

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
HYDERABAD | SUNDAY | 29 MARCH 2020

WEATHER

Max: 36.7°C
Min: 21.8°C
RH: 27%
Rain: Nil

Forecast: Partly cloudy sky
Max/Min temp. 37/23°C

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
918	20
TS: 67	01
AP: 19	00

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

6,15,000

DEATHS

28,000+

COUNTRIES AREAS WITH CASES

183

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvar: Uttarayana
Tithi: Chaitra Suddha Panchami till 2:01 am (Monday)
Star: Kritika till 3:18 pm
Varjyam: Nil
Durmuhurtam: 4:39 pm to 5:28 pm
Rahukalam: 4:30 pm to 6 pm
Muhurta: 6:00 pm to 6:30 pm
Shubham: 3:14:41 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5:13 am
Zohar: 12:31 pm
Asar: 4:42 pm
Maghrib: 6:34 pm
Isha: 7:42 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6:28 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6:12 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 9:23 AM
MOONSET TODAY 10:36 PM

COUNTER POINT



BRIEF

TS lockdown till April 14

Hyderabad: The Telangana government on Saturday issued orders extending the lockdown period till April 14. The General Administration department issued the GO Ms No. 54 making it clear that the lockdown imposed earlier till March 31 in the wake of Covid-19 outbreak stands extended till April 14.

Lockdown to be paid holiday

Hyderabad: The labour, employment training and factories department has declared the lockdown period from March 22 to 31 as paid holidays for employees working in factories in the state. In a Government Order, the department cited the emergency situation caused by Covid-19 and declared the paid holidays under the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1917, Telangana Factories and Establishments (National, Festival and Other Holidays) Act, 1974.

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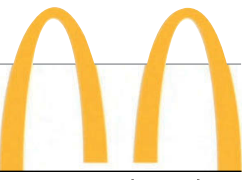


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Telangana records first Covid death

Samples of 74-year-old man who died last week test positive; coronavirus cases rise by eight in state to 67

BALU PULIPAKA | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 28

The government on Saturday reported the state's first death related to the coronavirus, that of a 74-year-old man who passed away late last week. Tests on samples collected from his body showed that he was infected with coronavirus.

The upward march of coronavirus infections in the state continued unabated on Saturday with the total number of cases rising to 67 from 59 on Friday. Overall, Telangana has conducted 27,688 tests.

Ten persons of the 65 active cases of Covid-19 under treatment turned out negative in their first test, bringing some cheer to the health department.

Health minister Etala Rajendar told reporters that a second set of confirmation tests will be conducted on these patients on Sunday. If they test negative, they will be scheduled for discharge as per advice of the doctors treating them.

The 74-year-old man, a resident of Khairatabad zone of the city, had travelled to Delhi to attend a religious meeting and returned to the city on March 17. Three days later, he was taken to a private hospital in Saifabad with high-grade fever and respiratory problems for which he was prescribed treatment and sent home.

He passed away at his home. His body was taken to the Gandhi Hospital mortuary because of his symptoms before his death. After the samples taken from his body tested positive, he was declared as a Covid-19 positive case. Members of the deceased's man family were placed under quarantine.

The health minister said there were no cases of community transfer of the virus in the state and of the spread of the virus so far, including that of the deceased man, either had a travel history resulting in the spread of the disease elsewhere, or having come into contact with those who had travelled back home from abroad.



Migrants wait to board a bus to their native villages during the nationwide lockdown imposed in the wake of coronavirus pandemic at Kaushambi in Ghaziabad on Saturday. — PTT

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■ Page 4: 13,000 under quarantine now in TS

Lockdown lost in sea of migrants from Delhi

DC CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

Large groups of migrant workers, with their belongings packed in cloth pots or stuffed into bulging backpacks, continued to walk to New Delhi's Anand Vihar bus terminal and Lal Kuan bus stand in Uttar Pradesh's Ghazipur district throughout Saturday after walking on foot for hours from areas in Delhi, Gurugram and other places.

There was crowding and complete chaos at the bus terminals as thousands of men, and some women and children, searched for buses that would take them to their respective

home towns. The 21-day lockdown imposed from Tuesday midnight rendered most migrant workers unemployed and penniless triggering a mass exodus from cities in several states.

On Saturday, the UP government arranged for 1,000 buses to ferry migrant labourers who are stranded in border districts. However, migrant workers are not just from UP. Many of them are headed to Bihar, MP, Jharkhand, HP, and in the absence of buses were walking to their native places.

"Delhi government has also deployed 100 buses to help the migrants who are walking back to their

home states. Though I would still appeal to people to please follow the lockdown ... Don't put your life at risk by stepping out," said Delhi Deputy Chief minister Manish Sisodia, who visited Ghazipur, near Delhi-UP border, where people have gathered in huge numbers to board special buses to their homes in UP. Delhi government has converted schools into night shelters to accommodate stranded migrant labourers.

"We have made arrangements if they (migrant workers) want to stay at night shelters. The Delhi government is in a position to feed the entire city," Mr Sisodia said.

FOOD RIOT LIKELY, WARNS EX-CHIEF STATISTICIAN

DC CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

New Delhi, March 28: Former chief statistician Pramad Sen has warned that if food requirements of migrant workers with no income are not fulfilled amid countrywide lockdown, then "food riot may be a real possibility."

In an interview with an online portal, Mr Sen said that if the coronavirus pandemic spreads in rural areas, containment will be impossible. In the wake of countrywide lockdown to combat the coronavirus threat, thousands of migrant workers from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and other states have started returning to their home states from cities, including Delhi and Mumbai. "The problem is that if food is not made available (to migrant workers) and this, we have experienced earlier, we had food riots during the times of famine. "...we could have food riots again if food is not made available. Let's be clear about this," the economist said while replying to a question on the impact of the lockdown on India's vulnerable section. — PTT

At 149 new cases, India sees its first massive increase

DC CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

In spite of a countrywide lockdown, the number of novel coronavirus cases rose at the fastest pace in India as 149 fresh cases and three deaths (Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Telangana) were reported since Friday taking the total number of positive cases to 918.

The rising numbers has prompted government to shift its focus on high disease-burden hotspots, rigorous contact-tracing, community surveillance and containment strategies.

The total number of active cases are 819 while 20 deaths have been reported so far. Seventy-nine people have been cured and 1 has migrated. The three people who died were elderly, had comorbid conditions and had contact with people on their foreign travel.

Maharashtra (180) and Kerala (176) continue to report highest number of cases. While five deaths have been reported from Maharashtra, three from Gujarat, two from Karnataka, two from Mad-

■ WITH PRIVATE labs also undertaking Covid-19 tests, the government said more people can be screened now

hya Pradesh and one each from Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Punjab, Delhi, West Bengal, Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh. With private labs also undertaking Covid-19 testing now, the government said more people can be screened now. The Union health ministry officials said that combined efforts are on to ensure 100 per cent lockdown so that social distancing gets implemented. "We were pre-emptive and graded in our approach and had anticipated the situation much before, and sent for a lockdown when we were getting limited cases of local transmission while other countries acted later on. The results of lockdown will be known later," Mr Lav Aggarwal, joint secretary in health ministry said.

Migrant groups stuck in Hyderabad

ADITYA CHUNDURU | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 28

This past week, migrant workers have been facing a lot of trouble because of the lockdown. Thousands of them tried to return home to their families in their respective states. Some walked, some chartered themselves into buses and lorries. A few were successful, many were not.

However, all their stories feature the same things — fear for their future and anger at the government for its apathy.

Erramsetti Sai, Raj and Srinivas were among the thousands of people who crossed the Telangana state-Andhra Pradesh border in the past few days. It took them four days to cover the distance between Hyderabad and their

village Konthalam in Rolugunta mandal, Visakhapatnam district. Construction labourers by profession, they were shocked when they were told by their employer the country was virtually shutting down and he had no work for them. They could no longer stay in Hyderabad. From their small tenement at Road No 14, Banjara Hills, they

packed up their bags and walked until the Outer Ring Road towards Vijayawada. "A lorry driver agreed to take us to Kodad for some money. From there we crossed over the AP border by walking another 20 km on foot to reach Chikalakki," recalled Sai.

■ Page 4: Migrants under quarantine after long walk

INSIDE
■ Page 5: Tatas to give ₹1,500 cr to fight virus

■ Page 4: Questions raised on community transmission

Foreign returnees told to submit selfie

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MARCH 28

Over the past week, the state government has been sending messages with website links to people who have entered the country after March 15, asking them to enter their name, address and country of travel. The website also requires the people to submit a selfie.

The message asks the

persons to upload their symptoms and pre-existing health conditions everyday.

The website service is being provided to the government by IIT-Hyderabad.

Some users who got these messages said they were not sure of the safety of their data.

■ Page 4: Safety of links questioned

Report says ease curbs from April 17 before closure from May 18-31

Panel recommends Lockdown 2.0

N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 28

The country may have to go for another round of lockdown sometime in May to avoid a second peak in the incidence of Covid-19, a report says.

The combined report, prepared by experts in the health, management, logistics and finance sectors working in top corporate houses favoured another

lockdown as there are chances of a second peak in Covid-19 cases, a phenomenon that is likely to occur after the lifting of the current phase.

■ TAKING LESSONS FROM THE 1918 flu pandemic in US, the report favoured easing restrictions for a month from April 17

Significantly, the report had recommended the first round of lockdown between March 20 and April 15 as the best remedy to contain the spread of the virus. The report prepared on March 17, a few days before Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the nationwide 21-day lockdown, was in favour of restrictions including clamping of Section 144.

Taking lessons from the

1918 flu pandemic in the United States, which formed the base across the globe for the present lockdown of several nations in the wake of Covid-19, the report recommended easing restrictions for a month from April 17 and clamping a lockdown again between May 18 and 31. It suggested that normalcy would be restored there after while government should encourage people to

continue to maintain hygiene and social distancing to the extent possible.

Countries which acted early and tough like South Korea, Japan, Thailand and Singapore are able to "flatten the curve" and bring down cases compared to those in the wait-and-watch mode like the US, Italy, France and Iran.

■ Page 4: Lockdown to save 10,000 lives

SHORT TAKES

APP TO GET COMPLETE INFO ON COVID-19

ADITYA CHUNDURU | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 28

The state IT department has created an integrated platform that will help the general public and officials monitor the Covid-19 situation. It will allow citizens to trace possible contacts with known positive patients and perform self-assessment based in WHO guidelines. It will also give them all updates released by the state government on the subject.

A demo of the application was made to health department officials and other top brass of the government. The IT department, supported by officials, handed over the platform to the health department on Saturday.

The committee which designed the platform was headed by the Research and Innovation Cell of Hyderabad (RICH). Other members included those from THUB and IIT Hyderabad. As many as 25 IT solutions were considered before arriving at the final design. Through the platform, citizens' location, contact and demographic data would be collected by the government. This data would, if the need arises, be used to restrict movement of citizens using e-license/e-passes within the state. It would give citizens information on red zones, government orders, a location-specific number of cases (confirmed, deaths and recovered cases).

Apart from citizen-centric services, the platform will have two additional for officials. Using an application, they will be able to report Covid-19 cases, report people for quarantining and notify SOPs for hospitals.

The platform will have special modules available only to senior officials. They will get an overview of occupancy of hospitals, quarantine centres for resource allocation. They will get a forecast of potential hot spots in the state. They will also have information on the availability of medical facilities such as ventilators, emergency wards. They will be able to monitor and speak to rapid response teams (RRT) across the state.

GOV PLEDGES 1 MONTH SALARY TO FIGHT VIRUS

HARLEEN MINOCHA | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 28

Governor Dr. Tamilsai Soundararajan has pledged to donate her one-month salary to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund to contribute in the state government's efforts to control the spread of the novel coronavirus. The Governor handed over a cheque to principal secretary disaster management, M. Jagadeeshwar at the Raj Bhavan on Saturday.

The Governor also spoke with the Chief Secretary and requested him to extend all help to daily wage labourers who have migrated from other states to Hyderabad.

She asked the government to provide them food and essential commodities sufficient for 15 days. Dr. Tamilsai said she has been receiving complaints from some quarters and her office has extended required help to them. The Governor pointed out the need to strengthen the ICR received private medical laboratories to conduct the Covid-19 tests. The Governor was interacting with the Red Cross units of 15 district branches advised the volunteers to take care of at least two poor families in all respects during the crisis.

What Covid? Birth date still matters

Maternity hospitals still follow the dictates of the parents-to-be; C-section on in both TS and AP

Pregnant women flood govt hospitals

KANIZA GARARI | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 28

In the times of Covid-19, what has not changed are the date and time when a newborn infant is born and doctors cannot argue about it as the pregnant woman is their major concern. These dictates are still being noted in maternity hospitals as the time and day of birthing is a priority for families and their astrological calendars. A C-section delivery, very high in both Telugu-speaking states, is still a preference during these times too.

Only corporate and big nursing homes are operational and all the load of affluent patients is on them.

A senior doctor, on condition of anonymity, explained, "We have a virus around us but that does not stop people from arguing over the time and day of the delivery. These beliefs are strong and with a newborn baby, no risks in astrology are to be taken."

Doctors are keen that pregnant women are safe and for that reason normal delivery is carried out by junior doctors and senior doctors are around for supervision. Earlier, they would all crowd around the patient along with the nurses but now social distance is maintained. "It is like going back to old times where the woman has to push the baby down and from far, we would give instructions," explained a senior doctor.

C-sections are done by wearing personal protective equipment as due to Covid-19 these extra precautionary measures have to be taken during the birthing process. The biggest challenge stated doctors are the scans as they are not being carried out for all pregnant women.

"We are going back to times when there were no ultrasound scans. This is because it would unnecessarily expose a pregnant woman to risk. Hence only if there is a clinical indication of anomaly in foetal movement then scans are being done. It is one in 2000 cases and, mostly, not required."

Scanning was a major part of all the three trimesters but doctors now do not want to risk their patients. The husband was a part of the birthing process but that is also not allowed as it is not safe. Similarly, those in the first and second trimesters of the pregnancy are not called to hospitals for routine checks but video conferencing is provided to clear their doubts. Telemedicine and email are also used by patients to check on substitutes for medicines as there is a crisis of brands.

Dr. Sri Latha Gorthi, gynaecologist, explained, "So far we have dealt with patients who have been seeing us from first day. Hence we know their history. Yet we check with them if they have come in contact with anyone who has travelled from abroad. There has not been a single case so far but precautions of checking travel

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MARCH 28

Small nursing homes in the city have closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Pregnant women who were registered for delivery with these nursing homes are forced to go to multi-specialty hospitals or government hospitals for delivery.

Government maternity hospitals at Koti and Nayapul are full as they have regular birthing processes carried out. Doctors stated that they

are taking all the patients who are coming to them and all precautions as instructed by government are being taken as well. In hospitals in HITEC City, Banjara Hills and areas around the new city, big private hospitals are seeing a lot of patients not registered with them. This is becoming difficult for the doctors.

A senior doctor explained, "We are talking to their regular doctors over the phone and requesting them to come over if they want to. Most of them are not willing to leave their homes and have asked us to carry out the birthing processes. These are tough times and the woman is in a delicate situation and we do not want her to go around to various places. For this reason, we are taking them.

Police are also allowing pregnant women to go easily but with only one attendant so that there is no overcrowding at hospitals. Attendants in hospitals are made to sit in the guest area and not allowed

inside until and unless it is crucial. Doctors state that in case of surgeries, attendants are not allowed inside the intensive care unit and are asked to wait in the rooms allotted to them. These precautions are being taken as there are doctors who have tested positive for Covid-19 in Hyderabad creating a major concern.

A pregnant woman, explained, "Pregnant women are already in a compromised stage. We cannot take any risks with them."

Dr. Sri Latha Gorthi, gynaecologist, explained, "So far we have dealt with patients who have been seeing us from first day. Hence we know their history. Yet we check with them if they have come in contact with anyone who has travelled from abroad. There has not been a single case so far but precautions of checking travel

history, are mandatory for us to do."

Pregnant women are already immune-compromised and hence precautions in terms of social distancing, hygiene, avoiding contact with people

from Covid-19-affected countries and also within the community is important, stated Dr. Kavitha Narasim, senior gynaecologist and infertility specialist at Continental Hospitals.

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TIPS FOR PREGNANT WOMEN

- Go to the hospital only with an appointment, wearing a mask and clean your hands regularly.
- Avoid touching any surface.
- At hospital, stick to only safe zones so that there is no contact with sick people.
- Avoid public transport and public places.
- At home, do not allow visitors.
- Do not use common towels or other sanitary materials.
- Eat home-made fresh food, drink plenty of water and a high protein diet.
- Continue prescribed medications and call your personal doctor when in doubt.
- Carry out relaxation and breathing exercises.
- Women who have delivered must stay indoors even after the lockdown period ends as they have to exercise care.
- Breastfeed the newborn as that is good for the health of the child and will keep the baby safe from infections.

— Inputs by Dr Vasundara Cheepurupalli, Consultant gynaecologist at KIMS Hospitals.

Lockdown woes



Consumers form a long queue of empty LPG cylinders to get them refilled at an agency in Dabeerpura in Old City on Saturday. — P. SURENDRA

Ensuring social distance a big challenge

ATHER MOIN | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 28

The Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation and Hyderabad City Police have shifted more than a thousand vagabonds to Exhibition Grounds in Nampally to ensure that they maintain social distance following the spread of Covid-19.



A large number of people have been rehabilitated at the Exhibition Grounds in Nampally, in view of the lockdown, on Saturday. — S. SURENDER REDDY

The vagabonds, most of them alcoholics and drug addicts, would generally take shelter under roofs of shops in and around the Nampally area, particularly Public Garden, Hyderabad Railway Station, Dargah Hazrat Yousufi, MNJ Cancer Hospital and Niloufer Hospital. They were shifted to Exhibition Grounds so that they could be kept in a controlled atmosphere to avoid coronavirus.

GHMC has deputed a community organiser to monitor the vagabonds while Begum Bazaar police have posted a picket to check them from leaving the place. Food and water are being provided to them by GHMC and NGOs.

Though the corporation has posted some sanitation staff, they may turn out to be insufficient in ensuring hygiene and sanitation at the place. This is because toilets and lavato-

ries at the Exhibition Grounds are not sufficient. There is also need for providing sodium hypochlorite in the area at least a day to check the presence or spread of Covid-19.

A medical team is also required as most of the vagabonds are suffering from various diseases. Police and GHMC officials have advised philanthropists to keep away from the Exhibition Grounds and not bring any food packets for the people confined there. Sufficient food supplies are available, they said.

Likewise, Nampally inspector Mohammed Khaleel Pasha has also appealed to philanthropists to avoid bringing any food items for patients and their attendants at Niloufer and MNJ cancer hospitals, as certain NGOs have already been providing food and water regularly to them.

Earlier to spot birds, we had to go all the way to the city outskirts, hillocks or forest areas. But, since the lockdown commenced, the birds are seen everywhere in the city. We humans have done huge damage to the movement of birds through our actions and creations," he said adding that he had too noticed that the numbers of existing species has suddenly gone up.

For example, we could see parrots at a few places in the city but now, their numbers too have gone up and they are there everywhere."

Barbers, salons rue corona lockdown

T.S.S. SIDHARTH | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 28

Weekends usually mean a trip to the barber's shop or salon for a haircut, shave, pedicure and so on, but this seems no longer the case in the foreseeable future. Effective from March 23, most barber shops, salons and beauty parlours have downed their shutters, following the state-wide lockdown ordered by the state government to stop the spread of coronavirus.

"Weekends used to be the busiest time, when we got close to 10-20 customers. However, due to coronavirus, the number of people visiting our shops had started dwindling even prior to March 23," Rahamanalla Bala Krishna Nayee of the Telangana Nayeey Brahmam Seva Sangam told Deccan Chronicle. According to him, in the Greater Hyderabad region alone, there are close to 15,000-20,000 people who are in the employ of this business, ranging from cleaners and barbers to clerks.

There are close to 70,000 shops across the state. "Initially, all of us were asked to wear masks and gloves to prevent any cross contamination. We were also instructed to wash our hands every 10 minutes," Bala Krishna said talking of the time before the lockdown.

The shutdown has meant a loss of about ₹2,000 on weekends, stated the "Gopal M., another barber from Dr. A.S. Rao Nagar. "95 per cent of our income goes towards our rents and household maintenance. With no income, we are in a dire state of income, we request the government to ask landlords to forego the rent for the upcoming months," said Bala Krishna.

He has also asked the government to give training to barbers on the kinds of infections and health hazards that they expose their clients to and ways to tackle them. Beauty parlours too are out of business, as they have been shuttered down. Certain people are, however, going online and booking beauty treatments on aggregator applications.

"I had booked for a manicure and pedicure treatment at home. The salon workers maintained good hygiene and did a good job," said Anjali Ahlawar, a resident of Secunderabad, who had booked a session on March 24.

CORONA | CRISIS | With human beings confined indoors, winged creatures of all hues have taken over the skies like never before

Birdwatchers spot rare species in city, thanks to lockdown

VIKRAM SHARMA | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 28

Stand on a rooftop or balcony or just take a walk (it's lockdown time but many people still do go out in the morning and the evening with precautions) and one cannot miss their chirping and singing — which is music to the ears amid complete silence. Some sound like whistling, others in varied or repeated tones, some refined and there are some in concord, all crystal clear.

With human beings in complete lockdown, birds of all hues have taken over the skies like never before, as if they just got azaadi (freedom) from humans and all

their creations. Birds like the lesser white throat and Hume's white throat among others are regularly being sighted in and around Hyderabad, which was not the case before.

"The number of existing species has definitely gone up. Be it tailor birds, sun birds, Asian koels and ashly prinias — their numbers have suddenly increased since the lockdown. If we give undisturbed foraging for species, birds can feed fearlessly to feed," Ms A. Surekha, secretary of Deccan Birders, a 40-year-old bird society with over 450 members, told Deccan Chronicle.

It is quite interesting to hear the birds chirp and sing. Sometimes, the chirps are in single syllables or in plural syllables. With silence all around, it is just music to the ears.

complete silence, birds can be heard chirping well beyond 11 am which was never the case earlier. "Lesser white throat has been sighted in Hyderabad but over the last few days and nights they have been sighted by our fellow birders. Hume's may not

be very rare as it is not sighted as often as the lesser white throat," Ms Surekha said. "It is quite interesting to hear the birds chirp and sing. Sometimes, the chirps are in single syllables or in plural syllables. With silence all around, it is just music to the ears," said Mr. Ajay Kumar, who has been into birdwatching since his college days. He said he also pays attention to the reaction of the birds as they chirp. "This is the best time for birders. It tells us that when humans and their creations do not disturb, birds and fauna thrive," he said.

According to another birder, Mr Ravi Abhishek, while Telangana state has over 400

species of birds, it is the first time that birds of all hues have come out in large numbers.

"Earlier to spot birds, we had to go all the way to the city outskirts, hillocks or forest areas. But, since the lockdown commenced, the birds are seen everywhere in the city. We humans have done huge damage to the movement of birds through our actions and creations," he said adding that he had too noticed that the numbers of existing species has suddenly gone up.

For example, we could see parrots at a few places in the city but now, their numbers too have gone up and they are there everywhere."



A Hume's white throat seen in the city.

IN BRIEF

NPA to donate a day's salary

Hyderabad: In the wake of the coronavirus outbreak, the faculty, staff and probationers at the Sardar Vallabhbhai National Police Academy (NPA) will be contributing a day's salary to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund.

Yashoda hospital open and working

Hyderabad: Yashoda Hospitals on Saturday said all its units in the city were open and were functioning fully and that there was no truth that its facility in Somajiguda has been shut down. In a statement, the group said its facilities at Secunderabad, Somajiguda and Malakpet were working normally. It said that it had come across some rumours on some social media platforms that its Somajiguda unit was shut. Following this, it has lodged a complaint with the Hyderabad cyber crime police. It said that one of its doctors who tested positive for Covid-19 along with his wife and mother were being treated at its dedicated Covid-19 facilities and that they were doing well.

RLY COACHES TO BE MADE INTO ISOLATION WARDS

ADITYA CHUNDURU | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 28

Railway minister Piyush Goyal on Saturday announced that the ministry is working on converting coaches into isolation wards for use in the Covid-19 response effort. He tweeted pictures of converted coaches from Assam, which had medical facilities and could accommodate nine patients. The Central Railway is working on a design of its own. It is learnt that the Railways has asked all its zones to come up with their own designs for isolation wards in railway coaches. The zones are required to submit their designs, out of which the best elements would be identified and made into a final uniform model.

SCR chief public relations officer Ch Rakesh said, "We are working on converting coaches into an isolation ward at the Carriage Workshop in Lalaguda. It should be ready by Monday." The collection of designs at the Central level is expected to take another week and the design is finalised, zones would be given targets for conversions of coaches. The targets would be given based on the need that arises in the coming weeks.

1,500 BEDS TO ISOLATE CASES COMING UP

BALU PULIPAKA | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 28

As many as 1,500 beds dedicated to provide isolation facilities to suspected Covid-19 cases is getting ready at a fast pace at the Gachibowli park complex, health minister Etala Rajendar said on Saturday.

Speaking to reporters after visiting the location and inspecting a 13-storey building where the facility is being created, Mr Rajendar said, "Three floors will be ready in three days while another three floors will be ready in three days after that."

"We plan to have the building ready for Covid-19 suspects in 20 days. While we do not anticipate that we will need this facility, we are getting it ready as per Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao's instructions that the state must be geared up for any eventuality," Mr Rajendar said.

He said all rooms in the isolation building will have modern bathrooms with motion activated taps, and will be on to provide air-conditioning to all the rooms. He urged people not to believe rumours making the rounds on social media about the disease or Covid-19 cases. He also said no part of the city has been declared as a 'red zone' because of cases from some areas.

Mr Rajendar said three floors will be ready in three days while another three floors will be ready in three days after that. "We plan to have the building ready for Covid-19 suspects in 20 days."

Lives at risk



A large number of customers line up, without maintaining social distance, to purchase medicines at a wholesale medical shop in Secunderabad on Saturday. — S.SURENDER REDDY

Failure to get a high as liquor outlets shut, 3 take extreme step

DURGA PRASAD SUNKU AND NARENDRA PULLOOR | DC HYDERABAD, NIZAMABAD MARCH 28

At least three persons have ended their lives in the state allegedly due to the non-availability of liquor since the lockdown for Covid-19 began. One of the suicides was reported from Hyderabad, and the other two from Nizamabad district.

In Hyderabad, a man, described as an alcoholic, was allegedly frustrated due to the non-availability of liquor and committed suicide in the forested area near IDPL. Identifying the deceased as Srinivas, police said that he began trying to purchase liquor after the lockdown was imposed. All liquor shops were closed at then. "On March 25, he tried to buy alcohol. All his attempts failed. From 2 pm to 5.30 pm, he committed suicide," a police official said.

However, Jeedimetla inspector P. Umama Reddy said, "Due to some family issues he committed suicide. We received a missing complaint on March 26 and were trying to trace him. Meanwhile we got to know that he had committed suicide."

The body was shifted to Gandhi Hospital mortuary for autopsy and the person missing case was changed to one of death under suspicious circumstances. Two today addicts from the undivided Nizamabad district succumbed to withdrawal symptoms on Saturday following the closure of all liquor outlets for the last six days as part of Covid-19 lockdown.

The two have been identified as Bhushan of Mudirajpet and Shakuntala resident of Saingar of Nizamabad town.

Like them, several of those addicted to consumption of spurious toddy are reportedly facing physical and psychological problems because of withdrawal symptoms.

District collector C. Narayana Reddy has directed prohibition and excise officials to inquire into the health condition of all addicts in the town. The officials, along with medical teams, visited the victims at their homes and advised medical treatment.

Meanwhile, arrack shop owners supply spurious toddy, which is blended with chloral hydrate and alprazolam, a dangerous combination even by normal standards. Given the demand, toddy tappers and some society reporters bribe excise officials and caste-based organisations. The illegal toddy mafia supposedly enjoys the patronage of politicians, which allows them to dump spurious toddy into their outlets.

The apprehension is that the lockdown period may see many more addicts complaining of withdrawal symptoms. In an immediate remedial measure, family members rushed the addicts to the Government general hospital and area hospitals for treatment.

'Partially open' order lacks fizz

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MARCH 28

A fake government order is in circulation on social media platforms, which claims that the director of prohibition and excise is allowing liquor shops to be open for some from Sunday put liquor traders and consumers in a state of confusion. Mr D. Venkateswar Rao, president of Telangana Wine Dealer Association, said that it is a fake order that is being circulated on WhatsApp and none should believe it.

Mr Rao said that they have informed the Cyber Crime police in the city about the fake order and will lodge a complaint.

and at each wine shop an excise constable will ensure social distance. The order also cautions wine traders against violating the timings. He said that the language clearly show that it was a prank but the message has gone viral with the consumers apparently sharing it widely across groups.

More than 2,400 retail liquor outlets and over 700 bars in Telangana state have been closed ever since the Chief Minister announced the lockdown to contain the spread of coronavirus.

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The apprehension is that the lockdown period may see many more addicts complaining of withdrawal symptoms. In an immediate remedial measure, family members rushed the addicts to the Government general hospital and area hospitals for treatment.

No sanitisers were provided to them. Officers even took them to task when they requested for sanitisers. He said that passes notifying essential services were given to them only on March 26 and that too only till March 31.

Another worker Iqbal said army officials have already restricted entry of civilians into the cantonment areas.

BID TO STEAL, ALLEGES WINE DEALERS' BODY

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MARCH 28

The Telangana Wine Dealers Association on Saturday has given a representation to Hyderabad police commissioner Anjali Kumar claiming that there were attempts to break into wine shops in the city and steal liquor.

Association president D. Venkateswar Rao in his representation said that burglars and liquor addicts were attempting to break open the shops to loot the stock during ongoing lockdown.

He asked the commissioner to deploy staff and increase patrolling near such incidents.

A report from Andhra Pradesh said a 56-year-old addict Shaik Bhaji Khan of Mandapet was found hanging from a tree under suspicious circumstances on Saturday. According to the Mandapet police, Khan, a push-cart vendor, was behaving erratically since the time liquor became unavailable due to a lockdown, according to locals. They suspected that he took the extreme step out of desperation.

Meanwhile, psychological experts say that alcohol withdrawal syndrome may lead to many problems during lockdown and the government should be vigilant and prudent at this time.

Prices of citrus fruits have also soared after CM's advice on consuming them to develop immunity. Prices of oranges are now being priced ₹200 when they were selling for only ₹100 last week.

The price of four lemons in the market is ₹20, when it was only ₹10 on Friday. Similarly, there is great demand for guava and grapes, which were sold for ₹80 per kg.

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Supply snag off, items trickle in

Supermarkets, groceries replenish shelves

DURGA PRASAD SUNKU | DC HYDERABAD MARCH 28

With supply chain challenges that arose in the wake of the lockdown in the state slowly being overcome, transportation of essential goods is limping back to a stage where supermarket chains and grocery stores have begun receiving supplies to restock their emptied shelves.

Meanwhile, Hyderabad city police have started a helpline in order to facilitate the movement of essential goods.

According to Hyderabad dal and mills merchant association president, Vinod Kintee, "The movement of transport vehicles has improved. But it is not enough. There are around 140 wholesale shops in the city. These require at least 10 trucks carrying 20 tonnes of dal each, which amounts to 200 tonnes of dal. On Friday, only four trucks were sufficient to meet the demand. The situation is better. Most dealers are in panic buying mode as they are still scared of deficit stocks."

He said that a meeting two days ago with the Hyderabad commissioner of police helped in sorting out bottlenecks and issuing passes to transporters. Speaking about the impact of lockdown on oil supply, Suresh Kumar Agarwal, president of the Telangana oil industries and trade miller's association said, "Hyderabad and its surroundings usually consume 600 tonnes of edible oil per day. There are enough stocks to last for eight more days and though the situation is improving, it will take a month for the situation to return to normal."

He said though the association had been working with the government for the past four days, the real challenge was, Hyderabad being a big consumer, keeping up the supplies from other states. This is difficult, especially since the city's oil supply is dependent largely on imports from other states like Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

Vehicles transporting oil from Krishnapatnam, Kakinada and other cities are being stopped at the state's borders. "Simultaneously, another challenge is the shutting down of oil markets due to the lockdown and fear among drivers to step out on account of the coronavirus and police violence," he said.

Speaking to Deccan Chronicle, B. Vik. Raju, joint managing director of Q Mart, said, "On Wednesday, we faced terrible issues; employees and their vehicles were not released and there was a major issue with the supply of groceries available with the wholesalers which could have lasted 10 days before the current stock comes in. We are worried due to the lockdown. We were clueless about future plans. We even decided to close the shops after two days."

However, he said, "Both state and central government came to our rescue. They had meetings with everyone and laid out standard operation procedures for the transportation of essential products which became easier to transport on Friday. By and large, 90 per cent of the products are available now in the city." He further hoped that the buying will also fade away in few days.

Speaking to this reporter at Heritage store manager said, "We don't have sufficient staff as most of them are unable to come to work due to the lockdown. However, there is no issue with dairy products and vegetable stocks. But there is scarcity in dal products."

A Reliance store manager also said that there is enough stock of essential goods and there was no deficit. In an official statement, he said, "The largest online supermarkets, Big Basket, etc. are creating a focused programme to bring back our on-field workforce, including delivery executives, pickers and packers. We are hoping to resolve this very soon," it said.

Hyderabad city police commissioner, Anjali Kumar, said, a helpline - 04042343434 - has been set up to facilitate movement of essential goods and uninterrupted operations of essential services.

On Thursday, a special task force was formed under the leadership of joint commissioner of police, Avinash Mohanty, to monitor each and every vehicle carrying essential items from other states. The team consists of 25 police officers who will work round the clock in three shifts.

177 mobile rythu bazaars come up

MAADY DEEKSHITH | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 28

In order to provide vegetables at the doorstep to the State government, the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC), in coordination with Agriculture and Marketing departments has set up 177 mobile rythu bazaars at various locations in the city.

The mobile rythu bazaars will move around 331 locations, including gated communities, apartments and colonies at designated timings.

Mr Rammohan said that it would not only streamline vegetable prices but also avoid huge crowds at the markets. Covid 19 guidelines mandate social distancing.

He said each DC can handle around 27,000 metric tonnes of fresh fruit and vegetables and there will be no question of any shortages. This concept will function like Mana Ooru Mana Kurugayulu launched by the Telangana government six years ago.

He appealed to the citizens not to fall prey to black-marketers and hoarders, who are selling essential commodities at exorbitant prices during the lockdown period.

The Mayor stressed that people can immediately complain to the local police and warders, who are selling essential commodities at exorbitant prices during the lockdown period. He appealed to the citizens not to fall prey to black-marketers and hoarders, who are selling essential commodities at exorbitant prices during the lockdown period.



Residents form a queue to purchase essential items from a mobile rythu bazaar van on Saturday.

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GIVING FILLUP KCR's call to consume it for immunity gives boost to industry

'No need to chicken out', says

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MARCH 28

Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao's call to consume chicken and fruits for abundant immunity has given a boost to both these industries.

Due to high demand and less supply, prices of chicken, eggs and citrus fruits sky-rocketed on Saturday.

Price of chicken has seen a four-time rise. A similar has been the case with fruits including lemons.

Incidentally, the Chief Minister, during his

speech on Friday, appealed to citizens that they must eat chicken, eggs and citrus fruits to improve their immunity and beat Covid-19.

He even asked the marketing department to stop export of local variety of oranges grown predominantly in the Nalgonda district areas. Instead, he ordered that they be sold in the local markets.

Following the CM's advice, price of chicken has shot up from ₹50 per kg to ₹177 per kg at retail outlets of the city. People queued up in large numbers at the outlets for



K. Chandrashekar Rao purchasing their share of chicken and eggs.

has given a major boost to the industry. He disclosed that it would take some time for the chicken and egg prices to stabilise as supplies to the city are unavailable.

"This is not the fault of government. Covid-19 panic has led to labour leaving many from the city. This has impacted prices. It will take at least two months to expect normalcy. Since there is a gap between the demand and supply, prices of chicken and eggs have

increased multiple times," Mr Sudhakar stated. Prices of citrus fruits have also soared after CM's advice on consuming them to develop immunity. Prices of oranges are now being priced ₹200 when they were selling for only ₹100 last week.

The price of four lemons in the market is ₹20, when it was only ₹10 on Friday. Similarly, there is great demand for guava and grapes, which were sold for ₹80 per kg at popular vegetable markets including Monda in Secunderabad.

RWA committees to check for flu signs

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD MARCH 28

Director General of Police M. Mahendar Reddy has appealed to colony associations and apartment societies to form committees which will check the premises for those who have flu-like symptoms.

Mr Reddy said, "It is the time for all of us to informally, to control the spread of the virus. "Please take responsibility to cut down and prevent unnecessary moments to and from your colony or apartment, the DGP said.

about the health conditions of the residents, whether any of them are having flu symptoms." He said if anyone was found with flu-like symptoms, the local police or Dial 100 should be contacted to control the spread of the virus. "Please take responsibility to cut down and prevent unnecessary moments to and from your colony or apartment," the DGP said.

SHORT TAKES

MILK SALE TIMING TO BE EXTENDED

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MARCH 28

Animal husbandry minister Talasani Srinivas Yadav has cautioned cattle and poultry feed traders of invoking PD Act against them if they were found hoarding stock and selling feed at higher prices.

He was reviewing the steps being taken for the supply of cattle and poultry feed with the senior officer of the department in the back drop of the Covid-19 lockdown.

He said the supply had decreased as supplying staff was not coming forward and because selling of milk was being allowed only from 5 am to 9 am.

EFLU PUTS OFF ENTRANCE EXAMINATION

HARLEEN MINOCHA | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 28

After the lockdown since March 22, the English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU) has switched to online classes for regular courses.

However, the student council of the university has written to the Vice Chancellor and the ministry of human resource development raising issues of the ambiguity on varsity working during the lockdown.

The student council sought clarification from the university on the timeline of evaluation, final working day and exams for this semester.

SAFETY OF LINKS QUESTIONED

FROM PAGE 1

Sai (name changed), who had recently returned from Japan and received the message, said, "Each of us got a unique hyperlink in the text message. This hyperlink does not need any authentication for users to access the portal."

"The pension app performs facial recognition to authenticate the user. In this case, the website only wants to see the user is uploading a genuine real selfie. This allows us to be sure of its authenticity," he said.

13,000 in state under quarantine

Some people are breaking quarantine and putting the lives of others at risk, cautions Etala

FROM PAGE 1

In the 22 cases since Friday, health minister Etala Rajendar said, six were from one family in the Old City, four were from a family in Quthbullapur, three were from another family in Domalguda.

None of the first two instances, two men from the families had visited Delhi to attend religious gathering at Jama Masjid this month, in the third case, that of the doctor who works at a corporate hospital in the city, he had contact with another person who had returned from London recently.

Mr Rajendar said the number of people under mandatory quarantine in the state has reduced to 13,000 from 20,000-odd as the period for those who were put under the restrictions had ended.

He, however, urged everyone to strictly observe the lockdown and not leave their homes.

2 FROM AP VISITED HYD

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MARCH 28

Two men from among the six new coronavirus positive cases declared on Saturday by the Andhra Pradesh government had been to Hyderabad before travelling to their destinations in the neighbouring state.

According to the daily bulletin issued by the AP government, a 65-year-old man who reached Hyderabad on March 9 travelled by bus to Vijayawada the next day.

The second person is a 23-year-old male who travelled by train from Rajasthan to Secunderabad, arriving here on March 18. He then took a MMTS train from Secunderabad to Kacheguda and, the next day, on March 19, took the Venkatadri Express to Kurnool.

NET EFFECT

DURGA PRASAD SUNKU | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 28

Social media networks are buzzing with misinformation on the Covid-19 epidemic. Although many social media outlets came out with reports and tried to give out authentic data, still the social media is flooded with fake audio clips which are creating panic among citizens.



People who came to buy medicines at the wholesale medical shops go about their business without maintaining any social distance near Koti, Hyderabad, on Saturday.

Migrants quarantined after long walk

FROM PAGE 1

The three men slept by the road near a petrol bunk in Chilikalku. They were stranded there for much of the next day, until they found a shared cab to Vijayawada for the next two days, they walked for some distance and boarded another lorry to reach Narsipattanam.

"It was a miserable journey. None of us had any food. Luckily, our friends told us to contact some activists here. They contacted some other volunteers in AP who delivered some food to us," said Sai.

The troubles for the three men didn't end there. The people of their village have enforced a 14-day home quarantine on them. They have no money left to buy food and there is no work.

Rajendar who hails from Deori in Giridih district, Jharkhand, and the others rented a bus in Hyderabad to take them home. Chaat and juice sellers and restaurant workers based in Abids and Chikkadpally couldn't stay on, Yadav said.

"Since there is no work here, we wanted to go home. We can't pay the bus rent here. We hired a bus for ₹1 lakh, which cost us ₹3,500 each."

A video clip of anti-CAA protesters caused much confusion

Social media fake news creates havoc

FROM PAGE 1

Some anti-social element with an intention to create a breach of peace and havoc in the general public, utilised the old video clipping.

They were asked to head back to where they came from. Luckily, they still had the bus at their disposal. "The permission letter mentioned the bus registration number, so no one else could transport us. If this bus wasn't there, we would have had to walk home," he said.

The 30 men waited for eight hours at the border, without food, water or information. Eventually, they were asked to head back to where they came from. Luckily, they still had the bus at their disposal.

Right now, the men are left with meagre savings. Yadav, for instance, has ₹5,000 left with him. "This money will run out in a few days. But I had to save some money for the trip to Hyderabad and other essential items," he said.

Some anti-social element with an intention to create a breach of peace and havoc in the general public, utilised the old video clipping.

many from Bihar and Jharkhand. Most of them didn't dare a trip to their native villages, in spite of their troubles here.

Anil Yadav of Gortoli in Jharkhand, has been stuck with 22 others from his state in smartments in a building in Uppal. They like most others from the state, work as restaurant workers and fruit sellers.

Anil Yadav said, "The police refused to give us permission to go home. They said we wouldn't be able to reach our villages since the other states on the route could stop us at the border."

"On Friday, we realised we had very little food or money. We took a loan from a money lender we know. However, we haven't been able to buy any food," he said.

Struggling for options, they contacted their association of Jharkhand-based migrants who pleaded the Uppal police and GHMC division to supply them food at their home. On Saturday morning, he got three bags of rice (total 75 kg) and some vegetables.

Like most migrants, they felt upset at being forgotten by their government. Yadav demanded to know why the government was organising flights for NRIs to facilitate their journey home, but not them.

Some anti-social element with an intention to create a breach of peace and havoc in the general public, utilised the old video clipping.

With the recent deaths of 300 people in Iran after ingesting methanol following the infections, the news went viral on social media, it is clear how dangerous a fake message can be. Another 10,000 people are hospitalised in Iran after consuming methanol.



Rajendar Yadav during his journey to Chhattisgarh



Erampalli Sai and Srinivas



Anil Yadav and his friends.

40 labourers from TN want to return

ATHER MOIN | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 28

Labourers from Tamil Nadu who are working in the wholesale vegetable and flower market at Gudmalapur have been stranded in the city and want to return home.

More than 40 workers, including women, hailing from villages around Tiruchirappalli of Tamil Nadu took shelter at Exhibition Ground near Lachmi, a labourer, stated that they were employed in shops at the vegetable market on daily wages. They lost their jobs due to the lockdown.

With the recent deaths of 300 people in Iran after ingesting methanol following the infections, the news went viral on social media, it is clear how dangerous a fake message can be.

"You can also refer to fact-checking sites (Altnews, Boomlive), check the date, watch for unusual formatting," added Mr Rachamalla.

AMIT SANGHI ARRESTED FOR WIFE ABUSE

DURGA PRASAD SUNKU | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 28

President of the Telangana Rifle Association Amit Sanghi who allegedly threatened his estranged wife was arrested by the Banjara Hills police on Saturday.

Amit Sanghi had fled the city and had crossed the state border when the police tracked him down and took him into custody.

Amit Sanghi's former wife Reeta Sanghi had lodged a complaint with the Banjara Hills police which booked a case of criminal intimidation and police on Saturday arrested him.

Speaking to Deccan Chronicle earlier, Reeta Sanghi, who was separated from Amit Sanghi three years back, said, "On Tuesday night, he came to my house with a weapon to kill me. He was under the influence of alcohol and was barely able to stand. He came to my house on the pretext of seeing my son to whom he showed the gun. My son alerted me and screamed for help."

CHECK FOREIGN RETURNEES, CIVIC BABUS TOLD

MAUDY DEEKSHITHA | DC HYDERABAD, MARCH 28

MAUD principal secretary to the chief minister Saturday instructed all municipal commissioners within the limits to check top spots for sanitation and ensure cleanliness in all towns.

"Beggars and homeless should be moved to night shelters and be provided food on a daily basis. Civic agencies maintaining construction labour should provide all the facilities required for them to be supervised by urban local bodies. Special sanitation camps should be taken up in isolation wards and regular spraying operations should be conducted at home quarantined locations, by procuring sufficient sodium hypochlorite solution at Covid-19 vulnerable places like hospitals, markets and prime municipal locations. He urged the civic commissioners to periodically conduct surveys to identify foreign returnees and ensure that they are home quarantined. He said if anyone violates, then the individual should be shifted to the nearest isolation wards."

The principal secretary exhorted the municipal commissioners to coordinate with the local super markets and ensure timely delivery facilities.

Lockdown to save 10,000 lives

FROM PAGE 1

The first batch of countries succeeded in containing the infections to below 10,000 population, the second group remained a mute witness to the infections crossing the 25,000 mark.

The Wuhan lockdown experience also proved that at least 10,000 lives could be saved in India by imposing the lockdown from March 20 than waiting for a month more. He reported that the susceptibility exposure, mild to critical infections, health care facilities and recovery were taken into consideration while preparing the two different scenarios. The researchers as well as governments



SHORT TAKES

TATAS PLEDGE ₹1,500 CR TO FIGHT CORONA

New Delhi, March 28: The Tata Sons on Saturday have pledged ₹1,500 crore for combating coronavirus pandemic. Tata Sons, the holding company of the Tata group companies, announced an additional ₹1,000 crore support towards Covid-19 and related activities over and above ₹500 crore pledged by Tata Trusts earlier in the day.

In a statement, Tata Sons Chairman N. Chandrasekaran said the group is also bringing in necessary ventilators and are gearing up to also manufacture the same soon in India. "The current situation in India and other parts of the world owing to the impact of Covid-19 is very worrisome and requires our very best action," he said in a statement.

Announcing an additional ₹1,000 crore support towards Covid-19 and related activities, Chandrasekaran said, "We will work together with the Tata Trusts and our Chairman Emeritus Tata and would be fully supporting their initiatives, and work in a collaborative manner to bring the full expertise of the group."

He further said, "In addition to the initiatives articulated by Tata Trusts, we are also bringing in the ventilators necessary and are gearing up to also manufacture the same soon in India. The country is facing an unprecedented situation and crisis and of us would have to do whatever it takes to alleviate and enhance the quality of lives of the communities we serve."

Earlier in the day, Tata Trusts pledged ₹500 crore for prevention and relief activities of the coronavirus pandemic.

ASSAM POLICE RESORTS TO BLANK FIRE

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, MARCH 28

Bogged down by frequent violations of the lockdown by crowds in market areas, Assam police on Saturday resorted to firing tear gas and air to disperse a crowd that turned violent and started pelting stones on police men enforcing lockdown in the Western Assam's Bongaigaon district.

Bongaigaon superintendent of police, Singha Ram Mili told reporters that a police team while trying to enforce lockdown came under attack at Boda Bazar area. "We have arrested four persons on charges of provoking the crowd to attack the police team," he said, pointing out that police team was asking people to close doors and commercial establishments following government orders.

"After the market was closed, one Anwar Hussain and his associates attacked the police team by pelting stones. The police had to resort to blank fire to disperse the crowd which had gathered," said the SP.

MODI, MAMATA DISCUSS COVID STATUS IN WB

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, MARCH 28

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, union home minister Amit Shah and external affairs minister S Jaishankar serially took updates from West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee over telephone on Friday evening about her government's steps to tackle Covid-19 in the state which has recorded two more cases taking the total number of patients to 17 including a death.

Modi's call to the Trinamul Congress supreme came in the wake of her indication that she would gradually relax the 21-day curfew-like lockdown announced by him, her complaint against the centre for no assistance, her demand for a ₹1,500 crore special package and her public intentions for awareness with a posse of officials for the last three consecutive days by hitting the streets across the city amidst the lockdown.

A day after talks with the top three figures at the centre, Banerjee was not going out in public places on Saturday.

During one of her visits, Banerjee was reportedly heard asking shop owners to keep their shutters open. The state government had previously resumed bus services on six routes in Kolkata for workers in emergency services.



Migrants walk towards their native places during nationwide lockdown imposed in the wake of coronavirus pandemic in Prayagraj on Saturday. -PTI

4 migrants crushed to death while walking back to Raj

800 migrants from Bengal are stuck in Maha as state has sealed borders

DC CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI, MARCH 28

The issue of migrant population, which is trying to go back to their native places after losing livelihood because of coronavirus outbreak in Maharashtra, has reached a critical state.

Migrants, most of whom worked as daily wage workers in metros of Maharashtra, are taking all the risks in search of shelter. Four such migrants met a tragic end when they were crushed to death by a speeding tempo in the wee hours of Saturday while walking back to their villages in Rajasthan. The accident took place on Mumbai-Ahmedabad highway in Palghar. The tempo driver, who fled from the spot after the accident, was later arrested by the Virar police.

The deceased, identified as Kabiraj Bagore (38), Nikhil Pandya (32), Ramesh Mangal Bhat (55) and Naresh Kalasiva (40) were migrant workers and natives of Rajasthan.

"The officials said that the victims were along with three others who have sustained injuries in the accident that took place at around 3 am on Saturday."

"While they were walking, the tempo came at a high speed and knocked the group. Four of them came under the rear wheels of the tempo, which killed them instantly. The accused tempo driver fled from the scene soon after," said officer of Palghar police station.

Upon investigation, the police learnt that the group was part of a large mass who were stopped at the Gujarat border and were sent back to Mumbai. The incident took place enroute their walk towards the city. Nearly 800 migrants from Bengal

are stuck in Maharashtra as the state government has sealed the borders to prevent the spread of the virus.

The issue of plight of migrants from Bengal was taken up by Trinamul Congress MP Derek O'Brien who discussed the matter with Maharashtra minister Aadiya Thackeray. Though the latter expressed the inability to send them back, he assured the Bengal MP that they will be taken care by his government.

Mr Thackeray tweeted, "I received a call from @dereko'brienmp with a message from Bengal CM @Manatoofficialji. About 800 labour stuck in Maharashtra. Of course we can't let them go back as state borders are sealed, but we reached out and are taking care of them. (sic)"

Meanwhile, expressing concern for the migrant workers, film actress Poiza Bhatt has appealed to Aadiya to convert studios and studios in the state into refugee centres.

In her tweet, Ms Bhatt said, "Dear Mr Aditya Thackeray, may I request you that the studio and stadium in Maharashtra be converted into shelter homes. (sic)"

She wrote another tweet saying, "Here we are distributing packets to the homeless? What would it be like if stadiums and similar places were opened to give shelter to those migrant workers? People's health can be monitored. If they show any symptoms then they will be contacted."

Meanwhile, hundreds of migrants of UP living in Maharashtra had called the Uttar Pradesh chief minister in the state. They want to go back to their village as they cannot live here without employment. Officials said that they are trying to convince them that they

Congress takes Centre to task on migration issue

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

Congress on Saturday once again blamed the central government for the migrant crisis. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, attacked the central government for the massive migration of labourers and workers from tier-1 cities.

In his tweet, Gandhi said, "It is a very big crime to do this to citizens." He attached in his tweet two pictures of massive gatherings of migrant workers who have currently camped at various state borders outside Uttar Pradesh in an attempt to return to their respective villages.

Gandhi also said, "Our government will have to abide by the government advisory to contain the spread of coronavirus."

Maharashtra BJP secretary Sanjay Upadhyay said, "We are coming up with a kitchen for the daily wage workers, including migrants of UP, Bihar and rest of the country. We have established food and vegetable distribution networks across the state by following the government advisory such as social distancing. The PM and BJP president has given target to reach out up to 52 lakh people with ready food packets or food grains."

Over 57-lakh north Indians especially from UP are residing in Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) and an additional eight lakh people live in remaining parts of Maharashtra. Of these,

brothers and sisters should at least get dignity in these times of crisis. The government should act fast to stop this from developing into a bigger situation."

He further urged people across the country to help the migrants by offering food or shelter as they undertake arduous journeys. "Today, hundreds of our starved brothers and sisters, along with their families, are forced to head to homes in their villages on foot. Help them if you can by offering them food, shelter as they undertake an arduous journey... special appeal to Congress workers, supporters... in Hindi!" he wrote in Hindi.

Heartbreaking visuals around 10 lakh migrants are daily wage workers, according to an estimate. Most of these people are working for construction sector, playing taxi, auto-rickshaw, selling vegetables, fruits and milk.

However, there are only ten to 12 thousand people are actually in crisis. After outbreak of Coronavirus, the UP government directed Bimlesh Kumar to act, as resident Commissioner of UP in Mumbai with immediate effect. The migrants can call on 022/611801, 9137452238, 9702901596 and 9821058315 to file their grievances during the lockdown.

Mr. Kumar said, "We are working with the local administration and Maharashtra government to resolve the problems of migrants. We have arranged the foods and

accommodation for them." Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari directed the government to stop people from entering the state from other parts of the country or vice versa during the ongoing lockdown. He also directed collectors to inform the people about the steps taken for accommodation and food by the government and non-governmental organisations.

He held talks with the six divisional commissioners in the state- Nagpur, Amravati, Nashik, Pune, Konkan and Aurangabad via video-conferencing to take stock of the impact.

He asked the authorities to make announcements in all major cities and industrial townships to urge the people to stay wherever they are right now.

Nitish: Return of migrants will defeat lockdown

NAYEAR AZAD | DC PATNA, MARCH 28

The spike in the number of Covid-19 cases in the country has prompted the Bihar government to initiate preventive measures to deal with the threat. The government is also worried about the massive migrant population returning home from other states.

Experts and a section in the state administration are of the view that the migrants may pose a threat of community spread if any one of them turns out to be infected by the deadly coronavirus.

On Saturday while talking to a television channel Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar said, "The whole purpose of complete lockdown would fail if people start returning in buses. In my view, shelter camps should be set up instead of sending them back in buses."

His comments came after UP government announced special bus services for migrants who have been stranded near the Delhi border. Hundreds of migrants mostly construction workers and labourers have been trying to return home after the coronavirus announced 21-day national lockdown.

Earlier this week the Bihar government had released ₹100 crore for migrant workers who are stuck outside the state. So far Bihar has reported nine Covid-19 positive cases and one death. Three persons including a paramedic staff of a private hospital in Patna and two youths were found positive on Friday at other states.

Experts and a section in the state administration are of the view that the migrants may pose a threat of community spread if any one of them turns out to be infected by the deadly coronavirus.

Meanwhile, the Union Health Minister on Saturday changed the rules for assistance under the State Disaster Relief Fund for returning availability of money for food and temporary accommodation for migrant workers during the 21-day lockdown.

In a communication to announced special bus services, the ministry also said medical care and clothing can be provided to migrant workers during the lockdown period announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to combat the coronavirus pandemic.

LOCALS RUSH TO HELP OUT MIGRANTS IN ODISHA

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 28

As the lockdown entered its fourth day on Saturday, the conditions of migrant workers and daily wagers undertaking long journeys with families and children have evoked strong responses from political leaders. In the meantime, the Congress party's frontline units have also opened helplines and are trying to give food to stranded people.

The Congress has also set up a task force to intensify the efforts of congress-ruled state governments to deal with the grave situation prevailing on account of Covid-19 in a coordinated manner. The members include P Chidambaram, Jaiaram Ramesh and Veerappa Moily.

When the locals enquired about their journey, the workers hailing from Nandapur in Koraput district, 600 kms from Bhubaneswar, narrated their harrowing story.

They said they had walked 100 kms on railway tracks - from Rajapur to Bhubaneswar - in the hope of catching a vehicle to reach home.

Realising that the workers had fostered a vain hope of getting a vehicle and would soon fall prey to fatigue and hunger due to the long walk, the local people immediately took them to a local school building and arranged food and water for them.

"The migrant workers walked through the night and had survived on a few biscuits. They drank water from rivers and ponds they came across on the way. We first provided them some food and asked them not to worry," said Purnanjan Padhi, a local youth and social worker.

Reports from Malkangiri said groups of migrants were seen walking home to Nabarangpur.

KERALA CM TAKES UP KARNATAKA BORDER ISSUE

VINAY MADHAV | DC BENGALURU, MARCH 28

The connectivity issue between Kerala and Karnataka is continuing even during the Covid-19 crisis, with Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan seeking Prime Minister Narendra Modi's intervention for the coming days.

However, Kodagu MLA K.G. Bopali shot back Kerala from both Dakshina Kannada and Kodagu districts. Four major border crossing points in Kodagu district including Karki, Makutta and Kutta have been sealed, while along the border of getting a vehicle and would soon fall prey to fatigue and hunger due to the long walk, the local people immediately took them to a local school building and arranged food and water for them.

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BRO work going on in full swing Frightened K'taka villagers flee into forest

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

Braving the threat of Covid-19, Border Roads Organisation (BRO) personnel are working to completely replace the damaged bridge in a foot, multi-span Bailey bridge, the only lifeline of the upper Subansiri district in Arunachal Pradesh to restore lines of communication for all 451 villages and secondary forces located along the China border.

The personnel of 23

BRTF/Project Arunank, at the special request of the local administration, are working full swing since operations on the bridge of the existing bridge.

Meanwhile, in the northern part of the country, BRO is presently engaged in snow clearance operations on the Manali-Leh axis, day and night, despite inclement weather and Covid-19 virus. BRO has been witnessing a continuous influx of people from Bengaluru, Shivamogga, Mangaluru

M. B. GIRISH | DC CHIKKAMAGALURU, MARCH 28

Fearing the coronavirus, some youths in Mudigere taluk of Chikkmagaluru are taken to staying in forest areas.

In recent days their village, Markhal, has been witnessing an influx of people from outside. These people, whose identities were not known immediately, have settled in Bapli hillock on Charmadi ghat. According to sources, Markhal has been witnessing a continuous influx of people from Bengaluru, Shivamogga, Mangaluru

and other parts coming to spend days but local people fear that these people might have brought the virus which has been threatening the world at the moment.

A source said "These people feared that those coming to their village might bring the virus with them and they could easily contract the disease, so they decided to enter the forest."

"To make their stay in forest isolated from their villages, these people have carried with them groceries to last several days before they return to the

village once things are clear for their safe return.

These people entered the forest a couple of days back and their departure came to light on Saturday. Meanwhile, as many as 10 new positive cases of coronavirus have been confirmed in Karnataka, taking the total number of the affected in the state to 74, the Health department said on Saturday.

"Till date 74 Covid-19 positive cases have been confirmed which includes 10 new positive cases," the department said in the mid-day situation update.



The villagers have settled in Bapli hillock on Charmadi ghat.

DECCAN Chronicle

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Merlena Imsoing

Off the beaten track

Exposure Day: P's discovery

It was a sunny day. Not that it made a difference. It was always sunny. A little too sunny. But today was the right kind of sunny. The telecom had announced that it would be safe to come outside and couldn't have been happier. It had been 382 days since her last outing.

She had to make sure she made good use of the two hours. All year, she had made up games in her head but there was no chance she could fit all those games in those two hours and all this thought was making her anxious. But it was not the time to be anxious. Every morning P would wake up, wait for an announcement from the telecom telling them that today was an Exposure Day but 261 times she would get disappointed.

But today was not one of those days. She woke up knowing that it was a different day. It was going to be a special day. She didn't know how or why but she just knew. She couldn't contain her excitement as Mother prepared her for her journey outside — one layer of double SPF followed by a gel coating and then an epidural hazmat and finally a tracker just in case she got into trouble. Ever since the girl a few blocks away fell into bio-chemical sludge and drowned, Mother had been very cautious about P's safety and she had every right to be.

P's house was tiny. It wasn't as nice as the houses that the Overground People lived in, which had glasses on the walls so they could see light. P's family couldn't afford that. They were not the Higher Ups. They were the underground people. The government made sure that there was enough daylight simulators so that the underground people would not feel left out, but it would never be able to replicate the real feeling of seeing actual daylight. Nevertheless, P's parents made sure that P did not miss out on anything just because they couldn't afford a lifestyle everyone desired. On her 8th birthday they gave her a cheap biosynthetic dog that barked every time P was sad. It was her favourite toy and she liked to pretend it was a real dog. She called it Woofus.

P had big plans for Woofus and herself today. Woofus, being a non living existent, didn't need to be prepared before sun exposure. That was the good thing about having a synthetic dog. You didn't need to take extra precautions. Besides, P's family could never afford the expenses of owning luxury items like real dogs. She often wondered what it felt like to be an Overground Person because that would mean that you didn't keep a real dog if you wanted to, but she would stop these thoughts immediately because she felt she was betraying Woofus even though Woofus was incapable of feeling or understanding emotion.

After what seemed like forever, the vault finally opened and all the underground people were released. There was a lot of shoving and pushing which couldn't be helped because people were excited to finally be out in the open. P ran towards her favourite spot — the plastic forest. It was because of the smell that the people were now used to. P saw the Overground People walking around with their dogs and felt bad that Woofus wasn't as good looking as those dogs.

P geared up for a game of catch with Woofus and picked up a plastic stick and threw it in the direction of the synthetic rocks. Woofus obediently ran toward it but didn't return for a long time after disappearing behind the rocks which was strange because it was programmed to track down and deliver.

P gave it a few minutes but couldn't hold her curiosity any longer. She knew that in such a situation she was supposed to inform the elders but she went ahead looking for Woofus behind the rocks and there it was, crouched over something it could not identify. P leaned forward and to her utter amazement saw a ball. Not the kind of ball that was issued to them but a real ball — a worn out football from the era of the carbon people. Ho wonder Woofus couldn't identify it. P picked it up. How had it managed to survive radiation? She had heard stories of how her grandfather himself used to play with one in those pre-quarantine days. It looked exactly like how he described it to her, just a bit tattered.

Merlena Imsoing is an actor and comedian who recently had to migrate from Facebook to Twitter because her family wasn't very appreciative of her inappropriate jokes. She lives in Bombay with her flatmates and 42 plants.



Subhani

A lockdown love letter to my beautiful planet



Shreya Sen-Handley

No More Mansplaining

Dear World,

Let me count the ways I love thee... In Sherwood Forest in England, we are not in full lockdown mode yet but will be soon. About to go into hiding like Robin Hood's Merry Men, I would've said, but that could be misconstrued as making light of this global tragedy. But Robin Hood, remember, was underground to emerge a beacon of hope as twin scourges swept his world; the Black Death, and the corruption embodied by the Sheriff of Nottingham. Not so different from our lives now. So, making light is essential, but in the sense of keeping the fires burning.

Today I walked my children one last time to their school, finally closing after every other around the world had shut because of the British government's misguided plan to inject the population with herd immunity by exposing our children to a virus without a cure. Like misinformed war-era parents sending their kids to chicken-pox parties in the hope they become immune. That's not how infection works. But it is a war we find ourselves in, between humans and a panic-fueled force of nature. A war without sound and fury — as long as you stay off social media. I do. I write, and I walk.

Ironically, with barely a car on the road, the walk is louder than it has been in a long while. A crisp cold morning, clear to the tree-fringed horizon, there isn't a smidgen of smog, mud-churned car track, or plastic waste trail. Just birdsong in the whispering leaves. And, with only the occasional child and parent reluctantly meandering to school, the chatter of rodents out in force, emboldened by their tormentor's near-disappearance. Daring up to us daringly, they are staking their claim to the world we took away. As we take the last leaf-lined turn to school, I tell my kids about my childhood ambles round Kolkata's Dhakuria Lake with my great-grandfather, holding on to his index finger against the buffeting of a wily winter wind. Something about the sunlight winking through the trees this morning reminds me of those, more innocent, times, and I'm tempted to breathe it in gratefully. But I'm forestalled by the vigilant voice in my head, the virus can be airborne, surviving several hours.

Returning home half-an-hour later, I went into a world of working-from-home husbands and their fragrant baking bread. My toffee-haired Englishman, with chapatti flour in his elbows in the kitchen, looks up and beams. There is still love and (seemingly) fresh air, but no leaves of bread at supermarkets. And now, as others get wind of those of us baking our own, the flour is evaporating from a shelves. Chappati flour is crumbly and not the best for baking, but there is something deli-

ciously devil-may-care about this fusion. As there is in making spaghetti from sweet potatoes, or soyamilk Thai curry, because there is neither packet pasta nor milk to be found in stores anymore. When the soap runs out however, we'll be in a lather, because the one time I made soap in school, I got the acid-alkali balance so wrong, I singed my fingers. But balance was never my forte and getting burned nothing new.

It will be a gilded cage. Yet the cage I'm most wary of is not our tree-smothered home, but my mind. I suffer from severe anxiety that can spiral into deep depression, following a trajectory of desolation (even in a crowd).

It's a slow, pleasant burn I aspire to this time, working on our forest garden in the low English sun. Spring is coming whether Corona likes it or not, and soon there'll be ripening tomatoes climbing the trellis on our lawn and chillis blazing brighter than the scarlet pots in which they were born. The strawberries will strive to outdo them both, of course, in lusciously reaching for the sun. Last year we finally developed green thumbs and got it all to blossom before our dog changed them straight off their stalks. This year we hope to bring them in. It won't be long either before trails of woodland nuts lead from our patch to the walnut copse. From its secret pond last summer, our little boy caught 35 shimmering fish which he conscientiously threw back. While it's highly unlikely our homegrown meals will

ever extend to fish from the emerald bog (because it is a bog and not because we don't eat fish, half-Bengali folk that we are), it is reassuring to know that a return to nature will keep the wolf from our self-employed door, should it ever come to that.

It would thou and I with fate conspire

To grasp this sorry scheme of things entire, Would not we-shatter it to bits — and then

Remould it nearer to the heart's desire?

All my love, Shreya

Shreya Sen-Handley is the author of the recently published Strange Stories, the award-winning Memoirs of My Body, and forthcoming book of travel misadventures

LETTERS TESTING FOR COVID

In the coronavirus news, there is hardly any reference to the number of tests being conducted or how (if) we are going to increase the testing capacity. In the absence of testing numbers, the daily report on the number of new cases is almost useless in understanding how the disease is spreading. Once we analyse how the numbers of those tested are growing, who is being tested (first responders vs foreign returnees, etc...), we can correlate and get a better picture of how many cases are increasing or decreasing. Isolation may flatten the curve or suppress the cases but without rigorous testing, the disease will likely rise after the lockdown ends. Even WHO has emphasised the need for testing. Moreover, the lockdown buys our system time to build hospitals and medical infrastructure capacity. I see the Telangana authorities working to build this capacity but do not see any consistent daily tracking of capacity numbers including beds, ventilators, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for professionals, induction of trained medical volunteers to handle the surge.

Sandeep Ganesh
Secunderabad

The massive damage inflicted by coronavirus forces us to make it imperative on us to be seriously and take precautions. It is essential to follow all instructions issued by the state and the Central government.

Sahinuddin
Hyderabad

The lockdown has brought human life to a standstill, leaving access to only bare minimum supplies. However, a considerable population in our country also has pets, be it fishes, dogs or birds, in their houses. Pet supplies, especially the feed, are getting exhausted. It would be wise to let pet food stores to open at least twice a week or 1500 both my perspective and peace of mind. I walked this familiar, fraught path through my violent first marriage, and then again after a miscarriage eight summers ago, when I first got on social media and in with the shady sort. This time when I self-isolate, it will be for a better tomorrow. I will get my hands in the soil and nose in flour, my fingers inkly with new writing and missives to the elderly far-flung (my parents amongst them), and my eyes set firmly on the beautiful four who are my world.

Because the earth has been upended and toxic patterns must be shaken.

Could thou and I with fate conspire To grasp this sorry scheme of things entire, Would not we-shatter it to bits — and then

Remould it nearer to the heart's desire?

All my love, Shreya

Shreya Sen-Handley is the author of the recently published Strange Stories, the award-winning Memoirs of My Body, and forthcoming book of travel misadventures

It will be a gilded cage. Yet the cage I'm most wary of is not our tree-smothered home, but my mind... This time when I self-isolate, it will be for a better tomorrow.

Railway demands passed

NEW DELHI, MARCH 28 The Lok Sabha today passed the demands for grants in respect of the Railway budget for 1920-21 totalling Rs 17000 crores after rejecting all cut motions. Earlier replying to the debate, Minister G. L. Nanda said that the review of the railway finances had revealed that a gap of Rs 200 crores in the Union home resources expected to be generated by the railways in the next five years.

Ramala Kinnera
Hyderabad

For the first time in recent memory, across the country there was no "Jumma" prayer on Friday. What was most striking amid the depressing coronavirus news was the near-total acceptance of the idea of staying away from mosques. Having learnt some lessons from Shaheen Bagh and other anti-CAA sites, the government reportedly established contacts with the Muslim clergy and the heads of various sects through government intermediaries, retired and serving bureaucrats and eminent personalities to take all seats on board. So by the time PM Narendra Modi addressed the nation for the second time and the Union home ministry issued an exhaustive six-page advisory, the average muslimian had received fatwas and religious announcements to avoid Friday congregations on his/her smartphone via WhatsApp groups. The rest was smooth sailing.

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

Even before he became CM, Shivraj visited Nath's 'sweet home'

What a windfall
Madhya Pradesh's capital Bhopal is witnessing a lot of action in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic and the change of regime. It was a tad unusual to see Shivraj Prasad Singh Chouhan calling on Kamal Nath's residence minutes after the Congress chief minister tendered his resignation and before Shivraj was to be formally named as the BJP's chief ministerial choice. Apparently, an Ujjain-based astrologer had insisted Shivraj pay a visit to the CM residence as the next few days were astrologically inauspicious. Mr Nath reportedly had his own mansion in a low-off house he lived in for 15 months before handing it over to his successor. A man of taste and class, Mr Nath is said to have invested a lot into renovating the official residence that overlooks the serene Indira lake (upper lake). Shivraj is going to be a beneficiary of the wood, artistry and jazzy items placed inside 6, Shyamla Hills.

Journalistic 'source'
Local journalists in Bhopal are a worried lot after one of them was found to be Covid-19 positive this daughter had returned from UK. The worthy journalist attended Mr Nath's farewell press conference and is said to have shook hands with about 100 people including key politicians, their political aides, and some key bureaucrats. Everyone has been advised self-quarantine.

Missing ministers
Senior ministers in the Narendra Modi government are keeping a low profile in the wake of the pandemic. There are a few ministers suffering from diabetes and hypertension who are wary of the coronavirus and are nowhere to be seen. These ministers have been exempted from daily duties and asked to remain cautious.

Scindia supporters anxious
The Rajya Sabha polls have been put off, causing disquiet and anxiety.



By WAQYANAWIS

Supporters of Jyotiraditya Scindia are counting the days till their leader is inducted into the Union cabinet. But without a Rajya Sabha seat, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is unlikely to take Mr Scindia in his council of ministers. Mr Scindia's true career was the near total acceptance of their leader moving to the 27, Safdarjung Road, Lutyens' bungalow where the former maharaja of Dewar was in the age of 13. Everything is under pause and anxiety levels are increasing by the day.

Remembering Satish Gujral
Artist, painter, muralist and architect Satish Gujral was an excellent human being. He was a member of the family of former Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral did not go to Paris or London to learn painting in 1950s. Gujral went to Mexico City to study with Diego Rivera and Siqueiros. He used to say that he did paint about Partition but painted his own suffering. He once told a newspaper that his earliest lessons in art came from words of Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Ghalib and Iqbal.

Fatwa against Jumma
For the first time in recent memory, across the country there was no "Jumma" prayer on Friday. What was most striking amid the depressing coronavirus news was the near-total acceptance of the idea of staying away from mosques. Having learnt some lessons from Shaheen Bagh and other anti-CAA sites, the government reportedly established contacts with the Muslim clergy and the heads of various sects through government intermediaries, retired and serving bureaucrats and eminent personalities to take all seats on board. So by the time PM Narendra Modi addressed the nation for the second time and the Union home ministry issued an exhaustive six-page advisory, the average muslimian had received fatwas and religious announcements to avoid Friday congregations on his/her smartphone via WhatsApp groups. The rest was smooth sailing.

SHORT TAKES

LENS ON KERALA YOUTH IN KABUL TERROR ATTACK

New Delhi, March 28: Central security agencies are looking into the role of Kerala youth - Mohammed Muhsin - who is believed to be one of the terrorists of ISIS that claimed responsibility of an attack on a gurdwara in Afghanistan killing 25 people, officials said on Saturday.

The youth hails from Kasaragod, Kerala, and had left India to the UAE in 2018 from where he is believed to have joined the ranks with the global terror organisation in Afghanistan, they said.

His identity was established after an Islamic state publication posted his picture identifying him with his kunya (Arabic name) Abu Khalid al-Hindi, the officials said.

They said he along with his family had returned to Kerala from Malaysia in 2017 and later had left for the UAE in search of work. The same year he returned and stayed with his family for sometime before leaving for the UAE in 2018, the officials said.

At least 25 worshippers were killed and eight others injured when a heavily armed suicide bomber stormed his way into a prominent gurdwara on Wednesday in the heart of Afghanistan's capital of Kabul, in one of the deadliest attacks on the minority Sikh community in the strife-torn country. The Islamic State terror group, which has targeted Sikhs before in Afghanistan, claimed responsibility for the attack.

The central agencies with the help of local police reached out to the family of the accused, who identified him to be Muhsin from the published picture, which had ISIS flag in the background, they said.

JAWAN KILLED IN ORDNANCE FACTORY BLAST

DC CORRESPONDENT BHOPAL, MARCH 28

An explosion in ordnance factory in Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh on Saturday led to killing of an Army jawan and left three others injured.

The mishap occurred when a gas cylinder exploded at the workshop of the gun carriage factory inside the unit. The unit, local city superintendent of police R. Devesh Pathak said.

An army jawan, identified as Kaluram (45) died, while three others suffered serious burn injuries following the accident, police said.

The ordnance factory in Jabalpur was established in 1904 by British in India. This is the oldest among the 40 odd defence manufacturing units being governed by the ordnance factory board.

The gun carriage factory functions in the 506 Army base camp in Jabalpur.

HIZB MILITANT SENT TO POLICE CUSTODY

DC CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR, MARCH 28

A special court in Delhi on Saturday sent Syed Naveed Mushtaq alias Naveed Babu, a top-ranking militant of Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, to police custody till April 4.

Naveed was among the two militants - the other being Asif Ahmad Rather - who were being held by Jammu and Kashmir police.

Asif Ahmad Rather - who were being held by Jammu and Kashmir police, Davinder Singh to move out of the Valley on January 11 this year. All the three were arrested after the police intercepted a private car they were travelling in on the Srinagar-Jammu highway.

The case initially probed by the J&K police was handed over to the National Investigation Agency by the Union home ministry. The NIA has made several more arrests since.

Special Judge Gurvinder Pal Singh sent Naveed to the custody of the Delhi police as an investigator told the court that he and the other co-accused were planning to execute attacks in the national capital and other parts of the country.

Davinder Singh who was posted as deputy superintendent of police at the Hijacking Squad at the Srinagar International Airport and the other two were reportedly on their way to Chandigarh.

The police had later arrested Irfan Shaif Mir, a lawyer, who it accused of being an overground worker of militants.

PM ANNOUNCES NEW FUND TO FIGHT COVID-19

New Delhi, March 28: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday announced the creation of an assistance and emergency situation relief fund where people can contribute and help in the government's fight against coronavirus.

The Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund will go a long way in creating a healthier India, he said on Twitter.

"People from all walks of life expressed their desire to donate to India's war against COVID-19," he said, adding the fund has been constituted respecting that spirit.

"It is my appeal to my fellow Indians, kindly contribute to the PM-CARES Fund. This fund will also cater to similar distressing situations, if they occur in the times ahead," he said.

A statement posted on his official website said while the prime minister is the chairman of the new public charitable trust, its members include defence minister (Rajnath Singh), home minister (Amit Shah) and the finance minister (Nirmala Sitharaman).

In India, like the rest of the world, the spread of coronavirus has become alarming and is posing severe health risks.



A police officer wearing a helmet depicting coronavirus requests commuters to stay at home during a nationwide lockdown to limit the spread of the virus in Chennai.

Kin not to get body of the deceased; Ernakulam collector to monitor burial proceedings

GILVESTER ASSARY IDC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MAR 28

The first Covid-19 death was reported in Kerala on Saturday after a 69-year-old patient succumbed to the infection at the government medical college, Ernakulam.

Health minister, K.K. Shailaja said, the patient Husain Sait suffered from serious health issues.

"The patient had a history of serious issues. After undergoing bypass heart surgery, the patient was under treatment for cardiac problems and had high blood pressure. His condition deteriorated further after contracting the coronavirus infection," she said.

The minister said the team of doctors tried its best to save the patient's life. Four more patients have had multiple issues are currently undergoing treatment in various hospitals across the state.

Shailaja said Sait's body will not be handed over to his relatives to prevent the spread of the disease.

"We have shown the video footage of the body to the relatives and relatives. The body will be buried deep, complying with the WHO protocol and guidelines," she added.

While the Ernakulam collector will monitor the burial proceedings, the administration has allowed only four persons, who will be in safety gear, to be present at that time in the burial grounds.

Sait reached Kerala on March 16 and was tested positive on March 22. All 49 persons who came along with him on the flight are under surveillance.

The close relative who received him at airport and the taxi driver who took him had also tested positive earlier.

One death and six more cases of Covid-19 were reported in Kerala on Saturday.

1.34 lakh persons are under surveillance. Two of the cases were from Thiruvananthapuram and one each from Kollam, Palakkad, Malappuram and Kasaragod.

As many as 1.34 lakh persons are under surveillance including 1.33 lakh in home quarantine and the rest in hospitals.

On Saturday, 149 persons were admitted to hospitals. Of the 6,067 samples sent for testing, 5,276 were found negative. The government has decided to postpone the forthcoming state entrance examinations in

DC CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 28

Two more persons committed suicide allegedly due to non availability of liquor in Kerala during the last 24 hours. One person ended his life in Kollam and another in Mayyazh in the same district. The dead were identified as Suresh, who is

also a cancer patient, and a former ISO employee, Biju Viswanathan of Mayyazh.

Both the persons were showing signs of disorientation and restlessness since the last two days.

In another incident, a youth ransacked his house in Rani in Pathanamthitta district after he went berserk on not finding liquor anywhere. He was

arrested and taken to a de-addiction centre. Similar violent incidents involving people, addicted to alcohol are being reported from various parts of the state after Kerala government ordered a complete ban on liquor outlets during the 21 day lockdown period. There are 285 outlets run by government-owned corporation and 36 run by

Consumers. The Excise department has started a toll free number 1445, for people facing health issues due to non-availability of liquor. The department is making arrangements to provide treatment and counselling to such persons at the Vimukthi de-addiction centre. A high level meeting of excise department will be held on Monday to

explore the possibility of providing liquor through any other channel to avert incidents of suicide, health emergencies and violence. Meanwhile, two persons were arrested for preventing the spread of liquor procured illegally from the government-run beverages corporation. A one-litre bottle of a particular brand which costs about ₹300 was being sold for ₹200.

Kerala records first corona death

No liquor, two more tipplers commit suicide

New positive cases in MP have no travel history

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY IDC BHOPAL, MARCH 28

Seven fresh cases of coronavirus positive cases being reported in the state in the last 12 hours.

Indore, considered the finance capital of MP, was the worst hit with total 19 confirmed cases being reported so far.

The state government has converted two private hospitals in Indore as hospital for Covid-19 patients. Shivpuri and Gwalior admitted in local government hospital in Indore died a couple of days ago.

While Jabalpur recorded total eight coronavirus positive cases, Bhopal, Shivpuri and Gwalior have recorded three cases, two cases and one case respectively so far.

In Chhattisgarh, the state government has declared to establish 100-bed-hospitals in each district in the state exclusively for Covid-19 patients.

Meanwhile, one more coronavirus positive case kits for health workers, oxygen cylinders and bio-medical equipment.

An industrial cluster is being set up in Kanjikode in Palakkad district for manufacturing these products. The assistance of Vikram Sarabhai Space Research Centre will be sought for the purpose.

The government has decided to launch a 'break corona' scheme to invite ideas from the people on tackling the infection.

Ideas and suggestions on manufacturing masks, supporting people under quarantine, creating jobs and coming out with income generating proposals during the crisis period can be submitted on breakcorona.gov.in. A panel of experts will examine the suggestions and take follow-up action.

No. of +ve cases surge in J&K

YUSUF JAMEEL IDC SRINAGAR, MARCH 28

The number of Covid-19 cases is rising steadily in Jammu and Kashmir, ringing alarm bells for the authorities and adding to the fears that more people might be at risk.

Officials said that 12 persons tested positive on Saturday, the highest number on a single day since the first case surfaced in Jammu three weeks ago.

With these, the number of patients rose to 33 in Jammu region and Kashmir Valley whereas it remains unchanged in Ladakh and, as was claimed by the officials, several among its 13 patients are recovering in a Leh hospital.

The surge in the number of Covid-19 cases prompted Lieutenant Governor Girish Chandra Murmu to ask officers, doctors and medical staff engaged in the fight against the deadly virus to double their efforts towards preventing its further spread.

He said that being at the threshold of the third stage of Covid-19, escalating the preparatory efforts for preventing the spread of the virus is required.

He asked the authorities concerned to increase isolation and quarantine facilities as well as beds in hospitals and for tracing the contacts of suspected cases so that testing could be done as a precautionary measure.

All those who tested positive on Saturday had had a travel history abroad or various parts of the country or had come in contact with such returnees particularly a 65-year-old man from the Valley's north-western town of Sopore who had contracted the deadly virus while attending the public outreach programme of Tablighi Jamaat that was also joined by people from Indonesia and Malaysia in New Delhi.

He died in a Srinagar hospital on Thursday.

WOMAN DELIVERS IN AMBULANCE

Kasaragod, March 28:

A pregnant woman in labour gave birth in an ambulance after the Karnataka police allegedly refused to allow the ambulance carrying her to cross the border road to Talapady, saying no vehicle, including ambulances from Kerala, could be permitted to their state, the drivers decided to take her to the general hospital here, but she went into labour and delivered in the vehicle.

QUESTIONS RAISED ON COMMUNITY TRANSMISSION

From Page 1

Questions are being raised on community transmission as 112 patients with respiratory illness and no history of foreign travel, 12 test positive for Covid.

Head of Epidemiology and Communicable Diseases at the ICMR, Naman R. Gangakhedkar said all patients with Severe Acute Respiratory Illness are being tested for the Covid infection. He, however, denied the possibility of community transmission at this stage.

"There are some sporadic instances where people are not revealing their exposure history but the numbers are not significant that we take it that the virus is spreading rapidly. Till the time we see a significant number of cases to indicate community transmission, let us not over-interpret things," Dr Gangakhedkar said.

111 government and 47 private hospitals have been tested in private sector. "More than five lakh people, who were notified from US have been tested in private sector. More than five lakh people, who were notified from US have been tested in private sector. More than five lakh people, who were notified from US have been tested in private sector."

Officials said government is working with states on health infrastructure preparedness.

7-MONTH-OLD, 1-YR-OLD TEST +VE FOR COVID

VRUSHALI PURANDARE IDC MUMBAI, MARCH 28

With fifteen new cases of Covid-19 in Maharashtra on Saturday, the total number of positive cases in the state rose to 167. The new patients included a seven-month-old boy, who tested positive from a close contact. Seven other cases were reported from neighbouring areas.

The civic health authorities stated that this is the first case of a baby developing Covid-19 through close contact.

Dr. Datta V. Shah, deputy director of the BMC health department, said, "A seven-month-old baby from Mumbai suburbs is recuperating at civic hospital in Hindu Nagar, Sakinaka. Balasabhai Thackeray Medical College and the one-year-old boy is at Kasturba hospital."

When asked if anyone is critical among the two children, Shah said, "The children are stable and recuperating."

She also confirmed that the 85-year-old male patient admitted in the privately-run Hinduja Hospital died last night on Thursday. He was a known case of diabetes mellitus and had a peripheral vascular disease with no history of travel. He was in contact with a 58-year-old man who had travelled to the United Kingdom. The patient had tested positive on March 26.

Maharashtra has the maximum number of confirmed coronavirus cases in India followed by Kerala at 165.

District officials said that people are seriously following the lockdown imposed in the country by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. However, migrant workers are finding it difficult to return to their homes from the absence of public or private transport, posing a risk to people from their states who will expose themselves and others to risk.

SHORT TAKES

VENEZUELAN ARMY CHIEFS BACK MADURO

Caracas, March 28: Venezuela's armed forces reaffirmed their support Friday for President Nicolas Maduro a day after the US Justice Department charged him with "narco-terrorism" and offered a \$15 million reward for his capture.

In his statement, Ceballos said the army categorically rejected "the extravagant and extremist accusations" against Maduro. The socialist president has increasingly relied on the backing of the powerful armed forces since succeeding his late mentor Hugo Chavez in 2013.

Maduro on Thursday slammed the "spurious, false" accusations, and said they were part of a conspiracy organized by the United States and Colombia to force him out of power. The Trump administration has stepped up pressure on Maduro with sanctions targeting his inner circle.

LOCAL ELECTIONS GOES AHEAD IN QUEENSLAND

Sydney, March 28: People in the Australian state of Queensland were urged to vote in local elections on Saturday or face a fine of \$80, as polls went ahead despite concerns people were encouraged to stay home to stem the spread of the coronavirus.

Many of the three million eligible voters had cast their ballot early or remotely by post or telephone. However long queues were reported outside some booths on Saturday due to safety measures limiting the number of people allowed inside at a time.

CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER LOWERY DIES AT 98

Atlanta, March 28: The Rev. Joseph E. Lowery, a veteran civil rights leader who helped the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. found the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and fought against racial discrimination, has died, a family statement said. He was 98.

Lowery, considered the dean of civil rights veterans, lived to celebrate a November 2008 milestone that few of his movement colleagues thought they would ever witness — the election of an African American president.

Taiwan invites US reporters

These are 13 journalists who were expelled from Beijing earlier this month

Taipei, March 28: American journalists expelled by China are welcomed to set up shop in Taipei, Taiwan's Foreign Minister Joseph Wu said Saturday, as the democratic island buns its credentials as a regional free speech haven.

Beijing ordered the expulsion of 13 journalists from the New York Times, Washington Post and Wall Street Journal earlier this month as part of a jangling spat over media freedoms with the United States.

The move marked the biggest crackdown on the foreign press in China in recent decades. It rattled nerves in Hong Kong because Beijing's order said the expelled reporters would not be allowed to work there, despite the semi-autonomous city supposedly controlling its own immigration decisions.

On Saturday, Wu took to Twitter to say the journalists would be warmly received on the other side of the Taiwan Strait. "I'd like to welcome you to be stationed in Taiwan — a country that is a beacon of 'freedom and democracy,'" Wu wrote. "You'll find people here greeting you with open arms & lots of genuine smiles," he added.



Wall Street Journal reporters Julie Wernau (L), Stu Woo (C) and Stephanie Yang walk through Beijing Capital Airport before departing on Saturday.

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Once a brutal autocracy, Taiwan has emerged as one of Asia's freest societies in the last three decades. It regularly tops media freedom tables for the region and last year became the first place in Asia to legislate same sex marriage. China's commu-

THE MOVE marked the biggest crackdown on the foreign press in China in recent decades.

nist leadership claims Taiwan as part of its territory and has vowed to seize the self-ruled island, by force if necessary. Beijing loathes Taiwan's current government because it refuses to accept the idea that the island is part of a "one China".

But the pressure campaign has won China few friends among the Taiwanese, who voted Tsai back into office in January with a landslide. A number of media organisations and rights groups that are banned from China have opened offices in Taipei in recent years.

officer let off: UN flays Lanka

Colombo, March 28: The UN human rights chief has condemned the pardoning and release of a former Sri Lankan army officer sentenced to death for killing eight Tamil civilians including four children, during the island's bloody ethnic war in 2000.

Sri Lanka's President Gotabaya Rajapaksa on Thursday pardoned former army sergeant Sunil Ratnayake who was sentenced in 2015 for the murder of eight Tamil civilians, including a five-year-old child, after more than a decade long trial.

Five defendants were brought to trial but only Ratnayake was convicted. The conviction was confirmed by the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka in March 2019.

This was one of the rare human rights cases from the decades long conflict that had ever reached conviction. Condemning the pardoning, Rupert Colville, the spokesperson for the UNHCHR said the High Commissioner is troubled by reports that the convicted perpetrator of the Mirusuvil massacre has received a Presidential Pardon and was released from jail.

Four die aboard cruise ship off Panama

Panama City, March 28: Four passengers have died aboard a cruise ship now anchored off the coast of Panama and two people aboard the ship have tested positive for the coronavirus, the cruise line has said, with hundreds of passengers unsure how long they will remain at sea.

Holland America Line said in a post on its Facebook page that more than 130 people aboard the Zaandam had reported flu-like symptoms. "Holland America Line can confirm that four older guests have passed away on Zaandam," the statement said.

The ship, which had been freed from quarantine at ports and now is being denied passage through the Panama Canal, was receiving medical supplies and medical personnel from another Holland America ship, the Rotterdam, and the company planned to begin transferring healthy passengers to that ship.

"Priority for the first guests to transfer will be given to those on Zaandam with inside staterooms and who are over 70," the statement said. There are 1,243 remaining on board the Zaandam.

Late Friday, the Panama Maritime Authority said in a statement that 40 passengers not showing symptoms of the virus would be transferred to the Rotterdam.

The authority said the bodies of the virus victims would remain on the Zaandam until the liner arrives at its final destination. The Panama Maritime Authority said it regrets these deaths, as well as the complex situation of the passengers and crew of the Zaandam cruiser go through," the statement said.



The Zaandam cruise ship is anchored in the bay of Panama City. Several passengers have died aboard the cruise ship and two people aboard the ship have tested positive for the new Covid-19, the cruise line said, with hundreds of passengers unsure how long they will remain at sea.

Iran toll tops 2,500: Ministry South Korea reports 146 new cases of pandemic

Tehran, March 28: Iran announced Saturday that 139 more people had died from the novel coronavirus, raising the official death toll to 2,517 in one of the world's worst-affected countries.

Health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour told a news conference that 3,076 more cases had been confirmed in the past 24 hours, bringing the total number of infections to 35,408.

"The condition of 3,026 of those hospitalised is critical in one way or another," he said, adding that 11,679 patients have recovered and been discharged from hospital. Jahanpour said that 57 million Iranians had been screened for the virus.

He said the data received had been "significant" and had helped with early detection and intervention.

Iran has imposed strict new containment measures, after weeks of public appeals largely failed to deter hundreds of thousands taking to the roads to visit family for the Persian New Year holidays.

They include a ban on intercity travel by road with offenders via roads and fining and impounding violators' cars. The restrictions, which will remain in force at least until April 8, include a ban on all intercity travel by road.

Seoul, March 28: South Korea has reported 146 new cases of the coronavirus and five more deaths, bringing its total to 9,478 cases and 144 deaths. South Korea's Centres for Disease Control and Prevention said 4,811 people have been released from hospitals as of Saturday, marking the first time the number of recoveries exceeded the number of people remaining under treatment since its first Covid-19 case on January 21.

The KCDC says 71 of the new cases came from the worst-hit city of Daegu, which has struggled to stem transmissions in hospitals, nursing homes and other live-in institutions.

BRUNEI SAYS a 64-year-old citizen has become the tiny oil-rich kingdom's first death from the new coronavirus. The health ministry said in a statement on Saturday that the man started showing symptoms four days after he returned March 4 from a trip to Kuala Lumpur and Cambodia.

Infections in the populous Seoul metropolitan area have reached 874 following a steady rise over the past two weeks that was mainly linked to passengers arriving from Europe and the United States.

Similar quarantines had been set up in places for passengers coming from Europe. South Korean Prime Minister Chung Se-kyun on Saturday called for Seoul and other local governments to strengthen their monitoring on South Koreans who returned from overseas after some of them triggered public anger by breaking quarantine and travelling to other regions before testing positive.

VIRUS CASES IN PAKISTAN RISE TO OVER 1,400

Islamabad, March 28: The coronavirus cases in Pakistan on Saturday reached 1,408, including 11 deaths, with the Punjab province emerging as the new epicentre of the deadly viral infection in the country.

Most of the infected people had returned from Iran, where the confirmed cases are over 30,000 with more than 2,300 deaths. Punjab recorded a total of 490 Covid-19 cases on Saturday up from 415 cases on Friday.

The number surpassed the state's tally of 457 cases in Sindh province, reported Pakistan's first virus case. Of the 490 cases in Punjab, the highest number of 207 were reported from Dera Ghazi Khan district. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 108 cases, Gilgit-Baltistan 87 cases, while it was 39 in Islamabad and 2 in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, the ministry said.

The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Lahore has sent a questionnaire to the PML-N supreme leader in the long case involving Jang Group's Editor-in-Chief Mir Shakilur Khan for 12 months but the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government later did not allow extension to his stay and declared him an 'absconder'.

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"In principle, we're sure that dogs could detect Covid-19. We are not sure how we can safely catch the odour of the virus from people as present it to the dogs," said Dr Claire Guest, CEO and Co-Founder of Medical Detection Dogs (MDD). "The aim is that dogs will be able to screen anyone, including those allowing staff to work from home. But bars, cafes and shops remain steadfastly open, without any self-distancing protocol advice for their customers. Ivan, an employee of a new technology company, has been working from home for the past three weeks."



PAK ANTI-GRAFT BODY SUMMONS NAWAZ SHARIF

Lahore, March 28: Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, who is set to undergo a heart procedure next week in London, has been summoned by Pakistan's anti-graft body to appear before it on March 31 for allegedly misusing his power in a land case when he was chief minister of Punjab province in 1996. Sharif, 70, has been in London since November 2017 for his treatment. The higher court had allowed him to travel abroad for four months but the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government later did not allow extension to his stay and declared him an 'absconder'.

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UK TRAINING DOGS TO SNIFF OUT VIRUS

London, March 28: A UK charity said it is working in partnership with scientists to explore how dogs can be trained to sniff out Covid-19 and join the fight against the coronavirus pandemic. Medical Detection Dogs said it is bringing together a team involving the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) and the University of Birmingham, which recently collaborated to successfully prove that dogs can be trained to detect malaria.

"In principle, we're sure that dogs could detect Covid-19. We are not sure how we can safely catch the odour of the virus from people as present it to the dogs," said Dr Claire Guest, CEO and Co-Founder of Medical Detection Dogs (MDD). "The aim is that dogs will be able to screen anyone, including those allowing staff to work from home. But bars, cafes and shops remain steadfastly open, without any self-distancing protocol advice for their customers. Ivan, an employee of a new technology company, has been working from home for the past three weeks."

FEAR NOTHING

Restaurants continue to serve food, and country's football league plays on

Belarus ploughs lone furrow over contagion

Minsk, March 28: As the rest of Europe shuts up shop to combat the new coronavirus, Belarus remains resolutely open for business. Restaurants in the former Soviet Republic continue to serve food, and the country's football league plays on. Despite being at the forefront of a European grappling with the deadly Covid-19, life goes on here more or less as normal.

The Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko has dismissed the global health crisis as "a malicious" and, refuses to follow the example of much of the globe by imposing a lockdown. With less than 100 positive cases and no deaths in Belarus, Lukashenko this week suggested "there shouldn't be any panic" over the virus.

He encouraged his citizens to work on the land. "There, the tractor will heal everyone. The fields will be clean," he suggested the farmer-talking-for-merch collective farm director who assumed power in 1994. Vodka and saunas also figure on his list of miracle cures. And so, in stark contrast to leaders elsewhere on the European continent, the Belarus championship

infected twice a day. As a result, a rare spotlight has been shone on the humble "Ysyshaya Liga", the Belarus first division. Russian public television channel Match TV has bought the rights to screen its matches. And former Belarus star Alexander Hleb suggested in the German press that it could be lit up by the arrivals of Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo. "We've taken all the measures recommended by the Sports Ministry. All those who are in contact with fans...are supplied with gloves," Belarus football federation spokesman

Aleksandr Aleinik said. "Crowds are well down though, by half last week compared to the week before," enabling fans to distance themselves in the stands" said Aleinik. Since Tuesday however, there has been a shift in tone from the top. During last week's meeting with the Chinese ambassador Lukashenko asserted that his country was "controlling the situation" and that he was in contact with 25,000 people. But they stick to the line that a general lockdown is

not the solution. Minsk, the capital, has become quieter over the past few weeks as people are encouraged to stay indoors, pupils are authorised not to attend school. During rush hour trains on the metro underground are not as full as usual, numerous companies are allowing staff to work from home. But bars, cafes and shops remain steadfastly open, without any self-distancing protocol advice for their customers. Ivan, an employee of a new technology company, has been working from home for the past three weeks.



Alexander Lukashenko



SHORT TAKES

Golfer Love's home in flames

Washington: Two-time US Ryder Cup captain and 1997 PGA Championship winner Davis Love's home was destroyed by fire on Friday but there were no injuries in the early morning blaze. The 55-year-old resident of St. Simons Island, Georgia...

Probe PSL media rights: Miandad

Karachi: Batting great Javed Miandad has called for an independent high-level inquiry to investigate how a media rights partner of the Pakistan Cricket Board could award broadcasting rights of five PSL matches to a UK-based betting company.

Crown Multan as Sultans: Mushtaq

Karachi: Former Pakistan spinner Mushtaq Ahmed says table-toppers Multan Sultans should be declared winners of the suspended Pakistan Super League (PSL) since hosting knockout matches later will affect the new season.

SA CRICKETER DANE TO PLAY FOR USA TEAM

Johannesburg: In an unusual move, South Africa off-spinner Dane Piedt is giving up his career in the ICC elite member nation and will move to the USA, with dreams of guiding the associate into a World Cup one day.

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TIME OVER!

No matches, big losses trigger money crisis

Denver, March 28: The postponement of the Tokyo Games has catapulted the sports organizations that make up the backbone of the U.S. Olympic team into crisis. At least one has already started layoffs and others are desperate to stay solvent.



Russia's high jumper Andrei Silnov, who is charged with doping based on evidence from the bombshell McLaren report, in action in this file photo.

Doping taint on Russian champs

Monaco, March 28: Two Olympic gold medalists were among four Russian track and field athletes charged with doping offenses. Andrei Silnov, the 2008 Olympic high jumper, and Natalya Antyukh, the winner of 400 metre hurdles in 2012, are facing doping charges for using a prohibited substance or method.

Navin Chikara has been given a back dated four-year ban, starting July 27, 2018, for using a prohibited substance.

New Delhi, March 28: The integrity unit of the global athletics body has suspended Indian shot putter Navin Chikara for four years for failing an out-of-competition dope test in 2018.

New dates might be bitter: Coe

Paris, March 28: World Athletics president Sebastian Coe admitted that settling on a new date for the Tokyo Olympics in 2021 will not satisfy everybody.

All sports have made it pretty clear they have particular challenges at particular times of the year. We are probably not going to reach a solution that meets with the approval of every sport.

SEBASTIAN COE president of World Athletics

However, there is no definite date yet for the rescheduled Games with IOC chief Thomas Bach saying Tuesday the Olympics "must be rescheduled to a date beyond 2020 but not later than summer 2021".

From football field to pharmacy

Coruna (Spain), March 28: Journeyman footballer Toni Dovale put his football boots to one side and slipped into a pharmacist's white coat in the front-line struggle against coronavirus in Spain.



Thailand football league club Navy FC player Toni Dovale poses with a ball at his family's pharmacy where he is working at the moment in Coruna, north-western Spain.

of sport in limbo the footballer realised the time was ripe to use his studies to help his homeland. "I was playing in Asia when, pharmacy is different from football, but in Spain long enough to work," he says.

Travel restrictions

BCCI pitches in with ₹51 crore

New Delhi, March 28: India's richest sporting body BCCI on Saturday pledged a donation of ₹51 crore to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund in the country's fight against Covid-19 pandemic.

RAINIA PLEDGES ₹2 LAKH FOR PANDEMIC BATTLE

Former India batsman Suresh Rainia on Saturday donated ₹2 lakh to the country's fight against Covid-19 pandemic and urged others also to contribute in these times of health crisis.

CHAMPS MOHUN BAGAN CONTRIBUTE ₹20 LAKH

Designated I-League champions Mohun Bagan have announced a donation of ₹20 lakh in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

AUSSIE FOOTBALLER AS CORONA POSITIVE

Sydney, March 28: An A-League footballer has become the first Australian professional footballer to test positive for the new coronavirus.

Break from sport is good, says Ravi

New Delhi, March 28: Sport coming to a standstill owing to the Covid-19 pandemic is a "welcome relief" for India cricketers, feels head coach Ravi Shastri, who has spent barely 10-11 days at home since leaving for the World Cup last May.

NEW ZEALAND TOUR, YOU COULD SEE SOME CRACKS COMING UP WHEN IT CAME TO MENTAL FATIGUE, PHYSICAL FITNESS AND INJURIES.

As with other sports across the world, cricket has also been affected with all international and domestic fixtures being called off due to the outbreak of the novel coronavirus. "This rest cannot be a bad thing because towards the end of the New Zealand tour, you could see some cracks coming up when it came to mental fatigue, physical fitness and injuries," Shastri said.



(This rest) cannot be a bad thing because towards the end of the New Zealand tour, you could see some cracks coming up when it came to mental fatigue, physical fitness and injuries.

— RAVI SHASTRI Indian men's cricket team coach