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LPG, DRUGS, RLY FREIGHT included in expanded exemption category

CENTRE, STATES SCRAMBLE to come to the rescue of poor, daily wagers

NPR, CENSUS PHASE-I processes postponed in view of outbreak

Day 1: Cracking the supply chain

Govt steps in after retailers and e-com players stopped

Minister Javadekar briefs on the Cabinet meeting. *Anil Sharma*

PRANAV MUKUL, PRABHA RAGHAVAN, SANDEEP SINGH, DEEPTIMAN TIWARY, AVISHEK G DASTIDAR
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

AS THE 21-day nationwide lockdown kicked in Wednesday, confusion prevailed among local authorities and police over exemptions, causing major disruptions in last-mile supply of food and grocery items, which are part of essential goods and services and exempted from prohibitory orders.

While some authorities including Delhi Police, Gurugram Police, Noida Police and Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation instituted mechanisms for allowing home deliveries, including issuing curfew passes to the staff of Amazon, Flipkart, BigBasket, Grofers, Swiggy, Zomato, etc, many raised concerns over non-adherence of Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) orders in different states. Offline retailers such as Future Retail, which operates the Big Bazaar chain, also complained that police confiscated bikes and keys of its staff and even beat them up on their way to stores.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Supply trucks stuck in Ghaziabad, near UP's border with Delhi, Wednesday. *Prem Nath Pandey* REPORTS, PAGE 4-7, 12, 13

No transport and no money, migrants take long road home

With public transport stopped, migrants start walking home from Ahmedabad Wednesday. *Reuters*

ANANYA TIWARI, VAIBHAV JHA, AISHWARYA MOHANTY & DEEP MUKHERJEE
NEW DELHI, AHMEDABAD, VADODARA, JAIPUR, MARCH 25

ANTRESH KUMAR, 21, started walking at 3 am on Wednesday from Dharampuri in Najafgarh, South West Delhi. Facing the prospect of no work due to the 21-day lockdown, the daily wager decided that heading home to Moradabad in Uttar Pradesh was his best option. Even if it meant walking most of the 175 km, spending two days on the road, and risking police wrath.

Antresh isn't the only one. Left stranded by a nationwide lockdown, which has halted all public transport, hundreds of labourers devoid of work have started leaving big cities on foot.

CORONA COUNT
606 CASES | 10 DEATHS
43 RECOVERED
22,928 samples from 22,038 individuals tested

In Ahmedabad, a majority of the estimated 2,000-plus migrant labourers left Tuesday evening, around the time Prime Minister Narendra Modi began his speech announcing the lockdown. Headed for villages in Rajasthan, they had reached Bichhiwara tehsil, 125 km away from Ahmedabad, by Wednesday afternoon, walking and hitch-hiking.

"Scores of people can be seen

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Teething problems, we are streamlining free passage of essentials: Police chief

DEEPTIMAN TIWARY
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

Delhi Police Commissioner S N Shrivastava

ACKNOWLEDGING that Delhi Police may have been caught off-guard by the enormity and unprecedented nature of the nationwide lockdown over the coronavirus outbreak, leading to disruption of certain essential supplies, Police Commissioner S N Shrivastava Wednesday said clear instructions have now been given to personnel on the ground on free passage of essential goods and services, and this will be streamlined in the coming days.

In an interview to *The Indian Express*, Shrivastava said: "This lockdown is unprecedented. Never in the past has it happened that the entire country is locked down. Because it has happened so suddenly, it is taking some time for things to settle down. As of now, the primary concern is that people, barring those not engaged in essential services, stay

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

On table: Cash transfers for unorganised workers, 7 kg subsidised grain per person

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

THE GOVERNMENT is finalising an economic package, the broad contours of which are likely to include targeted monetary transfers to unorganised sector workers, especially daily wage workers, sops for small and medium enterprises and relaxations in banking sector prudential norms to help companies tide over the countrywide lockdown that is causing significant disruption across the economy.

While the government may use money available with certain labour welfare funds, a limited fiscal space would be its biggest constraint. The Centre may borrow more to fund the relief package, which is expected to be announced later this week, said senior officials.

"Measures for MSMEs, cash transfers for daily wage workers and liquidity infusion are the key focus areas for the planned economic package," a Finance Ministry official said.

According to sources, the plan, being finalised in consultation with the Reserve Bank of India, also involves relaxing the non-performing asset classification

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BUSINESS AS USUAL
By UNNY

Money transfer, food aid: States announce schemes for daily wagers, vendors

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

FROM FREE ration to cash in bank accounts, UP, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat are among a number of states that have stepped up to help the unorganised labour sector — construction workers to street vendors — get through weeks without work under the coronavirus lockdown.

In most of these states, the workers will get Rs 1,000-1,500 as one-time relief through direct cash transfers, apart from ration assistance.

India's unorganised workers

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

EXPLAINED Reducing economic disruption

These targeted measures for the poor and daily wage workers, along with a series of other steps for companies and the banking sector, are being finalised to ease the extraordinary disruption in economy, which is forcing the Centre to let fiscal deficit expand and borrow more.

At least 25 killed in IS attack on Kabul gurdwara, India calls it diabolical, cowardly

A wounded Afghan Sikh woman in a Kabul hospital. *AP*

SHUBHAJIT ROY
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

AT LEAST 25 people were killed and more than eight others were wounded during an attack Wednesday on a gurdwara in the Afghan capital Kabul. The Islamic State has claimed responsibility for the attack. A spokesperson for the Taliban denied any involvement.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi condemned the attack, and New Delhi said "such cowardly attacks" at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic is reflective of the "diabolical mindset" of the perpetrators and their backers.

Afghanistan's Interior Ministry said security forces rescued at least 80 people, including women and children, who were inside the gurdwara complex.

Tariq Arian, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Interior, was quoted by Khama news agency as saying a group of suicide bombers entered the gurdwara in Shor Bazar area of Kabul around 7.45 am local time.

Arian said security forces rescued the majority of people who were trapped inside. The attack

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Foreign missions start flying out stranded citizens on special flights

SHUBHAJIT ROY
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

WITH INDIA on a 21-day lockdown, foreign embassies are chalking out plans to evacuate their stranded citizens, mostly tourists. While some have already begun evacuation, others are working on it.

Sources told *The Indian Express* that 10-12 countries, including Germany, France, US, UK, Canada, Israel, Russia and Afghanistan, have sought permission to evacuate their citizens. About 6,000-10,000 foreign nationals are expected to be evacuated on special flights, as all international flights have been cancelled.

About 1,000 Germans are being evacuated Wednesday and Thursday; Russia sent back about 400 of its nationals Wednesday.

The French Embassy is planning to evacuate about 2,000 tourists in the next few days. The US and UK are also working on similar plans for their nationals.

The Israeli Embassy helped some of its citizens leave from Goa and Mumbai recently. It is

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INSIDE

MAHABHARAT WAS WON IN 18 DAYS, WE NEED TO WIN THIS WAR IN 21, SAYS PM
PAGE 6

Floyd Cardoz, man who 'helped make Indian food cool', dies of virus in NY

POOJA PILLAI
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

RESTAURATEUR AND Indian-origin chef Floyd Cardoz, the man who introduced the world to Indian food beyond curry and chicken tikka, passed away in New York on Wednesday after testing positive for coronavirus a week ago.

In a statement issued late on Wednesday, a spokesperson for Hunger Inc. Hospitality, the company Cardoz founded in Mumbai in 2015 and which runs the popular The Bombay Canteen (TBC) and O Pedro restaurants, said, "Floyd tested positive for COVID-19, in USA, on March 18 and was being treated for the same at Mountainside Medical Center, New Jersey, USA." He was 59.

Tested positive on March 18, 10 days after he left India

Earlier this month, Cardoz was in Mumbai to celebrate the fifth anniversary of his TBC and to launch The Bombay Sweet Shop, a modern take on Indian mithai, before leaving for New York on March 8. On March 17, Cardoz posted on Instagram that he had checked himself into the Mountainside Medical Center after testing positive for COVID-19.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

PAGE 1 ANCHOR

Recovered, Mumbai, Pune cases return home to cheers by neighbours

ANURADHA MASCARENHAS, TABASSUM BARNAGARWALA & LAXMAN SINGH
PUNE, MUMBAI, MARCH 25

AMIDST REPORTS of coronavirus suspects facing harassment in several parts of the country, neighbours in Pune and Mumbai joined hands to welcome home Maharashtra's first COVID-19 patients.

Jivandhar, 51, and Prashanti Awati, 44, spent a sleepless night Tuesday at Pune's Naidu Hospital waiting for an all-clear. The state's first positive cases, they finally got the second result confirming them negative and ending their 14-day isolation, at 5.30 am Wednesday. They had tested positive on March 10. On Wednesday evening, their daughter Ankita too was discharged.

Delighted to be back home on the day of Gudi Padwa, an emotional Prashanti, 44, said, "Can you imagine the sense of relief? Since Tuesday evening, our bags were packed."

As the couple stepped out, people from chawls around Naidu Hospital lined up along the road to wave at the ambulance that took them home, escorted by a police van. "It was heartwarming," said Jivandhar, a senior manager with a Pune firm.

When they reached their society on Sinhagad Road, another surprise awaited them. Said Jivandhar, "The society has 350 flats across seven buildings. Several came to their balconies, clapping and cheering." Added Prashanti, "Some brought groceries, others offered to get food packets."

In Mumbai, a similar reception awaited the city's first two cases, a 70-year-old and his 69-year-old wife, who tested positive on March 11 and were discharged from Kasturba Hospital on Tuesday. The couple had travelled along with the Awatis to Dubai last month.

The Awatis were discharged on Wednesday; daughter expected back home soon

When the two reached their building in Andheri, four neighbours carried the 69-year-old in a plastic chair into the lift, and later to her second-floor apartment. Said the husband, "She was not able to walk, she has a stomach infection." Society members also had dinner ready for the two.

A domestic help who had tested positive for coronavirus was among those cleared Tuesday night in Mumbai. The 68-year-old, whose family staying in a slum had faced much harassment following the case, said, "I hope people will now realise that this disease can be cured."

She said one of her employers, who tested positive after returning from the US on March 17 and who is believed to have infected her, came to visit her in hospital. "He said he was sorry. But I told him he did not do it deliberately." The 68-year-old said the hospital took good care, and answered all her doubts. "From day one that I was admitted, there was not much change in my health," she said.

The Pune family and Mumbai couple were part of a group of 40 people who went to Dubai last month, of whom 15 tested positive. The Awatis had gone to mark their 25th anniversary.

The group returned on March 1, and the Awatis got themselves tested at the municipal corporation-run Naidu Hospital after Jivandhar developed symptoms. Apart from the family, a fellow passenger from Yavatmal and a driver of a taxi hired by them tested positive on March 10. Now all are negative and have been discharged.

Once news came of the Pune family being positive, the aged Mumbai couple, who had no symptoms, decided to get themselves admitted in Kasturba Hospital's isolation ward along with four others from their tour group.

Incidentally, the Andheri couple's two children are also under home quarantine — son in Singapore and daughter in the US, where they stay. A medical officer in Andheri West, Dr Gulnar Khan, said her staff visited

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WEB EXCLUSIVE

VIRUS LOCKDOWN: HOW MODI, TRUMP HAVE RESPONDED TO THE PANDEMIC
While Prime Minister Narendra Modi has announced a 21-day lockdown in India, US President Donald Trump says he "would love to have the country opened up" by Easter. Both have been criticised on the speed at which they took action to tackle the coronavirus outbreak.

VIDEO OF THE DAY

SOCIAL DISTANCING ACROSS THE COUNTRY
Social distancing seen at provision stores and cabinet meetings

TECH

COLD, FLU OR COVID-19?
This AI tool can help you differentiate between the three

EXPRESS AUDIO
Will food supply in India be hit by the lockdown restrictions?
NEW EPISODE EVERYDAY
As a 21-day lockdown begins, we detail why the supply chain of essential food items has been hit and why services like BigBasket and Zomato are having trouble

FROM PAGE ONE

Police chief

at home. Many times it is not so easy to implement."

On disruption of supplies, he said, "We are also trying to grapple with it. Every other second we come to know, okay, even this is an essential good or service. We are in constant touch with various stakeholders, educating people down below that these are essential goods. We are trying our best."

He said he is personally ensuring there is proper communication. "I have been doing video-conferencing with the DCPs. We have even sent a direct message to each constable. All 90,000 policemen are being directly communicated with. I can assure that in the days to come, these troubles will be overcome."

Since Sunday, there have been multiple instances of doctors being stopped at inter-state borders, vegetable shops and fruit kiosks being shut, trucks not being allowed to enter Delhi, newspaper vendors being kept off roads and e-commerce delivery staff being beaten up by police.

"The instructions are very clear that all essential goods have to be allowed. No questions are to be asked, no documents sought. We have to just be satisfied that these are essential goods. There may be an error of judgment here and there... We have setup a helpline 011-23469526. It is 24x7. It has become so popular that we are getting calls from as far as Karnataka," Shrivastava said.

On obstructions being faced by e-commerce platforms, he said, "We have made sure it is communicated that warehouses need to be open and functional. We have also communicated that delivery boys will pick up from these warehouses and so their movement is important. The magnitude is now being understood and being acted upon. One of our Additional CPs has spoken to representatives of all e-commerce companies. We have already sent passes to them."

He said police are also trying to facilitate movement of doctors and paramedics to hospitals.

On newspaper vendors not being allowed to deliver newspapers despite the Prime Minister saying that media is an essential service, Shrivastava said, "Clear instructions have been given that all those with ID cards in print and electronic media be allowed. As regards vendors, there is no ID card. How will my constable identify who is a genuine vendor? We have asked all media houses that they should get passes for them."

The police also have to ensure their own safety. He said masks, gloves and sanitisers have been provided. "Wherever they find a policeman without a mask, gloves or sanitiser, it is provided there and then. The DRDO is supplying us masks and sanitisers."

Shrivastava maintained that despite the preoccupation with the lockdown, normal policing has not been impacted. "The probe into the Delhi riots is also progressing well. We are moving from one challenge to another, but when the going gets tough, the tough get going," he said.

Cash transfers

norms — by another 30-60 days from the current 90 days. This will give firms the space to tide over the cash flow problems caused by the disruption in business.

Cash transfers through direct benefit transfer are being considered for registered unorganised workers and a minimum sustenance level transfer to those who are out of the social security net. As in the case of construction workers, the Centre can issue advisories to states to disburse funds from their respective labour welfare boards. The government already has DBT schemes under labour welfare funds for beedi, cine and mine workers.

On Tuesday, in the first step for unorganised sector workers, the Centre asked states to devise schemes for the use of Rs 52,000 crore of unutilised cess collected under the Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Cess (BOCW) Act and transfer funds to bank accounts of construction workers through DBT.

"Those who are outside the ambit of registration can possibly be asked to register or a basic sustenance level could be provided by states till then," said an official.

When contacted, a secretary in the finance ministry said he could not share details of the package as it is being worked out. Another government official said the RBI may have to subscribe to the bonds issued by the Centre to support the funding plan.

"A stimulus of even 1% of GDP can cost around Rs 2 lakh crore, and since tax and non-tax revenues collections will be even below the Revised Estimates, one can expect significant jump in the fiscal deficit levels," said a government economic advisor who did not want to be named.

At a Cabinet briefing on Wednesday, Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting Prakash Javadekar said that "all employees of the Central government will get their wages, including even contractual labour".

"In private industry as well, all the employers have been asked to provide salaries and the minimum wage. We have got a very good response," he said.

Some states like Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi have already announced free ration for the poor. For the rest of the unorganised sector, experts said the government may also need to look at widening the PDS to include vegetables apart from foodgrains, and subsidies for MSMEs for possible layoffs.

"Loans at a lower rate could be extended to such MSMEs. Also, the government could look at implementing MGNREGS more effectively," said K R Shyam Sundar, labour economist and professor of Human Resources Management at XLRI.

The Finance Ministry and RBI did not reply to queries seeking details of the economic package.

On Tuesday, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had said the government would introduce a broader economic stimulus package "sooner than later". She had announced a series of regulatory and compliance related relaxations for taxpayers, MSMEs, company directors and bank customers. The aviation industry is likely to get relaxation in payment of statutory dues including taxes.

Javadekar said governments, at all levels, are doing what they can to help people. "States and central governments are not separate. And several states have led from the front with initiatives." He assured that "the poor will get the essential items and services".

He said the Centre will provide 80 crore people with 7 kg ration per person. He said wheat, that costs Rs 27 per kg, will be provided at Rs 2 per kg; and rice, that costs Rs 37 per kg, at Rs 3 per kg. He said the Centre will provide the states three months of supplies in advance.

On migrant labourers trying to head back home, Javadekar said their advice "is to stay wherever you are for 21 days, because if you go back what will happen" in the villages can also be an issue.

Govt steps in after retailers & e-com players stopped

With reports like these pouring in from many cities, the MHA asked all states and union territories to draft standard operating protocols, set up helplines and appoint nodal officers to coordinate delivery. "We got reports that labourers and truckers were man-handled in some states when they tried to tell police they were connected with railway freight," a senior government official told *The Indian Express*.

On Day 1 of the lockdown, freight movement for the Railways slowed down by almost a third due to unavailability of labour for loading and unloading at different locations, even though food grains, milk "specials" etc were run.

To address the labour issue in Railways, the Ministry of Home Affairs on Wednesday specifically added "railway freight" to its exempted category list. It also excluded veterinary hospitals, manufacturing units of essential goods including drugs and food packaging material, LPG and petroleum products, shops for seeds and pesticides, resident commissioners of states, forest offices and social welfare departments, coal mines and railway and sea ports operations, apart from certain officers of the RBI, Controller General of Accounts and IT vendors for banks.

During the day, many online grocers like BigBasket announced suspension of operations. Micro-delivery service Milkbasket had to dump 15,000 litres of milk and over 10,000 kg of fruits and vegetables on Monday. The company has suspended deliveries for Gurugram, Noida, Hyderabad.

Flipkart too suspended deliveries across the board, following reports of police hauling up delivery agents in many cities. "We are prioritising the safety of our delivery executives and seeking the support of the local governments & police authorities," a spokesperson said.

Later in the evening, Flipkart Group CEO Kalyan Krishnamurthy said following assurances of safe and smooth passage, the company was "resuming" its grocery and essential services.

Another online daily delivery company SuprDaily suspended services to Mumbai, Pune, Delhi-NCR and Hyderabad for Thursday. "The safety of our delivery staff is at stake and we're very disheartened by it," said Puneet Kumar, founder & CEO of SuprDaily.

Following meetings with local authorities, online grocer BigBasket said it had resumed operations in several cities. However, the company said it was not operational in Chandigarh, Chennai, Delhi, Ludhiana, Pune and Visakhapatnam. "In each of these cities, our operations are completely shut due to severe restrictions imposed on our staff and movement of vehicles," the company said in a statement. Similarly, Grofers, which had suspended operations, resumed services in Delhi and started taking customer orders for essential grocery items.

For offline retailers doing home deliveries, the situation was no different, across big centres including Delhi, Mumbai, Uttar Pradesh or Tamil Nadu. "Our store employees across the country are facing difficulty reaching the stores, they have been beaten by police, their bikes or keys confiscated," said a senior executive at Future Retail, which operates the Big Bazaar chain of hypermarkets.

"Our store strength at different places has been hit by around 50 per cent. It is surprising to see the police behaviour is same across," an executive with another offline retailer, who did not wish to be named, said.

Major retailers and trade associations Wednesday met top officials of the Central government to apprise them about the situation. "Officials cautioned that steps will be taken in a manner which will not dilute the impact of the lockdown," said Praveen Khandelwal, secretary general of Confederation of All India Traders.

Outside the city limits, truckers continued to face challenges. Manoj Kumar Pandey of Pandey Transport Agency in Ambedkar Nagar, Uttar Pradesh, said while the district magistrate issued letters for transport of essential items, "My drivers are facing big challenge while returning with the empty trucks."

In the midst of the nationwide lockdown, chemists also pointed to panic buying of essential medicines like anti-diabetic drugs and even paracetamol in the course of a week. This, coupled with unresolved disruptions in their supply, hasn't helped matters for patients.

"If the situation continues, and the government doesn't pay attention to this, there will be serious shortages," said Kailash Gupta, president of All India Chemists and Distributors Federation (AICDF). "We can easily think of at least 50-odd medicines, some of them essential like insulin, that we are unable to supply to customers because of the lockdown," he said.

Separately to protect doctors and paramedics for harassment at the hands of landlords, the MHA issued a directive asking local authorities to "take strict penal action against such landlords/house-owners under the relevant provisions of law and submit an Action Taken Report on a daily basis to the ministry".

Daily wagers

make up 82.7% of the estimated employed persons, according to last NSSO Employment and Unemployment Survey, 2011-12.

Uttar Pradesh

Rs 235 CRORE BY MARCH 31

BENEFIT: Rs 1,000 per month for daily wagers, rickshaw pullers and street vendors, etc., under the Shramik Bharan Poshan Yojna for about 35 lakh beneficiaries — the scheme was launched Tuesday.

PROCESS: The money will be transferred to bank accounts of beneficiaries. About 5.97 lakh labourers, of the 20.37 lakh registered with the state, do not have bank accounts and officials have been instructed to help them.

The Urban Development Department has been asked to prepare a database of an estimated 15,000 vendors and rickshaw pullers to be included in the scheme for which Rs 235 crore will be utilised within March 31.

Kerala

Rs 1,000 FOR FAMILIES OUTSIDE PENSION UMBRELLA

BENEFIT: Free ration to all families — 35 kg rice for BPL families, 15 kg for others. Rs 1,000 for BPL families not covered under social security pension. Two instalments of social security pensions this month.

PROCESS: The beneficiaries, who are already in the state's database, may receive the cash component through DBT.

Andhra Pradesh

Rs 1,000 FOR DAILY WAGERS, AUTO & CAB DRIVERS

BENEFIT: Rs 1,000 per family during lockdown for BPL holders, daily wagers, autorickshaw and cab drivers, weavers, cobblers, workers, labourers, and others in the unorganised sector. Rs 1,500 crore has been set aside.

PROCESS: Beneficiaries in these segments had been identified for schemes announced earlier. The benefit will be delivered in cash on doorsteps, along with ration rice, 1-kg dal, oil and salt.

Gujarat

FREE RATION FOR 60 LAKH FAMILIES

BENEFIT: Free ration, including foodgrains, for daily wagers — about 60 lakh families consisting of 3.25 crore people. Each person will get 3.5 kg of wheat and 1.5 kg of rice, and every family 1 kg each of sugar, dal and salt.

PROCESS: Rations will be distributed through PDS. The distribution will be carried out in a phased manner.

Telangana

Rs 1,500 PER FAMILY

BENEFIT: Rs 1,500 per family for white ration-card holders, BPL families, unorganised sector workers, etc. They will also get 12 kg of free rice instead of 6 kg for April. Telangana has set aside Rs 2,417 crore -- Rs 1,103 crore for 3.36 lakh tonnes of rice and Rs 1,314 crore for the compensation.

PROCESS: Based on white ration cards, and a 'Comprehensive Household Survey' conducted in 2014. The money will be credited directly in bank accounts of beneficiaries from March 30.

Rajasthan

Rs 1,000 FOR LABOURERS, VENDORS

BENEFIT: Rs 1,000 each to 25 lakh construction workers and registered street vendors not covered under the social security pension scheme. The relief will be extended to 36.51 lakh BPL, state BPL and Antyodaya beneficiaries. The compensation is part of a Rs 2,000-crore relief package.

PROCESS: Beneficiaries will be identified by district administrations and Social Justice Department, and payments done through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) to bank accounts linked to Jan Aadhaar numbers.

Jammu & Kashmir

Rs 1,000 FOR CONSTRUCTION WORKERS

BENEFIT: Rs 1,000 each for 3.5 lakh people registered with the Building & Other Construction Workers Welfare Board for purchase of ration during the lockdown. All 2.26 lakh workers in the unorganised sector registered under the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) scheme will get relief, including wages.

PROCESS: The beneficiaries will be identified by the Labour & Employment Department.

Uttarakhand

Rs 1,000 FOR VENDORS

BENEFIT: Rs 1,000 each for non-registered labourers, street-shop owners, fruit and vegetable vendors, and daily wagers. The government will utilise Rs 30 crore from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund.

PROCESS: District Magistrates and local labour officers will conduct surveys in each district to identify beneficiaries who receive the money, either through their bank accounts or in cash.

— (COMPILED FROM ENS REPORTS)

IS attack

ended after an almost six-hour standoff, resulting in the killing of the assailants.

In New Delhi, Prime Minister Modi said, "I am saddened by today's terror attack on Sikhs at Gurudwara in Kabul. I express my condolences to the families of all the deceased."

The Shor Bazar area of Kabul was once home to several gurdwaras but they were destroyed during the fighting in the 1980-90s. Many Hindus and Sikhs living in the area also migrated to other countries. Kabul is still home to several hundred Hindus and Sikhs.

In 2018, a suicide bombing, targeted at the Sikh community and claimed by the Islamic State, killed more than a dozen people in Jalalabad.

Foreign citizens

planning three more flights — two from Delhi and one from Mumbai

A German embassy spokesperson said about 500 German tourists will take a special flight back on Wednesday night, while another 500 will be flown back on Thursday night.

A French diplomatic source said: "We are also in talks with the Indian government to have special flights operated via Air France. We are getting about 500 calls per day from French nationals."

Sources said about 11,500 French nationals are in India. The mission's core team is operating out of the embassy, while the rest of the staff are working from home. "Only one staff member has gone back as she was ailing," said the source.

The US Embassy put out a health alert and said that the US Mission in India continues to work with the US Department of State and airline companies to arrange flights from India. "We know there is great interest from US citizens in obtaining assistance to depart India," it said.

A British High Commission spokesperson said: "We are collecting information on nationals in India to help understand how best to support them and to advise them when commercial flights become available."

The Canadian High Commission also asked its nationals to send their details.

Mumbai, Pune

several buildings in the Andheri neighbourhood to screen people after the couple tested positive. Their contacts tested negative.

Officials have advised home quarantine for another 14 days to the aged couple as precaution. The 70-year-old called up his grocer Wednesday morning to stock up on tissue paper, disinfectants and milk, and worried about his dusty home. They came to know of the lockdown only after they came out, he said. "We have grocery for a day. I can't step out."

The domestic help's son said the discrimination they had faced in the slum they live in shocked him. "Everybody stopped talking to us," said the 43-year old, who tested negative along with other members of the family.

The Jammu district administration reported that two of its patients had recovered completely, and one discharged. In Kerala's Ernakulam, a British national given anti-HIV drugs for coronavirus also tested negative.

Leaving cities

walking along the Rajasthan border with Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat," Dr Hira Lal Tabiyar, chief medical and health officer, Banswara, Rajasthan, said. "So far we have received 4,500 migrant workers. We are screening each before letting them enter. The district administration has also arranged for buses at the Banswara border to take them to their villages."

Dashrath Yadav (32), a labour contractor from Banswara, said he had walked four hours from Ahmedabad before finding any transport. In a group of around a dozen, he said, "We were stopped at a police naaka, and told to hop onto a truck. The truck had at least 100 people and crawled all night due to police checking... We had no food or water, and after we reached Shamalaji in Aravalli, we again walked for two hours to reach Bichhiwara bus station."

Rajasthan officials confirmed that over 2,000 people from Ahmedabad had reached the bus station by Wednesday morning, and lined up at ticket counters, despite the lockdown. "We arranged three Rajasthan State Road Transport Corporation buses and 15-20 private mini buses and vehicles. They are being transported ensuring social distancing," said Bichhiwara tehsildar Amrit Patel.

Antresh, who is going from Delhi to Moradabad, said, "We would earn Rs 200-250 daily, now we have no income. Yet the landlord kept asking for rent." With shops shut, they were finding it difficult to get even food, he said.

Aram Singh set off from Preet Vihar in East Delhi, his few possessions bundled in a bag. Back in the village, the 25-year-old said, they would at least have food. "We will sleep wherever we find space, eat and drink whatever we find, but we have to get home," Aram said, grateful that police had been cooperative.

Umesh Kumar, 28, was headed with a couple of friends to Ghaziabad's Lal Kuan, 55 km away. Living alone in Delhi, he said the loneliness got to him after the curfew. "All the places to eat are shut," he said.

Also headed to Lal Kuan was Virender Singh Yadav, 23, who said he was lucky to find a dhaba in an inside lane in Laxmi Nagar in East Delhi. "Now everything is shutting," he said, adding that between him and three others, they had Rs 500. "We will walk and rest when we can. Since there is no food available and no bus, there is nothing we can do."

Some men said they had borrowed money before leaving.

Mrityunjay Kumar, the media adviser to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, said they had made arrangements for the migrants headed to the state. "Instructions have been given to district magistrates to provide assistance in terms of travel and food. Hence, DMs have been given the right to start buses."

In Ahmedabad, labourers from Madhya Pradesh were stuck in Odhav area. On Wednesday, police arranged 15 vehicles for over 500, to take them to Godhra and Dahod. "From there they can cross the border," said R G Jadeja, incharge, Odhav police station.

In Vadodara, Hariabhai Dhama (34), a contractual labourer, wondered how he would get home to Dahod, almost 150 km away, with his wife, ailing mother and three children. "We have been out of work for five days and there are 20 days more to go. We are surviving on our savings now," Dhama said.

A few kilometres away, 13 migrants engaged at a construction site in Bhayli started walking almost 200 km to villages in MP. They had a two-year-old child with them. "What will we eat here? Twenty-one days is a long time," said Sarthi Bhil, from Ranapur village in Jhabua.

At Surat, Gautam Lal Meena, 27, said he didn't know by when he would reach his native village of Lohagarh in Rajasthan's Pratapgarh district. He had been travelling for 24 hours, having started walking from Mumbai and hitching rides on five-eight trucks. A father of two, Meena said, "We worked as labourers in Borivali. After the Janata Curfew on Sunday, police didn't let us go to work. We decided to leave Mumbai on Tuesday, but as we neared the Gujarat border, we came to know that Modiji had announced a lockdown for 21 days. The truck on which we had taken a lift left us midway. We walked through the night to reach Surat."

Meena hoped to get to Banswara and then find a way to get to Pratapgarh, thanking the Gujarat authorities for arranging a ride for them. "Most of the money we had has been spent on paying for the lifts we took and the biscuits we bought to eat," he said.

He said that at several places, policemen hit them and forced them off the road. "We told them take us to jail. At least we will get food and a place to rest there."

— WITH ENS LUCKNOW

Floyd Cardoz

Cardoz is widely credited with bringing the diversity of Indian cuisine to the world's notice. It was at the city's Indian Institute of Hotel Management, Dadar, that he discovered his talent for cooking. He later went to Les Roches School of Hotel Management in Switzerland. In the late '80s he moved to New York, the city where he would evolve his trademark 'New Indian Cuisine'. "He was the first flag-bearer of New Indian Cuisine in America, bringing dishes apart from *chicken tikka masala, chaat* and the regular curry. He introduced other snacks and South Indian and Goan curries," said chef Manish Mehrotra of Indian Accent.

Indian fusion restaurant Tabla that he opened in NYC in 1998 (it shut in 2012) firmly established him, Though the Michelin star eluded him, he was among the few Indian chefs to have made a mark on the global culinary scene, besides Gaggan Anand, Suvir Saran and Srijith Gopinath.

From 2018 to September last year, Cardoz ran the popular Bombay Bread Bar, originally opened as Paowalla in 2016.

Chef Vicky Ratnani remembers the chef for his affability. "He made a connection with different people," he said.

In India, Cardoz became a name to reckon with when he opened TBC in 2015, along with partners, followed by O Pedro in 2017. Chef Manu Chandra of Monkey Bar and Toast and Tonic said, "Bombay Canteen and O Pedro are a testament to both Floyd's ability to set up truly global products in our own backyard. He helped make Indian food cool to Indians."

After his Instagram post on March 17, declaring his corona-positive status, Hunger Inc. Hospitality had released a statement saying that as a precautionary measure, the Mumbai health department had been informed of the diagnosis. "We are also reaching out personally to people who have interacted with him during his visit to India," the statement read.

Cardoz is survived by his mother Beryl, wife Barkha and sons Justin and Peter.

— WITH INPUTS FROM BENITA FERNANDO

SURAT MUNICIPAL CORPORATION
DRAINAGE DEPARTMENT

e Tender (On line) invitation Notice No. EE/Drainage/08/2019-20.

Online tenders are invited on https://smc.nprocure.com for the various works of drainage department, from the Government approved contractors of relevant class.

1	Name of the department	Drainage
2	No of the works	08
3	Total Estimated cost of Tender Rs. in Lacs	30013.00

The detail tender notice will be made available at above address and on website www.suratmunicipal.gov.in

No. P.R.O. /509/2019-20
Date: 24/03/2020

Executive Engineer,
Drainage Department
Surat Municipal Corporation

After complaints, police say will make e-retailers' life easier

MAHENDER SINGH MANRAL & SURBHI GUPTA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

A DAY after several e-commerce companies alleged they faced harassment by police personnel and their delivery executives were stopped while at work, the Delhi Police Wednesday held a meeting with representatives of several such companies and assured them that their delivery staff would be allowed to travel without hassles within the capital, and would be issued curfew passes to cross state borders.

The move comes a day after major confusion was seen on the streets, with online retailers such as Grofers, FreshToHome and 1mg telling *The Indian Express* that their staff were harassed and their warehouses sealed.

In Gurgaon, Commissioner of Police Mohammad Akil issued orders to senior officers to ensure 12 "online delivery services" are "allowed to operate" during the lockdown.

"Zomato, Flipkart, Amazon, Bluedart, Wow Express, Swiggy, Grofers, BigBasket, MilkBasket, Dunzo, Big Bazaar, IFFCO Tokio Good shall be allowed to operate," states the order.

In the meeting with senior Delhi Police personnel, the companies flagged several problems. Among those in the meeting were representatives of Grofers, BigBasket, Snapdeal, Flipkart and Zomato.

Afterwards, Delhi Police spokesperson Mandeep Singh Randhawa said: "As we all know, section 144 has been imposed in Delhi. The Delhi Police has been and will continue to ensure that movement of essential supplies is not hindered. E-commerce portals play a huge role; we held a meeting with them to discuss problems they are facing. We are issuing curfew passes and have assured them that police personnel will cooperate with their delivery partners."

"We have created a platform, a WhatsApp group, where they can share with us the difficulties and we can address their issues on an urgent basis," he said. "We also assured them that police personnel will help reopen their warehouses."

One of the problems flagged by the companies was delivery executives being stopped by security guards at several societies and gated colonies.

The meeting lasted an hour, and the firms also told police how high standards of hygiene were being maintained for all employees and delivery executives. Delhi Police asked them to ensure their employees carry ID cards and curfew passes.

A DCP-rank officer said, "We have sensitised police personnel about letting delivery staff go about their work. The logic was explained — if they won't let them work, more people will get out of their homes to buy stuff. We distributed some pamphlets regarding this too. We also got in touch with several resident welfare associations, asking them to allow delivery persons to drop essential items at their colonies."

A day after online grocer BigBasket suspended operations, cancelled deliveries and stopped taking new orders, the company's spokesperson told *The Indian Express* that they faced "an unprecedented increase in demand, which was well beyond what they had planned for". "What we are trying to do is to only accept as many orders as we are able to service...," they said.

While early Wednesday, e-commerce company Flipkart announced in a blog post that it has suspended operations, Group CEO Kalyan Krishnamurthy later in the evening said they will resume grocery and essentials service. "We have been assured of the safe and smooth passage of our supply chain and delivery executives by local law enforcement authorities and are resuming our grocery and essentials services later today."

Customers who were able to make orders on Grofers until Tuesday found the website and mobile app down Wednesday. But, after a brief halt, the company announced in the evening that they have resumed their operations and are taking orders in Delhi and Gurugram.

In the midst of some online delivery services suspending operations, supermarket chain Big Bazaar launched a doorstep delivery service in various cities. Soon after, the company issued a statement Wednesday: "In light of the recent announcement, we are receiving an unprecedented number of requests for doorstep delivery. There could be delay due to the restrictions on movements".

CORONA WATCH

Police chief orders home isolation for cops

New Delhi: Delhi Police Commissioner S N Shrivastava has stated in a letter that personnel should remain in isolation for a period of 10 days in rotation, in view of the lockdown. All police stations, DCPs and ACPs have been advised to allow 25-33% of their staff to stay at home for 10 days. For isolation, preference should be given to policemen over 50 years of age and those with medical problems, the letter said.

Man arrested for spitting on woman

New Delhi: A 40-year-old man in Northwest Delhi was arrested Wednesday for allegedly misbehaving with a Manipuri woman, spitting on her face and calling her 'coronavirus'. Police said the woman was returning from a grocery store when the man approached her and allegedly passed lewd comments. Police said he had fled in his two-wheeler after the incident. An FIR has been registered under IPC section 509 (word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman). **ENS**

TOGETHER IN ISOLATION

Outside a high-rise in Ghaziabad on Day 1 of the country-wide lockdown on Wednesday. *Praveen Khanna*

Should have 2-3 hospitals just for virus patients, says doctor heading CM panel

ASTHA SAXENA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

FIVE PEOPLE tested positive for COVID-19 in Delhi Wednesday, taking the total number of confirmed cases in the capital to 35. The new cases include a person with a history of foreign travel and four local transmissions. So far, one person has died of the disease, while five have been discharged following treatment.

Gearing up for phase 3 of the outbreak, which could see community transmission, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had Tuesday formed a five-member committee to oversee the crisis. Dr S K Sarin, head of the Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences (ILBS), leads the panel, which will file its initial report in a few days.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Dr Sarin said: "If you have centralised admission rather than multiple hospitals, whether it is public or private, I think you can have a more focussed approach. Centralised means you can have two-three big hospitals rather than multiple hospitals so that infectivity is contained, and whichever hospital has patients admitted, that hospital will have to be virtually closed. We will assess and give suggestions to the CM; the final call has to be taken by the government."

In Delhi, six hospitals have been designated to collect samples for coronavirus testing — Rajiv Gandhi Super Specialty Hospital, Lok Nayak Hospital, Deendayal Upadhyay Hospital, Babasaheb Ambedkar Hospital, Guru Teg Bahadur Hospital and Janakpuri Super Specialty Hospital.

Samples are sent to AIIMS, NCDC, RML, ILBS and LHMC for testing. Over the last two days, ICMR has increased testing centres by roping in private labs across the country.

Highlighting the need for more testing, he said the number of testing centres has to be increased during phase 3. "At present, ILBS is among the few labs offering testing facilities... But, if numbers increase, it will be difficult. Now the government of India has allowed private labs, but our aim should be to have more testing facilities. More kits are being approved by ICMR and FDA. If kits are available, one can have quick results. Testing should become readily available," he said.

"We should look at the possible ways by which healthcare workers can be protected, like prophylactic drugs such as hydroxychloroquine... Doctors and nurses working in hospitals at present are under huge stress. We need to see that healthcare workers are destressed and not hyper and worried," said Dr Sarin.

Ministry of Health & Family Welfare
Government of India

Help us to help you

NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

What do I do if I came in close contact with someone who is a confirmed case of COVID-19?

Monitor self for 28 days starting from the day you came in contact with the infected person

Watch out for...
Cough
Fever
Difficulty in breathing

Have symptoms? Immediately...
Visit the nearest health facility
Seek advice/ treatment
Furnish details of people you've been in close contact with

davp 17102/13/0030/1920

For further information:
Call the State helpline numbers or Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India's 24x7 helpline numbers

1075 (Toll Free) | 011-23978046
Email to: ncov2019@gov.in , ncov2019@gmail.com

mohfw.gov.in @MoHFWIndia @MoHFW_INDIA mohfwindia

Running out of supplies, residents of 2 sealed Noida societies in a fix

AMIL BHATNAGAR
NOIDA, MARCH 25

WITH THE lockdown extended for three more weeks, two Noida societies that were sealed after its residents tested positive for coronavirus are in a fix, since those living inside have been told not to venture out. Many said while they had enough groceries to last them until March 31, the new timeline may make life more difficult.

One of the societies wrote to the Gautam Budh Nagar district magistrate, requesting that shops be set up within the complex. "We have approximately 25,000 people who do not have necessary arrangements for the next three weeks. There are lonely senior citizens who cannot move about. If stores like Safal, Spencer, Big Bazar are allowed to open temporary stalls in the locality, it will meet demand and ease the burden. There has been no arrangement so far and we will run out of supplies," said the secretary of a housing society in Sector 74.

Residents of the two Noida societies have been told not to venture out. *Abhinav Saha*

The societies are currently sourcing essential items such as milk, vegetables, bread, atta, rice and dal from local vendors in nearby villages, but supply is not always smooth, they said.

"We tried stepping out but were told not to by police. Prior to the Prime Minister's announcement, milk packets would be dropped at the entrance and we could collect them. But the availability is less now. There are children in the house and this needs to be resolved soon," said Ritu, a resident.

On Wednesday evening, the administration issued an order stating that all grocery shops and other essential commodity establishments will remain open for a longer period. "Our godowns have enough stock and there is no need to panic. To ensure the supply chain does not fall short, shops will remain open between 6 am and 11 pm. As far as other movement is concerned, passes will be issued and there will be no hassles," said Gautam Budh Nagar District Magistrate B N Singh.

The Noida administration will issue passes to 88 gram panchayats so that essential supplies in villages are distributed. A similar order has been issued by the Ghaziabad administration, whereby shops can open between 6 am and 11 pm and vehicular movement of those carrying the supplies is not interrupted.

COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

In Gurgaon, 15 grocery shops on wheels to cater to residents

SAKSHI DAYAL
GURGAON, MARCH 25

AS RESIDENTS of Gurgaon struggle to get access to basic necessities and several migrant workers are rendered homeless due to the lockdown, officials from the district administration Wednesday said adequate measures are being taken to provide for their needs.

While night shelters have been directed to open their doors to "urban homeless people, stranded labour and some other categories", to meet the demand for food and groceries, officials are looking into coordination with supply chains and making arrangements for groceries to be delivered to people's doorsteps.

In addition, Commissioner of Police Mohammad Akil Wednesday issued orders to senior officers in the district, alerting them about 12 "online delivery services" that are "allowed to operate" during the lockdown. "The following online delivery services Zomato, Flipkart, Amazon, Blue Dart, Wow Express, Swiggy, Grofers, BigBasket, MilkBasket, Dunzo, Big Bazaar, IFFCO Tokio Good shall be allowed to operate," the order stated.

Since last week, shops in the district have seen an unprecedented rush as people hoard essential items, leading to empty shelves in several stores, while some others closed down unexpectedly this week.

A deserted National Highway - 8 in Gurgaon. *Tashi Tobgyal*

Prices in several places were hiked, and for some residents, getting to stores to purchase items became a problem as public transport was withdrawn.

Those relying on home delivery services were left wanting as several services remained unavailable this week, with companies alleging police harassment of delivery personnel.

Commissioner of Gurgaon Ashok Sangwan held a meeting Wednesday to discuss these issues with various stakeholders, including the Chemist Association, Kairana Association, milk suppliers, and online sellers of these items, to ascertain how to streamline supply of "essential items" and medicines to people.

"Residents should not panic in this hour of crisis, there is no shortage of anything. Everyday essentials like food grains, pulses, spices and sugar are available in sufficient quantity, and there is also adequate supply of milk in the district. All these will be supplied to consumers smoothly and people will get essential goods near their homes," said Sangwan.

In an effort towards this end, the Gurgaon district administration, on Wednesday evening, announced that 15 mobile grocery shops would become operational in the district in the coming days to provide essential items to people. "These mobile shops will allow people of upscale areas, high-rises, and condominiums to access essential items in their neighbourhoods. In the beginning, 15 such vehicles will provide goods, but the number may be increased or decreased as required in the future," said Deputy Commissioner Amit Khatri.

The Municipal Corporation of Gurugram (MCG) on Wednesday also began seeking information from all Residents' Welfare Association representatives about the need for essential food items.

In order to provide shelter to people stranded in Gurgaon with no work and little money, the Urban Local Bodies department, Haryana on Wednesday issued orders to all districts, directing them to house such people in their night shelters.

Meanwhile, Gurgaon did not record any new cases of COVID-19 on Wednesday, but a second case was recorded in Faridabad, with officials saying the patient is a 45-year-old who had given his sample for testing at a hospital in Delhi. "His sample returned positive today, and he has been admitted at an isolation ward at a private hospital," said an official.

The patient who had tested positive last week in Faridabad, emerging as the first case of coronavirus in the district, tested negative Wednesday.

"Another sample will now be sent to the lab, and only if that too tests negative will she be considered to have recovered from the virus," said Yashpal, Deputy Commissioner of Faridabad. Haryana has so far recorded 17 cases of coronavirus.

40-year-old dies repairing sewage treatment plant

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

A 40-YEAR-OLD worker died and another sustained injuries after they allegedly inhaled toxic fumes while repairing a sewage treatment plant (STP), which comes under the Delhi State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd (DSIIDC), Wednesday.

Police said the incident took place in Southeast Delhi's Okhla. Both men were found lying inside the plant. Police said the men weren't wearing any safety equipment.

DCP (Southeast) R P Meena said, "We received a call around 11.15 am about the incident. The police team found two men, Suresh (40) and Jagbir (43), unconscious inside the sewage treatment plant. The Delhi Fire Services was informed, and firemen pulled out the two men and rushed them to the hospital. Suresh was declared dead on arrival by the doctors while Jagbir is undergoing treatment."

D K Gupta, DSIIDC director, said they had hired a private contractor to repair the plant. He said they will conduct an enquiry and file an FIR against the contractor for not providing safety equipment.

Suresh worked with a private firm and was called to the spot to repair a screw that had blocked the flow of water inside the STP. Jagbir was a sweeper employed by the MCD who works at the plant.

Police said another man, Murari (40), also tried to enter the STP to rescue the men but got out when he couldn't help them. He informed others.

Murari told police that Suresh worked in the morning hours. When Suresh went inside, he inhaled fumes and fell unconscious.

After some time, Jagbir noticed that Suresh hadn't come out, so he went inside the STP to help him but also fell unconscious, Murari told police.

Police said Jagbir is undergoing treatment at Apollo Hospital.

"A case under sections of negligence resulting in death has been registered at Okhla police station against unknown persons. We are investigating the matter," said a police officer.

While Suresh lived in Tughlakabad, Jagbir is a resident of Dakshinpuri.

Over 180 cases filed, 5,103 people detained for defying lockdown

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

MORE THAN 180 cases were registered and 5,103 people detained on Wednesday for violating government orders during the coronavirus lockdown, police said.

According to the data shared by Delhi Police, 183 cases were registered under Section 188 (for disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) of the Indian Penal Code till 5pm.

A total of 5,103 people have been detained under Section 65 (persons bound to comply with reasonable directions of police officers) and 956 vehicles have been impounded under Section 66 of the Delhi Police Act, they stated.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday had announced a complete lockdown across the country for 21 days starting Tuesday midnight, asserting that social distancing is the only way out for the country in its decisive battle against the virus.

Meanwhile, Noida Police took action against 1,324 people for defying restrictions imposed due to the coronavirus outbreak in the district, officials said.

Paschimanchal Vidyut Vitran Nigam Ltd., Victoria Park, Meerut

SHORT TERM DATE EXTENSION NOTICE Tender opening date of tenders against tender specification no. PVVNL- MT/MM/115(s)/19-20 15 km Copper Control Cable Armoured size 2x2.5 sq. mm, 15 km Copper Control Cable Armoured size 4x2.5 sq. mm & 15 km Copper Control Cable Armoured size 6x2.5 sq. mm extended from 27.03.2020 to 01.04.2020. Remark:- **www.etender.up.nic.in** For detailed information please log on **www.pvvnl.org** & E-Tendering website **www.etender.up.nic.in** till the date of submission of bids. Superintending Engineer (MM-I) "Help line Number For Information of Theft of Electricity: "1800-180-3002 (Meerut), & 941220745" Superintending Engineer (MM-I)
For Managing Director पत्रांक: 8678/पं.वि.वि.नि.लि./मे. दिनांक: 25.03.2020

"Let's to gether We adopt Water Recharging Borewell System"
SURAT MUNICIPAL CORPORATION
HYDRAULIC DEPARTMENT

e-Tender (Online) invitation Notice No. CE / HYD / 23 / 2019-20
Tenders are invited for various Dept. works online on https://smc.nprocure.com from Government Approved / Experienced Contractors with following Schedule.

1.	Name Of the Department	Hydraulic
	No. of work	08
2.	Total Estimated Cost of Tender	Rs. 1,975.55 Lacs

The detail tender notice will be made available on website www.suratmunicipal.gov.in
No. PR.O./512/2019-20 Date: 24-03-2020
I/C. City Engineer, Surat Municipal Corporation

TAMILNADU TEXTBOOK AND EDUCATIONAL SERVICES CORPORATION
"EVK Sampath Maaligai" No.68, College Road, Chennai-600 006.
Phone: 044-28275851, 044-28278244, Fax No: 044-28224493,
E.mail: adpur.tntbesc@tn.gov.in , jdtntbesc@outlook.com
NOTICE INVITING TENDER
Rc.No.994/PUR-1/2020 Date:24.03.2020

1	Description of Tender	Supply and delivery of **1.22 lakh Nos.** of Rain Coat (Unisex) for the School Students studying in Hilly Areas in Tamil Nadu on annual rate contract basis for the year 2020-21.
2	Sale period of Tender Document	On all working days from **01.04.2020** to **29.04.2020** between 10.00 a.m. and 05.00 p.m.
3	Last Date and Time for Submission of Tender	**30.04.2020 upto 03.00 p.m.**
4	Pre-Bid meeting date, time & place	**23.04.2020** at 03.00 p.m. in Tamil Nadu Textbook and Educational Services Corporation, College Road, Chennai-6
5	Tender opening date, time & place	**30.04.2020** at 03.30 p.m. in Tamil Nadu Textbook and Educational Services Corporation, Chennai-6
6	Details of websites address from which Tender Documents can be downloaded free of cost	a) http://www.textbookcorp.tn.gov.in b) http://www.tenders.tn.gov.in

Managing Director, Tender Inviting Authority, Tamilnadu Textbook and Educational Services Corporation, Chennai-6
DIPR/1563/TENDER/2020

TAMILNADU TEXTBOOK AND EDUCATIONAL SERVICES CORPORATION
"EVK Sampath Maaligai", No.68, College Road, Chennai 600 006.
Phone : 044-28275851, 044-28278244 Fax No. : 044-28224493
E-mail : adpur.tntbesc@tn.gov.in jdtntbesc@outlook.com
NOTICE INVITING TENDER
Rc.No. 992/PUR-I/2020 Date : 24.03.2020

1.	Description of Tender	Supply and delivery of **29.15 lakh pairs of Shoes** separately for **Boys and Girls** for school children in Tamil Nadu on an Annual Rate Contract Basis for the year 2020-2021.
2.	Sale period of Tender Document	On all working days from **01.04.2020** to **05.05.2020** between 10.00 a.m. and 05.00 p.m.
3.	Last Date and Time for Submission of Tender	**06.05.2020** upto 11.00 a.m
4	Pre-Bid meeting date, time & place	**27.04.2020** at 03.00 p.m in Tamil Nadu Textbook and Educational Services Corporation, College Road, Chennai-6
5	Tender opening date, time & place	**06.05.2020** at 11.30 a.m in Tamil Nadu Textbook and Educational Services Corporation, Chennai-6
6	Tender Document and other details are available in the Websites and can be downloaded free of cost	a) http://www.textbookcorp.tn.gov.in b) http://www.tenders.tn.gov.in

Managing Director, Tender Inviting Authority, Tamil Nadu Text Book and Educational Services Corporation, Chennai-6
DIPR/1570/TENDER/2020

TAMILNADU TEXTBOOK AND EDUCATIONAL SERVICES CORPORATION
"EVK Sampath Maaligai", No.68, College Road, Chennai-600 006.
Phone: 044-28275851, 044-28278244, Fax No: 044-28224493,
E.mail: adpur.tntbesc@tn.gov.in , jdtntbesc@outlook.com
NOTICE INVITING TENDER
Rc.No. 1001/PUR-II/2020 Date:24.03.2020

1.	Name of the work	Supply and delivery of **15.66 lakh Wooden Colour Pencil** (Bi-colour) for School students in Tamil Nadu on an Annual Rate Contract Basis for the year 2020-21.
2.	Sale period of Tender Document	On all working days from **01.04.2020** to **27.04.2020** between 10.00 a.m. and 05.00 p.m.
3.	Last Date and Time for Submission of Tender	**28.04.2020** upto 03.00 p.m
4	Pre-Bid meeting date, time & place	**21.04.2020** at 12.00 Noon at Tamil Nadu Textbook and Educational Services Corporation, Chennai-6
5	Tender opening time & date	**28.04.2020** at 04.00 p.m. in Tamil Nadu Textbook and Educational Services Corporation, Chennai-6
6	Details of websites address from which Tender documents can be downloaded free of cost.	a) http://www.textbookcorp.tn.gov.in b) http://www.tenders.tn.gov.in

Managing Director, Tender Inviting Authority, Tamilnadu Textbook and Educational Services Corporation, Chennai-6
DIPR/ 1564 /TENDER/2020

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER PUBLIC WORK DEPARTMENT, BILASPUR CIRCLE BILASPUR, CHHATTISGARH
AMENDMENT NOTICE
Amendment are made in N.I.T. No 254, 255, 256/G dated 05.03.2020:-

Existing Description	To be read
Bid submission due date (Online) **26/03/20 17.30**	Bid submission due date (Online) **07/04/20 17.30**
End date for Physical submission (EMD, and affidavit in Envelope A) (by speed post or Registered post) **28/03/20 17.30**	End date for Physical submission (EMD, and affidavit in Envelope A) (by speed post or Registered post) **08/04/20 17.30**
Bid opening date (Scheduled) **30/03/20 11.00**	Bid opening date (Scheduled) **09/04/20 11.00**

Other conditions will remain same.
Sd/-
Superintending Engineer
P.W.D. Bilaspur Circle
Bilaspur (CG)
G-78161

SUPPLYCO
THE KERALA STATE CIVIL SUPPLIES CORPORATION LIMITED
MAVELI BHAVAN, PB NO 2030, GANDHINAGAR, KOCHI-682020
Ph.No.PABX- 0484-2206775, 2206795
Purchase Section –Ph No: 0484-2207924, 2206786, 2206782. FAX - 0484-2206782, 0484-2206799.
E-Mail: agmp@supplycomail.com, Website: www.supplycokerala.com
No.P.10/10353/2020 **TENDER NOTICE** Date:25.03.2020
(ONLY THROUGH ELECTRONIC TENDERING SYSTEM)
The Kerala State Civil Supplies Corporation Ltd intends to purchase Pulses, Spices, Rice and Sugar through e-tender, which will be accepted up to **02.00 PM on 03-04-2020** and will be opened thereafter. Tender Form and Terms & Conditions may be downloaded from our website **www.supplycokerala.com** or **www.tenderwizard.com/KSCSC**. For additional details please contact at the above address. Only suppliers possessing digital signatures will be permitted to participate in the e-tender.
Sd/-, Manager (Purchase)

TAMILNADU TEXTBOOK AND EDUCATIONAL SERVICES CORPORATION
"EVK Sampath Maaligai", No.68, College Road, Chennai 600 006.
Phone : 044-28275851, 044-28278244 Fax No. : 044-28224493
E-mail : adpur.tntbesc@tn.gov.in jdtntbesc@outlook.com
NOTICE INVITING TENDER
Rc.No. 991/PUR-I/2020 Date : 24.03.2020

1.	Description of Tender	Supply and delivery of **32.32 lakh pairs of Footwear (Velcro Sandal)** separately for Boys and Girls for school children in Tamil Nadu on an Annual Rate Contract Basis for the year **2020-2021**
2.	Sale period of Tender Document	On all working days from **01.04.2020** to **04.05.2020** between 10.00 a.m. and 05.00 p.m.
3.	Last Date and Time for Submission of Tender	**05.05.2020** upto 03.00 p.m
4	Pre-Bid meeting date, time & place	**24.04.2020** at 03.00 p.m in Tamil Nadu Textbook and Educational Services Corporation, College Road, Chennai-6
5	Tender opening date, time & place	**05.05.2020** at 03.30 p.m in Tamil Nadu Textbook and Educational Services Corporation, Chennai-6
6	Tender Document and other details are available in the Websites and can be downloaded free of cost	a) **http://www.textbookcorp.tn.gov.in** b) **http://www.tenders.tn.gov.in**

Managing Director, Tender Inviting Authority, Tamil Nadu Text Book and Educational Services Corporation Chennai-6
DIPR/1569/TENDER/2020

TAMILNADU TEXTBOOK AND EDUCATIONAL SERVICES CORPORATION
"EVK Sampath Maaligai" No.68, College Road, Chennai-600 006.
Phone: 044-28275851, 044-28278244, Fax No: 044-28224493,
E.mail: adpur.tntbesc@tn.gov.in , jdtntbesc@outlook.com
NOTICE INVITING TENDER
Rc.No. 1000/PUR-II/2020 date:24.03.2020

1.	Name of the work	Supply and delivery of **9.40 lakh Crayons** for School students in Tamil Nadu on an Annual Rate Contract Basis for the year 2020-21.
2.	Sale period of Tender Document	On all working days from **01.04.2020** to **27.04.2020** between 10.00 a.m. and 05.00 p.m.
3.	Last Date and Time for Submission of Tender	**28.04.2020** upto 11.30 a.m
4	Pre Bid meeting date & time, place	**21.04.2020** at 11.00 a.m at Tamil Nadu Textbook and Educational Services Corporation, Chennai-6
5	Tender opening time & date	**28.04.2020** at 12.00 Noon in Tamil Nadu Textbook and Educational Services Corporation, Chennai-6
6	Details of websites address from which Tender documents can be downloaded free of cost.	a) http://www.textbookcorp.tn.gov.in b) http://www.tenders.tn.gov.in

Managing Director, Tender Inviting Authority, Tamilnadu Textbook and Educational Services Corporation, Chennai-6
DIPR/ 1565 /TENDER/2020

NOTICE INVITING e-TENDERS
The Executive Engineer, Mechanical Division No. II, Irrigation & Flood Control Department, Govt. of NCT of Delhi I&FC Wing, Vikas Bhawan-II, Civil Lines, Delhi-110054. Invites on behalf of the president of Indian from vendors empanelled/ registered with Authorized Department/ Ministry, Govt. of NCT of Delhi/ Govt. of India for the following works:-
N.O.W:- R/M of Hydraulic Excavators for the year 2019-20.
Sub Work:- Providing of Operators and Khallasi cum Chowkidar for 04 Nos. Hydraulic Excavator (BEML 220G) for the period of 12 Month. (2nd Call).
(**H.O.A**:- MH 2711 (NON PLAN)
Estimated Cost: Rs. 40,21,896/-
Earnest Money: Rs. 80,438/-
Period of completion : (365) Days, Last date & time of submission of tender: upto 3:00 p.m on 26/03/2020.
(Tender I.D 2020_IFC_189804_1)
Note 1) The Tender forms and other details can be obtained from the website **http://govtprocurement. delhi.gov.in**
DIP/Shabdarth/1499/19-20

GOVERNMENT OF CHHATTISGARH, WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER MAHANADI GODAWARI BASIN RAIPUR (C.G.)
e-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE
eProcurement Portal: https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in
(1st Call)
CORRIGENDUM No. 01
In System Tender No. : 61519/NIT No. : 19/SAC/2019-20, Gariaband, Dated: 28.02.2020 Whose Advertisement No. 77485 / Dated 29.02.2020 following amendments are made:–

S. No.	PARTICULARS	EARLIER	AMENDMENT
1	Bid Download, Last Date & Time :	23.03.2020, 17:30 Hours	07.04.2020, 17:30 Hours
2	Bid Open Start Date & Time :	24.03.2020, 11:31 Hours	08.04.2020, 11:31 Hours
3	Clause 2.12 and 4.3.25 of (ENVELOPE - "C")		
4	Pre Qualification Criteria of (ENVELOPE - "B" & "C") To qualify for award of the contract, each prime contractor in the same name and style (tenderer), in its name must have in the last five years.		

Has been amended and details can be viewed on the website **https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in**
Note:– All other terms and conditions will remain be unchanged.
EXECUTIVE ENGINEER
Water Resources Division, Gariaband
for, Chief Engineer, Mahanadi Godawari Basin
Water Resources Department, Raipur (C.G.)
G-78169/2

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF A PERSON ACCUSED (See Section 82 Cr.PC.)
Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused person Pramod @ Hanuman, S/o Shri Kanhaiya, R/o A-53, Shyam Colony, Budh Vihar, Delhi has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case FIR No. 1054/15 U/S 380/411 IPC PS Shahbad Dairy, Delhi and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said accused Pramod @ Hanuman can not be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused Pramod @ Hanuman has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant).
Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused Pramod @ Hanuman of case FIR No. 1054/15 U/S 380/411 IPC PS Shahbad Dairy, Delhi is required to appear before this court to answer the said complaint on 20.06.20.
By Order
Shri Vaibhav Mehta
Metropolitan Magistrate-05
Room No. 114, First Floor, Rohini Court, Delhi
DP/124/ON/20

SALEM CITY MUNICIPAL CORPORATION
Roc. No. SSCL /1400 /2020 **RE -INVITATIONS FOR BIDS** Date : 24.03.2020

I	1.	Rejuvenation and Redevelopment of Kumaragiri Lake under Smart City Mission Estimate Cost **Rs. 1018.00 Lakhs.**
	2.	Rejuvenation and Redevelopment of Pallapatty Lake under Smart City Mission Estimate Cost **Rs. 1280.00 Lakhs.**
	3.	Formation of Diversion Channel to avoid mixing of sewage water in Pallapatty Lake Estimate Cost **Rs. 1250.00 Lakhs.**
II	4.	Installation of 25 TPD Incinerator Plant (2 Nos.) for disposal of Non-Biodegradable Waste at Erumapalayam and Chettichavadi Compost Yard Estimate Cost **Rs. 320.00 Lakhs.**
		Bid document and other information available at **www.tntenders.gov.in, www.tenders.tn.gov.in, www.salemcorporation.gov.in** Tender document can be downloaded from the above website.
III		**Date, Time and Venue for Re-Tender Procedures.** Submission of bids - **28.04.2020 upto 3.00 P.M** Opening of bids - **28.04.2020 at 3.30 P.M**

DIPR/1572/TENDER/2020 Commissioner, Salem Corporation

क्षेत्रीय कार्यालय
उत्तर प्रदेश प्रदूषण नियंत्रण बोर्ड
कमल सिनेमा बिल्डिंग, रेलवे स्टेशन रोड, मुजफ्फरनगर
पर्यावरणीय अनापत्ति हेतु लोक सुनवाई स्थगन की आम सूचना
सर्वसाधारण को सूचित किया जाता है कि मै० सरल केमटेक एल.एल.पी., 9 किमी0, जानसठ रोड, ग्राम शेरनगर, जनपद मुजफ्फरनगर (उ०प्र०) द्वारा पूर्व से कार्यरत इकाई में बल्क ड्रग्स, इण्टरमीडिएट एण्ड आर्गेनिक केमिकल्स (प्रोजेक्ट/एक्टीविटी 5(एफ.), कैटेगरी बी) के सम्बन्ध में पर्यावरणीय अनापत्ति हेतु उ0प्र0 प्रदूषण नियंत्रण बोर्ड द्वारा दिनांक 30.03.2020 को समय 1:00 बजे अपरान्ह मै० सरल केमटेक एल.एल.पी., 9 किमी0, जानसठ रोड, ग्राम शेरनगर, जनपद मुजफ्फरनगर (उ०प्र०) के परिसर में अपर जिलाधिकारी (वि0/रा0), मुजफ्फरनगर की अध्यक्षता में आयोजित होने वाली लोक सुनवाई की सूचना समाचार पत्रों में दिनांक 28.02.2020 में प्रकाशित करायी गयी थी, **जो अपरिहार्य कारणों से स्थगित की जाती है।** उक्त लोक सुनवाई हेतु नवीन तिथि की सूचना समाचार पत्रों के माध्यम से पुनः प्रकाशित की जायेगी।
क्षेत्रीय अधिकारी

TIRUNELVELI SMART CITY LIMITED
SMART CITIES MISSION
NOTICE INVITING RE-TENDERS (NIT)
Re-Tender Notice No.26/Smart City/2018-19/SCM Dated : 24.03.2020
The Managing Director, Tirunelveli Smart City Limited, Tirunelveli hereby invites Bids through both on-line and off-line from eligible bidders for the following works:

Sl. No	Name of Works	Estimate Amount Rs. in crore	Bid Security Rs. in Lakhs	Period of Completion
1	Development of Smart streets-1 in Tirunelveli Corporation (In Tirunelveli Town) (1) Mela Mada veethi road (2)Therku mada veethi (3) Anna street (4)Sathya moorthy street (5)Sathya moorthy cross street (6)Theppakulam east street (7)Ammian sannathi street. (4th call)	9.40	9.40	6 months
2	Development of Smart streets -2 in Tirunelveli Corporation (in Tirunelveli Town) (1) Kattalai Karuvelan kundu street (2)Vaiyapuri nagar west, north and east street (3)Vaiyapuri nagar south street (4)Vaiyapuri nagar link street -1 (5) Vaiyapuri nagar link street-2 (6) Cheranmahadevi road Tirunelveli Town (7) Perumal kovil south street (8) Perumal Kovil south mada veethi (9) Perumal kovil sannathi street.(4th call)	12.34	12.34	6 months
3	Modernization of Bharath Ratna Dr.MGR New Bus Stand in Tirunelveli Corporation. (3rd call)	14.80	14.80	12 months
4	Development of Palayamkottai Bus stand in Tirunelveli City Municipal Corporation. (3rd call)	13.08	13.08	12 months
5	Development of Nethaji Kalaarangam in Tirunelveli Corporation. (3rd call)	11.97	11.97	12 months
6	**Development of Smart Streets Phase II (Package IV)** 1) Pattapathu main road, 2)Thenpathu salai street, 3)Mahivanna nathapuram street, 4)Vellanthangi pillayar koil street, 5)Shenbagampillai othai street, 6)Kallanai street and 7)Vellanthangi pillayar koil cross street	10.40	10.40	6 months
7	**Development of Smart Streets Phase II (Package V)** 1)Manipuram street, 2)A.P.Mada street, 3)Vayal street, 4)Veerakerala Panditthar street and Vadampokki street.	5.96	5.96	6 months
8	Proposed Multi-Level Two Wheeler Parking at T.M.Road in Tirunelveli Corporation	6.75	6.75	12 months
9	Improvement of Bose Market in Tirunelveli Municipal Corporation. (3rd call)	10.97	10.97	9 months

A two cover bidding procedure will be adopted. The bidders shall satisfy the qualification criteria and the financial criteria as mentioned in the Bid document. The bidding documents will be available from **27.03.2020** to **13.04.2020**. A pre-bid meeting to be held on **07.04.2020** on **11.00 hours.** Tender documents can be downloaded from the website **https://tntenders.gov.in.** The bidder shall upload their bids on or before **15.00 hours** on **13.04.2020**. The tender will be opened on **15.30 hours** on **15.04.2020**.
Managing Director,
Tirunelveli Smart City Limited,
Tirunelveli Corporation Office, S.N.High Road, Tirunelveli – 627 001.
Office : 0462 - 2329328. Fax :(0462) – 2329327, Email ID: commr.tirunelveli@tn.gov.in
DIPR/1571/TENDER/2020 Managing Director, Tirunelveli Smart City Limited.

CORONA WATCH

HC extends interim orders till May 15

New Delhi: In view of the coronavirus outbreak, the Delhi High Court Wednesday said all interim orders passed by it or the lower courts on bails, paroles and stays, which are expiring or will expire soon, will be extended till May 15. A bench of Chief Justice D N Patel, Justice Siddharth Mridul and Justice Talwant Singh issued the direction in all matters pending before the High Court and all district courts of the capital. "Advocates and litigants have not been in a position to appear in matters, including those where stay/bails/paroles have been granted by this court or the courts subordinate to this court, on or before March 16, 2020. As a result, interim orders operating in favour of parties have expired or will expire on or after March 16, 2020," the bench observed. The Delhi High Court also suspended its functioning till April 15.

Residents avoid card machines

New Delhi: Afraid of contracting coronavirus, several people refrained from touching card machines at stores and pharmacies across the capital. While some customers carried exact change, others whispered their card PIN to shopkeepers after giving them their cards. Ishvinder Singh, owner of Preet Medicos & General Store in Khan Market said, "Very few people are dealing in cash. In fact, even when they give us their card, they do not want to touch the machine. So a number of them tell us their credit card PINs while making their payment and we type it in for them." **ENS**

STANDALONE

Customers queue up in designated circles outside a shop in CR Park, Wednesday. *Tashi Tobgyal*

COVID-19 CASES IN DELHI TOUCH 35

One woman back from Saudi Arabia, eight contacts positive, over 1,000 being traced

ASTHA SAXENA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

ON MARCH 10, a 38-year-old woman returned to the national capital from Saudi Arabia. A resident of East Delhi's Dilshad Garden, she developed fever soon after, followed by a cough and breathlessness. This prompted her to head to a private clinic in Seemapuri, where she was examined by a 49-year-old doctor, who also sits at a mohalla clinic in nearby Maujpur.

On March 18, the woman tested positive for coronavirus — case number 10 in Delhi's records.

She was admitted to Safdarjung Hospital for further treatment, and health officials in the city began tracing her contacts. By March 19, roughly 100 contacts had been traced, and a surveillance programme started in her residential colony. Calls were made, personal visits planned and officials began to ask people about the symptoms. Spreading awareness about cough etiquette and hand hygiene was part of the process.

Samples of her family members were collected and sent for testing as well.

On March 20, two of her contacts — her 35-year-old brother and 65-year-old mother — tested positive for COVID-19. Both live in Northeast Delhi's Jahangirpuri. The team then began contact tracing for both. By this date, Delhi had 20 confirmed cases of the virus.

The next day, the woman's two daughters both residents of Dilshad Garden, tested positive. Her 19-year-old son's test results are awaited.

CORONA COUNT DELHI-NCR
61 CASES | 1 DEATH
18 RECOVERED

And on Sunday, the health department received more alarming news: the doctor who had examined her initially had tested positive for the disease. By this time, the number of cases in Delhi had reached 30. The doctor was case number 28.

"After the woman tested positive on March 18, the doctor went into self-isolation. But he soon started to develop symptoms. He was admitted to GTB Hospital, but on Monday, he was shifted to Safdarjung Hospital after he complained of breathlessness," said a senior official from the department of health.

Each mohalla clinic on an average witnesses 160-200 patients per day. The health centre has a doctor and three other multi-task workers.

On Wednesday, the doctor's 48-year-old wife and his 17-year-old daughter were among five people who tested positive in Delhi, taking the total number of cases to 35.

A 35-year-old man from Jahangirpuri who tested positive on Wednesday has also been traced back to the woman, officials said.

"Between March 12 and 18, the doctor saw around 1,000 patients in that particular mohalla clinic. We are tracing each and every person who has visited it in that period. At the woman's colony, around 470 houses have been put under surveillance and around 1,200 people have been contacted by the department. We are checking with people about the symptoms. The team will also monitor people in Jahangirpuri since one more case, who was in contact with the confirmed case, has tested positive," said the official.

The two others who tested positive on Wednesday are a 41-year old man with a travel history to Brazil and a 24-year-old woman with a travel history to London. Both are residents of Sainik Farms.

'Elderly should avoid visiting hospitals for routine follow-ups'

ASTHA SAXENA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

DR PRASUN Chatterjee, associate professor at the Department of Geriatric Medicine in AIIMS, on precautions the elderly need to take during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Among the elderly, what are the red flags to look out for?

Older people, especially those who are 80-plus and not vaccinated against flu or pneumonia, and those residing in old-age homes or long-term care facilities, are at high risk of developing severe disease due to COVID-19. Symptoms are fever, cough (dry and persistent) and shortness of breath, which are not due to a known chronic disease like COPD, bronchial asthma or heart disease. Other atypical symptoms could be headache, sore throat, nausea, diarrhoea, myalgia or arthralgia, nausea or vomiting, nasal congestion, and haemoptysis. However, the most important consideration is contact history with someone who has travelled to countries where COVID-19 has already become a pandemic.

What makes the elderly more susceptible?

Possible explanations for the observed higher morbidity and mortality rates among older patients are due to multiple factors like low physiological reserves due to the biologic changes that accompany ageing, frequent presence of multi-morbidity (more than 2 chronic diseases), and a fading immune system. When there is a challenge by the virus, the response by an older person's immune system faces a higher chance of an overreaction known as cytokine storm, on top of chronic low-grade inflammation due to multi-morbidity and ageing itself. Cytokines are proteins that serve as signals to the body to mount its infection-fighting machinery. The cause of death of this virus is respiratory failure and septicemia due to the cytokine storm.

This is also flu season. What should one do if she has fever, cold and cough? Should the person go for testing? And if she can't get freely tested, what's the option?

Initially, if an elderly person is suffering from symptoms like fever, dry cough, throat congestion without any contact history, they should take rest, stay at home, maintain cough etiquette (coughing and sneezing in tissue), sanitise their hands frequently. They can call the helpline provided by the central or state government; no need to panic. However, if they show any alarming signs related to organ failure like shortness of breath, decreased urine, chest discomfort, diarrhoea with fever, they should immediately visit the hospital. The elderly should not visit a hospital for routine follow-up of chronic non-communicable diseases.

Capital's meat shops bear the brunt: 'We're essential, police don't listen'

SOMYA LAKHANI
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

EVEN THOUGH meat shops can remain open during the 21-day lockdown, several meat-sellers alleged that Delhi Police forced them to pull the shutters down.

In South Delhi's CR Park, which has a thriving meat and chicken market, the owner of East Bengal Halal Mutton and Chicken Shop, Mohd. Faizan said, "On Sunday, the whole market was closed due to 'janata curfew'. When we opened on Monday, the local police officer said we have to shut it. We told him the Delhi government has exempted us from the lockdown but he didn't listen."

Faizan said he showed newspaper clippings to police Wednesday morning but was not allowed to keep the shop open. "I have around 70 kg chicken and mutton in deep freeze," he said.

In Saket and Malviya Nagar too, at least two meat sellers alleged that police threatened them to shut shop. "We know we are allowed and that police are wrong but they threatened to hit us, so we are just sitting at home now," said a meat seller in Saket.

DCP (South) Atul Kumar Thakur, however, claimed that no personnel in his district had asked anyone to shut their meat shop, and that maybe shopkeepers did it on their own "because they don't have supplies".

At 11.30 am Wednesday, a mutton shop owner in Southeast Delhi's Zakir Nagar was allegedly "forced to shut shop after a policeman hit the counter with lathi". A video of the incident too did the rounds. The owner told *The Indian Express,* "The policeman said we should shut shop because the disease (coronavirus) is spreading because of it... If they have a problem, they should at least behave in a civilised manner."

The fish market in CR Park which was ordered shut, Wednesday. *Tashi Tobgyal*

DCP (Southeast) R P Meena said the shop was shut down as "there were too many people inside, but personnel have been briefed not to misbehave with public. We will inquire into this".

In East Delhi, the famous Ghazipur *murga* and *bakra* mandis, the main suppliers of chicken and mutton in Delhi, are shut. Akram Karim, who runs a shop there, said, "We have been shut since the 'janata curfew'. We get our stock from UP, Rajasthan, Punjab and supply it to hotels, restaurants in Delhi. The borders are sealed so we have nothing to sell, and restaurants — our major clients — are shut."

In Central Delhi's Meena Bazar, Suiwalan and Matia Mahal too, most shops were shut — with many attributing it to police high-handedness, while others cited zero stock. Mohd. Aslam, who runs Aslam Chicken in Meena Bazar, said, "We sell mostly to residents and have some stock, but police are not letting us operate. I have 15 employees and am suffering losses of Rs 15,000-20,000 a day."

DCP (Central) Sanjay Bhatia said, "Police have not told anyone to shut shops, they have done it on their own because restaurants, their main clients, are shut."

In Southwest Delhi's Vasant Kunj, Gulzar Ahmed, who runs Gulzar Chicken in Block D4, shared a similar issue: "I only have 4-5 kg stock in deep freeze but haven't been able to sell it... A local police personnel gave us an hour on Tuesday to shut shop."

In the posh Meher Chand Market, however, MI meat suppliers were open, and the owner said that "this may not last long as supplies are almost over and Ghazipur *mandi* is shut".

While some Green Chick Shop outlets were closed in the capital, one in South Delhi's Kailash Colony was open. The manager said, "Police on Tuesday told us we should not allow anyone inside, and should hand over packets at the gate. We are doing that."

CM launches helpline to ensure there's no harassment by cops

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

CHIEF MINISTER Arvind Kejriwal Wednesday announced the launch of two helplines — one for people attached with essential services to get e-passes, and the other for the general public to lodge complaints related to police harassment during the lockdown. He also said the government would ensure that during the lockdown, essential products such as milk, groceries and vegetables are easily available.

He made the announcement during a joint press briefing with L-G Anil Baijal, after a review meeting on administrative preparedness in ensuring maintenance of essential supplies in the city over the next three weeks.

The helpline for e-passes is 1031, while that to file a complaint against police harassment is 011-23469536. Several people, especially those delivering food or groceries, said they were harassed by police even though they are essential service providers.

Baijal said some amount of inconvenience was "bound to happen" but the administration is trying to sort out the issues.

Announcing that the helpline number for e-passes was operational, Kejriwal in the evening requested people not to use the number as a general helpline. "Anyone attached with essential services such as running grocery or vegetable shops, chemist stores and others can make one call and get the passes issued. This is not a general helpline, it is only meant to give out essential service passes...," said Kejriwal.

The helpline to report police harassment will be monitored by the Delhi Police chief, he added. The e-passes will help those engaged in running essential services but not having IDs, he said.

E-passes will be colour-coded based on the nature of essential services — blue for industry and manufacturers (related to essential services); orange for delivery; green for groceries and wholesalers, yellow for retailers; pink for medical staff; red for chemists/pharmacies; mauve for other miscellaneous heads. It will be sent via WhatsApp or email.

"The Centre, Delhi government, police are working unitedly. There's no need to panic. We saw queues outside shops after the PM's address last night. Such gatherings will defeat the lockdown's purpose," said Kejriwal.

The number of cases in Delhi went up by five to touch 35 on Wednesday. Urging people to stay indoors, Kejriwal said the government will take the responsibility to make essential items available: "With folded hands, I request you to follow the lockdown. Go out only to get vegetables, milk or necessary groceries." He also asked people to take responsibility of taking care of the poor in each area.

The L-G also appointed 17 nodal officers, including one each for e-commerce services and police-related issues.

CORONA WATCH

Mumbai residents celebrate the Marathi New Year. *PTI*

Youths held for attacking constables

Bengaluru: Two men on Wednesday attacked some constables after being stopped at a checkpost for defying the lockdown, police said. Both were arrested. The incident took place early in the day under Sanjay Nagar police station limits in the city, they said. A video, showing a group of young men arguing with the constables, and then a couple of them attacking and pushing the cops on to the street, has surfaced on social media. **PTI**

Cleric, others booked for namaaz

Dehradun: A cleric and at least 20 other unidentified people were booked for violating prohibitory orders by gathering at a mosque in Dehradun to offer namaaz. The police said that they reached the mosque in Sattowali Ghati area after finding out about the gathering during a patrol. Most of the people there ran away after seeing them. After this, the cleric, Abdul Samad, was asked to issue an appeal to people to offer namaaz at their homes. More than 330 people were arrested and 51 cases were lodged for violation of lockdown across the state. **ENS**

Stranded UK nationals flown out of Goa

Panaji: As many as 249 British nationals stranded in Goa were flown out of the country in a special early morning flight arranged by the Airports Authority of India on Wednesday. The fully sold-out flight to Manchester was operated by TUI airways. The Goa government is now making arrangements to fly out many Germans who are stranded in the state—the next flight is expected on Thursday. According to Goa Hotel Association, there are still many who are waiting to fly back to Europe but are waiting to see the situation improve." **ENS**

Mahabharat was won in 18 days, we need to win this in 21, says PM

DIPANKAR GHOSE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

A DAY after he announced a countrywide lockdown for 21 days as health authorities battle to check transmission of the coronavirus, Prime Minister Narendra Modi Wednesday reiterated the importance of social distancing and said strict action will be taken against those discriminating against doctors, medical staff and others who are "risking their lives to keep ours safe".

In an online interaction with residents of Varanasi, his parliamentary constituency, Modi compared the "war" against the coronavirus to the Mahabharat. "The Mahabharat war was won in 18 days. Today, the war against corona which is being fought by the entire country will take 21 days. It is our effort that we should win this in 21 days. During the war in Mahabharat, Bhagwan Shri Krishna was the saviour.

Today on the shoulders of 130 crore saviours, we have to win this fight against corona."

He urged people to refrain from self-medication, and to only trust the word of doctors.

PM talking to residents of Varanasi via video call. *PTI*

"We have a habit of taking medicines for fevers and colds without consulting our doctors... We have to be aware that till now there is no medicine or vaccine against corona that has been made anywhere in the world... our scientists, in our country and in the world, are working fast. So if someone suggests a medicine, please speak to your doctor first. You must have seen that people are putting their lives in danger by medicating themselves."

"The biggest thing that has come out from this virus is that it does not discriminate against anyone. It attacks developed countries and poor households as well... If people socially distances themselves, then the chance that the virus will affect them is much lower. It is important that over one lakh corona-affected people across the world have also recovered," he said.

Modi announced the creation of a Corona Helpdesk, created in collaboration with WhatsApp with the number 9013151515. "You can WhatsApp this number and be connected with it. If you write Namaste on this number, you will be connected."

To a question about doctors, nurses and other staff being discriminated against, Modi said, "Your pain is correct, and I have the same pain too. Yesterday I spoke to nurses, doctors, and lab technicians on these issues at length." He said that the country had set an example not only through Sunday's Janata Curfew, but also via the five-minute tribute at 5 pm.

"Those people that conducted rescue operations in Wuhan, I wrote a letter. That was not just any other letter, but made me emotional. I shared the photographs of the all-women Air India crew that rescued people in Italy. From some places, I have received information of these actions that bring pain to the heart. I appeal to citizens that if you see any such act, if you see people that are in the business of saving us, doctors, nurses, medical staff, sanitation staff, if bad behaviour happens with them, go to the people of your area and tell them what they are doing is wrong. You cannot do this. Whoever is serving us, we must help them."

"There may be stray incidents... I have asked the Home Department and DGPs of the states to act very strictly. If someone acts like this against doctors, nurses etc, then the costs for them will be very high. Right now, doctors and nurses, dressed in white in hospitals, are our gods. They are risking their lives to save ours," he said.

Responding to a question on the problems being faced by the poor because of the lockdown, Modi asked people to pledge to help nine families, if they have the resources. "A second powerful way to fight the coronavirus is Karuna. We can take one step to beat corona by showing compassion towards the poor and the needy. If we, for the next 21 days, for those who have the ability to do this, as Navratras have started, everyday pledge to help 9 families. I believe that if we do this, then what else can be a bigger prayer to our mother. This will be a true and powerful Navratra. We also have to care for the animals around us. Because of the lockdown, a crisis has come for animals as well," he said.

"It is possible that in some places, there are problems. That someone has been careless. But to concentrate only on these problems, to search for them, to focus only on them, to discourage, at a point like this, does not benefit. I will request that we understand that to spread negativity, there might be a hundred reasons, but life only goes on from hope and confidence. However much we support the law and the administration, the results will be that much better... The doctors, the officials, the police, the media, have they come from outside? They are our people. If such a heavy burden has come on them, may be we should share it too. We must increase their resolve."

Himanta sees tough task ahead, Tripura says fully prepared

LIZ MATHEW & ABHISHEK SAHA
NEW DELHI, GUWAHATI, MARCH 25

Himanta Biswa Sarma.

A DAY after Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a 21-day lockdown, Assam Finance Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Wednesday that the state would have to announce a financial package for the unorganised sector and added that states would require the Centre's assistance.

However, the BJP government in Tripura said it is fully prepared for the lockdown.

Sarma told *The Indian Express*: "Many states like Assam do not have the financial resources to tackle the lockdown for three weeks. Today is the first day. The challenges will grow as we move forward."

Sarma said the state government was prepared for a week-long lockdown but a 21-day lockdown would raise challenges for all Northeastern states. Before the Prime Minister's announcement, Assam had been placed under a lockdown till March 31 midnight to curb the spread of coronavirus.

"No one has stocks or preparations for 21 days. Prices, too, are going up. It will be difficult for us to manage. I am a little worried about how people will react after a week," said Sarma, also the convener of North East Democratic Alliance, a BJP-led coalition in the Northeast.

Assam has not reported any COVID-19 case so far. Among Northeastern states, Manipur and Mizoram have reported one case each.

Sarma said the worst sufferers of the lockdown would be the poor. "Challenges will emerge in three-four days. You don't know how prepared they are. They will need assistance. We will have to provide them some financial assistance," he said.

He said he is confident that the Centre would provide the required assistance. "We are depending on the Government of India," he said.

Sarma said that if COVID-19 strikes the region in a big way, the states would face a crisis as health facilities there are not up to the mark. The minister, however, said there may be fewer transmissions of COVID-19 in the Northeast.

Tripura Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb said the state government is fully prepared. "A task force has been formed to tackle the situation," Deb told *The Indian Express*.

He said the government has decided to provide 15 days of free ration to 5.86 lakh families. The state government will also give two months' pension in advance to 3.25 lakh pensioners, among other measures, he said.

"We have decided to distribute cooked food among the homeless and daily wagers. Food packets will be served two times daily," he said. He said the Centre has assured total support during the lockdown.

Meanwhile, multiple videos purportedly showing policemen thrashing people in Assam for stepping out during the lockdown have emerged.

Assam DGP B J Mahanta told the media that police will take all measures possible to ensure the lockdown and added that they might have to resort to harsh measures sometimes because people were not taking the lockdown seriously.

Delhi HC directs MEA to ensure well-being of Indians stranded in Kazakhstan

PRITAM PAL SINGH
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

THE DELHI High Court on Wednesday directed the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) to ensure the well-being of Indian students stranded at the airport in Almaty, Kazakhstan in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Directing the Central government to "promptly appoint a nodal officer from the Indian Embassy in Kazakhstan", a bench of Justices Siddharth Mridul and Talwant Singh ordered the government "to expeditiously facilitate, secure and provide the students with all basic amenities and humanitarian assistance in terms of medical care, boarding (food), lodging and transportation, as may be necessary or warranted".

The bench, in a special hearing held through video conferencing, directed the authorities that the "details and other necessary particulars of the Nodal Officer, so appointed, including his name and telephone number, be communicated to the Indian students stranded at the Almaty Airport, Kazakhstan".

The court's urgent direction were issued on a plea by Shehla Saira who said: "Indian nationals in sizeable numbers, who are enrolled for higher studies, including MBBS, as regular students, at the Semey Medical University in Kazakhstan, are stated to be stranded including at the Almaty Airport, Kazakhstan without food, water, transportation and medical aid since the last two-three days".

Central government Standing Counsel Jasmeet Singh, after accepting the notice on behalf of the MEA, sought time to file a reply. The bench directed them to do so on March 27.

HOLD THE LINE: People wait at earmarked spots outside a shop in Kolkata on Wednesday. *Partha Paul*

District in Jharkhand ties up with Swiggy to deliver essentials home

ABHISHEK ANGAD
RANCHI, MARCH 25

THE DISTRICT-LEVEL COVID-19 committee in Jharkhand's Bokaro has tied up with Swiggy for home delivery of essential grocery items amid the 21-day lockdown.

Bokaro Deputy Commissioner Mukesh Kumar told *The Indian Express* that the administration will provide the list of vendors to be enrolled on the Swiggy platform to cover around 1 lakh families in urban areas. The system is expected to go online on Friday.

A source said, "We initially thought of coming up with an app for the delivery of groceries, but that would have been time-consuming and doubts were raised on its viability. Any number would be flooded with calls or messages. We looked at other apps and found that Swiggy is popular. It already has a platform and back-end support."

The source said that they will be mapping each ward of Bokaro.

Jharkhand has not reported any COVID-19 case yet.

Officials of the administration said they will add around 50 grocery shops to their list and the payments to the vendors will be settled within 3-5 days of the delivery. The administration hopes to cover Bokaro and Chas cooperative area using Swiggy's network and will also put its own workforce on the ground for the deliveries. "Some organisations have approached us to provide delivery men who will be given a specific T-shirt that would ensure seamless movement across the city. A population of around 3-3.5 lakh people will be covered," said an official.

In Bokaro, barring a few food joints that operate from home, no eatery is currently delivering food through Swiggy.

A source in the Jharkhand unit of Swiggy said, "We will be replacing the restaurant listings with grocery shops. It will initially have 10-15 grocery shops and more will be added as per requirement."

As per the agreement, all goods will be sold as per MRP. "Swiggy may levy Rs 40 as delivery charge, out of which Rs 5 should be deposited to the Disaster Relief Fund," a source said.

The source from Swiggy said the charge was required to pay those making the deliveries.

Healthcare workers in Odisha to get four months' salary in advance

SAMPAD PATNAIK
BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 25

ODISHA CHIEF Minister Naveen Patnaik Wednesday announced that the state will pay four months' advance salary to doctors and health workers as a gesture of appreciation for their service in the battle against coronavirus.

In a video clip, Patnaik said: "Paramedics and all healthcare workers will be given their salaries for April, May, June and July in the month of April itself."

He added: "I have ordered the police that people who disrespect the health fraternity should face action."

The state government is also hiring healthcare workers on a large scale. *The Indian Express* has received a document which has called for temporary hiring of hundreds of staff nurses, pharmacists, lab technicians, radiographers, and multi-purpose health workers.

"The employees may be engaged on a walk-in interview basis by the concerned superintendents of MCHs (Medical colleges and hospitals) and CDM and PHOs of the district," the document stated. "The engagement of the given employees shall be given till June 30. The duration may be extended further. Engagement is temporary and can be terminated without assigning and reason thereof," it added.

Students leave Hyderabad for Andhra after PM announces lockdown

SREENIVAS JANYALA
HYDERABAD, MARCH 25

FOLLOWING THE Telangana government's decision to allow students and workers to return to their native places, the toll plazas on National Highway 65 leading to Vijayawada were jammed Wednesday night as thousands of people living in Hyderabad started returning to Andhra Pradesh.

The Telangana Police, however, had asked those wanting to leave to get an NOC from their local police station certifying that they had no COVID-19 symptoms. On Wednesday evening, defying the social distancing norm and lockdown restrictions, thousands of people lined up outside police stations to get a NOC.

"In January, I had enrolled at an academy in Ameerpet to learn AngularJS. Now the institute is closed and my PG owner has asked me to vacate the house because they cannot run the mess. I don't know how I will go back home. I have been asking everyone in my WhatsApp group for a lift," said 22-year-old Kurasala Venkatesh, a native of Mandapeta in East Godavari district. Venkatesh was offered a ride on a two-wheeler till Vijayawada by someone he met at the Kukatpally police station.

Following complaints by students against hostel and PG owners, Cyberabad Police Commissioner V C Sajjanar said a warning has been issued. "If PG or hostel owners force inmates to vacate under the present circumstances, strict action would be taken against them," Sajjar said.

INCREASED LOAD ON BANDWITH

Companies, governments prepare for Internet spike

KARISHMA MEHROTRA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

WITH ALL forms of transportation shut, the country's Internet bandwidth is being tested in the nationwide lockdown. From government data center operations to Silicon Valley companies, measures are in place to adjust to the changing landscape.

As a "digital industry", stakeholders met on March 24 to "ensure the robustness of the cellular network" by either defaulting mobile videos to standard definition, such as in the case of YouTube, or removing high definition viewing options altogether, which Star India and TikTok have done. Other companies that have signed the agreement are Sony, Facebook, Viacom18, Amazon Prime Video, Zee, Netflix, MX Player and Hotstar.

According to data from the Internet exchanges, Internet traffic has been on the rise. For example, one exchange, Extreme IX, began seeing a slight uptick from a little over 600 gbps to almost 700 gbps on March 16. Traffic on the exchange recently peaked at over 800 gbps on March 23. These Internet exchange points is the physical point where Internet service providers and content providers exchange traffic between their networks.

LOCKDOWN LOG

The National Informatics Center (NIC) has also enabled a Virtual Private Network (VPN) to allow government officials to access the e-filing system from their homes. The NIC has also seen an uptick of government officials using video-conferencing to replace physical meetings. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has recently held numerous video calls with stakeholders across the country and will participate in a G-20 video conference today.

Facebook announced that it reduced the bit rates for videos on both Facebook and Instagram in India, Europe and Latin America. A video bitrate is a measurement of the speed of uploading and downloading online. "The usage growth from COVID-19 is unprecedented across the industry, and we are experiencing new records in usage almost every day. In many of the countries hit hardest by the virus, total messaging has increased more than 50% over the last month," the company stated. "Similarly, in places hit hardest by the virus, voice and video calling have more than doubled on Messenger and WhatsApp."

On March 21, Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI) requested the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India to allow operators to waive charges for certain websites and telephone numbers offering information related to COVID-19, including Ministerial and World Health Organization websites.

This concept, also known as 'zero-rating', has come under significant controversy in India in the past, most notably in the net neutrality debate against Facebook's "free" internet service.

Last week, Kerala's IT Department met with Internet service providers such as Reliance Jio and Airtel to reroute data traffic to withstand a 40 per cent increase in usage.

CORONA WATCH

Firefighters spray disinfectants on a road in Amritsar. *PTI*

Mizoram pastor tests positive

Guwahati: A 50-year-old pastor in Mizoram, who had returned recently from Amsterdam, tested positive for COVID-19 late on Tuesday night, becoming the second person to contract the virus in the Northeast. Authorities in Mizoram and Assam said that the patient had returned to Delhi flying via Doha on March 15. The next day, he flew to Guwahati and changed flights to reach Aizawl. On March 18, he had fever and isolated himself at home. The pastor, along with his family members, has been shifted to isolation ward. **ENS**

Fifth case of coronavirus in Uttarakhand

Dehradun: A 25-year-old man back from Spain tested positive for the coronavirus in Uttarakhand's Kotdwar on Wednesday. This is the fifth positive case in the state. The patient was on a trip to Spain from February 20 to March 13. He stayed at a hotel in Delhi after returning. Later, he travelled home via train and bus. Meanwhile, a trainee forest officer, who tested positive for the virus earlier, tested negative on Wednesday. **ENS**

Two test positive in Chhattisgarh

Raipur: Two asymptomatic 24-year-olds, a man who had returned from Thailand and a woman back from the UK, tested positive for COVID-19 in Chhattisgarh on Wednesday, health officials said. The man is a resident of Rajnandgaon while the woman is from Raipur. The total number of positive cases in the state is now three. Both were tested after the state extended the testing criterion to "asymptomatic foreign returned persons", the state health minister TS Singh Deo said in a tweet. "We need to expand the testing criteria." **ENS**

States get going: Dedicated hospitals, new isolation wards, more doctors

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

WITH KERALA and Maharashtra recording more than 100 cases of the coronavirus, and a national lockdown in place, other states and union territories are ramping up their facilities for testing, isolation and treatment to contain the outbreak.

From Tamil Nadu to Jammu and Kashmir, they have increased isolation facilities, set up designated hospitals, fast-tracked appointment of new doctors, called in retired professionals and reached out to the private sector.

West Bengal, which recorded its first death Monday, has designated Calcutta Medical College (CMC) hospital as the state's first dedicated super speciality facility to face the challenge.

Health Department sources told *The Indian Express* that CMC will start a 700-bed isolation bay within a week, which will be expanded to accommodate 3,000 people.

The 11-storey CMC facility will include a dedicated ICU zone on the ninth and tenth floors, they said. The state already has two quarantine centres, and earmarked 310 beds at three other hospitals in Kolkata.

In UP, 2,800 isolation beds are in place, while work is on to make 11,000 more available at 51 public and private medical colleges. Testing is currently being being done at six labs — KGMU (Aligarh), BHU Institute of Medical Sciences (Varanasi), SGPGI (Lucknow), Medical College (Meerut) and Command Hospital (Lucknow). Two more labs — NIV centre (Gorakhpur) and Safai Medical College (Etawah) — will be added soon.

Calcutta Medical College has been designated as West Bengal's first dedicated super speciality facility to face the challenge. *Express*

Tamil Nadu is readying a 350-bed isolation ward — with over 20 critical care facilities and 700 toilets — at the multi-super speciality government hospital on Mount Road in Chennai. City-based Apollo Hospitals, which has received approval for a testing lab, has offered to treat patients at its 100-bed facility.

Haryana is pressing more personnel into action. The government has decided to immediately issue appointment letters to 447 doctors who were recently selected for service but are yet to undergo the character verification and medical examination process.

The state has also created a revolving fund of Rs 100 crore for key departments, and given the green signal for testing at private labs in at least four locations and designating four hospitals.

The Andhra government is increasing the capacity of testing labs at seven medical colleges to cover 1,000 samples per day — Rs 5 lakh will be given to each lab to purchase key equipment, and function round the clock.

The state has also deputed research scientists and assistants, and lab technicians, on a temporary basis to labs in Visakhapatnam, Kakinada, Vijayawada, Guntur, Anantapur and YSR Kadapa districts.

Rajasthan has started earmarking quarantine facilities for 1 lakh people, ranging from 1,500 beds in smaller districts such as Dungarpur to 10,000 beds in Jaipur.

Gujarat has 134 quarantine facilities with a capacity of 6,700 beds in place. Officials said facilities in Ahmedabad will be increased to a dozen quarantine centres with 5,000 beds.

In Yelahanka, near Bengaluru, the BSF is ready with three 100-bed barracks to extend quarantine facility for 300 people, while the IAF has established a 20-bed isolation ward at Command Hospital. Private hospitals have assured that 1,200 beds will be dedicated for patients.

In Jammu, the 1,070-bed Government Medical College (GMC) Hospital has been designated as a COVID-19 facility, with the administration deciding to hire retired doctors on contract for a year for "under-served areas".

Authorities in Kashmir have decided to convert SKIMS Medical College, C D Hospital, JLNM Hospital and the Police Hospital in Srinagar into isolation facilities.

And in Uttarakhand, the government has tagged four medical colleges, in Dehradun, Almora, Haldwai and Srinagar. It has directed private hospitals and medical colleges with a minimum of 100 beds to reserve at least 25 per cent for isolation.

Some states are yet to catch up with the rest. For instance, the Goa Medical College remains the state's lone testing facility, prompting a team of doctors to approach the government for a separate hospital.

(ENS INPUTS FROM WEST BENGAL, UP, TN, HARYANA, ANDHRA PRADESH, RAJASTHAN, KARNATAKA, J&K, GOA, GUJARAT AND UTTARAKHAND)

Govt looks for volunteer doctors

New Delhi: The government is looking for volunteer doctors to fight the COVID-19 outbreak. In a statement posted on Niti Aayog's website on Wednesday, the government appealed to retired government, Armed Forces Medical Services, public sector undertaking or a private doctor to come forward and join the efforts of the government . Those who wish to contribute to this and be a part of this nobel mission to serve the country may register themselves on a link provided on the Niti Aayog's website. **PTI**

Drug movement disrupted, patients left in the lurch

PRABHA RAGHAVAN
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

PATNA RESIDENT Sanjay Kumar Sinha was supposed to arrive in Gurgaon Wednesday for cancer treatment at a hospital that stocks the immunotherapy drug he needs every 15 days. But, following the announcement of a 21-day lockdown to curb the spread of COVID-19, he knew he wouldn't be able to.

Sinha, who is in the final stage of a tongue cancer that has spread to his lungs, contacted the distributor of the drug, nivolumab, in Gurgaon, but it was of no use.

"The distributor said there was no way for them to courier the injection because transport wasn't available. We tried another distributor in Patna, but their supply comes from Kolkata and the situation is the same," said his wife Neetu.

She said that before he took the drug, Sanjay would face difficulty breathing, his lungs would fill with water and he was not able to move. "After two sessions of immunotherapy, he has been feeling a little comfortable, but the doctor is saying if he misses it, the problems may start again."

Amid the lockdown, disruptions in supply of essential medicines across state borders have left patients like Sanjay in the lurch. The panic buying of certain medicines hasn't helped either.

JNU Professor Archana Prasad has been taking hydroxychloroquine for the last three years to treat an auto-immune disease. Without the drug, it becomes painful for her to put in long hours of work. A Delhi-based government official has been on this medication for the last six years for a similar condition. Without it, her arms and legs swell up and she gets tired.

The two have been doing rounds of pharmacies for the last few days in the hope that maybe one of them will have enough to keep them going. "People have to understand these are not illnesses that can be postponed," said Prasad.

Measures have been taken by some states to ease confusions about whether drugmakers are still allowed to manufacture, but movement of products across borders is still a problem.

"Even if one state has given clearance, they are stopped as soon as they cross the border," said the executive of an Indian pharmaceutical company.

"If the situation continues and the government doesn't pay attention, there will be serious shortage," said Kailash Gupta, president of All India Chemists and Distributors Federation.

"Nobody expected the lockdown would be for 21 days...When such drastic measures are taken, some disruptions are bound to happen," said Mankind Pharma chairman Ramesh C Juneja. However, pharma associations are working with states and central ministries to resolve this and he expects a solution in the next three days, Juneja said. "Our factories are working... Maybe the number of employees is short, but work is going on," he said. "The only problem is transportation..."

As of now, the government's inability to effectively pass on the message that pharma operations is an essential service has led to "utter chaos", said the executive cited above. "Manufacturers are not able to supply. Transporters and stockists are getting beaten up. You hear one story of one person going through this and the system stops," the executive said.

Himachal researcher's 63 days of dodging virus, Wuhan to Kangra

GAGANDEEP SINGH DHILLON
SHIMLA, MARCH 25

THIRTY-SIX days of lockdown in an apartment in Wuhan, 16 days of institutional quarantine in Delhi, and 11 days of home quarantine in Kangra, a district now under stringent lockdown following Himachal Pradesh's only COVID-19 death — that is the story of the last two months for a biologist from the state who was working in China when the coronavirus outbreak hit.

Now isolated at home with his family in Matlahar village in the district, Som Dutt, 36, chuckles, "It's the year of quarantine for me."

Kangra is so far the only COVID-19-affected district in Himachal, with three cases and one death.

A vaccine researcher, Dutt who works with a Chinese company engaged in research and development of vaccines, moved to Wuhan three-and-a-half years ago and lives by himself in a two-room apartment at Guangu Square. "It was January 10 when local authorities started advising residents to wear masks. It was a new virus, and nobody knew much about it. The number of cases shot up as people started moving out of the city in large numbers ahead of a seven-day spring festival. It was then that the government locked the city down on January 23," he says.

Som Dutt will end up being in quarantine for 63 days

Initially, people were allowed to step out to buy groceries and essential items, Dutt says. But, after February 10, they had to stay confined to their homes. A volunteer was assigned for each community to deliver items to their doorsteps.

"It was coordinated over WeChat and we never met. I physically met no human in that phase. I lived in a corner apartment, and my balcony opened out to a garden and an uninhabited area. I could see no human," he says.

Eventually, Dutt would step out of his apartment for a total of 1.5 hours in 36 days, spending most of his time reading medical literature and doing some online work for his company.

While he didn't plan to return home, Dutt's family started panicking. "All types of rumours, such as doctors killing patients, started doing the rounds and my mother turned sick with worry. The Indian government facilitated the return of 112 of us from Wuhan. When I stepped out of my room on February 27 and met one of my colleagues, I got overwhelmed and hugged him. It was a different experience," he says.

Back in Delhi, he was quarantined at the ITBP camp, where four of them shared a room. Dutt says that "everyone was scared of everyone" initially due to the threat of the virus but, in time, they bonded well and had a hearty farewell at the end. "We got separate beds, the place was hygienic, the doctor checked on us twice a day, the food was good and, to top it all, there was WiFi. I frankly didn't expect such a nice stay there. We enjoyed ourselves like during college days," he recalls.

It was the Kangra isolation that caught him unprepared. He returned home on March 14, after testing negative for the virus. Six days later, the district got its first case. With Kangra now under strict lockdown and curfew, Dutt's new quarantine will last at least 21 days.

However, Dutt doesn't resent the measure. "The lockdown is a great step by the Prime Minister. Isolation is our best defence. In Wuhan, people followed what authorities ordered and there was no culture of rumours. We will have to develop that. I would also suggest using the local machinery of leaders — panchayats, mahila mandals etc — to enforce the lockdown," he says, pointing out that a large number of policepersons and health workers got infected in Wuhan and it must be prevented in India.

At home too, Dutt spends much of his time reading research related to the virus. "This time, I have my wife and parents with me, and my five-year old daughter. Given the circumstances, I couldn't have asked for more," he smiles.

STUDY IN LANCET JOURNAL ON WUHAN CLOSURES

School, work closures reduced cases in virus epicentre: study

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, PUNE, MARCH 25

NEW MODELLING research, published in *The Lancet Public Health Journal*, suggests that school and workplace closures in Wuhan, China, have reduced the number of coronavirus cases and substantially delayed the epidemic peak — giving the health system the time and opportunity to expand and respond.

Using mathematical modelling to simulate the impact of either extending or relaxing current school and workplace closures, researchers estimate that by lifting these control measures in March, a second wave of cases may occur in late-August, whereas maintaining these restrictions until April would likely delay a second peak until October. This, the researchers pointed out, could relieve pressure on health services in the intervening months.

The researchers, led by those from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, concluded: "Our projections show that physical distancing measures were most effective if the staggered return to work was at the beginning of April; this reduced the median number of infections by more than 92% and 24% in mid-2020 and end-2020, respectively. There are benefits to sustaining these measures until April in terms of delaying and reducing the height of the peak, median epidemic size at end-2020, and affording health-care systems more time to expand and respond.

"However, the modelled effects of physical distancing measures vary by the duration of infectiousness and the role school children have in the epidemic."

Uncertainties, however, remain about the number of people each coronavirus patient is likely to infect, and this may have a large effect on the timing of the epidemic peak and final size of the outbreak, researchers have warned.

There has been no new confirmed case in Wuhan in the last 24 hours. The lockdown in the city ends on April 8, even as China has decided to lift the three-month lockdown in the central Hubei province.

While India is banking hugely on social distancing to break the chain of transmission of the deadly virus — and PM Narendra Modi announced a 21-day lockdown — extrapolation of these results into another country may not give the accurate picture, the researchers warned.

Results of the study will not look exactly the same in another country "because the population structure and the way people mix will be different", said Dr Yang Liu of London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. "But we think one thing probably applies everywhere: physical distancing measures are very useful, and we need to carefully adjust their lifting to avoid subsequent waves of infection when workers and school children return to their normal routine.

"If those waves come too quickly, that could overwhelm health systems."

Dr Kiesha Prem, from the same institution, who led the research, said, "The unprecedented measures Wuhan has put in place to reduce social contacts in school and the workplace have helped control the outbreak. However, the city now needs to be really careful to avoid prematurely lifting physical distancing measures, because that could lead to an earlier secondary peak in cases.

"But if they relax the restrictions gradually, this is likely to both delay and flatten the peak."

Daughter of MP among 10 new Karnataka cases

Bengaluru: The daughter of a former Union minister and an incumbent BJP MP from Karnataka and two girls aged nine and seven were among 10 people who were reported positive with coronavirus in the state on Wednesday.

While the 37-year-old daughter of the MP had returned to Bengaluru on March 20 after travelling to Guyana, the two young girls who have tested positive are daughters of patient number 17, who had tested positive several days ago after returning from Amsterdam, according to officials.

This is the highest number of confirmed cases reported in a day since the first case was detected in the state over two weeks ago, taking the total of confirmed cases across Karnataka to 51. **ENS**

In Rajasthan drive, 75,000 health workers cover 23 lakh homes

DEEP MUKHERJEE
JAIPUR, MARCH 25

INSIDE HIS office at the state secretariat, Rohit Kumar Singh flips through a folder of paper sheets listing 43 points to tackle the coronavirus outbreak in Rajasthan.

From airport screening to isolation monitoring, home surveillance to quarantine facilities, coordination with districts to inter-department liaison — the folder is a lifeline for Singh, who is additional chief secretary in the state's health department, in the rush to contain the virus.

"There are two aspects, prevention and response, after finding a positive case. Where we score better than others is the prevention part... we have trained 75,000 health workers and nursing staff from all districts through video conferencing. They have covered more than 23 lakh homes till now," he says.

The health department is also using an app — currently in Jhunjhunu and Bhilwara districts from where positive cases were reported — to track those quarantined at home. "They are able to enter their vitals daily on the app, which is helping the department keep a tab on their condition," says Singh.

Of the 38 cases recorded in the state so far, the first three were discharged after treatment, although one of them, an Italian tourist who was administered a combination of second-line anti-HIV medication, died later following a cardiac arrest.

By the time the fourth case was reported — a 24-year-old man who landed in Jaipur from Spain via Delhi on March 13 — Singh says the state's preventive mechanism was fully in place.

Officials say more than 30 lakh people have been screened so far across the state. *Express*

"Our first reaction was to contact airport officials to get the passenger list of the flight in which he had travelled to Jaipur. We also alerted the airline and officials at the Delhi airport. We marked those who sat on both sides of the patient, upto three seats away, as high-risk individuals," he says.

What followed was "a massive operation" by the department, tracking down those who came in contact with the patient, and screening hundreds of people near his home in a bustling neighbourhood in Jaipur.

Within the next 24 hours, a team of doctors, health workers and nursing students had screened almost all the houses located within 3 km of the patient's residence.

"We started screening houses on the night of March 13 itself, and came to know that there were two maids and a caretaker in his house. Following that, we started collecting information on the other houses where these people went, and their families. It was revealed that the patient had come in close contact with 12 people. All of them were quarantined at home," says Dr Narottam Sharma, chief medical and health officer of Jaipur.

According to Dr Ravi Prakash Sharma, additional director, rural health, more than 30 lakh people have been screened so far across the state.

While the infected cases are being treated at the Sawai Man Singh Hospital in Jaipur, an isolation ward has been created at the Rajasthan University of Health Sciences for those under observation. For each positive case, the health directorate has prepared a flow chart and a dossier for contact-tracing.

At present, there are six facilities in the state — mostly in divisional headquarters — which can conduct tests.

THE CORONA FIGHTERS
AN EXPRESS SERIES

FROM TESTING SAMPLES TO TRACKING CONTACTS AND TREATING PATIENTS, MEET THE MEN AND WOMEN, UNSEEN AND UNHEARD, ON THE FRONTLINES OF INDIA'S FIGHT AGAINST CORONAVIRUS

87 new cases, telemedicine guidelines issued by govt to take load off doctors

65-year-old dies in Mumbai; Delhi death case off list after patient found negative for coronavirus

ABANTIKA GHOSH
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

ON THE first day of a nationwide lockdown — 75 districts have been on a lockdown since Sunday — India reported 87 confirmed coronavirus cases, the highest single-day jump so far.

The total now stands at 606, including 42 recovered patients and 10 dead. Health Ministry officials maintained there is no community transmission.

A 65-year-old died in Mumbai on Wednesday, while a death in Delhi that was initially marked as a COVID-19 death was taken off the list after the tests came out negative.

Meanwhile, the Health Ministry Wednesday issued telemedicine guidelines in a bid to reduce the load on hospitals and doctors in the middle of the pandemic. This comes after Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his address to the nation, had asked people to refrain from crowding hospitals and get advice as far as possible over the telephone.

In a statement, the Health Ministry said approximately 64,000 people have arrived from other countries since March 21, of which 8,000 have been put in various quarantine facilities and 56,000 are in home isolation.

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) said that 25,144 samples, taken from 24,254 individuals, have been tested for COVID-19 as of 8 pm, Wednesday. Of these, "581 individuals have been confirmed positive among suspected cases and contacts of known positive cases", the ICMR said in a statement.

Following reports from many parts of the country that delivery personnel of different online facilities were stopped, and that e-commerce companies ceased home delivery of essential products, Home Ministry officials said during a briefing that they are in touch with both the companies and the state governments to ensure delivery.

On Wednesday, the Group of Ministers (GoM) discussed ways to prevent and manage the outbreak. The GoM discussed actions taken so far, the current status of social distancing measures as a preventive strategy, and stringent actions taken so far by the states to contain the spread of COVID-19.

The GoM discussed strengthening capacity of the states, which need to devote adequate resources for creating dedicated COVID-19 hospitals, equipping medical institutions with personal protective equipment (PPEs), ventilators and other essential equipment. States have been asked to ensure that essential services and supplies remain open. These include hospitals, medical shops and establishments engaged in manufacturing of medicines, vaccines, sanitisers, masks and medical devices.

The GoM also said Gujarat, Assam, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Goa, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and the UT of Jammu and Kashmir are setting up hospitals dedicated for management of COVID-19. A total of 118 laboratories have been included in the ICMR network of coronavirus testing.

TELEMEDICINE GUIDELINES

THE GUIDELINES define telemedicine as: "Delivery of health care services, where distance is a critical factor, by all health care professionals using information and communication technologies for exchange of valid information for diagnosis, treatment and prevention of disease and injuries, research and evaluation, and for the continuing education of health care providers..."

Telemedicine includes all channels of communication with the patient that leverage, Information Technology platforms, including voice, audio, text and digital data exchange. Only a registered medical practitioner can provide it, who has to complete a course on telemedicine within three years of notification of the guidelines.

Trade unions ask PM to help transfer money to workers amid lockdown

LIZ MATHEW & MANOJ C G
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

WITH THE country under a 21-day lockdown, trade unions, irrespective of party allegiance, have sought a financial assistance for the unorganised sector.

Both the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), affiliated to the RSS, and the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), linked with the CPI(M), have asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi to see that Rs 5,000 is transferred to every worker as wage relief in this lockdown period.

In a letter to Modi, the BMS made a list of demands, including sufficient budget allocation as a relief for those who do not get their wages or (small traders) who have shut down their units due to crisis, distribution of essential commodities through PDS, and making available essential medicines at affordable prices to everyone.

"The government should urgently transfer RS 5,000 as income support/wage relief to every worker in the unorganised sector as well as other unpaid workers through DBT (direct benefit transfer) by depositing directly to their bank accounts for subsistence for one month. Such money will sustain the purchasing power of people and if spent, will activate the market and economic activities without getting paralysed," the union wrote, according to BMS national president Saji Narayanan.

In his letter to Modi, CITU general secretary Tapan Sen asked the government to ensure transfer of Rs 5,000 for workers in the unorganised and informal sector aged up to 25 years, and Rs 10,000 to those above 25 on a monthly basis through their jan dhan bank accounts.

Both BMS and CITU leaders also pointed out that the worst hit in the coronavirus crisis would be the daily wage workers in the unorganised sector.

FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

DELHI CONFIDENTIAL

LOCKDOWN ENGAGEMENT

WITH POLITICAL activities shelved during the 21-day lockdown, BJP president J P Nadda has decided to engage party workers in social activities. Mindful of the social distancing requirements, Nadda has decided to convene meetings of party's national office-bearers through video conferencing in the evenings. In the first such meeting on Wednesday, the party chief suggested that the BJP should tap into its vast network of members across the country to feed the needy and the vulnerable during these 21 days. He set a target of identifying 1 crore party workers across the country to take up this task immediately — the aim is to get each member to take responsibility of feeding five people each.

BOOKMARK THIS

FOR BOOKWORMS under lockdown, Attorney General of India K K Venugopal has opened up his personal collection of rare books, albeit virtually. The 89-year-old veteran lawyer, who has a passion for collecting antiquities, particularly antiquarian books, has digitised his library and shared access to kkvlibrary.com, which has over 500 rare books, dating back to the 17th century. The collection ranges from religion, mythology and the Vedas to Indian art and sculpture, historical battles, the British Empire in India and tales of travels across the world.

CLASSICALLY VIRTUAL

THE INDIAN Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)'s centres across the world is moving to the virtual mode. The organisation's president, Vinay Sahasrabuddhe, who spoke to the heads of these ICCR centres overseas, noted in a tweet that while classroom teachings of yoga, Indian classical dances or Sanskrit and Hindi, etc, stand halted due to the coronavirus pandemic, "many have switched to Virtual Classes in right earnestness".

Centre postpones NPR update, first phase of Census

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

AMID THE nationwide lockdown to curb the COVID-19 spread, the Centre has decided to postpone the process of the updating the National Population Register (NPR) and the houselisting phase of Census 2021. Both were supposed to start on April 1 and be completed by September 30.

A statement by the Registrar General of India's office on Wednesday said that keeping in view the nationwide lockdown, "the first phase of Census 2021 and updation of NPR, which was to begin on various dates decided by the State/UT governments beginning 1st of April 2020 and various related field activities, are postponed until further orders".

The Indian Express on Saturday reported that the NPR exercise was likely to be postponed due to the coronavirus outbreak and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call to maintain social distancing. Several states had even written to the Centre, expressing their inability to implement the process given that their manpower was engaged in fighting the pandemic.

"Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, high alert has been declared by the Government of India as well as the States/Union Territories. The Ministry of Home Affairs vide order dated 24th March, 2020 has issued Guidelines with the directions for their strict implementation, on the measures to be taken by the Ministries/Departments of Government of India and State/Union Territory Governments for containment of COVID-19 Epidemic in the country. Lockdown has also been declared by many State/UT governments. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India has issued advisories for various precautionary measures, including social distancing," the RGI statement said.

It said the Census 2021 was scheduled to be conducted in two phases — House listing & Housing Census during April-September 2020 and Population Enumeration between February 9 to 28, 2021. The updation of NPR was proposed to be done along with Phase I of Census 2021 in all States/UTs, except Assam, as it has already gone through the process of preparing National Register of Citizens.

...the first phase of Census 2021 and updation of NPR, which was to begin on various dates decided by the State/UT governments beginning 1st of April 2020 and various related field activities, are postponed until further orders"

— RGI STATEMENT

Ramlalla shifted, Yogi faces flak for 'flouting' social distancing

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
LUCKNOW, MARCH 25

UTTAR PRADESH Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath shifted the Ramlalla idol to a new site at Manas Bhavan on Wednesday morning, following which he drew criticism for reportedly not adhering to the social distancing norm amid coronavirus outbreak. Photographs and videos of the ceremony that have gone viral show the CM standing close to a group, including Ayodhya District Magistrate Anuj Kumar Jha, security personnel, priests and members of Ram Teerth Kshetra Trust, office bearers of RSS and VHP.

The shifting of the idol clears the site to begin construction of the Ram temple. Speaking during the occasion, the CM said, "All of us are lucky to have witnessed the shifting of Maryada Purushotam Ram to his new throne in Ayodhya..."

Seeking blessings of Ram to fight the outbreak, the CM said, "Whenever humanity across the world faces crises, challenges and difficult situations, it has taken inspiration and light from Ram."

However, Congress state chief Ajay Kumar Lallu questioned his visit to Ayodhya. In a tweet Wednesday, Lallu said in Hindi, "It was the first day of Navratri and it was my wish too to visit the goddess's court. But I listened to the PM's appeal. The CM of UP does not. He went for darshan amid a crowd. In a scenario like this, why will the people of the state listen to the PM?"

Chidambaram calls lockdown watershed moment, offers plan for transfer of money

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

P Chidambaram

A DAY after India was placed under an unprecedented 21-day lockdown, former Finance Minister and senior Congress leader P Chidambaram on Wednesday called the Prime Minister's announcement a "watershed moment" in the battle against coronavirus and suggested a 10-point plan to put money in bank accounts of the poor and marginalised workers.

He also demanded a cut in GST rates by 5 per cent on essential goods and services for a three-month period.

In a statement, Chidambaram said, "We should put behind us the debates that took place before March 24 and look upon the nationwide lockdown as the beginning of a new battle in which people are the foot-soldiers and the PM is the Commander. We owe a duty to extend our total support to the Prime Minister and the Central and state governments."

The Congress leader also argued that the Centre should immediately announce a relief for the poor and the vulnerable.

For farmers, Chidambaram asked the government to double the "amount paid/payable" under the Prime Minister's Kisan scheme to Rs 12,000 and transfer the additional amount immediately to bank account of each beneficiary. Tenant farmers, he said, should be brought under the scheme and Rs 12,000 in two installments transferred to their bank accounts.

He asked the government to transfer Rs 3,000 into bank account of each registered MGNREGA worker. For the urban poor, Chidambaram said, "take the Jan Dhan accounts in urban branches of banks and transfer Rs 6,000 into account of each beneficiary. Offer every ration card-holder, through ration shops, 10 kg rice or wheat free as a one-time measure in the next 21 days. Arrange for home delivery."

He said the government should ask all employers registered under any law to "maintain current levels of employment and wages", and guarantee to these employers that "wages will be reimbursed by the government within 30 days of payment".

FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

Railways to make ventilators, coaches to be isolation units

AVISHEK G DASTIDAR
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

AS THE government prepares for a long battle against COVID-19, isolation wards in trains for rural and remote areas, and manufacturing of ventilators in its factories are at the top of the agenda for the Indian Railways.

While the Rail Coach Factory (RCF) in Kapurthala has been tasked with the duty of converting LHB coaches into isolation wards, the Integral Coach Factory (ICF) in Chennai, the makers of Train 18 (India's first electric semi-high speed train), is attempting to manufacture ventilators.

Addressing a video conference on Wednesday, Railway Minister Piyush Goyal and Railway Board Chairman V K Yadav told the top brass to be prepared in the event of community transmission of COVID-19, which would then require reinforcement of healthcare facilities across India, especially in rural and remote areas.

"The instructions are to achieve preparedness and be on standby," a top Railway Ministry official told The Indian Express on the condition of anonymity. "This is keeping in mind the scenario of a long battle beyond the 21-day lockdown."

RCF Kapurthala will be initially making a prototype by converting an existing LHB coach into an isolation ward. This will be a non-AC coach because it would be difficult to sanitise air for a communicable disease in case of an AC coach. The layout is being prepared and a decision will be taken as to how many patients can be accommodated in a coach keeping in mind various factors —distance, hygiene, necessary equipment to monitor health, and most importantly, exclusive bathroom usage.

Once the design is finalised, turning a rake into an isolation ward won't be difficult even in short time, officials said, adding that the coaches are anyway lying idle due to the lockdown.

However, according to officials, it is the manufacturing of ventilators that is turning out to be a challenge. ICF Chennai had made a prototype using "reverse engineering" but it has failed. More attempts are being made. "Making the machine is not difficult, but calibrating it is the challenge. Let's hope we can crack it. Gone are the days of mechanical ventilators. So what we make has to be of the existing standards," said a senior official.

India lacks an official figure on the number of ventilators it has. Rough estimates peg it at around 40,000. Many countries have also pressed into service non-health sectors to supplement their medical capability to fight the outbreak.

Double-digit MGNREGA hike for all states, UTs

HARIKISHAN SHARMA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

THE CENTRE has hiked wage rates for unskilled manual workers by double digits across all states and Union territories under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) for the financial year 2020-21. This comes after the allocation of the rural job guarantee scheme was increased to a record level in the revised estimate of the current year.

Some states saw zero increase in the wages rates for 2019-20 as against 2018-19. The increase this year ranges from Rs 13 to Rs 34 for all States and UTs.

The new wages will be effective from April 1, 2020.

The step comes when demand for work under the scheme has seen a decline amid a slowdown in the economy. This has forced the government to increase the allocation under MGNREGA from Rs 60,000 crore to an all-time record of Rs 71,001 crore in the current financial year at the revised estimate stage. For the next year, the Centre has allocated Rs 61,500 crore for the scheme.

As per a notification issued by the Ministry of Rural Development, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Maharashtra have seen the highest increase of Rs 34 (from Rs 224 to Rs 258) and Rs 32 (from Rs 206 to Rs 238), respectively. The lowest hike of Rs 13 has been recorded in the states of West Bengal (from Rs 191 to Rs 204), Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura (Rs 192 to Rs 205 in all four states).

After the increase, the average wage per day will be Rs 202 during 2020-21 and this is Rs 20 higher than the current financial year, a ministry official said. He further said the hike is due to the increase in CPI-AL (consumer price index for agriculture labourers) which reflects the increase in the inflation in rural areas.

Mizoram, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh have seen an increase of Rs 14 whereas Himachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Jammu & Kashmir recorded a hike of Rs 15, Rs 16 and Rs 17, respectively.

Manipur, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Odisha have seen a hike of Rs 19 while Assam and Kerala registered an increase of Rs 20. Wages have been hiked for Rajasthan (Rs 21), Punjab (Rs 22), Bihar and Jharkhand (Rs 23). There is an increase of Rs 25 in wages in Haryana, Gujarat and Daman and Diu, of Rs 26 in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka and Goa, and Rs 27 in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

During 2019-20, Karnataka, Goa, Kerala, Lakshadweep, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and West Bengal did not see any increase in MGNREGA wage rates.

Classifieds

PERSONAL

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to bring to the notice of the general public that our client, Ms. Rekha Anand, daughter of Mr. D.R. Bahl, resident of 174, Vivian Avenue, Wembley, Middlesex HA9 6RP, United Kingdom has lost the original of the Sale Deed dated 02.04.1981 executed by erstwhile landowners Mr. Dharmender Singh and Mr. Narendra Singh in favour of Ms. Rekha Anand for land comprised in Killa No. 21//20/2/1 (0-13) situated in Village Jhadsa, Gurgaon.
If any person has any claim or is holding the aforesaid document, he may contact the undersigned within 7 (Seven) days from the date of this notice with documentary evidence, failing which it shall be presumed that there are no claims.
ZEUS LAW ASSOCIATES
2 Palam Marg, Vasant Vihar
New Delhi- 110057
Telephone No.: +91 011 41733090
Email: zeus@zeus.firm.in

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is hereby issued notice in the interest of Public on the direction of my client that Sh. Karam Chand Sharma S/o Late Raghunath Sharma R/o H.N.- 40 A, A-3 Block, Dharampura Extension, Najafgarh, New Delhi - 110043, has disown his son namely Kapil Sharma S/o Sh. Karam Chand Sharma and his daughter-in-law namely Khushi w/o Sh. Kapil Sharma due to their unsocial conduct and bad habits and also debar them from all legal rights, movable and immovable properties with effect from today. It is further issued in public interest that in future, if anybody is having any kind of relation with son and daughter-in-law of my client, my client shall not be held responsible for any kind of consequences.
Bhalendu Mishra Advocate
Ch:- 454, Lawyer's Chamber,
Dwarka Courts, N. Delhi-110075

PUBLIC NOITCE

Be it known to all concerned that my clients Sh. Rajendra Gupta, S/o Late Tara Chand, age about 66 years, R/o House no.1580-B, Raj Block, Naveen Shahdara, Shahdara S.O. East Delhi, Pin-code 110032, and his wife Smt. Santosh Devi Gupta, W/o Sh. Rajendra Gupta, age about 64 years, R/o House no.1580-B, Raj Block, Naveen Shahdara, Shahdara S.O. East Delhi, Pin-code 110032, hereby we disowning/debarred my elder son Harsh Gupta his wife Smt. Garima Gupta, their three children namely Drishti, Nayra and Kartik, as they are not in under our control and their disrespectful behavior. It is to inform to the public at large that, he had intentionally made so many financial irregularities in the accounts and day -to-day business of my clients and was indulged in un-social activities with his friends. My clients and there family decide to debarred him out from their life, workplace/business and society. My clients is not intended to keep any kind of relationship with him and his family and also not allow him to live with my clients because of his rude & adamant behavior, which had never been changed by him despite all the efforts, by my clients. My clients want to live peacefully; therefore, my clients are severing all their relationships with their aforesaid older son and his family forever. Needless to mention here that anybody dealing with him and his family will be responsible for their future mental harassment and loses. My clients have debarred and disowned then from our all movable and immovable properties.
Jatin Aggarwal, Advocate
Chamber No. 279, Civil Side,
Tis Hazari Court, New Delhi-54

THE WORLD

Facing HC order, Israel parliament speaker resigns

ASSOCIATED PRESS
JERUSALEM, MARCH 25

ISRAEL'S PARLIAMENT speaker resigned Wednesday after seven years on the job rather than comply with a Supreme Court order to convene a vote on his replacement.

Yuli Edelstein had suspended parliamentary activities last week, citing procedural issues and restrictions on large gatherings. But opponents accused him of blocking a vote after his right-wing bloc failed to win a majority in March 2 elections.

He dismissed a Supreme Court call to explain his delay in convening the Israeli Knesset, or parliament, and that sparked an unprecedented judicial rebuttal, with the Supreme Court chief justice ordering him to hold a vote. With other top members of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party urging him to defy the order, he responded that he would "not agree to an ultimatum" and resigned instead.

"The Supreme Court decision destroys the work of the Knesset. The Supreme Court decision marks a harsh and arrogant intervention of the judicial branch in the affairs of the elected legislative branch," Edelstein charged in his last appearance as speaker.

Turkey charges 20 Saudis, including two ex-aides of MBS, over Khashoggi murder

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ISTANBUL, MARCH 25

TURKISH PROSECUTORS have charged 20 suspects including two former top aides to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman over the 2018 murder of Riyadh critic Jamal Khashoggi.

Prosecutors accuse Saudi Arabia's deputy intelligence chief Ahmed al-Assiri and the royal court's media czar Saud al-Qahtani of leading the operation against Khashoggi and giving orders to a Saudi hit team.

Khashoggi, 59, a commentator who wrote for The Washington Post, was killed after he entered the Saudi consulate on October 2, 2018, to obtain paperwork for his wedding to Turkish fiancee Hatice Cengiz.

Jamal Khashoggi, 59, was killed in October 2018

The Saudi insider-turned-critic was strangled and his body cut into pieces by a 15-man Saudi squad inside the consulate, according to Turkish officials.

His remains have never been found despite repeated calls by Turkish officials for the Saudis to cooperate. Riyadh insists he was killed in a "rogue" operation.

But the CIA, a UN special envoy and Ankara have directly linked the Saudi crown prince to the killing, a charge the kingdom vehemently denies. Turkey carried out its own investigation after being unhappy with Saudi Arabia's explanations.

The Istanbul prosecutor's office said in a statement that Assiri and Qahtani were charged with "instigating the deliberate and monstrous killing, causing torment".

The murder caused relations to between Ankara and Riyadh — which have a longstanding geopolitical rivalry — to worsen. Saudis, who enjoy investing and holidaying in Turkey, were urged to boycott the country last year.

Turkey is a key backer of Qatar, especially after a Riyadh-led economic blockade began against the Gulf state in 2017, and is accused of supporting groups including the Muslim Brotherhood.

Boko Haram kills 92 in Chad

N'djamena: Boko Haram extremists have killed at least 92 Chadian soldiers in the deadliest attack on the nation's forces, Chad's president said.

The attack took place overnight Sunday into Monday in the village of Boma in the Lac province near the border with Nigeria and Niger.

President Idriss Deby gave the toll on state television late Tuesday after visiting the site. "Never in our history have we lost so many men at one time," he said.

Boko Haram extremists have killed tens of thousands and forced millions from their homes during their more than decade-long insurgency. **AP**

CORONA WATCH

A police officer makes coronavirus-related announcements in Kolkata. *Partha Paul*

Pan Masala, gutkha banned in UP

Lucknow: The state government on Wednesday banned the manufacture, supply, and sale of pan masala and gutkha during the 21-day nationwide lockdown. The step was announced by Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Awanish Awasthi. Meanwhile, the government said about 10,000 gram pradhans had been called from the 1076 helpline, which was set up by the Chief Minister, to gather information about people from outside the state. **ENS**

Two test positive in Amaravati

Amaravati: A 52-year-old man and a 22-year-old tested positive for coronavirus in Andhra Pradesh on Wednesday night, taking the total number of cases to 10 in the state, the state health department said. While the 22-year-old youth had returned from the US to Vijayawada, the 52-year-old returned to his native town Guntur after attending a religious congregation in Nizamuddin Mosque in New Delhi, the department said in a bulletin. The youth was admitted to a local government hospital in Delhi on March 21 upon his arrival from Washington and discharged the next day. **PTI**

Those evicting doctors to face legal action

Jaipur: Rajasthan Health Minister Raghu Sharma on Wednesday said legal action can be taken against landlords who are evicting doctors and paramedical staff from their houses. He said doctors and paramedical staff are risking their lives and some landlords are mounting pressure on them to vacate their houses. Additional Chief Secretary Rohit Kumar Singh said, "Government has taken a serious note of it and a notification preventing such actions has been issued..." **PTI**

FLYING OFF THE SHELVES

Nearly empty shelves at a supermarket in Navi Mumbai on Wednesday, a day after a 21-day nationwide lockdown was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to combat the coronavirus outbreak in the country. *Amit Chakravarty*

Kerala plans public kitchens, says no one should starve

SHAJU PHILIP
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 25

TO ENSURE that the 21-day lockdown does not leave anyone starving in Kerala, the state government on Wednesday announced community kitchens run by local bodies. People can dial for food, which would be served by volunteers at their doorstep. Local bodies will also provide food to those under home quarantine.

The government has also entrusted local bodies and the revenue department to ensure food and accommodation for migrant workers still in Kerala.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said, "The prevailing situation would push people into starvation. But, nobody should be left starving in Kerala during the lockdown. Local self-governing bodies should take up the responsibility to supply food to those who cannot prepare food..."

He said, "Everyone's problems cannot be solved from a single centre. So, an elaborate decentralised system would be in place to address the issue. The ward-level volunteer system would be applied."

Vijayan said local self-governing bodies — village panchayats to municipal bodies — should establish community kitchens. Every local body should make an assessment on the people who will require food, he said.

"Some persons with false pride may not directly demand food. But, if a phone number is given, they would. Such persons should not be avoided on the ground that they did not seek any help," he said. He said local bodies would have to find cooks and volunteers for distributing food. Families in isolated areas should not be left unattended, he added.

The state government has also decided to take care of migrant workers in Kerala, mainly from North and Northeastern states. The Pathanamthitta district administration on Wednesday entrusted tehsildars with finding lodging for migrant workers.

In Ernakulam, secretaries of village panchayat have been asked to ensure accommodation and food for the migrant workers.

The Cabinet also decided to recommend to the Governor the promulgation of Kerala Epidemic Diseases Ordinance 2020. The proposed law would give more powers to the state government to control programmes held by individuals and groups. Accordingly, the state can seal its borders and restrict private as well as public transport. It also has provisions through which the government can restrict or ban crowds at public places and religious institutions and control functioning of government and private institutions.

FOOD FOR STUDENTS, ELDERLY IN DEHRADUN

Dehradun: Students with no cooking arrangements and senior citizens will be provided daily meals in Dehradun, according to officials. Dehradun has a large number of students who reside in hostels and rented homes. "Administration will tie-up with restaurants to cook and deliver meals to needy students," said Sonia Pant, deputy municipal commissioner. **ENS**

Tripura to set up community kitchen for free food to urban poor

DEBRAJ DEB
AGARTALA, MARCH 25

AMID THE lockdown, Tripura has asked self-help groups (SHG) and urban local bodies to provide cooked food packets and set up community kitchens for the poor.

Urban Development Director Dr Shailesh Kumar Yadav asked top executives of 20 urban local bodies of the state to set up community kitchens at a single location in every urban body.

"Any good Area Level Federation\ of SHG under DAY-National Urban Livelihood Mission (NULM) may be deployed for cooking and making food packets. Distribution of food packets to be urban poor twice daily may be done by using one or more dedicated vehicles by the respective urban local bodies", the official wrote in his order.

He said the distribution staff would be provided with gloves and hand sanitisers.

The state's Food and Civil Supplies Department was asked to arrange rice and pulses for all district authorities to ensure emergency food supply.

Meanwhile, the state government has set up control rooms in all eight districts for coordinating information pertaining to the coronavirus. An emergency number-102-was activated to manage queries about emergency ambulance services. Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb launched 50 such ambulances on Wednesday.

Over 948 persons who had recent travel history to affected countries or showed preliminary symptoms are under home quarantine in Tripura. Nobody has tested positive with COVID-19.

Modi to join G-20 session on COVID-19 chaired by Saudi king

SHUBHAJIT ROY
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi will on Thursday join a virtual summit of G-20 leaders, organised to discuss the coronavirus pandemic, which will be chaired by Saudi King Salman.

Modi tweeted on Wednesday, "The #G20 has an important global role to play in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. I look forward to productive discussions tomorrow at the #G20VirtualSummit, being coordinated by the Saudi G20 Presidency."

Saudi Arabia's King Salman will chair the virtual summit on March 26 to advance the global coordinated response to the pandemic. Apart from the leaders of G-20, the heads of state of Jordan, Spain, Singapore and Switzerland are also scheduled to participate. The UAE will also take part in its capacity as sitting president of the Gulf Cooperation Council states.

In a separate video conference earlier this week, G-20 finance ministers and central bankers agreed to develop an action plan to respond to the outbreak, which the IMF expects will trigger a global recession.

A video conference of senior health professionals of SAARC countries to share their experiences of combating the spread of COVID-19 is also proposed to be held on March 26. The major topics of discussion will be "practical joint action on online training capsules for emergency response teams, setting up of an Integrated Disease Surveillance Portal, creation of a Common Research Platform and coordination of research..."

First COVID-19 death reported in Tamil Nadu

ARUN JANARDHANAN
CHENNAI, MARCH 25

Police personnel set up blockades near Chennai airport in view of the 21-day lockdown on Wednesday. *PTI*

THE STATE reported its first COVID-19 death on Wednesday after a 54-year-old building contractor in Madurai succumbed to the infection. The same day, the total number of coronavirus cases reached 23 after five more people tested positive.

State health minister, C Vijaya Baskar, said the five positive cases include four Indonesian nationals and their Chennai-based guide. All of them had been in quarantine since March 22. They are now being treated at the Government Medical College in Salem.

The Indonesian nationals had reached Salem via Delhi and Chennai visiting several mosques. Health department workers are currently tracing people who came in close contact with the foreign nationals during their journey. The state health secretary, Beela Rajesh, told *The Indian Express* that all four Indonesian nationals, two Thailand nationals, and the building contractor from Madurai, who passed away on Wednesday, had attended a religious outreach programme at Erode (about 100 km from Coimbatore). "All of them were part of the meeting held in Erode," Rajesh said.

A senior health official said that at least a dozen people who had come in close contact with two Thai nationals have been admitted to a government isolation ward in the state as they were in the high-risk category, while nearly 150 people who visited the two mosques in the area have been instructed to stay in home quarantine.

Last week, a 49-year-old Thai national, who had accompanied the group and travelled to Erode, died in Coimbatore Medical College. The team reached Delhi on March 6 and left for Erode on March 10 onboard the Millennium Express after visiting several places in the capital. However, the cause of death of the Thai national was officially recorded as complications from diabetic nephropathy, sepsis and pulmonary oedema.

Following the rise in cases, the state administration officials on Tuesday began tracing about 80,000 people, who have landed in India since March 1.

Until Tuesday night, the total number of people in home quarantine across the state was 15,492 against neighbouring Kerala's 71,994. While the former has so far tested 890 samples (757 were negative), the latter tested 4,516 samples (3,331 were negative).

Health secretary Rajesh said a team of officials are assessing data from the Centre. "About 80,000 Indian passport holders from Tamil Nadu are to be traced... This includes those who have already been quarantined and those who live outside Tamil Nadu ... We will complete the segregation and verification and revenue officials will be tracing them..." she said.

MP reports first death; journalist tests positive

MILIND GHATWAI
BHOPAL, MARCH 25

MADHYA PRADESH reported its first COVID-19 death after a 65-year-old woman, who was under treatment in Indore, passed away Wednesday.

A resident of Ujjain, the woman was admitted in Indore's M Y Hospital. Neither the woman nor any of her close relatives had travelled abroad. Principal Secretary (Public Health and Family Welfare) Pallavi Jain Govil told *The Indian Express* that it COULD BE a case of "community spread" and all precautions are being taken by the administration.

The locality in Ujjain where the deceased lived has been sealed and her relatives have been isolated. The state has so far reported a total of 15 cases.

A journalist who attended the press conference addressed by former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Kamal Nath prior to his resignation on March 20 has also tested positive.

Many Congress MLAs, then state ministers, journalists, including those who came from Delhi, and officials of the government's publicity department were present at the press conference.

The journalist's daughter, who returned from London on March 18, had also tested positive. However, her brother, who accompanied her from Delhi to Bhopal on train, mother, and at least six others who spent time with her have tested negative. The father-daughter duo is being treated in AIIMS, Bhopal.

On Wednesday, curfew was imposed in Indore and Ujjain after five positive cases — four from Indore and one from Ujjain — were reported. Curfew has also been imposed in Gwalior, Shivpuri, Bhopal and Jabalpur from where the remaining nine cases have been reported in the last few days.

85-yr-old woman second COVID-19 victim in Gujarat

Ahmedabad: An 85-year old woman from Ahmedabad, who had recently travelled back from Saudi Arabia, died due from a COVID-19 infection at Ahmedabad Civil Hospital on Wednesday.

This is the second death in the state. So far, the total number of positive cases in Gujarat on Wednesday was 40 with new cases reported from Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Surat and Rajkot.

The deceased woman was suffering from co-morbid conditions, according to deputy municipal commissioner Om Prakash Machra.

He added that 28 others who had come in close contact with her had been institutionally quarantined at Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) facilities since the past 3-4 days So far, a total of 717 samples have been tested in the state, according to principal health secretary Jayanti Ravi. **ENS**

SUSPECTED TO HAVE PASSED ON INFECTION

J&K lens on man who came via Delhi, UP and tested positive

ADIL AKHZER
SRINAGAR, MARCH 25

Security forces at a blockade in Srinagar. *Shuaib Masoodi*

A SENIOR member of the Tableeghi Jamaat, a non-political Islamic outfit, who has tested positive for coronavirus may turn out to be Kashmir's "super-spreader" — like South Korea's "Patient 31", who is reported to have caused a rapid rise in cases in that country.

A day after the member, a resident of Srinagar, was found positive for COVID-19, Health Department officials said four people, also members of the same outfit, who come from Hajin in Bandipore district, were tested positive on Wednesday, making it eight confirmed cases in Kashmir.

While they are still not sure where the 65-year-old contracted the virus, officials said he travelled to several places in February and March, and health officials are now trying to trace all those he may have come in contact with.

Director Health Services, Kashmir, Dr Samir Matoo told *The Indian Express* that the person attended religious gatherings in New Delhi, Deoband (UP), in Jammu and also in Sopore, north Kashmir. "He took a train from Deoband to Jammu and a flight from Jammu to Srinagar during his journey," Dr Matoo said. "We are contacting health authorities in Delhi and UP to inform them about the case."

A doctor privy to the case told *The Indian Express* that the patient had developed symptoms while he was in Deoband. "After arriving in Srinagar, he got himself checked by a physician in Sopore. The doctor is under quarantine," he said.

Sources said seven doctors who have come in contact with the patient are being tested.

According to officials, the 65-year-old first approached Jhelum Valley Hospital in Srinagar on March 21 with serious symptoms of flu. He was treated and sent home. On March 22, he visited Srinagar's SMHS Hospital and was diagnosed as a suspected coronavirus patient. He was then referred to Chest Disease Hospital.

He is currently admitted there and doctors said his condition has improved.

Sources said he entered Kashmir on March 16 from Jammu. "He has had a long travel history in February and March. He has been in close contact with scores of people. We are yet to figure out the exact number of people he has been in touch with," a senior official said.

The official said the 65-year-old travelled to Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Kochi (Kerala) and Hyderabad. "He has spent time with several people from Malaysia and Indonesia during religious congregations, and was also in Delhi..." the official said.

Tableeghi Jamaat (group for Spreading Faith) focuses on urging Muslims to return to practising religion as it was practised during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad, with focus on rituals, dress, and personal behaviour.

FULL REPORT ON www.indianexpress.com

CONFUSION OVER DESIGNATION OF FISH AS ESSENTIAL COMMODITY

Gujarat's fishing industry grinds to a halt

GOPAL KATESHIYA & VAIBHAV JHA
RAJKOT, AHMEDABAD, MARCH 25

LABOUR shortage, transportation problems and confusion that fish is not part of essential commodities has brought the multi-billion dollar industry to a temporary halt.

"Fish has been included in the list of daily essentials whose movement and sale has been exempted from restrictions. It has to be treated at par with vegetables. But somehow, a message has spread or people have assumed that movement of fish is also prohibited. Therefore, traders and processors have stopped buying fish from fishermen and seafood processing units are suspending their operations," Velji Masani president of Akhil Bharatiya Fishermen Association told *The Indian Express* on Wednesday.

The last set of 22 fishing trawlers landed with their catch at Jakhau fishing harbor in Kutch on Tuesday. "Police are checking intensively all trucks transporting goods therefore traders are not taking risk..." said Usmangani Sherasiya, Secretary, National Fish-workers' Forum (NFF).

According to Masani, Veraval GIDC, the hub of seafood processing industry in the state, is deserted. Gujarat, which has a 1,650-km long coastline, exports Rs 7,000 crore worth seafood a year. The industry provides livelihood to 3.5 lakh fishermen and their families.

Gujarat, which has a 1,650-km long coastline, exports seafood worth Rs 7,000 crore every year. *Javed Raja*

Masani, who is also a member of the NFF, said there are 35,000 active fishing boats in the state. "Each boat supports employment of around 100 people. The government must do something... Otherwise, all the boats would come to shore and the number of fishermen confined to their boats in fishing harbours would increase," Masani said.

When contacted, Fisheries Minister Jawahar Chavda said, he was aware of the issue. "Therefore, we issued a circular to district collectors Wednesday asking them to ensure that movement of fish, processed seafood and fish-feed is not affected..." he said.

Processors and exporters said the restrictions were forcing them to suspend operations. "Labourers are not turning up for work... On the other hand, clearing and forwarding agents at ports are also not working. Therefore, shipment of fish for export has by and large halted..." said Karshan Salet, vice-president of the Gujarat chapter of Seafood Exporters Association.

FULL REPORT ON www.indianexpress.com

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE

THE SKY MAY FALL ON YOUR HEAD TOMORROW, BUT TOMORROW NEVER COMES — CHIEF VITALSTATISTIX

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

EASE THE FLOW

Amid lockdown, hurdles for free movement and trade in agricultural produce must be cleared immediately

THE GREAT BENGAL Famine of 1943, as Amartya Sen famously documented, wasn't brought about by a decline in food availability. Instead, it was a result of people not having access to food due to a collapse of "exchange entitlements". The situation today, arising from the nationwide lockdown to combat the novel coronavirus, is far from a replay of that horror story. Forget any production shortfalls, the Food Corporation of India's current wheat and rice stocks are over 3.5 times the required normative buffer reserve. Government godowns are also overflowing with surplus stocks of pulses. This, even as farmers are set to harvest a bumper crop of wheat, chana, mustard, onion and other rabi season produce. Not only are supplies plentiful, the shutting down of hotels, restaurants and catering businesses has led to demand destruction from institutional buyers. With abundant availability and demand now largely restricted to direct household consumption, there should be no scope for panic buying, hoarding and people going without food, as was the case during the Bengal Famine and many other natural calamities.

What India is at present facing is not a "supply", but a "supply chain" problem. Thanks to inter-state movement restrictions and arbitrary actions by local authorities to enforce the lockdown — including closing down produce collection centres and warehouses of organised retailers — the links in the chain connecting farmers to consumers have broken down, in turn opening up arbitrage opportunities for unscrupulous speculators. The only way to prevent this is to ensure seamless flow of produce and trucks not being held up at state borders. The lockdown guidelines have clearly defined food among the essential goods whose transport and supply are not to be subjected to any hindrances. That message, also articulated by the prime minister himself, has somehow not percolated to the ground.

The danger from inter-state movement restrictions on farm commodities — and also labour and other inputs used in their processing, packaging and distribution — is not to consumers in metros and large urban centres. The state food and civil supplies departments will ultimately ensure that the wholesale markets in these cities receive enough produce to feed their consumers. It is the people living in small towns and far-flung places, whose voices are less likely to be heard, who are going to bear the brunt of lockdown. Even in the Bengal Famine, Sen showed that the maintenance of essential food supplies to Calcutta was accorded very high priority by the authorities; the three million who died then were mostly the rural masses or those who did not survive after trekking from the districts to the city. That lesson from history should not be forgotten. If anything, this is the moment to free movement and trade in all agricultural produce. Well-functioning markets are the best guarantee against any collapse of exchange entitlements in the ongoing battle against COVID-19.

A DOUBLE ATROCITY

Government must urgently release remaining prisoners in Kashmir and restore high speed internet in these anxious times

ONE MORE HIGH-PROFILE detainee under the Jammu & Kashmir Public Safety Act has been released. Once again, the government at the Centre has given no reason why former Chief Minister Omar Abdullah had to be detained eight months ago, and later booked under a law deployed against dangerous criminals, or why it has decided to release him now. Nor will it say why only he and his father, Lok Sabha MP Farooq Abdullah, have been released, and not the others detained under this law, among them another former chief minister, Mehbooba Mufti.

The apparent brazenness with which the government arrested the entire political leadership of J&K under preventive sections on August 5 last year, and then used the PSA, with its draconian provisions, to extend their detention, does not bode well in a constitutional democracy. Some senior leaders in the BJP have offered the facetious explanation that the people of J&K were happy that their political leaders had been jailed. Others justified the arrests in the name of the "security situation". Even though it is clear that such authoritarian actions can pave the way for a greater erosion of the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution, by and large, these justifications have not been challenged adequately or vigorously. It is even more egregious that the courts became mere onlookers to these decisions.

At this time when India is battling a dangerous infectious disease and faces a situation like no other in its 73-year history, Kashmir has the misfortune of being doubly anxious. The disease has not spared J&K. There have been 11 confirmed cases so far. Meanwhile, hundreds of Kashmiris detained last year, on the day the government stripped the state of its special status and divided it into two Union Territories, remain imprisoned in J&K and in jails in other states. For the government to continue their detention during this terrible time is a double atrocity on them and their families. Further, while the rest of the country can freely access information on COVID-19 from across the world, J&K still does not have full-fledged access to the internet to enable people to understand this disease from a multiplicity of sources. Its doctors are struggling with low speed access to the net. The government must immediately release the remaining prisoners, wherever they are jailed, and restore full speed internet without delay

HISTORY WITH ASTERIX

Albert Uderzo, co-creator of the iconic comic books, will continue to show children that authority doesn't have to be grim

JOJO RABBIT, THE Oscar-winning film that portrayed Nazism and Hitler through a child's eyes, was criticised in many quarters for looking at the system of repression and murder through humour, and for humanising Hitler by making him the imaginary friend of the 10-year-old protagonist. Albert Uderzo, the co-creator of the Asterix comics along with René Goscinny, never faced such criticism. But the most successful Francophone export after wine, cheese and existentialism, was also a kind of re-telling of one of history's most gruesome wars, with brilliance, artistry, humour and innocence.

Uderzo, who died at 92 this week, created a kind of detail in his panels, especially of large battle scenes, that remains remarkable to this day. But more than mere technical finesse, what the Asterix universe did — through untold translations, a dozen or so films and even an amusement park a la Disneyland — was take the brutality out of history. Julius Caesar's occupation of Gaul (which comprised large parts of modern France, along with Belgium and Switzerland), was a violent evisceration of a people. But in the world created by Uderzo and Goscinny, the brilliant Asterix, strong and bumbling Obelix and faithful canine companion Dogmatix, managed to resist the might of empire with cunning, superpowers and hijinks.

Uderzo lived through the Nazi occupation of France. As much as anyone of his generation, he knew how grim war and occupation could be, how cruel the human stories behind the dates and speeches. And, perhaps, his creation provides an antidote to that harsh reality. Generations of children have been introduced to the cast and characters of the ancient world — from Caesar and Cleopatra to the gods and myths of ancient Rome and Greece — through the series Uderzo created, learning to laugh at those who claim to be great, wishing for a magic potion themselves. There is, of course, no potion. But the ability to laugh at authority is a lesson Uderzo will continue to provide to every child who opens up one of his books.

Let's take a deep breath

Data must be applied to context and societal response must be proportionate

VIKRAM PATEL

A 25-YEAR-OLD MAN ended his life on March 18 by jumping from the seventh floor of a government hospital in New Delhi, where he had come to be tested for COVID-19. He ended his life before the test result was available. A senior doctor in the hospital was quoted as saying that the man complained of "a headache, breathlessness, and was scared". In my reckoning, he was probably experiencing a panic attack, often mistaken for an acute medical emergency by both the patient and health care providers. With all attention focused on the dreaded virus, no one bothered to care for this man's mental health.

This tragedy was waiting to happen, as an increasingly febrile atmosphere about the threats posed by this new virus reaches suffocating levels, fuelled by hysterical predictions of the apocalyptic toll which will engulf India, sensationalist reportage ghoulishly documenting the death toll each day, and an avalanche of fake news spreading on social media. This has prompted terrified governments to impose an ever-growing range of restrictions on personal freedoms and public life, culminating in the nationwide lock-down on Tuesday.

We know from previous experience that these policies will have a profound effect on the well-being, social worlds and livelihoods of over a billion people; for instance, suicide rates in older Hong Kong residents showed a 31 per cent increase during the peak of the SARS epidemic, fuelled mostly by fear of contracting the disease and fears of disconnection.

This is not to deny that the virus threatens an existential humanitarian crisis. But the one lesson every infectious disease epidemic has taught us is that context matters. Simply put, bugs do not spread the same way everywhere. I vividly recall the hyped pandemic of HIV/AIDS which was predicted to overwhelm India in the late 1990s. These predictions were based on models which failed to recognise that sexual behaviour patterns in India were fundamentally different from those in southern Africa. One can argue that it was sensible to be prepared, but the fact remains that unless data are appropriately applied to the context, the risks are sensitively communicated and the societal response is proportionate, it can lead to a range of unintended bad effects. The HIV/AIDS predictions precipitated fear and panic, contributing to the diversion of scarce resources from building a stronger health system for all diseases, and to discrimination and stigma towards those affected. Context matters for this new virus too, as is evident from the vastly different trajectories in different countries and, indeed, within India itself.

> This is not to deny that the virus threatens an existential humanitarian crisis. But the one lesson every infectious disease epidemic has taught us is that context matters. Simply put, bugs do not spread the same way everywhere. I vividly recall the hyped pandemic of HIV/AIDS which was predicted to overwhelm India in the late 1990s. These predictions were based on models which failed to recognise that sexual behaviour patterns in India were fundamentally different from those in southern Africa.

One must wonder whether, given there was no evidence of widespread community transmission, we might have staved off the worst without a sledge-hammer approach, which no country at the stage of the epidemic we are in has imposed. Intensified case finding through testing and contact tracing, quarantining those who are infected, physical distancing by everyone, graded travel restrictions, preparing the health system to cater to those who may need intensive care and protect health care workers, and even locking-down limited populations with community transmission, could have stopped the epidemic in its tracks. That is what many of our Asian neighbours to the east successfully did; even China, the original epicentre of the epidemic, did not lock down the entire country.

It is not surprising that those proposing these policies — many of whom are members of my community of public health scientists — have salaried jobs which will not be threatened by such lock-downs. Their pay-checks will continue to be deposited in their bank accounts every month. They will emulate Europeans in using their Zoom accounts to maintain social connections and practise daily routines of yoga and exercise. They will send their maids to stand in line at the grocery store at 7 am.

But what do the hundreds of millions of Indians who face penury as a consequence of these lock-downs think about these policies? Is the risk of contracting a flu-like illness worth your family going hungry for weeks or longer? Why is it so much worse than other deadly infectious diseases, from TB to Japanese Encephalitis, which have been killing millions each year for decades? How do people who live jammed cheek to jowl in squalid slums with no water to drink and no money to buy food "socially distance", "wash hands thoroughly with soap" and "use sanitisers frequently"? Why did the people who queued up with me on the street outside a half-shuttered grocery store, minutes after the PM's speech, to stock up on essentials, get lathi-charged by imperious police? This, in Goa, where the COVID-19 case count is an impressive zero.

This epidemic is revealing to me one reason why government and scientists are distrusted by the poor. It is because we fail to recognise that all policies, even well-meaning ones, have impacts beyond what they were intended to achieve. We are already seeing the harmful consequences of policies which are spreading fear across the country.

The shaming and chasing down of those suspected of being infected is reminiscent of the vilification of sex workers and people with HIV. Racist discrimination against fellow Indians who "look Chinese" and European tourists, is being reported. The poorest have fled from their urban lives for their villages in states of panic, threatening to expose their rural communities, already gasping for health care, to this new infection.

The uncertainty of tomorrow, being disconnected from routine social interactions, loss of income, and realignment of health care services to focus on the predicted surge of COVID-19 cases, will have adverse impacts on a range of health outcomes. Ultimately, such heavy-handed policies may well lead to many more lives lost than the number they might have saved.

When governments act, they must do so in a proportionate and dynamic way that is appropriate for the context and takes into account the delicate balance between minimising the risk of predicted harm due to the infection with that of the possible harms due to the policies to contain it. But a nation-wide lock-down is now upon us, with no telling what its unintended consequences will be.

Hereon, public communication must focus on our collective responsibility towards the elderly and the health care system, and to one another, invoking our instincts of empathy, shifting the lens away from the fear of contracting a disease which, for the vast majority, will be negotiated with minimal distress.

Above all, the government must clearly communicate its plan to repair the lives of over a billion people devastated by a scale of disruption never seen before in any population as large and as desperately poor and unequal as ours.

The writer is the Pershing Square Professor of Global Health at Harvard Medical School

AN INDIAN HEALTH DIPLOMACY

COVID-19 shows that our responses to health issues cannot just be a domestic matter

SRIDHAR VENKATAPURAM

THE RAPID spread of the coronavirus beyond China and the identification of a large number of cases in India raise questions about India's preparedness to control, suppress or mitigate the pandemic. Preparedness could pertain to the domain of public health — identification of cases, healthcare facilities, methods to check the spread of the virus, research and communication. Aggressive policies to identify individuals with infections and those most vulnerable to the virus reduce the risk faced by the people at large and also slow down the spread of the infections so that severe cases do not overwhelm medical facilities. Aggressive social distancing measures, such as the lockdown that began in India on Wednesday, could also serve such a purpose.

A second set of "pandemic preparedness" issues is also important. These relate to India's external relations, UN agencies, international NGOs, businesses, and other transnational actors. China's management of external relations since early January — with the WHO, foreign governments, and the international media — shows the value of such preparation. Not having a health emergency diplomacy plan puts India at risk of losing control over a potential crisis and being overrun by foreign actors. It could place the country at a disadvantage in international negotiations.

What do effective external relations during a health emergency look like? Different strategies would apply if the outbreak started inside India versus if a pathogen came from outside. Even if a pathogen came from outside, India could become the epicentre of an outbreak. In a globalised world, such possibilities cannot be ruled out. The government needs to begin mapping the epidemiological risks India faces as well as the repercussions it could face externally, especially a dramatic reduction in trade and tourism. People of Indian or South Asian descent could face discrimination outside India as a result of being perceived as carriers. Many agencies — from the well-meaning to the self-interested — could begin information-gathering activities, research, and analyses. Such action could take place within an international order of global governance, which has been criticised by Shashi Tharoor and Samir Saran in their recent book, *The New World Disorder and the Indian Imperative*.

> The government needs to begin mapping the various kinds of epidemiological risks India faces as well as the repercussions it could face externally, especially dramatic reduction in trade and tourism. People of Indian or South Asian descent could face discrimination outside Indian borders as a result of being perceived as carriers.

Tharoor and Saran use the case studies of war, sustainable development and cyberspace to show the inadequacies of the current global governance system and what they see as India's inevitable leadership role in Asia and global governance. They, however, don't go into how the global order creates and distributes health risks like COVID-19. The lack of health issues being taken seriously in global governance was also evidenced at the Raisina Dialogue in January: Impressive otherwise, it showed that international relations scholars and policymakers, deeply engaged in global economics and security issues, do not give much importance to transnational aspects of health. As almost everyone in the world now realises, because of COVID-19, our responses to health issues cannot just be a domestic issue: We need to learn how to globally govern biological contagion with as much dedication as we give to governing economic and security matters.

Unsurprisingly, PM Modi and his close advisors seem to have recognised the importance of global health diplomacy. On March 15, Modi organised a video conference with SAARC leaders to discuss and share models for responding to COVID-19. The full value of this meeting will only make sense in a few months' time after the successes or failures of the Indian response to the pandemic are apparent. But, Indian health diplomacy during emergencies has to be much more than sharing a disease control model with other countries. Tharoor and Saran seem to argue that India's manifest destiny is to take a leadership role in global governance in order to make global institutions fairer. If that is so, we must pay close attention to how global institutions, nation-states, and other actors deal with COVID-19 to see what needs to change. There could be more pandemics after this one.

The writer is associate professor, global health and philosophy, King's College, London

MARCH 26, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO

INDIAN EXPRESS

ASSAM IN LOK SABHA

THE ECONOMIC BLOCKADE of Assam by the West Bengal Youth Congress (I) sparked off yet another uproar in the Lok Sabha culminating in yet another walkout by opposition parties. At one point, the Lok Dal leader, George Fernandes, thumped the table and asked, "What is the use of this House?" Several members had submitted adjournment motions on the continuing blockade of Assam but the speaker said he had ruled them out. Madhu Dandavate (Janata) pointed out that since the beginning of the session, the speaker had not allowed a single adjournment motion despite the importance of the matter involved.

JANATA SPLIT

THE JANA SANGH'S break with the Janata Party will be formalised before the national executive meeting on April 3. The Jana Sangh faction began a serious exercise for formalising the break with several group meetings at Sunder Singh Bhandari's house in Delhi. Even the name of the new party was understood to have been discussed. According to informed sources, the Jana Sangh faction has almost made up its mind to form a new party. For this purpose, a convention is likely to be called in Delhi in April. One of the points still being debated is whether to invite only the Jana Sangh faction members to the convention or to make it slightly more broadbased by including "all those unattached who had merged with the Janata Party on May 1, 1977".

BLIND RALLY

OVER 300 BLIND persons from all over the country participated in a rally organised by the National Federation of the Blind in Delhi. It started from the federation's office in Paharganj and converged at the Boat Club. Earlier, a delegation of the blind met the Prime Minister and presented her with their demands. The memorandum urged the Prime Minister to treat the blind on the same footing as the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes as they had been socially and occupationally ostracised for centuries.

THE IDEAS PAGE

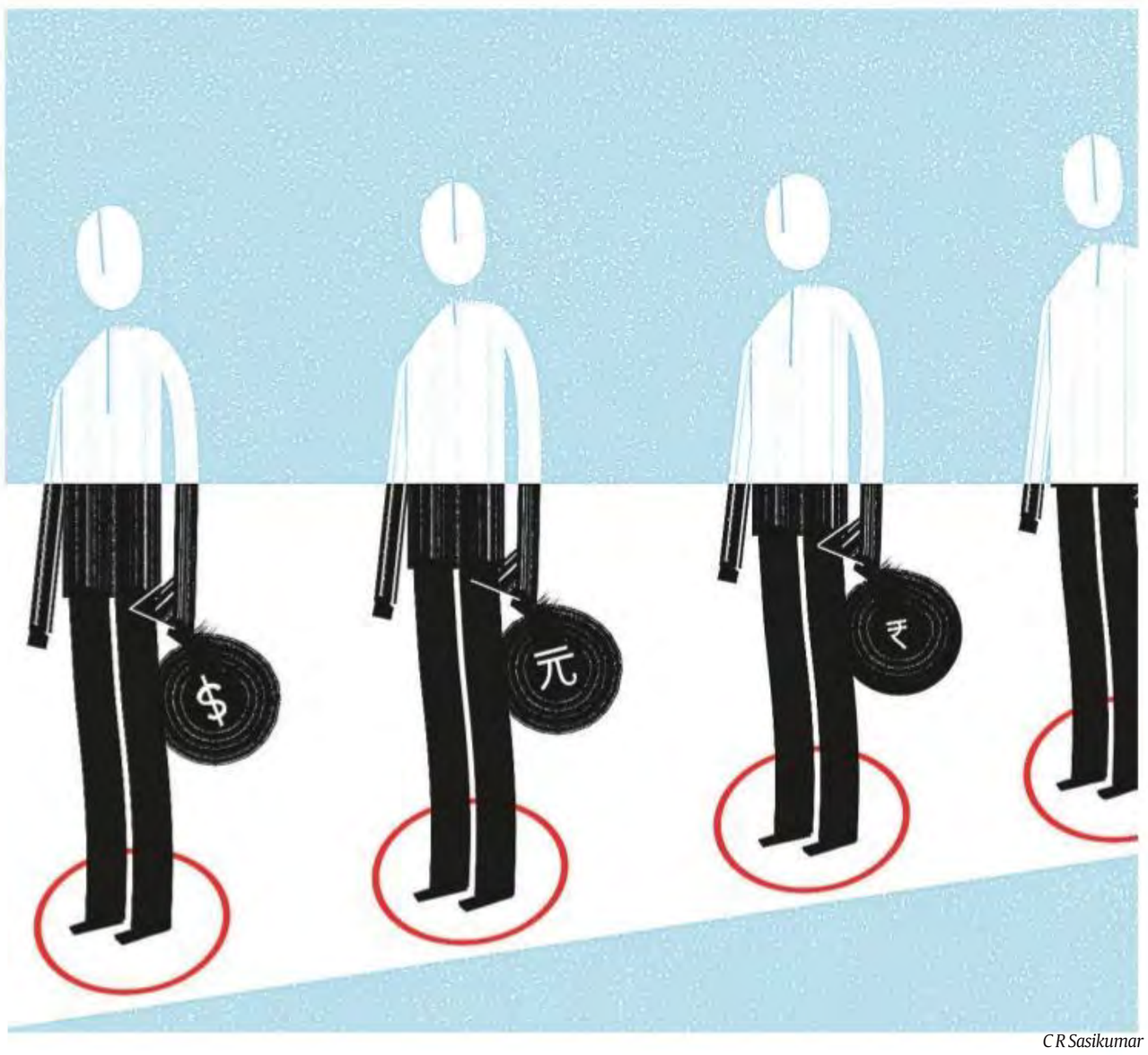
WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Everyone shares Mr. Trump's concern for the economy. But this is not a moment for mere salesmanship, for conjuring a cheerful vision rather than facing reality. It's a moment for providing a plan." — THE NEW YORK TIMES

Mind your own economic health

Governments are asking citizens to increase 'social distancing' to prevent spread of virus. Why it might be wise for countries to maintain 'economic distancing' amongst themselves too

ARUN MAIRA



C R Sasikumar

THE FRAGILITY OF the global economy has been exposed twice within the last two decades. In 2008, the collapse of a financial services firm in the US triggered a global financial meltdown. In 2020, the emergence of a novel virus in a food market in Wuhan has done it again. From west to east, now from east to west, the whole system has been shaken. In chaotic systems, the flapping of a butterfly's wings in the Amazon forest can cause a typhoon in Hong Kong. The global economy is exhibiting the properties of a chaotic system.

Systems theory says that systems take various forms. Broadly speaking, there are chaotic systems, engineered systems, and complex self-adaptive systems. As the weather in a storm, chaotic systems are unpredictable and uncontrollable. The global economy is behaving like a chaotic system. Engineered systems, on the other hand, can be controlled quite tightly, like machines. However, they are dull. No surprises. A nuclear power plant is a well-engineered system. We would want it to do just what it is supposed to and not produce any surprises.

In contrast to these systems is the design of nature. It is a complex self-adaptive system. It produces myriad innovations. It evolves. Yet, its fundamental stability is very reassuring. The realisation that mankind's technologies and engineering marvels are disrupting nature's stability, has raised alarms about the architecture of global economic governance.

The architecture of complex self-adaptive systems is formed by essential design principles. One is "permeable boundaries". The many parts of a complex self-adaptive system have permeable boundaries between themselves. Each part has its integrity. The parts exchange information and energy across their boundaries as required. The boundaries give the system resilience against shocks. Like the baffles inside a ship's hull, they slow down the sloshing inside when the hull is breached and stabilise the ship. When there are no boundaries within, or they are too weak, an accident at one end will soon sink the whole ship.

The drive for boundarylessness within the global financial system since the 1990s caused the sloshing around of contagion during the global financial crisis in 2008. Whereas global economic growth has undoubtedly been enabled by global supply chains, the vulnerability of economies everywhere to their disruption has become painfully evident with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Complex adaptive systems exhibit "fractal-like" shapes. Their parts are complex, combining the same diverse energies that permeate across the whole. Social forces, economic forces, and environmental forces combine within all countries, and in parts within countries too, albeit in different ways. Though the parts are similar to each other, they are not the same. Therefore, the same solutions will not fit all. An insight from systems theory is that global systemic problems such as climate change, persistent economic inequality, among others, will require local systems solutions.

Crises create stress tests for the health of systems. The financial crisis of 2008 exposed the fragility of an inter-connected and under-regulated financial system. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the architectural weaknesses in the global economy. Instead of worrying too much about the reversal of globalisation, national leaders should now focus on the well-being of their citizens and the health of their own economies. Six reforms are essential for reshaping the Indian economy.

First, focus on the provision of universal social security, rather than on the misdirected demand for even more "flexibility" in labour laws. The 90 per cent of Indians who are compelled to work in an overly flexible labour market need more fairness in their lives.

Second, respect the "informal" sector which provides the majority of Indians with opportunities to earn incomes, and give it more strength. It is also a great source for practical innovations and widespread entrepreneurship.

Third, change the economic paradigm from "trickle-down" to "build up". Build the internal engine of growth of India's economy by increasing incomes of India's citizens. When they earn more, they will spend more, and expand India's internal market. This will attract more domestic and foreign investments.

Fourth, strengthen public health services. Medical tourism may put India's private hospitals on the global map. However, they are not the solution to India's huge health problems.

> Crises create stress tests for the health of systems. The financial crisis of 2008 exposed the fragility of an inter-connected and under-regulated financial system. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the architectural weaknesses in the global economy. Instead of worrying too much about the reversal of globalisation, national leaders should now focus on the well-being of their citizens and the health of their own economies.

Fifth, reform and strengthen the public education system. It will contribute greatly to creating a level playing field for all children.

And sixth, strengthen local governance in India's towns and districts to develop and implement local systems solutions. The well-being of Indian citizens will be improved, and India's economy will be more resilient too.

All governments are asking their citizens to increase "social distancing" between themselves to prevent the spread of a health contagion. It would be wise for countries to maintain sufficient "economic distancing" amongst themselves too. They should mind the health of their own economies. Thereby, they will improve the health of the global economy too.

I conclude with a "namaste". A gesture with folded hands, without any physical contact with another, to acknowledge another's divinity. The expression "social distancing" is unfortunate. Whereas, what medical experts are actually asking citizens is to maintain "physical" distances from each other. The need of the hour is for more social solidarity amongst citizens. Within their localities, in their countries, and across national borders too.

Maira, a former member of the Planning Commission, is the author of Listening for Well-Being: Conversations with People Not Like Us

Above all, the Law

As a former CJI accepts RS berth, let's say it again: Judges are not the law, but like rest of us, its creatures

ALOK RAI

THERE ARE good reasons why institutions of the Law are sought to be protected from casual and random vilification. We are living in a time when all our institutions, even our very world, appears to have entered a process of accelerated decline. Despite the famous reassurance given by Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita — *yada yada hi dharmasya...* — a card-holding "sickular sepoy" like myself cannot help feeling that, in the absence of God or any credible representatives therefore, we all have a common interest in protecting the legitimacy of the Law and its institutions. The dignity of the Law is not a matter of concern merely to judges — though I believe it should be a matter of concern to them, too.

Hitherto, the law of contempt has been used primarily by judges in order to protect their fragile dignity, or to threaten others with their brief authority — as in the case of the judge who summarily sentenced a subordinate railway official on the station platform itself because he could not promptly provide the judge with last-minute accommodation — presumably by dislodging a legitimate traveller with a proper reservation. Similar examples, alas, abound.

It is time to recognise that judges are not the Law. They are — as indeed, we all are, except in the deepest personal matters — creatures of the Law. All of us, judges not excepted, exist under the Law, and not above it. It is in that sense that the Law, and the Law alone, that can be sovereign — doubly so in a country that describes itself as a constitutional republic. And all of us, judges and citizens — and, indeed, ex-judges — have a stake in maintaining the credibility and the legitimacy of the Law and its institutions.

But, perhaps, the time has come for the law of contempt to be invoked, not only by judges, but also against judges — and ex-judges — who endanger the dignity of the institution of the Law by their ill-considered words and actions. After all, the law of contempt must find its raison d'etre in the need to protect the institution of the Law, and not merely the personnel — human, all too human — who man these institutions from time to time. And there appears to be no reason, prima facie, why the honourable judges — they are all honourable ex-officio, aren't they? — should be considered exempt from, or above, the provisions of this, as of any other, law. It is, therefore, in the spirit of cooperative citizenship, of civic duty, and with deep humility, that I wish to suggest that judges — and ex-judges — should be considered liable for contempt against the sovereignty of the Law.

The legitimacy of the institutions of the Law is a complex business, and is not strictly reducible to being technically correct, as the lawyers springing to the defence of Ranjan Gogoi seem to think. Gandhi, after all, invented a whole style of politics on the basis of strategies — non-cooperation, satyagraha — whereby the vaunted legitimacy of the colonial state could be challenged. And we know the legitimacy of colonial law did not survive that contest, even though the post-colonial Indian state has seen fit to retain much of that "illegitimate" legal apparatus.

Law and morality are not the same thing — as Gandhi famously reminded Judge Broomfield. The domain of morality would lose something essential if it were to become a matter of legislation: Choosing freely, being free to choose both good or bad, is of the essence of moral being. But there is still a slippery relation between Law and morality. The Law and its institutions cannot afford to stray too far from commonly shared perceptions of morality. In point of fact, our courts have done commendable work in reminding the forgetful organs of the state that their legitimacy too derives not from the ever-serviceable forces of repression but from their being in some rough consonance with the moral sense of the people. Thus, it was the courts that, some years ago, reminded the state that there was something morally wrong in letting the people of the country die from starvation when the granaries were over-flowing, and the rats were dying from excess. I am aware that this "consonance" argument is problematic, particularly at a time when some people are arrogating to themselves the right to exclusive articulation of that "moral sense". Also, when that "moral sense" speaks in plural voices, it is the Law, and the law, that must prevail. The khap panchayat of loud-mouthed "nationalists" cannot be allowed to trump the Constitution and the Law. But perhaps, in view of the chorus of condemnation that has ensued in the wake of Gogoi's elevation, the Supreme Court needs to remember that its legitimacy too depends on some similar consonance?

The catalogue of Chief Justice Gogoi's dubious judicial actions in his final phase is already alarmingly familiar. Not least, may I say, because it is all so recent: The blood on the floor isn't quite dry yet, there are fingerprints that even our super-competent police can't miss, and the footsteps, ah, the footsteps... To say that the institutions of the Law stand damaged and diminished seems an understatement. Gogoi's personal choices are, well, personal. What concerns us is the larger question: Can the institutions of the Law seek to redeem their legitimacy by invoking the law of contempt? Indeed, with respect, contempt seems hardly sufficient. Try something stronger. Try disgust. Try repugnance. Try revulsion.

The writer taught in the department of English, Delhi University

Citizens on the frontline

In war against coronavirus, every Indian must participate, abide by restrictions

TEJASVI SURYA

INDIA RESPONDED overwhelmingly to the Prime Minister's call for a Janata Curfew on March 22. The PM has an ingenious ability to deploy Mahatma Gandhi's model of converting every issue into a mass movement. While only soldiers are involved in the battle during wartime, the current fight requires the participation of every citizen. Sunday's Janata Curfew was an effort to create mass awareness and most importantly, mass participation, in our fight against the lethal coronavirus.

Every balcony, window, door reverberated with the sound of taalis and thaalis (claps and plates) across the country to show solidarity and express gratitude to the health and sanitation workers and state officials. What was most heartening to see was the participation from political leaders across party lines, an indicator that India has truly risen as one. The Delhi government's decision of extending Ayushman Bharat to its people is also a welcome move.

However, people must understand that the one-day Janata curfew was the precursor to a minimum 21-day-long nation-wide quarantine, which was announced by the PM on Tuesday evening.

The day after the Janata Curfew, it seemed like it was business as usual in many cities. People ventured out for matters which are not more important than their and their loved one's health. It is amusing to see videos of large groups congregating at liquor shops. It is an indication that many have not yet understood the gravity of the battle. Now as part of the lockdown, those who defy the order will be dealt with strictly. If need be, the Army must be pressed into service to enforce the lockdown.

Many public health experts suggest that the ideal lockdown period should be five weeks, which makes the 21-day lockdown period all the more appropriate. They say that anybody who has contracted the virus will recover in three weeks. Anyone who comes into contact with them, like family members, will subsequently develop the infection and recover in the following two to three weeks. In such a scenario, by the end of five weeks, everyone will be free from the infection. Since the virus will not live outside the body, India would have practically removed the virus from the country.

On the other hand, if we let the virus get out of control like in Italy, it will become difficult to contain in a densely-populated country like India. The chances of the elderly surviving the pandemic will not be bright even if India manages to get a large number of ventilators.

The government has been effective and direct in its communication to citizens. As on March 18, the government worked on sending 70 lakh emails on MyGov, 20 lakh push notifications, publishing 624 newspaper ads and did much else to inform the public about lockdowns. It delivered 235 crore informative SMSes about the coronavirus and ensured that a caller tune in Hindi, English and 11 regional languages serves as a statutory warning before a person places any phone call. The Union Ministry for Health and Family Welfare has worked with the Indian Council of Medical Research to develop protocols for evolving scenarios, preparing for the inevitable. Surveillance of patients under home quarantine — which has risen from 70,000 people to nearly double the number — will now be strict. Those found violating the direction will be booked under IPC Sections 188 and 270 along with relevant sections of the Epidemic Disease Act, 1897. Those found violating the lockdown will also be punished.

Meanwhile, I have set up a Bengaluru South Coronavirus Task Force, in association with the Bengaluru Police, to enrol volunteers to attend to senior citizens and vulnerable sections.

There is no doubt that both the domestic and global economy will take a severe beating. The Prime Minister's Economic Response Task Force, headed by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, has a serious task ahead. However, this is the time when the PM's JAM (Jan Dhan, Aadhaar and Mobile) trinity will be a gamechanger in providing direct benefit transfers to the most vulnerable sections. The government must also look at deferring loan payments, announcing economic stimulus packages, including recapitalisation with zero-interest loans, to the worst-hit sectors and extending personal tax slabs to ensure people will have more money in their hands.

State governments have also announced special packages to address the economic disruption caused for daily wage workers and other temporary staff in different establishments. A lot more needs to be done.

This is the time for the country to display exemplary community self-discipline, a quality found wanting in times of distress. As the PM put it, *sankalp* and *sayyam* (resolve and restraint) will help us overcome this challenge. This is a fight where if humanity wins, we win. If you have a maid, let her continue her job but allow her to stay at her home for a few weeks. If you are an entrepreneur, do not cut down your staff. Let us turn this into a win-win situation. Let us pledge to lead by example.

The best news that has come out in the last several days is that there are no new cases reported out of China after a successful lockdown of the Hubei province. Vaccination is a long way off and so are curative medicines. Until then, the best cure that we have is quarantine, isolation, social distancing and lockdowns. For god's sake, stay home!

The writer is a BJP MP, representing Bengaluru South

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TOUGH QUESTIONS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'In hard times' (IE, March 25). The 21-day lockdown announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi is needed to step up the fight against the coronavirus. But that does not mean that we stop asking tough questions of the government. Many migrant workers are trapped in transit in the country's metros. The government has failed to provide an answer to their predicament. The economy is in disarray and the proposals announced on Tuesday will only give partial relief.

Suchak D Patel, *Ahmedabad*

TIME FOR UNITY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Other contagions' (IE, March 25). The stigmatisation of certain segments of people is worrying. It will compromise the fight against the pandemic. The battle against the pandemic demands resolve from the people. It is time to demonstrate fraternity and not cry hoarse.

Deepak Singhal, *Chennai*

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Other contagions' (IE, March 25). It is said that adversity tests a person's character and the same applies to a nation. As the country comes to a standstill for three weeks, it's not only patience and resilience which will be tested, but harmony, selflessness and compassion. We might be islands in ourselves right now, but the point to remember is that in our fight against COVID-19, we've no choice but to either sink or swim together.

Vijai Pant, *Hempur*

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

To encourage quality reader intervention, The Indian Express offers the Letter of the Week award. The letter adjudged the best for the week is published every Saturday. Letters may be e-mailed to editpage@expressindia.com or sent to The Indian Express, B-1/B, Sector 10, Noida-UP 201301.

TESTING KITS MATTER

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Tests needed, but each country has priorities' (IE, March 24). It is heartening to know that the government has placed an order for the import of one million testing kits for coronavirus. The government should make this import duty free.

Bijay Kumar Sinha, *Delhi*

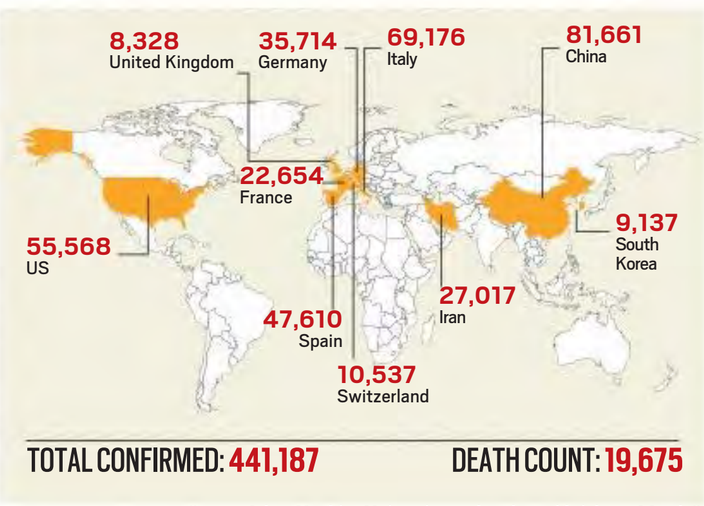
FEAR AND HOPE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'The reality check' (IE, March 24). There is much that is unknown about the COVID-19 outbreak. But what we know about the virus offers us reason to be optimistic in the fight against the contagion. The editorial correctly notes fear must be tempered with reason and uncertainty with information backed by science.

Dharm Sharma, *Mukerian*

CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

DAILY COUNT OF DEATHS, INFECTIONS



Source: Johns Hopkins University, updated at midnight on March 25

Are smokers at greater risk during the COVID-19 outbreak?

DIVYA GOYAL
LUDHIANA, MARCH 25

ARE SMOKERS at a higher risk from the novel coronavirus? Yes, according to health experts. The World Health Organisation (WHO) says in its FAQs on the outbreak that smoking is one of the things that people should not do during the outbreak.

Since the lungs and respiratory tract in smokers are already compromised to various extents, they are more prone to be severely infected by SARS-CoV-2, which primarily attacks the respiratory system in human beings, and in severe cases leads to symptoms such as difficulty in breathing.

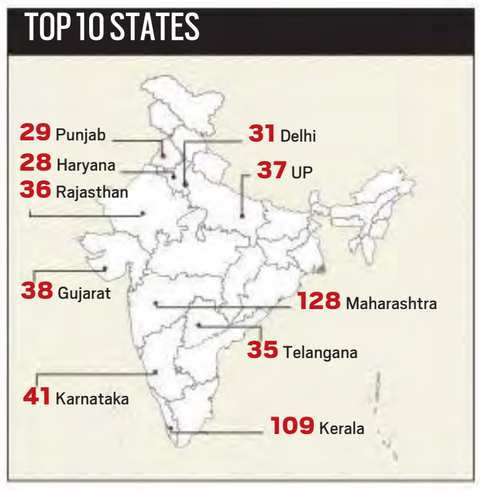
"A new infection attacking the already compromised respiratory system is dangerous," said Dr Harminder Singh Pannu, director, Internal Medicine, Fortis Hospital, Ludhiana. He suggested that now might be the best time for smokers to quit all together.

"Occasional smokers cannot get away by saying that I smoke just one or two cigarettes a day... The fact remains that you are exposing your respiratory system to something that is damaging it. Regular or heavy smokers are anyway psychologically dependent on smoking and consume one cigarette after the other. But the COVID-19 risk stands equally for both the heavy and the occasional smokers."

Smokers, Dr Pannu said, are at a higher risk than those who chew tobacco. "Tobacco causes more damage to oral health whereas cigarettes damage your lungs," he said.

'Quit', a programme run by Cancer Council Victoria in Australia with support from the Victorian Department of Health, says, "... If you previously smoked and have now quit, it's likely you'll have a lower risk of severe complications (if you were infected) than you would have if you were still smoking."

INDIA COUNT: 606 (10 DEATHS)



REST OF INDIA

Ladakh	13
Tamil Nadu	18
Chandigarh	7
Andhra Pradesh	9
Madhya Pradesh	14
West Bengal	9
Jammu & Kashmir	7
Uttarakhand	4
Odisha	2
Himachal Pradesh	3
Bihar	4
Chhattisgarh	1
Puducherry	1

Union Health Ministry update at 11 pm, March 25. Some states may have reported higher numbers. Only states with most cases are listed above.

43 PATIENTS DISCHARGED IN 11 STATES ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Have a question on the COVID-19 outbreak and what you should/should not do?
Write to explained@indianexpress.com

AP

AN EXPERT EXPLAINS

'Physical distance, not social isolation'

Staying physically distant is key to break the chain of transmission, but at this time of great anxiety, 'social distancing' conveys a wrong message. Lockdown loneliness can hit mental health — here's how to cope

SHEKHAR SAXENA

AROUND A fifth of humanity is confined indoors in what is possibly the widest lockdown in history, including an estimated 1.3 billion Indians who have just entered three weeks of isolation. The enormous stress and uncertainty could take an unprecedented toll on mental health around the world, and experts expect a spike in cases of anxiety and depression, as a consequence.

Why is it important to talk about mental health at this time?

Hundreds of thousands of people have tested positive for COVID-19, and thousands have died. People in India are under lockdown, constrained and restricted in their movements, and in their capacity to go to work. Many are stranded hundreds of kilometres away from home without transport, food, or money. We are experiencing a threat that can harm or kill us, and while all of us are concerned and anxious, some people will obviously feel it more than others. Mental health is a dimension. We are all somewhere on that dimension from very good mental health to very bad mental health. Imagine a spectrum with the left side being very good mental health and the right side being very bad mental health. We as a society are now moving towards the right, and that affects us all. From a public health viewpoint, a big problem for a small number of people is obviously a problem. But even a small problem to a very large number of people cumulates into a much bigger public health problem. Yes, the virus is a problem. It can affect people, kill people. But even a small deterioration in the mental health and wellbeing of a billion people in India is going to be a serious problem in terms of disability and distress.

You have written that "the mental and emotional toll of the virus is as much a threat to public health as the virus itself".

In a cumulative way, the threat which means anxiety and depression plus the practical difficulties — financial and employment — as well as the effects of segregation from your loved ones, is going to take a toll on people in terms of their mental and emotional wellbeing. And cumulatively, for a very large number of people, that is going to be a problem.

Does social distancing impact mental health?

We are all talking about social distancing. Actually, what we need is physical distancing, not social distancing — because that conveys the wrong message. In fact, in this time of stress, we need more social togetherness; we need more social support than social isolation. And if that is possible without compromising on the steps we are taking (to fight the virus), it should be encouraged. We should always be giving the message of physical distancing, which is a safety measure, but social togetherness, which can still be maintained from a physical distance. You talk to people on the phone, on any other media, you support people in each other's difficulties and that is what the community needs to fight it together. Saying 'social distancing', which means you are alone, is increasing stress. International organisations and national authorities are all exercising 'social distancing' when actually, what they should be saying is physical distancing but social togetherness.

What can governments do to prevent a full-blown mental health crisis in the wake of the pandemic?

Public education and messaging has to be very, very smart. The first fundamental principle is that government authorities should convey accurate and timely information to people. A vacuum leads to more anxiety. India is doing reasonably well on that front with the Prime Minister himself speaking.

Second, there is a large amount of misinformation on social media, WhatsApp groups, even in newspapers, which is completely non-evidence-based and is actually wrong. The WHO has called this an 'infodemic', an epidemic of wrong information. India is notorious for that, because most people are connected, especially in urban areas, and now they have time so they are disseminating this information without a thought to how it will affect people. It increases anxiety and concern, and needs to be curtailed. But the government alone cannot do that; we all have to do it — by not forwarding a message if it is not evidence-based.

Third, we all need to take a pause. We should not be consuming news round the clock because that increases anxiety. Even if we are at home, we should ensure we get enough sleep, nutrition, and do things that we find fulfilling.

What can be the effects of prolonged isolation?

Any change in our lives can cause anxiety. This is a massive, negative change. Instead of taking transport every morning to go to work, we are sitting at home. We are disconnected from our colleagues, friends, and even family in some cases. That can be very anxiety-provoking. We can still maintain clear communication with people that we have been in touch with. It is very important to check how they are feeling, whether you can support them, maybe not by being there practically, but by listening to them, being part of their difficulties. That is something we should do very actively. We don't know if it is going to be weeks or months, but we need to be ready for the long haul.

Will isolation impact the elderly, children, and the disabled more?

Absolutely. We already know that the elderly have been feeling more and more isolated. Loneliness has been seen as a major determinant of people's health, mental health, and life spans. The elderly may also not be able to use modern means of communication. They have no physical proximity to people. This can mean added anxiety or stress for them.

Similarly, children are accustomed to playing with friends and being surrounded by a number of adults, especially in joint families. Schools are closed. It is a massive change but young children may not understand why this is happening. That increases their anxiety.

People who are disabled — physically and mentally — may have more problems in communicating with others to get the right news, to be in touch with people, to get the social support they need. People who are mentally disabled in some way will feel a heightened sense of anxiety and abandonment. That will definitely increase their symptoms. Also, people who are living with a physical or a mental disorder will have great difficulty accessing the healthcare that they are used to.

You have said that parks should be kept open to allow people some physical activity. Is that viable in a densely populated country like India?

Obviously, there is a danger in allowing people to aggregate in large groups. That, of course, should not be allowed. But closing open spaces, parks, is denying people the possibility of physical exercise, to walk, to jog which is very important at such a time. So, in a regulated manner, that should be allowed. There are millions of people living in shanties where there are eight people to a room. It is criminal to confine them there. I think a compromise has to be found rather imposing than a blanket ban.

What kind of mental disorders are we likely to see on the other side of this pandemic?

The typical three disorders we will see are anxiety, depression, and stress-related disorders like sleeplessness. Studies have already proven that quarantine has increased anxiety and depression among people. We might also see more instances of smoking, alcohol, and drug use. When people do not have access to their usual entertainment, they might take solace in using substances.

*(Shekhar Saxena is Professor of the Practice of Global Mental Health at the Harvard T H Chan School of Public Health, and former Director, Mental Health and Substance Abuse, World Health Organisation. He spoke to **Mayura Janwalkar** from Geneva, which, like India, is under lockdown.)*

FACT CHECK, GROUND REALITY

Bangladesh to Pak to Sri Lanka, how India's neighbours are coping

NEHA BANKA
KOLKATA, MARCH 25

EARLIER THIS month, Prime Minister Narendra Modi proposed the creation of a SAARC COVID-19 Emergency Fund, to which all countries except Pakistan have made contributions. How has the outbreak affected India's neighbours?

BHUTAN

ITS FIRST case was a 76-year-old US citizen who had travelled via India and was hospitalised after showing symptoms on March 5. Some 90 people in the country may have come in contact with him. The patient's wife, their driver and guide were placed under quarantine, as were eight Indian nationals who were on the flight with him from India. The US citizen's wife too tested positive later. On March 22, the King of Bhutan said land borders would be sealed. Schools have been shut down in various parts of the country.

PM Lotay Tshering attended SAARC meeting. *AP*

People rushed home as trains stopped. *Reuters*

BANGLADESH

THE FIRST confirmed cases were two Bangladeshi nationals who tested positive on March 7 after returning from Italy. As of Wednesday evening, Bangladesh had seen 39 confirmed cases and five deaths. The country recorded its first death on March 18; the patient had pre-existing medical conditions. Testing remains low, according to media reports, which raises the possibility of there being many 'hidden' cases.

The government has closed all educational institutions until the end of the month and postponed school exams. *The Daily Star* said that the government had ordered the closure of all public and private offices from March 26 to April 4, barring emergency services, hospitals, and police stations. Public transport and banking services are limited, though markets are open. According to a Reuters report, the government has also ordered the closure of one of the world's largest brothels in Daulatdia.

NEPAL

NEPAL HAS had three confirmed cases of infection, and no deaths. The first was a student who returned from Wuhan in January, and who has now been discharged, according to *The Kathmandu Post*. The second case was that of a returned from France via Qatar on March 17.

By mid-February, Nepal had evacuated all its citizens from China, and placed them in quarantine for 14 days.

Nepal has suspended visa-on-arrival facilities for all foreigners, with the exception of official and diplomatic visas. Land borders have been sealed, and Mount Everest has been closed to expeditions. Schools and universities have been shut, and all examinations have been postponed. All public spaces have been closed. Nepal's domestic markets, which are heavily reliant on supplies from abroad, have been hit badly.

Many markets are depleted in Nepal. *Reuters*

Trains were stopped on Wednesday. *Reuters*

PAKISTAN

PAKISTAN'S FIRST two COVID-19 cases had a travel history from Iran. Initially, Pakistan suspended all flights to and from Iran, and put screening measures in place at land borders with Iran. But as the numbers spiked — over 1,000 cases and eight deaths as of March 25 evening — Pakistan introduced screening of domestic fliers too, limited international flights to Karachi, Islamabad, and Lahore airports, closed borders with Afghanistan and Iran for 15 days, shut schools and universities for students, and cancelled gatherings including the Pakistan Day parade on March 23.

The first death in Pakistan was of a 77-year-old with no recent traceable history of foreign travel. The next death was that of a doctor who had been treating COVID-19 patients in Gilgit-Baltistan; this triggered a government lockdown in the region. In an address to the nation on March 22, Prime Minister Imran Khan ruled out a full lockdown in the country in order to protect its most vulnerable sections.

SRI LANKA

SRI LANKA HAS had over 100 cases until March 25. The first was a Chinese tourist from Hubei. On February 1, 33 Sri Lankan students were evacuated from Wuhan and kept in quarantine for 14 days; no cases of COVID-19 infections were found in this group.

But more cases were recorded subsequently, including among those who had been in contact with the first case, and among Sri Lankan nationals returning from abroad. Sri Lanka ordered quarantine for passengers from Italy, South Korea and Iran, and then on March 22, banned the arrival of all passenger flights and ships. The government advised the public to work from home between March 20 to 27, for a period of one week.

The country later shut schools and educational institutions until April 20, closed public spaces like cinema theatres and zoos until further notice, and postponed sports events indefinitely.

(Longer version on www.indianexpress.com)

There is near total lockdown in Sri Lanka. *Reuters*

Global toll 20,000, 3 bn told to stay home

TOP OF THE WORLD

The Ruby Princess in Sydney. *Reuters/File*

AUSTRALIA

Thousands stuck on cruise ships off coast

Perth: 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 case surge. The Artania and Magnifica were anchored off the port of 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 told media Wednesday. A string of virus cases have been connected with cruise ship arrivals.

WEST AFRICA

Mali declares its first two virus cases

Bamako: Mali announced its first two cases of coronavirus on Wednesday, to fears that the war-torn West African state will struggle to handle an outbreak. Two Malian nationals who arrived from France in mid-March tested positive for the virus, the government said in a statement on Wednesday, and are receiving medical treatment. The statement added people should "remain calm and strictly respect the recommended preventive measures". There are fears that Mali is at particular risk in the event of an outbreak, however.

LIBYA

First COVID-19 cases reported

Tripoli: Libya has reported its first case of the novel coronavirus, a particular source of concern in the North African country where civil war has badly degraded the public healthcare system. Libya has been mired in chaos since the 2011 overthrow of longtime dictator Moamer Kadhafi. The health minister of the UN-recognised GNA late Tuesday reported "a first contamination with the coronavirus in Libya," without giving details of the case. "The necessary measures have been taken to treat" the patient, the minister, Ehmed Ben Omar, said in a brief online statement.

Italy fatalities rise by 683 to 7,503; total cases 73,386

AGENCIES
MARCH 25

THE CORONAVIRUS pandemic has killed more than 20,000 people worldwide, most of them in Europe, according to an AFP tally Wednesday using official figures.

A total of 20,334 deaths were reported, of which 13,581 were in Europe.

With 7,503 deaths, Italy is the most affected country ahead of Spain with 3,434 and China with 3,281, the country where the initial outbreak occurred.

This comes even as more than three billion people have been asked to stay home in almost 70 countries and territories as governments battle the pandemic.

Most of the countries concerned, including Argentina, Britain, France, India and Italy as well as many US states, have imposed mandatory lockdown measures. Others have introduced curfews, quarantines and other social distancing recommendations.

The death toll from an outbreak of coronavirus in Italy has grown by 683 to 7,503, the Civil Protection Agency said on Wednesday, a decline in the daily tally of fatalities following a spike the day before.

On Tuesday 743 people died. That followed 602 deaths on Monday, 650 on Sunday and a record of 793 on Saturday — the highest daily figure since February 21. The total number of confirmed cases in Italy rose to 74,386 from a previous 69,176, the Civil Protection Agency said.

A row of military trucks wait to take away coffins that have been piling up in a church in Italy on Wednesday. *Reuters*

Spain death toll crosses China's

AGENCIES
MADRID, MARCH 25

SPAIN'S CORONAVIRUS death toll overtook that of China on Wednesday, rising to 3,434 after 738 people died over the past 24 hours, the government said.

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.

Despite the national lockdown imposed on March 14, which is to be extended until April 11, both deaths and infections have continued to mount, with officials warning this week would be particularly bad.

"We are approaching the peak," the ministry's emergencies coordinator Fernando Simon said in announcing the figures. Health authorities are hoping it will soon become clear whether the lockdown is having the desired effect.

Madrid has suffered the brunt with 14,597 infections — just under a third of the total — and 1,825 deaths, or 53 per cent of the national figure.

Troops have set up a massive field hospital in Madrid's vast IFEMA exhibition centre which currently has 1,500 beds but which could be expanded to take in up to 5,500 people — making it the largest hospital in Spain.

EXPLAINED

War of attrition

IN MANY parts of Europe, the ranks of health workers have been thinning in a war of attrition. In Spain, 14% of cases are medical professionals. As per experts, this situation is damaging as it adds to the toll while cutting down the number of responders. This draws renewed attention to need to equip such workers properly.

US lawmakers reach deal for $2-trillion financial aid package

NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK, MARCH 25

THE WHITE House and Congress struck a deal in the predawn hours to deliver $2 trillion in government relief to a nation increasingly under lockdown, watching nervously as the twin threats of disease and economic ruin grow more dire.

Reached after midnight, the stimulus deal was the product of a marathon set of negotiations among Senate Republicans, Democrats and the White House that had stalled as Democrats insisted on stronger worker protections and oversight of a $500 billion fund to bail out distressed businesses.

Senator Mitch McConnell, Republican of Kentucky and the majority leader, announced the deal on the Senate floor well after midnight. "At last, we have a deal," he said. "In effect, this is a wartime level of investment into our nation."

The sheer size and scope of the stimulus package would have been unthinkable only a couple of weeks ago. Administration officials said they hoped that its effect on a battered economy would be exponentially greater than its $2 trillion cost, generating as much as $4 trillion in economic activity.

"This is not a moment of celebration, but one of necessity," the minority leader, Senator Chuck Schumer, said as he took careful note of the changes his party had secured in the legislation. "To all Americans I say, 'Help is on the way.'"

The Democratic-led House is unlikely to take up the package until at least Thursday, when Speaker Nancy Pelosi hopes to approve it by unanimous consent, a practice usually reserved for minor, uncontroversial measures. In this case, it would ensure House members , who are scattered across the country, do not have to travel back to Washington.

Meanwhile, President Donald Trump pressed to reopen the country for business by Easter, on April 12.

When asked how he came up with April 12 as a target date, Trump did not cite any scientific evidence. "I just thought it was a beautiful time," he said.

TESTING KITS

- US President Donald Trump has requested test kits from South Korea, his counterpart Moon Jae-in said on Wednesday
- Over 367,000 people in have been tested in South Korea, once the worst-hit country outside China
- 'If there is a domestic surplus, I will support as much as possible,' Moon told Trump

COVID-19 PANDEMIC: FOUR KEY FIGURES

€1.1 tn
The sum voted through by Germany via a package of measures to shield its economy from the impact of the coronavirus

800%
The percentage by which gun sales have exploded in the US, with people fearing that the pandemic might lead to social unrest

$2 bn
The amount allocated by the United Nations as part of a global humanitarian response plan to fight the virus in poor countries.

10 times
EU states need 10 times as much equipment and other medical devices, such as ventilators, as per an internal document

Iran to ban intercity travel as virus death toll tops 2,000

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
TEHRAN, MARCH 25

IRAN WILL ban intercity travel within days as it finally gets tough with the coronavirus that has killed more than 2,000 people in one of the world's deadliest outbreaks, officials said Wednesday.

The strict new measures come after weeks of cajoling largely failed to prevent hundreds of thousands of Iranians taking to the roads to visit family for the two-week Persian New Year holiday.

"New journeys will be banned, leaving towns and cities will be banned," government spokesman Ali Rabii announced, hours after President Hassan Rouhani revealed the government was poised to introduce "difficult" new measures against the outbreak.

"People should return to their home towns as quickly as possible," Rabii said.

Hassan Rouhani

He said the government would issue a statutory instrument setting out fines for violations. "Of course, the security forces are going to stop it," he said, referring to travel on Iran's major highways.

Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli told official news agency IRNA Wednesday that the ban would enter force "tomorrow or the day after".

Iran on Wednesday announced 143 new deaths from the coronavirus, raising the official death toll to 2,077.

Health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour added that "our colleagues have registered 2,206 new cases of COVID-19 infection" in the past 24 hours, bringing total infections to 27,017.

Iran had long resisted imposing any lockdown, choosing instead to rely on verbal appeals for people to stay home.

"There has been a long debate within the National Committee for Fighting the Coronavirus about how to strengthen the measures we have taken," Rouhani said.

"It may create problems for people's travel plans and require that people return home early," the president said.

A COVID-19 drive-thru test site in Chicago. *AP*

UK issues visa extensions for those hit by travel ban

ADITI KHANNA
LONDON, MARCH 25

BRITAIN'S INDIAN-ORIGIN Home Secretary Priti Patel has issued an over two-month extension on visas to foreign nationals who were stranded in the UK due to COVID-19 related travel bans imposed by several countries, including India.

The announcement, made on Tuesday, came as a relief for Indian nationals, including tourists, professionals and students, who were inundating the social media channels of the Indian High Commission in London with queries about their expired or soon to be expiring visas.

Like many foreign nationals, the Indian citizens also found themselves unable to return home amid the coronavirus pandemic due to flight cancellations and border restrictions.

Priti Patel

Giving them a grace period until May 31, Patel said she wanted to give people peace of mind that no enforcement action will be taken against anyone caught up due to the current stringent travel restrictions.

"The UK continues to put the health and wellbeing of people first and nobody will be punished for circumstances outside of their control. By extending people's visas, we are giving people peace of mind and also ensuring that those in vital services can continue their work," the senior UK Cabinet minister said. **PTI**

Prince Charles tests positive

MICHAEL HOLDEN & GUY FAULCONBRIDGE
LONDON, MARCH 25

PRINCE CHARLES, the 71-year-old heir to the British throne, has tested positive for coronavirus but is in good health and is now self isolating in Scotland with mild symptoms.

Charles, eldest son of Queen Elizabeth, is displaying what Clarence House said were mild symptoms. His wife, Camilla, 72, tested negative.

Prince Charles

"The Prince of Wales has tested positive for coronavirus," Clarence House said. "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."

"The Duchess of Cornwall has also been tested but does not have the virus," Clarence House said. Queen Elizabeth who is currently at Windsor Castle is in good health, Buckingham Palace said.

A royal source said the Prince of Wales, who was tested on Monday and got the results on Tuesday, was advised the condition was unlikely to escalate into a more serious case. **REUTERS**

Citing virus, Putin delays vote on changes to extend his rule

ANDREW OSBORN & TOM BALMFORTH
MOSOW, MARCH 25

RUSSIAN PRESIDENT Vladimir Putin on Wednesday postponed a nationwide vote on constitutional changes that would allow him to extend his rule, saying the health and safety of citizens was his top priority as the global coronavirus pandemic worsens.

His postponement followed calls from critics to delay the vote, which had been planned for April 22. One opposition activist, Andrei Pivovarov, likened the idea to proceed amid coronavirus to "holding a party during the plague".

"We see how severely the coronavirus epidemic is developing in the world. In many countries the number of cases is continuing to grow, the whole world economy is under threat," Putin said in a televised address.

"The absolute priority for us is the health, life and safety of people. Therefore I believe that the vote should be postponed until a later date."

Putin spoke on the day Russia recorded its biggest one day rise in cases, though at 658, the official tally remains much lower than in many European countries.

The mayor of Moscow told Putin on Tuesday however that the real scale of the problem far exceeded official figures, and *Reuters* reported earlier this month that a reported increase in pneumonia cases in Moscow was fuelling fears about the accuracy of official data. **REUTERS**

Pak suspends domestic flights as cases top 1,000

SAJJAD HUSSAIN
ISLAMABAD, MARCH 25

PAKISTAN HAS suspended all domestic flight operations until April 2 to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus after the country reported over 1,000 cases and seven deaths from the COVID-19 infection, authorities said on Wednesday.

The nationwide tally of COVID-19 patients touched 1,037 with 413 cases in Sindh; 115 in Balochistan; 296 in Punjab; 117 in K-P; 80 in Gilgit-Baltistan; 15 in Islamabad; and one in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, The Express Tribune reported.

The National Disaster Management Authority has said that so far 7 people have died due to the novel coronavirus and 18 recovered. In the wake of the outbreak, the country has halted its domestic flights operations.

Abdul Sattar Khokhar, the spokesman of Aviation Division, said that the decision was part of ongoing efforts to contain the deadly coronavirus. The ban will be effective from Thursday, Khokhar said.

According to a statement on the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority's website on Tuesday, the government has "decided to suspend all types of domestic scheduled/non-scheduled, chartered and private aircraft passenger flight operations..." **PTI**

'THERE IS NO CHANCE OF ISOLATION OR SOCIAL DISTANCING'

'Corona time' for refugees in Europe's main migrant camp

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PAZIANOU LESBOS ISLAND (GREECE), MARCH 25

IN EUROPE'S biggest asylum seeker camp of Moria, on the Greek island of Lesbos, authorities are trying to keep residents apart from a population with at least three coronavirus cases.

But in a sprawling, overstretched facility that was already a health hazard before the virus made landfall in Greece, there is widespread concern. "As you all know we are in corona time and... the (biggest) problem that we have is overcrowding inside these camps," Mohamed Omid, an asylum seeker from Afghanistan posted on Facebook Tuesday from inside Moria.

There have been 20 recorded deaths and 743 officially announced infections from the coronavirus in Greece, which has a population of 11 million. Three of the cases have been reported among Lesbos islanders.

There are nearly 38,000 people crammed into overstretched refugee centres on the islands of Lesbos, Samos, Chios, Leros and Kos. Moria alone has over 19,000.

The European parliament's civil liberties, justice and home affairs committee this week called for urgent measures to relieve pressure on the camps.

Migrants at the Moria camp in Lesbos, Greece. *Reuters/File*

"Many of those in the camps are already in precarious health situations due to the bad conditions in which they have lived for a long time," said Juan Fernando Lopez Aguilar, a Spanish socialist MEP who chairs the committee.

"There is no chance of isolation or social distancing, nor is it possible to ensure appropriate hygienic conditions," he said, adding that there are only six intensive care beds available on Lesbos.

As the island camps were originally intended to handle around 6,000 people, many sleep outdoors in makeshift shelters with minimal access to hygiene. The situation was recently termed a "health bomb" by government spokesman Stelios Petsas.

In Moria, not everyone has access to water and refuse routinely piles up. With staff and police now called away because of the lockdown, many residents are fearful. "The virus has brought chaos... the police are not here, staff do not come," said Sayed Nasid Haidari, an Afghan.

"Moria is divided into two groups. Around 20 percent are scared and hiding in their tents, and 80 percent are still walking around as if nothing is happening," said Haidari.

GOLD	RUPEE	OIL	SILVER
₹41,705	₹75.94	$26.15	₹38,100

Note: Spot gold markets shut due to lockdown in major states. *Indian basket as on March 19, 2020

SENSEX: 28,535.78 ▲ 1861.75 **NIFTY:** 8,317.85 ▲ 516.80 **NIKKEI:** 19,546.63 ▲ 1,454.28 **HANG SENG:** 23,527.19 ▲ 863.70 **FTSE:** 5,459.82 ▲ 13.81 **DAX:** 9,535.03 ▼ 165.54

*International market data till 1900 IST

COVID-19 EFFECT
AVIATION SECTOR HIT

SpiceJet returns some wet-leased aircraft; carriers fast losing cash reserves

PRANAV MUKUL
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

Moody's placed GMR Hyderabad International Airport Ba1 Corporate Family Rating on review for possible downgrade, and downgraded DIAL's CFR and senior secured ratings to Ba3 from Ba2

IN WHAT is being pegged as the first real impact of curtailed operations on Indian airlines, low-cost carrier SpiceJet has returned five of its wet-leased Boeing 737 aircraft to Turkey's Corendon Airlines. While sources indicated that SpiceJet returned the aircraft on account of a cash crunch, a company spokesperson denied the financial situation as a factor and said the carrier did not need the aircraft due to the trimmed operations.

Meanwhile, aviation consultancy firm CAPA India in a research note on Wednesday said the impact of COVID-19 will be "so severe that even the stronger carriers may not be immune". "In the event of a three-month shutdown, the two listed carriers alone — IndiGo and SpiceJet — could report combined losses of $1.25-1.50 billion across 4QFY2020 and 1QFY2021. IndiGo's hitherto enviable free cash reserves may almost be wiped out. Smaller carriers may exit," CAPA noted.

Responding to queries by *The Indian Express*, a SpiceJet spokesperson said: "The suspension of international operations and the weakening of domestic demand due to COVID-19 outbreak earlier this month provided an opportunity to SpiceJet to cut high-cost expenses and focus our resources on running a lean and profitable operation. As part of the cost cutting exercise, wide-ranging measures have been taken including returning some wet-lease aircraft".

"Lease payments are made in advance for these aircraft and the lessors have some payables to SpiceJet ... some aircraft were returned due to weakening demand and closure of international operations due to COVID-19. Had this not happened, we would have been operating these planes," the person said.

SpiceJet's rival GoAir, too, in an effort to cut costs, has extended salary cuts to all its employees for March. "We will ensure that the lowest pay grades suffer the least ... when the tide turns once again, and it will, GoAir will find a way to compensate all of you for the sacrifice you are being asked to make at this juncture," its CEO Vinay Dube said in a communication to employees.

Even as airlines suffer the pain of severely subdued demand, airports are also in the line of fire, and are expected to see a considerable fall in passenger throughput. "Given the fall in airline operations, airports are likely to operate at less than 20% capacity for the month of April and less than 50% till June. Decline anywhere between 8% to 15% is expected for passengers handled (domestic and international) by airports," CARE Ratings said in a report.

On account of the sharp decline in passenger and aircraft traffic at Delhi Airport, Moody's Investors Service has placed GMR Hyderabad International Airport Limited's Ba1 Corporate Family Rating on review for possible downgrade, even as it downgraded Delhi International Airport Limited's (DIAL) CFR and senior secured ratings to Ba3 from Ba2.

Spencer Ng, vice president and senior analyst, Moody's, said, "The downgrade to Ba3 reflects our expectation of a sharp decline in passenger and aircraft traffic at Delhi airport in the coming months and the uncertainty over the timing and extent of a recovery, which coincides with increased debt issuance as the airport enters the peak stage of its Rs 98 billion expansion project."

Even as the current scenario was full of uncertainty, Moody's expects a recovery in airport traffic to commence in the second half of the year. However, it expects Delhi airport's traffic levels for the next two-three years to be lower as a result of the coronavirus, which will reduce DIAL's available cash flow for its Rs 9,800 crore expansion project and increase its reliance on debt funding. "The rating action reflects the expectation of a sharp decline in passenger and aircraft traffic at Hyderabad airport in the coming months and the uncertainty over the timing and extent of a recovery, which coincides with increased debt issuance as the airport enters the peak stage of its Rs 5,500 crore expansion project," Ng said.

GLOBAL MARKETS RISE

7% jump: Sensex logs best single-day gain in over 10 yrs

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU
MUMBAI, MARCH 25

STOCK MARKETS on Wednesday posted their best single-day rise in over 10 years in percentage terms aided by a strong rally in the global markets and expectations of a stimulus package by the government to revive the economy hit by the coronavirus pandemic.

The BSE Sensex skyrocketed 1,861.75 points, or 6.98 per cent, to settle at 28,535.78 and the Nifty50 zoomed 516.80 points, or 6.62 per cent, to end at 8,317.85.

Despite the nationwide lockdown, markets rallied on strong buying support, mainly driven by banks and financials. "Global markets have been trading in the green, driven by expectations of stimulus measures to support the respective economies ... A more stable rally can happen only after any news regarding virus containment comes in," said an analyst.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman Tuesday said the Centre will soon announce a fiscal package to help the economy come out of the virus shock. Bourses in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Tokyo and Seoul rallied up to 8 per cent.

Deepak Jasani, head—retail research, HDFC Securities, said Asian and European markets surged after the White House and the Senate reached an agreement over a stimulus to shore up the US economy against coronavirus. The deal aims to buttress the teetering economy by giving roughly $2 trillion to health facilities, businesses and ordinary Americans buckling under the strain of the pandemic.

"While there is a lot of momentum in the risk-on rally, volatility remains on overdrive and 2-3 consecutive days of gains are still awaited across the globe even as news on virus front does not moderate in terms of its worst outcomes," he said.

S Ranganathan, head of research at LKP Securities, said, "Markets today mirrored the buoyancy displayed by Dow on expectations of a stimulus package. All sectoral indices on the BSE ended in the green."

EXPLAINED

Markets pin hopes on stimulus announcement

THE LIKELY clearing of the $2 trillion stimulus by leaders in the US has turned sentiments positive globally. Markets in India, meanwhile, are keenly awaiting the stimulus package being planned by the government to bail out the economy.

'70% of G7 households expect virus to make them poorer'

Seventy per cent of households in Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the US expect to lose income due to the coronavirus outbreak, according to a Kantar survey

- **WHAT HAS HAPPENED TILL NOW?:** The highly contagious coronavirus has caused entire regions to be placed on lockdown, halting services and production and breaking supply chains
- **82%:** Respondents who said the virus has or will impact their household income - the highest of the G7 countries - compared to 74% in the US and 70% in Britain

PREPAREDNESS:

- In Germany, Canada and Britain, over half the people thought public services in their country were prepared to cope with the epidemic and its consequences
- France is the nation with least confidence, where only 33% thought the country could cope
- Italy, which has so far seen over 6,800 deaths, had the highest number of respondents saying they were "very concerned" about the health of their local community

***Britain:** Just 28% of people said they had started working from home more often and only a little over half said they were avoiding visits to elderly and vulnerable relatives and friends where possible*

***Japan:** Had the highest number of people who said they had started wearing a mask (65%) but the lowest number of people doing all other measures listed in the survey, such as social distancing and washing hands more*

Source: Reuters

Oil rises for second day; US mkts gain as Senate votes on aid package

REUTERS
LONDON, MARCH 25

THE DOLLAR and global equity markets marched higher on Wednesday and were poised for a second day of gains following a coronavirus-induced selloff, though investors remained concerned about the pandemic's economic impact.

Hopes that an incoming $2 trillion US fiscal stimulus will ease the economic devastation caused by virus lockdowns lifted world equity indexes for a second day after historic gains on Tuesday, but investors refrained from calling a bottom.

Meanwhile, US crude prices rose slightly, bolstered by progress on the stimulus package, even as government data showed that the coronavirus pandemic started to hurt US fuel demand last week.

US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures rose 55 cents, or 2.3 per cent, to $24.56 a barrel. Brent crude, meanwhile, increased 40 cents to $27.55 a barrel, a 1.5 per cent gain.

Europe's main markets in London, Frankfurt and Paris were struggling to stay positive after ripping 4-5 per cent higher and oil prices swung from 3 per cent up to 3 per cent down. MSCI's gauge of stocks across the globe surged 2.65 per cent and emerging market stocks rose 4.32 per cent. The pan-European STOXX 600 index rose 0.96 per cent.

BRENT CRUDE UP TO $27.55/BBL

- **US West Texas Intermediate crude futures rose 2.3% to $24.56 a barrel, while Brent crude rose by 1.5% to $27.55 a barrel**
- **During early trading, the Dow Jones Industrial Average was up 4.40% at 21,615.91, the S&P 500 was up 2.84% at 2,516.72 and the Nasdaq Composite was up 1.28% at 7,512.57**

During early trading, the Dow Jones Industrial Average was up 911.00 points, or 4.40 per cent, at 21,615.91, the S&P 500 was up 69.39 points, or 2.84 per cent, at 2,516.72 and the Nasdaq Composite was up 94.71 points, or 1.28 per cent, at 7,512.57.

Bond markets too were calmer. Benchmark US Treasuries were yielding 0.7987 per cent while Germany's 10-year yield edged a basis point higher to -0.296 per cent, tailed by other higher-rated government debt.

Earlier, officials told *Reuters* that European Central Bank chief Christine Lagarde asked euro zone finance ministers during a video-conference Tuesday to seriously consider a one-off joint debt issue of "coronabonds".

PSBs unveil emergency credit lines to customers hit by coronavirus

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU
MUMBAI, MARCH 25

AFTER SBI'S COVID-19 Emergency Credit Line (CECL), public sector banks (PSBs) Bank of Baroda (BoB), Indian Bank, Union Bank of India and Bank of India (BoI) have unveiled similar emergency credit lines at concessional terms to borrowers whose operations are hit by the coronavirus pandemic.

Banking sources said more PSBs are likely to come with similar schemes in the coming days to bail out borrowers and needy customers, in the wake of the overall decline in the business.

BoB has rolled out Baroda COVID-19 Emergency Credit Line (BCECL) to provide emergency credit line in the nature of short-term loan or demand loan to existing MSME and corporate borrowers affected by the coronavirus. The bank has decided to make maximum 10 per cent of the existing fund based working capital limits (FBWC) subject to maximum of Rs 200 crore.

BoB said the interest rate for corporate borrowers would be one-year MCLR of 8.15 per cent without the standard premium and for MSMEs, the interest rate would be at repo-linked lending rate of 8 per cent. "We hope the additional liquidity facility CECL will offer the requisite support to our customers to smoothly tide over the financial distress," said Vikramaditya Singh Khichi, Executive Director, BoB.

BoI has proposed a loan product COVID Emergency Support Scheme (CESS 2020) and a personal loan product COVID-19 Personal Loan, valid up to June 30. Corporates will be eligible for an additional 20 per cent of their existing current working capital limit under CESS 2020. In the case of personal loans, additional loans of up to three times last drawn salary will be made available for those with accounts in BoI, up to a maximum limit of Rs 5 lakh.

Indian Bank has come out with emergency loans for various categories of customers — corporates, MSMEs, retail borrowers, pensioners and self-help groups (SHGs). Large corporates will get additional funding of up to 10 per cent of the working capital limits with a maximum limit of Rs 100 crore. Salaried employees will get an amount equal to 20 times the latest monthly gross salary subject to a maximum of Rs 2 lakh to meet urgent medical and other expenditures. For SHGs, each member can avail of a soft loan of Rs 5,000 — Rs 1 lakh per SHG — for 36 months with six months moratorium.

Union Bank of India has launched COVID-19 Emergency Line of Credit (CELC) for existing customers. Maximum 10 per cent of the existing working capital limit will be provided under CELC, with repayment period of 36 months including maximum moratorium of 12 months at a fixed interest rate of 8 per cent.

State Bank of India (SBI) last week said it will make additional credit available under its CECL scheme to existing borrowers on an ad-hoc basis. This scheme will be in force up to June 30.

Telecom tower cos still facing operational issues in states

AASHISH ARYAN
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

DESPITE THE DoT having written to state chief secretaries and Union Territory administrators more than twice over the past week asking them to ensure that critical telecom infrastructure remains operational, several network operations and call centres as well as tower sites have been facing problems, sources across India told *The Indian Express*.

The problem is especially severe in Punjab, Maharashtra, and Karnataka, where telecom infrastructure firms are facing problems in getting curfew passes issued for their vehicles which ferry diesel for generator sets lighting up the tower, sources said. "All efforts are being made for smooth functioning of telecom services and operations in their respective states," TR Dua, director general, Tower & Infrastructure Providers Association, said.

OTT, streaming players set to limit quality to SD

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

OVER-THE-TOP (OTT) and video streaming players across the board have decided to curtail the highest video quality by suspending high definition (HD) and ultra-high definition (ultra HD) content transmission on mobile networks for the 21-day lockdown duration.

Companies such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Viacom18, MX Player and Hotstar, among others said they would transmit videos only in standard definition (SD) of up to maximum of 480p on mobile networks until April 14.

Earlier, Cellular Operators Association of India had written to the companies asking them to see if they could limit the maximum video quality during the lockdown period so that the load on the network could reduce.

Retailers getting adequate fuel supply, say OMCs

KARUNJIT SINGH
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

PETROL AND diesel pumps across the country are receiving adequate supplies of fuel despite stray incidents of local authorities stopping fuel supply vehicles, according to sources within oil marketing companies (OMCs). Petrol pumps as well as LPG retailers are among the categories exempt from having to remain closed under the 21-day national lockdown to curb the spread of coronavirus.

"Our retailers are providing 24 hours service in areas where they are permitted to by the government, and for the maximum amount of time they are allowed to remain operational in other areas," said S Sundararajan, spokesperson, BPCL.

INTERVIEW WITH YK HAMIED, CHAIRMAN, CIPLA

'Medicines are essential commodities, but difficult for staff to come due to lockdown'

A WATERSHED moment in the AIDS epidemic was 20 years ago when Cipla started manufacturing and providing a triple cocktail medicine for the virus at roughly $1 a day, a fraction of the existing treatment price at the time. When swine flu broke out, it began manufacturing Antiflu (Oseltamivir) to combat the flu. Now, in the midst of the COVID-19 storm, ANUSHKA JAGTIANI caught up with Cipla chairman YK HAMIED to find out how the company is preparing:

The PM has announced a 21-day nationwide lockdown; what do you think about the decision? What's your advice to the Indian population?

The lockdown is absolutely essential, but essential services should not suffer. Isolation is the best thing we can do now ... First, we have to work on prevention. What are the maximum precautions a person can take? Other than isolation people talk of sanitisation. I accept that. If you are sanitising your hands, why aren't you sanitising inside your nose and mouth and inside your lungs? In my personal opinion, steam inhalation twice a day is advisable, it doesn't cost anything, in addition to that gargling once a day ... is also good since alcohol kills viruses.

From Cipla's current arsenal of drugs there are quite a few which can be used to treat COVID-19. There is anecdotal evidence that HIV, malaria and swine flu medicine are effective to some extent?

Firstly, I want to point out that for 80 per cent of those who get the virus, it's very mild. Those under 20 hardly get it seriously. Of the balance 20 per cent, 15 per cent would be bad cases. For this 15 per cent, I think the drugs that we have such as Antiflu (Oseltamivir), HCQS (Hydroxichloroquine), Azee (Azithromycin), and the AIDS drugs – all of that will certainly help. The balance 5 per cent have pneumonia and serious lung infections, for that we have the Roche drug, Actemra.

Cipla is also working with the Indian government on developing another drug to help fight coronavirus. Can you tell us more about that?

There's an anti-viral drug called Favipiravir, which has seen some good results in Japan. We have done developmental work in conjunction with the Indian Institute of Chemical Technology in Hyderabad and we hope to make it available in six to eight months. It's a difficult synthesis. We have to now scale up the manufacturing, but our factories and offices are right now virtually closed. It's very difficult to initiate large-scale manufacture.

Even though medicines are coming under essential commodities, it's difficult to get staff to come as trains and buses are not running. The government must clearly identify what is essential.

At a time like this will you divert most resources to drugs that help fight coronavirus?

Apart from coronavirus, there are many chronic ailments. People need drugs all the time for asthma or diabetes. We can't just do coronavirus drugs and nothing else. There are limited resources. We owe an obligation to thousands, those who are on our inhalers, nebulisers and other medicines — we can't deprive others who suffer from other diseases.

Currently, what is Cipla's inventory like for Antiflu, Hydroxychloroquine and the HIV drugs that are being used to treat coronavirus?

We have kept Antiflu (Oseltamivir) going and have been supplying that quite a lot. Whoever wants it can get it. For Hydroxychloroquine, we are only making the tablets, active substances are made by other companies ... And those active ingredients are in short supply for Cipla. If medicines are available today, what the government could do is keep a buffer stock if they can for distribution.

Is Cipla working on repurposing other existing medicines to treat coronavirus? Do you feel the government is being quite proactive in these efforts?

Research is being conducted on repurposing and repositioning existing drugs. Yesterday, the director of Indian labs said they did a test on a drug which is a sweetening agent called stevia — and they found that stevia helps coronavirus. They also did a test on a TB drug. This is what the government of India is doing today through ICMR (Indian Council of Medical Research), they are running short clinical trials on various drugs. I just got a note that Theobromine (an alkaloid compound slightly similar to Caffeine) and Theophylline (a compound present in small quantities in tea leaves), which are used to treat respiratory diseases, are helpful in treating this virus. We have to conduct our research to see if these can be repurposed.

₹670 cr recapitalisation plan of RRBs gets Cabinet nod

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

THE UNION Cabinet on Wednesday decided to carry out recapitalisation of the regional rural banks (RRBs) so that they can continue to provide credit to agriculture sector and rural areas.

For RRBs that are unable to maintain the RBI prescribed capital to risk weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR) of 9 per cent, the Centre will provide minimum regulatory capital for one more year, till FY21. The Cabinet approved the Centre's share of Rs 670 crore, which will be half of the total recapitalisation of Rs 1,340 crore. The rest will have to be provided by sponsor banks.

The Cabinet also approved continuation of Rebate of State and Central Taxes and Levies (RoSCTL) for the textile sector from April 1, 2020 till the scheme is merged with Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP).

Capital, debt services providers to stay open

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 25

MARKETS REGULATOR Sebi said the entities providing capital and debt market services will remain operational during the 21-day nationwide lockdown, announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi as part of efforts to curb spread of COVID-19 pandemic.

Referring to an order issued by Ministry of Home Affairs, Sebi said "the order... provides that commercial and private establishment shall be closed down but that the capital and debt market service as notified by the Securities and Exchange Board of India shall be exempted from such closures."

Sebi has issued the notification with "directions for strict implementation" and shall remain in force in all parts of the country for 21 days, from March 25, 2020.

FIGHTING COVID-19

Members asked to give info on measures: WTO

New Delhi: The World Trade Organization (WTO) has asked all its members to submit information on recent trade related measures taken in response to coronavirus outbreak. India is member of the Geneva-based WTO since 1995. The global body deals with norms on global exports and imports. **PTI**

World Bank, IMF urge debt relief for poorest

New Delhi: The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Wednesday urged official bilateral creditors to provide immediate debt relief to the world's poorest countries as they grapple with severe consequences of the spreading coronavirus. **REUTERS**

THE CORONAVIRUS

Test acts

Developing and deploying tests for SARS-CoV-2 is crucial

"WE HAVE a simple message to all countries." So said Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the head of the World Health Organisation (WHO) at a news conference held in Geneva on March 16th. "Test, test, test. All countries should be able to test all suspected cases, they cannot fight this pandemic blindfolded." Without adequate testing for sars-cov-2, the novel coronavirus that is now sweeping rapidly around the world, he said, there can be no isolation of cases and the chain of infection will not be broken. As if to prove the point, a vigorous policy of testing seems to have slowed the virus's spread in South Korea quite dramatically. And in Vo, a town in Italy, thorough and repeated testing of all 3,300 inhabitants has stopped new infections entirely.

Two main types of test are used to identify viral infections: genetic and serological. The first genetic test for sars-cov-2 was created just a few days after the virus's genomic sequence was published, on January 12th, by a group of Chinese researchers. Others, developed subsequently by public health bodies around the world (and also a few companies) have their own tweaks, but their broad principle is the same.

Amplification is his only employ

Each starts with a swab taken from the back of the nose or the throat of an individual suspected of being infected, in a search for rna—for sars-cov-2 stores its genes as rna, rather than the similar molecule, dna, which animals such as human beings employ for the purpose. Because of this quirk, the first step of genetic testing is to copy any rna collected into DNA, using an enzyme called reverse transcriptase. That done, the dna is then amplified in quantity by a process called the polymerase chain reaction (PCR). The now-amplified dna is sequenced and matched (or not) against the sequence that would be expected if the starting point was rna from the virus.

Executed properly, genetic tests of this sort are extremely accurate. But they have limitations. One is that if the virus is present only at low levels—at the start or end of an infection, for example—their sensitivity drops. Also, taking a throat swab is neither simple nor foolproof. If the sampling probe goes insufficiently deeply into the orifice concerned, or fails to gather enough cells, the test might not work. Virologists say that the best sort of throat swabbing almost inevitably makes a patient gag or cough. This means that whoever is doing the swabbing needs to be protected from infection.

All this assumes that the tests themselves are designed properly. The who published protocols for a sars-cov-2 test in January, and most places which have created their own tests have based them on these instructions. In America, however, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) designed its own protocols. Tests created using these American cdc protocols, which were distributed across the country to state-level public-health laboratories, turned out to be flawed. This no doubt contributed to America's slower response to the unfolding crisis.

Medical staff in protective gear work at a drive-thru testing centre for COVID-19 in Yeungnam University Medical Center in Daegu, South Korea, March 3. *Reuters*

The actual apparatus used to carry out pcr tests of this sort—regardless of the exact bug being tested for—is commonplace in hospitals in rich countries, for it is used routinely to identify viruses from influenza to hepatitis to hiv. But the process is thereby centralised, and can be slow. It may take as long as 48 hours after a sample is collected for the result to be returned to a patient. What is needed is a test which can be conducted immediately after sampling, a process known as "near-patient testing". This involves packing everything required for a test—both the instruments and the chemicals—into a reasonably portable machine, designed specifically to look for sars-cov-2, that can be deployed away from a big hospital laboratory.

Several firms are working on such things. BioMérieux, a French biotechnology company, says it will have a test on offer by the end of March, and that it has an emergency-use authorisation for it from the Food and Drug Administration, which approves such devices for America. Cepheid, a Californian firm, will try to use a similar approval process to get its own coronavirus-specific test to market. This is a box, the size of a small laser printer, that ingests a sample, carries out an analysis and returns a result within a couple of hours.

Think global. Act local

Machines like these could be particularly valuable in places where public-health laboratories are few and far between. John Nkengasong, head of Africa cdc (an arm of the African Union unrelated to the American organisation of the same name), wrote in the Lancet in February of his concern about the spread of coronavirus across his continent, given the strong links between many African countries and China, the place where the pandemic began. One of his worries was the continent's lack of testing capacity. At the start of 2020, only the Pasteur Institute in Senegal and the National Institute for Communicable Diseases in South Africa were able to carry out full-scale genetic detection of sars-cov-2.

Subsequent training, led by the who, has now enabled scientists in around 40 African countries to diagnose infection with the virus—but this can still be done only in each country's central public-health laboratory. Near-patient testing would help a lot. And many health-care workers in Africa are already familiar with similar self-contained diagnostic machines, because they have been used extensively to track the efficacy of antiretroviral therapy for HIV.

Genetic tests identify active infections. But to understand properly how sars-cov-2 is spreading through a population it is also important to know who has been infected in the past and recovered. That is where serological tests come in. They look not for rna in swab samples, but for antibodies in blood samples. Antibodies usually hang around in a person's bloodstream well after an infection has cleared. They thus form a historical record of the pathogens people have been exposed to over the course of their lives.

Each antibody is tailored to latch onto a specific protein on the surface of a pathogen, thus disabling it. A serological test for sars-cov-2 therefore works by using such a protein—referred to as an antigen—to capture antibodies from a blood sample. Most tests under development focus on spike, a protein which protrudes prominently, and in many places, from the surface of the otherwise-spherical sars-cov-2 virus particle. In a typical test, a blood sample would be placed into a test tube coated inside with the antigen. If relevant antibodies are present, they will stick to the antigen. Depending on the design of the test, a positive result could produce a colour change or emit light to indicate success. The whole thing is reasonably cheap and could give results in minutes.

Executed properly, genetic tests of this sort are extremely accurate. But they have limitations. One is that if the virus is present only at low levels—at the start or end of an infection, for example—their sensitivity drops. Also, taking a throat swab is neither simple nor foolproof.

BioMedomics, a firm in North Carolina, for example, has designed a serological test for sars-cov-2 that needs only a few drops of blood from a finger prick, and which gives results in 15 minutes. It includes a hand-held plastic stick which looks similar to that from a pregnancy-testing kit. And, similarly to those tests, it uses coloured lines to indicate the presence of particular antibodies. The company says the test has already been widely used by China's public-health authorities, but has not yet been reviewed for use by America's fda.

Designing a serological test, then, is straightforward. Checking that it gives accurate results takes time, though. A common problem with such tests is that antibodies may cross-react, meaning that a test for sars-cov-2 might also show a positive result when it comes across a different coronavirus—the original sars, perhaps, or one of the coronaviruses that cause colds. Testing the accuracy of these tests requires trials involving hundreds of people who are known to have had sars-cov-2 infections, and hundreds of others who are known not to have been infected.

Once validated, serological tests are fast and cheap to run at scale. They have already been deployed in China, Singapore and South Korea. Data on their efficacy, however, have not yet been publicly released or independently verified. America's cdc is evaluating two serological tests and Public Health England, the relevant government body in that country, is also working on a test. Chris Whitty, England's chief medical officer, said that the introduction of such a test would be a "game changer" in the quest to track and control the spread of sars-cov-2 across the population. It cannot come fast enough.

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CORPORATE HR CHIEFS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

The importance of people people

In a pandemic, a chief people officer can make or break a company

WHEN THE financial crisis rocked the business world in 2007-09, boardrooms turned to corporate finance chiefs. A good CFO could save a company; a bad one might bury it. The covid-19 pandemic presents a different challenge—and highlights the role of another corporate function, often unfairly dismissed as soft. Never before have more firms needed a hard-headed HR boss.

The duties of chief people officers, as human-resources heads are sometimes called, look critical right now. They must keep employees healthy; maintain their morale; oversee a vast remote-working experiment; and, as firms retrench, consider whether, when and how to lay workers off. Their in-trays are bulging.

Once derided as "pay and parties" managers, by the early 1990s HR chiefs turned to compliance, keeping firms out of the courts (and papers). A subsequent string of corporate imbroglios elevated their status, notes Patrick Wright of the University of South Carolina. In the wake of executive-pay scandals at companies such as WorldCom and Tyco in the 2000s they became more involved in remuneration. A decade later bungled successions, for example at HP, a printer-maker which sacked two bosses in as many years, left them with a bigger say in filling top jobs. In the past few years they have dealt with companies' often very public "me too" troubles.

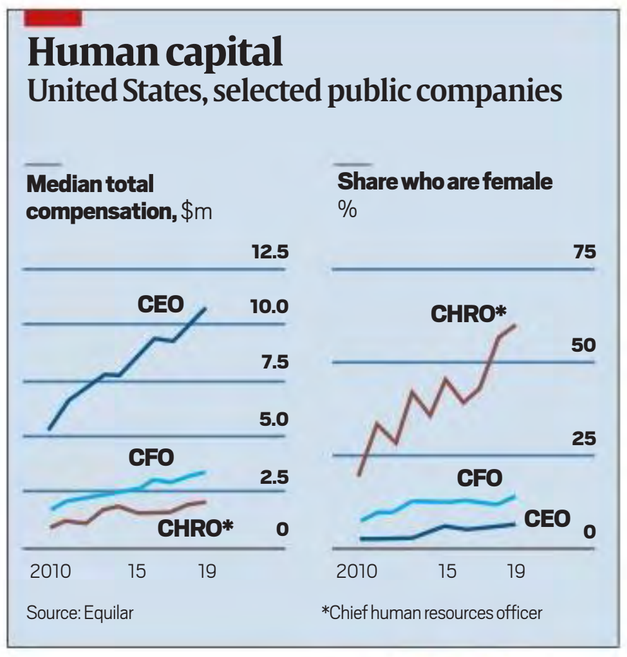
As recruiting and retaining skilled workers became chief executives' big preoccupation—four-fifths now worry about skill shortages, up from half in 2012—HR heads' desks moved ever closer to the corner office. Today many reside right next to the boss. Shareholders are inviting more outside HR chiefs to boards. In America their salaries remain lower than CFOs' but have risen 20% faster since 2010 (see chart).

A higher profile entails new expectations. HR was once the domain of history graduates and masters in labour relations; nowadays plenty hold business degrees. Although most firms recruit them from HR jobs, more are choosing outsiders or unconventional candidates. According to Russell Reynolds Associates, an executive-search firm, HR heads appointed to Fortune 100 companies between 2016 and 2019 were around 50% likelier than earlier hires to have worked abroad, in general management or in finance.

Before covid-19, tight labour markets and empowered employees pressed employers to understand how to get the most out of their staff, says Dane Holmes, a former head of human-capital management at Goldman Sachs, an investment bank, who now runs an HR-analytics firm. Diane Gherson, who runs HR at IBM, overhauled the computing giant's performance management using big data. Algorithms now challenge IBM managers' instincts on pay and promotion, and alert Ms Gherson's team when staff are at risk of fleeing (often before they realise it themselves).

The pandemic makes such "people analytics" more relevant. Beth Galetti, Ms Gherson's opposite number at Amazon, an engineer with no HR experience before joining the e-commerce titan, oversees 1,000 developers working exclusively on HR software. Amazon's pre-outbreak investment in digital induction for fresh hires is paying off. "We on-boarded 1,700 new corporate employees on [March 16th] alone," Ms Galetti reports.

People walk out of an Amazon Go store in Seattle. Amazon, Facebook, Google and Microsoft all advised Seattle employees to work at home after workers at Facebook and Amazon were diagnosed with the virus. *AP*



Covid-19 may lead more HR chiefs to adopt such systems. In the short run many have more pressing problems. Mala Singh, chief people officer at EA, a maker of video games, represents the c-suite on the team tasked with pandemic response. This now occupies 60-70% of her (long) day. Her team has been getting staff desks, computers, even noise-cancelling headphones. A bigger concern was balancing work with child care. Ms Singh told the caregivers on EA staff to take as much time as they need to adapt without using up paid leave. She is digitally monitoring employee sentiment, particularly anxiety. In a creative business like EA's, "having someone stressed about their family situation does not enable productive work", she explains.

Many companies, especially outside the knowledge economy, face tougher choices. HR leaders must strike a balance between a firm's professed purpose, which these days often involves treating staff decently, and the bottom line, observes Dan Kaplan of Korn Ferry, a consultancy. The instinct is to cut costs through mass redundancies, as some hotel chains, airlines and others have begun doing. Rather than slash payrolls indiscriminately, says Bill Schaninger of McKinsey, another consultancy, good HR heads can use the crisis to reconfigure company workflow: what needs to be done by whom, what can be automated and what requires people to share the same space. Some workers who at first appear redundant may be redeployed or reskilled.

The most far-sighted HR-ers at the most resilient companies are already starting to look beyond the flattened curve. Although not quite recruiting—times are too uncertain—Ms Gherson has begun to court talent at rival firms. Now that everyone is working from home, she says, no one is listening in on their calls. For a savvy HR chief, "it's the perfect opportunity."

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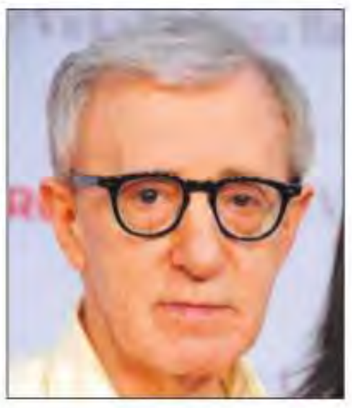
COVER UP

Italian luxury house Prada has also joined the list of other fashion brands such as Gucci and YSL, that are manufacturing face masks, given the huge need. The fashion house says it will produce 1,10,000 masks by April 6

SNAP SHOTS

Setting the Limit

YOUTUBE, THE online video-sharing platform, has reduced its default setting of viewing to standard definition, to ensure that maximum bandwidth is available globally. Earlier, the service had done the same for UK and Europe. For the next 30 days, users can manually adjust the video quality. In India, the temporarily default settings of HD and ultra-HD streaming have been changed to standard definition content at bitrates no higher than 480p on mobile networks, until April 14.



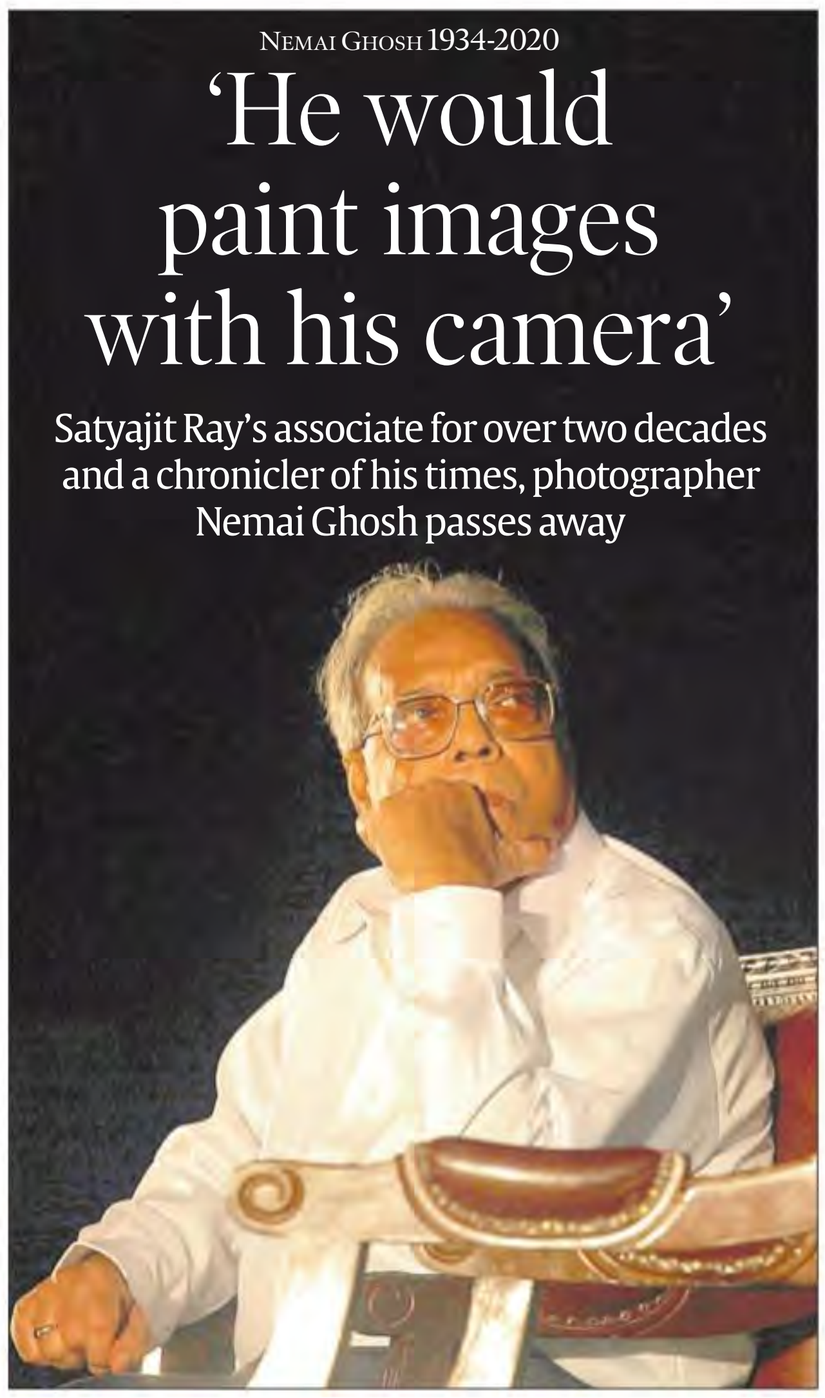
Life and Times

THE MEMOIRS of Woody Allen (*pictured*), titled *Apropos of Nothing*, has found a new publisher in the US. The 400-page autobiography was scheduled to be published by Hachette, but now has been published by Arcade Publishing, an imprint of Skyhorse Publishing. Hachette had dropped the book after allegations of abuse by Allen of his daughter surfaced. "The book is a candid and comprehensive personal account by Woody Allen of his life," read a statement by Arcade, "ranging from his childhood in Brooklyn through his acclaimed career in film, theatre, television, print and standup comedy."

NEMAI GHOSH 1934-2020

'He would paint images with his camera'

Satyajit Ray's associate for over two decades and a chronicler of his times, photographer Nemai Ghosh passes away



VANDANA KALRA

WITH A camera gifted by a friend, when photographer Nemai Ghosh visited the sets of filmmaker Satyajit Ray's *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* in Burdwan in 1969, little did he know that this would be the beginning of over two decades of association. The photographs taken by Ghosh were to reach Ray through art director and production designer Banshi Chandragupta, prompting Ray to comment how Ghosh had shot them exactly the way he would have.

The incident was recalled by Ghosh in an interview to *The Indian Express* in 2013. Best known as a chronicler of Ray's life and works, Ghosh breathed his last in Kolkata yesterday, at 86. "Unlike all of us who see just through our eyes, he was also able to see through the lens of the camera. His images, even though frozen in time, were always dynamic. Till the very last, I am told, he continued to take pictures," says Pramod Kumar KG, Managing Director of Eka Archiving. He curated his exhibition "Nemai Ghosh – Satyajit Ray and Beyond" at Delhi Art Gallery in 2013.

Nemai Ghosh (left); his photograph of Satyajit Ray *Express Archives*

An aspiring actor in the late '60s, the chance meeting with Ray was to change the course of Ghosh's career. In the following years, he was part of every Ray movie as his unit's stills photographer, from the more well-known films such as *Shatranj Ke Khiladi* and *Ghare Baire*, to lesser-known documentaries such as *Sikkim* and *Bala*. In the '80s, Ghosh travelled to Paris and met Henri Cartier-Bresson, where he was introduced by the latter as "Satyajit Ray's photographer". "I can't think of any other personality who has been documented so extensively by one person. He was with Ray throughout," says Ashish Anand, Managing Director and CEO, DAG, who acquired Ghosh's archive, consisting of more than one lakh photographs, in 2006.

Ghosh also worked with other filmmakers, including MS Sathyu, Tapan Sinha, Gautam Ghose and Ritwik Ghatak, and travelled across India to photograph tribal communities in Bastar, Chhattisgarh and Kutch. He also documented theatre in Bengal. "Most people don't realise that his first love was street theatre and theatre performances in Bengal. In addition to them being remarkable photographs, they are also a chronicler of Indian theatre post-independence," says Kumar.

Art critic and curator Ina Puri recalls working on him on the 2007 book *Faces of Indian Art: Through the Lens of Nemai Ghosh*. "I was most inspired by his positivity. Despite his failing health, he was forever ready to pick up the camera and create magic. You forgot his age when you saw his enthusiasm... He did not go to art school to learn photography but he learnt as he was shooting. He had some outstanding work already but he was constantly trying to better himself. He would paint images with his camera," says Puri.

How to stock an Indian pantry during a lockdown

The essentials that go into an Indian kitchen, and how to make best use of them

TORA AGARWALA

"Panic," says food and travel writer, Roshni Bajaj Sanghvi, "is the last reaction you need in this situation." The Mumbai-based Sanghvi is referring to the situation caused by COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown. As essential supplies fly off the shelves faster than you can say 'Corona', Sanghvi, a graduate of the French Culinary Institute, New York, says that a little thought and planning is enough to set up a well-stocked pantry and tide over these troubled times. Here are some tips on how to stock up:

Fruits and vegetables can be pureed, frozen and stored

Basic, nutrient-dense foods

Apart from rice and dal essentials, Sanghvi recommends keeping rajma (kidney beans) and chana (chickpeas) handy. "If nothing else, these can always be made into a chaat, as a snack," she says. She also suggests sprouting a lot of dal. "They make for great vegetable replacements, especially now, when fresh greens might not be as easily available," she says.

Must-have masalas

An India kitchen cannot function without a set of basic masalas: turmeric, coriander, chilli and asafoetida, as well as whole mustard and whole jeera. "But given the diversity of India, every community will stock their own spices and masalas," she says. Sanghvi also recommends a couple of easy masala mixes, like chana masala and tandoori masala, to keep handy for quick cooking. "You can boil chana, cut some tomatoes and add chhole masala. Or, you can cut potatoes, onions, tomatoes and add some tandoori masala," she says.

Puree fruits and freeze

Fresh vegetables might not be easily accessible during the lockdown, so Sanghvi suggests opting for 'hardy' ones, which do not perish easily. These include, apart from onion and potatoes, arbi (taro root), beetroot, etc. "Arbi is fantastic — it stays forever and is so versatile," she says. Fruits and vegetables can be pureed, frozen and stored too.

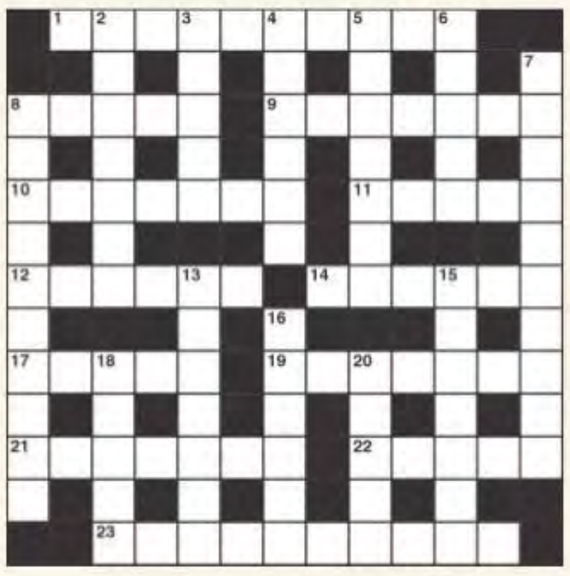
> **For me, being enclosed in my apartment means one thing: cooking, experimenting with flavours I had always wondered about, cuisines I have been curious about**
>
> ROSHNI BAJAJ SANGHVI
> FOOD WRITER

Sanghvi has a number of suggestions: tomatoes can be puréed and frozen, taken out in helpings as and when required; bananas can be mashed and frozen, then had with yoghurt; apples can be stewed with jaggery, put in a jar, and had with rotis.

Pots and Pans

For many who depend on take-out, the lockdown has forced them into the uncharted territory of a kitchen. While it may seem daunting in the beginning, Sanghvi says that for basic functioning, one just needs three-four things: something flat, a tawa or skillet, to make rotis, dosas, or to reheat items; saucepans of different shapes; a couple of ladles and flippers to flip omelettes; a kettle to make tea. For many, it can be a great time to experiment. "For me, being enclosed in my apartment means one thing: cooking, experimenting with flavours I had always wondered about, cuisines I have been curious about."

CROSSWORD 4075



ACROSS

1 Shaw's captain makes senior officers jump (10)
8 A charming French accent (5)
9 He often resorts to a piece in colour (7)
10 They sponge spoiled cards for example (7)
11 Directed me to help out (5)
12 Filled perhaps, or not filled (3-3)
14 One who foils trespassers? (6)
17 Recorded Edward as missing? (5)
19 As he got found out, he was taken prisoner (7)
21 It's not slow to put a thought into words (7)
22 Doubled fighting power (5)
23 Opposition to mixed ancestries (10)

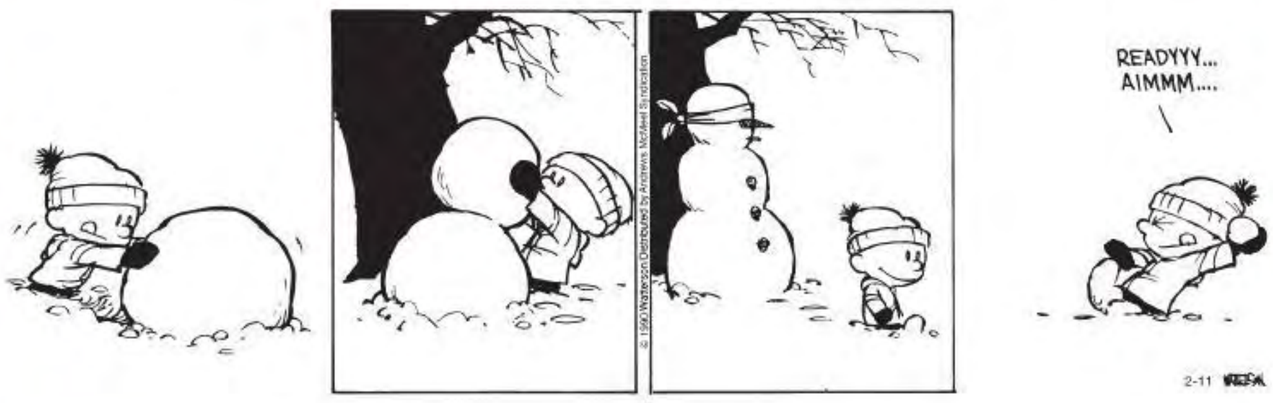
Down

2 Circle round the Spanish (7)
3 Dramatic episode is witnessed, we hear (5)
4 Bet he's in command (6)
5 A shade of grievance (7)
6 A starting point, that's a fact (5)
7 The unusually stern needs of affection (10)
8 He has lots to sell (10)
13 Descriptive of an eternity ring? (7)
15 Book for a traditional sporting event (7)
16 Charles starts writing for openings (6)
18 Light or sound recorder (5)
20 Is of a capital disposition (5)

Solutions Crossword 4074: Across: 1 Refuse, 4 Affair, 9 Vivaldi, 10 Racks, 11 Agree, 12 Emotion, 13 Cutting wind, 18 Heiress, 20 Truce, 22 Rooks, 23 Earplug, 24 Temple, 25 Editor. Down: 1 Reveal, 2 Fever, 3 Salient, 5 Forgo, 6 Auction, 7 Rising, 8 Hide and seek, 14 Uniform, 15 Watered, 16 Thirst, 17 Ledger, 19 Easel, 21 Unlit.

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis

CALVIN & HOBBES by Bill Watterson



MARVIN by Tom Armstrong

DAY TODAY

BY PETER VIDAL

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)
Nobody can force you to accept situations which you feel would be a threat to your security or which go against your interests. However, you must have a proper regard for other people's real beliefs and feelings. Stop, pause for thought and try to sympathise with their hopes and wishes.

TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21)
There are a number of planetary patterns which will be important if you are to keep your spirits aloft, so there seems to be little point in making life more difficult than need be. Give yourself an easy ride and you'll learn valuable lessons about how to manage your personal affairs in the future.

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21)
The fact is that partners or associates may be unwilling to part with certain information or let you in on a secret. There is no need to feel threatened, though, as all will become clear before long. I know you're impatient, but events are moving faster than they sometimes seem.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23)
Recent unexpected developments at work have done little to damage your confidence. In fact you will soon be riding on the crest of a wave, buoyed up by respect and praise from your peers. Everything depends on your sense of timing over the next week.

LEO (July 24 - Aug 23)
Take what is on offer and be grateful that the bad feeling of recent days finally seems to be coming to an end. You have every right to expect an explanation of recent behaviour even though none may be forthcoming. What I mean is that a partner should apologise, but whether they do is an entirely different matter.

VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sep 23)
The moment has come to take expert advice on a bureaucratic, legal or business matter. What you want to do now is consolidate all that you have worked so hard to achieve. You've got a difficult task — to set yourself free from one commitment, while hanging on to another.

LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)
There have been times when you would have been quite justified in making a song and dance but, right now, you may do better to turn the other cheek. After all, you are not entirely blameless; the present is the sum total of all your past actions.

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)
You seem to have been caught in the crossfire recently and may have begun to doubt the sense of a number of current endeavours. However, some of the criticism you have been subjected to have been misplaced and unfair — but that doesn't make it any the less hurtful.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 22)
Imminent planetary movements raise the need to settle matrimonial or partnership affairs sooner rather than later. What took place earlier may have hurt your pride, but should not prevent you from offering an olive branch, now. You'll get all the credit for restoring goodwill.

CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)
You have perfectly valid reasons to take a step back and concentrate on conserving your energies. There will be time enough over the coming months for pushing yourself to the limit and achieving your many ambitions. Just for now, take a look at your spiritual values.

AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)
Ensure that a partner or relation can't take the wind out of your sails today. You can be certain that you have honoured all your commitments and fulfilled your obligations. However, a pressing financial problem may still require urgent attention — there's a problem to patch up.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)
Take no notice of what appears to be going on behind the scenes, for those who are apparently threatening your position will receive their just desserts in good time. There is little that can go wrong with your plans just as long as you take every step in the proper order.

JUMBLED WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given quip.

If you want to keep something concealed from your ___, don't disclose it to your ___. - Solomon ibn Gabirol (5,..,6)

CMEEE

AMENDE

BKINR

LORUFY

SOLUTION: EMCEE, BRINK, DEMEAN, FLOURY
Answer: If you want to keep something concealed from your **enemy**, don't disclose it to your **friend**. - Solomon ibn Gabirol

SUDOKU 4160

Difficulty Level 2s
Instructions
To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

Difficulty Level
1s = Very easy; 2s = Easy; 3s = Medium; 4s = Hard; 5s = Very Hard; 6s = Genius

1	5				9		8	
		4					3	7
	2		7	4				
	8	2	5					4
			6		4			
7					2	8	6	
				7	6		5	
9	7					6		
	1		8				2	3

SOLUTION SUDOKU 4159

9	5	1	7	8	4	6	3	2
4	6	2	5	9	3	8	1	7
8	7	3	1	2	6	4	9	5
5	2	7	6	1	9	3	4	8
6	1	4	3	5	8	7	2	9
3	9	8	2	4	7	1	5	6
7	8	5	4	3	2	9	6	1
1	4	9	8	6	5	2	7	3
2	3	6	9	7	1	5	8	4

I just think the Premier League should be void. I know there's going to be a lot of Liverpool fans going: 'oh, Rio, just because you used to play for Man United.' I just don't see a way that can be done where health isn't compromised."

RIO FERDINAND

Pulling the plug: The WHO and why behind the Games rescheduling

From insisting the Games will go on to setting a four-week deadline to decide fate before eventually delaying, the IOC has rapidly changed its stance on Tokyo 2020 following the outbreak of the pandemic. Here are the reasons that led to the postponement. MIHIR VASAVDA explains.

WHO's 'alarming information'

IOC president Thomas Bach said government guidelines, imposing restrictions on daily life till April, and even USA president Donald Trump's target of lifting restrictions by 'middle of April' was among the reasons he waited to postpone the Tokyo Games. Amid mounting pressure, he then called an emergency meeting of the IOC executive board on Sunday, which agreed to open discussions with Japan over postponement and scheduled a call for Tuesday. In the hours after the IOC meeting, further "alarming information" emerged about the rapid global spread of the virus. This development, combined with Monday's WHO warning that the spread was "accelerating," meant the IOC opted to push for consensus to postpone the Games. The WHO's advice, Bach said, 'was a crucial moment' in their decision making.

Empty seats

The possibility of holding the Olympics behind closed doors was never seriously considered but there was an underlying concern of the stadiums not being filled to capacity during the Games. "'Hide the empty seats' is a popular dictate in the TV sports industry, something executives remind producers and directors about all the time. It's based on the idea that if only so many fans turned up in the stands, why would a viewer bother to watch?" the Associated Press noted. The IOC, many believe, would have found it difficult to allay the safety concerns and there was a risk that several athletes, officials, spectators and even sponsors would have stayed away from the Olympics if it would have gone ahead as scheduled. A poorly attended event would have reflected badly on the hosts as well.

Playing in an empty stadium was one of the reasons behind the postponement.

Qualification quagmire

With nearly every sport suspending play in the wake of the pandemic, more than two-thirds of the 11,000 potential Olympians from 200 countries had not yet qualified. With a majority of athletes unable to train, and given that there is still no clarity as to when the situation will get normal for play to resume, there were suggestions that quotas would be distributed according to the latest world rankings or, in some cases, based performances in the previous Olympics. That would have made the entire process arbitrary and created further complications. Many even argued that it would dilute the playing field. Postponing the Games by a year gives the respective sports federations enough time to work out strategies to finish their qualification process. More light on this is expected to be shed on Thursday, when the IOC holds a conference call with international federations.

Abe's crowning glory

The Games, many commentators say, were expected to be the 'crowning glory' of Shinzo Abe's nine-year period as Japan's Prime Minister. He is Japan's longest-serving Prime Minister in history and has actively promoted the Tokyo Olympics, even dressing up as Super Mario in the closing ceremony of the Rio Games. Like they used the 1964 Games to rightful place on the international stage following the ignominy of Second World War, Abe -- according to The Times -- 'had been banking on Tokyo 2020 to mark a similar moment of recovery from the tsunami and nuclear disaster in 2011'. Abe was faced with the choice of delaying the Games or cancelling, which would have caused a massive economic impact.

As per the rules of his political party, Abe is due to retire in September 2021. "Is this why he and Mr Bach agreed that the postponed Games will be held no later than the 'summer' of next year?" The Times wondered.

Calendar congestion: The logistical nightmare that could be 2021

Lionel Messi will end up playing the COPA and WC qualifiers in 2021.

WITH THE sporting calendar for the 2020 season being disrupted by the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, several major events of this year have been shifted to the following season. Only, the 2021 calendar is already packed with major sporting events, some of which will have to be moved to make way for the postponed 2020 tournaments. **SHAHID JUDGE** looks into the window of June to August, where a majority of these events are set to take place.

THE ADDITIONS

Three major events from the 2020 year have been postponed to the following year. The Copa America, South America's continental football championship, which was to be hosted in Argentina and Colombia this time, will take place from June 11 to July 11. On the same dates, what was to the Euro 2020, or the European Championships, will take place in 12 different countries across Europe.

Meanwhile, the biggest spectacle of 2020, the Olympic Games in Tokyo, has also been shifted to the summer of 2021. Though the new dates for the Games have not yet been confirmed, it is assumed that it may take place in the same window that was prepared for it in 2020 – July 24 to August 9.

COLLATERAL DAMAGE

Now that the Olympics will take place in 2021 (assuming between July 24 – August 9), four major events will be forced to reschedule. The World Aquatics Championships were originally scheduled for July 16 to August 1 in Fukuoka, Japan, and the World Athletics Championships were to be held in the United States from August 6 to August 15. Both these events, however, will have to be moved as all the big names in the two disciplines will be competing at the Olympics in Tokyo at the same time. Similarly, the Euro Hockey Nations, which was to take place in The Netherlands in August, will have to change its dates since the major hockey nations will be competing in Tokyo at the time.

From July 7 to August 1, England was to host the Women's 2021 European Championships, but now that the men's edition from 2020 will be held at the same time, and since women's senior teams will be competing at the Olympics, the women's Euros will have to be rescheduled.

THE UNAFFECTED

Tennis Grand Slams French Open (May 23 to June 6), Wimbledon (June 28 to July 11) and the US Open (August 30 to September 12) will take place in the June to August window, without any hindrance from the shifted 2020 events. The United States will also host the 2021 CONCACAF Gold Cup (continental championships) from July 2 to July 25. In September, the European Basketball Championships, or EuroBasket, will take place from September 2 to 19 in Germany, Italy, Georgia and Czech Republic.

The latter nation, however, may opt out of hosting the event as the country is contemplating shutting its borders for two years as a precaution against the coronavirus. Meanwhile, no dates have been fixed yet for the men's boxing World Championship, which is to be held in New Delhi, but the event in the past has been held in the past between August and November.

Spring in their step

IOC has left the door open for the Games to be staged in spring instead of the normal summer slot

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
TOKYO, MARCH 25

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.

It is not even clear exactly when the rescheduled Games will take place. International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach on Wednesday left the door open for them to be staged in the spring instead of the normal summer slot. "This is not restricted just to the summer months," Bach said in a conference call.

"All the options are on the table, before and including the summer of 2021." In a move symbolic of the difficulties, Olympic countdown clocks in Tokyo switched from displaying the number of days to go to simply show today's date and the time.

"It's like taking seven years to build the world's biggest jigsaw puzzle and, with just one piece to go, having to start again but now with less time to finish," tweeted Craig Spence, spokesman for the International Paralympic Committee.

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. The delayed event -- still to be called Tokyo 2020 -- will now be a "testament to mankind's defeat of the new virus", said Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. He repeated that message in a call with US President Donald Trump, in which the leaders agreed the Games would be "proof that humans have beaten the new coronavirus", a Japanese government spokesman said. The Olympic flame "could become the light at the end of the tunnel in which the world finds itself at present", Japan and the IOC said in a joint statement.

IOC chief Thomas Bach said that a task-force, named 'Here We Go', has been created to examine the scheduling woes. *File*

Way bigger than me: Bach

The quadrennial Olympics, which has weathered boycotts, terrorist attacks and protests, is the highest-profile event affected by the virus that has killed thousands and postponed or cancelled sports competitions worldwide. The IOC had come under fire for appearing out of touch by sticking to its schedule, but it eventually bowed to the inevitable, citing the need to protect the health of athletes. Bach said the postponement was "about protecting human life", with more than 11,000 athletes expected along with 90,000 volunteers, and hundreds of thousands of officials and spectators from all over the world.

He said 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 by all of the 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".

Spring of hope

The Olympic torch relay, due to begin from Fukushima Thursday, has also been postponed but the flame will stay in the area until it is safe to begin. Organisers have to wrestle with a host of unanswered questions: are the venues still available? What to do with ticket-holders and volunteers? How to fit the Games into a crowded 2021 sporting schedule? The athlete's village was due to be renovated into more than 4,000 luxury apartments, hundreds of which have already been snapped up. Tens of thousands of hotel rooms will need to be cancelled and rebooked. "I cannot tell you what the situation is," Bach said when asked about how the postponement might affect the village.

"It's one of the many thousand of questions the taskforce has to address." Japan and the organising committee were spending $12.6 billion on the Games and experts say they may need to spend around half that again to rearrange the event -- before hopefully recouping the losses when the Olympics are held.

Bach, who was part of West Germany's gold medal-winning foil fencing team at the 1976 Olympics, added: "Of course, I'd be very, very delighted if we could have the Olympic Village in the traditional form. Everybody who has once lived in an Olympic Village knows that this is the real Olympic experience, that this is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Living under one roof with the whole world, sharing your meals together, celebrating together, discussing together, and forming this unique Olympic unity." Bach concluded by saying: "We are at an unprecedented situation and have an unprecedented challenge. "We have to find the best possible situation under the circumstances that we are living in."

Tokyo 2020 president Yoshiro Mori, an 82-year former prime minister and cancer survivor, pointed to his own health battles as inspiration for the difficult times ahead. "We have no choice but to have hope. I myself suffered cancer... But I was saved by a new drug. I am here, allowed to live. "Let us hope for these things."

A taskforce, named 'Here We Go', had been created to examine the issue, Bach added, saying the first port of call would be with the 33 international federations, likely starting with a conference call on Thursday. "The first step, we have to see with them, to see what the options are. We also have to take into account the sports calendar around the Olympic Games," Bach said.

Pandit bids bye to Vidarbha, next stop MP

DEVENDRA PANDEY
MUMBAI, MARCH 25

CHANDRAKANT PANDIT, one of the most successful coaches in domestic cricket, will now coach Madhya Pradesh in the coming season after three years with Vidarbha. Under Pandit's tenure, Vidarbha won Ranji Trophy twice and also triumphed in the Irani Trophy. He has played for Madhya Pradesh as professional player in the 90's.

The former India wicketkeeper batsman Pandit had earlier coached Mumbai and Kerala. Pandit confirmed the news and talked about how the former India wicketkeeper Kiran More helped him in moving to the new role with MP. "I have decided to move on. I don't want to be in a place more than three years. My friend Kiran More knew that I won't be continuing for Vidarbha from this season onwards. He told MP about it and they offered a coach job which I accepted for two years," Pandit told The Indian Express.

Pandit known for his old-school-taskmaster coaching style has made it clear to MP that he will lead a restructuring of their team and the association has given him the free hand to execute his plans. "I have told them my expectations and how I want to go about it. MP is similar to Vidarbha. When I took job of Vidarbha they too were trying to make a mark in domestic cricket. Twice we won Ranji Trophy though this season things didn't go as we expected. MP has a young team and it will be great motivation to work forward," Pandit added, who currently is in lockdown in his village in Ratnagiri due to the novel coronavirus.

"The boys are good and it's just following right process. I like to coach young motivated boys, give them the goals and direct them how to achieve those goals. When I took on Vidarbha nobody expected that we will win Ranji Trophy and that too twice back-to-back years. Credit should also go to cricket association in Vidarbha and to former player Prashant Vaidya, who is in the association, for showing trust in me."

Chandrakant Pandit was the pivotal force behind Vidarbha's Ranji double. *File*

Pandit has built a reputation for being a coach who is a taskmaster and ticks all the right boxes: strategy, discipline, old-school work ethic, unorthodox methods to get the best out of players. Those in the domestic circuit know that only potential downside of Pandit is that some players might not like his hard style initially and it might lead to a few disagreements. As long as the association and players are ready for such an approach, he usually leads them to success. Some of Pandit's methods are the same irrespective of the teams. Like he did with Mumbai, he also formed various player-led committees for Vidarbha to take care of entertainment, food, fitness, travel— players were deputed to take ownership and it helped in the bonding process.

More coaches seek switch

More state associations will be searching for new coaches. Vidarbha for starters has to find a replacement for Pandit. MCA will also be looking to move on from Vinayak Samant and hunt for a new coach. Sanath Kumar, a very successful domestic coach with good track record across teams, has informed the Baroada Cricket Association (BCA) last season that he won't be continuing due to health issues. Last season during Ranji Trophy game, Sanath had suffered a heart attack and rushed to hospital.

Asian Games medal winning footballer Latif passes away at 73

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KOLKATA, MARCH 25

FORMER INDIA midfielder Abdul Latif, who was also a key member of bronze medal winning team at the 1970 Bangkok Asian Games died in Guwahati on Monday. He is survived by a son and two daughters. He was 73

"He was suffering from old age related problems and he breathed his last on Monday evening. His last rites were performed on Tuesday," a relative confirmed.

Latif was born in Mysore, Karnataka before making Guwahati his home. He was also represented India in Asia Cup Qualifier in 1968 in Myanmar and Merdeka Cup in 1969 in Kuala Lumpur. But his biggest glory was being part of the last national football team that had a podium finish at the continental games. Latif could play on both wings as well as central midfield as he represented Mohammedan Sporting from 1963-1967 and later took over as coach.

After retirement, Latif settled in Guwahati and began his career as a coach, under his tutelage Assam won the junior and sub-junior national championships. He also coached Mohammedan Sporting Club from 1978 to 1980.

Earlier, he played for State Bank of Hyderabad in the A-Division Rahim League here. Later, he moved to Bengaluru where he played for HAL before settling down in Guwahati. "It is sad to hear that Abdul Latif is no more. His contribution to Indian Football will never be forgotten. I share the grief," said All India Football Federation (AIFF) president Praful Patel.

Latif was a versatile midfielder and could play on the fla nks as well.

'Mental health is so important right now...'

Phelps says some athletes 'may have trouble' coping with an unprecedented one-year postponement of the Tokyo Olympic Games

ASSOCIATED PRESS
NEW YORK, MARCH 25

MICHAEL PHELPS has been open about his mental health struggles, even as he became the most decorated athlete in Olympic history. Now, with the Tokyo Games on hold because of the coronavirus, the retired swimming great worries that some athletes may have trouble coping with this unprecedented postponement.

"It's a total bamboozle," Phelps told *The Associated Press* on Tuesday.

"There's such a wave of emotions. I can't imagine what these athletes are going through right now."

In an telephone interview from his Arizona home, where he is largely hunkered down like so many others around the globe, Phelps gave reluctant praise to the International Olympic Committee for putting off the games until 2021 while the world deals with the pandemic.

"Honestly, my first thought was I was relieved," he said. "Now, there's more of a chance that we can beat this thing and do what we need to do to save as many lives as possible. I was happy to see them logically making a smart decision. It's just frustrating it took this long."

With the anticipated Olympic postponement now official, Phelps turned his attention to the world-class athletes who must deal with another jarring change to their preparations, even as they were still processing the cutbacks in training and lack of human contact stemming from worldwide efforts to curtail the virus.

Since his retirement in 2016, following an unprecedented Olympic career that produced 23 golds and 28 medals overall, Phelps has talked of suffering from depression and anxiety. He even had thoughts of suicide at his lowest points. He knows this is a challenging time for those who had their sights on the Olympics, which were scheduled to open on July 24 but now have been delayed by up to a year.

"As athletes, we're so regimented," Phelps said. "At this point, all the work is done. We're just fine-tuning the small things to get to this point. Now it's like, 'Oh ... we're not competing.' All these emotions start flaring up. I really think mental health is so important right now."

Phelps said the key to coping is keeping things as simple as possible. "Just control what you can control," he said.

"We're in such uncharted waters. We're getting all these big questions thrown at us: What if? What if? What if? It's so hard to understand. We're having a hard time just wrapping our head around it."

Thinking back to his own career, Phelps said he probably could have coped with a postponement just fine during the prime of his career because he had such steely focus on his goals.

But he probably would have struggled with a delay leading up to the 2012 London Games, when his motivation was lagging and he wasn't even sure he wanted to compete. "I was barely holding it together by the seams," Phelps recalled. "I don't know if I could've made it another year."

He retired after London, only to return to the pool less than two years later with a new-found passion that carried him to five more golds and a silver in Rio.

Phelps said he will gladly offer counseling and a shoulder to lean on to any athlete who is struggling over these next weeks and months.

"Some guys have already reached out, asking questions about what they can do," he said. "Anything I can do to support my friends and others who want to try to accomplish their goals and dreams, I'll do it. This is such a big time for mental health. It's more important now than it ever was before. I hope everybody is taking care of themselves mentally and physically at this time. I'm always available and open at any hour to anybody who needs help."

Now 34, Phelps is happily married with three young sons. Though he has no plans for another comeback, he is still involved in the sport through a swimwear company and other business ventures.

He was looking forward to attending the Olympics as a spectator for the first time. He hasn't been to Japan since his breakthrough performance at the 2001 world championships.

"I'm somebody who truly loves and enjoys watching the sport at the highest level," Phelps said. "I obviously know what it takes to get there. I was truly looking forward to seeing how everybody was doing." He still plans to be at the Olympics. But, like everyone else, his plans are hold.

Michael Phelps gave reluctant praise to the International Olympic Committee for putting off the Games until 2021 while the world deals with the pandemic. *AP*

"At this point, all the work is done. We're just fine-tuning the small things to get to this point. Now it's like, 'Oh ... we're not competing.' All these emotions start flaring up. I really think mental health is so important right now."

MICHAEL PHELPS,
OLYMPIC WINNER

Federer steps in, donates $1m to vulnerable Swiss

'NOBODY SHOULD BE LEFT BEHIND'
Tennis great Roger Federer 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), saying nobody should be left behind as Switzerland battles against the global pandemic. According to official figures reported to the WHO, Switzerland has the ninth-highest number of infections in the world, with more than 8,800 positive cases and 86 deaths as of Monday. "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," world number four Federer, 38, said on Instagram. "Our contribution is just a start. We hope that others might join in supporting more families in need. Together we can overcome this crisis! Stay healthy!"

FREE TICKETS FOR MEDICAL WORKERS
Premier League teams Brighton and Bournemouth have become the first clubs to sign up to a campaign to make 100,000 free tickets available to medical workers on the front line during the coronavirus outbreak. The initiative was conceived by executives at Brighton, which has committed to giving National Health Service workers 1,000 tickets for matches and has invited other clubs from the Premier League, English Football League, Scotland and Northern Ireland to join in. Bournemouth immediately followed suit, offering "a minimum of" 1,000 tickets.

FIFA MONITORING THREAT IN INDIA
FIFA said it is monitoring the developments arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic in India, which is scheduled to host the Women's U-17 World Cup in November. FIFA said it is also exploring "alternative solutions". "FIFA is currently monitoring developments regarding the coronavirus outbreak in India to decide the future of the U-17 Women's World Cup which is slated to be held in the country in November," the apex body said. "With public health and safety in mind, FIFA is also working with the Local Organising Committee to identify potential impact on preparations for the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup India 2020, and finding alternative solutions to upcoming events that were planned in the lead up to the tournament," it added.

SPANISH FEDERATION OFFERS LOANS FOR SMALLER CLUBS
The Spanish football federation has announced measures to help smaller clubs financially. The measures include a loan of $4.3 million to help pay the salaries of players and coaches. The loan will be available to clubs from the third and fourth divisions, and futsal clubs. It can be paid back without interest over two seasons. The federation also says it will negotiate a credit line for teams in the first and second division. Federation president Luis Rubiales says the federation's doctors will be made available to help fight the coronavirus pandemic, and the national team's hotel can be used as a hospital if necessary.

...but British stars relieved: 'What is another year?'

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
LONDON, MARCH 25

BRITISH OLYMPIC gold medal hopefuls Katerina Johnson-Thompson, Adam Peaty and Dina Asher-Smith expressed their relief after Tokyo 2020 was delayed until next year on Tuesday due to the COVID-19 pandemic. All three world champions had expressed their frustration at the delay of a decision on the Games, while countries across the globe imposed stringent restrictions on movement and travel to control the spread of the virus.

"A lot of athletes can breathe," Olympic 100m breast stroke champion Peaty told *BBC Sport*. "We felt under pressure to train and compete. "The decision from the IOC (International Olympic Committee) lifts that release that we don't have to be in shape over summer and we don't have to put unnecessary risk on others."

Johnson-Thompson is hoping to add to her world championship gold in the heptathlon last year with Olympic gold after missing out on the podium at Rio 2016. "Waited 8 years for this, what's another 1 in the grand scheme of things?" Johnson-Thompson posted on Twitter. "As an athlete, it's heartbreaking news about the olympics being postponed until 2021, but it's for all the right reasons and the safety of everyone! Hope everyone keeps safe."

Asher-Smith, Britain's world 200m champion, posted on Instagram: "#Tokyo2021, Same fire, new dates. Stay at home and stay safe everyone." Double Olympic triathlon champion Alistair Brownlee also welcomed the certainty of knowing the outcome after the IOC said as recently as Sunday a decision could take up to four weeks. "Evidently a very tough decision for the IOC and other stakeholders to make but in my opinion the right one," said Brownlee.

"Both, for the message it sends to people around the world battling with the virus and to give clarity to athletes attempting to prepare." Retired British track cyclist Callum Skinner, who fronts competitor-led movement Global Athlete, said the right decision had been made. "Tokyo 2021 presents an amazing opportunity to host a full Games celebrating the world (hopefully) entering the "post-pandemic" phase," he tweeted. Skinner, who won gold and silver medals at the 2016 Olympics and is a member of the British Olympic Association's (BOA) athletes' commission questioned the IOC's approach.

"Questions have to be asked of Thomas Bach's 'full steam ahead' policy. This saga has endangered athletes, public health and damaged the Olympic movement. What's more he wanted this limbo to continue for 4 weeks."

British Rowing welcomed the "certainty" over the Games. "We are now able to start planning how we best support our athletes, coaches and all our programme, both within British Rowing and as a wider group of Olympic and Paralympic sports in the UK," the organisation tweeted. British Paralympic discus thrower Dan Greaves tweeted: "Absolutely the right decision to postpone both the Olympics & @Paralympics by a year. Health comes first & with that, athletes can now take care of there's to make sure they are able to make the hard work count!!"

COVID-19 FALLOUT

Amidst shutdown, Belarus footballers play on: 'Why not?' ask authorities

RORY SMITH
MARCH 25

THERE WERE a handful of thermal-imaging cameras outside Dynamo Brest's stadium on Friday, intended to pluck out and turn away anyone showing signs of fever. Both Brest and its opponent, Smolevichi, had been given hygiene advice: wash your hands with soap, avoid hugging. The Ministry of Health had decreed that the stadium must be disinfected twice a day.

Other than that, though, the opening game of the Belarusian Premier League season would go ahead as planned. It would be followed by a full slate of games on Saturday and Sunday. There would be no restrictions on fans coming to watch. Unlike everyone else, almost everywhere else, Belarus had decided just to play on.

As far as the country's football authorities were concerned, there was no reason not to play. The ABFF — the governing body of the sport in Belarus — had seen the measures taken by other European leagues in light of the mounting coronavirus pandemic: first playing games behind closed doors, and then cancelling or postponing leagues and competitions entirely.

It had concluded the decisions had little or no effect on preventing fans from gathering or the virus from spreading, and that the situation in Belarus did not warrant the cancellation of the new season.

"Is there a state of emergency declared in our country?" Vladimir Bazanov, the head of the ABFF, said in an interview with the sports website Tribuna. "There is no critical condition, so they decided that we are starting the championship in a timely manner."

That call has left Belarus as an outlier in European football. Every other league on the continent, and nearly all others around the world, have been placed on indefinite hiatus. As the scale and severity of the coronavirus pandemic has become clear, in fact, most sports in most countries across the world have done the same, shuttering their doors until it is safe — for players and for fans — to reconvene.

The response in Belarus, on the other hand, has been skeptical. While much of Europe remains in lockdown — entire cities deserted, whole populations instructed to stay at home, often under threat of arrest — Belarus has yet to implement any severe measures. Officially, it has recorded 81 coronavirus cases, though the government has claimed 22 of those have recovered.

Though the country's president, Aleksandr Lukashenko — widely regarded as the last dictator in Europe — has advised citizens to observe social distancing protocols and not to visit anywhere that might be crowded, he has also suggested the virus is a "psychosis."'"It is yet another psychosis, which will benefit some people and harm others," he said last week. "I am absolutely convinced that panic can hurt us more than the virus itself. That's what concerns me the most." Lukashenko later suggested that coronavirus was "part of a plan to turn everything upside down," and has variously named vodka, saunas and working on a farm as potential cures for it.

In Belarus, where the country's president has called the coronavirus a "psychosis," some fans took more precautions than others. *Reuters*

As he explained why Belarus chose to press ahead with its football season, Bazanov's rhetoric echoed his president's. "What is growing right now is some strange stuffing that affects people psychologically," he said. "It is a bloated psychological situation."

In public, the league's players have acquiesced to the decision. Sergey Kislyak, a midfielder for Brest, said that "everything is quiet" among his teammates. "My mother works at a school; classes continue, as before," he said. "Everything is fine."

His teammate, Artem Milevsky, admitted to Arena Radio that though it is "strange" to be the only league playing in Europe, and though he is trying to have "less contact" with other people, it was ultimately not a decision for the players to make.

"We are paid to play," he said. "The authorities are in control. Everything is open, everything works, you can eat everywhere."

In private, though, things may be different. A poll released by Tribuna, the sports website, found that the majority of athletes were in favor of shutting down the league. The commentator Konstantin Genich described the idea of playing on as "desperate."

Aleksandr Hleb, once of Barcelona and Arsenal and likely Belarus's greatest player, called the lack of concern among both players and authorities "unbelievable," though in an Instagram post he later watered down his comments.

"Since the Presidential Administration does not see the real need to quarantine the country, the situation is under control," Hleb wrote. "If there is a real threat to the health of the players, the health of the audience, I'm sure the matches will stop."

Hleb has taken his family into self-isolation as a precaution. Some fans, evidently, feel the same way. Attendances for the first weekend of the season were around half of what they were last year, though that still meant almost 4,000 people turning up to watch Brest, the defending champion, play its first game.

"The attitude toward coronavirus as a whole is still rather frivolous," said Maksim Berazinski, the chief executive of Tribuna in Belarus and Ukraine. "This is partly due to the fact that the official authorities have not yet closed borders, schools, universities, and are trying in every way possible to downplay the significance of the problem.

"Many people continue to go to soccer, and are very actively speaking out against the idea of closing the tournament. For our part, as the media, we insist that the necessary measure now is to suspend the championships. The risk to which we expose people is not justified at the moment."

There is, as yet, no sign of a change of policy. On Tuesday, an ABFF spokesman, Alexander Aleinik, confirmed that the next round of games would go ahead. As things stand, fans will still be allowed to attend. The rest of the world has stopped, for as long as is required. But Belarus, all alone, plays on. **NYT**

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