still being stripped of essential items, including toilet paper, officials said there was no need for panic.

"There's no risk of food running out," Environment Secretary George Eustice told reporters at the government's daily Downing Street briefing.

"The challenge we have is getting food to the shelves and keeping it there." He told shoppers to "be responsible when you shop and think of others," warning that stockpiling items could leave others without crucial supplies.

When asked if the government would introduce rationing he said it was up to supermarkets to decide whether to limit purchasing of certain items.

NORTH KOREA FIRES TWO MISSILES

Seoul, March 21: North Korea fired what appeared to be two short-range ballistic missiles off its east coast on Saturday, the latest in a series of such launches by Pyongyang as the world struggles with the coronavirus pandemic.

The South Korean military condemned the launches as "extremely inappropriate given the difficult situation the world is experiencing due to Covid-19..." We urge them to stop immediately.

North Korea has not reported any cases of the coronavirus, which has turned into a major crisis with more than 11,000 deaths and over 250,000 infections worldwide.

There has been widespread speculation, however, that the coronavirus outbreak has reached the isolated nation across the world, and health experts have warned that it could devastate the country given its weak medical infrastructure and widespread malnutrition.

Military in Italy to enforce lockdown

627 Covid-infected people die in 24 hrs, the largest single-day toll anywhere in the world

Rome, March 21: Soldiers were being drafted in to help enforce the lockdown in Italy on Friday as officials announced 627 new deaths, the largest single-day toll anywhere in the world since the coronavirus outbreak began.

Desperate scenes have unfolded in the north of the country, particularly the hard-hit Lombardy region where infections first exploded last month, as hospitals struggle to treat thousands of cases.

And Chinese medical experts helping Italy deal with the crisis have said the restrictions imposed in Lombardy are "not strict enough."

The government has now agreed that the military can be used to help enforce the lockdown, the president of the Lombardy region, Attilio Fontana, told a news conference on Friday.

"(The request to use the army) has been accepted... and 114 soldiers will be on the ground throughout Lombardy... it is still too little, but it is positive," Fontana said. "Unfortunately we are not seeing a change of trend in the numbers, which are rising."

The soldiers had until now been deployed in the region to ensure general security in the streets.

More than 4,000 people have now died from the disease in Italy, the country's civil protection agency said on Friday — more than any other nation — and nearly 6,000 new infections were confirmed in the past day, bringing the total to more than 47,000 cases.

Daniela Confalonieri, an Italian nurse in Milan, the region's capital, said the situation was so dire that the dead were no longer being counted.

"We're working in a state of very high stress and tension," Confalonieri said. "Unfortunately we can't contain the situation in Lombardy, there's a high level of contagion and we're not even counting the dead any more."

"Look at the news that's coming out of Italy and take note of what the situation really is like. It's unimaginable."

A hospital doctor in Bergamo, another Lombardy city, said it had been hit so hard by the coronavirus that it is now sending patients who need intensive care to other parts of the country.

"Bergamo is sending ICU patients to other regions because we ran out (of space)," Dr. Stefano Magnone said on Friday.

— Agencies



A woman on her balcony reaches out to catch a rose delivered to her by a drone on Mothers Day, in the Lebanese coastal city of Jounieh, north of the capital Beirut on Saturday, as people remain indoors in an effort to limit the spread of the novel coronavirus. Three young Lebanese came up with the idea of delivering roses attached to drones, offered to mothers by their children as a surprise gift. The funds collected from this initiative will be donated to the Lebanese Red Cross to help fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Lebanon has been under a general lockdown order for several days, and has reported 206 cases.

— AFP

No new local Covid case for third straight day in China

Beijing, March 21: China reported no domestically transmitted coronavirus cases for the third consecutive day on Saturday, even as seven more fatalities were confirmed from the virus' epicentre of Hubei Province, taking the death toll in the country to 3,255.

The coronavirus death toll has gone up to 11,397 with more than 275,427 cases reported in over 160 countries and territories, according to data from Johns Hopkins University.

Italy has overtaken China as the worst-hit with over 4,000 deaths reported so far.

China's National Health Commission (NHC) said on Saturday that no new domestically transmitted cases of Covid-19 were reported on the Chinese mainland for the third day in a row on Friday.

On Friday, seven deaths

and 36 new suspected cases were reported on the mainland, with all the deaths reported from the virus' epicentre Hubei Province and its capital Wuhan, it said.

The overall confirmed cases on the mainland have reached 81,008 by the end of Friday, which included 3,255 deaths, 6,013 patients still undergoing treatment, 71,740 patients who have been discharged after recovery, the NHC said.

The commission said that 106 people were still suspected of being infected with the virus.

The NHC said 41 new confirmed Covid-19 cases were reported on the Chinese mainland on Friday from the people arriving from abroad, taking the total number of imported cases to 269.

While reporting about a steady increase in import-

ed cases, the NHC did not specify whether the infected persons were foreigners or Chinese nationals returning from abroad.

China has imposed strict quarantine measures for all those returning from other countries.

Of the imported cases on Friday, 14 were reported in Beijing, nine in Shanghai, seven in the Guangdong Province and four in the Fujian Province.

Provinces of Zhejiang, Shandong and Shaanxi each reported two cases and Sichuan reported one.

By the end of Friday, 256 confirmed cases including four deaths had been reported in Hong Kong, 17 confirmed cases in Macao and 135 in Taiwan including two deaths, the NHC said.

As the center of the virus continues to shift to the West, the rate of infection has been slowing for weeks in China. —PTI

China sends masks, experts abroad

Beijing, March 21: As the fight against a new virus shifts to Europe and beyond, China is supplying millions of masks and other desperately needed items to struggling governments, hoping to build political ties and defuse criticism that it allowed the disease to spread early on.

Serbia's president plans to be at the airport this weekend to welcome a shipment of medical supplies from his "brother and friend," Chinese leader Xi Jinping. Xi's government has flown gloves and protective clothing to Liberia. It is sending 100,000 test kits to the Philippines. More than 10 flights carrying millions of masks and other supplies are bound for the Czech Republic this week.

China, said Czech Interior Minister Jan Hamacek, is "the only country capable of supplying Europe with such amounts."

Islamabad, March 21: Pakistan on Saturday suspended the operations of its national flag-carrier PIA and curtailed train services as the coronavirus cases surged to 510 in the country after more pilgrims who returned from Iran tested positive for the deadly virus.

The measures came a day after Prime Minister Imran Khan ruled out total lockdown but asked people to reduce unnecessary travel and go for self quarantine for at least another 45 days to help tackle the coronavirus crisis.

Pakistan International Airline (PIA) said that its air operation will remain suspended from March 21 to 28 while Railway Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmad ordered to reduce the number of trains running in the country from March 25 until the middle holy month of Ramadan.

China hopes to benefit from a realisation in the West of how difficult it is to bring the virus under control, said Julian Ku, a law professor at Hofstra University in New York. "The Chinese government's failures... will be less harshly viewed in light of the failures of other governments to respond effectively as well," he said. —PTI

Covid risks take heavy toll on migrants

Berlin, March 21: Syrian refugee Mahmoud Ajlouni was due to pick up his new German residency permit last week but found the door firmly shut at the processing office in Berlin.

"I had an appointment," he said, adding he has "no idea" when he'll be able to replace the flimsy sheet of paper that is his only official identification.

For Ajlouni, the uncertainty could last weeks if not months as Germany has suspended refugee intake programmes or asylum seeker hearings amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Beyond Germany, fears are also growing about the

fate of migrants and refugees in the bloc as Europe takes increasingly stringent measures to fight contagion.

With Europe now the epicentre of the coronavirus pandemic, the European Union has slammed shut its external borders to halt the spread of Covid-19.

Countries like France, Spain and Italy have also imposed lockdowns on their populations to restrict movements and halt the spread of the virus.

Migrants and asylum seekers have become one of the most vulnerable groups hard hit by the cri-

sis as public services that usually tend to the group are wound down.

Aid groups have also warned that already poor conditions in camps including in Greece could worsen, while tense scenes have already erupted in refugee accommodations in Germany.

In Suhl, eastern Germany, 200 police were called in after brawls broke out in a refugee home where 533 people were quarantined. Twenty-two were sent for confinement in a former juvenile prison.

The quarantines had been ordered after several cases of Covid-19 were

detected among refugees in Germany.

Meanwhile people are only allowed to claim asylum at present if they can show a negative test for Covid-19 or after submitting to 14 days of quarantine. Volunteers and non-government organisations fear that locked up in close quarters, with shared bathroom and kitchen facilities, the confinement will do little to slow the virus' spread.

"Kids are still running around in the corridors," said Sophia, a volunteer working especially with Afghan families in a Berlin home. —AFP

Young people are 'not invincible', warns WHO

Rome, March 21: Hundreds of millions of people worldwide kicked off the weekend under a lockdown, as the global death toll accelerated sharply and the World Health Organisation warned the young they were "not invincible".

The pandemic has completely upended lives, sharply restricting the movement of huge populations, shutting down schools and businesses, and forcing millions to work from home — while many have lost their

livelihoods entirely.

While President Donald Trump insisted the United States was "winning" the war against the virus, individual states dramatically ramped up restrictions, with New York and Illinois joining California in ordering residents to stay home.

The virus death toll surged past 11,000 worldwide, with 4,000 alone in worst-hit Italy where the daily number of fatalities has shot up relentlessly over the past week. While the elderly and those with

pre-existing medical conditions are the hardest hit by the virus, WHO chief Tedros

Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned that young people were also vulnerable. "Today I have a message for young people: you are not invincible. This virus could put you in hospital for weeks — or even kill you," Tedros said.

"Even if you don't get sick, the choices you make about where you go could be the difference between life and death for someone else." —AFP

FINAL GAMBLE In 2018, Rogers scrapped the final dates of his farewell tour due to health concerns

Country music icon Kenny Rogers dies at 81

Los Angeles, March 21: Country music legend Kenny Rogers, whose career spanned six decades and helped bring the genre into the mainstream, has died at the age of 81, his family announced.

With hits like *The Gambler*, *Lucille* and the duet *Islands in the Stream* with Dolly Parton, the three-time Grammy winner left an indelible mark on American music.

"Rogers passed away peacefully at home from natural causes under the care of hospice and surrounded by his family," the

family said in a statement late Friday.

The family said they were planning a small private service "out of concern for the national Covid-19 emergency."

Tributes poured in from across the world of showbiz.

"You never know how much you love somebody until they're gone," Parton said.

"I've had so many wonderful years and wonderful times with my friend Kenny, but above all the music and the success I loved him as a wonderful man and a true friend."

Country star Blake Shelton said: "I can't express on Twitter the impact Kenny Rogers the artist and the man had on me. He was always very kind and funny to be around. Rest In Peace Gambler." Rogers, who sold tens of millions of records worldwide, had 20 albums go platinum, according to his website.

"I've never considered myself a great singer, but I do have a certain way as a storyteller," he told the Irish Examiner in 2013.

"I've been very lucky in finding many great songs that have had a staying



power, and have lingered longer in the heart." Released in 1978, his album "The Gambler" was a huge international hit, going multi-platinum. The title track became his signature song.

● ROGERS STARRED in a series of made-for-television movies based on *The Gambler* through the 1980s and 1990s, but he liked to joke that he wasn't much of a gambler himself.

Rogers starred in a series of made-for-television movies based on "The Gambler" through the 1980s and 1990s, but he liked to joke that he wasn't much of a gambler himself.

"I learned a long time ago, I can't win enough money to excite me, but I can lose enough to depress me," he told NPR.

"So I don't gamble." He played his final concert at Nashville in October 2017, where he was joined by Parton, his long-time friend and collaborator, and Richie.

In April 2018, Rogers scrapped the final dates of his farewell tour due to health concerns. "I didn't want to take forever to retire," the singer said.

"I've thoroughly enjoyed this opportunity to say farewell to fans over the course of the past two years," the singer said. —AFP



SHORT TAKES



Shreyas Iyer

Shreyas pulls out a magic trick

Mumbai: With ample spare time available due to Covid-19 pandemic, Indian cricket's "in house magician" Shreyas Iyer is pulling out card tricks to wow fans and keep himself entertained while also promoting social distancing. All cricketing activities across the world have been either called off or postponed as the coronavirus outbreak wreaks havoc with the sporting schedule. The BCCI on Saturday tweeted a video of Iyer, who is clearly enjoying his time away from the cricket field, performing a card magic trick with his sister Natasha. "Trust our in-house magician @ShreyasIyer15 to keep us entertained when we are all indoors. Thanks for bringing smiles champ! #TeamIndia," the BCCI wrote on its Twitter handle. The India batsman was seen performing a new magic trick which he calls "gun trick" with a deck of cards. — PTI

Hafeez takes a dig at Sharjeel

Karachi: Senior allrounder and former captain Muhammad Hafeez is not happy about Sharjeel Khan being offered another chance to play for the national team after completing a two and a half year ban for spot-fixing. Hafeez, who made his Pakistan debut in 2003, took a dig at Sharjeel on his Twitter account which has led to a debate on the Pakistan Cricket Board's policy on allowing tainted players back in the national team. Hafeez, in his post, said: "Shouldn't we set standards of dignity and pride higher than any other 'Extra Talent' to represent Pakistan. Just Asking." He had also resisted the comeback of Muhammad Aamir to the Pakistan camp some years back when the board recalled Aamir after he completed his five-year ban for spot-fixing. Another former captain Ramiz Raja has also voiced his concerns over the worrying trend of giving tainted a lifeline. — PTI

ECB suspends games till May 28

London: The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) have suspended all professional cricket till May 28, delaying the start of the new season, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The ECB took the decision following discussions with the First Class Counties, the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) and the Professional Cricketers' Association (PCA). "It was agreed that, given the current information available, a seven-week delay to the start of the season is the most appropriate approach," an ECB media statement said. The Board also announced that it is working on three new options, including the three-Test series against West Indies, the T20 Cup and the women's schedule against India, for a possible start in June, July or August. "Close liaison with the Government will continue, with discussions on the potential of starting the season behind closed doors and giving sports fans the opportunity to live broadcast action. The potential for reduced erions of competitions, should the season become further truncated, will also be discussed," the statement said on Friday. — PTI

MSD to retire quietly?

Gavaskar says Dhoni will not make big announcement when it comes to his retirement

Mumbai, March 21: Former India captain Sunil Gavaskar feels it would be very difficult for M.S. Dhoni to find a place in the India squad for the T20 World Cup slated to be played in October-November in Australia. "I would definitely like to see Dhoni in India's World Cup squad but it's highly unlikely that it is going to happen," Gavaskar told a leading Hindi daily.

"The team has moved on. Dhoni is not someone to make big announcements so I reckon he would silently retire from the game," Gavaskar added. Dhoni, 38, last played for India at the 2019 World Cup in England where the Men in Blue were knocked out in the semifinal.

Since then, he has been on a sabbatical and is due to appear on the cricket field in the upcoming edition of the Indian Premier League.

India head coach Ravi Shastri has already stated that Dhoni's selection depends on his performance in IPL. The IPL 2020 edition, originally due to start on March 29, has been postponed till April 15 due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Dhoni was training with the Chennai Super Kings squad but had to leave midway due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

When two new members, including the chairman Sunil Joshi, assumed charge earlier

this month, it was speculated that the national selection committee has not changed the panel's stance on Dhoni, who will "have to perform" in the IPL to be considered for T20 World Cup selection.

Joshi's predecessor M.S.K. Prasad had made it clear that the team has moved on from Dhoni and he has to first play to be considered for selection.

Former India off-spinner Harbhajan Singh, who plays alongside Dhoni in Chennai Super Kings, recently said he did not see the World Cup-winning captain returning to play international cricket.

"It is probably the end of the road for Dhoni. I heard the World Cup would be his last event for India — after that he won't play for India again. He had made up his mind long back and that is why he has not made himself available," Harbhajan added.

Harbhajan had said even if Dhoni had an excellent time in the IPL, he could decide not to play for India.

"If Dhoni has a good IPL and is sure he will because he works so hard... I have no doubt he will have a great IPL. As far as I know, he has made up his mind. If he has a good IPL, he will still make himself unavailable. I don't see him making a comeback. Knowing him, he has played his last game for India during the World Cup," Harbhajan added. — Agencies



A file photo of M.S. Dhoni at Chennai Super Kings' training camp. — PTI

The team has moved on. Dhoni is not someone to make big announcements so I reckon he would silently retire from the game. I would definitely like to see Dhoni in India's World Cup squad but it's highly unlikely that it is going to happen.

— SUNIL GAVASKAR



Kohli's record itself tells a lot, says Miandad

Karachi, March 21: Pakistani cricket legend Javed Miandad is in awe of Virat Kohli's batting and has picked the India captain as his favourite batsman, saying his record "itself tells a lot". The former Pakistan captain picked the current India skipper as his favourite due to his "classy" batting.

Speaking on his YouTube channel about the talent and depth present in the current Indian squad, Miandad especially praised Kohli for his enviable stats and the way he achieved them.

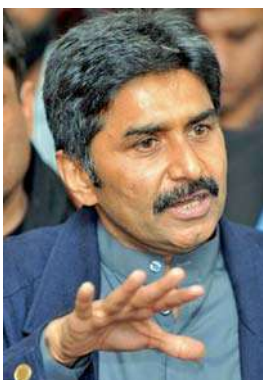
"I was asked who is the best in the Indian cricket team, so I choose Virat Kohli," Miandad said.

"I don't have to say much, his performance itself tells a lot. People have to admit this as stats are visible.

"Virat performed really well in South Africa; even on an uneven wicket, he scored a hundred. You cannot say he is scared of fast-bowlers or he cannot play on bouncy pitches or he doesn't play spinners well."

Miandad, stated that both Rohit Sharma and Kohli make batting look easy.

On Kohli, Miandad further added, "He is a clean hitter. Look at his shots, it feels so good to watch him bat. He has class." — PTI



Javed Miandad

WORLD | TWENTY20

CA may propose reserve day

Sydney, March 21: Cricket Australia (CA) may propose the introduction of reserve days for the semifinals of the Men's T20 World Cup in the ICC Cricket Committee meeting later this year.

Earlier this month, the ICC had faced a lot of flak for not keeping a reserve day for the knockout stages of the Women's T20 World Cup in Australia. As a result, England were forced to make an exit after their semifinal clash was washed out resulting in India, the higher ranked side in the group stage, progressing to the final.

As the ICC's current playing conditions stand, the men's T20 World Cup slated to begin here from October 18 will have no



ICC faced a lot of flak for not keeping a reserve day for the knockout stages of the Women's T20 World Cup in Australia. As a result, England were forced to make an exit after their semifinal clash against India was washed out.

reserve days available before the final at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on November 15. But, an ICC spokesperson said, according to a report in cricket.au.com, that playing conditions

for the Men's T20 World Cup will be discussed in the organisation's Cricket Committee, which is scheduled to meet in the middle of this year, before they are formally signed by the

Chief Executives Committee (CEC). Should any of ICC's member boards wish to suggest changes to playing conditions, they will have opportunity to do so at the CEC gathering, although it's rare for standard playing conditions to be revised at that stage, the ICC spokesperson said, according to the report.

CA Chief Executive Kevin Roberts, who will be part of that CEC meeting, said a case existed for the inclusion of reserve days in the men's T20 Cup.

"There's always cause for reflection at the end of any tournament, in terms of how you approach future tournaments," Roberts said. — PTI

Nightmarish situation for organisers



Ayaz Memon Over The Top

Sports events have been a major casualty in this global turmoil caused by Covid-19. Last week I made a short list of international fixtures that had either been cancelled or suspended e.g. the Melbourne Grand Prix, Premier League football. There have been additions since then.

The French Open tennis tournament, played between end-May and early-

June, has been shifted to the second half of the year, between September 30 and October 4. The start of the English County season, which was to commence on April 12, has been deferred to May 28.

Closer home, the Indian Premier League, was to start on March 29. It was postponed till April 15 by the BCCI after protracted dithering. There has been no update since, but with

Covid-19 showing little sign of abating, it's unlikely the IPL can start on April.

Will it be possible to squeeze in a truncated IPL between say end-April and May? Or, will the BCCI instead try and push for a full season in the second half of the year? Obviously, a full season is better than half or none, but where is the window in the latter of this year?

The cricket calendar is packed. England wants to have the inaugural season of The Hundred, it's own short-format tournament to compete with other leagues. Then there is the granddaddy of T20 cricket, the World Championship, to be played in Australia in

October which the ICC would be loathe to reschedule.

I've used cricket to highlight the detrimental cascading effect Covid-19 is likely to have on all sports. Tournaments will have to be rejigged, curtailed, cancelled or whatever. This is likely to cause mayhem and a nightmarish situation for organisers and promoters.

The biggest crisis in sports this year, however, revolves around the Olympic Games, scheduled to be held in Tokyo between July 24 and August. The Olympics are held every four years and arguably the most coveted event in the world. What's its fate going to be this year?

Till last week, there had been no suggestion from either the International Olympic Committee or host nation Japan that the Games will be rescheduled. If anything, IOC president Thomas Bach and the Japanese government, including Prime Minister Shinzo Abe were emphatic that the Olympics would be held on the designated dates.

But given the uncertainty about how long the virus will remain a threat, who can provide a clear-cut answer? It's premature still to talk of postponement or cancellation since the Olympics start in late July. But time is certainly running out rapidly.

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SHORT TAKES

Celtics star Smart positive for Corona

Los Angeles: Boston Celtics star Marcus Smart said he has the new coronavirus and urged young people to take the threat seriously and practice social distancing. Smart tested positive Thursday but said he was not showing any of the symptoms.

"I feel great. I feel fine. I feel like I can go play a game right now," the 26-year-old from Texas told CNN Friday. But he had a warning for young Americans like those shown partying on Florida beaches undeterred by the threat of Covid-19.

"I advise my generation, I am 26, to take it seriously. Be alert. Take precautions. By protecting yourself, you protect others. That's the key. People are not showing symptoms so it is hard for anyone to know they have the virus. But being around a group of people, friends, family and not isolating themselves, you are a carrier. You can spread the virus around without knowing," Smart said

— AFP

Olympics should be put off: Sharath

New Delhi: India's veteran table tennis player Sharath Kamal is in line to play his fourth Olympics in July-August but he wants the IOC to postpone the mega event due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sharath, who won his first title in 10 years when he won the ITTF Oman Open, is in self-quarantine ever since his return from Muscat on Monday. With the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) suspending all events until the end of April, next month's Asian Olympic Qualifying event in Bangkok has also been postponed indefinitely.

"As an athlete, I obviously want the Olympics to happen but it should not happen. The epicentre of the virus will keep changing, first it was China, now it is Italy and Iran too is badly affected in Asia. I don't see the scenario being safe for the Olympics to start on time," the 37-year-old said. — PTI

India hockey sides continue training

Bengaluru: Isolated inside the SAI Centre here in view of the Covid-19 pandemic, it's business as usual for the Indian men's and women's hockey players as they prepare for the upcoming Tokyo Olympics in a "safe environment".

The Sports Authority of India Centre, which has been shut for outside visitors, is well-equipped for regular practice sessions and no unauthorized persons are allowed to enter its premises. "The Covid-19 outbreak has not affected our practice sessions. We are continuously washing our hands and our temperatures are being checked regularly. The authorities at our SAI campus are ensuring that we are training in a safe environment. With the backing of SAI and our coaches, we have been training very hard for the Olympics," said the men's team captain Manpreet Singh. — PTI

F1 CHAMPION LEWIS IN SELF QUARANTINE

London: Six-time Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton says he is self-isolating but will not get tested for coronavirus as others need attention more than him.

The 35-year-old Briton said he decided to self-isolate because he had been at the same function in London that actor Idris Elba and Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's wife Sophie Gregoire-Trudeau attended earlier this month. Elba and Gregoire-Trudeau subsequently both tested positive for Covid-19.

"I want to let you know that I am doing well. I have zero symptoms and it has now been 17 days since I saw Sophie and Idris. I have been in touch with Idris and happy to hear he is OK," Hamilton said in a statement. There has been speculation about my health, after I was at an event where two people later tested positive for coronavirus. — AFP

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Tokyo on cliffhanger

Federations say Olympics must be postponed

Los Angeles, March 21: USA Swimming has urged the US Olympic and Paralympic Committee to back the postponement of the 2020 Tokyo Games amid the disruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

In a letter to US Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC) chief executive Sarah Hirshland, posted on USA Swimming's Twitter feed on Friday, swimming federation chief executive Tim Hinchey "respectfully requested" that the USOPC "advocate for the postponement of the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 by one year," to 2021. USA Swimming made the letter public after the US Olympic chiefs said in a conference call on Friday that more time was needed to determine the fate of the Tokyo Games.

Meanwhile, France's swimming federation also joined its US counterpart in calling for the Tokyo Olympics to be postponed because of coronavirus, adding pressure on IOC.

The U.S. track federation added its name to a growing chorus of calls to postpone the Tokyo Games because of the coronavirus.

In a letter to the CEO of the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee, USA Track and Field CEO Max Siegel urged the federation to advocate for the postponement of the Games.

OLYMPICS CAN WAIT, SAYS NORWAY

The Norwegian Olympic Committee wants the Tokyo Games only to take place once the coronavirus outbreak "is under firm control" worldwide. The NIF laid out its position in a letter sent to IOC President Thomas Bach, entitled "Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 and Covid-19" and signed by its president and secretary general. The body said it urged the IOC to provide an "insight on the central milestones" in the process leading to the final decision. "Our clear recommendation," the letter read, "is that the Olympic Games shall not take place before the Covid-19 situation is under firm control on a global scale." — Agencies.



People take pictures in front of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic flame on display at Ishinomaki Minamihama Tsunami Recovery Memorial Park in Ishinomaki, Miyagi prefecture on Friday, after its arrival from Greece. — AFP

Chorus grows against Games

Paris, March 21: As the deadly coronavirus spreads around the globe, doubts grow over whether the 2020 Olympic Games, set for Tokyo from July 24 to August 9, will go ahead.

A lot has been spoken over the Tokyo Games. Here are a few that stood out.

"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." — International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach.

"No solution will be ideal in this situation, and this is why we are counting on the responsibility and solidarity of the athletes." — IOC spokesman. "Anything is possible at

We don't have to make a decision. Our games are not next week, or two weeks from now. They're four months from now. So we are affording the IOC the opportunity to gather information. — SUSANNE LYONS, US Olympics and Paralympic chairwoman

the moment." — World athletics chief Sebastian Coe when asked whether the Games could be postponed to September or October.

"Respectfully requested...that the US Olympic and Paralympic Committee advocate for the postponement of the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 by one year to 2021." — USA Swimming chief executive Tim Hinchey.

"It's (a postponement) not only best from a performance statement for the athletes, but also for what these athletes are

going through right now in terms of their mental health." — Bob Bowman, the coach who guided swimming great Michael Phelps to 28 Olympic medals — 23 of them gold.

"The IOC wants us to keep risking our health, our family's health and public health to train every day? You are putting us in danger right now, today, not in 4 months." — Greece's Olympic pole vault champion Katerina Stefanidi.

"I think the IOC insisting this will move ahead, with such conviction, is

insensitive and irresponsible given the state of humanity." — Hayley Wickenheiser, a Canadian IOC member and a four-time Olympic ice hockey gold medalist.

"We don't have to make a decision. Our games are not next week, or two weeks from now. They're four months from now. So we are affording the IOC the opportunity to gather information and expert advice." — United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC) chairwoman Susanne Lyons.

"It should be postponed under the current situation where athletes are not well prepared," Japanese Olympic Committee executive board member Kaori Yamaguchi, a former Olympic judoka. — AFP

75 per cent drop in testing: NADA

New Delhi, March 21: The Covid-19 pandemic has hit India's dope testing programme big time with the national watchdog, facing various logistical problems, reducing the sample collection of athletes to just 25 per cent of earlier numbers.

National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) Director General Navin Agarwal, however, said that his organisation will be able to conduct enough number of tests on athletes who have qualified for the Olympics.

He said the NADA currently has insufficient number of dope sample collectors as most of them are government employees working at hospitals.

"We have reduced the number of dope samples by 75 per cent, that is, we are testing around 25 per cent of earlier number of samples. We are currently testing only those athletes who have a high risk (of doping) and those who have qualified for the Olympics," Agarwal said on Saturday.

"Most of the DCOs (Dope Control Officers) are medical and paramedical personnel working at government hospitals. Under the prevailing situation, their priority is to be at the hospital and ready to treat affected patients. Moreover, there is logistical problem of transporting dope samples in the current situation," he added.

Agarwal said that another reason behind the number of dope samples being reduced is that virtually all the sporting events have been cancelled and the national camps are shut.

We are testing around 25 per cent of earlier number of samples. We are currently testing only those athletes who have a high risk (of doping) and those who have qualified for the Olympics.

— NAVIN AGARWAL, Director General of National Anti-Doping Agency

The World Anti-Doping Agency has issued new guidelines to its member national bodies about how to ensure the safety of the athletes as well the dope collectors, and Agarwal said his organisation has been taking the necessary precautions.

"We are following the guidelines. We have ensured that the dope sample collection officers have proper safety gears like masks, gloves, sanitisers and other mandatory kits. We are also following rules regarding how to protect the athletes," he said.

WADA's latest guidelines advise anti-doping organisations to make sure that sample collectors are free from any symptoms of illness. Collectors should also ask athletes if they have any symptoms.

If test collection personnel are found to have contracted the virus, athletes they tested should be informed and vice versa, WADA said on Friday. Protective wear such as masks should be used and work surfaces disinfected. — PTI

WADA BODY ISSUES NEW COLLECTION GUIDELINES

Montreal, March 21: The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) issued new guidelines to facilitate continued testing amid the constraints of the coronavirus pandemic.

Noting that the spread of Covid-19 had evolved into "an even greater health and societal emergency" since its March 6 communique, WADA urged Anti-Doping Organisations (ADOs) to act in accordance with restrictions placed by local health authorities "to ensure proper protection of athletes and doping control personnel, while protecting the integrity of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games."

WADA's latest guidelines advise anti-doping organisations to make sure that sample collectors are free from any symptoms of illness. Collectors should also ask athletes if they have any symptoms or if they or anyone at the collection site are in the groups thought to be at heightened risk from

Manchesters unite for city

London, March 21: Manchester United and Manchester City have joined forces to donate a combined £100,000 (\$117,000) to help local foodbanks affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Collections are normally made at home games for both Manchester giants by fans' groups supporting foodbanks, but football in England is suspended until at least April 30 due to restrictions on mass gatherings due to coronavirus.

"We are proud of the role our supporters play in helping local food banks and recognise the increased strain likely to be placed on these charities by the impact of coronavirus," the clubs said in a joint statement.

"At a time of challenge for our community, we are pleased to come together with our fans to help vulnerable members of society in a City United," the statement added.

The donation will support the Trussell Trust's 19 foodbank centres in the Greater Manchester area.

United have been taken steps to try to alleviate the burden on their staff and supporters during the crisis. The Red Devils have vowed to pay 3,000 casual staff even for the remainder of the season even if matches at Old Trafford are forced behind closed doors or cancelled. And fans who travelled to Austria for the Europa League Last 16, first leg against LASK only for the game to be played behind closed doors at late notice were given a £350 (\$415) payment towards travel and accommodation. — AFP



Kevin de Bruyne (left) of Manchester City vies for the ball with Fred of Manchester United in this file photo.

Zaha extends succour for NHS medical staff

London, March 21: Crystal Palace winger Wilfried Zaha has offered free accommodation to medical staff in his London properties as they treat patients with coronavirus.

The 27-year-old Ivory Coast international is the latest football personality to offer a free bed, following in the footsteps of former Manchester United star Gary Neville and Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich.

Wilfried Zaha of Crystal Palace took up the baton to help Medical staff working in the National Health Service and provided them with accommodation.

Zaha, reported to earn \$150,000 a week at the Premier League club, willingly took up the baton saying he had

friends working in the National Health Service and he could provide accommodation for the hard-pressed staff who could not return home after their shifts.

"If you do good, good will come to you. It is clear that my intentions are that all I want to do is help at every opportunity, especially in the crazy period we are going through," Zaha cited in *The Times* on Saturday. — AFP

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