

IN BRIEF

Exams postponed due to lockdown

Hyderabad: The theory examinations of Kaloji Narayana Rao University of Health Sciences PG Medical scheduled to be held in April 2020 have been postponed indefinitely. The next date of examination for the courses along with fee notification and time table will be intimated later on the website knruhs.telangana.gov.in.

Transporters to get special passes

Hyderabad: Police commissioners of Rachakonda and Cyberabad on Wednesday met representatives of associations involved in transportation and supply of essential commodities and updated them about the do's and don't's during the lockdown period. Issues pertaining to transportation and the supply of pharma products, LPG, petrol and diesel, and groceries to traders and their availability for the public, were discussed. The police also discussed inter-state transportation issues and on how to address them.

The traders were advised not to sell commodities for higher prices and it was decided to give special passes to those involved in supply of essentials to ensure that the public does not suffer. Meanwhile, the Cyberabad special operations team sleuths apprehended 15 persons, who were selling vegetables, surgical masks and sanitisers at higher prices. They seized 54,000 worth vegetables and 14,000 worth masks and sanitisers from their possession.

TWO BOOKED FOR THRASHING HOME GUARD

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MARCH 25

Two persons assaulted a home guard for questioning them about the reason for travelling long despite a lockdown in force. The two have been booked in a case by the Kondrug police of Cyberabad Commissionerate.

The incident occurred Tuesday afternoon when the home guard from the PS stopped a car moving from Parigi to Shadnagar. When HG Venkatesh questioned the occupants, Ramakrishna and Madhusudhan, about the purpose of their travel, they were enraged and assaulted Venkatesh.

A case was subsequently registered against the two. Kondrug police also served notices to them.

TRA CHIEF HELD AFTER EX-WIFE COMPLAINS

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD MARCH 25

President of Telangana Rifle Association (TRA), who threatened his estranged wife, was booked by the Banjara Hills police here on Wednesday.

Speaking to Deccan Chronicle, Reeta Sanghi, who was separated from her husband Amit Sanghi three years back, said, "On Tuesday night, he came to my house with a weapon to kill me."

He was under the influence of alcohol and was barely able to stand on his legs. He came to my house on the pretext of seeing our son to whom he showed the gun. My son alerted me and in turn screamed for help. My brother, who lives next door, came to our rescue and overpowered my husband and took the gun from his possession. Our 16-year-old son, who witnessed the incident, remains in a state of shock," Reeta Sanghi said.

She lodged a complaint with Banjara Hills police, who booked a case of criminal intimidation and violation of Arms Act.

Banjara Hills police Inspector Kalinga Rao said, "Investigation is going on. Amit Sanghi said his son found the weapon in a bag and misunderstood him. He is a license holder."

Mr Rao added that only after questioning the son would they get a clear picture of what exactly transpired. "Meanwhile we have booked a case", he said.

● HE WAS under the influence of alcohol and was barely able to stand on his legs.

Curfew in Hyd further diluted

Despite appeals, public violates lockdown norms

MADDEY DEEKSHITH | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 25

Appeals made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao did not have any impact on several Hyderabad residents. Ignorant of the possibility that local transmission of Novel Coronavirus (Covid-19) had started and with the country entering stage 3 of the crisis, people queued up at supermarkets and wayside shops to purchase vegetables, meat and chicken to celebrate Ugadi.

In areas like RTC X Roads and Husbiguda, even sweet shops were open. A sweet shop owner in Musheerabad said, "we have already prepared sweets for a week prior to Janata Curfew. We have already suffered a huge loss. Thank God, everything was sold out by 9 am today because of Ugadi."

People took police, who were deployed in small numbers, to task at vegetable markets. There were stray reports of citizens having roughed up police, among others, at the Ramnagar vegetable market.

An over enthusiastic tiffin centre owner near the Musheerabad X-roads operated till afternoon in

thronging to wayside shops and supermarkets with their children. Busy by-lanes had a festive look, with people looking to buy goods necessary to celebrate Ugadi, the Telugu New Year. People gathered in hundreds at local markets in several areas to purchase vegetables, meat and chicken to celebrate Ugadi.

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An over enthusiastic tiffin centre owner near the Musheerabad X-roads operated till afternoon in

the name of service. Though he was selling food, he claimed, "how would people eat if everyone is closed. God will not forgive us if we do not serve hungry people."

However, by afternoon even by-lanes were empty. People cursed the police for closing their shops.

"How would we earn if police devils shut our shops. I have only 5 kg pickle left to be sold. I will earn about ₹1,500 if my shop is open till afternoon. I demand the government to save us from police brutality," said a pickle shop owner in Chilkalguda.

Citing demand, black marketers spread their wing, despite Mr Rao's warning to book them under the Preventive Detention Act.

The price of daily commodities saw a hike. Onions were sold for ₹40 per kg, which was ₹30 yesterday. Chillies were sold for ₹160 while it was only ₹80 yesterday. Tobacco products like cigarettes were sold for ₹200 per pack of 10 and further higher.

No decision yet on Haj 2020, says TS panel chief

ATHER MOIN | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 25

Chairman of Telangana State Haj Committee, Mr Mohammed Masihullah Khan, on Wednesday clarified that neither Saudi authorities nor the Haj Committee of India had announced about cancellation of Haj 2020 rituals.

Taking serious exception to the video making such claims that is going viral, he made it clear that they were being wrongly

interpreted. Speaking to the media, Mr Masihullah said Saudi government has not taken any such decision, although they had banned Umrah in the wake of Covid-19.

However, the video of Saudi Ambassador to Senegal, Abdullah Ahmad Al Abdan, which is in circulation, shows him advising Haj tour operators against making reservations with hotels and airlines till an official decision is taken, one way

or the other.

He said that the date for payment of second instalment has been extended and it can now be paid along with the final instalment amount.

Mr Khan also said that in case if Saudi Arabia cancels Haj operations this year, the amount paid by the pilgrims would be reimbursed. He added that those who have been selected for this Haj will be sent next year because of the Covid-19.

A long walk home



People leave their hostels in Secunderabad on Wednesday and walk towards LB nagar hoping to find some means of transport to help them reach their villages. -GANDHI

HAPPY | ANIMALS

NZP is completely sanitised and anti-viral sprays are also being used

Zoo declared as 'essential services'

BALU PULIPAKA | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 25

With the entire country in the grip of a serious Coronavirus crisis, the Central Zoo Authority has said that it is time to declare zoo in the country as 'essential services'.

Declaration of zoo under this category will enable them to function fully and normally under the current lockdown restrictions imposed across the country by respective state governments.

The state government has already declared the Telangana Forest Department as an essential service and thereby the NZP Nehru Zoological Park that functions as part of the Forest Department too received the status, though not formally.

With the zoo closed as part of the government's lockdown to stop the spread of Covid-19 disease, the forest department has written to the director-general of police and city commissioner of police to issue instructions to police personnel to allow zoo staff to travel from home to the zoo on work and on other assigned duties as required.

According to some of the zoo staff, by and large there is no problem with the police allowing them to go to work, since they have emergency duty passes. But sometimes they are

questioned. "Sometimes they are asked why the need to go to work at the zoo during the lockdown. The thing is we need people like electricians, carpenters, our own animal keepers, veterinary staff and others. The cages need cleaning every day, animals need to

Cops in action



Police use lathis on those who were found roaming the streets during lockdown on Wednesday. -DEEPAK DESHPANDE

KTR inspects ongoing lockdown

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MARCH 25

Municipal administration and urban development (MA&UD) minister. K.T. Rama Rao on Wednesday toured various parts of Hyderabad city and inspected the ongoing measures taken to prevent the spread of coronavirus. The minister took note of the situation while lockdown is being implemented in the city.

Some daily wage workers, natives of Suryapet district, were struck in Hyderabad due to the lockdown. While they were walking on the road along with their belongings, Rao, who was on his way to buddha bhavan, stopped the convoy and interacted with them. Learning about their problem, Rao immediately arranged for a vehicle and instructed the officials to make sure they reached their destination safely.

national safely.

Rao also interacted with a youth, an orphan, who is a native of Bihar. He instructed officials to shift the youth to one of the night shelters in the city.

Later, Rao went to the enforcement, vigilance and disaster management (EVD) office at buddha bhavan in Hyderabad. He enquired about the measures being taken up by the GHMC Disaster Response Force (DRF) to curtail the spread of coronavirus in the city.

Rao then visited the call centre set up at the GHMC head office to respond to queries related to the coronavirus. He interacted with the staff and asked them to respond with empathy to the queries of citizens.

Rao also visited the GHMC night shelter at Golnaka and interacted with the senior citizens and children there.

Few netas heed to KCR's call

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MARCH 25

Despite Chief Minister K. Chandrasekar Rao's call on Tuesday to elected representatives to come out on the streets and help the authorities during the lockdown, very few showed up to help police and municipal authorities in the city. Until afternoon no minister, MLA, corporator, or chairman was seen out in the city. Deputy mayor Baba Fasiuddin was the only elected representative who distributed food packets to police and municipal authorities in his division.

By afternoon, Jubilee Hills MLA Maganti Gopinath was spotted in the vegetable market enquiring about the spike in prices. When Deccan Chronicle asked TRS party workers why they had not heeded the CM's call, in a off the record conversation said how can you quote an off the record conversation that too after saying it was so? that they have been busy with the Ugadi festivities till afternoon and post that situation was under control. Some elected representatives claimed that when they tried to volunteer prior to Mr Rao's call, police had not allowed them on the roads.

Fines to be slapped as AI detects 3-km rule violation

T. JAYENDRA CHAITHANYA | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 25

There is a "third eye" closely watching movements of vehicles to detect violation of the three-kilometre rule for fetching essential commodities. The government has stipulated that whatever shopping a person needs to do during the lockdown period has to be within a three-kilometre distance from home.

Violators of the rule will find challans slapped against them, thanks to the state police using Artificial Intelligence-based video analytics from Wednesday onwards for strict implementation of the lockdown imposed throughout the state owing to Covid-19. Owners of vehicles that violate the order will be booked. There are about 250

● POLICE ARE now identifying owners of these vehicles to slap cases against them under relevant sections of the IPC and Epidemic Act.

thousands of high definition cameras have been installed to capture violations of traffic rules. These cameras have now been equipped with Automatic Number Plate Reading software, which will read the registration numbers of vehicles crossing the junction.

The software automatically calculates the distance travelled by the vehicle once it crosses the next junction. On Wednesday alone, over 1,000 vehicles, including cars and two-wheelers, were seen violating the

three-kilometre rule. Police are now identifying owners of these vehicles to slap cases against them under relevant sections of the IPC and Epidemic Act.

Speaking to Deccan Chronicle, a senior police official said, "The software detects vehicles that cross the three-kilometre limit and indicates a popup along with images. Our teams are in the process of identifying owners of these vehicles to book cases against them for violating the lockdown."

The official pointed out that youngsters have been coming out on roads to take selfies and shoot TikTok videos. Some are even taking up challenges of covering distances in the shortest time. "We appeal to the public not to venture onto roads unnecessarily and get into trouble," the official added.

Black marketing: HC takes up PIL

VUJJINI VAMSHIDHARA | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 25

The Telangana High Court has taken up a suo-moto PIL on the spiraling prices of vegetables, fruits and other essential commodities due to the lockdown across Telangana State. The High Court took up the PIL on the directions of the Chief Justice.

It was based on news reports, which highlighted about how traders and middlemen were selling essential commodities at exorbitant prices, taking advantage of the crisis. The inaction of the authorities in monitoring the rates was accentuated in the media.

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Secretary, Principal Secretaries of Home, Agriculture and Civil Supplies Consumer Affairs departments, Commissionerate of Civil Supplies, DGP, Collectors of Hyderabad and Ranga Reddy districts are respondents in the petition.

DECCAN Chronicle

26 MARCH 2020

Centre must plan for Lakshman Rekha

Finally, India has got into a lockdown fighting Covid-19 pandemic. About 130 crore people have been advised not to get out of their homes except for essentials, as part of the mammoth effort to break the chain of Covid-19 spread.

Olympics makes the sacrifice

The Tokyo Olympics has bowed to the inevitable in putting off the scheduled July 24 start and picking 2021 as its year. The Covid-19 pandemic has hit sport's greatest showpiece that has run once in four years from 1896 except during the world wars and embraced multiple disciplines to best reflect a panorama of competitive sport.

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The endgame in Afghanistan looks uncertain

On March 10 the UN Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution welcoming the agreement as a significant step "towards ending the war and opening the door to intra-Afghan negotiations".

The global coronavirus crisis has understandably overshadowed the international endorsement earlier this month of the Doha agreement between the United States and the Afghan Taliban.

important to keep in view the limits of the Doha agreement. This is indicated by its purposively vague nature in some respects and the obvious fact that it excluded the Afghan government with whom Washington signed a separate declaration.

driven by domestic political calculations rather than any strategic thinking. It enables him to deliver on his pledge to disengage America from an "endless war".

Several questions are raised by these developments. Will the start of the US drawdown mount enough pressure on Mr Ghani and Mr Abdullah to reconcile their differences and agree on a common negotiating team for intra-Afghan talks?

Nevertheless, the longer the delay in starting intra-Afghan negotiations the greater the risk of the peace plan mapped out at Doha being derailed and the country descending into political chaos.

Subhani



All-round approach vital to fight Covid-19



As the number of coronavirus (also called Covid-19) cases rises in India, we're conjuring up two very different scenarios: one, where India becomes the next epicentre of Covid-19, with dreadful consequences of unimaginable proportion, and the other, where India is successfully able to prevent any major outbreak and earn for itself a big applause.

Now that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has placed the entire country on a three-week lockdown, there is a high chance that we may get away from Covid-19 relatively lightly.

This extreme decision doesn't appear to be a knee-jerk reaction. Sunday's "janata curfew" seems to have been a prelude to preparing the public for the total lockdown, which was in the making as there were some hints to it in Mr Modi's first public address on coronavirus on Thursday evening.

responsive administration began imposing stricter measures as the situation started to unfold. However, there are other experts who disagree. They believe the actual number of cases is probably much higher than the reported numbers.

Indeed, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), the apex official body involved in biomedical research in the country, has been revising its testing protocols based on the learning that is coming from within the country and other high-risk nations.

In the spread of this infection, one surprise element has been the relatively low number of Covid-19 cases and deaths in India thus far: India has reported 512 cases so far, including nine deaths (these figures may rise by the time this article is published).

eventuality. As we've not had any major outbreak so far, our level of preparedness has not been tested yet. In Singapore and South Korea, swift public health and safety measures have helped in controlling the spread of this highly infectious disease.

While the administration at all levels has an important role to play, the role of the public in complying with the lockdown simply can't be overemphasised. As with the public, so is with business establishments. They need to rise above their narrow commercial interests and try to help the country in this hour of need.

It all depends on how seriously we all take the lockdown. By acting in unison, we can cut the chain of transmission and take the steam out of the disease. Together, we can defeat Covid-19, which we must.

(The writer is a development economist, formerly with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the World Bank)

LETTERS CORONAVIRUS

During the lockdown the only thing that brings information to public is the media. Though it is not safe, mediapersons are travelling to places, staying hours together at hospitals to cover news.

K. Manoj Kumar, Huzurabad, Karimnagar

India's precautionary measures are steps in the right direction. The Centre and state governments are doing their best to contain the virus, but the big task ahead for the world is on how to face an economic slowdown.

M. Jeevanand, Secunderabad

The nationwide lockdown is the right thing to do. We need a comprehensive plan to ensure senior and other vulnerable citizens are not adversely affected. Essential vegetables and fruits should be sold on mobile carts at the doorstep to ensure all citizens remain indoors and keep social distance while providing livelihood to vendors.

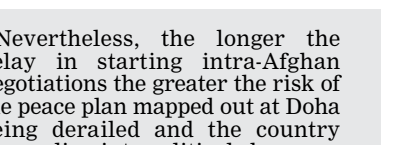
Ravi P., Hyderabad

Punjab ministry topped

CHANDIGARH, MARCH 25 The Gurnam Singh Ministry was today defeated in the Punjab Vidhan Sabha when the House rejected the Appropriation Bill 1970 by 44 votes to 22.

But fighting Covid-19 is only one of the battles that lie ahead. Shoring up the Indian economy, badly bruised by Covid-19, is another battle that has to be fought later. This will probably last much longer and require a far more concerted effort together with the rest of the world.

(The writer is a development economist, formerly with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the World Bank)



two CPM members voted against the Appropriation Bill. Eighteen Akali MLAs including the Chief Minister, Mr. Gurnam Singh, one PSP, one SSO and one Swatantra and one Rebel Akali member (Mr. Kapoor Singh) voted in favour of the Appropriation Bill.

(The writer is a former Pakistani ambassador to the US and the UN) By arrangement with Dawn

IN BRIEF

Third positive case in Nepal

Kathmandu: Nepal has reported its third Covid-19 case in a 32-year-old man who returned from Qatar as the government has announced a week-long nationwide lockdown to battle the pandemic.

Iran to ban intercity travel

Tehran: Iran will ban intercity travel within days as it finally gets tough with the Covid-19 that has killed more than 2,000 people.

S. Africa cases rise to 709

Johannesburg: South Africa reported that its number of confirmed cases of the novel Covid-19 jumped to 709 on Wednesday from 554 the previous day.

Pak suspends domestic flights

Islamabad: Pakistan has suspended all domestic flight operations until April 2 to curb the spread of the novel Covid-19 after the country reported over 1,000 cases and seven deaths from the infection.

ETHIOPIA TO RELEASE PRISONERS

Addis Ababa, March 25: Ethiopia announced Wednesday it would free thousands of inmates from the country's overcrowded prisons in a bid to curb the spread of the Covid-19.

Covid vaccine: 5k sign

Beijing, March 25: Around 5,000 people have signed up for the phase I clinical trial of recombinant novel Covid-19 vaccine in Chinese city Wuhan where the virus first emerged late last year.

ence 14-day quarantine restrictions after being vaccinated and their health condition will be recorded every day. Chinese scientists are hastening the development of Covid-19 vaccines through five approaches — inactivated vaccines, genetic engineering subunit vaccines, adenovirus vector vaccines, nucleic acid vaccines and vaccines using attenuated influenza virus as vectors.

The recruitment for participants ended this week with nearly 5,000 volunteers signing up for the trial, state-run Beijing News reported on Wednesday. A single-centre, open and dose-escalation phase I clinical trial for recombinant novel Covid-19 vaccine (adenoviral vector) will be tested in healthy adults aged between 18 and 60 years, according to the ChiCTR (China Clinical Trial Register).

So far, most teams are expected to complete preclinical research in April and some are moving forward faster; Wang Junzhi, an academician with the Chinese Academy of Engineering said. Wang noted that research and development of Covid-19 vaccines in China is not slower than foreign counterparts and has been carried out in a scientific, standardised and orderly way.

The trial, led by experts from the Academy of Military Medical Sciences, gained its approval on March 16 and the research is expected to last half a year. Requiring at least 108 participants, the trial will be conducted in Wuhan, capital of Hubei province, the region worst-affected by the virus in the country, state-run China Daily reported.

China has stepped up the process to finalise vaccines to counter Covid-19 after Kaiser Permanente research facility in Seattle and Washington stole the march and began human trials. China reported no new domestic cases on Wednesday. But there were another 47 imported infections from overseas, the National Health Commission said.

LOCKDOWN TAKEN OFF FROM VIRUS EPICENTRE WUHAN

Beijing, March 25: China on Wednesday downgraded the risk level of the Covid-19 in its epicentre Wuhan from high to medium and resumed bus services within the city for the first time since the nine-week lockdown even as a new study said thousands of positive cases there may have gone under the radar.

Wednesday. But there were another 47 imported infections from overseas, the National Health Commission said. In total, 474 imported infections have been diagnosed in China — mostly Chinese nationals returning home.

At 3,434, Spain toll overtakes China's

Madrid, March 25: Spain's Covid-19 death toll overtook that of China on Wednesday, rising to 3,434 after 738 people died over the past 24 hours, the government said.

THE NUMBER of deaths around the world from the novel Covid-19 cases stood at 19,246 on Wednesday.

MORE THAN 427,940 cases have been registered in 181 countries and territories since the epidemic first emerged in China in December.

Across the world, only Italy now has a higher death toll than that of Spain. In China, where the virus emerged late last year, 3,281 people have died. The spiralling number of deaths came as Spain entered the 11th day of an unprecedented lockdown to try and rein in the Covid-19 epidemic that has now infected 47,610 people, the health ministry said. As the authorities stepped up testing, the number of cases showed a 20 per cent increase on the figures for Tuesday, while the death toll showed a 27 per cent rise over the same period.

ry's emergencies coordinator Fernando Simon said. Health authorities are hoping it will soon become clear whether the lockdown is having the desired effect. The Madrid region has suffered the brunt of the epidemic with 14,597 infections — just under a third of the total — and 1,825 deaths, or 53 per cent of the national figure. With hospitals on the brink of collapse from the surge in patients, troops have set up a massive field hospital in Madrid's IFEMA exhibition centre which currently has 1,500 beds but which could be expanded to take in up to 5,500 people.



PRINCE CHARLES TESTS POSITIVE, SELF ISOLATING

London, March 25: Britain's Prince Charles has tested positive for the novel Covid-19 after he displayed 'mild symptoms' and is now self-isolating, his office said on Wednesday.

The 71-year-old heir to the British throne is self-isolating in Scotland with wife Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, who has tested negative for the deadly virus which has claimed 422 lives in the UK.

"The Prince of Wales has tested positive for Covid-19," the Clarence House statement read. "He has been displaying mild symptoms but otherwise remains in good health and has been working from home throughout the last few days as usual," it notes.

how many crew members were onboard.

Diamond Princess leaves Yokohama

Yokohama, March 25: The Diamond Princess, a Covid-19-hit cruise ship off Japan that saw 712 passengers and crew contracting the disease with 10 deaths, left its moorings in Yokohama Wednesday, a city official said.

The ship, which originally carried some 3,700 passengers and crew members, dominated international headlines as Japan's clumsy handling of its quarantine made it at one point the biggest cluster of Covid-19 carriers outside China.

"Disinfection work has been finished. Quarantine confirmed that the work has been finished," a Yokohama city official said. "It is leaving the pier" around 0500 GMT, he said, without revealing where it was heading or

The ship arrived off Yokohama on February 3, after a former passenger left the ship in Hong Kong and tested positive for the virus. Tokyo claimed its quarantine was effective, but passengers, crew members, and physicians who examined the ship reported shortcomings, such as inadequate protection for quarantine officials. The number of new infections soared daily.

NO KISSING Strict rules imposed by authorities following Covid-19 outbreak Social distancing at Indonesia weddings

Surabaya (Indonesia), March 25: Closed borders and social distancing rules to stem the Covid-19 outbreak failed to stop one transnational couple in Indonesia from tying the knot on Wednesday, minus the customary kiss.

ies, who have banned mass gatherings including weddings but allowed some exceptions for marriages booked before the pandemic began.

Their reception party was cancelled and only a compromise with the mosque allowed the pair to proceed with the ceremony on Wednesday, earlier than planned. "All people must pass our disinfectant gate after being checked with a thermal gun," Al Akbar mosque spokesman Helmy M. Noor said.



An man is treated in a hospital after a gunman stormed a religious gathering of Afghanistan's minority Sikhs at a gurdwara in Kabul on Wednesday.

25 killed, eight hurt in Kabul gurdwara attack

IS claims responsibility; suicide bomber gunned down

Kabul, March 25: At least 25 worshippers were killed and eight others injured when a heavily armed suicide bomber stormed his way into a prominent gurdwara on Wednesday in the heart of Afghanistan's capital of Kabul.

WE STRONGLY condemn the terror attacks in Afghanistan yesterday. They are an attack on Afghanistan's multicultural fabric. My thoughts are with the bereaved families.

NARENDRA MODI Indian Prime Minister

of the Sikh community in the strife-torn country. The Islamic State (IS) terror group, which has targeted Sikhs before in Afghanistan, claimed responsibility for the attack on the gurdwara in Shor Bazar area at about 07:45 (local time) as 150 worshippers were inside the building.

Mujahid said in a statement that the militant group had no link with the attack in Shor Bazar area of Kabul. Photos from the blast scene showed security forces carrying wounded people away on stretchers. Some Afghan media outlets shared videos of the family members of victims waiting outside a city hospital in tears.

Sikh worship area in PD1 of Kabul. A number of people have been rescued who were trapped inside the building," said Interior Ministry spokesman Tariq Arian.

It said 80 people stranded inside the gurdwara were rescued by the security forces. Earlier, the Afghan media reported that the attack that lasted for about six hours was carried out by four terrorists. The terrorist group issued a statement confirming that its members carried out the attack on Sikhs in Kabul city, Khaama Press News Agency reported.

Police in Kabul said that at least 11 children were rescued from the gurdwara. Sikh lawmaker Narendar Singh Khalsa told reporters that up to 150 people were praying inside the gurdwara when it came under attack. Khalsa, the only representative of the Sikh community in Afghanistan said he received a call from a worshipper inside the gurdwara, informing him about the attack.

Earlier, the country's main militant group, the Taliban, denied their involvement in the attack on the gurdwara. Taliban spokesperson Zabiullah said in a statement that the militant group had no link with the attack in Shor Bazar area of Kabul.

Our hearts go out to the families of the victims of this heinous act". Former president of Afghanistan Hamid Karzai strongly condemned the attack on the gurdwara and expressed his condolences to the victims' families.

US agrees on \$2 trillion rescue for economy

Washington, March 25: The Senate and White House have reached agreement on a \$2 trillion stimulus package for the US economy and millions of Americans ravaged by the Covid-19 crisis, top lawmakers said Wednesday.

TRUMP'S OWN BUSINESS IS IN PERIL

Washington, March 25: As if presiding over the threatened destruction of the US economy by the Covid-19 pandemic is not enough, President Donald Trump is watching another financial drama: The Trump Organisation hotel, golf course and real estate business that made him a billionaire. His five-star US and Canada hotels with more than 2,200 rooms are mostly empty, his golf courses in the United States, Scotland and Ireland are under pressure to close, and his cherished "Southern White House" — the beach-front Mar-a-Lago club in Palm Beach, Florida is shuttered.

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"We have a bipartisan agreement on the largest rescue package in American history," top Senate Democrat Chuck Schumer said shortly after McConnell spoke. "So many people are being put out of work through no fault of their own. They don't know what their future is going to be like, how are they going to pay the bills," Schumer added. "Well, we come to their rescue." The Senate and House of Representatives still need to pass the legislation before sending it to President Donald Trump for his signature.

know what their future is going to be like, how are they going to pay the bills," Schumer added. "Well, we come to their rescue." The Senate and House of Representatives still need to pass the legislation before sending it to President Donald Trump for his signature.

He received a call from a worshipper inside the gurdwara, informing him about the attack. "I rushed over to help. There were about 150 worshippers inside the gurdwara at the time of the attack," he was quoted as saying by the official Bakhtar News Agency. "Afghan forces have cleared the first floor of a

MORE THAN three billion people have been asked to stay home in almost 70 countries and territories as governments battle the pandemic sweeping the globe.

THE UNITED Nations on Wednesday launched a \$2 billion global humanitarian response plan to fund the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic in the world's poorest countries, warning that it is threatening the entire human race.

RUSSIAN PRESIDENT Vladimir Putin said Wednesday the public vote on his constitutional reforms must be postponed due to the Covid-19 and declared next week a public holiday. "I believe the voting must be postponed to a later date," Putin said.

Thousands stuck on cruise ships

Perth, March 25: Thousands of passengers on three cruise ships were stranded off Australia's west coast Wednesday as officials refused to let them land to avoid repeating the "utter disaster" of a previous cruise-related Covid-19 surge.

fica, carrying around 1,700 passengers, departed Fremantle Tuesday after being allowed to refuel, but was forced to turn back when told it could not dock in Dubai.

The Artania and Magnifica were anchored off Fremantle with a third, the Vasco de Gama, on its way. "There are no circumstances we will allow passengers or crew to wander the streets in our state," West Australian Premier Mark McGowan said on Wednesday. The Magnifica, carrying around 1,700 passengers, departed Fremantle Tuesday after being allowed to refuel, but was forced to turn back when told it could not dock in Dubai.

Health officials were testing some of the 800 passengers on board the Artania for Covid-19 after 25 were reported for respiratory illness. Virus cases have been connected with cruise ships in Australia, the latest being Ruby Princess, which let passengers off in central Sydney last week, sparking at least 133 cases and one death.



Indonesian bride Irra Chorina Octora and her Turkish partner Yavuz Ozdemir during their wedding ceremony in Surabaya on Wednesday.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	28,535.78	6.98
Nifty 50	8,317.85	6.62
S&P 500*	2,468.08	0.85
Dollar (₹)	76.08	0.15
Pound Sterling (₹)	89.45	-1.86
Euro (₹)	82.51	-1.43
Gold (Oz)* (\$)	1,629.00	-2.06
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	27.11	-0.15
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.304	-1.332
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.823	0.489

* As of 9:30 pm IST

Government bans export of malaria drug

Amid the coronavirus outbreak, the government has banned export of anti-malarial drug hydroxychloroquine with immediate effect to ensure sufficient availability of the medicine in the domestic market. Indian Council of Medical Research director general Balram Bhargava had on Monday recommended the use of hydroxychloroquine for treating healthcare workers handling suspected coronavirus cases.

Yes Bank needs up to ₹13,000 cr in 1-2 years: Icra



Yes Bank will need additional Rs 9,000-Rs 13,000 crore in the next one-two years, Icra said. "As the regulatory norms require banks to maintain a CCB (capital conservation buffer) of 2.5 per cent as on March 31, 2020, Icra expects additional capital requirements of nearly Rs 9,000-Rs 13,000 crore over the next 1-2 years," the ratings firm said. It said the bank may see deposit withdrawals for which liquidity support is needed.

Cost of 21-day lockdown seen at \$120 billion

Pegging the cost of the Covid-19 lockdown at \$120 billion (about Rs 9 lakh crore), British brokerage Barclays cut India's growth estimates and stressed the need to announce an economic package. "We estimate that the cumulative shutdown cost around \$120 billion or 4 per cent of the gross domestic product," Barclays said in a note, revising down its FY21 growth forecast by 1.7 percentage points to 3.5 per cent.

ONGC, IOC drastically cut production

With the lockdown shutting down factories, ONGC has cut natural gas production by up to one-tenth as customers refused to take supplies. ONGC, which produced 64.5 million standard cubic metres of gas per day till earlier this week, has reduced the flow to 59.8 mmscmd on Wednesday, and will further cut by 3 mmscmd more on Thursday. IOC said it is cutting down its refineries by one-fourth to align production to demand.

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Ed-tech sees unprecedented surge in interest

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MARCH 11

Ed-tech has seen a sudden spurt in demand as people sit at home or work for home. Proactive steps taken by the ed-tech companies are expected to convert new customers into regular ones even after the crisis.

Great Learning has seen a three-fold increase in content consumption on its platform. Its recently launched GL Academy has witnessed 100 per cent increase in learners consuming our learning content.

In light of the ongoing Covid-19 health crisis, in the second week of March Byjus had announced that it will be providing free access to its complete app to school students till the end of



April.

"Since our announcement last week, we have witnessed a 60 per cent increase in the number of new students using the app to learn from home daily. The number of queries from students and parents for its home learn-

ing programs more than doubled in the next one week," said Divya Gokulnath, co-founder and director of Byjus.

"We have seen a huge spike in March, specifically from the last week in terms of paid registrations from new users and also,

the engagements from existing users have spiked up quite a bit. Our teams have been handling the situation and are constantly on the roll to resolve all queries for the students. Recently, we have also witnessed college professors reaching out to our platform to explore and try the platform on behalf of all their students," Chandrabhanu Pattajoshi, founder of Glossaread.

Great Learning is seeing a lot of traction from working professionals, especially employed in the IT/ITES sectors. Over the past three-four weeks, there has also been a surge in interest from college students and fresh graduates.

"Keeping in mind the disruption Covid has caused to the established routines of working

professionals and also college students, we have launched the GL Academy to provide free online courses in areas such as Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Data Science, Cloud Computing, Digital Marketing etc.," said Hari Krishnan Nair, co-founder, Great Learning.

Most of the surge is coming from metro cities with Bengaluru being the leading city followed by other metros like Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad and Delhi. Increased enquiries are also coming from cities such as Pune, Noida and Kochi.

"We have observed that the students have comfortably adapted to online meetings, interviews, and lectures. Webinars are also conducted to provide informa-

tion on creative careers and the industry. Our online chat support handles and responds to all the students' queries that are coming in. Students seeking undergraduate and postgraduate programme education in design, art, and gaming are applying for online admissions," said Dhruvi Patel, director-marketing and admission, Ecole Intuit Lab.

A good number of these new customers can get converted into regular customers even after the crisis.

"We believe that the current situation is going to transform the ed-tech industry altogether with massive changes in consumer behaviour patterns and shift towards studying online," said Pattajoshi.

RIL soars on buzz that Facebook may take stake in Reliance Jio Sensex vaults even as FPIs keep selling

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, MARCH 25

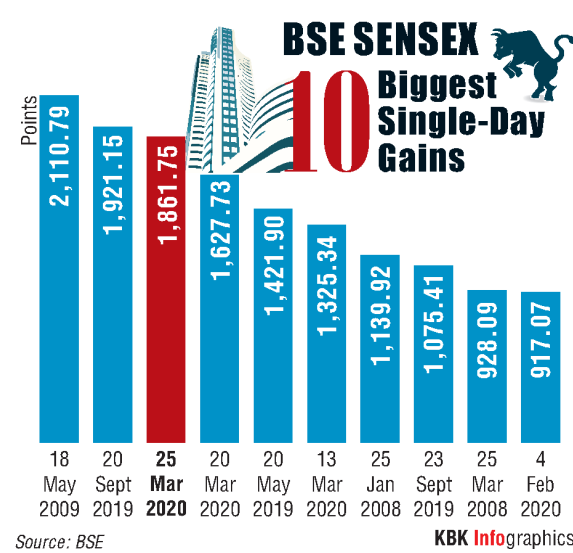
Market benchmarks Sensex gained over 1850 points and Nifty-50 gained over 500 points on Wednesday, recovering most of the losses earlier this week despite a nationwide 21-day lockdown announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Domestic equities rallied on hopes of a stimulus package sooner than later and reliefs related to tax compliance announced by the finance minister by extending the deadlines, besides gains in global markets on US leaders finalising a \$2 trillion stimulus package to boost the US economy.

With the lockdown in force, the number of coronavirus cases in the country has now crossed 600 while the global number was still rising fast at 4,40,318, along with deaths of over 19,750.

The Sensex gained 6.98 per cent, or 1,861.75 points, closing at 28,535.78 while the Nifty-50 closed 6.62 per cent up at 8,317.85, with a gain of 516.80 points.

Index heavyweight Reliance Industries gained 14.65 per cent, closing at Rs 1,081.25 on the BSE and contributed maximum to the gains in



Source: BSE

KBK Infographics

RIL promoter firms exchange ₹11,000 cr shares

New Delhi, March 25: Reliance Industries' promoter Devarshi Commercials LLP on Wednesday offloaded shares worth over Rs 11,000 crore in the firm through open market transactions. Devarshi sold shares of RIL through two separate transactions. While 5,80,40,583 shares were sold at an average price of Rs 950 apiece, 5,80,40,587 shares were offloaded at Rs 949 per scrip. Another promoter entity of RIL, Samarjit Enterprises LLP, bought these shares at the same price. —PTI

Sensex and Nifty-50 on market buzz that US tech giant Facebook is looking to pick up a 10 per cent stake in its telecom arm, Reliance Jio.

The large-cap stocks in the banking and financial services sector recovered, led by Kotak Bank (12.31 per cent), HDFC Bank (11.77 per cent), HDFC

(9.44 per cent), Axis Bank (7.33 per cent) and ICICI Bank (6.93 per cent).

Gainers among other index heavyweights included Maruti (12.23 per cent), Larsen & Toubro (8.22 per cent), and Bharti Airtel (6.36 per cent).

All the sectors ended in the green, with the Nifty Bank being the biggest gainer at 8.03 per cent.

However, market sentiments remained fragile with foreign portfolio investors selling equities worth Rs 1,893.36 crore while domestic institutions were net buyers by just Rs 737.98 crore.

Gaurav Dua, senior VP and head-capital market strategy & investments, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said, "Indian market surged ahead today building on the gains posted yesterday. Indian market got a boost from the positive global cues. The clearing of huge \$2 trillion stimulus by political leaders in US have turned the sentiments positive globally. In India, the decision to take aggressive step to fight coronavirus has also been welcomed by the markets. Wednesday's sharp uptick shows that any sense of stability can lead to sudden turnaround in the direction of markets."

US to unveil \$2-trn stimulus

JOSH WINGROVE,
LAURA LITVAN &
STEVEN T. DENNIS
MARCH 25

The Trump administration struck a deal with Senate Democrats and Republicans on an historic rescue package that tees up more than \$2 trillion in spending and tax breaks to bolster the hobbled US economy and fund a nationwide effort to stem the coronavirus.

"At last we have a deal," Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said early on Wednesday on the chamber's floor. "I'm thrilled that we're finally going to deliver to the country."

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer called it an "outstanding agreement."

The legislation was still being drafted but McConnell said the Senate would vote on it Wednesday. It would still have to pass in the House before it



gets to President Donald Trump's desk. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi had consulted with Schumer throughout his negotiations with Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin.

The plan includes about \$500 billion that can be used to back loans and assistance to companies, including \$50 billion for loans to US airlines, as

well as state and local governments. It also has more than \$350 billion to aid small businesses. Then there is \$150 billion for hospitals and other healthcare providers for equipment and supplies.

For individuals the package provides direct payments to lower- and middle-income Americans of \$1,200 for each adult, as well as \$500 for each child.

Unemployment insurance would be extended to four months, the benefits would be bolstered by \$600 weekly and eligibility would be expanded to cover more workers.

Democrats demanded and won a series of restraints on corporations that would benefit from loans or investments from the Treasury Department, as well as an oversight mechanism for who gets money.

Any company receiving a government loan would be subject to a ban on stock buybacks through the term of the loan plus one additional year. They also would have to limit executive bonuses and take steps to protect workers. The Treasury Department would have to disclose the terms of loans or other aid to companies and a new Treasury inspector general would oversee the lending program. —Bloomberg

E-com majors suspend services as local officials stop deliveries

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MARCH 25

E-commerce players, including e-grocers, suspended their services on Wednesday, the first day of the nationwide lockdown. They were unable to deliver essential items due to the clamp down by local authorities on warehouses, supply chain and delivery persons.

The central government had recognised the role played by e-commerce in helping citizens remain at home and maintain social distancing. However, e-commerce players are finding it tough to get essential items, like vegetables, fruits and medical sup-

plies, delivered to the customers.

The companies said the transit of materials through inter-state borders is being blocked, warehouses are being forcefully shut and delivery boys are being prevented from fulfilling orders. Due to this, e-grocers like BigBasket and Grofers were declining to take orders on Wednesday and were cancelling the existing orders. Amazon Pantry and Flipkart too suspended their services. "We will be back soon," most of the players posted on their websites.

"One thing that will help us and other grocery delivery companies is better

CENTRE OKAYS MORE GRAIN SUPPLY VIA RATION SHOPS

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

In order to ensure adequate supply of basic food items like rice and wheat during the lockdown period, the government, on Wednesday, increased the monthly quota of subsidised foodgrains by 2 kg to 7 kg per person through ration shops.

The decisions, taken by

the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, will benefit 80 crore public distribution system (PDS) beneficiaries.

The government also approved a total of Rs 1,340-crore recapitalisation of regional rural banks (RRBs) to improve capital to risk-weighted asset ratio (CRAR), in

which Rs 670 crore share, or 50 per cent, will come from central government for the scheme.

The cost of wheat is Rs 27/kg, which will be provided at a subsidised rate of Rs 2 kg, while the cost of rice is about Rs 32/kg but will be supplied at Rs 3/kg through ration shops, information and broadcasting minister Prakash Javadekar said.

declaring food delivery as essential, we are facing hardships in continuing our operations. Please bear with us as we are working hard to unblock local authority hurdles," online seafood and meat retailer Fresthome said in a message to the consumers.

While e-commerce players are finding it tough to handle the surge in orders, clampdown by local authorities is another challenge.

"Over the last few days, we faced a few hiccups in our operations which led to a backlog of around four lakh orders. However, the local authorities are helping us in resuming our operations. We are closely

working with them and with their support, we will soon start accepting orders on our platform," said Albiner Dhindsa, Co-founder and CEO, Grofers.

In many states, the local authorities do not have clarity as to what all are essential items. "We are working with the central government and local authorities, asking them to help us urgently with detailed on-ground operating procedures, to ensure delivery of priority goods like household staples, health and hygiene products...safely across the country to our customers' homes without any disruption," said Amazon spokesperson.

Auto shutdown loss pegged at ₹2,300 cr/day

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, MARCH 25

The Rs 8.21-lakh crore Indian automotive industry, the world's fourth largest, would be hit with a revenue loss of more than Rs 23,000 crore during the first 10 days of shutdown due to the coronavirus pandemic in Asia's third largest economy.

The automobile industry is the third largest employer in the country.

The Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers, or Siam, the trade lobby, on Wednesday said the closure of manufacturing plants by various automakers and component manufacturers due to the contagion would lead to a revenue loss of over Rs 2,300 crore per day.

All major automakers like Tata Motors, Maruti Suzuki India, Hyundai, Honda, Mahindra, Toyota Kirloskar Motor, Kia Motors, MG Motor India, among others, have declared temporary shutdown of plants.

Two-wheeler makers like Hero MotoCorp, Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India, TVS Motor Company, Bajaj Auto, Yamaha and Suzuki

Motorcycle have also suspended production.

Besides, tyre makers and other major auto component makers too have shut down manufacturing activities due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Manufacturing activities ceased from March 22 after the Maharashtra government decided to enforce work from home more strictly in the state. Companies having plants in Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu also followed suit to shut operations by March 23.

The Indian automotive market has produced an average of 75,000 vehicles every day so far this year, clocking production of nearly 25 million units till end of February, the latest data from Siam showed.

More than 500,000 units of two-wheelers, more than 5,000 passenger cars and little over 8,000 units of commercial vehicles powered by Bharat Stage IV engines are yet to be sold.

After the Supreme Court decided deadline of March 31 these vehicles will become scrap since BS4 stock cannot be sold or registered.

RoSCTL to continue for apparels from April 1

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MARCH 25

The tax refund scheme that was about to expire by March 31 for apparel and made-up exports, will now continue from April 1. However, the refunds, which have been pending since March last year, has just started to be issued to exporters from last week.

The apparel industry had faced a lot of hardships after the Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS) scheme was discontinued on March 7, 2019. MEIS had to be withdrawn as the country had graduated from the category of the least developed countries.

Though a new scheme, Rebate of State and Central Taxes and Levies (RoSCTL) was announced

in March, the refunds were pending for almost an year. This had squeezed the working capital of exporters. Meanwhile, the sector was expecting that Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP), announced for all export sectors, will be brought in for apparels and made-ups by April 1.

The Cabinet on Wednesday gave its approval for continuation of RoSCTL from April 1, 2020 onward. Later the scheme will be merged with the newly announced RoDTEP. Continuation of RoSCTL beyond March 31, 2020 is expected to make the textile sector competitive by rebating all taxes/levies which are currently not being rebated under any other mechanism, the government said.

SHORT TAKES

Pep, Messi donate to help fight corona

Madrid: Manchester City coach Pep Guardiola has donated one million euros (\$1.08 million) to help buy medical supplies for the fight against the coronavirus pandemic in his native Spain. The former FC Barcelona boss gave the money to the Medical College of Barcelona to buy "medical equipment that is currently lacking in health centres in Catalonia," the body said in a statement. His donation will also be used to produce ventilators to treat patients and protective gear for health care workers in Guardiola's northeastern region of Spain. Meanwhile Barcelona's Hospital Clinic said it had received a donation from FC Barcelona captain Lionel Messi to help it fight the virus. "Thank you Leo, for your support and commitment," the hospital added in a tweet. While the hospital did not say how much money the player donated, Catalan sports daily *Mundo Deportivo* said it was one million euros. — AFP

CR7, agent help set up three ICU units

Lisbon Cristiano Ronaldo and his agent Jorge Mendes will donate three intensive care units to Portuguese hospitals to help them cope with the coronavirus pandemic. The Portuguese pair will donate to at least two institutions and will give "two intensive care units", with a "capacity of 10 beds each" to the University Hospital Center of Northern Lisbon (CHULN), a group of hospitals in Lisbon, a spokesman confirmed. CHULN currently has a capacity of 77 beds. Mendes and Ronaldo will also donate a unit to the Santo Antonio Hospital of the University Hospital Center of Porto. "This is a very important investment that includes more than a dozen respirators and other necessary equipment," Eurico Castro Alves, director of the hospital's surgery department, told newspaper *Jornal de Noticias*. — AFP

Legend Roger gives \$1m for Covid-19

Geneva: Tennis great Roger Federer on Wednesday donated more than a million dollars to help support his "most vulnerable" Swiss compatriots through the coronavirus crisis. The 20-time Grand Slam champion and his wife donated one million Swiss francs (\$1.02 million, 943,000 euros), saying nobody should be left behind as Switzerland battles against the global pandemic. According to official figures reported to the World Health Organization, Switzerland has the ninth-highest number of infections in the world. "These are challenging times for everyone and nobody should be left behind. Mirka and I have personally decided to donate one million Swiss francs for the most vulnerable families in Switzerland. Our contribution is just a start," world number four Federer, 38, said on Instagram. — AFP

CHESS BODY POSTPONES OLYMPIAD

Chennai: The world governing body of chess, FIDE, has postponed the Olympiad, scheduled for August 5-17 in Moscow, to 2021 owing to the Covid-19 pandemic. The global chess body issued a statement saying that the Olympiad and the FIDE Congress, slated to be held in August in Moscow and Khanty-Mansiysk respectively, are rescheduled to the summer of 2021 at the same locations. "As you know, the Chess Olympiad is the most popular FIDE event, attended by thousands of people, including players, coaches, officials, and spectators. The mission of Chess Olympiads is not only to determine the sportive results but also to popularize our game and unite chess lovers around the world in this truly global sports festival. FIDE has decided to postpone the 44th Chess Olympiad," the statement said. — PTI

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TOKYO REBOOT

IOC chief calls for sacrifices to reorganise Games

Lausanne, March 25: International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach said Wednesday that the postponed Tokyo Games would require "sacrifices and compromises" from all sides to make them work. "These postponed Olympic Games will need sacrifices, will need compromises from all stakeholders," Bach told reporters in a conference call the day after the IOC decided to delay the 2020 Games because of the coronavirus pandemic. The IOC's role, Bach said, was "to make the Olympic dreams of athletes come true." He admitted that cancelling the Tokyo Games was "discussed and considered" but said: "It was very clear from the beginning that cancellation was not something the IOC would in any way favour." It is the first Olympic Games in peacetime to be postponed.

TOKYO TO REORGANISE GAMES

Japan set about the unprecedented task of reorganising the Tokyo 2020 Olympics Wednesday after making the tough decision to postpone the Games by a year as the coronavirus pandemic locks down one third of the planet.

The dramatic step to shift the Olympics, never before seen in peacetime, upends every aspect of the organisation — including venues, security, ticketing and accommodation.

In a move symbolic of the difficulties now facing Tokyo, Olympic countdown clocks in the city switched from displaying the number of days to go, instead simply showing today's date and the time.

It is not even clear exactly when the rescheduled Games will take place, with the International Olympic Committee saying the new date would be "beyond 2020 but not later than summer 2021".

Japan has framed Tokyo 2020 as the "Recovery Games" — a chance to show the world it has bounced back from the "triple disaster" in 2011 when a massive earthquake sparked a tsunami and the Fukushima nuclear meltdown. — AFP



These postponed Olympic Games will need sacrifices, will need compromises from all stakeholders. It was very clear from the beginning that cancellation was not something the IOC would in any way favour. — THOMAS BACH, president of International Olympic Committee



Children walk past a Tokyo 2020 official shop in Tokyo on Wednesday, a day after the historic decision to postpone the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games. — AFP

BWF might freeze rankings

New Delhi, March 25: The Badminton World Federation (BWF) on Wednesday said it might freeze the world rankings for a while as it works on a "fair solution" to the Olympic qualification process after the Covid-19 pandemic forced a postponement of the Tokyo Games.

There have been growing calls to freeze the world rankings after cancellations and postponements wrecked the sport's calendar. Indian shuttlers Saina Nehwal, B. Sai Praneeth, Parupalli Kashyap and H. S. Prannoy have been leading the way in expressing concerns.

"For our athletes, we will review any impacts on the Olympic and Paralympic qualification system to ensure a fair solution is found to qualify players for the postponed Games," the BWF said in a statement.

"BWF, in the short-term, is also looking into the possibility of freezing World Rankings until international tournaments start again. We are still working on the technical solution to ensure the freezing and eventual un-freezing of World Rankings works fairly for all players and we will announce this shortly," it added.

Shuttlers in the singles competition have to be inside top-16 of world rankings to qualify for the Olympics. In doubles, a country can field one pair if they are in the top 16 and two if both pairs are in the top eight. The BWF welcomed the International Olympic Committee (IOC)'s decision to postpone the Olympics, originally scheduled from July 24 to August 9, to next year in the wake of the pandemic, which has caused nearly



P. V. Sindhu in action in this file photo.

● **For our athletes, we will review any impact on the Olympic and Paralympic qualification system to ensure a fair solution is found to qualify players for the postponed Games, the Badminton World Federation said in a statement.**

19,000 deaths worldwide. "Today, we stand in solidarity with the IOC and International Paralympic Committee (IPC) in welcoming the postponement of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games," the statement said. "BWF fully supports the decision made yesterday by IOC President Thomas Bach, Prime Minister of Japan Shinzo Abe, and the

Organising Committee (TOCOG) to reschedule the Games to a date beyond 2020 but no later than summer 2021. "Balancing the many necessary considerations for the whole of sport has been a complex exercise, so we are supportive of how difficult this decision would have been for the IOC and TOCOG," it added. — PTI

US ATHLETES HAIL OLYMPIC SUSPENSION

Los Angeles, March 25: United States athletes welcomed the decision to postpone the Tokyo Olympics on Tuesday, exhaling a collective sigh of relief tinged with disappointment as they began to set their sights on 2021.

The deadly coronavirus pandemic has swept into all 50 states of America, leaving US athletes' years of carefully choreographed Olympic training plans in tatters. Powerhouse swimmer Katie Ledecky, expected to be one of the stars of the Tokyo Games, had been left without a pool to train in as restrictions in California shut down the Stanford University facilities.

Track and field star Noah Lyles — the reigning 200m world champion — had been denied regular access to a running track. Instead Lyles, who suffers from allergies and asthma, had been forced to train in a Florida park.

Lyles and Ledecky's problems had become all too common for US athletes, who found themselves torn between the need to comply with local regulations restricting non-essential movement while simultaneously sticking to training regimens designed to help them prepare for Tokyo.

Lyles had no reservations about the decision to postpone the Games — and vowed to be ready for Tokyo in 2021.

"Straight up I'm tired of hearing I'm sorry like my puppy just died," Lyles wrote on Twitter. — AFP

IPL is as good as over this season

New Delhi, March 25: The cancellation of this year's IPL looks inevitable with the BCCI under tremendous pressure after the declaration of a 21-day nationwide lockdown to contain the the deadly Covid-19 pandemic. When the BCCI postponed the IPL to April 15 earlier this month, it said conducting the tournament would only come into the picture if the pandemic subsided. However, there hasn't been any remarkable change in the situation with positive cases crossing the 500-mark in India, including 10 deaths. BCCI president Sourav Ganguly did not have much to say on the current scenario, which was made worse by the postponement of Tokyo Olympics to the summer of 2021, on Tuesday. The global Covid-19 death toll is nearing 19,000.

"I can't say anything at the moment. We are at the same place where we were on the day we postponed. Nothing has changed in the last 10 days. So, I don't have an answer to it. Status quo remains," Ganguly's helplessness was palpable. Kings XI Punjab owner Ness Wadia was more forthright. "The BCCI should really consider postponing the IPL now. As a premier event, we need to act with great responsibility. Contemplation of IPL is inhuman right now. We need to save lives, not IPL," KXIP co-owner Wadia said.

Currently, each stakeholder is discussing ways to limit the financial damage with insurance companies as well as broadcasters.

ICC SET TO MEET VIA VIDEO CONFERENCE

New Delhi, March 25: The member nations of the International Cricket Council will be engaged in a video conference on Friday to discuss contingency plans for upcoming ICC events in the wake of global travel restrictions to fight the Covid-19 pandemic. The high-profile ICC T20 World Cup scheduled in Australia from mid-October along with the bilateral Test series in the World Test Championship schedule could be in for a rejig.

However, one ICC Board member made it clear that no decision will be taken during Friday's video conference. "It's more about an update on contingency planning at this stage. In case of an extreme situation, there should be plan B and C ready. So, we board members need to understand the options available," the veteran administrator said.

"Obviously, the situation currently is very serious and Covid-19 and its implications is on agenda. But if you think logically, World T20 is in October and final of World Test Championship is in June, 2021," he added. However, if the lockdowns then member nations will be forced to make alternate plans for the series.

BENGAL CRICKET BODY HELPS NEEDY CHILDREN

Kolkata, March 25: The BCCI president Sourav Ganguly has come forward in support of those affected by the 21-day lockdown due to Covid-19 pandemic, pledging to donate rice worth ₹50 lakh for the underprivileged.

Ganguly along with Lal Baba Pite will provide for the needy people who have been put in government schools for safety and security, the Cricket Association of Bengal announced in a statement.

"Hope this initiative of Ganguly would encourage other citizens of the state to take up similar initiatives to serve the people of our state," the statement from the company added.

The 1.3-billion populated India has gone into a total lockdown from midnight in an attempt to slow the spread of Covid-19 virus and CAB secretary Snehshis Ganguly hailed the unprecedented step.

Meanwhile, the Cricket Association of Bengal have also decided to donate a sum of ₹25 lakh while its president Avishek Dalmiya pledged ₹5 lakh to the state administration to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. "We have decided to donate a sum of Rs 25 lakh and personally I will be donating Rs 5 lakh. We're in talks with the state government on how to donate the money," CAB president Avishek Dalmiya said. — PTI

Cricket stadium on standby for corona

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MARCH 25 With the coronavirus wreaking havoc, the Hyderabad Cricket Association — setting a precedence — has decided to offer the Rajiv Gandhi Cricket Stadium in Uppal as a venue to set up isolation centres.

In accordance with the services rendered by Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao, the HCA arrived upon this decision. "In sync with our commitment and passion in implementing the measures, I, on behalf of HCA President Mohammad Azharuddin, and the members of the Apex Council, would like to offer the facility of Rajiv Gandhi Stadium in Uppal to set up isolation centres," R. Vijayanand, HCA secretary said in a statement. "This we feel is the moral obligation on our part in this hour of crisis as there are 40 big rooms which can take care of some of the virus-affected patients," Vijayanand added.

BADMINTON NATIONALS PUT OFF INDEFINITELY

New Delhi, March 25: The Badminton Association of India on Wednesday postponed the 84th Senior Badminton National Championships scheduled to be held in Lucknow from April 27 to May 3 after the government put the country under lockdown till April 14 to combat the dreaded Covid-19 pandemic.

The coronavirus outbreak has claimed 10 lives and infected nearly 600 people in the country, prompting the government to put the whole country under lockdown till April 14 to fight the spread of the deadly disease. "Now that the government has extended the lockdown, we have decided to postpone the 84th Senior nationals badminton Championships and 75th Inter State — Inter Zonal. It is unfortunate that the tournament couldn't be held as planned but it is a grave situation and fighting this disease is the priority," BAI General secretary Ajay Singhania said. — PTI

IOA to revise preparation plans

New Delhi, March 25: The Indian Olympic Association on Wednesday conceded that careers of some athletes would be impacted by the postponement of Tokyo Olympics and the IOA would look to address this when it makes revised preparation plans in consultation with the sports ministry. Like all stakeholders, the IOA on Tuesday welcomed the International Olympic Committee's decision to postpone the Summer Games, supposed to be held in July-August, to the summer of 2021 owing to the global Covid-19 pandemic. "A one-year postponement might impact the career/qualification and plans of some athletes, which would be addressed

in the coming months and all necessary support would also be extended by us." IOA Secretary General Rajeev Mehta said in a letter to the IOC and the Tokyo Games organisers without specifying any names. "I am holding discussions and there would be meetings scheduled with the Federations after the lockdown in India is over. Athletes' safety is our utmost priority now. "We would be also consulting with the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports in revising the preparation plans," he added. While the postponement of the Games has brought relief to the athletes, it has also made some of them uncertain about the qualification process,

I welcome the decision of IOC to postpone #Tokyo2020 in view of the global pandemic. It's necessary for the well being of athletes from across the world. — KIREN RIJJU, Union Sports minister

which was abandoned in most sports due to the deadly outbreak. **RIJJU WELCOMES TOKYO POSTPONEMENT** Sports Minister Kiren Rijju has welcomed the postponement of this year's Olympic Games to 2021 in view of the worsening COVID-19 pandemic, saying the IOC's decision has ensured the well being of Tokyo-bound athletes.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) and Japan Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Tuesday announced postponement of the Games, scheduled for July-August, because of the pandemic which has brought the world to a standstill. "I welcome the decision of IOC to postpone #Tokyo2020 in view of the global pandemic. It's necessary for the well being of athletes from across the world," Rijju said in a tweet late on Tuesday. He also assured the Tokyo-bound Indian athletes of government's full support to ensure that their preparations are not impacted by the current situation. India was on Tuesday placed under a 21-day

lockdown to contain the spread of the deadly virus, which has caused close to 19,000 deaths worldwide. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected nearly 4 lakh people globally. In India, more than 500 positive cases have been detected so far and the death toll has touched 10. Earlier, the Indian Olympic Association had also welcomed the IOC's decision, saying it has relieved the country's athletes of a stressful buildup during a global health crisis. The pandemic has forced the cancellation or postponement of almost all sporting events across the world, including the Olympic qualifiers and the European football championships. — PTI