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WEB EXCLUSIVE

**ALCOHOL WITHDRAWAL ISSUES COULD BECOME A HEADACHE FOR GOVERNMENT**

Amid the novel coronavirus crisis and unprecedented nation-wide lockdown, mental healthcare professionals in Telangana are staring at an exigency worse than what they have experienced a decade and a half ago.

ENTERTAINMENT



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VIDEO



**ISOLATION COACH PROTOTYPE**  
A walkthrough of the isolation coach readied by the Railways

**EXPRESS AUDIO**

**How the tech industry has been hit by the coronavirus pandemic**

NEW EPISODE EVERYDAY

We detail how there will be a cascading effect in the tech industry and how our relationship with technology has changed during the pandemic.

FROM PAGE ONE

A prescription

immunity. This means that as long as the disease is not fully eliminated in the next three weeks (very unlikely), the disease will start to spread at an accelerating rate as soon as the curfew is lifted. That does not mean that the curfew was useless — for one, it probably bought us some time to put a plan in place and limit the number of infections in the next few weeks — but the problem will be there with us in 21 days.

We, therefore, need to be prepared for the disease to explode in pockets all over the country, including some of the more remote rural areas, over the next many months. Moreover, some of these hotspots will be exactly where our system of healthcare is the weakest. On average, we have about 1/8 as many hospital beds per capita as China, which is frightening in itself, but even those are concentrated in the more prosperous areas.

"Doctors" with no medical qualification are the dominant source of day-to-day healthcare in much of India, but at least with the more familiar ailments they sometimes know the standard protocols. Patients with COVID-19 will come to them for diagnosis and treatment, neither of which they are equipped to deal with. They will go to the hospitals, if at all, too late, having spread the disease along the way.

What can we do to limit the extent of preventable tragedy?

First, try to make sure that every household has at least one person who knows the key symptoms of the disease. Second, spread the awareness that some people will get infected despite their best efforts; we want to avoid ostracism and concealment. Honest reporting is key. Third, offer multiple ways to report; a hotline, the ANM, the Asha, etc.

Fourth, consider training the rural health practitioners (including the unqualified) in the detection of those symptoms and reporting them to the relevant authorities. Fifth, make sure that those reports are collated quickly so that we know where the new hotspots might be and more generally, focus on coordination of the evidence from across the country so that broad trends can be identified.

Sixth, in each state create a large mobile team of health professionals, doctors and nurses, with testing kits and, ideally, ventilators and other equipment. The idea is a part of this team will be quickly deployed wherever the number of reports seems to be growing fast (including in nearby areas in other states). If the current lockdown is successful, the most plausible scenario is that there will still be many mini upsurges at different points of time (as against a single catastrophic burst, which would be much worse) and this allows the possibility of using the same team in multiple locations.

Seventh, to build this team and make sure it has access to the necessary equipment, require all health professionals (and not just those who work for the government) to be available for call up where needed and give the teams the right to make use of all hospitals, private and public, as needed.

Eighth, be much, much bolder with the social transfers schemes. Without that, the demand crisis will snowball into an economic avalanche, and people will have no choice but to defy orders. What the government is offering is now a small potatoes — at most couple of thousands for a population that is used to spending that much every few days. If the point is to stop them from going out to find work and thereby spreading the disease, the amounts probably need to be much larger.

Moreover, eligibility for the schemes is confusing (who is a farmer?) and tied to eligibility for the "business as usual" schemes

known to have many gaping holes. It is better to go for universal coverage and find ways to discourage those who really don't need it (publish lists of beneficiaries so everyone knows who they were?) And now is clearly the time to deploy the JAM (Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, Mobile) infrastructure that the government takes pride in: the transfers should be sent directly to bank accounts, with an accompanying electronic message to the recipients.

Finally, be prepared to continue this "war effort" until the vaccine comes on line. Then vaccinate as many people as possible. And start to upgrade the healthcare system — let us be better prepared for the next time.

(Banerjee and Duflo are professors in the Department of Economics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology)

Leaving Delhi

As per initial information, he had a long-standing ailment as well. While we cannot confirm without facts whether he sustained any injuries during travel, it is possible that the exhaustion and fatigue added to the existing condition. He was travelling with friends, who informed us. It is very unfortunate," said Saurabh Dixit, Circle Officer, Hariparvat.

According to officials, Ranveer worked as a delivery staffer in Tughlakabad and hailed from Morena district in Madhya Pradesh. Officials believe he was travelling towards the MP border through the Delhi-Mathura highway.

What started as a trickle two days ago has turned into a flood of people desperate to return to their villages in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand amid the coronavirus lockdown, which has suddenly left lakhs with no means of income or food. And despite the central and state governments rolling out measures aimed at migrant workers, most say they don't have faith they will survive if they stay back in the city, and would rather be home with their families.

And so, Lal Kuan has been swamped by labourers who, after having walked for over a day, are desperate for a bus to take them closer home to their villages in Uttar Pradesh.

On Saturday, the UP State Road Transport Corporation said they are going to provide 200 buses every day, 8 am onward, to help labourers stuck at Noida and Ghaziabad.

Vinay Kumar's final destination is Hardoi. The 22-year-old waits for a bus along with his daughter, dressed in a bright blue dress, which he recently bought for her as a birthday gift. After his clock making unit shut shop in Noida, he is left with Rs 150. "There are no free buses. How will I reach my village?" Kumar asks.

This question is on the mind of every labourer and daily wageer — they barely have enough for the next meal.

Buses charge between Rs 400 and Rs 1,000. Those willing to sit on the roof pay less, while others have to bargain. Fights break out often between conductors and labourers who can't afford the fare. Authorities said they will ply buses for free later in the evening.

Daya Ram, 43, worked at a printing shop and earned Rs 800 before the lockdown was announced. Now all he has are two bananas wrapped in polythene. Too exhausted to look for a bus after walking from Mayur Vihar to Ghaziabad, he begs for money at Lal Kuan. "Please, sau rupye (Rs 100)," he asks passersby.

Most labourers have just a packet of clothes they carry along with discarded cement packets filled with bananas. A few have blankets too. Almost none wear a mask, even as policemen overseeing the exodus occasionally reprimand them for now following "social distancing".

Painter Ramjeet (47), who

Moving migrant crisis deepens

from Gwalior to Jhansi. And Uttarakhand said it was also organising transport for such workers from the state.

But the governments of Bihar and Chhattisgarh warned that such a move could lead to the spread of infection.

"Sending migrants by buses is a failure of the lockdown. Setting up relief camps at local levels is a much better option. If COVID-19 spreads, it would be difficult to tackle it. The advisable thing is for people to stay where they are," Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar said.

"As for migrant labourers stuck here, we have asked district authorities to ensure food and shelter for them," said a senior official in Chhattisgarh.

In other measures, Uttarakhand sanctioned Rs 50 lakh from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund for food and accommodation for workers from the state who are stranded in Delhi.

And, following similar re-

quests two days ago from the chief ministers of West Bengal and Odisha, the Madhya Pradesh government wrote to all chief ministers, requesting them to provide food and shelter to migrants from the state.

At the Centre, Union Home Minister Amit Shah reviewed the situation and said that "as per the directions of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the government has committed all support to migrant workers during the lockdown period".

Taking to Twitter, Union Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari wrote: "I have advised Chairman NHAI and Highway Concessioners/Toll Operators to consider providing food, water or any kind of support to migrant workers/citizens who are trying to reach to their respective native places."

In a letter, Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla asked all states "to immediately set up relief camps for migrant workers/pilgrims, etc., who are returning to their domicile states

or trying to do so during this lockdown period".

"States have been also advised to set up relief camps along the highways...including setting up of tented accommodation to ensure that these persons will stay in the relief camps till the lockdown orders are in place. The shelters are to be organised, keeping in view various precautions, including social distancing, with adequate medical check-up drives..." the Ministry said.

The Ministry also modified its 2015 notification on relief measures in times of disasters to add "homeless people, including migrant labourers, stranded due to lockdown measures".

In Lucknow, a government spokesperson said Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has organised transportation for people returning to UP and Bihar. A UP road transport corporation directive said the task of ferrying people from Noida and Ghaziabad on the Delhi

border to various districts in the state will continue till Sunday.

"The CM stayed awake all night and arranged 1,000 buses for people to reach their destinations from Noida, Ghaziabad, Bulandshahr, Aligarh and Hapur... At night, transportation officials, drivers and conductors were called from home," the spokesperson said in a statement.

"Buses were arranged for people from Charbagh (railway station) so that they can get to their destinations. The DGP and Lucknow Commissioner also made arrangements to feed people at Charbagh," the statement said.

Officials said people were ferried in buses from Lucknow to Kanpur, Ballia, Varanasi, Gorakhpur, Azamgarh, Faizabad, Basti, Pratapgarh, Sultanpur, Amethi, Rae Bareilly, Gonda, Etawah, Bahraich, Shravasti and other districts.

Public health vs private information

counties to determine whether to disclose hometowns.

An overarching law — the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) — provides certain patient privacy protections, but states also have their own specific laws. In the US, during public health emergencies, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has the power to waive certain non-compliance penalties, which was done on March 15 amidst the corona outbreak. But still, disclosing patient names is a violation of the law.

In February, HHS reminded stakeholders to limit the disclosure to the "minimum necessary" amount and to seek patient consent before disclosing their cases to the media and non-care entities.

For contact tracing and ensuring social isolation, states are relying upon informing communities. Karnataka, for example, has published a district-wise list of those who are home-quarantined with travel details and exact addresses on the Department of Health and Family Planning's website. Many states including Delhi, Gujarat, and Karnataka have instructed local authorities to label houses where individuals are quarantined.

Said Bhavin Solanki, medical officer at Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC): "We are putting stickers outside the homes of those home quarantined. This way, the neighbours remain aware." AMC is also informing secretaries and chairpersons of such housing societies about those under quarantine and citizens are encouraged to call authorities on a toll-free number to inform them if anyone is found violating the quarantine.

However, West Bengal, which has put 26,914 peoples under home surveillance and 385 people in isolation, has not disclosed the identities of individuals or hospitals in which they are kept.

Ajay Chakraborty, Director of Health Services, West Bengal, said: "This is our social duty to keep secret those identities. Otherwise, this will create more panic. We are not disclosing the identity even to our family and friends."

"Disclosures that are needed for contact tracing need to be restricted to public officials who are entrusted with enforcing the quarantine. Personal details must be masked when disclosed in public," he said.

The Epidemic Act, under Section 4, exempts filing suits or legal proceedings against any action taken "for anything done or in good faith intended to be done under this Act".

WHO IS DOING WHAT

**WEST BENGAL, UTTARAKHAND:** Confidentiality of COVID-19 patients and those in home quarantine.

**GUJARAT, TAMIL NADU:** Stickers outside homes with names of those quarantined there.

**ODISHA:** Curbs on journalists from reporting names or identities of those tested positive.

**RAJASTHAN:** Names of three individuals who tested positive including an Italian national and two died in Bhilwara were disclosed but officials have avoided giving out

any other names. In Bhilwara, where hundreds are under quarantine, posters are out with details of the family, with a caution to not visit the home.

**UTTAR PRADESH:** In some districts including Prayagraj and Moradabad, notices outside the homes of those who have travelled abroad in the last 30 days urging local residents to avoid contact.

**PUNJAB AND KARNATAKA:** Notices outside houses of those quarantined, start and end date of quarantine period. Also on website.

Management Act, under Section 73 also exempts "action taken in good faith" from all legal proceedings and under Section 74 gives legal immunity to government servants.

"Officers and employees of the Central Government, National Authority, National Executive Committee, State Government, State Authority, State Executive Committee or District Authority shall be immune from legal process in regard to any warning in respect of any impending disaster communicated or disseminated by them in their official capacity or any action taken or direction issued by them in pursuance of such communication or dissemination," the provision states.

While these two laws exempt legal action, any action that violates fundamental rights must be sanctioned by legislation enacted by Parliament.

"If a data protection law like the Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019 was in force at this point in India, these activities could have been examined in a different light," said Akriti Gaur, Senior Resident Fellow at the Vidhi Centre for Law and Policy.

In the Data Protection Bill, Clause 12 deals with processing personal data which is necessary for "prompt action", i.e. processing personal data without the consent of the data principal in an emergency. Under the Bill, a data fiduciary (the government) can process personal data of individuals to respond to a medical emergency where the life of a data principal is at risk. It can also be processed for providing medical treatment or other health services to a data principal in the face of an "epidemic, outbreak of diseases or any other threat to public health".

"The COVID-19 pandemic can fall under these categories. However, publishing names of individuals, along with their addresses on social media or in front of their houses is not necessary to 'provide a health service' or 'medical treatment'. There are lesser privacy-invasive measures to ensure the health and safety of the community at large. This also puts families at risk of physical or emotional distress," Gaur said.

If challenged in court, the government's actions will have to pass the "proportionality test" prescribed by the Supreme Court in the landmark 2017 verdict that recognised the fundamental right to privacy. In the three-fold test, apart from whether the action was taken under a law duly passed by Parliament, the government will have to show it had a "legitimate state interest" to violate the right to privacy and it had considered all less intrusive measures before violating the right.

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there will be no buses for Bihar.

A bus bound for Gorakhpur arrives at 2:20 pm. The driver, Baldev Singh, washes his hands with a bar of soap, which he shares with the conductor. "It will take us 22 hours to reach, and there is no stop in between. Of course, the passengers and I will be starving. But we are doing this for our country," he says.

As the sun set, a large mass of people gathered at the Anand Vihar Interstate Bus Terminal, to the point that some feared a stampede could take place.

At least 100 buses — some belonging to DTC while others to the UP government — were parked outside the bus terminal. Only a handful, however, were ferrying passengers outside the state.

"I started walking at noon after I heard that UP government will provide buses. I live in Bhajanpura and my business has been hit over the past month. We kept looking for buses to bring us to Anand Vihar but there is nothing. I have my whole family, including women and children, with me," said Anil Kumar, who wants to go back to his village in Kannauj, UP.

"I have earned very little money over the past month and the landlord has asked us to pay rent in advance. What option do I have but to go back to my village?" he said. At 11 pm at Anand Vihar, DTC buses started to take passengers to Meerut, Lal Kuan in Ghaziabad, and Sahibabad, where police officers said UP government had made arrangements for more buses. The Noida stadium was turned into a shelter for the night and several people who could not find place in buses were asked to head there. The shelters at borders in Delhi are already full.

"We have no option. We are telling people to stay in Delhi. We have assured them that they will be taken care of but they have made up their mind that they want to go home," said a police constable on duty.

Speaking to The Indian Express, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, who met a few men walking home on Friday, said: "Thousands of people are walking and since morning, we have provided buses for them. Some are leaving because they have no food left but most are leaving because they want to be home with their families at a time like this. Initially, a rumour had spread that UP government had made arrangements for buses at the border and thousands of workers started walking there. As a result, people were gathering at the border where there was no facility. We spoke to the (Union) Home Secretary and arrangements for buses were finally made from both sides. Two district magistrate have been on duty all night, trying to convince people to stay and to tell them that we will take care of them, but many want to go home."

— WITH INPUTS FROM MALLICA JOSHI & AMIL BHATNAGAR

Fair warning

emphasising the seriousness of the coronavirus crisis. The same evening, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray scaled up the restrictions, asking all private establishments to completely shut down until March 31. Earlier, the state had suggested they cut down staff attendance to 50 per cent. This triggered a massive rush of migrant workers to stations since they felt they cannot afford to stay on in the city. On March 24, after Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a 21-day national lockdown in an address to the nation, Thackeray suggested he did not know this was coming. "Modiji made careful and serious statement to us. I was also shocked for a moment after hearing about 21 days lockdown," he said, addressing people of his state.

Although state CMs did not

know about the announcement in advance, and that the lockdown would last 21 days, they were not completely surprised either. By March 23, a day before the nationwide lockdown was to be effective, 30 states and Union territories had announced a full lockdown covering 548 districts. Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha had closed only certain areas. Sikkim and Mizoram were the only states yet to issue a lockdown order.

In Maharashtra, two special trains departed from the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminal station on March 21. The 01101 special train left CSMT station for Patna via Nashik, Manmad, Jabalpur, Prayagraj Cheoki and Mughalsarai. The 01141 special train left for Asansol via Manmad, Jabalpur, Prayagraj Cheoki and Mughalsarai.

Between March 20 and 22, three special trains full of migrant labourers left Pune for Bihar's Danapur station via Manmad, Jabalpur, Prayagraj Cheoki and Mughalsarai.

"After assessing the demand on the ground, we had to make special trains to send them to their destinations, to clear the rush," said a senior railway official who did not wish to be named. "There was no restriction on running special trains as there was no talk of lockdown. We were merely advocating users to avoid non-essential travel and cancelling low-occupancy trains," he said.

All this while, the Railway management, right up to the Railway Board, was aware that a "demand" for such travel was building up.

Initially, by March 21, when there was no talk of a nationwide shutdown of train services beyond the Janata Curfew, Central Railways and Western Railways planned to run some 15 special trains to take migrant labourers back home. However, that idea needed to be dropped post Sunday.

When these trains were being planned to be run and Railway authorities internally were informing each other, the Bihar-based East Central Railway alerted the state government that a huge number of people were coming from COVID-19-affected areas and the state needed to put a plan in place.

An official, who attended the meeting in which top Bihar bureaucrats were present, said the railway authorities informed the state government the need for a screening protocol for such a huge crowd. A school next to the Danapur station was then earmarked for screening. "Each passenger was taken straight to the school to screen temperature and take details. They were also stamped with 14 days of home quarantine," an official said.

A special train also ran from the Surat side when the country-wide lockdown of all train services was announced Sunday. An estimated 100 regular trains, that had started their runs before the Janata Curfew, were reaching their respective destinations including in Satragachi in West Bengal. The last such train terminated at 9.55 am on March 25. One such regular train was from Ernakulam to Patna which again brought in several hundreds of migrant labourers.

Officials told The Sunday Express there is no indication that train services will resume in view of such large swelling of migrant labourers. Instead, the instructions are to "take care" of them.

"We fed a large number of labourers in Shakurbasti in Delhi. We are reaching out to tell them not to panic and be where they are, and that whatever help they need in terms of food and all will be provided," Railway Protection Force Director General Arun Kumar told The Sunday Express.

— INPUTS FROM VISHWAS WAGHMODE IN MUMBAI



# Delhi is under Lockdown until 14 April to contain the spread of Covid-19

A large section of the underprivileged are suffering as a result of the lockdown. The government is taking several steps to ensure no one has to sleep hungry.

- 1 7.5 kg free ration is being provided to 71 lakh people.
- 2 ₹ 4,000 to ₹ 5,000 pension is being given to 8 lakh senior citizens, widows and the specially-abled.
- 3 ₹ 5,000 will be given to all registered construction workers.
- 4 Arrangements for distributing cooked food to people are being made at various locations.

DIP/Shabdarth/D/0362/19-20

## Come forward and join us in this effort

- 1 Ensure no one in your street or colony goes hungry.
- 2 If your domestic help is unable to report to work, do not cut their pay. If possible, offer them an advance.
- 3 If you have leased your property and your tenants are unable to pay rent immediately, give them one month relaxation so that they can pay the rent in installments.

This is our duty to society, a true act of patriotism.  
If we don't stand with each other in these times,  
then when will we?

We will defeat Corona together. Jai Hind!





## WALKING HOME: WHO THEY ARE, WHY THEY ARE LEAVING



**VIJAY KUMAR, 26**  
Family members: 8  
Profession: Labourer in Noida  
Earning: Rs 5,000 a month; Headed towards: Kanpur

**WHY HE LEFT:** "My landlord was asking for advance rent, but I had no money. We had to leave to survive."



**BRIJMOHAN SINGH, 35**  
Family members: 10  
Profession: Carpenter at a private company in Ghaziabad  
Earning: Rs 9,000 a month; Headed towards: Hardoi

**WHY HE LEFT:** "The company is shut. I used to get by at my house by promising the local grocery store owner that I will pay money later. Now he is refusing to extend credit."



**AMIT KUMAR, 29**  
Family members: 4, including a newborn daughter  
Profession: Ola cab driver  
Earning: Rs 15,000 a month; Headed towards: Gorakhpur

**WHY HE LEFT:** "I drove a vehicle on lease, paying Rs 1,000 a day to the owner. Plus, I just had a child. I don't want my daughter to get this disease."



**SATNAM KUMAR, 36**  
Family members: 4  
Profession: Worker at a cloth-making unit in Noida  
Earning: Rs 2,100 a month; Headed towards: Hardoi

**WHY HE LEFT:** "I have walked 10 km with my sons aged 9 and 6. They didn't understand why we were walking for hours, so I had to explain to them about the coronavirus."



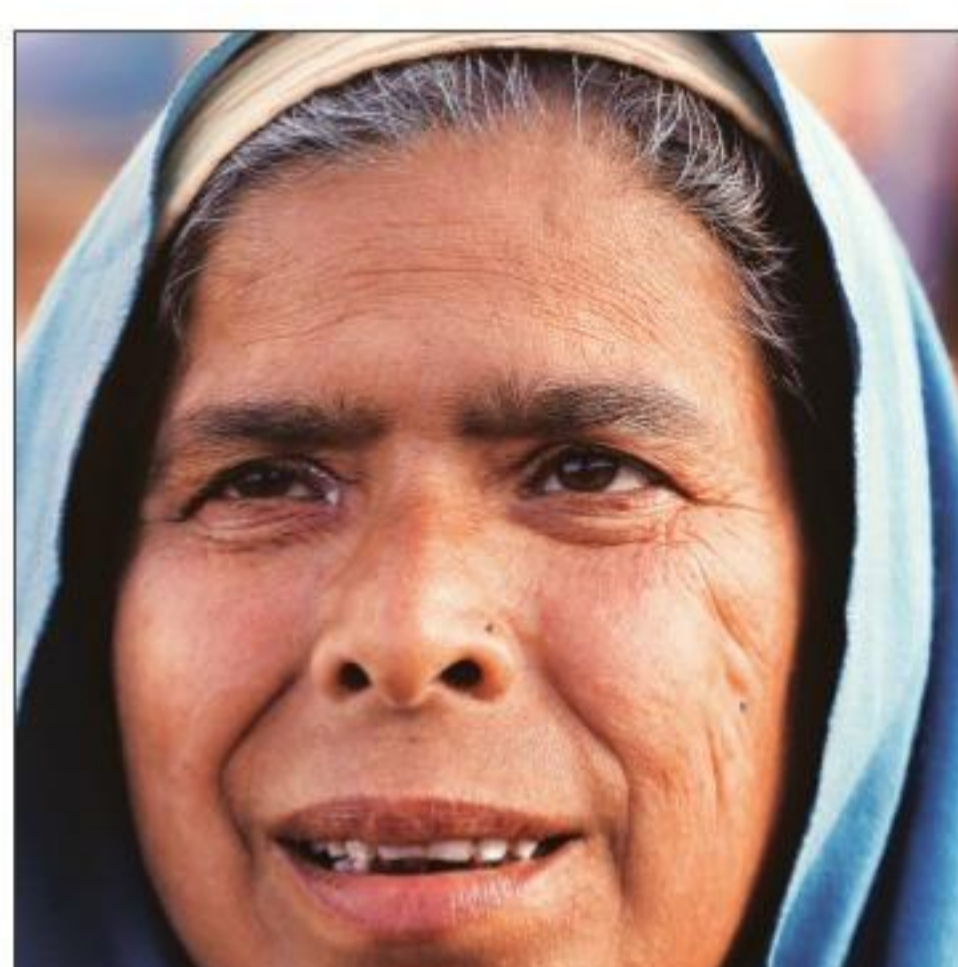
**BRIJPAL, 45**  
Family members: 3  
Profession: Worked at a toy-making factory in Greater Noida  
Earning: Rs 2,000 a month; Headed towards: Pilibhit

**WHY HE LEFT:** "The factory said they will close for three months. The manager has promised to pay me the salary next month in my bank account. It is my only hope. I trust him."



**RAJ KUMARI, 57**  
Family members: 3  
Profession: Daily wagger  
Earning: Rs 300 a day; Headed towards: Jhansi

**WHY SHE LEFT:** "I have got work for just two days over the past half month. I did not eat yesterday. Today, I survived on biscuits. The bus was crowded today, and I couldn't climb on the roof."



**SAYEEDA BANI, 40**  
Family members: Lives alone ever since her husband died  
Profession: Daily wagger, domestic help, thread cutter  
Earning: Varies; Headed towards: Sultanpuri

**WHY SHE LEFT:** "How will I pay rent? I'm going to my village, but I'm not sure anyone will accept me."



**HEERABAI, 55**  
Family members: 4  
Profession: Construction worker  
Earning: Rs 300 a day; Headed towards: Jhansi

**WHY SHE LEFT:** "I haven't had work for 10 days. I have lived long enough to see many things — but nothing like this."

REPORTING BY ANAND MOHAN J, PHOTOS BY AMIT MEHRA

## Five relief flights for Afghans from Delhi

AMIL BHATNAGAR  
NOIDA, MARCH 28

AS LABOURERS gather in large numbers at the Delhi-UP border to find a bus back home, a few kilometres away, hundreds of Afghan nationals wait anxiously for a mail confirming their tickets on a relief flight. Officials said the Embassy of Afghanistan has arranged for a limited number of flights to Kabul from Delhi to help them get home. With a majority of Afghan nationals living in India on medical visas, the lockdown has meant those here are running out of money.

"We have been told that there are some flights to Kabul in the next 10 days. There are limited seats on the flight, and the plane got full within hours. I will be flying with my family next week. I was here on medical visa. Given the circumstances, there are a lot of difficulties to get normal procedures done. It is better to wait at home," said Qayaz, who hails from Kabul.

Locals said the Afghan Embassy sent out information two days ago about the flights. The cost of tickets is being borne by their ministry, and the process is being carried out online on a first-come-first-serve basis.

"Kam Air is operating five relief flights for their nationals for evacuation. These are ferry flights. The dates on which they will operate are March 28 and 30, and April 1, 3 and 5. The flights have already been cleared," said a DGCA official.

The first bus arrived in Lajpat Nagar Saturday, and hundreds of Afghan nationals could be seen in the lanes. The Embassy has conveyed that a medical screening will take place in Kabul once they land. For those yet to find a place in the flights, there is still confusion on what the future holds.

## ARRANGEMENTS MADE TO FEED 4 LAKH, SAYS KEJRIWAL

## Tried hard to make people stay, many want to leave: CM

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

AS THE trickle of people walking to their villages turned into a wave on Saturday, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said his government had tried hard to make migrant workers stay back, and reassured people that every help would be extended to them.

"A lot of people are going back to their villages. We have tried very hard to make them stay. I have directed the MLAs to make appeals and made ample arrangements to make them stay back. We are making arrangements for food twice a day as well as a place for them to stay. Many have insisted that they want to go home. Many are not sure what the future holds," said the CM.

Since a nationwide lockdown was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday, thousands of men, women and children have started walking from where they live in Delhi and Haryana to their villages, mostly in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh.

No way to earn money, depleted rations and insecurity are the reasons most cited. On Friday, the Delhi government started handing out food packets to people across the city through centres set up in schools and night shelters. On Saturday, the government said it had built capacity to feed 4 lakh people every day.

For those bent on leaving, DTC buses were arranged on Saturday to ferry them to the Ghaziabad border, where UP government had made arrangements to take them further. "I didn't know the government was giving food and shelter. But even if I did, is it feasible to live in a shelter home with my family of five for three weeks?"



Migrant labourers on the National Highway 24 on Saturday. Amit Mehra

"I'd rather go home. There is dignity there, and we can all stay together," said 37-year-old Ram Niwas, who started walking from Rohini at 5 am and reached Ashram around noon. He has to go to Badaun in UP, over 250 km away.

Kejriwal, meanwhile, assured that everyone who chooses to stay back will be taken care of. Appealing them to stay where they are, he said, "If we leave like this, the danger of COVID-19 spreading rapidly increases. Stay where you are. I assure you that any problems you have, I will take care of them. We have made arrangements for stay as well as food. New shelters near the border are being set up in schools."

He said that the government had made arrangements to distribute food from 568 schools and 238 night shelters across the city

and that the capacity to feed 4 lakh people had been built. "A flying squad has also been appointed to find those who need food and deliver packets to them. There are some teething problems but they will be streamlined in a day or two," he said.

"We can see how it has progressed in other countries. These countries such as the US, Italy, France and Spain are developed countries. The situation is horrific there. I saw a doctor from a developed country talk about how they are having to take elderly people who are ill off ventilators to save the younger people. We have to learn from their experience and make sure we don't reach that stage," he said.

The Uttar Pradesh government, meanwhile, claimed: "Water and power connections of labourers living on Delhi were

snapped. They didn't get even food or milk." It also alleged DTC buses dropped off people at the Delhi border in the name of help.

"Announcements were made in Delhi and rumours were spread that there are buses at UP border waiting to drop people to their destinations," it claimed.

Delhi's Deputy CM Manish Sisodia hit back: "I am saddened that at the time of an epidemic, BJP leaders are indulging in such petty politics. Yogi Adityanath's government has alleged Arvind Kejriwal has snapped power and water connections and that is why people are leaving. This is the time to stand together and save the country, not the time for petty politics. No one from Delhi can say that Kejriwal has cut water and power. It does not feel right that your government is making these ridiculous statements."

## 'Don't leave city': Space for 600 people set up in Gurgaon

SAKSHI DAYAL  
GURGAON, MARCH 28

THE GURGAON district administration has set up four shelter homes, that can house almost 600 people, for workers from other states stranded in the city due to the lockdown.

According to officials, one shelter home capable of accommodating 350 people has been set up near IMT Manesar on the Delhi-Jaipur highway. Food will be provided to the occupants. "Since a lot of people work in IMT Manesar, the capacity of this shelter home is bigger than the others," said Deputy Commissioner Amit Khatri.

Officials said the other three are at the community centre on Gurgaon-Sohna road near Bhandi village (150 people), at

Bhim Nagar (40 people), and at Kadipur village (50 people).

"Mattresses, food and other provisions have been provided at all four shelters. I appeal to people from other states who reside in Gurgaon to come to the shelter homes and not leave the city. If the need is felt, we will increase the number of such shelters," said Khatri.

Meanwhile, no new cases of COVID-19 were recorded in Gurgaon Saturday, and the number of cases in the district remains at 10. According to officials, 342 samples have been sent for testing so far. Reports of 316 have been received, of which 306 tested negative. A total of 26 fresh samples were sent for testing Saturday.

In Faridabad, a 32-year-old resident of Sector 28 tested positive, taking the total cases to three. "He has no travel history. He

works for a German firm in Gurgaon but has not been in contact with anyone from outside; 33 of his contacts have been traced and quarantined," said officials.

Officials also said a patient in Faridabad, a 52-year-old woman who tested positive, a 29-year-old woman who had returned from Malaysia and Indonesia on February 22, as well as a couple from Nirvana Country, where the man had recently returned from London. The other two are a 22-year-old studying in London who had returned home on March 14, as well as her 16-year-old brother.

## 'Don't have savings... whenever I hear of free food, I rush there'

ASHNA BUTANI  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

PINKIASHRAWA from Jhansi used to work as a daily wage labourer in Najafgarh before the lockdown left her without a job and money. Asha, who sells jewellery and old clothes near Nizamuddin, too has been unable to make any money over the last week.

For Pinki, Asha and 2,000 other daily wage workers, the Indian Railways distributed free food at the New Delhi, Nizamuddin and Shakurbasti railway stations Saturday.

"My work came to a sudden halt a week ago. I live in Delhi with my husband and two young children, but we are unable to sustain our livelihood," said Pinki, as she accepted khichdi, packaged curd and bottled water from



At the railway station

Railway Protection Force officials at Nizamuddin station.

She said she also asked officials for help in reaching her hometown. "We are trying to go back to our parents' home in Jhansi. We have heard that if we walk around 100 km to UP, we will get a bus to Jhansi from there," said Pinki.

Asha added, "I do not have any savings. So whenever I hear

that food is being distributed at a particular spot, I rush there. I have two sons — one of them with me, while the other is with my husband in Maharashtra. Since I cannot go to Maharashtra, I am living on the streets here."

A N Jha, Senior Security Commissioner, Delhi Division, Indian Railways said that food is being prepared "in hygienic kitchens of IRCTC... All precautions of social distancing are being maintained during preparation and distribution of food."

At the New Delhi railway station, many said they could not get the food. Munna Saha, from Bihar, a shopkeeper near the station, said, "We really need food, but more than that we would be grateful if the government could arrange for us to get back home. There is no point staying in Delhi when we are not working."





Migrant workers boarding buses to return home on Saturday. Praveen Khanna

## OFFICIALS ON CORONAVIRUS ALERT

## Capital records nine new cases, highest single-day spike so far



## Crackdown on hoarders

**Gurgaon:** The district administration Saturday registered an FIR against a wholesaler in Sector 29 for allegedly hoarding food items under the Essential Commodities Act. At the wholesaler's godown in Sector 29, officials said they discovered two warehouses stocked with flour, rice, lentils, and mustard oil.

## Over 400 jail inmates released

**New Delhi:** In a bid to reduce overcrowding due to coronavirus across the three Delhi prisons—Tihar, Mandoli and Rohini—the authorities released over 400 inmates Saturday. AIG, Delhi Prisons, Rajkumar said, "At least 356 inmates have got interim bail, 63 are out on emergency parole." He said that interim bail is for 45 days and emergency parole is for two months.

## Electricity usage dips

**New Delhi:** Electricity usage across the city fell by 21-30% in the past week as businesses, markets, and civic life came to a standstill due to the lockdown. The lowest peak power demand was recorded on March 26 at 2,285 MW, as against 3,402 MW recorded on the same day in 2019. ENS

## ASTHA SAXENA &amp; AMIL BHATNAGAR

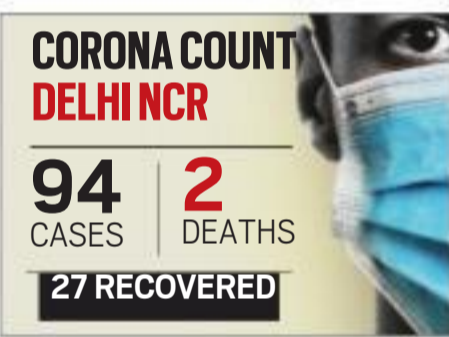
NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

REPORTING THE highest number of cases in a single day so far, Delhi recorded nine positive cases of COVID-19 on Saturday, taking the total number to 49. Two people have died from the disease—a 60-year-old Yemeni national admitted to Indraprastha Apollo hospital died on March 26, and on March 13, a 68-year-old woman from West Delhi had died at RML hospital.

Among the nine new cases is a 36-year-old woman from Jahangirpuri, a contact of a 38-year-old woman from Dilshad Garden who had tested positive as case number 10 in Delhi. So far,

nine people, including a 49-year-old mohalla clinic doctor, have been traced back to the Dilshad Garden resident, who tested positive after returning from Saudi Arabia. Fearing community transmission, many doctors working in mohalla clinics have not been coming to work. Health department officials said of the 470 total clinics, around 200 clinics are functional. Sources said many senior doctors who don't want to expose themselves to the risk, have applied for leaves.

A 48-year-old man from Uttam Nagar working in a private clinic also tested positive for the disease. The doctor had visited a person with a travel history to New Zealand. This is the second confirmed case of a healthcare worker testing positive in Delhi.



Of the nine new cases, three have a direct contact history and four are either contacts of a positive case or have had contact with a person having a travel history.

Sources said officials are now shifting their focus to community transmission, where the source of the infection cannot be traced. On Saturday, a positive case from Nizamuddin West put the authorities on alert. Senior officers in the department said that many people from this area, including

the 82-year-old man who tested positive, visit the Nizamuddin Dargah and samples of several people have been lifted. "We are also getting information that many people who visited the dargah have moved out of the city. We are tracing the case closely," said a senior official from the department of health.

## 9 cases in Noida

As 9 new cases of coronavirus surfaced in Noida, police said they will register an FIR against a fire safety firm for allegedly hiding information. Samples of five employees of the firm returned positive on Saturday. This is the biggest spike in the number of cases in Noida so far. It now has 27 cases. "So far we have details of six of nine patients who have

tested positive. Five employees, in their 30s, have been traced to the same firm where people had been infected before. The sixth case, an 11-year-old, got the infection from a family member who had travelled to Denmark. We will be submitting a complaint letter to Noida Police against the fire safety firm for withholding information about the visit of a British national to the firm in mid-March," said Dr Anurag Bhargava, CMO Gautam Budh Nagar.

Between March 14-16, a British national visited the firm for an audit and that information was allegedly not passed on to the health department. Since the visit, at least 13 persons, both employees of the firm and their family members, have tested positive in the district.

## Disinfectant ordered by DJB stuck in transit due to lockdown

SHIVAM PATEL  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

DISINFECTANTS ORDERED by the Delhi Jal Board from a manufacturer based in Maharashtra are stuck in transit over "logistical problems" due to the coronavirus lockdown.

A division of the department had ordered 125 litres of disinfectants, on an "immediate basis", for five of its laboratories at the water and sewage treatment plants on March 14. However, there has been a disruption in the shipping of these products due to the lockdown. They are now stuck in transit in Surat, Gujarat, said officials.

"There is an urgent need for these disinfectants because the current stock we have would hardly last us two-three days," said a DJB official. The 125 litres of chemicals the company had ordered could be diluted and made into over 500 litres of disinfectant for sanitising the laboratories and offices.

The DJB also plans to order more disinfectants for other divi-

sions, but officials said the manufacturer has stopped taking orders at present citing difficulties in manufacturing and transportation.

An official of the company that is producing the disinfectants said its factories were not allowed to function properly for some time, until its representatives met with authorities in Maharashtra and told them about their problems.

As manufacturing operations are getting back to normal, there is now a problem with transportation of a backlog of products accumulated over time.

"The courier service provider has not been able to operate smoothly. It had stopped services temporarily when the lockdown began and resumed them a day ago. For now, it is shipping products only twice a week, and only if there is a slot available," said an official from the manufacturing company.

He added, "It is not clear right now how long it would take to send the disinfectants to the DJB. We are also engaging with local logistics firms on this."

## Passes issued for smooth movement of goods

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

TO AVOID inconvenience to those delivering essential services around the city amid the 21-day lockdown, Delhi Police has introduced movement passes for smooth transportation of goods and items. Officials said those with valid documents to prove they are part of essential services do not need passes.

Any person associated with essential services (listed by the government) or has a personal emergency can apply for the pass on the Delhi Police official website, said officials. These can be used by police staff, electricity distribution staff, food and medicine delivery staff, healthcare staff, print and electronic media, water

department, fair price shops, among others. Passes can be downloaded online or collected from the office of the district DCP.

To obtain one, the applicant is required to submit a photograph, valid ID and a recommendation letter from their organisation. The person will need to produce the pass along with an ID to police at checkpoints in and around the city. On Saturday, police said they issued 2,920 passes in 24 hours, and also introduced a 24\*7 helpline—011-23469526—for queries regarding the passes or any complaints/grievances. A Delhi Police spokesperson said, "We have now briefed our staff to check documents and allow people to move. People who need to meet their family members or want to go back home can also get the pass."

TRACKING THE VIRUS			
<b>THE BREAK-UP</b>		<b>HOW HOSPITALS ARE HOLDING UP</b>	
Total positive cases	49	<b>Hospitals</b>	<b>Isolation Beds available</b>
Discharged from hospital	5	LNH	58
Deaths	2	RGSSH	110
Admitted at hospital	41	DDU	20
Migrated out of country	1	BSA	30
Outside Delhi residents	10	GTB	39
<b>SAMPLE DETAILS</b>		RML	35
Total samples sent	1,787	SJH	60
Total reports received	1,346	Occupied	
Total pending reports	441	Positive cases admitted (Delhi)	
<b>SURVEILLANCE DATA</b>		Figures as of March 28, 2020	
Contacts put under home quarantine till date		13,132	
Contacts under home quarantine as of today		11,493	
Contacts who completed 14 days of home quarantine		1,639	
Persons under institutional quarantine		1,134	
Passengers put under home quarantine till date		19,873	
Passengers under home quarantine as of today		5,979	
Passengers completed 14 days of home quarantine		13,894	

## NOIDA

## Admin tells landlords: Don't force tenants to pay rent

AMIL BHATNAGAR  
NOIDA, MARCH 28

IN A STEP meant to provide relief to labourers who have been returning to their villages amid the 21-day lockdown, the Noida administration has ordered landlords not to collect rent for the coming month.

In the last two days, thousands of labourers staying in rented accommodations across

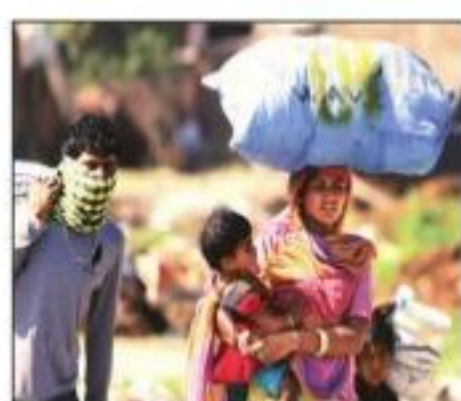
Noida and Greater Noida have been walking towards villages in UP to reach their homes.

"It has come to our notice that several labourers are being asked for rent, which is forcing them to move out and travel back to their homes. In such a case, the possibility of the infection spreading is higher. We need to assure them the security of a house. Landlords are instructed to not collect rent for one month from any tenant labourer," said Gautam Budh

Nagar District Magistrate B N Singh.

The administration invoked Section 51 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, and said non-compliance can lead to fine, imprisonment up to one year, or both. In the event that demanding of rent leads to a situation where there is damage to property, the imprisonment can extend up to two years, said the order.

"Some labourers are involved



Workers at Greater Noida, Saturday. Gajendra Yadav

in production of essential items/commodities and their exodus is impacting the supply chain as well. In such a scenario, no migration must take place due to demand of rent," said Singh.

Landlords can ask for rent after one month if no other order is issued in the interim, said officials. The administration also clarified that state government will not reimburse landlords.

Several labourers stay on rent

in areas beyond Sector 50 till Greater Noida, where several residential societies are currently under construction.

Till Friday evening, hundreds of labourers could be seen at Pari Chowk, walking towards the Yamuna Expressway to their villages in parts of Western UP.

Meanwhile, five fresh cases of COVID-19 were recorded in Noida on Saturday. This takes the total number of cases in Noida to 23, the highest so far across UP.

## EXPRESS Careers

Rajkiya Engineering College  
Agra Road, Mainpuri (U.P.) - 205119Mob: 7081066665 Email: director.gecm@gmail.com www.recmainpuri.in  
Ref: 72/REC/Mainpuri/2020 Date: 28/03/2020

## NOTICE

In reference of Advertisement No. Adv.-06/RECM/Mainpuri/2020 Dated 27/02/2020 for the recruitment to the Post of Director, Rajkiya Engineering College, Mainpuri. It is hereby informed that the last date for the receipt of application forms for the Post of Director is extended upto 25/04/2020 the terms and condition remain same. For details please visit the College website [www.recmainpuri.in](http://www.recmainpuri.in)

(Member Secretary)  
Board of Governors,  
Rajkiya Engineering College, Mainpuri





## CORONA WATCH



A policeman dissuades people in Chennai from stepping out. Reuters

## TAMIL NADU

## Quarantined man fatally bites woman

Chennai: A mentally disturbed man in Theni district, placed on home quarantine after a trip to Sri Lanka last week, ran out of his home naked and bit a 90-year-old woman in the neck, fatally injuring her. "He ran out on Friday night and killed the woman who was sleeping outside her house," said an officer. The woman was taken to Theni Government Hospital where she died later. The man was handed over to the police. ENS

## ASSAM

## Stones pelted at cops over lockdown

Guwahati: People pelted stones at the police in two districts in Assam when they tried to shut down non-essential shops and markets, officials said on Saturday. In Bongaigaon district, the police had to fire aerially to disperse the stone-pelters after ordering shops to close. Four persons have been arrested. In Dhubri district's Chapar town, a police constable was seriously injured in the stone pelting on Friday evening. Eight people were held. ENS

## MAHARASHTRA

## Chief secy's tenure extended

Mumbai: Maharashtra chief secretary Ajoy Mehta has been given three months' extension in view of the COVID-19 outbreak in the state. Mehta, who was set to complete his tenure on March 31, will serve till June 30. Sources said an official communication was received Saturday from the Centre approving the extension "as a special case, in public interest, considering the grave public health emergency situation". ENS

## Highest single-day spike: 194 cases; in 3 days, 80% cases from 16 places

ABANTIKA GHOSH  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

OF THE 312 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) cases reported from across the country in the last three days, 80% were from 16 cities and districts. Five of these — Delhi, Mumbai, Bhilwara (Rajasthan), Kasaragod (Kerala) and Nawanshahr (Punjab) — account for over 40% of these cases.

With 194 fresh cases, including two deaths, being reported in the last 24 hours — the highest single-day spike till now was 88 on March 26 — the count has now gone up to 918. While 79 have recovered, 19 have died.

The other districts which saw a spike in the last three days are:

Indore and Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh; Pathanamthitta and Kannur in Kerala; Pune and Sangli in Maharashtra; Gautam Buddha Nagar in Uttar Pradesh; Ahmedabad (Gujarat), Karimnagar (Telangana), Leh (Ladakh) and Chennai (Tamil Nadu).

A government source said three of these areas — Mumbai, Pune and Pathanamthitta — have emerged as "real hotspots, with transmission even in second and third generation contacts of the index patient".

"However, you have to understand that these lists are dynamic and change with the spread of the disease. A district that is in the top five today can be overtaken by another tomorrow. It is not a reflection of the containment efforts," said the source.

A second generation contact refers to a patient who has got the infection from a contact of the index patient. And a third generation contact is a patient who has got the infection from a second generation contact.

The number of districts which have reported COVID-19 cases now stands at 132; it was 75 when the 21-day lockdown was imposed earlier this week. For about 80-odd cases, the districts from where they have been reported are still being ascertained.

Meanwhile, Lav Agarwal, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, said: "As the situation is evolving, our focus is on high disease burden hotspots

where, along with the state government, we are doing community surveillance, rigorous contact tracing and containment strategy. We are ensuring effective implementation of the lockdown and social distancing. We are also concentrating on health infrastructure preparedness, dedicated hospitals and ICU beds for COVID patients."

He said both the patients who died in the last 24 hours were above 65 years; one had hypertension and diabetes.

While all international flights have been stopped since March 22, there is special focus on those who arrived at the international airports in Indore, Bhopal, Kannur, Surat and Ahmedabad before that. The process of tracing contacts can

take a long time, said officials.

Talking about the contact tracing initiative, and the reason why some cities with international airports remain hotspots, an official of the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme said: "Contact tracing is a very elaborate and rigorous process because even if one person is missed there may be grave consequences. That is why, even after so many days of stoppage of international commercial flights, we are still focussed on some of these cities. To give you an idea of the enormity of the exercise, for the two Agra residents who had travelled back with the first Delhi patient from Vienna, we had done contact tracing in 1.63,000 households, that's how elaborate it is."



Migrant workers in Vadodara jostle for space. Bhupendra Rana

## First COVID-19 death in Kerala: Days after return from Dubai, man dies

SHAJU PHILIP  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,  
MARCH 28

KERALA ON Saturday reported its first COVID-19 death after a 69-year-old person, who arrived from Dubai two weeks back, died at Government Medical College in Kochi.

Saturday saw six fresh coronavirus cases being reported from various districts, taking the total number of confirmed cases in the state to 182.

Kochi Medical College nodal officer Dr Fathahudeen said the victim, a native of Mattancheri near Kochi, had been admitted to the hospital with symptoms of acute pneumonia on March 22. He had been under treatment for cardiovascular disease, diabetes and hypertension, and had earlier undergone coronary artery bypass surgery, Dr Fathahudeen said.

An official at the COVID-19 control room said the person had arrived in Kochi from Dubai on March 16 and was under home quarantine. After he developed symptoms of coronavirus, he was moved to the medical college on March 12 and was put under life support system.

His wife and the driver who picked up the couple from airport

## First death in Telangana

Hyderabad: A 74-year-old individual who died at a private hospital in Hyderabad on Saturday morning tested positive for COVID-19, making it the first coronavirus-related death in the state. The individual was admitted to a hospital at Hyderabad's Nampally last week with multiple complications. Positive cases across the state rose to 65 with six new cases reported on Saturday, four from the same family in Qutubllapur area. ENS

had earlier tested positive. Their condition is stated to be stable.

As many as 148 passengers who travelled along with the deceased person have been put under observation, officials said.

Kerala Health Minister K K Shailaja said the deceased had serious health issues.

There are four other patients facing similar health issues, it was informed. At present, 165 people are under treatment in the state.

## Over 12,000 to be released from MP jails

MILIND GHATWAI  
BHOPAL, MARCH 28

MORE THAN 12,000 prisoners lodged in different jails across Madhya Pradesh are likely to be released in the next few days in the wake of the Supreme Court order to decongest prisons in an attempt to contain the COVID-19 outbreak.

The court order will benefit convicts and undertrials whose offences are punishable with a maximum jail term of five years.

Jails in MP accommodate nearly 45,000 prisoners against the capacity of 29,000. The decision to release the convicts on parole and undertrials on interim bail was taken by a high power committee comprising the chairman of the state legal services authority and top jail officials in a video conference.

While jail authorities decide parole for convicts, the decision on bail will be taken by various district courts. In a letter on March 27, jail superintendents were asked to collect applications from undertrials and forward their details within three days to the courts, which will decide these on merit in four days.

DG (Jail) Sanjay Chaudhary said convicts will be granted parole upto 60 days using a provision to grant emergency parole. The convicts who were already eligible for parole will benefit from it. Men over 65 years of age, women over 50 years and women with children under six years of age will get preference.

More than 7,000 convicts will benefit from the parole, including 5,000 who would have been released on parole this year. "Once we get confirmation from the state government, the first batch of convicts will be released," Chaudhary said.

The undertrials will get interim bail of up to 45 days. National Legal Services Authority of India (NALSA) guidelines covering 11 categories of undertrials will be used to release them. Undertrials who have spent more than half the period of their likely sentence; those accused of compoundable offences, those released on bail but unable to furnish sureties; those who are sick or infirm, and women offenders, are among those who will benefit.

While the three firms would provide three parallel manufacturing facilities to boost ventilator production, the devices would have to be "customised" to M&M and Tata's components as they are automotive firms. They are also trying to see if several electronic components, sensors and displays used to make ventilators can be "managed" with alternates. So far, ventilator makers have relied on imports for these components, but global supply chains have been hit due to the ongoing pandemic and the shortage of ventilators in other countries.

"Now, we can do away with the display. We can go to a total, simple user interface without just having buttons and it is automatically programmed without display," said Alva.

Queries to M&M about the development remained unanswered Saturday. The Tata Group too had said the group was looking at setting up a plan to manufacture ventilators "on priority".

FULL REPORT ON  
[www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com)



## DELHI TO LUCKNOW, FOUR DAYS ON FOOT

Three men carry their elderly father, in Lucknow. Soon after the nationwide lockdown was announced, the family started off from Delhi, reaching Lucknow after four-and-a-half days on Saturday. In Lucknow, they finally boarded a bus for their home in UP's Shrawasti district. Vishal Srivastava

## Not enough ventilators, so PSUs and corporates start ramping up production

PRABHA RAGHAVAN,  
ABANTIKA GHOSH,  
SANDEEP SINGH  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

TO RAMP up ventilator capacity, not only have state-owned PSUs such as Bharat Electronics been working closely with private medical equipment suppliers, but large Indian corporates such as the Tata Group, Mahindra, and Maruti Suzuki Ltd, too have made quick plans to start production of ventilators.

According to industry sources, average demand for ventilators in India is about 8,000 pieces a year. However, with the number of COVID-19 cases rising, the country might need anywhere between 1,10,000 and 2,20,000 ventilators by May 15 in the worst-case scenario, according to an analysis by think tank Brookings India.

The government is pulling all stops in the procurement of ventilators — Bharat Electronics Ltd, a PSU under the Ministry of

Defence, is in the process of manufacturing 30,000, while another 10,000 will come from HLL Lifecare Ltd, a PSU under the Health Ministry. The Integral Coach Factory in Chennai, makers of Train 18, is also attempting to manufacture ventilators.

"We are in the process of procuring adequate ventilators. One PSU is manufacturing 10,000 while Bharat Electricals is manufacturing 30,000," Joint Secretary Lav Agarwal said.

Government sources said there were 14,220 ICU ventilators now (cumulative capacity of state hospitals). In addition to this, in hospitals (mostly state government) dedicated for management of COVID-19 patients, there are about 6,000 ventilators.

Karnataka-based medical equipment supplier Skanray Technologies is working with BEL to simplify the design of ventilators, and also with Tata Motors and Mahindra and Mahindra to fast-track production. The simplified model would help the firm overcome hurdles like sourcing im-

ported components, so that it is able to service a surge in demand. Maruti Suzuki India Ltd has also announced an arrangement with Noida-based AgVa Healthcare to "rapidly" scale up production of ventilators. "The intention is to reach a volume of 10,000 units per month," the company said in a statement.

Vishwprasad Alva, Founder and MD, Skanray, said the company can boost its production to 5,000 units in one batch. "Skanray alone cannot scale up production, so we have Bharat Electronics now, which has 10,000 employees and a very large factory in Bangalore. They were one of the first to contact us and offer their facility. Their designers are already in Skanray and production has already been launched there," Alva said.

"We also have the Mahindra and Mahindra engineering team here... We are working out three different approaches to respond to the emergency. Yesterday, the Tata chairman called and we expect to have their team here in a couple of days as well," Alva said.

## 'EACH CAN CARRY NEARLY 13-15 LITRES OF LIQUID SOLUTION'

## Raipur to TN, civic bodies look at drones to sanitise areas faster, safer

KARISHMA MEHROTRA  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

CONVINCED THAT drones are a worthy investment in combating COVID-19, municipalities nationwide are deploying mini-choppers to sanitise their localities.

With trains and flights out of question, drone manufacturer Garuda Aerospace is sending eight drones and eight drone pilots by road from Chennai to Raipur on Saturday.

Raipur's Municipal Commissioner Saurabh Kumar said the city will begin work in areas that have reported confirmed cases. "Israel and Singapore are also

doing this. Drones are able to reach places where manually we cannot — such as slums," Kumar said.

"We are also planning to use it for public announcements related to coronavirus," he said.

The liquid solution will be of water, hydrogen peroxide, and silver nitrate — a WHO-approved sanitisation combination, Kumar said. He said the city police have used drones for the last one-and-a-half years for law and order observation and crowd control.

"Ground-level workers are optimal carriers for the virus and are susceptible to getting infected, unlike drones," Garuda founder Agnishwar Jayaprakash said. "Four lakh Indians are do-

ing this job across the country. We have machines that can do what manual public labourers are doing. Why not use it?"

Along with disinfecting aerial devices in South Korea, China, one of the biggest manufacturers worldwide, has used the miniaturised vehicles for fever detection, sanitisation, and supply delivery.

Tamil Nadu's Health Department has labeled its sanitisation programme "Surgical Strike on Coronavirus." According to a release, the project consists of 300 drones and 500 pilots to sanitise hospitals, metros, and roads across the state. In a chart comparing on-ground workers and drones, the release states that drones cover



Mumbai Police uses a drone to check people's movement during the lockdown. PTI

more area, work for longer, have less safety risks, and reach more locations.

In Indore, Municipal Commissioner Ameesh Singh hired two drones from an agricultural company more than a week ago. Each drone can carry 60 litres for a 30-minute flight covering up to 5 acres. Singh said they attempted to cover the whole city, but now have narrowed focus on three localities where 13 COVID-19 cases have been found.

"I saw a video of farmers using drones and asked my local officials whether we can re-purpose it for this. With wind, we can cover almost the entire city in a day with two drones," Singh said.

The solution is a combination of sodium hypochlorite, cresol powder, and a bio-sanitiser called Biokleen.

In Karnataka, the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) also expanded their sanitisation drive in the city to include the new technology two days ago, mayor M Goutham Kumar told *The Sunday Express*. They have seven drones and are focusing on hospital buildings and premises.

"The advantage in aerial spraying is it sanitises the entire area, including tops of buildings. But the disadvantage is that they don't have a great carrying capacity. They can carry roughly 13 to 15 litres," Goutham Kumar said.



# 7 THE OUTBREAK NATION



## CORONA WATCH

### TAMIL NADU 2-year-old among three dead, virus suspected

Chennai: Three people, including a two-year-old child, died at the Kanyakumari Government Medical college Saturday. COVID-19 test results were awaited for all three, state health secretary Beela Rajesh said. However, the state health department asserted that all of them had underlying health conditions. An official statement said the infant had osteopetrosis, a bone disease. The others were two men, one aged 66 and the other 24. The older man had chronic kidney disease, an organic brain disorder called uremic encephalopathy and lymphoma, cancer that affects the immune system. The younger one had pneumonia and sepsis. Tamil Nadu reported four fresh cases on Friday, taking the tally to 42. **ENS**

### UTTARAKHAND Youth back from Dubai tests positive

Dehradun: A 21-year old man who returned Dehradun from Dubai earlier this month tested positive for COVID-19 infection on Saturday. He has been placed in isolation at home. The man had visited a hospital in Dehradun with fever. His samples were sent for testing owing to his symptoms. Meanwhile the state health department has decided to deploy counselors and psychiatrists at its helpline number control room to help those calling with suspicions and fears related to COVID-19. **ENS**

### MP Journo who tested positive booked

Bhopal: A week after attending a press meet by former Chief Minister Kamal Nath, a journalist, who later tested positive for COVID-19, has been booked for endangering the life of others. The 55-year-old's daughter had returned from London via Delhi. She tested positive on March 22. Both are undergoing treatment at AIIMS, Bhopal. The journalist allegedly kept moving around, not only after his daughter tested positive, but also after testing positive himself. **ENS**



Rush at Charbagh bus stand in Lucknow after the UP government decided to allow bus transportation; (right) migrant workers in Maharashtra walk towards the Maharashtra-Gujarat border. Vishal Srivastava & Amit Chakravarty



## Congress slams govt over migrant exodus

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

THE CONGRESS party, which had earlier extended all support to the Central government in its efforts to combat the novel coronavirus, on Friday hit out at the government over its handling of the exodus of migrants from cities.

Senior party leader Rahul Gandhi said the government had no contingency plans in place for the exodus, and the large numbers of people returning to villages in crowded buses or on foot has significantly dented the lockdown, calling it another "distressing example" of the governments' "unpreparedness".

"Out of work & facing an uncertain future, millions of our brothers & sisters across India are struggling to find their way back home. It's shameful that we've allowed any Indian citizen to be treated this way & that the Govt had no contingency plans in place for this exodus," Gandhi said in a tweet.

"What are the central and state governments doing about the migrant workers who were allowed to leave the cities and towns and who are finding their way back to their villages?" Chidambaram asked. "Back to villages in crowded buses or on

foot has significantly dented the lockdown. It is another distressing example of the governments' unpreparedness," he added.

Party spokesperson Ajay Maken told the media that the government was ill-prepared to implement the lockdown and that it was a knee-jerk reaction. He cited the example of South Africa, saying that it gave three days' notice before implementing a 21-day lockdown. "Why didn't the ruling BJP... give people enough time to prepare and be prepared themselves?" Maken said.

Maken said India's testing rate is the "lowest in the world". "Even ventilators, orders have been given yesterday for 40-50,000 more ventilators which is required in lakhs and what has been ordered is just 40-50 thousand of ventilators and that too yesterday, why such precious time was wasted, when everything was happening around the world, when we knew that such sort of things were happening around us, why so much of time was wasted?" he asked.

Congress president Sonia Gandhi, in a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi earlier this week, had sought help for those stranded with one-time access to inter-state transport services.

## Among those stranded, man whose mother died, group taking relative's body home

GARGI VERMA

RAIPUR, KHARIAR ROAD, DEORI, MARCH 28

WHEN 70-YEAR-OLD Narayan Patel went to Rameshwaram and Tirupati in the first week of March with 17 friends from his village in Raipur, there was little murmur of trouble.

The group is now stuck on the Odisha-Chhattisgarh border, about 50 km from their village. After walking and hitching rides for over a 1,000 km, their patience is drawing thin.

On the Odisha side of the border, a medical camp has been set up. Dr Pradyumna Barik, a community healthcare worker, was woken up Thursday night by the sound of vehicles. "At first we thought they were migrant workers, but most of them were over 50. When I asked where they had come from, they said Tirupati," he said.

The group was in Tirupati when Janata Curfew was announced. "We had booked rooms in a lodge, but they told us to leave," Rajkumar Chandrakar (56) said. "We had a reservation for March 22, but railway staff

told us trains might stop running. So we booked general tickets and tried to board a train. It was so crowded that none of us could get in," Chandrakar said.

They then walked for 300 km and then hitchhiked to Parvatipuram in Andhra Pradesh in a truck. From there, they walked for nearly 200 km to Bhawanipatna in Odisha. "In Odisha, we managed to hire two vehicles to the border. There, we were given food and the border staff sent a message to the Chhattisgarh border staff," Patel said.

On Saturday, the men crossed the border. "We are tired. The Sarpanch in Temali asked us to move to an empty school building. We are so close, we just want to go home," he said.

Ashif Khan (32) and his brothers are stranded on the Chhattisgarh-Maharashtra border. They operate JCB machines in Rajnandgaon district, but are originally from Haryana. "Our work has stopped. Our families are restless back home," he said.

Trucks are lined up near the border. Bimlesh Singh from Jharkhand drives trucks between Chhattisgarh and Visakhapatnam. "I was hours

away from the pick-up spot when police stopped me and asked me to return. I have been stuck for five days. My boss has asked me to return, but the border staff won't let me in," he said.

Among those stranded is a group of 10 people with a body. "My nephew died in an accident near Mumbai. His family is in Jharkhand. We are trying to take the body back, we have all permits, but we are stopped at every border and made to wait," Mithilesh Singh (56) said.

They managed to cross the Chhattisgarh border Saturday and hope to reach Jharkhand Sunday afternoon. "We don't wish this on our worst enemies. This lockdown wasn't planned properly," he said.

Mukrim Ali, 26, lost his mother Wednesday and spent the day looking for transport to Varanasi, about 654 km from Raipur. Three days later, he is stuck in Koriya, 300-odd km from where he started on foot.

"Please ask them to let me go. I need to be with my younger brother," said the electrician. "I was working to ensure better treatment for her. Now she is dead and I wasn't even there for her burial."

## Walking home to Rajasthan, four migrants run over in Maharashtra

MOHAMED THAYER & SADAF MODAK  
VIRAR, MARCH 28

FOUR MIGRANT labourers were crushed to death and three others injured when a speeding truck ran over them at Bharol village in Virar on Mumbai-Ahmedabad Highway early on Saturday, police said.

The men, who were headed to their native villages in Rajasthan on foot, were walking back to Vasai after they were stopped and turned back from Bhilad on Maharashtra-Gujarat border when the vehicle hit them from behind, police added.

The accident occurred around 3 am on Saturday. The truck driver, who had managed to flee after the accident, was later arrested.

According to police, the seven labourers worked at tea stalls and canteens in Mumbai and its suburbs and wanted to return to their hometowns in Rajasthan as a nationwide lockdown to contain coronavirus disease made it difficult for them to earn a living.

Police have identified the four deceased as Ramesh Bhatt (55), Nikhil Pandya (32), Naresh Kalasuva (18) and Kaluram Bhagora (18), all hailing from Baswada in Rajasthan. Ramesh, who is survived by his wife and two children, worked at a canteen in Vasai; Nikhil worked at Goregaon, Kaluram at Vasai and Naresh at Bhandup, police said.

Two of the injured men have been identified as Mayank Bhatt (32) and Kalpesh Joshi (34). All the three injured have been admitted to a nursing home along the highway, police said.

"The men had left for Rajasthan around 6 pm Friday from Vasai. When they were not allowed to cross over (to Gujarat), they had to turn back. They started walking early morning on the highway hoping to reach Vasai, where they worked and lived, by the morning," Mayank's brother Rahul Bhatt said.

"We understand that the gov-

ernment had to enforce the lockdown, but at least they could have given us some time to go back to our villages," Rahul added.

Pravin Upadhyay, a Baswada native who employs people at his tea stall in Mumbai, said they have been persuading migrant labourers against trying to reach Rajasthan on foot. "But the situation is grim for them here. They eat what they earn on a day-to-day basis. They may have supplies for a maximum of four days. What would they do after that? They think it is better to return to their villages before their stocks run dry," he said.

Upadhyay added that the canteens usually supply food to several smaller units or offices around the area. "Since all of them are shut, there is no business. Many employers have no means to pay these men and hence, beyond a few days of ration, they cannot sustain here," he added.

According to Rahul and Upadhyay, trying to take the bodies of the four labourers to their village in Rajasthan was also a challenge now. "We have told their families that the men have met with an accident. They have not been told that four men have died. The least we can do is to take the bodies to their village for performing the last rites," Upadhyay said.

"Most of the deceased are from the ST community, while those employing them belong to the dominant castes of the same village and were entrusted to take care of them. Their families may be upset with us and the village sarpanch and other authorities may have to step in to ensure that things do not get out of hand," a man accompanying Upadhyay said.

On Friday, nearly 1,000 migrant workers walking home from manufacturing units at Boisar in Palghar district were ferried in tempos to a hotel in Talasari after they were reportedly refused permission to proceed beyond the Maharashtra-Gujarat border.

## 12 more cases in a day, Karnataka officials point to cluster infection

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
BENGALURU, MARCH 28

AS MANY as 12 people were diagnosed with COVID-19 in Karnataka on Saturday — the highest single-day spike for the state. The total number of cases in the state is now 76. The spread of COVID-19 in the state has started occurring in clusters within family groups and close circles over the past three weeks, said officials.

On Saturday, health officials in Karnataka reported that five people from the Chikkaballapur-Anantapur region on the Karnataka-Andhra Pradesh border, who were associated with a 31-year-old man who returned from a visit to Mecca on March 14 and tested positive for coronavirus, have also tested positive.

The six-member cluster is one of the largest in Karnataka

since detection of the virus began in early March. A large contingent from the Karnataka-Andhra Pradesh border region embarked on the Haj pilgrimage.

"We have deputed a senior health official of the rank of joint director to investigate the contacts... We are trying to cross-reference and ensure that all contacts will be in government quarantine," state Health Secretary Jawaid Akhtar said.

The cluster includes a 23-year-old man, a 70-year-old man, a 32-year-old woman, a 38-year-old man and an 18-year-old youth. They were all admitted to a government-designated hospital in Chikkaballapur.

A second cluster of four patients has emerged around a 51-year-old man in Bengaluru, who returned from London on March 13 and tested positive. The man's 21-year-old son was among the

12 who tested positive on Saturday. Two women who worked at the man's residence and a security guard also tested positive.

In another cluster, the wife (54) and two daughters — aged 28 and 23 — of a man who returned from Dubai and tested positive in Bhatkal area of coastal Karnataka have also tested positive, health officials said. The 65-year-old man arrived in Mumbai from Dubai on March 18 and travelled by train to Uttara Kannada, where he tested positive.

An earlier case of cluster infection was seen in the case of a 76-year-old man who died on March 10 after returning from Mecca. His 46-year-old daughter and 63-year-old family doctor also tested positive. The domestic help of a 67-year-old woman in Bengaluru, who returned from Dubai on March 9, also tested positive.

## CRPF called into Goa, given a 'free hand'

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
PANAJI, MARCH 28

TWO CRPF battalions will patrol Goa's streets as an additional force to impose the lockdown in the state.

Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, appealing to people to remain indoors and citing instances of curfew violation, said: "They have been given a free hand. Don't come complaining later."

The move comes as Goans continue to venture out for food and essentials, with the state still struggling to put in place an effective system for delivering essentials to homes. The government, though, continued to ask them to remain indoors, assuring them that the delivery system would soon start working. "Yesterday I saw mangoes

had arrived in the market and people thronged the vehicle. It's not safe to crowd around these trucks which have fish and mangoes. It's ok if you miss the entire mango season. You may leave home to buy mango but bring corona back home and risk the lives of your family members," Sawant said.

He said the CRPF would act against those who violate the "100 per cent lockdown rule of the state", assuring that the delivery channels for essentials would be activated soon, and cooked food packets would reach migrants and labourers stranded in the state.

Separately, Labour Minister Jennifer Monserrate said on Saturday that around 19,000 registered construction workers in the state will receive a monetary package, along with a one-time relief fund.

# Back from Chennai, 7 youths quarantined on tree outside Bengal village

RAVIK BHATTACHARYA  
KOLKATA, MARCH 28

FOR THE past five days, seven youths at Bhangdi village in West Bengal's Purulia district are living on the branches of a tree outside their village.

Bamboo sticks have been used to tie the wooden cots to the branches, about 8-10 feet from the ground. Each cot is covered by a plastic sheet and a mosquito net. The tree also has lights and plug points where the youths can charge their phones. They have been given masks too. The youths climb down only to relieve themselves, wash their clothes and when food is served thrice a day.

These seven youths, all of them migrant workers, have been

living on the tree ever since they returned from Chennai at a time when COVID-19 infections in the country are on the rise. After doctors asked them to stay under home quarantine, villagers made arrangements on the mango tree. "We spend most of our time on the tree. We climb down to use the toilet, wash clothes and when food is served. This has been done so that we are in complete isolation and do not become a risk to anyone in the village. We are abiding by what the villagers have told us to do," Bijoy Singh Laya, 24, told *The Sunday Express* over the phone.

According to Laya, all of them worked at an auto parts shop in Chennai. They boarded a train and reached Kharagpur last Sunday. From there, they took a

bus to Purulia and then a vehicle to Balarampur.

The youths, all of them aged between 22 and 24 years, said they were aware of the scare surrounding the COVID-19 spread and decided to go to the police station before entering the village.

"We first went to Balarampur police station. The officers heard us and sent us to a local hospital. At the hospital, doctors noted down our names and numbers. They said we need to stay in isolation for 14 days," said Bimal Singh Sardar.

"When we were about to enter the village, the villagers stopped us. They said they did not want to take any chances and made arrangements on a mango tree outside the village," said Sardar. The plastic sheet covering



The youths climb down only to relieve themselves, wash their clothes and when food is served thrice a day. Express

each cot is a protection against rain. There is a separate space where the youths can relieve themselves and another area for

washing clothes. "We do not want them to enter the village. During the isolation period, they may spread the

virus to family members or to others in the village. We have small rooms and proper isolation is not possible here. We have made proper arrangements on the tree and are providing them with everything they need," said a villager.

"Our clothes were not allowed inside, nor were our clothes given. We wash our clothes daily. Washing powder has been provided from the village," said Dinobandhu Singh Sardar.

The youths have been given separate utensils. Their family members bring food to them three times a day.

"Care is taken that no one touches us. Safe distance is maintained even when food is served in the utensils," said Laya. Villagers keep a watch on the

youths round the clock. The youths said they stayed in a rented room in Chennai and each would earn Rs 500 a day.

"Payment is due on the tenth of the month and since we left before that, the owner did not pay us. We frantically wanted to come home and just left... We are happy that we are near our home, even if we are on a tree. After 14 days, we will meet our families," said Dinobandhu.

Family members of the seven youth have supported the villagers. "We have small rooms and many family members. I am not sure whether proper isolation is possible here. They are on a tree now. Authorities should make a better arrangement," said Laya's brother Judhistir.

"The panchayat and the administration are trying to find a place, maybe a government building, where they can be kept in isolation," said Nitai Mondol, president of Balarampur Panchayat Samiti under which the village falls.

Shantiram Mahato, TMC MLA from Balarampur and state minister for Western Region Development Minister, said, "We are saying that all who come from outside the state, including migrant workers, should practise self-isolation. All those who show symptoms are admitted to hospitals. This area is near Ayodhya pahar and such machans are not uncommon. People build them to look out for elephants. I have heard the news. Let us see what can be done."



# 8 THE OUTBREAK NATION

## PM Modi announces relief fund, urges people to contribute

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 28



Prime Minister Narendra Modi

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi on Saturday announced the setting up of Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund (PM-CARES) and urged people to contribute to the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

"People from all walks of life expressed their desire to donate to India's war against COVID-19. Respecting that spirit, the Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund has been constituted. This will go a long way in creating a healthier India," Modi tweeted.

In another tweet, PM Modi appealed to the citizens, "Kindly contribute to the PM-CARES Fund. This Fund will also cater to similar distressing situations if they occur in the times ahead."

"The PM-CARES Fund accepts micro-donations too. It will strengthen disaster management capacities and encourage research on protecting citizens... Let us leave no stone unturned to make India healthier and more prosperous for our future generations," he said.

According to a release from the Press Information Bureau, the PMO has been receiving "spontaneous and innumerable requests for making generous donations to support the government" in this emergency.

"Keeping in mind the need for having a dedicated national fund with the primary objective of dealing with any kind of emergency or distress situation,

like posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, and to provide relief to the affected, a public charitable trust under the name of Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund' has been set up. Prime Minister is the Chairman of this trust and its Members include Defence Minister, Home Minister and Finance Minister," it said.

Meanwhile, BJP president JP Nadda held a video conference with presidents of BJP units in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka about joining the fight against coronavirus. He also reviewed the progress of the party's campaign to deliver food to 5 crore poor people.

### Donate Rs 1 crore each: Speaker to MPs

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Saturday urged all lower house MPs to allocate at least Rs 1 crore each from their local area development funds to authorities in their constituencies to tackle the coronavirus pandemic.

The country is passing through a tough phase due to COVID-19, and, "as public representatives, it is our duty to stand with the people," Birla said in a letter to Lok Sabha members.

(WITH ENDS, DELHI)



Workers alter the interiors of the train coach at New Delhi station. Tashi Tobgyal

## Coach turns into isolation ward, more in pipeline

AVISHEK G DASTIDAR  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

DAYS AFTER the government mooted the idea, the Railways has converted one of its coaches into an isolation ward for COVID-19 patients. As per the prototype, each non-AC coach can accommodate 10 patients.

In the first phase, 16 workshops of the Railways will be making two rakes each. Each rake will have 10 coaches. So to begin with, there will be 32 such rakes of 10 coaches each in the next two weeks. Every zone has been asked to prepare these rakes and keep them ready.

The *Indian Express* on March 23 reported about this plan to build capability to deal with more cases of COVID-19 in the coming days. More than 100 accident relief medical vans lying with divisions and equipped with hospital facilities across India and even the Lifeline Express may be pressed

into service, sources said.

Two of the four toilets in the prototype have been converted into bathrooms. The middle berth on one side in each cabin has been removed while the lower berth will act as the patient bed. The berths on the opposite side have been removed.

Each cabin has been separated with plywood and every patient area has medical-grade plastic curtains. There are cabins for a doctor and other medical staff. More electrical sockets for medical instruments, bottle holders to hold intravenous drips have been provided. There are also provisions for an external electric supply.

One of the issues that was discussed was how to evacuate the bio-toilet chamber if it gets full and the coaches are parked in remote locations. The concern was that if the person in isolation was COVID-19 positive, the toilet tank would probably carry the virus. The matter, it was learnt, was put

to rest when it was calculated that each tank of bio-toilet has a capacity of about 400 litres and it is not likely to get full with the kind of usage envisaged. "Even then, chlorine tablets will be put in the discharge that is treated by bacteria anyway, said an official.

"We have converted a non-AC coach with all necessary modifications. These can travel to remote locations of India if needed and be in service in India's fight against Coronavirus," Arun Arora, Principal Chief Mechanical Engineer, Northern Railway told *The Indian Express*.

At this point, estimates vary as to how many rakes will be converted into isolation units or how many will be needed at all. Officials said the numbers is not a problem since the modifications can be quickly done.

Rail Coach Factory, Kapurthala is also ready with a design layout and bill of instruments in case new coaches are needed to be converted into isolation wards.

## Haryana bans entry of NRIs from Punjab into its villages

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
CHANDIGARH, MARCH 28

HARYANA SATURDAY announced a ban on entry of NRIs from Punjab into state to curtail further spread of COVID-19. This comes at a time Punjab, after launching a frantic search for NRIs who are untraceable, warned that it would write to Centre to get their passports cancelled.

"NRIs living in Punjab are also likely to come to the adjoining districts including Ambala, Kurukshetra, Kaithal, Jind, Fatehabad and Sirsa. Therefore sarpnch of each village in these districts should take special care and no one should be allowed to enter. If anyone enters, then the same should be reported to the district administration immediately," Haryana Deputy Chief Minister Dushyant Chautala Saturday said.

He said the time period "till April 14 is very crucial for all of us and we all have to fight this epidemic together".

Dushyant also directed district officials to inform "about the people who have come to the villages in the last 15 days from abroad or from other states or cities, and if such persons have come then the sanitisation of the entire village should be done with a spray of sodium chloride and such persons should be quarantined immediately..." He was presiding over a review meeting regarding COVID-19 arrangements. He also directed Additional Deputy Commissioners and District Development Panchayat Officers to arrange accommodation and food facilities for migrant workers moving out of Haryana.

## His only minister, CM Chouhan checks state capital in lockdown

MILIND GHATWAI  
BHOPAL, MARCH 28



Shivraj Singh Chouhan

CHIEF MINISTER Shivraj Singh Chouhan, the only minister in the five-day-old BJP government in Madhya Pradesh, stepped out of his office on Saturday to see how the state capital was responding to the lockdown to arrest the coronavirus pandemic.

Travelling alone in his vehicle and wearing a mask, the 61-year-old often got down to thank, from a distance, those engaged in cleaning, providing security and supplying essentials—an exercise criticised by Opposition Congress as disregard for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal to stay at home, and one that endangers the health of his family, security personnel and staff.

There is no official word yet on when Chouhan will expand his Cabinet amid speculation that he will do it only after the lockdown ends. Holding meetings with bureaucrats and issuing video appeals, Chouhan has had a busy schedule. The lockdown was announced less than 24 hours after he was administered oath of office and secrecy on March 23.

He was scheduled to hold a "Facebook Live" chat with the people, especially farmers who

are worried by untimely rains and restrictions on movements that have made harvesting difficult and put a question mark on procurement that was to begin from April 1. But with many engagements on Saturday, he postponed it by a day.

In between, he had to respond to a fake social media post which warned people that they will be shot if they stepped out of their homes after April 1. A case was registered by the police's cyber cell against the perpetrator.

MP has so far reported 34 confirmed coronavirus cases, nearly half of them in Indore, and two deaths. The collector and the DIG of Indore were transferred on Saturday and officers who had worked in the state's commercial capital were posted there.

## 'Lockdown' in a 10x10 room: We just change sitting positions all day

SAGAR RAJPUT  
MUMBAI, MARCH 28

FOR THE last nine days, Digambar Rai, 37, a migrant worker from Bihar, and his brother Dinesh have not left their 10x10 room in Thane's Warlipada slum. "I am tired of staring at the wall," he says.

The 100-square-foot room, its roof made of asbestos sheets, stands on the mezzanine floor of a one-plus-one structure. Its cooking area, a washing area and a cupboard fills up most of the space.

"There is no space to move, so we just keep changing our sitting positions all day. It reminds me of the scenes from movies where people are locked in jail. The only difference is that we have our mobile phones," Rai says.

Rai had come to Mumbai 20



Digambar, Dinesh, stuck in their room in Thane. Express

years ago to work as a cook. Now, he works at a cake-box manufacturing unit during the day. After 6 pm, he works as a caretaker at a playground. From the two jobs, he makes between Rs 15,000 and Rs 17,000 a month. While both his employers have sent him on "leave" after the lock-

down, Rai hopes to get paid.

Until last week, the two were sharing the room with their younger brother Umesh. On March 19, just two days before Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray announced a lockdown across Maharashtra, Umesh had taken a train back to Bihar.

Rai and Dinesh had assumed that they could go back to work once Janata Curfew (on March 22) ended. Two days later, when the PM announced a country-wide lockdown, the brothers were stuck. "My wife and two children, and Rai's family (wife and three children) are in Bihar," says Dinesh. He works with a wholesale dealer of mobile phones and he is also on "leave" since the lockdown.

The only time the brothers step out is in the evening to buy vegetables.

## 9 fresh cases in Valley, 3 in Jammu

Srinagar: Nine people have tested positive for the coronavirus in Kashmir while three fresh cases were reported in Jammu on Saturday, officials said. The total number of cases in J&K is 33.

Of the nine cases in Kashmir, four are contacts of a 65-year-old man from Srinagar's Hyderpora who tested positive and died on Thursday. Director of Health Services, Kashmir, Dr Samir Matoo, said of the nine cases on Saturday, four were from Hajin in Bandipora who were contacts of the Hyderpora case, one has a foreign travel history, while two others travelled outside J&K. ENS

## EXPRESS NETWORK

# Punjab CM seeks MEA help to rescue Sikhs in Afghanistan

SHUBHAJIT ROY  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

AS PUNJAB Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh has sought the intervention of the Minister of External Affairs for the evacuation of Sikh families stranded in Afghanistan, New Delhi on Saturday said that it is in constant touch with the Hindu and Sikh community and has assured them of all support. The Afghan government has also assured full security to them, it said.

India also said that the bodies of Indian national Tian Singh and two other Afghan Sikhs are being repatriated to India where their families live.

"Dear S. Jaishankar, there are a large number of Sikh families who want to be flown out of Afghanistan," the CM tweeted. "Request you to get them airlifted at the earliest. In this moment of crisis, it's our bounden duty to help them."

Amarinder had earlier condemned the attack on a gurdwara in Kabul in which at least 25 people were killed on March 25, calling it extremely "tragic and unfortunate".

The Indian Embassy in Afghanistan said, "Mortal re-



Amarinder Singh

mains of Shri Tian Singh and two others are being repatriated to their next of kin in India by the special flight upon completion of various legal documentation and procedures."

The embassy said that it is in touch with the Hindu and Sikh community. "Government of Afghanistan has also assured full security to them," the embassy said.

PM Narendra Modi had also condemned the attack, and New Delhi had said that such cowardly attacks amid the COVID-19 pandemic is reflective of the "diabolical mindset" of the perpetrators and their backers.

Islamic State has claimed responsibility for the attack, while the Taliban spokesperson has denied responsibility.

## Bihar boy dies of 'hunger', 2 AES cases in Muzaffarpur

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
PATNA, MARCH 28

A DAY after an 11-year-old boy from the Scheduled Caste community died in Ara at Bihar's Bhojpur, the local ward councillor and the CPI-ML have called it a "hunger death", and the district administration has ordered a medical probe.

Rahul, who lived in Ara town's Jawahar Tola, died on Friday after he had been ailing for a week. His father is a daily wage earner and jobless since the lockdown was imposed. Local ward councillor Satyadev Ram said, "When we visited the family, we did not see any grain there. The boy's family had not approached us before the boy's death."

Bhojpur CPI-ML district secretary Jawaharlal Singh said: "Jawahar Tola is a cluster of 35 scheduled families depending on daily wages. Since there has been

lockdown, several people have run short of grains. The boy's death looks a hunger death."

Bhojpur District Magistrate Roshan Kushwaha told *The Indian Express*: "We have spoken to the municipal commissioner, who denied that any chance of hunger death..."

Meanwhile, Muzaffarpur's SKM College and Hospital has reported two cases of Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES). Both patients, a five-year-old boy and a three-and-a-half-year-old girl, come from poor families. As the disease is linked to malnutrition, it has raised some concerns for the district administration.

SKMCH medical superintendent Dr DK Shahi said, "Both cases were admitted on Friday. The first was admitted with a very low sugar levels, suggesting malnutrition... The patient was referred from a Motihari hospital. The boy, also from poor background, is in a much better condition."

## Bihar: Denied ambulance, kin carry body for cremation

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
PATNA, MARCH 28

TWO MEMBERS of a Bihar sharif family were forced to carry the body of their relative for four kilometres from the Patna Medical College and Hospital to a cremation spot after reportedly being denied an ambulance by the hospital authorities.

The deceased person, a 25-year-old woman, died at PMCH on Friday because of gastrointestinal complications. Hriday Paswan, the woman's uncle, alleged that the hospital administration had been asking for Rs 3,000 to provide an ambulance.

Paswan said since there had been no vehicle available because of the lockdown, they decided to carry the body on their shoulders. They took two hours to reach Gulbi Ghat after several breaks. "As roads were empty, there was not even a rickshaw available", he said.

PMCH medical superintendent Dr Binal Kumar Karak did not respond to calls and text messages seeking comment.

## Manipur MLA disqualified by Speaker tribunal

LEIVON JIMMY  
IMPHAL, MARCH 28

THE SPEAKER'S Tribunal of the Manipur Legislative Assembly disqualified MLA of the Andro constituency, Th Shyamkumar, with immediate effect from Saturday.

Shyamkumar had joined the BJP shortly after being voted to power on a Congress ticket during the 2017 Assembly polls.

The ruling of the tribunal comes two days after the MLA, a Congress leader, tendered his resignation to Speaker Y Khemchand. "...it is established beyond doubt that the respondent had voluntarily given up the membership of the Indian National Congress. Hence, this tribunal came to the conclusion that the respondent had clearly violated the provisions of the 10th Schedule of the Constitution of India and is liable to be punished as per the provisions to uphold the dignity of democracy and the mandate of the people," read the tribunal's order. A total of 15 pleas had been filed against him.

## Stuck in Valley, migrant workers long for home

NAVEEDIQBAL  
SRINAGAR, MARCH 28

SUNIL KUMAR arrived in Srinagar on February 26, hoping for work as the construction season picks up in Kashmir. The 31-year-old carpenter has been working in the Valley since 2014, helping people rebuild their homes after the floods.

Now, on the outskirts of Srinagar, he and several others from his hometown, Kushinagar in Uttar Pradesh, are looking for a way to reach home amid the lockdown. "This is not a distance

one could walk either," he said. Official figures from 10 districts of Kashmir put the number of migrant workers currently in the Valley at just over 14,000.

On Saturday, various district administrations started reaching out to the migrant workers. But, the major concern of the workers is how to reach home.

"I don't even have balance in my phone to call home. Right now, we are dependent on the government and we are thankful for their help. But if they can somehow make an arrangement for us to go home, that would be a bigger kindness," Sunil said.

In another part of Srinagar, Shakir from Moradabad in Uttar Pradesh said Kashmir is his second home. "I only visit my family about once a year," he said. The 40-year-old mattress maker added, "I left in August after the government said everyone from outside the state should leave but I came back around October because I can make around Rs 8,000 a month here and I need that to support my family." The father of five said work had just picked up when news of the lockdown came. "There is no work in the village and now no work here."

Divisional Commissioner,

Kashmir, Pandurang K Pole told *The Indian Express* that the majority of migrant workers in the Valley—the farm labourers—are yet to reach, but some construction and brick kiln workers are here. "Owners of brick kilns have been asked to take care of the workers. They should not face any scarcity of food. The administration is assisting construction workers. NGOs have also been roped in and we are providing food packets and dry ration," he said.

At Bijbehara in Anantnag, 27 workers from Araria in Bihar are confined to their accommodation

with no money and ration. "We have no work, no money and about 1 litre of gas," Mohammad Sartaj said.

He reached Anantnag on March 3. "We had some work lined up. We did that and I sent the money to my family. And just after that, this lockdown was announced," he said.

Sartaj said they are depending on help from the authorities and local residents but do not want to venture out on their own. "Yahan log madad kar dete hain. Raaste mein kaun poochega." (People help out. But who will help us out on the road.)

झारखण्ड सरकार  
झारखण्ड ग्रामीण स्वास्थ्य मिशन समिति  
स्वास्थ्य, चिकित्सा शिक्षा एवं परिवार कल्याण विभाग  
नामकुम, राँची, झारखण्ड  
Mob. No. 9065527501 / 9570171514 / 9065527620  
Email : idspjharkhand2@gmail.com & nrhmjharkhandfmr@gmail.com

Letter No. IDSP/148/2020/Part-II - 56 (IDSP) Date : 27.03.2020  
Public Notice COVID-19 MOST URGENT

National Health Mission, Jharkhand is in urgent requirement of the following items:  
1. Triple Layer Mask  
2. Hand Sanitizer (Alcohol based)  
3. Infrared Thermal Gun  
5. Ventilator filter  
7. Laryngoscope Neocinet Child & Adult  
8. Endotracheal Tubes of all sizes  
4. Portable ventilator  
6. Ambu Bag (Child/Adult)  
9. Hand Gloves

Any interested Manufacturer/stockist/vendor/agency may submit specification, quantity available, delivery time line, price & other terms and conditions in the office of the undersigned latest by 31.03.2020 - 12:00 Noon.  
PR 227603 Jharkhand Rural Health Mission Society (19-20)\_D (Director Finance)

झारखण्ड सरकार  
झारखण्ड ग्रामीण स्वास्थ्य मिशन समिति  
स्वास्थ्य, चिकित्सा शिक्षा एवं परिवार कल्याण विभाग  
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Email : idspjharkhand2@gmail.com & nrhmjharkhandfmr@gmail.com

Letter No. IDSP/148/2020/Part-II - 57 (IDSP) Date : 27.03.2020  
Public Notice COVID-19 MOST URGENT

National Health Mission, Jharkhand is in urgent requirement of the following medicines:  
1. Hydroxychloroquine - 400 mg.  
2. Hydroxychloroquine - 200 mg.  
3. Tab. Chloroquine - 500 mg.  
5. Tab. Azithromycin - 500 mg.  
7. Tab. Oseltamivir (Tamiflu) - 75 mg.  
8. Tab. Oseltamivir (Tamiflu) - 30 mg.  
9. Tab. Lopinavir - 200 mg.  
4. Tab. Chloroquine - 250 mg.  
6. Tab. Azithromycin - 250 mg.  
10. Tab. Retonavir - 50 mg.

Any interested Manufacturer/stockist/vendor/agency may submit quantity available, delivery time line, price & other terms and conditions in the office of the undersigned latest by 31.03.2020 - 12:00 Noon.  
PR 227602 Jharkhand Rural Health Mission Society (19-20)\_D (Director Finance)

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON  
See Section 82 Cr.P.C.  
Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused person namely Ikram@Ram Singh@Ram Kumar, S/o Ismile, R/o: H.No. C-04/198, Yamuna Vihar, Delhi, has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case FIR No. 497/14 u/s 323/341/376/392/495/506 IPC registered at P.S. Gokal Puri, Delhi and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued (unexecuted), stating that the said Ikram@Ram Singh@Ram Kumar cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said Ikram@Ram Singh@Ram Kumar has absconded (or is concealing him self to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proceeding u/s 82 Cr.P.C. has been initiated in this case. Proclamation is hereby made that the said Ikram@Ram Singh@Ram Kumar accused of FIR No. 497/14 u/s 323/341/376/392/495/506 IPC, P.S. Gokal Puri, Delhi is required to appear before this Court to answer said complaint on or before 30.04.2020.  
By Order  
Mr. Pawan Singh Rajawat  
Chief Metropolitan Magistrate,  
Karkardooma Court, Shahdara, Delhi  
DP/65/NE/2020



# 9 THE OUTBREAK SUNDAY STORY

## The past positives

India's response to COVID-19 has been robust, helping it check spread better than many countries. Several measures, from surveillance to tests across labs, are derived from lessons learnt from earlier epidemics, including 1994 plague and last year's Nipah. ANURADHA MASCARENHAS takes stock

WITH KAMAL SAIYED IN SURAT, DEEP MUKHERJEE IN JAIPUR & SHAJU PHILIP IN THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

AS COVID-19 spreads across the globe, infecting over 6.18 lakh people and killing more than 28,000, India appears to have fared better with 909 coronavirus positive cases and 19 deaths recorded so far.

While the current pandemic is unprecedented, considering the scale of the ensuing countrywide lockdown, India has battled several epidemic situations, with each testing the country's health systems — from the suspected pneumonic plague of September 1994 to the Nipah outbreaks of 2018 and 2019, besides the pandemic influenza H1N1, bird flu or A(H5N1), the Zika virus outbreak, as well as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus or MERS, Congo fever and a few others.

A look at some of these epidemics and the lessons that were drawn:

### Pneumonic plague, 1994

SURAT, GUJARAT

On September 16, Surat woke up to heavy rainfall, with its low-lying areas getting flooded within hours. By the time the waters receded, carcasses of cattle and rats lay across Surat, particularly the Ved Road area, inhabited mostly by cattle-herders.

Five days later, a patient who reported at a hospital near Ved Road with fever and pneumonia died, followed by eight other deaths with similar symptoms there. Soon, news of more deaths came in from other hospitals.

Professors of medicine at the Government Medical College in Surat, approached with the consent of the government, concluded that the victims had pneumonic plague. The news left the country stunned. The last India had heard of the disease was between 1896 and 1930, when 12 million were reported to have died of bubonic plague.

By September 26, 1994, 49 were dead in Surat, a city with a population of 25 lakh then, with 1,391 suspected cases. By then, the Central government had alerted the World Health Organization (WHO). By October-November, cases were being reported from Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata, with numbers climbing to 5,150 suspected cases and four deaths. The WHO sent an investigative team.

Then Deputy Municipal Commissioner (Health) S K Mohanty, among the officials who led the fightback, recalls that he first deployed epidemiological surveillance teams to check on around 500 families living in the Ved Road area, roping in primary school teacher, cancelling leave of municipal staff, and recruiting help from Rajkot, Vadodara and Ahmedabad. One of the first tasks was clearing animal carcasses, and spraying germicide in the flood-affected areas.

Mohanty, now 73, says officials moved into a municipal school and ate from a centralised kitchen as hotels had shut down. They also battled public wrath, as rumours spread that rats had caused the plague. "People accused the Surat Municipal Corporation of not keeping the city clean," says Mohanty.

To create awareness in the times before Internet, officials moved around the city in vehicles, making announcements to the public to keep their areas clean, and to avoid coming out of their houses. As textile and diamond units shut down and migrant labourers left Surat in droves, with around 3.5 lakh crowding the highways at one point, the government used the paramilitary to stop the exodus.

A drug used for the plague was bought in bulk by people. While there was no lockdown, essential items like vegetables, farm produce and milk ran out.

Talking about the measures they took, then Police Commissioner P C Pande says, "People were asked to refrain from discarding leftovers in the open. Police were deployed at hospitals to ensure patients stayed, did not leave midway through treatment, and their relatives did not visit them."

In just over a fortnight, Surat was back on its feet, with the water and dead animals cleared, and Ved Road area disinfected.

In March 1995, S R Rao, who took over as Municipal Commissioner, started a fresh cleanliness drive, including awareness against throwing garbage on the street. Private contractors were hired to sweep roads during night-time. Rao also demolished encroachments to widen Surat's narrow lanes, earning him the moniker of 'Surat's demolition man' and the city the tag of 'India's cleanest'.

However, what remains most remarkable about the 1994 outbreak was the confusion that followed later over what exactly had hit Surat. The Gujarat Plague Committee Report eventually ruled, "Not plague at all but lower respiratory tract infection or possibly, melioidosis — due to squalor, industrialization and a recent dam break & floods. No bubonic plague definitively proved at Surat and no infectious secondary cases either."

Despite the confusion, the outbreak was to be a turning point for India's public health system. "It was then that we started thinking in terms of better preparedness to deal with such outbreaks. Surveillance systems were established but needed a greater push," recalls Dr AC Mishra, who headed the Indian Council of Medical Research-National Institute of Virology (ICMR-NIV) from 2002-2013 and is now Director, Interactive Research School of Health Affairs, Bharati Vidyapeeth, in Pune.

### A(H5N1) or Avian flu, 2005-06

MAHARASHTRA, MADHYA PRADESH

That "push" to the surveillance system, which Dr Mishra speaks about, came when bird flu outbreaks were reported in 2005-06. WHO data shows that from January 2003 till March 2020, there were 861 cases of human infection by H5N1 across 17 countries. Though India hasn't seen a single case, panic buttons were pressed early on.

In India, the first outbreak of the highly pathogenic avian influenza occurred in Maharashtra in 2005, followed by an outbreak in 2006 in Madhya Pradesh. Smaller outbreaks were later registered at poultry



Ravi Batra



A Srinivas



Nirmal Harindran

farms in Manipur, West Bengal and Assam.

Over a million birds were culled at the time and, according to reports, 25 episodes of bird flu followed in 15 states and Union Territories till January 2015. A total of 7.2 million birds were culled and over Rs 24 crore paid as compensation to farmers.

Vijay Singhal who, as municipal commissioner, is leading the battle against COVID-19 in Thane now, was in March 2006 the district collector of Jalgaon and led its fight against avian influenza in four affected zones (blocks). Under him, the administration quarantined a 3-km area around each of the zones.

"The effort was to restrict transit of infected material," Singhal says. "As a result, around 21 bus stands were shifted outside the 3-km radius, weekly markets were shut down temporarily in 19 villages, and health workers were deployed to track symptoms of bird flu."

Besides, farmers were told to hand over their birds to the Animal Husbandry Department for culling, and disinfectants sprayed in homes where poultry had been kept. Special observation wards were opened in hospitals across the five affected tehsils and police sealed the borders of all the infected villages and those under surveillance.

The modus operandi for COVID-19 may not be the same, but Singhal says he has learnt some useful lessons: "We should be ready with a contingency plan, track, test and treat people, stay focused, not panic and know exactly what to do."

Away from Jalgaon, such was the scare that larger wheels of the government machinery came into operation, with the ICMR, which is leading the pushback against coronavirus now, and the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research laying emphasis on building capacities and strengthening laboratories.

In 2012, two labs — BSL-3 and BSL 4 —

## EXPLAINED E.

### Time to invest in public health

WHILE EVERY outbreak in the last couple of decades has forced a significant upgrade in India's capacity to respond to a public health emergency, the health infrastructure in the smaller towns and villages continues to remain abysmally inadequate. In that context, the current coronavirus pandemic could be the best opportunity for India to transform its health infrastructure and invest in public health.

were set up at the National Institute of Virology's microbial containment complex. (BSL-3 and BSL-4 indicate biosafety levels that measure the level of containment precautions required to isolate dangerous biological agents, ranging from the lowest BSL-1 to the highest BSL-4). In heavily guarded vaults, these labs store highly infectious pathogenic agents of diseases such as Ebola, anthrax, Lassa, haemorrhagic fever and smallpox to enable research and testing.

**Pandemic influenza A(H1N1) or swine flu, 2009**

PUNE, ELSEWHERE

The first case of this virus was detected in Mexico in April 2009 and spread to 74 other countries. In India, the first case was reported on May 16, 2009, from Hyderabad, and the virus went on to kill 981 people the same year.

The 2009 influenza A(H1N1) was a game changer for India's public health response and ensured that surveillance systems adhered to the three Rs — real-time reporting, recognition of the pathogen and response to the outbreak — that involved diagnosing and managing each case, and developing a network of isolation wards, says Dr Pradeep Awate, Maharashtra's surveillance officer.

"To deal with any kind of outbreak, there should be robust surveillance systems to understand the magnitude of the problem and strategically position the resources. While the plague outbreak was among the major reasons for setting up the country's Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme in 2004-05, it was only after H1N1 that influenza cases were reported in the health system," he adds. The surveillance system ensured that the samples sent from a particular hospital or civic-run facility were tested for H1N1, and the reports emailed to the hospital — a practice that is being stuck to while reporting COVID-19 cases.

This data collection and analysis helped identify the high-risk groups who succumbed to H1N1. An analysis between 2009 and 2015 showed that pregnant women accounted for 9.84 per cent (214 out of 2,175) of all influenza-related deaths in Maharashtra, with 97 per cent of the deaths during the second and third trimesters of their pregnancies.

It was to reduce mortality among such high-risk groups, also including diabetics, that Maharashtra introduced vaccination for them. Dr Awate says Maharashtra offered

## BEFORE COVID-19

**PNEUMONIC PLAGUE, 1994:** south-central, western India; 693 suspected cases, 50-plus deaths

**NIPAH:** first outbreak among pig farmers in Malaysia. Since then, at least 12 outbreaks, all in South Asia; Siliguri (West Bengal, 2001, 62 affected, 45 deaths); Nadia (West Bengal, 2007, 5 deaths); Kozhikode, Malappuram (Kerala, 2018, 21 deaths)

**CRIMEAN CONGO HAEMORRHAGIC FEVER (CCHF), 2011-2015:** 39 people affected in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh; 19 deaths

**AVIAN INFLUENZA A (H5N1), 1997:** first reported in Hong Kong. Cases of bird flu reported in Nandurbar district in Maharashtra. No humans infected in India.

**A(H1N1, SWINE FLU), 2009:** first reported in Mexico. All states of India affected; from 2010 to Feb 2020, approximately 1,60,826 affected and 11,048 deaths

**ZIKA VIRUS, 2018:** 4 cases reported in India in 2016-17; in late 2018, 159 cases of virus infection reported in Rajasthan, 127 in Madhya Pradesh

(Clockwise from left) Suspected plague cases come for tests to an infectious diseases hospital in Delhi; at an isolation ward in Government Medical College in Ernakulam, where Nipah virus patients were admitted; students wear masks during an H1N1 virus scare in Mumbai

of the best healthcare systems in the country, the response was much swifter.

The strategies the state Health Department put in place for COVID-19 — mainly contact tracing and management of persons under home quarantine — are derived from the days of its management of the Nipah outbreak.

The first cases of Nipah were reported from a village under Changaroth panchayat in Kozhikode district, when a youth with symptoms similar to that of encephalitis was admitted to Baby Memorial Hospital in Kozhikode on May 17. When Dr Anoop Kumar, head of the Critical Medicine Department at the hospital, learned that the patient's brother had died of a 'mysterious' disease and that two others in the family had similar symptoms, he rushed their samples to the Manipal Centre for Virus Research, which confirmed the presence of Nipah virus.

The Health Department acted swiftly — a control room was opened in Kozhikode, where Health Minister K K Shailaja camped for days to coordinate the activities.

Talking of the state government's outbreak containment plan for Nipah, an official in the Health Department says, "We simply followed the protocol established by the WHO for Ebola. All those who had come in contact with every positive case were traced and put under surveillance for 21 days."

In Kozhikode alone, where the first case was detected, around 2,400 people were put under observation and in neighbouring Malappuram, around 300 remained under home quarantine. Still, by the end of a month, by which time the outbreak was contained, the virus had claimed 17 lives in Kerala out of 18 confirmed cases.

The 2018 outbreak, followed by one in 2019, helped the government learn invaluable lessons. "Now our health staff, right down to the village level, are very aware about infection-control measures. The message is clear: all fever cases with unusual symptoms are to be sent for investigation," said the official.

Another significant fallout of the Nipah fight was that Kerala decided to focus on improving lab facilities. Besides strengthening facilities at the NIV's Alappuzha centre, a new Institute of Advanced Virology has been set up in Thiruvananthapuram with ICMR support.

### Zika, 2018

RAJASTHAN

Between September and December 2018, Jaipur saw a major outbreak of the Zika virus, concentrated in three areas — Shastri Nagar, Vidhyadhar Nagar and Sindhi Camp, dense localities with poor sanitation facilities.

The disease, whose symptoms include fever, rashes, joint pain, muscle pain and headache, poses the highest risk to pregnant women. The country's first case of Zika virus was reported in Jaipur on September 23, 2018, following which, on September 26, tests established traces of the virus in *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes.

By December, the disease was finally controlled, but by then, Rajasthan had become the state with the highest number of Zika-positive cases in India. The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, in an answer to a question in the Rajya Sabha in July last year, said that of the 294 Zika cases which India saw between 2016 and 2018, Rajasthan had the highest number — 159 cases, all in 2018. Madhya Pradesh stood next, with 130 cases of Zika.

After the first positive case of Zika was reported, an expert team from the NCDC rushed to the city and found that the second Zika-positive case lived a mere four houses from the first case, that is, within the flying range of the mosquito that had possibly spread the virus to the first patient.

Following the outbreak, the Rajasthan Health Department, under the leadership of then additional chief secretary, health, Venu Gupta, went on a massive drive to destroy mosquito larvae and identified pregnant women who could be at risk.

Though several pregnant women tested positive for the virus, no cases of microcephaly and Guillain-Barre syndrome — diseases Zika is known to cause — were detected.

By mid-October 2018, the department completed a door-to-door survey of more than 1 lakh homes and nearly 2.5 lakh containers were tested for mosquito larvae.

Health Department officials say that following the Zika outbreak, in March 2019, a detailed action plan was created, keeping in mind future contingencies.

"The major lessons learned from Zika include understanding the importance of training of health staff, significance of house-to-house surveys, ensuring coordination between departments. We are now employing the same method to deal with the coronavirus outbreak," says Dr Ravi Prakash Sharma, Additional Director, Rural Health, Rajasthan.

IT WAS in 2013 that the government expanded the network of public health laboratories to enhance capacity for diagnosis and detection of viruses. Over the years, more than a hundred Virus Research and Diagnostic Laboratories (VRDLs) have been established throughout the country.

It's a measure of the technological progress India has made, with lessons learnt from every major outbreak, that it now takes less than three hours to identify the virus in case of COVID-19.

Yet, says Dr Mishra, there are unanswered epidemiological questions and challenges that India will have to be prepared for. "One is forced to wonder what will happen if a virus like H1N1, which has high transmissibility, and another like H5N1, with high fatality, combine. How will humanity face such a situation?" wonders Dr Mishra. "We are still gasping," he says, adding that India needs more investment in biological sciences, better health infrastructure, ventilators and isolation beds.



# 10 THE OUTBREAK

MIGRANTS

# THE OUTBREAK

LOCKDOWN, 8 DAYS



(From top left) A man carries his son on the long walk home from Delhi on March 23, a day before PM Modi announced national lockdown; at Ghazipur border, a woman breaks down trying to negotiate with police, on March 27; Hiralal, a daily wagger going home to his village, in Prayagraj, March 26; stranded in Jammu two days after the lockdown; lining up for food at the corporation's community hall in Chennai on March 25; waiting for transport at a Lucknow bus stand on March 27



A deserted Bhilwara Railway Station, a week after Section 144 was imposed in the city. On March 21, largely concerned about the developing situation in Bhilwara, Rajasthan was among the first states to impose a total lockdown. Shaikat Ahmed

## Time stands still in Bhilwara

Medical staff among infected, 30 lakh including patients under screening, thousands of migrants out of work, 2,000 health teams, 6,400 people in quarantine, 149 high-risk possibilities, and one death. Why the COVID-19 watch in this Rajasthan district is monumental — and heartening

HAMZA KHAN

AROUND NOON on March 20, police jeeps and buses spread out across Bhilwara's city limits, announcing on loudspeakers that people should shut shops and head home. "Section 144 has been imposed in view of coronavirus."

Within moments, the crowded markets of Bhilwara emptied out. By March 21, concerned largely over the situation in Bhilwara, Rajasthan became one of the first states to announce a total lockdown.

A little over a week hence, Bhilwara, a south-east Rajasthan district with an estimated population of 30 lakh and famous for its textile industry, is under a COVID-19 watch unsurpassed in India. The entire population is being screened by nearly 2,000 teams on the road, doing door-to-door survey.

By Friday, they had covered 21.6 lakh people in 42 lakh homes. As many as 6,445 have been put in home quarantine, and 3,450 additionally identified as showing flu-like symptoms. 149 of them are in high-risk groups. Of the state's 46 positive cases, 21 so far are in Bhilwara. Results of 121 are awaited. Both the coronavirus-positive deaths in Bhilwara, one 73-year-old and the

other 60, had co-morbidities.

While the numbers are stunning, these alone do not make Bhilwara a coronavirus hotspot. Another reason is that at the centre of its infections is believed to be a doctor with relatives who had returned from Saudi Arabia, with the virus travelling from him to another doctor with a long list of patients in the town, and other medical staff since.

Says Additional Chief Secretary (ACS), Health, Rohit Kumar Singh, "Right now, the first doctor is the only identified source... the second got it from him. Patients were consulting the latter at his hospital, at their homes, at his home. So it led to the spread of the virus. But most of the patients are still medical staff."

The second doctor, 58, now in a hospital in Jaipur, denies this. Speaking over the phone to *The Sunday Express*, he said, "That is absolutely wrong, no such relatives (of his colleague) arrived. We serve day and night, so we might have come in contact (with a coronavirus case)". In fact, a report by Bhilwara District Collector Rajendra Bhatt also calls this doctor, a personal physician of some VIPs, Bhilwara's first coronavirus case, and makes no mention of the other doctor.

BJP Bhilwara MLA Vitthal Shankar Awasthi has another theory. According to him, the hospital knew it may have a coronavirus case on its hands by March 15. "There was a suspected case that it referred to Jaipur, who tested positive on March 15. Yet, the doctors at Bhilwara hospital was selfish and continued to function till March 18. Why has the government not taken ac-

tion against the hospital doctors yet?" At his health update Thursday, the Indian Council of Medical Research underlined that all cases in Bhilwara could be traced back to "one person who had travelled". "There is no community transmission."

But the uncertainty means Bhilwara is on edge. Bhatt said that between February 22 and March 19, when the services at the hospital were being wound up, 5,580 OPD patients and 613 in-patients had visited it. Since they came from across Bhilwara, and around 500 of them from other districts, the decision was taken to screen the entire population of Bhilwara along with their contacts.

Calling Bhilwara measures "the largest screening exercise in the country", Singh laughs, "We are more like Sherlock Holmes now, rather than health officials." The list of all the people who consulted doctors at the private hospital has been shared with Block Chief Medical Officers, to ensure home isolation. Similar lists have been shared with border checkpoints, to ensure no name included in them leaves Bhilwara. Rajasthan Health Minister Raghu Sharma says that after the outbreak, they rushed 300 medical personnel, the Medical Health Director, as well as representatives from the National Centre for Disease Control to Bhilwara. Dr Rommel Singh, Project Director, Child Health, is the nodal officer overseeing the containment efforts.

N.L. Meena says 13 teams have been disinfecting wards, starting with where the identified patients stay. Initially, a government hospital was converted into quarantine unit and since then, several other public and private sites as well as hotels and resorts have been approached for quarantine and isolation facilities.

Simultaneously, screening of the entire staff of 253 at the private hospital has been done. A 24-hour screening centre manned by Rapid Response Teams has been set up. Another centre collects samples 24 hours. Every evening, district officials hold at least one meeting to discuss feedback and decide the next day's intervention.

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By March 26, about 88% of the survey had been completed. Commending health officials, ACS Singh says, "Rajasthan has resource constraints and other issues compared to, say, Kerala. But Kerala's cases have crossed 100, even though it has excellent medical facilities, people are more educated, and they have a huge army of nurses."

Simultaneously, screening of the entire staff of 253 at the private hospital has been done. A 24-hour screening centre manned by Rapid Response Teams has been set up. Another centre collects samples 24 hours. Every evening, district officials hold at least one meeting to discuss feedback and decide the next day's intervention.

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## Home, alone

In Munger, with Bihar's only death, those back worry about future, their villages about COVID-19 tag

SANTOSH SINGH

ALAN KUMAR considers himself successful on two counts: that in his last year in Chennai, he picked up a fair bit of Tamil and sold "Magahi, Benarasi and Kolkata paan" to South Indians. "My paan is a little different from what they make there — each has three smaller paans with fillings of cloves, cardamom and zarda," he says.

Now the 25-year-old says he is lucky for another reason, that he is back with his family even as several others are struggling to get home amidst a nationwide lockdown, called to check the spread of coronavirus.

Lalan started for home on March 21, three days before Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the 21-day lockdown, taking a train from Chennai to Kolkata and then another to Munger. "I had my reservation for March 21, but when I got to the station, there was not an inch of space. The compartments were also overcrowded. Everyone was in a mad rush to get home," says Lalan from his home in Harpur village in Munger.

Bihar has reported its only COVID-19 death from Munger — a 36-year-old with renal complications back from the Gulf.

The state Labour Department is yet to compile data on migrants returning over the past fortnight — the number is estimated to be 15,000 for last week alone. As the department reaches out to over 8,600 panchayats to determine that number, the Munger district administration has a list of about 2,500 who have returned from Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Punjab and Delhi, besides Dubai, UAE and the UK, where they worked as plumbers, tailors, electricians, washermen, technicians, tea-sellers, farmers and daily wage labourers.

Lalan is among 16 to have returned over the last week. "Sar pariyo machine legakar zek karte hain, mera bhi hua railway station par (talking about a thermal scanner)". Now I am finally home. In a crisis, there is nothing like being with family," he says.

But Lalan admits there will soon be other worries. His father, a taxi driver, is out of work too, and if he can't go back to Chennai any time soon, the family that lives in a thatched house will have to dip deeper into their meagre savings.

Lalan says that in Chennai, he made Rs 1,500 on good days and sent Rs 10,000 home every month. He has to maintain a distance from my fam-

ily members," says Singh, who earned Rs 15,000 a month in Punjab. In many villages in Bihar, afraid of "outsiders" spreading the virus, the government has accommodated those coming in schools or panchayat buildings, now doubling as observation homes.

Mohammed Aftab, 29, of Goura village in Kharagpur, flew down from Dubai, where he worked as a driver earning the equivalent of Rs 50,000 a month, to Varanasi on March 16. He then went to Mumbai on some work before returning to the village.

On March 22, a few villagers informed the local Health Department about his travel history. A team from the Kharagpur primary healthcare centre came to Aftab's village and took him to the PHC, where he will be kept under observation.

Kharagpur Medical Officer Dr L.B. Singh said, "Aftab has an international travel history and he will have to stay at the PHC for a 14-day quarantine."

While Aftab says he went through the requisite medical checks and thermal screening at Varanasi and later in Mumbai, and that he was "ready to go into quarantine", Shailesh Kumar, from the adjoining Teria Bambar village, says, "It was only after some villagers complained that Aftab agreed to be kept under observation. We are scared with so many migrants returning. It is good that the government has a list now."

Mohammed Shahid, 22, and Mohammed Ziyau, 32, who work as technicians in a private company in the UAE and who reached their Ghazipur village in Munger on March 10 and 11 respectively, too, went through health checks and quarantined themselves for 14 days. "My parents wanted me to come back as they worried about the virus spreading from China to the Gulf," says Shahid.

Besides Shahid and Ziyau, the village has several others working as tailors, washermen, electricians and technicians in other states and countries.

Omar Farukh, whose wife is the mukhiya of Ghazipur, says, "I have just handed over to the administration a list of 17 people who have returned from other countries and states."

INTERVIEW: SUSHIL KUMAR MODI, DEPUTY CM, BIHAR

'Unfortunately we have data of only about 13 lakh construction workers'

A large number of migrants from across the country, abroad have returned to Bihar. What steps is the state taking?

In the past one week, nearly 7,000 migrants have arrived in Patna on two unscheduled trains — from Kerala and Pune. Since the lockdown was already on, the administration had to relax a few norms to help them get home. We are preparing panchayat-wise lists of migrants, which will help us screen them. Villagers are alert now. Once we are able to screen them and enforce self-quarantine, the threat will be less. Village heads must play a big role in ensuring that no one hides their travel history.

What about the migrants stuck in other parts of the country? We are setting up relief camps for them. In Rajendra Nagar in Patna, a stadium can host about a 1,000 people.

Many of the migrants are daily wagers who will struggle to make ends meet. We have already announced a host of measures — one-month free PDS to 1.68 crore ration card holders, transfer of Rs 500 to Jan Dhan accounts of BPL families, and advance pension of three months to senior citizens, widows and the differently-abled.

Is there a broader economic package planned for unorganised sectors? Unfortunately, we have data of only about 13 lakh construction workers. They are being given Rs 1,000 each.

Are hospitals in Bihar equipped to deal with COVID-19 patients? The Nalanda Medical College and Hospital is reserved for only coronavirus. Our next focus is to strengthen healthcare services at the district and sub-division level.

SANTOSH SINGH



A lucky few get a bus to go back home, in Ahmedabad, March 26. Reuters

## 'I left due to poverty... I am back with no money'

ABHISHEK ANGAD

IT HAS been two days since Sanjay Choudhary returned to his one-room kachcha house in Jharkhand's Garhwa district, covering a distance of 411 km from Nagpur. A construction worker earning Rs 450 for a day's work, he left Nagpur on March 22 as the impact of COVID-19 hit. The electricity in his quarters was cut, there was no food, and his manager went "missing".

While his journey back home was arduous — a six-hour train ride to Bilaspur, a night at the railway station, and finally an hour-long bus ride to his village — he is now worried about having to make ends meet for his family of six. "The first thing I checked when I reached home was our ration. We had one sack of rice, which should last two months. 2 kg daal, only enough for a few days, and a kilogram of onions," he says, adding that only his father has a PDS card through which they get some rice.

The 15-highland on which the family grows wheat, rice and some corn usually yields little by way of earnings. So when he had to leave Nagpur without his wages for the 21 days he had worked this month, he knew it wouldn't be easy.

"Twenty-three of us came back together. We didn't get paid for this month. We are all now in the same condition and I don't know whom to ask for help. Since there is a lockdown, I can't even move out and seek help. It was

poverty that forced me to leave the village, and here I am... I still have no money," he says.

While Choudhary says his fellow villagers raised no objections to his returning home, elsewhere in the state, news about the pandemic — and the migrants coming home — has met some resistance.

Outside Kadma village, in Jharkhand's Kanke block, a placard on a bamboo barricade warns visitors, "Kripya baahar se aane wale vyakti is gon mein pravesh na karen (Outsiders, please do not enter this village)". Another one threatens: "Aame par lathi padega (If you come, you will be beaten with sticks)."

Ved Prakash, a resident of Kadma, says they installed the boards in the past week, even as the village went into a self-imposed lockdown. "People are scared... Earlier, we stood guard at the entrance of the village, but now every one stays indoors. We don't want any badhi (outsiders) to infect us."

Some distance away, in Balu village, barbed wires and bamboo sticks have been placed at the entrance to ward off outsiders. "The entire village supports (this barricading)... We don't want to get infected," says Sarfaraz Anwar, a resident.

## Rationed rotis, watered daal

Out of money, short on space, low on patience, a slum in Panchkula with one case and 9,000 quarantined people watches its supplies dwindle

PALLAVI SINGHAL

LAXMI, 17, squats in front of a gas stove on the floor, the triangle of her handkerchief mask covering her nose and mouth. The fumes from the tempering for the greens she is cooking fill up the dark, window-less room. Laxmi stifles a cough, looks up and smiles. "The health officials have told us to be careful while sneezing and coughing. But how can you not cough?" she says.

On better days, Laxmi, a Class 12 student at Government Senior Secondary School in Sector 6, Panchkula, would have been outside, hanging out with "best friend" Seema and sneaking out to the Sector 7 market.

But these days, with the Kharak Mangali slum, one of the largest slum clusters in Panchkula, and its 9,000-odd residents under quarantine, Laxmi has been spending all her time at home — mostly doing chores and looking after seven-year-old brother Chotu.

So when they can, Laxmi and Seema sit on a stone slab over the open drain outside their homes, exchanging notes on this "curfew", rushing back only when they spot a health or police official.

"We are a family of five — my parents, Chotu, my younger sister and me — and we have two small rooms. The officials want us to stay inside all the time. But how can we do that? There's hardly any space," Laxmi says. The crates of vegetables that Laxmi's mother, a vegetable hawker, brought home the day the quarantine was announced take up most of the space in the room.

On March 20, a 40-year-old resident of the slum, working as a masseuse at a salon in Chandigarh, tested positive for coronavirus. With more than 2,500 households tightly packed in slum, the authorities cordoned it off early next morning, along with its residents. They are mostly Class IV government employees, auto-rickshaw drivers or household helps. Police now man the four main



Health officials keep dropping in, a cue for many to quickly wear masks. Jaipal Singh

access points, and eight checkpoints around, with no one allowed in or out. Health officials drop in, wearing protective gear.

Officials claim that every morning, entry of essential perishable items such as milk and eggs is allowed to kirana shops inside the slum, after "due precautions".

Rakesh Kumar, who owns a small kirana shop at Gate No. 3 of the slum, says, "Our supply of milk, bread and other such items has been coming, at least so far. But we have cut down on our orders since people in the slum are running out of money."

On Wednesday, five days into the quarantine, the Panchkula administration also started providing rations — 2-kg packets of rice, wheat and pulses — at subsidised rates to all daily-wage labourers. Pre-cooked food packets, meant to be sufficient for one, were given out at Rs 5 each.

Dr Rajiv Narwal, the nodal officer for coronavirus in Panchkula, says they can't take any risk. "We are scared the infection will spread quickly if even a single new case comes. It is a miracle there have been no new cases since the first one," Narwal says.

Back at the slum, while those who lie in the outer areas use masks or handkerchiefs or dupattas to cover their faces, deep inside, people pull their masks on only when they spot a health team.

Dr Narwal says they have provided masks to all residents seen sneezing or coughing. "All others have been asked to cover their faces. We have also been telling them to wash their hands every hour, if not every 20 minutes."

With schools shut, children of the slum mostly hang around the open dumping grounds nearby. "We keep telling them to maintain a distance of at least 1.5 metres from each other, but it's impossible. And with homes so cramped, how can children possibly spend all their times cooped up inside?" says an inspector.

As the men mostly sit outside their homes, smoking and chatting, the women say they have to work doubly hard. Laughs Huma Devi, who lives in the slum with her husband and daughters Harsha (4) and Mausam (2). "Earlier, I would send the children to the anganwadi and do their work. Now I end up looking after not just the kids, but my husband too."

Her husband Mahendrar Kumar has worries of his own. "It is getting very frustrating. We have never spent whole of a day inside in our entire lives," says Mahendrar, who owns a ration depot.

Rama Devi, 29, a daily wagger with four sons and a daughter, worries how they will go on. Her husband is a vegetable vendor, who is also out of work. "Each of us is eating two rotis per meal instead of four. I

add more water to the daal and give children tea instead of milk. I am trying to save whatever little money we have," she says, adding that, after a while, even subsidised food provided by the authorities may be unaffordable.

Mahendrar has also worked out barter deals to get on. "For instance, my godown has some grains, which I exchanged with my neighbour, a vegetable vendor," he says.

Rohit Sonker has no such option though. The 21-year-old runs a meat shop on the periphery of the slum, which is now shut. "The day they put us in quarantine, I kept some meat for my family and had to bury the rest so that it did not rot. I lost almost Rs 10,000 worth of meat."

The meat market, at the colony's Entry No. 3, has since been sanitised by the Municipal Corporation and Health Department. Policemen posted in the slum and nearby areas usually gather here for their lunch and dinner.

With cooking over, Laxmi says that despite the gloom, there are a few bright spots. "My Board exams were on when they shut the school. It was a dream come true. I don't think anybody has ever had such luck," she beams.

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# 12 THE OUTBREAK

BODY &amp; MIND

## Muscle's memory may keep us fit

Muscles may "remember" in ways that will allow us to regain fitness once we start working out again

GRETCHEN REYNOLDS

FOR THOSE of us sheltering at home because of coronavirus and unable to visit the gym or otherwise weight train, a new study of the inner workings of our muscles should be heartening. It finds that if muscles have been trained in the past, they seem to develop a molecular memory of working out that lingers through a prolonged period of inactivity, and once we start training again, this "muscle memory" could speed the process by which we regain our former muscular strength and size.

The findings suggest, in effect, that skipping workouts now need not guarantee enfeeblement later, and if we forget what fitness once felt like, our muscles recollect.

Many of us probably think that muscle memory refers to our well-documented ability to retain physical skills even without practice. Learn to ride a bicycle and you never forget. Ditto, by and large, for hitting a free throw, skiing a mogul or starting to walk as a child. These repeated movements apparently burn themselves into our motor neurons, scientists believe, and remain available for later retrieval from our brains and nervous systems, whenever needed.

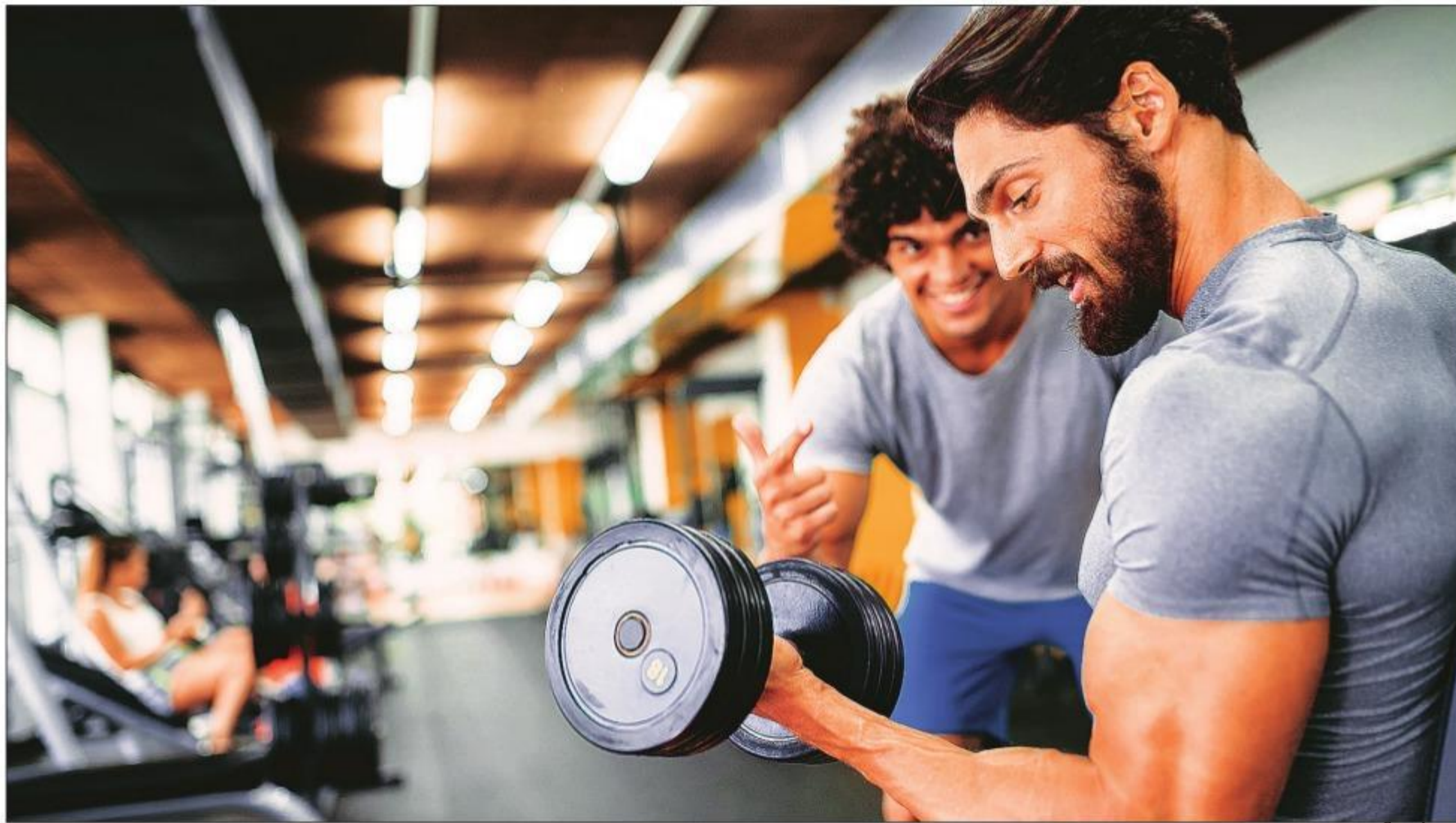
But it has been less clear whether trace memories of past exercise reside within our muscles themselves and affect how well we respond to future workouts. Past studies suggest that they might. In a representative recent study, for instance, sedentary older men who completed 12 weeks of weight training gained muscle strength and size, much of which they lost during a subsequent 12-week layoff, but all of which returned within only eight weeks of returning to the gym.

How past exercise primes our muscles for future gains has not been clear, though. In animal experiments, muscle cells inside mice and rats develop extra nuclei when the animals train, and these specialised bits of the cell remain even if the animals stop training and lounge about. The added nuclei are thought to prepare the muscles to add strength and size when the animals return to working out.

But a few small experiments with people suggest that our muscle cells may not pack on extra nuclei when we lift weights. So, a group of Swedish researchers began to wonder recently whether alterations in the activity of genes and proteins inside our muscles might help explain whether and why our muscles remember how to be strong.

To find out, they began by recruiting 19 young men and women who had never played sports or formally exercised at all, so that their muscles were new to formal weight training. They checked these volunteers' current muscular strength and size, and then had them start training a single leg.

To accomplish this, the young men and women completed increasingly strenuous leg presses and leg extensions using only their right or left leg, while the other limb lolly-gagged to the side. These one-legged work-

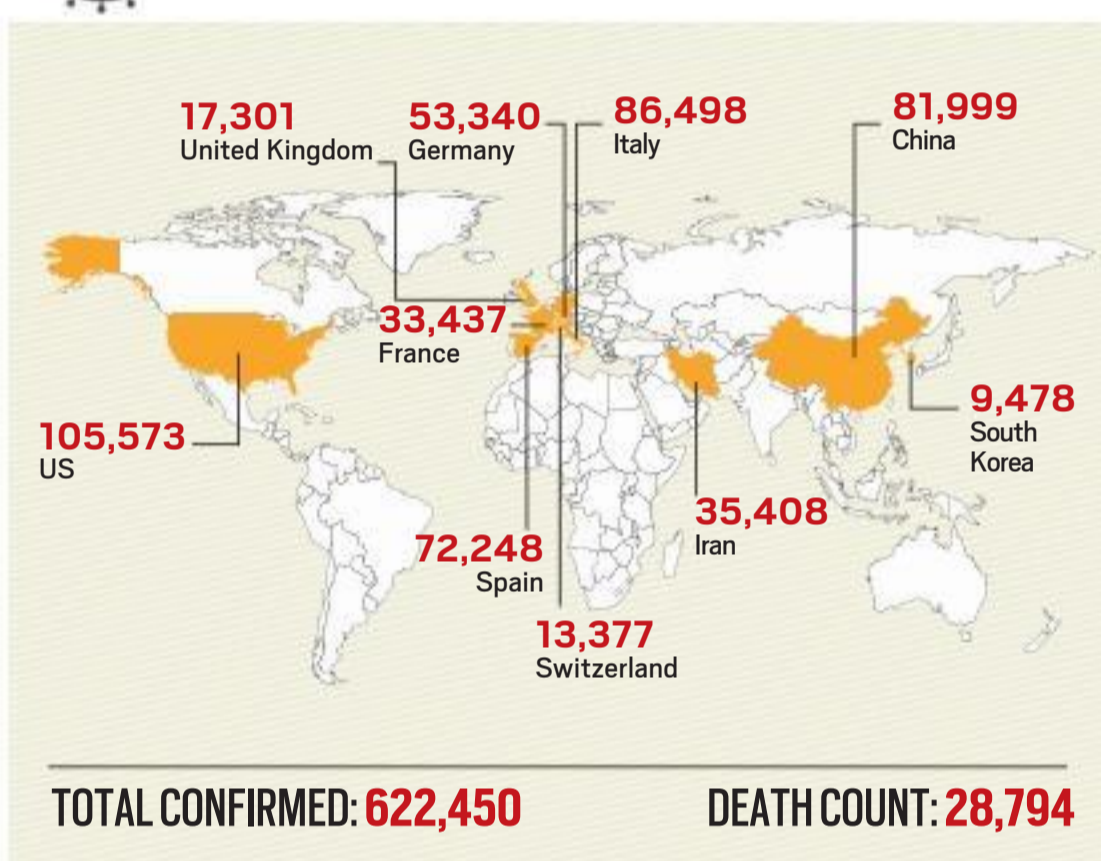


Getty Images



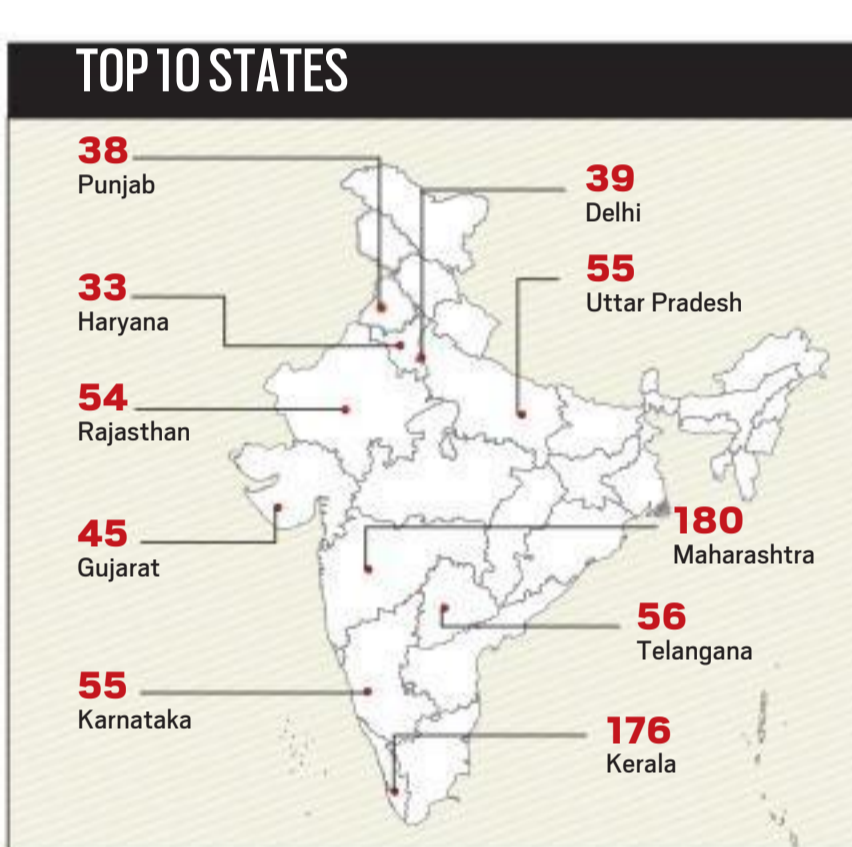
### CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

DAILY COUNT OF DEATHS, INFECTIONS



Source: Johns Hopkins University, updated at 9.50pm on March 28

### INDIA COUNT:



Union Health Ministry update at 5.45 pm, March 28. Some states may have reported higher numbers. Only states with most cases are listed.

80 PATIENTS DISCHARGED IN 13 STATES ACROSS THE COUNTRY

### 909 (19 DEATHS)

#### REST OF INDIA

Andhra Pradesh	14
Bihar	9
Chandigarh	8
Chhattisgarh	6
Goa	3
Himachal Pradesh	3
Jammu and Kashmir	20
Ladakh	13
Madhya Pradesh	30
Manipur	1
Mizoram	1
Odisha	3
Puducherry	1
Tamil Nadu	40
Uttarakhand	5
West Bengal	15

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

outs continued for 10 weeks, at which point the researchers re-measured muscles, and then the volunteers stopped their training completely for 20 weeks.

After this layoff from working out, they returned to the lab, where the scientists checked the current state of their leg muscles, took muscle biopsies from both legs and had them complete a strenuous leg workout, using both legs this time. Afterwards, the researchers biopsied the muscles again. Then they checked the levels of a wide array of gene markers and biochemical signals within the volunteers' muscle cells that are believed to

be related to muscle health and growth.

They found telling differences between the legs that had trained and those that had not, both before and after the lone training session. For one thing, the previously trained leg remained sturdier, having retained about 50 per cent of its strength gains during the 20 weeks without exercise.

The molecular differences from leg to leg were more complex, with some genes showing greater activity in the trained leg and others less, and some biochemicals being more abundant there and others more uncommon, compared to the untrained limb. Some of

these variances appeared in each leg before the workout, indicating that the trained muscles had become and remained subtly distinct, even after 20 weeks without exercise. Other molecular changes cropped up after the workout, with each leg responding a bit differently to the exertion. Taken as a whole, the scientists concluded, the trained leg's genetic activity suggests that its muscle cells had become genetically and metabolically more ready to strengthen and grow than the cells in the leg that had not trained before.

These findings "support the idea that muscle memory could occur at the gene and

protein level," says Marcus Moberg, an assistant professor at the Swedish School of Sport and Health Sciences in Stockholm, who led the new study. The scientists did not track the volunteers through subsequent workouts for this study, though, and cannot say how quickly strength and mass might bounce back. They also studied weight training, not endurance exercise, and only in young people without health problems.

But the results remain encouraging, especially for everyone confined at home now. When gyms reopen, our muscles should rapidly rebound, Dr Moberg says. **NYT**

## Belgium debates how far to cycle



A woman riding a bicycle in Brussels on Friday. Reuters

THE BELGIUM government has given mixed signals about whether it will place limits on the distance people can cycle, after neighbouring France told citizens not to travel more than a kilometre from home for exercise.

Belgium has already shut schools, cafes and gyms, and told people to stay home apart from trips to buy food or medicine, or for exercise, at a distance from others.

Cycling is a favourite pastime in Belgium, and the authorities are debating whether curbing it is necessary. Interior minister Pieter De Crem said the French limit was tighter than needed, but a 70-km cycle ride would be going too far.

France, which has seen more than 350 deaths from coronavirus and is currently under lockdown, has banned cycling and imposed a 2-km (1.2-mile) limit on far people can leave home for exercise.

Britain has advised people to "stay local" and not travel unnecessarily for exercise amidst the coronavirus pandemic, and urged them to use "open spaces" near home, where possible. It follows confusion over whether people could drive places to go walking, running, or cycling.

"Unfortunately you cannot do it anymore. And if clarification is needed, then it will come," Belgium minister De Crem said Thursday. Belgium Health Minister Maggie De Block though later contradicted him: "In fact, you can cycle as far as you want," she said. "I think going out for a walk or a bike ride is healthy."

Virologist Marc Van Ranst, speaking to Belgian broadcaster VRT, said he did not think a limit on distance travelled during exercise was necessary. More important was making sure people who venture out stay the recommended distance apart. "Does the number of kilometres you ride make a difference? I don't think so," he said.

As of March 27, Belgium had 7,284 confirmed cases of coronavirus. **REUTERS**

## Looking at flu with greater respect

COVID-19 is more devious than H1N1; it also comes with lockdowns leaving poverty in wake



TANU SINGHAL

WITH COVID-19 sweeping the globe, we are in the midst of an unprecedented crisis. For me, it brings back memories of the swine flu pandemic of 2009. In April that year we started hearing about a virus with genetic material from birds, swines and humans which was spreading rapidly across the globe. Ours was a new hospital then and I had just started my career as an ID (Infectious Disease) specialist. In July 2009, a 40-year-old man who had returned from the Caribbean walked into my room. He was running fever with chills and had blood-shot eyes. He cut a textbook picture of an H1N1 patient. Promptly, I referred him to the infectious disease hospital in Mumbai — he tested positive for swine flu. He was the first case in Mumbai. I had to travel to Kolkata the next day for a meeting but I skipped it because I feared I might infect

others on the flight. Fortunately, I did not fall sick.

Over the next few weeks we started getting more cases and they were admitted in the isolation ICU. There was severe stigma associated with the illness, and I remember being reprimanded in the print media when I suggested to a well-connected parent that their child could have H1N1 infection. Back then, Oseltamivir was in short supply and it needed a special prescription. The tests also could only be done in government centres. We saw many cases and deaths too. However, over the next few months the virus became a part of our lives; we got used to it. Isolation protocols were relaxed and then eventually stopped. Oseltamivir became freely available. Over the past 10 years we have regularly got patients with mild and severe H1N1 flu, with deaths, but it is just like any other illness. It did change some things though — we looked at flu with greater respect. Rates of vaccination against flu increased and, for the first time, we started using molecular methods in clinical practice to diagnose respiratory viral infections.

In the years that followed, we continued to have pandemic scares — the Middle Eastern respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS CoV) in 2012-2013; and the Ebola



We fear non-COVID-19 patients will be neglected, rising morbidity in the group. Health drives like for TB will take a hit

virus disease in 2014. We prepared for them as well but fortunately they didn't reach us. Fast-forward to 2020. I started to hear about COVID-19 sometime in mid/late-January. Towards the end of January India started placing travel restrictions, and I remember going to the Mumbai international airport to speak to authorities about the disease. I also spoke to the hugely apprehensive crew of Air India in Mumbai who were slated to bring back Indian students stranded in Wuhan. February was relatively quiet. Three stu-

dents tested positive for the virus in Kerala and recovered well, and cases in China also started declining. We were all optimistic that the virus, like the MERS and Ebola, wouldn't reach us or the rest of the world. In fact, I booked tickets for a summer trip to Europe. But in March, all hell broke loose. By the second week, South Korea, Italy and Iran saw an exponential increase in the number of cases/deaths, with their healthcare systems crumbling under the weight of the disease. Then, cases started growing in Spain, the US, France, Germany, and also

India. The government imposed international travel restrictions, followed by home-quarantine, domestic travel restrictions and, finally, a lockdown. We also prepared to admit patients in our isolation ward.

But COVID-19 is not following in the H1N1 footprint. This virus is more devious and spreads faster. The basic case reproduction rate (number of people infected by one person) for COVID-19 stands at 2-3, while that for swine flu is 1.3. The case fatality appears to be higher too — 1-2 per cent for

COVID-19 as against 0.1 per cent for the H1N1 flu. There is no anti-viral drug or vaccine for COVID-19 yet, unlike the swine flu, where Oseltamivir was available and a specific vaccine was developed promptly. There were no lockdowns and curfews at the time. Now people are fighting many enemies — disease, hunger and poverty. It is like a state of war. OPD services and elective procedures were affected in 2009 as well but to a much lesser extent. Now we fear the neglect of non-COVID-19 patients and the morbidity and mortality in this group may exceed that due to COVID-19. Other public health programmes for immunisation, TB, HIV, vector-borne diseases are sure to take a hit. This did not happen during H1N1.

Healthcare workers are most vulnerable to COVID-19 and hence, the need for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is much more than recommended for flu. We are already staring at PPE shortages, and the morale of the healthcare workers is at an all-time low.

And then, there is the infodemic — the explosion of information on social media now is infinitely higher than during H1N1. Everybody is an expert, many remedies are doing the rounds, and people are self-medicating. Hydroxychloroquine and Azithromycin are being mentioned everywhere. There is an air of panic, anxiety and hysteria.

But compared to 2009, we also have certain advantages now. The responses of the government and public health system are stronger and sturdier, and healthcare systems all over the world are connected like never before. So let us be hopeful. Will this virus just vanish, co-exist with us, or overwhelm us? Time alone can tell.

Dr Singhal is Consultant, Pediatrics and Infectious Disease, Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital in Mumbai



Across THE AISLE



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# Timid half measures, yet welcome

ON FRIDAY, March 19, the Prime Minister announced that there would be a Janata Curfew on Sunday, March 22. I thought that the PM was testing the waters and he would announce a lockdown of some sorts at the end of the curfew. There was no announcement on Sunday.

Meanwhile, between March 20 and March 23, several state governments announced partial or total lock down in many parts. Nothing noteworthy happened on Monday (23rd) or Tuesday (24th), except that the number who tested positive and the number who died were creeping up slowly.

Perhaps alarmed by what was happening in Italy, Spain and Iran, the PM went on television again on March 24 and announced a nationwide lockdown effective midnight on that day. The lockdown began at 00.00 hours on March 25 and, when you read this, it would have entered the fifth day. Not only was the country not prepared for a nationwide lockdown, even the Central government was unprepared. How can one otherwise explain the fact that the Economic Task Force announced by the PM on March 19 has not been constituted so far?

## UNPREPARED GOVERNMENT

Regrettably, unpreparedness has been the hallmark of the Modi government since the first case that tested positive was known on January 30. Consider the following:

- The biggest failure was inadequate testing. Epidemiologists and medical experts were unanimous in advocating more testing. Test, test more, trace, isolate and treat was the need of the hour. The government seems to have failed in this regard. At the highest (as I write this), only 12,000 tests per day were being done, casting a cloud on the number reported to be infected. The shifting positions of the ICMR added to the tardiness and the confusion. There is no clarity to this day;

- Even after the number of persons who tested positive had risen to 724 and new cases were reported from new locations every day, the ICMR and Ministry of Health maintained that India was still at Stage 2 and there was no evidence of 'community transmission', a claim doubted by some epidemiologists;

- India needs 7,00,000 PPE suits, 60,00,000 N-95 masks and 100,00,000 3-ply masks. There is no indication how many are available today or when the balance will be available;

- Despite the demand for a ban, export of ventilators, respiratory devices and sanitisers was banned only on March 24;

- Supply chains remain disrupted. Many grocery and provision stores were closed because supplies had stopped. In many instances shop assistants were not allowed to reach the shops;

- There were heart-rending images of small children admitting they had not eaten anything that day because there was no food at home and of migrant workers trudging on the highways to

their homes in Rajasthan or Uttar Pradesh or Bihar. It was evident that the governments had abandoned them to their fate;

- Police — no doubt under the control of state governments — had no clear instructions. In several places, they stopped delivery agents or people buying provisions. Videos of police beating alleged violators with *lathis* and imposing unusual punishments without authority of law went viral and caused great consternation.

## UNDERWHELMING PLAN

The most egregious failure was the failure to announce measures, *simultaneously* with the declaration of total lockdown, to protect the livelihood of the poor and the vulnerable — the tenant farmer, the agricultural worker, the daily wage earner, the self-employed, the owner of a MSME, the laid-off industrial worker, the destitute and the street people. Another set of people left helpless included the employer responsible to pay wages, the taxpayer and the borrower with EMI obligations.

Several suggestions were on the table but the government dithered until March 26. The Financial Action Plan (FAP) announced by the Finance Minister consisted of timid half-measures and was certainly not comprehensive. The FAP will provide adequate food to many sections of the poor, but the plan will not put enough cash in their pockets. Worse,

some sections of the poor and vulnerable were totally overlooked: tenant farmers, MGNREGA workers who will be without MGNREGA work, street people, destitutes, male Jan Dhan account holders, laid-off workers, etc were neglected. Besides, legitimate demands like extension of tax payment deadlines, deferment of EMI due dates, cut in GST rates, etc were not addressed. The FAP was underwhelming. I extended a cautious welcome to the plan.

## NEED LEADERSHIP

Although the FM claimed that the government's outlay for the FAP was Rs 1.7 lakh crore, my estimate of the additional cash that will be transferred to the beneficiaries is about Rs 60,000 crore, plus the imputed value of the foodgrains and pulses of Rs 40,000 crore. This expenditure is *necessary* but certainly not *sufficient*. FAP Part II will be needed in the next few hours or days.

Most people entertain the misplaced belief that India will not be affected as much as China, Italy or Spain were. I am afraid India is not exceptional. India, like every country, will suffer considerable devastation. Further, we are, at present, addressing only the life, health and livelihood concerns of the people. There are the larger questions of the economy, jobs and incomes. A sliding economy will slide further and add to the devastation and misery of the people. The government must shed its hesitations and provide exceptionally bold and decisive leadership.

Fifth COLUMN

TAVLEEN SINGH

Twitter: @tavleen\_singh



# A matter of trust

THE WORLD has changed completely since I last wrote this column. On the day that you last read it, we were under a voluntary 'Janata Curfew', without knowing that this was a rehearsal for a much longer and harsher curfew. I begin by pointing this out because nothing is more important in this time of national crisis than for the trust between the Indian State and ordinary citizens to be restored. At the moment it is in tatters because the State seems to be acting against us (supposedly in our interest) but without the smallest attempt at softening the harshness of the measures being taken to save us. 'Jaan hai to jahan hai', the Prime Minister said poetically, and it is true that the world only matters if we stay alive. But, he needs to bring not just words borrowed from Urdu poetry to reassure us but a large dose of compassion as well.

As I write this, those images of migrant workers walking hundreds of kilometres to get back home fill my head. As does the Reuters video sent to me by an American friend this morning of policemen beating up and humiliating people trying to get home. What she wrote above the video she sent me was, 'My god — the horror of this. It's a new level of monstrous autocracy. These desperate people...' When I put the video on Twitter, the people who shriek loudest about their devotion to Narendra Modi went berserk. They charged 'so-called journalists' like me of having an 'agenda' to defame India.

Their 'nationalism' is not offended by policemen who behave like brutes or an Indian State that does not provide transport to hungry, poor, helpless migrant workers trying desperately to get home. It is offended by journalists who try to speak for those who have no voice. What is frightening is that most of them seem to be members of some kind of core BJP support group on social media. It is the same people who show up on my timeline every time I have dared to criticise the Prime Minister. So without intending to, they confirm that Modi is allergic to criticism.

He has the support of the whole country in this fight against the Chinese virus. But does he trust us enough to tell us what his strategy is? It seems that he does not, or he would have warned our poorest citizens that they needed to get home before this long curfew began. He could tell us now what exactly will be done during these curfewed days to strengthen our medical defences. Will there be new field hospitals for those unlucky enough to get sick? Will ordinary hospitals provide higher standards of cleanliness? Will doctors and nurses on the frontline be given the equipment they need to prevent them from getting sick?

As the Commander-in-Chief of this terrible war against an invisible enemy, we need to hear from him often and with clarity. Donald Trump hates the media but is on national television every day to try and reassure people. The Governor of New York, Andrew Cuomo, has become a national hero for the way in which he has led from the front. Why is it that in this time of crisis all our chief ministers seem to have disappeared and the Prime Minister has only been seen twice? Could it be because that vital trust between the State and the citizens is truly broken?

The Finance Minister appeared last week to announce a relief package for 'the poorest' and she named migrant workers as being in this category, but seemed not to know that they did not even have the means to get home to benefit from this package. I am not going to analyse the details of whether the 'package' actually will provide the relief that people need. Others have done this well in this newspaper. What I noticed when Nirmala Sitharaman was speaking was that she left me feeling not even a little reassured. Instead of going into the details and the nitpiggery that should ordinarily be dealt with by a lowly official, what I would like to have heard from her was the grand plan to save the Indian economy from tanking. Does she have a strategy to ensure that this does not happen?

From the Prime Minister what we need to hear about are the steps that his government has taken to ensure that the virus is vanquished. He needs to share with us why so few Indians have been tested so far. Is it because we do not have enough testing kits? If this is so, then we need to know when there will be enough available? He needs to explain exactly why this curfew is for 21 days only? Instead of telling us on the 21st day that it is being extended, it would be truly reassuring if he explained in advance why this might be necessary and whether it will be relaxed in some states and cities before others.

It is only when he shows that he trusts us enough to give us some idea of what he plans to do to bring us safely through this terrible battle, that has no battlefield and no visible enemy, will we be able to trust him to lead us through these days of darkness to light. Meanwhile, stay safe, stay healthy.

inside TRACK

COOMI KAPOOR



## No BLAME CALLING

Opposition politicians complain privately that because of the pandemic, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has an excuse to wriggle out of accountability for the declining economy since there is now a global financial crisis. Finance may not be Modi's forte, but organisation, which a peeved LK Advani once described as "event management", certainly is. Even some of Modi's bitter political critics have appreciated the swift measures he put in place against coronavirus and the economic bailout package. Only time will tell whether Modi's biggest gamble will pay off or the solution proves more lethal than the actual disease. In the present health crisis, Modi relies on a ministerial brains trust which includes S Jaishankar, Harsh Vardhan and Hardeep Singh Puri. In addition, most ministers have been assigned specific states to monitor.

## FAST, BUT...

Narendra Modi's response to the COVID-19 threat was faster and bolder than both British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's and US President Donald Trump's. But there were loopholes in the policy meant to isolate India from the world. Initially, passengers from the US, UK, Japan and Saudi Arabia were exempted for diplomatic reasons and to accommodate OCIs, rather than as part of a comprehensive containment strategy. Most passengers returning from Europe simply took flights via London.

## HARD TASKMASTER

Cynics suspect that Parliament was not adjourned earlier because the BJP did not want the Madhya Pradesh Speaker to cite it as a precedent for not summoning the state Assembly for a vote of no-confidence against the Kamal Nath government. But an aspect that should not be forgotten is that Modi is a hard taskmaster who believes in pushing his people to the hilt and sets an example by leading from the front. When someone once congratulated a minister in Modi's Cabinet for a cushy existence, he remarked wryly, "Under Atal Bihari Vajpayee, it may have been cushy, but Modi keeps you on your toes all the time." During the present pandemic, when the Prime Minister received two complaints from returning passengers about the scanning at the Delhi airport being inadequate, he woke up all departments concerned in the middle of the

night to examine the video footage from the surveillance cameras to see if there were any slip-ups.

## PARTY TRIPS HOUSE

Despite pleas from both Opposition and some BJP MPs that Parliament be adjourned in view of the COVID-19 pandemic, Modi was initially adamant that House would continue till April 4, even though nearly half the Rajya Sabha MPs and a fifth of the Lok Sabha MPs, including Modi, are over 65 years and hence in the high-risk bracket. Rajya Sabha Chairperson Venkaiah Naidu did not permit TMC MP Derek O'Brien to wear a mask in the House and refused to let him demonstrate to MPs the correct method of washing hands to keep the virus at bay. Eventually, O'Brien and some other MPs had to perform self-quarantine when news broke that fellow parliamentarian Dushyant Singh, with whom they had been in contact, was possibly infected. The birthday party of Adil Ahmed in Lucknow, where singer Kanika Kapoor who tested positive was present and which Dushyant Singh attended, generated ripples in both Delhi and Lucknow. Consequently, Parliament adjourned abruptly on March 23 after passing the Finance Bill without discussion. The empty benches suggested that despite a whip, nearly half the BJP MPs asked to be excused. Central Hall was deserted with even the media staying away. Since Uttar Pradesh Health Minister Jai Pratap Singh was also a guest at the Lucknow party, many UP ministers had to self-quarantine too.

## BATTY COOPERATION

Donald Trump pointedly refers to COVID-19 as the Chinese virus, and a few Chinese officials have retaliated with dark hints that there is a US military hand behind it. In fact, two years ago, China and the US had collaborated on a joint study on bats and viruses in Nagaland. The institutions associated with the project, which studied human bat hunters who carried antibodies to deadly viruses like Ebola, included Wuhan's Institute of Virology, the US Department of Defence, which funded the project, and India's National Centre for Biological Sciences. A newspaper reported that the Indian Council of Medical Research was kept in the dark and its permission was not sought before taking samples from bats and bat hunters and accepting foreign funding. Besides, Nagaland has no history of the Ebola disease. The research results were published in a journal in October last year. One of the writers of the research paper was Shi Zhengli, co-director of the Wuhan Institute of Virology and the first spokesperson for the Chinese when the COVID-19 outbreak was reported to the world. She is also among those named in a \$20-trillion lawsuit filed by a Texas advocacy group against the Chinese for allegedly creating the COVID-19 pandemic.

She SAID

SHRUTIDHAPOLA

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# Truth is I, my child are facing unknowns

How long till grandparents visit? Will I get bed to deliver? What if my doctor tests positive? Questions every expectant mother is asking in COVID times

ALMOST EVERY pregnancy has its moments of panic and anxiety. It is inevitable. My first was when I gave in to the temptation early on and ate a packet of chips. Was this it? Had I done some irreparable harm to my unborn child because I had guzzled on chips? Dr Google and the various forums with advice from other mothers assured me it was all fine. So passed the first wave of panic.

But these new pangs of anxiety won't go away so easily. It is as though I have entered a different timeline. The last leg of the pregnancy marathon brings a plot twist that no one anticipated. After all, it is hard to prepare for a global pandemic at any given time, even in our hyper-connected world, where some of us have the privilege of still staying in touch with our friends, doctors, and family, of being able to work despite a 21-day lockdown.

The third trimester is supposed to be different or so I thought. Most have made their social media pregnancy announcements. Mine will be through this article I suppose. Baby showers are a no-go. All cancelled across the world as I see on the various pregnancy-related apps I have downloaded on my phone. No more social mingling, hello social distancing.

The anxiety is not new. I've been diligently following up on the coronavirus outbreak since February. It is one of the perils of working in the news industry. You cannot escape the flood of information, even if it is not your 'beat'. I've kept up with the *Lancet* studies on pregnant women in China, who tested positive in their third trimester and how things appeared to pan out well for them. But none of this brings any kind of reassurance to the mind. The truth is most experts still do not know how the disease will impact pregnant women.

Does the virus transmit from mother to the child? What happens if a newborn gets it? These are the questions that I cannot escape. The evidence is scarce and no one really knows what happens if the disease spreads to more people. And being acutely aware of this brings no relief.

Then there's the lockdown and its clear psychological impact. Am I breaking the law if I go for my checkups? Does my scan qualify as a 'routine checkup'? I'm already doing some complicated food maths in my



Illustration: Suvajit Dey

head. What happens if our regular milk supply doesn't come? What are my other sources of calcium at home? What about foods with iron? What about the eggs? What other proteins should I look at?

There's also the worry that should the outbreak worsen, India's already battered healthcare system will not be able to take the flood of patients. Will I get a bed to deliver? Will my obstetrician fall victim to this virus and be out of action when I need her the most? How do I get a backup doctor in this lockdown? Will my parents and parents-in-law be able to see their grandchild should it come early? How long will one have to practise isolation once the baby is born? I'm sure I'm not the only pregnant woman in the country struggling with these questions.

The 'Don't panic' message is not going to register in my head. I've made my peace with that at least. The anxiety and fear are palpable. And yes, it is okay to feel sad. Sad that this is not how you planned things,

no matter what someone else tells you. It is not an overreaction, at least not at this moment where it appears as though you are a character in a science fiction novel where things are going horribly wrong.

Even as these thoughts fill my head, I'm aware of my extreme privilege in these turbulent times. Food is not a concern, I am assured that some level of healthcare will be available, I still have access to my medication which is needed, and I know that at some point I will still be able to afford and buy the essentials for my unborn child. But for many other pregnant women in India, who are not as privileged as I am, the pandemic, if it worsens in the country, could leave them even more vulnerable and battered.

Shruti Dhapola is an Assistant Editor with The Indian Express online

National Editor Shalini Langer curates the fortnightly 'She Said' column

Out of MY MIND

MEGHNAD DESAI



DESPITE ALL the talk about globalisation for the last 30 years, the current crisis is the first truly global one. It began in China, which used to be a byword for poverty but is now an economic superpower. It stayed in East Asia but was mastered best by South Korea. Then it jumped across to Europe and real tragedies have struck these 'developed' economies. Italy has higher mortality numbers than China and Spain is catching up fast. The US is on the steep side of the curve and numbers of cases and deaths are multiplying at a rapid

# Amidst lockdown, poor need karuna

rate. India has just begun its journey on the infection ladder and the next three months will tell whether the public health system and the government machinery are up to protecting the public.

War has been the most frequently used image in the UK, which has romantic memories of having fought in the Second World War on its own (forgetting the millions from the Empire who fought on its side). Prime Minister Narendra Modi used the analogy of the Mahabharat, saying it lasted 18 days while the lockdown to defeat the virus was for 21 days. Not a happy analogy, as lakhs died in those 18 days. But this is nothing like a war. There is no visi-

ble enemy out there you can attack. We are our own enemies. Any one of us could be carrying and spreading the virus. If you care for your family, friends, town, country, stop meeting friends and family, stop going to work. Become like the untouchables in old India whose shadow was not allowed to fall on the *savarna*.

We are all globally together but only if we keep apart, socially distancing if we are to live and let live. Display *karuna* (compassion), as the Prime Minister said, to fight corona. Each country has a national character. The East Asians — Japanese, Koreans, Chinese — have an enormous feeling of national solidarity. If

the government were to say stay in, the East Asians comply. This is why South Korea succeeded in controlling its mortality and the Chinese were able to lock down the Hubei province.

The British find it very difficult to obey orders except in a real war situation. Many think it is their birthright to disobey what they are asked to do by anyone in authority. So, PM Boris Johnson dithered for two weeks before finally reading the Riot Act and putting the country in lockdown.

India is a mixture of apparent obedience with lurking anarchy. It is the second most populous country and the public health infrastructure is dilapidated. The

system looks after VIPs (who think rules don't apply to them, as we saw in Kolkata) and those who can pay, but leaves the 99.5% to manage the best they can.

The lockdown was launched last Sunday and then accelerated, but no one seems to have grasped the morphology of the society. The poor cannot afford social distancing. If they cannot work in the metros, they have to flee to their rural homes. They can't stay indoors as they live outdoors. They rush back on crowded trains and buses or walk. These trains are traps for the virus, so, for the poor, lockdown cancels itself.

Show *karuna* — behave like an *achhoot* (untouchable).



# 14 THE OUTBREAK THE WORLD

TOP OF THE WORLD



In Karachi, Saturday. AP

## PAKISTAN

**Pak Punjab now epicentre; cases cross 1,400**

Islamabad: The coronavirus cases in Pakistan on Saturday reached 1,321, including 11 deaths, with the Punjab province emerging as the new epicentre of the deadly viral infection in the country. Punjab recorded a total of 448 COVID-19 cases on Saturday, up from 419 cases on Friday. The number surpassed Sindh's tally of 440 cases. Sindh was the province, which reported Pakistan's first coronavirus case. Twenty-three people have recovered. Punjab chief minister Buzdar tweeted that a 22-year-old COVID-19 patient died in Faisalabad, taking the total number of deaths due to the disease in the province to five.

## CANADA

**Virus military's primary concern, says general**

Montreal: The head of Canada's armed forces has said preventing the spread of the coronavirus is the "primary concern" of his troops. "Today, our mission along with the armed defence of Canada is to safeguard our health, safeguard the health of Canadians, and be prepared to respond to calls for assistance," General Jonathan Vance said in a statement Friday. Units will be able to "deploy by sea, road or air" to support authorities in the battle against the pandemic in Canada, the statement added. All those returning from deployment will be quarantined for 14 days.

## CHINA

**Clashes erupt as people try to leave Hubei**

Beijing: In a rare display of public anger in China, dozens of people in central Hubei attacked official vehicles after they were stopped from crossing a bridge and travel to Jiangxi. Videos on Chinese social media on Friday showed unprecedented scenes of police from Hubei and Jiangxi clashing on the bridge connecting the two provinces over barricades erected from stopping Hubei people from moving out over fears of coronavirus spreading. Policemen argued over how to verify if people were allowed to enter Jiangxi, as per reports.

## JAPAN

**Abe says nation at critical stage**

Tokyo: Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe says the country is at a critical stage, but not at a point to declare a state of emergency. Abe says Japan has managed to keep clusters under control by following infection routes. But the strategy is now having difficulty, with a rise of infections that are no longer traceable — an early sign of infection explosion. He says once there is infection overshoot, "our strategy of slowing down the peak of the infections will instantly fall apart." He adds "under the current situation, we are just barely holding up. But I understand we are standing on the edge."

# Grim records in Italy, Spain as toll rises



Coffins pile up in a church due to a high number of deaths in Seriate, Italy, on Saturday; a police officer detains a man from a distance for defying lockdown in Kathmandu. Reuters

## As global infections cross 620,000, Trump signs \$2-trn stimulus package

AGENCIES  
MARCH 28

THE NUMBER of confirmed coronavirus infections worldwide topped 620,000 on Saturday as new cases stacked up quickly in Europe and the United States and officials dug in for a long fight against the pandemic.

The pandemic has killed more than 20,000 people in Europe. Europe is now the most affected continent with 20,059 deaths from a total of 337,632 cases.

US President Donald Trump has signed into law the historic \$2 trillion rescue package, setting in motion a desperately needed financial relief for millions of Americans and secure the country's economy ravaged by the coronavirus pandemic that has killed over 1,700 and infected more than 100,000 people across the nation.

The far-reaching legislation is the largest emergency aid package in US history and promises to deliver a tidal wave of cash to individual Americans,



President Donald Trump signs the stimulus relief package, at the White House. AP

businesses and health care facilities all reeling from the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Help is on the way," Trump assured his countrymen as he signed the bill in the Oval Office at the White House. The Senate and the House of Representatives earlier passed the Bill.

"We got hit by the invisible enemy and we got hit hard," he

said, adding the economy would come roaring back. "I think we are going to have a tremendous rebound," he said.

New York remained the worst-hit city, but Americans braced for worsening conditions elsewhere, with worrisome infection numbers being reported in New Orleans, Chicago and Detroit.

"We cannot completely prevent infections at this stage, but we can and must in the immediate future achieve fewer new infections per day, a slower spread," German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who is in quarantine at home after her doctor tested positive for the virus, told her compatriots in an audio message.

"That will decide whether our health system can stand up to the virus." The virus already has put health systems in Italy, Spain and France under extreme strain. Lockdowns of varying severity have been introduced across Europe, nearly emptying streets in normally bustling cities, including Paris where drone photos showed the city's landmarks eerily deserted.

In parts of Africa, virus prevention measures have taken a violent turn as countries impose lockdowns and curfews or seal off major cities, with police in Kenya firing tear gas and officers elsewhere captured in mobile phone footage whacking people with batons.

## Fatalities in Spain rise by 832 in a day

REUTERS  
MADRID, MARCH 28

SPAIN'S CORONAVIRUS fatalities rose by a record 832 people overnight to 5,690 as hospitals and morgues were overwhelmed and a police chief fought back tears announcing a colleague's death.

Second only to Italy in fatalities, Spain also saw infections rise to 72,248 on Saturday from 64,059 the day before.

Health emergency chief Fernando Simon said the epidemic appeared to be reaching its peak in some areas, but the nation was short of intensive care unit beds.

"We continue to have a major problem with ICU saturation," said Simon.

As Spain prepared to enter its third week of lockdown, an unused public building known as "the doughnut" was the latest to be turned into a makeshift morgue after a city ice rink last week, Spanish media including El Pais newspaper reported.

## Virus response fateful for EU, says Italy PM, as death toll tops 10,000

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
ROME, MARCH 28

ITALIAN PRIME Minister Giuseppe Conte warned Saturday that the European Union could lose its purpose if it fails to come up with a strong response to the coronavirus threat.

The move comes even as Italy's death toll exceeded 10,000, as per a government official.

Conte aired his grievances after the 27 EU leaders could not agree on an action plan during an argumentative six-hour video conference Thursday.

The crux of the argument is about the extent to which the EU should abandon its policy of keeping within tight budget constraints. Rome and Madrid want the EU to start issuing "corona bonds" — a form of common debt that governments sell on markets to raise money and address individual economic needs. "If Europe does not rise to this

EXPLAINED  
E.

## Calls for more to be done

THE EU meet was held even as the eurozone is predicted to face recession. As opposed to its policy of tight budgets, the EU has approved major sums to combat effects of the pandemic. Spain and Italy, the most affected nations, call for more to be done. As per reports, this has led to hesitance from some countries, especially over the idea of joint debt.

unprecedented challenge, the whole European structure loses its raison d'être (reason for existing) to the people," Conte said.

## In COVID-19 fight in Scandinavia, Sweden stands out as unorthodox

CHRISTINA ANDERSON & HENRIK PRYSER LIBELL  
STOCKHOLM, MARCH 28

WHEN THE coronavirus swept into the Scandinavian countries, Norway and Denmark scrambled to place extensive restrictions on their borders to stem the outbreak. Sweden, their neighbour, took a decidedly different path.

While Denmark and Norway closed their borders, shut restaurants and ski slopes and told all students to stay home this month, Sweden closed only its high schools and colleges, kept its preschools, grade schools, pubs, restaurants and borders open — and put no limits on the slopes.

Sweden's approach has raised questions about whether it's gambling with a disease, COVID-19, that has no cure or vaccine, or if its tactic will be



Crowded cafes in Stockholm on March 26. Reuters

seen as a savvy strategy to fight a scourge that has laid waste to millions of jobs and prompted global lockdowns. By Saturday, Sweden, with 10.12 million people, recorded more than 3,060 cases and 105 deaths.

There is no evidence that Swedes are underplaying the enormity of the disease rampaging across the globe. The country's leader and health officials

have stressed hand washing, social distancing and protecting people over the age of 70 by limiting contact with them.

The state epidemiologist, Anders Tegnell, said in an interview that Sweden's strategy is based on science and boiled down to this: "We are trying to slow the spread enough so that we can deal with the patients coming in."

Sweden's approach appeals to the public's self-restraint and sense of responsibility, Tegnell said. "That's the way we work in Sweden. Our whole system for communicable disease control is based on voluntary action. The immunization system is completely voluntary and there is 98 percent coverage," he explained.

"You give them the option to do what is best in their lives," he added. "That works very well, according to our experience." NYT

## COVID-19 PANDEMIC: THREE KEY FIGURES

**\$142 bn**

Canada PM Justin Trudeau announced measures, doubling the aid pledged days ago to more than Can\$200 bn

**\$300,000**

The emergency funds granted by the Asian Development Bank to Bangladesh to help the country tackle the virus pandemic

**900%**

The percentage by which hate speech towards China and Chinese people has increased on Twitter, according to a report by a tech startup

## 1,000 deaths in UK, testing stepped up

ESTELLE SHIRBON  
LONDON, MARCH 28

MEDICAL WORKERS in England on the front line of the coronavirus pandemic started to be tested on Saturday as the number of COVID-19 deaths in Britain topped 1,000 after a record 260 people died in the previous 24 hours.

Government figures showed 1,019 people had died as of 17:00 GMT on Friday, while the number of confirmed cases stood at 17,089 on Saturday morning, up 17.5% on a day earlier. Britain is bracing for the epidemic to peak in the coming weeks, and is building field hospitals in London, Birmingham, Manchester and Cardiff to bolster the response from its NHS.

The government, which had been criticised by some doctors and nurses for not providing them



Paramedics in London. Reuters

with enough protective gear and testing kits, announced on Friday it was introducing a much bigger testing regime, with checks for health workers in England.

Frontline medical staff in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are already being tested.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson and health minister Matt Hancock are among those who tested positive. REUTERS

## AFGHANISTAN

**Taliban carry out attacks amid growing virus threat**

MUJIB MASHAL & NAJIM RAHIM  
KABUL, MARCH 28

THE TALIBAN on Saturday attacked several provinces in northern Afghanistan, overrunning large parts of one district even as American diplomats expressed optimism that a peace process stalled over the release of prisoners was getting back on track.

The insurgents launched major assaults in three northern provinces — in Kunduz, whose capital was overrun by the Taliban repeatedly in recent years, as well as in Faryab and Badakhshan. Some of the worst fighting occurred in Badakhshan Province, where the insurgents took control of much of the district of Yamgan and inflicted heavy casualties on Afghan forces in another district, Jurm.

Amanullah Iman, who leads the executive branch of the Yamgan district office, said hundreds of Taliban fighters attacked soon after dawn and captured the district centre after three hours of fighting. "There were five outposts in Yamgan district center, and the Taliban captured all of them," Iman said. "The security forces escaped to a military base in another part of this district."

The fighting rages despite an appeal for a cease-fire on humanitarian grounds to slow the spread of the coronavirus across the country. In the roughly dozen Afghan provinces that have reported positive cases, the Taliban launched more than 300 attacks last week. The capital, Kabul, as well as Herat, have gone under partial lockdown. NYT

## AT A HOSPITAL, SHE WAS TOLD HER SICKNESS WAS RUTHLESS

# 'Patient Zero': 57-year-old shrimp seller in Wuhan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
BEIJING/LONDON, MARCH 28

A 57-YEAR-OLD female shrimp seller in China's Wuhan city, the originating point of the coronavirus pandemic, has been identified as one of the first victims of COVID-19, which has claimed nearly 28,000 lives around the world so far, as per media reports.

The coronavirus 'patient zero', who made a full recovery in January after month-long treatment, believes the Chinese government could have checked the spread of the disease had it

acted sooner.

Wei Guixian, as identified by *The Wall Street Journal*, was selling shrimps at the Huanan Seafood Market on December 10 when she developed a cold. Believing she had the common flu, Wei went to a local clinic for treatment where she was given an injection, the *Mirror UK* reported.

However, Wei continued to feel weak and visited Eleventh Hospital in Wuhan a day later.

The feeling of lethargy persisted and Wei visited one of the biggest medical facilities in the region — Wuhan Union Hospital — on December 16.



A temperature check facility in Wuhan, Hubei, Saturday. Reuters

At the Union Hospital, Wei was told her sickness was "ruthless" and that many from Huanan Market had visited the hospital with matching symptoms.

At the end of December, Wei was quarantined when doctors related the emergence of the coronavirus with the seafood market, the *Mirror UK* reported. Chinese news outlet *The Paper*.

The article in *The Paper* concluded that the new coronavirus is likely to become the fifth endemic coronavirus in humans. "Coronaviruses clearly have the ability to cross species boundaries and adapt to new hosts, which al-

lows us to more directly predict more coronaviruses in the future."

Wei regained her health in January. The COVID-19 'patient zero' believes she got the disease from a toilet she shared with meat sellers in the market. She said several vendors trading close to her also contracted the killer disease.

In a release, Wuhan Municipal Health Commission confirmed Wei was among the first 27 patients to test positive for COVID-19 and one of 24 cases directly related to the market.

Wei said the virus death toll could have been lower if the government had "acted sooner."



# 15 ECONOMY

## BANKING WATCH MEGA MERGER OF PSBs FROM APR 1

Mumbai: The schemes for the merger of ten state-run banks into four lenders are coming into force from April 1, the Reserve Bank of India said. In separate releases, the RBI said the branches of merging banks will operate as of the banks in which these have been merged. PTI

## DESPITE SIGNIFICANTLY LOW GLOBAL CRUDE PRICES, FALLING IMPORT BILL

# Forex reserves fall \$12 bn as FPIs pull out funds on virus-driven uncertainty

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

EVEN AS global crude oil prices continue to trade significantly low and imports have also gone down following the coronavirus outbreak, a sharp outflow of funds by foreign portfolio investors (FPIs), looking for safer havens amidst the current global uncertainty, pulled India's foreign exchange reserves sharply down by \$12 billion in the week ended March 20. The reserves were down to \$469.9 billion, from \$481.9 billion a week back on March 13.

While the foreign exchange reserves had hit an all-time high of \$487.23 billion on March 6, they fell sharply by \$17.3 billion over the next two weeks. The decline has been primarily driven by outflow of funds by FPIs as they pulled out over \$15 billion in March till date. The outflow has also led to a steep fall in the stock markets, as the Sensex at the BSE has fallen by 8,482 points, or 22.1 per cent, this month.

According to data released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), while the forex reserves fell by \$12 billion in the reporting week ended March 20, the decline in reserves was mainly on account of

EXPLAINED

## FPI outflow from emerging markets likely to continue

WITH THE coronavirus threat looming large on global growth and countries facing risk, FPIs are likely to continue their outflow from emerging economies, such as India, and that may keep the foreign exchange reserves under pressure. Low crude oil prices and decline in imports may, however, provide it some support.

decrease in foreign currency assets that fell \$10.2 billion to \$437.1 billion from a high of \$451.13 billion on March 6, 2020.

The global spread of coronavirus over the last couple of months — which has so far claimed over 27,000 lives — has not only roiled stock markets but is threatening to pull global growth significantly down as economic activity has been hit badly. It has, thereby, pushed investors to seek refuge in safer investment destinations and instruments, leading to outflow of funds.

Indian foreign exchange reserves had a smooth run over the last six months as they rose week-on-week for nearly six months.

While FPIs invested a net of Rs 58,337 crore, or nearly \$8 billion, between September 2019 and February 2020, a relatively low crude oil price also helped the rise in foreign exchange reserves.

Since September 20, 2019, when Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a cut in corporate tax rates, the forex reserves have been rising week-on-week and shot up to an all-time high of \$487.23 billion in the week ended March 6, 2020. A sharp decline in global crude oil prices, meanwhile, were a blessing in disguise for India during this period.

As crude oil amounts for almost 20 per cent of the country's import bill, crude prices trading at

levels of around \$26 per barrel (down from \$52 per barrel a month ago) provides India a lot of comfort on the current account front. It has also given central government the headroom to raise the duty on petrol and diesel prices by Rs 3 per litre.

On March 23, the government raised the cap on special additional excise duty on petrol and diesel to Rs 18 and Rs 12 per litre, respectively, as per the amendments in the Finance Bill passed in the Parliament Monday. The change in the cap will enable the government to raise duties on petrol and diesel by another Rs 8 per litre each.

It is important to note that, while there was a sudden spike in global crude oil prices in January, following the geopolitical tensions between United States and Iran and it hit a 8-month high of \$70.25 per barrel on January 6, 2020, the prices fell sharply following the de-escalation of tensions, until the outbreak of coronavirus in China.

Analysts believe that the decline in crude oil prices following the outbreak of coronavirus will help India as it will reduce India's annual import bill and also provide the government with a window to raise some additional resources.

## FOREX RESERVES

Week ended	Reserves*
Sept 20	428.6
Sept 27	433.6
Oct 4	437.8
Oct 11	439.7
Oct 18	440.8
Oct 25	442.5
Nov 1	446.1
Nov 8	447.8
Nov 15	448.2
Nov 22	448.5
Nov 29	451.1
Dec 6	453.4
Dec 13	454.5
Dec 20	454.9
Dec 27	457.5
Jan 3	461.2
Jan 10	461.2
Jan 17	462.2
Jan 24	466.7
Jan 31	471.3
Feb 7	473
Feb 14	476.1
Feb 21	476.1
Feb 28	481.5
Mar 6	487.2
Mar 13	481.9
Mar 20	469.9

\*in \$ billion; Source: RBI

## AIMS TO BOOST AIR TRANSPORT CAPACITY DURING VIRUS CRISIS

# To ensure timely movement of essential commodities, govt sets up air cargo management group

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

TO TACKLE with the sudden shortfall in air transport capacity, the government has instituted an air cargo management group for COVID-19 to ensure that essential commodities can be ferried across the country in a timely manner.

In addition to freighter aircraft already being allowed to transport without restrictions, the Centre has also allowed private airlines to operate passenger planes only with cargo.

"An Air cargo management group for COVID-19 has been created with a dedicated team for smooth movement of cargo. Ministry is adopting a hub & spoke approach to move essential commodities across the country. Resident Commissioners of States/UTs are part of the group," the Ministry of Civil Aviation said.

Notably, cargo carried in underbelly of passenger aircraft accounts for nearly 60 per cent of the total air cargo transported across India. "Private airlines/freighters have been co-opted to link the request of States/UTs for smooth movement of essential items. Additionally, ATRs of Alliance Air have been kept on standby at Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Hyderabad," the Ministry

## PRIVATE AIRLINES TO FLY PLANES WITH CARGO

In addition to freighter aircraft already being allowed to transport without restrictions, the central government has also allowed private airlines to operate passenger planes only with cargo

Notably, cargo carried in underbelly of passenger

aircraft accounts for nearly 60% of the total air cargo transported across India

Moreover, Air India planes are being chartered by the government at concessional rates for cases needing large aircraft, especially to move ICMR items to North East and other states

added. Alliance Air operates a fleet of ATR turboprop aircraft.

On Friday, budget carrier SpiceJet operated a special charter flight from Delhi to Coimbatore carrying a Hazmat suit to help local authorities there replicate and start local manufacturing.

"We are already flying food, medicines and medical equipment for government every day. We would love to alleviate the suffering of these migrant workers, especially those from Bihar by flying some flights between Delhi/Mumbai and Patna," Ajay Singh, CMD, SpiceJet, said.

Vadia Group airline GoAir, too, has offered the government to fly migrant workers to their native places.

In addition, Air India planes are being chartered by the govern-

ment at concessional rates for cases needing large aircraft, especially to move Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) items to North East and other states. "Helicopters are ready in NE for intra-region movements. Support is being given to private agencies interested in aiding efforts," the Civil Aviation Ministry said.

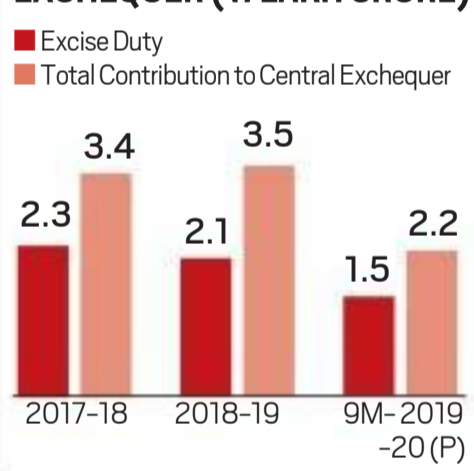
"Accordingly, essential items especially medicine & ICMR kits were transported from Delhi to Aizawl, Dibrugarh, Kolkata & Hyderabad on 27th March. The second flight of the day transported essential items from Mumbai to Pune, Bengaluru & Trivandrum," it further said, adding that the third batch of air cargo transported essential items from Delhi to Pune and ICMR kits from Pune to Patna.

## Tax hike on fuel unlikely to generate sizeable amount

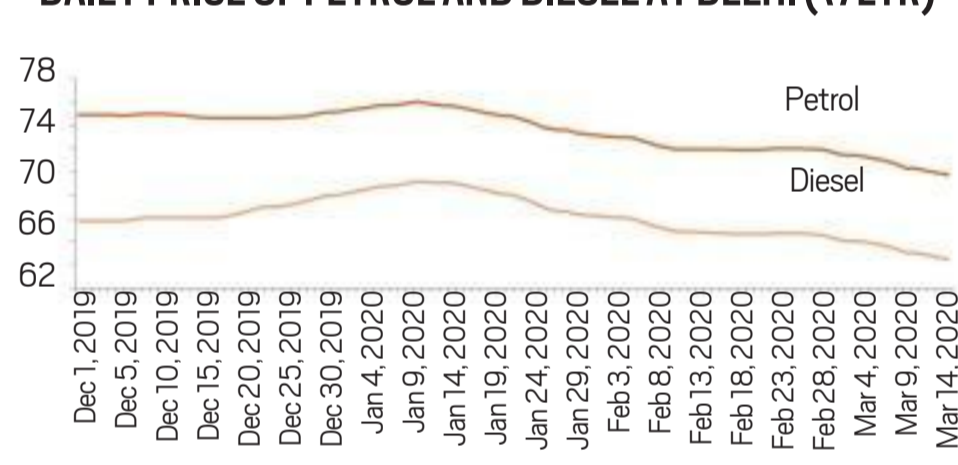
The recent hike in duty on petrol and diesel by ₹3/litre each is aimed to shore up government coffers. However, the Centre is unlikely to collect a sizeable amount as excise duty revenue given the current slowdown and COVID-19 outbreak

FALL IN CONSUMPTION: The consumption of petrol and diesel, which has largely remained subdued, is expected to fall further with the travel restrictions imposed by the various state governments, according to CARE Ratings. Consumption of petrol and diesel has been around 8.2 per cent and 1.1 per cent (April-February) as compared with it being 8.1 per cent and 3.2 per cent in the corresponding period a year ago

## CONTRIBUTION OF EXCISE DUTY TO THE CENTRAL EXCHEQUER (₹/LAKH CRORE)



## DAILY PRICE OF PETROL AND DIESEL AT DELHI (₹/LTR)



Nearly 50% fall in oil prices: Global crude oil prices have decreased by a steep 48.9 per cent since from the start of the calendar year 2020 till date

Compiled by: ENS Economic Bureau

## Tata group commits ₹1,500 cr to fight COVID-19, to make ventilators locally

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU  
MUMBAI, MARCH 28

THE TATA group on Saturday said it has committed Rs 1,500 crore to fight the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, as well as protect and empower all affected communities. The group also said it's gearing up to manufacture ventilators in India.

While Tata Trusts, the major shareholder of Tata Sons, have committed Rs 500 crore, Tata Sons announced an additional Rs 1,000 crore in support towards fighting the COVID-19 outbreak and related activities.

"In this exceptionally difficult period, I believe that urgent emergency resources need to be deployed to cope with the needs of fighting the COVID-19 crisis, which is one of the toughest challenges the human race will face," Tata Trusts chairman Ratan Tata said.

"... I believe that urgent emergency resources need to be deployed to cope with the needs of fighting the COVID-19 crisis, which is one of the toughest challenges the human race will face"

## RATAN TATA

CHAIRMAN, TATA TRUSTS

According to Tata, the money will be used for personal protective equipment for medical personnel on the frontlines, respiratory systems for treating increasing cases, testing kits to increase per capita testing, setting up modular treatment facilities for infected patients, and knowledge management and training of health workers and the general public.

Tata Sons chairman N Chandrasekaran said, "In addition to the initiatives articulated by

Tata Trusts, we are also bringing in the ventilators necessary and 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 the group's very best action, he 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," Chandrasekaran added.

"The country is facing an unprecedented situation and crisis. All of us would have to do whatever it takes to alleviate and enhance the quality of lives of the communities we serve," he said.

"Tata Trusts and the Tata group's companies have in the past risen to the needs of the nation. At this moment, the need of the hour is greater than any other time," Tata said.

## Irdai postpones reinsurance programme

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU  
MUMBAI, MARCH 28

THE INSURANCE Regulatory and Development Authority of India (Irdai) has relaxed the regulatory provision to file board approved final re-insurance programme of insurance companies from April 30 to May 31, 2020.

This is to be filed along with a synopsis of catastrophe modeling report, it said.

"In view of COVID-19 pandemic, it may be difficult for some insurers to adhere with above stipulated time lines. Thus, the insurers may comply with the above regulatory provisions on or before 31st May, 2020," Irdai said. Reinsurance is insurance that an insurance company purchases from another insurance company to insulate itself (at least in part) from the risk of a major claims event.

## FIGHTING COVID-19

### SFBs asked to provide risk-free simple services

Mumbai: The Reserve Bank of India on Saturday allowed Small Finance Banks (SFBs) to carry out simple financial activities without seeking a prior approval from it. His will be applicable to those SFBs who have completed three years of operations. To harmonise the instructions for existing SFBs — those to be licensed under Guidelines for on-tap Licensing, it has been decided to "exempt all existing SFBs from seeking prior approval of Reserve Bank for undertaking such non-risk sharing simple financial service activities, which do not require any commitment of own fund, after three years of commencement of business of SFB. PTI

### Japan PM vows unprecedented stimulus

Tokyo: Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Saturday promised an unprecedented package of steps to cushion the world's third-biggest economy from the fast-spreading deadly coronavirus pandemic, saying that the country was close to a national emergency as infections surged. REUTERS

## Nod to one-time exemption from compliance to enable MPLADS contribution

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU  
MUMBAI, MARCH 28

AFTER ALLOWING a one-time dispensation under the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) to allow MPs to recommend funds for purchase of medical testing and screening equipment for government hospitals and dispensaries in the wake of COVID-19, one-time exemptions have been granted to MPs to produce some certificates for release of the instalments only for FY21.

A Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation circular said for MPs who have decided to contribute for COVID-19,

one-time exemption would be made for furnishing for utilisation and audit certificates, applicable only for financial year 2020-21.

"The sitting Members of Parliament may recommend release of fund from the eligible instalment/s to be released by the MoSPI during 2020-21 to through such fund/central government pool (as may be decided by central government for managing COVID-19 in the country," it said.

Many MPs have announced contribution for COVID-19 from their MPLADS fund. Under the MPLADS scheme, each MP has the choice to suggest to the District Collector for works to the tune of Rs 5 crore per annum to be taken up in his/her constituency.

## China readies stimulus measures

REUTERS  
SHANGHAI, MARCH 28

CHINA PLANS stronger steps to revive an economy hit by coronavirus, as the nation on Saturday reported no new locally transmitted infections for the previous day. The ruling Communist Party's Politburo said Friday it would step up macroeconomic policy adjustments and pursue more proactive fiscal policy, state media reported.

The world's second-biggest economy expected to shrink for the first time in four decades this quarter.

## Discoms get 3 months for payment to gencos to ensure 24X7 power supply

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

TO ASSURE uninterrupted power supply in the middle of the country-wide lockdown to contain the coronavirus outbreak, the Union Power Ministry has relaxed payment norms for electricity distribution companies (discoms). The central government has asked the state-run power generating companies such as NTPC and Power Grid Corporation of India Ltd (PGCIL) to not curtail supply to the states even if the discoms do not clear payments to them on time.

The lockdown is seen to take a

## FM: Banks are certain they'll ensure customer service without disruption

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

AMID COUNTRY-WIDE lockdown to prevent the spread of coronavirus, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday asked state-owned and private sector banks to ensure there was "adequate liquidity" at the branch, ATM and banking correspondent level. Banking and financial services are exempt from the lockdown.

Sitharaman held one-on-one interactions over the phone with heads of all government and leading private banks, who assured assured of customer services without disruption and keeping all branches open.

The minister said she will discuss with states and ensure there are no restrictions on the movement of cash, bankers, vendors or bank mitras.

"Had a detailed conversation with the chiefs of banks — public & private. Encouraging to know that they are doing their best, even during the lockdown. They are certain that they'll ensure customer service without disruption. Social distancing is being adhered to as well," Sitharaman said in a series of tweets on Saturday.

"Bank officials and staff have consistently been on the frontline in providing services to customers during this time of adversity, whether it is physically providing cash where it is needed or keeping branches

open no matter what," she said. According to Indian Banks' Association (IBA), 1,05,988 bank branches across the country were operational on Friday.

Meanwhile, the Department of Financial Services, which oversees the country's banking and insurance sector operations, has created a new handle @DFSFightsCorona to help customers raise complaints, queries and concerns on banking and insurance-related issues with regard to coronavirus related relief measures.

Sitharaman's interactions comes a day after the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) announced a series of measures to reduce interest rates and inject liquidity into the economy.

## SBI raises \$100 mn via green bonds

ENSECONOMIC BUREAU  
MUMBAI, MARCH 28

AT A time when the global financial markets are roiled by the coronavirus pandemic, State Bank of India (SBI) has priced its third overseas green bonds programme of \$100 million.

The bank raised \$100 million floating rate notes at a coupon rate of three months Libor plus 80 basis points during the week. The bonds will be issued through SBI's London Branch by March 31, 2020 and will be listed on Singapore SGX.

## ONLINE FACILITY FOR ALL EPFO MEMBERS

# Rules for relaxation in withdrawal criteria from EPF accounts notified

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

THE LABOUR and Employment Ministry has notified amendments to the Employees' Provident Funds Scheme to bring into effect the relaxation in conditions to allow withdrawal not exceeding the basic wages and dearness allowances for three months or up to 75 per cent of the amount standing to a member's credit in the EPF account, whichever is less, in the wake of outbreak of epidemic or pandemic. The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) subscribers will be able to apply for the withdrawal online and the facility would be available to all members across the country, a senior EPFO official said.

"The Commissioner or, where so authorised by the Commissioner, any officer subordinate to him, may, on an application from any member of this Scheme employed in any establishment or factory located in an area declared as affected by outbreak of any epidemic or pandemic by the appropriate government, permit a non-refundable advance from the provident fund account of such member not exceeding the basic wages and dearness allowances of that member for three months or up to seventy-five per cent of the amount standing in his credit in the Fund, whichever is less," the Ministry's notification said.

In a communication to field

The EPFO has said officers should be made aware about the changes so that such claims are "processed promptly and relief reaches the worker and his family to help them fight with COVID-19"

"Please note that the COVID-19 has been declared pandemic by appropriate government for the entire country and therefore the employees working in establishments and factories across entire India, who are members of the EPF Scheme, 1952, are eligible for the benefits of non-refundable advance ...," the communication said.

On Thursday, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman — as part of the government's financial package to counter the COVID-19 outbreak — had announced measures for a section of organised workers by bearing the outgo on contribution of 24 per cent for establishments having up to 100 workers with 90 per cent having income below Rs 15,000 and relaxing withdrawal conditions from EPF accounts.



BRIDGE

Dealer North, both vulnerable. NORTH SOUTH ♠ J8 ♠ QT103 ♣ QJ9542 ♣ A10 ♦ A63 ♦ J875 ♣ A9 ♣ QT1053

WEST NORTH EAST SOUTH 1♥ 3♥ 1♣ Pass 2♥ 3♥ 3♣

THE EAST HAND: ♠ AK965 ♥ K6 ♦ 92 ♣ J862 THE SOUTH HAND: ♠ 742 ♥ 872 ♦ KQ104 ♣ K74

You are North, defending 3S by East. Your partner, South, leads the DK followed by the D4 to your ace. Declarer has followed with the D2 and D9. You are on lead with the DA at trick three - what next?

North-South had two challenges on this board. The first was to not let EW play at the two-level. Holding a nine-card heart fit, it is a good idea for North-South to compete to the three-level rather than concede.

If South had started with DKQ4, they might play the DQ on the second round. Having started with four cards, and DQ104 now remaining, it is correct to play a small card now (low from what is now three to an honour). North will win the DA, and should recognise that South started with four so there are no more diamond tricks to be taken. An imaginative North will realise that 3S can be beaten if South has the CK - play the CA, another club to partner's king, and then a club ruff will get a nice plus score.

Dealer East, nil vulnerable. NORTH WEST EAST SOUTH ♠ KJ6 ♠ 10742 ♠ 983 ♠ AQ5 ♥ QJ3 ♥ 105 ♥ K9864 ♥ A72 ♦ 92 ♦ 87543 ♦ KQ6 ♦ AJ10 ♣ Q10864 ♣ K7 ♣ A2 ♣ J953

WEST NORTH EAST SOUTH 1♥ INT 3NT♥ Pass Pass

West leads the H10. Plan the play

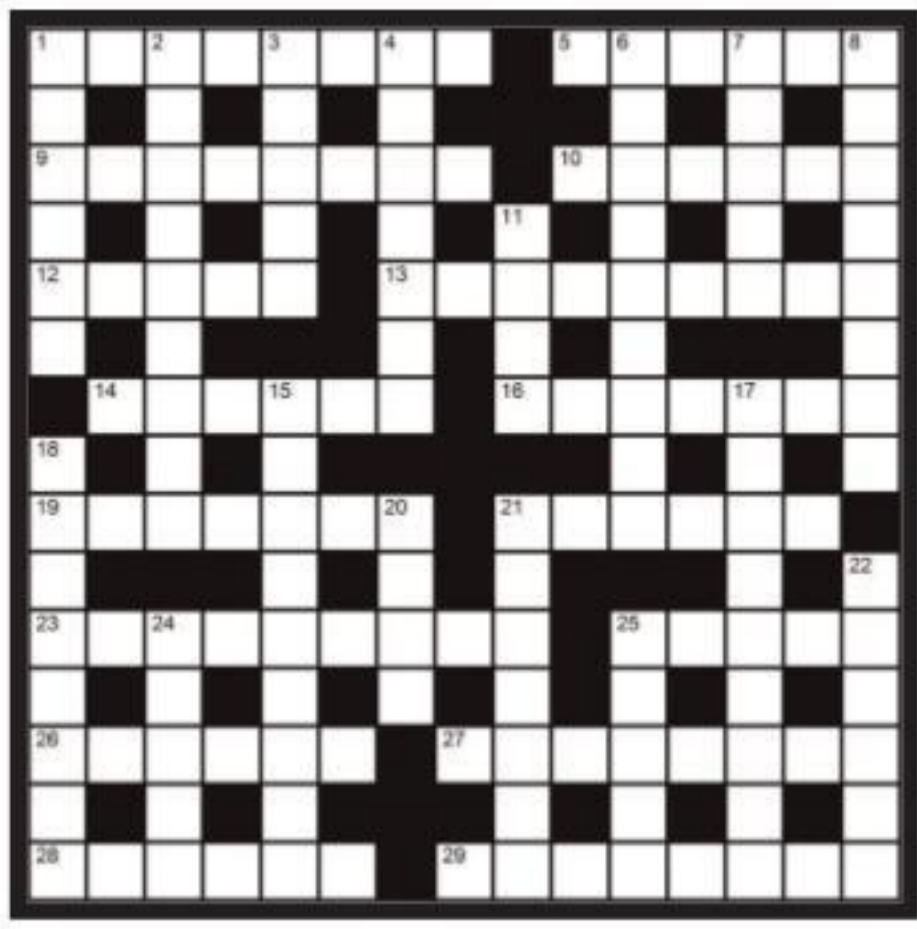
JUMBLED WORDS Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given clue. \_\_\_and\_\_\_favour the brave-Ovid (7,4)

SOLUTION: SHEAF NUTTY, RECOUP, PLEAF, SQUANDER

SUNDAY CROSSWORD 2262

QUICK CLUES

- ACROSS: 1. Sufficiency (8) 5. Black Sea port in Ukraine (6) 9. Quick and energetic (8) 10. Acquiesce (6) 12. Approximately (5) 13. Captivated or bewitched (9) 14. Retract (6) 16. Pupil (7) 19. Opposite word (7) 21. Eerie; repellent (6) 23. Rock group of 'Unforgiven' fame? (9) 25. Birth (5) 26. Universal remedy (6) 27. Agricultural (8) 28. Sharp bodily pains (6) 29. One who is punishable by law (8) DOWN: 1. Out of the country (6) 2. Outgoing person (9) 3. Dark (5) 4. Clog (7) 6. Rakish (9) 7. Guide (5) 8. Remedy (8) 11. God of war (4) 15. Undoing (9) 17. Act of expelling (9) 18. Innocuous (8) 20. Chief (4) 21. Cavalry horse (7) 22. Core of a nut (6) 24. Singer Lopez (5) 25. Just title (5) CRYPTIC CLUES ACROSS: 1. Puts a new coat on which is of cloth - tailored satin (8) 5. Season of resilience (6) 9. To be or not to be? (8) 10. Russian transport with ample horse-power! (6) 12. Squandered asset which belong to the Orient (5) 13. Branch swell being bribed to discontinue hostilities (6,3) 14. Old tennis champion, Alicia Stone (6) 16. Move downwards add a point and drop the hothead and exits? (4,3) 19. Does the sailor have to put it into position? (7) 21. Levels the scores (6) 23. Commanding officer was deprived of liquor, it's mother's milk to us! (9) 25. An instant envelope with padding (5)



- 26. Prophet gets jail - he is confounded (6) 27. Skill brought up in the seat of poet (8) 28. Not what the tailor busies himself making? (7) 29. Genius sprang from the nineties (8) DOWN: 1. As a spectator sport croquet is diminished when one's croquet ball hits an opponent's (6) 2. Dragons who impress recruits for newspapers available to Georgia and New Guinea (5,4) 3. Stress an addict usually concealed (5) 4. Final payment of Russian coin may cause a problem (7) 6. So-so kitsch-sounding game (9) 7. What he said when he entered? (2,1,2) 8. On the surface this is drawn from the great airforce motif reversed without the top mark (8) 11. Immature sounding psychiatrist? (4) 15. The growth of a fairy-tale (4,5) 17. Not straight and with future too unsettled (3,2,4) 18. As far as work goes, they are not fully extended (8)

Solutions to 2261

- QUICK CLUES ACROSS: 1 Rule of thumb, 7 FBL, 9 Stain, 10 Badgering, 11 Carneloni, 12 Blast, 13 Rescind, 15 Call, 16 Etty, 20 Flyleaf, 23 Elapse, 24 Nonparad, 26 Tardness, 27 Twice, 28 Did, 29 Discernment DOWN: 1 Rest cure, 2 Leanness, 3 Ounce, 4 Tabloid, 5 Undying, 6 Beer belly, 7 Frieze, 8 Legato, 14 In the wind, 16 Televisive, 17 Affluent, 19 Yankees, 20 Finesse, 21 Watted, 22 Soared, 25 Aston. CRYPTIC CLUES ACROSS: 1 Engaged tone, 7 CIA, 9 Exile, 10 Seediness, 11 Apartment, 12 Moody, 13 Cockpit, 15 Pets, 18 Lamb, 20 Pack-ice, 23 Green, 24 Betrothed, 26 In uniform, 27 Brace, 28 SOS, 29 Frenchwoman DOWN: 1 Elegance, 2 Guidance, 3 Sward, 4 Dessert, 5 One-stop, 6 Enigmatic, 7 Cedex, 8 Assays, 14 Plaintiff, 16 Right arm, 17 Dead keen, 19 Bob hope, 20 Potomac, 21 Uglier, 22 Demurs, 25 Outbox.

If it's your Birthday

Sunday March 29 The winds of change are blowing gently now. You will be under pressure to make all-round improvements, you should fight for peace - and a better world.

Monday March 30 Secret passions are surfacing, there could be plenty of pleasure to be had. Your major asset is your charm, you can wrap other people around your little finger.

Tuesday March 31 You're at the end of one emotional cycle. You may once again pin your hopes on romantic ambitions which you had begun to imagine would never be fulfilled. But then, you have many hopes and wishes and too little time.

Wednesday April 1 Good times are returning, like some strange emotional boomerang. You might be happy with pleasant surprises. You'll have a chance to make up for an old mistake.

Thursday April 2 If you're falling in love, it could be with the person you're destined to be with. It could also be with an idea, a friend or with yourself. Follow your heart and keep an eye on long-term commitments.

Friday April 3 Go all out to achieve whatever goals are important to you. If you've got time to day-dream then do so. You may be knocked off-course by intense emotions, but only briefly.

Saturday April 4 Personal prospects are looking up. There might be a little confusion. Do not misread other people, focus on what improvements you can make in your relationships.

YOUR WEEK AHEAD

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)

Important stars have moved into influential positions, which has to be good news. These are important times for Arians, particularly if you are waiting for the results of recent meetings and applications.

TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21)

The plain fact that Venus is in a supportive aspect to your sign makes it inevitable that there is work to be done in relationships.

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21)

The steady passage of planets through the friendly and sympathetic regions of your chart always favours your interests. It is time for you to break through the chains which tie you to a particular set of commitments.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23)

Partners and loved ones need to be handled with velvet gloves, perhaps because people seem to be totting up the cost of emotional entanglements.

LEO (July 24 - Aug 23)

Social stars are upping their game in your chart. The present time is likely to be challenging and emotionally trying at home.

VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sep 23)

There is a marvellous connection between planets aligned with financial sectors and those respecting professional regions.

LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)

Everything depends on your attitude to life. Are you one of those Librans who insists on being a martyr and a victim? Or are you prepared to face life head-on.

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)

The approaching relationship between Venus, the planet of love, and Pluto, the obsessive ruler of your unconscious desires, means that a once perfect emotional partnership may be up for renewal.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 23)

If you're thinking of pressing ahead with a number of general ambitions that are not specifically related to your emotional desires or professional cares, these are still early days.

CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)

Do not concern yourself unduly with personal matters and relationships: partners are in a strong position and are quite capable of looking after themselves as well as offering you a reasonable degree of support and assistance.

AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)

You are likely to feel rather tired and jaded. Perhaps you will also be concerned that someone has already, or is about to, let you down.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)

Work and worldly ambitions hold your attention. You have much in common with important colleagues at the moment, more than you might think.

SUDOKU 4162 SOLUTION SUDOKU 4162

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SALUTE THE SOLDIER Head Constable Santo Ram Bharali On 29.03.2003, while performing escorting and safety duty of construction Engineering staff, near Manu Railway Station in Tripura State.



**BCCI DONATES ₹ 51 CR**  
India's richest sporting body BCCI on Saturday pledged a donation of Rs 51 crore to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund in country's fight against COVID-19 pandemic.

## Break is not a bad thing for fatigued Indian players: Shastri

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 28

SPORT COMING to a standstill owing to the COVID-19 pandemic is a "welcome rest" 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.

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.

He was speaking to former England captains Michael Atherton and Nasser Hussain and Rob Key on a *Sky Sports* podcast. According to Shastri, the players may use the time to re-energise themselves, especially after a gruelling New Zealand tour where India played five T20s, three ODIs and two Tests. "The amount of cricket we have played over the last ten months, that was beginning to take its toll. Guys like me, and some other guys from the support staff, we left India on May 23 for the World Cup in England. Since then we have been at home for 10 or 11 days. There are certain players who played all three formats, so you can imagine the toll it has taken on them, especially being on the field, adjusting from T20s to Test match cricket and all the travel that goes with that because we travelled quite a lot," Shastri said.

After the World Cup, the Indian team travelled to the West Indies, then played a long home series against South Africa that was followed by a full tour of New Zealand. "So it has been tough but a welcome rest for players," the coach said.

India is currently in a 21-day lockdown and according to Shastri, his players knew something like this was imminent when the series against South Africa, right after the New Zealand tour, was called off. "It came as a shock but to be honest, having been on the road during the South Africa series, we guys anticipated it," he said. "We knew something was on the cards as the disease had just started spreading. When the second ODI was called off, we knew something was gonna happen and a lockdown was imminent."

The disease, which originated in the Chinese city of Wuhan in Hubei province, has so far claimed over 27,000 lives across the world. "I think the players knew it was coming, they sensed it in New Zealand. There were apprehensions towards the end of that tour, when flights were coming through Singapore, out of Singapore. By the time we landed (in India), I thought we got out at just the right time. There were only two cases in New Zealand at that time, that has rocketed now to 300. The day we landed, that was the first day they were screening and testing people at the airport."

Shastri said that in such a situation, players could play a role by spreading awareness about this pandemic. "As players, you have a lot of responsibility. That's why the message is very clear that cricket should be last on everyone's mind now," he said. "I think the most important thing is safety and not ensuring just your safety but ensuring safety of others as well, by creating a kind of awareness that tells people there is something serious around. Virat has done it, a lot of other players have done it by posting certain messages on social media."



India coach Ravi Shastri says since the 50-over World Cup in May, he has hardly been home for 10 days. File

WITH DUE apologies to the American collegiate basketball tournament, 'March Madness' should now forever be reserved for the never-ending March of 2020. Though the manic sporting Sundays of pre-coronavirus times seem a lifetime ago, it was mere weeks ago that this was to be a glorious spring filled with ripe storylines.

Now, even if the world of sport resumes this summer, some narratives may have rushed conclusions or while some may not conclude at all. Take your mind away from the sad 'what is', to the even-sadder 'what could have been'...

### FROM NEVER WALKING ALONE TO SELF-ISOLATION



There was no bigger story than watching Liverpool escape their personal purgatory.

The last of its 18 domestic title wins was in 1990, and the club was on its way to ending the wait. Sure, they'd started to lose steam but a lead of 25 points was practically unassailable. Bitter rivals Manchester United too pitched in, defeating second-placed City to leave Liverpool two wins from glory. Heartbreaks by a point, or a slip, looked distant. Liverpool couldn't be touched, parades were planned, and the stage was set for a rousing chorus of You'll Never Walk Alone.

Cut to two weeks later, and the players, like millions others, are in self-isolation, and their title ambitions in limbo.

The Premier League has been suspended till April 30, and further decisions will be taken in the coming week. Reports claim clubs have been warned against using the phrase 'null and void', using 'curtailed' instead as a worst-case scenario.

But while the title race was a foregone conclusion, the action was rivetting on the opposite spectrum. The flip-side to 'awarding' the title to Liverpool means consigning Bournemouth, Aston Villa and Norwich to relegation with at least nine match-days left and eight points separating the bottom six.

To put things in perspective, in 2015, Leicester was nailed to the bottom till the 31st match-day i.e. April 11. A run of seven wins from their last nine fixtures not just helped them survive, but allowed Leicester to stage a fairytale campaign the year later, winning the title from the odds of 5000-1.

### LAYING SIEGE TO AN EMPIRE OF CLAY



The tennis world seemed on the cusp of a #NextGen player breaking the hegemony of the men's tour, and DOMINIC THIEM was the safest bet. The closest to a pure clay-courtier in today's game, the 26-year-old Austrian sailed into the last two French Open finals before submitting to the perennial master Rafael Nadal to four sets last year.

This January, Thiem replicated the run at the Melbourne Park, losing the Australian Open final to Novak Djokovic in five sets after vanquishing Nadal in the quarters. He was expected to carry his form into the Indian Wells title defence and pose a fiercer challenge to Nadal at Roland Garros. Then Indian Wells became the first big tennis cancellation, and French Open unilaterally resched-

uled itself a week after US Open in September.

Chalk Thiem's coronation up to the long list of 'what ifs'. Will Rafael Nadal be able to extend his French Open record to 13 titles? Could Serena Williams recalibrate and make another run at the elusive 24th Grand Slam? Will Roger Federer — currently out due to a knee surgery — now choose to play his second French Open in five years, or will he stay loyal to the coinciding Laver Cup?

In addition to a public health crisis, the pandemic has also been a class crisis in many cases. In sport, it's evident in the struggles of the lower-league clubs in football and the millions of pounds a relegated/promoted team stands to lose/gain.

Another such status quo crisis could be manifesting in the top-heavy world of professional tennis. While the Federers, Djokovics and Nadals can afford to come through with generous donations, several outside of the top 50 don't know where the next cheque will come from.

The bigwigs can use home gyms (or private academies) to train and keep nutritionists employed; others, such as world No. 93 and former 25th-ranked Vasek Pospisil, are binging on pasta and doing burpees in their apartments.

Hopes of watching Federer compete at his last Olympics have also been dashed. "This would be my 5th Olympic Games, I hope I will be healthy unlike Rio! Can't wait Tokyo (sic)," the 38-year-old, who has spoken of his dream to achieve the golden slam (four majors and an Olympic singles gold), had tweeted last year.

Nadal (34) is getting up there in years as well, and both have had to take timeouts to prolong their careers. In theory, inactivity can

# Ides of March 2020

It was shaping as a year of mouth-watering showdowns, rivetting league endings and eagerly anticipated last hurrahs. But earlier this month, the world's priority changed. GAURAV BHATT on how the corona lockdown pulled the plug on those several tantalising sporting tales featuring Liverpool, Thiem, LeBron, Hamilton and Dhoni.



KL Rahul keeping wickets has added balance to the Indian team with the T20 World Cup in October but uncertainty prevails over the dates of the tournament. File

## ALL DRESSED UP, NOWHERE TO GO

THE ADRENALINE high of the Super Over heists in New Zealand seemed enough to tide Team India over the sobering failures in other (some would say less relevant) formats. The 5-0 T20 whitewash an indicator that Virat Kohli and Co were on the road to October's World Cup without any obvious weaknesses.

Mohammed Shami was quick to share the load from a returning Jasprit Bumrah.

Shreyas Iyer made one wonder how India would have fared with a designated Number 4 last year in England.

And a KL Rahul moonlighting as a wicket-keeper was a further good omen for World Cup hopes.

It's been two long months since then, and while ICC is hopeful of organising the tournament in Australia as planned, the escalating outbreak and grim forecasts mean

everything's up in the air.

While the plug hasn't been pulled yet on the Indian Premier League, the T20 extravaganza has already been delayed once. Also in limbo thus is the return of MS Dhoni.

The 38-year-old hasn't played since the World Cup semifinal loss against New Zealand and recently featured in an IPL commercial which could best be described as the Sourav Ganguly's 'Bhoole toh nah!' cam-

paid for this generation. The ad shows the two-time World Cup-winning captain over-hearing a couple poking fun at his sabbatical. "Bohot shor haina," Dhoni says, putting his headphones on after hiding them without saying a word. "Khel bole ga," screams the advertisement.

That's the official hashtag for the tournament, in case the commercial is too subtle for you.

also provide significant time to recover. But it might not be as simple if we're to believe another GOAT.

### KING JAMES'S LAKERS DOING IT FOR KOBE



"Heartbroken" over the death of Kobe Bryant this January, **LEBRON JAMES** promised to continue his fellow NBA and LA Lakers legend's legacy. True to his word, James had been averaging 25.7 points, 10.6 assists and 7.9 rebounds per game at the time of the NBA suspension on March 11.

Lakers was atop the Western Conference tables, and while the battle for Los Angeles was on the cards against Clippers, it was the head-to-head clash between marquee players James and Kawhi Leonard that had fans salivating.

The current hiatus means the league is looking at play-in tournament or shortened playoffs as options. James however believes a shortened regular-season finale is necessary before the playoff bracket.

"One thing you can't just do is go straight to the playoffs," James said on the Road Trippin' podcast this week. "Because it discredits the 60-plus games that guys had

fighting for that position."

More importantly, James highlighted the importance of rhythm and the adverse effects of "rest" on his body.

"When you've been building six months of conditioning and preparation and then (it's gone), the narrative that I don't like (is), 'Well, now guys get so much rest' or, like, 'LeBron, he's 35, he's got so many minutes on his body, now he gets so much rest'. It's actually the opposite for me because my body, when we stopped playing, was asking me, like, 'What the hell are you doing? My body was like, 'Hey man, what the hell is going on? It's March 13th, you're getting ready for the playoffs, why are you shutting down right now?'"

### THE GENERATIONAL TUSSLE CUT SHORT



By now, we should have been two GPs into **LEWIS HAMILTON'S** quest for fourth-straight, and seventh overall world championship. Stopping him from trying to match Michael Schumacher's haul would be 22-year-olds Max Verstappen and Charles Leclerc; beating the 34-year-old Hamilton would have made either of the two the new poster boy, holding the young guns off would

have cemented the Brit as an all-time great. Instead, the first eight races have been cancelled or postponed. That's more than one third of what was to be the longest season of Formula 1.

That includes new hosts Vietnam, who signed a \$60mn per year deal in a bid to emulate Singapore's glitzy night race and fill the void left by Malaysia. For F1, Vietnam GP was even more important after the failures in Korea and India.

Current CEO Chase Carey said earlier this week that he still hoped to pull off a calendar of up to 18 events. Former chief Bernie Ecclestone however would've chosen to abandon the season entirely.

"I'd have to say we're going to close down talk of having any races this year. That's the only thing you could do safely for everybody, so nobody starts making silly arrangements which may not be able to happen," Ecclestone told reporters.

"I hope they do it. They could run three or four races at the beginning of next year and still count to the 2020 championship. The problem is where are you going to have them where the teams can go and which promoter wants to run a race. It's all very well making the calendar, which you can do while you wait. The big problem is getting the promoters to want to run the race."

A cancelled season however opens up a different can of worms. 2020 is the final year under current regulations and covenants, with a slew of political and regulatory changes to be introduced in 2021.

Next year's driver market also brings up possibilities of exits and new blood.

Not to forget, Hamilton himself runs out of the contract with Mercedes at the end of the season.

## IN LIMBO

# Europe mulls finishing football season at end of year: UEFA chief

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE  
ROME, MARCH 28

EUROPE'S FOOTBALL bosses have not given up hope of finishing this pandemic-hit season — even if it might have to be done at the start of the next one. The novel coronavirus has created an existential challenge to the world's most widely played and watched sport. Europe's football leagues are the planet's richest and can afford to pay the most money to the biggest stars. But that system could be crumbling down quickly if there is nothing to show on TV.

Cristian Ronaldo has not had a chance to celebrate goals for Juventus for nearly three weeks because Italy's Serie A had to shut down. He and other Italian league stars are thinking of giving up millions of euros in

salary to help their teams stay solvent.

UEFA boss Aleksander Ceferin told Italy's La Repubblica daily that he was holding urgent talks with the continent's biggest leagues to figure out what can be done. The Slovenian said all options were under consideration in an effort to salvage the season and preserve the sanctity of the beautiful game. "We could start again in mid-May, in June or even late June," Ceferin said.

Any time after that and "the season will probably be lost." The idea of the entire season simply being cancelled stirs panic in fans of clubs such as Liverpool — on the cusp of lifting their first title in 30 years. Ronaldo's Juventus would probably not be terribly happy either. The men in the famous black-and-white stripes are edging Lazio by a point in their race for a ninth successive title and are still in the Champions League, which they



UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin.

**Serie A and most other European leagues were originally supposed to have finished in May. Belarus remain the only European nation still playing football in the face of a pandemic that by Saturday had officially claimed nearly 30,000 lives.**

have not won since 1996.

Ceferin said he opposed the idea of playing games in empty stadiums and would prefer to wait out the pandemic.

He also hinted that some big teams ap-

peared ready to delay the start of next season in order to finish out this one.

"There is also a proposal to end this season at the beginning of the next one and then start the next one a little later," Ceferin said.

Serie A and most other European leagues were originally supposed to have finished in May. Belarus remain the only European nation still playing football in the face of a pandemic that by Saturday had officially claimed nearly 30,000 lives. Italy's world-leading death toll from Friday was 9,134.

But the scheduling is growing tricky and time appears to be running out.

Most European leagues are supposed to start their 2019-20 seasons at the end of August. Italy still has more than two regular months of matches of the 2018-19 season to play out. A resumption of the current season at the end of June would probably require a

delay to the start of the next one until at least September or October.

It would also mean that players get very little rest and would also create problems for those whose contracts are expiring in June.

Italian Football Federation (FIGC) president Gabriele Gravina sounded fine with that. "We would all be happy to finish the season on the pitch," said Gravina told Sky television. "We are in contact with FIFA for contract extensions if we need to go beyond June 30."

Gravina did not explain why he was talking to the world football governing body and not the European one headed by Ceferin.

But he did concede that his earlier hope of restarting Italian matches in early May was now almost certainly dashed. "I am aware that it is still too early," said Gravina. "But we must think positively."



TRACKING  
THE VIRUSIran's Olympic star  
Hadadi tests positive

Ehsan Hadadi, Iran's first Olympic track and field medallist, has tested positive for coronavirus, World Athletics reported on Saturday. Hadadi, the Asian discus champion who became a national hero when he won silver at the 2012 Olympics in London, has an athletics base in the U.S. but was at home in Tehran when he contracted the virus. "We've received word that Iranian discus thrower @EhsanHadadi has tested positive for Coronavirus. We wish him a full and swift recovery," World Athletics, the sport's global governing body, said on Twitter. Hadadi, a six-times Asian Championship winner and Asian discus record holder, had been among the favourites to win gold at this year's Tokyo Games before the announcement of their postponement on Tuesday.

I struggled to breathe:  
Dybala on his battle

Juventus star Paulo Dybala revealed how he "struggled to breathe" after contracting coronavirus which has killed over 9,000 people in Italy. The Argentine international announced last Saturday he was one of three Juventus players to catch the virus along with Daniele Rugani and Blaise Matuidi, who both had no symptoms. "I feel better now after some strong symptoms," the 26-year-old Dybala told JTV channel. "A couple of days ago I was not well, I felt heavy and after five minutes of movement I had to stop because I was struggling to breathe." Now I can move and walk to start trying to train, because when I tried in the past few days I started to shake too much. "I gasped for air and as a result I couldn't do anything, after five minutes I was already very tired, I felt the body heavy and my muscles hurt." Now I'm fine. My fiancée Oriana (Sabatini) has also overcome the symptoms."

A-League pays the  
price for carrying on

A player from A-League side Newcastle Jets on Saturday became Australia's first professional footballer to test positive for coronavirus. The man was not named but reports said he was involved in the team's Monday night 2-1 home win over Melbourne City behind closed doors — the last game before the season was suspended due to the pandemic. A member of staff at Wellington Phoenix was also confirmed as having COVID-19. "Newcastle Jets can confirm that a player in its A-League squad has returned a positive test," the club said in a statement. "The player and his family are in good health, and currently in quarantine in accordance with New South Wales Health protocols." It added that the squad were monitoring their health and anyone showing symptoms would self-isolate. The A-League was one of the last football competitions in the world still running until the plug was finally pulled on the 11-team domestic league this week.

'8 West Ham players  
have virus symptoms'

West Ham have eight players in self-isolation after showing mild symptoms of the coronavirus, according to the club's vice-chairwoman Karren Brady. The Hammers are the latest Premier League club to be hit by the pandemic. Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta, Chelsea winger Callum Hudson-Odoi — both now recovered — and several unnamed Leicester players tested positive for the virus. "I am relieved to say they are all showing mild symptoms and, along with their families, seem to be well," Brady told The Sun newspaper on Saturday. "But it is no more than a handshake, sneeze or cough away from any of us, so no one should be complacent." West Ham's players are training at home and the club hopes to resume regular sessions when Britain's lockdown period ends on April 13. AGENCIES

## Playing with fire

IOC let an Olympic qualifier happen despite virus warnings; 7 tested positive after taking part in the event

TARIQPANJA  
MARCH 28

AT LEAST seven people tested positive for the coronavirus earlier this month after taking part in a London boxing tournament to qualify for the Tokyo Games, an event that was allowed to begin by the International Olympic Committee despite widespread cancellations and warnings about the pandemic.

Turkey's boxing federation believes three of its boxers and a coach caught the coronavirus while attending the European qualifying tournament that started March 14. Croatian officials say two coaches and one boxer were infected at the same event, which was canceled after three days of competition — two with spectators present.

The tournament began even as the virus was already present in Britain and major sporting events like Premier League soccer and N.B.A. games were abruptly put on hold worldwide.

The boxing tournament was held by an I.O.C. task force at a time when the organization's president, Thomas Bach, and Tokyo officials were clinging to the idea of holding the Games as scheduled in July. The Olympics were postponed earlier this week until 2021, and Prime Minister Boris Johnson of Britain said Friday that he had the coronavirus and was suffering from mild symptoms.

"Athlete health was absolutely not considered first — that's the whole reason for our frustration," said Eyup Gozgec, the Turkish Boxing Federation president, in an interview through an interpreter. "Why did they let this event take place when the world was already on edge with this global outbreak for the past three months?"

The three boxers, Necat Ekinci, Serhat Guler and Busenaz Surmeneli, as well as the head coach Seyfullah Dumlupinar, tested positive after they traveled home to Turkey from London, Gozgec said. The entire traveling party was immediately placed in quarantine upon arrival, and was still waiting on the results of some tests, he added.

The BBC, citing an official from the Croatian Boxing Federation, reported that two coaches and an athlete from Croatia were "stable" and had been quarantined after contracting the virus. The team's epidemiologist believed they contracted the virus in London.

Tomo Kadic, a coach on the team, posted a video on Facebook to confirm he had tested positive. Boxer Toni Filipi later told a local radio station that he, too, was infected, but was already feeling better.

For the I.O.C., the episode comes at a bruising time. It was heavily criticized by athletes who thought it took too much time to make an inevitable move to postpone the Tokyo Games. In a statement it sent on behalf of its boxing task force — a group it set up after suspending boxing's global federation over governance failures last year — the I.O.C. said it found no evidence that the athletes contracted the virus at the qualifying tournament.

"Many participants were in independently



Three Turkish boxers, Necat Ekinci, Serhat Guler and Busenaz Surmeneli, as well as the head coach Seyfullah Dumlupinar, tested positive after they travelled home from London. AP

## The boxing tournament was held by an I.O.C. task force at a time when the organization's president, Thomas Bach, and Tokyo officials were clinging to the idea of holding the Games as scheduled in July.

organized training camps in Italy, Great Britain and in their home countries before the competition started on 14 March 2020 and have returned home a while ago so it is not possible to know the source of infection," the I.O.C. said.

On Friday, the I.O.C.'s sports director, Kit McConnell, sent a letter to the participants of the tournament that acknowledged the coronavirus cases, though it said one athlete's results was a "false positive."

In the letter reviewed by The New York Times, McConnell did not confirm that anyone contracted the virus at the event, but said anyone who may have been in contact with those infected should take the appropriate measures. "The risk of infection from them is low thanks to the daily health checks and hygiene measures as well as other precautionary measures taken before, during and in the follow-up of the event," McConnell wrote, without specifying what those measures

were. "These individuals would not have become infectious until the day before developing symptoms, and none have reported being ill at the event or on the day after competition concluded in London."

Gozgec is convinced his countrymen fell ill at the tournament. He said he has written to other federations to see if their athletes who were at the event are displaying symptoms of the virus. Even before the Boxing Road to Tokyo event was called off, competitors complained about the risk of infection. The first two days of the event were held with spectators present, then the event was moved behind closed doors for the third day, on March 16. That was the final day of action for a tournament that was originally scheduled to run through March 24.

Britain was one of the last European countries to put up restrictions against mass gatherings, including sporting events. On March 11, the World Health Organization declared the coronavirus threat a pandemic, and on March 12, Johnson called for a "delay phase" in Britain but did not officially ban mass gatherings.

Football leaders in the country called a halt to matches before a government ban, after players and coaching staff started to test positive for Covid-19. The I.O.C. said its qualifying tournament had followed the guidelines in place at the time, and that it took precautions to minimize risks.

"Safeguarding the well-being of the ath-

letes, officials and all other participants has always been a top priority," the I.O.C. said.

Another boxing qualifier was moved from Wuhan, China, in February to Jordan in early March by the same task force.

Gozgec painted a much different picture. He said the teams participating in the event were housed in the same hotel, where at times they needed to jam together into one elevator because a second one had broken down. All the delegations dined together and at no point, Gozgec said, were products like hand sanitizers made available — even though at the time, the British government had been pushing a national message focusing on hand hygiene.

"The problems started from the airport, once we landed on U.K. soil," Gozgec said. "At the hotel, the training facilities, why didn't they take the necessary measures to meet hygienic standards so that none of the people, athletes, coaches, officials involved would not catch coronavirus?"

Once the event was called off, the Turkish delegation scrambled to get home, with Turkey banning flights from the U.K. on the same day. Gozgec said the government added an extra Turkish Airlines flight from London to get them home and into quarantine. Some of Turkey's contingent, Gozgec said, started to show symptoms after three or four days.

He warned that others may have contracted the virus: "We are waiting for the test results." NYT

Former Liga  
winger dons  
white coat to  
take on virus

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE  
CORUNNA (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. The 29-year-old pharmacy graduate and former top-level sportsman had been playing football for a Thai club, but was visiting his family in Spain when the COVID-19 pandemic took hold.

So he decided to pitch in his 'grain of sand' against the virus using the studies which he had yet to put into practice due to his passion for football. "I really was packing my bags to go back when things got complicated," Dovale told AFP. Travel restrictions trapped Dovale in his native La Coruna in the Atlantic coast region of Galicia, where he started his football career with nearby Celta Vigo. Although Dovale also completed his university studies in pharmacy four years ago, he had never actually worked in the field. Now with the world of sport in limbo the footballer realised the time was ripe to use his studies to help his homeland.

## Different ball game

"I was playing in Asia then; pharmacy is different there and I was never in Spain long enough to work," he says. "With football stopped and travel banned I said to myself 'get some practical experience and do your bit'."

The coronavirus is ravaging Spain with a death toll of over 4,800 and some 64,000 registered cases of infection.

There is hope of course with around 10,000 people already cured of the virus in Spain for multimedia clients "We're in a really frightening situation. Those of us working with the public are afraid, and the people who come to us for advice are afraid too," says Dovale, who is working in a pharmacy run by his family.

He has gloves but no mask, and does not appear ready to lose his smile any time soon. "We all know we are exposed, that this is a pandemic and a complicated situation," he says.

"But we all know too that our behaviour in complicated situations defines who we are, and for me I need to put fears for my own safety to one side and help in any way that I can. "There are shortages of many things and we are struggling to get enough of the simple things like thermometers, paracetamol, gloves and hand gels."

## With football stopped and travel banned I said to myself 'get some practical experience and do your bit'

TONI DOVALE  
FORMER BARCA YOUTH PLAYER

Pay cuts and pink slips:  
Sports on austerity drive

The virus outbreak has spared no one. From the richest leagues in the world to national federations, everyone is taking 'tough' calls to 'survive' the unforeseen crisis.

**URUGUAY FOOTBALL LAYS OFF 400**  
The Uruguayan Football Association (AUF) announced that almost all of its staff, including coach Oscar Tabarez, have been laid off due to the coronavirus pandemic that has frozen sport worldwide. "The executive committee informs that, due to the current health crisis which has brought to a halt all its activities, it is obliged to take a series of tough decisions in order to protect the future functioning of the institution," the AUF said in a statement on Friday. The main measure was to "send all its staff to collect unemployment insurance" including Tabarez, 73, who has been the coach of the Uruguayan national team since 2006, leading them to a World Cup semi-final and a Copa America title. As well as full time staff, the AUF said it is also suspending

"all outside contracts in all categories" and was maintaining only "essential" services for the "basic needs of the institution."

## ATLETICO JOIN THE LINE

Atletico Madrid became the latest La Liga club to request labour authorities to allow them to cut player and staff salaries while football is suspended in Spain due to the coronavirus pandemic. In a statement on Friday, club CEO Miguel Angel Gil said that they were "obliged" to propose a partial unemployment plan "for the employees who, due to the state of emergency in our country, can no longer carry their work". Atleti are among a raft of clubs set to take a huge financial hit due to the indefinite suspension of football in Spain, one of the countries worst hit by COVID-19.

ALL BLACKS COACH IAN FOSTER  
LEADS BY EXAMPLE

All Blacks coach Ian Foster says he will take a pay cut and players will follow suit as New Zealand Rugby cuts expenses while professional competitions are shuttered. Foster confirmed he and other coaches had agreed to pay cuts as long as NZ Rugby's revenues are affected. He did not give a percentage figure. "Our coaching group has definitely taken a big cut," Foster told radio Newstalk ZB. "It's already been agreed to... It's a different sort of process for players but I know that they're willing to go into that space too," he said.

**A-LEAGUE CLUB SIDELINES PLAYERS**  
Australia's footballers' union Saturday threatened legal action against A-League club Perth Glory after players were stood down without pay as the coronavirus shutdown takes its toll. Despite holding

out to be one of the last competitions in the world still going, the plug was finally pulled on the 11-team domestic soccer league this week. Football Federation Australia plans to review the suspension on April 22 and

most clubs appear to be waiting until then to decide what to do. But with no revenue from ticket sales, Perth Glory owner Tony Sage made the "heartbreaking" decision to stand down the squad, effectively keeping them on the books but without pay.

## HUNTER READY TO SACRIFICE

England women's captain Sarah Hunter has said she is willing to take a pay cut to ensure staff at the country's governing body do not lose their jobs due to the coronavirus crisis. England's Rugby Football Union (RFU) faces losses of up to 50 million pounds (\$62.3 million) over the next year-and-a-half with global sport coming to a virtual standstill due to the pandemic. The RFU's Executive Team have agreed to take a pay cut in excess of 25% and England men's coach Eddie Jones has also accepted a salary reduction to help ease the financial burden. "That little sacrifice and selflessness can go a long way," Hunter, 28, told BBC Sport. "I'd be willing to do that to make sure there's still an RFU and people aren't having to lose their jobs." AGENCIES

## Meet the country's first all-transgender football team

match. Formed three years ago, Ya-All is a non-profit youth-led network for the LGBT community to fight stigmatisation and discrimination. "I am overwhelmed with excitement to be part of a team of our own kind and also for the fact that we are the first transgender football team in the country," said 22-year old Chaki Huidrom, vice-captain and main striker of the side.

## Finding their calling

Chaki is pursuing his Masters degree in physical education at Dhanamanjuri University, Imphal.

"I love sports, particularly football. But I have never felt comfortable being part of a women's team just because I was born as a girl. Thanks to Ya-All, I'm living my dream."

Sadam Hanjabam, founder and CEO of Ya-All, said that it took his organisation almost three years to put together the football team. It was formed with the objective to create a platform, to break the stereotypes surrounding the queer community, and



The team was formed on March 8, the start of the Yaoshang festival.

spread awareness. He said that the first attempt in this direction was made in March 2018, during the Yaoshang festival. A six-a-side exhibition match was played in the presence of a substantial number of supporters, including transwomen. However, there was resistance to the idea of a team of transwomen due to social factors, said Hanjabam.

## Sadam Hanjabam, founder and CEO of Ya-All, said that it took his organisation almost three years to put together the football team.

"It was not an easy task to put together the team because society is still finding it hard to accept the third gender. But the Supreme Court ruling that decriminalised homosexuality was a big help."

He said that the team has received many invitations and even played an exhibition match outside the state. Hanjabam felt that with people's support, the transgender football team can do even better.

"Despite the difficulty we are facing, we will continue our work to bring together the LGBT community. We have plans to organise a state-level tournament for the queer", said the Ya-All CEO.

Football stars, musicians mull  
online fest for raising funds

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
MADRID, MARCH 28

FOOTBALL PLAYERS and celebrities will take part in a global music festival on Saturday organized by the Spanish league in order to raise funds for the fight against the coronavirus.

Barcelona's Gerard Pique, Real Madrid's Sergio Ramos and Sevilla's Jesus Navas will be among the players involved in the charity event organized to raise money "for the purchase of medical supplies in the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic and to also support fans confined to their homes during the current period of quarantine," the league said.

Celebrities in the festival will include singers Aitana, Alejandro Sanz, Beret and Luis Fonsi, actress Danna Paola, music bands Morat and Taburete, and tennis star Rafael Nadal. The football players and celebrities

will all participate from their homes. The concert is to be shown live through the league's international broadcasters and streamed via YouTube and Facebook.

"Together we'll succeed in convincing people about the importance of staying at home at this time, whilst raising money to buy medical supplies, which are in such high demand at times like these," league president Javier Tebas said.

Spain, where stay-at-home restrictions have been in place for nearly two weeks, reported 832 more deaths on Saturday, its highest daily count yet, bringing the total to 5,690. Another 8,000 confirmed infections pushed that count above 72,000.

The league said more than 11,400 euros (\$12,600) had been raised ahead of Saturday's event.

The "music extravaganza" will be broadcast in more than 180 countries simultaneously, starting at 10:30 pm.