

# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA  
HYDERABAD | WEDNESDAY | 1 APRIL 2020

**WEATHER**  
Max: 37.3°C  
Min: 23.7°C  
RH: 31%  
Rain: Nil  
Forecast: Partly cloudy sky with haze.  
Max/Min temp. 37/24°C

**CORONA COUNT**

CASES	DEATHS
1397	35
TS: 96	06
AP: 44	00

**WORLD CONFIRMED CASES**  
8,00,000

**DEATHS**  
38,540+

**COUNTRIES AREAS WITH CASES**  
183

**ASTROGUIDE**

Sarvari: Uttarayana  
Tithi: Chaitra Suddha Ashtami till 3:38 am (Thursday)  
Star: Arudra till 7:23 pm  
Varyyam: Nil  
Durmuhurtam: 11:55 am to 12:44 pm  
Rahukalam: 12 noon to 1:30 pm  
**HJRI CALENDAR**  
Shabaan 6,1441 AH  
**PRAYERS**  
Fajar: 5:10 am  
Zohar: 12:30 pm  
Asar: 4:41 pm  
Maghrib: 6:35 pm  
Isha: 7:43 pm  
SUNSET TODAY 6:29 PM  
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6:10 AM  
MOONRISE TODAY 11:48 AM  
MOONSET TODAY NA

**COUNTER POINT**



You are lucky! You don't have corona, only swine flu, jaundice, dengue, HIV...

**IN BRIEF**

**Only BS-6 fuel from today**  
Hyderabad: India will switch to cleaner BS-VI fuel from April 1, joining select club of countries. The new fuel contains just 10 part per million (ppm) of sulphur and reduce nitrogen oxide emissions considerably. The switch to cleaner fuel was planned in 2016 by the Narendra Modi government. Though public sector oil marketing companies meet April 1, 2020 deadline, auto companies got 10 day extension to sell vehicles that run on older BS-IV fuels.

**Euro chief warns EU's break-up**  
Brussels: Eurogroup president Mario Centeno warned the euro single currency could break apart if feuding governments don't bury the hatchet and agree on a rescue plan to help Italy and Spain. The warning came as the 19 members of the single currency still cannot agree on a rescue plan to reverse the impact of the coronavirus. — PTI

**Brokerages: Cut trading hours**  
Hyderabad: The Association of National Exchanges Members of India (Anmi), which represents nearly 900 brokerages, asked market regulator Sebi reduce market hours four from the current six hours 15 minutes. The brokerages body want the markets to from function from 10 am to 2 pm as against the present 9.15 am to 3.30 pm in view of national lockdown.



**WORLD | 8**  
China may test Covid vaccine abroad



**BUSINESS | 9**  
PSBs' mega merger comes into effect

**TABLOID**  
Buying ventilators? It is sheer stupidity



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## City has 603 Tablighi suspects

### Telangana reports 15 Covid positive patients; officials form teams to trace Markaz visitors

MADHY DEEKSHITH AND JAYENDRA CHAITHANYA  
T. I DC  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 31

Telangana state registered a steep increase in number of coronavirus positive cases with the government on Tuesday announcing 15 new cases — the single largest jump in the state in one day.

All the cases announced on Tuesday were of people who had either visited the event organised by the Tablighi Jamaat at the Markaz mosque in Nizamuddin of Delhi between March 13 and 15, or relatives of those who attended it, health minister Etala Rajendar said in an official statement.

Tuesday's cases took the total Covid-19 tally so far to 96, of which 14 patients have been discharged while six others have died, leaving 76 active coronavirus cases under treatment as on Tuesday in different hospitals in the state. According to the government, in all, 1,030 persons from the Telangana attended the Markaz.

The immense impact of the Tablighi Jamaat organised events in Delhi on the spread of coronavirus in Telangana, sent state officials, including the police, scrambling to trace every one of the 1,030 persons and bring them to hospitals, or place them under home quarantine, along with members of their families and their other contacts. The government poured in manpower forming special teams that fanned out across all districts of Telangana for the purpose.

In the city itself, 200 special teams including the GHMC, revenue and police officials, fanned out to trace, locate and get 603 Markaz attendees from the city to book. "It did not help any that many of the addresses we had for these people were fake. It has been a Herculean task to locate them," an official said.

A senior police official said, "about 90 per cent of the people state-wide who visited Delhi for the religious event have been traced. Those with symptoms of Covid-19 were shifted to government hospitals and quarantine centres for treatment."

All put, official said, the total number of Covid-19 suspects in the state connected to Markaz visitors now may be in thousands. "But we have to identify and trace every one of them and check them for symptoms," he added.

In the city, GHMC officials were up and running early and formed 200 special teams to identify 603 persons from the city who attended Markaz. The teams inspected houses of 463 people and identified that 74 persons have been suffering from Covid-19 symptoms, apart from various other ailments.

■ Page 4: A large group returned from Delhi by road



People, who came for a religious gathering at Nizamuddin mosque, are being taken to a hospital for Covid-19 test in New Delhi on Tuesday. — PTI

## Tablighi spreads Covid in AP

### AP adds 21 cases in 1 day; 711 people from AP visited Markaz

MD ILYAS I DC  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 31

The Tablighi Jamaat meet conducted by the Markaz masjid at Nizamuddin is turning into a disaster for Andhra Pradesh too. Twentyone new coronavirus (Covid-19) positive cases were identified in the state on Tuesday, taking the total to 44, out of whom 18 persons had returned from the meet.

Prakasam district tops the list, with 11 new positive cases, followed by Visakhapatnam (10),

Guntur with nine positive cases, Krishna (five), East Godavari (four), Anantapur (two), and one each registered in Chittoor, Kurnool and Nellore districts.

Adding to the crisis, people are falling for rumours wherein even non-coronavirus deaths in the family of any Delhi returnee is being related to Covid.

Besides this, people who met any of the Delhi returnees in various places in Guntur district are fearing community transmission and rushing

to the Guntur General Hospital for testing.

The Markaz meet was conducted from March 15 to 17 and was presided by Moulana Saadh, head of the Markaz mosque. Tablighi Jamaat leader Ikram Ali of Hyderabad supervised the programme.

State officials found 711 people who attended the meet from Andhra Pradesh, in which officials traced whereabouts of 626 people and shifted them to quarantine. The search is on for information on the remaining 85.

The highest number of people who went to attend the Delhi meet are from Kurnool district (189), followed by districts of Guntur (88), Anantapur (73), Nellore (68), Prakasam (67), Kadapa (59), Krishna (43), Visakhapatnam (42), Chittoor (36), East Godavari (27), West Godavari (16) and Vizianagaram (three).

Many of these returnees transmitted Covid-19 to their family members, including their wives, and the officials have shifted them to quarantine.

## SC ASKS CENTRE TO PREVENT MIGRATION

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 31

A day after the Uttar Pradesh administration received flak for spraying migrant labourers with some unspecified chemicals, the Centre told the Supreme Court on Tuesday that there is a possibility that three out of 10 migrant workers heading towards their villages are carrying the deadly novel coronavirus.

The court was also told by the Centre that now there are no migrant workers on the road, a submission contradicted by reports and images coming in on Tuesday.

In its daily briefing, the Union home ministry said over 6.6 lakh stranded and destitute people have been housed in shelter camps across the country.

■ Full report on Page 5

## Centre to focus on urban areas

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 31

The Union health ministry on Tuesday said that cities and states with the highest number of positive cases are being treated as major hotspots of Covid-19 and the government is making all efforts to focus on them to contain the spread of the virus. But at the same time it emerged that till now only 42,788 people have been tested in the country so far for the deadly virus.

Since India recorded its first confirmed positive case in Kerala on January 30, this means that an average of 713 tests have been conducted every day in a country of 1.3 billion.

During the last 24 hours, 121 new confirmed cases and three deaths have been reported in India, taking the total confirmed cases to 1,397, and the death toll to 35. By late Tuesday evening, there

## MEDICAL GEAR EXPORT TO SERBIA KICKS UP ROW

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 31

Ending a controversy on alleged export of protective medical equipment to Serbia in contravention of a ban, a government official said the consignment did not contain any item, whose export was prohibited.

The official said 90-tonne consignment was purchased from vendors

in India by Serbia and was flown from Kerala to Serbian capital Belgrade. The consignment reportedly includes "35 lakh pairs of sterile latex surgical gloves".

While the export of latex gloves was banned, the government official said the government had banned the export is on Nitrile Rubber (NBR) gloves.

According to reports from Europe on Tuesday,

"A second cargo Boeing 747 landed at Nikola Tesla Airport in Belgrade from Kerala, with 90 tonnes load of medical protective equipment bought by Serbia to combat COVID-19".

The reports said "the cost for the transport of the equipment was fully funded by the European Union."

■ Page 7: Cochin Port tweeted about export

were 1,238 active cases, 123 people have been cured while one left India.

The sudden spurt in cases in the last couple of days is being attributed to the Delhi mosque gathering in Nizamuddin where 24 have tested positive so far and health agencies have intensified contact

tracing of those who attended the event.

The government is facing severe criticism for having one of the lowest testing rates in the world. Over 200 scientists and members of the Indian academic community on Tuesday asked the government to rapidly enhance

testing facilities to detect Covid-19 in every region.

Defending the government, ICMR scientist Dr Raman Gangakhedkar said so far 42,788 samples have been tested for Covid-19 out of which 4,346 samples were tested on Monday, while the private sector screened 399 cases.

**OFFICIAL | APATHY** Experts say TS would have seen fewer cases if suspects were traced earlier

## TS ignored Centre's warning on Markaz

KANIZA GARARI | DC  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 31

A total of 257 people who attended a religious congregation at Markaz Nizamuddin in New Delhi a couple of weeks ago came to the Gandhi Hospital for testing on Tuesday. The testing was going on till late night as people were waiting for their turn. Of all the people who have come from different parts of Hyderabad, about 30 of

them are from one area.

It is suspected that this could lead to a cluster transfer of Coronavirus (Covid-19) in the state if a majority of them test positive. So far, most of these people do not have any symptoms. These people said they had been to the Markaz, but as they had no travel history to any foreign country, they did not suspect that they could have been infected by the disease. The congregation

was attended only by men, most of them middle-aged.

The prayer meeting is an annual event and they go there every year. Members claimed that all precautionary announcements made by the government were being followed at the meet, save the request not to hold congregations. Since there were no symptoms in any of them, none of them felt a suspicion that Covid-19 could strike the gathering.

They said they are now scared after being brought to hospital by health workers and the police. The queue to get tested was fairly long and only six people were allowed in the room at a time. The Gandhi Hospital got 15 teams ready for testing purpose and nasal swabs were taken.

The action of the state government on Tuesday to track, quarantine and test all those who attended the event, and their touch-

points, comes after six deaths were reported in the state.

The cluster of Indonesians, which was being tracked by the government, showed that there were smaller groups which had splintered in different directions.

There are a lot of questions, which are now coming to fore, especially after a note by Union home ministry which says that it had informed Telangana gov-

ernment about this risk on March 21.

If that was the case, experts are asking why did the Telangana government take so long to track these people.

The Indonesians have recovered completely and are fine, which implies that had the rest been tracked on time, several lives could have been saved and any others would have been spared the infection.

■ Full report on Page 9







## SHORT TAKES

HALF SALARY,  
PENSION UNFAIR,  
SAY PARENTSHARLEEN MINOCHA | DC  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 31

The Telangana Parents Association (TPA) vehemently opposed the state government order to pay half the salaries and pensions of state employees and pensioners for March.

Nagati Narayana, state president, TPA in a letter to the Chief Minister over the issue said that it was irresponsible of the government to pass such an order during the lockdown.

"In the situation that we see today, the expenditure being incurred by the people is immense. Most of the salary and pension goes into paying rent and EMIs, stocking up basic essentials and fulfilling medical needs.

Families are facing financial problems. This order will defeat the spirit of the lockdown," he said.

Mr. Narayana, on behalf of the Telangana Parents Association, demanded that the government retire the order and pay full salaries and pensions.

SALARIES WILL  
NOT BE CUT BUT  
DECLAYED: STATES.N.C.N. ACHARYULU | DC  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 31

The state government has clarified that it has not cut the salaries of its employees but has only deferred their payment.

It may be recalled that the Telangana government had earlier announced a cut in salaries of all government employees including All India Service (AIS) officers and public representatives including MLAs.

Employees and others thought that they will lose a part of their salary due to the government's decision.

According to an order issued by the state administration on Tuesday, the government is only deferring the payment of salaries, wages and allowances.

The order says due to the present crisis, the state government has decided deferment in payment of salaries from the month of March 2020, payable on 1st April. This order will be in force till a further order is issued in this regard.

Officials too have clarified that only a part of the salary will be paid for the month of March. The balance salary will be paid to all at a later date. Officials maintain that the government is not in a position to pay the full salaries at present due to financial constraints.

● OFFICIALS TOO have clarified that only a part of the salary will be paid for the month of March. The balance salary will be paid to all at a later date

## Workers angry with KCR over pay cut

Employees, families find decision unpalatable; move may also demoralise them amid Covid fight

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 31

The decision of Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao to cut the monthly pay of state government employees by half has come as a shocker to employees. Though nobody has dared to challenge it, considering the war-like situation, the phlegmatic posturing by employees could not be considered as a red herring.

Through a late evening government order (GO), the TRS government announced a 50 per cent pay cut to 70 per cent of employees and pensioners — rest being staffers of Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) and outsourced employees. Even employees of PSUs, including the Singareni Collieries Company Ltd, would also be affected under the 50 per cent pay cut scheme, though the employees of electricity department might be exempted.

A ballpark estimate is that the monthly salary bill of Telangana runs to almost ₹3,200 crore. Excluding the electricity employees and outsourced employees, the salary outgo aggregates to about ₹2,850 crore. A cut by means the state government will save ₹1,400 crore a month owing to this decision.

Despite the Covid-19 being a global crisis and no one being immune to it, Telangana government staff find the pay cut an unpalatable decision, with employee and their families being furious at Mr Rao's decision. For almost all employees who depend on salaries, the equated monthly instalments (EMIs) of housing loan, car loan, personal loan, and in some cases, house rent, milk bill, grocery, cable TV bill, electricity bill, often empties the bank accounts where

salaries are deposited. There is still confusion over the announcement made by Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman about moratorium or deferment on EMI payments, including if it applies from April 1, whether banks have calibrated their software to defer deduction of instalments towards loans through auto-debit mode.

There is also confusion whether it applies to personal loans and credit cards, and if individuals should apply to respective banks seeking to avail the moratorium. Most employees, who would receive only 50 per cent of salary, are keeping their fingers crossed.

A several staff union leader in Telangana, who requested anonymity saying "this is not the right time to blame it on government", said it is employees who make any government scheme a success, though politicians take credit.

"Everybody perceived huge expenditure on Kaleswaram project and other irrigation schemes, close to ₹ 1.20 lakh crore, an investment to generate a permanent economic

activity. The service of employees in making this project a reality was not small. Yet, today we are being punished," he said.

Leader of another union said, "half pay would mean half work or half-hearted work. For that matter, every scheme launched by TRS government has been a big hit with wholehearted and full-fledged support of

employees. But, now they are pained as resources into exchequer ebbed for no fault of ours."

The state government employees were looking forward to amounts they might receive as arrears and enhanced monthly pay, once pay-revision commission submits its recommendations and the same were implemented.

The PRC would have to be implemented from July 1, 2018. Now, with Covid-19 casting its darkest shadow on prospect of implementing PRC, government employees are disappointed. "They are now feeling it would be enough if current salary hits their accounts without a cut, leave alone a revised and enhanced pay check," said a union leader.

The dole promised to government staff during elections includes enhancing retirement age to 61 and scrapping of Contributory Pension Scheme; now, these two are also unlikely to happen.

Employees are irked that Chief Minister Rao suddenly announced the decision to cut their pay. "He could have discussed options and cut pay by 25 per cent and cut expenditure on welfare schemes partially too," he said.

"The state is spending almost ₹25,000 crore for purchase of more than one crore metric tonnes of paddy and entire output of maize. If the state had purchased only 50 per cent of these two crops, it could have utilised the remaining ₹12,500 crore for other things," said a senior bureaucrat.

"CM Rao could have balanced other welfare schemes to maintain salary and pension bill. Instead, he forced his own machinery to sacrifice government staff earnings. Maybe employees would grudgingly hold their anger for now and uncork bottled-up anger later," he said.

A senior doctor wrote, "This is truly disgusting and demoralising the doctor fraternity. Instead of boosting our morale, the Telangana government is diverting our attention as we will not get our regular rightful salary. Scarcity of funds is only an excuse not to carry out their duties and appreciate those who are fighting day and night with minimal resources in hospitals."

The Telangana Joint Action Committee (TJAC) of health and medical department got into action as doctors demanded that government must be apprised of their work and their salaries must not be cut.

The TJAC explained that out-patient department is everyday seeing patients with cough, cold and fever and many of them are not revealing their travel and contact histories.

KCR says state is revenue surplus,  
why cut salary, ask Congress, BJPS.A. ISHAQUI | DC  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 31

The state Congress has strongly opposed the decision of the state government to cut salaries of government employees and slash pensions. BJP state president Bandi Sanjay Kumar also vehemently opposed the decision of Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao.

Mr Kumar requested the Chief Minister to reconsider his decision of paying only 50 per cent of salary to government employees, teachers and pensioners and deferring salaries and pensions to 10 per cent of Class IV employees and pensioners.

Expressing complete solidarity with Mr Rao's efforts to contain the spread of Covid-19, he pointed out that the Chief Minister had declared Telangana as a surplus revenue state.

He said, "I am unable to understand how could the state financial position deteriorated in less than 15 days of announcing of the lockdown."

He reminded that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had directed paying of salaries to employees of

private and even unorganised sectors for the lockdown period. If the government cuts salaries, it is obvious that the private sector will take advantage of it, Mr Sanjay said.

Several Congress leaders including MPs Komatireddy Venkata Reddy and A. Revanth Reddy, former minister Mohammed Ali Shabbir, and TPCC treasurer Gudur Narayana Reddy, AICC official spokesperson Dasoju Sravan and TPCC spokesperson Indira Shoban while opposing the state's decision said Mr Chandrashekar Rao was wrongly trying to take advantage of an epidemic to cut down the salaries of employees and pensions.

They said that the move would demoralise the government staff which has been working relentlessly for the last 10 days to prevent the spread of coronavirus in the state.

They said that employees of all departments are involved in anti-coronavirus operations and the health, police, energy and municipal administrations departments are working round the clock basis to provide essential services to the people during the lockdown, employees of other departments are taking care of logistics and other managerial tasks. While demanding that the government issue a White Paper on the state finances and explain the sudden economic crisis, Mr Shabbir Ali said, "it will be a shock for all the employees to learn that they would be getting only 50 per cent of their salary this month."

He questioned how could the state became poor within less than 15 days and be unable to pay the full salaries and pensions.

Mr Komatireddy Venkata Reddy reminded that during the announcement of lockdown, the Chief Minister had announced spending of ₹10,000 crores to combat Covid-19 as Telangana state is rich.

He questioned how could the state became poor within less than 15 days and be unable to pay the full salaries and pensions.

Dr Sravan said state employees who had retired depend solely on their pensions. If they get only 50 per cent of their pension at this crucial hour they would suffer mental agony and trauma.

Ms Shoban said that instead giving incentives to the employees who are on 24x7 duty since the outbreak of Covid-19, the move to cut salaries was inhuman.

Congress leaders demanded that the government withdraw the decision for and re-assure the employees they would not face any financial burden.

There is also confusion whether it applies to personal loans and credit cards, and if individuals should apply to respective banks seeking to avail the moratorium. Most employees, who would receive only 50 per cent of salary, are keeping their fingers crossed.

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activity. The service of employees in making this project a reality was not small. Yet, today we are being punished," he said.

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employees. But, now they are pained as resources into exchequer ebbed for no fault of ours."

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Revanth opposes CM's  
decision on salary cutIREDDY SRINIVAS  
REDDY | DC  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 31

TPCC working president and Malkajgiri Congress MP Revanth Reddy has found fault with the decision of Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao to impose 50 per cent cut in salaries of state government employees and pensioners.

In an open letter written to the Chief Minister on Tuesday, he opposed the decision, stating that it will demoralise employees, paramedical staff, doc-

tors and Class 4 employees and police, all of whom are on 24x7 duty following the outbreak of Covid-19.

The MP said: "The country is facing a calamity because of Covid-19. In such a crisis, the government should not take hasty decisions."

He regretted that on one hand, the government was appealing that people stay away from gatherings and maintain social distance. On the other, it has asked revenue officials to issue notices for land acquisition to build the

Pharma City complex in Ranga Reddy district. He said revenue authorities are holding a public hearing on April 3 in this regard.

Mr Revanth Reddy also questioned the irrigation department's move calling tenders on Monday for works to be undertaken for the third phase of lifting water from the Kaleswaram project.

"Is it time for tenders or conducting public hearing for land acquisition," he asked, appealing to the CM to re-think on the issues raised in his open letter.

## Covid cricket



Youth kill time playing cricket in an open space near Jamai Osmania railway station on Tuesday.

—GANDHI

## 2 nabbed for arson attempt

JAYENDRA CHAITHANYA  
T | DC  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 31

Two men from the city attempted to burn a religious place, an RTC bus and an ATM centre. They hurled petrol bombs at the religious place last week but there was no damage to property or life, said the Hyderabad police.

On March 14, some bottles of liquor were found at a place of worship in Madannapet. On checking,

police found that they were filled with kerosene, and it was an attempt to set ablaze the place. There was no damage to property or life.

The South Zone Task Force sleuths on Tuesday apprehended Arshad, 22, and Abdul Wasi, 20, both residents of the city, and childhood friends, for these crimes.

The two were motivated by the imposition of the Citizenship Amendment Act and the National Register of Citizens, said

Task Force Additional DCP G. Chakravarthy. "They closely observed the incidents in Delhi and at Shaheen Bagh. They also watched the recent riots in Delhi on social media applications. They were attracted to the speeches against the CAA and assumed that their community may be expelled from the country," Mr Chakravarthy said.

He said the accused believed that the Centre was suppressing the Muslim community and so

they hatched a plan to disturb the peaceful atmosphere in the city.

In the course of the investigation, police found that Arshad and Wasi were also involved in attempts to set ablaze an RTC bus at Kanchanbagh, an Axis Bank ATM kiosk at Chandrayangutta and a religious place at Madannapet, said the Additional DCP. He said further investigation is underway in all the three cases and the accused will be produced before a court.

IN FOND MEMORY  
7th ANNIVERSARY

## Sri A. BALA KUMAR

4th October 1941 - 1st April 2013

Daddy, Deep in our hearts you'll always inspire us.

We miss you every day.

Always Yours :

Bagi, Madhavi, Suneetha, Seenu, Nanna, and SNL FAMILY



# DECCAN Chronicle

1 APRIL 2020

## More vigilance needed to keep Covid-19 at bay

The sudden outbreak and detection of a large number of coronavirus cases that can be traced back to a thousands-strong religious congregation held in New Delhi's Nizamuddin area, that has already caused the deaths of at least 10 Indians and one foreigner in different parts of the country (including six in Telangana), is a warning on the perils of not taking "social distancing" seriously. At least 250 foreign nationals — including from virus-hit Malaysia and Indonesia — had come to attend the congregation hosted by the Tablighi Jamaat at its Markaz facility in the first half of March, many of whom were among the 1,500-odd people still there on Monday, when the city's health authorities swung into action and took at least 300 of them to hospitals. At least 24 of them have tested positive. True, the event was held before the lockdown went into effect in Delhi and the rest of India, but given the flurry of advisories early on cautioning people against gatherings of large numbers of people due to the virus threat, the actions of both the Tablighi Jamaat and the governmental authorities in allowing it to carry on was irresponsible, to say the least. The area was finally cleared on Tuesday morning, with the police moving 700-plus people to quarantine in different parts of the city, and a police case lodged against the mosque administration, but the damage has largely been done.

While the Tablighi incident is a wake-up call on the consequences of slackness in the face of a health emergency, the callous actions of those in authority in the face of the grave humanitarian crisis that we face — particularly the plight of migrants with no food or shelter who feel compelled to make the long trek homewards — is also a cause of great alarm. The shocking action of the municipal authorities in Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh — in hosing down a large group of migrants on the move with a chemical solution described by some as "insecticide" — was brutal and inhuman, to say the very least. In the face of outrage in the social media after a video of the spraying went viral, and vociferous protests by Opposition leaders, the district magistrate of the area was forced to admit that the municipal authorities had "gone too far", but who will be held responsible for this horror? This was one more example, if any was needed, that the rights and protections that our middle classes take for granted — even in extraordinary times — do not seem to apply to the poor in India.

There was no real alternative to the nationwide lockdown that was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi a week ago. Those who believe that it could have been avoided just need to look at the plight of New York — a shining symbol of the richest and most powerful country in the world — which now threatens to be the epicentre of the coronavirus pandemic — to see what could have happened had India delayed any further. But our government failed to realistically assess the impact this measure would have on the most vulnerable sections of our population, and plan accordingly. Some steps are now being taken, but much more needs to be done.

## A political pardon

Sri Lanka refuses to be accountable to the world for the war crimes committed in the course of winning the war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The decision of its president Gotabaya Rajapaksa to pardon the soldier R.M. Sunil Ratnayake is not only deeply disappointing but also sends quite the wrong signal to the UN and the world that the island nation will not bow to international opinion on respecting the law against war crimes.

The hand of the Rajapaksas, who returned to power last year, is behind this decision to exonerate the only soldier of five who had been sentenced to death for a war crime in the village of Mirusuvil in December 2000 where the Sri Lankan Army had killed Tamil civilians who had returned home to the Jaffna Peninsula to see the state of their village. The decision is seen to be linked to the parliamentary polls that were to be held on April 25, but which were postponed due to the global pandemic.

How exceedingly political the brothers — President Gotabaya and Prime Minister and former President Mahinda — can be is signified in their chauvinistic support for Sinhalese soldiers and their disregard of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations that has been fighting for accountability in war crimes. The island's history was punctuated with extreme violence in the three decade war against the Tamil rebels of the equally brutal guerrilla force of the Velupillai Prabhakaran-led LTTE. His own death, as well as that of his elderly father and his minor son, are thought to have been engineered in possible war crimes generally attributed to the command of Lt General Shavendra Silva, who was the Army Commander at the time of the final battle. If the soldier had not been pardoned, he would simply have stayed in jail as the nation has suspended executions, making it clear that the Rajapaksas are using him to make a statement of political intent in this selective exonerations.

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Zarrar Khuhro

## Since millennia, man has strived to either defeat or delay death

There is nothing quite like a global pandemic to remind you of your own mortality, is there? All day long, we are subjected to an ever-increasing tally of infections and deaths, as if the whole world were glued to the scoreboards of a morbid, seemingly never-ending Olympics. At some point, you have to wonder if you too will end up as a statistic on a government chart. But, as singer Hank Williams lamented, "No matter how I struggle and strive, I'll never get out of this world alive," and while we will, as a species, survive this latest plague, it is also certain that, at some point, our individual lives will come to an end. After all, only two things are certain: Death and (depending on where you live) Taxes. Still, trying to forestall the inevitable has always been a human obsession, and it is no different when it comes to trying to outwit or dodge death itself. Over 2,000 years ago, Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of united China, proclaimed a dynasty that "would last 10,000 generations". He

also expressed the desire to be around long enough to see it through. Seeing as the Qin state was also arguably the world's first proper police state, he simply ordered his governors to search for the elixir of immortality, and newly discovered records show a fascinating series of exchanges between an increasingly impatient emperor and "assorted awkward replies from regional governments who had failed to find the key to eternal life". Qin Shi Huang died at the age of 49, but the quest continued for millennia, with subsequent emperors and noblemen remaining wedded to the idea of discovering the elixir of immortality, often with deadly results. Ironically, the elixirs brewed by Chinese alchemists were better suited to ending lives rather than prolonging them, containing as they did toxic metals and minerals such as mercury, lead and arsenic. An even greater irony perhaps is that the experiments of one alchemist, who was using saltpetre in his concoctions, ended up blowing

up in his face, burning him and his entire house: he had not found the secret of immortality, but had in fact discovered gunpowder, which has played a major part in ending so many lives since then. Of course, the quest did not start with the Chinese. The ancient Epic of Gilgamesh revolves around the mythical king's search for the plant that confers immortality, and millennia later we have the apocryphal quest of Ponce de Leon for the Fountain of Youth. And today, we have medicine replacing sagas and superstition, and we have scientists looking to succeed where heroes and kings failed. The end-goal, however, remains the same: to defeat or at least delay death. That is not to say some of these techniques are not inspired by legend and history. Bram Stoker's Dracula believed that "the blood is the life" and so did the real-life 'blood countess' Elizabeth Bathory, who reportedly bathed in the blood of young women to preserve her youth

and beauty. In the modern iteration of this technique, a company called Ambrosia, led not by count Dracula, but by a Dr Karmazian, is infusing the blood of the young into the veins of the old, a process it claims can rejuvenate the recipient at the trifling cost of up to \$12,000 for two litres of a young person's plasma. While the US Food and Drug Administration has warned that this treatment has "no proven clinical benefit", effectively shutting down Dr Karmazian's business, the overall anti-aging industry is considered to be a safe investment bet, given that, according to Merrill Lynch, it is expected to reach a value of at least \$600 billion by 2025. That is a lot of money, and so you can expect that a lot of different techniques are being tried right about now, such as organ replacement technologies, in which the most promising is currently the prospect of 3-D printing working human organs to replace failing ones. Nanotechnology offers another lifeline with two potential applications:

one is to use these microscopic machines to cure life-threatening diseases like cancer, delivering their payload directly to malignant cells. Similarly, custom-built nanobots are being designed that could actively work to remove the plaque that builds up in arteries leading to heart attacks and disease. Extend that concept and you could, sooner than you think, have armies of nanobots in your body repairing cellular damage in real time. The most promising frontier for life-extending technology lies in the field of genetic research, where scientists are studying the genetic structures of long-lived species like whales, turtles and tortoises in an effort to unlock their secrets. As creatures age, their DNA strands become increasingly prone to damage and breakage, and learning to control that may prove to be a key to longevity. This is what the future holds, let us see if we live long enough to see it. By arrangement with Daan



Subhani

# Overcoming effects of ill-conceived policies



Mohan Guruswamy

It has been three weeks since the World Health Organisation declared a Covid-19 pandemic. It's not the world's first coronavirus. We have had Sars, Mers, H1N1, swine flu and the like, some with much higher rates of fatality. But this is unique in its sweeping virulence. America's Centres for Disease Control (CDC) says the annual percentage of the US population infected with the flu is about eight per cent, which translates to 26 million people a year. Of these, the CDC estimates up to 60,000 persons die. It stands to reason that many more in India get afflicted by flu and influenzas each year, possibly with larger fatalities.

The essential facts about Covid-19 is that while it is virulent, its fatality is around one per cent, and this is principally concentrated among the elderly and already ailing. Its symptoms are mostly akin to common seasonal flus often attributed to a change of season, etc. Covid-19 can only be confirmed by testing and the cheapest test costs about ₹5,000 each. Clearly, we cannot afford to test enough, which means we won't ever know how many are truly afflicted by the virus.

The average life expectancy of Indians is 68.7 years. The above-65 years cohort accounts for only about six per cent of India, which suggests that the incidence of fatality here will be lower. Bubonic plague has a mortality of over 80 per cent, while even diphtheria has a mortality rate of 32 per cent. Covid-19 is not a killer virus. In developed countries like the United States, Italy and elsewhere with substantially higher life expectancy, the 70-plus cohorts are much bigger. The mortality rate has been the highest in Italy, with about nine per cent. Almost 86 per cent of Italians who died were over 70. Italy has the second oldest population in the world after Japan, with over 23 per cent over 65. Experts believe this was the determining factor in its high fatality rate. The goal of social distancing is a hugely unfulfilled aspiration. The poor in India live cheek by jowl, with densities

often exceeding 60,000 per square mile. India has over 410 million workers in the unorganised sector, the vast majority of whom are daily wagers making a little more than the prescribed official wage and often much below that. This working age cohort is mostly made up of younger Indians. The youthful age group (14-35 years) accounts for about 34 per cent of India's population. This cohort is about as much as the 35-65 years cohorts. Thus, even if the pandemic is real for India, the fatality due to it will be very low. The vast majority of Indians who might get infected by Covid-19 won't even know it.

Now assume that the Covid-19 pandemic will overwhelm India, and consider India's abysmal healthcare scene. We have six physicians; nine hospital beds and 13 nurses per 10,000 people. Nationwide, we have less than 40,000 ventilators and only 70,000 intensive care beds. This calls for a policy that will help stagger the load and allow

they said, the restrictive episodes may be shorter, with longer intervals between them. Clearly, the nationwide simultaneous social distancing norms' imposition was ill-conceived.

The IMF has now announced a global recession due to disrupted supply chains and contraction of consumption. In India, consumption (C) accounts for 63 per cent of GDP. Given GDP is = C + I + G + (X - M), or GDP = private consumption (C) + gross investment (I) + government spending (G) + (exports - imports), the impact of the collapse of private consumption in the economy can be easily understood. Many respected analysts are agreed that it will be no less than 20-30 per cent in Q1. The government pledged to step up its spending by ₹1.7 lakh crores. We won't go into how this was arrived at now, but just consider how inadequate it is compared to the hit taken by consumption. The government clearly needs to do more. It needs to pull out all the stops to do this.

The question is: where is the money? Even if it sequestered 20 per cent of the cash reserves with our 100 top corporations, it will be substantial. The top 10 corporations alone have a hoard of over ₹10 lakh crores. (Reliance has cash reserves of ₹398,000 crores. TCS has almost ₹100,000 crores, ITC has ₹60,000 crores.) Our government's wage and pensions bill accounts for 11.4 per cent of GDP. Holding back only 10 per cent of this, or just the annual LTC, will fetch the Central and state governments over ₹2 lakh crores. It only calls for will and vision to accumulate the cash to begin reconstruction of a devastated economy. The pain cannot and must not be borne by the poorest alone. PM Narendra Modi has formidable communication skills, and he must use it now.

The writer, a policy analyst studying economic and security issues, held senior positions in government and industry. He also specialises in the Chinese economy.

### TACKLING COVID-19

The only possible method for dealing with the epidemic may be multiple 'intermittent' social-distancing periods that ease up when cases fall to a certain level, and reimposed when they rise past a key threshold

### LETTERS

#### DISINFECTANTS

In these times of the coronavirus epidemic, it is correct medical procedure to spray disinfectant on visitors. This is not a new procedure. For centuries, disinfectant usage is being practised in every hospital across the world in one way or the other. Let there be no sentiments attached to this practice. Because of not carrying out such practices in the initial stages on foreign visitors, the entire world is suffering.

T. Satvik Rithika  
Secunderabad

#### EXEMPT PENSIONS

The coronavirus crisis has unsettled the financial position of not only Centre but also of all the states. CM K. Chandrashekar Rao's decision to pay reduced salaries is a step in the right direction to mop up revenues to meet medical expenditures. But to reduce the payment for pensioners is certainly unfair as it is already a hand-to-mouth situation for many of them with rising rents, living and medical expenses. They have no other means to survive except with the existing pensions with hand loans etc.

Katuru Durga Prasad Rao  
Hyderabad

#### EXODUS TRAGIC

The exodus of migrant workers to their home states has added a tragic dimension to the Covid-19 related lockdown. The dread of starvation and the urge to seek refuge in the safety of home has overwhelmed their fear of catching the infection in the midst of their desperate journey. Would they have embarked upon this arduous journey had the host states taken care of them when they had no income to meet their basic needs?

G. Thirupathiah  
Kothapet

#### Attempt on Basu's life: One held

PATNA, March 31  
Mr Jyoti Basu, Marxist former Deputy Chief Minister of West Bengal, escaped unhurt after an unknown assailant had fired a shot at him at Patna railway junction this morning. But an officer of the Life Insurance Corporation, Mr Ali Imam, was hit by the bullet and was killed. The assailant who Mr Basu pointed out made his escape in the large crowd gathered to greet the Marxist leader as he arrived from Calcutta. Police later took into custody one man on suspicion. They also took possession of a car parked outside the staircase as also the car of Mr Ali Imam.

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle



SHORT TAKES
ARMYMEN TOLD NOT TO SHARE VIDEOS IN UNIFORM

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 31

Indian Army on Tuesday issued an advisory asking its personnel not to share videos in uniform on social media sites as it can reveal their personal identities.

There have been certain cases in recent times where personnel from defence forces have been honey-trap by the Pakistan's spies on social media like Facebook. Last year, Indian Army was able to identify around 150 social media profiles of Pakistani spies which were using various modus operandi to try to trap its men.

"It has been noticed that serving Indian Army personnel are creating or sharing videos on social media giving their identity as also in Uniform. All personnel are advised to follow existing guidelines and refrain from such activities," said the advisory on Tuesday.

An army dossier last year had warned its men against honey-trap by Pakistan spies who create fake female profiles on social media like Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. It had asked its personnel to avoid accepting friend requests from unknown people, avoid suspicious websites and not to take calls from or chat with unidentified people. It had advised its men to change the privacy settings on Facebook and other apps to "only friends."

CONG ASKS GOVT TO SCALE UP COVID-19 TESTING

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 31

Expressing apprehensions that India might soon enter the phase 3 of the Coronavirus outbreak, the Congress on Tuesday asked the government to scale up testing as advised by the World Health Organisation. It also demanded that a consolidated amount of ₹10,000 be put into Jan Dhan accounts of all vulnerable sections.

According experts in the field of medicine, the situation on Tuesday points towards the country entering stage 3 of Coronavirus transmission, Congress Spokesperson Manish Tewari said addressing the media through video-conferencing.

"The only antidote to Covid-19 spreading is test, test and more test," he said adding that this is what has been advised by the WHO.

He noted that India was possibly one of the countries which has tested the least. "We have tested only 32 out of 10 lakh people. Compared to this, in England, 1,921 out of each 10 lakh have been tested, while in America the number is 2,600," he said.

Tewari also sought government intervention on the plight of migrant workers and landless labourers.

U.P. AMBULANCE WORKERS GO ON STRIKE

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 31

Demanding immediate release of pending salary and protective gear, the association of ambulance employees in Uttar Pradesh has stopped work from Tuesday afternoon. The association of 19,221 workers which includes pilots (drivers) and emergency technicians also alleged that they are not provided with basic protective equipment.

General secretary of ambulance employees association, Brajesh Kumar told this newspaper that employees are not paid salary since January and workers working on ambulance are exposed to infection due to lack of protective gear.

"102 and 108 emergency ambulance services in Uttar Pradesh are managed and operated by a private operator GVK — under contract with the state government. There are a total of about 4,500 such ambulances deployed across the state. 19,221 workers — drivers and emergency technicians — are posted to these ambulances are on contract with the private firm," Kumar added.

According to Kumar, ambulance workers do not have sanitisers, gloves or proper masks. "We have not received salaries for three months. When we go to fill oxygen, people don't allow us inside. We told the local chief medical officer to arrange better supplies but got no response. Our vehicles have not been sanitised either," said an ambulance driver.

Kerala records second Covid-19 death

Health officials on high alert as the deceased had no travel history; efforts on to trace origin of infection

DC CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 31

Kerala recorded second death due to Covid-19 on Tuesday after a 68-year-old man, who had no travel history, succumbed to the infection at the Triuvandrum Medical College Hospital.

The death of the Covid-19 patient Abdul Azeez has troubled the health authorities as he had not reported any travel history. Efforts are now being made to trace the origin of infection.

The state had reported its first Covid-19 death on March 28 when a 69-year-old man died at the Ernakulam Medical College.

The health officials have begun a detailed exercise to locate the primary and secondary contacts of the patient who was a retired additional sub inspector of police.

Azeez was admitted to the Triuvandrum Medical College on March 23 after he developed symptoms of Covid-19.

He was in a highly critical condition since past five days and remained on

ventilator support till death.

During the course of his treatment in ICU, the man suffered paralytic stroke and cardiac arrest.

What is bothering the authorities now is the lack of clarity on his travel details.

Before being admitted to medical college hospital, the patient had visited several places attended marriages, funeral ceremony, went to government offices to collect pension, took part in prayers in mosques.

The authorities suspect that he might have come into contact with people with infection during these events.

The authorities could not take much details about his travel because of critical condition.

His native village Pothencode and adjoining areas have been put under total lockdown and surveillance has been stepped up in areas bordering other panchayats.

Meanwhile, health minister K.K. Shailaja said the body of the patient would be buried complying with the World Health Organisation protocol.

7 persons test +ve for virus, 1.63 lakh under surveillance

DC CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 31

Seven more persons tested positive for Covid-19 in Kerala on Tuesday taking the total number of infected persons in the state 215.

Of the seven cases, two each were reported from Kasargod and Thiruvananthapuram, one each from Kollam, Thrissur and Kannur respectively. Baring one person, all contracted the infection through contact.

As on Tuesday 1.63 lakh people are under surveillance including 1.62 lakh under home quarantine, 658 persons admitted to hospitals including 150 on Tuesday.

Kasargod has the highest number of people in hospitals — 163 followed by Kannur 108 and Malappuram 102.

Of the 7455 samples sent for testing 6,380 have been

KASARGOD HAS the highest number of people in hospitals 163 followed by Kannur 108 and Malappuram 102.

piratory problems. The samples of such persons will be taken and set for testing.

The facilities of Kasargod medical college has been improved by turning it into Covid Hospital. Kasargod central university has received the nod from ICMR for starting testing facilities.

Vijayan said the state is facing a problem in connection with the people who have returned from Nizamuddin in Delhi and Malaysia after attending the Tablighi conference. It needs to be examined whether such people have contracted the infection.

The police has conducted a detailed inquiry and with the help of district collectors have prepared list of people who participated in these conferences.

Required preventive measures will be taken at the district level.

Oldest patients in state recover fully

DC CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 31

Kerala's oldest Covid-19 patients Thomas, 93 and his wife Mariyamamma, 88, have fully recovered from the infection.

The couple who contracted the infection from their son, daughter-in-law and grandson who returned from Italy on February 29, were successfully treated at the Kottayam Medical College.

Health minister K.K. Shailaja hailed the recovery of the elderly patients who had developed severe complications warranting ICU support during the treatment. Apart from cardiac problems, the elderly persons had blood pressure, hypertension and urinary tract infection.

During the treatment Thomas had also reached a critical stage and was even put on ventilator support, however, due to the

deft handling by doctors and nursing staff, they could be brought back to life. One of the nurses who treated the couple contracted the infection. She has been extended all support from the government for treatment.

Meanwhile, Kerala police on Tuesday warned of arrest and cases against persons sending April fool messages pertaining to Covid-19 and lockdown.

Those found to be sending such messages will be arrested instantly.

In a statement here, state police chief Lokanath Behara said such fake messages intended to make fool of people, will be viewed seriously. Cases will be registered under relevant IPC sections as fake messages could cause distress and fear among the people. The people creating such messages, sharing and forwarding these on the social media would be taken into custody.

COCHIN PORT TWEETED ABOUT EXPORT

From Page 1

The European Union had announced the 93 million euro package for Serbia, which provides immediate as well as short and medium term assistance to help Serbia to fight Covid-19.

According to the Indian government notifications in the past few weeks, the items that are prohibited for export include N-95 masks, surgical masks, disposable masks, all ventilators, textile raw materials for masks and coveralls, NBR gloves and medical goggles. However, the items that can still be exported include gloves (except NBR gloves), surgical blades, PVC conveyor belt, plastic tarpaulin and certain kinds of breathing appliances as well as ophthalmic instruments and appliances.

On March 28, the Cochin Customs had tweeted, "Cochin Customs in action to clear a consignment of 35 lakh pairs of sterile latex surgical gloves to Serbia to support the global war against Covid-19".

It may be recalled that in a video-conference on Monday evening with all 130 Indian envoys posted abroad, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had asked the Indian envoys "whether we can source medicine, and other items" from abroad to tackle the situation. All envoys were directed by PM Modi "to identify in their countries of accreditation ... sources to procure medical equipment, for India's fight against Covid-19". All the Missions shared the situation in their countries of accreditations and had also apparently highlighted the items which are available in that country which could be imported by India.

Taking Covid head on



Railway employees make sanitisers during a nation-wide lockdown in the wake of coronavirus pandemic in Prayagraj on Tuesday.



Jail inmates stitch masks at Mathura district jail in Mathura on Tuesday.

Centre to ensure movement of trucks

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 31

After managing to contain the large-scale movement of migrant labourers/workers, the home ministry is working with states to ensure that thousands of trucks stranded on national and state highways with essential commodities are allowed to move.

A special team has been deployed in the centralised control room set up in the home ministry.

After tackling the issue of thousands of stranded workers walking back to their villages, next on the MHA's priority list is to ensure the smooth movement of trucks. State officials were asked to im-

A SPECIAL team has been deployed in the centralised control room set up in the home ministry

mediately do a detailed survey of all trucks parked on highways and roads in their areas and identify those with important items.

"The issue now is to ensure supply chains of all essential commodities are fully functional and the raw material for them should reach the factories, else the production too will be hampered," a senior official said. The MHA is also working with the surface transport ministry to ensure that the toll for these trucks is waived.

SCARE | CONTINUES MP Chief Minister expresses concern over spike in cases

Indore records 25 new cases in 24 hours

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, MARCH 31

Indore, known as 'mini-Mumbai' of India, has turned new hotspot of coronavirus outbreak with the city witnessing a record 25 new Covid positive cases in the last 24 hours.

As many as 17 new coronavirus positive cases were reported in one day on Tuesday in Indore, taking the tally of confirmed cases in the city to 44.

On Monday, eight new Covid positive cases were reported in Indore.

"It is a matter of grave concern. We will enforce lockdown in the city stringently to bring Indore out of red zone of coronavirus

outbreak", a senior Indore district officer told this newspaper.

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan also expressed serious concern over the spike in confirmed cases in Indore while reviewing the situation at a high level official meeting held here on Tuesday.

With this, the total number of coronavirus positive cases in MP rose to 64. Of the five deaths due to the virus reported in MP, Indore accounted for three deaths.

Meanwhile, one more Covid patient in the state succumbed to the virus on Tuesday taking the death toll to five in the state.

The patient died in AIIMS, Bhopal.

AT LEAST 31 people who attended the Tablighi Jamaat religious event in Delhi recently have taken shelter in two religious places of minorities in Bhopal.

THE ALERT by Intelligence was issued in the wake of six devotees who attended the conference in Delhi succumbing to Covid-19 in Telangana recently.

Meanwhile, at least 31 people who attended the Tablighi Jamaat religious event in Delhi recently have taken shelter in two religious places of minorities in Bhopal, intelligence has alerted the MP government.

According to Intelligence sources, at least 107 devotees who attended the religious conference in Delhi have fled to MP after nationwide lockdown was declared on March 22. Out of them, 31 are currently staying in two religious places of minorities in Bhopal.

The alert by intelligence was issued in the wake of six devotees who attended the conference in Delhi succumbing to coronavirus in Telangana recently.

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Tuesday convened a high level official meeting here to take stock of the situation in the wake of the development. He ordered to identify

each of the devotees who attended the conference in MP and quarantine them.

Sources said some of the devotees have fled to a village on the outskirts of Bhopal following the move to quarantine them.

In another development, the state government has initiated a probe to find out if any devotees who attended the religious conference held in Tablighi in east Pakistan this year have visited MP recently.

Meanwhile, the state government asked police to book the violators of lockdown under appropriate sections of Indian Penal Code, indicating to enforce the lockdown strictly.

IN BRIEF

**Pastor held for ignoring orders**

**Miami:** An evangelical pastor in Florida was arrested on Monday for "repeatedly" ignoring confinement orders intended to slow the spread of the coronavirus by holding services with hundreds of people, police said. Pastor Ronald Howard-Browne, 58, was arrested for unlawful assembly and violating quarantine orders while holding two services on Sunday in the eastern Florida city of Tampa, prison records show. The pastor "intentionally and repeatedly disregarded state and local public health orders, which put his congregation and our community in danger," tweeted Hillsborough County sheriff Chad Chronister.

**China's vaccine to be tested abroad**

**Beijing:** China, which is developing a vaccine for the deadly novel coronavirus, plans to conduct additional trials in other countries seriously hit by the pandemic if the ongoing trial in the country's virus epicentre Wuhan proves it is safe and effective, a Chinese researcher said. The first stage clinical trial for the vaccine was started in Wuhan on March 16 after authorities approved. It has been proceeding smoothly, and its results will be published in April, said Chen Wei, a member of the Chinese Academy of Engineering.

**AI tool can predict after virus effects**

**New York:** Scientists have developed an artificial intelligence (AI) tool that may accurately predict which patients newly infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 would go on to develop severe respiratory disease. The study, published in the journal *Computers, Materials & Continua*, also revealed the best indicators of future severity, and found that they were not as expected. "While work remains to further validate our model, it holds promise as another tool to predict the patients most vulnerable to the virus, but only in support of physicians' hard-won clinical experience in treating viral infections," said Megan Coffee, a clinical assistant professor at New York University in the US.

**After Bibi, Israel's army chief isolated**

**Jerusalem:** The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) Chief of Staff, Lt Gen Aviv Kochavi, along with two of his senior commanders, went into isolation on Tuesday after a senior commander they came in contact with recently was tested positive for coronavirus, the army said. The development came a day after PM Netanyahu and his close advisers were placed under quarantine after an aide on Parliament affairs tested positive for virus. Lt Gen Kochavi, along with Home Front Command head Maj. Gen. Tamir Yadai and Operations Directorate Commander Gen. Aharon Haliva, had attended a meeting 10 days ago in which a commander in the reserves, who later tested positive for the coronavirus, participated.

**GREAT PYRAMID LIGHTS UP IN SOLIDARITY**

**Cairo, March 31:** Egypt's famed Great Pyramid was illuminated Monday evening with messages of unity and solidarity with those battling the novel coronavirus the world over. "Stay safe", "Stay at home" and "Thank you to those keeping us safe," flashed in blue and green lights across the towering structure at the Giza plateau, southwest of the capital Cairo. Egypt has so far registered 656 Covid-19 cases, including 41 deaths. Of the total infected, 150 reportedly recovered. "The tourism sector is one of the most affected industry but our priority is health," said tourism and antiquities minister Khaled al-Anani, speaking at the site. Senior antiquities ministry official Mostafa al-Waziri thanked "all the medical staff who help to keep us safe." Egypt has carried out sweeping disinfection operations at archaeological sites, museums and other sites across the country. In tandem, strict social distancing measures were imposed to reduce the risk of contagion among the country's 100 million inhabitants.

**New York hospital doc prepares for the worst**

**This is going to be a long and drawn out battle says Patel**

**New York, March 31:** With the rapid rise of hospitalisations and a health system nearly at capacity, New York doctor Shomit Patel is preparing for the worst over the next few days, all while hoping he won't have to start choosing which coronavirus patients to treat.

Just 10 days ago, only half of the 46-year-old internist's patients at Beth Israel — one of the Mount Sinai hospitals in Manhattan — were suffering from Covid-19. "We're not over capacity yet, but we're planning for it to go over capacity," he said, adding he thinks the hospital has "planned well."

The wave of virus patients at Beth Israel corresponds to the one inundating New York City, which shot from 463 confirmed cases two weeks ago to 36,000 on Monday. "At the rate that I'm seeing, the peak could be anywhere from end of this week to sometime next week," said Patel.

Under extreme pressure for the past two weeks, he is preparing for the worst, even if "it's something that we hope we don't have to see." For Patel, the worst would be a situation similar to that in certain regions of Italy, where the health system is so overwhelmed that it can no longer take care of all patients. "You're gonna have to be

a little quicker in seeing and assessing and getting the treatment plan for each patient," Patel predicted, noting they "may have to double or triple the number of patients you're seeing."

But, he added worriedly, "you can't really go more than triple the number of patients you're seeing in a day and provide effective treatment."

In addition to the limitations of healthcare personnel, Patel is worried about a potential shortage of equipment, particularly of ventilators.

New York governor Andrew Cuomo and New York City mayor Bill de Blasio talk daily about the need for the machines. "If you get a surge of patients coming in, and you only have a limited number of ventilators, you can't necessarily ventilate patients," Patel said.

"And then you have to start picking and choosing." Outside of the hospi-

tal, Patel is also worried about transmitting the virus to his family.

He lives with his 80-year-old father, who suffers from Parkinson's, and his aunt, who has cancer. "I don't want to come back here and actually give it to them because I don't think they would do well at all," he said.

He maintains the minimum two meter (six-foot) distance and uses antibacterial wipes generously, while ensuring his relatives have enough food. "I stay pretty much in my room," Patel explained, "and then I'll go out there and periodically check on them."

"If it's something that kicks in, then it goes down after it peaks, then we can sustain it for a little while," Patel said. "But all hands on deck for months on end is something that's hard to sustain." "This is going to be a long and drawn out battle." — AFP

**Hungary gov't's sweeping powers sends alarm bells**

**Brussels, March 31:** European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen warned on Tuesday that coronavirus emergency measures taken by EU countries must be "limited", after Hungary's nationalist leader Viktor Orban took on sweeping powers.

Brussels' top official did not single out Orban or Hungary by name in her statement, but it came a day after he adopted rule by decree, claiming extraordinary powers ostensibly to combat the Covid-19 pandemic.

"The European Commission will closely monitor, in a spirit of cooperation, the application of emergency measures in all member states," she tweeted. "We all need to work together to master this crisis."

Orban's spokesman for international relations responded to the EU statement directly, also on Twitter, saying: "We com-

pletely agree". "That's why the Hungarian state of emergency and extraordinary measures are congruent with the treaties and Hungarian constitution and targeted exclusively at fighting the coronavirus," he insisted.

"It upholds EU values, rule of law, press freedom." In a separate statement read out by her spokesman, Von der Leyen admitted: "Over the past weeks, several EU governments took emergency measures to address the health crisis caused by the outbreak of the coronavirus". "We are living in extraordinary times, and governments, in principle, need to have the necessary tools to act rapidly and effectively to

protect the public health of our citizens," she added.

But, in a clear but unstated reference to events in Hungary, she insisted: "Any emergency measures must be limited to what is necessary and strictly proportionate. They must not last indefinitely." "Democracy cannot work without free and independent media," she said.

Hungary is threatening prison sentences for journalists who publish what it deems "falsehoods" about the virus or the measures against it. Critics at home and abroad have condemned Hungary's "anti-coronavirus defence law", saying it gives Orban unnecessary and unlimited power and is a means of cementing his position rather than battling the virus.

After declaring a state of emergency on March 11, the new law passed on Monday gives Orban the power to indefinitely rule by decree until his government decides the emergency is over. — AFP

**WHO WARNS 'FAR FROM OVER' IN ASIA AND PACIFIC**

**Jakarta, March 31:** The World Health Organisation warns that while attention has shifted to epicenters in Western Europe and North America, Covid-19 epidemics are "far from over" in Asia and the Pacific.

Urging governments at all levels in the region to stay engaged in efforts to combat the virus, WHO Regional Director for the Western Pacific, Dr Takeshi Kasai says, "This is going to be a long-term battle and we cannot let down our guard. We need every country to keep responding according to their local situation." He said the WHO realizes there is no one-size-fits-all approach but there are common tactics. "Those are: finding, isolating and testing case early, tracing and quarantining contact quickly, and putting in place multiple public health interventions to place physical distance between people to slow and stop transmission."

Takeshi also cautioned that countries still need to prepare for large-scale community transmission. — AP

**CHINA REBOUNDS AS VIRUS CONTROLS EASE**

**Beijing, March 31:** China's manufacturing rebounded in March as authorities relaxed anti-disease controls and allowed factories to reopen, an official survey showed, but an industry group warned the economy has yet to fully recover.

The ruling Communist Party is trying to revive the world's second-largest economy after declaring victory over the coronavirus even as the US and other governments shut down businesses. — AP

**Flag at half-mast**



The Italian flag flies at half-mast on the Altare della Patria, Vittorio Emanuele II monument in Rome on Tuesday as flags are being flown at half-mast in cities across Italy to commemorate the victims of the virus, during the country's lockdown aimed at curbing the spread of the Covid-19 infection, caused by the novel coronavirus. — AFP

**Global death toll crosses 40,000**

**Madrid, March 31:** Spain recorded its highest single-day death toll from the coronavirus Monday into Tuesday as 849 people died.

Spain's Health Ministry reported on Tuesday that it diagnosed 9,222 new cases of the virus and saw 849 deaths in a single day. The country has reported more than 94,400 cases of Covid-19 and nearly 8,200 deaths since the coronavirus pandemic began. Spain has the third most cases behind the US and Italy and has the second highest daily toll was 260, recorded on Saturday, with the number dropping to 180 on Monday.

Some 25,150 people have now tested positive for the virus in Britain, including Prime Minister Boris Johnson, a daily increase of 3,009. Data published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) for England and Wales on Tuesday revealed that the true toll could be 24 per cent higher.

The government figures cover those who have been taken to hospital and tested for the virus whereas the ONS data is for deaths in the community where COVID-19 is suspected.

Sierra Leone has recorded its first case of the new coronavirus, the government said on Tuesday, making it the latest African country to register an infection.

In a televised press conference, President Julius Maada Bio said that a 37-year-old man who arrived in the country from France on March 16 had tested positive. The man had been quarantined on arrival in the West African state, Bio said. "It was not a matter of whether, but when. Ladies and gentlemen, the when is here," the president said. Sierra Leone had been one of the few countries in Africa to have reported zero cases, despite neighbouring Guinea and Liberia having detected infections. — Agencies

◆ **INDIAN-AMERICAN** former Barack Obama campaign staffer, Suraj Patel who is running in the Democratic primary for a Congressional seat in New York's 12th District, has been tested positive for coronavirus.

◆ **TANZANIA ON** Tuesday recorded its first death from coronavirus, a 49-year-old man who had underlying health issues, the health ministry said.

◆ **12-YEAR-OLD** girl confirmed infected with COVID-19 has died in Belgium, health officials said Tuesday. Fatality at such a young age "is a very rare occurrence," said government spokesman Dr Emmanuel Andre, adding that her death "shook us".

◆ **Country singer** Kalie Shorr says she has contracted the novel coronavirus despite being under quarantine.

**Europe sends medical gear**

**Berlin, March 31:** European nations have delivered medical goods to Iran in the first transaction under the Instex mechanism set up to evade American sanctions on Tehran, the German foreign ministry said Tuesday.

"France, Germany and the United Kingdom confirm that Instex has successfully concluded its first transaction, facilitating the export of medical goods from Europe to Iran. These goods are now in Iran," the ministry said in a statement.

The first successful transaction comes over a year after Britain, France and Germany announced the creation of Instex, months that have been marked by Iranian chafing against European delay. "Now the first transaction is complete, Instex and its Iranian counterpart STFI will work on

◆ **IRAN ON TUESDAY** said 141 more people have died from the novel coronavirus, raising the official toll in one of the world's worst-affected countries to 2,898.

more transactions and enhancing the mechanism," Berlin said. Britain, France and Germany were among a list of countries that Iran reported receiving medical aid from earlier this month as it battles a serious outbreak of the novel coronavirus.

On Monday, the number of cases in the country passed 40,000, and the government warned the epidemic could run for several more months and cost over 10,000 lives. Tehran's struggle to bring the virus' spread under control has been made more difficult by US sanctions. — AFP

**Russia's doctor who met Putin tests +ve**

**Moscow, March 31:** The head of Moscow's main coronavirus hospital who met with President Vladimir Putin a week ago has tested positive, he said on Tuesday, as the Kremlin announced the Russian leader's health was fine.

Last Tuesday Denis Protsenko met with the Russian leader who inspected the Kommunarka hospital while wearing a bright yellow hazmat suit. But the 67-year-old Putin was also seen talking to Protsenko without any protective gear.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov swiftly told Russian news agencies that Putin took regular tests and there was no reason to worry about his

health. "Everything is fine," Peskov said. Protsenko said he tested positive but "felt quite well".

Posting a picture of himself wearing a mask and green scrubs on Facebook, he said he self-isolated in his office and would continue to work. Protsenko has become a high-profile figure on the frontlines of Russia's fight against Covid-19, posting daily on Facebook to inform Russians about his hospital's work and patients.

Over the past 24 hours Russian authorities have reported 500 new cases — the biggest daily increase so far — bringing the total tally to 2,337 cases and 17 fatalities. — AFP

ROYAL | SPLIT

**The Duke and Duchess of Sussex will hold on to their titles but will not be actively using them**

**Harry, Meghan bid formal farewell as royals**

**London, March 31:** Britain's Prince Harry and wife Meghan Markle on Tuesday bid a formal goodbye to their role as frontline royals as they settle down to their financially independent roles in the US.

Harry, who remains sixth in line to the British throne, had announced the royal split along with his former actress wife Markle earlier this year and, as per the deal struck with Buckingham Palace, they will now be in a 12-month transition period with the option for the prince to return to his frontline roles by March 2021.

The Duke and Duchess of Sussex will hold on to their titles but will not be actively using them or formally representing Queen Elizabeth II from April 1. "As we all find the part we are to play in this global shift and changing of habits, we are focusing this new chapter to understand how we can best contribute," they said in reference to their new roles away from the UK as the couple signed off as "Harry and Meghan" on social media.

"What's most important right now is the health and wellbeing of everyone across the globe and finding solutions for the many issues that have presented themselves as a result of this pandemic," the couple said in their final message on their Sussex Royal Instagram.

"While you may not see us here, the work continues. Thank you to this community — for the support, the inspiration and the shared commitment to the good in the world. We look forward to reconnecting with you soon. You've been great! Until then, please take good care of yourselves, and of one another," read their farewell message, which indicates their return to social media under a more private capacity in the



Picture of Prince Harry with Meghan Markle. — AP





SHORT TAKES

Red Bull wanted drivers infected!

Vienna: Red Bull motorsport consultant Helmut Marko has admitted that he wanted the team's Formula One drivers to deliberately contract coronavirus before the potential start of the new season.

Lancashire chief dies of corona

London: Lancashire county cricket club chairman David Hodgkiss has died after being infected by the dreaded coronavirus. He was 71.

Paine's wallet stolen from car

Melbourne: Australia Test captain Tim Paine's wallet was stolen from his car on Tuesday after he parked the vehicle on the street outside his home in Hobart to convert his garage into a gym.

SONY EXTENDS DEAL TO BEAM WWE SHOWS

Mumbai: Sony Pictures Networks (SPN) India Private Limited and WWE on Tuesday announced a five-year extension with an expanded broadcast agreement that will deliver WWE's weekly flagship programming and localised content in India and the Indian subcontinent, making SPN the exclusive home to WWE in-ring content across its television and digital platforms.

FREEZE FRAME

Badminton body blocks rankings amid suspension

New Delhi, March 31: The Badminton World Federation (BWF) on Tuesday decided to freeze the world rankings, saying standings as on March 17 will be the basis for entry and seedings when it restarts the international calendar that has been thrown haywire owing to the Covid-19 pandemic.

There was a clamour for freezing the world rankings with Indian shuttlers Saina Nehwal, B. Sai Praneeth, Parupalli Kashyap and H. S. Prannoy leading the way in expressing their concerns.

"The Badminton World Federation (BWF) can announce it will freeze World Rankings and World Junior Rankings until further notice. The freezing of rankings will be backdated to Week 12, which is the week following the last international tournament that was played the YONEX All England Open 2020," BWF said in a release.

"The ranking lists issued on 17 March 2020 will serve as a basis for entry and seeding into the next international tournaments although it is difficult to say at this stage when this may be."

Shuttlers in the singles competition have to be inside top-16 of world rankings to qualify for the Olympics. The cut-off for doubles is also top-16.

The BWF had suspended all tournaments post the All England Championships until April 12 due to the pandemic.

These tournaments include big-ticket events like India Open (Super 500), Malaysia Open (Super 750) and Singapore Open (Super 500), apart from the three Continental Confederation championships.

"Due to the Covid-19 outbreak, the badminton community has experienced suspension to international tournaments from mid-March 2020 to the end of April 2020."

The world body said it will take time to decide on the process of unfreezing the world rankings as it will depend on how the international calendar looks once things improve.

"Following the announcement to reschedule the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games to 23 July to 8 August 2021, BWF will now also initiate a review process to confirm any impacts on the Olympic qualification system," BWF said.

BWF eyeing new dates for Worlds

New Delhi, March 31: The Badminton World Federation (BWF) is in talks with hosts Spain to reschedule the 2021 World Championships after the Tokyo Olympics were pushed to next year due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Huelva, a city in southwest Spain, is scheduled to host the 2021 Badminton World Championships in August but with the Tokyo Games now rescheduled to July 23 to August 8, BWF is looking for alternatives.



People wearing masks walk past a countdown clock showing the adjusted time remaining for the postponed Tokyo Olympic Games, outside the Tokyo station on Monday.

Task cut out for Tokyo

Tokyo, March 31: The countdown clocks have been reset and are ticking again for the Tokyo Olympics.

The model outside Tokyo Station, and others across the Japanese capital were switched on almost immediately after organisers announced the new dates - July 23 to August 8, 2021.

The clocks read 479 days to go. This seems a long way away, but also small and insignificant compared with the worldwide fallout from the coronavirus.

Then again, it's not much time to reassemble the first Olympics to be postponed since the modern games began 124 years ago; not for 11,000 Olympic athletes, 4,400 Paralympic athletes - and not for sponsors, broadcasters, the fans that have already bought tickets, and Japanese organisers and taxpayers who have spent billions, and will have to come up with billions more to pay for the setback.

"I believe that these Olympics are going to have great historical significance," Yoshiro Mori, the president of the Tokyo organising committee, said after confirming the new dates.

Mori, an 82-year-old former Japanese prime minister, also recalled there's no guarantee that the coronavirus pandemic will be under control a year from now. That includes the new dates for the Paralympics now set for Aug. 24 to September 5.

"This is a prayer that we have and I do believe that someone is going to listen to our prayers," Mori said. After cursory talk about an Olympics in the spring, the new summer dates overlap perfectly with the same time slot that was picked for 2020.

Organisers are hoping to overlay the old plans with new plans, keeping venues in place, securing thousands of rooms in the Athletes Village, deploying the same volunteers, and letting people who bought tickets keep them.

The summer date also avoids conflicts with the crowded North American and European sports schedules. But summer in Tokyo also means grappling with intense heat and humidity, the major worry for games organisers before the pandemic.

"Obviously in the summer there might be typhoons and the heat problems. However, this situation is the same. We always had those problems so we will be prepared for those issues," Mori said.

Though the international sports federations went along with the new dates, some like the International Triathlon Union preferred the cooler spring during Japan's cherry blossom season. But that was overridden by the easiest route to lining up venues.

Paris, March 31: The 2021 World Athletics Championships in Eugene, Oregon (USA) will be shifted to 2022 to accommodate the re-arranged Tokyo Olympics, World Athletics said.

NEXT YEAR'S ATHLETICS WORLDS MOVED TO 2022

The announcement came immediately after Olympics organisers said the 2020 Tokyo Games will now take place on July 23-August 8, 2021.

That means the World Athletics Championships that were scheduled to take place in Eugene on August 6-15, 2021, can no longer be held on those dates.

"This gives our athletes the time they need to get back into training and competition. Everyone needs to be flexible and compromise and to that end we are now working with organisers of the World Athletics Championships on new dates in 2022 for our World Athletics Championships," it said.

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CORONA CONTRIBUTION

Athletes continue to donate money

Mumbai, March 31: Star India batsman Rohit Sharma has donated ₹80 lakh to fight the rapidly-spreading Covid-19 pandemic, saying the onus is on the citizens to help the country get back on its feet.

Rohit, who is the vice-captain of the Indian ODI team, has donated ₹45 lakh and ₹25 lakh to the CM's Relief Fund (Maharashtra) respectively.

He has given ₹5 lakh to 'Zomato Feeding India', which is helping families affected by the ongoing national lockdown, and another ₹5 lakh to help aid the welfare of stray dogs.

"We need our country back on feet & the onus is on us. I've done my bit to donate ₹45lakhs to #PMCareFunds, ₹25lakhs to #CMReliefFund Maharashtra, ₹5lakhs to #FeedingIndia and ₹5lakhs to #WelfareOfStrayDogs. Let's get behind our leaders and support them @narendramodi @CMOMaharashtra," tweeted the elegant right handed batsman on Tuesday morning.

NEERAJ GIVES ₹3 LAKH

Asian Games gold medal-winning javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra on Tuesday donated a total of ₹3 lakh to the central and Haryana state relief funds to combat the Covid-19 pandemic in the country.

Chopra is currently in self-isolation at the National Institute of Sports (NIS) in Patiala after flying back from a training trip in Turkey.

"I have donated a sum of ₹2 Lakh to #PM CARES fund and ₹1 Lakh to the Haryana Covid Relief Fund. I hope we all can come together in our own individual capacities to bring relief during this time and help our nation overcome this pandemic," the Commonwealth Games gold-medallist tweeted.

NEHRU STADIUM IS NOW A QUARANTINE FACILITY

New Delhi, March 31: The Sports of Authority of India (SAI) said it is handing over the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium here to the Delhi government for using it as a quarantine facility for patients infected with the novel coronavirus.

SAI handed over the stadium after the District Magistrate had on Monday day asked if it could be used for the purpose of quarantine.

The Sports Ministry had on March 22 announced that facilities under SAI across the country will be made available for usage as quarantine facilities.

More than 1,250 positive cases for the novel coronavirus have so far been reported across the country besides 36 deaths.

Flushing Meadows turns Corona Park

New York, March 31: The site of the US Open tennis tournament here will be used to build a 350-bed facility in an effort to provide additional medical infrastructure to the city as it battles the growing coronavirus outbreak.

A report in The Wall Street Journal said that New York city's emergency management office plans to build a 350-bed facility at the Billie Jean King National Tennis Centre in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park.

The report said construction could begin as early as Tuesday at an indoor training center at the facility, which has multiple courts and wide spaces, according to a spokesman for the US Tennis Association.

The beds will likely be for patients who do not have Covid-19, the illness caused by the novel coronavirus.

Additionally, the tennis centre's Louis Armstrong Stadium will become a commissary that will package 25,000 meals per day for medical professionals and others. Construction may begin as early as Tuesday, a report in NPR media said.

As public and private hospitals across the state come under immense

overcome this pandemic," the Commonwealth Games gold-medallist tweeted.

Chopra, who hails from Panipat, has qualified for the Tokyo Olympics and is considered a strong medal contender.

TT BODY CHIPS IN ₹5 LAKH

The Table Tennis Federation of India (TTFI) on Tuesday pledged ₹5 lakh to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund for the battle against the fast-spreading Covid-19 pandemic.

"The TTFI, as a part of its social responsibility, decided to contribute in its own small way a sum of ₹5 lakh to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund," TTFI said in a statement.

"A cheque for the amount was sent to the Indian Olympic Association (IOA), which had requested all National Sports Federations (NSFs) to make contributions to the Fund," it added.

AUGUSTA PLEDGES \$2m

Augusta National Golf Club, which in most years would be preparing to host the Masters, announced on Monday it will give \$2 million to help fight the coronavirus pandemic in its region.

This year's Masters, which was to have lured golfers and fans from around the world to the famed Georgia layout next week, was postponed indefinitely due to the global outbreak of the deadly virus.

"It is our hope these gifts will help address the many challenges brought about by the coronavirus throughout the city of Augusta and the greater region. We believe Augusta National has an important responsibility to support and protect the community," Augusta National chairman Fred Ridley said.



P. V. Sindhu in this file photo.

We want to train, Hima tells Rijiju

New Delhi, March 31: Confined to their hostel rooms at NIS Patiala amid the coronavirus-forced lockdown, some athletes, led by star sprinter Hima Das, have requested the sports ministry to allow them to train outdoors within the campus, which is out of bounds for outsiders right now.

Deputy chief national athletics coach Radhakrishnan Nair, who is supporting the move, said that the Hima-led campers at the National Institute of Sports (NIS)

are expecting a reply from the ministry in a day or two.

"Hima and some other athletes have written to the Sports Minister that they be allowed to train one or two hours a day in small groups at different times so that they can also practice social distancing while training at the same time," Nair confirmed from Patiala.

"They have written to Rijiju that they be sent home if no training is allowed. (But) going home is not feasible as the coun-



Hima Das

try is in a lockdown and Prime Minister has said everybody should be where they are.

"So, the ministry will not allow them to go back home but this outdoor training idea is feasible. We will know about it in a day or two," he added. Nair said he and other coaches have supported the idea as there is no risk of any camper contracting the dreaded coronavirus as nobody is coming in and going out of the facility. "We have 41 athletes at NIS and the track and field area is just 50m from the hostels. We can have small groups say eight athletes each and only one group will train at a time for one or two hours. All the athletes of a group will not do running or throwing together, one will run alone and finish it and then another will run after him or her. This way we can practice social distancing and be safe," the top athletics coach said.

"Athletics is different. In many sports, the athletes utilise a small space but a runner or a thrower or a jumper covers a lot of distance and their cardiovascular system and physical strength has to be built continuously over a period of time," he added.

As public and private hospitals across the state come under immense