

26 new COVID-19 cases reported in A.P.

Doctors have been asked to refer patients to designated hospitals as soon as symptoms are detected

STAFF REPORTER
VIJAYAWADA/BENGALURU/
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Andhra Pradesh reported 26 more COVID-19 cases from several districts during the 24 hours ending Saturday night. The tally has now gone up to 190 in the State.

A 24-year-old patient, the first one to test positive from Krishna district, has recovered and was discharged from a hospital in Vijayawada in the evening. So far, five

Rising numbers

COVID-19 cases are on the rise in the southern States. A look at the numbers reported by the States on Saturday:



Posing a risk: People waiting to collect relief being distributed by the administration at Vathuruthy in Kochi on Saturday.

State	Total number of cases	Active cases	Number of those cured	Deaths
A.P.	190	182	5	1
Karnataka	144	128	12	4
Kerala	306	254	41	2
Tamil Nadu	485	476	7	2
Telangana	272	228	33	11

patients have recovered and one has died in the State.

Nine new cases were reported in Krishna and six new cases were reported in the neighbouring Guntur district. Kadapa reported four new cases while Kurnool reported three cases and Prakasam reported two cases. Anantapur and Chittoor districts reported one case each.

So far, Nellore and Krishna districts have reported 32 cases each, the highest num-

ber in the State and they are followed by Guntur (26), Kadapa (23), Prakasam (19), West Godavari (15), Visakhapatnam (15), East Godavari (11), Chittoor (10), Kurnool

(4) and Anantapur (3). Vizianagaram and Srikakulam reported zero cases.

Telangana has so far reported a total of 229 positive cases. In Karnataka, 16 fresh

cases were confirmed on Saturday, taking the total number of those affected to 144, the Health department said. The figures include four deaths and 11 patients who were discharged.

Death in Bagalkot

A 75-year old man, a resident of Bagalkot, confirmed positive on Friday and undergoing treatment at a designated hospital in the district, has died.

Karnataka Education Minister Suresh Kumar said the man had initially consulted an ayurveda doctor. He later went to another hospital and was there for four days. However, doctors there suspected his condition to be COVID-19 and sent him to the designated hospital, where he was under treatment for a day before he died.

The man had cardiac stents, diabetes and hypertension, the Minister said and appealed to doctors and hospitals to refer patients to government hospitals as soon as they detected symptoms.

Among the 16 fresh cases, two had attended the Tablighi Jamaat congregation in Delhi, while seven are from Mysuru (four had a travel history to Delhi in January).

The government has appealed to those who attended the congregation to contact 080-2971171.

Among the 144 cases, eight are transit passengers of Kerala who landed at airports in Karnataka and are being treated in the State.

Those discharged include nine patients from Bengaluru and two from Kalaburagi.

Among the deceased are one person each from Kalaburgari, Bengaluru, Bagalkote and Tumakuru.

In Kerala, 11 more persons tested positive for COVID-19 on Saturday, taking the number of active cases to 254.

While five of the positive cases had come from Dubai, three are Tablighi Jamaat event participants and one person had returned from Nagpur, a government press release quoting Health Minister K.K. Shailaja said.

(With PTI inputs)

Police arrest 39 people out for morning walk in Kochi

STAFF REPORTER
KOCHI

Venturing out of home in the early morning hours in violation of the lockdown landed 39 persons, including two women, in trouble on Saturday.

The group from different points in Kochi had converged on the walkway at Panampilly Nagar, a major residential hub in the city, in violation of the social distancing ordered to check the spread of the pandemic when south police, aided by a drone, descended there and arrested all of them around 6.15 a.m.

They were taken to the police station and charged under IPC Sections 188 (Disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) and 269 (Negligent act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life) and relevant provisions of the Epidemic Diseases Ordinance passed last month allowing the Kerala government to take special measures and frame regula-

11 held for conducting mass prayers in Kerala

STAFF REPORTER
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Kerala police intensified their efforts to detect violations of the ongoing lockdown in the State on Saturday. The Palode police arrested 11 people for conducting mass prayers at the Chittoor Jamaat Mosque at Peringamala on Friday. Those arrested included the president and secretary of

the Jamaat committee. They were later let off on bail.

The city police registered 143 cases for various violations that were detected in the city.

These included 36 cases registered under the Epidemic Diseases Ordinance 2020.

Drones were also deployed in various parts of the city to identify violators.

tions to tackle an epidemic disease. Later, they were released on bail.

Repeat offenders

"They were detected by the drone even before and were repeatedly warned against violating the lockdown. But they kept on dishing out lame excuses like they were not aware of the restrictions.

So, we chose to take action against them when they defied the directions again," said G. Poonguzhali, Deputy Commissioner of Police.

For a week now, the city police has been carrying out surveillance using a drone allocated to them by the State police headquarters for better enforcement of the lockdown.

Ophthalmologist's Delhi visit causes anxiety

He conducted surgery after the event

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
ADILABAD

The entire medical fraternity in Adilabad district of Telangana is waiting anxiously for the COVID-19 test report of an ophthalmologist at Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), Adilabad.

If the test report turns out to be positive for the deadly viral infection, then scores of people who have come into contact with him will become COVID-19 suspects entailing a huge exercise in isolation and performing tests, according to sources at RIMS hospital.

The medical fraternity and the district administra-

tion are aghast that the eye specialist in question hid the fact that he had visited the Tablighi Jamaat markaz (centre) at Nizamuddin in New Delhi between March 8 and 12. He, in fact, attended duties between March 12 and April 1 before he was sent into quarantine at the RIMS wards.

The eye specialist in question is a senior national-level functionary of the Tablighi Jamaat based in Adilabad town. He is reported to have attended the preparatory meeting of the Jamaat between the dates in question having flown in and out of the national capital.

BJP leader Shobha smells 'corona jihad'

She asks govt. to punish those who went to Jamaat but failed to take medical test

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHIKKAMAGALURU/MYSURU

Lok Sabha member and Karnataka BJP leader Shobha Karandlaje has courted controversy by saying that she smells "corona jihad" in several cases of COVID-19 being traced to the religious congregation of Tablighi Jamaat at Nizamuddin in Delhi.

She appealed to the Centre and State governments to punish those who attended the event and did not take medical tests.

Speaking to presspersons here on Saturday, Ms. Karandlaje said: "Those who attended the Nizamuddin event are engaged in spreading the infection across the country. Many of the participants are still missing. One

can smell 'corona jihad' behind all this."

She said those who attended the event should undergo medical test and remain in quarantine. "Those who fail to follow the guidelines should be traced and the government should sub-

ject them to life imprisonment," she said.

'Light will kill virus' Mysuru's BJP MLA S.A. Ramdas has invited ridicule by claiming that the virus will die when candles are lit. While making an appeal

to the people to light candles at 9 p.m. on Sunday in their homes as suggested Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Mr. Ramdas said the viruses in the house will be "drawn towards the candle and die from the heat just like insects fly towards light to burn themselves to death." He claimed that his observations were "scientific." "Also, on Sundays, the heat generated by the sun is higher than other days", he said.

Mr. Ramdas also sought to lend a "scientific" angle to the Prime Minister's call for clapping on April 22.

He claimed that virus would be "killed by the heat generated in the body by clapping and through the sound generated".

IN BRIEF



Bengaluru Karaga is on, but it will be low-key

BENGALURU
The famous Bengaluru Karaga will be held as per schedule on April 8, but it will be a low-key event. The Karnataka government has instructed Mayor M. Goutham Kumar to conduct the festival with 'only a handful of people'. BBMP officials and councillors have been instructed to restrict the number of people visiting Dharmarayaswamy temple on account of COVID-19 restrictions.

Plantations granted exemption

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM
The Kerala government has exempted tea, cardamom, oil palm, cashew and clove plantations from the lockdown. The epidemic has stalled harvesting, processing, storage, irrigation and sustenance of plants in scores of plantations across the State. The government, however, has put several riders. Estate managements can employ only workers who are staying on the plantation. They have been barred from hiring outside help.

Police warn against mobilisation of funds

KOZHIKODE
The police have thwarted the attempts of a few youth organisation members and self-appointed volunteers to illegally mobilise funds in Kerala in the name of COVID-19 relief activities. The police have also arrested a member of a youth organisation involved in such activities. District Police Chief (Kozhikode Rural) A. Sreenivas said no cash should be paid or online transfer of funds made on the request of such fraudsters.

A hard summer



Tough times: Due to the lockdown, farmers are unable to get proper price for their produce in Hyderabad. Watermelons, which are in huge demand during summer, has few takers now. •NAGARA GOPAL

Kerala police come to the aid of starving herons

They buy fish to feed the birds that live along the coast

NAVAMY SUDHISH
KOLLAM

With stories about bird flu doing the rounds, personnel at the Neendakara coastal police station here were alerted when they spotted several blue herons lying on the ground. They alerted the Animal Husbandry Department, and an autopsy held at District Veterinary Centre revealed the cause of death as starvation.

Since Sakthikulangara and Neendakara harbours are among the few avian-rich sites in Kerala, they are



Dishing out treats: Coastal police personnel feeding fish to the birds •SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

home to hundreds of fish-eating species, including storks, egrets, cormorants, and herons. But the recent fishing restrictions, along with the ban on auctions at harbours, impacted their

main food source. When the coastal police found the birds famished, they decided to step in.

"You cannot feed them grains as they eat only fish. So we began to buy fish from country crafts which return at 4 a.m. On the first day, we bought fish for ₹1,000. We keep some fish on a wooden stand on our station premises and spread the rest in areas where the birds flock. We have been arranging food for stray dogs coordinating with voluntary organisations, but arranging fish during the lockdown was a bit difficult," says sub-inspector M.D. Prashanthan.

Coastal ecosystem

According to the Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) 2019, the harbour area has a very high count of little egrets. While some birds go in search of food to other places, some species like blue her-

77.04 lakh A.P. families get aid of ₹1,000

STAFF REPORTER
GUNTUR

About 77.04 lakh families received financial assistance of ₹1,000 announced by Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy in the wake of the lockdown owing to COVID-19 threat. About 57.91% of rice cardholders received the amount till 6 p.m., said a media release.

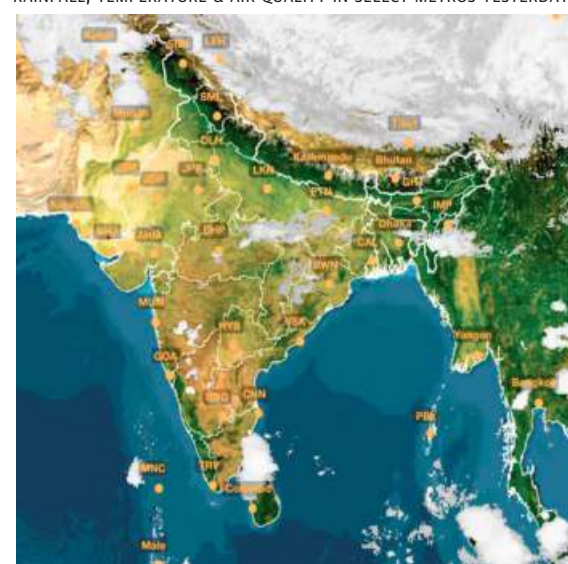
The government had earlier announced financial assistance of ₹1,000 to the poor who had lost employment owing to the lockdown.

About 2,39,159 volunteers participated in the drive in 15,001 village/ward secretariats across the State.

The Chief Minister had ordered distribution of the amount to 1.33 crore rice cardholders and ₹1,300 crore had been allocated for the same.

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18:00 HRS)

Forecast for Sunday: Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning very likely at isolated places over Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Karailak and West Bengal.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	...	36.4	20.6	Kozhikode	...	37.8	27.6
Ahmedabad	...	38.9	21.7	Kurnool	...	32.5	26.1
Aizawl	Lucknow	...	38.2	15.6
Allahabad	...	36.8	16.4	Madurai	...	35.4	25.0
Bengaluru	...	35.6	22.1	Mangaluru	...	35.4	27.0
Bhopal	...	34.7	20.2	Mumbai	...	32.6	24.2
Bhubaneswar	...	38.8	25.0	Mysuru	...	21.6	...
Chandigarh	...	29.7	12.7	New Delhi	...	31.2	15.6
Chennai	...	34.9	24.4	Patna	...	35.2	17.0
Coimbatore	...	37.2	24.4	Port Blair	...	32.0	24.7
Dehradun	...	29.5	13.1	Puducherry	...	34.3	25.4
Gangtok	...	20.8	11.6	Pune	...	38.7	20.5
Goa	...	33.4	26.0	Raipur	...	35.8	21.8
Guwahati	...	35.2	17.9	Ranchi	...	33.6	18.0
Hubballi	...	36.0	22.0	Shillong	...	25.3	17.0
Hyderabad	...	35.2	24.2	Shimla	...	19.8	7.9
Imphal	...	31.2	13.6	Srinagar	...	17.5	4.6
Jaipur	...	33.6	18.0	Thiruvananthapuram	...	34.4	25.4
Kochi	...	33.6	26.8	Tiruchi	...	38.5	24.6
Kohima	...	24.2	12.0	Vijayawada	...	...	...
Kolkata	...	36.7	25.6	Visakhapatnam	...	...	26.8

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

CITIES	SO ₂	NO ₂	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE	Yesterday
Ahmedabad	32	47	17	63	79	...	...
Bengaluru	04	07	39	77	...	...	...
Chennai	04	20	38	55	...	...	...
Delhi	23	21	23	170	104	...	...
Hyderabad	04	21	25	66	69	...	...
Kolkata	08	26	21	146	97	...	...
Lucknow	06	18	55	90	...	...	...
Mumbai	03	04	40	50	86	...	...
Pune	35	12	50	45	42	...	...
Visakhapatnam	07	41	06	49	71	...	...

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)
SO₂: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.
NO₂: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.
CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.
PM2.5 & PM10: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

FROM PAGE ONE

42% of patients between 20 & 40 years

"About 1,023 positive cases linked to the organisation can be traced to 17 States. We couldn't manage and understand this event and the cases increased due to this," said Mr. Agarwal. Nearly 22,000 contacts related to the religious event had been quarantined. About 75,000 had so far been tested, an ICMR spokesperson at the press briefing said. "We are gradually increasing our testing capacity. Our capacity is now nearly 10,000 tests per day."

The Health Ministry has also revised its advisory on the use of masks. The new guidelines accept the role of "face covers." Unlike the surgical masks and respirator masks used in hospitals, "face covers" are home made and made of cotton and could be re-used provided they were properly

washed and dried.

"People who are not suffering from medical conditions or having breathing difficulties may use the handmade reusable face cover, particularly when they step out of their house. This will help in protecting the community at large," a note from the Ministry said.

Last week, the office of India's Principal Scientific Adviser made public a manual that explained how such face covers could be made and recommended that they be widely used. While the general recommendation by the WHO has been to avoid masks — as they could deplete supplies for health personnel — opinion has changed over concerns that the infection had spread widely and people were increasingly likely to catch it when outside.

Virus drives oncologists to tweak cancer treatments

An analysis of patients in China published in *The Lancet Oncology* in March stated that patients with cancer might have a higher risk of COVID-19 than individuals without cancer. "Patients with cancer had poorer outcomes from COVID-19, providing a timely reminder to physicians that more intensive attention should be paid to patients with cancer, in case of rapid deterioration," the article's authors wrote, further suggesting "intentional postponing of adjuvant chemotherapy or elective surgery for stable cancers in endemic areas".

"Data from China has shown that mortality in cancer patients was two times higher as compared to general patients with COVID-19," observed Ashok Vaid, chairman, medical and haemato oncology, Medanta Hospital, Gurgaon. "Italy had recorded a 20% mortality in cancer patients. We have to use this data for our learning. We are trying to make multiple interventions on case to case basis.

For example, we are switching elderly cancer patients on oral therapies instead of intravenous, opting for milder therapies and also reducing their hospital visits. But it all differs on a case to case basis, based on the biology of cancer," he said.

Mumbai-based surgical oncologist Vinay Deshmone said his team had been postponing surgeries if possible and were operating only on cases where surgery couldn't wait. "I am also advising three weekly therapies instead of weekly therapies. The idea is to not have a rigid outlook and treat each case individualistically," he said.

The lockdown has already resulted in reduced patient footfall. "We are not discontinuing the ongoing regimens," said Amal Katak, director of Dr. B Borooah Cancer Institute, Guwahati. "But we are modifying the treatment protocol in some cases so that the risk of COVID-19 is mitigated as much as possible," Dr. Katak added.

Grounding of planes hits weather data supply

"Now that's been reduced. But because weather services are an essential service we are working with reduced manpower," he added. The IMD is a subsidiary of the MoES. A major factor for gauging the performance of the monsoon is the El Nino, a warming of the ocean waters in the equatorial Pacific Ocean. This data is measured by observational data buoys located in the sea and relayed via satellite. "This data isn't affected so far," Dr. Pai said. The IMD issues its first fore-

cast for the June-September monsoon in April and updates it in June.

Aviation-generated data is also helpful to warn of developing thunderstorms or swings in temperatures that often begin at the heights aircraft traverse.

"There are mathematical fixes that can be used to compensate for this. However, a lack of data for a prolonged period of time is a big loss for calculating weather trends and future climate patterns," the IMD scientist added.

Pak. vows to appeal against acquittal of Omar Sheikh

In another statement, the Imran Khan government said it was "concerned" about the verdict. "Government of Pakistan reiterates its commitment to follow due process under the laws of the country to bring terrorists to task," a statement issued by the Pakistan Information Department said.

The Ministry of External Affairs declined to comment on the case. However, diplomats and security officials said the acquittal and Pakistan's subsequent actions would only open a new can of worms in the case of Omar Sheikh, who was arrested for kidnapping and terror in India in 1994. He was released along with Masood Azhar after the IC-814 hijacking.

Sheikh, who was believed to have worked closely with

Al Qaeda before and after 9/11, was being investigated for wiring \$100,000 to 9/11 attacker Mohammad Atta. He was in touch with Osama Bin Laden.

Former diplomat Vivek Katju said, "Pakistan's approach to terrorism is revealed by the shoddiness with which they prosecuted Omar Sheikh in such a high profile case. Much will depend on how it manages the appeals in the higher courts."

Apart from the loopholes, some also raised the questions of a possible link to the current Minister of Interior Brig (retd.) Ijaz Shah, a former IB chief. In 2002, with a manhunt declared for him in the Pearl case, he had reportedly sought refuge with Mr. Shah, and then "surrendered" to him.

PM to brief floor leaders on COVID-19

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has called for a meeting of floor leaders of political parties in both Houses of Parliament on April 8 to brief them about COVID-19 outbreak and related issues. The meeting will be held through video-conferencing.

The Budget session of Parliament was adjourned on March 23 after an increase in number of COVID-19 positive cases in the country.

The Trinamool Congress has said it may give the meeting a skip.

A Trinamool leader said the party had been seeking a discussion in Parliament and an all-party meeting on COVID-19 since early March but to no avail. "Now that the situation has blown up, why are they calling this meeting. It's merely a photo-op," a senior party leader said.

The Congress has not taken a call on the issue.

Cong. seeks more aid for States

Rahul asks government to scale up testing rather than 'lighting lamps'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Saturday said the Union government should empower the State governments by announcing a special economic package of ₹1 lakh crore and release about ₹42,000 crore due as compensation for the goods and services tax (GST).

It urged the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to offer zero interest loans as the States have been at the forefront of the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi asked the government to scale up testing rather than "lighting lamps", while the party criticised the government for not banning export of diagnostic kits until Saturday.

"India is simply not testing enough to fight the #Covid19 virus. Making people clap & shining torches in the sky isn't going to solve the problem," Mr. Gandhi tweeted.

"Testing & Diagnostics are imperative in fight against

States don't have the same instruments to mobilise funds like the Union government even though the real implementation of the measures announced are being done by the State governments

SUPRIYA SHRINATE, Congress spokesperson



#COVID2019! Till 19th March & 24th March, Govt permitted export of Masks, Sanitizers & Ventilators. Even more shocking is the fact that Govt permitted export of Diagnostic equipment till date! Who is weakening the fight," asked Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala on Twitter with a copy of a government notification attached.

Curbs imposed
An April 4 notification of the Commerce Ministry restricted the free export of diagnostic kits.

In an online media interaction, Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinate offered a number of suggestions, including building a consensus instead of making "unilateral

announcements".
"We urge the government yet again to create a national consensus by putting in place a structured consultative process between the Centre and the States while formulating our strategy to deal with the COVID-19 outbreak and the collateral damage of life and livelihood. A similar consensus must also be arrived at by involving all political parties in key decision-making at this crucial juncture rather than making just unilateral announcements," the Congress spokesperson said.

"The States don't have the same instruments to mobilise funds like the Union government even though the real implementation of the measures announced are be-

ing done by the State governments. We strongly urge the Central government to announce a special economic package of at least ₹1 lakh crore for the States to combat the crisis," Ms Shrinate said. The money could be divided on the basis of a State's population.

Delayed payment

"The Centre has delayed payment of GST compensation to the States. Of the ₹48,000 crore pending in GST compensation, only ₹6,195 crore has been released so far. Due to the halt in economic activity, the States are facing a further shortage in GST revenue. Several States, including the BJP-ruled ones, have approached the Central government seeking clearance of their pending tax dues," she said.

The Congress urged the RBI, which effected an additional 30% increase in Way and Means Advances (WMA) for the State governments, to make it interest-free.

'Nothing but a cruel joke on the poor'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi asked people to switch off electric lights at home and light candles or oil lamps for nine minutes on Sunday, the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) wrote to him on Saturday to express disappointment.

CITU general secretary Tapan Sen, said the workers suffering because of the lockdown to curb the spread of COVID-19, expected some relief from Mr. Modi's Friday address. "The country remains in the dark on the measures that your government is taking to fight the coronavirus, while you called upon the people to put off lights and light candles at 9 p.m. on April 5 to drive away the darkness caused by the coronavirus... It is nothing but a cruel joke on the poor," the letter stated.

The CITU urged Mr. Modi to address the demands of trade unions.

U.P. government to expand virus testing

Surveillance has started in districts that have not recorded cases, says State Health Secretary

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government has indicated it would expand the spread of testing for COVID-19 in the State, though in small numbers.

State Health Principal Secretary Amit Mohan Prasad said the surveillance process had started in those districts that had not recorded any cases yet.

Till Friday evening, 24 out of 75 districts in the State had reported positive cases, as per the U.P. Directorate of Health Services.

With 47 cases across 14



Fever check: The State has eight laboratories testing for COVID-19 with a ninth one in Jhansi waiting for approval. •PTI

districts linked to members of the Tablighi Jamaat event in Delhi, the State's overall fi-

gure stood at 174 on Friday evening.

Mr. Mohan said districts

where there had not been enough testing had been directed to test at least four samples of cold, cough, fever and pneumonia cases daily. This would be done across the State, he said.

"At this stage, getting people tested as much as possible and as soon as the results come, carrying out immediate aggressive containment and isolation exercise and putting them under facility quarantine are the most important tasks," Mr. Prasad said.

The State currently has eight laboratories testing for

COVID-19 with a ninth one in Jhansi waiting for approval.

Mr. Prasad also said that the State was going to use rapid testing kits for surveillance soon.

COVID-19

Each district had a dedicated level-1 COVID-19 hospital operating, while three level-3 COVID-19 hospitals were notified and six level-2 COVID-19 hospitals were to be notified, said the official.

Uttar Pradesh has so far tested 4,006 samples for COVID-19.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BHUBANESWAR

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Saturday called upon Tablighi Jamaat returnees to come forward for testing within 24 hours and urged people not to panic but stay watchful to contain the spread of COVID-19.

Mr. Patnaik appealed to those who had returned to the State after attending the Jamaat's religious conference in Delhi to call toll free number 104 and follow the advice of the doctors.

The State government's Health and Family Welfare Department said in a message, "We once again request all who have a link to Nizamuddin incident to voluntarily call 104 and provide information about their contacts. There is no need to panic and hide. Anyone with information about such persons may inform 104. Help us keep you safe."

The government has so far traced 28 persons who had returned from the Nizamuddin gathering. While 25 of them had tested negative, three — one each in Cuttack, Puri and Jajpur — tested positive.

The government said that about 40 others from the State who attended the event were reportedly stranded in Delhi and other States. The contacts of a group of 10 delegates of the Jamaat who had returned after visiting Talcher town are being traced.

1,395 samples were tested at the three labs across the State till Friday.

Don't spread communal virus, warns Uddhav

CM talks tough on hate speech

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Saturday warned of strict action against persons spreading communally divisive messages on social media amidst rising cases of COVID-19.

In his address through social media, Mr. Thackeray reiterated that no permission will be granted to religious, political or sporting events in the State till further notice. He also added that lifting of lockdown in the State after April 14 will depend upon the compliance by people to the government directives.

In an apparent reference to hate speech on social media against a Muslim community in the wake of the

spike in COVID-19 cases linked to Tablighi Jamaat gathering in Delhi, Mr. Thackeray warned of strict action against such persons. "There is another virus of divisiveness apart from the coronavirus. I warn such people that I will ensure that no law will save you," he said.

Addressing communities other than Hindus, without specifically naming them, the Chief Minister said, "We celebrated Gudhipadwa and Ramnavmi by staying indoors. I am confident that other communities would do the same."

The CM said religious leaders, including maulvis, have been in touch with him, and have asked members of their communities to not venture out.

Modi, Trump talk on fight against virus

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and U.S. President Donald Trump on Saturday held a detailed discussion on the situation arising out of the COVID-19 outbreak and resolved to deploy the full strength of the India-U.S. partnership to fight the pandemic.

Mr. Modi tweeted that he held an "extensive" telephonic conversation. "We had a good discussion, and agreed to deploy the full strength of the India-US partnership to fight COVID-19," he posted.

Mr. Modi also tweeted that he had a conversation with Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro on how India and Brazil could join forces against the pandemic.

Two more positive cases from Dharavi

Civic body carries out disinfection

STAFF REPORTER
MUMBAI

The number of COVID-19 positive cases from Dharavi rose to four on Saturday.

A 30-year-old woman, a resident of the same area as the first patient, along with a 48-year-old man from Dharavi's Mukund Nagar, tested positive for the disease. This brings the total to four from the area, excluding a conservancy worker, who also tested positive.

Upscale Shivaji Park too reported its first positive case on Saturday.

Even as authorities are inspecting a Tablighi Jamaat link to the death of the first COVID-19 patient, the deceased's immediate contacts have tested negative.

But, a 30-year-old woman

from the same part of Dharavi, Baliga Nagar, tested positive on Saturday. She was not a contact of the first patient. Her family is being tested and Baliga Nagar was sealed off. BMC has set up a health camp and is taking swab samples of residents who exhibit symptoms.

The second case is of a 48-year-old man from Mukund Nagar, not very far from Baliga Nagar. The patient has been admitted to Sion hospital. Both patients did not have a foreign travel history. BMC carried out screening and disinfection at Mukund Nagar on Saturday. BMC

Earlier, a doctor from Wockhardt hospital had also tested positive for COVID-19 and is under treatment.

Mallya case order may get delayed

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The verdict in the extradition case against fugitive businessman Vijay Mallya by a United Kingdom court may get delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has so far claimed more than 4,300 lives there.

In February, the court heard Mr. Mallya's appeal against the Westminster Magistrates Court's clearance of his extradition in connection with the cases instituted by the CBI and the Enforcement Directorate. A joint team of both agencies was there to assist the prosecution.

"After the hearing, the court reserved the order. It is possible that the pandemic may cause delay in the announcement of the verdict," said an official.

Four militants killed in Kulgam

Operation was the first in the district after 11 months

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR

Four militants were killed and a house was damaged in an operation by security forces in south Kashmir's Kulgam on Saturday.

Three militants were killed earlier in the day and the body of the fourth was recovered later in the debris of the house, where the militants were holed up, a spokesman in Srinagar said.

The police said the militants surrounded by a joint search party of the Army, the police and the CRPF in Man Gori village of Khul Batpora area of Kulgam.

"The militants were challenged. They opened fire and the exchange of fire resulted in their killing," the police said.

However, the locals said the militants were killed in a blast detonated by the secur-



Battle cry: Jawans rush towards the encounter site at Hardmand Guri village in Manzgam. • NISSAR AHMAD

ity forces that razed the house to the ground.

The police said they were identifying the slain militants. Today's operation was the first encounter in Kul-

gam district after a gap of 11 months.

The police said the militants were behind the killing of four civilians in Kulgam in the past 15 days.

J&K parties condemn changes to domicile laws

NC, PDP and PC united in their stance

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR

The Centre's move to make amendments to Jammu & Kashmir's domicile laws within days of its issuing, drew flak from the regional parties including the National Conference (NC), the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the Peoples Conference (PC), on Saturday.

The Home Ministry order late on Friday provides protection to domiciles to "any post" in the government including Group A and Group B, apart from Group D and entry-level non-gazetted government posts.

"It's high time people of J&K get to decide the laws that will govern them rather than being subjected to the whims and fancies of the Centre, where orders are issued in the morning and

changes issued in the evening. Restore statehood and conduct elections in J&K," said NC vice president Omar Abdullah.

Castigating the ruling BJP, PDP spokesperson Firdous Tak said, "The domicile legislation, even in its amended form, portrays the real intention behind the scrapping of J&K's special status. A law that was meant to govern the 12 million population of Jammu & Kashmir was so offhandedly drafted."

PC spokesperson Junaid Azim Mattu said: "The sensitive and cherished aspect of sub-identity remains unguarded. This perhaps sums up the new state of affairs: 'Take a pound from you and throw some pennies back at you and subject you to enacting a monkey dance'.

Lights-off event will not harm grid: Ministry

Arrangements in place to handle variation in demand, it says

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

India's power grid is likely to come to no harm on account of the mass switching off of electric lights on Sunday, the Power Ministry has said in a statement.

"Some apprehensions have been expressed that this may cause instability in the grid and fluctuation in voltage which may harm the electrical appliances... they are misplaced," the press statement said.

It said the electricity grid was "robust and stable", and adequate arrangements and protocols were in place to handle the variation in demand.

Only residential lights

It said the call was not to switch off street lights or computers, television sets, fans, refrigerators and air conditioners. Only lights should be switched off, but not except in hospitals and other essential services such

Apprehensions have been expressed that this may cause instability... they are misplaced

as public utilities, municipal services, offices, police stations, manufacturing facilities.

To dispel the "deep darkness" that the pandemic had wrought, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday exhorted Indians to switch off their residential lights at 9 p.m. on Sunday and light candles or flash their phone-lights in the following nine minutes.

Power companies say a sudden dip and then a spike in supply could threaten the stability of the grid and may cause some of them to trip.

Power System Operation Corporation (Posoco) Ltd, a public sector company in charge of managing the grid load, said it expected a 12-13 GW (1 gigawatt is 1,000 megawatt) dip and a subse-

quent surge in 17 minutes. (A four-minute window either side of the nine minutes when consumers would begin switching off and then relight).

20% down

With the lockdown in force, power suppliers across India are already grappling with a 20% dip in demand. An instability in the grid would wobble the frequency range at which electricity flows and threaten an outage.

In an advisory, Posoco described the anticipated fluctuation in demand as "unprecedented" and would need hydro and gas resources to help the grid retain its stability.

The method of management would be a phased reduction in gas- and hydro generation from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at inter-State generating stations and then a ramping up from 9:10 onwards, according to the note.

Power managers primed for a dip and surge

Measures like voltage control and black start will be in place for Sunday's event

M. KALYANARAMAN

The lights-off event planned for Sunday can lead to disruptions in power supply when everyone switches off their lights from 9 p.m. and switches on after nine minutes. Electricity authorities have studied power consumption patterns across India and the share of lighting in it, to come up with a plan to handle the expected dip and surge in consumption.

When everyone switches off their lights, the power plants will be affected. The situation can be compared to a bicycle climbing upward. When the lights go off all at once, it is akin to the cyclist suddenly reaching the peak and continuing to pedal as before during the climb down. The bicycle speed will then ramp up and could lead to the cyclist losing his balance. The voltage in the grid and the frequency will surge. The frequency can be understood as the electrical equivalent of the bicycle's speed.

The bicyclist losing his balance is like our power plants



The contingency plans include black start — starting power plants during a black-out.

stopping operation as a result of these sudden changes. If, however, the bicyclist anticipates the steepness of the terrain and the cliff, then he can pedal as required.

Electricity authorities have observed consumption patterns across States and concluded that the dip and surge is likely to be of the order of 12 to 14 gigawatts, which is roughly 10% of electricity consumed (load, actually) at any given point in time in India. And the dip and the surge will each happen in two to four minutes.

Different types of power plants have different abilities to handle sudden increase or decrease in load. The control

System Operation Corporation (Posoco) Limited has come up with a strategy.

In India, power consumption hits a low at around 6.10 p.m. This is when everyone has left their offices. Lights are off in offices and not yet on at homes. The sun has not set yet. Fans are probably off, too. After the low, power consumption rises and hits a peak at around 7.20 p.m. It then starts reducing.

Evening plan

During the evening, when power consumption starts rising after the 6.10 p.m. low, the hydro plants will be powered down by decreasing the water flowing to the turbines and, instead, storing the water in the reservoirs during the evening (after 6 p.m.) when power demand hits a peak. The load will be taken up by other units.

Before lights-out on Sunday, by 8.55 p.m., the thermal generating units such as coal and gas will be powered down to 60% of their capacity. And hydro plants will be powered up to take the

shortfall from thermal plants.

After 8.57 p.m., both types of plants will be powered down as people switch off their lights. Power managers will keep a watch over the frequency. If they reduce the power but the demand is still there and not enough people are switching off their lights, then the frequency will dip too much.

As the lights-out picks up, hydro units will be brought down to less than 10% of the maximum power they can produce. Gas units will be brought down to minimum power.

From 9.05 p.m., the thermal units will start ramping up, and from 9.09 p.m. hydro units will start powering up. After stabilisation, the operation of all types of power plants will be brought to normal.

Operationally, Posoco has asked all senior personnel to be on duty. Contingency plans include black start — starting power plants during a black-out.

(The writer is an independent journalist)

IN BRIEF



No plan yet to resume services, says Railways

NEW DELHI
The Railways on Saturday said no final decision had been taken on the restoration of train services. The statement comes amid reports that the Railways had prepared a plan to resume the services that remain suspended because of the 21-day lockdown. "No such plan regarding the resumption of passenger services has been issued," the Railways said.

Padma awardee denied proper treatment: Sukhbir

CHANDIGARH
Shiromani Akali Dal president and former Punjab Deputy CM Sukhbir Singh Badat on Saturday alleged that Bhai Nirmal Singh Khalsa, a Padma Shri awardee who died of COVID-19, was not given quality medical treatment at the government hospital in Amritsar. "Details of the last telephone call of Khalsa with his family are shocking. He disclosed that no one attended to him for four hours. Later, the family revealed that the hospital was unhygienic, nurses did not have any gloves," he claimed.

Pregnant woman refused attention: Minister

JAIPUR
Senior Congress leader and Rajasthan Tourism Minister Vishvendra Singh alleged on Saturday that a pregnant woman was refused medical attention at a government hospital in Bharatpur because of her "religious identity". The woman was referred in a critical condition by the hospital to Jaipur. "The child, who was later delivered in an ambulance, died. What worse can we ask for?" he tweeted. An enquiry into the incident has been ordered.

Fightback



All in: (Clockwise from top) Senior citizens waiting to collect their pensions while maintaining distance at the General Post Office in Patna during the lockdown on Saturday; policemen on vigil outside the apartment complex where the first COVID-19 positive case in Guwahati was detected; and a medical worker equipping an isolation coach in Ahmedabad. ■RANJEET KUMAR, RITU RAJ KONWAR & VIJAY SONEJI

ICMR issues rule book on 'large outbreaks'

It also released guidelines on the use of rapid antibody testing kits

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) made public guidelines that detail how the country plans to manage a "large outbreak" as well as guidelines on how rapid antibody test kits ought to be deployed. India's official position is that there is no evidence of community transmission in the country.

According to Lav Agrawal, spokesperson, Health Ministry, 30% (about 1,000 positive cases spread across 17 States) of India's total case count is attributable to the Tablighi Jamaat gathering in

Delhi earlier this month.

The plan for large outbreaks, released on Saturday, specifies: active surveillance for cases and contacts in the identified geographic zone, expanding laboratory capacity for testing all suspect cases, high risk contacts and Sever Acute Respiratory Illness cases, operationalise surge capacities created for isolation (COVID-19 hospitals/COVID-19 dedicated blocks) to hospitalise and manage all suspect/confirmed cases, implementing physical distancing measures with strict perimeter control, provide chemopro-

phylaxis with hydroxy-chloroquine to all asymptomatic healthcare workers and asymptomatic household contacts of laboratory confirmed cases.

It also detailed guidelines on the use of rapid antibody testing kits. Unlike the real-time RT-PCR kits that are used to detect an ongoing infection, these kits — within 15 minutes to two hours at the maximum — can say if a person has ever been infected by the virus and gives authorities an estimate of whether there are asymptomatic carriers of the infection in a community.

Knowing the proportion of asymptomatic carriers to positive cases gives an insight into the infectivity of the disease, transmission patterns and helps prepare for the long-term management of the epidemic. Testing negative via an antibody kit doesn't automatically rule out infection and needs to be supplemented by a PCR test, the ICMR guidelines specify.

Hundreds of antibody kit manufacturers have been approved in India in the last week to offer tests, according to the Health Ministry website.

Study lists 69 existing drugs to target novel coronavirus

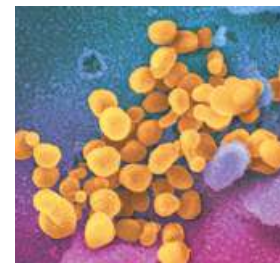
Nearly 100 scientists worldwide collaborated for it

ASWATHI PACHA

In a breathtaking feat, nearly 100 scientists from across the globe worked together to study the genes of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) and have published a list of drugs that can be repurposed to treat COVID-19.

The study posted on preprint server bioRxiv on March 27 is yet to be peer-reviewed or published in a scientific journal.

The proteins of the virus must attach to the human proteins to cause the infection. The team studied 26 coronavirus genes that help in the production of these proteins. It also studied human proteins and found 332 SARS-CoV-2 and human protein interactions. The team then listed 67 human proteins that can be targeted by



The novel coronavirus

69 drugs to fight the infection. These drugs include the those under clinical trials and/or preclinical compounds.

"When the virus invades the cells, it hijacks the cells' molecular machinery to replicate itself because it cannot do this on its own. The drugs we have identified may be able to inhibit these molecular machines so that the virus can no longer use them for its own survival.

However, they still need to be further tested," said Mehdi Bouhaddou, one of the authors. He is a post-doctoral fellow at the University of California, San Francisco.

Familiar names

The list includes unexpected candidates such as entacapone used to treat Parkinson's disease. Another is the antiviral medication named ribavirin, which was administered to Nipah patients in Kerala during the 2018 outbreak. Chloroquine, an antimalarial drug, and metformin, used to treat diabetes, are also there.

"The next step is to test these drugs in labs we are collaborating with in New York (Mount Sinai) and Paris (Pasteur Institute), where they have the virus growing," he said.

₹50 lakh insurance cover for policemen

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

Amid the COVID-19 crisis in the State, Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Saturday announced a special health insurance cover of ₹50 lakh each for the police personnel and sanitation workers in the front line of the battle against the pandemic, on the lines of that announced for health workers by the Centre. The number of cases in the State rose to 65 till April 4 with eight fresh cases on Saturday, including three who attended the Tablighi Jamaat congrega-

tion in Delhi in March. The Chief Minister also warned of strict action, including impounding of passports, of those who fail to declare their travel history.

Strict action

At a Cabinet meeting, Capt. Amarinder said there could be no compromise on this count and anyone found hiding their travel history from police and Health department personnel would be dealt with strictly. "We will take away their passports too," he warned.

The Chief Minister also

authorised extension for all retiring health department employees by three months, said an official statement.

Taking note of shutdown of operations by several private hospitals, the Cabinet decided on strict action, with the Chief Minister suggesting that the Health department cancel the licences of hospitals refusing to treat COVID-19 patients.

The Health department officers earlier informed the Cabinet that rapid tests will begin in the State to speed up the identification of positive cases.

Shillong dentist writes prescription for liquor

Patient has withdrawal symptoms

RAHUL KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI

To drink or not to drink. This is the subject of a lively debate in Meghalaya's capital Shillong amid the ongoing nationwide lockdown.

A dentist in the city on Friday prescribed two bottles of whiskey to a 65-year-old male patient, advising him not to drink more than two pegs a day.

The doctor cited the case of Kerala in justifying the prescription. He said his patient was suffering from withdrawal symptoms.

"I have advised him to consume alcohol in limited

quantity," he said.

The dentist's prescription coincided with an appeal by the Wine Dealers and Welfare Association in Shillong to Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma seeking permission to open their outlets across the State with immediate effect. The association said the lockdown had increased the demand for liquor.

Their appeal followed the withdrawal of an order by the State government asking bonded warehouses to sell liquor. The order was withdrawn after the Indian Medical Association objected to it.

Khans offer office to help fight virus

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Actor Shah Rukh and Gauri Khan have offered their personal office to the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) to help expand their quarantine facility for those afflicted with COVID-19.

The four-storey building, located in Mumbai's Khar area, would be equipped with essentials for quarantined children, women and the elderly. The BMC handle @mybmc tweeted this on Saturday.

This comes two days after the actor had pledged aid to a number of organisations on several fronts.

POSTGRADUATE INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL EDUCATION & RESEARCH, CHANDIGARH
ADMISSION NOTICE No. 05/2020
Online applications are invited for admission to DMM,Ch, MD (Hospital Administration), Master of Public Health (MPH) & Post Graduate Diploma in Public Health Management (PGDPHM) courses for the July 2020 session through computer based test (CBT) to be held at different cities across the Country. Tentative Schedule of related activities is given below:-

Commencement of online Registration and filing of application form on PGIMER, Chandigarh website	6 th April, 2020
Closing of online Registration and submission of application form	6 th May, 2020
Computer Based Test (CBT)	7 th June, 2020 (Sunday)

For eligibility criteria, number of seats and other details, applicants are advised to read the prospectus and instructions given there in carefully before starting online registration and filing of application form. The information brochure/prospectus of admission is available on Institute's website i.e. www.pgimer.edu.in. The candidates are requested to visit the PGIMER website regularly for all subsequent changes/update for entrance examination/communications/ addendum/ corrigendum.

VIJAYAWADA MUNICIPAL CORPORATION (VMC)
CORRIGENDUM
Tender Notice No. CE-20/VMC/AE/2019-20, Dt.23-03-2020, Dt.04-04-2020
The corrigendum is hereby issued for the two works of tender notices No. CE-20/VMC/AE/2019-20, Dt.23-03-2020 (ID:324908) & CE-21/VMC/AE/2019-20, Dt.30-03-2020 (ID:325058) regarding attachment of images for some of BoQ items.
The detailed corrigendum may be seen in e-procurement portal i.e., tender.aeprocurement.gov.in for works with above IDs.
*Remaining terms and conditions are un-altered
Sd/- XXXXX
CHIEF ENGINEER

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH & TRAINING (NCERT), NEW DELHI
ADMISSION IN TO VARIOUS TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMMES OF REGIONAL INSTITUTES OF EDUCATION
The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), New Delhi is an autonomous organisation set up in 1961 by the Government of India, Ministry of HRD to assist and advise the Central and State Governments on policies and programmes for qualitative improvement in school education and teacher education. The eight constituent units of NCERT, located in different parts of the country, include: (i) RIE, Ajmer; (ii) RIE, Bhopal; (iii) RIE, Bhubaneswar; (iv) RIE, Mysore; (v) NERIE, Shillong; (vi) NIE, New Delhi; (vii) CIET, New Delhi; and (viii) PSSCIVE, Bhopal.
Applications are invited on-line from the eligible applicants for admission into various Teacher Education programmes, viz. (i) B.Sc.B.Ed. (4-year), (ii) B.A.B.Ed. (4-year), (iii) M.Sc.Ed. (6-year), (iv) B.Ed. (2-year) and (v) M.Ed. (2-year) run under Regional Institutes of Education. The on-line application form is available w.e.f. 06/04/2020 to 04/05/2020 at https://cee.ncert.gov.in. Common Entrance Examination (CEE) will be conducted at various centres across the country on May 24, 2020. For details, visit our URL https://cee.ncert.gov.in. For any query contact CEE-2020 Helpdesk phone numbers 0755-2661467/ 0755-2661468 or the email ID cee2020help@gmail.com

S.No.	Important Events	From	To (Last Date)
1.	On-line Registration and Submission of Application Form	06.04.2020	04.05.2020
2.	Downloading Admit Card	12.05.2020	23.05.2020
3.	Date of Common Entrance Examination-2020		24.05.2020
4.	Last date for Submission of Qualifying Examination Marks for Applicants appearing entrance examination for B.Sc.B.Ed. (4-year), B.A.B.Ed (4-year) and M.Sc.Ed. (6-year)		10.06.2020
5.	Last date for Submission of Qualifying Examination Marks for Applicants appearing entrance examination for B.Ed. and M.Ed.		01.07.2020
6.	Declaration of Results for B.Sc.B.Ed. (4-year), B.A.B.Ed. (4-year) and M.Sc.Ed. (6-year)		05.07.2020
7.	Declaration of Results for B.Ed. and M.Ed.		10.07.2020

Principal
RIE, Bhopal

Americans told to wear face masks

Trump says it is voluntary; Europe sees glimmer of hope as new infections slow in Spain and Italy

**AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MADRID**
Americans on Saturday came to grips with recommendations to wear masks against the coronavirus, while Spain added to hopes that Europe could be turning a corner in the pandemic with a second daily drop in deaths. Since COVID-19 emerged late last year, more than 1.1 million people have fallen ill. More than 60,000 people have died. Europe accounts for the lion's share of virus fatalities, but America logged another rise in its death toll to bring the total to just over 7,100.

On Saturday, New York State's toll rose at a devastating pace to 3,565 deaths, Governor Andrew Cuomo said, up from 2,935 the previous day, the largest 24-hour jump recorded there. President Donald Trump's administration on Friday suggested widespread use of simple masks or scarves might help slow the spread — even if the U.S. leader said he himself wouldn't be following the advice.

"It's going to be really a voluntary thing," Mr. Trump said. "You don't have to do it and I'm choosing not to do it, but some people may want to do it and that's okay." Anthony Fauci, head of infectious diseases at the National Institutes of Health, cited "recent information that the virus can actually be spread even when people just speak as opposed to coughing and sneezing".

The World Health Organization has been more cautious, saying the airborne threat was only known to occur during certain medical treatments. The U.S. recommendation will likely worsen an already severe shortage of masks in the U.S. and Europe, which both rely heavily

on imports from China. Officials in New York, the worst affected part of the U.S., began advising people to wear masks some days ago, and there were signs on the streets that the advice was being heeded.

Hope in Europe
In Europe, Italy and Spain continue to bear the brunt of a pandemic that has kept millions of citizens confined to their homes, closed schools and businesses and overwhelmed healthcare systems. But official figures suggested unprecedented measures to restrict people's movements were working and that the peak may have hit on the continent.

Spain, which is under a near-total lockdown, on Saturday recorded a second successive daily fall in coronavirus-related deaths with 809 fatalities. The total number of deaths in the country now stands at 11,744, second only to Italy. The number of new Spanish cases also slowed at 7,026, taking the total to 1,24,736.

Italy reported late on Friday that the daily rise of officially registered infections dropped to a new low of just 4%, while the number of people who had fully recovered was rising.

In Germany, where the death toll rose again on Saturday, Chancellor Angela Merkel said figures showing the virus's spread was slowing "give us a little bit of hope". "But it is definitely much too early to see a clear trend in that, and it is certainly too early to think in any way about relaxing the strict rules we have given ourselves," she said. German authorities joined the U.S. and other countries in encouraging citizens to wear self-made masks in public.



Testing children too: Healthcare workers collecting blood samples from a child to detect the SARS-CoV-2 virus, in Antananarivo, Madagascar, on Saturday. • AFP

U.S. to cover treatment of uninsured people

**AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON**
The tens of millions of Americans who lack health insurance will be covered by the government if they fall sick with the COVID-19 illness, the U.S. Health Secretary said on Friday.

Alex Azar told reporters that the CARES act, a coronavirus stimulus package passed by Congress, included \$100 billion for health care providers who "will be forbidden from balance billing the uninsured for the cost of their care."

Instead, hospitals and healthcare professionals will be reimbursed at the rates for Medicare, a state insurance programme for the elderly.

Mr. Azar added that people who have recently lost

their jobs and thus their insurance would be eligible for a special enrollment period under healthcare exchanges created by the Affordable Care Act. President Donald Trump has spent most of his tenure trying to undo the law, also known as Obamacare, and the marketplaces created under it.

The latest official figures showed there were 27.5 million people without health insurance — but the current number is likely far higher after 10 million people filed unemployment claims in the past two weeks.

Public health experts have repeatedly warned that the uninsured may be reluctant to seek treatment, placing themselves at greater risk and fuelling the spread of the disease.

U.K. death toll records daily high of 708

**AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON**

Britain on Saturday reported 708 more deaths from COVID-19 in a new daily high, as the number of confirmed cases rose to nearly 42,000. The Health Ministry said 4,313 people who tested positive for the virus in hospital had died as of 1600 GMT Friday while there were 41,903 confirmed cases as of 0800 GMT Saturday, up 3,735.

The toll has been steadily increasing at more than over 500 deaths a day this week and the country is bracing for an expected peak in the next week to 10 days. Prime Minister Boris Johnson ordered a three-week lockdown on March 23 to try to cut infections.

China pauses in memory of virus victims and 'martyrs'

In Wuhan, sirens sounded as people fall silent in the streets

**AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WUHAN**

China came to a standstill on Saturday to mourn patients and medical staff killed by the coronavirus, as the world's most populous country observed a nationwide three-minute silence.

At 10 a.m. local time, citizens paused, cars, trains and ships sounded their horns, and air-raid sirens rang out in memory of the more than 3,000 lives claimed by the virus in China. In Wuhan — the city where the virus first emerged late last year — sirens and horns sounded as people fell silent in the streets.

Tongji Hospital staff stood outside with heads bowed towards the main building, some in the protective hazmat suits that have become a symbol of the crisis worldwide. "I feel a lot of sorrow about our colleagues and patients who died," Xu, a nurse at Tongji who worked on the frontlines treating COVID-19 patients, said, holding back tears. "I hope they can rest well in heaven."

Workers in protective wear paused silently beside barriers at one residential community — a reminder there are still tight restrictions on everyday life across Wuhan. State media showed Chinese President Xi Jinping and other officials standing outside a Beijing government compound, wearing white flowers. National flags were lowered to half-mast across the country, including in the capital's Tiananmen Square.

Pedestrians in a busy shopping district stopped and kept their heads low in silent tribute, while police stood with their riot shields



In a mood for reflection: People paying tribute to those who died of the COVID-19 disease in Beijing on Saturday. • REUTERS

down and bowed heads. "During this process, a lot of people including the medical workers... have made extraordinary contributions. They are all heroes," said shopper Wang Yongna.

Park-goers paused their activities too, some with hands together in prayer. Trains on Beijing's subway network halted, and passengers stood silently in a mark of respect.

Mourning the 'martyrs'
Officials said the observance was a chance to mourn virus "martyrs" — an honorific title the government bestowed this week on 14 medical workers who died fighting the outbreak.

The hashtag "China remembers its heroes" had nearly 1.3 billion views on Twitter-like Weibo Saturday.

The martyrs include doctor Li Wenliang, a Wuhan whistleblower reprimanded by authorities for trying to warn others in the early days of the contagion. Mr. Li's death from COVID-19 in February prompted a national outpouring of grief and anger at the government's handling of the crisis. The ruling Communist Party has

sought to direct criticism to local authorities in Wuhan and surrounding Hubei province, who were accused of downplaying the severity of the virus. Despite drastic measures to lock down the province in January, the epidemic spiralled into a global pandemic. Some restrictions in Hubei were eased in recent weeks after the official stated number of new infections dropped to near zero. Saturday's commemoration coincided with the annual Qing Ming holiday — the "tomb sweeping" festival — when Chinese people visit the graves of relatives and leave offerings in remembrance. Some restrictions were tightened again this week to prevent a second wave of infections, with authorities discouraging cemetery visits to mark the festival. Last year, nearly 10 million people visited cemeteries across the three-day holiday, according to state news agency Xinhua.

At Beijing's enormous Babaoshan cemetery, mourners made online reservations to visit graves in a limited number of time slots, with only three relatives allowed per tomb.

Trump fires top intelligence official

Inspector General Atkinson had played a key role in his impeachment

**ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON**

U.S. President Donald Trump on Friday abruptly fired the Inspector General of the intelligence community, sidelining an independent watchdog who played a pivotal role in his impeachment. Mr. Trump informed the Senate intelligence committee late on Friday of his decision to fire Michael Atkinson, according to a letter. Mr. Atkinson handled the whistleblower complaint that triggered Mr. Trump's impeachment last year.

Mr. Atkinson's firing, which is part of a shake-up of the intelligence community under Mr. Trump, thrusts the President's impeachment back into the spotlight as his administration deals with the deadly spread of the virus.

'No confidence'
Mr. Trump said in the letter that it is "vital" that he has confidence in the appointees serving as Inspectors General, and "that is no longer the

case with regard to this Inspector General."

Mr. Atkinson was the first to inform Congress about an anonymous whistleblower complaint last year that described Mr. Trump's pressure on Ukraine to investigate Democrat Joe Biden and his son. That complaint prompted a House investigation that ultimately resulted in Mr. Trump's impeachment. In letters to lawmakers in August and September, Mr. Atkinson said he believed the complaint was "urgent" and "credible." But the acting Director of National Intelligence at the time, Joseph Maguire, said he did not believe it met the definition of "urgent," and tried to withhold the complaint from Congress.

The complaint was eventually released after a firestorm, and it revealed that Mr. Trump had asked Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in a July call to investigate Democrats. The House launched an inquiry in September, and three



Michael Atkinson. • AFP

months later voted to impeach Mr. Trump. The Republican-led Senate acquitted Mr. Trump in February.

Mr. Trump said in the letter to the Senate that Mr. Atkinson would be removed from office in 30 days, the required amount of time he must wait after informing Congress. He wrote that he would nominate an individual "who has my full confidence" at a later date.

According to two congressional officials, Mr. Atkinson has been placed on administrative leave, meaning he will not serve out the 30

days. One of the officials said Mr. Atkinson was only informed of his removal on Friday night.

Tom Monheim, a career intelligence professional, will become the acting Inspector General for the intelligence community, according to an intelligence official. Mr. Monheim is currently the general counsel of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency.

Larger shake-up
Mr. Atkinson's firing is part of a larger shake-up in the intelligence community. Mr. Maguire, the former acting Director of National Intelligence, was also removed by Mr. Trump and replaced by a Trump loyalist, Richard Grenell.

The intelligence community, which Mr. Trump has always viewed with skepticism, has been in turmoil amid the constant turnover. Mr. Atkinson is at least the seventh intelligence official to be fired, ousted or moved aside since last summer.

Pro-European Keir Starmer elected U.K. Labour leader

He vows to reunite party, end rift between leftists & centrists

**AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON**

Pro-European centrist Keir Starmer was on Saturday unveiled as the new Labour party leader, heralding a shift in Britain's main Opposition party after a crushing election defeat under veteran socialist Jeremy Corbyn and years of ideological infighting.

The 57-year-old former Chief State Prosecutor defeated Corbyn loyalist Rebecca Long-Bailey and backbencher Lisa Nandy in a lengthy campaign sparked by Mr. Corbyn's resignation after December's loss at the polls to Boris Johnson's Conservatives.

Angela Rayner becomes the new deputy leader, Labour announced on Twitter, after it was forced to cancel a special conference because of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Mr. Starmer, who was Labour's Brexit spokesman,



Keir Starmer. • AFP

called his election "the honour and privilege" of his life and vowed to "engage constructively" with Mr. Johnson's Conservative government.

Constructive work
Mr. Johnson immediately offered his congratulations and the pair spoke, with Mr. Starmer accepting an invita-

tion to a government briefing on COVID-19 next week. "Keir offered to work constructively with the government on how best to respond to the coronavirus outbreak," his spokesman said.

Mr. Starmer himself vowed to reunite Labour, after deep rifts between supporters of socialist Mr. Corbyn's left ideals and centrists, and wrangling over its Brexit strategy.

He immediately addressed the issue of anti-Semitism that Mr. Corbyn was accused of failing to tackle, which tarnished the party's reputation and caused Jewish members to leave in droves.

"Anti-Semitism has been a stain on our party. I have seen the grief that it's brought to so many Jewish communities," Starmer said. "On behalf of the Labour Party, I am sorry."

Biden to begin process of selecting running mate

He has committed to choosing a woman

**ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON**

Joe Biden said on Friday that he will announce a committee to oversee his vice-presidential selection process and is already thinking about whom he'd choose to join his Cabinet.



Joe Biden. • NYT

Mr. Biden, who holds a lead in delegates over Sen. Bernie Sanders but has yet to officially clinch the nomination, also said he's spoken to Mr. Sanders to let him know he'd be proceeding with the vetting process. Mr. Biden has previously committed to choosing a woman as his running mate. Mr. Biden's comments came in response to a question during a virtual fundraiser

about whether he'd be willing to release his full proposed Cabinet at the same time he announces his vice-presidential pick. Mr. Biden didn't answer the question directly, but did indicate that there are a number of people who have been helping his campaign with whom he's discussed whether they'd be "willing to come into a government if I get elected."

Kabul gurdwara attack 'mastermind' arrested

Afghan Special Forces detained ISKP chief Mawlawi Aslam Farooqi in a 'complex operation'

**VIJAJITA SINGH
NEW DELHI**

Afghanistan's Special Forces on Saturday arrested Mawlawi Aslam Farooqi, a Pakistani national and the emir (chief) of the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP), the group that claimed the March 25 attack on a gurdwara in Kabul that killed 27 people, including an Indian.

Confirming the arrest, an Afghanistan official said on Saturday that the ISKP has strong links with "regional intelligence agencies", hinting at a Pakistani hand in the terror group's operation.

Javid Faisal, the spokesperson of the Office of the National Security Council in Afghanistan, said on Twitter, "ISKP leader Abdullah Orakzai, a Pakistani national

known as Aslam Farooqi, was detained in a complex operation by @NDSAAfghanistan special forces. In initial investigations, he has confessed of strong relationship between the Islamic State-Khorasan and regional intelligence agencies."

Senior government officials in India maintain that the ISKP is run by Pakistan's Inter-State Intelligence (ISI) and the arrest of Farooqi establishes it.

ISI link
"Farooqi was a small time militant commander who was active in Pakistan's Khyber area. His rise in the ISKP leadership was made possible by the ISI," said an official. Another official said that Farooqi was earlier as-



Mawlawi Aslam Farooqi

sociated with Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT).

The gurdwara attack in Kabul was executed by a 29-year-old man from Kerala's Kasargod — Muhammed Muhsin. He stormed into the

gurdwara along with two others. As reported earlier, there are indications that another Indian — Sajid Kuthirummal, a shopkeeper from Kasargod who was among a group of 21 people who left India in 2016 to join the ISKP — could also have been part of the terror plot.

Mushin was killed in the encounter and the whereabouts of Sajid are not known yet.

A July 25, 2019 report published by a UN monitoring team said that Farooqi had replaced ISIL-Khorasan leader Mawlawi Zia ul-Haq in April the same year, referring to another acronym of the IS.

"In April, ISIL-K leader Mawlawi Zia ul-Haq, also known as Abu Omar Khorasani, was dismissed and replaced by Mawlawi Aslam Farooqi, who was previously in charge of operations in the Khyber Agency. Ul-Haq's demotion was reportedly due to poor performance in the context of ISIL-K setbacks in Nangarhar in the second half of 2018. The new leadership nomination was made during a visit by an ISIL core delegation, underscoring the direct relationship between ISIL-K and the ISIL core in Iraq and Syria," the report said.

There are other reports which said the leadership changed in 2018 after differences between Pashtun fighters led by Farooqi and ul-Haq's group comprising fighters from Central Asian countries.

ELSEWHERE



Morrison seeks action against wet markets

MELBOURNE
Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison on Friday urged the World Health Organization and the United Nations to act against China's wet markets, like the one where the deadly coronavirus is thought to have originated, as they pose "great risks" to the health and well-being of the rest of the world. • PTI

South Korea to extend social distancing period

SEOUL
South Korea said on Saturday that it will extend its intensive social distancing campaign scheduled to end on Monday by two weeks in a bid to curb the rate of virus infections to around 50 a day. This week, the government has been gauging whether it should extend a 15-day intensive social distancing policy it implemented on March 21. • REUTERS

1 killed, 4 injured in Russia gas explosion

MOSCOW
One person was killed and four were injured when a gas explosion ripped through a five-storey residential building outside Moscow on Saturday, authorities said. The blast took place in the town of Orekhovo-Zuyevo during stay-at-home orders from authorities trying to slow the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. • AFP

2 killed in knife attack in French town

LYON
A man armed with a knife attacked people out shopping in the southeastern French town of Romans-sur-Isere on Saturday, killing two and wounding four, the Mayor said. The attacks took place in the morning outside a bakery, and at shops in the town centre, said Mayor Marie-Helene Thoraval, who said the assailant had been arrested. • REUTERS



Sunil Paliwal

Kamarajar Port to boost cargo capacity

N. ANAND
CHENNAI

Kamarajar Port Ltd. (KPL), as part of its expansion programme, has taken up several new projects involving an investment of over ₹1,000 crore, to increase its cargo-handling capacity by about 60% over the next two years.

"Currently, we have a capacity to handle 48 million tonnes of cargo per annum through eight berths," said Sunil Paliwal, chairman and MD, KPL.

"We will be expanding our cargo-handling capacity by 12 million tonnes by May 2020 and 18 million tonnes by 2021, respectively. With this, we will be adding three more berths and raising the total capacity to 78 million tonnes per annum," he said.

"All the new berths will handle coal. Coal berth terminal III and IV with 18 million tonnes capacity is reserved for Tangedco," he said.

KPL had spent almost ₹600 crore on building jetties and capital dredging, while Tangedco had spent ₹450 crore for coal berth terminal III and IV, said industry sources.

Sical's iron ore terminal, which has been lying idle for the last few years due to the Madras High Court's ban on handling dusty cargo, is being converted into a coal berth at a cost of ₹220 crore.

Centre tweaks rules to make inactive accounts functional

Aims to ensure cash transfer under COVID-19 relief reaches beneficiaries

MANOJIT SAHA
MUMBAI

The Finance Ministry has tweaked prevention of money laundering (PML) norms with the aim to make all inoperative accounts functional so that cash transfers by the government under the COVID-19 relief package can reach beneficiaries.

In a communique to banks, the Department of Financial Services has conveyed that in respect of the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana accounts, basic savings account and small accounts, those accounts which have become inoperative due to various reasons – including non-completion of know your customer (KYC) re-



The Centre wants to ensure beneficiaries can withdraw cash without further documentation. ■ V.V. KRISHNAN

quirements or updation – rules have been amended with an aim 'to avoid any difficulty caused to poor people and beneficiaries of PM-GKY [Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana]'.

As a part of the PMGKY scheme, the government has decided to transfer ₹500 per month for three months to the poor and vulnerable sections of the society whose livelihood has been impacted

due to the nationwide lockdown. Accounts that may have become dysfunctional due to non-operation in the account for the last two years have also been made functional.

"Please ensure that beneficiaries do not face any difficulty on this ground and are able to withdraw the money transferred to them by the government without any problems or requirement of additional documentation," the communication said.

"Branch officials and business correspondents may be suitably instructed, along with necessary changes in the system (if required) for adherence to these guidelines," it added.

Coal India's dispatches drop, output increases

Inventories rise at mines, power plants

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

India's largest coal producer Coal India Ltd. (CIL) has seen a 10% fall in dispatches in March 2020 due to a sharp fall in demand from the power sector, leading to an increase in inventories both at power plants and coal mines. This comes amid production rising up 6.5% to 84.4 million tonnes (MT). CIL's dispatches declined 10.3% year-on-year (YoY) to 53.5 MT in March 2020 as demand for power plummeted.

Production declines
For FY20, CIL's dispatches dropped 4% YoY to 582 MT, while production declined about 1% YoY to 602 MT.



India's nationwide lockdown came at a time when power demand had largely remained muted and production at Coal India's mines ramped up following a heavy monsoon season.

Hence, inventories at coal mines and power plants have risen, a general trend seen at the onset of summer but now higher than usual.

Refiners to halve crude import

Sliding demand results in a huge increase in inventories

PYIYUSH PANDEY
MUMBAI

Indian refiners – from Indian Oil Corporation (IOCL) to Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL) – are looking to cut down their crude oil imports for April by as much as 50%, even as the oil firms have offers to buy crude at \$20 a barrel or even less.

The reason? All their storage capacities are full and refining need not be done at full capacity due to the over-50% fall in petrol and diesel sales and the nil sales of aviation turbine fuel (ATF).

Confirming the development, R. Ramachandran, director-refineries, BPCL, told *The Hindu*, "We are looking at cancelling [or] deferment of April crude oil supplies. Our refineries are now oper-

ating at 80%, which will be reduced further. Hence, we have to cancel, postpone or sell the cargoes."

IOCL has already written to west Asian suppliers citing 'force majeure' clause as its petrol sales have fallen 54% and diesel sales by 63% after the government announced a nationwide lockdown to contain the spread of COVID-19.

IOCL, which owns about a third of India's 5 million barrels per day (bpd) refining capacity, has reduced its refining capacity by a third as demand for petroleum products has declined substantially. The demand for ATF has also come down sharply due to suspension of flights.

HPCL and Mangalore Refineries and Petrochemicals Limited have also reduced

OPEC, Russia delay meeting

Saudi Arabia, Russia spar over plunging price of oil

REUTERS
DUBAI/MOSCOW

OPEC and Russia have postponed a meeting planned for Monday until later next week, OPEC sources said on Saturday, as a row intensified between Moscow and Saudi Arabia over who is to blame for plunging oil prices.

The meeting's delay came despite pressure from U.S. President Donald Trump for the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies, known as OPEC+, to urgently stabilise global oil markets.

Output cut

OPEC+ is working on an unprecedented oil output curb equal to about 10% of world supply, or 10 million



Lossing flow: The postponement comes despite U.S. President Trump appeal to stabilise prices. ■ REUTERS

barrels per day, in what member-states expect to be a global effort that will include the United States.

Oil prices hit an 18-year low on March 30 due to sliding demand caused by government lockdowns to contain the COVID-19 outbreak, and the failure of OPEC and other producers

led by Russia to extend an earlier deal on output curbs that expired on March 31.

Three OPEC sources, who asked not be identified, said the emergency virtual meeting planned for Monday would likely be postponed until April 8 or 9 to allow more time for negotiations.

Consumption, external trade to see impact

Standstill to affect investments: KPMG

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

India's private consumption, investment and external trade, the three major contributors to GDP, will get affected, according to KPMG's report titled "Potential impact of COVID-19 on the Indian economy."

India's real GDP decelerated to its lowest in over six years in third quarter of 2019-2020, and the outbreak of the COVID-19 posed fresh challenges.

Steps taken to contain its spread, such as nationwide restrictions for 21 days and a complete lockdown of States, have brought economic activity to a standstill and could impact both con-

sumption and investment, said the report.

While Indian businesses, barring a few sectors, can possibly insulate themselves from the global supply chain disruption caused by the outbreak due to relatively lower reliance on intermediate imports, their exports to COVID-19 infected nations could take a hit.

In sum, the three major GDP contributors – private consumption, investment and external trade – will get affected. The impact would be even more severe if domestic supply chain disruption caused by the 21-day lockdown was to affect the availability of essential commodities.

INTERVIEW | JOHN BABY

'Toy industry is now virus-hit'

Shipments hit badly, says Funskool India CEO

N ANAND

COVID-19 has affected shipments by the domestic toy industry. Some firms have even deferred their capex plans. However, Funskool India Ltd. CEO **John Baby** feels the situation will change for the better in the coming months. Edited excerpts:

What has been the impact of the economic slowdown and COVID-19 on your plans?

■ Of course, both of them affected our business and new investment plans. COVID-19 will affect the business and profitability badly.

COVID-19 has hit the industry in the most critical months – March and April. March being the year-end when maximum shipments are planned for export business and April being the biggest selling month for the domestic market.

Normally, factories commence production soon after the Chinese New Year. However, this year, on account of the lockdown in China, many workers were not able to make it back to the factories after it. So, production delays have become inevitable, which also had a cascading effect on shipping dates.

Did it impact your turnover or export figures this fiscal?

■ We were looking for a growth of 50% over the previous year. Last year, our export turnover was ₹60 crore. Since March '20, shipments have not taken place. We expect to close the year with a growth of around 40%.

How is the Ranipet unit faring?

■ The Ranipet unit II has done well. We targeted an export pro-

With a rise in import duties on toys, manufacturing in India has become more economical

duction of ₹20 crore in the first financial year. We expect to end with ₹25 crore.

Will you be expanding the second unit in June?

■ The slump in the domestic market during the year and the liquidity crunch had a negative impact on our cash-flows, resulting in project delays. The project is our priority. It will be taken up once the overall economic situation improves.

How is the future for the domestic toy industry?

■ We foresee a bright future for the domestic industry on account of the government's push for domestic manufacturing and many global toy companies looking to India as a manufacturing destination. Further, the current year's Budget has increased the import duties on toys substantially, making manufacturing of toys in India more economical.

Currently it is estimated that 80% of the toys sold in the country are imported. With the duty in-

crease, we will see a positive change in the Indian toy industry.

What would be your revenue for FY21?

■ Marginally lower numbers compared to the previous year. Last year, we were around ₹225 crore. For the current fiscal, it will be above ₹200 crore.

Your capex plans for FY21...

■ The last estimate for the new plant alone was ₹50 crore approximately. As of now, it all depends on economic recovery and recovery from COVID-19.

Do you have any dealings with the China market?

■ Many of the major toy brands that we work with source products from China and therefore, we import such brands directly from China.

We rarely source unbranded Chinese products. We also get some moulds/toolings for products done in China.

How many new products will be added in the coming year?

■ We expect to launch over 60 new products manufactured at our three plants, during 2020-21.

This year our focus will be on developing the wooden range under our infants and pre-school brand – Giggles.

Last year, we had tasted success with the My First Easel. We have just launched an Abacus.

We will shortly be launching an educational wooden clock which is also a shape sorter, Info Cubes, a 6-sided wooden cube with a lot of educational learning and an activity table and chair unit for toddlers. Additionally, we will also be launching products under the Handycrafts range.

IRDAI seeks transparency in agent reward payout

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD

The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has observed that the board-approved policy of many insurers on rewards to be paid to agents and intermediaries lacks objectivity and transparency.

"In certain instances, the policy allowed delegation of power to the CEO or other authorised person to decide on the rewards to be given to insurance agents and insurance intermediaries. Further, there appears [to be] minimal oversight by the board to determine the efficacy of such a policy. In many instances, the quantum of reward paid to insurance agents and intermediaries exceeds the commission and remuneration paid to them," IRDAI said.

IRDAI said it is issuing clarifications to insurers on the rewards payment policy from 2020-21.

Member (distribution) T.L. Alamelu, in a circular, said such policies should contain the objective and transparent criteria, including parameters on which the rewards are calculated, along with the necessary justification.

There shall be consistency in the approach to rewards payable to the agents and insurance for similar businesses and situations, it said, adding the board must have effective oversight of the implementation of the policy. IRDAI also asked insurers to communicate in the beginning of the year to agents and intermediaries about the maximum rewards they can earn that year, subject to fulfilment of criteria of the policy and keeping in view the laid down proportion of rewards to commission/remuneration.

THE HINDU GROUP

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Coronavirus: TCS uses AI for drug discovery

The researchers have identified 31 candidate molecules to target the main protease which helps the virus replicate

SHUBASHREE DESIKAN

Scientists from TCS Innovation Labs in Hyderabad are harnessing the power of artificial intelligence (AI) to identify new molecules which might have the potential to target specific parts of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2). Using new methods, they have identified 31 candidate small molecules, which may serve as inhibitors of the chymotrypsin-like protease, one of the key drug targets in the fight against COVID-19.

The results have been posted in a preprint repository *ChemRxiv*. Preprints are yet to be peer-reviewed and published in scientific journals.

Target proteins

The genome of the novel coronavirus codes for several proteins that have crucial roles in entry of the virus into the host cell, its replication, assembly and host-pathogen interactions. Some of these proteins that help the virus perform its functions are common targets for drug developers. Among these

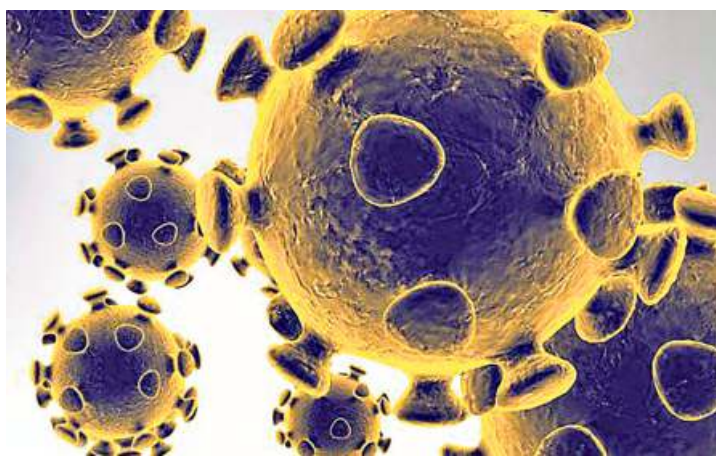
drug targets are the spike protein, which helps the virus attach itself to the host cell and enter it, and viral proteases which help it replicate.

Role of viral protease

"The viral RNA synthesises two long polyproteins when it infects human cells via a human cell surface protein. The role of the protease protein is to cut the polyproteins to individual proteins, so that new viruses can be assembled. This is important for its replication and survival," explains Arijit Roy from the Life Sciences Division of TCS Innovation Labs, Hyderabad, in an email to *The Hindu*.

The chymotrypsin-like protease or the main protease primarily does the function of cleaving the polyprotein into proteins and the papain-like protease also aids in this process. The former was chosen as the drug target by the group for their research.

First, using a database of approximately 1.6 million drug-like small molecules from the ChEMBL database, the researchers trained



Line of attack: Prime drug targets are viral proteases which help the virus replicate and the spike protein. ■ AFP

the generative deep neural network model. As a second step, the network was re-trained with protease inhibitor molecules. This was done with a view to narrow the focus of the neural network on to a smaller subset of the chemical space. "We trained the system with all available protease inhibitors and asked the pre-trained model to produce more new molecules that

possess the characteristics of protease inhibitors," says Dr. Roy, who is an author of the preprint. "Finally, we checked how well these newly produced molecules can bind to the target protein – chymotrypsin-like protease of the virus."

Starting from a space of nearly 50,000 molecules, the team has made a short list of 31 candidates. Two of the designed molecules had

a high degree of similarity to Auranitamide, a naturally occurring antiviral-compound.

"Our aim was to create new molecules which possess the characteristics of protease inhibitors. We checked, whether these molecules retain all the drug-like properties. We also checked how easily they can be synthesised. All these were part of the AI-based model," says Dr. Roy.

Drug discovery is a complex process, needing several layers of validation before the drug may come in use. In this work, the researchers have brought down the time taken for the initial step of designing suitable candidate molecules for testing from years to just a week, reinforcing the power of AI in handling huge datasets.

Clinical trials

"TCS has signed a MoU for collaboration with CSIR. The clinical trials will take time. The first step is the chemical synthesis and biological testing *in vitro*, followed by pre-clinical testing on laboratory animals," he says.

Update on India's war against COVID-19

This involves detection, protection, prevention, prescription and, not the least, participation



SPEAKING OF SCIENCE

D. BALASUBRAMANIAN

Since early March, our war against COVID-19 has been making steady progress in India. This has involved detection, protection, prevention, prescription and participation. Purposefully, private groups, industries, medical fraternity, scientists and technologists have joined hands together with the government in this war, both through financial contributions and participation by involving their R&D expertise. Government agencies such as DST, DBT (and its BIRAC), SERB, CSIR, ICMR, DMR, MHFW, DRDO, and others have announced several grants focusing on specific aspects related to this war, while the Tata Trust, WIPRO, Mahindra, the Wellcome Trust India Alliance and several multinational pharma companies have come forward in this joint effort.

Detection, prevention, protection

The first thing is to detect whether a person has been infected by the virus. Since COVID-19 spreads within the moist part of the inner nose and throat, one measures the temperature of the individual around his nose and face, using a thermo-screening device (as used with arriving passengers in airports, or entering buildings and factories). Better devices of greater speed, detail and accuracy, such as whole-body scanners which depict body temperatures with colour codes on a computer monitor have come about from abroad. The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has been offered 1,000 digital thermometers for screening, and 100 full-body scanners.

Clearly India needs these by the thousands. This need has triggered some computer industry people in India to make such body scanners here at home, a positive step. We hope these can come about at the soonest.

Once an individual is tested positive this way, it needs to be confirmed by doing a biological test to make sure that it is coronavirus infection. Until a month ago, we needed to import kits to do this. Today, more than a dozen Indian companies (most notably by the MyLab-Serum Inst. duo which can make several lakhs of these kits a week) have made them, each certified by the national body. This has rapidly expanded the scale of reliable testing rapidly across the country. Once tested positive, the patient has to be isolated and quarantined in appropriate centres. This has been done with remarkable speed and reliability, as mentioned below.

An important way to protect oneself against the invasion by the virus is to wear a mask. We constantly hear about how these are not available or sold at exorbitant cost. The notion that it is not always necessary is wrong. As the well known infection expert Dr. Jacob John of Vellore clarifies (*The Hindu*, April 2), it is vital that we mask ourselves as we move about in streets, since the virus is also airborne. Towards this, even as many entrepreneurs and firms across India have started making these at affordable costs, social media such as WhatsApp show the typical jugaad way of using a baby diaper (unused!), male banian (unused!), the pallu of a saari, or dupatta and such. Happily enough, after the government clarifications and advice on this matter, more and more people are now seen to mask themselves. TV channels are also doing a useful service by inviting experts and asking them to offer relevant advice to people who have specific questions and doubts about protection in specific individual instances.

In this connection, a very recent piece of advice on protection has been given to people wearing glasses, (and also to eye doctors whom they consult) by my colleague Dr. Muralidhar Ramappa of the L V Prasad Eye Institute, Hyderabad. He says: (1) If you wear contact lenses, switch to glasses for a while. (2) Wearing glasses may provide a layer of protection. (3) Do not skip your eye exam, but take precautions. (4) Your eye doctor may recommend some more precautions. (5) Stock up your prescribed eye medicines, if you can and (6) avoid rubbing your eyes.

In addition to what the Central and State governments and notable private hospitals (for example, Apollo, Medanta and others) have set up as isolation and quarantine centres, several private agencies have helped set up these in Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Haryana, West Bengal, and helped equip them (for example, Infosys Foundation, Cyient, Skoda, Mercedes Benz, and Mahindra). These are some examples of how governments and private agencies have joined hands – as they say: We are all in this together.

Another exciting advance towards protection (and prevention of spread) has been the large scale production of incubators, ventilators and devices to monitor the individuals who have been placed in such quarantine centres. Mahindra has successfully made ventilators in large scale at affordable prices, and DRDO has come up with a special kind of tape in order to make patient protection gowns for clinicians, nurses and paramedics.

Can India offer drugs?

While the possibility of a preventive vaccine for large scale use in India is at least a year away, we need to turn to molecular and drug-based approaches, in which India has great internal expertise and teams of excellent organic and biological scientists. Rightly, the government and some drug companies have turned to them to locally prepare and use several drugs (favilavir, remdesavir, avigan and such), and also modify them using well-known methods. Indeed, the CSIR has already roped in organic chemists and bioinformatics experts who can predict the 3D structures of proteins, so as to look for potential areas on their surface to which molecules can fit (lock and key approach). I have every hope that with such team efforts, India will come out with 'made in India' drug molecules to overcome this killing virus. Yes, we can.

Despite their full knowledge that millions of people have settled in cities and large towns, as daily wage labourers, far away from their families in villages, State and Central governments did not plan ahead for them, nor did they plan to reimburse their wages during the lockdown which blocked their getting back home. This led to a toss of social distancing and possible community spread. Social distancing is, alas, not in Indian culture, while herd mentality is. This could have been thought of by the social scientist advisors to the governments, and could have been avoided.

(Disclosure: it is important to note that I have chosen to highlight only some examples here. There are several more 'unsung heroes' across the states and the nation. I hope they will not be offended that I have ignored them.)

dbala@hvpel.org

Novel coronavirus can be transmitted even before symptoms show up

The existence of presymptomatic or asymptomatic transmission makes contact tracing more challenging

R. PRASAD

A study of seven clusters in Singapore by Vernon J. Lee and others from the Ministry of Health, Singapore, provides some evidence that virus transmission to others (resulting in infection) can happen from one to three days before a person shows symptoms. But the World Health Organization maintains that the risk of getting infected with the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) from someone with no symptoms at all of Covid19 is "very low". And it says that it is assessing ongoing research on the period of transmission of the virus.

The transmission one to three days prior to onset of symptoms was seen in four clusters, while in three clusters the precise timing of transmission could not be established as the index case and the contacts lived together. The results were published in the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

Early detection and isolation of patients and contact tracing are important to contain the spread of the virus. However, the existence of presymptomatic or asymptomatic transmission adds a new layer of complexity and challenge in tracing contacts.

The first cases in Singa-

pore was confirmed on January 23, and during the period from January 23 to March 16, 243 cases were reported of which 157 were locally transmitted. Of the 157 cases of local transmission, 10 (6.4%) cases have been during the period before the person who spread the virus to others showed any symptoms and hence were presymptomatic.

According to *Los Angeles Times*, a choir practice for 150 minutes in Washington on March 10 where 60 people participated left 45 people infected with the virus; two died from COVID-19. The county health officials concluded that the "virus was transmitted through the air from one or more people without symptoms".

Evidence from China

This is not the first case where presymptomatic transmission has been seen.

Looking at the serial intervals (the number of days between symptoms onsets in a primary case and a second

ary case) in China, researchers had in a study suggested that 12.6% of transmission was presymptomatic.

Similarly, presymptomatic transmission of the virus has been documented in a nursing facility in Kind County, Washington. The re-

sults were published in the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. In this case, a healthcare provider, who showed symptoms since February 26, tested positive on March 1 and seven others, too, tested positive for the virus by March 6. An investigation by the Atlanta-based Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that 23 of the 76 residents tested positive for the virus on March 13. Of the 23, 13 did not have any symptoms on the date of testing. Ten of the 13 asymptomatic residents developed symptoms seven days later and hence were presymptomatic at the time of testing.

Some cases in Singapore and other countries suggest that viral shedding can occur in the absence of symptoms and before symptom onset.

Avoidance of grouping

"These findings suggest that to control the pandemic it might not be enough for only persons with symptoms to limit their contact with others because persons without symptoms might transmit infection. Finally, these findings underscore the importance of physical distancing in the public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the avoidance of congregate settings," the authors write.

'Shutdown alone is not enough to break the chain'

R. PRASAD

In an unprecedented measure, India on March 25 began a country-wide shutdown for 21 days to cut the transmission chain of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2). Till Wednesday, India had adopted the containment measures of screening, testing, isolating and tracing contacts.

On March 25, *The WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus* said: "Shutting down population movement is buying time and reducing the pressure on health systems. But on their own, these measures will not extinguish the epidemic. The point of these actions is to enable the more precise and targeted measures that are needed to stop transmission and save lives." Among other measures every country should take, the WHO chief said the production, capacity and availability of testing has to be ramped up, and a system to "find every suspected case at community level" has to be implemented.

Giridhara Babu, Head of the *Lifecourse Epidemiology at the Public Health Foundation of India, Bengaluru*, in an email to *The Hindu* explains how the shutdown along with testing can help flatten the curve.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said 21 days of lockdown will help cut the transmission chain. Is that true?

Yes, it is the bare minimum period we require to be sure. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call for a 21-day nationwide shutdown is an effort to break the chain



Giridhara Babu ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

of transmission. India's COVID-19 fight could make or break the global war. The "incubation period" means the time between catching the virus and beginning to have symptoms of the disease. Most estimates of the incubation period for COVID-19 range from 1-14 days.

A lockdown for 21 days would be a great social experiment which allows physical distancing. If followed strictly, it will contribute to delayed peak and to an extent, in flattening of the curve. Lockdowns may have to get extended in the areas with high transmission. It is important to identify such areas.

India has imposed the lockdown much earlier than many countries, including China, which failed to contain the initial spread of the virus. Although it started late, the Wuhan shutdown slowed the dispersal of infection to other cities by an estimated 2.91 days, delaying epidemic growth elsewhere in China. Other cities that

implemented control measures pre-emptively reported 33.3% fewer cases in the first week of their outbreaks compared with cities that started control later.

Why were Wuhan and other cities under lockdown for two months?

In Wuhan, the measures started much later as compared to what India is doing. It takes that much longer when you start late. The initial outbreak of COVID-19 started in China and it was spread across before diagnoses and preventive measures could be established. Not just China, by then the virus had spread to other countries as well.

As a result, longer lockdowns of nearly two months were required in some regions. Before the interventions, scientists estimated that each infected person passed on the coronavirus to more than two others, giving it the potential to spread rapidly. But between January

16 and 30, a period that included the first seven days of the lockdown, the virus reproduction decreased from 2.35 to 1.05. The number of new daily infections in China seems to have peaked on January 25 just two days after Wuhan was locked down.

Epidemiologists say that measures implemented during this time did work. But China's mammoth response had one glaring flaw: it started too late. This delayed the measures to contain it.

In China, implementing the measures three weeks earlier, from the beginning of January, would have cut the number of infections to 5% of the total.

Will complete shutdown for 21 days alone be enough to break the chain? Is it right to say that shutdown only buys time?

It is right to say that shutdown not only buys time but also decreases the overall burden and delays the outbreaks in most places. Stronger containment measures done together with these mitigation measures will ensure flattening the epidemic.

Mitigation measures or shutdown alone are not enough to break the chain of emerging COVID-19 pandemic. The containment strategies include identifying all cases which are positive and identifying their contacts, too. Once identified, cases will have to be isolated, and contacts will have to be placed under quarantine.

Mitigation is a precursory measure and if containment is also not done, it is not going to help. Both need to go hand-in-hand. Also, reviewing of States

where any single case is confirmed is need of the hour. Contact tracing of all those people who might have got the infection is highly needed. Only then will India succeed in current strategies to combat COVID-19.

What then should be done during the lockdown?

Aggressive testing alone without mitigation doesn't help in breaking the chain of transmission. Without mitigation, the spread of the infection from one person to another will happen at a faster rate. We may find a certain number of cases doubling every week, also the number of deaths. The lockdown is an opportunity for us to rapidly scale up the capacity to have enough resources to manage, isolate and provide intensive care for those who needed it. Both measures going hand-in-hand could have a reasonable effect on flattening the epidemic curve.

The revisions in testing strategy involving accredited private laboratories too could not solve the issue since only a particular number of suspected can be tested in a day. With its high population, testing everybody in India is out of the question. Therefore, we need to follow mitigation measures. I recommend the syndromic approach now, wherein we need to manage every case of fever, cough and respiratory distress as COVID-19 unless otherwise proved. Once testing is scaled up, this can get better.

Should India find all suspected cases in the community and test them, as per WHO's

recommendation?

This virus effectively hides and quickly doubles. By testing only suspect cases, we might miss many of those who are asymptomatic during screening. The best strategy is to test among the SARI (severely affected respiratory infections) admitted in the hospitals and the OPDs of these areas. Many States have not even begun testing such cases. This is part of March 23 national recommendations. Therefore, strong national and local surveillance review is needed. There is a potential to cause illness suddenly in large numbers of people. Without having an idea of the total number of cases, it would become guesswork to plan for the future management of COVID-19.

Can contact tracing, quarantining and testing of contacts of people who participated in the religious congregation in Nizamuddin alone be sufficient?

Tracing such contacts, quarantining them and testing such cases are definitely most necessary but not sufficient by themselves. Wherever hot spots are present, stricter enforcement of lockdown, even beyond what is already announced is needed. There should be enforcement of active surveillance in these areas for any flu-like illness, and people should be encouraged to self-report. Other measures such as providing accurate information and building awareness in the hot spots, especially on personal hygiene, hand hygiene and cough etiquettes are necessary.



Bounty from oil plunge

Why has India reacted to declining global crude prices by raising excise duties?

K. BHARAT KUMAR

The story so far: Till U.S. President Donald Trump's tweet the past week, on his conversation with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Brent crude prices had been declining in an unprecedented manner, touching an 18-year low. Mr. Trump's assurance that the West Asian kingdom and Russia, major oil producers, would soon announce a production cut sent prices up again. Earlier this year, Saudi Arabia and Russia had fallen out on agreements to cut production which would have kept oil prices up.

What has helped oil prices swing wildly both ways?

Brent crude had tanked about 50% over the month of March and was trading in the region of \$26 per barrel till Thursday. Prices jumped, and crude now trading at about \$33 per barrel, after the U.S. President's tweet that a production cut could be 'as high as 15 million barrels' per day. To set that in context, when talks on production fizzled out earlier, Saudi Arabia said it would raise its production from 9.8 million barrels per day (bpd) to 12.3 million bpd.

Why does it matter to the U.S. how much oil its competitors produce?

Profits that companies make in selling oil depend directly on the cost of extraction, which is influenced by factors such as the terrain where the oil field is located. There is still a staggering quantity of oil in the world left to be extracted but the cost of extraction is increasing. For example, fracking, which helps extract oil from rocks, and which is a significant source for U.S. extraction firms, does not come cheap. So, a spike in production by Saudi Arabia and Russia typically drives down oil prices, following the traditional concepts of supply and demand. Beyond a certain point, U.S. producers may not be able to withstand declining oil prices, considering their costs. A January 2020 Haynes and Boone's Oil Patch Bankruptcy Monitor report said that since 2015, when oil prices began to drop save for a few spikes in between, 208 North American producers have filed for bankruptcy involving \$121.7 billion in aggregate debt.

With international oil prices declining, the Central government has used the opportunity to keep end-user fuel prices stable while increasing its own prospects for collection by hiking excise duties

But now, if Saudi Arabia and Russia too are considering a production cut to help bring prices back up again, it is a signal that oil prices have gone too low for even these producers to profit from. Significantly, neither of these oil producers has publicly committed to production cuts.

How has COVID-19 influenced prices?

With the virus which originated from Wuhan in China in late 2019 bringing global economic activity to a near-complete halt, demand for fuel is bound to have dropped significantly. This would have had a dampening effect on oil prices. After all, if you do not move out for work or entertainment but only occasionally for grocery shopping, how much fuel would you burn over the period of the lockdown? Even before the virus-induced lockdown, India's consumption of petrol by volume grew a marginal 2% in February 2020, over April 2019 and diesel consumption fell by 2.2% in the same period.

What is happening to Indian oil prices?

The country's oil bill may have fallen in the recent past and could remain low if Saudi Arabia and Russia do not behave as the U.S. President expects them to, but Indian end-customers may not benefit. Indian prices of petrol and diesel have remained steady.

Between March 2014 and April 2020, the price per barrel of the Indian crude basket fell from \$107 to \$21. The average retail selling price of petrol in Delhi has fallen by ₹1.82 from March 2014, to ₹69.59 per litre in February 2020. Of this amount, the portion that goes to the Centre in the form of duties has more than doubled from ₹10.38 to about ₹23.

In March, the Central government reacted to declining international oil prices by raising excise duties by about Rs. 3 per litre on fuel sold in India, such that the end user saw little or no change in the retail price. This was only the latest in a series of duty increases over the past few years.

Why the excise duty hike?

Even before the virus-induced lockdown paralysed the economy, the government had been battling a fiscal deficit problem. The nearly four-year-old Goods and Services Tax has not immediately yielded robust collections; consumer demand has fallen and there have been calls to put more money in the hands of the consumer, fuelling expectation of a tax cut. The Centre could not afford a blanket cut in income tax rates but it did offer taxpayers the option of moving to a lower tax slab without deductions or rebates.

With international oil prices declining, the government has used the opportunity to keep end-user fuel prices stable while increasing its own prospects for collection. With consumer inflation being largely influenced by poorer supply of specific food items, and not necessarily by rising fuel prices, the government has chosen to keep Indian end-user fuel prices stable with higher taxes to augment its otherwise-emasculated kitty.

Before the COVID-19 lockdown was announced on March 24, there were reports that the most recent duty hike would give the Centre ₹43,000 crore for the fiscal year 2020-21.

How long does SARS-CoV-2 stay potent?

What have scientists observed about the novel coronavirus? Why is it important to clean surfaces?

RAMYA KANNAN & SERENA JOSEPHINE M.

The story so far: With a nascent virus, SARS-CoV-2, causing a global pandemic, the scramble has been, so far, and will be for a time to come, to understand the virus. While it belongs to the coronavirus family – variants of which cause the common cold – scientists and health-care workers are trying to fathom the nature of the virus, its behaviour and patterns, and gain familiarity with the pathogen, hoping that it will give them a better handle on this pandemic. It is known that coronaviruses, which primarily affect the upper respiratory tract in people, are transmitted through respiratory droplets. The simple act of being close to persons who sneeze or cough, even speak loudly (if they are carrying the infection) and the involuntary act of touching surfaces where the viruses have been deposited can infect someone. The period that the virus remains on the surface and remains capable of spreading infection, can be considered the period for which the virus is viable.

What guides our understanding of viability?

The Atlanta-headquartered Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has said that current evidence suggests that SARS-CoV-2 may remain viable for hours to days on surfaces made from a variety of materials. Information listed on the CDC website says: "Cleaning of visibly dirty surfaces followed by disinfection is a best practice measure for prevention of COVID-19 and other viral respiratory illnesses in households and community settings."

One of the studies that guides our understanding of the viability of SARS-CoV-2 was done by the National Institutes of Health, CDC, UCLA and Princeton University scientists who found that SARS-CoV-2 was detectable in aerosols for up to three hours, up to four hours on copper, up to 24 hours on cardboard and the longest – up to two to three days – on plastic and stainless steel. The study was published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* on March 17, 2020 (<https://bit.ly/3dTewEN>), and postulated that the stability of SARS-CoV-2 was similar to that of SARS-CoV-1, but also that the novel coronavirus was more stable.

The researchers wrote: "SARS-CoV-2 remained viable in aerosols throughout the duration of our experiment (3 hours)... Our results indicate that aerosol and fomite (materials capable of transmitting the infection) transmission of SARS-CoV-2 is plausible, since the virus can remain viable and infectious in aerosols for hours and on surfaces up to days."



Surfaces	HOURS TAKEN FOR VIABLE VIRUS TO...	
	... reduce to half of its initial value	... completely disintegrate
Aerosols (such as saliva droplets)	1.09	3
Plastic	6.81	72
Stainless steel	5.63	72
Copper	0.774	4
Cardboard	3.46	24

An analysis by the CDC on the cruise ship Diamond Princess which had 3,700 passengers and which was quarantined after a large number of them developed COVID-19, showed that the SARS-CoV-2 RNA was found on surfaces in the cabins of people who were infected, for up to 17 days after the passengers disembarked, and before disinfection procedures were initiated. However, the analysis mentioned that "data cannot be used to determine whether transmission occurred from contaminated surfaces," meaning the scientists were not the wiser about whether the virus on the surfaces infected people on the ship.

Scientists are trying to estimate the decay rate of the virus on various surfaces to determine how long they will be potent or capable of spreading the infection to others who come into contact with the surfaces. There are, of course, no rules about survival on surfaces, since everything depends intensely on the environment as well.

The good news, scientists say, is that by themselves, viruses are not capable of multiplying; they need a host for that. So disinfecting surfaces and practising hand hygiene will reduce the chance of infection

The World Health Organization (WHO), reacting to a global fear of the infection spreading via newspapers, said: "The likelihood of an infected person contaminating commercial goods is low and the risk of catching the virus that causes COVID-19 from a package that has been moved, and exposed to different conditions and

temperatures is also low." Additionally, the International News Media Association has recorded that there has never been a documented incident whereby the COVID-19 virus has been transmitted from a print newspaper, print magazine, print letter, or print package, citing doctors and scientists.

The good news, scientists say, is that by themselves, viruses are not capable of multiplying; they need a host for that. So disinfecting surfaces, and practising hand hygiene, besides avoiding touching the face, will greatly reduce the chances of people catching infection from surfaces that are not reinfected.

What is the solution?

Disinfection helps in reducing the viral load in the environment, public health experts say. A 1% hypochlorite solution is an effective disinfectant on various surfaces.

Presently, massive disinfection efforts are being carried out in public places as a control measure. This is assuming that people would have spit in the open or sneezed without covering their mouth.

Floors, walls and surfaces frequently touched by hands should be disinfected as per guidelines. This is because handrails of staircases, elevators, door handles, armrests of chairs, table surfaces can be contaminated by droplets.

The CDC has also recorded on its website: It is unknown how long the air inside a room occupied by someone with confirmed COVID-19 remains potentially infectious. Facilities will need to consider factors such as the size of the room and the ventilation system design (including flowrate [air changes per hour] and location of supply and exhaust vents) when deciding how long to close off rooms or areas used by ill persons before beginning disinfection. Taking measures to improve ventilation in an area or room where someone was ill or suspected to be ill with COVID-19 will help shorten the time it takes respiratory droplets to be removed from the air.

Is there something that people can do themselves?

A good part of avoiding COVID-19 infection indeed rests on each and every individual. Following hand hygiene – washing hands frequently with soaps and sanitisers is key. Maintaining physical distance between one another is also very important.

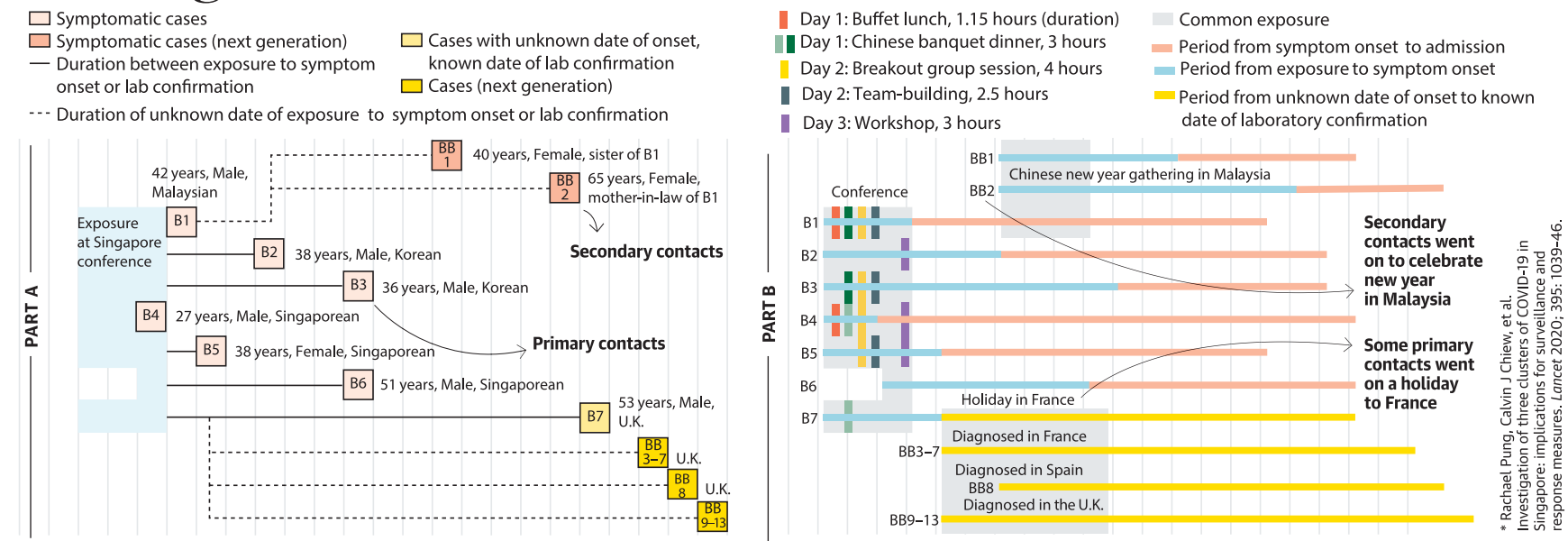
Measures such as a lockdown attempt to do precisely this: restrict the access of people to public spots, thereby making sure that there is no opportunity for gatherings in large numbers.

It is important to respect the rules of the lockdown, those under quarantine must remain indoors, since asymptomatic people making sorties outside the home might spread the infection to others.

Why must COVID-19 clusters be identified?

Can infected individuals be tracked and quarantined quickly with the help of contact tracing?

Plotting the Cluster



VIGNESH RADHAKRISHNAN

The story so far: On Monday, the Delhi police cordoned off the area around a masjid located around 100 metres from the Nizamuddin dargah. Around 9,000 people from across the country, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Saudi Arabia had attended a gathering at the Alami Markaz Banglewali Masjid, the headquarters of the Tablighi Jamaat, in the Nizamuddin area of Delhi in March. Many returned home, and the government was alerted about a disease cluster when cases of COVID-19 surfaced in several States in people who had attended or were linked to the Nizamuddin gathering. Tamil Nadu, for instance, has identified all 1,103 people (from the State) who attended the conference in Delhi, helped by cooperation of the participants themselves. Several State governments have struggled to identify the participants as some of them switched off their phones or have simply gone off the radar.

What is a disease cluster?

A disease cluster is defined as "an aggregation of cases in an identifiable subpopulation." Dr. Daniel Wartenberg, who spent more than a quarter century investigating such clusters in the United States, coined this definition in a research paper he wrote for the *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*.

The word 'cases' in the definition stands for people with similar symptoms or a medical condition and 'subpopulation' points to those who share or belong to the same space, time, family, workplaces, etc.

Reports show that the novel coronavirus can travel about six feet from a diseased person and cause infection between two and four individuals. Thus, when people congregate in a place – typically for worship/shopping/commute – the chance of a disease spread multiplies, resulting in a cluster of cases. The size of a disease cluster could vary widely from just four cases to as many as 5,000 depending on the place visited by the infected individuals.

All patients who belong to a disease cluster need not have shared space and time. For instance, a person who picks up the infection from a co-passenger during a flight may infect a taxi driver who picks him up from the airport. Such secondary transmissions also belong to the same cluster with the primary source being the passenger. The cluster keeps growing as the driver could infect a family member, the passenger could infect a nurse in a clinic after developing symptoms and so on.

How are clusters identified?

Health workers often stumble upon clusters accidentally. In a paper published in *The Lancet journal* by the Singapore 2019 Novel Coronavirus Outbreak Research Team, the process of discovering clusters is described in detail (*see graphic*).

The *graphic* shows one such cluster of cases which originated in a company conference in Singapore. The conference that happened between January 20 and 22 was attended by 111 participants from 19 countries and at least one of them was from Wuhan, China, the epicentre of the novel coronavirus outbreak. On February 4, Malaysia declared a person who had been to the conference as a COVID-19 case. Singapore authorities were alerted. The health workers contacted the other participants and quarantined them. Then they mapped their secondary and tertiary level of contacts (all those not infected by the primary case) – as shown in Part A of the *graphic*. Then they were tested and isolated if necessary. Once they found a set of cases among those who attended the conference, it was identified as a cluster. In parallel, the activity trails of the primary infected during the conference and also of others outside the conference were pieced together like a puzzle. Those who had come in contact with the infected during such activities, for example the hotel workers, were called in for testing. This is called contact tracing.

Part B of the *graphic* shows detailed activity trails of all the primary, secondary and tertiary contacts. Such mapping also helps in calculating the time taken by each individual to show symptoms, or to be declared as suffering from COVID-19, from the time he or she was infected. This information impacts how future cases are handled.

What are the challenges after identifying a cluster?

Discovering a cluster is akin to a fire alarm going off. Every moment wasted will spread the fire further. The faster the infected individuals are identified and quarantined, the lesser the number of future contacts. But this is easier said than done. As of Saturday at least 1,023 positive cases in 17 States/Union Territories have been linked to the recently discovered Nizamuddin cluster in India. The cluster which was discovered in late March originated in a religious congregation in the Nizamuddin area of New Delhi. As of April 2, 9,000 people linked to the event which happened in mid-March have been traced, according to the Joint Secretary, Health Ministry, Lav Agarwal. Close to 1,300 of them

were foreigners, he said. In such large clusters, identifying the participants will be challenging. Reports from Tamil Nadu show that the attendees came forward in numbers after the State's Chief Minister issued an appeal. On Friday, Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope said that around 1,400 people from the State, who had attended the Delhi event, had been traced. Mr. Tope said these people are being isolated or quarantined by the district administrations.

Sources said Andhra Pradesh is tracing the digital footprints of those who tested positive for COVID-19. As those who were infected respond differently in each State, a common protocol cannot be followed and this has pushed the States to adopt various uncharted methods making the process challenging.

Why must the activity trail be followed?

A group of attendees took an early morning flight from Delhi on March 24 and landed in Port Blair, Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Another group boarded a train to Erode, Tamil Nadu. One of the attendees, Navi Mumbai's index patient, had visited Noor Masjid in Vashi, Maharashtra. This led to a secondary transmission to six people, including the secretary of the mosque, his friend, son, grandson and maid and another person who was present at the mosque. This shows that the attendees fanned out to various locations after the conference and engaged in a variety of activities. This leads to the possibility of a wide range of secondary and tertiary transmissions across many States of India.

How have clusters functioned in other countries?

Almost all countries have discovered a large cluster and in most of them, the number of COVID-19 cases shot up after identification of the infected and contact tracing began. As of April 4, South Korea has mapped 83% of its cases to some clusters. More than 51% of the country's cases originated from the Shincheonji Church of Jesus. And most of the infections were allegedly brought to the church by a 61-year-old woman who ignored her symptoms and attended the church.

In Austria, the Ischgl Ski Resort is said to have been linked to 600 cases. A funeral in George Town, Albany, U.S. may have resulted in more than 600 infections. The Osaka Live Music Venue in Japan is directly linked to 80 cases. A dinner party in Singapore is linked to 43 cases.

Read online – bit.ly/EMirelief
Manojit Saha on COVID-19, loans and repayment: How will the three-month moratorium on EMIs impact customers?

A nation built to withstand a pandemic

Long before COVID-19, social distancing, washing hands and mask-wearing were common in Japan

TOKYO



Rows of masked commuters line the train compartment, eyes trained on their phones, bodies held slightly away from each other. In Japan, this kind of a scene was par for the course on the metro long before coronavirus became a standard part of everyone's lexicon. While the rest of the world dabbled in asymmetrical earrings and oversized handbags, in Japan, facemasks were the accoutrement à la mode for years. In 2017, Japan produced about 5.3 billion facemasks, up from 1.8 billion in 2008, according to Statista, a market and consumer data-providing firm.

What was behind this mask mania in pre-COVID times? The obvious answer is a heightened awareness

and concern among the public for health and hygiene. Those with cold and cough wore them so as not to infect others. Healthy people wore them so as to lessen their chances of being infected by the sick.

Sociologically minded explanations centred on the desire among many Japanese to minimise social interaction. A mask could make the wearer invisible, less likely to be noticed or talked to.

But the history of mask-wearing in Japan is longer and more chequered than these quick explanations, traversing a century worth of past pandemics, natural disasters, air pollution, new kinds of flora, allergies and technology. A massive outbreak of influenza in the early years of the 20th century first kicked off the custom of covering the face with scarves. Then the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 triggered a massive fire

that filled the sky of the capital with smoke and ash for weeks. Facemasks became a standard sight on the streets of Tokyo and Yokohama.

In the 1950s, Japan's rapid post-War industrialisation caused rampant air pollution and a concomitant spread of the pollen-rich Japanese cedar tree, which flourished due to rising ambient levels of carbon dioxide. Large parts of the population developed allergic reactions to the pollen emitted by these trees. In 2003, the SARS scare once again caused a spike in mask-wearing, helped by a technological innovation that popularised a new type of non-woven material for masks.

In many ways, Japan is a country built to withstand a pandemic. Other than its extreme hygiene consciousness, one of the greatest social challenges the nation faces is the "problem" of social recluses. Called *hikikomori*, this cohort of upwards of a million people have chosen to end all social contact, often refusing to leave their homes for years. Long



before the COVID-19 outbreak, social distancing and washing hands were already Japan's super power.

Fast forwarding to the present, thus far Japan does seem to be weathering the coronavirus better than many other nations despite its

proximity to China, early exposure to the virus and population density (the greater Tokyo metropolitan area is home to 38 million people). Speculation about the reasons for the relatively limited number of cases in Japan has included epidemiological and climatic factors. But increasingly, experts and the average person on the street are converging on the country's mask-wearing habit as at least one crucial part of the puzzle.

Misguided advice

Many Western countries, including the U.S., have actively discouraged people from wearing masks, claiming they are of limited efficacy and simultaneously, if contradictorily, asking that available masks be earmarked for medical personnel caring for the sick. But the prevalent expert opinion in East Asian countries like Japan and China is that such advice is misguided. The greatest benefit of masking the masses, they argue, comes not from stopping the mouths of the healthy, but from co-

vering the mouths of people already infected who may be asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic.

That said, masks cannot be the only ingredient in any coronavirus-containment strategy. Japan suddenly began to see a spike in infections towards the end of March, which indicates that the archipelago is not as immune as the data from earlier in the month indicated. Some analysts have suggested that widespread mask-wearing could have engendered a false sense of security among the general population. Large, albeit masked, gatherings took place in Tokyo to view the annual blossoming of cherry trees, for example, despite the government's advice to avoid crowds. Cases began to rise soon after.

Nonetheless, when compared to countries in Europe and the U.S., Japan has, for now, managed to moderate the growth of cases while keeping much of its economy open. And there is a close-to-unanimous belief that the humble mask is to thank.



Pallavi Aiyar is a journalist based in Tokyo

From Cuba with care

Brazil is reintegrating Cuban doctors into its healthcare system as COVID-19 is spreading

SAO PAULO



For more than a year, Yaima Acuna has been waiting tables at a restaurant in Belo Horizonte, the capital of Minas Gerais State. Before she turned to serving drinks and food to customers, the 30-year-old Cuban worked as a doctor at a healthcare unit in the interior of the Brazilian State, seeing more than 20 patients a day. In November 2018, Ms. Acuna lost her job as a pact between Brazil and Cuba ended abruptly with the election of Jair Bolsonaro as President. Deciding to stay in Brazil to earn a local diploma, she worked as a waitress to survive.

Ms. Acuna is one of 1,800 Cuban doctors who stayed back in Brazil after the programme, which brought

them here was scrapped. Now, as COVID-19 spreads across this country of 210 million people, its healthcare system faces an unprecedented stress and the government is turning to the Cubans for help. "I am very excited to be able to work as a doctor again. The disease is growing here and I want to help," said Ms. Acuna, as she heard about the federal government issuing a notification to "re-integrate the Cuban doctors" in the healthcare system.

The Cubans came to Brazil under a programme called 'Mais Medicos' (More Doctors), launched by then President Dilma Rousseff in 2013 with a plan to appoint doctors in the most remote and vulnerable places. In five years, 8,000 Cuban doctors were appointed in basic health units across 3,000 municipalities. With Mr. Bolsonaro, who constantly attacked the "communist" Cuba for



"selling its doctors" during the 2018 election campaign, becoming President, Havana cancelled its arrangement with Brasilia and most doctors went home. But some, like Ms. Acuna, stayed back, doing odd jobs or studying. With more than 9,200 in-

fections and 365 deaths till now, Brazil is desperate for more helping hands and looking at the Cubans, who are eager to chip in. "The anxiety for working and helping is very high," says Niurka Perez, head of the Association of Cuban Doctors, who stayed on in Brazil. "The country is currently in an emergency but they have not told us when we are going to be called," adds Ms. Perez.

Hiring more professionals

The Ministry of Health announced last week that it would hire 5,811 medical professionals to reinforce the fight against COVID-19, with local doctors getting the first preference. The Cubans are likely to be called for jobs next week or within 15 days. The news has given a ray of hope to people on the margins of Brazilian society who were badly affected when the Cubans left the health units in their communities. "The programme was essential to assist and guarantee healthcare to people who had hitherto been unassisted. With the

abrupt disruption of the plan, several communities, especially the indigenous people, were left without any medical support and the situation continues to be so," says Denise Pimenta, an anthropologist at University of Sao Paulo.

Ms. Pimenta, who works extensively with the marginalised people, says Brazil needed to invite doctors from Cuba, a country of just 11.5 million people, because of the elitist nature of medical studies in the country. As most doctors come from a privileged background, says Ms. Pimenta, the remote areas were left ignored. "Brazil has always had many doctors, being very well-paid compared to the rest of the population, but most of them never wanted to leave the big centres and their facilities to serve in peripheral and precarious regions," says Ms. Pimenta, adding the Cubans went to work in locations that were considered "end of the world" for Brazilian doctors.

Now, as COVID-19 grows exponentially across the country, the private

medical centres have already collapsed and all eyes are now on the hospitals run by the country's Unified Healthcare System (SUS), which has faced massive cuts in resources since the impeachment of Ms. Rousseff in 2016. "It is still the best coordinated healthcare system that exists. The Cuban doctors are completely aligned with the SUS guidelines. If they come back, they can provide quality healthcare in the remote areas and peripheral regions such as slums," says Ms. Pimenta.

As the SUS hospitals get filled with patients, many healthcare workers are in danger as they lack basic protective equipment. Just in Sao Paulo State, close to 600 professionals are suspected of having caught the virus. In the slums, entire communities have turned to making their own masks and hiring private services to survive the outbreak. With the peak of pandemic still weeks away, Brazilians can't wait much longer for the Cubans to come back and support the creaking system.



Shobhan Saxena is a journalist based in São Paulo

Uncertainty during difficult times

Sri Lanka's working people are worried their pay and jobs will be easy targets as the economy is hit

COLOMBO



Sri Lanka has been under curfew for over a fortnight. The near-total lockdown and the over 10,000 violators that police have arrested have ensured that almost everyone stays indoors.

Depending on the cash left in hand or their bank balance – in case of those making card payments – and social networks, some have been managing – either by buying from the trucks sporadically selling essentials in different neighbourhoods, or placing online orders, or tapping friends with curfew passes.

For many of them, especially families with children, older people and pets, the insecurity about diminishing supplies is real. As is their gen-

eral anxiety about a once-distant virus now having become a threat right outside their doorsteps. The risk is here and now.

COVID-19 has hit everyone, but some have been hit more than others. Many of Sri Lanka's working people – while tackling the everyday challenge of sourcing food in these difficult times – appear consumed by a greater fear. Will their jobs wait on the other side of this crisis? What might be the 'normal' they would return to?

Thangavel Malar, 30, has been employed in a garment factory at the Free Trade Zone (FTZ) in Katunayake, some 35 km north of Colombo, for the last five years. "The factory has been closed because of the virus. On March 21, my family somehow managed to return to our hometown with a colleague who was travelling back urgently to attend her

father's funeral," she says from Batticaloa in the Eastern Province, 300 km away.

Ms. Malar hasn't been able to check if her salary for March, of LKR 20,400 (roughly ₹8,165) has been credited to her account as her employers had assured. "We can't go out now. We don't know whether they will pay us anything for April, or take us back after this problem ends," says the mother of two. But compared to hundreds of her colleagues stuck in the FTZs in Katunayake, neighbouring Biyagama and Koggala in the southern Galle district, Ms. Malar says she is better off. At least she got back home.

No cash, no food

Some thousand workers are still in their boarding houses near their factories, without cash, food supplies or information on when their employers might arrange transport for them to go to their hometowns, according to Padmini Weerasuriya, director of Women's Centre, an organ-

isation working with FTZ workers. The employers cannot simply "wash their hands off", she says. "Open your eyes and see their plight. After all, these workers will rush back to your factories when you reopen. You cannot abandon them until then, you have a responsibility," she tells the factory owners.

Sri Lanka's first FTZ was set up in the late 1970s, when the economy was opened up. In the following decades, they have expanded to different parts of the country with the aim of increasing employment and boosting exports. According to Sri Lanka's Board of Investment, the apparel sector, crucial to the economy, fetched a revenue of \$5 billion in 2018 while employing 15% of the country's workforce.

As exports plummet during the pandemic, workers are worried about their future. They know that if the factories, when they reopen, decide to cut costs, their salaries and jobs will likely be early targets. At one level, the coronavirus outbreak



has amplified their existing poverty – many are heavily indebted trying to make ends meet – but at another, it has made their jobs and lives even more precarious.

Workers employed in Sri Lanka's tea estates are desperately asking the

companies to give them work for 25 days. Twenty-five days of work and their productivity alone – 18 kg a day – could bring some incentives over their basic wage of LKR 700 (roughly ₹275). However, in the current climate of stalled exports – tea fetched \$1.4 billion in 2018 – and an economy reeling in shock, employers are reluctant to engage them for as many days. Their three year-long, consistent demand for a basic wage of LKR 1,000, that President Gotabaya Rajapaksa said would be given from March 1, is now a failed promise.

"There are trucks going around with some supplies, but most estate labourer families don't have cash to buy essentials. Some say give us rice, we can at least make a *kanji* (porridge) and drink it," says Menaha Kandasamy, adviser to the Red Flag plantation union. "Those working in our tea and rubber estates were already so badly exploited. This pandemic is going to be another good excuse for the employers to exploit them even more in future."



Meera Srinivasan is The Hindu's Colombo correspondent

Pakistan's fight against coronavirus

Provincial governments have announced curbs, ramped up preparedness to fight the outbreak

LAHORE



Pakistan's first two coronavirus cases were confirmed on February 26. Since then, the number of infections has jumped to 2,714 now, with 40 deaths. Punjab, the largest province, has more than 1,080 cases, while Sindh has reported 830, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 343 and Balochistan 175. At least 130 people have recovered so far.

Pakistan has been under a partial lockdown for weeks. Schools and educational institutions and malls and other places of big gatherings have been shut across the provinces.

Musarrat Jamsheed Cheema, a spokesperson of the Punjab government, told *The Hindu* that more than 17,000 tests had been conducted in

the province. "We test everyone who has a travel history. We have tested all the *zairreen* (Shia pilgrims who went to Iran). We are now testing locally transmitted cases also who have no travel history but have shown symptoms."

Punjab has established a quarantine facility at Expo Centre, Lahore. "Punjab has systematically tried to deal with the pandemic. A Cabinet committee was formed by the Chief Minister that not just had politicians and bureaucrats but also experts, scientists and virologists. We also consulted Chinese experts and authorities from the beginning."

Ms. Cheema says Punjab has the capacity to quarantine 27,000 people at the moment. Capacity to deal with patients is 100,000 in hospitals all over Punjab in the worst-case scenario.

The Sindh government has esta-



blished isolation centres at 12 different hospitals in the province.

"A field hospital has been established at Karachi Expo Centre. Two full-fledged hospitals have been established outside Karachi to serve as isolation centres. We have esta-

blished quarantine centres in different areas of Sindh that can cater to about 6,000 people," Murtaza Wahab, a spokesperson of the provincial government, told *The Hindu*.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) authorities are also beefing up efforts to fight the outbreak. "We took partial lockdown and social distancing measures even before the Centre decided upon them."

To ensure maximum coordination, we have formed a task force and a technical advisory group that is looking after all the measures being taken in the province," said provincial Health Minister Taimur Khan Jhagra.

Aggressive contact tracing

"On surveillance and tracking, we are forming Rapid Response Team at the local level to deal with suspected cases and isolate/test them as per procedure. We also do aggressive contact tracing in cluster areas after putting them under quarantine. We are also constantly working on in-

creasing our testing capacity to increase surveillance."

Mr. Jhagra said the KP government had established isolation wards in district hospitals with a capacity of almost 2,600 beds. "We have also collaborated with private hospitals to set up isolation wards with a capacity of almost 600 beds," he said.

The Balochistan government was the first to impose a health emergency as the province shares a border with Iran, one of the hardest-hit countries that saw over 50,000 infections and about 3,300 deaths.

"When news of coronavirus cases in Iran broke, we took action. We imposed a ban on the border till we made arrangements. We sent tents and N-95 masks to the Taftan border for the pilgrims," Liaquat Shahwani, a spokesperson for the Balochistan government, told *The Hindu*.

"Four to five rooms for isolation were set up at all district headquarters in the province. We have a dedicated 225-bed hospital in Quetta. We have established 18 qua-

rantine centres on the Pak-Afghan and Pak-Iran borders," Mr. Shahwani said, explaining the measures the provincial authorities have taken to meet the emergency situation.

While the federal and provincial governments have taken these measures, the challenge before Prime Minister Imran Khan is to prevent a total collapse of the country's beleaguered economy while containing the deadly virus.

The Prime Minister said on Saturday that his government is walking a tight rope between the lockdown and the economy. "In the subcontinent, with a high rate of poverty, we are faced with the stark choice of having to balance between a lockdown necessary to slow down/prevent the spread of COVID-19 & ensuring people don't die of hunger & our economy doesn't collapse. So we are walking a tightrope," he tweeted.

"[T]o stop the devastation of the lockdown we have kept our agri sector open & now we are opening up our construction sector."

IN BRIEF



Neymar donates \$1 million
RIO DE JANEIRO
Paris Saint-Germain forward Neymar has donated \$1 million to help combat the coronavirus outbreak in his native Brazil. The funds have been divided between UNICEF and a charity campaign launched by TV presenter Luciano Huck. Former Barcelona and Spain star Xavi Hernandez and his wife have donated \$1.08 million to the Hospital Clinic in Barcelona. IANS

UEFA lifts TV blackout for England, Scotland

LONDON
UEFA has lifted a ban on the live screening of Premier League games kicking off at 3 p.m. in England and Scotland for the rest of the season. The blackout has long been in place to protect attendance at matches. The move by European football's governing body is seen as a step towards restarting some domestic competitions in Britain behind closed doors in order to complete the season, interrupted by the coronavirus crisis. AFP



Rohit, Warner best T20 openers: Moody
NEW DELHI
Tom Moody on Saturday picked India's Rohit Sharma, in pic., and fellow-Australian David Warner as the best opening batsmen in T20 cricket. In a question-answer session on Twitter, Moody also picked Chennai Super Kings as his favourite IPL team and M.S. Dhoni as favourite captain. Moody said Shubman Gill "stands out" among emerging players. PTI

Serie A says no date set for return to action

MILAN
Serie A bosses said on Friday that doubts remain over when football can return to Italy — all sport in Italy is suspended until at least April 13. A meeting between top-flight Serie A and representatives of the Italian players' union (AIC) took place by video conference to discuss a date for a return to action and potential player salary cuts. No decision was taken on both. AFP

Kobe Bryant heads 2020 Hall of Fame list

LOS ANGELES
Five-time NBA champion Kobe Bryant, who died in a helicopter crash in January, headed a star-studded list of players named in basketball's 2020 Hall of Fame on Saturday. He was among the nine who will be enshrined at the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame on August 29. AFP

FIFA puts off women's U-17 WC

India has to wait to host the showpiece event until new dates are decided

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The FIFA Under-17 Women's World Cup to be held in India in November was on Saturday postponed by football's governing body due to the worsening COVID-19 pandemic.

The women's age-group showpiece was to be held at five venues in the country — Kolkata, Guwahati, Bhubaneswar, Ahmedabad and Navi Mumbai — from November 2-21. It was to be India's maiden appearance in the U-17 World Cup.

U-20 WC postponed

The decision was taken by the FIFA-Confederations working group which was recently established by the Bureau of the FIFA Council to address the consequences of the pandemic.

The working group also recommended postponement of the FIFA Under-20 Women's World Cup Panama/Costa Rica 2020 — originally scheduled for August/September 2020.

Meanwhile, the All India



Welcome deferred: India had been looking forward to playing the perfect host to the Under-17 Women's World Cup. FILE PHOTO: PTI

Football Federation (AIFF) said the postponement was on expected lines.

"Just like other sports events which were postponed due to this dreaded disease, it (postponement of U-17 World Cup) was to happen," said AIFF general secretary Kushal Das.

"The qualifying events in Europe and Africa and other confederations are yet to be held and so the decision was on expected lines."

He said the tournament would most likely be held next year.

- The event was to be held at Kolkata, Guwahati, Bhubaneswar, Ahmedabad and Navi Mumbai
- Qualifying events in Europe, Africa yet to be conducted

LTA pledges support to revive the sport

TENNIS

KAMESH SRINIVASAN
NEW DELHI

The cancellation of Wimbledon this year due to the coronavirus pandemic has dealt a serious blow to the tennis fraternity.

The Lawn Tennis Association (LTA), which governs the game in Britain, however, has swung into action and pledged around £20 million to tennis venues, coaches, officials and players in order to ensure a healthy revival of the sport in England, Scotland and Wales.

The measure is aimed at protecting the grassroots of the sport even as it aspires to support the professional players and coaches, including providing financial grants to the lower-ranked players.

To ensure viability

"Our primary objective in announcing these unprecedented measures is to ensure clubs and venues remain viable, and coaches and officials are not lost," said LTA chief executive Scott Lloyd in a statement.

Most significantly, ATP/WTA ranked players in the 101-750 bracket in singles and 101-250 in doubles will get appropriate grants. There will also be increased prize money and tournament bonuses when the events are revived.

The financial commitment includes repayment holiday of up to six months for all existing LTA facility



Scott Lloyd. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

loans to the tune of £1 million in all. An equal amount will reach the tennis fraternity through the refund of registration fee for venues for 2019-20.

Hardship fund

A hardship fund of about £13.5 million has been kept to provide interest-free loans of up to £5,000 for those in need. Around £4 million would be provided as financial grant for the LTA-accredited coaches and tutors, apart from a separate fund of around £1 million for interest-free loans for coaches up to £5,000.

There will also be support for tournaments cancelled where the players' entry fee may have been reimbursed.

In return for the support, the LTA would ask the players and coaches concerned to commit their time to help open up tennis to more people in their area when play resumes.

The Indian Tennis Association and sports administrators should start looking at ways to do their bit, taking inspiration from LTA.

Training Dutee a new challenge now, says coach Ramesh

'Plan is to make her compete in both 200m and 100m'

V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM
HYDERABAD

For N. Ramesh, the SAI athletics coach who gave a new direction to sprinter Dutee Chand's career by supporting her when she was facing the IAAF ban on grounds of hyperandrogenism a few years ago, it is a new challenge to train her for the postponed Tokyo Olympic Games.

"In a way, the rescheduling of the Games is a blessing in disguise for most of the contenders, except, maybe, for those who are ageing.

"In Dutee's case, we are already into the preparatory mode," the 55-year-old Ramesh told *The Hindu*.

"The plan is to make Dutee compete in both 200m and 100m events in the run-up to the Games, but the focus will be on 100m as research, and her own inclination, suggests the shorter sprint is more suited to her," he said.

Early start

"It is not just Dutee alone, who is being trained via mobile app.

"The day starts at 4.30 a.m. for all the athletes scattered across Telangana and Andhra Pradesh," he said.

"I first suggest to them to do some visualisation on the day's training session before the start, for this has been proven scientifically to have



Silver lining: Ramesh feels the Tokyo Games postponement is a blessing in disguise for many, including Dutee.

The focus will be on 100m as research, and her own inclination, suggest the shorter sprint is more suited to her

a better effect," he said. How is the review done? "For example, Dutee will give me the video feedback of her set of 30m sprints with timings and, based on that, corrective measures will be suggested. Similarly, all the athletes have their own specific training modules.

Tokyo Olympics: SAI to reassess preparations

GENERAL

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The postponement of the Tokyo Olympics has forced the Sports Authority of India (SAI) to re-evaluate preparations for the same.

On Saturday, it began the process, with SAI DG Sandip Pradhan holding a video conference with Hockey India officials, including CEO Elena Norman and High Performance Director David John. The men's and women's chief coaches were also present.

Various modalities including teams' training and domestic and foreign competitions were discussed with the coaches expressing satisfaction at the measures currently in place at the SAI Centre in Bengaluru.

"We had a positive discussion about the state of affairs and indicated our preferences once the situation improves and as soon as more is known about the possibilities in the future," women's chief coach Sjoerd Marijne said.



Sandip Pradhan. FILE PHOTO

"We had a very productive meeting, discussed the planning process for the next 16 months and await decisions as to when we can re-start full training," men's coach Graham Reid added.

HI gives ₹75 lakh more
Hockey India, meanwhile, added another ₹75 lakh to take its contribution to the PM-CARES fund to ₹1 crore to counter the spread of COVID-19.

The federation had earlier committed ₹25 lakh before its Executive Board decided to up the amount on Saturday.

England cricketers' noble gesture

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LONDON

England cricketers, both men and women, have volunteered pay-cuts and donated £500,000 as contribution towards the fight against COVID-19.

The gesture comes after the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) had proposed a 20% cut in players' salaries. "The donation of £500,000 is equivalent to a 20% reduction in the men's salaries while the women volunteered for a cut in April, May, June salaries.

"Following a meeting of all of the England men's centrally contracted cricketers, the players have agreed to make an initial donation of 0.5m to the ECB and to selected good causes," read a statement from the players. "This contribution is the equivalent of all of England's centrally contracted players taking a 20% reduction in their monthly retainers for the next three months," the statement said.

These are not normal times, says Narain

'This is the first time in 27 years I am spending more time with family'

RAYAN ROZARIO
COIMBATORE

For Narain Karthikeyan, the 'fastest Indian in the world', life has come to a screeching halt due to COVID-19. The former F1 driver agrees that he has lived his life in the fast lane all these years and a sudden stop like this is a bit unusual.

"This is the first time in the last 27 years that I am spending more time with my family. I do not know whether it is a nice thing to happen when the world is struggling because of the virus," Narain told *The Hindu* here on Saturday.

"These are not normal times... in fact, they are the most difficult and make you realise that the world can change overnight — from a bright scenario to a bleak one."

He revealed that things were moving at snail's pace for him. "I need to get the day going, and plan it accordingly."

Hard at work

The 43-year-old racer, whom young drivers look up to for inspiration, is working hard to keep himself fit for future events.

After spending some time in Japan, where he drove in the SuperGT series for Nakajima Racing and finished with a win under testing conditions in the final race of the season, Narain has set



Narain Karthikeyan. FILE PHOTO

his sights on the European LeMans racing endurance series. "I doubt if anything will happen this year because the situation is so bad," he said.

Will it be difficult for drivers to come back with a bang after a break like this? "It will be slightly difficult but you will have to go with the flow," said Narain.

Battle-ready

"I compete with world-class drivers half my age and I feel I have enough speed in me to beat them on a regular basis. I also keep myself fit all the time," added Narain who, along with the other drivers in the Race Legends group, has planned to chip in for those affected by the pandemic.

Narain said he has never seen anything like this in his life.

"I wish and pray this never happens again."

SUDOKU

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

1	7	8	2	4	3	9	5	6
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6	9	5	8	7	1	2	4	3
5	2	7	4	9	8	6	3	1
3	6	4	7	1	2	8	9	5
8	1	9	3	6	5	7	2	4
9	3	1	6	8	4	5	7	2
7	5	2	1	3	9	4	6	8
4	8	6	5	2	7	3	1	9

IPL should happen, says Pietersen

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The COVID-19 pandemic may have indefinitely stalled all sporting activity, but former England captain Kevin Pietersen "truly believes" that the 13th edition of the IPL should happen the moment there is a window of opportunity.

He proposed a "condensed" league behind closed doors, adding the fans shouldn't be risked.

"Let's say July/August at the earliest... I do truly believe the IPL should happen. I do believe it is the kick-start to the cricket season. I think every single player around the world is desperate to play in the IPL," Pietersen said.

The former star batsman expressed his thoughts on Star Sports' show *Cricket Connected*.

"There could be a way in which to get some money into the franchises, into the economy by having a



Batting for it: Pietersen believes every player around the world is desperate to play in the IPL. GETTY IMAGES

situation where you use maybe three venues which are completely closed to fans and the players can still go out and play the tournament in three or four weeks.

Condensed version

"So, it's a more condensed tournament in three venues which we know are safe, which we know are secure," he said.

Agreeing with Pietersen,

former India batsman Sanjay Manjrekar spoke of the importance of organising the IPL. "When you talk about the IPL, it's not just about the Mumbai Indians, or a Dhoni or a Virat Kohli, there are a lot of people who are making their livelihood through the IPL," he said.

The IPL was slated to begin on March 29, but has been deferred until April 15.

Will not let anyone down: IOA

Have to be optimistic to get out of this situation, says Batra

VIJAY LOKAPALLY
NEW DELHI

Indian Olympic Association (IOA) president Narinder Batra, on Saturday, assured the sporting fraternity of all help during the ongoing phase of lockdown.

"These are challenging times for sports. Everything will have to be restructured (when things become normal)," Batra said.

Identifying talent

"We are in touch with all the (national) federations but it is just that you are planning based on assumptions that things get all right by July-August. How to build up. When to peak? It is basically focusing on the Olympics. And, in the longer run, identify the younger lot which is going to be our potential in 2024 Olympics also."

On the role of the administrators, Batra informed, "We have been in touch with all the federations and all athletes through their (respective) federations. We are



Narinder Batra. FILE PHOTO: PTI

trying to make sure that everyone is doing well. The athletes and their families are in good state. The local administration, State government, Sports Authority of India are involved fully. Everyone is trying to make sure that things remain in good condition."

Be free of stress

On the assurance to athletes, Batra said, "I can assure them that things will be as per their requirements whe-

never it becomes normal. Whatever they want will be met with. There will be fear until the vaccine comes out (for COVID-19). I agree there will be problems. We have to be optimistic to get out of the current situation. You have to be mentally free of all the stress, because it can affect the performances."

Batra emphasised the athletes need not worry on the financial front. "Most federations in India would only be making a statement if they try to give assurances and not delivering at a later date. All our athletes are employed by the government or private organisations, so no salary cuts have been done. That's one good assurance.

"Right now, we are engaged in giving contributions to the Prime Minister's CARES Fund which can help the society in general. If a situation comes where an athlete or group of athletes need help, rest assured we won't let anyone down."



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HOPE**
**SWITCH OFF
FEAR**



9 pm. 9 mins. Tonight.