

3-MONTH PLAN FOR FREE FOOD, GAS;
Rs 500 per month for women in Jan Dhan A/c

INSURANCE FOR HEALTH WORKERS;
Rs 2,000 assistance to each farmer

NON-REFUNDABLE ADVANCE OF 75%
allowed to be taken out from EPF accounts

Day 2: Govt rolls out first safety net

Rs 1.7 lakh cr package targets farmers & informal labour, includes existing schemes

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

TWO DAYS into the national lockdown announced to contain the spread of Covid-19, the government unveiled the first set of measures to address the looming economic distress set off by the shutdown of business and destruction of demand.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman Thursday announced a package that aims to provide, for the next three months, free food to the "poorest of the poor", some income support to farmers and unorganised sector workers, a Rs 50-lakh medical insurance cover for health care staff and a Rs 500-transfer to women Jan Dhan account holders.

While Sitharaman pegged the cost of the package at Rs 1.70 lakh crore, a scrutiny of the measures shows that around Rs 70,000 crore could already be accounted for in existing schemes and funds. The announcements come when the government is hard-pressed to create the headroom for additional spending in a fiscally difficult year.

Officials indicated that a package for the MSME sector and a broader income-support scheme for migrant and farm workers, which was being expected, are likely to follow.

Several state governments including Delhi, Maharashtra and Kerala are among those which have announced measures — including advance pension payments, free food, use of worker welfare funds and minimum income transfers — to tackle the economic effects of the epidemic, which might be funded through higher borrowings.

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Sitharaman announced the package on Thursday. Anil Sharma

Holes in the net: Many who have been hit still left out, relief too little

PVAIDYANATHAN IYER
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

THE Rs 1.7 lakh crore economic package announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for the vulnerable sections — farmers, women, construction workers, senior citizens, widows and the disabled — is less than 1 per cent of India's GDP.

The issue at hand is not just the size of the package relative to the GDP but the urgency of monetary transfer to unorganised sector workers, who have not only lost their jobs and income, but also face a massive health scare.

The central government's package, as it is, comes a week after Kerala first announced a Rs 20,000-crore support for its people. Many states including

Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Telangana and Rajasthan followed suit.

Even now, there is no evidence that the government has a plan for unorganised sector workers such as dhobis, rickshaw pullers, barbers, rural labourers, etc, even if they are registered with state governments. Neither for construction workers who are not registered with states. Workers in both these segments will not be eligible for any payout.

A decade back, to unorganised sector workers stood at 47.41 crore, according to the NSSO's Employment and Unemployment Survey, 2011-12. While the Labour Ministry does not keep data on migrant workers, the Economic Survey in

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A woman at Howrah railway station breaks down after realising she has missed out on food being distributed to migrant workers. Reuters

12 walk 200 km, down hills and past forests, on biscuits, one meal

LALMANI VERMA
DEHRADUN, MARCH 26

IN FOUR days and 200 km of walking, Pravin Kumar, 46, was stopped at every checkpoint. Police checked whether he and 11 others with him had their Aadhaar cards and then waved them on, with an instruction to maintain "social distancing".

So, for their only proper meal in 65 hours, offered by a voluntary organisation, the 12 sat one metre apart in Dehradun on Thursday afternoon.

Kumar, employed like the others at the Char Dham Road Project's Hanuman Chatti site in Uttarkashi, says he knows the value of hygiene in the time of



Labourers walking to their villages take a nap along the Lucknow-Faizabad highway on Thursday. Vishal Srivastav

coronavirus. So, every time he found a source of water along the route, he ensured he washed

his feet at least. That also gave some relief from the footsores he

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

As States in East send SOS, Centre too says: Help stranded migrants

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

THE CENTRE Thursday asked all states to ensure food and shelter for thousands of migrant workers who have been left stranded without jobs amid a national lockdown to contain the coronavirus outbreak.

The Centre stepped in after the chief ministers of West Bengal and Odisha appealed to the rest of the country to assist workers from the two states. Bihar announced relief measures of its own, and Jharkhand set up a team of IAS officers to coordinate its efforts.

CORONA COUNT

694 CASES **16** DEATHS

45 RECOVERED

25,144 samples from 24,254 individuals tested

"We have asked state governments to arrange food and shelter for migrant workers. We are sensitising everyone that wherever they are, they should remain there," said Punya Salila Srivastava, Joint Secretary.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Army all set, contingency plans for COVID-19 in place at 6-hr notice: Chief

SUSHANT SINGH
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

ARMY CHIEF General M M Naravane has said that the Army is undertaking its operational tasks and there is no effect of the coronavirus outbreak on its operational preparedness. At the same time, there are contingency plans in place at six hours' notice, he said, including a 45-bed isolation facility and 10-bed ICU for COVID-19 at field hospitals, and mobilisation of Quick Reaction Medical Teams on call.

Asked about the possibility of the Army being called in to help fight the outbreak as in some other countries, General Naravane said that "the Indian Army is of the people and for the people of India" and "is mandated to provide assistance to civil authorities whenever called for".



FIELD HOSPITALS TOLD TO READY ISOLATION BEDS' GENERAL MM NARAVANE CHIEF OF ARMY STAFF

In an email interview to *The Indian Express*, he said that "whenever the Government assigns a particular task in future, the Army will execute the same to the best of its capability."

As "there is likely to be an increase in demand for medical

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Youth who jumped to death from Safdarjung hospital tests negative

ASTHA SAXENA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

THE 23-YEAR-OLD man who committed suicide by jumping off the seventh floor of Safdarjung Hospital, where he was taken for coronavirus testing from Delhi's IGI Airport earlier this month, has tested negative for COVID-19.

A resident of Punjab's Balachaur district, the man had arrived from Sydney on March 18, and was taken to the hospi-

tal after he complained of a headache during screening at the airport.

"He reached the hospital around 9 pm along with four other passengers. The incident took place within 30-35 minutes. His sample was collected and the report came back negative, a few days after the incident," said a senior doctor from the hospital.

The Health Ministry, in a statement following the death, had said: "The patient reached around

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300 migrants found crammed in two trucks, thousands in a railway train

AVISHEK G DASTIDAR & SRINATH RAO
NEW DELHI, MUMBAI, MAR 26

THREE HUNDRED crammed into two trucks, and thousands travelling surreptitiously in an empty railway rake — the stories of desperate migrant labourers somehow trying to get home continue.

In Yavatmal, Maharashtra, police stumbled onto the trucks containing the migrants during a routine inspection at a police check-post on the state's border with Telangana. Yavatmal

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



Migrants inside a container truck in Yavatmal. Express

PAGE 1 ANCHOR

Child, wife killed, gurdwara sewadar says, 'Time to leave Kabul'

DIVYAGOYAL
LUDHIANA, MARCH 26

IN 10 DAYS, Tanya Kaur would have turned four. She was planning her birthday cake, said her father, Harinder Singh Soni (40), kirtan sewadar at the Gurdwara Har Rai Sahib in Shor Bazar of Kabul, where 25 were killed in a terror attack on Wednesday.

Tanya, and her mother, Surpal Kaur (40), were among those killed. Harinder also lost his father, Nirmal Singh Soni (60), who was the head granthi of the gurdwara, father-in-law Bhagat Singh (75) and cousin

Kulwinder Singh Khalsa (35). His mother, Rawail Kaur, was injured in the attack.

Harinder's two other children, Gagandeep Singh (13) and Gurjit Kaur (11), and four brothers were not in the gurdwara at the time of the attack. Speaking to *The Indian Express* on the phone, Harinder, who was born in Afghanistan, said: "It is time to leave the country with my mother, children and brothers, before they too are killed."

While he said four armed men had stormed the gurdwara, an AP report quoted Afghanistan's Interior Ministry as saying that a lone Islamic State gunman had

carried out the attack.

"My daughter was shot in head. She kept shouting, 'save me daddy, save me daddy'... they kept shooting, even at the heap of bodies lying on the ground," he said.

Tanya was a student of a pre-primary class in the gurdwara. "She had just started learning the alphabets," said Harinder.

"The local Sikh community had gathered at the gurdwara around 6.30 am for daily prayers as usual. I was on the stage... There were nearly a hundred devotees. Midway through the prayers, a devotee shouted 'chor aa gaye hai, daaku aaye hain'



(thieves have come), and there was complete chaos," he recalled. "Four men stormed inside and started shooting at every-

one... I was on the stage. My nephew, Kulwinder, shouted at me to get down. As I got down, the bodies of my wife and



Tanya was 3; (left) a mourner at a funeral Thursday for the victims. Reuters

daughter fell on me," said Harinder.

He said the attack lasted for hours. "They were trying to shoot everyone in the head... My wife and father were shot in the chest," he said.

On Thursday, at the mass funeral in Kabul, each coffin had a note with the following message: "Nanak naam chardi kala, tere bhane sarbat da bhala" (Nanak, with your name, may there be peace and happiness for all)."

Among those killed was Moharram Ali, a security guard at the gurdwara. "He had been working at the gurdwara for about five years now... He was

the first to be shot," said Harinder, who also owns a small cosmetics store in Kabul.

According to him, there are about 800 Sikh families in Afghanistan, mostly in Kabul, Jalalabad and Ghazni. "Many of these families lost a relative in yesterday's attack. There is hardly any Sikh family left here who hasn't lost a relative in a terror attack. Most of them want to leave now," he said.

After Wednesday's attack, Harinder too wants to leave the country of his birth. "Earlier, I used to feel that Afghanistan is my country, but not any longer. I don't want to live here now," he said.

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WHY DOE-EYED NIMMI WAS ONE OF HINDI CINEMA'S LAST LINKS TO THE GOLDEN AGE

The yesteryear star who died on March 25 aged 87 was the last of the greats from 1950s Bollywood.

VIDEO OF THE DAY



SPORTING EVENTS ACROSS THE GLOBE

Coronavirus has affected and disrupted various sporting events

FULL COVERAGE



CORONAVIRUS

Big challenge for India's 37%—'internal migrants'

EXPRESS AUDIO

Unpacking the COVID-19 relief package

NEW EPISODE EVERYDAY

Today on the 3 Things podcast, we talk about the relief package announced by the Finance Minister and discuss to what degree it will help the poor

FROM PAGE ONE

Holes in the net: Relief too little

The past had assumed it 20 per cent of the total workforce. What is deeply worrying policy experts is the ability of the government to locate and deliver support to the migrant workers, many of whom were trekking hundreds of kilometres to their homes or lining up at shelters for a meal, even as the package was announced.

Migrant workers are of two kinds: permanent and seasonal. March, in particular, sees large number of seasonal migrants because it is harvesting time, and not much labour is required now. Seasonal migrants keep moving continuously, from one place to another, in search of work. This has only exacerbated the problem.

Had a support programme for all unorganised sector workers preceded the lockdown, it could have just been possible for the government to make them stay back at urban centres, instead of exposing them to the risk of catching the disease and further infecting their families back home.

A back-of-the-envelope calculation of the money transfers that could be immediately effected following Thursday's announcement shows that it adds up to Rs 61,380 crore over the next three months. Women Jan Dhan account holders: Rs 10,000 crore; Widows, elders, and the disabled: Rs 3,000 crore; Farmers: Rs 17,380 crore and, Building and construction workers: Rs 31,000 crore from the Welfare Fund.

The Rs 25,000-crore corpus of the District Mineral Fund is for augmenting and supporting medical facilities and testing, and not to be handed out as cash transfers.

The Rs 17,380 crore to be released for farmers is not an additionality - it is already budgeted for in 2020-21, but the government is front-loading the payment of the first tranche of Rs 2,000 (of the budgeted Rs 6,000 per farmer a year under the PM KISAN scheme).

Even the money for construction workers does not require the government to borrow extra. The corpus of the fund actually comes from a 1 per cent cess on the cost of construction and collected by states and UTs, as mandated under the Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Cess Act, 1996. The states and UTs had collected Rs 45,473.1 crore and spent Rs 17,591.59 crore up to September 30, 2019.

The Rs 20-increase in MNREGA wages to Rs 202 a day doesn't mean much since in many states works have been halted given the health scare due to spread of the Covid-19 disease and the subsequent total national lockdown since Tuesday midnight. Given that most states have seeded Aadhaar card details of MNREGA workers with their Jan Dhan accounts, the government could have made DBT transfers for immediate relief.

Those who opt for MNREGA are the poorest of the poor, and the best antidote given that they cannot find work for at least three weeks, could have been to credit their bank accounts with at least wages for 15 days - approximately Rs 3,000 per worker. This could have been reviewed mid-April, and additional transfers made.

Of the total 13.65 crore job cards, an estimated 8.22 crore are active. A payout of Rs 3,000 each (active) would have meant less than Rs 25,000 crore and Rs 41,000 crore if all

had received it.

Did fiscal constraints bind the Finance Minister in expanding the financial package for the unorganised sector workers?

This argument can hold good when any additional borrowing by the government may adversely affect the borrowing prospects of the private sector. Called the crowding out effect, this hurts private sector when demand in the economy is robust. In India, private investment has been sluggish for six years now on the back of a series of disruptive events such as demonetisation, GST, bad loan pile-up in banks, and the NBFC liquidity crisis.

It would be wrong to call these fiscal support measures as some kind of a stimulus. The additional expenditure was required to provide a safety net for workers - a compensation for loss of income - so that it greases the machinery for them to buy daily need items, mostly food.

The government's stimulus can kick in only after the economy is unlocked, about which there is little certainty now.

According to estimates by leading analysts, the 21-day lockdown may affect 4 per cent of annual GDP. It may also lead to spike in prices, but this is expected to be short-lived. That's why, for now, the Centre's fiscal support for the unorganised workers, who are estimated to contribute between 48 per cent and 56.4 per cent to the economy, falls woefully short of the requirement.

12 walk 200 km to head home

developed from the long walk, with 60 km more to go, to home in Kutubpur village of Saharanpur district of Uttar Pradesh.

Between the 12 of them, only one had a mask.

For the past four months, Kumar and the others have been building a retaining wall using boulders for the Char Dham Road Project, earning around Rs 500 a day each. Now, Rs 500 is the maximum any one of them has, as they head home.

Back in his village, Pravin Kumar, a father of three, said, he can make a maximum of Rs 150 a day, with a meal thrown in, working as a farm labourer.

In Lakhimpur Kheri in Uttar Pradesh, district authorities came to the aid of a group of 19 who had walked two days for over 450 km from Delhi, and arranged transport for them to Bahraich, a further 135 km away.

The lockdown announcement caught them by surprise, Pravin Kumar said. On Janata Curfew day, March 22, the 12 had taken it easy, relaxing in the makeshift tents they stayed in, watching movies on their mobile phones. When the restrictions were tightened to a lockdown by the state the same evening, Kumar said, they rushed to their contractor. "He said he cannot provide food to us without work for so many days. We were uncertain as to how long the work would remain stopped."

Kumar said they asked the contractor for a week's worth of pay so that they could go home. "However, he said he had no money. With no transport available, we decided to walk back."

They left early morning on March 23, and made their way to Dehradun on Thursday via Chamba, Kaddukhal and Raipur.

Having carried food barely for one day, they could not eat anything after Monday night as everything along the way was shut. On Thursday afternoon,

Rs 1.7 lakh cr targets farmers & informal labour, includes existing govt schemes

"We have immediately responded within 36 hours of the lockdown," Sitharaman said, adding that the government has reached out to those people who immediately require support, the poorest of the poor. She unveiled the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana to provide free wheat, rice and pulses to nearly 80 crore people across the country, or two-thirds of the country's population, for a period of three months. Under the scheme, each person will be given, free, 5 kg wheat or rice each month for the next three months.

The government will also provide free of cost 1 kg of pulses per family of their preferred choice (tur, urad, chana), for next three months. While wheat and rice can be provided from the existing buffer stock of the Food Corporation of India, fresh procurement may be required for pulses. Planned income transfers to the farmers are also being front-loaded - with the government providing Rs 2,000 to each farmer during April, covering a total of 8.7 crore farmers across the country.

Free gas cylinders will be provided to 8 crore poor families registered under Ujjwala for the next three months. Daily wage under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is being raised from Rs 182 per day to Rs 202 per day with effect from April 1. While the wage hike works to almost 11 per cent, the minister said that it will benefit approximately 13.62 crore families, with the government spending an extra Rs 5,600 crore. However, how effective this will be at a time of lockdown is the question.

The government hasn't detailed the arithmetic of the Rs 1.7 lakh crore nor explained its impact on the fisc.

"Over Rs 50,000 crore available in mineral fund and workers welfare funds does not look like a fresh stimulus, and income transfers of Rs 17,400 crore to farmers are being front-loaded - these are not extra payments. Similarly, increase in rural employment plan payments will not help now due to the lockdown. But utilisation of these funds will definitely help in alleviating the pain," a senior economist said.

These funds come under the jurisdiction of states and it's the unutilised amount in those funds which the Centre is asking states to spend to cushion the COVID-19 impact. This could likely take away another Rs 70,000 crore out of the Rs 1.7 lakh crore.

Income transfers to senior citizens, widows, Jan Dhan account holders, as well as provision of free gas cylinders, wheat, rice and pulses, Provident Fund contribution will cost the Centre extra money. Also, a relaxation of the EPF withdrawal, does not entail any outgo for the Centre.

"Well, at this stage I am more concerned about those who need help," Sitharaman said when asked about the fiscal impact of the proposals during the press conference. To queries on whether government will provide any relief to industries and borrowers, the minister said that the focus right now was on providing relief to the poor. "We will come back when something is ready (for industry)," she said.

The government will transfer Rs 2,000 into the accounts of farmers under the PM KISAN scheme in the first week of

April. Under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme, the government provides a minimum income support of Rs 6,000 per year to farmers in three instalments.

For senior citizens, widows and divyang (people with disability), the minister announced an ex-gratia income support of Rs 1,000 (in two instalments), aimed at helping nearly 3 crore individuals. An ex-gratia transfer of Rs 500 into each of the 20 crore women Jan Dhan accounts for next three months is aimed at helping them run their household during this difficult period, Sitharaman said. The government would spend Rs 31,000 crore for this purpose.

In a leg-up to self help groups (SHGs), the Minister announced an increase in the limit for collateral free lending for women-organised SHGs from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 20 lakh to support almost 6.85 crore households. With economic activity coming to a halt and lenders turning risk-averse, SHGs may not immediately benefit from this move.

Even as the lockdown has been announced for 21 days, the relief package aims to provide cover for three months to cover the impact of spread of the virus.

For the organised sector under EPFO, for the next three months, the government announced that it will pay both employees' and employers' monthly contribution under the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) for workers earning below Rs 15,000 a month in establishments having up to 100 employees. This is estimated to have a financial outgo of around Rs 5,000 crore. "This may benefit 80 lakh employees and expected to incentivise

4 lakh establishments," Sitharaman said.

The EPF scheme regulations will be amended to allow a non-refundable advance of up to 75 per cent of the balance or three months of wages, whichever is lower. "This is expected to benefit 4.8 crore workers registered with EPFO.

Under the EPF scheme, employees and employers have to contribute an equal amount of 12 per cent of the employees' basic salary plus dearness allowance. From the employer's EPF contribution, 8.33 per cent is marked for the Employee Pension Scheme and the remaining to the PF account of the employer. The EPS component is subject to a wage cap of Rs 15,000, or actual basic pay, whichever is lower.

The Centre will direct state governments to use the Welfare Fund for Building and Other Construction Workers, which has around 3.5 crore registered workers. The Centre said states will be asked to utilise the funds available under District Mineral Fund - worth about Rs 25,000 crore - for supplementing and augmenting facilities for medical testing, screening and treatment in connection with the pandemic.

"While details on the financing of the package or the fiscal implication have not been provided, assuming that the entire Rs 1.7 lakh crores is additional expenditure that is to be incurred over the budgeted expenditure for FY21 (of Rs 30.4 lakh crores) and the projected GDP is retained, the fiscal deficit would increase by 0.75% from the budget target of 3.5% to 4.3% of GDP. However, given that GDP growth for the year is expected to decline, the fiscal deficit would widen further," Care Ratings said.

as they rested under trees at Banjarawala on the Haridwar bypass highway, a security guard at a nearby marble shop, Mohammad Akhtar, spotted them and rushed over with water. A few minutes later, four volunteers of a social organisation came with a packet of pooris, a bucket of sabji and disposable plates.

Pritam Kumar, a resident of Kaasampur village in Saharanpur, said that in the plains of Raipur near Dehradun Thursday morning, a family offered them tea and biscuits. However, as Deepak Saini, who is from Manjhipur village in Saharanpur, said, such instances were rare. "We found several people outside their homes, but we could not understand their accent and they could not get what we were saying." The only breadwinner of his family, including his parents, wife and two children, Saini said he was getting constant calls from home checking where he had reached and if he was safe.

Zakir of Tanda village in Saharanpur, returning home with younger brother Usman, said that because they crossed forested areas during their walk, they slept hardly two hours at night and that too in shifts. "We feared attacks by wild animals or criminals."

Usman said they came across many in a similar situation as them, headed home on foot. "Before implementing the lockdown, the government should have made arrangements for workers like us to get home," Zakir said.

The brothers are also wor-

ried about returning without any earnings. The family has a farm where they grow foodgrains. Zakir pointed out that in the forests of Kaddukhal area, they had to leave behind their blankets and quilts as well, as the load got too heavy.

The labourers said they also faced problems finding their way, as they had earlier always used public transport to get home. "We approached police for directions. But that was the only help they provided. Otherwise, they checked our ID proof (Aadhaar) at every checkpoint and barricade," said Pritam Kumar.

In Dehradun, as they ate, police arrived in a jeep and questioned them. Before leaving, the officials told them, "Why are you seated so closely? Keep a distance of at least 1 metre, including when you walk."

Additional District Magistrate, Lakhimpur Kheri, Arun Kumar Singh said they spotted 19 migrant labourers in Mohammadi area. "They told us they were coming from Delhi, where they were employed with a construction firm, and were headed for Nanpara in Bahraich. With dhabas and hotels on highways closed, they hadn't eaten in three days. We provided them food and arranged a bus to take them," the ADM said.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath intervened to help around 80 people, including a pregnant woman, travelling in a bus from Mumbai to Sant Kabir Nagar and Basti districts, who had been stopped by police between Teekamgarh and

Chhatrapur.

In Dehradun, with home nearer, Deepak Saini clung to one silver living. "My contractor gave me Rs 500 for travel. I saved that because I could not find transport."

— WITH MANISH SAHU, LUCKNOW

States in East send SOS

Ministry of Home Affairs.

Kerala has already announced a series of measures for migrant workers there, ranging from community kitchens set up by local bodies to hostel buildings hired by the government. According to unofficial estimates, the state provides work to more than 25 lakh migrant workers, mainly from the East.

The labour department in Maharashtra has recommended the transfer of money to the bank accounts of 12 lakh registered labourers, mostly migrant workers, in the construction sector.

Speaking to The Indian Express, Maharashtra Labour Minister Dilip Walse Patil said the proposal is under discussion, and that a collective decision will be taken to cover the entire labour force. "Desperate times need extreme measures," he said.

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar said his government will set up relief camps in districts for returning workers. Social distancing will be maintained in these camps, which will have teams of doctors, Kumar said, adding that Rs 100 crore has been allocated from

the CM's relief fund.

Bihar has also deputed its Resident Commissioner in Delhi to co-ordinate relief efforts for workers employed in other states.

According to estimates, about 5,000 migrant workers on their way home are stuck in various towns in Bihar with the lockdown in place. "Their relatives are wary of welcoming them due to fears of the virus spreading. Most of them have not been screened, either. The camps will take care of this," said an official.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, meanwhile, wrote letters to 18 chief ministers seeking their help for workers from the state.

"We are getting SOS calls from them. They are generally in groups of 50-100 and can be easily identified by the local administration... kindly ask your administration to provide them basic shelter, food and medical support during the period of crisis. We, in Bengal, are taking care of such people in our state," she wrote.

In his appeal, Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik wrote: "... any person or group of persons stranded in any part of your state may please be assisted with food, accommodation, security." He assured that "Odisha will bear whatever cost is needed".

Jharkhand has formed a team of 15 IAS officers, each of whom has been assigned a different state to resolve the problems of workers stuck there. These officers have been instructed to report back to Principal Secretary (Labour)

Rajeev Arun Ekka, who has been appointed as the state's nodal officer for the initiative. Chief Minister Hemant Soren has also responded to appeals on social media and contacted the chief ministers of Delhi, Chhattisgarh and Odisha to resolve the issues raised.

Gujarat Chief Minister Vijay Rupani has asked businesses and traders employing migrant workers to arrange for food and shelter with assistance from the state government and NGOs.

And UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has set up a committee under the Chief Secretary to contact workers from the state employed outside. District Magistrates have been asked to provide relief at the state's borders for workers returning from neighbouring states on foot.

Army all set, says Chief

services for both infected and suspected cases within the Indian Army as also requisition from civil administration in the coming days", the Army Chief said that the Army had already sent instructions to augment medical facilities and infrastructure.

These include: increasing the capacity for surveillance and isolation at Military, Base and Command Hospitals; setting up a 45-bed isolation facility and a 10-bed ICU facility at field hospitals exclusively for COVID-19 patients at six hours' notice; keeping 30 per cent of Field Hospitals on standby for constructing COVID hospitals in COVID hotspots; preparing Quick Reaction Medical Teams to mobilise at six hours' notice.

Admitting that it is "difficult to say how the situation will develop", General Naravane said that the Army had started planning and preparing "after having analyzed the impact of COVID-19 over last two-three months in other countries". He said that "the Army has certain inherent capability to rise up to various emergency situations by virtue of organisational structure and training. And in keeping with that, the Indian Army is planning and preparing to fight COVID-19."

The Army Chief said that he was personally "reviewing the situation on daily basis" and was in "touch with the Army Commanders and Principal Staff Officers. Various advisories and instructions have been issued to the environment to create awareness and contain spread of COVID-19."

"Speaking in military language," General Naravane said that "at present COVID-19 is in preparatory stage of impact in India and we are making concerted efforts to prevent COVID-19 from establishing a firm base. Concurrently, we are preparing for stringent counter measures, should COVID-19 manage to (get) a foothold."

And the "next few weeks will be crucial" to prevent the negative effects of the virus.

Suicide: Youth tests negative

9 pm and was taken to the seventh floor for admission and evaluation. When doctors reached the room, he wasn't inside. At the same time, another doctor coming out of the building observed a body on the floor around 9.15 pm.

His family in Punjab had alleged callous attitude by health officers and airport staff towards suspected patients. The family also claimed officials were not giving enough information about the hospital facilities at the airport.

"We went to Safdarjung to

get information about him but the hospital did not tell us anything, and after an hour there, a staff member told us he must have been taken to Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital because his name was not on their list. We then went to RML hospital and after struggling for an hour, we got the same reply. Then we went back to Safdarjung hospital to get his whereabouts," his uncle Sukhdev Singh had told *The Indian Express*.

Migrants found inside trucks

Superintendent of Police M Rajkumar said the drivers claimed to be transporting essential goods to Rajasthan. However, when police and revenue officials checked the trucks, they found several hundred men sitting inside.

"The men are primarily construction workers returning from Hyderabad to different parts of Rajasthan," Rajkumar said, adding that police were probing how they had managed to get that far from Hyderabad without being intercepted.

The incident of labourers travelling illegally in a railway rake was reported by the Uttar Pradesh authorities to the Railways. The rake was being brought back from Thiruvananthapuram to Gorakhpur, as part of a nationwide measure by the Railways for rakes stranded due to the national lockdown. While most of the men got off at Jhansi, it is not clear from where they got on. Railway sources said railway managers of several divisions had informed the ministry about coming under pressure from labourers to let them travel in empty rakes. After the matter was highlighted at a video conference Thursday chaired by Railway Minister Piyush Goyal, the movement of all empty rakes has been stopped for the time being.

After they realised that migrants had travelled in the rake coming from Kerala to UP, railway authorities scanned through CCTV footage to determine where they had got on. It doesn't seem to be either Thiruvananthapuram or Ernakulum, where the rake had stopped. Officials said while they didn't have an exact figure, they estimated around 300 labourers used the rake.

"The matter has been brought to our notice and we are looking into it," Arun Kumar, Railway Protection Force Director General, told *The Indian Express*.

The Railway Board had earlier this week identified over 600 rakes that were stuck away from home bases because of the lockdown. While ordering that these be brought back to home bases, the ministry had asked officials to ensure there was no unauthorised boarding, with stops only allowed for crew changes.

As the Railways mounts its own efforts to check COVID-19, it is considering waving the mandatory breathalyzer tests for loco-pilots engaged in running goods trains, which are the only ones in operation. Many have refused the same for fear of infection. Officials said they are considering self-certification and administering an "oath" to the drivers.

By Saturday, the Railways expects to have a prototype ready for a non-AC coach to be turned into an isolation ward. The modifications include turning two of the four toilets on the coach into bathrooms with hand shower, removal of ladders, removal of a lower berth, and isolating each cabin with a permanent partition.

3 THE OUTBREAK THE CITY

HEALTHCARE WORKERS TO BE TESTED

4 more test positive in Capital

ASTHA SAXENA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

DELHI REPORTED four more cases of COVID-19 on Thursday, taking the number of people who have tested positive to 39. Of the four new cases, one is a resident of Delhi — a 32-year-old man from Jamia Nagar with a travel history to Dubai. The other three cases, three men aged 42, 59 and 34, are from Kargil, Kurukshetra and Bengaluru respectively. After a 49-year-old doctor working at a Mohalla Clinic tested positive for COVID-19 on Wednesday, the Delhi govern-

ment has decided to conduct tests for all healthcare workers directly involved in treating coronavirus patients.

According to an order by the health department, healthcare workers in facilities directly involved in drawing samples from patients at designated hospitals will also be tested.

"Healthcare workers are at the forefront and need to be tested regularly so that the infection is contained," said a senior health official. On Wednesday, the 47-year-old wife and 17-year-old daughter of the Mohalla Clinic doctor tested positive for COVID-19. Around 1,000 pa-

tients who were seen by the doctor between March 12 and March 18 are also being traced.

Apart from healthcare workers, the government will also begin testing all patients with Severe Acute Respiratory Illness (SARI) who are admitted to government hospitals.

Those working in hospitals under the central government such as AIIMS, Safdarjung, RML, Lady Hardinge Medical College, and Army Hospital Research & Referral have been requested to contact the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) for collecting samples and getting them tested at their facilities.

On Wednesday, patients and healthcare workers who visited the Mohalla Clinic in Mohanpuri area of Maujpur between March 12 and 18 were directed to home quarantine for 15 days. The doctor was shifted to Safdarjung Hospital from GTB Monday night after he complained of breathlessness.

Several private hospitals in Delhi have been authorised to test and admit COVID-19 patients in Delhi. Max Healthcare will begin admissions of COVID-19 patients from Friday in specially designated isolation wards at its hospitals — East block of Max Super Speciality Hospital in Saket and Max Super Speciality Hospital in

Patparganj. "The units are well-equipped with isolation beds, adequate supply of personal protective gear, ventilators, and trained staff to support any complex positive cases. Max Labs will begin testing for COVID-19 for samples collected from four units across Delhi-NCR. The testing samples will be collected at selective Max Hospitals — Saket, Gurgaon and Patparganj. We will keep adding bed/wards in case there is a surge in COVID-19 patients," read a statement by Max Healthcare.

BLK Super Speciality Hospital will begin admissions from Friday. Apollo too will begin its testing and treatment facility Friday.



A migrant labourer near Noida Extension leaving Delhi on Thursday. *Cajendra Yadav*

Mohalla clinics try social distancing, but flood of patients continues

ANAND MOHAN J
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

A MIDDLE-AGED woman wriggled her way through an iron gate bound by chains to enter a Mohalla Clinic in Northeast Delhi's Trilokpuri.

The entrance to the clinic has been shut. A doctor, a multi-task worker and a pharmacist have locked themselves inside the clinic, and speak to the patients from a window.

The woman eventually managed to get close to the window and told the doctor, "I have a headache, fever and cold. I may have coronavirus." The doctor reassures her that she does not, and prescribes her some medicines. They take down her mobile number and details of her Aadhaar card, their only hope of tracking her.

Around 170 patients visited this Mohalla Clinic located at Trilokpuri's Block 25. The only clinic which is open till 7 pm, it attracts patients from Trilokpuri, Kotla, Chilla village, and even the Yamuna floodplains.

On Wednesday, a 49-year-old doctor of a Mohalla Clinic in Mohanpuri area of Maujpur tested positive for COVID-19, after he examined a 38-year-old woman from Dilshad Garden who had returned from Saudi Arabia. The Shahdara Sub-Divisional Magistrate has asked all patients who visited the particular clinic to be under home quarantine.

At the Trilokpuri Mohalla Clinic, Dr Sanjeev Kumar, who is on the evening shift, insists social distancing is the key. He has got a full body safety suit, surgical gloves and a face mask for himself. The multi-task worker manages with gloves and a



At the Mohalla Clinic in Northeast Delhi's Trilokpuri, the only one which is open till 7 pm. *Amit Mehra*

mask, while the pharmacist does not have either on while handing out medicines to patients.

Dr Sanjeev said the clinic has not seen any cases of coronavirus, though there have been scores of patients who complained of some symptoms. "We do not have a testing kit. When we see such symptoms, regular medicines are prescribed as per protocol. If at all we have such cases, they will be referred to Lal Bahadur Shastri Hospital. There have been some youngsters who said they have the symptoms. There is no community transmission yet."

Outside the clinic, patients have crowded the window. Circles marked with chalk designating waiting spots have vanished as toddlers wait with their mothers, licking iron beams meant to support patients.

Most of the patients have come with skin infections, body pain or cold.

Lalmami (43), a domestic worker, has come down with

cough and body pain. She barely has strength left in her to hold her medicines, which slip from her fingers and fall to the ground.

Right behind her, Laxmi (34) has come with her son. Both are down with fever, and with several hospitals shutting down OPDs, there is no other place to go. "This Mohalla Clinic is our only hope," she said.

At one point, a middle-aged man sneezes, flaring tempers. "Cover your mouth," a patient snaps. Another says, "This is how a doctor got the virus. Now hundreds are infected."

Many women are accompanied by their children, some of them infants. None have a face mask, and instead, the women cover their toddlers' faces with their clothes. One of them, Ruksana, said: "I am a single mother with no income. My brother gave me some money. But I don't have money left for a hand sanitiser and a mask."

To solve crowding, 35 buildings converted into shelter homes

ASHNA BUTANI
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

AFTER REPORTS of overcrowding at night shelters in the capital, where several daily wage labourers and migrant workers have sought shelter amid the 21-day lockdown, the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB) has converted 35 empty buildings into shelter homes.

"They will be operational by Friday and people will be shifted from the overcrowded shelters to the new ones. We are also ensuring availability of soap, water and hand sanitisers across the shelters. We will ensure that people living in the shelters are tested soon," said DUSIB member Bipin Rai.

Several workers are stranded in the capital as all modes of inter-state transport have been suspended for 21 days. While some decided to walk hundreds of kilometres to their villages in other states, others have sought refuge in the shelter homes. As a result, day-time occupancy at the shelters has increased by 2.5 times in the past three days.

As per a DUSIB report, 22 shelters near Jama Masjid, Yamuna Pushta and Kashmere Gate have exceeded their capacity in the last two nights. While two of them are buildings, three are tents and the rest are portable cabins. For



At the shelter home at AIIMS. *Tashi Tobgyal*

instance, a shelter in Yamuna Bazaar with a capacity of 50 had 90 people on March 23 and 170 people on March 24. A tent in Nizamuddin with a capacity of 50 saw 105 people on March 23 and 119 people on March 24.

"Usually, there are around 7,000 people in the 234 shelters across the city. The shelters can accommodate a total of 18,538 people. They have been full since the lockdown was enforced," said DUSIB member Bipin Rai.

The Delhi government has been distributing food at the shelters since Monday and is also considering financial aid for those living in shelters. According to a DUSIB report, there are 78 RCC (reinforced cement concrete) buildings, 115 portable cabins, and 41 tents that function as shelters.

Exodus on foot continues: 'All okay if I make it home'

MALLICA JOSHI
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

SOME WALKED empty handed. Others carried backpacks and small packets of food. And a few pushed their bicycles on foot, tired of pedalling.

They all had one destination — away from Delhi.

Rishipal Yadav, 20, was among the last few to leave from Gurgaon for Badaun in Uttar Pradesh — around 250 kilometres away — at noon on Thursday. He reached the DND Flyway by 3 pm. He had made the journey from Badaun to Gurgaon just five days ago.

"We had all gone home for Holi, like every year. We had been saving since the beginning of the year and took home gifts for our parents and siblings. When we came back, there was no work. Now we have no money and no way to earn some. What will we do here? Only our family can take care of us," said Yadav, who sells 'Ram laddus' in Gurgaon with his 22-year-old brother Ramniwas. The two had saved close to Rs 20,000 ahead

of Holi, and spent it on their family.

They haven't told their family that they plan to make it on foot. The one bag they carry has a change of clothes and a 750 ml water bottle. They have no food. "If we tell them, they will worry about us," he said.

Kuldeep Kumar, 24, a tailor who resided in Okhla, is headed to Badaun on foot.

"I came back to Delhi from the village in the second week of March, after Holi. I got work for only three days after that. I gave all the money I had saved to my family for Holi and have nothing left. There is no food, and if you go out to buy something, everything is twice the price it was. They are selling aata for Rs 60 per kg. Even potatoes are unaffordable. Someone will take care of us at home," he said, walking from Ashram towards DND Flyway.

Hundreds of men and women, mostly daily wage labourers and those employed in the unorganised sector, face

hunger, insecurity and loneliness as cities across the country have gone into a lockdown. Train and bus services have been suspended. Public transport is open for only those who are employed in essential services and related industry.

With no way to get out of the city, which is almost at standstill, migrant workers have been leaving in droves — on foot.

For Keshav Singh, 40, the main aim is to get to Badarpur from East Delhi's Kondli. He knows it is unrealistic to believe he can walk to his village, near Gwalior.

"If we can reach the border, I think we will find a way out," he said, filled with doubt. He has carried only one bottle of water with him, along with an extra set of clothes.

"My whole family lives there. Parents, wife, children, and siblings. I work in a sweet shop here and live there too. But there is no money or food. I think everything will be fine if I can just get home," he said.

ADVERTISEMENT NOTICE (WALK-IN INTERVIEW)

Applications on plain paper are invited from PSC/Non-PSC doctors, for the tenure posts of Tutors/Registrars / Demonstrators in the following disciplines for a maximum period of three years as per SRO-25 of 2013 dated 28-01-2013. The applications and documents should reach the office of Principal GMC Doda by email: principalgmc@doda@gmail.com on or before 31.03.2020.

This is without any prejudice to any writ petition pending before any Hon'ble Court. Details of posts in various subjects are as follows:

S.No.	Department	Name of Post	Total No.
1.	Physiology	Demonstrator	1
2.	Forensic Medicine	Demonstrator	1
3.	Pathology	Demonstrator	3
4.	General Medicine	Registrar	3
5.	Obst & Gynae	Registrar	2
6.	General Surgery	Registrar	6
7.	Paediatrics	Registrar	2
8.	Respiratory & T.B. Medicine	Registrar	1
9.	Dermatology	Registrar	1
10.	Psychiatry	Registrar	1
11.	Orthopedics	Registrar	1
12.	Radio-diagnosis	Registrar	2

Eligibility criteria:

- FOR IN-SERVICE (PSC) CANDIDATES:**
 - Candidates after selection shall be paid as per LPC.
 - Candidates should seek prior permission from Administrative Department and should route their applications through proper channel.
- FOR NON PSC(NON IN-SERVICE) CANDIDATES:**

Selected Candidates shall be engaged on consolidated pay equal to basic pay of M.O/Asstt. Surgeon of Health Department as per SRO-93 dated 15.04.2009, plus D.A. Candidates with Postgraduate Degrees shall be paid an incentive of Rs.15000/- per month. Maximum age of eligibility is 50 years as on cut off date.
- GENERAL CONDITIONS OF ELIGIBILITY FOR ALL CANDIDATES:**
 - QUALIFICATION: Minimum MBBS (MD/MS/ M.Sc(Medical in preclinical subjects like Physiology shall be preferred).
 - Candidates who were earlier appointed as Registrars/ Demonstrators in GMC Jammu/ Srinagar, but have left service before completing their tenure can also apply.
 - Candidates who have already completed 3 years of Registrar-ship/ Demonstrator-ship in any other discipline can also apply.
 - The experience gained shall be counted / valid for further promotion / appointment to the higher post.
- APPLICATIONS SHOULD BE ACCOMPANIED WITH ATTESTED COPIES OF THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS:**
 - Attempt certificate of 1st, 2nd, Pre-final and Final MBBS issued by concerned Universities.
 - MBBS, MD/MS/M.Sc (Medical Physiology) Degree in concerned subject (Preference will be given to the candidates possessing Post Graduate Degree/ Diploma.
 - Internship completion certificate.
 - Service Certificate (clearly indicating rural service, if any) issued by DHS Jammu/ Srinagar in respect of in-service candidates.
 - Distinction / National scholarship/Honours/Medals/Academic Merit Certificate.
 - House-job (Jr./Sr.) certificate issued by concerned Principal or Equivalent authority.
 - Professional publications in a MCI permitted indexed standard medical journal if any.
 - Date of Birth Certificate as per Matriculation Diploma for non-PSC candidates.

The selection of the candidate shall be made on the basis of combined academic merit and performance in the interview as per the rules/order issued by state government.

No T.A./D.A. shall be admissible for appearing in interview.

ALL APPLICANTS SHOULD PUT ON THEIR MOBILE TELEPHONE NUMBERS & EMAIL ID (IF ANY) ON THEIR APPLICATIONS. DATE OF INTERVIEW (IN CASE OF MORE THAN ONE CANDIDATE) SHALL BE HELD ON 2ND APRIL 2020.

(Dr. Tariq Parvez Azad)
Principal
Dated: 21.03.2020

No.: 2834-41/GMCD/Adm/2019-20 D/PJ-15456

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Analjit Singh, Chairman and Trustees
Bhai Mohan Singh Foundation

**Government of India
Department of Atomic Energy**

Advt.No.01-R/IMSc/2020 Date: 20.03.2020

**Invites applications for the post of
DIRECTOR, IMSc
(Level – 15 under 7th CPC)**

**(The Institute of Mathematical Sciences (IMSc), Chennai is one of
the Grant-in-aid Autonomous Institutions under the Department
of Atomic Energy)**

Last date for receipt of applications : 30.04.2020

For detailed advertisement log on to the following websites

- www.dae.gov.in under "Vacancy notices"
- <https://dopt.gov.in> under "Notifications"
- www.imsc.res.in under "Opportunities"

**ACC
ACC Limited**

Registered & Corporate Office: Cement House, 121, Maharsi Karve Road,
Mumbai - 400 020, India. CIN: L26940MH1936PLC002515;
Phone: +91 22 41593321; Fax: +91 22 6631 7458 | Website: www.acclimited.com;
Investor Support: ACC-InvestorSupport@acclimited.com

NOTICE FOR POSTPONEMENT OF 84TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Members of ACC Limited (the 'Company') are hereby informed that, due to the outbreak of novel corona virus ("Covid-19") pandemic in India and globally, and considering the announcement made by the Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi and orders issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs for the nationwide lockdown for the period of 21 days started from midnight of March 24, 2020 and other directives/advisories issued by the State Governments and local authorities to avoid the spread of Covid-19 and to ensure health, safety and welfare of all the stakeholders and in the public interest, it has not been possible for the Company to organize the 84th Annual General Meeting ('AGM') of the Company scheduled to be held at PamaThadani Auditorium, Jai Hind College, "A" Road, Churchgate, Mumbai 400 020 on **Monday, April 6, 2020 at 3.00 p.m.** to transact the business specified in the Notice convening the 84th AGM of the Company.

The revised date of 84th AGM of the Company shall be decided in due course of time by the Board of Directors of the Company and will be intimated to the Members in accordance with the Applicable Laws.

In view of the above, the e-voting facility provided by the Company for voting on the businesses mentioned in the AGM Notice stands cancelled.

It is further notified that the Record Date of Monday, March 30, 2020 for the purpose of determining the entitlement of dividend payment for the financial year ended December 31, 2019 remains unchanged. Accordingly, the dividend, if and when approved by the Members at the rescheduled AGM of the Company will be made payable to those Members whose names stand on the Register of Members as on March 30, 2020.

The documents, if any, relevant to the re-convened AGM will be sent to Members accordingly.

In case of any query(ies), Members may contact Company's Registrar and Transfer Agent, KFINT Technologies Private Limited ('KFintech') [Formerly known as Karvy Fintech Private Limited] at Selenium, Tower B, Plot No.31-32, Gachibowli, Financial District, Nanakramguda, Hyderabad, Telangana 500032 or at email ID: evoting@karvy.com or on Phone No. 040 6716 1563 or call KFintech's toll free No.: 1800 3454 001 for any further clarifications.

**By Order of the Board of Directors,
For ACC Limited
Sd/-
Rajiv Choubey
Chief Legal Officer & Company Secretary
ACS No.: 13063**

Place: Mumbai
Date: March 26, 2020

Man's hand severed in accident, docs at Safdarjung reattach it

ASTHA SAXENA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

DOCTORS AT Safdarjung Hospital have given a new lease of life to a 29-year-old man as they reattached his left palm, which was severed in a bike accident on Mohan Nagar flyover.

The man, Vikas, who works in a bank, was on the flyover when he suddenly felt lightheaded and lost control of his bike. He hit the side metal bar of the bridge, where his left hand was entangled in the bars and got severed.

A resident of Mandawali, he was rushed to the hospital by police officers. The officers also collected his left palm, which was entangled in the iron bar, and rushed him to a local hospital from where he was referred to Safdarjung Hospital.

Doctors took him to the OT and the team decided to deal with COVID-19 patients took charge of the case. He was operated on by 10 doctors for almost

The man, Vikas, who works in a bank, was on a flyover when he suddenly felt lightheaded and lost control of his bike

10 hours. "After initial investigations, we decided to operate on the patient at 7 pm. We first got the orthopaedic team to fix the bone. In the next few hours, we united the three veins, two arteries, tender nerves and salvaged the limb. The surgery finished around 4 in the morning. His hand has been successfully joined to the forearm. Its movement will not be like before but he will be able to use it," said Dr Rakesh Kain, head of the department of burns and plastic surgery.

As many as 36 suspected COVID-19 patients are admitted to Safdarjung hospital as on Thursday.

New order for e-retailers will be out soon: Police

SOMYA LAKHANI & SURBHI GUPTA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

A DAY after Delhi Police held a meeting with representatives of several e-commerce companies and assured them that their delivery staff will be allowed to travel easily in the city, the order was withdrawn Thursday afternoon. The new note said, "...retailers/operators of online delivery services shall be allowed to operate in Delhi... this message may please be treated as withdrawn with immediate effect."

The message further stated that "revised instructions shall follow". As per Delhi Police source, this is "temporary as the Ministry of Home Affairs wants uniformity in giving easy access to delivery services across the country. It has been withdrawn for the sake of uniformity. We will issue revised instructions."

A senior IPS officer said, "There is also some clarity needed on what essential serv-



People queue up outside a store in the capital. Abhinav Saha

ices are as far as delivery is concerned. Till the order comes, delivery services related to food and medicines will be allowed. The order has been withdrawn just to establish uniformity across India."

Prashant Tandon, co-founder of online pharmacy 1mg, said the order is not a worry "as a new notification would be shared, we have been assured". The online pharmacy will be doing deliver-

ies Friday. "We will 100 per cent follow the guidelines and orders by the customers, but we need to balance the needs of the customers. We will be taking orders but will only deliver according to the new notification but our stores will be open," said Ayesha Grewal of The Altitude Store, an organic store which home delivers groceries, vegetables and fruits.

More online delivery services in Gurgaon list

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
GURGAON, MARCH 26

FOLLOWING AN order on Wednesday that permitted 12 online delivery services to operate in Gurgaon district, Commissioner of Police Mohammad Akil issued another order later in the evening adding other e-commerce retailers and operators to the list.

"The following other retailers/operators online delivery services Zomato, Flipkart, Amazon, 24Seven, Blue Dart, DTD, Wow Express, Swiggy, Grofers, BigBasket, MilkBasket, Dunzo, Big Bazaar, Snapdeal, Licious, Medlife, PharmEasy, Urbanclap, Ninjacart, Honasa Consumer Pvt Ltd, Healthians Diagnostics, Delhivery Pvt Ltd, Nutrimoo Milk Dairy, More Retail Ltd, Easyday, Jabong, Myntra, Spencer's, Reliance Fresh, Jubilant Food Works, Foodpanda, Faaso's, Pizza Hut, Uber Eats, Needs Supermart Pvt Ltd, 1mg, Dr Lal Path Labs, Max-Path, Satvacart and any other e-commerce retailers/operators shall be allowed to operate," stated the order.

The order comes after several services stopped operations following harassment of their delivery personnel in the city. Both Gurgaon Police and the district administration Tuesday had held meetings to discuss measures to ensure smooth supply of goods to residents at their doorstep during the next three weeks.

Jamia prof tweets he 'failed 15 students', univ suspends him

ARANYA SHANKAR
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

JAMIA MILLIA Islamia has suspended an assistant professor who tweeted that he had passed all his students except 15 "non-Muslim" students for supporting the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). The teacher, however, later claimed the tweet was "sarcastic" and "misinterpreted".

Assistant Professor Abrar Ahmad, who teaches electrical engineering at the university, had tweeted Wednesday morning: "All my students are passed except 15 non-Muslims, who have to reappear #CAA. If you have #CAAProtests, I have 55 students in my favour #CAASupport. Majority will teach you lesson if protests not ends #riot (sic)."

After it attracted criticism, Ahmad tweeted, "Regarding a post I wrote about an examination discrimination is parody to explain #CAA and #CAAProtests (and) how government is discriminating a community. There has been no such examination and no such results... It is just to explain an issue..."

At 12.30 am on Thursday, Jamia tweeted from its official handle, tagging the Human Resource Development Minister, saying Ahmad had been suspended pending enquiry. "Dr Abrar Ahmad, Asst Professor, tweeted in public domain as to

failing 15 non-Muslim students... This is a serious misconduct inciting communal disharmony under CCS CONDUCT RULES. The university suspends him pending inquiry," it said.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Ahmad claimed he had been "misinterpreted". "It was a sarcastic tweet. I wanted to say that the way the government is targeting minorities in the name of CAA — by targeting those protesting against it — is wrong. Just like it would be wrong if I fail the non-Muslim students in my class... if they protest against it," he claimed.

"In this session, exams have still not taken place. In the previous semester, I taught two M.Tech classes, in which all students have been passed. This was a misunderstanding. Anyway, the university has set up an inquiry, so everything will become clear now," said Ahmad.

The Jamia unit of Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) hit out at Ahmad for his tweet, saying he had "shamed the pious profession of teaching".

"A prominent university like Jamia Millia Islamia has no place for a bigoted teacher like Dr Abrar who spews the venom of communalism to poison the minds of students dependent on him for their education," said ABVP Jamia president Shubham Rai.

Seven get bail in riots case

New Delhi: A court on Thursday granted bail to seven people arrested in connection with the recent riots in Northeast Delhi.

Metropolitan Magistrate Vijayshree Rathore granted relief to Mohd Arman, Shakir, Dilshad, Zakib, Bhure Khan, Razi and Shabir on furnishing a bail

bond of Rs 20,000 with one surety of like amount.

The court granted bail to the accused on the ground of principle of parity since two people were earlier enlarged on bail in the case. Police opposed the bail saying the investigation was at its initial stage. PTI

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH
Information & Public Relations Department

Extension of date to Request for Proposal for Engaging Multimedia Electronic Creative Producing Agency for Government of Andhra Pradesh

This department has invited Request for proposals from Multimedia Electronic Creative Production Agencies to provide services to Government of Andhra Pradesh. The tender dates are extended due to administrative reasons. The tender schedules will be issued till 17-04-2020 upto 1 PM. Sealed tenders should reach this office on or before 5.00 PM on 17-04-2020. For further details can be viewed in the website: www.approcurement.gov.in or contact Sri P. Kiran Kumar, Joint Director (Advertisements) 9121215223.

Sd/- T. Vijay Kumar Reddy I.S. Commissioner
RO No. 2161/CL/ADV/II/2019-20

Rajapur Municipal Council
E-tender Notice No.18 for the year 2019-20

Online E-tender for Construction Bandhara at Kodavli (Sayabache Dharan) District Ratnagiri is invited from the Contractors by Chief Officer Municipal Council Rajapur. The Blank B-1 Tender Documents in E-Tender form is available from the date 27/03/2020, 10.00 am upto date 20/04/2020, 12.00 am on website <http://mahatenders.gov.in>. E-Tender will be open on date 21.04.2020 at 12.00 am.

Sd/-
Chief Officer
Rajapur Municipal Council
Date - 26.03.2020

BHAKRA BEAS MANAGEMENT BOARD
(IRRIGATION WING)

CORRIGENDUM-1 NOTICE INVITING e-TENDER
NIT No. 602/20/TS

Name of Office : Sr. Executive Engineer, BC & Township Division, BBMB, Nangal Township, Distt. Ropar-140 124 (Pb.)

Name of Work : Construction of Museum and National Training Hydrology Centre at Nangal Township

Last Date / Time of Sale/ Availability of Documents

Download End Date & Time	24.04.2020 at 11:00 hrs.
Last Date & time of Online Bid Submission	24.04.2020 at 11:00 hrs.
Date & time of online Bid opening	24.04.2020 at 11:30 hrs.

For detailed NIT/ Terms & Conditions etc, please visit / download from BBMB website : www.bbmb.gov.in, www.eproc.punjab.gov.in

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आवश्यक रद्द सूचना

ई-निविदा आमंत्रण सूचना संख्या—**DOPR/DE/GIRIDIH/13/2019-20** जिसका पी० आर० संख्या 226939 **Rural Development (19-20) D** है को अपरिहार्य कारणवश स्थगित किया जाता है।

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PR 227534 Rural Development (19-20)D

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(Tele. 0135-276388, 276359, Fax: 0135-276357)
CIN No. U40161UR2001SGC025866, website: www.uttarakhandajalvidyut.com

Tender Notice
Tender No: 11/EE(G)/CPS/2019-20

Office of Executive Engineer (Generation), Chibro Power Station, Dehradun invites sealed tenders for following work:-

Name of Supply: Annual contract for cleaning & up keeping of switchyard and Chibro Power House complex.

Estimated cost - ₹24,97,388/- + GST Extra

Earnest Money - ₹74,925/-

Tender Cost - ₹1,180/-

Last date of downloading tender documents: 21.04.2020 up to 13:00 Hrs.

Last date of submission of bid : 21.04.2020 up to 17:00 Hrs.

Date of opening of bid: 24.04.2020, 11:00 Hrs.

For eligibility criteria and full & further details, kindly visit our website www.ujvn.com. Tenders can only be downloaded from our website & their cost has to be paid at the time of submission.

पत्रांक सं० 171/रिजि० 23/03/2020
EE(Gen), CPS, Chibro

"Avoid wasteful use of Electricity"

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

Executive Engineer,
Drainage Department
Surat Municipal Corporation
No. P.R.O./509/2019-20
Date: 24/03/2020

Punjab Water Supply & Sewerage Division, Ludhiana
eeppwssd1v21dh@gmail.com

CORRIGENDUM Date 25.03.2020

Name of Work:- Construction of Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs), Pumping Stations, ETPs for Dairy Complexes, Rehabilitation of existing STPs & Main Pumping Stations for abatement of pollution in Buddha Nallah, Ludhiana including Operation & Maintenance for a period of 10 years (on DBOT basis) under AMRUT Scheme, Cost of Project:- Lump Sum (including 10 years O&M)

In continuation of the e-tender Notice No. 17 /PWSSD/LDH of 12/2019, which was published in "Hindustan Times", "The Tribune" & "Indian Express" is now extended as per below schedule :-

Important Date and Time Schedule

Last date & time for On-line Submission: 15-04-2020 upto 5:00 PM
Date & Time of Opening of Technical Bid: 16-04-2020 at 11 :00 AM
For detailed terms and conditions refer to Website <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in>

Executive Engineer
Punjab W/S & Sew. Divn. Ludhiana

SBI STATE BANK OF INDIA
MINI SECT. BRANCH, DISTRICT KURUKSHETRA

[Rule-8(1)] POSSESSION NOTICE (for immovable property)

Whereas the undersigned being the Authorized Officer of State Bank of India, Mini Sectt. Branch, District Kurukshetra, under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with rule 8 & 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a demand notice to borrower/ Guarantor(s) on the dates mentioned hereunder, calling upon the Borrower(s) / Guarantor(s) to repay the amount mentioned in the respective demand notice within 60 days of the date of the notice.

The borrower(s) having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower(s) and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/her under section 13(4) of the said Act read with rule 8 & 9 of the said Rules, on the dates mentioned in the account.

The Borrower's attention is invited to provision of sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.

The borrower(s) in particular and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of the State Bank of India, Mini Sectt. Branch, District Kurukshetra, for the amount(s), mentioned herein below besides interest and other charges/expenses against the account.

Name of Borrower/ Guarantors	Description of the Immovable property	Date of Demand Notice	Date of possession Notice	Amount as per demand notice
Sh. Multan Singh S/o Sh. Siri Ram, Bhagwan Nagar Colony, Pipli, Thanesar, District Kurukshetra & Guarantors: (1) Sh. Darshan Singh S/o Sh. Mani Ram, Village Baholi, P.O. Bir Mathana, District Kurukshetra & (2) Sh. Rishi Pal S/o Sh. Jyoti Ram, Village Sinsama, Tehsil Thanesar, District Kurukshetra.	A part plot measuring East to West 30', North to South, 66', Total area 220 Sq. Yards i.e. 7 Marla being 7/177 share out of 8K-17M comprised in khewat No. 93, Total Kitta's 1, situated at Village Pipli, Tehsil Thanesar, District Kurukshetra, vide Sale Deed No. 2054 Dated 02.06.2016 in the name of Sh. Multan Singh S/o Sh. Siri Ram. Bounded as under: East: House of Saini Niwas, West: House of Harmeah Singh, North: Gali Sarai-aam, South: House of other owner.	15.01.2020	21.03.2020	Rs. 22,06,177/- plus incidental expenses plus other charges plus accrued interest thereupon w.a.f. 15.01.2020. (Loan Account No. 30576564832, 35867191975)

Date: 26.03.2020 Place: Kurukshetra Authorised Officer

Bank of Baroda
City Plaza, Vaishali Nagar, Ajmer-305004 (Rajasthan) Phone: 0145-2640898
E-Mail: vaisha@bankofbaroda.com

Letter No. VAISHA/ADV/NPA/Regd. Post/AD Date: 20.03.2020

NOTICE TO BORROWER (UNDER SUB-SECTION (2) OF SECTION 13 OF THE SARFAESI ACT, 2002)

1) Shakti Singh Rawat S/o Sh. Sohan Singh & 2) Smt. Dharmawati Rawat W/o Sh. Shakti Singh Rawat Address: H.No. E-401, Mangalam Flats, Pragati Nagar Kotra, Near Central Academy School, Ajmer

Dear Sirs Re.: Credit facilities with our Vaishali Nagar Branch.

I, We refer to our letter No. BOB/ADV/dated 14.03.2014 & 15.01.2016 conveying sanction of various credit facilities and the terms of sanction. Pursuant to the above sanction you have availed and started utilizing the credit facilities after providing security for the same, as hereinafter stated. The present outstanding in various loan/credit facility accounts and the security interests created for such liability areas under:

Nature and type of Facility	Limit in (Lacs)	Rates of interest	Outstanding Amount	Security agreement with brief description of securities
(EM of property) under Baroda Housing Loan A/c No.:				Equitable mortgage dated 19.01.2016 of land & building Residential property Flat No. E-401, 1Vth floor situated at 'The Residency E' Kotra Grah Nirman Scheme, of Mangalam Build Developers Pvt. Ltd, Kotra, Ajmer. Admeasuring 808 Sq.fts. in the name of Mr. Shakti Singh Rawat S/o Sh. Sohan Singh Rawat
1) 17370600016673	Rs. 9.60 Lakh	9.00%	O/s as on 29.02.2020 Rs. 7,00,187.98 plus further interest from 01.03.2020 and other charges.	
2) 17370600017055	Rs. 7.80 Lakh	10.50%	O/s as on 29.02.2020 Rs. 6,33,572.89 plus further interest from 01.03.2020 and other charges.	
		Total	Rs. 13,33,760.87 plus further interest from 01.03.2020 and other charges.	
OD Mudra A/c No.:				
1) M/s Sai facilities Company Prop. Shakti Singh Rawat A/c No.: 55850400000010	Rs. 4.00 Lakh	10.00%	O/s as on 31.01.2018 Rs. 4,04,440.50 plus interest and other charges.	
1) M/s Sai Associates Prop. Dharmawati Rawat A/c No.: 55850400000011	Rs. 10.00 Lakh	10.00%	O/s as on 31.01.2018 Rs. 10,20,337 plus interest and other charges.	
			Total Approximate amt Rs. 27,58,538.37 plus interest and other charges.	

In the letter of acknowledgment of debts dated 14.03.2014 & 15.01.2016 you have acknowledged your liability to the Bank in the tune of Rs. 9.60 lakhs & Rs. 7.80 lakhs as on 14.03.2014 & 15.01.2016. The outstanding stated above include further drawings and interest up to 29.02.2020 & Other charges debited to the account are Nil. 3. As you are aware, you have committed defaults in payment of interest on above loans outstanding for the quarter ended December 2019 and you have also defaulted in payment of instalments of term loan/demand loans which have fallen due for payment on 03.12.2019 and thereafter. 4. Consequently upon the defaults committed by you, your loan account has been classified as non-performing asset on 04.03.2020 in accordance with the Reserve Bank of India directives and guidelines. In spite of our repeated requests and demands you have not repaid the overdue loans including interest thereon. 5. Having regard to your inability to meet your liabilities in respect of the credit facilities duly secured by various securities mentioned in para 1 above, and classification of your account as a nonperforming assets, we hereby give you notice under sub-section (2) of section 13 of the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002, and call upon you to pay in full and discharge your liabilities to the Bank aggregating Total approximate amount Rs. 27,58,538.37 plus interest & other charges, as stated in para 1 above, within 60 days from the date of this notice. We further give you notice that falling payment of the above amount with interest till the date of payment, we shall be free to exercise all or any of the rights under sub-section (4) of section 13 of the said Act, which please note. 6. Please note that, interest will continue to accrue at the rates specified in para 1 above for each credit facility until payment in full. 7. We invite your attention to sub-section 13 of the said Act in terms of which you are barred from transferring any of the secured assets referred to in para 1 above by way of sale, lease or otherwise (other than in the ordinary course of business) without obtaining our prior written consent. We may add that non-compliance with the above provision contained in section 13(13) of the said Act, is an offence punishable under section 29 of the Act. 8. We further invite your attention to sub section (8) of section 13 of the said Act in terms of which you may redeem the secured assets, if the amount of dues together with all costs, charges and expenses incurred by the Bank is tendered by you, at any time before the date of publication of notice for public auction/inviting quotations/tender/private treaty. Please note that after publication of the notice as above, your right to redeem the secured assets will not be available. 9. Please note that this demand notice is without prejudice to and shall not be construed as waiver of any other rights or remedies which we may have, including without limitation, the right to make further demands in respect of sums owing to us.

Yours faithfully
(Preetam Sethi) Authorised Officer

WESTERN RAILWAY AHMEDABAD DIVISION
COMPLETE MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF RUNNING ROOM

E-tender Notice No: DRMM/ADI/25/2019-20 Dtd 20.03.2020; Tender No: M 377/55/RR-BLDI/2019-20; E-tender is invited from eligible contractors for the following works: Name of the Work: Contract work for Complete Management and Maintenance of Running Room - Bhildi (BLDI) including Subsidized Meals and Crew Box handling for a period of 3 Years. Estimated Cost of work: ₹ 3,68,45,664.44/- (Rupees Three Crores Sixty Eight Lakh Forty Five Thousand Eight Hundred Sixty Four Paise Forty Four Only). Earnest Money Deposit: ₹ 3,34,200/- (Rupees Three Lakhs Thirty Four Thousand Two Hundred Only). Date & Time of Tender Closing: Closing at 15:00 hrs on dated 20/04/2020. Date & Time of Tender Opening: Opening at 15:30 hrs. on dated 20/04/2020. Website particulars Notice Board location where complete details of tender can be seen & address of the office of tender inviting Authority: <http://www.ireps.gov.in>, Divisional Railway Manager (Mechanical), (W. Ry), 2nd Floor, Mechanical Branch, Near Chamunda Bridge, Naroda Road, P.O. Saljpur Bogha, Ahmedabad-382345.

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"IMPORTANT"

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PUBLIC NOTICE/TENDER NOTICE

Sr. No.	Name of Department/ Board/ Corporation	Name of Work/ Notice tender	Opening date closing date Time	Amount/EMD (Approx.) in Rupees	Website of the department	Nodal Officer/ Contract details/ email	Tender Ref. No. Tender No.
1.	The Haryana State Cooperative Supply & Marketing Federation Limited (Hafed).	E-tender notice for construction of open plinth under CAP hiring Scheme-2019.	20.03.2020 (03.00 P.M.) 01.04.2020 (12.00 Noon)	As Mentioned in the tender documents	www.hafed.gov.in	0172-2590520 hafed@hry.nic.in	

Sd/- Addl. General Manager (Proc. & WH)
For Managing Director, Hafed.

80530/HRY.

CHHATTISGARH HOUSING BOARD DIVISION JAGDALPUR (C.G.)
NOTICE INVITING TENDER Advt. No. 66

Invitation of online Bids & Tender in Form 'F' (Lump-Sum) CPWD EPC mode 3 (Turn Key) from eligible contractors and expert construction agencies/firm's in field of Monolithic Technology as detailed in the "Pre-Qualification document and registered in CLASS-A with Unique registration system or equivalent class registered in Govt. of India & other experienced contractor through tendering under two bid system detail in the Pre-qualification" Document for the following work as per detail given below. The document can be purchased and downloaded from-<https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in> on before 30.04.2020 up to 17:30 hours.

Name of work	Tender Amount	Earnest money	Cost of Tender Form	Time allowed for completion
Construction of Township for NMDC Ltd at Niyantar, Jagdalpur, C.G. SH: Total Land Area 118 Acre and 262 Nos. Residential Quarters including Hospital Block, VIP Guest House, Club, Dormitory, Community hall, Auditorium, School, Sports, Commercial Block & Allied buildings etc. (All Residential Multistoried building shall be constructed with monolithic concrete technology) including all Development Works (Civil & Electrical) on EPC Mode 3 including Operation and Maintenance for 2 years. (C.G.)	Rs. 1768.56 Crore	Rs. 17.79 Crore	Rs. 50,000.00 (Non refundable)	24 Months (i.e. rainy season)

Note:-1 Prequalification criteria and all other conditions can be seen on website (2) The bid document can be downloaded and submission of from website <https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in> up to 30.04.2020 (3) Pre-Bid meeting will be held on 16-04-2020 at Head office "Paryavasth Bhawan" North Block Sector-19 Nava Raipur Atal Nagar 492101 (C.G.) (4) Any other information can be obtained from the office of the Executive Engineer, C.G.Housing Board Division Jagdalpur during the office hours. (5) Amendment in tender if any will only be uploaded on the website and shall not be published in any news paper or inform by mail to any contractor.

Executive Engineer

Coping with the virus a challenge for India's 37% — internal migrants

From UP, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, they came to build a school for Delhi. Now, they are on their own

SEEMA CHISHTI
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

"IT WOULD be a very big government school when built," says Kaushalendra Trivedi (45), a recent migrant from Gorakhpur, employed as a guard in Uttam Nagar in the national capital's Rajkiya Sarvodaya Bal Vidyalaya. His family is five kilometres away in a makeshift home; he has been here for four days now, and as is his habit, to guard the place.

This is a self-run site with almost 200 migrant construction workers from UP, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, accommodating men, women and children in several hutments — people who have practically built Delhi, but cannot call it home when crises like the coronavirus lockdown strike.

"The Delhi people may get *galla* (foodgrain) as they have cards; we are not from here, we have nothing to show for. We have got nothing," Trivedi says.

The group of 60 from Damoh in Madhya Pradesh here is particularly restless. They were enrolled to work on the site just months ago, and while several have families here, many are divided, with children back home too. Some have their wives and children assisting in the work here, now stranded, with work having stopped.

Lakhan Ahirwal has a towel tied around his face and while aware of the coronavirus fears, his worries are less about social distancing or soap, and more about the day-to-day living for which there has been no assistance so far. "Can you get us back home, our children call on the phone and there is nothing here for us."

Neema (40) does manual labour, lifting and cleaning up after a day's work, and manages to get Rs 275 per day as wages. But all that is not there now. She is particularly worried about basic



Outside a homeless shelter at Yamuna Pushta. The influx of people lining up for food and shelter has meant many end up being left out; (left) at Uttam Nagar, where almost 200 migrant construction workers live in hutments. Tashi Tobgyal

staples, vegetables and grain prices shooting up. "Our *thali* has shrunk. It is potatoes and rice. *Dal* is a luxury, the younger people get a *pao* (250 gm) of dal occasionally. Vegetables which were Rs 25 a kg until yesterday cost Rs 40 per kg today."

No one here, including the couple Poonam and Ram Singh from Saharsa in Bihar with their four children, wants to openly criticise their contractors as "they are themselves helpless or have gone back".

Poonam says they would make "Rs 1,000 each for the two of us every week, but no payment has come in this week".

India, as per the 2011 census, records 45.36 crore or 37% of its population as "internal migrants". The number has gone up steadily from the last census. There is little to regulate their working conditions and lives even during routine times, and coronavirus has added dimensions to the extreme precariousness of being.

Sociologist professor Sanjay Srivastava, who has studied urbanisation closely, thinks it is important to focus on India's own peculiar challenges: "In a country where 20% of the population are intra-national economic migrants, our policies are mainly geared towards those who are not. We are a much more mobile country than the West, and the idea that we can cut and paste strategies from elsewhere is little more than aspirational policy making. The epidemiological crisis will be compounded by a social one."

Jagdish (22), from Madhya Pradesh, does a mason's work and is worried that even if the contractor gives money, that would be a loan, not relief. "Woh sab to karz hoga na? Sarkar ne toh kuch nahi diya hai. We have a few days of ration left, that is all."

It was just two years ago, on March 19, 2018, when a Supreme Court bench comprising Justice Madan Lokur and Justice Deepak Gupta had made a strong statement on paying migrant construction workers their due: "We have been informed that under the Cess Act, more than Rs 37,400 crore has been collected for the benefit of construction workers, but only about Rs 9,500 crore has been utilised ostensibly for their benefit. What is being done with the remaining about Rs 28,000 crore? Why is it that construction workers across the country are being denied the benefit of this enormous amount? These are some questions that arise in this petition — are the answers blowing in the wind?"

While electricity and some minimal water supply in the government school site is there, they

say, conversations about soaps and hand wash and even social distancing appear to be from another world.

Says scientist D Raghunandan, of the All India Peoples' Science Network, working on public health issues: "Those who managed to flee to their original villages and towns a few days ago anticipating the lockdown underwent harrowing journeys in overcrowded trains and buses, spent huge sums on last-mile journeys, possibly infecting countless others or getting infected on the way. Back home, they face hostility and an extremely weak public health system. Those lakhs of migrant workers now stuck in Delhi find themselves in limbo, with no income or opportunities for work, lacking for food, and many without shelter unable to pay rent."

"Since it would be impossible to practise physical distancing in the limited and crowded temporary shelters being set up for them, they are also further exposed to infection. A better planned lockdown could have anticipated these problems. The central government is also yet to plan for income support for these workers and other poor in the unorganised sector, or announce any relief and welfare package."

Mohammed Talib, (25) from Bareilly in UP, does tile and stone work and came to Delhi with many hopes just three months ago: "The money, along with the work, has stopped. So even if the stores around us are open, what can we do?"

One of the women workers who deals with water work puts it succinctly: "Sabzi, chawal, mostly aloo, is being cooked, lekin kya karein, hum parades mein hain na. Can you help us get back?"

"Tackling the COVID-19 epidemic is not just a medical issue, but a multi-faceted socio-economic one, and calls for commensurate measures," scientist D Raghunandan concludes.

From 'adopting' 250 Pakistani Hindu families to feeding 2 teens, Delhi Police extends helping hand

MAHENDER SINGH
MANRAL
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

AS MANY as 250 families staying in a Pakistani Hindu refugee camp in Northwest Delhi, who largely work as daily wagers, have been left without a source of income following the lockdown. It was on Wednesday that the Northwest district police came to their rescue and decided to 'adopt' the families for the next 21 days. Police said they will contribute funds from their pockets at the district level to ensure they have three meals a day.

During the lockdown, some people approached DCP (Northwest) Vijayanta Arya while she was on patrolling duty and narrated their ordeal to her. "We decided to help all these families after 'adopting' them. We have decided to contribute money, and will provide them raw food as per their requirement," said Arya. President of the Pakistani



Govindpuri police station roped in volunteers to provide essential supplies to people in need

Hindu refugee camps, Nehrul Lal, said: "I sell mobile accessories, which helps me sustain my family. But I have been facing a tough time for the last 10 days — my family of five barely

had enough to eat. We raised this with senior police officers and they have assured us help."

In other parts of the capital as well, police have voluntarily

started helping daily wage labourers.

"In Southwest Delhi, police personnel have decided to help 1,000 people under each police station by working alongside

'good samaritans' in their area. Some of them are also keen to contribute from their salaries," said a senior police officer.

In Old Delhi's Khari Baoli, over 500 daily wagers had been struggling in the absence of work, and no means to go home.

"We decided to help them out and asked locals in our area to extend help as well. We prepared food and distributed it in our area," said SHO (Lahori Gate) Satish Sharma.

Govindpuri police station in Southeast Delhi has, meanwhile, roped in volunteers to provide essential supplies to people in need.

In North Delhi's Inderlok, a PCR call was received on Thursday wherein the callers were crying and requesting help.

"They told police that they had not had food for the last four days. Both of them are teenaged daily wage laborers. Police called them to the police post and offered them food and money to help them tide over the coming days," said a senior officer.

DURING 21-DAY LOCKDOWN

Govt says grocers can run 24x7

SOMYA LAKHANI &
SOURAV ROY BARMAN
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

ESTABLISHMENTS PROVIDING essential services, including grocery shops, will be allowed to operate 24x7, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced Thursday.

In a joint press briefing with L-G Anil Bajaj, the CM said Delhi Police ACPs and sub-divisional magistrates have been ordered to "personally ensure" functioning of essential services without any hindrance in their respective areas. "Be it a vegetable vendor, a grocery shop owner or a chemist, every essential service provider is being given e-passes. All they need to do is call the helpline number (1031). The passes will reach them via WhatsApp," said Kejriwal, adding that police have been asked to allow essential service providers to function even if they don't have passes.

Bajaj said the measure will "help in staggering customer visits and help maintain social distancing norms". The announcements were made after a meeting of the core committee, monitoring arrangements to keep the capital running during the 21-day lockdown period, at the L-G's residence.

However, not many grocery stores are keen to take up the offer to stay open 24x7. Many shopkeepers the *The Indian Express* spoke to cited lack of manpower and diminishing stocks as the main reason.

At Lajpat Nagar's Home Shoppe store, a manager said, "Shelves are getting empty quickly and we don't have a lot of stock anyway. All our stock comes from outside Delhi and there is uncertainty about whether we will be able to replenish it or not."

At Sadar Bazar's Annapurna

grocery store, the owner said, "There is no footfall after 8 pm, there are hardly any people in the day. I won't keep my shop open at night." At Jain Dairy nearby, the owner said, "It's a good order but we will have to pay staff extra money for the extra hours. Will they bear that bill?"

Meanwhile, Confederation of All India Traders in a statement welcomed the move in the "time of this unprecedented crisis as it will facilitate more people to procure their daily essential goods".

More than 3,000 e-passes issued

The New Delhi district administration is issuing e-passes in seven different colours, categorising applications based on the nature of services extended by individuals and establishments. The South and East district administration have decided to keep "things simple" and issue similar passes to everyone.

New Delhi district magistrate Tanvi Garg said the system was devised for easier identification and record keeping of passes. By Thursday morning, the administration had received 525 applications and 299 passes were issued. The administration also plans to persuade vendors with passes to start doorstep delivery so that people don't have to come out.

South Delhi DM B M Mishra said they have issued around 1,000 e-passes so far. He said the passes were being issued on a "trust basis" as physical verification of the claims would take up a lot of resources. "That does not mean anyone who applies will get the pass. We are proceeding with abundant caution," he said.

Officials of the East Delhi administration said around 2,800 passes have been issued so far. The e-passes will remain valid only during the lockdown. Any misuse will attract punishment.

Noida reports 3 more coronavirus cases

AMIL BHATNAGAR
NOIDA, MARCH 26

THREE MORE Noida residents tested positive for the coronavirus Thursday, taking the total number of cases in the district to 14. Till Thursday afternoon, Noida had the highest number of cases in UP.

According to officials, the three patients do not have a travel history and are believed to have been in direct or indirect contact with a couple in Sector 137 who had tested positive earlier.

"Three more samples have come back positive. One of the patients came in contact with another positive patient, following which his wife was also infected. The daughter of the couple who had been diagnosed earlier has also been found positive. The screening process has begun and we are tracing more contacts," said Dr Anurag Bhargava, CMO, Gautam Budh Nagar. The couple diagnosed on

Thursday are residents of a housing society in Sector 150. The man had reportedly met a positive patient — the resident of Sector 137 — and a British national, following which he contracted the virus. His wife contracted it from him.

According to locals, the two men were in constant touch with the British national who was staying at a hotel in the district for a few days.

Officials said the society in Sector 150 and the hotel in Sector 135 have been sealed for two days to contain the spread. Residents of the society have been advised not to step out since the risk of infection remains, officials said. Staff at the hotel are also being screened and officials will be sanitising the entire hotel over the next two days.

As per the state health department, till Thursday evening, four patients in Noida had tested negative for coronavirus as per their latest samples.

SOUTH DELHI'S MAHIPALPUR

At this slum with no water, residents ask: How do we wash our hands?

SHIVAM PATEL
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

A HALF-FILLED drum of water measuring about 25 litres is all Rekha has left for her family of six living in a slum cluster near south Delhi's Mahipalpur.

For the past three days, she said, her son and nephew have been unsuccessful in reaching a nearby, privately owned borewell from where they get their daily supply, because of police heavy handedness. "There is not a drop of water left here," said the 35-year-old, referring to the *jhuggi jhopri* cluster of about

a 100 families that are involved in waste picking in Mahipalpur.

"My son tried to get water a couple of days ago but ran into police officers midway, who hit him with *lathis* and asked him to go back home. They did the same with my nephew a day earlier," said Rekha.

Others in the slum claimed the borewell has been shut since the lockdown began, which was unexpected for them as they thought authorities would not interrupt water supply.

Sunil Kumar (30) managed to fill up two drums of water of 50 litres each less than a week ago. One of them finished Thursday

morning, as his family of 10 uses this water for cooking, drinking, bathing and almost everything else. At this pace, the other drum might also run out soon.

Kumar, who works as a waste picker, said, "We have to stop the spread of this disease (coronavirus) and for that we have been told we need to keep washing our hands. But how will we be able to do that with no water left? I have stopped going to work because of this."

The slum cluster where Rekha and Kumar live is not connected to the water network of the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) and has not been receiving water tankers



For the 100 families at the slum, the only source of water is a privately owned borewell nearby. Express

for around four months. The only source of water, they said, is the privately owned borewell, which charges around Rs 70 for 50 litres of potable water, and Rs 20 for 15 litres of drinking water.

"My son has been sick for two days; he has a headache and fever. We have been told to wash our hands, but bathing is out of question. Our drinking water has also run out," said Rekha.

Adding to the woes of families in this cluster is a slump in work, as residential colonies have started restricting entry of waste pickers, and there's no waste coming out of offices. There are also no takers for

dry waste that has accumulated at the site — such as plastic, rags and cardboard — which families sell for a living, said Rekha.

The local general store has started charging more for necessities with 5 kg of wheat flour now selling for Rs 190 — Rs 50 more than the price before lockdown, Kumar said.

It's a similar story in Northwest Delhi's Bhalswa, where Sahira Bano (37), the local secretary of the waste pickers group Safai Sena, said they are just about making it with a private water tank coming once a week.

"We are getting piped water here but that also comes once a

week and smells really bad and is dark in colour. When the water tanker comes, there is crowding and fights break out as well," she said.

Bano estimates that there are about 1,000 waste pickers in the area, all of whom have lost work since the lockdown. The Bhalswa landfill, where they would pick up dry waste from to resell, has shut their entry. "The shops around here open every day, but when people do not have any money, what will they buy?"

A DJB official said they have taken note of the problem faced in both areas and it would be resolved soon.

6 THE OUTBREAK NATION



No community transmission yet, rate of spike in positive cases slowing: govt

88 new cases; ICMR expert says one or two 'anecdotal cases' doesn't mean community transmission

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

AS THE number of coronavirus cases in the country climbed to 694, including 44 recovered patients and 16 dead, and questions persist about possible community transmission, Health Ministry officials on Thursday said that "one or two anecdotal cases", where the source of the infection has not been traced, does not mean community transmission has started occurring in the country.

On Thursday, 88 fresh cases were confirmed, and Health Ministry officials maintained that the rate of increase in cases

is going down. Dr R R Gangakhedkar, Head of Department, Epidemiology and Infectious Diseases, at ICMR, also rejected a modelling study that has predicted "300 and 400 million Indians likely to be infected by July".

Asked about uncertainty over the source of infection among some patients, including one in Tamil Nadu and the cluster of cases among medical professionals in Bhilwara, Rajasthan, Dr Gangakhedkar said: "You have to understand that when contact tracing is done, travel history is taken into account, (as) also the contact history. Every person will have to reply to everything; you cannot always believe everything

they say. One or two anecdotal cases do not make community transmission — we do not have evidence (of community transmission) till now. If it was there, why wouldn't we tell you?"

He also said, "The media has to be cautious when reporting about all this (community transmission). Otherwise it will create panic. It is not right to do that without evidence."

According to the World Health Organization, community transmission "is evidenced by the inability to relate confirmed cases through chains of transmission for a large number of cases, or by increasing positive tests through sentinel samples (routine systematic testing of

respiratory samples from established laboratories)."

Lav Agarwal, Joint Secretary, Health, explained that in Bhilwara one doctor had a travel history and some others who got infected was a case of local transmission. He said: "There are 500-600 cases, contact tracing is on. Even if we do not always get to the source, we do not say community transmission has happened. Only when there is a large number of such cases, and they are widespread, can we say community transmission (is taking place)."

Agarwal said: "One person (who) has travelled to three or four places may not be able to communicate all of that effectively...it is important for us to

collectively fight the disease. Do not get into semantics."

He said that the rate of increase of infections has "stabilised", but "complete lockdown" is the key.

So far, 17 states have started work on dedicated hospitals for COVID-19.

On the modeling study predicting a huge spike in cases, Dr Gangakhedkar said, "They do not model with concrete evidence. I can say from my experience of AIDS in 2000 (that) they projected 4 crore infections — we are at 56 lakh now. There are a lot of these doomsday predictors. Our steps are so good that if they are followed, numbers will start to fall immediately."

Video of girl asking cop father not to go out strikes a chord among policemen

REENIVAS JANYALA
HYDERABAD, MARCH 26

A SHORT video of a small child holding her policeman father's leg, asking him not to go out as there was coronavirus outside, landed in police WhatsApp groups of Telangana Wednesday. Many policemen broke down receiving the message.

While there have been many instances of police high-handedness across the country in enforcing the 21-day lockdown, on the other side of this picture are personnel battling personal anxieties, enhanced duty hours and a restless public — often armed with nothing but a mask and a lathi.

Saying that he can understand why the video touched so many hearts, Rachakonda Police Commissioner Mahesh Bhagwat told *The Indian Express*, "Policemen, especially those on the streets, are under a lot of stress. People argue with them and abuse them. They also face the risk of catching the infection and passing it on to their families...In spite of rotational shifts, they end up working long hours."

Ensuring people stay indoors and maintain social distancing when they are outside is a drastic departure from police's usual role of implementing law and order. They have also been asked to check black-marketing, issue passes for emergency and essential services, assist citizens in medical distress if an ambulance is unavailable, and seal inter-state borders.

Officials said that while people strictly observed the Janata Curfew on Sunday, police had a difficult time keeping them in on Monday and Tuesday. With several instances being reported of police using force, a Cyberabad Police officer said, "By Monday afternoon, the state government asked police to clear the roads. But people were unwilling to listen. When every other person argues that he has a right to be on the



A traffic policeman has meal by the roadside. Express

road, it creates a problem for policemen. To how many people can a policeman patiently explain? Everyone thinks his or her job or errand is the most important."

The official added, "A young woman argued with me for 15 minutes. She wanted to pick up her friend and take her home. Some people were out just to see what was happening."

Since Tuesday, Cyberabad Police has issued over 10,000 passes, to medical personnel, pharmacists, vegetable vendors, goods carrier owners, hostel managers and their cooks, IT core staff, etc.

On Wednesday and Thursday, students from other states approached police stations in Hyderabad and Cyberabad for a certificate that they were healthy and want to go home. This process stretched the police further.

Additional DCP, Madhapur Division in Cyberabad, M Venkateshwarlu said things seemed more organised by Wednesday. "To ensure that the force gets enough rest, we have requisitioned all the staff for COVID-19 duty. We have reduced the working hours for each police personnel to eight hours so that they get enough rest as well as can buy essentials for own homes," he said.

"It is a tough exam for police. I and other senior officers are visiting them at checkpoints and appreciating their work to keep them going," Bhagwat said.

Bihar govt to open relief camps for migrants

Patna: The Bihar government has decided to open relief and stay camps for migrants and others left stranded due to the nation-wide lockdown. The decision was taken after reports of many people being stranded as no vehicle was allowed to ply due to the lockdown. Meanwhile, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar convened an emergency meeting on Thursday and decided to open disaster relief camps in Patna and other towns, where food and shelter would be provided and social distancing would be also maintained. **ENS**

J&K govt launches relief fund

Jammu: The Jammu and Kashmir government on Thursday launched the J&K Relief Fund and appealed to the general public to donate to the fund to fight COVID-19. Lt Governor G C Murmu said the account number for the fund is 0110010100000016 with J&K Bank, and said that the country was facing an unprecedented challenge, with communities and economies everywhere affected by the virus. **ENS**

Man killed after tiff over lockdown

Mumbai: Police on Thursday arrested a 28-year-old man for allegedly killing his younger brother in Mumbai. According to police officials, the deceased, Durgesh Thakur (21), lived with his elder brother Rajesh. Police said on Wednesday, after a fight erupted between the two after Rajesh returned following a grocery run, in the ensuing scuffle, Rajesh hit Durgesh on the head with a pan, leading to his death. **ENS**

J&K: 65-yr-old first COVID-19 death; 8-month-old among 3 to test positive

ADIL AKHZER
SRINAGAR, MARCH 26

A 65-year-old Srinagar man who reported positive for coronavirus two days ago died at a local hospital on Thursday morning, marking the first COVID-19-linked death in the Valley.

On Thursday evening, Jammu and Kashmir administration's spokesperson Rohit Kansal stated that two siblings, aged seven and eight months old, have tested positive for coronavirus.

The siblings are grandchildren of a Srinagar man who has tested positive for coronavirus and has travel history to Saudi Arabia, Kansal tweeted. The man tested positive on March 24, he stated.

In another tweet, he said a positive case has been reported from Rajouri in Jammu region and that this person was in contact of the deceased patient.

The deceased, a senior member of Tableeghi Jamaat, a non-political Islamic outfit, was originally from Sopore. He had travelled to several places, including Delhi, Deoband, Jammu and north Kashmir's Sopore and was suspected to have spread the virus to many people, *The Indian Express* had reported on Wednesday.

On Wednesday, four people, also Tableeghi Jamaat members from Hajin in Bandipora district, who were the dead patient's "contacts", tested positive for COVID-19, officials said.

A doctor privy to the case told *The Indian Express* that the patient died at Srinagar's Chest Disease Hospital. "The patient had shown signs of improvement, but he suffered a cardiac arrest in the morning and died," the doctor said.

Late Thursday afternoon, sources said, the body was taken directly for burial in his native village in Sopore and the burial was conducted under strict guidelines.

"On doctors' recommendation, the body was not taken to his home and was directly taken for burial. Only close family members were present at the funeral," a Health Department official in Sopore said. "Those who took part in

the burial were given proper kits and they have been kept under surveillance. The vehicle which transported the body from the Srinagar hospital was fumigated."

The police increased security arrangements in Sopore to deter any big gathering at the burial.

What worries officials in Kashmir's Health Department is the travel history of the deceased, which has prompted a massive contact-tracing exercise. On Thursday, the Pulwama administration declared all mosques be designated as quarantine centres where recently returned Tablighi Jamaat members are residing.

Officials said the man flew in from Jammu on March 16 and reported to SKIMS medical college in Bemina on March 21. From there, he was referred to SKIMS, Saura. A day later, he visited SMHS Hospital in Srinagar, where doctors diagnosed him as a suspected coronavirus patient and referred him to Chest Disease Hospital for further treatment.

While it is not clear why hospital authorities did not admit the patient on March 21, his family members claimed that doctors at SKIMS-Saura "refused to admit the patient because he had no international travel history". A doctor at SKIMS-Saura said they are looking into the matter.

Divisional Commissioner, Kashmir, has marked an inquiry after he received report that the patient (now deceased) "was not handled as per the protocol" at SKIMS Bemina. In the order issued Wednesday, Divisional Commissioner Pandurang Kondbarao Pole stated that the patient reported to the hospital's casualty on March 21. The order states: "...the report further reveals that the patient who was later tested positive for COVID-19 has not been handled as per the protocol required for treating patients. The report further reveals that knowing the travel history of the patient and observing the symptoms of the patient, the Hospital administration has not brought it into the notice of Divisional/District/Police authorities when he left the hospital without getting admitted."



German nationals, who were stranded in different parts of the country, arrive at the German Embassy in New Delhi on Thursday. Anil Sharma

73-year-old dies in Bhilwara, officials say no COVID-19 link

HAMZA KHAN
JAIPUR, MARCH 26

A 73-YEAR-OLD man in Rajasthan's Bhilwara district, who had tested positive for coronavirus and was in a coma due to kidney failure, died on Thursday, Health Department officials said. However, the officials declined to attribute his death to the infection.

In a statement, the Health Department said the 73-year-old suffered from chronic kidney diseases and had diabetes, and was undergoing hemodialysis. "On March 3 he suffered a brain stroke and was admitted at the private hospital, where he was admitted till March 11," the department said.

As the septuagenarian's condition did not improve, he was discharged by the hospital.

Six staff members of this hospital tested positive for COVID-19 on March 20. As per health officials, the 73-year-old was infected while he was admitted at the hospital.

"Even before COVID-19 spread in the district, the patient was comatose due to kidney failure and brain stroke. So it won't be appropriate to say that he died of COVID-19, but that he died of pre-existing diseases," said Rohit Kumar Singh, Additional Chief

Secretary, Health.

On Thursday evening, the 73-year-old's son and granddaughter also tested positive for coronavirus, taking the total number of cases in the district to 19. The number of cases in the state rose to 43, with one person each in Jaipur, Jhunjhunu and Jodhpur testing positive for the virus.

Meanwhile, in an order Thursday, Bhilwara district administration invoked Rajasthan Epidemic Diseases Act, 1957 and took over nine hotels/resorts and five private hospitals.

As per the order, the premises as well as services of the entire staff of the hospitals and all available resources and equipment at the hospitals were taken over and handed to the Chief Medical and Health Officer of the district.

The managers of the hospitals and the hotels were directed that they should not indulge in negligence, indifference or delay in the hand over.

They have also been asked to ensure that water, electricity and other essential services be ensured for the entire duration of the takeover.

Municipal Council of Bhilwara has been asked to ensure that the acquired hotels and hospitals are cleaned daily, under the direction of health officials.

Karnataka reports second death

Bengaluru: Karnataka Thursday reported its second COVID-19 death as the total number of cases in the state rose to 55.

A 70-year-old woman from the Chikballapur district which borders Bengaluru, has been identified as the second victim. She had returned on March 15 from a visit to Mecca.

"The patient died on March 24 at a designated hospital in Bengaluru. The funeral rites have been done with all the precautionary measures as per the guidelines issued by GoI for COVID-19 suspect deaths," the Karnataka health and family welfare department said. **ENS**

Another death in MP, state toll 2

Bhopal: A day after Madhya Pradesh reported the death of a 65-year-old woman from Ujjain, another 65-year-old COVID-19 patient died on Thursday. Both were undergoing treatment at a government hospital in Indore.

So far 20 people from the state have tested positive. The Ujjain resident had been referred to Indore on Tuesday. **ENS**



The incident took place at Naweda Chauraha in Badaun

UP constable removed from duty after making returning labourers squat & hop

AMIL BHATNAGAR
NOIDA, MARCH 26

A CONSTABLE in Badaun in Uttar Pradesh has been removed from duty and a probe initiated against him after he allegedly made five labourers squat and hop on the road while they were walking to their homes amid the lockdown.

A video of the incident, which appears to have been shot by a passer-by and has since gone viral, shows five labourers with backpacks squatting and hopping on the directions of a policeman who has two sticks in his hands. Three of the labourers start walking later, but the policeman tells them to squat and hop again.

It appears that the police intercepted the labourers while they were walking to their hometowns after the government announced the 21-day lockdown to check the spread of COVID-19 and all means of transport stopped operations.

Officials said the video was shot on Wednesday at Naweda Chauraha in Badaun, officials said.

Badaun police have issued an apology and called for action against the policeman. "The video belongs to our region. Police had

been deployed on the streets soon after the lockdown announcement. Senior constables were also present during the checking and they immediately removed him from duty once they came to know of his act. As chief of the district, I apologise and feel ashamed since the action was unwarranted," said SP Ashok Kumar Tripathi. According to officials, an inquiry has been initiated against the policeman, Vikrant.

Jitendra Srivastava, SP City, who is probing the matter, said Vikrant joined as a trainee constable three months ago and is under probation. "By Friday, I will gather more information about the incident. Strict action will be taken accordingly and the guilty will not be spared," said Srivastava.

According to local residents and officials, several men from NCR and other districts have been seen walking towards different parts of Uttar Pradesh after the lockdown was announced. The crossing at which the video was shot connects three cities Mathura, Bareilly and Sambhal. "After the incident, the men in the video went on one of the highways and walked further on," said an official from Civil Lines Police Station.

ANXIETY IN MP, PUNJAB

Lockdown puts question mark on wheat procurement

MILIND GHATWAI & ANJU AGNIHOTRI CHABA
BHOPAL, JALANDHAR, MARCH 26

FIRST IT was over two weeks of political uncertainty and now it is the 21-day lockdown to combat COVID-19 that is giving anxious moments to the lakhs of wheat growers in Madhya Pradesh.

Procurement of their produce — farmers in the state have sown a record 79.68 lakh hectares under wheat this time, against 60 lakh hectares in 2019-20, on the back of an excellent monsoon that boosted groundwater aquifers and reservoir levels — was to start on March 25. That date was postponed to April 1, even while the Kamal Nath-led Congress govern-

ment fell on March 20 after battling an internal rebellion.

The new BJP government was sworn in late on March 23, but less than 24 hours later came the lockdown announcement from Prime Minister Narendra Modi. That has put a question mark on procurement based on the new schedule.

Nearly 19 lakh farmers had registered themselves on the MP government's e-Uparjan procurement portal between February 1 and 28. The crop in the main Malwa-Nimar belt has already been harvested. Farmers in other regions were also busy harvesting their wheat when the lockdown was imposed.

On Wednesday, CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan told farmers not to worry, while assuring that the gov-

ernment would buy their wheat. The detailed instructions, including scheduling of procurement, would be issued soon. "As things stand, procurement will begin on April 1. The situation was still evolving when this lockdown was suddenly announced. We are working out how to regulate the process..." said an MP official.

The lockdown has resulted in the police and local authorities also imposing restrictions on movement of combine harvesters, straw reapers and threshers. "We will ensure that the movement of these machines will be allowed after screening of the drivers. Everything will fall in place," Chouhan assured farmers.

"If procurement does not start within the next few days, there will

be huge pressure on the mandis and prices could even crash," claimed Kedar Sirohi, farm activist and Congress leader. According to Rambharose Basotiya of Bharatiya Kisan Sangh, "farmers are worried and I expect procurement to start only around April 15".

Meanwhile, there is uncertainty over procurement operations even in Punjab, where arrivals in mandis normally start from April 10 and pick up pace after the Baisakhi festival. The latter is scheduled this year on April 13, while the present lockdown will continue till April 14.

Punjab accounted for 129.12 lakh tonnes (lt) out of the country's total wheat procurement of 341.32 lt for the Central pool last year. Unlike MP, which contributed only

67.25 lt, Punjab has no system for registration of farmers and regulation is generally left to the arhatiyas (commission agents) through whom they sell to government agencies.

But this time, there is concern over the need to maintain social distancing in the mandis during procurement, which is usually completed by the end of April. The issue of restricting number of farmers to be allowed entry into markets was discussed at a meeting of state government officials at Chandigarh on Wednesday.

"We will fix the entry limits depending on the size of each mandi and in consultation with the arhatiyas who are in direct contact with the farmers," K A P Sinha, principal secretary of Punjab's

Food, Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs, said. The other major issue discussed at the meeting was arranging labourers at the mandis. An estimated 90 per cent of these labourers — who unload and clean the grain brought by farmers at the auction platforms, before filling them into gunny bags that are further stitched and loaded on to trucks — are from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

In Punjab, harvesting is yet to commence. "That should not be a problem because it can be done by combines that need only 2-3 labourers. The real problem will be finding labourers, who number 3-4 lakh in the 2,000 mandis and grain purchase centres of the state," said Vijay Kalra, president of the Punjab Arhatiya Association.

7 THE OUTBREAK NATION

Digital push: Webinars by AIIMS doctors, app to trace possible contacts of COVID-19 patients

DIPANKAR GHOSE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

THE UNION government has developed a platform which will host webinars by AIIMS doctors for healthcare workers across the country, and an app that will trace the paths of COVID-19 positive patients, serving as a warning to possible contacts.

These, as well as chatboxes on Facebook and WhatsApp set up by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), are part of the digital push to fight the novel coronavirus.

The webinar platform has been developed in tandem with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. "Basically, the frontline health workers now face the biggest risk. Nurses and paramedics have to be aware of the dangers. Through AIIMS doctors, we have created a webinar series. We are putting it on Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp so nurses, paramedics, ASHA (accredited social health activist) workers, anganwadi workers should all be able to see. The webinar will be a daily thing," said a senior government official.

"If it worsens, you may see a situation where in many families, a person will have to turn caregiver. Then there will be no MBBS degree or nursing degree that will apply... there will be customised content on YouTube — separate for doctors, nurses, anganwadi workers etc. We are involving the state governments because we need content in the regional languages also," said the official.

Besides, on the lines of an app already functional in Singapore, the ministry has also worked on a contact path tracing app, tentatively called 'Corona Kavach'. "The app will be green initially. It will keep storing your location data, you will have to keep your Bluetooth on... The system knows who all were in a particular location within 3-5 metres. Suppose you were with me, and I test positive. The lab will enter my credentials. The information about my mobile number testing positive will be sent to the cloud. A signal will come to my app which will convert it to red," said the official.

"Then, based on my entire location and Bluetooth data — only for the people who are red — the server will do some computation and find out who I was in

close proximity with in the last 14 days. Their apps will turn yellow, and they will get an alert that they should go home, quarantine, and take care of themselves," the official said.

A day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a WhatsApp phone number chatbot for information about COVID-19, officials are looking at upscaling it. "We are concentrating on giving the right information... and busting fake news," said the official.

"You just have to send a 'Hi' to 9013151515, and we will reply in English and Hindi. We have activated a Gujarati version, created a Marathi version; Kerala and Karnataka are also coming on board... We are getting two more numbers — 9013252525 and 9013353535," the official said.

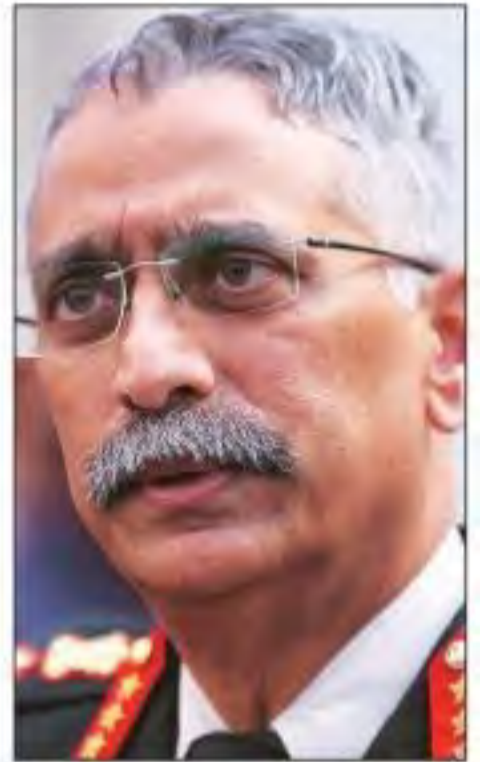
The government is also setting up a portal to map the requirements faced by hospitals, and cross-referencing them with those who have offered to help with equipment. "The Health Ministry has set up a system which will capture what is required by various hospitals. There are people willing to offer that. We have created a portal where this mapping is happening," said a MeitY official.



ROBOT IN RAJASTHAN HOSPITAL: Jaipur's Sawai Man Singh Hospital, the biggest govt hospital in Rajasthan, has started using a humanoid robot in its COVID-19 ward. Express

Field hospitals told to ready isolation beds, ICUs: Army chief

ALL BRANCHES of the government, including the armed forces, are helping fight COVID-19. As the biggest service among the forces, the Army, has a leading role to play. Army Chief General M M Naravane interacted with SUSHANT SINGH over email about the effect of COVID-19 spread on the Army, its preparations, and its contingency planning. Excerpts:



What has been the effect of COVID-19 on the Army — operationally, recruitment and training-wise, and in terms of logistics?

It is the earnest responsibility of the Army to keep the borders safe while the country is fighting COVID-19. The Indian Army is undertaking its tasks like before and there is no effect on operational preparedness. Various measures have been promulgated with respect to restricting movement of personnel, conferences/seminars, postings, etc. These measures are in sync with various directions and advisory issued by GoI (the Government of India).

The spread of COVID-19 will not affect the core efficiency of IA (the Army). The temporary phase of postponing our routine activities will soon be overcome by rescheduling them as and when the situation stabilises. As of now, our focus will be to combat COVID-19 aggressively by taking precautions, following lockdown and curfew measures effectively, and preparing own resources for future scenario.

"The Army is geared up (for) the overall mantra 'Say No to Panic, Yes to Precaution'.

In many European countries, the Army has been called out to help fight COVID-19. Should we expect a similar situation in India?

The Indian Army is of the people and for the people of India; (it) is mandated to provide assistance to civil authorities whenever called for. As of now, keeping with the nation's requirements, we have established quarantine facilities at Manesar, Jaisalmer and Jodhpur for evacuees from China, Italy and Iran. Additional four locations have been earmarked for setting up of wellness/ quarantine facilities.

We are also running awareness campaigns for communities residing near cantonments. Whenever the government assigns a particular task in future, Indian Army will execute it to the best of its capability.

What types of contingencies are you expecting in India that the Army needs to be prepared for?

It is difficult to say how the situation will develop. However, having analysed the impact of COVID-19 over two-three months in other countries, one can start planning. Indian Army has certain inherent capabilities to rise up to emergency situa-



WITH M M NARAVANE
ARMY CHIEF

tions by virtue of (its) organisational structure and training...

What preparations are being made to help the civil administration if the crisis worsens?

There is likely to be an increase in demand for medical services for both infected (and) suspected cases within the Army, as also requisition from the civil administration in coming days. Necessary instructions have been passed to the Command Headquarters to augment medical facilities and infrastructure, including:

- Increasing capacity for surveillance/isolation at MH/BH/CH;
- All field hospitals have been instructed to be ready to set up a 45-bed isolation facility and create 10-bed ICU exclusively for COVID-19 at six hours' notice. Vacant KLPs (key location plans)/ existing infrastructure are earmarked for the same;
- 30 per cent field hospitals have been kept on standby in COVID hotspots;
- responsive and agile quick reaction medical teams to be ready to mobilise at six hours' notice to meet the requirements of hospitals/civil administration.

What kind of early warning orders and directions have you passed to the top hierarchy? How often are you reviewing the situation yourself?

I am reviewing the situation on a daily basis. I am in touch with Army Commanders and PSOs. Various advisories and instructions have been issued to the environment to create awareness and contain spread of COVID-19. Command-wise, COVID-19 helpline numbers have also been given. Overall, I am satisfied with the planning and preparations undertaken by the Army so far...

Father dead, man gets exemption to travel Mumbai to Kolkata

IRAM SIDDIQUE
MUMBAI, MARCH 26

AMID THE national lockdown, one man has been exempted from the stay-at-home order. Over the next two days, 28-year old Anindya Roy will be driving close to 2,300 km, cutting across three states, to reach his home in Kolkata from Mumbai to attend his father's last rites.

He has been issued a special pass by Maharashtra transport commissioner Shekar Channe to drive back home in his private vehicle, following appeals made on social media platforms.

Around 6.30 am Thursday, Anindya, who works for a law firm in Mumbai, woke up to 30 missed calls and a hundred text messages on his cellphone. He called back, only to be told that his father Ashish Kumar Roy, a 61-year-old and a practising advocate at Calcutta High Court, had passed away in the wee hours after a cardiac arrest.

His father had complained of chest pain at 1 am. Anindya's mother could do little at that point. When the pain became more severe, she began calling friends and relatives. They reached an hour later, and took Roy to a hospital around 3 am — he was declared brought dead.

"My mother cannot drive, driving was a thing which my father took care of," Anindya said. He began calling his friends and acquaintances to help him reach home. With no buses, trains or flights leaving the city, he was told to wait at home. "I could not imagine how mother was handling things. I wanted to see my father one last time," he said.



A file photo of Anindya Roy with his parents

He decided to use his father's death certificate as a valid reason to return home. He then put up a post on social media platforms, urging authorities to help him out. "A friend then helped me with a former collector's number who then directed me to the transport commissioner," he said.

He spoke to transport commissioner Channe and sent him the death certificate. Within 45 minutes, a special pass was issued for his friend's vehicle, which he planned to use for the journey to Kolkata. Along with a friend, Anindya left the city around 3.30 pm.

"Honestly, I don't know if I will be allowed to cross the three borders and reach home. But I cannot afford to leave my mother all by herself and sit back," said Anindya. Channe said: "It is the first such request we received. We have issued a pass for him to facilitate his journey home on humanitarian grounds."

By night, Anindya had reached Nagpur.



Spraying disinfectants on Tamil Nadu Housing Board Quarters in Chennai Thursday. PTI

TN to trace over 50,000 who reached India after March 1

ARUN JANARDHANAN
CHENNAI, MARCH 26

THE Tamil Nadu government Thursday handed over to districts a list of about 54,000 people to be traced and put in quarantine. These are among the 80,000 Indian passport holders from the state who entered the country after March 1.

The list has been provided to the state by the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS). Of these 80,000 people, about 16,000 are already quarantined at homes or hospitals and the rest are right now not in Tamil Nadu.

With two fresh cases, the number of COVID-19 cases in Tamil Nadu stands at 29 now. Those who tested positive on

Thursday include a 24-year-old man who returned from London and a 65-year-old woman who came in contact with him.

On Thursday, Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami had a video conference with all district collectors, SPs and city police commissioners. Greater Chennai Corporation tested drones for spraying disinfectants at the corporation's headquarters, Ripon Buildings. According to Corporation commissioner G Prakash, they will be using drones similarly to spray disinfectant in markets and crowded localities, including slums.

Health secretary Beela Rajesh said they would expand this technique to other districts too. She said the government has identified some medical and en-

gineering colleges that had closed down to accommodate COVID-19 patients. "We will be setting up at least 3,000 beds in these facilities. They will be ready within days," she said.

Rajesh said a major challenge may be catering to patients such as senior citizens or pregnant women if there is a massive surge in COVID-19 cases. "In the last few days, we have identified about 1.5 lakh pregnant women across the state, including over 10,000 in the high-risk category. An officer will follow up the medical condition of at least 20 women in the locality daily over the phone. Whenever they need anything, the nearby Public Health Centre or advanced facilities in the districts will be ready," she said.

MAY BE MOST EXTENSIVE ONLINE TEACHING TRIAL IN COUNTRY

Schools shut, teachers keep students engaged, from behind a screen

RITIKA CHOPRA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

AT 10 am on Wednesday, Preeti Manchanda (38) locked herself in her daughter's bedroom for a video conference on Zoom. As she sat at her child's study table, Manchanda pointed her phone camera at a notebook and started guiding the other 62 participants through a maths problem.

For the last two weeks, as schools across the country have shut their doors to curb the spread of COVID-19, teachers have been scrambling to deliver lectures to students.

Manchanda is among many teachers trying to adjust to a new system of online learning. For the first time in 15 years, Manchanda is meeting her stu-

dents on the virtual space. The transition was quick, and the learning curve steep. However, the experiment, which may eventually become the most extensive online teaching trial in the country, is mostly limited to private schools at the moment.

Schools run by Union and state governments don't have an alternative plan in place yet. The Delhi government, for instance, has called for a brainstorming session on March 26 to find ways of learning in the wake of an extended lockdown.

The HRD Ministry, on the other hand, has written to all state governments encouraging them to make use of the 32 DTH educational channels run by the Centre.

For Delhi's New Era Public



Preeti Manchanda taking a mathematics class online

School, where Manchanda is a mathematics teacher, the switch to online classes was made through two pilot tests over two days, and a simultaneous crash course for 30 teachers of Class 10 and 12 in the use of the Zoom platform.

The dry run for online teaching threw up some challenges. "Ambient noise was a problem. Since the teachers and the students are logged in from their respective homes, there was a lot of background noise during the class," Manchanda said.

There were also a few troublemakers who hijacked the screen shared by the teacher and scribbled on it. "We later discovered the mute option. So now during the lesson, all students are on mute to cut out the ambient noise. To prevent the

naughty students from disturbing the class, we lock all students out of the screen shared by the teacher," she said.

However, the most significant adjustment that teachers have had to make is the inability to gauge a student's understanding of concepts. "When you are in the classroom, you can read their faces. I can tell whether a student is not following a lesson. In online teaching, some times your lesson turns into a monologue," said Rannu Pathak (44), who teaches Political Science at Mount Abu Public School in West Delhi. Pathak has been taking a 50-minute class online every day for students in Class 12.

Since interaction is limited, teachers are researching ways to keep students engaged — from

PowerPoint presentations and videos to online quizzes. Hence, prepping for an online lesson ends up adding more work to a teacher's normal planning load.

"At this time of the year, teachers are usually engaged in preparing the academic calendar and schedule of extra-curricular activities, among other things. Tailoring our lessons for the online format is taking a lot of time, probably because all of us are so new to this medium," said an English teacher at a private school in South Delhi, who did not wish to be identified. "With the lockdown extended for another 21 days, more and more classes will move online. Preparing for multiple online sessions could be a little overwhelming."

But even as private schools

Sonia to PM: Set up temporary facilities, give cash transfers to poor

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

ASSERTING THAT the Congress will support each step taken by the government to ensure containment of COVID-19, Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Thursday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and suggested a series of measures, including construction of temporary health facilities with large numbers of ICUs, tax breaks and interest subvention for small and medium businesses, and cash transfer to the poor and vulnerable sections of the society.

Sonia said there is an urgent need to equip medical health staff with personal protection equipment, including N-95 masks and hazmat suits, and asked the government to scale up manufacturing and supply of these items. She asked the government to announce a special "risk allowance" for doctors, nurses and health workers for a period of six months retrospectively from March 1.

Arguing that there was uncertainty about the designated hospi-

tals and their locations besides the number of beds, isolation chambers, ventilators, dedicated medical teams and medical supplies, she asked the government to set up a dedicated portal for sharing "these and all other necessary information".

"Given that even the most advanced and developed healthcare systems in the world are facing an overload of patients and crumbling under the weight of the sheer numbers of affected persons, the Union government could immediately commission and begin construction of temporary facilities with large numbers of ICUs and ventilators in geographical areas where the outbreak is expected to be concentrated in the near future," she said.

Pointing out that the lockdown period coincides with the harvest season, Sonia asked the government to take necessary steps to enable harvesting and procurement of crops at MSP.

She also stated that the government "might consider deferring all EMLs for a period of six months".

Cong says govt package modest, CPM calls Rs 20 hike in MGNREGA pay a 'joke'

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

HOURS AFTER the Centre announced a financial assistance package for the poor, unorganised workers and those who need immediate help amid the 21-day lockdown, the Congress and the CPM on Thursday called the measures announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman "inadequate" and "too little, too late".

While former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi called the package 'the first step in the right direction', senior party leader P Chidambaram only gave it a "cautious welcome". Congress leader Anand Sharma said he "broadly" supports the action plan.

The party's communications department head Randeep Surjewala asked the government to revise the package, and said the quantities of free rice and wheat announced for the poor are insufficient. He also asked the government to declare harvesting and procurement as essential services. CPM general secretary Sitaram Yechury said the package is inadequate.

Extending a "cautious welcome" to the plan, Chidambaram

said, "It is a modest plan. In due course, (the) government will realise that it must do more. The plan gives adequate additional foodgrain to the poor for three months, and that is welcome (but) the plan does not put enough cash in the pockets of the poor. Some sections have been left out.

"Our estimate of (the) additional money that will be transferred including the value of the grain and pulses) is Rs 1 lakh crore. Necessary but not sufficient at all. Suggestions like help to tenant farmers and destitutes, maintaining current levels of employment and wages, tax deferral, EMI deferral, GST rate cut, etc. have not been addressed. Let's hope there will be a Plan-II shortly," he added.

Sharma said, "It is reassuring for the poor and those who have lost their jobs and wages. I request the Prime Minister to increase MGNREGA wages to Rs 300, as the hike announced is very little to give the desired benefit."

Yechury termed the enhancement of MGNREGA wages by Rs 20 a "joke". He said, "Currently there is no work going on. What they need is direct cash transfers, or payment of wages irrespective of work."

Calling it "too little, too late", Surjewala said: "Farmers have now been offered a sum of Rs 2,000 through PM-Kisan accounts on April 1. But Mr Prime Minister, farmers are supposed to be paid a sum of Rs 6,000 under the PM-Kisan scheme as per your own announcement earlier. Why cut Rs 4,000 now?" He demanded farmers be paid Rs 6,000 on April 1.

Arguing that around 334 lakh hectares of wheat crop is ready for harvest, Surjewala said farmers are facing a problem, as all grain markets are shut and Food Corporation of India has not come forward for procurement. "Gunny bags are not available for the farmer. How should the farmer harvest the crop and take it to the market. If harvesting is delayed till April 15, farmers will lose 40 per cent of the standing crop from which he will never be able to recover," he said, asking the government to "declare harvesting and procurement operations as part of essential services".

Yechury demanded that farmers be given a one-time waiver on their loans. He sought direct transfer of Rs 5,000 for each month for the next three months for all Jan Dhan account holders and BPL families.

Nadda calls on BJP workers for mechanism to link community kitchens

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

BJP PRESIDENT J P Nadda on Thursday urged party workers to put in place a mechanism to link various community kitchens that can serve at least 1,000 people per day to ensure food to the urban poor, migrant workers and others working in the unorganised sector who have been hit by the lockdown to combat the coronavirus pandemic.

Nadda held a meeting via a video link with all BJP state chiefs to scale up the programme to make available food to the poor and ensure that at least 5 crore people get their meals from party workers daily, a statement said. He also asked elected representatives such as party MPs and MLAs to join the exercise. Nadda said every MP from Karnataka has started a control room for the purpose and 15,000 people are being provided food in Tamil Nadu. But, he said, party workers should keep social distancing in mind and coordinate with local administration in providing food to the poor.

The party also floated an online form seeking details of people or organisations running community kitchens.

DELHI CONFIDENTIAL



CARE FOR ALL

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi's call for taking care of animals around us seems to have pleased former Union minister Maneka Gandhi the most. Maneka, who expressed her gratitude to the PM for being compassionate to all beings, has been active in ensuring that animals also get the care required during the ongoing 21-day lockdown. She has contacted almost all state governments in an effort to ensure that measures are taken to get the animals fed during the crisis. After she spoke, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath gave powers to district magistrates to provide passes to animal-feeders, and to evacuate stranded animals from pet shops. In Delhi, dog-feeders can get the district DCP office to get a feeder pass, while the Bengaluru Police Commissioner has promised help. In Sikkim, the Chief Minister has issued orders that NGOs and others can feed street animals for a limited period every morning and evening.

MONITORS APPOINTED

AT WEDNESDAY'S Cabinet meeting, Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave each Union minister responsibility of one state each to monitor the coronavirus situation and issues related to the lockdown. The ministers are expected to be in touch with the district magistrates and district collectors in the state concerned and report to the Prime Minister every day. So, while Nirmala Sitharaman would keep an eye on Andhra Pradesh, Assam will be monitored by V K Singh and Kiren Rijiju will have to report on Arunachal Pradesh. Ram Vilas Paswan will look at Bihar and Smriti Irani will have to report on Chhattisgarh.

UPDATE ON UPDATES

THE INDIAN Council of Medical Research (ICMR) discontinued its twice-daily updates on samples tested and found positive for COVID-19 from Thursday, apparently to "do away with the confusion created because of too many different figures". On any given day, ICMR would give out figures higher than that on the Health Ministry website, and this caused some discomfort.

OPEN HOUSE

BJP'S AGRA MP Prof S P Singh Baghel has offered help for people from his constituency who are stranded in Delhi due to the lockdown. Baghel, who was in Agra on Thursday, made an appeal through a letter and a video. He said those stuck can stay at his official residence in Delhi --- 7, K Kamraj Lane --- if the police and the local administration allow them. They will be provided food and accommodation, he mentioned. A fourth-time Parliamentarian, Baghel is perhaps the first MP to make such an appeal to the stranded people.

**पावरग्रिड
POWERGRID**

NOTICE

1. Approval under regulation-86 of CERC (Conduct of Business) Regulations 1999 and CERC (Terms and Conditions of Tariff) Regulations, 2014 and CERC (Terms and Conditions of Tariff) Regulations, 2019 for (i) True up of Transmission tariff for 2014-19 tariff block and (ii) Determination of Transmission tariff for 2019-24 tariff block for Transmission assets under Transmission system associated with North East-Northern/Western Inter Connector-I.

2. The beneficiaries of the above mentioned Transmission system are: (1) AEGCB, (2) MECL, (3) Government of Arunachal Pradesh, (4) Power and Electricity Department, Government of Mizoram, (5) Manipur State Electricity Distribution Company Limited, (6) Department of Power Government of Nagaland, (7) TSEB, (8) HPSEB, (9) PSPCL, (10) HPPCL, (11) PDD JGS (12) UPPCL, (13) DTL, (14) Chandigarh Administration, (15) UPCL, (16) RPCC, (17) North Central Railway, (18) BSES Yamuna Power Ltd., (19) BSES Rajdhani Power Ltd., (20) Tata Power Delhi Dist.Ltd., (21) New Delhi Municipal Council, (22) MPPMCL, (23) MSEDCL, (24) GUVNL, (25) ED Daman & Diu, (26) ED Dadra & Nagar Haveli, (27) CSEB, (28) MAKVNL, (29) KPTCL, (30) APTRANSCO, (31) KSEB, (32) TNEB, (33) Electricity Dept. of Goa, (34) Electricity Dept. of Puducherry, (35) APEDCL, (36) APSPDCL, (37) APGPDCL, (38) APNPDC, (39) BESCOM, (40) GESCOM, (41) HESCOM, (42) MESCOM, (43) CESCL, (44) TCTL, (45) AVVN, (46) Jodhpur VVNL, (47) Jaipur VVNL, (48) APPCC, (49) BSEB, (50) WBSCTCL, (51) GRIDCO, (52) DVC, (53) Power Dept. Sikkim, (54) JSEB, (55) NBPDC, (56) SBPDCL, (57) Tata Steel, (58) MPL, (59) IND BEL, (60) Ad HPL, (61) LBPL, (62) HSPPL, (63) MB Power, (64) HBPL, (65) JPL, (66) KSK Mahanandi, (67) PTC, (68) IL&FS, (69) APL, (70) Torrent Power, (71) HWB, (72) ACG India, (73) Enco Energy, (74) Spectrum, (75) BARC, (76) BALCO, (77) Dharwal In L, (78) D B Power, (79) NTPC, (80) NHPC, (81) NEEPCO

3. Tariff details:

a) True up Transmission Tariff for 2014-19		Rs. in lakhs				
Project		2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Asset-1	Revised AFC based on true up	487.65	508.79	505.3	498.14	490.56
Asset-2	Revised AFC based on true up	218.13	223.43	225.24	222.86	220.64
Asset-3	Revised AFC based on true up	166.08	181.06	191.22	188.86	187.42
Asset-4	Revised AFC based on true up	8003.2	20052.02	19572.4	18890.94	18342.39
Asset-5	Revised AFC based on true up	0	236.17	495.39	517.31	520.46
Asset-6	Revised AFC based on true up	0	150.97	325.16	343.96	344.44
Asset-7	Revised AFC based on true up	0	30.77	338.33	352.71	351.92
Asset-8	Revised AFC based on true up	0	393.41	1349.39	1401.28	1390.57
Asset-9	Revised AFC based on true up	0	401.5	869.17	857.03	879.74
Asset-10	Revised AFC based on true up	0	1149.4	2348.8	2345.05	2363.62
Asset-11	Revised AFC based on true up	0	0	0	137.39	214.14
Asset-12	Revised AFC based on true up	0	0	0	309.39	462.28
Asset-13	Revised AFC based on true up	0	0	0	135.23	464.99
Asset-14	Revised AFC based on true up	0	289.52	713.54	725.72	731.1
Asset-15	Revised AFC based on true up	0	596.28	1457.3	1445.45	1461.95
Asset-16	Revised AFC based on true up	0	292.98	617.73	626.46	632.31
Asset-17	Revised AFC based on true up	0	153.22	562.22	565.63	574.89
Asset-18 Upto 13.02.2019	Revised AFC based on true up	0	46424.46	114961.37	116083.7	103174.41
Asset-19 Upto 13.02.2019	Revised AFC based on true up	0	0	15202.55	28304.03	26296.52
Asset-18 (from 14.02.2019 to 31.03.2019)	Revised AFC based on true up	0	0	0	0	10237.49
Asset-19 (from 14.02.2019 to 31.03.2019)	Revised AFC based on true up	0	0	0	0	3488.98

b) Tariff for 2019-24 block

Project		2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Combined AC Asset (Asset - 1 to 17)	AFC	27863.08	27291.89	26567.46	25797.89	25026.29
Asset-18	AFC	79534.32	79050.43	78231	77215.03	76176.95
Asset-19	AFC	27128.22	27272.95	26888.17	26580.22	26173.77

4. A copy of the application made for determination of tariff is posted on the website of the applicant at www.powergridindia.com

5. The suggestions and objections, if any, on the proposals for determination of tariff contained in the application to be filed by any person, including the beneficiary before the Secretary, Central Electricity Regulatory Commission, 3rd & 4th Floor, Chandrakot Building, Jangpeth, New Delhi - 110 001 (or other address where the office of the Commission is situated), with a copy to the applicant at the address of its corporate office within 30 days of publication of this notice.

Place : Gurgaon
Date : 20.03.2020
Sr. General Manager (Commercial)

POWER GRID CORPORATION OF INDIA LIMITED
(A Government of India Enterprise)
Corp. Office : "Saudamini", Plot No. 2, Sector-29, Gurgaon-122001, (Haryana) Tel. : 0124-2571700-719
Reg. Office : B-8 Quab Institutional Area, Kalkaji Sarai, New Delhi-110 016. Tel. : 011-26560112, 26560121
www.powergridindia.com, CIN : L40101DL1989G00038121

A MAHARATNA PSU

Govt. of Haryana

NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

Haryana is locked down to stop the spread of CORONAVIRUS

DON'T WORRY

HELP IS JUST A PHONE CALL AWAY

1075
National Helpline (except Gurugram & Faridabad in Haryana)

1100
Helpline Across Haryana (To be started soon)

855-8893-911
Helpline for Gurugram and Faridabad

108
For Ambulance

Response to queries regarding Corona & other services including Food & Civil Supplies, Transport, Police, Urban Local Bodies, Industries, Education and Labour available through 24x7 Helplines

Sh. Manohar Lal
Chief Minister, Haryana

For Further Information ▶ e-Mail: ncov2019@gmail.com

Health Department, Haryana

HARYANA POLICE HOUSING CORPORATION
(A Haryana Government Undertaking)
PLOT NO. C-10, SECTOR-6, PANCHKULA-134109
CIN: U45201HR12895G030775

Tender Notice No. HPHC/2020/06 Dated: 26.03.2020

NOTICE INVITING E-TENDERS
(Global Enquiry)

1) Online bids on percentage rate (as specified in tender documents) basis are hereby Re-invited from architectural consultant firms for the following work on the dates as per the schedule mentioned below in the office of Chief Engineer on the prescribed form. The electronic tender forms are available at website <http://etenders.hry.nic.in> for downloading and uploading / submission of bids through e-tendering

Sr. No.	Name of Work	Earnest Money	i) Cost of Tender Document/ E-Service Fee (Non refundable) ii) Time Limit
1.	MADHUBAN DIVISION Providing consultancy services for preparation of master plan, concept study and planning, surveying, detailed architectural planning, drawings, structural design and proof checking, detailed project report / detailed estimate, BOQ and other statutory clearances, periodic supervision etc. for construction of Kailasa Chawla Govt. Medical College, Karnal, Phase-II (Estimated Cost of the project Rs. 360.00 Crore)	Rs. 7.20 Lacs	Rs. 15,000/- for Tender Document Fee & Rs. 1,180/- for E-Service Fee Till the completion of whole of the Job defined in TOR.

Start Date & Time of Bid Preparation & Submission	30.03.2020 at 03.00 PM
Expiry Date & Time of Bid Preparation & Submission	21.04.2020 at 05.00 PM
Expiry date & Time of EMD and tender fee Submission	21.04.2020 at 05.00 PM

Financial Bid Opening Date will be informed through email
For Further detail Login to <http://etenders.hry.nic.in>

(Suman Rawat)
Assistant Engineer (Civil)
Haryana Police Housing Corpn. Panchkula

50828/HRV

कार्यालय नगरपरिषद श्रीगंगानगर (राज.)

क्रमांक: निर्माण/नग/2019-20/4001 दिनांक- 24.03.2020

ई-निविदा सूचना संख्या-42/2019-20

नगरपरिषद श्रीगंगानगर द्वारा वार्ड नं. 01 से 25, 26 से 50, 51 से 65, नंदीशाला व नाला सफाई कार्य के लिए टेंडर ट्रायल ड्राईवर व दो श्रमिक उपलब्ध कुल तीन निविदाओं से घर-घर कचरा संग्रहण व निस्तारण का कार्य करवाया जाना है। उक्त कार्य राशि रु. 4,10,84,160/- रुपये (चार करोड़ दस लाख चौरासी हजार एक सौ साठ रुपये) हेतु कार्य विशेष का अनुभव रखने वाले नगरपरिषद श्रीगंगानगर में पंजीकृत संवेदकों एवं राज्य सरकार/केन्द्र सरकार के अधिकृत संगठनों व अन्य विभागों में पंजीकृत संवेदकों से निर्धारित प्रपत्र में ई-टेंडरिंग प्रक्रिया द्वारा ऑनलाईन निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है। निविदा की विस्तृत विवरण वेबसाईट <https://eproc.rajjasthan.gov.in/> से डाउनलोड तथा वेबसाईट <https://sppp.raj.nic.in/> पर समस्त शर्तों/विवरण देखा जा सकता है।

UBN No. DLB1920SLOB25174, DLB1920SLOB25175, DLB1920SLOB25176, NIB No. DLB1920A6502
(करूपा चांडक), सभापति (प्रियंका बुडानिया), आयुक्त नगरपरिषद श्रीगंगानगर

9(19)/Study-MSME Exports/2018-EP
Government of India
Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
Office of Development Commissioner (MSME)

Expression of Interest (EoI)

Subject: Submission of Techno-Financial proposal for conducting study on high potential market, tariff lines and FTAs for MSME sector.

The Office of Development Commissioner (MSME), Ministry of MSME wishes to conduct a detailed study on export potential for MSMEs. The proposals are invited under the Quality and Cost Based Selection (QCBS) Methodology.

The details of the Expression of Interest (EoI) are available at www.dcmsme.gov.in/EOI-Techno-Financial-Proposal.pdf

The proposals may be submitted to:

Joint Development Commissioner (EP)
Room No. 723, 7th Floor, A-Wing
Nirman Bhawan
New Delhi-110108

davp 25113/11/0287/1920

Directorate of Information and Publicity
Block No. IX, old Sectt, Delhi-110054

Essential service providers can apply for their individual & vehicle's e-Pass, if required, through WhatsApp by furnishing following details.

- Name
- Address/Place of engagement.
- Details of Essential service/purpose
- Period
- Time
- Copy of ID card like Aadhar, Voter Card etc.
- Vehicle number, only if required.

These details can be sent on below Whatsapp numbers of the concerned district:-

NO pass is required for movement of general public for procurement of essential services/commodities or for any medical exigency as per GNCTD's order dated 24th March 2020. Such movement is allowed on self-certification basis

WhatsApp Numbers for issuing Passes

Districts	Contact No.	Districts	Contact No.
East	8447200084 8375878007	South East	8595246396 8595258871
North East	9540895489 8860425666	West	9414320064 8595252581
Central	7428336279 7428210711	South	9599649266 9643150027
New Delhi	9540675392 9873743727	South West	9971518387 9971526953
North	8595298706 8595354861	North West	8595559117 8595543375
Shahdara	8595272697 8595274068		

You can also contact us at Help Line No.1031
Caution- Furnishing forged or false information shall attract strict penal action including filing of FIR.

DIP/Shabdarth/1502/19-20

ESSENTIAL SERVICE PROVIDERS CAN APPLY FOR THEIR INDIVIDUAL & VEHICLE'S

E-PASS THROUGH WHATSAPP

FURNISH FOLLOWING DETAILS FOR GETTING E-PASS:

1. Name
2. Address/Place of engagement.
3. Details of Essential service/purpose
4. Period
5. Time.
6. Copy of ID card like Aadhar, Voter Card etc.
7. Vehicle number, only if required.

WHATSAPP NUMBERS FOR ISSUING E-PASS:

East District:	8447200084, 8375878007
North East District:	9540895489, 8860425666
Central District:	7428336279, 7428210711
New Delhi District:	9540675392, 9873743727
North District:	8595298706, 8595354861
Shahdara District:	8595272697, 8595274068
South East District:	8595246396, 8595258871
West District:	9414320064, 8595252581
South District:	9599649266, 9643150027
South West District:	9971518387, 9971526953
North West District:	8595559117, 8595543375

You can also contact us at Help Line No. **1031**





I DON'T BELIEVE IN THE OLYMPIC SPIRIT. WHEN CHINA HOSTED IT, THE EVENT WAS CONSTRUCTED WITHOUT REGARD FOR THE PEOPLE'S JOY.

— AI WEIWEI

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Lockdown and the poor

State's measures to fight virus may protect you and me. But they are stripping the poor of dignity and hope



HARSH MANDER

I WON'T DIE of corona. Before that, I will surely die of hunger". I heard this lament more than a dozen times from different people as I joined a group of young friends trying to feed a thousand homeless people in Old Delhi in our small, almost helpless gesture of solidarity with them. "Demonetisation was nothing compared to what we are going through", said another. "We don't know if and how we will survive this time".

An hour later, I read with bemusement and despair the relief package Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced. Her objective, she declared, was to shield the poor from the economic impact of the coronavirus shutdown. "No one will go hungry", she promised.

Did she really believe that five extra kg of wheat or rice and 1 kg of pulses for a family, Rs 1,000 for the aged, disabled and widows, Rs 1,500 over three months for women with Jan Dhan accounts, free gas cylinder connections, and a Rs 2,000 cash transfer to farmers under an on-going scheme, would ensure this?

Neither she, nor Prime Minister Modi in his three addresses to the nation on measures to fight the lethal spread of COVID-19, has acknowledged even a fraction of the potentially catastrophic impact of these measures on hundreds of millions of India's informal workers, farmworkers and destitute people.

Modi tersely mentioned the poor and suggested that civil society should mitigate their distress. Sitharaman, at least, dwelt on the poor, but seemed to believe that cobbling together a token set of one-time tiny food and cash infusions into poor households will be enough defence for them from the tsunami that they face.

There are, also, implementation barriers for each of these. How, for instance, will they draw money from their accounts during the lockdown? And the most food-vulnerable people, such as street children, homeless and disabled persons, and remote and nomadic tribes don't have either accounts or cards.

More significantly, neither acknowledged the devastating economic impact of a national lockdown on an economy of mostly

informal workers which was already grinding down. Economist Jayati Ghosh in a recent interview estimated that the damage of the first two days of lockdown was greater than the full impact of demonetisation, and that the economy, which was on a sharp downward slide, stood in danger of slipping into an abyss. It does not require formal economic training to recognise the veracity of her grim assessment.

Who will harvest, and who will buy the harvest? Small and medium enterprises have shut down, and construction, even informal workplaces like eateries and tailoring units, have closed. A homeless man told me, "I have grown up on the streets. I have no family. I learned to make tandoori roti and earned Rs 500 a day. Today, I am holding out my hands for two rotis from you". My eyes were downcast in shame.

In places where we were offering food, there were several thousand homeless people waiting in line. Many said they had sat six hours for someone to come with food. Most said they had not eaten more than a couple of meals in the last three days. And the portions they got in charity were so meagre that they barely filled their stomachs.

If a rumour arose that some kind person is distributing food in a corner, a near-stampede would break out. The disabled, the aged, women and children are left behind. The food is elementary, insufficient, and most of all, destructive of their dignity. They want work, not pity. If work is taken away from them by state action, their survival should not be a question of private charity but of the highest public duty. And there are at least three more weeks of this for them to endure, as hunger will mount menacingly.

Many said that since there was no food and work for them in the city, their best chances for survival and emotional well-being was to return to their villages. But within brief hours of the Prime Minister's announcement of the lockdown, trains and buses were abruptly cancelled. The Indian government found it fit to charter planes with medical staff to fly in migrants from other countries. But it felt no responsibility

at all to the millions of migrants stranded without work and food in every corner of the country. If they try to walk to the state borders, they are beaten by the police. Those who persevere or cross by stealth are being compelled to trudge or cycle, sometimes thousands of kilometres, to reach their villages, dodging hunger and the police along the way. Truck drivers are trapped on highways across the country, in a purgatory from which they have no escape or succour.

Except for the announcement of a small financial package to improve health services, there is nothing to assure us that the poor will have access to a health system that works for them when the virus hits them. Where will they test, will they have to pay, and where will there be hospital beds and ventilators for them? We need to learn from Spain and New Zealand and nationalise the private health services at least for the duration of the pandemic. Otherwise the poor seem doomed to die not just of hunger but also of the virus when it catches up with them.

There have been many calls for bipartisan support to the Prime Minister as he leads the country out of this unprecedented crisis. P Chidambaram has declared that the PM is his commander-in-chief in this war. Many chief ministers concur. But I am afraid that I am unable to support this shockingly anti-poor lockdown. India could learn well from countries like South Korea and Taiwan which combatted the virus without national lockdowns. We must consider a roll-back.

The state is bereft of public compassion, the capacity and the will to stand equally with us all, rich and poor. There is no better time to recall the talisman Mahatma Gandhi left for us. When in doubt and confusion, he counselled, think of the most vulnerable person you know, and ask if the measures will improve her life and freedom. I met some of these "last persons" today. The measures the state has opted for may possibly protect you and me, but for her, they will only destroy her possibilities of dignified and hopeful survival.

Mander is a human rights worker and writer

ARDUOUS ROAD AHEAD

Finance Minister's package to deal with corona fallout can be only a beginning, will need to be reviewed as situation changes

ON THURSDAY, FINANCE Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a slew of measures to address and alleviate the economic hardship caused by the coronavirus. The measures follow a two-pronged approach: They are aimed at ensuring a steady supply of food and cooking gas, and second, easing cash woes of the vulnerable sections. These are welcome first steps. But, given the massive disruption in economic activity, even seen alongside steps announced by various state governments, the Centre's cash transfers appear modest. The total outlay of the package has been pegged at Rs 1.7 lakh crore (around 0.8 per cent of GDP), though some of it has already been budgeted for under existing schemes.

To ensure food security, Sitharaman has announced that 800 million people will get 5 kg of wheat or rice per month free of cost, over and above their existing 5 kg allocation, along with 1 kg of pulses (per household) for the next three months. Given that food grain stocks with the FCI are well above the required norms, ensuring these supplies should not be a problem — though the extent to which migrant labourers are able to take advantage of this is uncertain. To ease cash flow woes, the government is banking on front-loading of an existing scheme. Rather than disbursing Rs 500 per month to 20 crore women Jan Dhan account-holders for three months, perhaps a better mechanism might have been to club this with the MGNREGA — given the element of self-selection, better targeting could have been achieved. The package also does not address the challenges being faced by unorganised/informal small and medium enterprises and other hard-hit sectors. This will be the third shock that the informal economy faces, after demonetisation and GST. As their revenue dries up, these businesses will not be in a position to pay wages. And as workers in the unorganised sector have no safety nets or savings to fall back on, the economic costs of an extended lockdown will be grave.

Given the long and arduous road ahead, the announcements on Thursday should be considered as only the beginning of emergency measures — they should be reexamined and reevaluated as the crisis plays out. The government must consider the option of a larger economic package. The authorities, including the RBI, should be prepared to intervene at multiple levels — providing regulatory forbearance, a moratorium on interest payments, changing classification norms, and ensuring easy access to credit. At the same time, questions must also be asked of the corporate sector. Where is the compassionate capitalism that is often spoken of here? Sure, some industrialists have spoken up to offer relief to their workers. But it is not even close to what is required. This crisis requires a societal response. It needs everyone to step up to it and to reach out to those who cannot.

HORROR IN KABUL

Attack on gurdwara underlines that the US-Taliban deal has brought Afghanistan no respite

THE ATTACK ON a gurdwara in Kabul, in which 25 people were killed, all except one from Afghanistan's Sikh community, has shown that the coronavirus may well be vanquished by science, but human beings will continue to inflict barbarity upon each other. Those who died in the attack were men, women and children, worshippers and residents of a housing complex in the gurdwara. The attack, carried out by three gunmen, took place in the early morning hours, when over a hundred people were present inside. Within hours, it was claimed by the Islamic State, which later also said it had carried it out in revenge for Kashmir. If there were still doubts left on this score, it must be clear after this attack that the US-Taliban deal was not an arrangement to return Afghanistan to peace.

The gurdwara attack was the first strike after the agreement claimed by the IS. Under the pact, the Taliban have committed themselves to eliminating the Islamic State from Afghanistan. If the IS claim is true, the Taliban have yet to begin honouring that commitment. Appearing to hint at something more sinister, the ministry of external affairs called the attack "diabolical" and condemned the "perpetrators and their backers", a formulation usually reserved for attacks suspected to have emanated from, or to have the backing of Pakistan. The Taliban's operational leadership is now in the hands of Sirajuddin Haqqani of the Haqqani group, which has been blamed for several attacks on Indian targets, including the 2008 Indian Embassy bombing in Kabul. The Taliban have denied having anything to do with the gurdwara attack, and Pakistan has condemned it strongly. Who, really, is the IS in Afghanistan is a question that security experts have been asking for some time now.

On Tuesday, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres made an appeal for an immediate ceasefire in theatres of conflict across the world, to enable governments, health workers and humanitarian aid agencies to access those who might be most vulnerable to COVID-19. The epicentre of the outbreak is Herat, where over 1,00,000 Afghans recently crossed over from Iran. After the number of confirmed cases rose to 58, the province has been placed under lockdown. But the government is hobbled in its efforts to contain the disease, both by a contested election result — Afghanistan has two presidents — and the burden of an agreement that has brought it no respite. Indeed, Afghanistan faces two contagions, new and old — COVID-19 and the relentless violence.

PAUSE AND PLAY

Olympics must wait as the virus draws the world into a bigger game

THE OLYMPIC GAMES grinding to a halt in peacetime is unprecedented. After an initial reluctance, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and host Japan acknowledged the overwhelming global fear of stepping outdoors in times of the coronavirus pandemic to push back the Summer Games by a year. The rising fatalities across the world overrode the sighs of disappointment from athletes who were readying to head out to the Games for their long-awaited date with soaring challenge and glory. But the celebration of the abilities of the fittest would never have felt right amid the wave of anxiety currently sweeping the planet. With the mere act of travelling posing a grave risk, and Japan anticipating a second wave of the virus outbreak with thousands returning home, a postponement was foretold.

The Olympics have always meant more to the host country than merely the possibility of an impressive standing in the medals tally. For Japan, too, this was going to be the successful rallying back of a nation from a dark past of nuclear disaster, and at the start of the decade, the tsunami. The Games this July were meant to seal the legacy of Shinzo Abe, Japan's longest serving prime minister, who finishes his term in 2021. Tokyo 2020 was to be about Japan's proud self-assertion as the global superpower from Asia, affording the country much more leeway to stamp its style on the Olympics than Tokyo 1964 did so soon after the war. It is possible that what was planned for 2020 might well play out in 2021. But the year's lag will bear the scars of a torrid time that has brought the world to a standstill like nothing before.

Sport eulogises grit and sacrifice, the overcoming of barriers and the pushing of limits better than any book or movie can. Tokyo, now, is tasked with proving in a year's time that humanity can win the biggest game it can play — of sheer survival.



E P UNNY

COMIC LOVERS WILL forever debate which is superior, the adventures of Asterix or Tintin. But for the world today, under an unseen threat, it is the Asterix moment. The time to stay back, stay together and resist the invader. Albert Uderzo, who visualised the indomitable Gaulish village, died at 92 this Wednesday of a heart attack. The world over, he would be intensely mourned for the spirit of his work.

The boy reporter Tintin can never stay for long at sailor friend Captain Haddock's well-appointed bungalow. It doesn't take much for the two to dash off on some strange mission. Asterix and Obelix are not averse to travel either. More than the journey, however, what is central to the two is their small Gaulish village (circa 50 BC), the incredible little quarter that refuses to yield to an imperial Ceaserean Rome. Writer Rene Goscinny and illustrator Albert Uderzo would take you out of this quaint hamlet only to bring you back at the end to the familiar banquet under the Gaulish sky. The full moon, the owl, the stars and plenty of roast wild boars, not to mention a mercifully silenced Cacophonix.

What is celebrated is the safe return, not the triumphant travel. Asterix and Obelix are no conquerors. They resist conquests. Left to themselves, they would hardly step out of home except to hunt for wild boars, an essential act of sustenance. They would have coped with today's lockdown more than the footloose Tintin and Captain Haddock, who

THIS ASTERIX MOMENT

The world that came alive in the lines of Albert Uderzo speaks to us today

would have sworn his head off. In a world working from home, we are all rediscovering the long lost corners of our dwellings. The pile of old books and magazines cast away in forgotten trunks and shoe boxes. From where comics fans would in all likelihood dust up a well-thumbed volume of Asterix for the umpteenth re-read. In honour of Albert Uderzo. He is the last creative link to the Gaulish world we have more reasons than ever to love today. Thirty years back when his co-creator Rene Goscinny died, the writer was mourned, but by a world more hectic, more happening and more distracted. Today in a slowing down, reflective world, we have time enough to mourn. Uderzo, the illustrator, took on the writing part in 1977 and single-handedly sustained the comic series. Diehard fans did detect a dip in the wit. But many stayed loyal, thanks to the visual content that grew on you no less than the textual humour. The drawing had finish and it was fresh. The artist, though, had taken his time to settle down. After entertaining dreams to become a clown and then an aircraft engineer, Uderzo finally found his calling because throughout his schooling he had a pronounced talent only in drawing. By the early teens, when he was ready to paint, his teachers discovered he was colour blind. By then, the line had firmed up and that mattered. Colour could always be added. The line is what went on to grip millions of readers across 116 languages. Uderzo

brought to life Goscinny's world through highly stylised characters set against a meticulously drawn to scale architectural backdrop. A daring mix that gave the comic characters a certain sense of reflected realism. The setting told the story as well as the script. Fortified overbuilt Roman camps where troops practised absurdly geometric formations contrasted sharply with the open airy cluster of elegant modest hutments where Gauls carried on in merry abandon till they were called to war. The battle itself looked like the extended brawls outside Unhygienix's fish stall. Only, more animated, on the strength of the magic potion Druid Getafix brewed. Structured war theatre of the Romans squarely outwitted. Till the next round.

Meanwhile, the way we go on and on it would seem we have read the original in French. What we have lapped up is the work of Anthea Bell, the celebrity British translator who died in 2018. At home in multiple languages and varied content, her fidelity to the source text is unsurprising. But she had to manage the word count visually. The translated dialogue had to perfectly fit into the speech balloon. The balloons were integral to the structure. That is how Uderzo crafted the frames. Some very bright minds worked in seamless sync to bring us today the much-needed cheer.

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MARCH 27, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO

RSS IN ASSAM PRIME MINISTER INDIRA Gandhi told the Lok Sabha that the majority of Assam students "want a settlement" but some other forces were advising them against it. At the same time, she charged that the RSS was openly supporting the agitation in Assam and giving it "full encouragement". Replying to supplementaries following from a calling attention motion on the economic blockade of Assam, Mrs Gandhi said what was happening in West Bengal was only a reaction. The fundamental problem lay in Assam and that had to be solved at any cost. The blockade, said Mrs Gandhi,

was only a "temporary thing". JANA SANGH SPLIT THE JANASANGH faction took the first formal step towards splitting the Janata Party with L K Advani calling a convention on April 5 and 6 in Delhi of those "who regard the dual membership issue as a bogey and who would like to see the party function as an effective instrument for the achievement of Janata Party's aims". The Janata Party chief, Chandra Shekhar, described the Jana Sangh faction's decision as "unfortunate" and refused to say anything further. The party general secretary, R K Hegde, said the decision to call the convention was "blatantly unauthorised".

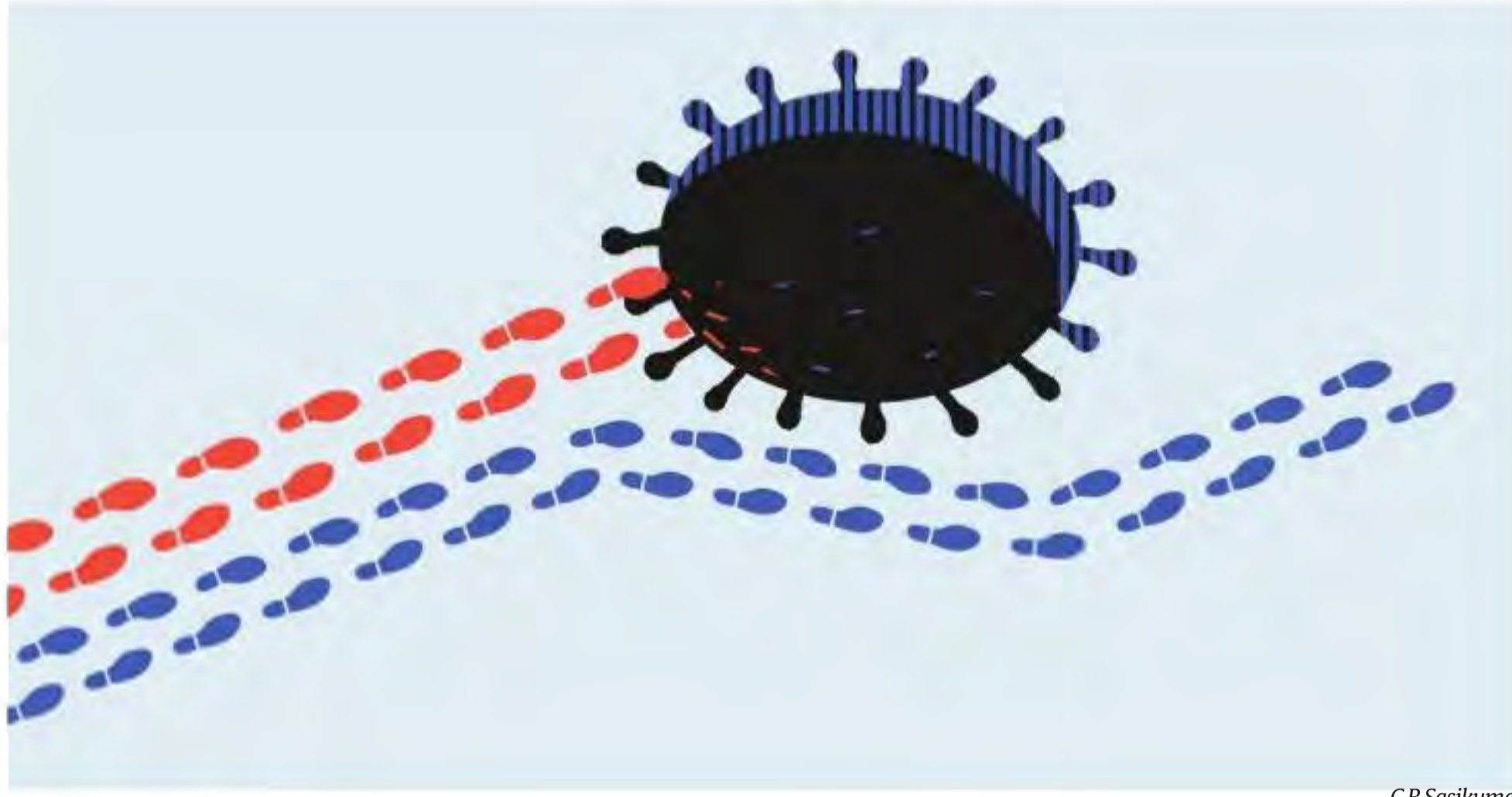
TARAPUR PLANT THE GOVERNMENT HAS been obliged to reduce the level of power generation in the Tarapur atomic plant owing to non-arrival of scheduled enriched uranium from the United States, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi told the Lok Sabha. She told A K Roy that against 2,294 million generation units in 1976, the output last year was only 1,958 million generation units. Asked if efforts had been made to produce enriched uranium within the country or to procure it from any other source, Mrs Gandhi said as long as the cooperation agreement of 1963 subsisted, the US was obliged to make enriched uranium available.



THE IDEAS PAGE

Let's use follower's advantage

In confronting coronavirus, India's first moves have been right, but much will depend on follow-up. We could learn from South Korea



CR Sasikumar



ECONOMIC GRAFFITI
BY KAUSHIK BASU

WITH THE CORONAVIRUS pandemic spreading across the globe, the Indian economy faces a challenge as big as any it has faced in several decades. It is a humbling time, as all human beings stand together to confront a common threat. How this threat will pan out no one knows but what we do know is that the intensity of the challenge and its impact on our well-being will depend greatly on how we reach out to ordinary people, and the policies we implement. There is a lot of evidence that has already emerged which can help us do this right, and it is good to see India taking steps to be ahead of the curve.

Let me begin with some historical perspective. Compared to the fatality numbers of some earlier pandemics, such as the Asian flu, 1957-58 (1.1 million dead) and Hong Kong Flu, 1968 (2 million dead), the fatality numbers of the current coronavirus pandemic are, as yet, nowhere near. One of the most comprehensive studies on the pandemic, by the Imperial College of London, shows that the "case fatality rate", or fatality among those who get coronavirus is 0.9 per cent — this means a 99.1 per cent survival rate among the people who get it.

What makes this pandemic special is that it is happening in the age of digital connectivity and greater scientific knowledge than we have ever had. We can inform people quickly and take big steps to contain it. But this also has a danger we have never faced. Policy actions can have a mega backlash on the economy. We are in uncharted territory — never before have we taken the kind of collective action against a pandemic as we are doing now.

But there is some evidence from history, and from the country that has been the most successful in dealing with this pandemic — South Korea. The country's success has saved lives, protected the economy from undue damage, boosted the popularity of the Korean President Moon Jae-In across political divides and raised the global standing of South Korea. France's President Emmanuel Macron and Sweden's Prime Minister Stefan Lofven have consulted Moon Jae-In for advice.

We have some evidence and estimates about the kind of damage this pandemic can do. China's industrial production in January-February 2020 declined by 13.5 per cent compared to a year ago. Goldman Sachs has estimated that the US's GDP growth could decline 24 per cent for the second quarter this year. Data are coming in on recent US unemployment claims climbing by 30 per cent.

This is clearly time to put political differences aside, and collectively confront our common humanitarian challenge.

In designing policy, it is important to reallocate all interventions to contain the pandemic have economic implications. Some people react to this by saying that our first priority is to save lives, not the economy. This is a mistake. The two are not separate matters. A poorly-executed policy can damage the economy and this can end up taking more

lives than the original problem. We have examples of the damage policies can do from history. In 1958, Mao Zedong initiated the Great Leap Forward to boost China's production. The Communist government tried to replace the private incentives of ordinary farmers with top-down state directives to large artificially-created collective farms. This unleashed the biggest famine in modern times, which resulted in 20 to 40 million deaths.

The Bengal Famine of 1943 occurred with no decline in food production but there were disruptions in supply chains from the farms to those who needed food. The death toll was two to three million. Such evidence from the past warns us that policies not designed well can cause more deaths than the pandemic itself.

More evidence is still to come, but we already have three lessons from Korea, which are being widely discussed in newspapers and the media around the world. First, you need strong leadership. Second, it is critically important to have trust between society and government. There is only that much you can do if people do not cooperate. Third, the need is for nuanced policies, with the government having the courage to make course correction as it goes along.

India has many of these qualities and the first moves have been right, but much will depend on the follow-up. First, trust can be a casualty with the lockdown. There are reports of the police wielding the baton too quickly on ordinary vendors, small grocers and sellers. A part of this is because there is a lot of genuine misunderstanding, even among the police, let alone ordinary citizens, about what is allowed and what is not. We have to clarify these and impress upon our police that they have to be both the enforcer of the law and helping-hand for distressed people. They need to explain to people so that they begin to actually cooperate, instead of complying only when under observation. That is the key difference between a trusting society and a trustless one.

When it comes to nuanced policies, we have to be aware that an economy-wide lockdown can disrupt supply chains and cause prices to rise and food supplies to vanish, with devastating effects. South Korea enforced regional lockdowns. Daegu was under lockdown but with other parts of the economy functioning, at least partially, food and medical supplies were ensured to the

All interventions to contain the pandemic have economic implications. Some people react to this by saying that our first priority is to save lives, not the economy. This is a mistake. The two are not separate matters. A poorly-executed policy can damage the economy and this can end up taking more lives than the original problem. We have examples of the damage policies can do from history. In 1958, Mao Zedong initiated the Great Leap Forward to boost China's production. The Communist government tried to replace the private incentives of ordinary farmers with top-down state directives to large artificially-created collective farms. This unleashed the biggest famine in modern times, which resulted in 20 to 40 million deaths.

locked-down region. The same was true of Hubei in China. India should begin to give directives soon to move to a targeted and nuanced lockdown.

To believe that small traders and private firms can be substituted by the government is the mistake Communist China made in the 1960s and 1970s, before the arrival of Deng Xiaoping. The idea must be to carefully ease up business and trade, especially the informal sector, with clear rules of behaviour in place. An example of the importance of specialised knowledge — this applies to the US as well — pertains to the role of cash grants to the poor. Such grants work well in normal times but may need to be supplemented with the direct support of food and medical services.

We know this from the experience of the Bengal Famine. Sometime before the famine broke, the British instituted the practice of buying up most of the farm products from farmers and paying in cash, in contrast to the earlier practice of leaving some of the food with the farmers. This is normally innocuous but when the supply bottlenecks tightened, prices started to rise. The rich were ready to pay for whatever necessities they needed and even stock up on supplies, leaving farmers with cash that was inadequate for them to buy necessities, and there was widespread starvation. It was a combination of insensitivity on the part of Winston Churchill's government towards a subject people and genuine mistakes. These are the kinds of finer planning that we need to do. The Indian bureaucracy, which is talented and known for its ability to rise to challenges, can manage this well, once the best ideas and expertise are brought to the table.

Some say that the Korea analogy is of no use to us because it is a relatively small country. It is true that everything will not apply here. But on the other hand, Korea and Hubei province of China are very comparable. Korea's population is 52 million, Hubei's is 58 million. The number of people who died of the virus in Korea is 126. The figure for Hubei is 3,160. Korea, of course, had the follower's advantage since the virus struck there later. But we too have that advantage.

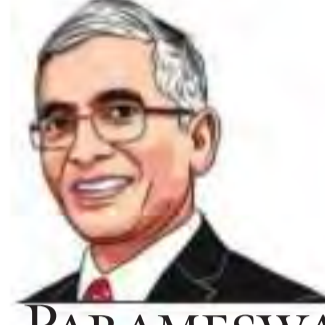
The writer is C Marks Professor at Cornell University and former Chief Economist and Senior Vice President, World Bank

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

The idea of a Sino-American G2, reaching bilateral consensus on key issues to prudently steer the international community, always sounded like a fairytale. But from this moment in time, it seems more like a bad joke. — THE GUARDIAN

It shouldn't take a pandemic

Why handwashing with soap is a habit that can and must be sustained even after the threat of coronavirus has passed



PARAMESWARAN IYER

THE CORONAVIRUS has taken the world by storm. This highly contagious and deadly virus spreads primarily when people touch surfaces where the virus has been deposited by infected individuals, and then touch their eyes, nose or mouth. This chain is best broken by the simple act of handwashing with soap, and this has been correctly projected as the silver bullet in our collective battle against this global health catastrophe.

The message that washing one's hands thoroughly with soap for 20 seconds neutralises the virus is being promoted by several stakeholders the world over — governments, multilateral agencies, private sector participants, media and entertainment channels, and even celebrities. And there is little doubt that these efforts are paying off and that many more people are washing their hands with soap much more frequently than they were in the past.

However, once the pandemic is behind us, will this good habit stick? Richard Thaler, one of the global gurus on behavioural economics, and co-author of *Nudge*, when in Delhi over a year ago and in a discussion with us on the Swachh Bharat Mission, advised that it would take at least 2-3 years of continued behaviour change communication efforts to sustain the habit of using toilets and stopping open defecation.

Coming back to handwashing with soap, it is little known that this simple practice is extremely effective against several other viruses and diseases as well. Research has time and again shown the direct causality between the reduction of diseases and regular handwashing with soap, especially at critical times of pre-meals, post-defecation and pre-feeding babies. According to UNICEF, handwashing at the aforementioned critical times can save millions of lives, especially of children below five, by reducing diarrhoea rates by more than 40 per cent. Moreover, handwashing not only reduces the rate of infection but also keeps children in school, since they are not staying home due to illness. That said, it is also estimated that the rates of handwashing with soap at these critical moments is very low the world over — ranging from zero per cent to 34 per cent.

There have been several efforts in the past by various stakeholders to promote handwashing and hygiene. There has been momentum generated on the subject at the time of previous epidemics in the 21st century — during SARS and Swine Flu. On both occasions, handwashing with soap became fashionable in parts of the world most affected by the diseases, but failed to sustain and become ingrained as a habit for posterity. This can be partially attributed to the fact that once the threat of the diseases had faded, there was not

enough follow-through in terms of sustained behaviour change communication on the subject. Slowly, people returned to their old ways, with the need for handwashing not being as apparent anymore. This time, however, there has been a multi-stakeholder barrage of communication on the subject like never before, and more countries are affected by coronavirus than any pandemic in recent memory. In this threat is also an opportunity for the world — to make handwashing with soap the default behaviour and a key public health objective, even after the threat of the virus is behind us. This time, the behaviour change can and must be sustained.

I have been working in the water, sanitation and hygiene sector for over two decades, and I have had my own experience of co-organising a multi-stakeholder effort to promote hygiene behaviour, and in particular, handwashing with soap. During my first stint in the World Bank about 20 years ago, a couple of colleagues and I developed a major global knowledge programme we called the Public-Private Partnership for Handwashing with Soap (PPP-HWS), which brought together the biggest soap companies in the world, the health experts and the top global agencies in a coalition aimed at securing and promoting global knowledge on the subject, but also curating and integrating this knowledge into some country implementation strategies.

Three developing countries agreed to implement the knowledge and research coming out of this partnership: India through the state of Kerala, Ghana and Peru. While the programme did not take off in Kerala as the then state government believed that it was a ploy by multinational companies to sell soap and undermine the socialist traditions of the state, Ghana and Peru, implemented very successful campaigns.

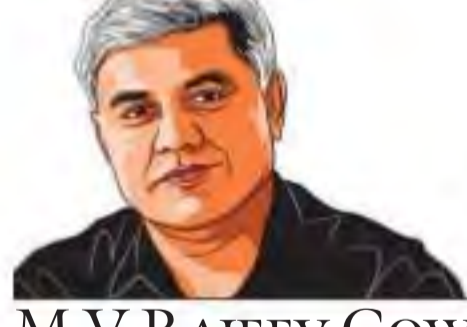
Today, in India, we have a comparative advantage with respect to large scale behaviour change, having implemented perhaps the largest ever social revolution the world has ever seen — the Swachh Bharat Mission. Over 55 crore people have changed their habit of open defecation and have started using toilets. This has come about because the people adopted the programme as their own and made it a true jan andolan. Today, the focus is on sustaining the changed behaviour — that of using toilets and stopping defecating in the open. It will still take a lot of effort, but the commitment to do so is there and the behaviour change communication and the capacity building at the local level will continue. The government has also developed a 10-year strategy on rural sanitation and is increasing the scope of swachhata from ODF to ODF Plus, which includes solid and liquid waste management.

Just as we are today collectively promoting handwashing with soap to fight the coronavirus, we must continue to work together to ensure that this habit sticks. It should not take a pandemic to promote hygiene behaviour. It saves lives even in not-so-desperate times.

The writer is secretary, Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti. Views are personal

A helping hand to states

The need of the hour is for Centre to release funds for states to fight COVID-19



M V RAJEEV GOWDA

IN KARNATAKA, we celebrate Ugadi by eating *bevu bella*, neem leaves mixed with jaggery so we can take both bitter and sweet in our stride. Our new year started with the 21-day lockdown announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This extraordinary but appropriate risk management measure should help keep our fellow citizens safe at home. Our health authorities must now scale up testing, isolation and treatment of those infected by the COVID-19 virus. Over the next three weeks, we should be able to drastically curtail its spread.

The government has finally announced a financial relief package to help Indians facing a loss of livelihood and food security as a result of the lockdown. They now have some reassurance that the government is thinking of their plight and will do its duty and provide them with a safety net.

Along with this, we urgently need the Centre to enhance the resources it allocates to India's states. They are already taking decisive measures to combat the pandemic and to provide support to those who are economically displaced. Our governance model provides for decision-making at the Union level. But the burden of policy execution falls upon states. Healthcare, sanitation, agriculture and public utilities are administered by state governments.

Our early success in containing the spread of the virus has been due to the early start by state governments. Kerala started screening

people and recommended social distancing weeks earlier. Chhattisgarh started scaling up its healthcare infrastructure to tackle COVID-19 as early as February. Rajasthan was the first state to announce a complete lockdown and comprehensive social security measures like cash transfers and provision of food for the most vulnerable. Karnataka is working to make food available for those affected. Maharashtra, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Uttarakhand, Assam, and other states have taken similar proactive measures.

India's states, however, are at a massive disadvantage. They are at the frontline but have limited resources to fight. Post GST, their ability to raise resources through taxes has been curtailed. To fight the global pandemic, I urge the Union government to strengthen federalism and take the following measures:

First, release all the pending dues owed to the state governments on account of GST compensation. Make an advance payment of the dues that will arise over the financial year. Earmark a fund dedicated to supporting state government activities to contain COVID-19, which may go beyond what the Centre has decreed. If states are still short of money, actively assist them in raising finances from markets, even giving an explicit sovereign guarantee to lenders. The Centre should also share some of the bonanzas it will gain from the fall in crude oil prices and hike in excise duty.

Second, reorient investments to activities that will contain the pandemic, especially

since the fight against COVID-19 will not end in 21 days. Medium-term and long-term planning must start now. Utilise funds earmarked for investments in infrastructure to supplement efforts of state governments. The redevelopment of the Central Vista, a grand Rs 20,000-crore project to create a new Parliament House and prime ministers' residence, can wait. Setting up isolation centres, production of medical and safety equipment, and ramping up of testing capabilities cannot wait. Projects under the Swachh Bharat Mission and MGNREGA should be reoriented to align with the larger health mission.

The Union government must clear all its dues to states under different programmes and policies. Most welfare schemes that rely on central government transfers suffer from delays in allocation. The Mid-day Meal Scheme and MGNREGA are less effective because of massive delays in releasing funds to states. These vital components of our social safety net must be fully funded and dues released urgently.

Third, regularly consult all chief ministers and lieutenant governors and devise a protocol to ensure seamless execution of activities. Supply chains have been greatly affected by the varied lockdowns across India. Different states' guidelines hinder the movement of citizens from other states and essential goods and services. Their concerns and other bottlenecks must be removed through a holistic approach.

One welcome step by the Union government was directing states to transfer funds to registered construction workers from the earmarked welfare funds. Different states have made decisions based on their financial capabilities. What is lacking is support from the Union government.

While Rajasthan and Punjab announced advance payments of monthly pensions, some states have not. The Union government should step up by starting a direct cash transfer scheme similar to Congress's NYAY proposal. Payments can be made through the Kisan Samman Nidhi and to Jan Dhan accounts.

It is harvest time in parts of India but, with the lockdown and depressed demand, we are staring at a huge drop in earnings for farmers, along with labour shortage. Nearly half of India depends upon agriculture for their livelihoods. The Union government must offer support to state governments to ensure that farmers receive a fair price and can move their produce, especially perishables, to markets.

Some state governments are doing a stellar job. The need of the hour is for the Union government to support all of them to step up. Team India is in this together. The prime minister must ensure our states have the resources to fight, and overcome, COVID-19.

The writer is a Congress MP in the Rajya Sabha and chairperson of the AICC Research Department

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

KEEP TALKING

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'An Indian health diplomacy' (IE, March 26). Incidents of virus-induced diseases have become very rampant. The ability of viruses to mutate instantaneously make it very difficult for researchers to understand their complex life cycle. There is a need for international collaboration in the field of virology. States, autonomous institutions, and private pharmaceutical companies need to come together.

Sudip Kumar Dey, Kolkata

SUPPLIES MATTER

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Ease the flow' (IE, March 26). Bolstering the supply chain is the need of the hour to not only meet consumer demands but also compensate farmers in difficult times. E-nam ought to be utilised for safe marketing. The option of PDS shops tying up with delivery partners like Swiggy and Zomato grocery supply can also be an option. Social security pensions disbursed through the DBT mode can cater to the economic security of the poor in these trying times as well.

Anjali Bhavana, Thiruvananthapuram

BONDS AND VIRUSES

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Other contagions' (IE March 25). The spectre of coronavirus has not only sent shock

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.

waves throughout the length and breadth of the country, it has given rise to mistrust and suspicion. The fear psychosis is assuming disturbing proportions and creating a wedge in families, neighbourhoods and society. While isolating and treating the sick and social distancing are vital imperatives, cohesiveness in society is equally important. The treatment meted out to the Air India crew who ferried the stranded Indians from the pandemic affected countries is highly deplorable in this hour of crisis. Similarly, the rough treatment of people from the country's Northeast is also reprehensible.

Ravi Mathur, Noida

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER



For the last two days, thousands of migrant workers with no work or money, have been walking the long road from the big cities to their villages which are in some cases hundreds of kilometres away. PTI

Unpacking the Garib Kalyan package

For poor households and small businesses, today's crisis is a crisis of liquidity. The nationwide lockdown has cost daily wage workers and informal sector entrepreneurs their opportunity to earn. To what extent can the government's package alleviate their distress?

HARISH DAMODARAN
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

In the current situation, which is the most significant component of the Rs 1.70 lakh crore Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana relief package announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday?

The increased entitlement of foodgrains supplied through the public distribution system (PDS) is a major intervention. A typical poor household having five adult members consumes 50-55 kg of cereals and 4-5 kg of pulses every month. Currently, the PDS provides 5 kg of cereals per person per month at Rs 2/kg and Rs 3/kg for wheat and rice, respectively. That is 25 kg for a family of five.

Under the package, an additional 5 kg of wheat or rice would be given per person per month, free of cost. The doubling of entitlement, effective for the next three months with the extra grain coming free, will practically meet the family's entire cereal requirement. Roughly 80 crore persons or two-thirds of India's population covered under the National Food Security Act will benefit. These poor or lower middle class

sections, impacted most by the lockdown, will no longer need to buy any wheat or rice from the market. Further, they will receive 1 kg of pulses per family per month, again free of cost for the next three months. That would meet 20-25% of their total requirement.

How much will all this cost? And how effective will it be on the ground?

The effectiveness will be more in states with well-functioning PDS. That is, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh and Odisha — but not Uttar Pradesh or Bihar. The Food Corporation of India (FCI) in 2019-20 has incurred an expenditure of Rs 26.80 for procuring and distributing every kg of wheat, and Rs 37.48 per kg of rice. At an average economic cost of Rs 30/kg, 80 crore persons being provided 15 kg each of free grain (over three months) would translate into an additional outgo of Rs 36,000 crore.

But there are savings as well. The economic cost does not include the FCI's expenses in holding and maintaining excess stocks in its godowns. This "carrying cost" — basically interest and storage charges — is estimated at Rs 5.61 per kg in 2019-20. On 12 million tonnes (mt) of grain — which is what 15 kg for 80 crore people would

be — that works out to over Rs 6,700 crore. The net outgo for the exchequer will then be well under Rs 30,000 crore. Even after adding Rs 4,000 crore towards giving 3 kg of pulses free to 20 crore families — the estimated economic and carrying cost here is Rs 60-70 per kg — the total outgo will not exceed Rs 35,000 crore. And given that FCI and the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India are now holding some 77.6 mt of cereals (3.5 times more than required) and 2.2 mt of pulses respectively, this is also an effective way to dispose of excess stocks.

What is the other substantial relief measure announced?

Sitharaman has said that LPG gas cylinders would be distributed free to 8 crore poor families for the next three months. Taking an average non-subsidised cylinder price of Rs 800 and three cylinders each over three months for these families, the financial cost will be Rs 19,200 crore. But it is also worth bearing. The least that the government can do for those worst hit by the lockdown is to secure their basic dal, roti and cooking fuel requirement.

Will enhancing daily wages under MNREGA

by Rs 20, from an average of Rs 182 to Rs 202, help?

Not really, in a lockdown, where there's little scope to undertake MNREGA works. In today's context, all MNREGA households — a total of 13.65 crore job cards have been issued, of which 8.22 crore are active — should ideally be given an unemployment allowance. The Finance Minister has claimed that the Rs 20 wage rate hike will result in an additional income of Rs 2,000 per household. This is a theoretical calculation, assuming all job card holders are provided 100 days of guaranteed wage employment under the scheme. When daily wage earners are supposed to remain at their homes, the only way to compensate them under MNREGA is through unemployment allowance. The onus for paying that under the Act is, however, on the state governments. It is unlikely they would make the necessary budgetary provision.

The relief package also seems to have cash transfer components.

Yes, but not very substantial. A total of 20.4 crore of bank accounts belonging to women under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana are to be credited Rs 500 each per month for the next

three months through direct benefit transfer (DBT). That is hardly any recompense for those forced out of work. Nor is payment of Rs 2,000 to 8.7 crore farmers under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi anything to write home about. Farmers are already receiving an annual income support of Rs 6,000 under this scheme, with the first installment payment of Rs 2,000 for 2020-21 anyway due in April. There's no additional financial implication here — at a time when farmers are facing both lower crop prices due to a coronavirus-induced market collapse, and higher harvesting costs on account of labour shortages from the lockdown.

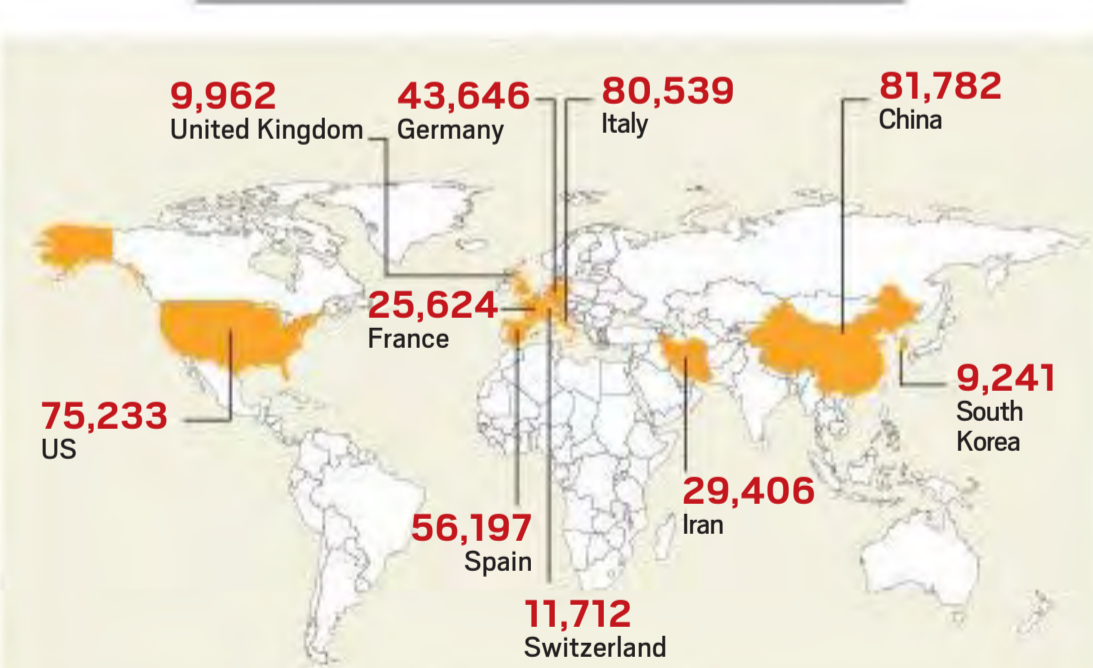
What does the package really amount to?

The main problem for poor and vulnerable households today is liquidity stress. Unlike big businessmen or the salaried middle class, these are people with no balance sheets, reserves, or bank balances. Every day's loss of work for them means cutting down even basic consumption and going deeper into debt. Free grain can help, but does not address the real crisis, which is of liquidity. They need cash to buy essential things other than just food — and most of them had it till the other day.



CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

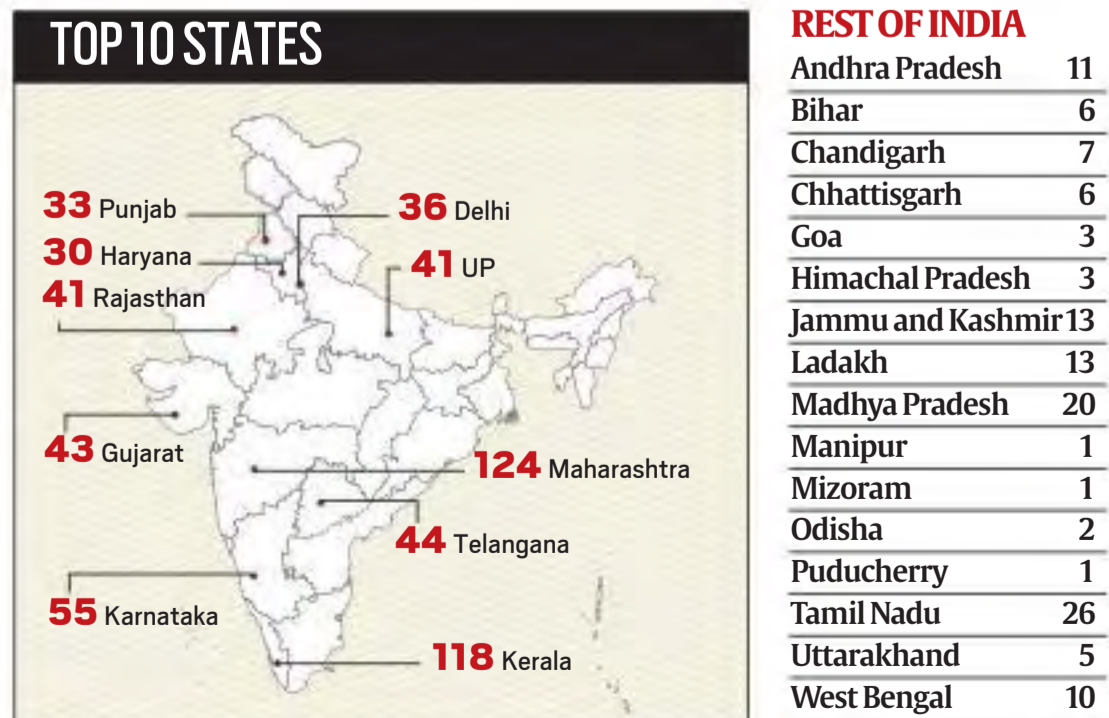
DAILY COUNT OF DEATHS, INFECTIONS



TOTAL CONFIRMED: 510,108 DEATH COUNT: 22,993

Source: Johns Hopkins University, updated at midnight on March 26

INDIA COUNT: 694 (16 DEATHS)



Union Health Ministry update at midnight, March 26. Some states may have reported higher numbers. Only states with most cases are listed.

45 PATIENTS DISCHARGED IN 10 STATES ACROSS THE COUNTRY

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

'Severe' steps can cut cases drastically: study

Without 'draconian measures', the virus could infect nearly 60,000 people by mid-May, shows projection

AMITABH SINHA
PUNE, MARCH 26

THE 21-DAY lockdown that began at midnight Tuesday has brought enormous misery and suffering to some of India's most vulnerable people — however, in the absence of aggressive government intervention, the infection could, spreading at its current rate, reach 4,800 people by April 15 and, a month from then, balloon to 58,600, says a new study.

The study published earlier this week has weighty institutional backing — it has been carried out by scientists at Johns Hopkins University and the University of Michigan among other American universities. However, it uses data until March 16 — and does not reflect the impact of government interventions made before (such as airport screenings and quarantines) and after that date (Janata Curfew and the ongoing nation-

wide lockdown). Social distancing measures like the ban on travel and stopping of trains and flights would likely have slowed the spread of the novel coronavirus.

The study acknowledges this — "the most severe form of interventions", it says, would drastically bring down infections, and restrict the spread to just about 13,800 cases by May 15, instead of 58,600. In this situation, the study's authors say, it is "highly appropriate to adopt draconian measures".

The study does not specify the "draconian measures" or "severe" interventions — but it does discuss the possible impact of social distancing, travel ban and lockdown, without which the number of infected people (including those who would have recovered) could rise to even 1.31 lakh by June 15. Even these numbers, the study says, could be "at best underestimates" based on early-phase data.

Bhramar Mukherjee, a professor of epidemiology and chair of biostatistics at The

University of Michigan School of Public Health, and one of the authors of the study, told *The Indian Express* in an email that the researchers had run the models again with data up to March 21, and the numbers had indeed increased from the ones that were published in the study.

"We just ran the model with data till March 21 and the projections for May 15 became around 100,000 (upper limit could go up to 1.3 million), which used to be 58,600 (upper limit of 915,000). It is still important to look at data every day, and keep updating our model for the most informed projections," Prof Mukherjee said.

The COV-IND-19 Study Group, which did the modelling, found that an infected person in India was passing on the infection to at least two more people on average. A different study by two scientists at the Institute of Mathematical Sciences at Chennai, which was reported by this newspaper last week,

had found that every infected person was transmitting to only 1.7 persons on average. That study, by Soumya Easwaran and Sitabhra Sinha, did not make a long-term projection for the spread.

The past four months (since the outbreak of the disease in Wuhan) has been "a failure of our social collective imagination", Prof Mukherjee said. "From the point of 'COVID-19 is not a big deal' to a complete lockdown has taken only a few days in many places. I feel watchful waiting, intelligent surveillance are needed to come up with clever and perhaps modulated intervention strategies."

The study acknowledges that there are some uncertainties in the calculations. That is "largely due to many unknowns arising from model assumptions, population size, accuracy of diagnostic tests..., heterogeneity in implementation of different government-initiated interventions and community-level protective measures", it says.

'WHO's underfunding hits global disease response'



ROBERT YATES

Do most big public health plans stem from large crises?

It is definitely true that many of the world's most significant and successful universal health coverage reforms have followed, and been a consequence of major crises. Good examples include the UK, France and Japan after World War II, Thailand after the Asian financial crisis, China after the 2002 SARS crisis, and even Rwanda after the 1994 genocide.

To what extent does the underfunding of

bodies like the WHO impact global information-sharing on disease?

This crisis has once again put the spotlight on the underfunding of global health bodies like WHO which is limiting their ability to coordinate the global response including the sharing of information across national boundaries. In September 2019 the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board Report recommended that Member states need to agree to an increase in WHO contributions for the financing of preparedness and response activities and must sustainably fund the WHO Contingency Fund for Emergencies, including the establishment of a replenishment scheme using funding from the revised World Bank Pandemic Emergency Financing Facility. Looking to the future, it is vital that governments heed this recommendation and the other ones outlined in the GPMB report.

Poor countries do not have the money to make public health a top priority, many governments say.

I don't agree with this. The amount that governments spend on public health, health systems, and health in general is a political choice weighed up against other priorities. Some countries choose to spend a higher proportion of their GDP through public health financing than others, and in many instances have increased public spending quite dramatically. China did for example, after the SARS epidemic in 2002. There are though, a number of countries that demonstrably give a low priority to public health spending, and regrettably that includes India.

Could something good and useful emerge on the other side of this pandemic?

Yes, I hope this terrible tragedy will be a wake-up call that the world collectively needs truly global universal health coverage whereby everyone on the planet receives the quality health services they need without suffering financial hardship. This clearly means access to and use of public and preventive health services to stop outbreaks be-

coming epidemics, and also curative, rehabilitative and palliative care services for those who become sick.

This can only be achieved through publicly financing the health system so that the healthy wealthy subsidise the sick and the poor. And there are already signs of some countries recognising that they do need to socialise their health financing systems more (e.g., Ireland, Spain, South Africa) to tackle this epidemic and this may also happen in countries like India and America as well, which have become dominated by inequitable private financing. So hopefully in the long run, responding to this epidemic will take the world closer to the SDG goal of universal health coverage.

(Robert Yates is an internationally recognised expert on universal health coverage and progressive health financing, who has previously worked as a senior health economist with the World Health Organisation. He spoke to **Seema Chishty**.)

13 THE OUTBREAK NATION

SC judges to hear urgent cases from home office via video conference

ANANTHAKRISHNANG NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

THREE BENCHES of the Supreme Court will resume hearing of urgent cases via video conferencing from Friday.

The three benches will comprise Justices Arun Mishra and Deepak Gupta, Justices D Y Chandrachud and Surya Kant, and Justices L. Nageswara Rao and Aniruddha Bose. They will take up matters from residential office of judges.

An SC circular Thursday said the court "shall continue to function and to hear matters involving extreme urgency, till further orders in this regard".

On March 23, the apex court had begun hearing cases through video conferencing for the first time in its history. This was done due to the COVID-19 situation — to avoid crowding and make it easier for lawyers and clients to access the court.

Sitting in Court 1, a bench of Chief Justice S A Bobde and Justice Chandrachud took up two matters that day.

Although some matters were listed for hearing before two benches headed by Justices Chandrachud and Nageswara Rao on March 25, this was adjourned the night before after the government declared 21-day lockdown to tackle the spread of COVID-19.

Compared to March 23, the difference this time is that the video conferencing facilities have been put up in the residential offices of judges. This means that they too will not have to travel to the SC for hearing matters.

Three Bihar cops held for shooting at van driver, seeking bribe

SANTOSH SINGH PATNA, MARCH 26

THE PATNA police have arrested three constables for shooting at a driver of a pick-up van carrying potato and demanding Rs 5,000 bribe from him to allow the vehicle to ply.

Sonu Sah, who was bringing potato from the riverine belt to Danapur town, was shot in his leg after an argument with three policemen near Patna. "I was first asked to take the vehicle to police station and they hinted that I should talk to senior officers and that the matter could be resolved after paying Rs 5,000," he alleged.

The Punjab government is set to release convicted prisoners on parole and grant interim bail to under-trials for six weeks. All prisoners in custody under Section 107/151 CrPc in the state are to be immediately released on bail by the executive magistrate concerned. It was announced.

Punjab had 23,871 prisoners in its jails as on March 16.

The Maharashtra high-powered committee was formulated on March 24 and based on its recommendations, the state government is expected to issue a notification, following which the process to release the prisoners is expected to start next week.

On Thursday night, Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh tweeted, "I've asked for releasing nearly 11,000 convicts/undertrials imprisoned for offences with prescribed punishment upto 7 yrs or less on emer-

gency parole / furlough to reduce overcrowding in prisons and contain the risk of a COVID-19 outbreak."

The Maharashtra Prisons Department had proposed granting provisional bail of undertrials incarcerated in offences of nature below a certain level of seriousness. The department had also announced a series of other steps including setting up isolation wards in some jails and suspension of visits by relatives and lawyer and courting hearings to be conducted via video conferencing at the prisons.

Additional Director General (Prisons and Correctional Services) Sunil Ramanand had filed an affidavit on the notice on March 20 on behalf of Maharashtra. Ramanand said, "The HPC has submitted its recommendations. Some basic guidelines have been laid down. The inmates who are undertrials or convicts in offences of lesser seriousness and offences which are not heinous will be granted provisional bail or parole.... Approximate number of inmates that may be released comes to around 11,000."

British-era prisons such as Yerawada in Pune (133-per cent overcrowding), and Mumbai's Arthur Road (362 per cent), and Thane Central Jail (265 per cent) are the worst affected by overcrowding.

In Punjab, convicts and undertrials in cases with imposed or prescribed sentences of 10 years of imprisonment or less, with health conditions such as chronic diabetes, HIV, serious neurological issues, chronic lung disease, severe asthma, severe heart condition, and pregnant women will also be considered for release on parole.

FULL REPORT ON www.indianexpress.com

Taking testing cue from S Korea, ICMR seeks 5 lakh antibody kits

KAUNAIN SHERIFF M NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

AS PART of efforts to step up testing for coronavirus, the Indian Council of Medical Research has invited manufacturers to supply 5 lakh antibody kits for diagnosis of infection. Experts in the government point out that the serological test will act as a screening process, as was done in South Korea, one of the few countries which has been able to flatten the pandemic curve.

Dr V Ravi, Head and Senior Professor, Department of Neurovirology, NIMHANS, who specialises in public health virology and development of indigenous kits, told *The Indian Express* that considering the large number of suspected patients being quarantined in the country through contact tracing of just a single patient, the antibody testing for COVID-19 will act as a "screening test" that will give quick results in a few hours.

"The conventional RT-PCR test (reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction) being done in India detects the virus genetic material, which is the RNA. The antibody test will detect the body's response to the virus. The former is direct evidence and the latter the indirect

evidence. Therefore, the antibody test will be used as a screening test where large number of people are being quarantined and where everybody cannot undergo RNA test."

"Since there is shortage of PCR kits, the test is complicated, expensive and time-consuming. What South Korea did was that they started screening people with history of travel and contact, and conducted the serological test using the antibody kit. The antibody will give an indication that a person has been exposed to the virus. If the test is positive, then you can collect the swab and do an RNA test using the PCR kit. This will be a two-stage process," Dr Ravi said.

"The advantage is that the antibody test is very simple. Just a drop of blood is required and the results will be available in just one-two hours. Some kits require whole blood and some kits require blood to be centrifuged. However, one needs to remember that this is not a test that will definitely tell you that a person is infected with COVID-19 infection. It is only for screening," he said.

Inviting suppliers to submit quotations for a "tentative requirement" of 5 lakh antibody kit, ICMR said that supply has to be "ensured" to six locations in the country: Dibrugarh,

Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bhopal, and Delhi. Currently, India is only conducting the RT-PCR test; the government has fixed a Rs 4,500-cap for a RT-PCR test in a private laboratory. The ICMR has also asked suppliers for a quotation on procurement of 7 lakh RNA extraction kits.

Dr Ravi flagged that the serological test will only help screen more number of suspected patients in a shorter duration, but is not aimed to be a tool for mass testing. "Remember, it will be a test to screen persons who have come in contact with COVID-19 patients. If Mr X is COVID positive, and by contact tracing, it is revealed that 1,000 persons have come in contact with Mr X, those 1000 persons, after 4-5 days, can undergo the antibody test for screening. However, these 1,000 persons still have to undergo quarantine for 14 days, the incubation period," he said.

"A positive test in the antibody will tell you that you have been exposed to the virus; and a negative test does not rule out COVID-19 infection, especially if it is very early after exposure. The reliability of such a test, in general, is seven days after the virus has entered the human body. The kit will clearly say what is the probability and at which point it is definite," Dr Ravi said.

Govt hospitals should have 1 critical care unit to combat corona: ICMR

KARISHMA MEHROTRA NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

THE INDIAN Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and other stakeholders have called for each tertiary government hospital in the country to have one critical care unit for coronavirus, and training of health professionals to handle the spread of COVID-19.

The points were made in an issue of *Indian Journal of Medical Research* dedicated to coronavirus. The researchers wrote: "Given the implications of importation of cases and (its) impact on the local epidemiology of COVID-19 in secondary foci, it is essential to break ground on preparing health facilities to combat a local cluster of COVID-19 cases... Biocontainment provides value for money in the longer term, even if it is a resource-intensive affair in the short term."

In a guidance to build such "well-equipped dedicated health facilities (DHF)", the ICMR focuses on building new bio-security wards, or creating

makeshift facilities in tertiary healthcare facilities.

The researchers stated that a DHF must be a "self-contained establishment that can meet most of its daily needs with only essential but limited contact with the outside world". The basic requirements include water, cleaning practices, adequate floor space for bed, hand-washing facilities, ventilation, isolation rooms, protective equipment, regulated traffic flow of people to minimize contact, and rodent control.

"When transmission-based precautions are being practiced, the ideal condition is to have single occupancy rooms for every patient," the researchers pointed out. "Since that may not be feasible in every scenario, the practice of cohort isolation can be followed with a spatial separation of =3 feet (or 1 m)... It is rarely possible to create an ideal room."

The paper also details technical training for physicians and nurses.

FULL REPORT ON www.indianexpress.com

Top panel to look into logistic issues; MHA issues SOP to fix supply chain

AVISHEK G DASTIDAR NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

IDENTIFYING THE delivery of essential items as key to the success of the 21-day nationwide lockdown, the government has formed a high-level inter-departmental Logistics Committee for COVID-19 Relief Operations. This committee comprises six Secretaries, Chairman Railway Board and others to sort out all issues related to supplies.

On Thursday, the Home ministry issued a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for states to ensure the smooth running of the supply chain during the lockdown. It identified restaurants supplying home delivery of food as essential, among others. "Large brick and mortar stores or e-commerce companies would be allowed to operate ensuring strict social distancing," states the letter to states and Union Territories.

The government's nine-member logistics committee is convened by Secretary, Pharmaceuticals, and has members from Health, Civil Aviation, Railways, Textiles, Consumer Affairs, Shipping and senior officials from the Department of Military Affairs and Home Ministry.

According to sources, the committee was formed and the SOP issued following a meeting at the Home ministry on Wednesday on the issue of logistics, where the government conveyed that doorstep delivery of essentials was key to the success of the lockdown.

The meeting, the sources said, was also attended by representatives from e-commerce companies. "By essentials, we don't just mean foodgrains, medicines, milk and such conventional items, but also a host of items that are considered key to daily lives, especially in the doorstep delivery space," an official who attended the meeting told *The Indian Express*.

The SOP issued by Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla says, "It is

therefore important that availability of essential goods is ensured to relieve the hardship faced by people during the period of lockdown." The SOP identifies small local retail shops and e-commerce companies as vital to the availability of essential goods.

"Transporters/drivers/loaders etc of essential goods from the place of manufacture to wholesale and/or retailer. Such transportation may involve intracity, inter-city in same state/UT or inter state movement," states the SOP, listing the services exempted during the lockdown.

It also said employees involved in such supply chains should be allowed to commute on the basis of e-pass or certification by local authorities.

Even as Railways moved less foodgrain on Thursday than it did the previous day, officials said most places in the country are now well-stocked with foodgrain and essentials. "Coal-based power plants have sufficient stock of coal, too, so there is no emergency on that front right now," said a government official.

Owing to lack of labour, officials estimate that a huge volume of consignment is getting piled up at warehouses and if it is not cleared, it might lead to operational issues in the coming days. "However, we have seen that after proactive efforts of the government and the states over the past two days, the coordination issues are easing and we expect them to be gone by Friday," said the official.

The government has activated several helplines for transporters to reach out to in such cases. "The Logistics Committee for COVID-19 Relief Operations shall make available transport and other logistics services, including air transport, road and rail transport. The Committee will ensure that the logistics and transport requirement of central, state, other government bodies and Private Institutions for medical and other essential supplies are met without delay," the order from the Cabinet Secretariat says.

To cut jail clutter, Maharashtra, Punjab jails to free many

SUSHANT KULKARNI & SOFI AHSAN PUNE, CHANDIGARH, MARCH 26

DAYS AFTER Supreme Court observed that overcrowding in prisons poses a risk in the COVID-19 pandemic, Maharashtra and Punjab governments have decided to release or give interim bail to convicts and undertrials with prescribed punishment up to a certain level.

The decision came on recommendations of the high-powered committees, formed on the top court's directions to formulate guidelines to reduce overcrowding in jails.

In Maharashtra, more than 11,000 inmates — both undertrials and convicts — incarcerated for lesser and non-heinous offences in jails across the state are likely to be released either on provisional bail or parole.

The Punjab government is set to release convicted prisoners on parole and grant interim bail to under-trials for six weeks. All prisoners in custody under Section 107/151 CrPc in the state are to be immediately released on bail by the executive magistrate concerned. It was announced.

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FULL REPORT ON www.indianexpress.com



THE GROUND RULES

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee draws circles so that people maintain appropriate distance at a Kolkata market on Thursday. *Express*

Tree along Rajasthan-MP border becomes nikah venue

MILIND GHATWAI BHOPAL, MARCH 26

A BABOOL tree along the border between two states may not qualify for an ideal wedding venue, but two families held a nikah ceremony there due to lack of other options amid the COVID-19 outbreak.

Saddam's family had to travel nearly 85 km from a village under Sarangpur police station area in Rajgarh district of Madhya Pradesh while Zeba's family had to cover less than 15 km to reach the venue from a village under Manohar police station area in Rajasthan's Jhalawar district.

They did not have permission to cross the border as both states have imposed curbs on movement and the authorities allowed only five persons from each side for the nikah ceremony that lasted barely 15 minutes. Besides the



Ten people were present for the ceremony. *Express*

qaazi and a cleric, the 26-year-old bride had her parents with her while the groom came with his parents and two witnesses.

"It was destiny. We did not want to miss the date because it would have been a bad omen. Maybe this is what the Almighty wanted. *Haalaat se samjhauta karke aur dil pe pathhar rakh ke kitya* (we compromised with the situation and did it with a heavy

heart)," Nisar Mohammed Khan, the bride's father, told *The Indian Express* over phone.

The 60-year-old retired government teacher said the nikah was fixed in December, and till few days ago, the families thought it would be held on March 24. He said he took permission from the sub-divisional magistrate.

Before the nikah was performed, a medical practitioner checked all the 10 persons, sanitised their hands and made them wear masks. "We did not even offer a glass of water, forget sweets. It was a very simple affair," Khan said, adding "we followed all corona rules". "It was still an emotional affair," he said. "The whole world is scared, I am no exception," he said of the pandemic, sounding relieved that the ceremony was over. Khan said there was no question of taking a photographer along because authorities would not allow any extra person.

Citing vulnerability to COVID-19 in jail, Christian Michel moves HC for bail

PRITAM PAL SINGH NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

ALLEGED MIDDLEMAN Christian Michel, accused in the AgustaWestland VVIP chopper case, Thursday moved the Delhi High Court seeking interim bail citing his health condition and vulnerability to COVID-19 in prison.

In the bail application, Michel's advocates said the infection could have a lethal effect on their client who is suffering from serious pathologies.

Advocate Aljo K Joseph said that they have mentioned the urgent application before the Registrar who will apprise them of the hearing on Friday.

Highlighting the Supreme Court's March 16 order addressing difficulty in practicing social distancing in overcrowded Indian prisons, the plea said, "The applicant (Michel) is of 59 years of age and ill. The agedness and a pre-existing ill state of



Accused in VVIP chopper scam case

health will make the applicant's body more susceptible to the said infection than any other ordinary prisoner with a normal health condition."

It claimed that the Supreme Court has stressed on the need to adopt preventive steps to avoid the spread of COVID-19 among prisoners.

The High Court is already seized of Michel's bail application, which was opposed by the CBI and ED on the ground that he was "brought to India with unprecedented difficulty and there is all likelihood of him fleeing from justice, if enlarged on bail".

Michel approached the High Court against a trial court's order of September 29 last year denying him bail.

In Kerala, people set aside fear to offer homes as quarantine centres

SHAJU PHILIP THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 26

AT A time when the number of COVID-19 cases in Kerala have climbed to 138 and over one lakh people are under home quarantine, several citizens have come forward to support the state government in tackling the outbreak.

Several residents have offered their homes for the accommodation of those under observation.

At Kathirur in Kannur district, the CPM-led local self-governing body was faced with the tough task of putting 184 people under home quarantine.

Panchayat president M

Sheeba said, "Our panchayat has 184 people under home quarantine and managing their medical and non-medical needs is a big task. Many people were reluctant to stay at their own homes fearing that their whole family will be socially boycotted. Then, someone suggested the idea of shifting all of them to a few houses, depending on the availability of rooms with attached bathroom."

Five days after the local body mooted the idea, owners of eight houses have handed over the premises to lodge those under observation.

The panchayat president said that some of the house owners have handed over their houses



A policeman distributes bananas among the poor, in Kochi, on Thursday. *PTI*

and moved to ancestral houses to stay with close relatives. Others comprise Non-Resident Keralites whose houses are vacant. Now, more people are coming forward to hand over their houses, she said.

Such houses are helping the local body address the issues of those under home quarantine in a better way. Since each house can accommodate several people under quarantine, the health workers need not visit multiple locations to check on them. Food is being served at these premises by volunteers recently trained by the local body.

A man quarantined at one of these houses said, "I feel comfortable here. This has taken away my family's tension regarding social

boycott. If a person is under quarantine, everyone living in that house is watched by local residents who fear they may spread the infection," he said.

A youth, who recently returned from Dubai, said there are four people at the house where he is quarantined but they do not meet each other. "We take utmost care not to mingle with one another. Our families need not worry about us as local panchayat is providing us food," he said.

At Mogral Puthur in Kasaragod district, farmer Abdul Hameed has handed over his house to the health department to lodge five people under observation. "These youths have elderly people at their houses. Hospitals in the district do

not have enough rooms to lodge persons under observation. So, I handed over my house," said Hameed, who is now living at a small house in his agricultural land 40 km away from Mogral Puthur. Hameed said everybody is afraid of infection now. "My family too was scared. But, I put public interest first," he said.

Health department officials said many others, mainly those living abroad, have come forward to hand over their houses. "A hotel owner has allowed us to use rooms for isolation," said the official.

Similar offers have come from Alappuzha and Pathanamthitta districts too, said officials.

Meanwhile, the state govern-

ment has decided to mobilise youths, palliative care volunteers, nursing students and retired doctors to tackle the crisis.

After a review meeting on Thursday, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said the government would field 2.36 lakh youths in the 22-40 years age group as volunteers for COVID-19 related activities in all local self-governing bodies. The youths can register themselves online and they would be entrusted with supplying food, shifting patients to hospitals and as attendants at hospitals, he said.

The Chief Minister also said that the state has 1,640 doctors who retired after 2012 and their details have been collected.

Open feeding centres for beggars: Govt to civic bodies in 10 cities

ESHA ROY
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

THE MINISTRY of Social Justice and Empowerment on Thursday directed municipal bodies in 10 cities across the country to open feeding centres for approximately one lakh beggars in view of the lockdown to check the spread of COVID-19.

The feeding centres are to be opened and run by the municipal corporations of Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Indore, Nagpur, Lucknow and Patna.

The centres will be funded entirely by the Social Justice Ministry. The order comes into effect immediately and will be in effect for the entire duration of the lockdown, till April 15.

"We had initiated a comprehensive plan to end begging in the country which included things like identifying the beggars and eventually rehabilitating them. Each city would've been divided into segments which a nodal officer will oversee. Such as Delhi has about 100-120 segments. The nodal officer would supervise the identification of beggars and then develop a plan for them. This scheme was supposed to kick off from April 1 this year. With the spread of COVID-19 and then the lockdown, we have fast-tracked this plan."

"At the feeding centres, not only will this vulnerable group get meals, but in the process we will also identify them as a part of our overall scheme," Secretary, Social Justice Ministry, R Subrahmanyam, told *The Indian Express*.

The scheme is to be rolled out in five phases. The first phase would involve mapping the begging hotspots and identifying and enumerating beggars in these cities. In the second phase, the beggars would be convinced to stay at temporary shelters or centres, the third would be to provide medical attention to those in need and the fourth and fifth phases would involve looking at alternative livelihoods, and reuniting them with their families or rehabilitating them in sustainable settlements, respectively.

"The entire cost of the feeding centres will be borne by the Ministry. There is no specific financial allotment yet because we don't know how much grant will actually be needed," added the Social Justice Secretary. Subrahmanyam said the Ministry has reached out to the transgender community, also vulnerable to COVID-19 as well as the lockdown. "Their normal means of earning have been severely affected by this. The first thing we have asked the transgender community, the transgender welfare boards and the NGOs working with them to do is to identify those who don't have ration cards. Transgender persons with ration cards should be able to avail the 5 kg rice scheme of the government, but those who don't won't have access to that," said the secretary.

"For both these vulnerable communities, beggars and transgenders, starvation is a real threat under the present circumstances," he added.

From factories in Maharashtra, migrant labourers begin the long walk home

KAVITHAIYER
PALGHAR, MARCH 26

DALPAT SINGH, a 20-something casual labourer employed through a contractor at a chemical manufacturing unit in Boisar, Maharashtra, left his cramped home not far from his factory at 4 am on Thursday. By 9.30 am, he and his group of about 15, all migrant labourers, had reached the bridge across the Surya river near Tawa village on the Mumbai-Gujarat highway, having covered nearly 35 km, walking non-stop, having had to skip even the morning cup of tea.

Mopping his brow and shifting his little backpack, the kind used by college students, from one shoulder to another, he made it clear he didn't want to stop and chat.

"We're getting a bus from Gujarat, somebody said buses are running today," he said. They were hopeful of boarding a bus from somewhere near Bhilad, another 75 km away. If the tip about the bus was off the mark, they would have to walk about 700 km more to get home in Rajsamand, Rajasthan.

Working under a contractor providing labourers to units in the Boisar MIDC and Palghar region, the youngsters earn Rs 10,000 to Rs 15,000 a month, de-



A group of migrant workers employed at units in Boisar walk back home to Rajsamand in Rajasthan, 750 km away

pending on availability of work and shifts. "Things were bad since March 15-16, but since this Monday, we have been unable to get even basic supplies to cook and no restaurants or even tea stalls are operational. Most of those working with us left for their homes yesterday, not many plan to stay back," Dalpat said. A straggler in the group said it didn't make sense anymore to pay rent when the likelihood

of units closing down and work being unavailable in coming days are now very real. "In any case, we couldn't have lived here during the 21-day lockdown, it's impossible without any kind of arrangements for food," he said.

Only a fraction of the thousands of small units dotting the Boisar-Palghar belt offer accommodation to labourers, and the large majority lives in informal

housing around the factories. The pharmaceutical units are now the only ones still operational, and an estimated 3,000 workers from this belt alone are migrant labourers now undertaking the gloomy journey back to their native towns and villages, walking in the absence of any transportation services across district and state borders during the lockdown and not very hopeful of hitching a ride.

Praful Makwana, who has run Quality Process Equipment Private Limited for more than 20 years in Palghar and Vasai, said his is a rare facility that accommodates its non-local labourers, all of them on the rolls.

A manufacturer of capital equipment for chemical industries, Makwana said SMEs in the region are most certainly facing impending closure, having to service business loans while the

facility remains shut. "So it's natural for labourers who are not covered by things like provident fund or other employment benefits to leave for their native places, because of the uncertainty ahead and the continued expense of living here while not earning anything," he said.

"Most of the informal labourers live in slums in groups. Only a very small percentage may have purchased their own accommodation if they have lived and worked here for a long time."

On the highway, Ramesh Dokphode and his wife Devka were still cheerful after walking 30 km from a brick kiln where they were indentured labourers. The couple belongs to Veti village on the Kasa-Jawhar road, another 12-15 km away. "The kiln is shut, so the owner didn't want to foot our food expenses for the next 21 days," Devka said.

She doesn't know much about COVID-19, but she wrapped a handkerchief across her mouth anyway, mainly to keep the dust out and also because others walking on the highway were doing so. She also doesn't know anything about special flights that brought home Indians stranded abroad. "We're almost home," she said brightly. "But we'll have to start looking for work again."

Job of police to facilitate journalists, not impede work: Editors Guild

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

RESPONDING TO the multiple cases of police stopping journalists from reporting in different parts of the country since the 21-day lockdown came into effect, the Editors Guild of India has said police needs to be reminded by the governments that journalists provide an essential service and are exempted. The Guild also said there should be regular minister-level briefings where the media gets the opportunity to ask questions.

In a statement issued on Thursday, the Guild said, "The job of the police is not to impede journalists' work, especially under current circumstances, but to facilitate their functioning. The State and Union Territory governments and the police also need to be reminded that media has been exempted as an essential service under the current lockdown guidelines of the Union Home Ministry."

It noted "with concern that high-handed and arbitrary police action has obstructed many journalists from reporting on the coronavirus outbreak in many parts of the country".

"Such action is self-defeating when media freedoms are critically important for covering the outbreak and the state response," the Guild stated.

No case yet, Assam to convert stadium into quarantine facility

ABHISHEK SAHA
GUWAHATI, MARCH 26

THE ASSAM government is converting a stadium into a quarantine facility and also preparing to ready final-year medical and nursing students in the state to join the healthcare providers in case of a coronavirus outbreak in the state.

"A large quarantine centre will be established at the Sarusajai Sports Complex, Guwahati with capacity for about 700 people. This morning visited the site to take stock of preparedness and the facil-

ity. It shall be ready in a week's time," Assam Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma tweeted on Thursday.

Speaking to reporters, Sarma explained that if any positive case of COVID-19 infection is reported in a family, other members of the family will be brought to the Sarusajai quarantine centre.

He added that the state government has prepared a module to train final-year MBBS students in the state's medical colleges as well as final-year nursing students to increase the number of healthcare providers.

Assam has not reported any case of COVID-19 infection so far but the government is strengthening its healthcare infrastructure to deal with any emerging situation.

The Assam health minister also tweeted that he has held discussions with owners of private hospitals in Guwahati about the ways in which they "can share burden along with govt hospitals".

"I suggested that while govt hospital can be restricted for #Covid patients, regular patients can be sent to them for which we reimburse. Hopeful something will work out," he tweeted.

Odisha to set up 2 hospitals in capital, Naveen urges CMs to help stranded Odias

SAMPAD PATNAIK
BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 26

GEARING UP for a hike in the number of COVID-19 cases in the state, the Odisha government has signed separate tripartite agreements with two private medical colleges and as many PSUs to set up two hospitals in Bhubaneswar with a combined capacity to accommodate 950 patients.

Odisha has reported two cases of COVID-19 infection so far.

One of the agreements has been signed between the state government, SUM Medical College and Mahanadi Coalfields Limited for a 500-bedded hospital. The other has been signed between the state government, KIIMS Medical Colleges and the Odisha Mining Corporation. The PSUs will provide CSR funding for the projects.

The state government has assured that both facilities will be functional in a fortnight.

According to a senior official, "This will help in pooling all resources, human and material, in one place to treat patients rather than a scattered effort throughout the state. Doctors from different state medical colleges may be deployed at this one place for streamlined services."

A release by the government shows, "The global experience states that COVID-19 patients need to be put under observation and treatment in a separate hospital instead of a general hos-

pital, thus minimising chances of transmission to others."

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Thursday wrote to his counterparts in other states, urging them to help stranded Odia people in their states by providing them with food and accommodation.

"Some people may be stranded across the country away from their homes. They may be pilgrims, students, workers and professionals. I would make an earnest appeal to you that any person or group of persons stranded in any part of your state may please be assisted with food, accommodation, security," he wrote.

He requested the Chief Ministers to pass on the message to the Collectors and assured that "Odisha will bear whatever cost is needed". He also said Odisha will be making the same gesture for stranded people and the cost will be borne from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund.

Cases in Chhattisgarh double in 24 hours

GARGI VERMA
RAIPUR, MARCH 26

THE NUMBER of patients who tested positive for coronavirus in Chhattisgarh has doubled in 24 hours, from three confirmed cases on Wednesday to six on Thursday. The patients are from Bilaspur, Durg, Rajnandgaon and Raipur, with the state capital having the maximum number of reported cases till now.

According to sources, two of the patients are over 60 years of age. While contact tracing and surveillance in the state has increased, health officials are facing difficulties in getting COVID-19 testing kits from the National Institute of Virology in Pune due to lockdown.

"The ICMR is providing the kits, and I messaged the direc-

tor informing him that we are running low on testing kits. He responded saying they are finding it difficult to transport the kits owing to the lockdown," state Health Minister T S Singh Deo said. In its attempts to procure more beds, the Health Department has taken over a private hospital in Raipur, which will be converted into an isolation facility for COVID-19 patients.

On Thursday, the Health Department took over the Raipur Institute of Medical Sciences, a private hospital and training institute with over 500 beds, run by the Lord Buddha Educational Society in Godhi area of the city.

"We are trying to be prepared as at the last minute, we can't be running around for hospital beds. We can't push neonatal

and other emergency cases from the government hospitals and some don't even have the bed space. As of now, we have taken over this hospital but if needed we will take over other hospitals too," Singh Deo said.

A 64-year-old woman from Bilaspur district, who returned from Saudi Arabia in February, tested positive 40 days after she travelled to the country. "We had tested her earlier, but her report had been negative. This is just one of the ways in which the virus is surprising us. As of now, there are no data about how it works. However, we are learning from the patients. Only one case has been sent for retesting," state Health Secretary Niharika Singh Barik said.

As of now, testing for the virus is taking place at AIIMS Raipur and Jagdalpur Medical

College. "We have written to ICMR asking for more kits. We have also reached out to My Lab, the Pune-based private firm that has been granted permission to make the testing kits. While My Lab is overwhelmed with requests... ICMR has run into logistic issues of how to send the kits," a senior health official said, adding, "They will arrange a cargo and send something, but it is yet to be figured out."

Although testing kits across the country are being supplied by the NIV, orders for them are placed through ICMR.

According to sources, the state currently has a total of about 500 kits in one of the testing centres. The state also has over 2,400 VTM testing kits, which are used for testing swine flu cases, but won't be of much use for COVID-19 cases.

"Before shutting the transport means, the central government should have identified ways to send the kits from NIV to testing centres across the country. However, we have to wait and hope that our kits don't run out before the supplies come," a private health expert said.

Meanwhile, the Raipur Police registered an FIR against a 23-year-old woman, who tested positive Wednesday, for allegedly hiding information about her travel history and not following isolation and curfew orders. "We have booked the woman as there is reason to believe that she had moved out and also hid information from us," Raipur SP Arif Shaikh said. The police have registered similar FIRs against about 20 people from across the state for hiding information and travel history.

THE WORLD

Benny Gantz, breaking vows, says he would serve under Netanyahu

ISABEL KERSHNER & DAVID HALBFINGER
JERUSALEM, MARCH 26



Benny Gantz

PRIME MINISTER Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel was set to hold onto power after his chief rival, Benny Gantz, reversed himself Thursday and signaled that he would be open to serving in a Netanyahu-led government.

Gantz, a former Israeli army chief who had vowed to bring Netanyahu's long rule to an end and fought him to a draw in three elections, said he was changing course to help bring

the country together to fight the coronavirus pandemic.

"These are unusual times and they call for unusual decisions," Gantz said in a speech to Parliament Thursday evening.

"This is not the time for infighting and mudslinging," he said. "This is not the time for controversy and divisions. This is the time for responsible, committed, patriotic leadership. Let's join hands and get Israel out of this crisis."

The move was a 180-degree reversal and broke countless campaign promises by Gantz. Netanyahu has been indicted on criminal corruption charges and Gantz had vowed not to serve in a government led by a prime minister under indictment.

Gantz said that he would "explore the formation of a national emergency government". **NYT**

Christchurch gunman pleads guilty to murder, terrorism

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WELLINGTON, MARCH 26

THE MAN who committed the worst atrocity in New Zealand's modern history when he slaughtered 51 worshippers at two Christchurch mosques unexpectedly pleaded guilty to all charges Thursday.

The attacks targeting people praying at the mosques a year ago shocked the nation and prompted new laws banning types of semi-automatic weapons. It also prompted global changes to social media protocols after the gunman livestreamed his attack on

Facebook, where it was viewed by hundreds of thousands of people.

The sudden turn in the case took survivors and relatives by surprise, and brought relief to people across New Zealand. Many had feared Australian white supremacist Brenton Tarrant would try to use his trial as a platform to promote his views.

Tarrant, 29, pleaded guilty to 51 counts of murder, 40 counts of attempted murder and one count of terrorism at the Christchurch High Court. He had previously pleaded not guilty to all charges and his trial had been scheduled to start in June.

US charges Venezuela president Maduro with drug trafficking

NEW YORK TIMES
WASHINGTON, MARCH 26

PRESIDENT NICOLÁS Maduro of Venezuela was indicted in the United States on Thursday in a narco-terrorism and cocaine trafficking conspiracy in which prosecutors said he led a violent drug cartel even as he amassed power.

The indictment of a putative head of state was highly unusual and served as an escalation of the Trump administration's campaign to pressure Maduro to leave office after his widely disputed reelection in 2018. Maduro has led



Nicolas Maduro

Venezuela's economy into shambles and prompted an exodus of millions of people.

Attorney General William P. Barr announced the charges on Thursday at a news briefing

along with the head of the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the top federal prosecutors in Manhattan and Miami.

Maduro condemned the charges, accusing the US and its ally Colombia on Twitter of giving "the order to fill Venezuela with violence." He declared that he would not be defeated.

The US no longer recognises Maduro as Venezuela's president. With most of Venezuela's neighbours, the Trump administration has recognised the leader of the opposition, Juan Guaidó, as president since he declared himself the country's leader in January 2019.

PANDEMIC WATCH



Priti Patel

UNITED KINGDOM
Priti Patel looks at measures akin to India

London: UK Home Secretary Priti Patel is keen to close UK borders to passengers from global hotspots such as US, Iran and China, similar to moves taken by India, as per a report. The Indian-origin Cabinet minister feels visitors from certain countries should not be continuing to fly into the UK when the government has put the country in lockdown to halt the pandemic, which has claimed 465 lives across Britain. Patel is seeking cross-government support for the move that would stop the daily flights from Tehran, New York and Los Angeles and Beijing, claimed a 'Daily Telegraph' report.

NEPAL

Key border points with China to open

Kathmandu: Nepal has decided to reopen its key border points with China to ease the supply of essential goods in the wake of the pandemic. A high-level committee led by Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Ishwar Pokhrel has decided to reopen two border points with China by completing the necessary protocols at the earliest, the officials said Thursday. The border points were closed due to the devastating earthquakes of 2015. The decision to open the key border points comes at a time when the country is facing a total lockdown amid fears of coronavirus spread.

AUSTRALIA

Virus-stricken ship told to leave

Sydney: A cruise ship stricken by the outbreak was told Thursday to leave Australian waters, days after local infection numbers spiked when passengers on another vessel were allowed to disembark. Seven passengers have tested positive for COVID-19 aboard the Artania, which had been due to travel onward to South Africa but is now anchored near Fremantle. Western Australian Premier Mark McGowan said he would ask the national government to call in the navy if the ship refused to move on from Australian waters. "This ship needs to leave immediately," he said.

G20 leaders plan \$5-tn economy boost

Put human feelings, not economic targets, at centre of global fight against pandemic: PM Modi

SHUBHAJIT ROY
NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

NOTING THE "alarming social and economic costs" to the novel coronavirus pandemic, Prime Minister Narendra Modi asked G20 leaders to put "human beings", and not "economic targets" at the centre of the global cooperation to fight the disease. At the end of the two-and-a-half hour virtual G20 summit — which was not on a purely economic agenda — the leaders decided to inject "\$5 trillion into the global economy".

"We are injecting over \$5 trillion into the global economy, as part of targeted fiscal policy, economic measures, and guarantee schemes to counteract the social, economic and financial impacts of the pandemic," a joint communique of the G20 leaders said. The leaders also agreed to contribute to the WHO-led COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund on a voluntary basis.

According to an Indian government source, the G20 summit did not include any reference to the origin of the crisis. This was in response to a possible face-off between US and Chinese leaders.

Modi, in his remarks, noted that 90 per cent of the COVID-19 cases and 88 per cent of deaths were in G20 countries, even as they share 80 per cent of the world GDP and 60 per cent of the world population. He called on the G20 to come out with a concrete action plan.

The PM underscored the need to "freely and openly share the benefits of medical research and development", "develop adaptive, responsive and humane health care systems", promote "new crisis management protocols and procedures for an interconnected global village", strengthen and reform intergovernmental organisations like the WHO and work together to reduce economic hardships resulting from COVID-19, particularly for the economically weak, a statement by the Ministry of External Affairs said.

He also called on leaders to



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses other G20 leaders during a virtual summit, in New Delhi on Thursday. NSA Ajit Doval and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar were also present. ANI

help usher in a new globalisation for the collective well-being of humankind and have multilateral fora focus on promoting the shared interests of humanity.

As per a source, Modi told G20 leaders that, in many senses, "globalisation had failed us", the multilateral fora had become a platform to "balance competing individual interests, rather than the collective interests of all humankind", whether it was "combating terrorism or climate change".

"Thousands of precious lives have been lost to this crisis", Modi is learnt to have told G20 leaders. And, even three months after the crisis, he said, "We are still looking, working, trying to find a coordinated response".

Although the G20 summit shows the international community "can come together", but "it has taken some time for it to respond to a crisis of this magnitude and damage", the source re-

called Modi telling the leaders.

The summit was chaired by Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud.

Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed that a "G20 health ministers' meeting be convened as quickly as possible to improve information sharing, strengthen cooperation on drugs, vaccines and epidemic control, and cut off cross-border infections". "G20 members need to jointly help developing countries with weak public health systems enhance preparedness and response. I propose a G20 COVID-19 assistance initiative for better information sharing and policy and action coordination with the support of the World Health Organisation," he said.

He also said China will be more than ready to share its practices, conduct joint research and development of drugs and vaccines, and provide assistance

where it can. "We need to make a collective response for control and treatment at the international level. This is a virus that respects no borders," Xi said.

"I want to call on all G20 members to take collective actions — cutting tariffs, removing barriers, and facilitating the unfettered flow of trade. Together, we can send a strong signal and restore confidence for global economic recovery. The G20 needs to draw up an action plan and promptly set up communication mechanisms and institutional arrangements for anti-epidemic macro-policy coordination," the Chinese President said.

The G20 communique said, "We will continue to conduct bold and large-scale fiscal support. Collective G20 action will amplify its impact, ensure coherence, and harness synergies. The magnitude and scope of this response will get the global economy back on its

feet and set a strong basis for the protection of jobs and the recovery of growth..."

Saudi King Salman said the impact of the pandemic has spread to reach the global economy, financial markets, trade, and global supply chains, hampering growth and development and reversing the gains accomplished in the previous years. On the trade front, the G20 must send a "strong signal" to restore confidence in the global economy by resuming, as soon as possible, the normal flow of goods and services, he said.

"The G20 has previously proven its effectiveness in mitigating the severity of the global financial crisis and its ability to overcome it. Today, through our cooperation, we are confident that we, together, will overcome this crisis, and move forward towards a future where all people thrive, prosper and are healthy," he said.

3.3 mn in US claim unemployment; Senate approves \$2-tn aid package

EMILY COCHRANE & NICHOLAS FANDOS
WASHINGTON, MARCH 26

THE \$2 TRILLION economic stabilisation package agreed to by Congress and the Trump administration early Wednesday morning is the largest of its kind in modern American history, intended to respond to the coronavirus pandemic and provide direct payments and jobless benefits for individuals, money for states and a huge bailout fund for businesses.

The measure, which the Senate approved unanimously just before midnight on Wednesday is unprecedented in its sheer scope and size.

"This is certainly, in terms of dollars, by far and away the biggest ever, ever done," President Trump said at the White House, where he veered from his usual partisan vitriol and praised Democrats for their work on the agreement. "That is a tremendous thing because a lot of this money

goes to jobs, jobs, jobs — and families, families, families."

More than three million people filed for unemployment benefits in the US last week, sending a collective shudder throughout the economy that is unlike anything Americans have experienced.

In the half-century that the government has tracked applications, the worst week ever was 695,000 "initial" claims. That was in October 1982.

The latest numbers, released by the Labour Department on Thursday, are some of the first hard data on the economic toll of the coronavirus pandemic, which has shut down whole swathes of American life faster than government statistics can keep track.

Just three weeks ago, barely 200,000 people applied for jobless benefits, a historically low number. The sudden rush of layoffs has led to jammed phone lines and overwhelmed computer servers at unemployment offices across the country, leaving many people unable to file claims. NYT

WHAT THE LEGISLATION ENTAILS

■ Direct payments of \$1,200 to millions of Americans, including those earning up to \$75,000, and an additional \$500 per child

■ \$377 billion in federally guaranteed loans to small businesses and a \$500 billion government lending program for distressed companies

■ \$100 billion to hospitals



on the front lines of the pandemic. Expand duration of jobless aid and extending payments for the first time to freelancers and gig workers

WHO sees encouraging signs in Europe: 'Marathon, not sprint'

AGENCIES
MARCH 26

THE WORLD Health Organisation's European office said Thursday it saw "encouraging signs" as Italy reported a lower rate of infections of the new coronavirus, cautioning it was too soon to say whether the worst had passed.

"While the situation remains very serious, we are starting to see some encouraging signs," WHO regional director for Europe, Hans Kluge, told a press conference.

"Italy, which has the highest number of cases in the region, has just seen a slightly lower rate of increase, though it is still too early to say that the pandemic is peaking in that country," he added.

According to Kluge they will soon be able to determine the degree to which those measures have had an impact.

But Kluge also cautioned governments and citizens to be aware of the "new reality" created



Medical staff prepare to transfer COVID-19 patients from Strasbourg to hospitals in western parts of France. Reuters

by the pandemic and prepare for the long term impact. "This is not going to be a sprint, this is going to be a marathon," Kluge said.

The number of declared coronavirus cases in Europe topped 250,000, more than half of which are in Italy and Spain, according to an AFP tally Thursday.

"We are collapsing," said Lidia Perera, a nurse who works at Madrid's Hospital de la Paz. "We need more workers." She

said watching patients die alone is "killing all of us inside."

In Italy, doctors and nurses have been begging the government daily to provide more masks, gloves and goggles and urged the public to understand how important onerous social distancing measures really are.

"Please don't leave us alone. Help us help you," Dr Francesca De Gennaro, who heads a small medical clinic in Italy.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC: FOUR KEY FIGURES

\$33.17 bn

The package unveiled by Singapore to support its workers and businesses amid measures to deal with economic fallout

1.5 bn

The number of students missing school during the outbreak. The UN has enlisted tech firms, NGOs to find remedies

500,000

The number of people who signed up as volunteers within 24 hours of a govt appeal to help the NHS

500,000

The number of tests per week that Germany conducts, a virologist said, adding early detection was key

WHO sided with China, says Trump; Beijing praises its role

K J M VARMA & LALIT K JHA
BEIJING/WASHINGTON, MARCH 26

THE WAR of words between the US and China over the origins of the deadly coronavirus has extended to the WHO as Chinese President Xi Jinping praised its role in advancing global battle against COVID-19 amid his American counterpart Donald Trump's criticism that the UN health agency sided with Beijing and people are unhappy with its position.

President Xi on Thursday appreciated the World Health Organisation (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus' efforts to advance the global battle against the COVID-19 pandemic. Under Ghebreyesus' leadership, the WHO has been actively advancing global cooperation against the contagious illness and gained wide recognition from the international community, Xi said.

China, he added, will con-



US President Donald Trump at the White House. Reuters

tinue to firmly support Ghebreyesus and the WHO.

Xi's praise of WHO and Ghebreyesus' leadership came after Trump said the UN health body has "very much sided" with China on the coronavirus crisis and claimed that many are unhappy with the "very unfair" praise by the agency on Beijing's handling of the outbreak.

President Trump was responding to a question on allegations by Republican Senator Marco Rubio that the WHO showed "favouritism" to China

E. Worries of backlash

THE US-CHINA war of words has worried many at a time when a heightened level of global cooperation is needed. Reports of the US moving from words to action has heightened such worries, given that China is a key exporter of medical goods to the US. Experts said such a "demonisation contest" can only damage efforts to combat the virus.

where the disease originated.

"It (WHO) has been very very much sided with China. A lot of people are not happy about it," Trump said at a White House news conference on Wednesday.

Stop congregational prayers to save lives: Al-Azhar fatwa

SAJJAD HUSSAIN
ISLAMABAD, MARCH 26

A TOP global Islamic body has issued a fatwa (religious edict) on the request of Pakistan President Dr Arif Alvi, empowering the head of the state to suspend Friday prayers in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak.

The fatwa issued on Wednesday by the Grand Imam Shaikh of Egypt's Jamia Al Azhar, an authority on Islamic injunctions, and the Supreme Council in Egypt, said public gatherings, including congregational prayers at mosques, could result in spread of coronavirus and the governments of Muslim countries had full juris-

diction to cancel such events.

"I am thankful to Grand Imam Shaikh of Al-Azhar and Supreme Council for responding to my personal request to provide guidance to us with regard to Farz Jamaat & Juma prayers in mosques during coronavirus attack," the president tweeted on Wednesday.

Alvi asked clerics in Pakistan to act as per the principles of Islam from Quran and Sunnah, and said it purely Islamic to cancel Friday prayers over coronavirus concerns, The News reported.

"Countries that have stopped congregational prayers are UAE, Saudi, Iran, Algeria, Tunisia, Jordan, Kuwait, Palestine, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt," he said. PTI

'THIS IS A MASSIVE, MASSIVE RETURN — SIMPLY OVERWHELMING'

Afghan returnees from Iran raise fears of another Wuhan

FATIMA FAIZI & DAVID ZUCCHINO
HERAT, MARCH 26

AFGHANISTAN HAS already imported its epidemic. And each day it adds to it, as thousands more displaced Afghans continue to flow across the border from Iran, which has reported among the world's highest numbers of Covid-19 cases and deaths.

The returnees, some surely infected with the coronavirus when in Iran, cluster shoulder to shoulder in massive crowds on both sides of the crossing,

where toilet facilities are primitive and soap and potable water are scarce.

Later, they climb aboard overloaded taxis, buses and minivans for the two-hour trip to Herat city, the sprawling and crowded hub of western Afghanistan, where they sleep in packed hostels and cramped rooms behind restaurants.

From Herat, tens of thousands of the new arrivals have boarded more overloaded buses and vans en route to Kabul, the capital. From there, they have returned to crowded homes in Kabul or traveled onward to out-



People returning from Iran cross into Afghanistan. NYT

lying provinces — potential vectors for spreading the virus.

More than 115,000 Afghans returned from Iran just between

16 ECONOMY

GOLD	RUPEE	OIL	SILVER
₹41,705	₹75.16	\$26.15	₹38,100

Note: Spot gold markets shut due to lockdown in major states. *Indian basket as on March 19, 2020

SENSEX: 29,946.77 ▲ 1410.99 NIFTY: 8,641.45 ▲ 323.60 NIKKEI: 18,664.60 ▼ 882.03 HANG SENG: 23,352.34 ▼ 174.85 FTSE: 5,564.93 ▼ 123.27 DAX: 9,578.11 ▼ 296.15

*International market data till 1900 IST

PART OF ₹1.7 LAKH CRORE PACKAGE TO COMBAT COVID-19 IMPACT ON No income threshold for withdrawal from EPF accounts, contribution waiver for 40% of firms

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

AS PART of its financial package to counter the outbreak of COVID-19, the government on Thursday announced measures for a section of organised workers by bearing the outgo on contribution to Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) for low-income workers and relaxing withdrawal conditions to allow 75 per cent of the amount or three month of wages, whichever is lower, from the EPF accounts.

The EPF contribution waiver of 24 per cent (12 per cent for employers and employees each) will be for establishments having up to 100 workers with 90 per cent having income below Rs 15,000,

which are approximately 4 lakh or 40 per cent of the total number of establishments under the ambit of the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO).

On the relaxation in withdrawal conditions from EPF accounts, officials clarified there will be no income threshold for the subscribers.

"The scheme is for MSMEs where more than 90 per cent are low-paid workers and employers too are economically not too strong, particularly in a situation like these days, when their business is hit," a senior EPFO official told *The Indian Express*.

There were over 10 lakh establishments under the ambit of EPFO, as per its Annual Report for FY17. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the government

FOR ENTITIES WITH UP TO 100 WORKERS

■ EPF contribution waiver of 24% will be for establishments having up to 100 workers with 90% having income below ₹15,000

■ There were over 10 lakh establishments under EPFO ambit, as per its Annual Report for FY17

will pay the 24 per cent contribution for the next three months, which "may benefit 80 lakh employees and is expected to incen-

tivise 4 lakh establishments". The financial outgo for the EPF contribution waiver is expected to be around Rs 5,000 crore.

She added that the EPF scheme regulations would be amended because of the prevailing pandemic situation to allow a non-refundable advance of up to 75 per cent of the amount standing to the credit to the member or three month of wages, whichever is lower. "This is expected to benefit 4.8 crore workers registered with EPFO," she said.

"All EPF subscribers can withdraw 75 per cent of amount in their accounts though there is a limit of withdrawal to 3-month wages in case the 75 per cent amount is higher, especially in case of high-income subscribers. However, we don't think a higher

salaried person will withdraw unnecessarily if he/she is getting such a tax-free high interest rate on deposits," the EPFO official said.

Though there has been no official announcement on the date of implementation, the official said EPFO will try to do it as soon as possible. Under the EPF scheme, employees and employers have to contribute an equal amount of 12 per cent of the employees' basic salary plus dearness allowance.

From the employer's EPF contribution, 8.33 per cent is marked for the Employee Pension Scheme (EPS) and the remaining to the PF account of the employer. The EPF component is subject to a wage cap of Rs 15,000, or actual basic pay, whichever is lower.

TO HELP MITIGATE VIRUS IMPACT ON 3.5 CR REGISTERED WORKERS States asked to use ₹31,000 cr balance from building and construction workers' fund

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

THE CENTRE has asked states to use funds of around Rs 31,000 crore in their respective state construction worker welfare funds under the Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Cess (BOCW) Act to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic for 3.5 crore registered workers.

Earlier this week, the Labour Ministry had directed states and Union Territories to use the cess proceeds to the tune of Rs 52,000 crore.

The difference in amount utilisation has surfaced because the respective state governments have already earmarked some amount from the total funds of Rs 52,000 crore for expenditure and welfare of construction workers as per the existing rules for the welfare boards, an official said.

"Rs 31,000 crore is the amount which state governments have been asked to spend for this (COVID-19) purpose," the official added.

The on-ground benefit to the construction workers will depend on the states devising their respective welfare schemes to utilise the cess proceeds. However, the coverage will be limited to only registered 3.5 crore construction workers.

As per labour experts, over 1-1.5 crore construction workers are estimated to be unregistered, leaving them out of the coverage of this announcement.

The latest available government data for state-wise breakup of the registered building and other construction workers shows Uttar Pradesh having the highest share of such workers at 48.5 lakh, followed by

REGISTERED BUILDING & OTHER CONSTRUCTION BENEFICIARIES IN STATE BOARDS

State	No. of workers registered
Andhra Pradesh:	18,15,889
Arunachal Pradesh:	30,841
Assam:	2,48,871
Bihar:	2,39,470
Chhattisgarh:	19,39,898
Goa:	5,117
Gujarat:	6,54,550
Haryana:	8,56,980
Himachal Pradesh:	1,74,968
J&K:	3,42,295
Jharkhand:	7,96,146
Karnataka:	15,42,432
Kerala:	15,26,861
Madhya Pradesh:	30,97,889
Maharashtra:	16,10,619
Manipur:	1,18,332
Meghalaya:	28,836
Mizoram:	52,947
Nagaland:	11,912
Odisha:	27,15,058
Punjab:	8,67,223
Rajasthan:	22,22,924
Sikkim:	36,236
Tamil Nadu:	28,28,553
Telangana:	11,75,531
Tripura:	99,762
Uttar Pradesh:	48,56,323
Uttarakhand:	2,32,627
West Bengal:	31,01,362
Delhi:	5,40,631
A & N Island:	15,126
Chandigarh:	21,498
Dadra & Nagar Haveli:	2,176
Daman and Diu:	5,149
Lakshadweep:	176
Puduchery:	47,080
Total:	3,48,62,288

West Bengal at 31.01 lakh. According to the Building and Other Construction Workers

(Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996, a cess is levied and collected at the rate of 1 per cent of the cost of construction by the state governments.

The states, through their respective State Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Boards, constituted under the BOCW Act, utilise the cess fund as per Section 22 of BOCW Act, 1996.

Section 22 of the BOCW Act states that the Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Board can provide assistance to a beneficiary in case of an accident; give pension to those who have completed the age of 60 years; sanction loans and advances to a beneficiary for construction of a house not exceeding such amount and on prescribed terms and conditions pay premia for group insurance scheme of the beneficiaries; give financial assistance for the education of children of the beneficiaries, for medical expenses for treatment of major ailments, payment of maternity benefits and make provision and improvement of such other welfare measures and facilities as may be prescribed.

Further, the Board may grant loan or subsidy to a local authority or an employer in aid of any scheme approved by the respective state government for the welfare of building workers in any establishment.

Every construction worker who has completed eighteen years of age, but has not completed sixty years of age, and who has been engaged in any building or other construction work for not less than ninety days during the preceding twelve months shall be eligible for registration as a beneficiary under this Act.

To be hiked from April 1, MGNREGA wage revision was due before FY20-end

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

THE GOVERNMENT on Thursday announced the 'Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package' to deal with the outbreak of COVID-19, though some of its components are already existing and were due for implementation in coming months.

For instance, an increase in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) wages by Rs 20 with effect from April 1, 2020, has already been notified on March 23 as the revision was due before the end of the current financial year.

The wage rates under the rural job guarantee scheme are an-

'Growth in next 2 quarters not to be over 3%'

New Delhi: Former chief statistician Pronab Sen on Thursday said India's growth in the next two quarters will not be more than 3 per cent due to the lockdown across the nation. PTI

nounced by the Centre under Section 6 of the MGNREGA, 2005. Moreover, the MGNREGA wages are linked to the Consumer Price Index for Agricultural Labour (CPI-AL). So, the wage rates follows the trajectory of CPI-AL.

COVID-19 Impact: Crisil downgrades 81 companies

Crisil Ratings has downgraded as many as 81 companies which are likely to face cash flow challenges in near term

REASONS FOR DOWNGRADES:
■ Near-term challenges to liquidity
■ Unutilised bank lines
■ Vulnerable to a sharp slump in cash flows

REASONS FOR RATINGS RETAINED:
■ Balance sheet liquidity
■ Unutilised bank lines
■ Other external financial flexibility

MAJOR COMPANIES FOR WHICH RATINGS UNAFFECTED:
■ HCL Technologies
■ Cyient
■ Sonata Software
■ Shoppers Stop
■ Savaera Industries

SECTORS IMPACTED THE MOST:
■ Airlines
■ Hotels
■ Tourism
■ Malls, organised brick & mortar retail
■ Multiplexes and restaurants



Ratings Impact	Number of Companies
Downward revision	40
Downgrade	22
On Negative Watch	19
Ratings retained	39

With the nation under a 21-day mandatory lockdown, the impact on airlines, hotels, tourism, and malls would be the maximum. Owing to the liquidity pressures likely over the next few days, companies may find it tough to sustain financial flexibility. Source: Crisil Ratings

COVID-19 EFFECT ONLINE MARKETPLACE

Lack of on-ground clarity limits full scale operations for online grocers

PRANAV MUKUL NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

EVEN AS authorities and local police have started issuing directions to allow online companies delivering necessity items like food, grocery, medicines, etc. the players are being cautious in absence of complete certainty on the ground regarding their operations. After almost two whole days of no operations and a series of meetings with various police departments and local bodies, some of these companies resumed operations in patches across the country.

India's largest online grocer Bigbasket said it has started delivering orders in Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Bhopal, Coimbatore, Indore, Mumbai, Mysuru, Nagpur, Noida, Surat, Vadodara and Vijayawada. Bigbasket, which is unsure about when it will resume operations in Delhi and Gurgaon, has geofenced the regions with customers not being able to access its website and app.

Its rival Grofers, on the other hand — which has resumed services in Delhi-NCR, including Gurgaon, Faridabad, Noida and Ghaziabad — said it will be ramping up capacities in coming days to fulfil the backlog of orders. Grofers has also resumed services in Bengaluru, Ahmedabad, Lucknow and Kanpur.

Grofers said it was facing difficulties in restarting deliveries in Pune and Chennai. "We are currently not operational in these cities and all our warehouses are shut. We are not sure when we will be able to start delivering in these cities again," it stated.

After a series of meetings with various police departments and local bodies, some of these companies resumed operations in patches

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Puneet Kumar, founder-CEO of SuprDaily, said that the company had on Thursday began delivering perishables like milk and fruits & vegetables to its customers in Bengaluru and Chennai, while it will attempt deliveries to all eight cities it serves, including Delhi, Gurgaon, Noida, Pune, Hyderabad and Kanpur.

"We were not operating in four cities because the situation on the ground was not very favourable. In the last 24 hours, the situation has slightly improved. Governments are helping us get more clarity and we can provide essential services like milk and groceries across our cities. The big issue has been about the clarity on the last mile, where our delivery boys interface with the police and law enforcement agencies. When one or two incidents happened, it created a fear and the workforce now needs more clarity before they can come back on," he said.

"As far as movement of trucks is concerned, the problem is that while the government has been really helpful, full clarity is not there on the ground. Some trucks are being allowed, some are not being allowed," he added.

'GDP to take ₹10.3 lakh cr hit in first half of 2020'

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

HDFC BANK has projected that the COVID-19 outbreak and 21-day lockdown will reduce India's gross domestic product (GDP) in the first half of 2020 by Rs 10.3 lakh crore, bringing GDP growth for FY20 down to 4.8 per cent and causing a 3 per cent contraction of GDP in the first quarter of fiscal year 2020-21.

The report projected overall GDP growth for FY21 at 3.2-3.5 per cent, assuming that the lockdown would end in April and that the spread of Covid-19 in the country is contained.

Meanwhile, a report by SBI Research's Ecwrap said the country's economic growth is likely to fall sharply to 2.6 per cent in 2020-21 due to lockdown amid the coronavirus pandemic.

POSITIVE MOMENTUM FOR SECOND CONSECUTIVE SESSION Sensex rallies 1,411 points, rupee gains 78p on economic package

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU MUMBAI, MARCH 26

STOCK MARKETS Thursday staged further recovery, with the benchmark Sensex soaring 1,411 points as Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced various welfare measures to tide over the coronavirus crisis. The rupee also surged by another 78 paise to 75.16 against the US dollar.

The Sensex gained 4.94 per cent, or 1,411 points, at 29,946.77 as investors went on a bargain hunting spree. The NSE Nifty Index rose by 323.60 points, or 3.89 per cent, at 8,641.45.

"Investors started buying battered stocks which were down by almost 30 per cent in the last one month," said veteran dealer Pawan Dhamidharka.

The Sensex which had skyrocketed by 1,862 points, or 6.98 per cent, on Wednesday has

EXPLAINED Boost from positive global cues as well

FOLLOWING THE announcement of the Rs 1.7 lakh crore stimulus to battle the virus threat to the economy, markets continued their positive momentum for the second straight session. Another factor that helped boost markets was supportive global cues.

gained over 3,200 points in the last two sessions.

Powell says US economy in recession due to virus

REUTERS WASHINGTON, MARCH 26

US FEDERAL Reserve Chair Jerome Powell told Americans Thursday progress in controlling the spread of the coronavirus would determine when the economy reopens but assured them the Fed was taking every action to support a vigorous rebound when it comes.

In an interview on NBC's *Today Show*, Powell said the US "may well be in recession" but that confidence would return once the virus was under control. He spoke about an hour before data showed a record-breaking spike of unemployment claims to 3.28 million.

"We are not experts in pandemic... We would tend to listen to the experts. Dr. Fauci said something like the virus is going to set the timetable, and that sounds right to me," Powell said, in reference to Anthony Fauci, head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases who is on the White House's coronavirus task force.



US Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell. File

BoE ready to buy more bonds

London: The Bank of England held off from taking fresh action to stop the pandemic from plunging Britain's economy into a recession, but said it was ready to ramp up its bond-buying programme if needed. It said many were describing it as worse than the financial crisis. REUTERS

WALL STREET RISES ON TALKS OF STIMULUS AFTER WEAK JOBS DATA Oil sinks on weak demand; US stocks gain

REUTERS NEW YORK/LONDON, MARCH 26

OIL PRICES fell Thursday after three sessions of gains as restrictions on travel worldwide crimped fuel demand, with US crude futures plunging about 4 per cent after the US scrapped plans to buy domestic oil for its emergency reserve. Brent crude futures fell 11 cents to \$27.28 a barrel. Wall Street gained more



The floor of the New York Stock Exchange. File

US weekly jobless claims surge to record 3.28 mn

Washington: The number of Americans filing claims for unemployment benefits surged to a record of more than 3 million last week as strict measures to contain the coronavirus pandemic brought the country to a sudden halt, unleashing a wave of layoffs that likely ended the longest employment boom in US history. The weekly jobless claims report from the Labor Department

on Thursday offered the clearest evidence yet of the coronavirus' devastating impact on the economy. With nearly half the country's population under some form of a lockdown, economists are bracing for further jobless claims. "Initial claims for unemployment benefits rose 3.00 million to a seasonally adjusted 3.28 million in the week ending March 21," the Labor Department said. REUTERS

Sebi asks states, UTs to ensure smooth functioning of capital, debt markets

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU NEW DELHI, MARCH 26

EVEN AS certain sections of the market are calling for its closure under the current crisis that has resulted in country-wide lockdown, Sebi has written to chief secretaries across states and Union Territories that functioning of capital and debt markets are exempt from lockdown and that they should facilitate the functioning and movement of personnel of entities notified by it and officials of Sebi for smooth functioning of capital and debt markets.

While the Home Ministry had on March 24 issued an order containing guidelines on measures to be taken by ministries/departments of the central/state governments and authorities of states/union territories for containment of the COVID-19 epidemic, the Securities and Exchange Board of

India (Sebi) said that the Clause 4 of the guidelines refers to the working of the commercial and private establishments.

"Clause 'h' of the Exceptions to the Clause 4 empowers Securities and Exchange Board of India to notify Capital and debt market services from the applicability of the above order and guidelines w.r.t. the functioning of Commercial and Private Establishments," the note said.

In the note, the markets regulator added that it issued a notification dated March 24, 2020, where it has notified various entities providing Capital and Debt Market Services to be exempted from the closure. "It is requested that the State Governments/State and Union Territories may facilitate the functioning and movement of the personnel of entities notified and Officials of SEBI for the smooth operation of the Capital and Debt Market."

ON WARFOOTING

RBI offers over ₹11K cr to banks

Mumbai: The RBI Thursday offered Rs 11,772 crore to banks through a 12-day variable rate repo auction.

WTO: Sharp fall in trade in 2020

New Delhi: World trade is likely to see a sharp fall due to COVID-19 crisis, and global solutions will be required to deal with it, WTO said.

Yes Bank board okays ₹5,000 cr fundraising plan

New Delhi: Yes Bank on Thursday approved a proposal to raise Rs 5,000 crore by way of share-sale, including qualified institutions and rights issue. The board meeting held on Thursday cleared this proposal. With this the new board also came to the force with Prashant Kumar formally becoming the MD and CEO of Yes Bank. PTI

'Global output to shrink in 2020'

Washington: The International Monetary Fund projected a contraction of global output in 2020 and recovery in 2021 as it asked the leaders of the G20 countries to back a doubling of its \$50 billion emergency financing capacity. PTI

RESPONDING TO COVID-19

In sickness, not in health

American life has been transformed in a few short weeks

THE TITULAR conceit of *28 Days Later*, as with many contagion-style horror films, is of a man waking up after a month-long coma only to find society upended by a rampaging virus. Many Americans are experiencing something similar. On March 3rd there were just 122 confirmed cases of COVID-19—the disease currently sweeping the world—and only seven deaths. By March 17th there were 7,786 confirmed cases (even these were a sure underestimate given the dearth of testing) and 118 deaths. Twenty-eight days later, on March 31st, what might America look like?

"We don't know whether we're going to look like Italy or the provinces outside Hubei" in China where the spread of COVID-19 was fairly effectively contained, says David Blumenthal, president of the Commonwealth Fund, a health-policy think-tank. "But the likelihood is—given the slowness with which we responded to the epidemic—that we look more like Italy," he adds. Jerome Adams, the surgeon-general, has warned of the same.

Can America's health system cope? The structural problems that make pandemic response more difficult—lack of paid sick pay, a large uninsured population and a significant number of insured people nonetheless worried about out-of-pocket medical bills—cannot be mended overnight. Instead, public-health experts and doctors are increasingly worried about sheer capacity constraints. In China, 5% of those diagnosed needed intensive care. There are roughly 97,000 beds in intensive care units (ICUs), of which one-third are empty. Though America has relatively few total hospital beds per person compared with other countries, it ranks among the highest for ICU beds per person, with nearly three times as many as Italy.

"The real limiting factors are likely to be the ventilators or the staff," says Greg Martin, a professor of medicine at Emory University and president-elect of the Society of Critical Care Medicine. There are roughly 50,000 physicians trained in critical care and 34,000 similarly specialised nurses and assistants. This could be insufficient in the face of hundreds of thousands of cases at peak rates of infection.

Then there is the problem of kit. In China, half of those in critical care required the use of ventilators, machines that help people breathe. There are thought to be 62,000 full-featured mechanical ventilators in the country, many of which are already in use. Older stocks of perhaps 100,000 devices—including CPAP machines used for those with sleep apnea—could be called upon if needed, but would provide only basic functions. Ramps-up in ventilator production are being pondered, including through emergency powers given to the president under the Defence Production Act of 1950, but there has been little actual action yet. On a phone call with state governors, President Donald Trump urged "respirators, ventilators, all of the equipment—try getting it yourselves", which could spark an unhelpful competition between states for scarce resources.

"Under almost any basic scenario, things look tough. Hospital beds will be completely full many times over if we don't substantially spread the load," warns Ashish Jha, director of the Global Health Institute at Harvard. To head that off, Mr Jha has called for an Italy-style national quarantine, lasting for at least two weeks, in which all non-essential businesses are closed and gatherings of more than five people are barred to give time for



Empty shelves at a Target store as US shoppers stockpile. AP file

testing to become widespread. After a dismally slow start to testing, the numbers are finally heading up—although the best estimates come not from public-health agencies, but volunteer trackers using a Google sheet—to an estimated 12,535 tests conducted on March 17th. Given the expected scope of the disease, and the reported obstacles to people with symptoms actually getting tested, much more will be needed.

Most hospitals are making contingency plans. There are plans to add physical beds by cancelling elective surgeries that can be postponed, converting recovery rooms into added beds and building tents to house some patients. The Cleveland Clinic, a prominent hospital, says it has plans in place to add 1,000 beds of capacity within 72 hours if needed. Teams of doctors and nurses with other specialities could be conscripted into critical-care work, supervised by critical-care doctors who handle the trickiest cases—like respiratory distress coupled with organ failure in the kidneys or heart. If this is insufficient, recently retired doctors could be drafted into service. Some teaching hospitals are using simulation centres to prepare medical staff for the inevitable surge in cases.

Testing? Testing?

Whether it will come to all this is still unclear. Testing capacity remains constrained, limiting the information epidemiologists

have to feed both their models and their willingness to speculate. Their policy recommendations—social distancing, closure of schools and large gatherings—are nevertheless clear. One team of researchers has concluded that an epidemic resembling that of Wuhan, where the novel coronavirus first broke out, would overwhelm hospitals many times over, while one resembling Guangzhou, a city that locked down in the early days of the virus, could be dealt with.

On March 16th, however, a team of scientists based at Imperial College London, who have been advising the British government, also published forecasts of the epidemic's trajectory in America. As with Britain, the figures look grim. Without any mitigation, America would experience 2.2m deaths, they predict. Even in the case of some mitigation— isolation of the sick, social distancing for the elderly, but an otherwise normal society—American hospital and ICU capacity would be exceeded eight times over,

and the country would be on track for at least 1.1m deaths. Averting this through "suppression"—isolation of sick, closing of schools and universities, social distancing for everyone—would require months until therapeutics or vaccines can be developed.

America is therefore turning towards suppression of the virus. Millions of pupils and university students have been sent home and left to take classes online. Mr Trump has advised that people not congregate in gatherings of more than ten people. San Francisco and surrounding counties have issued a "shelter-in-place" order that requires 7m to remain in their homes unless necessary. New York City is expected to do the same for its 8m residents. In 22 states, bars and restaurants have been ordered to close their seating and only serve takeaway. The state of New York is setting up drive-through testing centres, starting in New Rochelle, a commuter town in Westchester County that was one of the early sites of a

COVID-19 cluster, and is urging federal troops to build emergency, temporary hospital facilities. New Rochelle's mayor says he is surviving the lockdown there on "adrenalin, coffee and m&ms".

The goal is to increase general hospital capacity by a factor of two and ICU capacity by a factor of ten within two months. Elections have been postponed in a few states for the Democratic primary, which now seems a dull, distant affair. America's devolved system means that the shuttering will happen at different rates in different places, but the trajectory is clear. "You want a single national response. But when the federal government completely fails, as it has so far, then you can get states and cities to step up," says Mr Jha.

The question is how long this can go on for. Unmitigated, the epidemic would not peak for at least another three months. Suppression can reduce the spread of the disease, as China's experiment with locking down most of its population showed, but relaxing these measures will inevitably bring another surge in cases. Mr Trump, who a few weeks ago was suggesting the virus was the latest hoax invented to damage him, is now warning that this could be the start of a months-long reorientation in American life. And while these extraordinary actions should smother the disease, they will also smother the economy.

The dismal economic forecasts will require further action from Congress. It spent the last week haggling over a bill that would make testing for the disease free, increase the flow of safety-net benefits and grant paid sick leave to more workers (though this provision appears to be hollowing out with every iteration). Even before that bill was finalised, Washington's attention had already turned to the even bigger economic stimulus package that must come next. Senators, both Democrats and Republicans, are tripping over themselves issuing plans to send cash directly to American families.

The total package, which could be worth \$1trn or more, dwarfs the \$100bn-or-so bill recently signed into law and every other stimulus package in history. The Trump administration has proposed sending \$500bn in direct cash to taxpayers, \$300bn to keep firms afloat, and \$200bn to bail out critical industries like airlines. The typical partisan bickering from Congress and even from Mr Trump has been muted. Every politician seems to now realise that the country faces an unprecedented crisis, first of public health and then of the economy, that will last for months. Whether this action will look sufficient 28 days later is, as with seemingly every aspect of the COVID-19 pandemic, deeply uncertain.

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COPING WITH COVID-19

Prayer in a pandemic

How prayer is changing as a result of COVID-19

FOR CENTURIES the adhan, the Muslim call to prayer, has been a changeless feature of life in the Arab world. In war or peace, prosperity or famine, the same rhythmic chant echoes across cities and towns five times each day. Midway through comes an exhortation to worship. But on March 13th a muezzin in Kuwait, his voice plainly cracking with emotion, made a small tweak. Instead of "hayya alas-salah" (come to prayer), he told the faithful "as-salatu fi buyutikum" (pray in your homes). Words that seemed immutable were no longer such.

COVID-19 has already disrupted economic and social life. Across the Middle East it is also changing ancient patterns of worship. There is scriptural precedent for stopping Friday prayers: for example, an uncle of the Prophet Muhammad is said to have urged followers to stay at home during foul weather. But Kuwaitis say this is the first time in their modern history that prayers were cancelled.

Other countries are following suit. Egypt, the most populous Arab country, first capped Friday sermons at 15 minutes. Then al-Azhar, the Sunni world's most prestigious scholarly centre, decreed that they could be halted altogether to stop the virus from spreading. The United Arab Emirates stopped them on March 18th. Jerusalem's al-Aqsa mosque has been closed indefinitely, though worshippers

The outlier has been Iran. It has the third-highest number of confirmed cases of the virus, behind only China and Italy. Yet for weeks it refused to close the bustling shrines in Qom, a holy city that is the centre of its outbreak. When the authorities shut them at last on March 16th, small crowds broke through the doors in protest

pers still gather on the large esplanade outside.

The scene is even more striking in Mecca, the spiritual centre of the Muslim world. In normal times the city's grand mosque is a teeming mass of humanity, filled day and night with thousands of pilgrims circumambulating the Kaaba, the imposing granite cube that is Islam's holiest site. On March 4th, though, the authorities in Saudi Arabia suspended the umrah, a pilgrimage that occurs year-round. Astounded Saudis swapped photos of the mosque's white-marble plaza, glittering in the sun—and deserted, save for a few workers spraying disinfectant.

Younger Saudis could not recall ever seeing it so empty; older ones drew a parallel with 1979, when the mosque was seized by extremists and besieged for two weeks. The government has not made any decision about the annual haj pilgrimage, which should begin in late July. Cancelling it would be a blow both spiritual and financial: it attracts millions of people and contributes more than \$10bn to the Saudi economy. Pilgrimages are the kingdom's largest source of revenue after oil.

Coptic churches in Egypt have suspended most activities. Instead of holding one large mass they plan to conduct several, to limit crowds. The Maronite church in Lebanon ordered priests to hand communion wafers to worshippers, instead of placing them on their tongues. Holy water has been replaced with hand sanitiser. In Jerusalem the Western Wall, the holiest site where Jews are permitted to pray, is largely deserted. Rabbis have urged the faithful not to kiss the stones.

Qom on Iran

The outlier has been Iran. It has the third-highest number of confirmed cases of the virus, behind only China and Italy. Yet for weeks it refused to close the bustling shrines in Qom, a holy city that is the centre of its outbreak. When the authorities shut them at last on March 16th, small crowds broke through



Officials spray disinfectants inside a mosque in Jakarta, Indonesia on March 8. Reuters file

the doors in protest. A few other congregations have been restive: a mass in Ajaltoun, a village in the mountains north-east of Beirut, had to be halted when worshippers complained about the changes to communion.

Most have accepted them with equanim-

ity, though. Some even find small cause for amusement. The new taboo around social contact is alien to many in the region, used to clasping hands or kissing on the cheeks. But it is old hat for conservative Muslims, who avoid physical contact with the oppo-

site sex. Instead of awkward innovations like the elbow bump, they greet as they always have: a hand on the heart, a slight bow of the head. Not everything has changed.

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18 TALK

ART, MUSIC, STYLE, FOOD

LITTLE BIRDIE

Netflix has commissioned 40 11-minute episodes of *Angry Birds: Summer Madness* — an animated comedy inspired from the mobile game. It's scheduled for a 2021 release.



'One doesn't play music just for the hours to pass'

Remembering jazz great, saxophonist, keyboard-man and arranger, Manu Dibango



HEAR HIM

- A rebuttal to the Band-Aid fundraiser for Ethiopia
- *Soul Makossa*, one of his best-known works
- His album *Wakafrika*, with Angélique Kidjo, Yassou N'dour and Peter Gabriel

on the "relationship that Africa has" with sound, "and a communion between sound and the visual stronger than in any other culture. The sound carries the rhythm and the movement creates the images. The way an African moves compared with the environment is different from the western conception."

Dibango went to school in France in 1949, where he trained to play the sax, but failed to clear high school. It is said that he was the only black boy in the Sarthe region of France's Saint-Calais at the time. He started a career soon after, in Belgian nightclubs, before the floor proved too small for his talents there.

Dibango lived across many countries, all

experiences feeding his music. He got his first big break when he was signed up by the Congolese musical giant, Joseph Kabasele, whose album *African Jazz* blazed a trail. He was invited by Kabasele to Congo's capital, Leopoldville, now Kinshasa, where he moved, along with his wife, Coco, whom he met in Brussels. After many record hits and experiments with Congolese music and soul, he and Coco ran Tam Tam — a nightclub — but racism in Congo is said to have pushed both of them to move to Ivory Coast. He returned to France and went on to compose singles, participate in tours, work with films and do a variety of work.

Annoyed by western musicians' Band-Aid, a tribute to Ethiopia's famine as condescending, Dibango and his fellow musicians released their own fund-raiser in 1985, a lilting single called *Tam Tam Pour l'Ethiopie or Starvation*.

He remained active for decades and played for many hours in London, at the Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club. The club is closed due to COVID-19, but its social media pages paid tribute to the jazz man and quote him: "You know that one don't play music just for the hours to pass. But you play music because you are in love with music and luckily if it happens that people like what I'm proposing, I'm happy."



(From left) Asmita Theatre's *Ramkali* and *Court Martial*; a performance made available by The Roots India

The Show Goes On

Several performers are reaching out to audiences by uploading plays or conducting workshops online — all for free

DIPANITA NATH

DO YOU think of Lady Macbeth while washing your hands repeatedly, Hamlet's "To Be or Not To Be" when deciding on household chores or Romeo and Juliet as you stand on a balcony late evening? If so, you belong to a community of theatre regulars for whom the lockdown means spending endless days without drama. Theatre has found a way to reach the audiences. A number of performers from across genres are facing the lockdown by screening, streaming and sharing some of their best productions to audiences or offering masterclasses. Today, on World Theatre Day, you could celebrate with some of these works:

QUARANTINE THEATRE FESTIVAL

WHERE: Facebook page of Asmita Theatre Group

When social distancing came into effect across India, Arvind Gaur, director of Asmita, a Delhi-based activist theatre group, messaged members of his group: "Log pareshan hai, dare hai, dukhi hai (people are worried, frightened and sad). What is the responsibility of an artist who uses theatre as a social tool?" The brainstorming resulted in the Quarantine Theatre Festival, on March 21-31, featuring screenings of the group's best shows. The recordings are from Asmita's archives and smartly shot and edited. A new play opens at 7 pm every day but you can

view anytime and anywhere.

LAKHMIPREM

WHERE: FACEBOOK PAGE OF MANISH JOSHI

Theatre director Manish Joshi began his Facebook post with, "You have all heard of Dada Lakhmi Chand but nobody knows anything about him." He has shared a recording of his play, *Lakhmiprem*, so that people, confined to their homes, can understand the life of one of the greatest poets and performers of the Haryanvi language. Chand is the writer of major works of Swaang, a form of folk performance, such as *Nal-Damyanti*, *Mirabai*, *Satyavan-Savitri* and *Puran Bhagat*. The 1.14-hour recording of the play travels the arc, from Chand as a young boy deeply interested in Swaang to him becoming a writer with a large following.

WORKSHOP ON PUPPETS

WHERE: Facebook page of Anurupa Roy

One of the leading theatre practitioners of India, Anurupa Roy tells gripping stories on stage and street using puppets. Now, she is conducting a workshop on puppetry through her Facebook page. The week-long initiative, from March 22, started as a response to requests from adults and children and began with the Rajasthani kathputli. Roy has recorded the video on her cellphone to create an informal and "homemade" feel; she speaks directly to the viewers, keeps her lecture

short and conversational and supplements it with descriptive notes on the history of puppet traditions and links to recordings of shows by master puppeteers.

BBO IN THE CLOUDS

WHERE: Instagram page of Black Box Okhla

Black Box Okhla, a performance space in Delhi, offers a chance to be part of a masterpiece. They are running a "virtual engagement" programme called "BBO in the Clouds", which works on the premise that "if your smart phone screen was your own Black Box, what would you stage?" Every day at 5 pm, the organisers put up a post on their Instagram page and ask you to vote. The programme runs till March 31.

THE ROOTS INDIA

WHERE: WhatsApp

"I know that staying confined to the house can be unsettling but we can interact over social media. I think literature is a good way to escape present anxieties. Let us read some stories and poems to each other," says actor Zeeshan Ayyub in a recorded video. He reads out from Harishankar Parsai's *Mahatma Gandhi ko Chitthi Pahunch*, a story that resonates with present politics. The video is a part of the collection that The Roots India art organisation is making available publicly "to keep the artistic instinct alive in all of us".

The arts inputs will arrive on your phone in the form of a poem, recording of a play, short story or reading materials such as the writings of Bhagat Singh. Till now, the group has sent out an enjoyable 18-minute shadow puppet performance, *Machhar Ka Pyara Sandesh*, a poem by Sahir Ludhianvi titled *Yeh His Ka Lahu Hai*, and a letter from Bhagat Singh to Sukhdev on April 5, 1929, among others. Register on WhatsApp number 9953384330.

CROSSWORD 4076



- ACROSS**
- Stay treated with pitch (5)
 - The range of a direction finder (7)
 - A bumpkin of a sort (3)
 - Recovery in the closing stages by the side (9)
 - Don't stop although a person's upset (5,2)
 - He's around at the preliminary races (5)
 - A field of activity of all-round significance (6)
 - Ecclesiastical vestments may hide them (6)
 - They often pop out for drinks (5)
 - Pipe for smoking pot (7)
 - First in the field? (2,7)
 - A disgusted expression (3)
 - Shorten a game of cards (7)
 - Not a bow; not even a smile, apparently (5)
- Down**
- Store up trouble for travelling performers (7)
 - Overtime pay for a barman (9)
 - Shouts agreement about fifty-fifty setup (5)
 - Locating, we hear, and naming (6)
 - Painstaking preparation (7)
 - Boring point of law perhaps (3)
 - Eyesores yet to be improved on board (5)
 - Modern day undertaking may be exciting (9)
 - Continued to give the total in a rush (7)
 - Take action to stop weakening of the spirit (3,4)
 - The difficulty capers may get you into (6)
 - Tea is usually drunk from it (5)
 - There's no attempt to work on this river (5)
 - The stock variety is not generally used (3)

Solutions Crossword 4075: Across: 1 Brassbound, 8 Acute, 9 Habitude, 10 Cadgers, 11 Aimed, 12 Ill-fed, 14 Fencer, 17 Noted, 19 Hostage, 21 Express, 22 Fists, 23 Resistance. Down: 2 Roundel, 3 Scene, 4 Behest, 5 Umbrage, 6 Datum, 7 Tenderness, 8 Auctioneer, 13 Endless, 15 Classic, 16 Chasms, 18 Taper, 20 Sofia.

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBS by Bill Watterson



MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



JUMBLER 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.

- EELSHK God gives the nuts, but he does not crack them — Kafka (5,4)
- GWAER IOSTCM
- ADUCT EELSHK

SOLUTION: WAGER, BUCKLE, SITTOM, SHEKEL. Answer: God gives the nuts, but he does not crack them — Kafka

Difficulty Level 3s
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



SOLUTION SUDOKU 4160



DAY TODAY

BY PETER VIDAL

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)

You may now tell business associates and anyone with whom you are financially connected to put up or shut up. But you must do so soon, before a number of planets remove your advantage by changing signs. Long-distance and overseas connections are opening, by the way, so stay alive to new opportunities.

TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21)

You may still be in a bullish mood, buoyed up by the influence of aggressive Mars. It is good to be sure of your ground, yet nobody would advise you to be so confident that you overlook or ignore certain essential details. One word of warning, though - you could be throwing good money after bad.

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21)

Mercury is in such a supportive position that you may be sure that bad feeling will be avoided even if partners are still being frustratingly obtuse. Continue to press for firm agreement. The sooner you get partners committed and tied down, the better.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23)

All that has happened in the past will pale into insignificance beside the immense and profound changes which will be sweeping you before them later on. You are now entering a period of personal transformation which is going to find you discovering talents you never dreamt existed.

LEO (July 24 - Aug 23)

The first few steps in a new friendship are often hesitant, even for you. However, people who come into your life now must be cultivated, for they will prove to be valuable allies in times to come. Even if you imagine that someone you meet is a rival, you may be mistaken.

VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sep 23)

Much has been written about the creative potential of this particular phase, not all of which has yet made sense. Today's planetary picture crystallises a number of very subtle trends, pointing you to a life that is both more satisfying and productive.

LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)

You must pay more attention to working partnerships for the simple reason that colleagues hold the key to your future. You may already have found that fresh light has been shed on formerly confused circumstances. Such clarity is most welcome, as I'm sure you'll agree.

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)

The Sun, Mercury and Venus have come to your assistance, lightening your load and relieving you of pressing domestic questions. It is looking increasingly likely that you will be saved by the prompt action of a friend, perhaps someone you have ignored.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 22)

There are complications in the air. Although you may have to resign yourself to a continuing mystery, you have a choice as to whether to devote your time to work or family issues. Possibly the latter will be more enjoyable although the former may be more necessary.

CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)

As you have realised, there is little that you can do if you don't have the necessary funds. Joint financial affairs must now be settled, and deals must be signed and sealed. Otherwise you may find that you have run out of time, and that partners may decide to stand up for themselves.

AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)

This is an intense period for those in the property market. Positive trends and obstacles compete for your attention, but after everything has been taken into consideration you may seem to be running on the spot. Perhaps you should just slow down and take a rest.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)

By tradition this is a time of year when events should run in your favour, yet you cannot count on success unless you do your best, drum up support and leave no stone unturned in your drive to better yourself. You must, repeat must, consult partners before you take a controversial decision.

19 SPORT

BRIEFLY

Candidates tourney stopped after Russia bans flights

The world governing body of chess (FIDE) on Thursday stopped the Candidates tournament in Yekaterinburg, Russia at halfway stage after the hosts decided to ban all flights into and out of the country owing to the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. The prestigious tournament was stopped after seven rounds. The eighth round was scheduled to be played on Thursday. "Today, the government of the Russian Federation announced that starting March 27, 2020, Russia interrupts air traffic with other countries without indicating any time frames," FIDE president Arkady Dvorkovich said in a statement. "FIDE can not continue the tournament without guarantees for the players' and officials' safe and timely return home. In this situation and on the basis of clause 1.5. Rules of Candidates Tournament, the FIDE President decided to stop the tournament." Eight players fight it out in the Candidates tournament to determine the worthy challenger for world Champion Magnus Carlsen.

Tour de France may go ahead without roadside spectators

It is too soon to decide whether the Tour de France can go ahead amid the coronavirus pandemic, but if it does it may be without roadside spectators in order to minimise infection risk, the French sports minister said. Following the postponement of the Euro 2020 soccer Championship and the Tokyo Olympic Games, the Tour de France – which takes place in June and July – is one of the last major global sporting events that has not yet been cancelled or postponed. "The Tour is a sports monument. It is too soon to decide. There is a time for everything. For now, we have a more urgent battle to fight. Let us focus on this mountain in front of us and then consider what's next," French Sports Minister Roxana Maracineanu wrote on Twitter. Since the Tour's inception in 1903, only the two world wars of 1914-1918 and 1939-1945 have forced organisers to cancel the race.

McLaren F1 staff back home after quarantine

All the McLaren Formula One team members quarantined Melbourne since the cancelled Australian Grand Prix have returned home, the UK-based outfit reported on Thursday. "We are pleased to confirm that as of yesterday (Wednesday) evening, all team personnel who were in self-isolation in Melbourne, as well as management who had stayed with them, have now safely returned home," a spokesperson confirmed. A total of 16 McLaren staff were placed in quarantine for two weeks at the request of the Australian medical authorities. One because he had tested positive for the coronavirus, another because of developing virus-like symptoms and the remainder because they had been in close contact with the British mechanic who had tested positive. Three management personnel remained in Australia to support them. McLaren announced last week that the mechanic was symptom-free.

AGENCIES

Wimbledon ponders next move – cancellation an option

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MARCH 26

A UEFA CHAMPIONS League Round of 16 game, on March 11 between Liverpool and Atletico Madrid at Anfield, was the last high-profile sporting activity to take place in England. In hindsight, it was a match that should not have been played, or at least, should have taken place behind closed doors, for on that same day, the World Health Organisation declared COVID-19 as a pandemic.

Instead, at least 3,000 fans from Madrid – a city already in lockdown at the time – were allowed to enter the stadium, pubs, restaurants and hotels in Liverpool, and a day later, the host city faced 10 new cases of people testing positive for the coronavirus.

The situation has become much worse all over the world ever since. But in the United Kingdom, that one fortnight in June-July, when the biggest stars in tennis – some who transcend sport – flock to the grass courts of Wimbledon, now hangs in the balance. The coronavirus has already forced the organisers of the French Open to reschedule to September, but by next week, the fate of this year's



A Wimbledon cancellation could also delay Roger Federer's comeback. AP

Wimbledon Championships will be decided.

"The unprecedented challenge presented by the COVID-19 crisis continues to affect our way of life in ways that we could not have imagined, and our thoughts are with all those affected in the UK and around the world. The single most important consideration is one of

public health, and we are determined to act responsibly through the decisions we make," All England Lawn Tennis Club chief executive Richard Lewis said in a statement. "We are working hard to bring certainty to our plans for 2020 and have convened an emergency meeting of the AELTC Main Board for next

For Wimbledon, the only grass-court major in the calendar, a drastic shift like French Open's is not an option since the amount of sun required for the surface will not be suitable in the latter months of the year.

week, at which a decision will be made."

When the Fédération Française de Tennis made the unilateral decision earlier this month to postpone the French Open from its usual spot in the last week of May and first week of June to a week after the US Open in September, players in particular were annoyed by the sudden change in schedule. Yet, given the clay surface used at Roland Garros, it was a shift that could have been made. For Wimbledon, the only grass-court major in the calendar, such a drastic shift is not an option since the amount of sun required for the surface will not be suitable in the latter months of the year.

"At this time, based on the advice we have received from the public health authorities, the

very short window available to us to stage The Championships due to the nature of our surface suggests that postponement is not without significant risk and difficulty. Playing behind closed doors has been formally ruled out," read the statement on Wimbledon website.

One possibility for the organisers is to make use of the now vacant spot made available by the postponed Tokyo Olympic Games. The main draw for Wimbledon is scheduled to start on June 29 and continue till the men's singles final on July 12, while the Olympics were scheduled to start two weeks later on July 25.

Sources, however, told *The Guardian* that Wimbledon is unlikely to utilise the window made available by the Olympics, due to the "thinking (that it) is safer – and more convenient – to stick with existing arrangements, however perilous in terms of planning, than disturb a system that has been in place for years."

Due to the current lockdown in place in the United Kingdom, only a small number of staff is presently permitted to continue work on site to maintain the grass courts and security.

Should The Championships be called off this year, it will be the first time for it to have happened in 75 years, after it was not held from 1940 to 1945 due to the Second World War.

Cricket ready with eraser

World Test Championship might see a major rewrite, T20 World Cup likely to be scrapped

SHAMIK CHAKRABARTY
KOLKATA, MARCH 26

FOLLOWING THE postponement of all qualifying events for the 2021 T20 World Cup and the 2023 World Cup, the International Cricket Council (ICC) has decided against discussing the future of the ongoing World Test Championship (WTC) during its Board meeting on March 29. The game's global body is still optimistic about holding this year's T20 World Cup in Australia as per schedule – in October-November – but given the global spread of coronavirus, uncertainty remains.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) has suspended all professional cricket in the country until May 28 and with England scheduled to play their first Test of a three-match series against the West Indies on June 4, at the Oval, reworking the WTC calendar appears highly likely. Bangladesh, too, are scheduled to host Australia for a two-Test series in June and if those series are deferred, there might not be enough time to accommodate the Tests featuring all nine teams by March 2021. The first cycle of the WTC ends in March next year, with the final due in June. Teams are supposed to play six series each.

When contacted by *The Indian Express*, a top ICC official said the upcoming Board meeting, via conference call, is unlikely to discuss a WTC rescheduling. "Those matters will not be taken up now. The upcoming meetings will deal with urgent matters like approval of the accounts, audited statements etc. that are required for Annual Conference," the official said.

Asked if the ICC would deal with the issues during its meetings in May, the official said: "Let's see what happens. It depends on the situation of the globe (with regards to the coronavirus outbreak)."

At the moment, India top the WTC table with 360 points. But Australia breathe down their neck with 296 points and all other teams have the opportunity to climb up the ladder, given that they have enough games in hand. With no timeline available for the coronavirus problem to run its course, the ICC, it is learnt, will think about the future only after cricket resumes.

According to Dr Frank Atherton, the chief medical officer for Wales, the coronavirus outbreak might peak in UK in May-June. "The best guess is then a period of six to eight weeks of quite significant levels of transmission in the UK, with a tapering perhaps in July



CLOSE-OF-PLAY

Action from a cricket match at a closed-market during the lockdown in Srinagar. AP

and August... So an upsurge in April, possible peak in May-June and a downturn later in the year," Dr Atherton told reporters at Cardiff earlier this month. Little wonder then that the All England Club has called an emergent meeting next week to decide if it is even viable to hold this year's Wimbledon, due to start on June 29. The International Olympic Committee in agreement with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has already decided to defer the 2020 Tokyo Olympics – due to begin on July 24 – until the summer of 2021.

Against this backdrop, the ICC might have a race against time to complete the first WTC cycle within the scheduled March 2021 deadline. This paper understands that if there's not enough time to accommodate all the series, the entire cycle can be stretched. Then again, with the current Future Tours Programme (FTP) ending in 2023, an exten-

sion of the ongoing WTC cycle might create a serious problem in terms of holding the second edition of the Test Championship, due from 2021-2023, inside the current rights cycle. As every team still has a fair chance to reach the WTC final – top two teams will get there – picking the finalists based on current standings is not an option. In worst-case scenario, declaring the entire first cycle null and void, subject to the ICC Board's approval, is not ruled out.

"I think it is too soon to make a call on what happens," a Pakistan Cricket Board official told this paper.

2020 T20 World Cup

The 2020 ICC T20 World Cup is scheduled to be held in Australia from October 18 to November 15. However, the Scott Morrison government in Australia has imposed a Covid-19 travel ban for all non-residents and

non-citizens, which could remain for six months or longer. And this puts a question mark over the T20 World Cup, although the tournament is still seven months away.

"We are monitoring the situation closely with relevant authorities and will continue to do so. We are planning for the event to go ahead as scheduled," an event spokesperson told *The Indian Express*.

Meanwhile, in a press release the ICC stated: "After careful evaluation of the current situation and with the health and well-being of the global cricket family the priority, all ICC qualifying events due to take place before 30 June will be postponed subject to further review. The decision has been taken in conjunction with Members and in line with the relevant government and public health authority advice." This puts on hold eight qualifying tournaments involving Associate members.

Buttler hoping for curtailed IPL, Stokes training but unsure of trip to India

London: ENGLAND WICKETKEEPER-BATSMAN Jos Buttler is hoping for at least a curtailed IPL this season, aware that it would be difficult to conduct the "massive tournament" in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic. The league was scheduled to start on March 29 in Mumbai but it was postponed to April 15 to contain the spread of the coronavirus, which has claimed more than 21,000 lives across the globe.

"No news at the moment. We saw, initially, that it was going to be postponed. It's very hard to see this changing in the immediate future, so I don't see that as a possibility at the moment," Buttler said in a *skysports* podcast. "Obviously, it's such a massive tournament for world cricket, so hopefully some of it can go ahead – perhaps a shortened tournament."

Asked with whom he would least like to self-isolate with, Buttler quipped: "Ravi Ashwin, probably. It's actually a year ago since I got 'mankaded' because I keep getting tweeted about it, saying 'stay safe, don't go outside' with those pictures of me." Ashwin on Wednesday had cited the Mankading incident involving Buttler to urge people to stay indoor during coronavirus lockdown in the country.

UK too has put its population under a lockdown and Buttler said the break has given him an opportunity to spend time with his daughter and he tries to keep himself fit.

"Obviously, very strange circumstances, but it's actually quite nice to spend some time at home, be with our little girl and actually just be a dad for a bit. I've also been doing some Pilates with my Mrs, in my cricket gear," he said.

'I know I'm probably not playing'

England all-rounder Ben Stokes says he is working hard to stay in shape for next month's IPL, even though he knows the tournament is unlikely to go ahead. "At the moment my next competitive cricket is going to be in the IPL," Stokes – one of the 13 England players due to feature in the league – told BBC Radio 5 Live. "That hasn't changed yet so I have to think I will be playing on April 20. I have to get my head round that I am playing even though in the back of my mind I know I am probably not. I have to build up and get myself physically in a position that if it does happen I am good to go. I cannot take three weeks off and expect the body to be ready because it doesn't work like that."

PTV/REUTERS

KIWI GROUNDED

Former New Zealand pacer O'Brien crowdfunding for flight back home

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
CHRISTCHURCH, MARCH 26

DESPERATE TO reunite with his family in the UK, stranded former New Zealand pacer Iain O'Brien has resorted to crowdfunding to arrange for his tickets after his flights were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 43-year-old from is seeking donations through social networking site Twitter to fund his way back home.

"Ok, so trying to raise some money to pay for this flight back to the UK," O'Brien wrote on his handle. "I have an idea. If anyone would love a 20 min Skype/vid call, one on one, talk about all things cricket, politics, sausages, mental health, Sachin, etc. If you'd like that & can spare a couple of \$, DM me."

O'Brien played 22 Tests, 10 ODIs and four T20Is for New Zealand but now lives with his wife Rosie and two kids in the United Kingdom.

The coronavirus outbreak has so far claimed more than 21,000 lives and in-

fectured over 4,00,000 globally, prompting countries to shut down borders.

O'Brien, who was in New Zealand to deal with some mental health issues, had earlier said that he is worried about his wife's health as she has a lung condition, which puts her at great risk in the rapidly-spreading virus.

"The big bit for me is my wife has a lung condition where if she gets any sort of chest infection it can take time off her life," O'Brien was quoted as saying by the 'stuff.co.nz'.

"This virus could kill her. With a couple of kids for her to deal with, and her mum is 80, there's a fair bit on her plate at the moment. I would be kind of keen to take some of that stress off her but I think I'm just adding to it at the moment."

We've to keep an eye on those who are staying alone: Langer

Melbourne: Australia head coach Justin Langer is worried about the impact prolonged isolation can have on a player's mental health and said they will keep a close watch on those who are forced to live

alone now due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The mental health thing, we talked about it in a conference call yesterday, particularly for any of our staff or players who are home alone basically. We have to keep an eye on those guys and girls to make sure they're ok," Langer was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo.

"Hopefully being around their families and having a rest from the pressure of the games at the moment will have an impact. But we're very aware and we've got incredible resources available for all our players and staff at Cricket Australia.

"In leadership we talk about caring about people – it's a really, really important part of any leadership."

The global health crisis, which has so far killed over 21,000 people globally since its spread from Chinese city of Wuhan, has forced shut the sporting world with Olympics being pushed by a year and all cricket events coming to a standstill.

Australia were forced to cancel their home limited-overs series against New Zealand after just one match and their Test tour to Bangladesh in June also looks un-



Stranded in New Zealand, Iain O'Brien is seeking donation for return trip to UK.

certain at present.

Langer appealed to players to remain optimistic during the crisis and consider this extended break as a blessing.

The age-old debate

With Olympics postponed by a year, ageing stars like Powell and Gatlin are running out of time

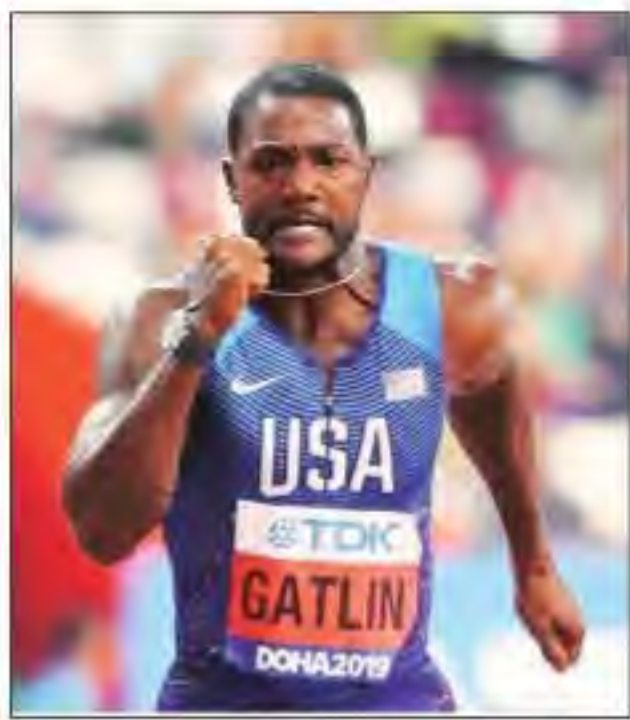
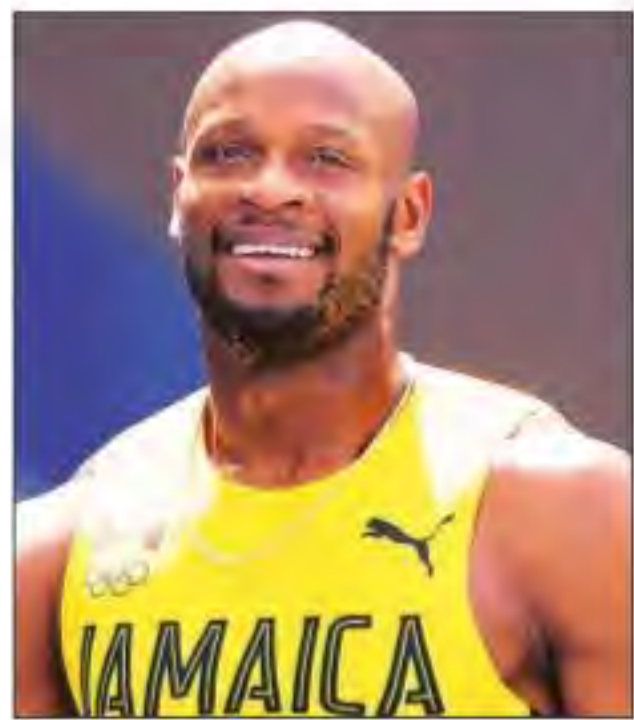
ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON, MARCH 26

HIGHLIGHTS OF their very best moments are still available on compact discs, maybe even actual video tape. When teammates shout out, "Hey, old man" — well, they know that's directed at them.

At first glance, America's Justin Gatlin and Jamaica's Asafa Powell might seem like relics from a bygone age of sprinting. In reality, they're still in the mix — and not even a year-long postponement of the Tokyo Olympics is going to shut them down. "I'm ready for this year," Powell told The Associated Press in the wake of the IOC's announcement that the games would be delayed due to the coronavirus. "I definitely have to be ready for next year."

Make no mistake, they are running out of time. Gatlin will be 39 when the Olympics finally roll around and Powell, who turns 38 in November, will be steaming toward the same number. Both men were beginning to make a name for themselves in track before a young phenom named Usain Bolt had raced his first Olympics. Bolt, by the way, is 33 and happily retired.

Both Gatlin and Powell are "Jeopardy" questions just waiting to be asked. The last



Powell (L) will be 38 and Gatlin 39 when the Tokyo Games take place.

man to win an Olympic gold medal in the men's 100 before Bolt? That would be Gatlin. The last man to hold the 100-meter world record before Bolt? That would be Powell. Gatlin won the Olympics in 2004. "Feels like five years ago," he insists. Powell set a world record in 2007, when he ran 9.74 seconds. Bolt topped it less than a year later and eventually lowered the mark to

its current standing of 9.58. Gatlin and Powell think they could make a different kind of history in 2021.

The oldest Olympic champion in the men's 100 meters remains Linford Christie, who was 32 when he won at the 1992 Barcelona Games, according to research by Olympic historian Bill Mallon. As for the oldest Olympic medalist in the event, that dis-

inction belongs to Gatlin, courtesy of his silver at the 2016 Rio Games. "It's pretty cool to know we can hang with these younger guys and still be competitive," Powell said. "And be ones to reckon with for the gold medal."

That's nothing to laugh at. Gatlin won a silver medal at the world championships last year. Powell, who's healthy after dealing with groin strains and hamstring tightness, said he's still doing the same reps at the same tempo as when he was younger.

This won't be easy for the 30-some-things. American Christian Coleman won the 100 last season at the world championships in Doha and his teammate, Noah Lyles, took the 200. Canada's Andre De Grasse earned medals in both, and some consider him, not Gatlin or Powell, the prime challenger. None will have reached their 27th birthday by the time the starting gun goes off in Tokyo. "They're very talented," Gatlin said. "But sprinting also comes with understanding and learning and wisdom and some patience. Those are all qualities you get as you get older."

Life has changed for Gatlin since the COVID-19 pandemic forced shutdown of gyms and training facilities across the country. He's been training on the grass in Clermont, Florida, and watching shows on Netflix.

Paes' one last roar to run its course, and then some

The postponement of Tokyo 2020 may have left some of India's top athletes in the lurch, but not completely out of the picture.

LEANDER PAES

India's only Olympic medallist in tennis was well on his way to make his 2020 run on the circuit, including an Olympics bid, as his swansong. But now due to coronavirus, Paes finds himself with the possibility of extending his career by another year. The 45-year-old told ESPN that he is considering it because it would be his eighth Olympics and an opportunity to make history.

MARY KOM

Historically, a light-flyweight, the transition to the 51-kg flyweight category, a must to participate in the Olympics, means that Kom goes from being the queen of the ring to just one of the top-most contenders for a medal. To make matters tougher, the 2012 London Olympics bronze medallist will be 38 next year, two short of the age limit for boxers who can take part in the Olympics. To be at that age and wanting to participate is in itself laudatory, but whether she will have a chance to actually be on the podium may be decided in the one year that she loses.

SHARATH KAMAL

While Mary's chances have been hampered as the Olympics get postponed by a year, Sharath Kamal's medal hopes, however slim, may diminish even more. After having won their first ever table tennis medal at the Asian Games in 2018 in the men's team event, the chances of India winning the unlikely of medals at the Olympics take a hit when the ageing talisman of the side has to wait it out another year.

SUSHIL KUMAR

Arguably India's greatest ever Olympian, Sushil Kumar's bid to qualify for the Games was on its last legs and if his national rival in the 74kg category Jitender Kumar would have made the finals of the Asian Olympic Qualifiers, it would have been game, set and match. But the cancellation of the qualifiers at Xian, China, and then at Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, due to the coronavirus pandemic means that Jitender's qualification is still up in the air and that Sushil's attempt to reach Tokyo is still alive, as of now.

Turkish boxing chief slams IOC after team members test positive

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
ISTANBUL, MARCH 26

TURKEY'S BOXING federation on Thursday slammed organisers of an Olympic qualifying tournament in London after three Turkish fighters and a coach tested positive for the coronavirus. The London competition featured around 350 male and female boxers from dozens of European nations and was the first opportunity for boxers from Europe to qualify for Tokyo 2020.

"The International Olympic Committee Boxing Task Force and the local committee in London — responsible for the organisation — acted as if nothing happened rather than postpone the tournament over coronavirus while every corner of the world has been on fire since December," Eyup Gozgec, president of the Turkish Boxing Federation, told AFP in a phone interview.

The Boxing Road to Tokyo event started on Saturday and was scheduled to run until Tuesday behind closed doors. But it was suspended after three days over growing coronavirus fears. Gozgec, who is also the vice-president of the European Boxing Confederation, said his team went to London on March 11 to prepare for the tournament but found no protective measures in place at their hotel or elsewhere.

"There were no protective measures in the hotels we were staying, whether it be hygienic disinfectants, gloves or a warning sign," he told AFP. "All the coaches and athletes ate in self-service style from the same kitchen. There was neither a warning nor any other measure as if the virus had not visited there."

'Failed the test'

Organisers of the boxing qualifiers said before the event started that measures had been put in place to protect competitors. "All of the teams have been told to adopt regular hand washing," they said in a statement.

Additional measures offered included routine temperature testing as part of daily medicals. Gozgec said one more Turkish athlete tested positive on Thursday after they returned from London, bringing the number to four including one coach. "Some of our fighters are under quarantine in dormitories, and some are in their homes," he said. "I am also on my 9th day of quarantine. I'm in good health."

Gozgec said he lodged complaints to relevant world bodies saying the London event should have never been held while welcoming its suspension as a "right decision". European Boxing Confederation (EUBC) president Franco Falcinelli had said prior to the London event that he feared the risk of a boxer getting the virus there was "very high". Gozgec said everyone including his family warned him not to go. "I thought it is a tournament on the road to the Olympics, the measures must have been taken and it must have been safe and hygienic. Britain is a developed G-8 country but they failed the test."

July-August 2021 Olympics in pipeline

Tokyo: The International Olympic Committee (IOC) is working with sports bodies to arrange a July-August window for the postponed Tokyo Olympics in 2021 and hopes to confirm the schedule within a month, Japan's Yomiuri newspaper reported on Thursday.

John Coates, the IOC's Coordination Commission chief for Tokyo, told the Yomiuri the Games would have to be held between the tennis Grand Slams of Wimbledon, slated to end in mid-July, and the U.S. Open, which starts in late August.

"We want to more or less finalise the dates in four weeks' time," the paper quoted Coates as saying.

Coates, who is also president of the Australian Olympic Committee (AOC), said the summer scheduling would be dependent on avoiding clashes with the world championships for swimming (July 16-Aug. 1) and athletics (Aug. 6-15). World Athletics boss Sebastian Coe has said the world athletics championships in Eugene, Oregon could be moved back to 2022 if necessary. The AOC confirmed the Yomiuri report's veracity and also told Reuters in a statement that Coates had "proffered a view but confirms a range of options are on the table for the IOC".

The IOC and Japanese government succumbed to pressure from athletes and sporting bodies around the world on Tuesday, agreeing to push back the Games by as much as a year because of the coronavirus pandemic.

On Monday, the Tokyo 2020 organising committee launched a taskforce to resolve issues linked to the postponement, such as reviewing dates for the Games and securing venues.

देशव्यापी लॉकडाउन से उत्पन्न परिस्थितियों से निपटने के लिए

केन्द्र सरकार द्वारा प्रधानमंत्री गरीब कल्याण योजना के तहत लिए गए महत्वपूर्ण निर्णय

केन्द्र सरकार द्वारा

1 लाख 75 हजार करोड़ रुपये की सहायता की घोषणा

- अस्पतालों में जो सफाई कर्मचारी, वाई बॉय, नर्स, पैरामेडिकल स्टाफ, टेक्निशियन, डॉक्टर व स्पेशलिस्ट आदि के लिए बीमा योजना शुरू की है, जिसके तहत सरकार इनका 50 लाख का बीमा कर रही है।
- प्रत्येक किसान के खाते में अप्रैल, 2020 के पहले सप्ताह तक ₹2000 रुपये जमा किये जायेंगे। जिससे 8 करोड़ 70 लाख किसानों को इसका लाभ मिलेगा।
- महिला जनधन खाताधारकों को ₹500 प्रतिमाह की राशि अगले 3 महीने तक दी जायेगी। इसका लाभ 20 करोड़ 40 लाख महिलाओं को मिलेगा।
- प्रधानमंत्री गरीब कल्याण योजना के तहत 8 करोड़ महिला लाभार्थियों को 3 महीने तक गैस सिलिण्डर मुफ्त दिया जायेगा।
- जिन प्राइवेट कम्पनियों में 100 से कम कार्मिक हैं और जिनका वेतन 15000 से कम है उनका अगले 3 महीनों का पी.एफ. सरकार द्वारा उनके पी.एफ. खाते में डाला जायेगा।
- बुजुर्गों, दिव्यांगों एवं विधवाओं को 3 महीने तक ₹1000 अतिरिक्त मिलेगा। यह दो किस्तों में दिया जायेगा। 3 करोड़ लोगों को इसका लाभ मिलेगा।
- हर व्यक्ति को 5 किलो चावल और गेहूँ 3 महीने तक अतिरिक्त दिया जायेगा। गेहूँ, चावल के साथ 1 किलो दाल भी दी जायेगी। इस योजना के तहत 80 करोड़ लोगों को लाभ मिलेगा। यह सुनिश्चित किया जायेगा कि कोई भी व्यक्ति बिना भोजन के ना रहे।
- मनरेगा के मजदूरों की दिहाड़ी ₹182 से बढ़ाकर ₹202 कर दी गयी है। 13 करोड़ 62 लाख परिवारों को होगा फायदा।
- कार्मिक अपने पी.एफ. फंड में से 75 फीसदी या अपने तीन महीने के वेतन के बराबर जो कम हो, निकाल सकता है। 4 करोड़ परिवारों को होगा फायदा।
- महिलाओं द्वारा संचालित 63 लाख स्वयं सहायता समूह 6 करोड़ 85 लाख परिवारों की सहायता कर रहे हैं। ऐसे समूह बिना कागजात दिखाये उनके 10 लाख की जगह 20 लाख एडवांस ले सकते हैं। ताकि वे और सहायता कर सकें।

यदि स्वयं एवं परिवार को बचाना है तो लॉक डाउन के दौरान घर से बाहर नहीं आना है

देशव्यापी लॉकडाउन से उत्पन्न परिस्थितियों से निपटने और देश के गरीबों, मजदूरों, किसानों, बुजुर्गों, महिलाओं, दिव्यांगों, विधवाओं, संगठित व असंगठित क्षेत्र को राहत पहुंचाने हेतु लिए गए निर्णय व ₹1.7 लाख करोड़ के आर्थिक पैकेज की घोषणा का हम स्वागत करते हैं।

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— त्रिवेन्द्र सिंह रावत
मुख्यमंत्री, उत्तराखण्ड



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