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DMs, SPs PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE for ensuring only goods cross state borders

SUPPLY OF ESSENTIAL GOODS being maintained for minimum 10 days: Centre

WORKERS MUST GET THEIR WAGES where they are, Centre tells states and UTs

Govt doubles down on lockdown

Day 5: To stem flow of migrants, state borders are sealed

KRISHN KAUSHIK, DEEPTIMAN TIWARY & ABANTIKA GHOSH
NEW DELHI, MARCH 29

AS THE lockdown that gradually started from last Sunday entered the second week, the government indicated it was not going to deviate from this containment and mitigation strategy against coronavirus, despite initial hiccups through the week.

While Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday underlined that this was the only way to fight COVID-19, the Home Ministry directed states to ensure effective sealing of the borders. The Defence Minister chaired a meeting of an informal Group of Ministers to take stock of the situation. The ministers were told that supply of a minimum 10 days' essential goods was being maintained.

The Union Home Ministry said that in an order under the Disaster Management Act, "Directions were issued that district and state borders should be effectively sealed. States were directed to ensure there is no movement of people across cities or on highways." Only goods movement should be allowed, it said, adding that district magistrates and police superintendents would be personally responsible for implementation of these directions.

The Centre also asked states and Union Territories to make adequate arrangements for the poor, including migrant labourers at their place of work. State Disaster Relief Funds are to be used for the purpose, with the Centre saying "sufficient" money was available under this head.

Following the Centre's order on Sunday, several states, including Delhi, announced that they were stopping movement across borders.

The advisory called for enforcement of 14-day quarantine for those travelling in the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Migrants queue at Peetol checkpost on NH48 in Gujarat's Dahod district, on the state's border with Madhya Pradesh, around 1 pm on Sunday. *Bhupendra Rana*

Modi says forgive me for difficulties, but stresses India has to win this 'war'

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 29

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi on Sunday sought "forgiveness" for the difficulties caused by the 21-day nationwide lockdown, especially to the poor, while hoping that the country would put the coronavirus crisis behind in a month's time.

Speaking at his *Mann ki Baat* show, the PM said he had no choice but to take tough measures. "I had to take certain decisions which have put you in a lot of difficulty. Especially when I look at my poor brothers and sisters, I definitely feel they must be thinking, what kind of a Prime Minister is this, who has placed us in this difficulty. Possibly, many would be angry at me for being locked in their homes... I seek forgiveness... I strongly feel you will forgive me," he said.

In an over 30-minute address, the PM added, "Today every Indian is staying inside home to save one's life. But, in the coming days, the same Indian will break all barriers for the country's progress, take it forward... *Humein yeh jang jeetna hai. Zaroor jeetenge.* Mann ki Baat *ke liye phir agle mahine milenge. Aur tab tak in sankaton ko maat karne mein hum safal ho bhi jayein, isi ek kalpana ke saath, isi ek shubhkamna ke saath, aap sabko bahut bahut dhanyawad* (We have to win this war. We will win. Next month, we will meet for *Mann Ki Baat* again, and I thank you all with the hope, the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

I feel you will forgive me: PM on *Mann ki Baat*

Delhi officers overseeing movement of migrants face Centre action

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 29

THE CENTRE on Sunday suspended two senior bureaucrats of the Delhi government and initiated disciplinary proceedings against two others for alleged dereliction of duty during the COVID-19 lockdown. Sources said action had been taken against the bureaucrats over the exodus of migrant workers seen in the national capital over the past couple of days.

The suspended officials include Additional Chief Secretary (Transport) Renu Sharma and Principal Secretary (Finance) Rajeev Verma. Disciplinary proceedings have been initiated against Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Satyagopal and the Seelampur SDM. Both have been sent showcause notices. The order also recommends penalty against Sharma.

As the Divisional Commissioner, Verma coordinated with all state district magistrates and their teams. The responsibility to make arrangements to distribute food and provide shelters to the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Cases cross 1,000, govt sets up 11 groups to fight spread

ABANTIKA GHOSH
NEW DELHI, MARCH 29

EIGHT DEATHS of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) patients were reported in the last 24 hours — the highest single-day toll so far — taking the total toll to 27. With 151 fresh cases being confirmed on Sunday, the number of positive cases has now touched 1,024, of which 95 have recovered.

At the daily briefing, Lav Agarwal, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, did not give details of those who died in the last 24 hours, but said that "most cases of death have seen old age and co-morbidity play a very major role."

An analysis of the 19 deaths till March 27 shows that 14 were aged above 60 years; 12 had confirmed co-morbid conditions such as hypertension, diabetes and asthma; seven had a history of travel abroad.

A 38-year-old man who died in Patna had a history of chronic kidney disease.

A total of 34,931 samples have been tested so far.

The government on Sunday set up 11 empowered groups to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Migrants waiting for buses are sprayed with water from a fire tender at Transport Nagar in Jaipur Sunday. *Rohit Jain Paras*

BUSINESS AS USUAL
BY UNNY

THE GOVERNANCE PAGE P11

'THERE IS BLATANT DIFFERENCE IN GOVT ATTITUDE TOWARDS MIGRANTS FROM ABROAD AND HERE'
DR CHINMAY TUMBE
ECONOMIST, IIM-AHMEDABAD

No more essential and non-essential: curbs on goods transport lifted

AVISHEK G DASTIDAR
NEW DELHI, MARCH 29

IN YET another change in guidelines for enforcing the lockdown, the Centre on Sunday allowed transport of "all goods" and not just essential commodities.

Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla sent a letter to chief secretaries of all states and UTs clarifying what is allowed as per the latest order. This followed a video conference of trade and industry stakeholders with Railways and Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal on Saturday, where they said a protocol must be set in place so that factories can start production again, and that existing stocks would last only around three more weeks.

The Home Secretary's letter said, "transportation of all goods, without distinction of essential and non-essential, (has) been allowed". "Groceries include hygiene products such as handwashes, soaps, disinfectants, body wash, shampoos, surface cleaners, detergents and tissue papers, toothpaste/oral care, sanitary pads and diapers, battery cells, chargers etc," it said, adding that newspaper supply chain was also included in this.

Praveen Khandelwal, national

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

In Kerala, only 4 cases out of 202 needed to be put under critical care

ARUN JANARDHANAN
CHENNAI, MARCH 29

THE NUMBERS are reassuringly still low for comparison with global hotspots, the trajectory of the coronavirus's spread is still unclear, but experts in Kerala, fingers firmly crossed, say there is a glimmer in the state.

Of the 202 cases that tested positive for COVID-19 in Kerala until Sunday, 181 are still in hospital and only four of them needed critical care — admission in the Intensive Care Unit.

Of these four, one passed away Saturday, a 54-year-old man who had returned from the Gulf, the other three are being closely monitored.

This is a significant number even if we are in the early stage of the outbreak, said A S Anoop Kumar, a senior expert and the member of advisory panel for Kerala government's COVID-19 treatment and prevention. It works out to just under 2 per cent.

Moreover, the R-0 (R-naught,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

EXPLAINED

Good sign, will help planning

THESE ARE still early days in the outbreak in India, and the number of cases has just crossed 1,000 when the global total is over 7 lakh — even so, the fact that such a small number of COVID-19 patients needed to be admitted to the ICU offers a glimmer of hope regarding the virulence of the infection. These hopeful signs will also help Kerala plan its next steps in the battle better, according to officials in the state.

Informal sector workers not registered, officials flag problems in paying wages

AANCHAL MAGAZINE
NEW DLEHI, MARCH 29

THE CENTRE and several states have asked shops and establishments, and other commercial units, to pay wages to their workers during lockdown, but the informal nature of these entities, and non-registration of many unorganised workers with states, would restrict the states' ability and administrative control to enforce such orders, said government officials, who did not wish to be named.

Some state government officials *The Indian Express* spoke to said besides the state's capacity to ensure its orders were met, they were grappling with two other issues: many unorganised sector workers are not registered with the state government, and most states did not have significant corpus of funds to meet such contingencies.

"Most establishments in India are informal sector establishments, most are not registered. Some may be registered under the Shop and Establishments Act, but a lot of them are not. So, the problem of locating them, how many were employed there and then making the money available to them.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

A SHRUNKEN WELFARE STATE
BY CHRISTOPHE JAFFRELOT & UTSAV SHAH
PAGE 8

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INSIDE

DELHI SEES HIGHEST SPIKE; 23 CASES IN A DAY, 200 ON WATCH
PAGES 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 11, 12

PAGE 1 ANCHOR

Last call of man who died walking: *Lene aa sakte ho toh aa jao*

DIPANKAR GHOSE
MORENA (MP), MARCH 29

THE AUDIO file is 42 seconds long. On one end is a loud, animated voice. Screaming, beseeching. "Ask someone to give you a lift till Morena. Hello? Hello?" Silence. Then more urgently: "Call 100. Is there no ambulance? Can they not drop you? Hello?" Still silence. Then, a heavy breath crackles through. Defeated by the lockdown that made him walk over a hundred kilometres from Delhi in a desperate bid to reach home in Madhya Pradesh. And, perhaps, the knowledge that these were the last words to his family. "*Lene aa sakte ho toh aa jao* (Come get me if you can)."

This was the last time they heard the voice of 38-year-old Ranveer Singh, before he collapsed due to exhaustion and died of a heart attack Saturday in Agra, well over 100 km still to go.

Ranveer was one among the countless migrant workers walking home from big cities to their villages, where new rules of isolation and quarantine await. And his story is emblematic of their plight, and the trauma of waiting families.

On Sunday, Ranveer's wife Mamta huddled with their three children in Badfara village, their voices barely above a whisper, exhausted by the tears.

The house is sparse, red brick and cement, the family still in debt because of its construction. On March 22, Mamta had spoken to Ranveer on the phone, asking him to return. "Two other boys of our village were returning from Delhi. He said he couldn't. He worked as a delivery boy with a restaurant in Tughlakabad, and they were still open. He asked us to take care of ourselves, and that he would be fine," she said.

Ranveer lived alone in a shanty next to the DDA colony in Kalkaji. For food, he depended on the restaurant. Between the debt for the house, and the expenses back home, there was no money. So on Friday, at 2 pm, he called his eldest daughter Deepa, a Class 12 student in a school in Ambah, 2 km from Badfara. He was coming home, he said. "How?" she asked. "*Koi saadhan nahin hai. Na bus chal rahi hai, na train... paidal aa raha hoon* (There is nothing here. No bus, no train... am walking home)," he replied.

At 5 pm, he was still walking, dodging police, he said on another call. At 9 pm, there were the first signs of trouble. Pinky Singh, one of his two younger siblings, remembers him saying that he had found a truck to take him a little ahead. "But he was exhausted. He said he wanted to lie down. I told him that we wanted him back alive," she said.

On Saturday, the family woke up early, having barely slept. At 5 am, Pinky called him. "He said he had reached Sikandra Road in Agra. But he couldn't breathe, couldn't say anything. All he said was he had a pain in his chest," she said.

In panic, Pinky rushed to wake up other family members, asking them to call him, pick him up, do something. At 5.30 am, Arvind Singh, his brother-in-law, spoke to him — it was that 42-second call.

Two sets of relatives swung into action. One rushed to the village doctor, convinced him to hand over his ID card, got a ride on a motorcycle and rushed to Agra.

Another set of cousins took out their jeep, used to transport threshed wheat, and went to the Ambah Police Station. "We needed a pass. Otherwise, we wouldn't have been let through. They gave it to us but it took time," a relative said.

In Agra, they found his body in a hospital, covered in a white

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Ranveer's wife Mamta at their home in Morena. *Gajendra Yadav*

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WEB EXCLUSIVE

WHY BASU CHATTERJEE INTERPRETATION OF BYOMKESH BAKSHI IS GOLD STANDARD

Rajit Kapur, who attacked his role with such ebullient, cocky enthusiasm, was and still is the definitive Byomkesh Bakshi for most Indians. A remarkable feat considering the character has been played on screen by a galaxy of stars

IN THE LOCKDOWN

KERALA: WOMEN RUN COMMUNITY KITCHENS

These kitchens are powered by an army of Kudumbashree

FULL COVERAGE

LOCKDOWN HAS CLEANED UP THE AIR

Major cities across the world experienced lower emission levels

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

Seven fresh cases reported, COVID count in Karnataka 83

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
BENGALURU, MARCH 29

SEVEN NEW cases of the COVID-19 infection were reported in Karnataka on Sunday, taking the total number of cases in the state to 83.

Among the fresh cases is a cluster of five persons, all of them employees of a pharamceutical company in Nanjangud area of Mysuru district from where a 35-year-old man with no history of foreign travel or contact with COVID-19 patients tested positive on March 26. Since the first person to be infected at the company did not have a history of travel to any COVID-19-affected country, health authorities are probing how he was infected.

"As per present history, the case has no travel history and contact history. He was with the quality assurance section of a pharmaceutical company and has been in contact with many healthcare professionals. Detailed investigation is under process. Seven primary contacts have been traced and are under quarantine," the state department said last week.

On Sunday, the health department reported that five of the contacts of the employee had also tested positive. "As per preliminary reports patient 77 to 81 work in the same pharmaceutical company as P52," health officials said. The other cases reported on Sunday comprise a 35-year-old man from Udupi who returned from Dubai on March 17 and a 29-year-old man from Udupi who came from Kerala.

Uttarakhand: For 2 migrants, a meal a day and 250-km walk

LALMANI VERMA
DEHRADUN, MARCH 28

WITH PRACTICE question papers of Economics, a pair of jeans, a dozen rotis, and a water bottle, Yogendra Tyagi began walking on Saturday morning from Dehradun to his home in UP's Moradabad district, nearly 250 km away. The 19-year-old is a second-year BA student who has been doubling up as a worker in a textile factory in Dehradun for the past two months to pay the bills.

"Factory has closed due to the lockdown. Earnings have stopped too, and hence it is better to go home," he says. After hearing rumours from fellow labourers that the lockdown may be extended, he decided to make the journey home-like hundreds of other migrants labourers in the state. Walking with him is his colleague, Rajat, 20, also a BA student.

Both packed a few rotis and started making their way towards Haridwar. "Some policemen told me that I may get some transportation at the UP border. That is after Haridwar, which is some 80 km from here," says Yogendra.

"It will take at least three days to reach home. Our rotis will not be enough," adds Rajat adding that they were surviving on a meal a day.

FULL REPORT ON www.indianexpress.com

We have to win this war: PM

good wishes that we will be able to overcome this big problem by then)."

With migrant labourers leaving big cities in droves for villages, Modi urged people to help them. "We should be more sensitive towards the poor. Our humanity lies in feeding the poor first in this time of difficulty. India can do this, this is our culture."

Underlining the threat posed by COVID-19 again, like he had done in his previous addresses to the nation on coronavirus, Modi said the disease did not consider region or weather. "For a country the size of India, we need strong measures. Nobody likes to take such strong measures, but it is the only option, having seen what happened in other countries and learning that the disease must be dealt with at the beginning before it becomes incurable."

Warning those "not understanding the gravity of the situation", he said, "This lockdown is for your own protection... Those who are breaking the law are actually playing with their lives... The world over, many people nursed this delusion (that they will not be affected by coronavirus). All of them are regretting now... those breaking the rules are playing with their lives."

The PM also urged that those in home quarantine or who had tested positive should not be mistreated. "We have to keep social distance, not emotional and human distance. Such people are not criminals... They have quarantined themselves to save others from infection... When people are taking responsibility themselves, behaving badly with them is not right. Instead, they should be shown sympathy and cooperation... Social distancing doesn't mean stopping social interaction."

Modi, who had asked people to express gratitude for those lending essential services on Janata Curfew day, thanked "warriors" and "soldiers" such as healthcare and sanitation workers, promising health insurance of Rs 50 lakh for around 20 lakh such people. He said small shopkeepers, drivers, bank workers, e-commerce delivery persons and IT professionals who were keeping the Internet running were putting themselves at risk to make essential services available.

The PM suggested that people should use the 21-day period they are locked in to "not go out but look within yourself, try to know yourself", develop new hobbies.

During the programme, Modi invited coronavirus patient Ramagampa Teja to share his experience. Teja said he was initially frightened but felt reassured because of doctors and hospital staff. The PM also spoke with Agra's Ashok Kapoor, who tested positive along with his entire family, including young grandson, after he had visited Italy. Modi told Kapoor to spread awareness about anti-coronavirus measures in Agra.

Another doctor who came on the show, Nitish Gupta from Delhi, said many hospitalised people were scared seeing news of deaths in other countries, and require counselling. Dr Borse from Pune told Modi that all the patients in his hospital were recovering well.

All goods can move now

secretary general of the Confederation of All India Traders, who attended the video conference, told The Indian Express, "The wholesalers of all essentials across India have stocks that would last up to around 20 more days, we told the government. So it was conveyed that if production is not resumed slowly, then there might be a problem in the long run."

A timeline of how long the stocks might last without production was also discussed, with the industry and traders saying that retailers had stocks for just five days and these would need to be replenished, with uninterrupted transportation. "Industry players said law enforcement authorities in states were not allowing the movement of a number of items, saying these were not essential commodities," a government official said.

Sources said government representatives, including Goyal, took the projection and feedback "positively".

Sources said industry players as well as officials had pointed out to the government multiple times over the past week that essential items should also mean grocery products needed for the smooth running of households. The letter by the Home Secretary also allows services of Indian Red Corss personnel.

Industry stakeholders told the government that the protocol for factories to start running again could include truncated manpower. "We said let there be a health protocol for workers and maybe allow 50 per cent staff to come to factories," Khandelwal said.

Following the meeting, the government issued the new circular to states on movement of "all goods".

On Sunday, the Railways also announced that it would run additional parcel trains to aid the supply chain of essential commodities, including "dairy products, medical equipment, medicines, groceries and edible oil". This is expected to help e-commerce companies especially, which are facing transportation issues due to the lockdown.

While eight parcel specials have been run since March 22, additional trains are being planned on 20 routes. One such train set off on Sunday with products of FMCG major Nestle, from Moga ion Punjab to Changsari in Assam.

A glimmer from Kerala

reproduction number) that refers to the number of people, on an average, who are infected by one corona-positive indivdual, is also below 1 in Kerala, said Kumar. For the country, that number is around 1.81.

"For about 180 cases, there can be at least 35 people who are sick, eight to 10 are expected to be in ICU or in need of ventilators. But we didn't have to use them. Maybe because the infection-level in Kerala was much lower than expected, or maybe it depends on the kind of population that is getting affected. Or the age group? There are many factors which we need to ascertain," Kumar said.

Underlining that this is an early stage of the outbreak in India and several factors play a role in local transmission, Kumar said that these early hopeful signs will help the state plan the next steps.

Other than those in critical care, many in the "high-risk" group (elderly, underlying conditions) were also stable and responding "positively," said a senior health official. These include the 92-year-old patient from Pathanamthitta and his wife in her late 80s.

Acknowledging these positive indicators, state health secretary Rajan N Khobragade said that the the government was "geared to face any kind of eventuality."

Until Saturday, about 1,34,370 people were under surveillance in Kerala. Most of them are in home quarantine.

G R Santhosh Kumar, the UNICEF consultant in northern Kerala during the Nipah outbreak, said that even if this is an early stage, the credit for such a "positive trend" goes to Kerala's public health army.

"Hundreds of our junior public health nurses, lady health inspectors, health supervisors, health inspectors and Asha (Accredited Social Health Activists) workers are the people who are fighting this virus now. The amount of risk they have taken to trace thousands of contacts and the collective networks where they share and take information about people being quarantined. all these grass-roots level interventions are definitely going to reduce the load of this outbreak in Kerala," he said.

The man who died walking

sheet. The doctors and police called it a heart attack. "When I spoke to him last, I could tell he was flat on the ground and close to death. We brought his body back and cremated him on Saturday," said Arvind.

There is regret in his voice. Arvind, too, worked in Delhi at a popular Greater Kailash restaurant. "I returned on March 22. I should have insisted that he come with me," he said.

On Sunday evening, all the talk in the village was about compensation. "Our shops are shut, and we can't go out. We understand coronavirus and take it seriously. But the government should have let the trains run for three more days...maybe, the buses. What will happen to his children now? The family deserves a government job so they survive, and compensation," said Mahendra Singh, a neighbour.

The family, meanwhile, remembers Ranveer as a man assaulted by circumstance, but one who never stopped fighting. "You think he wanted to be a delivery boy? He only left three years ago because he needed the money for his family. He grew up in Dewas where his father worked in a factory. He studied in Holy Child School, an English-medium school. But at 18, he began to work in an electronics store. His father died and he realised there was money trouble. He moved the family here, and went to Delhi," Pinky said.

In those three years, Ranveer sent money back regularly, and began building a house for his wife and children. There was debt, but they did not know how much. "He never told them. There was enough worry at home," Arvind said.

Ranveer's youngest daughter, only three years old, has polio and has already lost the ability to stand.

Giving up was never an option. Badfara had little to offer in terms of employment. "Close to 200 boys are in the cities all over India," Arvind said.

Some of them have now returned, walking, hitchhiking, beating the elements and their blistered feet. Others are still on their way, with little or nothing left in their pockets.

Ranveer had Rs 800. That's all his family has now.

To stem migrant flow, Centre seals inter-state borders, orders quarantine

lockdown, saying, "The migrant people, who have moved out to reach their home states/home towns, must be kept in the nearest shelter (in) the respective State/Union Territory Government quarantine facilities after proper screening, for a minimum period of 14 days."

Earlier, the Centre had said landlords should not charge labourers or students during this period or evict them, warning of action. Sunday's advisory said, "States have been told to ensure timely payment of wages to labourers at their place of work during the period of lockdown without any cut... All the employers, be it in the industry or in shops and commercial establishments, shall make payment (to) their workers, at their work places... without any deduction, for the period their establishments are under closure."

Ministry of Health Joint Secretary Lav Agarwal again emphasised the need for a complete lockdown for desired results against coronavirus. "If one person in one district does not follow instructions, we are back to the same situation," he said, during the daily briefing.

Sidestepping a question on whether the movement of migrants had caught the government unawares, he said, "This is an unprecedented situation. A flood or an earthquake affects only one part of the country at one time. But this is something that affects the whole country at the same time. We seek your support in this."

Agarwal added that the same quarantine protocol as in place for those returning from foreign countries in the early days will apply to the migrant labourers coming home. "According to their contact history and other details, they will have to stay in home quarantine for 14 days or in a facility quarantine if it is so required."

Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba and Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla held video conferences with chief secretaries and police chiefs of states on Saturday evening and Sunday morning. "It was noted that, by and large, there has been effective implementation of guidelines across all states and Union territories," the government said.

Delhi Police Commissioner S N Srivastava instructed personnel not to let people leave the Capital, enhancing picket deployment and stopping all buses, after the Centre's advisory. Uttarakhand withdrew a decision to open inter-district transport on March 31 to allow those stranded to get home.

Uttar Pradesh has sent nodal officers to several states, including the Northeast, to convince migrant workers to stay where they are. Nearly one lakh people who have arrived in the state over the last few days have been asked to remain in home quarantine.

Haryana directed deputy commissioners to completely seal all inter and intra-state borders.

For the second time in two days, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan sought the PM's intervention to ensure vehicles carrying essential commodities were not blocked by neighbouring Karnataka. He also said it was "incorrect" to portray certain districts in the state as "highly affected".

Karnataka had earlier blocked the roads next to the North Kerala districts of Kaaragod and Kannur, which have so far reported more than half of the state's 202 coronavirus cases. On Sunday, Karnataka did not let in an ambulance from Kasaragod to Mangaluru, allegedly leading to the death of a patient.

Vijayan's office said he talked to Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who called at the behest of the PM.

The group of ministers that reviewed the situation Sunday expressed concern over the movement of migrant labourers and their gathering at state borders. Those present at the meeting included Rajnath Singh, Shah, Ram Vilas Paswan, Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank, Prakash Javadekar, Hardeep Singh Puri, Narendra Singh Tomar and Smriti Irani. They were told that the supply of essential commodities was "satisfactory".

The empowered group of officers will deal with issues such as medical emergency management, testing and quarantine facilities, augmenting of human resources and capacity building, facilitating supply chains, coordination with private sector and NGOs, economic and welfare measures, public awareness, data management, and strategic issues relating to the lockdown.

Cases cross 1,000, 11 groups to help fight virus

coordinate the management and control of the disease across the country. The groups will look at issues related to the medical emergency management plan, availability of hospitals, isolation and quarantine beds, availability of critical medical equipment, human resources supply chain management, coordination with private sector, economic and welfare measures, communication, technology, public grievances and strategic issues on lockdown.

Each group has a representative from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and Cabinet Secretariat; they held meetings at the PMO on Sunday. The group on medical emergency is headed by NITI Aayog member Dr V K Paul, while NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant heads the group on private sector. All the others are headed by Secretaries.

Amid reports of shortages across the country, a government stocktaking exercise has found that 3.17 lakh personal protective equipment (PPE) and 11.47 lakh N95 masks are currently available.

Central PSUs are in the process of manufacturing 40 lakh more masks — 13 lakh have been procured and 5 lakh received as donation.

Masks and PPEs are essential for health workers engaged in management of COVID-19. There are already reports of several doctors being infected, and at least one death of a Mumbai urologist.

Reports have also appeared citing Invest India estimates that the current requirement of masks in the country is 3.8 crore and PPEs is 62 lakh.

Responding to a question about the reported shortage of PPEs and masks etc, Agarwal said: "Invest India is a government body but they may not be completely updated… We have started manufacturing and procuring PPEs, ventilators and N95 masks, and are trying to get them from abroad too. We just got one shipment yesterday. We are making all efforts to upgrade logistics and hospitals."

"The requirement is a function of our graded response and it keeps changing. Our strategy has been to anticipate and plan in advance… initially, PPEs were made of imported cloth that was not easily available. After many efforts, the Ministry of Textiles had a series of meetings with Indian manufacturers. We have amended PPE guidelines, keeping the virus in mind. Currently, over 10 manufacturers in India have been approved and they have started production. We are looking at others too," he said.

The Department of Expenditure has issued special instructions to enable fast decisions in matters related to procurements.

There are now 1,26,720 isolation beds that have been earmarked for COVID-19 patients across the country. This includes 17,631 beds in central government institutions and 1,09,089 in the states. However, there are only 25,743 ICU beds so far.

Problems with paying wages

Issuing orders without the administrative capacity to carry it out is a little worrying. In this sort of situation, you can do this with organised sector entities, but for an unorganised and informal sector establishment, it is not feasible," former Chief Statistician of India Pronab Sen said.

Most of the small-scale shops and establishments have a minimum buffer which is used by them to manage purchases, making it tough to pay during a 21-day shutdown, industry sources said.

"Most small businesses run with a monetary buffer of 3-7 days, with which they manage the working capital requirement, including purchase of inputs and provisions for worker salaries. An extended shutdown that stretches beyond a few days impedes this cycle and makes it difficult to provision for payments, including salaries. There is no way that a majority of small and even medium-sized businesses can make salary payouts when the factory or unit has downed its shutters," a senior executive with a Mumbai-based diversified business house, which counts several SMEs as part of its supplier base, said.

Experts said that even in the construction sector, which employs the largest share of migrant workers, the workers would not be tied to one contractor, making it difficult to enforce such orders.

Sen suggested that the government authorities should instead set up registration centres for migrant and casual workers immediately in towns and cities to help them. "Out-migration should have been stopped much earlier. The more sensible thing to do now is to tell people who are working in such establishments to get themselves registered with some government authority and say that the government would on registration give them 'x' amount of money on a daily or weekly basis, depending on how they want to do it... something like the ration system," he said.

As per the last available Sixth Economic Census, conducted during January 2013-April 2014, out of total 5.85 crore establishments with 13.13 crore workers in operation, 77.6 per cent (4.53 crore) were engaged in non-agricultural activities (excluding public administration, defence, and compulsory social security activities) while 22.4 per cent establishments (1.31 crore) were engaged in agricultural activities (excluding crop production and plantation).

No recent official data estimate the country's unorganised workers. According to the last NSSO Employment and Unemployment Survey, 2011-12, unorganised sector workers were estimated to be 82.7 per cent or 39.14 crore of the total 47.41 crore estimated employed persons. The contribution of the unorganised or informal sector to the economy, according to a National Statistical Commission report of 2012, varies between 48 per cent and 56.4 per cent. While the Labour Ministry does not keep data on migrant workers, the Economic Survey in the past had assumed it at 20 per cent of the total workforce.

Delhi officers suspended

migrant workers has been with these teams.

As Additional Chief Secy (Transport), Sharma was in-charge of the Delhi Transport Corporation, which pressed into service buses to help migrant workers reach borders and NCR towns.

"It has been brought to the notice of the competent authority that the following officers, who were responsible to ensure strict compliance to the instructions issued by Chairperson, National Executive Committee, formed under Disaster Management Act 2005, regarding containment of spread of COVID-19, have prima facie failed to do so," a Home Ministry statement said. "These officers have failed to ensure public health and safety."

The order against Sharma adds that the Additional Chief Secretary had "failed to maintain absolute integrity and devotion to duty. It is also contemplated to initiate proceedings for imposition of major penalty against her."

Earlier, the Aam Aadmi Party, which rules Delhi, and the Uttar Pradesh BJP had traded charges over the migrant exodus on the border.

The Delhi government did not respond to the action against the officers despite repeated attempts. Sources said it was not aware of any impending action against the officers.

The power to appoint, transfer or take action against officers in the Capital lies with the Centre through the Lieutenant Governor.

SBI
Agency Banking Department, Madame Cama Road, State Bank Bhavan, Mumbai - 400 021.

CORRIGENDUM

Please refer to RFP No. SBI/R&DB/ABD/2 dated 02.03.2020 for processing, sorting, packeting, bundling and shrink wrapping of Currency Notes. **Corrigendum** is available at Bank's Websites "**https://bank.sbi**" and "**https://etender.sbi**".

Place: Mumbai
Date: 30.03.2020

Sd/-
Deputy General Manager (ABD)
Agency Banking Department

People and their belongings being sprayed with disinfectant at Anand Vihar bus terminal, Sunday. East Delhi mayor Anju Kamalkant said the disinfectant was also sprayed at several other places by MCD workers. A senior MCD official said sodium hypochlorite mixed with water is being used. *Prem Nath Pandey*

CORONA WATCH

HC judges donate Rs 10k each

New Delhi: The Chief Justice and 33 sitting judges of the Delhi High Court donated Rs 10,000 each towards the PM's Relief Fund to tackle the coronavirus crisis.

Fake ID to divert crisis funds

New Delhi: The Cyber Crime unit of Delhi Police found a fake UPI ID being used to divert funds from the newly launched PM Cares Fund. Anyesh Roy, DCP (Cyber Crime), posted a tweet with the correct UPI ID and alerted people of the scam. Police said SBI has also been briefed about the fake ID and they have blocked it. Police said the accused will be identified soon.

FIRs against AAP's Chadha

Noida: Noida Police filed an FIR Sunday against AAP MLA Raghav Chadha for allegedly making defamatory comments against UP CM Yogi Adityanath. Another FIR was filed in Ghaziabad over the same statement. Chadha, in a statement, said: "The FIR... warrants to be rejected with the contempt it deserves."

NIZAMUDDIN WEST UNDER SCANNER, OVER 1,000 BEING TRACED

23 more cases in city: 'Likelihood of a surge in the coming days'

ASTHA SAXENA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 29

DELHI RECORDED a 47% spike in coronavirus cases as 23 more people tested positive for the disease Sunday, taking the total number of cases in the capital to 72.

This is the highest single-day jump in the city so far.

Of the 23, six people, who have been admitted to AIIMS Jhajjar, are part of the Tablighi Jamaat outfit and attended an event held at a Nizamuddin West mosque last month, a Delhi health department official said, adding that more people who were part of the gathering or may have been in touch with the group are being identified and quarantined. The six are not residents of Delhi.

Officials zeroed in on Nizamuddin West after an 80-year-old resident of the area tested positive for COVID-19 on Saturday. According to sources, around 200 people have been quarantined from the area so far, and over 1,000 are being traced.

Of the 200, 99 with symptoms have been sent to various hospitals.

"People who attended the event are not just from Delhi, but other states as well — positive cases have been reported from Telangana and the Andamans. When health officers in those states began contact tracing, they discovered that the patients had visited Nizamuddin. That's how we discovered the mosque, which has now been closed for sanitisation," said an official.

A team of doctors has been posted at Nizamuddin to assess people with symptoms.

Apart from the six who attended the Tablighi Jamaat event, 13 who tested positive Sunday have a travel history, while four are cases of local transmission.

Of the 72 cases, five have been discharged while two people — a 68-year-old resident of West Delhi and a 60-year-old Yemeni national — have died.

When contacted, Dr S K Sarin, head of the five-member committee formed by Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to prepare the city's health set-up for possible community transmission, told *The Indian Express*: "There is a possibility that samples which have been lying pending for long have been put on testing since testing kits have been increased by the ICMR (Indian Council of Medical Research). But the picture will be clear in a day or two only. There is also a fear that these 23 new cases may have transmitted the virus to a fair number of people. There is a likelihood of a surge in cases in the coming days. The only thing we need to do right now is ensure self-reporting of cases. People should start going to the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme to report themselves and take all people who they have been in contact with. Delhi is completely ready for stage 1, which means recording 100 cases a day."

Speeding truck kills 5 migrant workers on expressway in Gurgaon

SAKSHI DAYAL
GURGAON, MARCH 29

FIVE PEOPLE, including a woman and a child, died after a speeding truck ran over them on the Kundli-Manesar-Palwal (KMP) Expressway in Gurgaon late Saturday night. The victims are believed to be migrants returning to their villages amidst the countrywide lockdown, who were stopped at the Tauru border by police.

"The truck driver, a UP resident, was arrested," said Gurgaon Police PRO Subhash Boken.

The incident took place at 12.10 am near the toll plaza. In a complaint to police, Kuldeep, an eyewitness who hails from UP and was among several people standing near the toll, said the speeding vehicle came from the direction of Farrukhnagar.

"The truck first hit an auto parked on the side, and rammed another auto. We screamed at the driver to stop... but he drove towards us, running over some of my friends and other bystanders before ramming the vehicle into the divider," he alleged.

Police said the truck was loaded with tomatoes and travelling from Ahmedabad to Ghaziabad. "Five people, including a woman and a child, were killed in the incident, while seven others sustained minor injuries. One of the victims has been identified as the driver of the auto, which the accused had hit. Four-five people in his vehicle were also injured," said Deepak Saharan, DCP (Manesar).

An FIR has been registered at Bilaspur police station under relevant IPC sections including 279 (rash driving) and 304A (death by negligence).

DJB denies UP govt claim: No water connections cut

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 29

THE DELHI Jal Board Sunday denied allegations made by the Uttar Pradesh government that water connections of migrant labourers were snapped.

In a statement Saturday, the UP government had claimed that migrants were leaving the capital because the Delhi government has snapped their power and water connections.

"Water supply has been maintained as normal, no connection in any area has been cut. We are also regularly supplying tankers to areas not connected to our network," said Shalabh Kumar, member (water supply) at the DJB, adding that all officers have been asked to be more vigilant about services of the department. Kumar said special focus is on areas that house people from economically weaker sections.

Another senior DJB officer said, "This is a time to ensure uninterrupted supply. We have not cut water connections recently."

Earlier this month, on March 20, the DJB had also decided to suspend meter reading and billing for the month until March 31, directing that customers who were left out would be billed in the following months.

Power department functionaries, too, said the allegations were incorrect. "If we look at the past week, there has been no big change in the number of active power connections. These are political allegations; they have nothing to do with ground reality," said an official.

11 Italian tourists discharged, one remains on ventilator

ASTHA SAXENA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 29

A 79-YEAR-OLD Italian tourist who tested positive for COVID-19 and was admitted to Gurgaon's Medanta Hospital has been on ventilator support for two weeks, with doctors saying her lungs are not responding well to treatment.

She is among 14 Italian tourists who were admitted to the hospital as suspected cases of COVID-19. Eleven of them have since been discharged after they recovered and tested negative for the disease. Two other tourists also tested negative and will be discharged on Monday, said officials at the hospital.

"There is only one patient who has not recovered yet, she has been on ventilator support for two weeks now. As her lungs are not in good shape, we have not been able to take her off ventilator support. Her other parameters such as liver, kidney and heart are well-maintained," said Dr Sushila Kataria, director of internal medicine at Medanta.

The 79-yr-old is among 14 Italians who were admitted to Medanta hospital

"When she was admitted, she had an existing cardiac issue and hypertension. But she was in a good enough condition to travel to India. The COVID-19 infection has affected her condition. We are closely monitoring her situation. There have been a few days when she showed improvement," Kataria said.

A total of 24 people, including 21 Italian tourists and three Indians who were in contact with another Italian national who tested positive for coronavirus in Jaipur, were shifted to the ITBP Chhawla facility for testing. On March 4, on special request of the government, 14 asymptomatic tourists were shifted to the hospital.

5 more cases in Noida, all linked to private firm

AMIL BHATNAGAR
NEW DELHI, MARCH 29

FIVE FRESH COVID-19 cases were reported in Noida Sunday taking the district's tally to 31, the highest in UP. At least 20 of the 31 cases — including Sunday's cases — are directly or indirectly linked to a fire safety firm in Sector 135, whose MD and other employees had tested positive. The firm also has health departments of other districts on alert as a case in Ghaziabad and Bareilly each have been linked to it.

According to officials, an FIR was filed at Expressway police station against the MD of the firm for not informing health authorities about the travel of a UK national in mid-March, which led to the outbreak.

"Samples of five persons linked to the firm have returned positive; we have begun contact tracing. Among the fresh cases is a 34-year-old man whose sample had initially tested negative but he had passed on the infection to his mother and wife," said Dr Anurag Bhargava, CMO, Gautam Budh Nagar.

According to officials, among the patients are three employees of the firm: a 19-year-old from Sector 27; the 34-year-old man from Sector 137, and a resident of a village in Dadri. Officials said Block F in Sector 27 and the village in Dadri have been sealed.

Two fresh cases were reported in Ghaziabad Sunday, taking the total cases to seven. Officials said one patient is linked to the Noida firm.

MOST HAIL FROM ASSAM

Under shadow of Gurgaon towers, ragpicker colony runs out of supplies

SAKSHI DAYAL
GURGAON, MARCH 29

FOR THE first time since he moved to Gurgaon 15 years ago, Abdul Halim, a ragpicker, asked his parents in Assam to send him Rs 1,000 so he could buy food for his family of four. "I usually earn around Rs 200 a day picking up bottles, cartons and selling them. This is normally enough to sustain my family... I also manage to send around Rs 1,500-Rs 2,000 to my parents. This month, I don't even have money to feed my family," said Halim.

For Halim and 400 others who live in a slum near the community centre in Sector 21, the lockdown has come as a sudden blow. Located under the shadow of Infospace Limited Business Complex — a cluster of high-rise buildings that house offices of banks and several international organisations — the slum is home to 107 families. While most are employed as ragpickers, some work as drivers. A majority of the families hail from Assam, and a few from Bihar and UP.

"What we earn varies from day to day, and from person to person. Ragpickers make Rs 100-300 a day, and a handful of drivers earn better, around Rs 500," said Mohammad Ayub, another ragpicker.

Residents of every shanty *The Indian Express* spoke to said they had no money, no work, and no idea how to feed their families. Hesitant to venture too far fearing police harassment, they spend their days sitting at home, hoping help will reach soon.

Even as they hear from their acquaintances in other parts of the city about food packages and ration being provided by the administration and social workers, they are yet to receive anything. A possible reason, they say, is because their slum is in a corner of the city. "If we were in people's line of vision, maybe we would get help as well, but our homes are hidden by these large offices and boundary walls. If people do not even know we are here, how can they help us?" said Kalchan Ali, another ragpicker from Assam.

The slum in Sector 21 is home to more than 100 families. *Amit Mehra*

"Our ration is running out. If we do not get help, we will starve in a day or two. Some families are already out of ration, but we are all pooling in to ensure nobody goes hungry," he said.

In the past week, help arrived once — from an NGO in Delhi. But provisions, they say, was enough to provide one meal to about 50 residents. "They left some rice, lentils, flour, but we have kept aside as much as we could. If we cook all, fights could break out," said Jiarur Rahman, a resident.

Water supply, too, is uncertain due to lack of income. The community usually procured water through tankers, at Rs 50 for a drum. "A few tankers came today and gave water at half price, so we will be able to manage for a day or two... after that, we don't know what will happen...," said Halim.

"If the government extends this lockdown, we may have to look for a way to return to Assam. We want to follow orders and not move around, but the government needs to give us basic provisions to survive," he said.

EMPLOYER TO LANDLORD, HELPING HAND WAS MISSING

SAROJ DEVI, 35
Family members: 4
Profession: Labourer in Bawana
Earning: Rs 300 a day; **Headed towards:** Jhansi

WHY SHE LEFT: "My husband and I have no money and we're scared of this disease... We have been waiting for a bus to take us home for three days now... our children are in the village."

MAKHAN LAL, 32
Family members: 1
Profession: Labourer in Azadpur
Earning: Rs 400 a day; **Headed towards:** Jhansi

WHY HE LEFT: "There's no work. Police told us to gather on one side of the road (at Anand Vihar), saying buses will come there, so we did. Then they said go to the other side. It is so difficult here."

ASHIYA, 25
Family members: 2, including 6-month-old daughter
Profession: Factory worker in Mehrauli
Earning: Rs 300 a day; **Headed towards:** Moradabad

WHY SHE LEFT: "My husband and I work at a home factory; we help with the packaging. But they removed us after the lockdown, so we came walking here to take a bus home."

RAMA DEVI, 35
Family members: 3
Profession: Construction worker in Ghaziabad
Earning: Rs 300 a day; **Headed towards:** Damoh

WHY SHE LEFT: "We have been waiting here for two days as the contractor didn't give us the money. Where do we go? We have no food to eat, and we have two children to feed."

SIYA BAI, 55
Family members: 1
Profession: Construction worker
Earning: Rs 200 a day; **Headed towards:** Jhansi

WHY SHE LEFT: "There is no work at all, we have been sitting here since 7 in the morning. We need to go back home, but we cannot find a bus that goes to MP."

RUCHI SINGH, 30
Family members: 3
Profession: Housewife, her husband works in a hotel
Earning: Nil; **Headed towards:** Pratapgarh

WHY SHE LEFT: "My husband earns Rs 15,000 a month; we have just Rs 2,000-3,000 left. If we don't go home, we will starve. We left at 11 am today... We just have biscuits and some milk."

SUNITA, 25
Family members: 4
Profession: Labourer in Nangloi
Earning: Rs 300 a day; **Headed towards:** Badaun

WHY SHE LEFT: "The contractor stopped giving us money, and the landlord locked us out saying that unless we pay rent, he won't allow us to stay. We had to leave as we have no food."

MOTI LAL, 62
Family members: 1
Profession: Labourer in Naraina
Earning: Rs 200-300 a day; **Headed towards:** Lucknow

WHY HE LEFT: "I started walking around 8 am... How long will we sit here? I don't think I can avail ration as I'm not a Delhiite."

REPORTING BY ANANYA TIWARI, PHOTOS BY PREM NATH PANDEY

Lockdown intensifies as police try to get a grip

MAHENDER SINGH MANRAL, ANANYA TIWARI & JIGNASA SINHA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 29

HOURS AFTER the Union Home Ministry told the chief secretaries of each state and union territory to arrange food and shelter for stranded migrant workers, Delhi Police stopped those trying to leave the capital on foot, sealed borders and barricaded arterial roads, especially those leading to the Delhi-Uttar Pradesh border. The Ministry also told states that those who have been walking have violated the lockdown, and must be quarantined after screening for 14 days.

"We are stopping and asking them why they are leaving. They are then being told about the arrangements the state and Centre have made," said a senior police officer. He said police are also telling migrant workers about how such a mass movement can spread COVID-19.

The Centre has asked states to utilise the State Disaster Response Fund to provide food and shelter. "Earlier, SHOs were directed to arrange food for the poor in their areas... Now, they have been told to focus on law and order instead, and stop migrants from leaving," the officer said.

Delhi Police spokesperson Mandeep Singh Randhawa said, "We have sealed all borders and blocked the exit of migrant workers. We have also blocked entry and are now providing them facilities arranged by government departments. We are either dropping them at their place or shifting them to the shelters." Personnel have been told to be polite, but take legal action if anyone violates CrPC section 144. Delhi Police Commissioner S N Shrivastava also visited several areas in the capital to check preparedness.

Migrants crossing the Yamuna floodplain in a bid to avoid police barricades nearby, Sunday. *Abhinav Saha*

At Anand Vihar, where thousands had gathered on Saturday night to catch buses to their villages, some confusion remained.

While empty buses waited on the road, the entrance to the terminal was barricaded by police, as hundreds of migrants gathered, pleading to be let in.

Kamlesh (40), who earns Rs 400 a day as a labourer at a tile factory in Trilokpuri, said, "We were left with a day or two of work money, with hardly anything to eat." She said she had to think of her five children. "We don't have money to pay rent. Our neighbours are not helping us. We have even taken loans from people," she added.

As people were stopped from gathering at Anand Vihar, many started walking to Ghaziabad, hoping to reach the Lal Kuan bus stop. As the day passed, police got stricter. By evening, security was increased at the borders and only a few labourers were seen standing near the Anand Vihar bus terminal.

Santosh Mishra (33), a labourer who lives in Shahdara, hid in one of the lanes there. He said, "I have been waiting since morning, but police won't let anyone go. My wife and sister are waiting at a shop nearby. We want to return home to Badaun."

A few people tried moving towards Anand Vihar railway station, but found barricades on the way. Deepak Kumar (45), a fruit seller, said his family lives in Moradabad and he had come to Delhi a month ago for his cousin's wedding. "I can't live alone. I want to go back to my children but police are not allowing it," he said.

In a wireless message sent out to personnel, the police chief instructed them to increase picket deployment and stop the movement of every bus going outside the capital. "All district DCPs, ACPs and SHOs have been instructed to make announcements in areas with migrant population that the government will pay them their full wages and also create awareness among them about the threat of spread of coronavirus and also to warn them that strict action will be taken if they are seen on the roads," he added.

Meanwhile, the owner of three private buses and his three drivers were arrested during picket-checking at Dhaula Kuan flyover on Sunday for allegedly carrying passengers in violation of lockdown orders.

'FOLLOW PM MANTRA, STAY WHERE YOU ARE'

Stay put, no one will go hungry: CM

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 29

REITERATING HIS appeal to people to stay indoors, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal Sunday urged everyone to rise above political differences and ensure no one has to go hungry due to the lockdown and restrictions on economic activities.

Without naming any party, Kejriwal asked AAP volunteers to not get into squabbles and focus on serving people in distress.

The BJP-led Uttar Pradesh government had Saturday accused AAP of creating a situation that forced migrants to leave the capital. This prompted a sharp response from Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, who called the allegations petty and ridiculous.

"Yesterday, an opposition party had levelled certain allegations against us. We should not get into any form of squabbling. If we are told about shortcomings, we need to rectify. When confronted with such allegations, put the record straight politely. If you are still abused, just ignore. The need of the hour is to save this country and serve its people," he said, pointing to the alarming spread of COVID-19 in countries such as Italy, UK and USA.

What started as a trickle out of the city had turned into a flood of migrants on Saturday, as thousands headed to their villages, mostly in UP, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand.

Kejriwal pointed out how other states — Kerala, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Odisha, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh Haryana and Punjab, among others — have also been witnessing similar scenes: "I appeal to them — when the PM had announced the lockdown, he had made one statement — '*jo jahan hai, wo wohi rahe*'. This, I believe, is the mantra. If we fail to stick to it, the fight against coronavirus will fail."

CM Arvind Kejriwal at Sunday's press conference

"Those returning should know they run the risk of contracting the virus from someone in the crowd. If one such person contracts the virus, he will take it to his village. The villages are still unaffected. If this spreads, controlling it will be very difficult," he said.

The CM once again listed the arrangements made by the AAP government in terms of food and lodging for migrants. He said many schools where facilities have been put together are now lying empty.

"We will also make arrangements at stadiums. I also want to appeal to those with wealth, the industrialists — this is the time to give back to society. We earn all our lives but at the end, nothing matters. What matters is what we give back. Please don't let anyone starve," he said.

Kejriwal added that the government will not hesitate to act against landlords evicting tenants over rent or forcing them to pay.

"Postpone their rents for some time. After a month or two, when things get better, I assure you if a tenant is unable to pay rent due to poverty, the government will bear the loss," said the AAP chief.

Kejriwal also made a "personal" appeal to people to make good use of the lockdown period and recite the *Bhagavad Gita*:

"If you are a true *desh bhakt*, the biggest *desh bhakti* is staying at home. *The Bhagavad Gita* has 18 chapters and the lockdown has 18 days left. Since yesterday, we at home, the entire family, have started reading it. It takes half an hour. If you're so inclined, you can too."

Late night rush sees a packed bus depot in capital

MALLICA JOSHI & AMIL BHATNAGAR
NEW DELHI, MARCH 29

FOR THREE years, Ramesh Singh (26) has longed to return home to UP's Badaun. But the urge to make the 280-km-long journey has never been as strong as it is now.

A father of two boys, Singh, a waiter, lives in South Delhi's Kotla Mubarakpur. For three days, he was apprehensive as he saw his neighbours leaving for their villages on foot. But on Saturday, news reached him that UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath had "arranged for buses at the Delhi-UP border". "After walking three hours, we reached Anand Vihar in the evening. Four hours on, we are still waiting to get into a bus. My wife and children are inside the terminal, I am outside looking for a way to get home," said Singh on Saturday night.

With restaurants shut, Singh is running out of money and patience: "My employer has given me two-thirds of my salary. I can't blame him, he is suffering massive losses too."

At 10 pm Saturday, roads leading to the Anand Vihar Interstate Bus Terminal were packed with people and buses. By evening, the UP and Delhi governments had arranged close to 1,000 buses. Some of these were at Lal Kuan in Ghaziabad, Meerut and Sahibabad. Around 11 pm, several buses began taking people away. But more and more people continued walking towards Anand Vihar.

Police tried to stop workers and divert them to shelters. "We said we will ensure they get shelter and food in Delhi, but nothing is working. They are yearning for their villages and

At Anand Vihar ISBT, Saturday night. *Amit Mehra*

families," said a police constable on duty at the terminal.

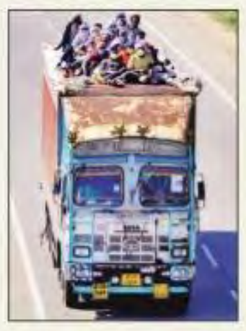
Till Saturday night, many people were still being allowed to pass through. The order to stop movement and seal borders was passed by the MHA on Sunday. By 2 am, migrant workers were told they will now get buses at Ghaziabad's Lal Kuan – 20 km away. Sheshnaag (36) asked 15 people in an hour about his bus to Bareilly. He went to Lal Kuan but returned after he failed to get one. "My wife and four sons are inside the terminal. In the last three-four hours, there have been announcements that buses are finally leaving from Lal Kuan. I will take them to Lal Kuan again to see if it is actually coming," he said.

Delhi Police could be seen looking for Ghaziabad policemen to confirm the plan of action. Soon, an announcement was made to send people to Lal Kuan. At 3 am at Lal Kuan, policemen announced about buses leaving for Kanpur and Lucknow. With no streetlight for 200 metres, crowds huddled in the dark so no one got lost.

"Officials told us there is a disease and we need to avoid travelling. For us, the disease means nothing. If we don't have wages, hunger will kill us first," said Ashfaq, who is headed to Aligarh.

By 3.30 am, more people found seats and the buses left.

CORONA WATCH



Migrant workers travel during the lockdown in Prayagraj Sunday. *PTI*

2 more Army cases: Doctor and JCO

New Delhi: An Army doctor and a Junior Commissioned Officer tested positive for coronavirus on Sunday, taking the total cases reported from the armed forces to three. The first case was a soldier in Leh whose father had returned from Iran and had tested positive. The doctor is a colonel-rank officer in Kolkata while the JCO is serving in Dehradun. Both travelled to Delhi in the first and second week of March. Army sources said contact tracing has been carried out and the two persons, now placed in quarantine, are in good health. **ENS**

HARYANA

COVID-19 cases rise to 21

Chandigarh: The total number of coronavirus cases in Haryana rose to 21, with a fresh case reported from Ambala, officials said on Sunday. The state has reported 10 cases from Gurgaon, four from Panipat, three from Faridabad and one each from Palwal, Panchkula and Sonipat. The test reports of 153 samples is awaited, while 455 samples were found negative, a bulletin said. The total number of COVID-19 patients discharged in the state stands at six. **PTI**

MP

70-year-old dies, report awaited

Indore: A 70-year-old man, who was admitted to a government hospital here for possible exposure to coronavirus, died on Saturday, but his test reports are still awaited, an official said on Sunday. "The elderly man was admitted to the hospital with symptoms of coronavirus, but his test results are still awaited," said dean of the medical college where he was admitted. **PTI**

STRETCHED

Migrant workers in a bus ask for water pouches as they leave for their villages, outside Prayagraj bus station on Sunday. The Uttar Pradesh government has been providing water and food to migrant labourers reaching the state amid the 21-day nationwide lockdown to curb the spread of COVID-19. *Ritesh Shukla*

KERALA

Migrant workers say they want food, ask to be taken back home

SHAJU PHILIP
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 29

DEFYING THE lockdown, hundreds of migrant workers, many of them from West Bengal, stormed the streets of Paipad in Kerala's Kottayam district, demanding food and that they be taken back to their home villages.

Around 11 am, the workers turned out in huge numbers and blocked a road in Paipad. But by afternoon, after the government assured them of regular food supplies, the protesters returned to their camps.

A social worker, who works among migrants at Paipad and who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the protesting workers wanted to be taken back to their villages. "They had been getting restless. camping in their cramped rooms and watching videos on their mobile phones about migrants in Delhi and elsewhere walking back home. So today afternoon, some of them trooped into the streets demanding that they be taken back to Murshidabad," he said.

The state government had on Friday directed all local self-governing bodies to launch community kitchens for destitutes, the indisposed etc. The government had also directed contractors who employ migrant workers or house owners who give out their homes on rent to migrant workers to ensure food and shelter for them. The social worker, however, said that several migrant workers had complained about not having enough to eat.

Paipad panchayat member Thomas Varghese said that at a meeting on Saturday, all house owners who lodged migrant workers or those who employed them had agreed to provide the workers food until April 14. "But today was the first day after the meeting and not all house owners ensured food for the migrants as per yesterday's resolution. That might have triggered the protest. We have around 4,000 migrants living in the panchayat. Hence, the local governing body cannot take responsibility for providing food for all of them. Community kitchens are not meant for them (the migrants)," he said.

Panchayat vice-president Teena Mol said while the panchayat has been supplying cooked food through its community kitchens, they can't possibly reach everyone. "At present, around 4,000 migrants are camping in the panchayat area and we have been supplying food from the community kitchen to around 300 people. It is the also the responsibility of the house owners or those employing the migrant workers to ensure that they get food during the lockdown. Two days ago, we had visited the migrant camps and ensured that they have enough supply," she said.

In a statement, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan called the Paipad incident "unfortunate" and blamed "forces out to create trouble".

"Kerala is a state that has at every step displayed the highest regard for its guest workers. 1.70 lakh guest workers are now lodged in 5,000 camps across Kerala. If there are shortcomings, collectors have been directed to address those. There are indications that certain forces, who are out to create social unrest, are behind the workers' spilling out into the streets. Such conspirators will be exposed through a probe," he said.

State Civil Supplies Minister P Thilothamman too alleged the migrants had been instigated. "Food is not their problem. They want to go back to their home state. Certain quarters have instigated them to raise that demand. We have asked police to look into whether there is any conspiracy behind the incident," he said.

Paipad village panchayat, a major hub of migrant workers in Kottayam district, has around 10,000 of them, but many of them returned home before Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the 21-day lockdown.

Kottayam District Collector K P Sudhir Babu said, "We told them they will not face any difficulty in food and lodging. They said they don't want cooked food from the community kitchen. So we have ensured supply of provisions, including atta. But we can't take them to their home state at this juncture. They had the impression that they can go back home or they would be taken home. That demand is against lockdown norms."

Migrants gather at Paippad village in Kottayam. CM blames 'forces out to create trouble'. *PTI*

Walking home from Sonipat after factory shut down, UP man run over by bus

MANISH SAHU
LUCKNOW, MARCH 29

A 26-YEAR-OLD man, who was walking to his native place at Rampur in Uttar Pradesh from Sonipat in Haryana, died after a private bus hit him in Pakwarha area of Moradabad on Saturday. Nitin Kumar worked at a shoe factory in Sonipat and was returning home after the unit was shut following the Centre's announcement of a 21-day lockdown.

Nitin was walking with his younger brother Pankaj, who works in the same factory, around 195 km from the spot where the accident took place. Rampur district is around 35 km from the spot.

The police have seized the bus, which was ferrying passengers from Ghaziabad, and are trying to trace its driver, said Circle Officer, Highway, Ram Sagar. The bus belongs to a Meerut resident and the police are trying to trace him too. SHO, Pakwarha police station, Surendra Pal Singh said an FIR had been registered against the unidentified driver. Police said they are probing how a private bus was plying despite the lockdown.

Pankaj said he and Nitin had been working in the shoe factory for the past five years. After the government announced the lockdown, the factory downed shutters and they were out of work. "We decided to return to our village because staying in Haryana without work and food was meaningless. Three days ago, we left for Rampur on foot because no public transport was available," he said.

"We walked day and night and reached Moradabad Saturday. We were near an intersection when a bus hit my brother from behind. He died on the spot," he said.

Rahul writes to PM: Millions returning to villages will up risk for elderly there

MANOJ C G
NEW DELHI, MARCH 29

Rahul Gandhi

TWO DAYS after Congress president Sonia Gandhi wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, asking him to make available one-time state transport services to those walking to their hometowns or villages, former party president Rahul Gandhi on Sunday said millions of young people rushing back to their villages will increase the risk of infection for the elderly population living there, resulting in a "catastrophic loss of life".

In a letter to Prime Minister Modi, he said it is important that the government "consider a nuanced approach that takes the complex realities of our people into consideration" and argued that "our priority must be to protect and isolate the elderly and vulnerable from the virus and to clearly and strongly communicate to the young the dangers of proximity to older people".

Referring to the 21-day lockdown, Rahul said he thinks the "government will eventually extend this even further" and argued that "it is critical for us to understand that India's conditions are unique. We will be required to take different steps than other large countries who are following a total lockdown strategy".

"The number of poor people in India who are dependent on a daily income is simply too large for us to unilaterally shut down all economic activity. The consequences of a complete economic shutdown will disastrously amplify the death toll arising from the COVID-19 virus. Millions of India's elderly live in villages. A complete lockdown and the resulting shutdown of our economic engine will almost certainly ensure that millions of unemployed youth rush back to their villages, increasing the risk of infecting their parents and the elderly population living there. This will result in a catastrophic loss of life," he said.

Rahul said the sudden lockdown has created "immense panic and confusion" as tens of thousands of migrant labourers rendered vulnerable without their daily wages or access to nutrition and basic services are trying to walk home to their villages and are stranded at various state borders. "They are struggling to reach far away homes and seek refuge. It is important that we help them find shelter and provide them with money directly into their bank accounts to help them tide over the next few months," he said.

"We must immediately strengthen the social safety net and use every public resource we have to support and shelter the working poor. Large population centres will require big dedicated hospitals with thousands of beds and ventilators. It is critical that we start setting up these structures and manufacturing the equipment that would be required, as fast as is humanly possible. At the same time we need to dramatically increase the number of tests that we are carrying out to get an accurate picture of the spread of the virus and to contain it," he said.

He also suggested that the government insulate key financial and strategic institutions from the shock wave "that is bound to come as the true impact of the virus and our economic shutdown hits us a few weeks from now".

"Our informal economy and immense network of small and medium businesses and farmers are going to be vital to any rebuilding effort. It is crucial that we engage them in a conversation, build their confidence and protect their interests with correct and timely action," he added.

Cop writes on labourer's forehead: I have violated the lockdown, stay away

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
BHOPAL, MARCH 29

"*Maine lockdown ka ullanghan kiya hai, mujhse door rehna* (I have violated the lockdown (restrictions), stay away from me)".

This is what a sub-inspector wrote on the forehead of a migrant labourer returning to Madhya Pradesh from Uttar Pradesh. This has taken place in the Gaurihar police station area in Chhatarpur district of Madhya Pradesh.

Three labourers were entering the state from the Uttar Pradesh side late on Saturday when police directed them to a primary health centre for medical examination. While they were waiting for the doctor, a woman sub-inspector who joined the force in 2016 scolded them for violating the lockdown and wrote on the forehead of at least one of the labourers.

Chhatarpur SP Kumar Saurabh told *The Indian Express* that the police personnel have been instructed not to engage in such behaviour. He said PSI Amita Agnihotri has been taken off duty and would be issued a showcause notice.

The Opposition Congress has criticised the police. "(Chief Minister) Shivrajji has given only two option: either die from coronavirus or of hunger," tweeted the Congress, sharing a video clip in which the woman sub-inspector is seen writing on the forehead of the labourer.

Meanwhile, the number of people who have tested positive for COVID-19 in the state has risen to 39 after five more cases were reported from Indore on Sunday.

'We know virus is spreading but we'll die of starvation if we stay'

AISHWARYA MOHANTY
DAHOD, MARCH 29

THE PEETOL intersection on NH-48 has been overflowing with a sea of migrant labourers who are on their way home. With the elderly and children in tow, they are battling hunger. Ever since the government announced a 21-day lockdown to check the spread of COVID-19, over 40,000 migrant labourers have been crossing the Gujarat-Madhya Pradesh border at this intersection daily.

The queue of migrant labourers can be seen from at least a kilometre away. They are followed by buses, jeeps and trucks as police prevent the vehicles from crossing the border without screening the travellers. Until Saturday, over 95 per cent of the migrants reached the border on foot. However, on Sunday, all of them came in state transport buses, jeeps and trucks, police officers at the site said.

Niyaz Ali (30), along with 10 others, started walking from Mumbai on Thursday night to Allahabad, about 1,392 km away. On Saturday morning, they were stopped by Ankleshwar police. By afternoon, they were asked to get into an Uttar Pradesh-bound truck with over 20 others.

On Sunday afternoon at the Peetol intersection, he ate his first meal in two days. "This truck is more spacious than the house we lived in. Almost seven of us lived in a 10x10 room," said Ali, who works as a mechanic at a garage in Jogeshwari, Mumbai.

"We had run out of food. Our garage has been closed for over a week now. The owner has been unreachable since the lockdown began. We don't even know if they will pay us," he added.

"We don't know much about the disease. We know it's spreading and it kills. But if we don't go back to our villages, we will die of starvation," Ali added.

Most of these labourers used to work in factories, agricultural fields, construction sites and private firms in Gujarat and even Maharashtra, officials said.

Ali, along with the 30 others, then joined the long queue for thermal screening. The migrants are being screened by a medical team and given a food packet by representatives of NGOs before they cross the Madhya Pradesh border. Beyond it, state transport buses of Madhya Pradesh wait to ferry them to their villages.

Thousand miles away from home, without job, shelter

ARUN SHARMA
JAMMU, MARCH 29

A LABOURER from Chhattisgarh, Rajan Singh, 25, has made the verandah outside a closed shop in faraway Jammu his temporary shelter for the last nine days.

After celebrating Holi with his parents and children back at home, he arrived in Jammu by train on March 21. Instead of heading to his rented accommodation at Talab Tillo, nearly 10 km from Jammu railway station, he decided to wait on the platform for his wife, Sunita, who was to arrive on March 23.

That was not to be.

On march 22 came the public curfew, followed by the 21-day countrywide lockdown announced on March 24. After trains got suspended, the police started clearing the railway station area, and Rajan said he took refuge under the verandah of a closed shop nearby. Nine days on, he still waits for his wife, who is held up at Pathankot.

"We left Chhattisgarh for Jammu together, but I decided to drop her at my brother's home (in Pathankot, just over a hundred km before Jammu)," he said, adding that Sunita is pregnant. "The moment trains start, she will come. Where she will find me if I am not at the railway station," he asked. "We both go to our room at Talab Tillo together." Rajan said he has not been able to speak with her for the last few days since he lost his cellphone while leaving the station premises in a melee in view of the lockdown.

Traffic policemen distribute food among those stranded

Dwarka Nath, who comes from Doda, has been working at a local dhaba outside the railway station for the last nearly 10 years. The lockdown has left him without a job, and a shelter. Dwarka stayed at the dhaba at night, but with the eatery closed following the administration's orders, he has nowhere to go. "Other workers live nearby and went home. I had to move to the market nearby, as public transport to Doda was suspended," he said.

There are many others with similar tales who, at present, are staying in the market near the station. Unable to go anywhere, many are looking for Railways to resume operations so that they can return to their native places, anywhere between 1,500 and 2,000 km away.

To help such people, Jammu and Kashmir Police has started distributing food packets across Jammu. To carry out the work, the police have formed different teams led by local SHOs, who, besides distributing food packets among the stranded, are also ensuring home delivery of essential commodities to local residents at many places, police officers said. This is apart from various local NGOs, shopkeepers' associations and gurdwaras who have stepped in to provide food and water to people in distress so that they continue to stay where they are.

Rajan said local Sikhs from a nearby gurdwara provide them breakfast, while some local shopkeepers organise lunch. Some NGOs are providing them dinner, Dwarka Nath said.

The Vaishno Devi Shrine Board distributed ration kits among slum-dwellers and stranded workers in Katra town on Sunday. The Shrine Board's staff and gazetted officers have donated a day's and two days' salaries, respectively, to J&K Relief Fund.

DELHI CONFIDENTIAL

SOS RAIL FOR BAIL

WITH IMAGES of scores of migrant labourers taking to the streets to return to their villages coming in, a clamour arose on social media to run trains to transport them safely. One of them was former Railways Minister and Trinamool leader Dinesh Trivedi. Tagging Railway Minister Piyush Goyal, Trivedi demanded that trains be run for the workers returning home. Trivedi has apparently told in his internal circles that if the Railways wanted, it could marshall "hundreds of trains" in no time for the migrant work force, and things would not have come to such a pass.

SHORING UP DEFENCE

AS INDIA prepares for an aggressive fight against COVID-19, the government is encouraging everyone to contribute in whatever way she/he can. To support the recently announced PM-CARES fund, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh approved a proposal over the weekend for every employee of the Defence Ministry to voluntarily contribute. The proposal includes employees of Defence Public Sector Units, and the three forces: the Army, Navy and the Air Force. The ministry anticipates the contribution to be in the range of Rs 500 crore. To ensure that it remains voluntary and is not binding on anyone, whoever does not wish to contribute can opt out.

MEETING ONLINE

BESIDES THE corporates, business establishments or offices, political parties have also embraced video-conferencing in the wake of the nationwide lockdown. The Congress, the other day, organised a meeting of all its general secretaries, states in-charge, state presidents, CLP leaders and heads of frontal organisations to discuss the party's efforts to combat COVID-19 via video-conferencing. Eighty-two people, including Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and AICC treasurer Ahmed Patel, are said to have participated in the meeting. On Sunday, AICC spokesperson Abhishek Singhvi addressed a press conference via Zoom, a video-conferencing app.

A UNITED FIGHT

THE INTERNATIONAL department of Communist Party of China has sent a handbook—published by the Global MediXchange for Combating COVID-19, founded by Jack Ma Foundation—to the Left parties in India. The book, compiled by frontline and best medical teams in China, is aimed at providing advanced knowledge on COVID-19 and to share its experiences in combating this pandemic. When he received the book, All India Forward Bloc leader G Devarajan forwarded it to Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan and Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, stating that it could help them in their fight against the pandemic. Vijayan promptly responded to Devarajan, saying that he would go through it.

Pattern of postponed entrance tests won't change: Edu Secy

RITIKA CHOPRA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 29

THE PATTERN of questions in competitive exams for admission to centrally run educational institutions will not change even if the tests are deferred till July due to the coronavirus lockdown, Education Secretary Amit Khare told *The Indian Express*.

The government is also exploring ways to conduct the remaining Class 12 Board examinations, even if the lockdown doesn't end as announced on April 14, he said. "A modality will have to be worked out," he said.

Besides, Khare said, Kendriya Vidyalayas, Central Tibetan Schools and CBSE schools will move to online learning in the first week of April. He said the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) is already airing lessons on its SWAYAM channels and has online content ready for Classes 9, 10, 11 and 12.

Asked about the entrance tests, Khare said they "will be conducted after the lockdown ends". "The paper pattern, we

Amit Khare.

are definite, will not change even if the exams are held in July. If we say 'let's have one paper instead of two', that will put all the students, who have prepared as per a set pattern, at a big disadvantage. They have put in a year's hard work. We can't have a shortcut here," he said.

On March 28, The Indian Express reported on how 45 lakh students preparing for major competitive exams over the next three months are stranded, with the lockdown impacting the calendar by at least a month.

The tests expected to be delayed include JEE (Advanced), JEE (Main), NEET, UGC-NET, CSIR UGC-NET and Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) AIEEA.

The Board exams for Class 12, Khare said, "are critical as these marks are used for admission in different universities".

"There are certain core subjects left. Having (these) exams from home will not be proper. We will have to conduct the regular exam as soon as the lockdown is lifted," he said.

On the options before the government, if the lockdown is extended, Khare said CBSE may still have to go ahead, keeping in mind the sanctity of the process and without putting any section of students at a disadvantage.

"The numbers (of candidates) are huge, and the centres dispersed. Secondly, it should not be unfair to some students who are dependent on public transportation to reach the test centres. The well-off can use their own vehicles. We will ensure the children are not put to a disadvantage," he said.

The CBSE could consider having multiple sets for each of the remaining core papers and stagger the dates for students of different regions, he said.

The CBSE had to defer 41 papers of Classes 10 and 12 in the wake of the virus outbreak. Of these, six are "major subjects" of Class 12 — Business Studies, Geography, Computer Science, Hindi (Core and Elective), Home Science and Sociology.

About 3.5 lakh students are expected to appear for Business Studies, one lakh for Geography, 2.5 lakh for Information Practice and Computer Science, 3.4 lakh for Hindi (Core and Elective), 58,000 for Homes Science and 45,000 for Sociology.

For KVs, CBSE schools and Central Tibetan Schools, Khare said, the government has asked NIOS to "prepare a class-wise and subject-wise schedule for the online content so that students can follow it".

"Whenever schools reopen, there will be no learning loss as students would have studied some of the chapters in a systematic manner. We have also requested NIOS to air lessons over radio. For junior classes, we have asked them to work with Kendriya Vidyalayas on the new academic session plan," he said.

INTERVIEW ON www.indianexpress.com

'Opened daal-bhaat centres, giving 2-month ration to 2.55 cr under PDS'

DEVENDRA KUMAR TIWARI, the top bureaucrat in Jharkhand, which has till date not reported any confirmed case of coronavirus, tells **ABHISHEK ANGAD** that the state administration is ready to address the situation if there's an outbreak. Excerpts:

THE EXPRESS INTERVIEW
WITH
DEVENDRA KUMAR TIWARI
CHIEF SECRETARY, JHARKHAND

Jharkhand has a substantial population in the unorganised sector - around 90 per cent of the workforce. Is there any data to help these people in the aftermath of the lockdown?

The figures have changed, but as of now 2.55 crore people in Jharkhand have been covered under PDS (public distribution system), and we are in the process of giving two months' ration to them. Around 8 lakh people whose applications were pending for ration cards will be given 10 kg rice. We are reaching out to all of them. If the crisis escalates, proper measures will be taken.

What measures have been taken so far to mitigate their suffering?

We have 25 lakh active MGNREGA card-holders and Rs 150 crore have been pumped into the system to clear their dues till date. More work will be given to them if the crisis continues. We will give three-month pension to the beneficiaries in Jharkhand. Around 9 lakh construction workers are registered with us and we have Rs 400 crore out of cess that we get, though we are yet to decide on how to help them monetarily. Central government schemes (such as) PM Kisan and Ujjwala will continue side by side.

On the ground, there are many holes in the schemes you talked about. How are you ensuring that the people get food?

Around Rs 3.19 crore is in the process of being allocated to open 498 "daal-bhaat" centres (to serve rice and daal) in all 24 districts. Additional such centres have been opened in 342 police stations. Each centre will feed around 200 people every day, with a total of 1,68,000 people in the state for two months. We will review the situation as per need. In distant villages, were it is not possible to supply cooked food, we will distribute packets consisting of 2 kg flattened rice, jaggery and whole black gram.

Is the government planning any other direct benefit transfer (DBT) scheme? Don't you think many villagers will need cash in hand?

There are no other DBT announcements. Even during the lockdown we have kept the village economy sustained by allowing groceries, vegetable, weekly markets to function while maintaining social distancing. I don't think they would need cash in hand as of now.

Jharkhand Milk Federation did not procure milk from dairy farmers for three days. Around 4 lakh litres of milk is accumulated. Is a move such as distributing that, at say half the price, being considered?

That will hurt the economy. We are in talks with Bihar and Chhattisgarh to take the milk and convert it into powder. Some solution will be reached at.

Jharkhand has zero COVID-19 cases as of now. Is that a case of under-reporting?

Not at all. We got 175 samples checked and none came out positive. The test compared to the population is more than (what has been done in) other states. Earlier we were following ICMR guidelines, which changed recently. Currently two machines at Ranchi and Jamshedpur are functioning. We are procuring machines from four other medical colleges. The frequency of tests will increase in a few days.

But many migrant labourers who returned were not checked properly.

Around 75,000 people have returned in recent weeks, most of them labourers. Once they reached their village our health workers tracked them and advised them home isolation, among other measures. We arrived at the figure based on the data provided by those workers.

Is Jharkhand equipped to handle the outbreak?

We have ordered supplies. We have made arrangements and at maximum we can deal with 2,000 COVID-19 patients at a time. We have asked all private labs, pathologists, paramedics to join in during the crisis. We will handle it if there's an outbreak.

Pharma giant readies five-minute test, may bring it to India, too

KAUNAIN SHERIFF M
NEW DELHI, MARCH 29

GLOBAL PHARMA giant Abbott, which on Friday announced it has received US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval for a portable device that can tell if someone is COVID-19 positive in five minutes, said it plans to "bring more tests forward with the intent to get them to more people in more places around the world".

To a question on whether Abbott planned to bring the test to India, a company spokesperson told The Indian Express, "We are developing COVID-19 tests across our Abbott testing platforms (including laboratory and lateral flow tests) and plan to bring more tests forward with the intent to get them to more people in more places around the world. We are working to produce as many tests as possible, running our production 24/7 and will expand manufacturing capacity when we can."

Currently, the ID NOW COVID-19 test is available only in the United States as this is where most of the company's ID NOW instruments are in use, the Abbott spokesperson said. This platform, introduced in 2014, is currently being used for testing for Influenza A and B in American labs.

EXPLAINED

E. Very fast and definitive

THE ABBOTT device will produce a diagnosis in just over five minutes; the conventional RTPCR test kits currently in use across the world take almost a day to provide results. Crucially, Abbott's ID NOW COVID-19 test gives results fast like the antibodies test kits — however, while a negative result does not rule out infection, Abbott's kits, which use RNA amplification technology, give definitive results.

It is small, lightweight (6.6 lbs) and portable (the size of a small toaster) — and uses a unique isothermal nucleic acid amplification technology, which provides molecular results in minutes.

The test will deliver positive results for COVID-19 in approximately five minutes, and negative results in 13 minutes.

The device, which Abbott claims is the "fastest available molecular point-of-care test" for the detection of COVID-19, is its second test to receive emergency use authorization by the FDA. Last week, the company launched the m2000 RealTime SARS-CoV-2 EUA test which identifies the virus by targeting small amounts and amplifying it until there's enough for detection. Between the two platforms, Abbott expects to produce about 5 million tests per month.

In the US, Abbott will make the ID NOW COVID-19 tests available next week to healthcare providers — where the ID platform instruments are already in use. In a statement, the company said that it "expects to ramp up manufacturing to deliver 50,000 tests per day".

"The COVID-19 pandemic will be fought on multiple fronts, and a portable molecular test that offers results in minutes adds to the broad range of diagnostic solutions needed to combat this virus," Robert B Ford, president and chief operating officer, Abbott, said. "With rapid testing on ID NOW, healthcare providers can perform molecular point-of-care testing outside the traditional four walls of a hospital in outbreak hotspots," he said.

Unpreparedness is byword, buzzword of this govt: Congress

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 29

THE CONGRESS on Sunday stepped up its attack on the BJP government over its implementation of the lockdown to check the spread of COVID-19, saying unpreparedness has become the "byword and buzzword" of the government. Taking a dig at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, it said "seeking forgiveness" is fine but the need of the hour is concrete action.

Referring to the thousands of migrant workers stranded on the roads, the Congress said unpreparedness of the government which led to such a congregation may have led to a humongous increased risk of COVID-19 to this nation.

"It is not that lockdown is wrong. The real problem is that this government has created a virtue out of unpreparedness every time. Be it the demon of demonetisation, be it sudden lockdown with three or four notices after having given an idea of it four days earlier," Congress spokesperson Abhishek Singhvi told the media.

Equating the Prime Minister's sudden lockdown order to a "sultani farman", Singhvi said "unpreparedness has become the byword and buzzword of this government.

"The fight against COVID-19 is a national challenge. It is a matter of concern that central and state administration were not fully prepared to sensitively deal with the fallout of closure of businesses and the forced movement of migrant workers following loss of work and wages," said senior Congress leader Anand Sharma.

"Our response must be national and uniform not a fragmented one. Prime Minister Modi leads the national campaign and Chief Ministers are the commanders in states. Supporting their effort is a national duty," he said.

Cop among 4 held for 'damaging' religious structure in UP

Lucknow: A police sub-inspector (SI) and three others were arrested for allegedly damaging a religious structure at Saduapura village in Sahso police station area of Etawah district on Friday. Police said the S-I, Vijay Pratap, was deployed in the village, which has a significant Dalit population, to ensure that local residents follow the lockdown directive.

Pratap allegedly told people to gather at a spot in the village and instigated them to damage a religious structure by urging them "not to believe in any God and goddess," police sources said. A police team later got the structure repaired. **ENS**

After five days of tree quarantine, Bengal youths moved to ICDS centre

RAVIK BHATTACHARYA
KOLKATA, MARCH 29

AFTER THEY had spent five days quarantined on a mango tree, seven youths in West Bengal's Purulia district have been moved to an Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) centre for isolation. The seven youths, who work in Chennai and returned to Bhangdi village on March 24, had been living on the branches of the tree after doctors asked them to stay in home quarantine.

The villagers had tied cots to the branches and also arranged for mosquito nets and plug points to charge phones. The villagers had asked the youths to not enter the village as proper isolation may not be possible at their homes.

"Last night authorities came to us and saw us on the tree. They spoke to us and got all details. Since villagers did not want us in the village, they made arrangements at a nearby ICDS centre. This room has a toilet and fans. We are fine now," said Bijoy Singh Laya, one of the seven youths. "We are also getting proper food from the village and we are maintaining hygiene and distance from others," said Laya, adding that they are yet to get a cot and are sleeping on the floor.

"After the news broke, the authorities identified the room and now the youths are placed there. None of them have any symptoms," said Nitai Mondol, president of Balarampur Panchayat Samiti.

Tamil Nadu cases touch 50 mark, 21 have same Thailand origin

Chennai: The number of COVID-19 cases in Tamil Nadu reached 50 on Sunday with eight more people testing positive for the virus.

And, as per epidemiological data linking contacts prepared by the state government, a cluster of 21 cases—including the eight fresh ones and a 54-year-old man who died in Madurai—has its origin in Thailand.

A 29-year-old railway doctor and her 10-month-old boy, and two other women, aged 58 and 52, who were in the close contact of doctor, were among the cases reported on Sunday.

Meanwhile, state health secretary Beela Rajesh said thousands of people were screened for COVID-19 symptoms across the state on Sunday as part of a massive drive. **ENS**

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER (Procurement)
PLANNING & PROCUREMENT WING
KASHMIR POWER DISTRIBUTION CORPORATION LIMITED

EXTENSION NOTICE

In view of the present circumstances due to covid-19 outbreak, the last date of sale/ download, receipt/ submission and the bid-opening of below mentioned e- NIT for the purchase of the material detailed below is extended as under:-

1. Last Date of sale/Downloading Receipt/submission of e-Bid Documents below mentioned Tender (Extended): 16.04.2020 up to (14:00 Hrs)
2. Submission of Hard Copy (End) Date & Time: 18.04.2020 (16:00 Hrs) in the office of **Chief Engineer Procurement and Planning wing, PDD complex Bemina Srinagar**.
3. Commercial /Technical Bid opening of e bid Document of the Below mentioned Tender(Extended): 20.04.2020 up to (14:00 Hrs)

S. No	NIT No.	Tender ID	Description of Material	Techno-Commercial Bid-Opening Date Extended)
1	SE/Proc/06/ 2019-20	2020_PDD_ 91685_1	Purchase of EHV Grade Transformer Oil	20.04.2020 14:00 Hrs

The complete NIT/Tender Documents/BOQ can be downloaded from the website www.jktenders.gov.in. All other terms and conditions as stipulated in the original NIT shall remain same.

Sd/-
Superintending Engineer (Procurement) KPDCL,

OFFICE OF THE EXCISE COMMISSIONER CHHATTISGARH

Re-TENDER-NOTICE

No./EX./Distillery/2020/ 1541 **Raipur, Dated: 27 March, 2020**

TENDER NOTICE FOR THE MANUFACTURE AND SUPPLY OF COUNTRY, LIQUOR IN SEALED & PACKED BOTTLES BY DISTILLERS OF CHHATTISGARH FOR THE PURPOSE OF SUPPLY IN THE AREA OF RAIPUR, DURG, BEMETARA, BASTAR, BILASPUR, KORBA, JANJGIR-CHAMPA AND RAIGARH IN THE STATE OF CHHATTISGARH.

1. Sealed Tenders (separate for each area to be mentioned in the Tender) are invited from distillers of Chhattisgarh for the grant of licence (s) under the provisions of the Chhattisgarh Country Spirit Rules, 1995, framed under Chhattisgarh Excise Act, 1915 (No. II of 1915) for supply of Country Liquor to storage warehouses situated in the supply areas of the State and for supply of Country Liquor to retail sale licensee of country liquor in sealed bottles after bottling and packaging in the distillery of the Tenderer in Master cartons for a period commencing **from 15th April 2020 and ending with 31st March 2021**.
2. Tender form with detailed terms and conditions may be obtained from the Office of the Excise Commissioner, Chhattisgarh, GST Building, North Block Sector-19, Atal Nagar Nava Raipur-492002 on payment of Rs. 20,000/- (Rupees Twenty thousand) Only, by demand draft payable to the Excise Commissioner, Chhattisgarh, Raipur payable at Raipur. The Tender forms can also be made available by post to the Tenderer, if so desired by him. The documents will be dispatched through post office of the Department of Post, Government of India, after receipt of Rs. 20,100/- (Rupees Twenty thousand, One hundred) only, for each area to be paid in the form of bank draft of any Nationalized bank or Scheduled Commercial bank or Regional Rural bank drawn in favour of Excise Commissioner, Chhattisgarh payable at Raipur. The department however takes no responsibility for delay in the receipt of the tender form by post by the intending Tenderer.
3. Tender form will be issued till the date **01-04-2020** (During working hours) i.e. one day before of Tender opening.
4. Sealed Tenders may be dropped in Tender box in two part as prescribed in Tender document at Office of the Excise Commissioner, Chhattisgarh, Raipur before **1:00 p.m. on date 02-04-2020 (Incase tender receiving/opening date is declared holiday, tender will be received/opened on next working day at same time).** The Excise Commissioner or an Officer nominated by him will open the sealed envelope **at 2:00 P.M. on the same day.**

Sd/-
(Niranjan Das)
Excise Commissioner, Chhattisgarh

CIN: U75302RJ2016SGC056429
Ajmer Smart City Ltd., Ajmer
Opposite RRTI, Near High Security Jail, Jaipur Road, Ajmer (Raj.) PIN-305023
e-mail: asclajmercity@gmail.com Tel : 0145-2970922

No. ASCL /NIT-42/2019-20/ 707 Date:. 20/03/2020

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Ajmer Smart City Limited (ASCL), Ajmer invites online bids for the following works under Smart City Mission, from repuled firms who have experience in civil construction works.

1. Providing, laying, jointing, Testing and commissioning of sewer pipeline system along with IPS, House Sewer connections in various areas of Ajmer City Anasagar Zone including 10 years O and M ASM1920WLOB00036
2. Providing laying jointing Testing and commissioning of sewer pipeline system House Sewer connections in various areas of Ajmer City -City Zone including 10 years O and M ASM1920WLOB00037
3. Mining of Legacy Waste and Recovery of Land at Makhupura Dumping Ground Ajmer on Build Operate and Transfer Basis ASM1920WLOB00038
4. Development of Gandhi Smriti Udyan Ajmer ASM1920WSOB00039
5. Development of Various Parks in Ajmer Phase III ASM1920WSOB00040

The details & bids documents are available at www.eproc.rajasthan.gov.in & http://sppp.rajasthan.gov.in

Raj.Samwad/C/19/6329 **Chief Engineer**

UJVN Limited
H.O. "UJJWAL" Maharani Bagh, GMS Road,Dehradun.-248006
Telephone-0135-2763508, 2763808 Fax 0135-2763507
CIN No. U40101UR2001SGC025866, Website: www.ujvnl.com

Date Extension Notice

Due to unavoidable circumstances, the date of submission & opening of the **Tender No. 10, 11 &12/EE(Gen.)/ CHILLA/TN/ 2019-20** is hereby extended as,

Last Date/Time for downloading of tender : 20.04.2020 Upto 14:00Hrs
Last date/time for submission of tender : 20.04.2020 Upto 15:00Hrs.
Date & Time for opening of tender : 22.04.2020 At 11:00 Hrs.

For full & further details, kindly visit our website. The tender documents of the above works can be downloaded from the Nigam's web site "www.ujvnl.com".

पत्रांक: 185 दिनांक: 28.03.2020

Executive Engineer (Gen.)
Chilla Power House

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CORONA WATCH

A crowded fish market in Chennai on Sunday. *PTI*

Varsity creates online resource for rural youth

New Delhi: The English and Foreign Languages University, a Central university in Hyderabad, has decided to offer online educational resources, along with EnglishPro, a mobile app, for the benefit of rural youth, said a release. The programme is part of University Social Responsibility, an initiative introduced—for the first time in India, according to the varsity— by EFLU vice-chancellor Prof E Suresh Kumar in 2017 in an effort to enable the university increase its role in building a sustainable society. The varsity has also created an endowment fund. **ENS**

BENGAL

Govt starts selling fish online

Kolkata: People living in Kolkata will now be able to order fish online as the West Bengal government launched an app to tackle rising prices amid the nationwide lockdown, a senior official said Sunday. The West Bengal Fisheries Development Corporation Limited will also be selling fish in the districts from its vehicles, he said. The decision was taken after several complaints regarding the steep rise in the price of fishes, the official said. **PTI**

TAMIL NADU

Flouting rules: Over 15,000 cases booked

Chennai: The Tamil Nadu Police Sunday said it has booked 15,610 cases for violations relating to Section 144 of CrPc. Police said there were 15,610 cases for violations of lockdown and 14,815 FIRs registered. Encouraging people to stay indoors and follow the lockdown order, the police continues to patrol roads and has deployed barricades in major arterial roads. **PTI**

Two elderly women walk towards a charity counter distributing food packets in Mumbai on Sunday. *Express*

Maharashtra records two more deaths, number of cases now 205

TABASSUM BARNAGARWALA
MUMBAI, MARCH 29

HOURS AFTER her death, throat samples of a 40-year-old Kandivali woman tested positive for COVID-19 in KEM hospital on Saturday. This is yet another case of coronavirus transmission where civic officials have found no link of the positive case with an infected person. She also had no travel history abroad.

With her death, and that of a 45-year-old Buldhana man, who had a history of diabetes, the confirmed death toll from COVID-19 rose to eight in state. There are now 205 COVID-19 positive cases in the state.

The 40-year-old woman, the wife of an auto-rickshaw driver, developed cough, breathlessness and chest pain three days ago. Her family took her to SK Patil hospital in Malad from where she was referred to KEM hospital. "By the time she was brought, she was already in a critical condition. We put her on ventilator," said Dr Hemant Deshmukh, dean, KEM hospital.

The woman had hypertension and high blood pressure. She was unable to breathe and required artificial breathing support. "We had to intubate her," a resident doctor said. By Saturday evening, three hours after she was admitted in hospital, she suffered acute respiratory distress syndrome and passed away.

At least 15 KEM hospital staffers, including resident doctors, nurses and ward boys from emergency ward's intensive care unit, have been quarantined in the hospital. A hospital staffer said as a precaution they are wearing personal protective equipment for every patient who visits the emergency ward. "We had worn protective gear when we intubated her. The risk of infection is low," a doctor said.

Seven of the woman's close contacts, including her husband, son and neighbours, have been tested for coronavirus. Their results are awaited. "We have not managed to take a detailed history from the family. We initially suspected the husband must have driven someone from the international airport and caught the infection from the passenger. But he said he hasn't driven any such passenger," a civic official said. The housewife had not stepped out of their flat in the last fortnight, the family informed BMC. "She only interacted with neighbours," the civic official said.

The building where her family lives was sanitised on Saturday. "Her case seems to have deteriorated very quickly and we did not get a chance to trace all contacts. Once cremation is over, we will be taking a detailed statement from her family to understand how she may have got infected," a civic official said.

Vidarbha recorded its first coronavirus death in Buldhana. Also, Nagpur registered three new positive cases, taking the total number of affected persons to 14, four of whom have already been discharged. "A 45-year-old man, a teacher in a municipal school of Buldhana, died on Saturday night at the government hospital. He was suffering from pneumonia and was being treated at a private hospital. Yesterday, he was referred and rushed to the government hospital but within hours his condition deteriorated and he died. We sent his samples for test. Today, the report said he had tested positive," Amravati Divisional Commissioner Piyush Singh told *The Indian Express*. Asked if the man had any travel history, Singh said, "No."

Following the death, the district administration is on alert about possible community spread of the virus.

In Pune, four persons tested positive for COVID-19; three on Sunday, one late Saturday night. A father (65) and daughter (30) from near marketyard slum area at Gultekdi tested positive, said Dr Sanjeev Wavare, assistant medical chief at PMC. They had returned from Dubai on March 9. They have been admitted to Naidu hospital and their contacts are being traced.

Crop ready, states look for farm hands

Telangana in talks with Bihar; Punjab, Haryana struggle

SUKHBIR SIWACH & SREENIVAS JANYALA
FATEHABAD, HYDERABAD, MARCH 29

A farmer at his wheat field in Punjab on Sunday. *Express*

IT'S TIME to harvest wheat in Punjab and Haryana, and Telangana is sitting on a bumper paddy crop. But all three states are struggling to find farm labour, with the lockdown stalling movement of people. Besides, for the two northern states, where rains have delayed harvesting, the lockdown has meant harvesting machines remain stuck in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, where harvesting happens early.

Farmers are getting increasingly anxious. "When will this lockdown end?" asked Rammehar Beniwal, a farmer from Gorakhpur village of Fatehabad district, who has wheat crop in 10 acres. "My crop is almost ready, but no labourers and harvester machines," he said.

"Unlike in the past, when farmer families harvested the entire crop, we depend on labourers now," says Beniwal. Every year, many harvester machines are taken from here to Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. This year, they are stuck there due to lockdown. "In this scenario, harvesting of the wheat is bound to get delayed," he said.

According to Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU) Haryana president Gurnam Singh Chaduni, harvesting machines are taken to Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh since the harvesting season takes place early in these states.

He said farmers in the state would face tough times this year. "A large number of labourers from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, who come to Haryana to work during harvesting every year, have not landed here till now. And now, they can't travel because of the lockdown," said the farmer leader.

Haryana Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister J P Dalal admitted there would shortage of migrant labourers. He said the state would try to ensure smooth mobility of harvesting machines to Haryana from other states. "We are contacting owners of harvesting machines in Punjab to ensure that there won't be any difficulty in the movement of their machines in Haryana this time," says Dalal.

"Each mandi requires 200-400 labourers. To deal with the problem of shortage of labourers and prevent the spread of coronavirus, we have decided to stagger the wheat procurement this time," Dalal said. Further, they would ensure smooth mobility of tractor-trolleys so that farmers don't face any hurdles in taking their produce to the mandis.

Telangana, meanwhile, is expecting a bumper crop of 1.05 crore tonnes of paddy and 14.40 lakh tonnes of maize, but thousands of farm workers from Bihar, UP and Jharkhand have either gone back or have not returned from their native villages since Holi. Telangana has standing crop in over 54 lakh acres.

Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao said on Sunday, "We will be helpless without farm labour who usually come from Bihar and UP. They usually go to their native villages during Holi but this time have not been able to return. Those who are available are not enough to harvest the crop in over 54 lakh acres. If they do not arrive in time, we won't be able to harvest the crop. Chief Secretary is in talks with Bihar counterpart to try and arrange special trains to bring some farm workers in the coming days,'" he said.

From paddy sown in 44 lakh acres, the state expects a bumper crop of over one crore tonnes. "In view of the prevailing COVID-19 situation, we will purchase every food grain produced in the state. The market yards have been closed and we will purchase directly from farmers from the villages. But before that, we have to arrange for workers to harvest the crop,'" he said.

The Chief Minister also announced an ex-gratia of Rs 500 per person per week to stranded migrants and those who do not have white ration cards but are facing unemployment or starvation. "Migrants and people coming from other states are Telangana's development partners. I appeal to all migrants not to worry about going back home. We will take care of you—we will give you 12 kgs of rice or wheat flour and Rs 500 per person during this crisis. Don't panic, the state will take care of you. We have a list of about 3.5 lakh migrants at present. Every migrant family with two adults will receive Rs 1,000. If necessary, we will start community kitchens at marriage halls and feed the migrants and other stranded people," he said.

Anger, chaos in Goa as supplies run out

SMITA NAIR
PANJIM, MARCH 29

ON SUNDAY, Goa reported two more positive cases of coronavirus, taking the total so far to five. But news of COVID-19 was overshadowed by the chaos in the implementation of the 21-day lockdown, with erratic supply of food and essentials causing confusion and panic.

What sharpened the anger over the food supplies running dry were videos that did the rounds of social media on Sunday of CISF personnel beating and getting locals to do squats. On Saturday, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant had called for the CISF, saying police and CISF would be sent to the interiors of Goa too and "later, no one should say he has been hit because he was outside the house".

Speaking of the chaotic distribution network, Sapna Shahani, a Pilerne resident, said, "The home delivery system of the government relies on a volunteer pass. But that usually comes with a recommendation and ordinary citizens cannot get it. That's hampering the emergency needs. The panchayats have put out countless numbers, saying we can call for supplies, but they are also not working. It's a mess."

What added to the confusion was that while the Chief Minister continued to request people to stay at home and avail of home delivery services — which the government announced on March 27 after a rap on the knuckles from the High Court of Bombay at Goa — ruling MLAs arranged for food to be distributed and asked voters to come to community halls to collect those.

Rohit Braz Dsa, the advocate who had approached the court, said, "Stocks and supply chains are being disrupted with essentials being supplied through MLA offices while licenced grocery shops continue to remain empty," he said, adding that he would approach the court again.

On Sunday morning, Aparna Kamath from Dauna Paula was out at 5 am, "hunting for milk". Kamath said, "No one willingly moves out of house. We all are aware of the dangers, but what do we do when stocks dry at home."

Srikrishna Hardalnkar, the former sarpanch of Chorão island, said, "We all waited patiently till Sunday morning, and finally lost it. Milk is over, there are no vegetables. There's nothing beyond some rice and dal which too we started sharing among families..."

"People are scared to even open shops here as they have not been prepared or briefed properly. We were not left with even a biscuit," he added.

By afternoon, a "protest letter" drafted by lawyers, addressed to the Chief Minister and Chief Secretary Parimal Rai, gathered signatures from Goans across north and south districts.

"People are on the roads on account of lack of clarity and confusion due to constantly changing announcements about supply of essential commodities and services, with no real systematic access to food. To blame this situation on the people on the roads is to absolve the State's own responsibility." the letter read.

When contacted, IGP Jaspal Singh said, "Those with valid reasons, or who can show prescription for medicine and drugs, and emergency needs, do not have to fear. We are only strict against those who are flouting the lockdown rules and roaming with no purpose."

Chief Minister Sawant later told reporters that only "10-15 per cent Goans were facing trouble getting groceries" and that everyone doesn't need to go to shop. "I am seeing people going out to buy a sachet of shampoo. These are not necessities," he said.

TWO MORE CASES REPORTED IN STATE

OF THE two COVID-19 cases Goa reported on Sunday, one is a person who worked in a ship and reached New York from Bahamas, from where he came to Mumbai and then, took a flight to Goa. The second is a person who had come in contact with a person from Chorao, who had earlier tested positive. Both of them are stable, said Health Minister Viswajit Rane. A 68-year-old woman with respiratory problems died on Sunday. "We are still awaiting her results," Rane said.

A funeral for a COVID-19 victim in Tangmarg, Sunday. *Express*

Second COVID-19 death in J&K, cases rise to 38

ADIL AKHZER
SRINAGAR, MARCH 29

A MAN who had tested positive for COVID-19 in north Kashmir succumbed to the infection on Sunday, making it the second coronavirus-related death in Jammu and Kashmir.

J&K Government Spokesperson Rohit Kansal said on Sunday afternoon that five new positive cases had come forward in the Union Territory, taking the total number of cases to 38.

"Sad start to the day. Unfortunate demise of a coronavirus patient in Srinagar this morning," Kansal tweeted.

Hours later, he tweeted again saying: "5 more positives cases confirmed in Kashmir -2 from Srinagar, 2 Budgam, 1 Baramulla."

According to sources, the victim, hailing from Baramulla district, was initially admitted to Srinagar's SMHS hospital and was later shifted to the Chest Disease hospital on Saturday evening.

"He was admitted with multiple ailments. He even developed bilateral pneumonia and we shifted him to Chest disease hospital for further treatment," a senior SMHS official told *The Indian Express*.

Health department sources said that the deceased, in his 50s, had come in contact with a couple who had recently returned from Saudi Arabia. The couple is currently "asymptomatic", they said.

Another health official said that the couple had been shifted to the GMC Baramulla and after the deceased was found to be positive, several other people have been put under isolation and quarantine in different facilities in the district.

A senior officer privy to the case told The Indian Express that a limited number of people were allowed to attend the funeral of the deceased patient in Baramulla. "They have also been kept under active surveillance," said the officer.

Ladakh: No positive case in 10 days, 3 cured

Leh: There have been no positive cases of COVID-19 over the last ten days in the Union Territory of Ladakh, a senior official said on Sunday. Also, three people, who had got the coronavirus infection, have been cured while 10 others are being treated, Commissioner (Health) Rigzin Samphel said. **PTI**

CONFIRMED AND HOUNDED ON SOCIAL MEDIA, KERALA COUPLE TEST NEGATIVE, LEAVE HOSPITAL

'Daughter wanted us to hug, kiss her, we could not'

SHAJU PHILIP
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 29

ISOLATED FOR 20 days in hospital, a Kerala couple, Robin Thomas and Reena, who were tested positive for COVID-19, left Medical College Hospital in Kottayam on Saturday after they were tested negative.

The virus had cast a shadow over the Kottayam-based family. Seven relatives of Thomas, 34, including his parents-in-law and the latter's aged parents, were tested positive for COVID-19. All have emerged negative.

The couple's four-year-old daughter remained unscathed, even though she stayed with her parents all these days in hospital isolation, wearing a mask and under other precautions.

Thomas said, "Initially, fear of death haunted me and my wife. Since our daughter was with us, we could not even cry aloud — I went to the bathroom and cried. When we were isolated... COVID-19 meant death in the world outside — on phone, we read news about death everywhere; we thought our end was near."

Thomas, who worked as a nurse in Malta before the family's return to Kerala in June 2019, said fear of death had been the dominating thought in the first week of isolation. Later, doctors, nurses and counsellors infused hope and confidence.

They were married in 2013, and lived in different countries "to piece together a life", Thomas said. "While I worked in Malta and later in the UAE, my wife was in Italy with her parents (the latter worked in Italy). We returned to Kerala last June," he said.

Robin Thomas and Reena with their daughter

Thomas and Reena, 29, were primary contacts of three family members who returned from Italy and tested positive on March 8, marking the second bout of COVID-19 in Kerala. Thomas, Reena and their daughter had gone to Kochi airport to pick up his in-laws and their son. When the in-laws were confirmed with the virus on March 8, the couple went into isolation. They, too, tested positive on March 10.

Thomas said they were treated by fellow villagers — in Chengalam, Kottayam — as people who brought COVID-19 to the village. Several other relatives and friends had to go into home quarantine, he said.

"When a friend's father died it was projected as a COVID-19 death (even though reports did not indicate so). Just because I was their neighbour, his body was subjected to autopsy. But even as many others found fault with me, my friend called me to comfort," Thomas said.

He feels relieved that none of his primary or secondary contacts — many are still in home quarantine — tested positive.

During isolation, he said, they faced the challenge of keeping their daughter safe. "We were torn between love and safety. Our daughter wanted to us to hug and kiss her like always, but we could not. All three of us wore wearing masks — we told her that a serious disease had caught us, and that she was safe."

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE

SUSPICIONLESS SURVEILLANCE DOES NOT BECOME OKAY SIMPLY BECAUSE IT'S ONLY VICTIMISING 95 PER CENT OF THE WORLD INSTEAD OF 100 PER CENT.

— EDWARD SNOWDEN

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

CARELESS TALK

War on COVID-19 is infringing on citizens' right to privacy — without adding significantly to the effort

IN TIMES OF crisis, governments may curb fundamental rights in the national or public interest. During World War II, for instance, the right to free speech was reduced — British installations were plastered with a poster that read, "Careless talk costs lives," and the people of a blisteringly outspoken nation agreed that the curb was necessary. Now, the war on COVID-19 is infringing on the fundamental right to privacy, without adding anything to the effort. The details of 722 airline passengers who landed in Delhi this month are being shared online, some state governments are revealing the identities of the quarantined and the Corona Kavach app released by the government, which evaluates the risk status of users and informs them of the proximity of potential carriers, is in public beta. In addition, the quarantined (who may be negative) have been stamped with indelible ink and their phone GPS is monitored.

Doctor-patient confidentiality is being breached and data is shared on digital networks, apparently to contain the pandemic. India does not respect the right to be forgotten, digital data remains etched in silicon, and may determine the social status and health insurance burden of the quarantined in the future. Attitudes to data privacy vary from West Bengal, where authorities regard the maintenance of patient confidentiality as a social duty, to Delhi, where the identity of those in quarantine, whether positive or not, is announced to unhealthily curious neighbours in a poster by the front door. Responses have been ad hoc, since the emergency legislation pressed into service against the coronavirus predates the question of privacy. Even the Personal Data Protection Bill speaks only of "processing" data without consent in emergencies. Is pasting a notice branding the quarantined a legitimate process?

In the absence of clear legal sanction, the law applies the tests of logic and proportionality. Does the public sharing of personal information advance the fight against coronavirus? And does any advantage won justify the erosion of privacy? The nations hit hardest by the virus are locked down — with varying degrees of efficiency and intelligence — because in the absence of a vaccine or a cure, social distancing is the only known deterrent. It is a blunt instrument to be applied rigorously, indiscriminately and blindly by everyone, with respect to everyone else. The strategy is absolutist and information-agnostic. The citizen must keep all others at a distance, whether they have been overseas or not, whether they have symptoms or not, and whether they are in quarantine or not. Information about health status is irrelevant to the efficiency of social distancing, and sharing it outside the community of doctors, researchers and administrators, who do need to know, is irresponsible and callous.

ESSENTIAL PROTECTION

There is urgent need to ensure that those keeping supply chains of essential items running are protected against COVID-19

EVER SINCE PRIME Minister Narendra Modi announced the 21-day nationwide lockdown on March 24, the Union home ministry has issued four classificatory notes to expand the list of essential supplies and services that are to be available and accessible during this period. Given the initial uncertainty and panic following the PM's announcements, the move to ensure that supply lines for essential items — food, medicine and goods and services essential for agriculture, among others — is a necessary one. However, it will not do to forget that those actually involved in keeping these supply chains going are as vulnerable to COVID-19 as anyone else, that being part of an "essential service" also makes a citizen more vulnerable to exposure. Moving forward, the task for governments at the Centre and in the states is twofold. First, they must ensure that the representatives of the state on the ground — the police and other civic administration officials — do not harass or obstruct those who work. at great risk to themselves, for the greater good during the lockdown. Second, and perhaps more importantly, every precaution must be taken to ensure that those working on every link of the supply chain are protected against the virus.

Complex supply chains for food items, for example, involve a large number of people interacting and handling produce, increasing the risk of a COVID-19 infection, as well as its spread to the general public. As on March 24, India had conducted only 25,144 tests, according to the Indian Council of Medical Research. This number is low — just 18 tests per million of population. The government's strategy — understandable given the country's population and inadequate medical infrastructure — has been to follow the "Italy model" rather than the "South Korea model". While the former relies on isolation, social distancing and quarantines, the latter also includes mass testing. So far, it also appears that the number of positive coronavirus cases emerging from various states is directly proportionate to how much they have been testing: Kerala and Maharashtra, which have reported a large number of cases, have had more widespread testing than, say, Jharkhand, which has zero confirmed cases so far. Governments at the Centre and in the states are reportedly going to expand testing. As they do so, special care must be taken to ensure that supply chains, particularly for food and medicine, are not crippled by the pandemic.

Wherever possible, protective gear must be provided and protocols for testing and immediate quarantines, where necessary, must be put in place. This will not be an easy task — it will require monitoring and raising awareness about symptoms and self-isolation, in the field, from those involved in transport to mandis and warehouses to the retailer and the vegetable vendor.

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY

A shrunken welfare state

Keeping poor and vulnerable safe in lockdown is state responsibility, not an act of charity

CHRISTOPHE JAFFRELOT AND UTSAV SHAH

THE ONGOING LOCKDOWN across India has been compared to the demonetisation episode of 2016. And for good reason. The nation-wide lockdown was a sudden decision announced by the Prime Minister. It has huge implications for society, the poor in particular. This style of governance was evident in the implementation of GST also. It reflects a concentration of power at the highest level in the government, recalling the premiership of Indira Gandhi. But in contrast to government-functioning in the 1970s, the current order has seen a shrinking of the state.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2014 motto — "minimum government, maximum governance" — is materialising in an unexpected manner. Today, it finds expression in three different ways. First, the society has been requested to take care of itself. In his last speech, PM Modi invited the rich to take care of the poor and asked each well-off family to support nine poor families during the lockdown. This approach is well in tune with the traditional RSS view, in which the society prevails over the state apparatus. RSS ideologue Deendayal Upadhyaya had started fighting the Nehruvian state-building paradigm in the 1950s itself, when the first post-Independence public hospitals were being built by the Centre. The social welfare-oriented activities of the Sangh Parivar, including Seva Bharati, follow this perspective and assume that charities can make the welfare state partly redundant.

Second, the Sangh Parivar believes the society also has to take care of itself through self-regulation. A soft version of this idea has been epitomised by the "Janata Curfew". But self-regulation can also mean self-policing. The practice of naming and shaming initiated by the UP government against anti-CAA activists and the facilitation of vigilantism reflect this vision. Vigilantes are not only looking for cows that some Muslims are suspected to take to slaughter-houses, they also, now, seem to be involved in enforcing the lockdown.

Third, the state has retreated from critical domains such as public education and public health — this is a function of the liberalisation. India spends less than 1.2 per cent of its GDP on public health. The country has 0.7 bed per 1,000 inhabitants — Indonesia, Mexico, Columbia etc fare better. Unsurprisingly, the under-funding of public healthcare has created a demand for private hospitals among the middle class. Private hospitals have mushroomed in the last two decades so much so that they provide 51 per cent of the hospital beds available in India today. Most of them are unaffordable for the poor, of course.

> The Sangh Parivar believes the society also has to take care of itself through self-regulation. A soft version of this idea has been epitomised by the 'Janata Curfew'. But self-regulation can also mean self-policing. The practice of naming and shaming initiated by the UP government against anti-CAA activists and the facilitation of vigilantism reflect this vision.

The shrinking of the welfare state also has to do with financial constraints. India's fiscal deficit has been growing and today adds up to about 9 per cent of the GDP (when the deficits of the Centre, states and the public units are added). This deficit is partly due to the recent slowdown (the growth rate dropped from 7 per cent to 4.5 per cent over the past two years), which has resulted in a fall in tax collections.

Today, the government of India is not in a position to execute a massive relief programme for this very reason. The Rs 1.7 lakh-crore package announced by the finance minister for helping the economically endangered is a mere 0.8 per cent of the GDP, not much more than the MGNREGA programme at its peak under the UPA government. Though the finance minister's package involves a number of direct cash transfers, the amounts announced are disappointing. The transfer of Rs 500 to women Jan Dhan account holders or a minimal increase in MGNREGA wages from Rs 182 to Rs 202 a day, are unlikely to help, especially since jobs are unavailable at the moment for a majority of MGNREGA workers. In fact, the FM's economic package suggests that the government either is yet to understand the enormity and scale of the problem or does not have the needed resources.

The SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises), which employ over 40 per cent of the Indian workforce, are facing the biggest hit due to the lockdown. The relief package does not cover their fixed costs, which make up to 30-40 per cent of the total cost. This has resulted in enterprises cutting costs by dismissing workers, who in any case are redundant during a lockdown. Ninety-four per cent of India's 500 million-plus non-agricultural labour force is employed in the unorganised sector. They work without contracts and do not have the protective cover of trade unions. Hence, it is easy to lay off these workers, a process that has already started. In fact, most of the unorganised labour were asked to leave the accommodation provided to them, under the pretext that they posed a health hazard.

Clearly, the distress of the most vulnerable sections of the society is not just financial. The lockdown has been implemented in such a way that it has already resulted in their disempowerment. The quantity of additional food that needs to be distributed under the PDS has been underestimated in many states — Kerala is an exception and a model for other states.

Keeping the poor and vulnerable safe is a matter of responsibility for the state and the private sector, not an act of charity. Leaving migrant workers to fend for themselves and forcing them to return to their villages will only enable the spread of coronavirus. In this regard, a clear distinction in the provision of aid for the urban and the rural poor must be made so that resources are better allocated amongst the poor.

The financial situation of India is precarious, of course. The banks are still burdened by NPAs, an issue that governments have let grow over the years. India's debt-to-GDP ratio is already high. At 69 per cent, it is higher than that of most of the emerging countries (except Brazil) — a clear indication that fiscal discipline was on par with other forms of indiscipline. But these are unprecedented times — as the RBI governor Shaktikanta Das said last week — and therefore, India may have to borrow more money for making the welfare state work.

The time has come for the government to revive vital functions of the welfare state. And, it needs to minimise the concentration of power at the Centre in the name of maximum governance and maximise aid to the poor and vulnerable, instead of minimising government.

Jaffrelot is senior research fellow at CERI-Sciences Po/CNRS, Paris and professor of Indian Politics and Sociology at King's India Institute. Shah is a student of International Economic Policy at Sciences Po

FOR A RUNNER TO STAND STILL

Cancellation of Olympics, quarantine, are not easy. But they are necessary

DUTEE CHAND

I AM AT home in Bhubaneswar right now and like the rest of the country, observing social distancing because of the coronavirus outbreak. My routine has changed since the lockdown has been enforced, but I am not complaining because at present, everybody's priority is to stop the virus from spreading.

I usually train twice a day and upwards of six hours. The Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar, where I go to train every day, is locked. I have been doing basic exercises at home and trying to stay as fit as possible. Yet, this past week, I felt like I have lost all my strength. Missing a day of training sets one back by a week. For athletes, if we don't go out and run or follow our regular training regime, we feel empty. Imagine one day you are doing high-intensity work-out and the next day you are hardly moving. It makes you lethargic.

I have also had to change my diet. For this period, I am not taking supplements and have reduced my protein intake because I am hardly training. I am also unable to sleep at night, as I have naps during the day. Earlier, because of training day-in and day-out, I would fall asleep as soon as I hit the bed.

The upside is that I have got a lot of time to watch movies, listen to music and do household chores. I am also exchanging messages with athletes who are my friends and for all of us not being able to train or compete is a new experience. Nobody is stepping out and everyone is at home. That said, what an athlete has to forgo in these difficult times is nothing compared to those who have been affected.

ONE OF 800 MILLION

A VOICE, UNDER 35

> For those who had already qualified for the Olympics, it would have been a blow because they thought that they would be in Tokyo in four months' time and would have planned their training regimen and competition schedule accordingly.

Around the world, all events have either been cancelled or postponed. Athletes have been preparing for the Olympics for the past four years, so it does impact us when it is postponed. It was the right decision to postpone the Games because the health and well-being of everyone comes first. In such times, sports has to be on the back-burner.

For those who had already qualified for the Olympics, it would have been a blow because they thought that they would be in Tokyo in four months' time and would have planned their training regimen and competition schedule accordingly, to peak at the right time. They will be experiencing a void, all the money and effort they invested to qualify will seem wasted. But it is important for everyone to be patient. In these grim times, medals will be the last things on the minds of sportspersons.

For someone like me, who was still hoping to qualify as the deadline to make the cut was in late June, the postponement means I will get more time. As the Tokyo Games are now going to be held in 2021, I guess the qualifying period window will open again and this will be an opportunity. Of course, there are many uncertain factors like, what if an athlete gets injured later in the year. Also, everyone will be a year older and that could make a difference.

I was planning to make Germany my training base and also participate in competitions in Europe in a bid to qualify for the Olympics. But because of the pandemic, this won't be possible. Just see how things change. Right now, no one can even think of going to Europe.

All our other athletes who were abroad are now back in India and in quarantine or following lockdown instructions. These are difficult times for everyone. But the key is to bounce back as a country. Everyone must not only think of themselves but also of other people and must do their best to ensure that the coronavirus does not spread. The efforts and sacrifices of healthcare workers, doctors, nurses and those who are part of essential services, in the private sector and government, who have to go out everyday must be applauded.

The writer, 24, is the national record holder in the 100 metres and an Asian Games medalist. She spoke to Nihal Koshie

MARCH 30, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO

BENGAL CLASHES

A VIOLENT CLASH between the police and the Chhatra Parishad (I) workers in Calcutta marked the Parishad's "economic blockade" of Assam on the sixth day of the movement. About 300 parishad volunteers demonstrated before the Indian Airlines office in Chittaranjan Avenue in Calcutta, raising the slogan "stop all bookings to Assam". After they had shouted slogans for two hours, the police sought to disperse them. Initially, appeals were made which fell on deaf ears. Then suddenly, brickbats were thrown and the police had to resort to lathi-charge. The police fired six rounds of teargas shells and dispersed the gathering. Thirty demonstrators have been arrested.

JANATA CONFUSED

THE TWO-DAY CONVENTION called by Jagjivan Ram began with amid confusion created by the declaration that it was the first representative convention of the Janata Party and assertions by several prominent leaders, including Arjan Singh Bhadoria that it was the foundation day function of a new party. Sitting on a lone chair on a huge dais in a big pandal that was three-fourths vacant, Jagjivan Ram spoke, saying that while the May 1977 convention was of the supporters of the Janata Party, this was the first session of the party. Only two MPs — Satyadeo Singh of the Lok Sabha and Ganpat Bhagat of the Rajya Sabha — were present among the 1,000-odd delegates at the beginning of the convention.

ARAFAT'S CONCERN

YASSER ARAFAT, CHAIRMAN of the PLO, voiced the concern of the Arab countries over American presence in Persian Gulf area. Answering questions at a press conference in New Delhi, he said: "All this troop massing constitutes a danger and directly affects the Palestinian cause and the security of Arab nations." He said that India's diplomatic recognition of the PLO "will help our struggle for self-determination and liberation". Arafat also said that he did not discuss with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi the issue of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan.

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

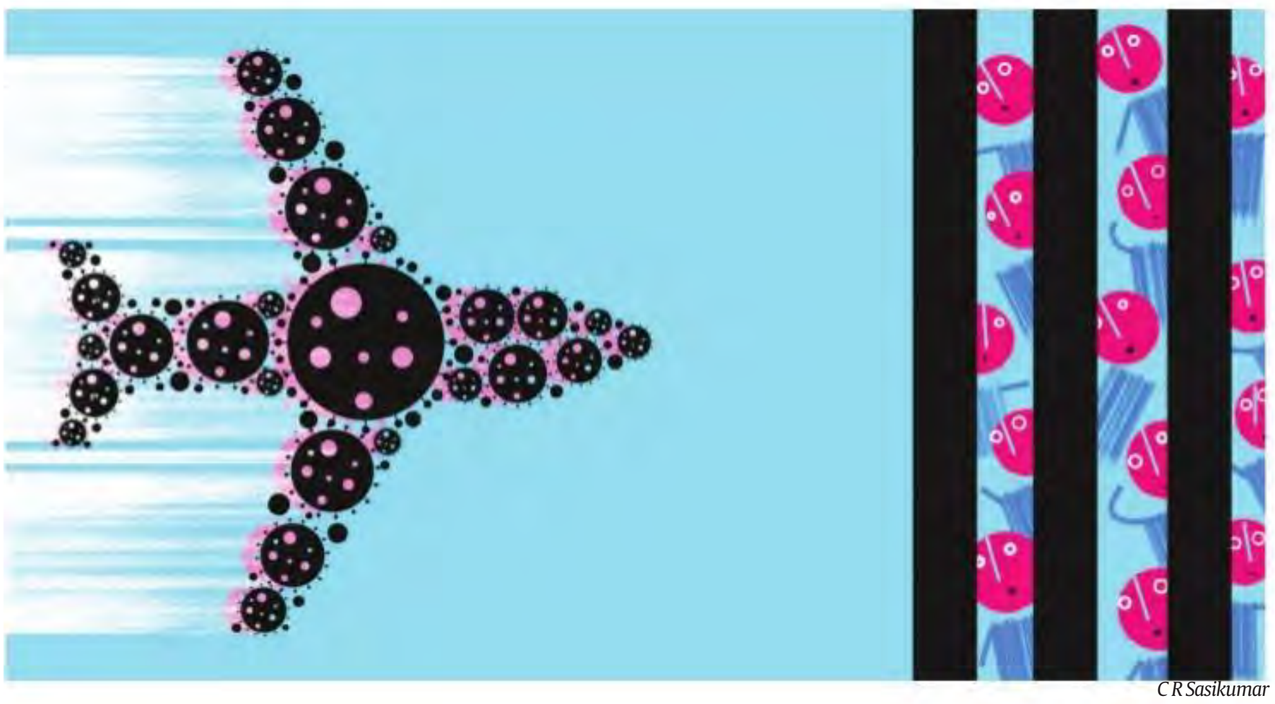
"In an epidemic which seeks out and targets the elderly, social care workers are on the frontline of resistance. There must be a focus on their needs that is commensurate with the responsibilities they carry.."

— THE GUARDIAN

How to meet rural challenge

Disruption in economic activities in urban areas has pushed migrant labourers back to their villages. This calls for a strategy for new hotspots

MANOJ MOHANAN



C R Sasikumar

IN JUST a few weeks, the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) went from being an unknown entity to the largest problem we've faced in India in recent history. But the real worry is when the virus enters the community transmission stage in rural areas.

Community transmission of the coronavirus is already happening in India; to assume that no one infected by a traveler has yet passed it on to others is just naïve. Debating about whether the epidemic is still in stage two or three misses the point. The virus is here and the epidemic is growing exponentially, and this means, expect a staggering increase in the number of cases in the coming days and weeks. The reported data so far shows the beginning of an exponential growth of this epidemic.

To understand the seriousness of what exponential growth could mean, consider a large pond with waterlilies that double in number everyday. Now imagine the pond is covered with lilies, millions of them. How long does it take for the pond to go from being half empty to fully covered? One day. Even more stark, just five days before the pond is fully covered, just over 6 per cent of the pond is covered with lilies. This is the problem with exponential growth — it is too slow and then too fast. By the time we see it, it is too late.

My objective today is to bring attention to a major chink in our armour and to offer suggestions on how policymakers might respond proactively to stem the tide. The three main things to bear in mind are: First, two-thirds of India lives in rural areas. Second, the quality of healthcare available to them is staggeringly poor, and third, the most common symptoms of COVID-19 are cough, fever and shortness of breath. We need to plan ahead to mitigate a potential epidemic in these areas because it is merely a matter of time (weeks, not months) before this becomes our biggest collective challenge.

Because the coronavirus arrived in India with international travellers, most cases so far have been in cities. But not much longer. Family members, extended contacts, and household workers have been infected. A major event that has happened is the dramatic contraction of economic activity in cities which has pushed migrant labourers back in droves to their villages in rural Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and other states, potentially carrying the virus back home.

Over 70 per cent of primary care visits in India happen in the private sector. Furthermore, in rural areas in states like Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh, unqualified healthcare providers — what we call "informal sector providers" — provide care for over 75 per cent of primary care visits. Studies, including several that my co-authors and I have conducted, show that the quality of care available to people in rural parts of India is staggeringly poor. Providers in these areas have very low levels of knowledge and they often do even less than they know — what we refer to as "know-do" gaps. As a result, we find providers frequently under-prescribing the right treatment and over-prescribing harmful ones even when they know better. We see similar patterns for a number of conditions including diarrhoea, pneumonia, maternal health, tuberculosis and other conditions in a wide range of settings. Providers with advanced medical training working in large tertiary centres do better. Sadly, these are not representative of the typical doctors or healthcare settings that most people in India can access, because two-thirds of India lives in rural areas.

If — or perhaps when — rural areas start seeing transmission, we would expect an uptick in the number of people suffering from cough, fever, and shortness of breath. None of these, however, are exceptional symptoms. In fact, tuberculosis, which also presents with cough (although not dry as with COVID) and fever, is quite common: India, after all, accounts for over 27 per cent of new TB cases globally.

The vast majority of coughs and fevers are treated by informal sector providers. Their clinics, very quickly, can become sites of transmission unless providers know what to expect, how to protect themselves, and how to prevent transmission. These providers will not have access to protective equipment. They have no idea about how to recognise or manage COVID cases if they show up in their clinics. Prescribing the common treatments they offer (typically a cocktail of antibiotics, cough syrups, fever medication, and pain killers) might offer some relief, but it is just a matter of time before many of these cases will need hospitalisation and ICU care. If that happens the health system will be totally overwhelmed because India just does not have enough ICU beds to meet that demand.

Now, consider an alternate scenario where the provider decides that it is safer (for themselves) to just refer all cases that have fever, cough, and shortness of breath, to larger urban centres for testing and consultation. The massive demand will again overwhelm the limited capacity of the system. Furthermore, if suspected positive patients from rural areas try to travel to urban centres to get tested, this can undermine efforts to limit transmission.

If all this sounds like trouble brewing, that's mostly correct. But there is still time to get ahead of this challenge. The three pronged approach that I would recommend is as follows: First, prepare healthcare providers for what is coming; second, educate patients about what coronavirus is and how to deal with it; and third, make strategic investments in creative surveillance systems that can help get ahead of the epidemic.

> The vast majority of coughs and fevers are treated by informal sector providers. Their clinics, very quickly, can become sites of transmission unless providers know what to expect, how to protect themselves, and how to prevent transmission. These providers will not have access to protective equipment. They have no idea about how to recognise or manage COVID cases if they show up in their clinics.

Informal sector providers are untrained, and hence will need clinical guidelines that are in local language, and more accessible ones than are currently available from the Ministry of Health and the WHO. I expect resistance from the formal medical establishment and some doctors, but this is not a time for a turf war. We could leverage the presence of a vast network of medical representatives of the pharmaceutical industry to reach informal providers. It is possible to develop videos in local languages to inform providers about safety and prevention.

Educating patients about the illness to avoid panicking and overwhelming the health system with every fever or flu will be critical. In the absence of clear information aimed at ordinary citizens from reliable sources, social media is currently rife with fake remedies and misinformation. The collaborative effort between the health ministry and WhatsApp is an excellent step in this direction, and needs to be publicised widely.

Finally, trying to chase this epidemic is futile — it will move faster than any system can respond. We need to put in place a system of surveillance to help policymakers learn where the epidemic could be peaking in the next week. Creative solutions such as digital surveillance systems based on self-reporting of symptoms using the wide cell phone coverage in India have the potential to be a second-best solution that can be mobilised immediately. Learning about a significant uptick in symptoms can help policymakers identify potential hotspots of transmission in order to plan and coordinate delivery of more testing kits and drugs for palliative treatment. It will not put an end to the epidemic, but it is the best chance we have to prevent an early system failure.

The writer is associate professor of public policy, economics, and global health at Duke University

Things to do, food for thought

Agriculture and livestock sectors need separate action plans to protect the interests of producers and consumers during and after lockdown

VIJAY SARDANA

THE RABI crop is almost ready for harvesting. In some cases — mustard, chana, and even wheat in Madhya Pradesh — farmers have already harvested the crop and are waiting to transport them to the mandis. The country produces around 52 crore litres of milk daily. There are also 80 crore-odd live poultry, both broilers and layers, at any given time, supplying meat and eggs to consumers. These birds and animals, in turn, support the livelihoods of poultry and dairy farmers, as well as those producing maize, soyabean, mustard, groundnut, cotton and other coarse grains that are ingredients for livestock feed.

During lockdowns, such as the present one, it is relatively easy to shut factories, IT parks, hotels, malls and multiplexes. But it is not so with agriculture and animal husbandry; these sectors will continue to produce. You cannot plug the udders of cows even if they are at home! It is the government's responsibility to ensure that farmers are able to keep their animals alive and market the crop that has been, or will be, harvested during the lockdown period. We need an immediate action plan to manage our agriculture and livestock sectors in the interest of both producers and consumers.

The first thing is to ensure free movement of farm produce, livestock feed and veterinary medicines. It is obvious that not all issues can be addressed overnight. But the minimum the government can do is to ensure ground-level implementation of already-taken decisions. Many essential services, for instance, were kept out of the purview of the lockdown. Food, feed and agricultural inputs have been specifically notified as essential services. But there are several problems at the level of implementation that are coming to notice. The Centre has issued various directives/notifications, many of them brief and general in nature. Based on these, the chief secretaries of states have issued circulars to their respective district administrations. Many of these have either not reached the local authorities and police personnel or are not clearly worded. As a result, the smooth movement of essential items has been affected.

There are also reports of conflict between the police and citizens, including people involved in the transportation and delivery of food as well as inputs to farms (seed, cattle and poultry feed, fertiliser and crop protection chemicals) and processing units (consumables, packaging materials, labels, etc).

The Centre must issue a single notification relating to food items in a standard format and uniform language so that all ambiguities are removed. This needs to be finalised after consultations with the stakeholders and the state governments can release it to officials working at the grass roots. The focus should be to address the problems arising from restrictions on the transport — between and within states — of agri-produce and inputs related to them.

Another suggestion is that the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA) be invoked for the delivery of all essential services relating to food to prevent disruption of supplies. Right now, many are unable to run their dairies or mills to the necessary capacity because of staff shortage, an outcome of the lockdown. Companies that are in a position to provide food and accommodation, and within factory premises, should be given the powers to deploy the minimum necessary staff for production. These workers should be restricted from travelling outside the factory compounds. Special passes can be issued by the local police station for drivers and people involved in the movement of essential goods.

There is another issue: What will happen after the lockdown ends? Many plants are now shut or working at low capacity utilisation. Consumption by hotels and other institutions, too, is low. Nor is any export or import happening. But once the lockdown ends, there will be a rush to procure raw material, trucks and rail rakes.

The government must start planning now to prevent post-lockdown chaos, especially profiteering in the event of shortages. Smooth recovery from the lockdown is as important as managing supplies during the lockdown. Here are a few suggestions to ensure that the common man does not have to suffer hardships during and after the lockdown:

First, place all food items, agri-inputs, packaging material and transport services under ESMA for a six-month period to prevent profiteering. The MRP that was applicable in February should remain till October. In the case of farm produce, it helps that we are looking at a bumper crop, which makes it all the more necessary to ensure its smooth marketing.

Second, suspend APMC (agricultural produce market committee) laws for the next six months. Traders with APMC licence are bound to act as cartels during rush hour, which will hurt both farmers and consumers. Any rise in inflation — not justified given the current surplus produce — will hurt the government's image, even if it has successfully controlled the novel coronavirus.

Third, ESMA should apply to all utilities and transport services. State governments can make exemptions on a case to case basis: These exemptions should be subject to public scrutiny under the Right to Information Act. The government should announce the above measures well in advance. We need to prepare for crises, both current and prospective, during and after the lockdown.

The writer is a food technologist and member of Commodities Derivatives Advisory Committee, SEBI

FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH

A smarter supply line

Rope in civil society, ease links between retail distribution, wholesale supply

BY ASHOK GULATI AND HARSH WARDHAN

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi's announcement of a 21-day all-India lockdown to break the chain of transmission of COVID-19 would have led many to appreciate the threat posed by the virus. In 1918, the Spanish Flu infected 500 million people globally, when the world's population was just 1.8 billion. The pandemic claimed the lives of 50 million people — 14 million to18 million of them in India. It's quite obvious that the PM did not want to take any chances. He is right. But the lockdown has also created problems for a section of the country's population. Migrant labourers in Mumbai, Delhi and other metros have left for their homes in Bihar, Jharkhand and UP. Let's hope that no such worker has been infected by the virus. Else, the pathogen could reach the rural areas of these states, where the public health infrastructure is badly strained.

The government has announced relief measures. Last week, the Finance Minister announced a welfare package of Rs 1.7 lakh crore. This is too small to cope with the onslaught of the virus. We believe that a package to compensate all losses, including business losses, should amount to at least Rs 5 to 6 lakh crore, if not more. How will the government find funds for this package? The windfall gains that have accrued to it as a result of the crash in crude oil prices could come in handy, the government could divert all subsidies and some development funds to fund this package and ask the country's corporate leaders to help with funds. The prime minister could even issue a clarion call to those with a fixed income (say above Rs 50,000/month) to voluntarily donate at least 10 per cent of their salaries to fund the battle against the virus.

But in this piece, we focus on the supply lines of food — what the government must do to ensure that people don't go hungry and the measures it must take to make sure people don't crowd a few outlets, increasing the chances of the virus spreading. The government has announced that the beneficiaries of the public distribution system can avail three months' ration at one go. The challenge is to ensure that fair price shops deliver the provisions in an orderly manner and their supply lines remain intact. Home (street) delivery of these provisions, to avoid crowding, is a good option. This is also an occasion to rope in civil society. NGOs, resident welfare associations, religious organisations and paramilitary forces can be engaged for orderly and safe distribution of food — both precooked and fresh. NGOs with experience in food preparation and distribution, such as Akshaya Patra, could guide local authorities. People involved in this endeavour should be provided with safety gears.

The challenge, however, pertains to supplying perishables like fruits, vegetables and milk. These perishables must be sold in a packaged form in mobile vans. The weekly markets need to be temporarily suspended lest they spread the virus — at such markets, people are known to do quality checks on vegetables by touching and feeling them. Vegetable vendors can work with civil society organisations as well as e-commerce players to do this job in a safe manner.

Retail distribution lines need to be seamlessly linked to wholesale supply lines. Luckily, the government godowns are overflowing with wheat and rice — about 77 million metric tonnes (MMT) on March 1, against a buffer stock norm of 21.4 MMT on April 1. And, procurement operations for rabi crops are around the corner. The FCI and other procuring agencies need to be trained about safety measures and supplied safety gear. Farmers could be given Rs 50/quintal per month as an incentive to stagger bringing their produce to the market — say after May 10. They will also need to be screened, given training and equipped with safety gear.

There is another big question as well. This pertains to mandi operations for fresh produce in large APMC mandis like Azadpur in Delhi and Vashi near Mumbai. These mandis are usually overflowing with fruits and vegetables and the labour force at these centres usually handles the produce without safety gears. The challenge of screening and providing safety kits to these workers is doubly daunting. We don't think that the country is fully prepared in this respect. The safety of workers in mandis — and other workers who handle agricultural produce — should be accorded as much priority as the safety of frontline health warriors. We should also use this opportunity to suspend the APMC Act and encourage NGOs, civil society and corporate houses to directly procure from farmers.

In such times, prices of essential food items are known to shoot up. But in India, prices of food items like chicken meat and eggs have registered a sharp fall. In Delhi's Gazipur Mandi, for example, the price of broiler chicken has fallen from Rs 55/kg in January 2020 to Rs 24/kg in March. In Namakkal in Tamil Nadu, prices have of eggs have fallen from Rs 4/egg to Rs 1.95/egg over the same period. This has also pushed the maize prices down as poultry is largely fed packaged maize. The government may have to think of compensating poultry and maize farmers in due course.

Finally, when things settle, it will be worth knowing how the virus spread from Wuhan to Iran, Italy, Washington, India and other parts of the world. Which organisation or nation failed to blow the whistle and alert the world in time? Was it China's failure? Or that of WHO? Or was it the failure of all governments around the world to respond quickly to the outbreak? We need better global governance for pandemics to avert the next crisis.

Gulati is Infosys Chair Professor for Agriculture and Wardhan is consultant at ICRIER

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FIX SUPPLIES

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Ease the flow' (IE, March 26). The lockdown and other initiatives are welcome but essential commodities like food must be supplied by the government. Grains and cereals stored in the godowns can be supplied easily through the PDS supply-chain. But raw vegetables and other agricultural products are not available in many places, even in the metros and big cities. It's harvesting time and farmers' harvests have not been picked up. Farmers' crops are ready to be harvested and they are facing logistical issues. Such constraints must be removed by both central and state governments.

Tapomoy Ghosh, *Burdwan*

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Ease the flow' (IE, March 26). Small towns and rural areas are likely to be vulnerable to mismanagement of supplies, including food items. This issues, besides many other things, are yet to catch public attention. In fact, leaving supplies to market dynamics can aggravate such tendencies.

Bijay Sinha, *Delhi*

CHANGING HABITS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'It shouldn't take a pandemic' (IE, March 27). Decades of official efforts asking people to cultivate the habit of handwashing with soap, along with sanitation have not brought significant behavioural changes. Toilets are still to catch the imagination of people despite the fact that they are important for the health and dignity of people. Policy makers need to do more than try to bring about behavioural changes

G Javaid Rasool, *Lucknow*

LONG BATTLE

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Citizens on the frontline' (IE, March 25). It is essential for citizens to participate in the fight against the coronavirus epidemic. The government cannot control the pandemic on its own. After the generous support for the "Janata Curfew" on March 22, people came out on the streets the next day. This approach will not help. This is a battle in which the masses are the soldiers against a common enemy, COVID-19.

Anuj Sharma *via e-mail*

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

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

Recovered patients' plasma: what is this experimental therapy?

TABASSUM BARNAGARWALA
MUMBAI, MARCH 29

ON SATURDAY, the Houston Methodist Hospital took blood from a patient who had recovered from COVID-19 patient two weeks ago, and infused it into another critically ill patient. It was a first for the US; the hospital's blood bank now plans to collect blood from at least 250 recovered COVID-19 patients.

With no specific treatment available for novel coronavirus disease and a vaccine at least a year away, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) last week approved use of blood plasma from recovered patients to treat severely critical COVID-19 patients.

How does this therapy work?

It is called convalescent plasma therapy. It seeks to make use of the antibodies developed in the recovered patient against the coronavirus. The whole blood or plasma from such people is taken, and the plasma is then injected in critically ill patients so that the antibodies are transferred and boost their fight against the virus. New York Governor Andrew Cuomo announced on March 24 that the state would begin clinical trials to use plasma therapy for COVID-19 patients. A study in *The Lancet Infectious Diseases* last month said a COVID-19 patient usually develops primary immunity against the virus in 10-14 days. Therefore, if the plasma is injected at an early stage, it can possibly help fight the virus and prevent severe illness.

How often has it been used in the past?

Several times. The United States used plasma of recovered patients to treat patients of Spanish flu (1918-1920). Hong Kong used it to treat SARS patients in 2005. In 2009, H1N1 patients were treated with plasma. A study in Oxford University's journal *Clinical Infectious Diseases* found that "convalescent plasma reduced respiratory tract viral load, serum cytokine response, and mortality" in H1N1 patients.

In 2014, the World Health Organization released guidelines to treat Ebola patients with convalescent whole blood and plasma. The WHO observed that "convalescent plasma has been used successfully for the treatment of a variety of infectious agents" for which no treatment is available. The Democratic Republic of Congo and Guinea eventually did so. In 2015, plasma was used for treating MERS patients.

How is it done?

The process to infuse plasma in a patient can be completed quickly. It only requires standard blood collection practices, and extraction of plasma.

If whole blood is donated (350-450 ml), a blood fractionation process is used to separate the plasma. Otherwise, a special machine called aphaeresis machine can be used to extract the plasma directly from the donor. While blood is indeed extracted from the donor, the aphaeresis machine separates and extracts the plasma using a plasma kit, and the remaining blood components are returned into the donor's body.

WHO guidelines in 2014 mandate a donor's permission before extracting plasma. Plasma from only recovered patients must be taken, and donation must be done from people not infected with HIV, hepatitis, syphilis, or any infectious disease. If whole blood is collected, the plasma is separated by sedimentation or centrifugation, then injected in the patient. If plasma needs to be collected again from the same person, it must be done after 12 weeks of the first donation for males and 16 weeks for females, the WHO guidelines state.

How optimistic is the latest move?

COVID-19 does not have a specific treatment, only supportive care— including antiviral drugs, oxygen supply in mild cases and extracorporeal membrane oxygenation. Dr C E Eapen of the hepatology department of Christian Medical College, Mumbai, who works on plasma exchange in critical patients, said plasma can be infused into two kinds of COVID-19 patients— those with a severe illness, or individuals at a higher risk of getting the virus. Eapen added, however, that while plasma transfers immunity from one person to another, it is not known if it can save lives in COVID-19 infection.

Dr Om Srivastava, infectious disease expert in Jaslok Hospital, agreed: "With antibodies from recovered patients, we try to make sure the person's infection does not go out of control. It helps, but to what extent we don't know yet."

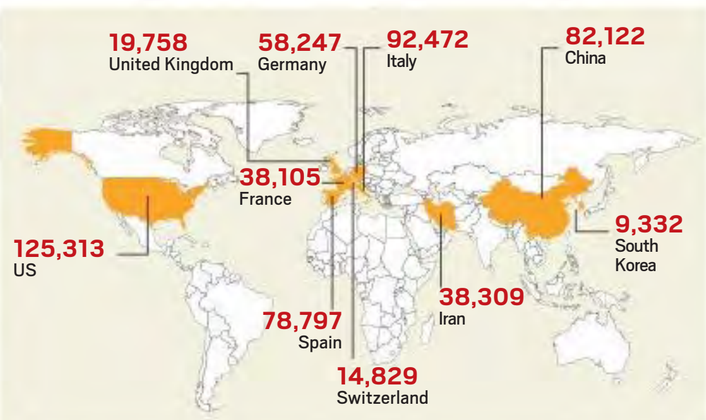
Can it be done in India?

India has facilities for removing 500 ml of plasma from a donor using aphaeresis.

For this experimental therapy to be tried out, the Drug Controller General of India will first have to grant blood banks approval for removal of plasma from recovered COVID-19 patients. Dr Manoj Chugh, chief scientist in Transasia Biomedicals, said the treatment could be effective for patients in the age group 40-60, but may be less effective for people aged beyond 60 years.

Chugh said the procedure is simple and can be done in India, but it is important to control the risk of infection during transfusion, and the patient's acceptance is required. "It's like a vaccine. It will engulf the virus and kill it. But it is easier said than done. We may need a series of approvals. India has never done this before," he said.

CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK
YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED DAILY



TOTAL CONFIRMED: 685,623 DEATH COUNT: 32,137

Source: Johns Hopkins University, updated at 11pm on March 29

What can cause a patient to relapse after recovery?

IN THE last few days, there have been reports of recovered COVID-19 patients testing positive a second time. Since the exact behaviour of the novel coronavirus is still being studied, immunity against it is not fully understood. For instance, previous coronavirus outbreaks have been inconsistent: a study on the coronavirus that caused MERS revealed that patients are unlikely to get re-infected within a short duration of the original infection; but, after the SARS outbreak, cases of relapse that were reported.

Theoretically, various factors can cause relapse in patients recovered from COVID-19. SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, is like viruses that cause any other flu. Therefore, there is always a probability of mutation as in the case of influenza viruses. The mutation, theoretically, can make an individual vulnerable to reacquire the COVID-19 infection.

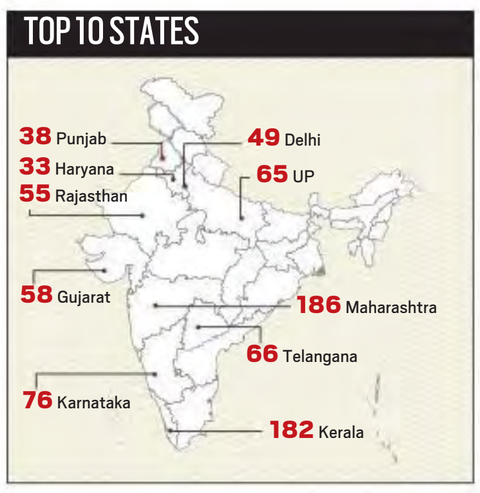
Patients who test positive for COVID-19 develop protective antibodies. Theoretically, there can be a relapse even in patients who have antibodies. At this stage, it is not fully understood as to how the long the antibodies provide protection against the viral infection.

Also, in the absence of any vaccination, it is not known whether the immunity acquired by the persons is permanent. Another scenario that can lead to relapse is when immunity is compromised, if the patients have underlying conditions and if they are dependent on immunosuppression drugs.

Experts also have pointed out that a "false negative" RTPCR test — the RNA test being conducted to diagnose COVID-19 infection — can lead to a patient testing positive a second time after testing negative in between. There have reports from Spain about imported RNA test kits giving inaccurate results.

INDIA COUNT: 1024 (27 DEATHS)

TOP 10 STATES



REST OF INDIA

Andaman and Nicobar Islands	9
Andhra Pradesh	19
Bihar	11
Chandigarh	8
Chhattisgarh	7
Goa	5
Himachal Pradesh	3
J&K	31
Ladakh	13
Madhya Pradesh	30
Manipur	1
Mizoram	1
Odisha	3
Puducherry	1
Tamil Nadu	49
Uttarakhand	7
West Bengal	18

Union Health Ministry update at 7.30 pm, March 29. Some states may have reported higher numbers. Only states with most cases are listed above.

96 PATIENTS DISCHARGED IN 12 STATES ACROSS THE COUNTRY

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

SIMPLY PUT QUESTION & ANSWER

Where does virus go from here?

A look at various possible scenarios that can happen in the COVID-19 outbreak, which one of these is most likely playing out in India now, and the role of the lockdown in addressing the situation

AMITABH SINHA
PUNE, MARCH 29

ON SUNDAY, the number of people infected with the novel coronavirus in India crossed the 1,000 mark. There are 40 countries who have more people infected. The death toll in India reached 27; the count is higher in 30 other countries.

These numbers would suggest that India is in a relatively better, even if still difficult, situation. But this is not so simple. There are scientists who are saying that over the next two months, the number of infected people in India could cross a million. There are others who assert that community transmission of the virus must already be happening, and these are not getting captured because India has not been testing enough number of people. The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has been maintaining that despite the emergence of a few cases for which the original source of infection has not been traced, there is no community transmission happening.

Then, there are research papers suggesting that the survivability of the virus weakens in high temperatures, and some have used this to explain the relatively low infection rate in India. In the midst of all this, an unexpected humanitarian crisis in the form of desperate movement of migrant labourers threatens to undo the benefits of the largest-ever lockdown imposed anywhere in the world.

The Indian Express spoke to several scientists and experts to understand how these disparate, some of them conflicting, elements explain the current health crisis. The picture that emerges is still not complete, but it does indicate how these elements are joined together. And this is how it looks like.

Migrant workers rush to enter a bus leaving Allahabad on Sunday. *Ritesh Shukla*

The possible pathways

Let's begin with the most important question: How will this end? When a new virus outbreak happens, there are three predictable scenarios through which its spread can be contained.

BLOCK AT SOURCE: In this scenario, every source of the transmission is isolated. In the context of the spread in India, for example, this would have meant identifying and isolating every incoming foreign traveller carrying the virus to ensure that they did not pass on the infection. It is almost certain that this has not happened. Otherwise, the daily detection of new positive cases would have at least slowed down, if not stopped, a week after all incoming flights were stopped. That has not been the case.

COMMUNITY TRANSMISSION: This when the virus gets into the community and infects a substantial fraction of the population. The more vulnerable in the population die of the infection. But in the process, the population develops an immunity to the virus, after which the infections slow down, and eventually the virus is rendered ineffective. This is the principle of herd immunity. This situation becomes more or less inevitable once community transmission begins. The size of the population that gets infected before immunity is developed depends on many factors, notably on how fast the disease is spreading (how many people are infected on an average by every infected person). This entire process can normally take six months to a year. As of now, scientists do not know how long this period could be in case of SARS-CoV2. In any case, this process can be very painful, depending on how lethal the virus is.

VACCINE: This is the situation in which a vaccine is developed, and administered to every vulnerable person. By all accounts, we are at least 12-18 months away from developing a vaccine for SARS-CoV2. By that time, the herd immunity scenario would have played itself out.

Two more possibilities

Theoretically, there could be two other scenarios as well.

VIRUS FAILS TO SURVIVE: This arises when, due to some reason, possibly unsuitable climatic conditions, the virus is not able to survive long enough in a geographical region, thus losing its potency to infect large numbers. Some scientific research has indicated a vulnerability of this virus in high temperatures, but the evidence is not yet conclusive. On the other hand, the fact that the virus has survived in India for more than a month, and continues to infect a large number, could be offered as a counter-argument.

PRE-EXISTING IMMUNITY: This could happen if the population has a pre-existing immunity to the virus. In the case of SARS-CoV2, there is no evidence to suggest that the Indian population has any special pre-existing immunity, even though the rate of spread of the virus has been slower in India than many other places.

The one most plausible

Most scientists agree that SARS-CoV2 would follow the second scenario in India — community transmission leading to possible eventual immunity. Although there are very few recorded cases of community transmission as of now, and even these are contested, scientists see this scenario as far more likely than any of the other scenarios. The ICMR has acknowledged that there have been a few cases in which the original point of transmission has not been ascertained, but has insisted these numbers are so few that they do not establish community transmission.

Scientists saying that community transmission must be happening are not relying on any data (there is hardly any worth a note from India as of now) but on their knowledge of how such diseases spread.

But if that scenario is indeed playing out, at some point of time, the spread could be rapid. If no intervention is made to halt the spread, infections would grow at an exponential rate, and very soon a large proportion of the population would get infected. This would be in accordance with the projections made by several scientific groups using mathematical models. Such projections are based on a number of assumptions, including the kind of interventions being made, their likely impact, and the expected behavioural responses of the general public to these interventions.

Once a substantial proportion of the population gets infected (and most of them recover), herd immunity will kick in and fight back, slowing down the infection rate. In the olden days, this is how most disease outbreaks used to unfold. The death toll in these outbreaks would depend on the nature of the virus. If the virus is not very lethal, an argument can be made to let the virus spread in the community and herd immunity develop, though what constitutes an acceptable death rate can be an extremely sensitive issue.

Reasons to be cautious

There are two reasons why governments would be extremely reluctant to take this approach to deal with the outbreak. In today's world, letting the virus spread and take its toll would be "considered extremely unethical", as Vineeta Bal, an immunologist at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Pune, put it. No government can afford to be seen to be doing nothing against a disease that is claiming lives, even if whatever it decides to do might not alter the final death toll very significantly.

The second reason concerns practical difficulties. A very small proportion of infected people, about 5-7%, require hospital care. But if the virus is allowed to spread rapidly in a country like India, that 5-7% would translate into huge numbers, beyond what its medical infrastructure could handle.

This is where the utility of the 21-day lockdown, and other measures taken before that, kick in.

How lockdown helps

By confining a majority of the population to their houses, and limiting their contact with other people, the spread of the virus can be significantly slowed down. It cannot be entirely stopped because there always would be some people – emergency workers, healthcare professionals, and those involved in essential duties -- who would continue to interact. Additionally, in this vast country, some people are always likely to flout lockdown instructions and continue mingling with others. Even if a very small proportion of these people are carrying the virus, it would continue to find new susceptible hosts and remain in circulation.

A slowdown in the infection rate due to measures like lockdown would also reduce the pace at which herd immunity is built. But most importantly, it would give authorities the time needed to ramp up medical capabilities, create emergency infrastructure, and prepare itself to deal with large influx of patients who would inevitably arrive.

"Achieving an optimum balance between these two objectives can be very difficult," says Bal.

To be successful, the lockdown expects a mature response from both the general public as well as government authorities. By following instructions on remaining confined and social distancing, the public has to make sure that there is no run on the hospital beds, ICUs and ventilators. And the government has to ensure that it uses this period to significantly ramp up its capacities. This is already happening. Several cities and states have started earmarking a certain number of beds for COVID-19 patients. Isolation wards are being created in trains. There are plans to convert large public areas like stadiums into makeshift hospitals dedicated to COVID-19 patients. Medical equipment are being ordered in large numbers.

The other consequence

By shutting down railways, airlines and bus services, the government probably thought it will keep people where they are. What it did not probably factor in is that people would walk hundreds of kilometres to reach their homes. Besides the pain it has caused to individuals, and beyond the humanitarian crisis that it has become, such largescale movement also seriously undermines the purpose of the lockdown.

A large majority of migrant workers, who are desperately trying to reach their homes, are driven by fear – the fear of a 'city disease' from which they will be safe only in their native places, the fear of becoming socially isolated in a place which is not their own. Many of them have been saying that if they have to die, they would much rather die in the company of their family and village community.

Better communication could have eased the suffering. The fears need to be addressed, not just in those who are desperately walking, but also among those who are getting increasingly paranoid in their homes, fearing they would get infected and die. All these people need to be reassured, ideally from high levels of government, that even if they get infected, most of them were likely to recover without major problems, without needing hospitalisation.

MAJOR EPIDEMICS AND PANDEMICS, 19TH CENTURY ONWARDS

1817
FIRST CHOLERA PANDEMIC
■ First major epidemic in colonial India; first case reported on August 13, 1817 in Jessore. Happened before data collection began; no estimates of death toll.

1829
SECOND CHOLERA PANDEMIC
■ Started in Bengal, spread through rivers to United Provinces, areas around Delhi and in Punjab. Also spread to villages and cities in China along the trade routes.

1852
THIRD CHOLERA PANDEMIC
■ Lasted till the late 1860s, affected several countries. India was not major area of impact, but in later phase, small spurts of cases in Bengal.

1863
FOURTH CHOLERA PANDEMIC
■ Infection spread from Mecca to other countries. Kumbh in Haridwar in April 1867 thought to have been responsible for massive spread in northern India.

1896
BOMBAY PLAGUE EPIDEMIC
■ Began in September 1896 in Bombay where rapid growth of commerce had led to increase in population and overcrowding; killed thousands.

1918
INFLUENZA PANDEMIC
■ Also known as the Spanish Flu of 1918-19; H1N1 strain caused 20-50 million deaths worldwide. India was the focus of the outbreak; killed 12-17 million people.

1974
SMALL POX EPIDEMIC
■ Over 15,000 died from Jan-May 1974, with most deaths in Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal; thousands disfigured or blinded. India reported 61,482 cases in these months.

SUSHANT SINGH

Source: Epidemics and Pandemics in India throughout History: A Review Article, by Swetha G *et al*: *Indian Journal of Public Health Research and Development*, Aug 2019

COMBATING CORONAVIRUS

How Karnataka govt uses technology, data and surveillance to contain Covid-19

A task force of 10 IAS officers with expertise in technology, medicine and healthcare is leading the charge

JOHNSON TA
BENGALURU, MARCH 29

ONE OF the crucial elements in successfully surmounting the challenge posed by the spread of Coronavirus in countries like South Korea, Singapore and even China was the use of data from technologies like the Global Positioning System (GPS), mobile phone apps etc. While health workers tended to patients, experts in the use of modern communication and surveillance technologies worked behind the scenes to deploy technology to prevent the fast spread of the disease.

Learning from countries like South Korea, the Karnataka government has now turned to its in-house experts on technology, and the IT resource base in Bengaluru.

One of the tasks assigned to a 10-member Covid-19 task force — comprising IAS officers with expertise in the fields of technology, medicine and healthcare — is to develop a system to track all persons who visited foreign countries during the period of the Covid-19 outbreak. The system, which should be ready in the next few days, would also track those who have tested positive and all their known and unknown contacts.

Different "Applications (or Apps)" are already in the pipeline for informing people about the places where they may have come in contact with a Covid-19 positive person. There are apps for checking on persons in quarantine, and for geofencing places with a large number of infections.

One of the applications for mobile phones called "Corona Watch," which gives details of places visited by Covid-19 positive persons in Karnataka in the 14-day incubation period of the virus, has already been released through the state government's official portal.

The estimated number of travellers — the primary target of surveillance since the virus is known to have come from affected countries — who have returned since the outbreak is 40,000. A total of 21,509 persons from 28 districts of the state returned from foreign countries between March 10 — when data collection began — and March 23 — when international flights were halted in the state. As of March 26, there were a total of 56 Covid-19 positive cases detected in Karnataka with 55 of them involving persons who recently returned from foreign countries — including two elderly persons who have died within days of returning from pilgrimages to Saudi Arabia.

View of Covid-19 war room at Bengaluru city council headquarters *Express*

"What we are finding is that if we have 40 to 50 coronavirus patients the number of their contacts runs into 10 times the number of patients. Everybody in the family becomes a primary contact. By chance if one person happened to go to a concert — as it happened in one case — then certainly 300 people need to be isolated," says IAS officer Munish Moudgil, Secretary (Administrative Reforms) and member of the state task force for containing Covid-19 with the specific responsibility for looking at the use of IT and related activities to contain the virus.

"The whole effort in India and Karnataka is to ensure that the number of patients who need intervention does not go beyond the capacity of the health system. It is not going to be easy. For that to happen at this juncture we are trying to prevent community spread and in this situation, technology can play an important role," said Moudgil, an IIT Bombay graduate who has used technology for farm loan waivers and urban land record digitisation in Karnataka.

Since testing everyone for the coronavirus is impractical at this stage, the best-acknowledged means of curbing the spread of the virus is through social distancing or cutting off all social interaction for 14 days -- which is the incubation period of the virus — in the understanding that this will stop its community spread.

"Bangalore has 25 lakh households or families and the total number of people who arrived from abroad since the whole Coronavirus issue started is 40,000. Theoretically, If we had successfully quarantined all 40,000 people after they returned, along with their families, there would probably have been no escalation beyond these 40,000 people," Moudgil said.

"Keeping a watch on this 40,000 people is only possible through technology. It is just not possible to send the whole police force to sit outside the houses of people," he said.

One of the first apps — on the lines of those deployed in South Korea to track the persons in self-quarantine — is almost ready and will require voluntary participation by the quarantined persons to declare their location every day during the 14-day-period, the official said.

"What we are doing right now is developing an app which will be out in a few days. We will give this app in the hands of the people and those who are self-quarantined will have to report on this app every half an hour or one hour, let us say. If a person does not report then we will send a follow up physical verification team of the police," Moudgil said.

The home quarantine app will require people to click their photo and send it to health officials who will be able to use geotags of the photo to know where the picture is taken. With several home-quarantined persons found socialising and visiting theatres, malls, play areas, the app is expected to curb this during the mandatory period of social isolation.

"The other thing we are trying to do with technology is that we are using software and data from telecom service providers to get information on people who were in the vicinity of these people and we will notify them saying — 'you were in the vicinity of Mr Y who is now a corona positive patient. Please report for a quarantine'," the IAS officer said.

The task force is using tower location information from telecom providers and available apps to notify people about their possible interaction with Covid-19 positive persons.

EXPLAINED

Significance of using technology

The best way to combat Coronavirus is to contain its spread. That's where Karnataka government has learnt from the experience of South Korea, which leveraged surveillance technologies to effectively track those individuals who were infected and fast spreading the virus. The Corona Watch app is the first such effort.

Migrant workers and their family members waiting to leave for their villages outside Allahabad bus station in the wake of a nationwide lockdown. *Ritesh Shukla*

'Before announcing lockdown, assuring migrant workers would have helped'

CHINMAY TUMBE, author most recently of *India Moving - A History of Migration* and an Assistant Professor at IIM (Ahmedabad) spoke to SEEMA CHISHTI on the many implications of the surging crowds of migrants anxious to go home in the wake of the national lockdown.

THE POLICY INTERVIEW
CHINMAY TUMBE
Asst. Prof, IIM-Ahmedabad

Given the sudden rush of our migrants, what are your biggest concerns?

That migrants' health takes a huge beating in this process. That the already-malnourished will suffer immensely. The mental stress induced by the long walk back home. And that for a few who may test Covid-19 positive, the fatality rates may be higher, only because of the long walk back home.

What is it that makes places they set out to make a life to, so inhospitable for them?

One needs to understand the psychology of the circular migrant worker. The city is seen as a means to an end of providing for the family back home. In times of distress, whether a recession or a pandemic, 'home' is the native place and migrants set off. The economic dimension comes from paying housing rents which one can save on, if one leaves the city.

Could this have been planned better?

While the government has to make many hard trade-offs, I think in this case what is blatant is the attitude towards international migrants — note the rescuing of stranded travellers abroad versus the sudden lockdown without no prior notice given to internal migrants. The closest comparison of the long walks seen today is the Partition of 1947 and even then, transport options were open for some distances and did not affect all parts of India.

This could have been planned much better by announcing that along with the Sunday janta curfew, people would be given few days to go home if they choose to do so. Trains could have had important Covid-19 information dissemination outlets as millions took their journeys home. The idea that we should shut internal migrant workers in cities so that they don't take the epidemic back home is misplaced, as we are seeing now, because migrants will anyway try to scramble home, and that too under worse conditions. Ramping up of testing facilities and social distancing in key source-region districts was and is warranted. And above all, a clear message while announcing the lockdown, that all concerns of migrant workers would be addressed by the provision of food, water and shelter in the cities. That would have reduced the need for instant-flight.

Are certain social groups more vulnerable in this?

To the extent that short-term seasonal migration is over-represented by historically marginalised social groups, they face the brunt of this crisis. But circular migration of longer durations also includes people across castes and social groups so everyone is affected.

Some sociologists have spoken of this as being the tip of a much bigger crisis India may be on, and not just a threat from the virus. Your thoughts?

This is a good time to conceive a new approach to providing social security to migrant workers. The Working Group on Migration published a report in 2017 by what was then called the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation and that should be taken seriously. There is a serious public health issue faced by migrant workers which has little to do with Covid-19. Malnutrition levels among kids of construction workers on construction sites are on par with what is found in sub-Saharan Africa.

What might be done to prevent these problems?

Clear information campaigns that the return migrants are not necessarily a threat. Social distancing and enforced self-isolation as done with returning international migrants.

How is this different from people moving to villages after Demonetisation?

It is different because there were transport options available then. You did not see long walks back home.

Full interview on indianexpress.com

Work non-stop or stay at home? For the 18 members of this Kolkata lab, the answer was tough but clear

RAVIK BHATTACHARYA & ATRI MITRA
KOLKATA, MARCH 29

THE CORONA FIGHTERS
AN EXPRESS SERIES

ANANYA CHATTERJEE is up at 6 am after working late into the night, leaving her with no time for her eight-month-old baby girl. Madhumati Basu has moved to her parents' home to be near her workplace. Hasina Banu and Agniva Majumdar handle over 500 phone calls every day. All of them are part of an 18-member team of doctors, virologists and microbiologists at the Regional Virus Research and Diagnostic Laboratory at the National Institute of Cholera and Enteric Diseases in Kolkata. This has been their daily routine since February 17, when widespread testing began for the coronavirus.

At the Beleghata office, the team's workspace includes a small room next to the lab with a round table at the centre surrounded by computers, tabulation sheets, and piles of papers and reports. Phones ring constantly, with queries pouring in from health department officials, government hospitals, and worried city residents. Apart from screening and testing samples, the team processes data and liaises with the National Institute of Virology (NIV) in Pune while keeping state officials and government hospitals in the loop.

"Our work officially starts from 10 am but continues till late into the night. I get to spend only a little time in the morning and in the night with my baby. My mother and domestic help take care of her. But we try to maintain a smile always because what we are doing is very important work, given the situation," says Ananya, 34, who holds a PhD in Molecular Biology.

The 18 lab members handle 500 calls a day apart from testing samples *Express*

"I got married in December, and it takes about two hours to reach the office from my husband's home in Howrah. In February, I returned to my parents' home in Sinthi, which is an hour away, because I wanted to be near the lab," says Madhumati, 21, who has completed a Masters in Molecular Biology.

So far, the team has tested over 200 samples, initially catering to West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand, Sikkim and the North-Eastern states. But now, with the NIV bringing in other labs in the system, the focus is on West Bengal and Sikkim.

At work, it takes anywhere between three and 24 hours to conduct the tests and issue reports. But at home, the challenge is of a different kind.

"The owner of the apartment where a team member lives asked her to vacate after coming to know that she conducts Coronavirus tests. We had to convince him that we are in a safe environment," says Hasina, 34, an MD in Medical Microbiology who hails from Murshidabad. "We have told our families that we take extra precautions at work. Yet, they are always concerned," says Agniva, an MD in Microbiology.

Then there's Rudrak Gupta, whose two-hour drive from office in the west to home at Behala Chowrasta in the east is a "nightmare". Soumen Mukherjee, 42, who holds a PhD in Biotechnology from IIT-Kharagpur assures that the team is used to handling "very infectious diseases".

ON THE FRONTLINES

Containing Covid-19 where population density is 50 times Wuhan's

TABASSUM BARNAGARWALA
MUMBAI, MARCH 29

WITH THE threat of Coronavirus, Medical surveillance officer Dr Vikas Singh has no dearth of reasons to worry these days. In particular, he is worried about the population density and how it may exacerbate the threat of Covid-19 spreading fast. Singh mans a central ward in Mumbai, called Kurla, which has double the city's density — 58,438 people per sq km. That is 50 times the population density of Wuhan (China) where Coronavirus originated. "We have to prevent community transmission here anyhow" Singh says. "If I could I would shut everything".

Already a positive Covid-19 case has been recorded in adjoining wards. It is a matter of days before Kurla, or the L ward, records one. Kurla has 80 per cent slums, the remaining 20 per cent are affluent residents who reside close to the plush corporate area — the Bandra Kurla Complex. Once he covers all residential pockets, he will start the laborious task of sensitising slum dwellers where the awareness drives are yet to start.

Every morning Singh checks the status of people under home quarantine. There are 50 international passengers in his ward. His team of 300 staffers across 16 health make daily calls to them. Once he confirms none have developed any symptoms, he plans awareness drives in housing societies, then makes daily calls to hospitals and local physicians to check for any spike in respiratory illness. This is to ensure the virus is not silently spreading in the community. On March 15, more than 500 societies were visited to counsel people about symptoms, to check if anyone had breathlessness, share posters on dos and don'ts, on myths, and residents were urged to report if anyone did not follow home quarantine rules.

Singh's wife is a medical officer in another ward. With elderly parents (the most at-risk age group) at home, Singh carries a can of pink coloured liquid soap to keep washing his hands. "I don't need to now, but soon I may have to maintain distance to keep them safe," he says.

It was January 8 when the first call came. An Indian had returned to Kurla from Wuhan, the epicentre of the outbreak. "I immediately sent my officer, we requested him to remain at home for 28 days. Back then the guidelines mandated a 28-day quarantine. For a month we called him daily to check for symptoms," Singh says. In January the preparation was within the public health department, sharing information on Covid-19, training health workers, stocking up on protective gears. By February, posters were pasted in societies, every day a tempo with a medical officer on microphone would roam announcing the symptoms and precautions.

Dr Vikas Singh is the medical surveillance officer of Kurla ward. *Prashant Nadkar*

Singh himself goes for many such drives.

"Once a resident called to complain that a Dubai return was roaming freely in society. I immediately rushed to the society. We counselled the man on the threat he posed to his own family. I realised if we counsel well, people do listen," he said. On another occasion, he went to a corporate office to just teach the way to properly wash hands to white-collar workers. The employees had just one concern, N-95 masks are out of stock, and Singh gently convinced them to use handkerchieves instead. He and his staff have masks as their only protection. "We wear gloves when needed," he says.

The most difficult task, he says, is when a positive case comes up. "Out of 9.28 lakh population, 80 per cent here are slum dwellers. We have not even started sensitising them. We will have to trace each close contact to ensure the virus does not spread in slums," he says. For that he has a plan — take minute-by-minute detail from a positive case to track each movement, retrace steps, and disinfect everything that came in the patient's way. "Cluster containment is easier said than done," he says.

'Out of 9.28 lakh population, 80 per cent here are slum dwellers. We have not even started sensitising them,' says Singh highlighting the severity of the task

"Our doctors are visiting each international traveller to stamp on their fist. Such people can be identified if they step out, but what a waste of resource. If these people self-quarantine, our job gets easier," he says.

Health officials like him are also counselling people against social discrimination. Whenever he visits a society, he encourages people to bring grocery, help residents who are under home quarantine while ensuring minimal contact. "People need to help, not boycott each other during these times," he looks agitated. Even during the H1N1 outbreak, there was panic, but the panic this time has led to rumours, consuming hours of civic staff's time in discrediting them.

2,000 deaths in US, global toll 32,000

Fatalities may cross 1 lakh, says US expert; Trump quarantine idea slammed as 'declaration of war'

AGENCIES
WASHINGTON, MARCH 29

The US government's foremost infection disease expert says the country could experience more than 100,000 deaths and millions of infections from the coronavirus pandemic.

Dr Anthony Fauci, speaking on CNN's "State of the Union" on Sunday, offered his prognosis as the federal government weighs rolling back guidelines on social distancing in areas that have not been as hard-hit by the outbreak at the conclusion of the nationwide 15-day effort to slow the spread of the virus.

"I would say between 100,000 and 200,000 cases," he said, correcting himself to say he meant deaths. "We're going to have millions of cases." But he added "I don't want to be held to that" because the pandemic is "such a moving target."

President Trump said on Saturday night that he would not impose a quarantine on New York, New Jersey and Connecticut but would instead issue a "strong" travel advisory to be implemented by the governors of the three states.

Trump made the announcement on Twitter just hours after telling reporters that he was considering a quarantine of the three states in an effort to limit the spread of the coronavirus to Florida and other states.

Several Democratic governors said on Sunday that they feared hospitals in their states would soon be overwhelmed with patients sick with COVID-19.

Deaths from the coronavirus in the US surged past 2,000 on Saturday, doubling in just three days, as per a tally by Johns Hopkins University. Confirmed cases topped 121,000.

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo has said Trump's suggestion of a quarantine for the tri-state area would be a "federal declaration of war", resulting in "chaos and mayhem".

"It would be a chaos and mayhem. It's totally opposite everything he's been saying. I don't think it is plausible. I don't think it is legal," he said.

New York alone has reported more than 52,000 cases.

A deserted street in New York's Chinatown. *AP*

COVID-19 DEVELOPMENTS

PELOSI BLAMES TRUMP FOR 'EARLY DENIAL'

New York: US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi put the blame for the nation's flawed response to the pandemic squarely on President Trump.

"His denial at the beginning was deadly," Pelosi, a California Democrat, said on CNN's "State of the Union." "Now I think the best thing would be to do is to prevent more loss of life."

"We really want to work in a unified way to get the job done here," she added, "but we cannot continue to allow him to continue to make these underestimates of what is actually happening here."

"Don't fiddle while people die, Mr President," Pelosi said. The White House had no immediate comment.

FIRST INFANT DEATH IN U.S. REPORTED

New York: An infant who tested positive for the coronavirus has died in Chicago, the authorities said on Saturday. It was the first known death of a child younger than a year old with the virus in the US.

Newborns and babies have seemed to be largely unaffected by the coronavirus, but three new studies suggest the virus may reach the fetus in utero.

"There has never before been a death associated with Covid-19 in an infant," said Ngozi Ezike, director of the Illinois Department of Public Health. "A full investigation is underway to determine the cause of death." Older adults have been viewed as the most vulnerable in the outbreak, but younger people have also died. **NYT**

Social distancing outside a supermarket in Madrid. *Reuters*

Spain reports 838 more deaths; Italy toll climbs by 756

AFP & REUTERS
MADRID/ROME, MARCH 29

SPAIN CONFIRMED another 838 deaths in 24 hours from coronavirus on Sunday, a new daily record bringing the total number of deaths to 6,528, according to health ministry figures.

Meanwhile, the death toll in Italy climbed by 756 to 10,779, the Civil Protection Agency said on Sunday, the second successive fall in the daily rate.

The number of confirmed cases in Spain has now reached 78,797 -- after the one-day increase of 9.1 percent -- as the country battles the world's second most deadly outbreak after Italy.

Except for a brief lull recorded on Thursday, Spain's death toll has been rising daily.

However, officials have pointed to a slower growth rate for both deaths and confirmed cases and expressed hope that the peak of the outbreak was approaching. Spain also reported Sunday that 14,709 people had been cured of COVID-19, a rise of 19.7 percent in 24 hours.

The total number of confirmed cases in Italy rose on Sunday to 97,689 from a previous 92,472, the lowest daily rise in new cases since Wednesday.

Of those infected nationwide, 13,030 had fully recovered on Sunday, compared to 12,384 the day before.

ACROSS EUROPE, affluent city dwellers have been leaving hard-hit cities for their second homes, where proximity to the sea or mountains lessens the discomfort of confinement. But they also bring fears that they will spread the coronavirus to regions with few hospitals. The situation has ignited anger over what the pandemic is laying bare every day: the ever widening gap between the rich and the poor

Pak deploys Army, insists virus outbreak under control

SAJJAD HUSSAIN
ISLAMABAD, MARCH 29

PAKISTAN'S TOP health official claimed on Sunday that the situation was under control as the number of confirmed coronavirus cases was still limited to 1,560, even as the army was deployed across the country to enforce strict lockdown to contain the fast spreading viral infection.

Prime Minister's Adviser on Health Dr Zafar Mirza told the media that due to the effective measures by the government, the virus outbreak was under control in Pakistan. However, he said that 1,106 suspected cases were added during the last 24 hours, taking the total number of such cases to 13,324. On Sunday, Pakistan's cases reached 1,560 after more people were tested positive.

The Pakistan Army said on Saturday it has deployed troops across the country. "Army troops are assisting Federal & Provincial administrations in ensuring enforcement measures for containment of COVID-19 with focus on Public Safety. All points of entries (POE) being manned & monitored, establishment of joint Check Posts and joint patrolling with other Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) being carried out effectively," it said. **PTI**

In Islamabad, Sunday. *AP*

AFTER THE LOCKDOWN

A man gets out through barriers built to block buildings from a street in Wuhan, China, on Sunday. The country has resumed domestic flights in epicentre Hubei, except for Wuhan, as part of a plan to ease a lockdown in the region. *Reuters*

Merkel shines in crisis even as power wanes

ASSOCIATED PRESS
BERLIN, MARCH 29

IN HER first address to the nation on the pandemic, German Chancellor Angela Merkel calmly appealed to citizens' reason and discipline to slow the spread of the virus, acknowledging as a woman who grew up in communist East Germany how difficult it is to give up freedoms, yet as a trained scientist emphasising that the facts don't lie.

Then, wearing the same blue pantsuit from the televised address, the 65-year-old popped into her local supermarket to pick up food, wine and toilet paper to take back to her Berlin apartment. Photos snapped by someone at the grocery store were shared worldwide as a reassuring sign of calm leadership.

With the outbreak, Merkel is reasserting her traditional strengths and putting her stamp firmly on domestic policy after two years in which her star seemed to be fading, with attention focused on constant bickering in her governing coalition and her own party's troubled efforts to find a successor.

She faces her biggest crisis yet — a fact underlined by her decision last week to make her first television address to the nation other than her annual New Year's message. "This is serious — take it seriously," she told her compatriots. "Since German unification — no, since World War II — there has been no challenge to our country in which our acting together in solidarity matters so much."

Merkel's response to the coronavirus pandemic is still very much a work in progress, but a poll released Friday by ZDF television showed 89 per cent of Germans thought the government was handling it well.

The poll saw Merkel strengthen her lead and a strong 7 per cent rise for her bloc after months in which it was weighed down by questions over its future leadership.

MINISTER KILLS SELF OVER 'CRISIS WORRIES'

Frankfurt Am Main: Thomas Schaefer, the finance minister of Germany's Hesse state, has committed suicide apparently after becoming "deeply worried" over how to cope with the economic fallout from the virus, state premier Volker Bouffier said Sunday.

Schaefer, 54, was found dead near a railway track on Saturday. The Wiesbaden prosecution's office said they believe he died by suicide.

"We are in shock, we are in disbelief and above all we are immensely sad," Bouffier said in a recorded statement. **AFP**

Economy a factor in response: Rouhani on virus measures

ASSOCIATED PRESS
TEHRAN, MARCH 29

IRAN'S PRESIDENT on Sunday lashed out at criticism of its lagging response to the worst coronavirus outbreak in the Middle East, saying the government has to weigh economic concerns as it takes measures to contain the pandemic.

Hassan Rouhani said authorities had to consider the effect of mass quarantine efforts on Iran's beleaguered economy, which is under heavy US sanctions.

"Health is a principle for us, but the production and security of society is also a principle for us," Rouhani said at a Cabinet meeting. "We must put these principles together to reach a final decision." "This is not the time to gather followers," he added. "This is not a time for political war."

Rouhani was earlier under fire for the unraveling of the 2015 nuclear deal he concluded with the United States and other world powers. President Donald Trump withdrew the United States from the agreement and has imposed crippling sanctions on Iran that prevent it from selling oil on international markets.

Iran has rejected US offers of humanitarian aid.

State TV on Sunday reported another 123 deaths, pushing Iran's overall toll to 2,640 amid 38,309 confirmed cases.

EXPLAINED

Trouble with enforcement

WHILE IRAN took some steps such as closing down many businesses and restricting travel between cities, the moves came long after other countries imposed more stringent measures. In addition, as per reports, the government has faced trouble in imposing its restrictions, with many flouting such directives. This has contributed to recent criticism of the government.

'NOW THAT I AM BACK HOME, I FEEL LIKE THE NIGHTMARE ISN'T OVER'

Jobless and afraid to hug his children: One of first patients in NY

EDGAR SANDOVAL
NEW YORK, MARCH 29

IT WAS not the joyous homecoming Fatehi Darhan had dreamed about while he lay alone for two weeks in a hospital room in Queens, fighting the coronavirus. He came close to death.

When he entered his small apartment in the Far Rockaway section of the borough and saw his three young children, their eyes longing for a fatherly hug, he fought every instinct to wrap his arms around them. "I froze," Darhan, 34, said. "I wanted to hug them, but it did not feel safe. I don't know when I would feel safe hugging them again."

Darhan's misgivings underscore the difficulties of returning to normal life after surviving a disease that has changed almost every aspect of living in New York City.

Nearly a month after he became the first Queens resident to test positive, Darhan not only feels he cannot touch his children, but he has lost his job as an Uber driver and has no idea what is next, or how long he can pay his monthly bills. "I'm worried," he said.

Fatehi Darhan, 34, spent over two weeks fighting the virus. *NYT*

Like Darhan, survivors say they are starting to realise the ramifications of surviving the illness, from lost work to severe anxiety.

Darhan's ordeal began on February 28, when he walked into the emergency room at St. John's Episcopal Hospital in Far Rockaway with difficulty breathing and a rising fever. Hours later, he said, he was discharged and told to follow up with his primary care doctor.

But when he returned home, he found it hard to rest, he said in an interview. His symptoms seemed to worsen. His skin burned, as if lava ran through his veins, he recalled. It felt as if invisible knives were plunging into his lungs.

"I never felt anything like this before in my life," Darhan said, speaking in Arabic through a translator. "I knew this was different. That's when I thought, maybe it's coronavirus."

His wife and their children — Ali, HaDeel and Sara — sleep in one of the two bedrooms in their apartment, he said. He is in the other. When awake, he stays at least six feet away during meals and anytime he shares a room with them.

Darhan, an immigrant from Yemen, said he longed to play with his children, or to sit close together and watch television. But he cannot escape the fear that remnants of the virus are lingering in his body. So, he talks to them over FaceTime from a different room or several feet apart.

"I feel like I had come back from death — I had come back to life," he said. "Now that I am back home, I feel like the nightmare isn't over."

"I feel like I had come back from death — I had come back to life," he said. "Now that I am back home, I feel like the nightmare isn't over." **NYT**

PANDEMIC WATCH

Tom Hanks

USA

Hanks, wife return to LA after quarantine

Los Angeles: Tom Hanks and his wife Rita Wilson returned to Los Angeles on Friday after spending more than two weeks in quarantine in Australia after testing positive for the coronavirus. The "Forrest Gump" and "Toy Story" actor and Wilson were photographed smiling while driving a vehicle in the city. Celebrity website TMZ said the photographs were taken shortly after the pair landed at a small Los Angeles area airport. Hanks, a double Oscar winner, and Wilson were the first big celebrities to announce they had tested positive for the disease.

SAUDI ARABIA

Missiles stopped over cities under virus curfew

Riyadh: Saudi air defenses intercepted ballistic missiles over Riyadh and a city on the Yemen border late Saturday, leaving at least two civilians wounded in the capital that is under curfew in a bid to curb the spread of the coronavirus. Multiple explosions shook Riyadh in the attack, which the Saudi-led military coalition blamed on Yemen's Iran-aligned Huthi rebels who have previously targeted Saudi cities with missiles, rockets and drones. It was the first major assault since the Huthis offered last September to halt attacks.

USA

Iconic Indian paper closes print edition

New York: An iconic ethnic Indian newspaper in the US that catered to the Indian diaspora for the last 50 years has announced that it will cease the print edition from Monday due to pre-existing troubles in the publishing industry worsened by the cancellation of advertisements amidst the coronavirus outbreak. Founded by Indian-American publisher Gopal Raju in 1970, India Abroad rose to great heights of popularity by focusing on Indian news meant for expatriate audience. Suresh Ventakachari through his note announced its decision to cease the print edition.

NEPAL

Govt extends lockdown period

Kathmandu: The government on Sunday decided to extend the lockdown in Nepal by another week. In a cabinet meeting, it was decided to extend the lockdown restricting people's movements as a preventive measure. With medical staff combat the outbreak without proper safety equipment, the government on Sunday imported 12.6 tonne of protective material, including gowns, goggles and RNA extraction kits. Of the material, 2.6 tonne was granted by the Chinese government while the rest were purchased by Nepal.

MARKET WATCH

FPIs PULL OUT OVER ₹1 LAKH CR

New Delhi: As the coronavirus pandemic is triggering fears of a global recession, foreign investors have started rowing back from the Indian capital markets by withdrawing a massive over Rs 1 lakh crore in March after remaining net buyers for six consecutive months. **PTI**

SURGE IN DATA USAGE SINCE LOCKDOWN ANNOUNCED TO TACKLE COVID-19

Lockdown triggers changes in viewership trends; data usage spikes delayed, extended

AASHISH ARYAN
NEW DELHI, MARCH 29

WITH THE country under a complete 21-day mandatory lockdown and nearly 10 days of partial lockdown and work from home to limit the spread of coronavirus, the data usage patterns of users has undergone a shift, according to the initial data collected by the three major telecom companies. A comparative analysis of the data between March 10 and March 25 has showed that due to complete and partial lockdown effected by various governments, the volume of data usage spiked between 9 am and 11 am in the morning, and then after 4 pm until 10 pm.

"Earlier, we had data spikes between 8 and 10 in the morning and then between 5 and 8 in the evening, which are mainly office travel hours. Then, of course, the usage was high during weekends due to binge watching habits. Of late, however, that has changed," a senior executive of a telco said.

During the initial period of the partial and complete lockdown, there was a huge surge in data usage, which prompted the telcos and industry body Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI) to issue appeals to over-the-top (OTT) and digital video streaming players to limit the streaming quality to standard definition from high and ultra-high definition.

"We saw an initial surge of up to 30 per cent in data traffic volume, which put a lot of strain on the network. With the transmission quality now limited, we are hoping that about 20-30 per cent of the bandwidth will now be free, which will be beneficial in reaching out to more consumers," another senior executive said.

Another telco executive, however, said they had been seeing continuous load on their network infrastructure instead of the isolated periodical spikes earlier, and that they expected the reduced transmission quality to have little to no impact on freeing up the bandwidth in the near term.

"Whatever network or bandwidth is freed up will be consumed, that has to be understood. The network infrastructure was anyway under pressure. So a relief as such we do not see in the near term, or until April 14 at least. Once more cell sites come up, the parameters can be checked again," the executive said.

The work for reducing bit rate and limiting transmission quality was accelerated after Department of Telecommunications (DoT) Secretary Anshu Prakash was learnt to have personally called up heads of OTT and digital streaming players and sought their cooperation, sources close to the development told *The Indian Express*.

Mobile data users have not felt any problems even up until now in general as far as speeds are concerned, the telcos said. However, to prepare for an eventuality that the lockdown is extended beyond 21 days, the three major telecom operators and COAI have written to the DoT to allocate additional access and backhaul spectrum.

"The DoT has asked all operators to approach the Wireless Planning Commission. The allocation has various entanglements. The Supreme Court has various concerns about spectrum being allocated through an auction process.

"So the ministry is aware about the situation but they are being careful," COAI director general Rajan Mathews told *The Indian Express*.

The required spectrum allocations are likely to be done within the next week after the matter is vetted by top legal counsels of the government, a senior ministry official said, adding that there may not be an immediate benefit to the end user in the near term even if the spectrum is allocated.

"We had asked for all this spectrum as a precautionary measure. We have also been seeking permission for temporary tower sites, which we call 'cell on wheels'. Hopefully we will minimise any problems that could occur," Mathews said.

EXPLAINED

Telcos may seek nod to set up temporary towers in rural areas

THE SHIFT in data usage pattern and the overall reduction in transmission quality has the telcos looking for extra access and backhaul spectrum to prepare for any eventuality in case the lockdown extends beyond the currently stipulated 21 days. Telcos are also preparing to seek the government's permission for roving telecom towers in certain villages on the periphery of urban areas and metros if the situation does not improve even after the mandatory lockdown period.

India Inc reaches out to employees as companies across sectors may dock part of salary for March, April

AASHISH ARYAN, AANCHAL MAGAZINE & PRANAV MUKUL
NEW DELHI, MARCH 29

WITH THE 21-day mandatory lockdown in place starting to have an impact on cash flows, companies across India have started sending out mails to their employees, explaining the impact and the near term plan.

A cab aggregator, which had already laid off nearly 500 employees in one go in December and was expected to further lay off an equal number of people in the next three months by March, is likely to continue letting go people even after this month, some of the employees *The Indian Express* talked to said.

A food delivery startup — which mostly operates cloud kitchens — also sent a mail to its employees, telling them there could be a pay cut between 20 to 50 per cent for April, owing to the current circumstances wherein the cash flow and liquidity in hand are limited.

The company, however, assured employees it would not be axing any jobs in the near term. A call on the payment of salaries docked in March and April would be taken as and when the situation improved, the startup said in its mail.

Two of the big four accounting firms have expressed also concerns about the impact of COVID-19 on their cash situation to their employees, with one of them suggesting a likelihood of a pay cut and another announcing it for partners and executive directors.

A Mumbai-based accounting firm has decided to defer hikes and bonuses for all employees, along with a hiring freeze for the next fiscal starting April 1. A 25 per cent pay cut has also been communicated by the company for partners and executive directors.

In a LinkedIn post, Shyamal Mukherjee, chairman and territory senior partner at accounting company PwC India, said "We at PwC India have initiated proactive measures that will help navigate the uncertainties, keep all employees safe and make our organisation more sustainable. We have worked out some interim measures which includes deferment of promotions, increments and bonus till a point in time one gets certainty around business."

Airlines, which are one of the worst hit sectors by COVID-19, were among the first to announce pay cuts across the board. In an attempt to protect its cash flows. India's largest airline IndiGo announced up to 25 per cent salary cuts across the board, including for its CEO. Similarly, GoAir, in an effort to cut down costs, extended its salary cuts to all its employees for the month of March. Full-service carrier Vistara cut employee salaries by around 10 per cent, in addition to asking some of its staff to go on leave without pay.

National carrier Air India, too, has frozen recruitment and induction, in addition to implementing 10 per cent deduction in allowances, excluding basic pay, house rent allowance and variable dearness allowance, for all employees, except cabin crew, for a period of three months effective March 2020 salary.

However, certain companies in the cash-rich IT and software services sector have announced additional payouts for a section of their employees during this time of crisis. Cognizant told its employees last week it would be paying an additional 25 per cent of their base salary in April.

This policy, which is likely to cover almost two-thirds of Cognizant's Indian staff, is applicable for employees who are at associate level or below. Similarly, Facebook has announced an extra $1,000 for all of its 45,000 employees for managing expenses in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak.

3 KEY POINTS

1 With the 21-day mandatory lockdown in place starting to have an impact on cash flows, companies have started sending out mails to their employees, explaining the impact and near term plan

2 Airlines, which are one of the worst hit sectors, were among the first to announce pay cuts

3 However, certain companies in the cash-rich IT and software services sector have announced additional payouts for a section of their employees

FIGHTING COVID-19

CCL registers highest output in one-day

New Delhi: Central Coalfields Ltd (CCL), a subsidiary of Coal India Ltd, has registered its highest one-day coal production with almost 6 lakh tonnes production on March 28 amid the 21-day nationwide lockdown. Further, CCL has ensure continuous dispatch of coal to its linked power plants, without any break, so that sufficient stock is available at their end. **ENS**

IndiaNivesh closes down PMS business

Mumbai: Financial services company IndiaNivesh has decided to wind up its portfolio management services (PMS) business due to coronavirus-triggered turmoil in the markets. The flagship brokerage business is not being shut, but the ongoing lockdown-related aspects is leading to a delay in releasing payouts to clients. It can be noted that indices have lost over 40 per cent of their value in the last few weeks because of COVID-19. **PTI**

Contribution towards PM-CARES Fund to qualify as CSR spending

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, MARCH 29

CONTRIBUTIONS BY companies towards the PM-CARES Fund for emergency relief will count towards mandatory corporate social responsibility (CSR) expenditure, the Corporate Affairs Ministry clarified on Sunday. The Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations (PM-CARES) Fund was constituted by the government earlier this week to receive charitable contributions to deal with emergency situations like the current coronavirus outbreak.

"The PM-CARES Fund has been set up to provide relief to those affected by any kind of emergency or distress situation. Accordingly, it is clarified that any contribution made to the PM CARES Fund shall qualify as CSR expenditure under the Companies Act 2013," said a notification by the Ministry.

Companies with a minimum net worth of Rs 500 crore, turnover of Rs 1,000 crore, or net profit of Rs 5 crore are required to spend at least 2 per cent of their average profit for the previous three years on CSR activities every year. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is the chairman of the fund, while Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Home Minister Amit Shah and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman are among its members.

The Ministry had earlier clarified that any expenditure undertaken by companies towards dealing with the virus outbreak, including for preventative healthcare, sanitation and disaster management, would count towards mandatory CSR expenditure.

'Corporates spent ₹52K cr in last five fiscals'

New Delhi: Corporates have spent Rs 52,000 crore towards social welfare activities in the last five fiscals and now making contributions to the Prime Minister's relief fund will further help them meet their obligations under the companies law, a senior government official said.

"The macro picture is that over the last 5 years, CSR contributions amounting to around Rs 52,000 have been made against total demand of around Rs 77,000 crore," Corporate Affairs Secretary Injeti Srinivas said. **PTI**

Lockdown period not to be part of timeline for any insolvency process

KARUNJIT SINGH
NEW DELHI, MARCH 29

INSOLVENCY REGULATOR IBBI on Sunday stated that the 21-day lockdown imposed by the Centre will not count towards timelines in the corporate insolvency resolution process (CIRP) under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC). The IBC prescribes that the CIRP for companies be completed within 330 days. including time taken for litigation.

"... the period of lockdown imposed by the Central Government in the wake of COVID-19 outbreak shall not be counted for the purposes of the timeline for any activity that could not be completed due to such lockdown, in relation to a corporate insolvency resolution process," said a notification by the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI).

Experts said the move was welcome as many insolvency cases had come to a standstill during the lockdown."(It) is a welcome move as many CIRP proceedings have come to standstill due to the lockdown," said Daizy Chawla, managing partner at law firm Singh and Associates, adding that if the provision had not been notified there would have been a "flood of litigation to seek exclusion" of this time period once the lockdown is lifted.

Manoj K Singh, founding partner of Singh and Associates, however, said more steps were needed to protect businesses undergoing CIRP. He said if companies that were previously not under stress needed relief from the Reserve Bank of India in terms of a moratorium on payments for three months, then businesses undergoing insolvency proceedings also need interim financing to preserve business value.

"Some kind of financial impetus is required for companies under resolution, so that business can be preserved and so that they can have some interested buyers when the economy starts getting momentum again," he said, adding that the Centre may choose some criteria to ensure that only business which have ongoing operations are given this interim finance. He noted that if this was not done, companies undergoing CIRP would not remain going concerns.

The government, last week, increased the default threshold for initiation of insolvency proceedings to Rs 1 crore from Rs 1 lakh, to protect small enterprises from being dragged into insolvency proceedings due to issues caused by the coronavirus outbreak.

MOVE COMES AS SPICEJET PILOT TESTS POSITIVE FOR COVID-19

DGCA temporarily suspends breath analyser test for all aviation personnel

PRANAV MUKUL
NEW DELHI, MARCH 29

FOLLOWING WHAT was the first incident of a pilot testing positive for COVID-19 in India, aviation regulator DGCA has moved to suspend breath analyser test, to check for alcohol consumption, at all airports across the country until further notice. On Sunday, low-cost carrier SpiceJet said one of its first officers had tested positive for the disease. The said pilot did not operate any international flight in March, and the last flight he operated was on March 21 from Chennai to Delhi and has been quarantined at his home since then.

"... this is to convey that due to the extraordinary circumstances in view of the outbreak of COVID-19 and also in view of the directions issued by Hon'ble High Court of Delhi and Hon'ble High Court of Kerala, the conduct of breath analyser test in respect of all aviation personnel as required under civil aviation requirements in force is temporarily suspended at all airports until further orders," the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) said in an order Sunday evening.

Notably, a union of Air India pilots had on March 20 made a representation to DGCA requesting a temporary stay on requirement to conduct pre-flight and post-flight breath analyser test on account of the COVID-19 outbreak. On Sunday, the Indian Commercial Pilots' Association (ICPA) sent another letter to the regulator with a reminder following the SpiceJet case. "You may please note that reports indicate that a SpiceJet airline pilot has tested coronavirus positive. Continuing BA tests in these circumstances is extremely dangerous. As a responsible association, which has demonstrably believed in the efficacy of pre-flight and post-flight BA tests, all we ask is that safety of our pilots be considered by you and appropriate orders be passed," the ICPA wrote in a letter to DGCA chief Arun Kumar on Sunday, prior to the regulator's order. Last week, the Delhi High Court ordered suspension of breath analyser test of air traffic controllers through tube process. It followed a Kerala High Court judgment, which ordered suspension of breath analyser test at airports in the state.

For the flight crew, both cockpit and cabin, the breath analyser tests are conducted by medical officers of the respective airline posted at the airport. As per regulations, the crew are mandatorily supposed to undergo the test to check for alcohol content in their blood once prior to their flight and once after it. The test involves blowing air into an instrument, which shows the content of alcohol in the blood of the person taking the test. Pilots have raised concerns that the apparatus for the test remains the same for the entire crew and that "droplets/aerosols of infected pilots may further infect the healthy".

In its Sunday orders, the DGCA noted that every aviation personnel reporting for duty will be required to submit an undertaking that he or she is not under the influence of alcohol and that he or she hasn't consumed alcohol or any other psychotropic substance in the last 12 hours. Further, for flight crew members, the airlines have been asked to conduct random checks to ensure compliance with the rules. Even as all scheduled flights across the board have been suspended, airlines are operating special flights both domestically and internationally to repatriate passengers and ferry essential goods. In a March 6 order, the DGCA had said that any aviation personnel, showing symptoms of COVID-19, will be exempted from breathalyser test.

A SpiceJet spokesperson said: "As a precautionary measure, all crew and staff who had been in direct contact with him (infected pilot) have been asked to self-quarantine by staying at home for the next 14 days. All measures are being taken to provide appropriate medical care to him".

A SpiceJet official said the airline was providing necessary information about its crew members to relevant government authorities that are trying to create a trail of who else might be infected as a result of coming in contact with the pilot in question.

A union of Air India pilots had on March 20 made a representation to DGCA requesting a temporary stay on conducting pre-flight and post-flight breath analyser test

Moratorium on credit card dues may lead to windfall for banks if users delay monthly repayments

GEORGE MATHEW
MUMBAI, MARCH 29

BANKS AND credit card companies could end up getting a bonanza if card users utilise the RBI moratorium and roll over their monthly card repayments by three months. With total card outstandings touching Rs 1,10,000 crore, banks stand to earn up to Rs 10,000 crore on accumulated interest charges for the three month period if all customers were to roll over their repayments.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has allowed moratorium on repayment for three months, but it has not waived the interest charge for the three months. Normally, banks and card companies charge up to 42 per cent per annum interest rate on unpaid balance outstanding on credit cards.

"It makes sense not to use the moratorium on card repayment. After three months, banks will ask you to shell out the huge interest charge for three months. The interest rate ranges from 36 to 42 per cent. It's not 8 or 10.5 per cent as in home loans. If a customer has the means to repay card dues, he should continue making repayments," said a banking source.

If a card holder has Rs 50,000 card outstanding, he will have to pay over Rs 5,000 as interest charges for the three month period. This will be added to the principal outstanding dues. If a customer pays only 'minimum due' amount – which is around 5 per cent of the outstandings – by the due date, the payment of the balance will come at a huge cost, i.e. 36-42 per cent interest rate.

"It would be better if credit card customers pay dues by taking a personal loan at cheaper rates," said an SBI official. "If a housing loan is deferred, it would be at 8-10.5 per cent, in personal loan it's 16-22 per cent, working capital 15-20 per cent. In credit card, it's up to 42 per cent." Interest charges during the moratorium period on term loans are also carried forward, but rates on many of these loans are reasonable.

As per RBI data, there were 5.61 crore credit cards in the country, as of January 2020. The total card outstandings as on January 31, 2020 were Rs 1,10,864 crore, showing a spike in growth at 31.6 per cent on a year-on-year basis.

Though the interest rate in the banking system has been coming down in the last one year, interest rate on credit card outstandings has not fallen. Users say the credit card interest rates are outrageous and there's no justification to charge such a high interest rate.

According to bankers, defaults in card repayment affect the credit rating of the customer. "Even missing an installment can bring down the rating. It's better to pay up outstandings as early as possible without utilising the benefit of moratorium. We don't expect all card users to use the three-month moratorium on card repayments," said a banking source.

The high rates on credit cards — considered unsecured debt — are not unique to India alone. In Canada, where normal policy rate is 0.25 per cent, credit card interest rates are between 20-30 per cent. The average credit interest rate in the United States is lower at 16.69 per cent, down by 111 basis points since July 2019.

BANKS MAY EARN UP TO ₹10,000 CR

- Banks could earn up to ₹10,000 crore on accumulated interest charges for the 3-month period if all customers were to delay payments
- The RBI has not waived interest charge for this 3-month period

'Govts, central banks must boost efforts to help economies cope with crisis'

London: Governments and central banks need to step up efforts urgently to support their economies in the face of the coronavirus crisis, the head of the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) said on Sunday.

General Manager Agustín Carstens, who heads BIS — an umbrella group of the world's central banks — wrote an opinion piece on Sunday saying that "urgent" solutions beyond those used during the 2008 financial crisis were needed.

Rules brought in after the 2008 crash were designed to prevent banks overextending themselves, but the worry now is they are not stepping in. **REUTERS**

'Discoms' outstanding dues to gencos rises 32% in Jan y-o-y'

Total outstanding dues owed by discoms to power gencos, rose nearly 32 per cent to ₹88,311 crore in January 2020 over January 2019, according to the PRAAPTI portal

₹6,618.20 cr: OVERDUES OF NON-CONVENTIONAL ENERGY PRODUCERS LIKE SOLAR AND WIND IN JANUARY 2020

25.94%: SHARE OF OVERDUES OF INDEPENDENT GENCOS WITHIN TOTAL OVERDUE OF ₹76,192 CR ON DISCOMS

₹51,453 cr
TOTAL OVERDUE AMOUNT IN JAN 2019

₹86,948 cr
TOTAL OUTSTANDING DUES ON DISCOMS IN DEC 2019

₹75,930 cr
TOTAL OVERDUE AMOUNT ON DISCOMS IN DEC 2019

OVERDUES OF CENTRAL PUBLIC SECTOR GENCOS ON DISCOMS:
- NTPC: ₹11,007.50 crore
- NLC India: ₹4,731.13 crore
- DVC: ₹4,614.49 crore
- NHPC: ₹2,548.85 crore
- THDC India: ₹2,129.53 crore

OVERDUES OF PRIVATE GENCOS ON DISCOMS:
- RKM Powergen: ₹3,421.68 crore
- Adani Power: ₹3,201.68 crore
- Lalitpur Power Generation Company Ltd: ₹2,212.66 crore
- GMR: ₹1,930.16 crore

PRAAPTI: Payment Ratification And Analysis in Power procurement for bringing Transparency in Invoicing of generators, or PRAAPTI, was launched in May 2018

Source: PRAAPTI/PTI

Qatar Airways says it will need state support

REUTERS
DUBAI, MARCH 29

QATAR AIRWAYS will have to seek government support eventually, Chief Executive Akbar al-Baker told Reuters on Sunday, warning that the Middle East carrier could soon run out of the cash needed to continue flying.

Several states have stepped in to help airlines hammered by the coronavirus pandemic that has virtually halted international travel, with the United States offering $58 billion in aid. Qatar Airways is one of few airlines continuing to maintain scheduled commercial passenger services and over the next two weeks expects to operate 1,800 flights.

THE STATE AND COVID-19

Everything's under control

Big government is needed to fight the pandemic. What matters is how it shrinks back again afterwards

A health worker checks a man's temperature at a checkpoint on the outskirts of Duhok, Iraq, earlier this month. *Reuters*

IN JUST a few weeks a virus a ten-thousandth of a millimetre in diameter has transformed Western democracies. States have shut down businesses and sealed people indoors. They have promised trillions of dollars to keep the economy on life support. If South Korea and Singapore are a guide, medical and electronic privacy are about to be cast aside. It is the most dramatic extension of state power since the second world war.

One taboo after another has been broken. Not just in the threat of fines or prison for ordinary people doing ordinary things, but also in the size and scope of the government's role in the economy. In America Congress is poised to pass a package worth almost $2trn, 10% of GDP, twice what was promised in 2007-09. Credit guarantees by Britain, France and other countries are worth 15% of GDP. Central banks are printing money and using it to buy assets they used to spurn. For a while, at least, governments are seeking to ban bankruptcy.

For believers in limited government and open markets, covid-19 poses a problem. The state must act decisively. But history suggests that after crises the state does not give up all the ground it has taken. Today that has implications not just for the economy, but also for the surveillance of individuals.

It is no accident that the state grows during crises. Governments might have stumbled in the pandemic, but they alone can coerce and mobilise vast resources rapidly. Today they are needed to enforce business closures and isolation to stop the virus. Only they can help offset the resulting economic collapse. In America and the euro area GDP could drop by 5-10% year-on-year, perhaps more.

One reason the state's role has changed so rapidly is that covid-19 spreads like wildfire. In less than four months it has gone from a market in Wuhan to almost every country in the world. The past week logged 253,000 new cases. People are scared of the example of Italy, where almost 74,000 recorded cases have overwhelmed a world-class health system, leading to over 7,500 deaths.

That fear is the other reason for rapid change. When Britain's government tried to hang back so as to minimise state interference, it was accused of doing too little, too late. France, by contrast, passed a law this week giving the government the power not just to control people's movements, but also to manage prices and requisition goods. During the crisis its president, Emmanuel Macron, has seen his approval ratings soar.

In most of the world the state has so far responded to covid-19 with a mix of coercion and economic heft. As the pandemic proceeds, it is also likely to exploit its unique power to monitor people using their data. Hong Kong uses apps on phones that show where you are in order to enforce quarantines. China has a passporting system to record who is safe to be out. Phone data help modellers predict the spread of the disease. And if a government suppresses covid-19, as China has, it will need to prevent a second wave among the many who are still susceptible, by pouncing on every new cluster. South Korea says that automatically tracing the contacts of fresh infections, using mobile technology, gets results in ten minutes instead of 24 hours.

This vast increase in state power has taken place with almost no time for debate. Some will reassure themselves that it is just temporary and that it will leave almost no mark, as with Spanish flu a century ago. However, the scale of the response makes covid-19 more like a war or the Depression. And here the record suggests that crises lead to a permanently bigger state with many more powers and responsibilities and the taxes to pay for them. The welfare state, income tax, nationalisation, all grew out of conflict and crisis.

As that list suggests, some of today's changes will be desirable. It would be good if governments were better prepared for the next pandemic; so, too, if they invested in public health, including in America, where reform is badly needed. Some countries need decent sick pay.

Other changes may be less clear-cut, but will be hard to undo because they were backed by powerful constituencies even before the pandemic. One example is the further unpicking of the euro-zone pact that is supposed to impose discipline on the member-states' borrowing. Likewise, Britain has taken its railways under state control—a step that is supposed to be temporary but which may never be retracted.

More worrying is the spread of bad habits. Governments may retreat into autarky. Some fear running out of the ingredients for medicines, many of which are made in China. Russia has imposed a temporary ban on exporting grain. Industrialists and politicians have lost trust in supply chains. It is but a small step from there to long-term state support for the national champions that will have just been bailed out by taxpayers. Trade's prospects are already dim; all this would further cloud them—and the recovery. And in the long term, a vast and lasting expansion of the state together with dramatically higher public debt is likely to lead to a lumbering, less dynamic kind of capitalism.

But that is not the biggest problem. The greater worries lie elsewhere, in the abuse of office and the threats to freedom. Some politicians are already making power grabs, as in Hungary, where the government is seeking an indefinite state of emergency. Israel's prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, appears to see the crisis as a chance to evade a trial for corruption.

The most worrying is the dissemination of intrusive surveillance. Invasive data collection and processing will spread because it offers a real edge in managing the disease. But they also require the state to have routine access to citizens' medical and electronic records. The temptation will be to use surveillance after the pandemic, much as anti-terror legislation was extended after 9/11. This might start with tracing TB cases or drug dealers. Nobody knows where it would end, especially if, having dealt with covid-19, surveillance-mad China is seen as a model.

Surveillance may well be needed to cope with covid-19. Rules with sunset clauses and scrutiny built in can help stop it at that. But the main defence against the over-mighty state, in tech and the economy, will be citizens themselves. They must remember that a pandemic government is not fit for everyday life.

One reason the state's role has changed so rapidly is that COVID-19 spreads like wildfire. In less than four months it has gone from a market in Wuhan to almost every country in the world. The past week logged 253,000 new cases

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SPAIN

The emergency room

Spain has suffered more COVID-19 deaths than any country save Italy

People wearing protective face masks rearrange their shopping for their households in Madrid, on March 29. *Reuters*

WITH ITS carefully spaced empty white beds laid across the dark floor, the pavilion of Madrid's exhibition centre looked like an installation left over from last month's contemporary art fair. In fact it is a field hospital, set up by the army in 18 hours on March 22nd. Three days later it housed more than 300 coronavirus patients, and was being expanded to take up to 5,500. It is the front line in what Spain's Socialist prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, has called "the most serious situation the country has faced since the civil war".

After Italy, Spain is the country worst hit by covid-19, with 78,797 cases and 6,528 dead as of March 29th, with both numbers still rising steeply. It has now overtaken China on the death count. Officials see this week as crucial. With the health system in Madrid, the centre of the outbreak, close to breaking point, the government hopes that a state of emergency and lockdown imposed on March 14th will ensure that the peak of infection will pass by the end of the month. Whatever happens, Spain's economy is heading for deep recession. Its prized health system faces criticism; its politics may be changed.

This week a spectral parliament agreed to extend the state of emergency until Easter. Mr Sánchez has rejected calls from some regional governments to tighten the lockdown further. This already confines most Spaniards to their homes, with no outdoor exercise allowed. It has shut most shops and all bars, restaurants and hotels, but allows factories, farms and building sites to continue. The prime minister notes the restrictions are among the most severe in Europe; tightening them would have an even bigger impact on livelihoods.

The priority now is to get through the health crisis. There are several pressure points. Hospitals and their intensive-care beds in the capital are all but full. As well as the new field hospital, the government has commandeered a dozen hotels for patients with milder symptoms and has ordered private hospitals to admit patients from the public system. The army is ferrying others to quieter areas.

Spain's outbreak has several peculiarities. The high death rate is partly because the virus has cut a swathe through nursing homes, many of which lack medical staff. Spaniards are more tactile than north Europeans and interact much more with older and more vulnerable relatives. It is also because the government and health services, which are decentralised to regional administrations, were slow to react, with almost no testing until long after the virus had gained a hold. Only now have 650,000 test kits arrived, with another 1m on the way. "The lockdown is very important, but not enough," says Daniel López-Acuña, a former official at the World Health Organisation. "It has to be backed up with testing."

Lack of readiness showed itself too in the infection of many health workers (14% of total cases), who lacked protective gear. Spaniards have hailed their steadfastness with nightly applause from balconies. The government hopes to recruit some 50,000 retired or former health workers. Lastly, the virus is now spreading rapidly around the country (faster than in Italy), with Catalonia now accounting for around 20% of cases, behind only Madrid (around a third).

The next worry is the economy. It depends heavily on tourism and the car industry, both of which have shut down completely. Economists are forecasting that GDP will shrink by up to 15%, depending on how long the emergency lasts. Much of that will not be recovered. "Tourists who come later on won't eat two dinners a night," says Toni Roldán of Esade-EcPol, a think-tank.

The government has unveiled an aid package worth up to €200bn (around 16.5% of GDP), half in credit guarantees and €17bn in extra spending on health services and income support. It has guaranteed that workers temporarily laid off (some 1.5m so far) will get unemployment benefit. That will not help the 2.5m workers on short-term contracts or the 3.7m self-employed. Officials say they are working on measures for these groups. "The key issue is immediacy," says Mr Roldán.

How is all this to be paid for? The fiscal deficit could swell to 10% of GDP this year, and, with interest costs rising, push public debt to 120%. No wonder Mr Sánchez is pushing hard for the EU to help out, such as by issuing "coronabonds".

By common consent the government, an inexperienced and uneasy coalition between the Socialists and far-left Podemos, erred in its tardy reaction to the virus. In what now seems another world, ministers were fixated on healing their divisions with a big feminist demonstration on March 8th. But since the start of the state of emergency, which centralised policing and health services, Mr Sánchez has seemed more sure-footed.

His critics have their own difficulties. The conservative People's Party (pp) has oscillated between loyalty and sniping. It runs the Madrid regional government, which was more aggressive than others in cutting health spending and privatising some provision. Quim Torra, the separatist head of the Catalan government, called for the "total confinement" of his region, but has failed to handle the virus well. In a poll this month his was the only region where respondents gave higher marks to the central government than their local one.

Mr Sánchez has made verbose and repetitious televised speeches, much mocked by opponents. But many Spaniards like the fact that he is engaging with the problem and with them, says Charles Powell of the Elcano Royal Institute, a think-tank. Spaniards have generally been more disciplined than other Europeans in observing the lockdown. "There's an element of Spanish patriotism, not nationalism, in this," says Mr Powell. "My prediction is that Sánchez will come out of it looking stronger."

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FRESH SOUND

Nobel Laureate and global music phenomenon Bob Dylan has released a new song after a gap of eight years. The 17-minute song is about the assassination of JFK and is a nostalgic throwback to the sixties.

(From left) Lavanya Tagra and her mother cooking for the elderly in Gurgaon; Sakshi Kapoor delivering meals in Delhi; Aakash Shah's initiative for seniors in Pune

Home, But Not Alone

Youth organisations and sensitive neighbours are rushing to the aid of senior citizens, left stranded in the face of the lockdown

PALLAVI CHATTOPADHYAY

SUNDER HINGORANI, 79, resident of a co-operative housing society in Bandra, had little inkling of the challenges that lay ahead after undergoing a knee-replacement surgery last month. Hingorani, whose daughter is settled in the US and son works in Australia, was advised by doctors not to step out of his house to avoid any serious injury to his knees permanently. With his cook and cleaner not turning up at his doorstep since Sunday after the Prime Minister announced the Janata Curfew, followed by a lockdown, he is among the many elderly living alone, now left on their own to face the lockdown. He possesses no cooking skills (his wife passed away five years ago), and with the neighbouring food outlets not being allowed to deliver, getting his daily meals has been a struggle for him for the past few days.

He called Vishal Mirpuri, a volunteer at the Mumbai-based group Round Table India, to bring him home-cooked food every day, and serving others like him with essential groceries and medicines, without any delivery charges, in Bandra (West). Mirpuri's name and number appears in WhatsApp forwards along with the names of 12 other volunteers, assigned area-wise in places like Vile Parle and Santa Cruz. These forwards have turned into a lifeline of sorts for many stranded senior citizens, whose children live in different cities or are settled abroad. "If Vishal had not come to my help, I cannot imagine my condition. I would have been starving. If my daughter hadn't informed me about the helpline, I wouldn't have got to know about this," says Hingorani, a former Air India employee who worked at the Mumbai airport for 39 years.

GET IN TOUCH

Gurgaon	Lavanya Tagra	9899806306
Pune	Aakash Shah	9657610008
Pan-India	Mahita Nagaraj	9591168886
Mumbai	Vishal Mirpuri	9821321622

Now receiving a hundred calls every day, for help Mirpuri says, "I can't even recall the number of times old people have said 'god bless you' to me in the past few days."

Gurgaon-based homemaker Lavanya Tagra, 37, residing at Vatika City apartments, Sector 49, is supporting senior citizens in the neighbouring apartments. Each day since the lockdown, she has been dropping dalia, poha, roti, vegetable curry and dal at their doorstep, free of cost, keeping social distancing in mind. After posting about her initiative on the Gurgaon Network page of Facebook, comprising over 50,000 members, she has been serving 20 families on a daily basis with the help of her mother. Tagra says, "I cook elderly-friendly food, that's softer on the gums." Volunteers wishing to cater to other seniors in other parts of Gurgaon often come with their requests and pick her home-cooked meals. Tagra hopes more people embark on similar initiatives in their localities.

After receiving calls from her panic-stricken school friends settled in the US and the UK to help their parents stock up groceries for a month, Mahita Nagaraj from Bengaluru took up the cause. She has been helping the senior population — including the bedridden and the specially-abled — through her Facebook page Caremongers India. The digital marketing professional spearheads its operation in all states through the page that has over 10,000 members, most of them volunteers. "We came up with a pan-India helpline number after realising people don't want to ask for help publicly," says Nagaraj, 38. Distress messages from people like Annu Durga, currently stuck in Mumbai, explain how the two helps looking after her mother — a wheelchair-bound dementia patient — have been stopped from coming to work by cops. Volunteers can join the group, find out those in need in their neighbourhood, and help out by delivering medicines or groceries.

In Delhi, Sakshi Kapoor, President of the NGO Save Girl and Senior Citizens Organisation, is helping the elderly in Vasant Kunj. Along with her husband, she dishes out home-cooked lunch and dinner for senior citizens in the C1, C2 and C3 apartments for Rs 80 and Rs 70 respectively on a no-profit-no-loss model. Kapoor says she came up with the initiative after seeing an elderly citizen in the flat above hers struggle for food as the cook did not turn up. Speaking about the 18 orders she delivered last Tuesday, Kapoor says, "I wear gloves and a mask so that I don't touch anything and the food is not contaminated. We are also not taking cash but charging only through Paytm or weekly and monthly payments." She ensures that the food she cooks is made using less spices (masalas) and oil, so that the elderly face no digestion problems.

Eighty four-year-old Naresh Chandra Jain is one of Kapoor's patrons, living in C1 apartments. He chooses not to have food from restaurants for a reason: "I have digestion problems. One can't say how the food is there and hence I don't prefer it. My daughter living nearby suggested Sakshi to me after getting to know about her initiative."

Aakash Shah, 24, is reaching out to those in Pune aged 70 and above, through his youth organisation Action for Pune Development, through Twitter and Facebook. A resident of Adinath Society on Pune-Satara Road, Shah and his team of 60 volunteers have received calls from 350 senior citizens in the last five days, and requests from their respective children residing in other cities are pouring in.

Acknowledging that senior citizens are most vulnerable to COVID-19 and advised to stay at home, Shah says, "Pune has a lot of people settling here after retirement. Many, who are diabetic, have hypertension or thyroid issues, are completely dependent on medicines on a daily basis. Another major demand is for adult diapers. I have never seen a situation where people have called me and said even if I could get rice, that would be enough. Then there are demands for toor dal, Parle G and salt."

ON THE LOOSE

The Post-Covid World

What the threat of contagion is going to do to how we socialise

LEHER KALA

THE LAST movie I saw in a theatre was the Oscar-nominated *Little Women* in February. Despite the convenience of online streaming networks, a film in a hall is a delight to which we return time and again. People of a certain vintage who think of movies as a memorable outing are driven by the ritual of popcorn and trailers, and the unbeatable 35mm screen. There was so much excitement for the presciently titled Bond film *No Time To Die*, but the world has changed overnight. Considering this scenario, one has to wonder if anybody will care about Bond by the time it hits cinemas in November. Quarantined at home, there is time to reflect on joyful moments from not so long ago, when a shared armrest didn't cause one to retreat in wild panic.

The cinema hall is just one example of the old way of life bound to suffer profound and incalculable collateral damage because of the coronavirus. Absolutely nobody, not even for Daniel Craig, wants to be in an enclosed theatre among crowds for the foreseeable future. People are spooked. It is a peculiar conundrum indeed that everything we engaged in for entertainment and culture — restaurants, bars, museums, malls and plays — are potential spaces of contamination. What kind of a life can it be if fear lurks at the back of your head while hailing an Uber, or working out at the gym, that a random encounter may put us or our family members on life support? One may take solace in the fact that extreme paranoia never lasts. Eventually, people will get fed up and regress to old habits.

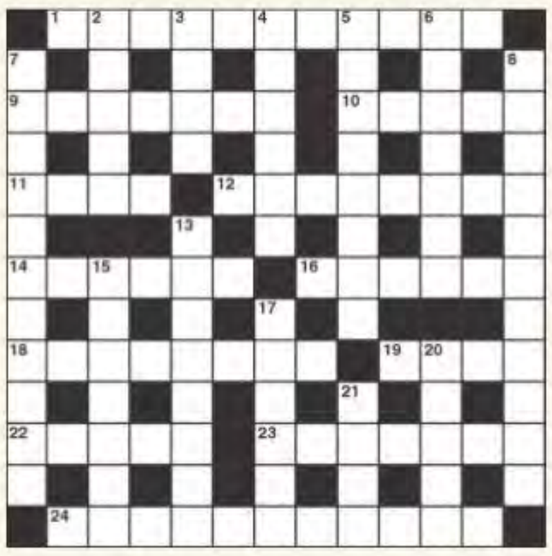
Human beings are wired to relish new experiences. It's what drives us to bungee jump, try different cuisines, send probes to the moon and participate in all that hectic flying around to new destinations. Maybe, we undervalue ordinary moments and overvalue superlatives.

Perhaps the good that will emerge from this pandemic is that it will force us into new ways of seeing; that trivial day-to-day activities, making tea and coffee and one's own bed, carry their own little comforts. History, however, suggests that the world descends back into how it was, no matter what the setback, world war or atomic bombs. Pestilence has come and gone over centuries — the plague, small pox and typhoid — all killers, but mankind thrived while destroying the planet with impunity, creating great art, technology and music along the way. Point to note, through the relentless hardships of the last few weeks, fake happy news of dolphins and whales in Venice and Mumbai resurfacing, have been widely shared. We may be thinking a little more about what's important but our social behaviour remains the same.

Many of us have come to terms with the lockdown and settled down into some sort of routine. I am on my 15th day home as I write this, learning many lessons in patience, which has never been my strong suit. Daily reminders that Anne Frank stayed hidden in an attic for two years without Netflix, helps. Considering people willingly sign up for vipassana, surely a couple of weeks of social deprivation should be handleable. Thank the lord for cheap Internet connections, even a global pandemic hasn't entirely broken up the party. In the evenings, I connect with friends on something called Houseparty, a virtual party App that pre-corona, was used only by teenagers. Currently, it's overrun by middle-aged folk with a lot of time on their hands and nothing to do. (In trivia, post-Corona, houseparty's market capitalisation briefly exceeded Uber's). It's not much of a party though because it's impossible to steer a conversation away from the all consuming Covid-19. Nobody can shed the niggling worry that the lockdown is only a small disruption compared to the chaos that lies ahead.

hutkayfilms@gmail.com

CROSSWORD 4078



ACROSS

1 They follow, one falls but the other breaks (5,3,3)
9 Settle how a monk may live (7)
10 City investment? (5)
11 Fairly large stock company (4)
12 Ingenuity about beginning (8)
14 Smiled wryly when given the wrong directions (6)
16 Make an offer for a boat (6)
18 Scandinavian of manner so strange (8)
19 Come very close to a qualification (4)
22 Not inclined to build (5)
23 Meeting of former associates in Rouen, perhaps (7)
24 Anyway, it's where papers like to have reporters (2,3,6)

Down

2 Blood of the gods upsets the choir (5)
3 Vagrant who needs nothing more than warm place (4)
4 A song from Iolanthe maybe (6)
5 Find the record has finished (8)
6 Declared a number was incorrect (7)
7 Just a privilege objected to (5-6)
8 Boring possibly, but shrewd (11)
13 You'll find the answer at the foot of the column (8)
15 Fit and sure maybe, but altogether too much (7)
17 Tangled brier cut by a playwright (6)
20 Put up a house for sale, perhaps (5)
21 Third power block (4)

Solutions Crossword 4077: Across: 1 Thrush, 4 Obedient, 9 Kaiser, 10 Mountain, 12 Salt, 13 Dozen, 14 Once, 17 Forging ahead, 20 Literary lion, 23 Ivor, 24 Haste, 25 Mail, 28 Port Said, 29 Spools, 30 Resident, 31 Excess. **Down:** 1 Takes off, 2 Raillery, 3 Stem, 5 Broken hearts, 6 Done, 7 Elaine, 8 Tended, 11 Congregation, 15 Minim, 16 Satyr, 18 Pinafore, 19 Analysis, 21 Nipper, 22 Boards, 26 Used, 27 Apex.

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis

CALVIN & HOBBES by Bill Watterson

MARVIN by Tom Armstrong

DAY TODAY

BY PETER VIDAL

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)
The Moon has now spread its emotional sway over all your relationships. The basic message is that there is no time for malingerers, time-wasters and others who imagine they can leech off your goodwill for ever. If you're going to grant someone else a favour, make sure that they deserve it.

TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21)
There does seem to be some cause for discretion today, although exactly why, is not clear. If, on the other hand, you do decide to come clean, all the indications are that you'll receive a fair hearing. That, at least, has to be some consolation.

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21)
If you have been a mite frustrated or muddled as a result of partners' failure to see what was staring them in the face, you may hope that events will now take a turn for the better. Within a few days someone will claim that they knew what you were talking about all along.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23)
The Moon's influence on the uppermost reaches of your solar chart should remind you that you were born under one of the so-called 'cardinal' signs, and that, as this suggests, you were born to lead, not to follow. But, if you want other people to do what they're told, you'd better be pleasant to them.

LEO (July 24 - Aug 23)
Although you are likely to receive some help and assistance today, when other people start lending a hand they may begin to take over. This is why you should first always double-check their apparently good advice. The last thing you want to do is move over while they make a mess of things.

VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sep 23)
You need to know where to draw the line. Only if you take a much firmer stand now will other people respect you. As Mars approaches another relationship with your chart, partners will increasingly be demanding that you do things their way - and the pressure may be hard to resist.

LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)
The key to contentment lies in your ability to get on with people with whom you are increasingly being forced into very close contact. This advice, by the way, can include people you work with as much as people you live with. Don't wait until they see eye-to-eye with you.

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)
Over the next two weeks you will show an increasing tendency to look on the bright side of life and, if you continue to believe that others are certain to help you on your way, they probably will do just that! Some prophecies are self-fulfilling, which is why optimism breeds success.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 22)
Mercury and Mars' intelligent alignments indicate that, where you have gone ahead without consent, you must now reach a retrospective agreement. It is no use just pretending that other people have no right to be consulted. You've got to keep them in the picture.

CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)
If there's one thing that's certain, it's that nothing is certain. The Sun is but a short distance away from its passage into a whole new sector of your chart. This is why you may consider the virtues of keeping certain plans to yourself, perhaps even for another few months. here your limits lie.

AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)
Superficially it looks like decision time, but no matter how hard others try to persuade you to make up your mind, it seems unlikely that any firm choices will be taken. Neither should they be. There is still more information to come along, so be patient.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)
If you've been flogging a dead horse at work, you must now give it a rest. Otherwise it may come as a greater shock when you realise you've been heading very fast down the nearest cul-de-sac. Still, you can console yourself with the knowledge that no experience is wasted, and that you can learn valuable lessons from your mistakes.

JUMBLED WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given quip.

Times have not become more violent. They have just become more ____ - Marilyn Manson (9)

GSEEE

EGNULT

DEZIS

AELVDV

SOLUTION: GEESE, SIZED, GLUTEN, VALVED
Answer: Times have not become more violent. They have just become more **televised** - Marilyn Manson

SUDOKU 4164

Difficulty Level 5s
Instructions
To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

Difficulty Level
1s = Very easy; 2s = Easy; 3s = Medium; 4s = Hard; 5s = Very Hard; 6s = Genius

	5			7	8			
		6					9	
8	3	7						
	9	2	4					
1			6		5			4
					3	1	2	
						5	4	1
	6					3		
			8	4			7	

SOLUTION SUDOKU 4163

7	9	1	6	2	8	5	3	4
2	4	8	5	1	3	9	7	6
6	5	3	4	7	9	1	2	8
9	1	6	2	5	7	8	4	3
8	2	7	3	4	1	6	9	5
4	3	5	8	9	6	2	1	7
1	8	2	7	3	5	4	6	9
3	6	9	1	8	4	7	5	2
5	7	4	9	6	2	3	8	1

TWITTERATI

#IndiaFightsCorona #Covid19India @RaviShastriOfc

Stay indoors people. Crucial phase this. Only thing flying around the world like a tracer bullet is this bloody Corona (COVID-19). Stay in before the bugger gets you.

IPL 2020 likely to be cancelled, no mega auctions next year

Mumbai Indians are the defending champions. *File*

DEVENDRA PANDEY
MUMBAI, MARCH 29

IT'S YET to be made official by the Indian cricket board but it's certain now that Indian Premier League will not happen this year due to the novel coronavirus. The Indian board is waiting for an announcement from the Indian government and sports ministry on visas before it makes the new official. The BCCI will officially address the issue with the IPL franchises after April 15, when the countrywide lockdown initiated by the central government ends.

The Indian government has suspended all foreign visas until April 15. *The Indian Express* understands that if IPL happens next year than there will be no mega auction. Instead, the status quo will be continued and IPL franchises allowed to pick players if they want too. As per the schedule, the mega auction was supposed to take place in 2021 with franchises allowed to retain a few players while the rest were supposed to go under the hammer.

"IPL will not happen this year. It will now happen next year. We all know how the situation is at the moment in the country and no one will take any risk. One can't have social distancing in stadium. It's better to play IPL next year. Also, no mega auction will take place. We will inform the franchises once we get final confirmation from the Indian government, the same season can continue next season," a source in the IPL administration informed.

On March 14, BCCI had a meeting with all IPL owners to discuss coronavirus outbreak and its impact on the upcoming season. Indian board president Sourav Ganguly had then hoped to see a truncated IPL while the franchises felt that board can still do it like they did in 2009 in South Africa when the tournament ran for just 37 days.

"We will monitor further. Safety is most important … as much as we want to host IPL, we also need to be careful about security," Ganguly had said then.

However, the situation is different now with India approaching 1000 positive cases. With Tokyo Olympics already postponed and many sporting events around the world called off, the Indian board doesn't want to take any risks by playing cricket. "The BCCI along with all the IPL franchises have reiterated BCCI's stand of putting the safety and well-being of fans, athletes, and employees as a priority. The board will continue to monitor and work closely with Government of India, state governments and other states regulatory bodies to decide on the future course of action in the best interest of public health," BCCI secretary Jay Shah had said in a statement.

"… humanity first, everything else comes second. The situation has not improved so there is no point in even talking about it. If IPL doesn't happen so be it," Kings XI Punjab co-owner Ness Wadia had told *PTI*.

The BCCI will officially address the issue with the IPL franchises after April 15, when the countrywide lockdown initiated by the central government ends.

Zonal Camp to be suspended

It is learned that the Indian board will suspend the National Cricket Academy zonal camp that was supposed to take place across the country during the summer season. The junior selection committee picks team for Zonal camp and it is understood no selection meeting has yet taken place. NCA conducts camps for fast bowlers, spinners, and batsmen and employees hundreds of coaches to conduct these camps.

BRIEFLY

England players set for pay cuts

London: England's cricket players must "realise the bigger picture" and will be expected to take a pay cut as the country's cricket governing body (ECB) tries to deal with the financial impact of the coronavirus pandemic, The Times reported on Sunday. More than 662,700 people have been infected by the novel coronavirus across the world and 30,751 have died, according to a Reuters tally, and the outbreak has brought global sport to a virtual standstill. England's tour of Sri Lanka was cancelled earlier this month and the ECB announced no professional cricket will be played until the end of May.

England's home test series against West Indies and Pakistan and limited overs series with Australia from June to August are also at risk of being postponed or cancelled if the situation does not improve, leading to a further loss of revenue. "We're looking at everything about how the game can make savings," an ECB spokesman was quoted as saying by The Times.

Boxing fed starts online coaching

New Delhi: Their training halted by the coronavirus-forced national lockdown, India's Olympic-bound boxers will be provided online classes by their coaches from Monday to ensure that aspects such as mental well-being and nutrition are taken care of. Nine Indian boxers have qualified for the Tokyo Games, postponed to 2021 due to the global pandemic which has caused thousands of deaths.

In a conference call with these boxers on Sunday, Boxing Federation of India (BFI) President Ajay Singh took stock of their preparations amid a national lockdown till April 14 to fight the pandemic. "This is a challenging time for all of us and is all the more a reason for us to take care of ourselves...stay fit, continue with the exercises as directed by the coaches and try to maintain your weights as much as possible," Singh told the boxers.

Ex-footballer Recber gets coronavirus

Istanbul: Former Turkish national team and ex-Barcelona goalkeeper Rustu Recber is in hospital after testing positive for coronavirus, his wife said. Recber took on hero status in Turkey as he kept goal at the 2002 World Cup, anchoring his team to the semi-finals and ultimately third place, their greatest ever performance in the tournament. The powerfully built and poney-tailed goalkeeper was easily recognisable.

UMESH YADAV INTERVIEW

'If you get into negativity, you won't find motivation to train and be fit'

UMESH YADAV has stopped worrying about being in and out of the Indian team, and now focusses on giving his best whenever an opportunity arrives. He talks to **SRIRAM VEERA**.

How are you handling the Coronavirus situation?

Staying home. Staying alive! Following what the government is saying. I train at home. This is an extraordinary situation; one can't be thinking about playing sport in these times.

How have you handled being in and out of the national team?

Thoda kharaab, buraa toh lagta hai (You do feel a touch bad) that you aren't getting as many chances. I used to feel a bit down in the past about sitting on the sidelines and watching. But it's important that you make yourself understand the situation. I realised that it's not healthy if I slip into pity. That feeling isn't good as you won't be able to perform well when you get a chance.

You can't complain too much as the other three- Ishant (Sharma), (Mohammed) Shami and (Jasprit) Bumrah are bowling well. So I can understand that for a team management, getting the right balance wouldn't be easy. All four of us are experienced bowlers.

You do well in Indian conditions and you get a *chhaap* (image) like that. It's sort of unfair as if I get regular chances in overseas Tests, I would definitely do well. I hardly get two matches in a row. Unless you play more in those conditions, you will not learn more about those conditions. I have stopped bothering too much about all this. The benchmark in our team is high, and I just want to do well in whatever opportunity I get. You have to always keep your fitness levels high, think that you can play any time. If you get into negativity, you won't find motivation to train and be fit.

Has this constant in-and-out situation affected your aggression? You are one of the fastest bowlers in the world but you don't have that aggressive aura about you.

The main thing is when you don't play back-to-back games and get the odd match in between, what does happen sometimes is that you don't have the match-rhythm of bowling. The kind of confidence that comes when you are consistently playing. That rhythm is different. You do worry about the fact that you might get dropped if you don't do well in this chance. Your focus is different then.

All that runs in the head. You are not thinking, '*jaake mein uda doonga inko*' (I will go and blow them away). Mentally, something else is running. You want to take wickets, give less runs, and stuff like that. All that is bound to affect your bowling. When you bowl *bindaas, khulke*, without a care, it's a completely different experience and you look different to people. You have no mental pressure. When you are coming back for a game in six months, you don't have that positive body language as there are too many things running in your head. I keep telling myself and prepare myself mentally –that's why you see I do well in Tests whenever I play - but you understand, it's not easy and there is bound to be some affect. As I don't even play ODIs, my off-period is longer.

But aggression doesn't mean you get into angry fights with batsmen. I am not talking about that kind of behaviour. What's the use of getting angry with the batsmen? If some batsmen trigger me deliberately, may be yes, but generally I like to keep calm and do my thing. That's my nature.

Umesh Yadav played just two overseas Tests in the last two years. *File*

It's been a dream journey. My father used to be a coal-mine worker. He wanted me to be a policeman and I too wanted a secure simple life. Here I am now playing for India. Years ago, I told him to stop working and enjoy life for a change. Life has given me more than I have asked of it."

UMESH YADAV

What's happening with the whole ODI stuff?

I haven't understood that. White or red, the skill lies in swinging the ball, na? I can do it as I have done it. Of course, the lengths will vary and that is obvious and down to cricketing intelligence. If I get a series of ODIs, I feel I can prove myself as a wicket-taking bowler. I do feel I haven't been used properly by selectors in ODIs. Get a game here and there, then sit out for six months. It does get difficult. Career has never been stable. Always up and down. I did well at the 2015 World Cup, but then again out.

On a lighter side, no one has to worry about my workload management as I don't get enough work! (laughs).

Who helps you handle these emotions?

Myself! It's not new; I have always been in and out of the team, through my career. My circle of people is also good. Subbu sir, Subroto Banerjee (former India bowler and coach) is a very energetic and happy person. He doesn't allow me to linger too long in negativity. Another cricketer, Pritam Gandhi bhai is also there, another direct talker, doesn't give any false hopes.

So it's good, I feel. And when you perform well in the chances you are given; all doubts go out of the head. That gives you the most confidence. My main thought is to play cricket. Yes, I am a cricketer who plays for India but the main thing is the game which got me here. I want to play well wherever and whichever team I play – be it Ranji Trophy, India A, or for India. Just enjoy swinging it at pace.

Do you see yourself as a swing bowler or a fast bowler?

Primarily a fast bowler, but a fast bowler who swings the ball at 140 kmph and over. In this day and age, just bowling 140 kmph and over isn't enough. You will get hit. You have to swing it and from the right areas. Try to get it to swing as late as possible and at pace. Not easy, not many bowlers do it but that's my aim. There are bowlers who seam the ball off the pitch, I like to get it to swing. Swing bowlers are very few, especially those who do it at pace.

You used to seam it well as well. That ball to Ricky Ponting in the 2012 Perth Test, it came in to knock down his stumps!

I remember that ball well! But essentially, I see myself as an outswing bowler. At times, I have tried to get it to swing in from a really full length but because of minor problems with the grip in the past, it has gone down the leg side. I have sorted that out.

Could you detail the changes in grip now?

I used to hold the ball a bit up, on the top, with the fingertips. Some hold it in the palm, some hold it tight. I used to hold it up. When the head would fall, the ball would tilt away towards leg stump. I tried a few grips. With the fingertips. Now it sits well in the palm, not too loose. It has done two things for me of late: it doesn't go down the leg side and, most importantly, it swings late. I felt that before the ball would swing too early, almost from the hand.

Now it swings late. Just a tweak really but it has helped a lot. After playing for years, you know what to do according to the conditions. My action does change also, high-arm or jumping out towards the corner, and things like that.

Apart from that ball to take out Ponting, what else do you treasure?

Clean bowling Faf du Plessis. Then the reverse-swinging spell against South Africa in the (2015) Delhi Test. Reverse swing comes naturally to me as I have a round-arm-ish action. I treasure a comment from the great West Indian fast bowler Andy Roberts. He said that I am a natural fast bowler, still bowling fast after 8-10 years. He encouraged me saying that's a great thing, continue bowling fast. Those comments drive me. God has given me a good body, so why not use it?!

Look, I started leather-ball cricket when I was 19-20. When I played Ranji Trophy, others used to tell me that I am India material. It's then that I thought I could do it. It's been a dream journey. My father used to be a coal-mine worker. He wanted me to be a policeman and I too wanted a secure simple life. Here I am now playing for India. Years ago, I told my father to stop working and enjoy life for a change. Life has given me more than I have asked of it.

A DIFFERENT GEAR

Protective masks for health professionals, now cut from Yankees' cloth

DAVID WALDSTEIN
NEW YORK, MARCH 29

HAD THE baseball season not been postponed because of the coronavirus, players across the country would have been decked out in crisp new uniforms for opening day on Thursday. Now, some uniforms will be put to better use.

Fanatics, the company that manufactures the Nike uniforms for Major League Baseball, has temporarily converted its domestic factory in Easton, Pa., to produce desperately needed protective masks and gowns for medical professionals who are fighting the pandemic in the United States.

The masks are made from the same bolts of polyester mesh fabric used to make big-league uniforms, and the first prototypes bear the distinctive pinstripes of the Yankees and the Philadelphia Phillies.

"We've got tremendous amounts of fabric, which is exactly what the players wear," said Michael Rubin, the founder and executive chairman of Fanatics. "We're just taking it and making the masks and gowns that can be used by the people who are working to save lives every day."

Protective masks have been in short supply across the country, leaving health care workers more vulnerable to infection as they work with patients being treated or tested for Covid-19. The coronavirus is generally transmitted through viral droplets — often emitted by coughing, spitting or sneezing — and from contaminated surfaces. At best, doctors should be wearing respirators, eye protection and gloves. Gowns are also needed because the virus can survive for periods of time on surfaces of some materials.

Rubin said prototypes of the new masks made with the material for baseball uniforms were developed last week, with help from experts from the St. Luke's hospital system in Pennsylvania. The masks will go there and to the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency first.

He said that they provided basic protection, not the best protection found in respirators, but that they were still useful in a crisis. They would not be approved for surgery.

Rubin said the state of Pennsylvania offered to pay for the production, but Fanatics and M.L.B. agreed to bear the costs. "When Michael called me about this, it was the first piece of good news in a while," Rob Manfred, the commissioner of Major League Baseball, said in a telephone interview. "I really hope it's just the first step in baseball contributing to the country getting back on the road to normalcy."

The shift is part of a broader push for apparel companies to make basic medical goods quickly, using material and equipment that are not specialized, like those required for some respirators. The Fanatics factory was closed last week as part of mass closures of nonessential indusRubin, who is also a part owner of the Philadelphia 76ers of the N.B.A., said he was already discussing the possibility of making masks and gowns with the material in stock at Fanatics when the company was contacted by St. Luke's, seeking help with protective equipment. March and April are normally months when Fanatics is busy producing uniforms for teams and for commercial sales, so Rubin called Manfred for permission to use the material for the masks and gowns. Manfred was eager to support the project.

"I just love the symbolism of patterns that are associated with baseball being used by the people who are carrying a huge burden for all of us," Manfred said.

Gov. Tom Wolf heard about the endeavor and called Rubin to urge him to go forward.

Wolf said in a statement that he was grateful for the shift by Fanatics. "Their innovative approach will be a model for other businesses to follow in Pennsylvania and throughout the country," Wolf said.

The first masks, bearing the Phillies and Yankees' pinstripes, came out of production on Wednesday and were expected to be distributed to hospitals within a couple of days. Fanatics hopes to produce at least 10,000 masks and gowns per day to start, but Rubin said that they hoped to increase to 15,000 per day. He said they had enough uniform material in stock for two months.

After supplying hospitals in Pennsylvania, Fanatics will look toward New Jersey and New York with masks and gowns made from Yankees pinstripes. If they have the capacity to produce for other areas, and it is feasible, those could be made from the uniforms of the teams in those areas, too.

NYT

The masks are made from the same bolts of polyester mesh fabric used to make big-league uniforms. *NYT*

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