

**OPINION 6**  
CORONA'S  
PRIVACY CONCERNS

**MONEY 9**  
SENSEX SNAPS 2-DAY  
LOSING STREAK

**SPORT 12**  
WILL NEED AT LEAST ONE  
MONTH OF TRAINING: RAHANE

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INDIAN HISTORY:  
AYUSHMANN  
10 VIVACITY

## Public transport soon: Gadkari

Govt formulating guidelines adhering to social distancing norms

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The end of the extended lockdown has begun to look like a possibility with the Centre on Wednesday disclosing that road public transport services may resume soon.

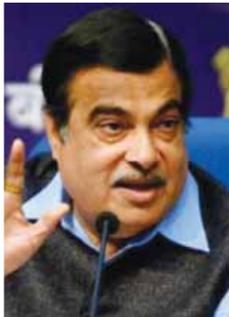
The Government is formulating guidelines for safe usage of different transport modes adhering to social distancing norms to check the spread of coronavirus.

While addressing members of Bus and Car Operators Confederation of India, Union Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari said, "The Government will soon make efforts to start bus services on the basis of certain guidelines. We need to start transport at some level, because people are stranded in several places."

Gadkari said the opening of transport and highways will go a long way in instilling confidence among the public and cautioned towards maintaining social distancing and adopting all safety measures like hand wash, sanitising, face masks, etc, while operating buses and cars.

On demand of a bailout for passenger transport industry, Gadkari said the Government is fully aware of their problems and will fully support them to mitigate their issues.

He said he is in regular touch with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, who are working overtime to uplift the economy during



these difficult days of Covid-19 pandemic.

The Minister also asked investors and the industry to convert the coronavirus-induced crisis into an opportunity by occupying larger global market.

"Economy is facing crisis due to coronavirus outbreak... We should treat it as blessing in disguise as no one wants to deal with China. Japan's Prime Minister is facilitating industry there to do investment out of China... It is a chance to boost Indian economy," the Minister said.

He said Indian industry should grasp this opportunity to invite those foreign companies to invest in them in India. He expressed confidence that the country and its industry will together win both the battles — the one with coronavirus, and the one with economic slowdown.

Responding to concerns raised by the operators, the



Migrants who arrived from Surat by a special train board a bus to reach their native place, during the ongoing Covid-19 lockdown, in Prayagraj on Wednesday

Minister said his Ministry is looking at adopting the London model of public transport, where Government funding is minimal and private investment is promoted.

He also pointed out towards the poor standards of Indian bus and truck bodies which he said are functional for only 5-7 years, whereas the European models last for up to 15 years.

Gadkari emphasised upon adopting good practices from

European operators, which will also be economically viable for indigenous industry in the longer run.

The Minister said he is aware of the tight financial condition of the Indian market during the ongoing pandemic. But, he said all stakeholders will have to work together to combat it.

Members of the confederation made suggestions for improving the condition of public transport which includ-

ed extending interest payment exemptions, restarting public transport, extending age limit, deferring state taxes, extending Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSME) benefits, extending insurance policy validity, etc.

The Minister also said the insurance sector should come forward to help as it has benefited due to less accidents during the lockdown. He further said work on many highway projects has resumed.

## Most wanted Hizbul ultra among 4 killed

Naikoo was A++ terrorist with reward of ₹12L on head

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Riyaz Naikoo, one of the top commanders of Hizbul Mujahideen, a pro-Pakistan banned terror outfit in Kashmir Valley, was killed along with one of his close aides in Beighpora area of South Kashmir's Pulwama district on Wednesday.

Naikoo was an A++ category terrorist and carried a reward of ₹12 lakh on his head. In 2019, Naikoo had also figured on the list of most wanted terrorists prepared by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Two other local terrorists were killed in a separate encounter with the joint teams of security forces in Sharshali Khrew area of Awantipora, taking the tally of killed terrorists since January 2020 to 67.

As stone-pelters as usual tried to scuttle the encounter, a few of them were injured in police action, but there was no official confirmation about the nature of injuries.

Confirming the identity of the terrorists killed in Beighpora area, Inspector General of Police, Kashmir



Army soldiers during an encounter with terrorists at Beighpora area in Pulwama district of South Kashmir on Wednesday



Commander-in-Chief of Hizbul Mujahideen Riyaz Naikoo

"In the second operation in Beighpora village of Awantipora, a top terrorist commander was trapped along with his accomplice. The operation was launched last evening and contact was established with hiding terrorists in the morning on Wednesday. In this encounter, two terrorists were killed. One of the terrorists has been identified as Riyaz Naikoo. He was the chief operational commander of the HM outfit in Kashmir," the spokesman said.

Following his elimination in the six-hour long operation, widespread incidents of stone-pelting were reported from Beighpora, Gulzarpora, Ghat Tokna and Malangpora prompting the authorities to suspend mobile internet and voice calling facilities of private networks across the Kashmir valley.

## Corona cases soars to 52K, 29% recovered

1,781 die; Maha situation grim

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's Covid-19 count crossed half-lakh mark on Wednesday as the country registered 3,050 fresh cases of viral infection, taking the tally to 52,460. The death toll from the virus also surged to 1,781 with Maharashtra again topping the list of the worst-affected States.

However, the total recovery number is 14,911, and active cases 35,762.

Maharashtra's tally spiked to 16,758 after detection of 1,233 new cases — highest in a day so far while 34 deaths on Wednesday took toll to 651.

Tamil Nadu reported 771 positive cases taking the tally to 4,829 while Gujarat reported 6,680 after the day's addition of 380 cases even as 25 more patients died. The total death count in Gujarat stands at 298. Delhi has 5,110 cases, including 65 fatalities.

Uttar Pradesh added 118



A health worker wearing protective suit sprays disinfectant at a banquet hall, during the ongoing nationwide lockdown, in East Delhi on Wednesday

more cases to be just two short of 3,000 with a death count of 60. Madhya Pradesh reported 89 cases for a tally 3,138.

The Ministry of Home Affairs secretary Ajay Bhalla on Wednesday wrote to West Bengal Chief Secretary Rajiv Sinha saying the coronavirus testing in the State was very low and the mortality rate was higher than any other State.

### Shops to remain closed in Ahmedabad for a week

Ahmedabad: To control the spread of coronavirus in the worst-hit Ahmedabad city, civic authorities on Wednesday ordered the closure of all the shops except those selling milk and medicines for a week, triggering panic buying of grocery items and vegetables.

## French hacker finds security issue in Aarogya Setu app

Govt rejects claim but app team in touch with him to plug loopholes

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Serious concern about data security breach of Aarogya Setu App was raised after a French hacker Robert Baptiste, who goes by Elliot Alderson on Twitter claimed a potential security issue in the app, prompting the Government to issue clarification that there was no security vulnerability in the contact tracing app.

Responding to clarification, Alderson tweeted, "I will come back to you tomorrow. The challenge by the hacker has put the Government machinery in a fix and given ammunition to the Opposition parties amid Covid lockdown."

The app with about 9.08 crore users as of now has been the most downloaded app on Play Store. It did not take long for the tweet to catch the eye of Aarogya Setu App team which



contacted Alderson shortly and tried to fix the loopholes.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, the Software Freedom Law Centre, India (SFLC.in) and the Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF), have raised question on Aarogya Setu App.

After Alderson's tweet, several people have expressed privacy and security concerns over the app, which has been made mandatory for all public and private sector employees, as well as those in coronavirus containment areas.

His tweets created a flutter on Twitter, with several people asking him questions about the alleged security issue. One Twitter user asked if Alderson

believed the issue was intentional and done by design, to which he replied in the affirmative.

Soon after the Modi Government rejected the claim, Alderson tweeted that five people felt unwell at the PMO; two unwell at the Army headquarters; one infected people at the Indian Parliament and three infected at the home office. "Basically, I was able to see if someone was sick at the PMO or the Indian Parliament. I was able to see if someone was sick in a specific house if I wanted," he tweeted.

Meanwhile, rejecting charges by the Opposition that the Aarogya Setu app breaches privacy, Union IT Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad has asserted that the platform is "absolutely robust, safe and secure" in terms of privacy.

"This is a technological invention of India — Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, our scientists, NIC, Niti Aayog and some private (entities) — whereby it is a perfectly accountable platform to help in the fight against Covid-19," Prasad said.

## With 85 more +ve in ranks, BSF Covid cases mount to 152

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Eighty five new cases of Covid-19 positive patients were reported in the BSF ranks on Wednesday, taking the total number of infected persons in the border guarding paramilitary to 152.

The CRPF has already reported 138 cases and the ITBP has 45 positive cases, taking the number of corona virus-hit personnel in the paramilitary ranks to nearly 400 taking into account the viral infection from the SSB and the CISE.

The BSF had earlier sealed two floors of the headquarters building at the CGO Complex in Delhi after detection of a positive case on Friday. After following all disinfection protocols, the BSF headquarters went functional on Wednesday.

"While performing operational and essential duties, 85 more BSF personnel have been infected with Covid-19. It is reiterated that in each estab-



lishment of the BSF, all SOPs are strictly being followed. Instructions are enforced and religiously followed to check the spread of the pandemic," a BSF spokesperson said.

Earlier a total of 69 BSF personnel were tested Covid-19 positive out of which two have recovered and 67 were undergoing treatment. While 110 BSF personnel contracted the disease in the national Capital while assisting the Delhi Police in deployment at Jama Masjid/Chandni Mahal area and the remaining are mostly from Tripura.

### CAPSULE

#### 4,000 TABLIGHIS TO BE RELEASED IN DELHI

New Delhi: The Delhi Government ordered the release of 4,000 Tablighi members who have completed their required quarantine period in centres.

#### WE WILL SHARE IT WITH WORLD: ISRAEL'S ENVOY

New Delhi: Israel's ambassador to India Ron Malka said that his country is an advanced stage of a breakthrough on developing an antibody to the coronavirus and is awaiting results of clinical trials. We are at an advanced stage. Yes, of course, we will share it with the world," Malka told ANI.

#### ADMIN OF INSTA GROUP 'BOIS LOCKER ROOM' HELD

New Delhi: Delhi Police's Cyber cell has arrested the admin of Instagram group "Bois Locker Room" which was being used to share obscene messages and morphed pictures of underage girls on the social media site.

## Young cop dies, 1st Covid death in Delhi Police

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 31-year-old Delhi Police constable died from coronavirus on Tuesday. It is said to be the first death of a Delhi Police official due to Covid-19.

The lab report confirming his Covid positive status came posthumously. On Tuesday evening, when he was feeling uncomfortable, he was rushed to the Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital where he was declared brought dead, a senior police official said.

Now all police personnel who came in contact with the constable, who belonged to Haryana's Sonapat, are being tracked to be quarantined. "He is survived by wife and a 3-year-old son," the official said. The deceased constable was posted at Northwest Delhi's Bharat Nagar police station.

## K'taka halts migrants' trains to restart eco, action sued in HC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

About 10,000 migrant workers from Dhanbad in Jharkhand were caught in a hapless situation in Karnataka when the State Government cancelled three trains that were to carry them back to their native places on Wednesday. The Karnataka Government decided to stop them from going back after a meeting between Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa and property builders a day before.

The logic of "reviving economy" in the State seemed to have prevailed over the BJP Government in cancelling the special trains, which was strongly criticised by the Opposition Congress. The State

Government was holding workers as "captive" and treating them like "bonded labourers," alleged the Congress.

The All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICTU) termed the move a violation of the fundamental right of the freedom of movement and one that promoted forced labour. AICTU has moved the Karnataka High Court seeking relief to migrant workers who are left stranded after the Karnataka Government's sudden move.

The plea states the stand of the State Government is in violation of the fundamental rights of the workers protected under Articles 19 (1)(d) and Article 14 of the Constitution of India.

## Auto firms resume partial production, Maruti's Manesar plant from May 12

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Automobile majors, including Maruti Suzuki India, Mercedes-Benz, TVS Motor, and Royal Enfield, on Wednesday announced partial resumption of or plans to restart production at their respective manufacturing units following relaxation of guidelines by the Government for the third phase of lockdown.

The country's largest car-maker Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) said it would resume operations at its Manesar plant from May 12.

The Gurugram district administration had allowed MSI to run Manesar facility on a single shift basis, while fixing the total number of employees at plant at 4,696.

Detailed report on P9

## Now get liquor on you doorstep in Punjab, Bengal, Chhattisgarh

State Govts amend laws, online sale to stop recurrence of chaos seen 3 days

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Several State Governments, including Chhattisgarh, Punjab and West Bengal, have decided to allow home delivery of liquor via the online sale to avoid the chaos witnessed in front of liquor shops during the last three days.

Officials said the Punjab Government has allowed amendment in the Excise Act in order to allow home delivery of liquor in a bid to ensure that social distancing norms are not violated amid curfew and



Covid-19 lockdown. Punjab generates ₹6,000 crore annually from liquor.

Similarly, the Mamta Banerjee Government has allowed amendments in the State Excise Act, permitting home delivery of liquor. Bengal gets ₹11,000 crore revenue from liquor sale every year.

The Chhattisgarh Government has set up Chhattisgarh State Marketing

Corporation Limited to deliver liquor at home in green zones. A customer can order up to 5,000 ml of liquor at a time for home delivery and the delivery charge will be ₹120," the release stated. Except Raipur and Korba districts, the remaining 26 districts of the State are in green zones.

According to a survey by Local Circles, a social media and community platform, around 52 per cent consumers want liquor to be delivered at home in red zones.

The Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies director general Vinod Giri urged the State Governments to give permission for token system through which liquor can be sold and it will also be better crowd management.

TACKLING CORONAVIRUS

# Punjab CM: Punjab suffers 88% revenue loss in April

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

pegging the April revenue shortfall for Punjab at 88 per cent, Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh on Wednesday said that with all tax revenues dried up and only 1.5 percent of the industry currently operational, Punjab was facing a difficult financial situation, which was compounded by absence of aid from the Central Government.

Capt Amarinder, participating in a video conference of Chief Ministers of Congress-ruled states with party president Sonia Gandhi along with former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh and senior party leader Rahul Gandhi, shared Punjab's Covid containment strategy and the roadmap for economic revival.

During the meeting, Sonia asked the Chief Minister to convey her congratulations to the State's farmers for a smooth procurement season, with the latter disclosing that more than 100 lakh MT had arrived in the mandis already, and the entire procurement process was expected to be completed by mid-May.

As against the estimated revenues of ₹3,360 crore for April, only ₹396 crore had been received during the month, the Chief Minister said, adding that the state's power consumption had declined by 30 percent with a daily loss of ₹30 crore in collection of electricity tariff to the Punjab State Power Corporation Limited. In addition, the State's GST arrears of ₹4,365.37 crore are yet to be paid by the Government of India, he pointed out.

However, he said that

despite the financial crunch, Punjab Government was committed to prepare the society and common man to manage and contain coronavirus, and was also taking every possible step to upgrade and readjust state's healthcare system to meet the challenges of Covid-19.

The Chief Minister was of the opinion that the decision on classification of zones as red, orange or green should be left to the states, which, in turn, could authorize the Deputy Commissioners to demarcate as per the ground realities. "Main concern is that the people sitting in Delhi are deciding on classification of zones without knowing what's happening on the ground," he said.

He cited the example of Patiala being classified as a red zone, even though Nabha - a major milk-producing area - is located in the district. Punjab currently has four containment zones and four red zone districts, with 15 districts remaining in orange zone and the remaining three in green.

Providing an update on the Covid status in Punjab, the Chief Minister said that there had been a spike in cases in the State after Punjabis residing outside Punjab started coming back from Rajasthan and Maharashtra.

Of the 4200-odd persons who had returned from Nanded, 969 had tested positive, though only 23 of them were symptomatic, and some results were awaited, he said, adding that the spike was expected to end, with the situation stabilizing in the next three-four days, once testing of all such people is completed. All returnees are now being checked and quarantined, he added.

The Chief Minister warned of high risk of spread of infection in Punjab from those returning to the State especially the workers coming back from the Gulf in crowded ships. Four ships of

migrants, mostly labourers, were expected to arrive in the next few days, while the first plane with NRIs was expected to reach Punjab on Thursday, he said.

Giving details, the Chief Minister said around 20,000 international travelers are expected to return to Punjab in the next three-four weeks, in addition to around 12,000 who had registered in other states for coming back.

As for the migrant workers wanting to go back from Punjab to their native states, he disclosed that 10 lakh had registered so far, of which 85 percent belonged to UP and Bihar.

The State Government has sanctioned ₹35 crore to provide for train travel cost of these workers, he said, adding that three trains left on May 5 for UP and Jharkhand and six more were scheduled for May 6. "Railways is charging ₹870 per ticket, which the state is paying," he said.

"The Government has drawn up a comprehensive strategy to contain the spread... All persons coming back will be kept in quarantine for about one week until they have been tested for the virus," he said adding that persons testing negative will be placed in home quarantine for another two weeks, while those testing positive will be placed in containment wards.

The Chief Minister also shared details of issues raised by his Government with the Centre including pending GST arrears, demand for revenue grant for the next three months, review of current year report by 15th Finance Commission, among others.

The State Government was also pursuing for relief to the poor and daily wage agricultural and industrial labour including migrant workers who are badly affected due to loss of jobs or employment, he said, adding that the state had also sought urgent relief for MSMEs and the Power sector.

# Spl train with 1,200 migrants departs to Bihar from Haryana



PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

The first special train, carrying around 1,200 migrant workers stranded in Haryana, left for Katihar in Bihar from Hisar Railways Station on Wednesday.

The train will not stop at any in-between station before the destination. According to Railways official, five special trains will run for migrant workers from Haryana to other States on May 7 and 8.

Addressing the people of the State during 'Haryana Aaj' programme through live telecast in Chandigarh, Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar said that the State Government is committed to send all migrant workers of Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh to their home States free of cost by special trains.

He said that it is our responsibility to send migrant labourers to their native places. "Large numbers of migrant workers were involved in harvesting crops. Labourers are the backbone of State's agriculture and industry sectors. It is time of crisis they should not be in hurry to go their homes but try to remain wherever they live. The situation in Haryana is better than other States", Khattar added.

Hisar based district officials said that only those migrants who were involved in agricultural activity will be transported to their home States in the first phase.

Before the journey,

migrants were told to assemble at one place, where they were medically examined and provided tickets. Roadways buses were roped in to bring migrants to the Railways station observing all necessary precautions. Around 1200 migrants were allowed to board in the train to ensure social distancing. The migrants were not charged. The state government paid for their fare.

Three special trains will depart on May 7 while two on May 8. The fare of the entire special train has been fixed by the Railways department. Normally 72 passengers are allowed to seat in a coach but due to corona virus outbreak and to maintain the social distancing norms, 50 to 54 passengers were allowed to sit in one coach of the train and total around 1200 passengers were boarded. Railway Protection Force (RPF) and Government Railway Police (GRP) have been deployed for the safety and security of the passengers in the train. Passengers will be served food on the train itself.

Sources said that there were 50,000 migrants workers involved in agricultural activity in Haryana, 20,000 of whom were from Bihar.

Meanwhile, 221,880 migrants from other States are stranded in Haryana and 62,260 people from the State struck in other States, according to a summary prepared by the State Government. Of the migrants, 69,496 are from Bihar and 31,824 from Uttar Pradesh, they added.

# Khattar to top cops: Form team to eradicate smuggling of liquor

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Wednesday directed all Deputy Commissioners and Superintendents of Police to constitute district level teams headed by a Magistrate and comprising of officers of Police and Excise and Taxation Department so as to eradicate smuggling of illegal liquor across the inter-State borders and also to prevent the supply of non-duty paid liquor from the distilleries to the vends.

Presiding over a meeting with all the Deputy Commissioners (DCs) and Superintendents of Police (SPs) through video conferencing here in which Deputy Chief Minister, Dushyant Chautala was also present, the Chief Minister also appreciated the DCs and SPs for their efforts in containing the spread of corona virus in the State.

Khattar directed the DCs and SPs to ensure quick installation and regular monitoring of flow meters in every distillery. While directing the SPs to identify illegal godowns of liquor, if any, in their districts, he said that an inventory of such liquor seized by police should also be prepared.

The CM asked the DCs and SPs to ensure that vehicles carrying mining material and having valid e-Rawana slip should not be stopped unnecessarily.

He said that 400 to 500 vehicles involved in illegal mining have been impounded in the State with maximum number of such vehicles from the districts of Sonapat, Ambala, Faridabad, Narnaul, Palwal and Panchkula.

He asked the DCs of these districts to ensure that if the owner failed to get their vehicle released, they should start the process for the auction of such vehicles.

Khattar said though the migrant labourers are eager to return to their home towns, Deputy Commissioners con-



cerned should try to pacify them to remain in Haryana as after the lockdown, industrial and other economic activities have been resumed in the State in a phased manner. For the agricultural labour and other migrant labour from other States of India who are keen on returning, the registration process has been started at the local level.

He said on Wednesday, the State Government sent a special train for the migrant labourers from Hisar to Katihar in Bihar. Apart from this, 8 more trains would also be sent to various destinations in the next one or two days. In addition, arrangement of buses has also been made for the migrant labourers going to Uttar Pradesh.

He said that as the Home Department has issued SOPs in this regard, all the DCs and SPs should ensure that these are followed in letter and spirit to facilitate the return of migrant labour and other agricultural labour in a safe and systematic manner.

The Chief Minister also asked the DCs to ensure the supply of distress ration for the month of May and June to the unorganized labour who do not have any ration cards. He said that it should be ensured that no such person remains deprived of food.

Among those present in the meeting included Chief Secretary, Keshni Anand Arora, Principal Secretary to Chief Minister Rajesh Khullar, Additional Principal Secretary to Chief Minister V. Umashankar, Additional Chief Secretary, Home Vijai Vardhan, Principal Secretary, Excise and

Taxation Mr Anurag Rastogi, Director General of Police Mr Manoj Yadava and ADGP CID Anil Rao.

## PENALTIES FOR VIOLATING SOCIAL DISTANCING NORMS IN HRY

The Haryana Urban Local Bodies Department on Wednesday issued directions for imposing penalties and fines for violation of social distancing norms in the market areas within the Municipal limits.

An official spokesperson said that Deputy Commissioners will constitute a Committee at the District level consisting of members from the Labour, Revenue and Disaster Management and other Departments for the purpose of monitoring the implementation of guidelines for maintaining social distancing during opening of market areas in the extended period of lockdown upto to May 17.

All Municipal Corporations, Municipal Councils and Municipal Committees have been directed to ensure the compliance of these guidelines and directions and strictly issue challans as per provisions of Section 381 of the Haryana Municipal Corporation Act, 1994 and Section 233 of the Haryana Municipal Act, 1973, the spokesperson said.

He said action can also be initiated under the provisions of Disaster Management Act, 2005 as well as under Section 188 of Indian Penal Code, 1860 against the violators as per the severity of violation on case-to-case basis.

# Punjab issues advisory for Sewa Kendras to maintain hygiene

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab Government on Wednesday issued an advisory on maintaining hygiene and sanitation in Sewa Kendras to ensure safety of its staff and citizens from Covid-19 pandemic.

"The State Government has planned a phased approach to resume citizen-centric services provided by the Sewa Kendras. However, only the Sewa Kendras permitted by the Government to resume services shall start its functions as per the plan fixed by the Government," said the spokesperson.

The spokespersons said that a comprehensive plan regarding staff should be drawn up which shall include sitting arrangement in a manner that minimum one metre distance is maintained amongst them at all times. Possibility of use of alternate counters for staff may

be explored. Flexible timings of reporting and leaving the office, for lunch and tea breaks in between with an objective to avoid crowding the office premises shall be planned.

"The staff shall preferably wash hands with soap for at least 20 seconds and a two-hourly hand wash protocol should be followed. Staff handling documents or cash transaction is advised to sanitize or wash their hands with soap and water after the transactions. Staff should mandatorily hand wash or sanitize before touching refreshments during tea or lunch-break etc.

The meals and utensils should not be shared amongst the staff," said the spokesperson.

The advisory stated that the staff should not roam unnecessarily in Sewa Kendra or its periphery or outside and to work from their allotted space only. "Use of intercoms

or electronic media for inter-personal communication of the staff should be encouraged. Staff should be advised to wear cloth masks and it should be washed with soap and water daily after use," it added.

For general public, lines, squares or circles should be drawn at a distance of six feet in front of service area of Sewa Kendra, said the spokesperson adding similar lines, squares or circles should be drawn in front of all counters with first one at two feet from the counter to ensure appropriate distance.

Separate queues should be designated for senior citizens, no associates of applicants should be allowed inside Sewa Kendras except in case of differently able citizens, elderly citizens and minor children.

Only citizens with valid appointments to be allowed inside Sewa Kendras, besides, they should be encouraged to

make digital payment for service availed, while manual delivery of documents over the counter should be discouraged. Delivery of certificates should, preferably, be done only through speed post, the advisory stipulates.

## BAJWA URGES CAPT TO STOP EXODUS OF MIGRANTS

Congress Rajya Sabha MP Partap Singh Bajwa on Wednesday urged the Punjab Government to stop the exodus of migrant workers from the State to avoid a 'self-made' economic crisis after the coronavirus lockdown is lifted.

Bajwa, in a letter to the Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh, said that around 10.08 lakh workers, who are an integral part of the state economy, have applied to go home and the State Government should convince them to stay back to avoid a labour crisis after the

lockdown.

"Without these individuals, we will have a labour crisis that will irrevocably hinder our economy. With the workers gone, I fear our factories will have no labour post-lockdown," said Bajwa while asking the Government to do everything to encourage these workers to remain in the state, otherwise, "we are staring at a self-made economic crisis" adding to the woes of the industry already reeling under the damage caused by Covid-19.

## MOHALI ANNOUNCES MORE RELAXATIONS

In addition to the relaxations already in place, Mohali Deputy Commissioner Girish Dayalan on Wednesday ordered some more relaxations in curfew from Thursday (May 7) including increasing the timings of shops which can now remain open from 7 am to 3 pm, with all other previous

restrictions to continue.

Liquor shops will also be allowed to open from 7 am to 3 pm, while making it clear that no liquor shops will be opened in containment areas or zones.

Regarding movement of persons, the Deputy Commissioner's orders said that no person would move unnecessarily for non-essential work, and the movement of persons will be allowed only between 7 am and 7 pm to and from the work-place on production of identity card issued by the employer (either government or private), from 7 am to 3 pm to shops or commercial establishments and vehicles must be avoided, from 9 pm to 1 pm to banks for public dealing.

Four wheelers will be allowed with a maximum of two passengers besides a driver - and only for permitted activities, while two wheelers will be allowed without a pillion rider.

## HARSIMRAT CLAIMS CENTRAL FOOD RELIEF FOR APRIL NOT DISTRIBUTED

Union Food Processing Industries Minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal on Wednesday said that central food relief material for month of April had not been distributed to the people in Punjab.

Asking the Government not to deny the poor their due, Harsimrat said that there were reports from across the State that even though the central relief including wheat and pulses for the month of May had also reached the State, previous ration had not been delivered to them. "Negligible amount of ration has been distributed. This despite the fact that one lakh metric tonnes of wheat and 6,000 metric tonnes of pulses have been received from the centre by the State for 1.4 crore people, which is half the population of Punjab" she claimed.

# Liquor vends reopen in Hry after over five weeks

Chandigarh: After over five weeks, liquor vends in Haryana reopened on Wednesday with people following social distancing norms to purchase their drink.

The vends will remain open from 7 am to 7 pm. The state government has imposed a variable Covid cess, which has made different categories of liquor including Imported Foreign Liquor, Indian-Made Foreign Liquor, country liquor and beer costlier than before.

At different vends in districts including Karnal, Panchkula, Gurgaon, Kaithal, Rohtak and Bhiwani, moderate rush of buyers was witnessed.

Home Minister Anil Vij said he had strictly ordered district police chiefs that social distancing should be ensured. "I had directed them that if there is any violation, then, liquor contractors will be held responsible," he said.

It will be ensured that social distancing is maintained at the vends and there is proper barricading, he said, adding that customers will have to stand six feet apart.

Only five customers at a time were being allowed to stand on the sales counter of the retail liquor vend. Ten minutes before the closure of a retail vend, no customer shall be allowed to stand in queue, except the five customers already at the counter.

Wearing face masks is mandatory for customers and salesmen while liquor vend owners will have to make available hand sanitisers at the counter at all times.

The state government had in a cabinet decision on Tuesday decided to open the retail liquor vends throughout the state barring in containment zones. However, no ahataaor open drinking places adjacent to liquor vends will be allowed. Haryana government had shut down liquor vends in the state from March 27, two days after a countrywide lockdown came into force. PNS

# Covid-19 cases surged to 124 in UT

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

With sudden surge in the Covid-19 positive cases in Chandigarh, the recovery rate has declined to 16.9 percent in the city, lower than the national average of around 29 percent. Nine fresh cases were reported on Wednesday taking the total number to 124 in the city. Chandigarh, a joint capital of Punjab and Haryana, is declared as Coronavirus red-zone by the Central Government.

"Out of nine fresh cases, eight were reported from Babu Dham colony and one from Sector 56 here. The total number of positive cases stood at 124 in the city," as per the Chandigarh Health Department's evening bulletin.

"The city has 102 active cases while 21 have recovered from the infection so far. One Coronavirus death has been reported. 1785 samples have been tested till evening," the bulletin stated.

## Positive cases reported on Wednesday

- ◆ A 34 years old male resident of Sector-56 who has been sampled at CH-Mohali and tested at PGIMER has been reported as positive for COVID-19. He has seven family contacts at Sector-56 house and 9 more at sector-52. All of them are asymptomatic.
- ◆ Two members including 15 years male and 58 years female, both residents of BDC have been reported positive. They are community contacts of already positive cases.
- ◆ Two family members including 20 years male and 65 years male, resident of BDC are also tested positive. They are community contacts of already diagnosed positive COVID case.
- ◆ Four more family members of the community contact of a positive case of the area have been tested as positive for COVID-19.



As per the mapping of positive cases, 66 cases have so far been reported from BDC followed by 20 from Sector 30. Five cases each have been reported in Sector 21 and Sector 33, three each in Sector 32, 37, 38 and 52 and two each in Sector 19, Sector 49, Dhanas among others.

After the first positive case of coronavirus from the BDC was reported on the night of April 24, this containment zone has seen an explosion of infected patients with number already crossing 60 and the reports of more infected people continues to pour in every day.

The Chandigarh Administration has so far declared six containment zones including entire BDC, part of Sector 30-B, Kacchi Colony, Dhanas, part of Shastri Nagar, Part of Sector 38 and Part of Sector 52 in the city.

While relaxations have been allowed during lockdown in the non-containment zones in Chandigarh from 7 am to 7 pm post May 4, the containment zones remain sealed and only government staff related to essential services are allowed to enter these areas. As a precautionary measure, 4469 residents have been put under home quarantine till now, out of which 2168 have completed the quarantine period.

Notably, the first coronavirus positive case in Chandigarh was reported on March 19.

# Petrol, diesel prices increased in Chandigarh from May 7

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

People of Chandigarh will have to shell out more for petrol and diesel from May 7 onwards with the UT Administration on Wednesday announcing a hike in prices by enhancing the VAT, in a bid to generate revenue amid financial crisis due to coronavirus pandemic.

The new prices of petrol will now be ₹68.62 per litre and diesel would be ₹62.02 per litre. The decision to increase the fuel price was taken at the meeting of Punjab Governor and UT Administrator VP Singh Badnore on Wednesday.

"The Administrator decided to enhance VAT in respect of petrol and diesel. The new prices of petrol will now be ₹65.82 and ₹59.30 a litre respectively. Notably, the Administration had a day before decided to levy additional cess on fuel and liquor prices to fill its coffers.

The liquor shops, which opened after 41 days as curfew was lifted and Chandigarh was



few in the city amid Coronavirus pandemic.

Earlier, the price of petrol and diesel in Chandigarh were ₹65.82 and ₹59.30 a litre respectively. Notably, the Administration had a day before decided to levy additional cess on fuel and liquor prices to fill its coffers.

The liquor shops, which opened after 41 days as curfew was lifted and Chandigarh was

# Total lockdown on Saturdays, Sundays

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

There will be a complete lockdown in Chhattisgarh on all weekends -- Saturday and Sunday -- in May to prevent the spread of coronavirus, an official said on Wednesday.

Only shops selling essential items will remain open.

Home Minister Tamradhwaj Sahu made this suggestion which was approved by Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel on Wednesday, a government spokesperson said.

After the Union government announced relaxation of certain rules in the third phase of lockdown, several shops selling non-essential

## During entire month of May



merchandise reopened in Chhattisgarh from May 4, except those located in Covid-19 containment zones,

he said. Sahu advised that the relaxation be suspended on weekends and there be a

complete lockdown on Saturdays and Sundays to avoid weekend crowds. However, shops selling

**Home Minister Tamradhwaj Sahu made this suggestion which was approved by Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel on Wednesday**

essential items including vegetables, milk and medicines will do business on weekends too.

# College Principal breaches containment norm, gets notice

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The Principal of the Government Nagarjun Post Graduate College in the Chhattisgarh capital was on Wednesday served a notice for violating the Covid-19 containment norms issued by the Raipur District Magistrate and Collector.

Principal D.N. Verma got the notice for opening the college and directing the staff to report for work in violation of the containment norms announced on Tuesday in the area covered by Saraswati Nagar police station to check the spread of the pandemic.

Verma's decision was considered a violation of the containment zone norms and an act of civil indiscipline.



The district administration announced the containment zone calling for a closure of all offices, shops and other institutions until further orders after a sixth positive Covid-19 case was discovered in Raipur city. Raipur falls under the Red Zone.

The Tuesday order covered Science College Hostel Road, Pt Ravishankar Shukla

University Main Gate, the road leading to Kukurbeda, Hanuman Temple, Dumartalab, Amanaka, Daga AC shop under the over-bridge, new mosque and Pt Deendayal Auditorium.

In the containment zone, all essential items will be delivered at home. No vehicular movement will be allowed except in emergency cases.

# SECL to develop rail line in C'garh to move coal



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

A common loan agreement was signed between the Chhattisgarh East West Rail Ltd (CEWRL), a Rail joint venture company of South Eastern Coalfields Ltd. (SECL), and a consortium of banks led by the State Bank of India for a loan of ₹3,976 crores to develop a 135 KM double rail line to move coal from SECL mines.

The loan will be utilized by CEWRL for the rail connectivity from Gevra Road to Pendra Road (both existing stations) to transfer coal from Gevra, Dipka and Kusmunda, the mega mines of South Eastern Coalfields Ltd.

The project has been designed with a Debt to Equity ratio of 80:20 wherein the promoters are required to contribute about ₹994 crores and the balance amount of ₹3,976 crores is arranged from banks as rupee term loan.

With the promoters

**The loan will be utilized by CEWRL for the rail connectivity from Gevra Road to Pendra Road (both existing stations) to transfer coal from Gevra, Dipka and Kusmunda, the mega mines of South Eastern Coalfields Ltd**

investing more than ₹650 Crore in the project and land acquisition and forest clearance already obtained for the main line, the project is now expected to be completed by March 2023.

When completed, it will help SECL move about 65 MT of coal every year from its mines.

The East West Rail Corridor Project linking Gevra Road and Pendra Road is a shorter and alternate route to the existing highly congested one to move coal traffic towards the northern and western parts of the country.

The project includes connectivity to the Gevra, Kusmunda and Dipika Mines of SECL.

South Eastern Coalfields Ltd. (SECL) has a 64% holding in CEWRL while IRCON (a Ministry of Rail PSU) holds 26% stake. The rest 10% is held by the State Industrial Development Corporation of the Chhattisgarh government.

The State Bank of India is the lead bank in loan exposure. The other banks involved in the project are Punjab National Bank, Union Bank of India, Canara Bank, Indian Bank and Bank of Baroda.

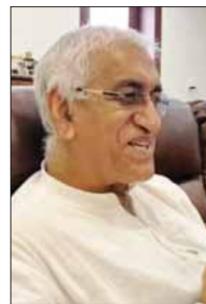
# C'garh braces for migrants, Singh Deo tells US diplomat

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh will face a challenging time ahead with more and more migrant workers returning from different states, Health and Family Welfare, Panchayat and Rural Development Minister T. S. Singhdeo on Wednesday told the US Consul General in Mumbai, David J. Ranz.

The Minister briefed the diplomat about Covid-19 related issues in the state.

He said that preparation to battle the coronavirus pandemic began in January. Now the state will have four laboratories for RT-PCR tests, up from just one



earlier. With procurement of 75,000 RD kits by the state government, there is better surveillance, he said. "The state will face a challenging task ahead with continued arrival of migrant workers from dif-

ferent states of the country in future," the Minister said.

Chhattisgarh has developed around 8,000 beds to treat Covid-19 positive cases. Already 36 positive patients have recovered after treatment. There is also coordination with the central government, he said.

On a query from the Consul General regarding economy, Singhdeo said that enhancement of livelihood works had been undertaken on priority under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and National Rural Livelihood Mission. Better organic resources are being promoted, leading to more employment in the villages.

# Excessive liquor consumption kills man in capital

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

After liquor vends reopened after a long closure due to Covid-19 lockdown, a fruit vendor from Raipur's New Rajendra Nagar area couldn't resist himself from drinking excessively, leading to his death on Wednesday.

Sanjay Pundhir, the Station House Officer of Rajendra Nagar police station, identified the man was Jiwan Lal Nagwani, 45.

The deceased sold fruits in Rajendra Nagar. When

the ban on sale of liquor was lifted on Monday, he started consuming liquor after a gap of more than 40 days.

He didn't wake up after going to sleep on Tuesday night. The family rushed him to a nearby hospital where doctors declared him brought dead.

The distraught family members have asked the government to again close down liquor shops. They said they have lost a family member and didn't want any other family to suffer a similar fate.

# NYK teaches how to prepare herbal sanitizer

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

In a unique gesture, the Nehru Yuva Kendra (NYK) in Raipur has taught youths how to prepare at home high quality sanitizers which are running in short supply as the nation valiantly battles Covid-19.

This sanitizer is made from naturally available medicinal ingredients such as neem leaves, a germicide, basil leaves, which are rich in medicinal properties, Manjari, marigold flowers, coconut oil, rose water, alum and camphor along with rectified ethanol.

The training was provided by Dr Ashish Chandra Sharma, NYK's Master Trainer and President of the Pandit Sundar Lal Sharma

Educational Academy, in Paragaon, Lakhna and Mohandi villages in Raipur district.

Dr Sharma explained that coconut oil acts as an antiseptic (antimicrobial) along with Manjari and forms a layer on the hand surface, limiting the access of germs and virus to the skin. He said this sanitizer is 3-4 times more powerful than the common sanitizer.

Fifty youths were trained in batches of 8-10.

Arpit Tiwari, the District Youth Coordinator, NYK, Raipur, said that at a time when sanitizer was not readily available in shops, it is imperative that innovative home-based reme-



dies were made available to people through capacity building programmes.

He said that such training will also provide new employment opportunities to villagers. Limited availability and high cost of sanitizers in the market will boost the use of such home-made ayurvedic sanitizers, he added.

According to him, NYK has distributed some 20 litres of sanitizers in Raipur, Gariaband, Balodabazar and Dhamtari districts covering around 300 households.

The NYK functions under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports of the central government.

# Rural economy on track with MGNREGA, 1.23 crore man-days of work in a month

## Wage payment of ₹548.41 crore in April alone

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The rural economy in Chhattisgarh remains strong despite the nationwide lockdown implemented to control the Covid-19 pandemic owing to the extensive works started under MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) in the state.

After the lockdown began, a total of ₹548 crore 41 lakhs of wages have been paid in April alone, both for



new and old works. The state government has also released ₹210 crores for

payment of material head. According to officials, an additional ₹76 crore 94

lakhs will also be released soon for further employment of 50 days.

The payments amid Covid-19 has increased the purchasing power of the villagers, besides freeing them from employment concerns, an official said.

Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel and Minister of Panchayat and Rural Development T.S. Singhdeo have called for a large number of MGNREGA works to provide relief to villages in the present difficult conditions.

On April 1, at the start of fiscal 2020-21, the number of MGNREGA workers in

Chhattisgarh was only 57,536. In view of the need of work in villages in the current phase of lockdown, MGNREGA works started by the government are in full swing. At the end of April, the number of workers had reached 19,85,166.

During this period, more than one crore 23 lakh man-days of employment was provided to 10,24,000 families. The process of payment of wages was speedily completed. The total payment to workers in April was more than ₹200 crores.

# Labourer going from Maha to J'khand dies in Bilaspur

STAFF REPORTER ■ BILASPUR

A 40-year-old migrant labourer who was on his way to Jharkhand all the way from Maharashtra, mostly on foot, has died in Chhattisgarh's Bilaspur district amid the nationwide lockdown, police said on Wednesday.

Eight Jharkhand-bound labourers were admitted to the Chhattisgarh Institute of Medical Sciences (CIMS) here on May 3 night, said Dr Aarti Pandey, its Public Relations Officer.

One of them, identified as Ravi Munda, who was suffering from dehydration and other illnesses, died during treatment on May 4 morning due to multi-organ failure, she said.

His swab sample was sent for a coronavirus test which came out negative on Tuesday. After getting

permission from his relatives, his final rites were performed here by a local social organisation, she said.

The other seven labourers were discharged after they recovered and were sent to Jharkhand in a bus with the help of the district administration, she added.

Bilaspur Superintendent of Police Prashant Agrawal said preliminary information showed that the labourers had left Nagpur in Maharashtra for their native places in Jharkhand on foot via Chhattisgarh during the ongoing coronavirus-enforced lockdown.

They possibly also took lift from goods vehicles to cover the distance of about 400 km till Bilaspur, he said.

After getting information about their condition, they were shifted to CIMS.

# Manmohan, Sonia question lockdown 3.0, seek roadmap ahead

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Congress chief Sonia Gandhi on Wednesday questioned the Modi Government's decision-making on the extended coronavirus lockdown and sought to know the roadmap after May 17 when the deadline for third lockdown ends.



(Government of India) using to judge how long the lockdown is to continue... Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala quoted Sonia Gandhi as saying in the meeting to discuss the COVID-19 situation and the post-lockdown work.



Both Singh and Sonia were part of the video conference meeting of Chief Ministers of Congress-ruled States. Sonia questioned the Government over the criteria it adopted to judge how long the COVID-19-induced lockdown will continue.

Addressing the Chief Ministers of States where the Congress is in power, she asked "what after May 17?"

India has been under lockdown since March 25 to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus. The first and second phase of the lockdown was from March 25 to April 14 and April 15 to May 3, respectively. The third phase began from May 4 and would end on May 17.

She thanked farmers, particularly of Punjab and Haryana, for ensuring food security by giving bumper wheat produce despite all odds.

Singh said, "We need to know, as Soniji said, what will happen after lockdown 3.0?"

"Soniji has already pointed out. CMs need to deliberate and ask as to what is the strategy of the government of India to get the country out of the lockdown," Singh asked.

Rahul said the central piece of the strategy to fight COVID-19 is to protect the elderly as well as those who are diabetic and with heart conditions.

Speaking at the meeting, Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh said he has set up two committees, one to strategise on how to come out of the lockdown and the other

on economic revival. "Concern is people sitting in Delhi are deciding on classification of (COVID-19) zones without knowing what's happening on the ground," he said at the meeting.

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot said, "until extensive stimulus package is given, how will states and the country run? We have lost Rs 10,000 crore revenue."

He said states have repeatedly requested the prime minister for a package, "but we are yet to hear from the government of India."

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel said, "States are facing dire economic crisis. They need to be provided immediate assistance."

He said Chhattisgarh is one state where 80 per cent of small industries have restarted and nearly 85,000 workers have returned to work.

The Centre is deciding on COVID-19 zones without consulting states, Puducherry chief minister V Narayanasamy alleged.

"This is creating an anomalous situation. People sitting in Delhi can't tell the states,

## Cong flays Centre for petrol-diesel price hike

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Wednesday slammed the Centre for increasing the prices on petrol and diesel. Terming the rise in fuel prices as unfair, the party demanded that the Government immediately roll back the increased prices.

Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi said that at a time when the fight against coronavirus is causing economic hardships to all, the Government has chosen to increase fuel prices instead of reducing them.

"The ongoing battle with the coronavirus is causing severe economic hardship for our crores of brothers and sisters. At this time, instead of reducing prices, the decision of the government to raise prices of petrol and diesel by ₹10-13



per litre is unfair and should be withdrawn," Rahul tweeted after the Centre hiked excise duty and cess on petrol by ₹10 per litre and on diesel by Rs 13 a litre. This was the second hike in excise duty in less than two months.

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra was also unsparing in her attack against the Government

excise duty so that the benefit that should have gone to the consumers is instead used to fill its own suitcase. Who is the government collecting this money for? The labourers, farmers, middle-class, industry, nobody is benefiting from the fall in crude oil price," Priyanka said.

Senior Congress leader and former Finance minister P Chidambaram too voiced concern and suggested the Centre must borrow to meet deficits and not impose higher tax burdens when economic activity has ground to a halt amid the coronavirus.

"New or higher taxes are justified only when the economy is booming. Tax burdens on the middle class and poor is actually taxing distress. Governments should give money to the people in times of

distress, not squeeze and take money from the people," Chidambaram tweeted.

Congress chief spokesman Randeep Singh Surjewala at AICC Press video conference said the entire nation and its 130 crore people are fighting the Corona pandemic and the poor migrant labourers and workers, the shopkeepers, the farmers, the small and medium businesses are virtually penny less, they are struggling for every single Rupee, yet, this draconian Government is fleecing 130 crore Indians by raising insurmountable taxes on petrol and diesel.

Congress alleged that between the years 2014-15 up till the year 2019-20 that is in a period of six years, the Modi government has increased taxes on petrol and diesel 12 times and has collected ₹17 lakh crore.

changed at all.

The Congress president is also likely to discuss the issue of migrant labourers and workers stranded at various places and steps taken by the states in bringing them back to their home states.

Sonia Gandhi had announced on Monday that the state units if Congress party would pay for the train fare of migrants as they prepare to go back to their homes. She also criticised the central government for charging them train fare.

Surjewala later said during the chief ministers meeting with the Congress president, that "states should assure that they have decided to pay for the travel of migrant labourers and have asked the Railways for special trains."

"Punjab CM informs that ₹ 35 crore has been set aside and Railways is charging ₹870 per ticket, which state is paying," he said.

## MHA blames Bengal Govt for blocking int'l cargo to B'desh

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre and the Mamata Banerjee dispensation's locking of horns continued on Wednesday this time over the issues of non-movement of essential goods through the India-Bangladesh border as it entail international ramifications and the under-reporting of Covid-19 related deaths from the State besides violation of lockdown guidelines there.



○ Bhalla said directions were given on April 24 to allow cross land border transportation of essential goods through all Indo-Nepal, Indo-Bhutan and Indo-Bangladesh borders and send a compliance report to the MHA. But we have not received the compliance report from the State Government of West Bengal, he said

Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla wrote two letters to the State Chief Secretary Rajiv Sinha. In the letter sent in the morning, the MHA blamed the State Government for blocking international cargoes to Bangladesh while in the one in the evening it accused the Trinamool Congress-ruled State of underreporting of Covid-19 deaths and series of violations of lockdown rules.

"A large number of trucks carrying essential supplies, bound for Bangladesh, are stranded at different border crossing points... A number of drivers returning from Bangladesh have not been allowed to cross the border and are stranded in Bangladesh. The unilateral

action of State Government will have larger implications for the Indian Government with regard to its legally binding international commitments," Union Home Secretary's letter to the State Chief Secretary stated.

Bhalla also said, "This act of the State Government amounts to violation of the

orders issued by MHA under Disaster Management Act, 2005."

Bhalla said directions were given on April 24 to allow cross land border transportation of essential goods through all Indo-Nepal, Indo-Bhutan and Indo-Bangladesh borders and send a compliance report to the MHA. But

we have not received the compliance report from the state government of West Bengal, he said.

In the second letter, Bhalla said: "Lockdown violations have been noted in Kolkata, Howrah by specific groups in specific localities with media reports of 'corona warriors' including the police being attacked. This necessitates stricter enforcement of lockdown. Overcrowding in bazaars, free movement of people in large numbers without masks, bathing of people in rivers, playing cricket football, serious laxity in enforcing lockdown in containment zones and poor supervision in implementation of crowd control measures by the district authorities."

The Home Secretary also cited the reports of Centre's Inter-Ministerial team's findings against the West Bengal Government in tackling the pandemic and non-cooperation including the under-reporting of the number of deaths.

"There remain gaps in the surveillance and contact tracing of positive cases. State has not furnished any data regarding

## Bengal Govt to take call soon on movement of essential goods

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Responding to the Centre's letter, the West Bengal Government said it will take a call on the movement of essential goods through the Indo-Bangladesh borders after considering all aspects. State's Home Secretary Alapan Bandopadhyay said: "There are a lot of things that need to be looked into," he said.

households/individuals contacted/surveyed for COVID19. Indefinite delays in testing results have further affected the contact tracing, put patients at risk...Points to very low rate of testing in proportion to the population, and a very high rate of mortality of 13.2, by far the highest for any State. This is a reflection of poor surveillance, detection and testing in the State," said the Union Home Secretary.

## Modi urged to ensure free rly travel for migrant workers back to their homes



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Civil society groups have urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to ensure that the Railways do not charge for tickets on the special trains being run to transport migrant workers back to their homes amid the coronavirus-forced lockdown.

They said all travel must be free and food expenses should be borne by the state.

The civil society organisations, who have come together to form 'National Campaign

for Migrant Workers', demanded that the migrant workers returning home be provided an ex-gratia of ₹7,000 in lieu of the wages lost due of the lockdown.

They also appealed to the ministry of home affairs to issue directions to withdraw all the mass FIRs against the migrant workers filed in places like Surat, Bandra (Mumbai), Hyderabad where the workers protested to allowed to be go home. "The protests were an expression of genuine distress," said the activists.

The campaign also urged

the MHA to withdraw the May 2 order, clarifying the definition of stranded workers.

The Home Ministry had on Sunday made it clear that the relaxations given for the movement of people during the lockdown were available only to distressed migrant workers.

It clarified that the order is not applicable to those categories of persons who are otherwise residing normally at places other than native places for purposes of work etc and those who wish to visit their native place in normal course.

## Ministry's panel on infrastructure OK's construction of three seaplane airports

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Environment Ministry's Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) on infrastructure has cleared terms of reference (ToR) for three seaplane airports at the Brahmaputra riverfront in Guwahati and at the Statue of Unity and Shatrunjay Dam, both in Gujarat. The ToRs are guidelines for conducting environmental studies of projects after which it is considered for clearance by the panel.



posed access road near Palitana, noted the EAC.

Similarly, the development of water aerodrome has been proposed at Guwahati Riverfront (Brahmaputra River), Guwahati, Assam by the State Transport Department.

The proposed terminal will be spread over the plot area of 0.42 Hectares.

Considering that the water aerodrome are just emerging in the country as a new mode of transport involving sea/river fronts and its likely impacts on water, air and aquatic biodiversity including flora and fauna, the EAC followed the appraisal process as is being done in the case of airports.

The project proponents also informed the EAC that water aerodrome were primarily on water, intended to be used either wholly or in part for the arrival, departure and movement of seaplanes, and any building and equipment on ground or water.

Sea plane operation from coastal/river/canal as well as terrestrial water bodies will extend the connectivity to those areas where there is no land-based airport.

The high capital investment for airside infrastructure development required in land-based airport can be avoided. Thus, there is a necessity to establish water aerodromes for seaplane operations, argued the project proponents.

After discussion with members, the EAC cleared ToRs for the three projects asking their proponents to take clearance from the National Board for Wild Life (NBWL) in case near to the sanctuary as well as impact of aerodrome on flow characteristics during normal and flood conditions by modelling study among other required clearance.

They have also been asked to conduct public hearing for preparation of environment impact assessment report.

## All is not well with around 200 RML nurses

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Government may be applauding the role of frontline health workers by various gestures like the recent one by showering flower petals on them, but around 200 nurses at the Centre-run RML Hospital in Delhi are a disappointed lot.

Appointed in December last year, they are yet to get their salary which has left them at the receiving end as many of them are living in rented accommodations. Hailing from across the country, some of these nurses have been taking credit from their friends and relatives to pay their bills as they have not got salary for the last four months since joining the hospital. The Covid-19 induced lockdown has just added to their agony.

Some of them have been assigned duties at the Covid-19 wards as well. Though they have represented before the concerned authorities in this connection several times but except assurance their grievance has not been met.

A nurse on the condition of anonymity said that they have submitted all the required documents related to their job.

"We are doing our duty diligently. But in this lockdown time, it is difficult to sustain without money. Moreover, it is quite frustrating that while on the one hand the country is expressing solidarity with our efforts, on the other we are waiting for what is our rightful due," she said

## Convict seeks parole from HC to find 'suitable girl' to overcome depression

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has sought response of the police on a plea moved by a man, serving life term since 2005 in a murder case, seeking parole to find a suitable wife for himself and curb his "inner stress and depression" due to incarceration which has "exacerbated" due to COVID-19 pandemic.

Justice Prateek Jalan directed the police to file a status report after verifying the address and health condition of the petitioner's family, with whom he intends to stay if parole is granted.

The court also directed that the status report shall also "disclose the precautions which are being followed by the jail authorities while releasing the prisoners on parole or bail and at the time they are returned to custody, inter alia, in terms of the directions of the High Powered Committee".

With the direction, the court listed the matter for hearing before an appropriate bench on May 19.

The petitioner has challenged the authorities December 2019 decision to reject his application for parole "to explore the possibility of finding a suitable match, to maintain social ties and family relations, and to curb inner stress and depression due to incarceration



tion".

The high court had on January 14 issued notice to the police and called for his nominal role. However, due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the court's functioning was restricted and his plea could not be heard.

Subsequently, he moved two applications - one seeking early hearing of his plea and another for grant of parole on the grounds of coronavirus pandemic.

His lawyer told the court that the grounds upon which parole was sought from the State included the requirement to curb inner stress and depression due to incarceration which has been exacerbated due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The police told the court that his application for parole was rejected by the authorities as on an earlier occasion when he was granted the

relief in 2011, he committed an offence in respect of which he was convicted on February 22, 2018 for dacoity, robbery, and conspiring to commit these crimes.

On the ground taken by the police regarding violation of an earlier parole, the court said despite his conviction in 2018, he was, thereafter, released on parole twice in 2018 and 2019 which were not misused by him.

The court also noted that according to his nominal roll he worked as a 'sahayak' in the jail and his conduct has been satisfactory at least for last one year.

The petitioner was earlier convicted in 2005 in a murder case and sentenced to life imprisonment by a trial court.

His appeal against the 2005 order of the trial court was dismissed by the high court in 2009.

## Plea in HC to close liquor shops in Delhi till Covid-19 pandemic under control

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A PIL was filed in the Delhi High Court on Wednesday seeking direction to the AAP government to close liquor shops here until the coronavirus pandemic is under control.

The plea was mentioned for an urgent hearing and it is likely to be listed on May 8.

The petition by NGO, Civil Safety Council of India, challenged the Delhi Government and its Excise Department's decision to open liquor shops in the city from Tuesday "without any planning and crowd management".

The plea, filed through advocate Arvind Vashista, said the people of Delhi are facing complete lockdown for the last so many days but the May 3 notification regarding opening of liquor shops has failed the whole system, set up by the State, and it is going waste and putting the life of citizens in danger.

"Liquor consumption is not in consonance with the directive principles of state policy, under which improving public health is among the primary duties of the state. This would include prohibition of intoxicating drinks and drugs which are injurious to health," the plea said.

It said due to this decision, a large number of persons have lined up outside liquor shops in the city for the second consecutive day.

# TN can't do without opening liquor shops: Govt Economist

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Tamil Nadu Government has no options other than opening liquor shops in the State to tide over the economic crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic and the resultant lockdown, according to a top Government official in Chennai.

All liquor shops barring those in Chennai city would reopen on Thursday morning bringing cheers to the dispirited tipplers in the State.

More than ten persons had committed suicide during the days when the 5,146 liquor outlets in the State downed the

shutters. Though the Government hiked the prices of liquor by Rs 10 to Rs 80 per bottle, it has not dampened the spirit of the boozing fraternity as the wait for sun to rise on Thursday to queue up in front of the liquor outlets.

Liquor is one of the main sources of income for Tamil Nadu Government.

"State's Own Tax Revenue contributes to 60 per cent of Tamil Nadu's monthly revenue which runs to Rs 10,000 crore. What the State may receive in the month of April would not be more than 20 per cent of this amount because of the shut down," Prof C Murukadas, lead



economist of Tamil Nadu and adviser to the Government. Fifty percent of the SOTR comes from the sale of alcohol and petroleum products. Tamil Nadu Government holds the monopoly in liquor procurement and sales. All liquor outlets in the State are owned by the Government. The financial year 2017-2018 saw liquor contributing Rs 26,797 crore of the State's revenue.

excise duty on manufacture and sale of alcohol comprises 10 to 15 per cent of the State's Own Tax Revenue. States like Tamil Nadu impose VAT; also charge special fees on imported foreign liquor, transport fee and label and brand registration fee. As liquor sales are operated by TASMAM, Tamil Nadu Government receives certain amount as

sales margin. Altogether in 2018-2019, Tamil Nadu Government's earnings from liquor stood at Rs 31,157 crore. This is 35 per cent of the State's Own Tax Revenue of Rs 87,905.26 crore generated in 2018-2019. The Total Revenue of Tamil Nadu in 2018-2019 was Rs 2.98 lakh crore out of which liquor contributed 10.45 per cent. There fore Tamil Nadu Government cannot afford to dispense with the earnings from liquor for its day to day functioning," said Prof Murukadas, himself a strong proponent of prohibition.

Prof Murukadas, a widely respected scholar in the State

with many books to his credit, pointed out that Tamil Nadu was on the brink of financial crisis mainly due to the expenditure for containment of Covid-29 pandemic.

"At this juncture, it is not possible for the government to deploy the police force to detect illicit distillation. The incidents of suicides are on the high because of liquor addicts," he pointed out.

Besides, liquor and petroleum, the other areas from which the State mobilizes revenue are registration of vehicles and immovable properties. "But there are no business activities in the State because of

the coronavirus lockdown. Since vehicles are off the roads, there is no sale of petroleum products and this has taken a heavy dent on the State's economy," pointed out Prof Murukadas.

Officials in TASMAM (Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation), said the distilleries from where they procure liquor are owned by leaders of the DMK as well as the AIADMK. "The DMK is in the forefront opposing the government's move to reopen the liquor shops. But that is to impress and convince the people in the State," said the official.

## 34 fresh Covid cases take tally to 775 in J&K

PNS ■ JAMMU

Thirty four cases of coronavirus were detected positive, taking the total tally to 775 in Jammu & Kashmir on Wednesday.

Out of 34, a total number of 32 cases were reported from Kashmir while 2 fresh cases were detected from Jammu district. At present four districts of Kashmir valley namely Bandipora, Srinagar, Anantnag and Baramulla have reported more than 100 positive cases.

On Wednesday, Srinagar and Anantnag districts reported 11 fresh cases each while Shopian reported 5 and Kupwara three fresh cases.

Worried over the constant rise in number of positive cases, Deputy Commissioner, Srinagar Dr Shahid Choudhary tweeted, "Each Covid-19 case confirmed in Srinagar today & yesterday could've been avoided. Most traced to single illegal travel. Please don't make fatal mockery of our efforts for your safety." In Jammu, the authorities had completely sealed entry and exit points of localities from where fresh cases have been reported since Monday.

According to media bulletin, out of 775 positive cases, 445 are active Positive, 322 have recovered and 08 have died.

## Goa Gov slams ASI for neglect of 17th century church

Panaji: Criticising the

Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) for its lackadaisical attitude towards the preservation of a 17th century Catholic church, the Basilica of Bom Jesus, Goa Governor Satya Pal Malik on Wednesday appealed to Union Minister of State for Tourism, Prahlad Patel, for assistance.

In a letter to Patel, Malik also urged the Union Ministry to instruct the ASI to complete maintenance work at the Old Goa church complex, one of the most popular tourism destinations in the state, before the onset of the monsoon.

"Though ASI has cited various constraints for the slow pace of work such as non-availability of sand or dillydallying and unresponsive behaviour of the contractors, the entire attitude of the ASI in preserving, conserving and restoring the Basilica seems to be casual and lackadaisical," the Governor said in his letter to Patel.

"The report of the ASI reflects uncoordinated action and non-committal attitude of the different branches of the ASI in dealing with the preservation and restoration of the architectural marvel," Malik said in his letter.

After complaints made by the Rector of the Basilica, Fr

## ₹1,610-crore relief for lockdown-hit in K'taka

Bengaluru: To bring early relief

to farmers, flower growers, washermen, barbers, auto-rickshaw and taxi drivers — some of the worst-affected by the Covid-19 induced lockdown, the Karnataka Government on Wednesday announced a Rs 1,610 crore package.

"The state government will provide Rs 1,610 crore compensation/benefit to the people who are in distress due to the lockdown since March 25 and extended till May 17 to contain the coronavirus spread," Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa told reporters here.

Among the beneficiaries of the package are farmers and growers of flowers, vegetables and fruits, washermen, barbers, auto-rickshaw and taxi drivers who all suffered huge losses due to the prolonged lockdown, which has been extended twice since April 15 and May 4.

"As growers have destroyed their flowers in 11,687 hectares across the state due to lack of demand during the lockdown, Rs 25,000 compensation per hectare will be given to those who suffered crop loss to the extent of 1 hectare," said Yediyurappa.

A separate relief package will soon be announced for farmers and growers of vegetables and fruits, as they too suffered huge amount of losses due to the lockdown, he

## Corona cases inching towards 5K mark in TN

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Despite Tamil Nadu Government's stance that all is well on the coronavirus front, the number of persons tested positive for Covid-19 reached 4,829 by Wednesday evening. The day saw 771 persons testing positive for the pandemic on Wednesday, the highest number of persons testing positive on a single day.

The death toll reached 35 in the State while Chennai has become the epicentre of the pandemic. The release issued by the Department of Health said 324 persons tested positive in Chennai making the total number of Covid-19 patients in the metropolis to 2,328.

"We are also transferring Rs 2,000 in the bank accounts of 11.80-lakh building workers through the DBT," he said.

About 15.80 lakh registered building workers are registered across the state, and action has been initiated to transfer Rs 2,000 into the accounts of the remaining 4-lakh construction workers after verifying their bank details, he added.

The state government has also decided to transfer Rs 3,000 more to building workers through DBT.

IANS

## waiver scheme announced earlier for handloom weavers, Rs 29 crore has been paid to them and balance Rs 80 crore will be released soon." Yediyurappa said.

The 54,000 handloom weavers will also be eligible for fresh loans to resume their business. A reimbursement benefit will be provided to weavers who repaid loan in the last fiscal.

The Chief Minister said a new scheme "weaver samman yojana" (nekarara samman yojane) for the benefit of the weavers would soon be announced.

Under the scheme, the state government will deposit Rs 2,000 in the bank account of each handloom weaver through the direct benefit transfer (DBT) scheme.

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IANS

## is because of the increase in the number of tests being done in Tamil Nadu compared to other States in the country. 1,88,241 samples have been tested till date and we have 52 testing centres in the State, the State with largest number of testing labs," said the Chief Minister while speaking to reporters earlier in the day.

It was on March 7, 2020 the State confirmed the detection of the first coronavirus patient. It took 36 days for the number of patients with COVID-19 to reach the 1000 mark.

Within the next 16 days Tamil Nadu's coronavirus cases crossed 2000. The number shot past the 3000 mark in five days and by Monday evening it stood at 3,550.

It crossed the 4000 mark in just two days. As things stand today, the number of coronavirus patients in the State is all set to cross the 5,000 mark by Thursday evening.

Medical experts and government officials are worried over the opening of the liquor outlets in the State on Thursday morning. "It is certain that we will see more crowd in front of the liquor shops and the possibility of infections increasing is very high," said a government doctor who did not want his name to be quoted.

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The number of cops working in the State Police Head Quarters who have been tested positive reached 13 by Wednesday evening.

Chief Minister Edappadi Palaniswami asked the people not to panic because of the spurt in the number of coronavirus cases in the State. "This

## One dead, 68 more infected in Dharavi

PNS ■ MUMBAI

In yet major another spike in Infected cases in Mumbai's Dharavi, one person died and as many as 68 persons tested positive for coronavirus on Wednesday, taking the total number of infected cases in Asia's biggest slum to 733.

A day after as 33 more persons tested positive for Covid-19, Coronavirus claimed one life taking the total number of deaths to 21 and left 68 others infected in various parts of this densely populated slum.

A maximum six positive cases were reported from Matunga Labour camp, while five new infected cases each were recorded in transit camp, Kumbharwada, Indira Nagar and 90 feet road area. Among the infected persons was a 90-year-old woman from Kumbharwada. Three cases each were reported from 60 feet road area and Dharavi PC.

With 68 fresh cases, the total number of positive cases has risen to 733 in Dharavi. Dharavi has witnessed substantial number infected cases in Dharavi for the past five days.

On Tuesday, 33 new positive cases were reported from

## Kerala exempts pregnant women, kids among returnees from hospital quarantine

Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Wednesday said non-resident Keralites returning from abroad and from within the country from Thursday, except pregnant women and children, will remain in state-run quarantine centres for a week.

Such arrivals are scheduled at Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi and Kozhikode. The Kannur airport is not on the list, but would be added in the second schedule.

The arrivals at these airports would be supervised by a DIG of Police.

"The exception from quarantine is only for pregnant ladies and kids, who can remain in isolation at their homes. This is the rule for all those arriving from outside the country and those from within the country," said Vijayan.

"There are two flights on May 7 as of now -- one from Abu Dhabi to Kochi and another from Dubai to Kozhikode. We are waiting for further instructions from the Centre. After quarantine, those who

test negative can go home and remain in quarantine for another week" said Vijayan.

The Chief Minister said that all arrangements have been made.

"The media also should take necessary caution. Attempts to interview those who are coming from abroad should not be done. Media has to ensure that social distancing norms are followed. You should ensure that there is self-control," added Vijayan.

State Health Minister K.K. Shailaja said: At present, 207 hospitals in the state have been kept ready to admit people showing coronavirus symptoms. Everyone landing at the airports will have to download an app. The body temperatures of all returnees would be taken at the aerobridge. All those who are normal will be sent to the help desk while those who have higher-than-normal temperature would be moved to the isolation bay. From there, normal returnees would be taken to the corona care centres and others send to hospital." IANS

## Maha seeks ICU beds from Rly, GOI undertakings

CM requests for increased ICU beds to meet anticipated increase in Covid infections during May

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In an effort to meet an anticipated increase in the number of Covid-19 infections during May, the Maharashtra Government has requested hospitals, institutions and buildings under the management of the Railways, Mumbai Port Trust, Indian Army, Navy and other Central Government undertakings to make available Intensive Care Unit (ICU) beds at their facilities available across Maharashtra. I have personally spoken to people at a higher level in this regard," the chief minister said.

Uddhav said that since the Union government had predicted that the severity of Coronavirus would increase in the month of May, his government had planned to increase the isolation facilities and ICU beds in Mumbai, Pune and other prominent cities in the state.

"In this context, the government has already created ICU beds in Mumbai's Mahalaxmi Race Course, Nehru Science Centre, Nehru Planetarium, Goregaon Exhibition Centre, Richardson & Cruddas factory, Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC) and other locations," the chief minister said.

"Similarly, the Municipal Commissioners and district collectors concerned are creat-

## also increased". "The state government has requested hospitals, institutions and buildings under the management of the Railways, Mumbai Port Trust, Indian Army, Navy and other Central Government undertakings to make available Intensive Care Unit (ICU) beds at their facilities available across Maharashtra. I have personally spoken to people at a higher level in this regard," the chief minister said.

ing additional ICU beds in other big cities in the state. We are Also getting huge places belonging to private hospitals and major organisation for creating ICU beds in other parts of the state," Uddhav said.

The chief minister said that following the relaxation of lockdown norms, the people had started coming to Maharashtra from other parts of the country and even people will start returning from abroad in the coming days. "Keeping this and as well as the anticipated increase in number of cases, the state government is all to increase the availability of ICU beds in various hospitals,

## including those Railways, Mumbai Port Trust, Indian Army, Navy and other Central Government undertakings

Meanwhile, Brihanmumbai

Municipal Corporation (BMC) Commissioner Praveen Pardeshi has authorized all ward officers in the city to requisition additional beds/wards/facilities in private hospitals or clinics for Covid-19 patients.

Mumbai is the worst Covid-19 affected city in the country. With 25 fresh deaths 769 new infected cases reported on Wednesday, the total number of deaths has risen to 412, while the total number of infected cases has mounted to 10714.

## from the Centre. It seems that the Centre is shirking its responsibility by passing the cost of travel fare of migrant workers to the states," Sawant said.

He said that in the first place, health was a state issue and "in such a crisis period, no financial assistance has been given to the states by the central government despite the fact that state governments are fighting against the corona crisis."

"Besides, the central government has not given Rs 15,000 crore for GST compensation to the state. There is already a loss of around Rs 25,000 crore in March. There is no income this month. In such a scenario, there is no support

## and Rajasthan government, who are taking fare from the poor," Sawant said.

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# Javadekar's Rly fare charge against Maha, Kerala, Raj 'false': Cong

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The Maharashtra Congress on Wednesday slammed Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar for making a "false" allegation that all State Governments are paying rail fare for poor migrants except Maharashtra, Kerala and Rajasthan Government, "who are taking fare from the poor."

"Even in times of crisis, the BJP's blatant insensitivity in lying to the people is shocking. I would like to challenge Prakash Javadekar that if there is any sensitivity in the Union government, the Centre should

issue a two-line order that the railways shall not take any money for ticket fare from migrant workers" Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) spokesperson Sachin Sawant said.

Sawant said that though the central government allowed the migrant workers to return to their hometowns, it took an "insensitive decision" of asking the state government to collect fare from the poor and deposit with the Railways.

Sawant said that extremely upset over this insensitivity, the Congress President Sonia Gandhi decided that the cost of repatriation of migrant

workers in this extremely unfortunate situation would be borne by the Congress in each of the states.

"With the general public aware of the insensitivity shown by the central govern-

ment and the decision taken by Congress president Sonia Gandhi, the grounds of the Bhatiya Janta Party (BJP) has shaken. As a result, BJP leaders have launched a nationwide campaign to spread propagan-

da and false statements," Sawant said.

"Yesterday, Sambit Patra, BJP's national spokesperson made a public statement that the central government is giving 85 per cent concession while other 15 per cent is being borne by the state governments," the state Congress spokesperson said.

"And, in such a scenario, what the Congress party will give? In order to target opposition, the union minister Prakash Javadekar went ahead and made a false allegation that all state governments are paying rail fare for poor migrants except Maharashtra, Kerala

and Rajasthan government, who are taking fare from the poor," Sawant said.

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"Besides, the central government has not given Rs 15,000 crore for GST compensation to the state. There is already a loss of around Rs 25,000 crore in March. There is no income this month. In such a scenario, there is no support

from the Centre. It seems that the Centre is shirking its responsibility by passing the cost of travel fare of migrant workers to the states," Sawant said.

"Javadekar's statement shows the mentality of the central government is to take credit of work done by the state government," the Congress spokesperson said.

"Official decision to give 85% concession in railway fares has not yet been taken. However, it is quite possible that the BJP can make a move to say later that this concession was already there. Currently the railways is recovering full fare

for the tickets. It is cleared that the central government has directly cheated poor people," Sawant said.

"Going beyond that, to say that only the governments of Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Kerala are taking money from the workers is the height of hypocrisy of BJP leaders like Javadekar. In Gujarat, several media channels not only have shown that money is being taken from all workers but no people are being sent without water and food. And the BJP's hypocrisy has been exposed. In Madhya Pradesh too, labourers are travelling at full cost," the Congress spokesperson added.



# Creation to preservation

Millions of Indians are out of work. We must not let them get out of hope as well. It's time for some big-bang reforms



A survey by an independent economic think-tank, the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), for the week ended May 3 has estimated that unemployment rate in India surged to a staggering 27.11, up from just 8.7 per cent in early March. Unemployment has always been a slow-burn crisis in India but what's worrying is an urban flare-up ever since the lockdown. According to the latest CMIE data, unemployment rate was the highest in urban areas, which include a majority of the red zones. As against 26.16 per cent for rural areas, it stood at 29.22 per cent in urban India. In the previous week

ended April 26, the urban unemployment rate had stood at 21.45 per cent and the rural unemployment rate at 20.88 per cent. The impact of the shutdown on small businesses and manufacturing facilities has been brutal. Several previously viable, even profitable businesses have been laid low due to the COVID-19 shutdown. And with it, all hopes and dreams of not just thousands of entrepreneurs but also accountants, clerks, secretaries and more have been shattered. Companies have had to slash wage bills significantly in order to ride out the storm and "orders" to pay salaries cannot possibly be met. We understand that several unions have approached the courts, asking them to order companies to pay up. Firms, too, have retaliated saying that they cannot possibly pay and that there needs to be a sense of rationality here. It is true that some companies have used the pandemic as an excuse to shut down parts of their business or to get rid of recalcitrant employees and are just shrugging their shoulders. That said, unions should also realise that several firms have seen their cash flows drop to zero and normal salary payouts to all employees will be impossible. Instead of fighting fruitless cases, which will only succeed in shutting down companies, unions need to rally the troops and raise money from their employed members to support those who are jobless. Of course, only good ones do that and in India, unions have been in a political morass for decades.

It must be agreed that we had no other option than go for a complete shutdown in a bid to contain the disease. But this does not absolve the Government. When the scale of disruption has been such that unemployment is becoming the norm, it calls upon the Government to intervene and respond with all the resources it has at hand to alleviate distress. Statements by the Chief Economic Advisor KV Subramanian, saying that there will be "no free lunch" for a stimulus, are extremely unhelpful and insensitive. Further, the situation conveys that this Government is not getting the correct advice. Maybe these words were made in response to Nobel Prize-winning economist Abhijit Banerjee's comments on a call with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, where he had argued for a massive stimulus. But *prima facie*, it is impossible to see what choice the Government has if the economy is to revive. It will be expensive and will mean the suspension of some big-ticket projects and investments. Possibly even a pay cut for the Government itself. But if revenues are to rise again, the Government has to spend instead of doing public relations exercises around "Make in India." The need is to sustain incomes and that calls upon the Government to save the weakened parts of the economy. The need for a fiscal package cannot be denied. This is the start of the seventh year of the Narendra Modi Government and the COVID pandemic cannot be blamed on prior actions. India has a once in a lifetime opportunity to attract investors and make some truly dramatic reforms. We are letting that opportunity as well as any job of preserving jobs slip through our fingers. We cannot allow that to happen. If for nothing else, at least for the sake of the millions who are now unemployed.

# Feluda to the rescue

CSIR has developed a testing strip, named after Satyajit Ray's famous sleuth, to detect COVID-19 in minutes



Filmmaker and author Satyajit Ray created the sharp-witted, well-read, analytical and intellectual sleuth Feluda as a home-grown counterpart to the great detectives in world literature. Feluda wasn't superhuman or a geek, wasn't blessed with great tools of gimmickry but was a simpleton with a deductive mind, one which we could relate to. He was the original Bengali, who simply because of his rootedness became a pan-Indian favourite, too. And now he seems to have inspired a testing kit tool in our fight against COVID-19. Two Bengal scientists at the Council for Scientific

and Industrial Research (CSIR) have developed a rapid testing strip named after him, which is paper-based, affordable and reliable for early detection. In conjunction with Tata Sons, CSIR is gearing up for commercial production for it to be ready for use by the end of this month. Making the best use of the new CRISPR technology for mapping the genomic sequence of the novel Coronavirus and paper strip chemistry, the testing kit can read a visible signal that can be rapidly assessed to establish the presence of viral infection in a sample. Unlike the antibody-based rapid test currently being used by the Government for surveillance in hotspots and containment zones, the IGIB diagnostic kit relies on DNA-protein interaction for successful diagnosis. The strip basically will change colour, just like a pregnancy strip does. What's more, the results will be available in minutes. Besides, there's no need for any specialisation, the test can be carried out in a simple pathological lab. While the now extant RT-PCR test kits are priced at ₹4,500, the Feluda test strip would cost only ₹500 per test. Compared to the RT-PCR test for COVID-19, which takes more than a day to yield results, Feluda results will be out in an hour, out of which 45 minutes would be just for the testing preparations. This will facilitate large-scale sampling, which undoubtedly is much needed. Currently, India is testing less than one person per 1,000 people (0.76 to be precise). The scientists prefer saliva over blood because it is easy to collect even from an elderly patient.

With nations across the world caught in a race against time to develop a vaccine for the deadly Coronavirus, India, too, has been scurrying to build its own arsenal to fight it. From laboratories coming up with promising ideas to fast-tracking the development of a vaccine and the development of rapid testing kits by a lab in Pune, the Corona crisis may well change science for good. What is most required though is developing a respect for scientific temperament, holding talent and funding research in the country. If a virus assault of three months could prod home-grown scientists to find their own solutions, imagine what sustained encouragement and funding of R&D could do? We should keep our best scientific minds home in a post-COVID world to build our own sufficiencies. And begin to collect our own patents rather than in collaboration with others.

MN Qasmi  
Kolkata

# opinion 06

## Corona's privacy concerns

With changing transnational contours of the app economy, where the jurisdictional functionality of service providers is questionable and operates in clouds, India needs to strengthen data laws



ARUN K PUJARI

The Government's directive to all public and private sector employees to install the Aarogya Setu app in their mobile phones has raised eyebrows in some quarters. But the fact is that a post-COVID world is going to be equated with a digital society. It will be the new normal, where the use of diverse and converged digital technologies will help people maintain social distancing and facilitate secured living in an age of pandemic.

The Aarogya Setu app is designed to keep the people informed about the risk of them being infected with Coronavirus. Self-assessment begins with a request for information such as gender, full name, age, countries travelled to in the last 30 days and professional details. The app, which makes the use of GPS to get the user's location, discovers other available applications near his/her device using bluetooth. By cross-referencing the location details with that of Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)'s database and by collecting records of nearby users, it does a risk assessment and returns with a colour-coded message. It appears that the app continuously collects the user's data and uploads them to a Government server along with a DiD, which is a unique digital id. Data in the server is anonymised in such a manner that personalised features are suppressed without affecting the statistical features of the data ensembles.

The fact that devices exchange information, continuously collect location data of registered users and maintain a record of the places where they may have come in contact with other people has given rise to a sense of distrust among the people. Hence, the controversy. Arguments can be drawn into two fields: One of data privacy and the other on surveillance. While debate around the Aarogya Setu app is unsubstantiated and unfounded, questions related to data privacy will very much be a talking point in a post-COVID society.

Data is now widely being treated as the new "oil", "gold" and is a valuable resource from the perspective of society, economy, polity, privacy and human progress. For a society to make progress from an information age to a knowledgeable, digital world (data-driven society), the effective use of data and information, while qualifying with privacy parameters, will be a cornerstone of public discourse. Privacy is as old as mankind and has a close connection with human dignity, freedom and independence of an individual. Maintaining privacy will be more challenging in an age of informed society. Data privacy is a necessity so as to preserve and protect personal information that is collected by organisations. The fear of it being used by a third party is always there.

Data privacy assumes significance as people live with the app economy for the entire day, every day and every hour. Digital



citizens, while accessing various apps, give in to the consent clause and in reciprocation forfeit intimate details to data companies by accepting the fine print of services that they receive through the app. Further, several devices often track our movements, preferences and any information they can mine from our digital existence. This without the consent of the user.

Let us be clear at this stage that collecting data, however private it may be, with the user's consent, implicit or explicit, for any purpose and using it for data analytics in anonymised form is not a breach of privacy. Of course, unless the data is personalised and shared with other platforms or a third party. This seemingly is not the case with the Aarogya Setu app at present.

The nation has just seen that all efforts to curb the rapid spread of the Corona pandemic can be seriously affected due to contact tracing. This can be minimised with the help of data-driven technology that collects contact history of individuals. Undoubtedly, contact history is private but is used for a public cause. Aarogya Setu ensures just that and is a proof that India is growing to be a digitally matured State.

Post the COVID pandemic, India will witness a rise in app-driven socio-economic activities. Every aspect of the digital society — spanning from

“COLLECTION OF DATA, PRIVATE OR OTHERWISE, IS INEVITABLE AND UNAVOIDABLE IN A DATA-INTENSIVE AND ALGORITHMICALLY GOVERNED SOCIETY. AT THE SAME TIME, THE USE OF DATA RESPONSIBLY WHILE ALSO PRESERVING PRIVACY SHOULD BE THE ORDER OF THE DAY”

e-commerce, digital marketing and learning, digital art and culture, digital banking and transactions, social networking and social media, to digital Government interventions — will spread ominously.

Collection of data, private or otherwise, is inevitable and unavoidable in a data-intensive and algorithmically governed society. At the same time, the use of data responsibly while also preserving privacy should be the order of the day.

This brings us to an important question: Is India prepared to regulate data laws in the cyberspace? Further, are the citizens digitally educated to understand the trade-off between "comfort" and "luxury" while using digital technologies or when they share their data for a purpose? Are they aware of the privacy concerns arising there-of? These questions need to be addressed by digital communities of a post-COVID society.

India's legal system, too, can be construed as half prepared to deal with concerns arising out of data privacy violation in the app economy and highly integrated digital age, even though the Information Technology Act (2008, amended in 2011) provides the necessary legal regime for cybersecurity and protecting privacy concerns thereof.

With changing transnational contours of the app economy,

where the jurisdictional functionality of service providers is questionable and operates in clouds, India needs to consolidate and strengthen data laws on priority.

The Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019, which is still stuck in Parliament, intends to regulate the processing of personal data of individuals (data principals) by the Government and private entities (data fiduciaries). The Bill must provide legal teeth to data protection authorities to prosecute the data fiduciaries with penal actions. Such regulation, even if passed, cannot be effectively compliant in the context of lacking digital citizenship practices and etiquette.

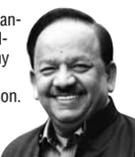
A post-COVID society and democracy in India will be digitally driven and will be converged around data privacy and security that should not be devalued due to the current political bickering on the installation of the Aarogya Setu app. The app has only a limited purpose to contain the spread of the Corona infection. At the same time, developers of the app must take care to ensure that the data collected for the purpose is not intruded, de-anonymised or exploited by any other party.

(The writer is former Dean of the School of Computer and Information Sciences at the University of Hyderabad and currently the Vice Chancellor of Central University of Rajasthan)

## SOUNDBITE

The Centre is ready to help in every way possible — be it manpower increase, capacity building, technical assistance or any kind of handholding that is required to manage the situation.

Union Minister  
—Harsh Vardhan



What would life be? Without a song or a dance, what are we? So I say thank you for the music. For giving it to me... #music.

Actor  
—Deepika Padukone



Pakistanis may soon recognise that China seeks not a partner but a colonial vassal, the deaths of whose citizens it sees as wholly irrelevant.

Former Pentagon official  
—Michael Rubin



We need to know what will happen after lockdown 3.0? The CMs need to deliberate and ask as to what is the strategy of the Government to get the nation out of the lockdown?

Former Prime Minister  
—Manmohan Singh



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Prevent overcrowding

Sir — This refers to the editorial, "All for a drink" (May 5). As the fight against COVID-19 entered its third phase with the Government providing considerable relaxation in lockdown curbs as part of a phase-wise exit plan, hundreds of people have been lining up before Government-run liquor shops, jostling and pushing in complete defiance of social distancing norms. At most places, many buyers were not even wearing masks. The over one-month-long nationwide lockdown to prevent the spread of the virus will become ineffective if the Government does not control such crowding around the liquor shops.

MN Qasmi  
Kolkata

### Save the labourers

Sir — The extended lockdown has exposed the plight of the migrant workers. India of the 1960s had dignified the rural economy. Rural infrastructure support, that would have sustained income levels in agro-slack

seasons, was soft-pedalled, resulting in migration.

Now, as restless migrants tried to set off for their villages, employers leveraged the lockdown to block the exodus to ensure continuity to their farm and factory outputs. This 140 million strong migrant labour is vital to our economy, yet shock-

ingly, their status remains undefined. China has 300 million workers but it provides them with more congenial work environment. It would be a pity if we now fail to incorporate the exploited labour in the new scheme of things.

R Narayanan  
Navi Mumbai

### The pharma industry deserves appreciation

Governments across the world are engaged in an intense battle to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. Only a vaccine can be a definite and conclusive solution to help mankind return to normal life. Whoever first develops a COVID vaccine will gain a huge competitive advantage. India, too, has the potential to develop an antidote to COVID-19. We should be proud of our biotech companies. Six Indian companies are in the race to make a vaccine for Coronavirus. Over 30 Indian vaccines are in different stages of development, with a few going on to the trial stages. One of them, the Serum Institute of India (SII), is the world's largest vaccine manufacturer by the number of doses produced and sold globally — more than 1.5 billion so far. It is great to know that a vaccine candidate, developed by the SII in partnership with American biotechnology firm Codagenix, has progressed to the pre-clinical test phase (the animal trial phase) and is estimated to be ready by early 2022. Much of the optimism over the vaccine stems from its reported success on rhesus monkeys.

The Government should empower our pharmaceu-



tical scientists and doctors, provide them with more infrastructure. We should also enhance our bio-defence mechanism. Hospitals should be equipped well to treat patients affected with special pathogens in the future. In this crisis, pharma industries and pharmacists also deserve appreciation. They have been working tirelessly.

Ravi Teja Kathuripalli  
Hyderabad

### Sheer injustice

Sir — This refers to the editorial, "Reality, not criticism" (May 5). The homecoming of migrant workers on special trains is welcome. But it is also the moral responsibility of the Government to bear the cost of their train jour-

ney considering their tragedy and distress. It's ironic that the Government could fly back stranded tourists back home for free to display its efficiency to the rest of the world.

Though after facing pressure from Opposition, the Centre clarified that the railways will pay 85 per cent of the train fares and the remaining 15 per cent will be paid by the State Governments, the onus has been put on respective States who are already reeling under tough conditions. Not to forget, there's no accountability of the money being collected in the name of the crisis in the PM Cares fund.

Nimai Charan Swain  
Bhubaneswar

### India must retaliate

Sir — The loss of three soldiers in Jammu and Kashmir is tragic. India must retaliate with full might. Only immediate forceful action will calm the people of India.

Jayant  
Via email

Send your feedback to:  
letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

# A very risky proposition

The concept of 'immunity passports' comes with practical difficulties and a lack of sufficient scientific backing



KOTA SRIRAJ

With May 17 just ten days away, 1.3 billion people are waiting with bated breath to see if the Government is able to usher in a graded relaxation of the 53-day-long lockdown that India is currently under. The Government, on its part, is mulling how to gradually open up the nation and the economy without resulting in a fresh outbreak of Coronavirus cases.

As of now, the number of cases in the country is inching towards the 50,000 mark as States registered 2,958 fresh Coronavirus cases in the last 24 hours. There have been 1,694 casualties till now as the toll zoomed to 126 in one day across the country.

Amid this spike, the Centre's dilemma is made worse by the assessments made by British brokerage firm Barclays, which pegged losses to the Indian economy at \$120 billion or four per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), putting more pressure on the Government to ease the lockdown, at least on commerce, at the earliest.

If the recent surge in cases is anything to go by, India still has a long way to go before it can claim to have a grip on COVID-19, unlike New Zealand which has successfully eliminated the virus. According to Ashley Bloomfield, Director-General of Health, New Zealand, this feat was achieved through rapid preventive measures, widespread testing and scientific research-based methodologies.

India needs to script its own success story in controlling the virus on one hand and revivifying the economy on the other hand. This naturally needs an immediate restoration of business and commercial activities but this is fraught with unimaginable risks to public health. As it is, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat have continued to report a high number of COVID-19 cases while Delhi's Coronavirus count reached 5,000 after a deadly spike on May 4. But despite the doom and gloom scenario, the economy has to be opened up anyhow. These exasperating conditions have led some countries to explore the option of giving "immunity passports" or "risk-free certificates" to those who were infected with COVID-19 but recovered from it.

These passports or certificates issued by the Government are being visualised as a way to help people go to work and, in the process, get the economy moving again. In order to have an immunity passport, one would have to be reliably tested for antibodies and specific proteins that could help stall and stop the growth of the COVID-19 infection. This concept quickly caught the imagination of many nations stuck in various levels of the lockdown as it presented a plausible exit strategy from the existing limbo. But the concept of immunity passports has its own share of practical difficulties and lack of sufficient scientific backing, all of which make it a major hit or miss initiative.

The foremost challenge for the immunity passport strategy is that the antibody testing procedures across the world are in their formative stages. Even the home-testing kits for the same are not up to the mark in terms of quality and require strict following of instructions as per the kit.

Then there is also the issue of people who have fought off the disease initially having got infected again, whereupon their immunity failed. This also undermines the concept of immunity passports, as once the person is granted an immunity certificate, there is no guaranteeing that s/he will not get infected again, thereby posing a threat of community transmission.

The issuance of an immunity passport will also cause socio-logical issues as it demarcates "healthy" people from "sick" people who have no option but to wait for vaccines or drugs to be developed.

The novel Coronavirus is a "new" strain and has no precedent nobody knows how and when it ends and the level of immunity needed to tackle it. Therefore, it is very difficult to predict how and when an infected person can be pronounced safe. Basing immunity-related conclusions on still-developing antibody testing processes for a disease that has evolved out of a new strain is nothing but speculation, which is not advisable. The lockdown of the global economy has dealt a major blow to incomes. However, panicked initiatives to open the economy can lead to a major loss of lives, which are more precious than monetary gains.

India must follow the trio of best practices adopted by New Zealand, wherein rapid isolation measures for hotspots, widest possible population testing using the latest scientific methodology is combined with a calibrated easing of activities for green and orange zones. It must also ensure that the identified hotspots or red zones stay fully quarantined. India must also encourage the scientific research community to identify measures to enhance and bolster cell-level immunity in human bodies as that alone provides the first line of defence against the COVID-19 virus.

(The writer is an environmental journalist)

POINT COUNTERPOINT

WE DEMAND THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE FUEL HIKE AS IT WILL MAKE FOODGRAIN, VEGETABLES AND OTHER ITEMS OF DAILY USE COSTLIER.

—DELHI BJP PRESIDENT  
MANOJ TIWARI



LIFE ISN'T ALL ABOUT RAINBOWS AND SUNSHINE. TOUGH TIMES NEED TOUGH SOLUTIONS. THIS HAS BEEN MY LEARNING AS FINANCE MINISTER.

—DELHI DEPUTY CM AND FM  
MANISH SISODIA

# Cure this malaise

The contemptible action of people to obstruct the dignified interment of doctors and violence against health workers battling the pandemic has outraged the medical fraternity and most citizens



ROBIN R DAVID

A doctor contracted COVID-19 from a patient and succumbed to the virus on April 19 in Chennai. The funeral of the doctor was stopped by residents who assembled in large numbers to oppose it. The Madras High Court, taking suo moto cognisance of the despicable incident, said that Article 21 of the Constitution, which protects the life and personal liberty of all persons, includes within its ambit the right to a decent burial. The court said that this doctor was deprived of his right to have a decent burial.

In another incident in Meghalaya, the local governing bodies known as *Durbar Shnong* prevented the cremation of a COVID-19 infected doctor. Consequently, the Meghalaya Bar Association filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the High Court, against the State and local bodies. The court noted that the State authorities handled the matter in an inept way and the obstructive conduct of the *Durbar Shnong* would shock the conscience of every right-thinking individual.

The contemptible action of various groups to obstruct the dignified interment of doctors and other healthcare professionals has outraged the medical fraternity and all citizens with a conscience. On April 20, the Indian Medical Association (IMA) said that objections to proper funerals of doctors and other health workers, dying in the line of pandemic duty, is the last straw. The IMA demanded a special Central law to take stringent action against those who indulge in violence against healthcare professionals and hospitals. The IMA called for a "white alert" on April 22 and sought to declare April 23 as a "black day" if its demands to protect the serving medical fraternity were not met.

Soon after, the Union Cabinet passed the Epidemic Diseases (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020 which was then signed by the President. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare intended the Ordinance to ensure "zero tolerance" to any form of violence against healthcare professionals and damage to property. Significantly, in 2019 the Healthcare Services Personnel and Clinical Establishments (Prohibition of Violence and Damage to Property) Bill, drafted by the Health Ministry to contain violence against doctors, was rejected by the Home Ministry, saying that there cannot be a separate legislation to protect the members of a particular profession.

Hopefully, this Ordinance will make up for the past errors and infuse confidence in the healthcare community, that is on the frontline in our war against the pandemic. Though the passing of the Ordinance itself is a positive decision by the Government, the moot question is whether the new law is adequate to protect doctors and other healthcare workers?

According to the Ordinance, an "act of violence" includes any of the following acts committed against healthcare personnel: Harassment impacting living or working conditions; harm, injury or danger to life; obstruction in the discharge of duties and loss or damage to the property or documents of the healthcare personnel.

Property is defined to include: Clinical establishment; quarantine facility; mobile medical unit, and other property in which a healthcare worker has a direct interest. Further, "healthcare personnel" are people, who while carrying out their duties in relation to countering the epidemic, may come in direct contact with affected patients and thereby are at the risk of being impacted by such disease and include any public and clinical healthcare providers such as

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ALTHOUGH THE MINISTRY MAKES TALL CLAIMS OF ZERO TOLERANCE, WITH VERY HIGH ASPIRATIONS OF PACIFYING A DEMORALISED AND SHAKEN MEDICAL FRATERNITY, THE 2020 ORDINANCE DOES NOT ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF ATTACKS ON HEALTH WORKERS IN NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES AFTER THE PANDEMIC IS OVER. ASSAULTS ON THEM EXISTED GLOBALLY, LONG BEFORE COVID-19 REARED ITS UGLY HEAD. NUMEROUS PLEAS TO PROTECT MEDICAL STAFF HAVE FALLEN ON DEAF EARS. ACCORDING TO THE IMA, OVER 75 PER CENT OF DOCTORS AND OTHER HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS HAVE FACED VIOLENCE AT WORK



doctors, nurses, paramedical staff and community health workers. The Ministry claimed that while the citizens fully cooperated with healthcare personnel most of the time, there were sporadic incidents of violence that demoralised the medical fraternity fighting the contagion. Therefore, it was felt that separate and stringent provisions for emergent times were needed to act as effective deterrents to any such incidents of violence.

Though the Ministry makes tall claims of zero tolerance, with very high aspirations of pacifying a demoralised and shaken medical fraternity, the Ordinance does not address the issue of attacks on healthcare workers in normal circumstances, after the pandemic is over. Assaults on them existed globally, long before COVID-19 reared its ugly head. Numerous pleas to protect medical staff have fallen on deaf ears. According to the IMA, over 75 per cent of doctors and other healthcare professionals have faced violence at work.

In 2012, a pregnant woman with obstetric complications died in Tuticorin. In retaliation, the attending doctor was killed by the enraged husband. This triggered a call for a strike by the Tamil Nadu Government Doctors' Association. The IMA has demanded that hospitals be declared as "protected zones" and called for strict implementation of laws in cases of violence against health professionals.

In 2014, angry relatives of a 14-year-old boy, who was declared "brought dead" at a private hospital in Bathinda, Punjab, went on a rampage. They damaged the nursing home and burnt down the doctor's house. The Punjab State Chapter of the IMA demanded strict action against those responsible for damaging the nursing home and the house of the doctor. Angry relatives of patients are not the only ones who oppress medical professionals, the Government set-up is

also equally guilty. Dr Indranil Khan, an oncologist, faced harassment after he posted images of doctors wearing raincoats in a COVID-19 ward of a Government hospital on social media. Police detained Dr Khan, charged him with causing communal disharmony and criminal intimidation and confiscated his phone.

A writ petition against his harassment by the police was filed before the Calcutta High Court. Justice Prasanna Mukherji of the Calcutta High Court said that freedom of speech and expression, which is granted under Article 19 of the Constitution, has to be scrupulously upheld by the State. The court said that if an expression of opinion brings the Government into disrepute, it cannot defend the allegation by intimidation of the person expressing the opinion by subjecting him to prolonged interrogation, threatening arrest, seizing his mobile phone and SIM card.

In another incident, Dr Piyush Pushkar Singh, who complained about the shortage of equipment and protective masks, was terminated by the Hindu Rao Hospital for bringing disrepute to the institution on April 15. Clearly, the Epidemic Diseases Ordinance, 2020, which is stated to ensure the safety of healthcare professionals is not designed to protect Dr Khan and Dr Singh.

Sadly, the COVID-19 outbreak led to a rash of attacks against doctors and other health workers. Healthcare personnel deployed in rural areas were beaten and stopped from entering the villages and for "violating" the lockdown while going to work. The hurried promulgation of the Ordinance appears to be a knee-jerk reaction by the Government. First, the Ministry's claim that the citizens fully cooperated with the healthcare workers is belied by its own statement that incidents of violence have occurred which demoralised the medical fraternity. Second, the Ordinance only "protects" healthcare

personnel in an epidemic and not in general conditions. Therefore, this Ordinance does not afford any protection to the medical fraternity in a non-epidemic situation.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), health workers must be provided with training on infection prevention, given Personal Protection Equipment and technical updates. They must have a blame-free environment to report on incidents such as exposure to blood or bodily fluids or violence.

The right to health i.e. the right to live in a hygienic and safe environment, flows from Article 21. According to Article 47 the improvement of public health is the primary duty of the State. Justice Chandrachud said under Article 21, the right to life is meaningless unless accompanied by the guarantee of certain concomitant rights including, but not limited to, the right to health. The right to health is understood to be indispensable to a life of dignity, well-being and includes, for instance, the right to emergency medical care and the right to maintenance and improvement of public health. In the current situation, with the need to have a conducive and safe environment for medical professionals and the responsibility of the State to provide for public health, the Government will be well-advised to take all steps to protect the medical fraternity from any form of lawlessness. The Centre must consider enacting a stand-alone law that will enable hospitals and medical personnel to work in a safe environment at all times, so as to attain the Constitutional aspiration of right to health for all citizens. While social distancing is being advocated, medical professionals do not have the privilege of working remotely. The best form of applause to give the doctors and medical personnel is to give them a safe working environment.

(The writer is Advocate Partner in a law firm)

# Substance over showmanship needed

The 'Corona warriors' would have been much more appreciative if they had been provided with PPE and protection from rampaging mobs by the military. Our Ordnance factories could have been used to mass-produce such gear



DEEPAK SINHA

The Indian subcontinent has always been extremely prone to natural disasters like floods, earthquakes, landslides, avalanches and storms. Statistics published in media reports suggest that post-Independence, till 2017, India has witnessed 529 natural disasters, leaving aside those caused by droughts, epidemics and extreme temperature. These disasters have resulted in nearly 2,00,000 deaths and left hundreds of millions affected in the country.

In all of these incidents, our

armed forces have been employed for conduct of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) missions, more often than not, as the key nodal agency.

It, therefore, comes as a major surprise to all, especially the military leadership, when they find themselves and the military on the fringes in this ongoing war against the pandemic, tasked with providing only limited assistance on the periphery.

That apparently appears to have become a source of immense anxiety and insecurity among the Service Chiefs, forcing them to call a press conference to announce a series of displays by elements of the three Services and the Coast Guard to honour our "Corona warriors."

If, on the other hand, these were the directions of the Government that they were complying with — which is also a major possibility — it shows them up as weak, only aiming to please their political bosses in

hopes of future rewards.

To my mind, there appears to be no other reasonable explanation for this bizarre exercise, which obviously appears to have, at least outwardly, paid them some dividends, if the Prime Minister's tweet means anything.

Let us not get it wrong. There is indeed much to be appreciative of, inasmuch as such displays go towards building the morale of the "Corona warriors." But did it really require the Chief of Defence Staff and the three Service Chiefs to make the announcement? Is that what they have been reduced to? For that matter, was the scale that this morale-boosting exercise was undertaken at really necessary?

In such troubled times, substance over showmanship would have been better appreciated. Much of that time, money and effort, could and should, have been better utilised in providing assistance to the vast numbers of our citizenry who have

been rendered utterly destitute, hungry, without shelter and unable to reach their homes because of an ill-planned and poorly-executed nationwide lockdown.

Feeding the hungry, providing tented shelters for the homeless or transport for the weary are not matters that require approval from the highest levels, just a humane bent of mind at the local level. That in itself would have garnered enough goodwill among the populace, without this grasping for publicity that we witnessed on television.

It should be seen as a positive step that our military has not been called out in this disaster, except of course for providing medical assistance where necessary. This suggests that our civil administration is finally maturing and waking up to its duties, however poor its performance might have been this time around.

In all fairness, this particular disaster has been on an unprece-

dent scale. We neither anticipated it nor were we prepared or trained for it and errors were to be expected.

It has been the bane of the military in the past that whenever a disaster occurred, it invariably led to the civil administration and its agencies all but abdicating their responsibilities, leaving it to the military to take over the process, coordinate and provide the required assistance. Examples are too numerous to quote but the floods that devastated Uttarakhand and Kashmir, in the past, best illustrate this phenomenon.

Clearly, as we look at and assess the security environment in our region, there can be little doubt that our military must take all necessary precautions to keep its units out of harm's way so that they can meet their constitutional obligations and successfully protect our sovereignty at a moment's notice. Static units and those uncommitted opera-

tionally, spread out all over the country could have been utilised in a number of ways to provide succour to our hard-pressed brethren. As a matter of fact, it was the bounden duty of our Service Chiefs to have interceded with the Prime Minister and have convinced him of the enormous range of assistance that our forces were capable of providing.

Obviously the lack of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) within the forces may well have been an important consideration for the hierarchy in whatever suggestions they may have made. In any case, the "Corona warriors" would have been more appreciative if they had been provided with PPE and protection from rampaging mobs instead.

In fact, within the veteran community, leaving aside a few, these theatrics have been seen as contrary to service norms and ethics, as the former Naval chief, Admiral Laxminarayan Ramdas', article in one of our dailies makes it amply

clear. Instead of copying what the US Air Force Aerobatics Teams did at New York, we could have looked at the more innovative ways the Spanish military was used to manufacture PPE. It may come as a surprise but various Ordnance Corps establishments within the Army are authorised tailors and equipment repairers, who could have been gainfully employed to produce masks and other equipment.

Given the massive deficiency in PPE suits, even the Ordnance Parachute Factory at Kanpur could have been modified quickly to mass-produce them. An opportunity to do good was truly squandered, leaving behind only a bitter taste in the mouth that is unlikely to disappear any time soon.

(The author, a military veteran is a Consultant with the Observer Research Foundation and a Senior Visiting Fellow with The Peninsula Foundation, Chennai)

# SHOW WUHAN ORIGIN PROOF, CHINA DARES US

PTI ■ BEIJING

China on Wednesday dared US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to show the "enormous evidence" he has to prove that the novel coronavirus originated from a lab in Wuhan and asserted that the matter should be handled by scientists instead of politicians out of their domestic political compulsions in an election year.

In recent days, US President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Pompeo have claimed that the deadly virus originated from the Wuhan Institute of Virology in the central Chinese city of Wuhan, where the outbreak was first detected last December. The two leaders have also said that China has refused to give international scientists access to learn what happened.

The claim has drawn fierce

rebuttal from Beijing, which on Wednesday described the accusation as "smear" intended to bolster President Trump's re-election chances in November.

"He (Pompeo) said 'enormous evidence'. Then show us," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying told a media briefing here. "Pompeo cannot present any evidence because he does not have any," Hua said. "This matter should be handled by scientists and professionals instead of politicians out of their domestic political need."

China's foreign ministry called the accusations a political strategy to "smear China" for Republicans ahead of the 2020 election.

"The recently exposed US Republican strategies shows they are encouraged to attack China under the pretext of the

virus," Hua said, adding that China was "fed up with such tricks."

"We urge the US to stop spreading disinformation or misleading the international community. It should deal with its own problems and deal with the pandemic at home," she said. Hua said the head of the World Health Organisation (WHO) stated that the US has not presented any evidence to it so far to back up its claims.

"On the issue of the origin of coronavirus, people have different opinions. I think tracing the origin is a very serious matter. That should be researched by scientists and professionals," she said.

"Almost all top scientists, including those in the US, believe that this virus came from nature, not man-made and there is no possibility that it was leaked from a lab," said

"The WHO officials also said all the evidence showed that the virus is not man-made", she said.

Hua also said all countries must examine the reports that the cases of Covid-19 were reported in some countries in

September and December last year. She said recent reports said coronavirus cases were reported in the US in October

last year. Reports from France spoke of a coronavirus case detected from a patient in December last year, Hua said.

## Chinese envoy airs backing for WHO amid criticism from Trump

AP ■ GENEVA

A senior Chinese diplomat expressed backing for the World Health Organisation on Wednesday, but said an invitation for the agency's experts to visit Wuhan to look into the origins of the coronavirus must wait until after the pandemic is beaten.

"First things first: The top priority for the time being is to focus on the fight against the pandemic," said Chen Xu, China's ambassador to UN institutions in Geneva, when asked about the timing of a

possible invitation for a WHO team. "We need the right focus and allocation of our resources."

"So it's not we are allergic to any kind of investigations, inquiries or evaluations," he said, "as long as it will be beneficial to the international efforts."

The comments from Chen amount to the latest Chinese diplomatic push, just as the United States has criticized the WHO over its handling of the COVID-19 outbreak that has infected millions and killed at least 2,50,000 people — and its

alleged coziness with Beijing. Chen said China is now on board for an initiative led by the WHO, many European countries and charity groups like the Gates Foundation to expedite vaccines and COVID-19 treatment tools to developing countries. He didn't offer details on how China would show its support.

The US meanwhile has not lined up for the Access to COVID-19 Tools, or ACT, "Accelerator" that aims to help the most vulnerable countries gain access to vaccines, diagnostics and treatment tools for

the coronavirus as they emerge. President Donald Trump's administration has criticized the WHO's handling of the early outbreak and announced a suspension of funding from the US — the UN agency's top donor. Administration officials have accused the WHO of covering up missteps as the outbreak emerged in Wuhan.

Chen said the US was "duty-bound" to keep up its funding.

"We do hope that the Americans could have second thoughts, to come back to the right track," he said.

● Russia's Minister of culture has tested positive for the coronavirus, the third Russian Cabinet member infected. Culture Minister Olga Lyubimova has mild symptoms and is undergoing treatment at home, according to her office. The ministry says Lyubimova attends video calls with other officials. Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin and Construction minister Vladimir Yakushev were reported to have the virus last week.

● An ambassador to China says the Government is not "allergic" to welcoming World Health Organization envoys to examine the origins of the coronavirus in Wuhan at some point. Chen Xu was asked about WHO assertions that the UN agency won't send envoys to visit Wuhan until it receives an invitation from Beijing. "First things first: The top priority for the time being is to focus on the fight against the pandemic," Chen said. "We need the right focus and allocation of our resources."

● Serbia's parliament is expected to vote to end an overnight curfew, an almost complete lockdown for people older than 65 and military patrols in towns and borders. Serbia's Prime Minister Ana Brnabic told the assembly lifting of the emergency measures is made possible after the rate of infections substantially decreased. Serbia has recorded more than 9,600 COVID-19 cases and 200 deaths.

● Mosques in Bosnia opened their doors amid a gradual rollback of a coronavirus shutdown that began nearly two months ago. Bosnia's official Islamic Community, which governs all Muslim religious affairs, allowed the return to the mosques for five daily prayers after livestreaming of weekly prayers and sermons.

● A foundation in northern Thailand wants to help elephants who have lost their jobs at parks due to tourists disappearing on account of the coronavirus. So the Save Elephant Foundation has established a project to have the animals return to their homes in natural habitats where they won't be so dependent on handouts. Animal protection organizations warn that their situation is desperate, with 1,000 to 2,000 elephants at venues all over the country at risk of starving. The animals' owners have been left with insufficient income to afford the beasts' daily diet of as much as 300 kilograms of grass and vegetables.

● A comprehensive study in the Czech Republic to determine the undetected infections with the coronavirus in the population has revealed a low number of COVID-19 cases. Health Minister Adam Vojtech said a total of 26,549 people were tested across the country, including the capital, with 107 previously undetected positive tests. The study was conducted in different parts of the Czech Republic where the epidemic was at different stages on people aged 18-89.

● France's Government is warning the French that they shouldn't expect to travel far for their vacations this summer because of the coronavirus pandemic. Jean-Baptiste Lemoine, a deputy minister at the French Foreign Ministry, said Wednesday that the external borders of Europe's visa-free Schengen area, incorporating 26 nations, will remain closed "for several weeks, for several months."

COUNTRY	TOTAL CASES	TOTAL DEATHS
USA	1,245,857	73,145
Spain	2,53,682	25,857
Italy	2,14,457	29,684
UK	2,01,101	30,076
France	1,70,551	25,531
Germany	1,67,372	6,993
Russia	1,65,929	1,537
Turkey	1,31,744	3,584

- UK has become second country to record more than 30,000 deaths as a result of the coronavirus pandemic
- Former CDC director: US will reach 100,000 virus deaths by the end of May
- Republican-led Michigan Legislature suing Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer
- Singapore's virus infections surge past 20,000



## THE SECOND VIRUS WAVE: How bad will it be as lockdowns ease?

AP ■ ROME

From the marbled halls of Italy to the wheat fields of Kansas, health authorities are increasingly warning that the question isn't whether a second wave of coronavirus infections and deaths will hit, but when — and how badly.

In India, which relaxed its lockdown this week, health authorities scrambled Wednesday to contain an outbreak at a huge market. Hard-hit New York City shut down its subway system overnight for disinfection. Experts in Italy, which just began easing some restrictions, warned lawmakers that a new surge of infections and deaths is coming, and they urged intensified efforts to identify victims, monitor their symptoms and trace their contacts.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said after meeting with the country's 16 governors that restaurants and remaining shops will be allowed to reopen in the coming weeks but that restrictions will be reimposed if new infections hit a certain level. "There will be a second wave, but the problem is to which extent. Is it a small wave or a big wave? It's too early to say," said Olivier Schwartz, head of the virus and immunity unit at France's Pasteur Institute. France, which hasn't yet eased its lockdown, has worked up a "re-confinement plan" to ready for that second wave.

Many areas are still struggling with the first wave. Brazil for the first time locked down a large city, the capital of Maranhão state. Across the ocean, the number of confirmed coronavirus cases in Africa has shot up 42% in the past week. Infections were expected to surpass 50,000 there on Wednesday.

An Associated Press analysis, meanwhile, found that U.S. infection rates outside the New York City area are in fact rising, notably in rural areas. It found

New York's progress against the virus was overshadowing increasing infections elsewhere.

"Make no mistakes: This virus is still circulating in our community, perhaps even more now than in previous weeks," said Linda Ochs, director of the Health Department in Shawnee County, Kansas.

The virus is known to have infected more than 3.6 million and killed more than 251,000 people, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins that all experts agree is an undercount because of limited testing, differences in counting the dead and concealment by some governments.

The U.S. has seen over 71,000 deaths amid its 1.2 million confirmed infections, and Europe has endured over 144,000 reported deaths.

"Burying both parents at the same time? It's hard," said Desmond Tolbert, who lost his mother and father in rural Georgia. Because they had the virus, he couldn't be with them when they died.

The researchers behind a widely cited model from the University of Washington nearly doubled their projection of deaths in the U.S. to around 134,000 through early August, in large part because of the easing of state stay-at-home restrictions.

President Donald Trump, with his eye on being reelected in November, is pushing hard to ease the social-distancing orders and resuscitate the U.S. economy, which has seen over 30 million workers lose their jobs in less than two months. Though the White House had signaled Tuesday that it would begin winding down the country's coronavirus task force, Trump tweeted Wednesday that it would continue "indefinitely with its focus on SAFETY & OPENING UP OUR COUNTRY AGAIN."

Underscoring those economic concerns, the European Union predicted the worst recession in its quarter-century

history, and the U.S. unemployment rate for April, which comes out Friday, is expected to hit a startling 16 percent, a level last seen during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

A century ago, the Spanish flu epidemic's second wave was far deadlier than its first, in part because authorities allowed mass gatherings from Philadelphia to San Francisco.

As Italy's lockdown eased this week, Dr. Silvio Brusaferrò, president of the Superior Institute of Health, urged "a huge investment" of resources to train medical personnel to monitor possible new cases. He said tracing apps — which are being built by dozens of countries and companies — aren't enough to manage future waves of infection.

"We are not out of the epidemic. We are still in it. I don't want people to think there's no more risk and we go back to normal," said Dr. Giovanni Rezza, head of the institute's infectious-disease department.

Lothar Wieler, head of Germany's national disease control center, said scientists "know with great certainty that there will be a second wave" of infections but said Germany is well-prepared to deal with it. The country has been hailed for testing widely and has had one-fourth the number of deaths in Italy or Britain, which have smaller populations.

Britain has begun recruiting 18,000 people to trace contacts of those infected. British officials acknowledge that they should have done more testing and tracing earlier and could learn from South Korea, which brought its outbreak under control by rigorously testing, tracing and isolating infected people.

South Africa, which has years of experience tracking HIV and other infections, has more than 30,000 experienced community tracers at work. Turkey has 5,800 teams of contact tracers who have tracked down and tested nearly half a

million people.

India was concentrated on the immediate drama around the market in the southern city of Chennai, which is now tied to at least 1,000 virus cases. An additional 7,000 people connected to the now-shuttered Koyambedu market are being traced and quarantined. Experts are worried about a health catastrophe in a country of 1.3 billion people with an already stressed medical system.

New confirmed daily infections in the U.S. exceed 20,000, and deaths per day are well over 1,000, according to the Johns Hopkins tally. And public health officials warn that the failure to lower the infection rate could lead to many more deaths — perhaps tens of thousands — as people venture out and businesses reopen.

"The faster we reopen, the lower the economic cost — but the higher the human cost, because the more lives lost," New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo said. "That, my friends, is the decision we are really making."

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio warned on CNN that some states may be reopening too quickly.

"My message to the rest of the country is learn from how much effort, how much discipline it took to finally bring these numbers down and follow the same path until you're sure that it's being beaten back," he said, "or else if this thing boomerangs, you're putting off any kind of restart or recovery a hell of a lot longer."

Trump acknowledged the toll but argued that keeping the US economy closed carries deadly costs of its own, such as drug abuse and suicides.

"I'm not saying anything is perfect, and yes, will some people be affected badly? Yes. But we have to get our country open and we have to get it open soon," he said during a visit to Arizona in which he did not wear a face mask.

## NURSES BODY: Over 90K health workers test Covid+ve globally

Geneva: At least 90,000 health-care workers worldwide are believed to have been infected with Covid-19, and possibly twice that, amid reports of continuing shortages of protective equipment, the International Council of Nurses (ICN) said on Wednesday.

The disease has killed more than 260 nurses, it said in a statement, urging authorities to keep more accurate records to help prevent the virus from spreading among staff and patients.

The Geneva-based association said a month ago that 100 nurses had died in the pandemic sparked by a novel coronavirus that emerged in the central Chinese city of Wuhan late last year.

"The figure for health care workers infections has risen from 23,000 to we think more than 90,000, but that is still an under-estimation because it is

not (covering) every country in the world," Howard Catton, ICN's chief executive officer, told Reuters Television in its lakeside offices.

The 90,000 estimate is based on information collected on 30 countries from national nursing associations, government figures and media reports. The ICN represents 130 national associations and more than 20 million registered nurses.

Catton, noting that 3.5 million cases of Covid-19 have been reported worldwide, said: "If the average health worker infection rate, about 6 percent we think, is applied to that, the figure globally could be more than 2,00,000 health worker infections on Wednesday."

"The scandal is that Governments are not systematically collecting and reporting on this information. It looks to us as though they are

turning a blind eye which we think is completely unacceptable and will cost more lives," Catton, a Briton, added.

The World Health Organization (WHO), which is coordinating the global response to the pandemic, says that its 194 member states are not providing comprehensive figures on health worker infections as they grapple with the unprecedented crisis.

The WHO last said on April 11 that some 22,000 health workers were thought to have been infected.

The ICN said it now believes those "shocking" figures to significantly underestimate the reality.

"This failure to record both infection rates and deaths among healthcare workers is putting more nurses and their patients in danger," the statement said. Agency

## Chinese researcher on 'verge of making very significant' coronavirus findings killed in US

PTI ■ NEW YORK

A Chinese medical researcher on the "verge of making very significant" coronavirus findings has been found shot dead in the US state of Pennsylvania, media reports said on Wednesday.

University of Pittsburgh professor Bing Liu, 37, was found dead inside his home in Ross Township, north of Pittsburgh, on Saturday with gunshot wounds to the head, neck, torso and extremities, according to the Ross Police Department.

Investigators believe an unidentified second man, Hao Gu, 46 who was found dead in his car, shot and killed Liu in his home before returning to his car and taking his own life, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reported.

Police believe the men knew each other, but say there

is "zero indication that there was targeting due to his (Liu) being Chinese," according to Detective Sgt. Brian Kohlhepp, the CNN reported.

The university issued a statement saying it is "deeply saddened by the tragic death of Bing Liu, a prolific researcher and admired colleague at Pitt."

The University extends our deepest sympathies to Liu's family, friends and colleagues during this difficult time."

"Bing was on the verge of making very significant findings toward understanding the cellular mechanisms that underlie SARS-CoV-2 infection and the cellular basis of the following complications," his colleagues at the university's Department of Computational and Systems Biology said in a statement.

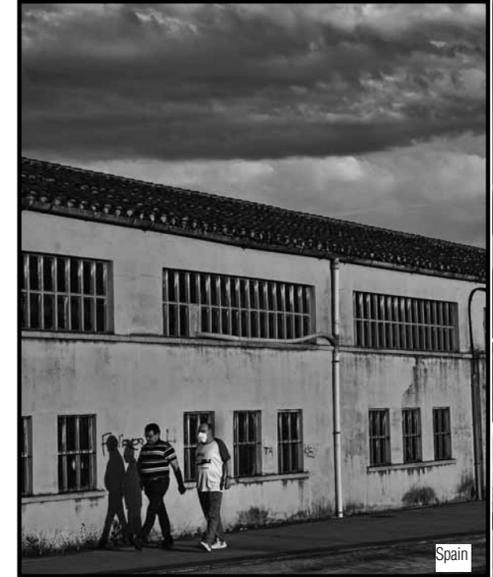
"He was a very talented individual, extremely intelligent

and hard-working," said Ivet Bahar, the head of the computational and system biology department in Pitt's School of Medicine. Members of the university's School of Medicine describe their former colleague as an outstanding researcher and mentor, and have pledged to complete Liu's research "in an effort to pay homage to his scientific excellence."

Liu, who earned a Ph.D in computational science from the National University of Singapore, worked as a post-doctoral fellow at Carnegie Mellon University before becoming a research associate at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine.

The deadly coronavirus which originated from the Chinese city of Wuhan has infected over 3.67 million people and killed 258,051 people globally, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University.

### AROUND THE WORLD IN PICTURES



## No signs Kim received heart surgery: S Korean spy agency

AGENCY ■ SEOUL

There are no signs North Korean leader Kim Jong Un received heart surgery when he disappeared from state media for three weeks, but he reduced public activity due to coronavirus concerns, South Korean lawmakers briefed by the spy agency said on Wednesday.

Kim attended the completion of a fertiliser plant, North Korea's official media said on Saturday, the first report of his appearing in public since April 11.

His absence fuelled a flurry of speculation about his health and whereabouts, with a South Korean news outlet reporting Kim was recovering

from a cardiovascular procedure while CNN said US officials were monitoring Intelligence he was "in grave danger" after surgery.

Members of South Korea's parliamentary Intelligence committee said after a meeting with the National Intelligence Service (NIS) that the reports were "groundless."

"The NIS assesses that at least he did not get any heart-related procedure or surgery," committee member Kim Byung-keel told reporters.

"He was normally performing his duties when he was out of the public eye."

"At least there's no heart-related health problem."

But the lawmaker said Kim Jong Un only made 17 public appearances so far this year, compared with an average of 50 from previous years, which the National Intelligence Service (NIS) ascribed to a possible coronavirus outbreak in North Korea.

"Kim Jong Un had focused on consolidating internal affairs such as military forces and party-state meetings, and coronavirus concerns have further limited his public activity," Kim Byung-keel said.

"Though North Korea maintains it has zero cases, it cannot be ruled out that there is an outbreak there given they had active people-to-people exchanges with China before closing the border in late January."

# Sensex snaps 2-day losing streak BANKS, AUTO STOCKS SPARKLE

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Markets found firmer ground on Wednesday after two sessions of losses as investors made a cautious return to some recently-battered banking, finance and auto counters.

Dismal macroeconomic data and rising concerns over the country's economic outlook amid rising Covid-19 cases capped the gains, traders said. After swinging over 800 points during the day, the 30-share BSE Sensex closed 232.24 points or 0.74 per cent higher at 31,685.75.

On similar lines, the NSE Nifty rose 65.30 points, or 0.71 per cent, to finish at 9,270.90. M&M was the top gainer in the Sensex pack, spurting 5.27 per cent, followed by Bajaj Finance, HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank, Hero MotoCorp and HDFC.

On the other hand, ITC cracked 5.81 per cent. HUL, TCS, Titan and Infosys too ended in the red.

According to traders, economic uncertainty due to the Covid-19 pandemic, muted corporate earnings and weak



**Intra-day on May 6**

Open: 32,200 | High: 32,000 | Low: 31,600 | Close: 31,685.75

Previous close: 31,453.51

Stock	Change (%)
M&M	5.27
Bajaj Finance	5.19
HDFC Bank	3.80
Bharti Airtel	3.45
ICICI Bank	3.19
ITC	-5.81
Hind Unilever	-1.57
TCS	-1.41
Infosys	-1.19
Titan	-1.15

KBK Infographics

macroeconomic data kept investors wary. India's service sector activity plummeted to a historic low

Index stood at just 5.4 in April, from 49.3 in March — the most severe contraction in services output since records began in December 2005.

"Markets were volatile as 9,100 levels held out as a key support for the Nifty in a day of mixed gains for its constituents. Financials led the gains, in anticipation of stimulus measures while FMCG, bluechip IT stocks and OMCs disappointed.

"The volatility in the indices is expected to continue as investors look out for trading cues in the form of stimulus measures by the government and global market trends," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

BSE finance, telecom, bankex, auto, basic materials and realty indices climbed up to 2.46 per cent, while FMCG, consumer durables, IT and energy closed lower.

Broader BSE midcap and smallcap indices rose up to 0.78 per cent. Global equities were mixed as investors tracked the rising coronavirus cases and escalating US-China tensions. Bourses in Shanghai, Hong

Kong and Seoul settled with significant gains, while Tokyo was closed for a holiday.

European markets were trading on a cautious note in early deals. International oil benchmark Brent crude futures rose 1.65 per cent to USD 31.48 per barrel.

## ₹ closes down by 9p at 75.72 against \$ on growth concerns

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee depreciated 9 paise to close at 75.72 against the US dollar on Wednesday due to growth concerns as a survey showed that the services sector contracted in April.

Weakness in Asian currencies following Chinese yuan dropping by 0.6 per cent against the US dollar and sustained foreign fund outflows also weighed on the rupee.

Inflation concerns following the Centre and some states increased taxes on petroleum products also hit investor sentiment.

# Covid-19 disruptions may further spike duty on petrol, diesel after Tuesday's unprecedented hike

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

The unprecedented increase in excise duty on petrol and diesel by ₹10 and ₹13 per litre on Tuesday may not be the end of the government's exercise to fleece the two petroleum products for additional revenue this year.

Sources indicated that that another ₹3-6 per litre increase in excise duty on petrol and diesel may come midway during the year if government felt the need to mobilise more resources to finance additional economic recovery packages to fight Covid-19 related disruptions.

This level of increase could provide government additional revenue to the tune of ₹60,000 crore for full year.

In March, government had taken Parliamentary approval to raise special additional excise duty on petrol to ₹18 per litre and on diesel to ₹12 per litre but did not change the levy then. On Tuesday, special additional excise duty has been raised to ₹12 on petrol and to ₹9 on diesel. This leaves Government with the space to increase excise duty on petrol by a further ₹6 per litre and on diesels by ₹3 per litre.

"This is the option with the Government that could be con-



sidered later in the year depending on the need and prevailing global oil prices. If global oil and product prices remain at current levels or lower, a further duty hike this year is a strong possibility," said a source from public sector oil marketing company.

For consumers, any further increase in duty should not impact much as retail prices may be left unchanged or marginally increased as lower oil prices would allow for absorbing any increase in price.

However, a further increase in taxes on fuel would make the product most taxed globally.

The current taxes account for close to 70 per cent of the price of petrol and diesel. With any further increase in duty, this Fichte could reach 75-80 per cent level.

Higher retail price is not an option for the government at this juncture as it could push inflation.

According to Barclays the estimate is that the central government's revenue benefit from the additional hikes in fuel taxes undertaken on Tuesday, could be as much as ₹1.4 lakh crore (0.67% of GDP) on an annual basis. This is on top of an estimated ₹2.8 lakh crore already being collected by the central government from the fuel tax/cess, which would bring the total contribution to central exchequer from fuel taxes to ₹4.4 lakh crore (~2.1% of GDP). These projections assume that demand for both petrol and diesel will fall 12% in FY20-21.

# LOCKDOWN 3.0 Some auto cos resume production OTHERS PREPARE TO RESTART MANUFACTURING

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Automobile majors, including Maruti Suzuki India, Mercedes-Benz, TVS Motor, and Royal Enfield, on Wednesday announced resumption of or plans to restart production at their respective manufacturing units following relaxation of guidelines by the Government for the third phase of lockdown.

The country's largest car-maker Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) said it would resume operations at its Manesar plant from May 12. The Gurugram district administration had allowed MSI to run Manesar facility on a single shift basis, while fixing the total number of employees at plant at 4,696.

The company's Manesar (Haryana) plant is outside the limits of Gurugram Municipal Corporation, while its Gurugram plant falls within the city limits.

The two plants in Haryana have an installed capacity to roll

The Home Ministry had allowed factories in rural areas or those outside municipal limits to resume production under strict safety and hygiene guidelines from Monday with an aim to kickstart economic activity in the third phase of lockdown till May 17



out 15.5 lakh units per annum. Operations at the facilities are suspended since March 22.

Hyundai Motor India, which is yet to start rolling out vehicles from its Chennai plant though it has commenced preparations to do so, said around 250 company dealerships have resumed operations across various States.

On the other hand, Mercedes-Benz India said it has resumed production at its manufacturing facility in Chakan, Pune.

The production has commenced in a graded manner following directives from the

Government of Maharashtra to reopen and resume operations, the company said in a statement. Similarly, Chennai-based TVS Motor Company said it has commenced operations in India across all factories in Hosur, Mysuru and Nalagarh, while niche bike maker Royal Enfield also said it has resumed operations at its manufacturing plants.

However, Honda Cars India Ltd (HCL) said lack of required workforce is making it difficult for the company to resume operations at its two manufacturing plants, but added that its dealerships have

started to open across the country.

The automaker, which sells models like City and Amaze, said that with new relaxations from the Government, it is planning to restart operations at Tapukara plant in Rajasthan sometime next week.

Likewise, utility vehicle maker Isuzu Motors India also said it has received approvals from local authorities to resume operations at its plant in SriCity, Andhra Pradesh.

Similarly, tyre major MRF Ltd said it has partially resumed operations in most of its plants with restricted manpower, following relaxation of lockdown guidelines by the Government.

The Home Ministry had allowed factories in rural areas or those outside municipal limits to resume production under strict safety and hygiene guidelines from Monday with an aim to kickstart economic activity in the third phase of lockdown till May 17.

## Delhi HC to Centre: Verify, pay Bharti Airtel's ₹923 cr GST refund claim

New Delhi: In a relief to telecom major Bharti Airtel, the Delhi High Court has directed the Centre to verify the company's claim of excess GST of ₹923 crore within two weeks and refund the amount once verified. Bharti Airtel alleged that there was excess payment of taxes, by way of cash, to the tune of around ₹923 crore.

"This was occasioned to a great degree due to non-operationalisation of Forms GSTR-2A, GSTR-2 and GSTR-3 and the system related checks which could have forewarned the petitioner about the mistake. Petitioner now desires to correct its returns, but is being prevented from doing so, as there is no enabling statutory procedure implemented by the Government," said the judge.

"We also direct the Respondents that on filing of the rectified Form GSTR-3B, they shall, within a period of two weeks, verify the claim made therein and give effect to the same once verified," the High Court said.

## Oil marketing companies' shares trim most of sharp early losses

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of oil marketing companies — Indian Oil Corporation Ltd, Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd — on Wednesday trimmed most of their early losses at close of trade after plunging up to 13 per cent during the day after hike in excise duty on petrol and diesel.

Shares of Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) settled 5.68 per cent lower, Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) slumped 2.73 per cent and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) fell 0.94 per cent on the BSE.

During the day, HPCL tanked 13 per cent, Bharat Petroleum 9.99 per cent and Indian Oil 7.49 per cent. Late on Tuesday evening, the Government hiked excise duty on petrol by ₹10 per litre and that on diesel by ₹13 a litre to mop up gains arising from international oil prices falling to a two-decade low.

# Trai begins online OHDs, but tariff floor price issue may not be taken up for now

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Telecom regulator Trai on Wednesday resumed its customary open house discussion (OHD) on pending matters through video-conference but the issue of floor price of tariffs is unlikely to be taken up via online mode for now, till the ongoing situation arising from Covid-19 pandemic stabilises, a source said.

The Trai source said the regulator may soon come out with a consultation paper dealing with bill shocks in international mobile roaming, that will seek to address the issues faced by consumers in terms of loss of connectivity, and high bills.

The modalities of the consultation paper will be finalised soon, and it may be released within a month. The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) has, so far, lined up at least two OHDs — a standard practice followed by it to take verbal inputs from industry and public on specific issues — through video-conference for this month.

The source said in all probability an OHD will also be organised on the issue of "transparency in publishing of tariff offers", by month end. Besides, at least 3-4 other

OHDs will take place next month through video-conference, and online will be the regular mode for such discussions till things get back to normal. Even once things are back to normal, OHDs may assume a hybrid format, to ensure increased participation, the source added.

However, the issue of fixing floor price of tariffs may not figure immediately in OHD via video-conference, the source said adding that some of the pending matters are likely to be taken up first.

Also, given the ongoing scenario of coronavirus pandemic and the difficulties faced by people, Trai may wait for situation to stabilise before it proceeds to the OHD stage on floor price issue, the source said. When contacted, Cellular Operators' Association of India (COAI) Director General Rajan Mathews recently told PTI that the regulator is aware of the industry's sense of urgency, but that the industry will wait for Trai to take a call.

Stating that telcos are currently focusing on ensuring uptime, quality of service and engaging with the Government to open retail recharge facilities, Mathews said the "issue of floor price will emerge once we get past Covid-19 situation".

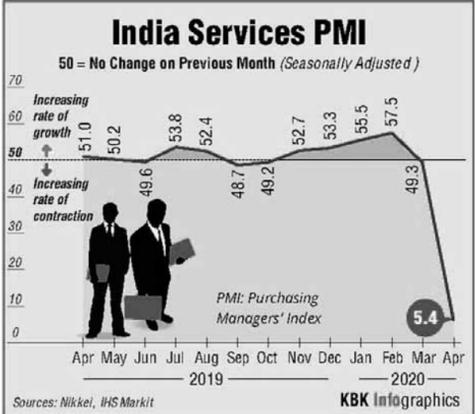
## US stocks end higher amid oil rally, hopes for economy reopening

IANS ■ NEW YORK

US stocks closed higher as market sentiment was boosted by a strong rally in oil prices and hopes for restarting the economy.

On Tuesday, the Dow Jones Industrial Average increased 133.33 points, or 0.56 per cent, to 23,883.09, after jumping more than 400 points earlier in the session, Xinhua news agency reported.

# April service sector output slides to record low, shows PMI



IANS ■ MUMBAI

The outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent national lockdown implemented to curb its spread, has led to a massive decline in India's service sector output in April, a macro-economic data point shot wed on Wednesday.

Accordingly, the IHS Markit India Services Business Activity Index showed a reading of 5.4 in April, which is an extreme decline from 49.3 in March, and indicative of the most severe contraction in services output since records began in December 2005.

An index reading of above 50 indicates an overall increase in economic activity and below 50, an overall decrease.

The survey panellists said the activity fell severely as a

result of the nationwide lockdown, leading businesses to shut down their operations as demand collapsed.

"Approximately 97 per cent of survey respondents observed a reduction in output, highlighting the widespread impact of the Covid-19 pandemic," the report said.

Similarly, the Composite PMI Output Index, which measures the combined services and manufacturing output, sank to a new record low in April.

"At 7.7 per cent, the index fell from 50.6 in March and was indicative of an unprecedented decline in private sector business activity," the report said.

"The latest reading was the smallest by some margin, eclipsing the previous low seen in February 2009."

# Report: Consumer enquiry rises in residential realty amid lockdown

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

Enquiries regarding residential properties across major cities by prospective buyers have increased during the lockdown, courtesy the online route, although sales remained subdued, according to a report by 360 Realtors.

The report noted that the coronavirus pandemic continues to undermine growth in the Indian realty sector, as demand has softened in most of the major cities.

"The industry showed some resilience by leveraging the digital medium, but a knock-off in site visits and sales was inevitable. The numbers plunged, thereby tanking overall sentiments. Interestingly, there was a steep rise in enquiries as people are

having plenty of extra time due to lockdown," it said.

In Pune, the monthly enquiries grew by 220 per cent in April, while in Bengaluru, the rise is pegged at 140 per cent, said. In Noida, it was up 58 per cent, followed by Mumbai where enquiries rose by 56 per cent.

Ankit Kansal, Founder and MD, 360 Realtors said: "Due to lockdown, most of the people are working from home, which is giving them ample time to research and learn more about properties.

Although COVID has triggered uncertainty and volatility in the market, it is also enabling wide-scale behavioural changes. Across the value chain, spurred adoption of the digital medium is visible."

In terms of demand, the

report said that the distress is more visible in markets like Gurugram, where a sharp 70 per cent monthly reduction in transaction volumes has been registered.

However, in other IT-centric markets like Pune and Bengaluru, the deceleration is more indistinct, as realtors can sell properties through online platforms.

It observed that there might be a possible compression of 10-25 per cent in the office rentals. The report further revealed that renewed leasing will be in the range of 20-25 million square feet in the year, a notable dip of around 50 per cent.

However, strata leasing and small ticket size sales of ₹50-70 lakhs will continue to infuse momentum.

# Luxury home sales up 9% in Delhi-NCR, Mumbai, Bengaluru in 2019: Report

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

Overall sale of luxury properties across the key markets of National Capital Region (NCR), Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) and Bengaluru rose by 9 per cent in 2019 on a year-on-year (YoY) basis to 40,376 units, according to a PropEquity report.

As per the report, supply of luxury units rose by 7 per cent in 2019 across the three metros to 31,230 units and the unsold inventory in the segment declined 9 per cent 95,965 units.

Sale of luxury housing in Delhi-NCR witnessed a growth of 17 per cent in 2019, while Bengaluru and MMR saw a growth of 10 per cent and 6 per cent respectively.

Samir Jasuja, Founder and MD of PropEquity said: "There was a limited demand

for luxury housing projects across India with ready-to-move-in options by Grade-A developers seeing some traction in 2019. Going ahead, we can expect some decent uptake for ready to move in and nearing completion luxury projects by renowned developers in top cities."

He further said that as corona pandemic is expected to subside in the next few months, the market may witness a positive spike in luxury demand as buyers who were delaying their decisions would enter the market.

"New supply of luxury housing units in Delhi-NCR jumped by 37 per cent to 8,026 units in 2019, whereas Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) saw a marginal growth of only 3 per cent to 15,720 units and new supply fell by 8 per cent to 7,484 units in the same period in Bengaluru," it said the report.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
Information is given to general public at large that my client Mrs. Divya Sharma & Mr. Sanjay Kumar Sharma owner of Freehold residential plot no. A-30 & A-31, area measuring 400 sq. Yards out of Khastha No. 1671, situated at Mohalla Modipon Colony Road (Kant), Enclave, Modinagar, Tehsil Modinagar, Dist. Ghaziabad, U.P. by virtue of Sale Deed dated 24.04.2019 registration no. 4399, Book No. 1, Vol. No. 815, Page no. 134, Dated 24.04.2020. SR Modinagar & Sale Deed dated 22.06.2012 as registration no. 8961, Book No. 1, Vol. No. 5380, Page no. 305-346, date-22.06.2012. SR-Modinagar in the chain surviving member certificate late Sri. Umrao Dadu died on 11.05.2011 is not available and same property is going to be financed by Aavas Financiers Limited. (Formerly known as AU Housing Finance Ltd.) Branch Modinagar, U.P. If any person having objection right claim against the said property, contact to the undersigned along with supporting documents within 7 days from the date of publication of this notice and or the same to the undersigned if found by any one.  
Naveen Kumar Verma, Advocate  
F-211, Sector-3, Vaishali, Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh-201010, Mobile: 09958871432

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
Information is given to general public at large that my client Mrs. Divya Sharma & Mr. Sanjay Kumar Sharma owner of Freehold residential property bearing no. WZ-131, built on plot no. 161, area measuring 200 sq. Yds., out of Must. No. 35, Killa no. 252, situated in the colony known as Vishnu Garden, area of village Khatwa, New Delhi by virtue of relinquishment deed dated 07.03.2010 as document no. 8045, volume no. 19176, pages no. 20-24, dated 09.03.2012 (SRO-II) in the chain surviving member certificate late Mr. Jagdish Lal Segan and Mrs. Prakash is not available and First Lady without roof rights sold to be Mrs. Shalu Migdal and same property is going to be financed by Aavas Financiers Limited. (Formerly known as AU Housing Finance Ltd.) Branch Dwarka Mor New Delhi. If any person is having objection right claim against the said property, contact to the undersigned along with supporting documents within 7 days from the date of publication of this notice and or the same to the undersigned if found by any one.  
Naveen Kumar Verma, Advocate  
F-211, Sector-3, Vaishali, Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh-201010, Mobile: 09958871432

**SEARCH FOR MISSING/KIDNAPPED**  
General public is hereby informed that a girl named Gudiya Kumari (D/o Nand Kishor, R/o 475/476, Railway Road, Azaadpur village, Delhi has been Missing/Kidnapped since 27.04.2020 from the area of P.S. Adarsh Nagar, Delhi. In this regard, FIR No. 387/2020, dated 28.04.2020 u/s 363 IPC has been registered at P.S. Adarsh Nagar, Delhi. Sincere efforts have been made by the local police to trace out the Missing/Kidnapped girl but no clue has come to light so far. The description of the Missing/Kidnapped girl is as under:  
**Name:** Gudiya Kumari, **Gender:** Female, **Age:** 17 years, **Height:** 4'6", **Complexion:** Wheatish, **Face:** Round, **Built:** Medium, **Wearing:** Black colour salwar, green colour kruti and pink colour dupatta and slippers in her feet.  
If anyone has any information regarding this Missing/Kidnapped girl, kindly inform SHO/P.S. Adarsh Nagar, Delhi.  
E-mail : cic@cbi.gov.in  
Ph: 011-24368638, 24368641  
Fax : 011-24368639  
SHO  
P.S. Adarsh Nagar, Delhi  
Ph. No. 011- 2767 4452  
DP/165/NW/2020

**SEARCH FOR MISSING**  
General public is hereby informed that a female named Mundi Devi W/o Late Sh. Bhoop Singh, R/o 3382, Delhi Gate Bazar, Delhi, Age: 67 yrs., Height: 5 ft., Complexion : Shallow, Face : Round, Built : Thin, ID Mark : A Cut Mark on Stomach and Mentally Weak, Wearing : Blue Colour Saree, Black Colour Blouse and Bare Footed, has been missing / kidnapped since 26.07.2015 from her house. In this regard a case DD No. 16-A dated 28.07.2015 has been lodged at P.S. Darya Ganj, Delhi. Sincere efforts have been made by local Police to trace out the missing / kidnapped female but no clue has come to light so far.  
if anyone have any information about this missing / kidnapped female please inform undersigned  
Website: http://cbi.nic.in, Email: cic@cbi.gov.in, Ph.: 011-24368638, 24368641, Fax : 011-24368639  
SHO  
DP/90/CD/2020. P.S. Darya Ganj, Delhi Ph.: 011-23279331, 23274683

Trend Glazer

'Always loved Indian history'

Actor **AYUSHMANN KHURRANA**, who has brought a change in mainstream Bollywood cinema with his roles, has enrolled himself for an online course on Indian history.

"I have always looked to better myself because I believe that we are blessed to learn and evolve for as long as we live. I'm a seeker of knowledge, have always been," said Ayushmann.

Talking about his love for Indian history, the *Bala* star added: "I have always loved Indian history and have been keen to know more about it. We have a fascinating history, it's rich diverse and dipped in culture."



'Before the lockdown, I was not so good at cooking. But during this phase, I have learnt a great deal. Thanks

to the self-quarantine phase, I can literally make a full course meal and I keep trying to improvise the skills. I try different cuisines so, yes, this phase has almost turned me into a chef.'

—Karan Tacker

MADHURI DIXIT

will be back as a judge on reality TV, when she returns on the new season of *Dance Deewane*.

Keeping the quarantine period in mind, she has urged dance enthusiasts to pick any corner of their homes and record a video to showcase their dancing talent.

"I'm truly honoured that we have been able to bring back another season of *Dance Deewane*. It's true that dance has always been my stressbuster. It helps elevate one's mood and I'm sure it is also keeping millions across the country motivated during these tough times," said she.



Chris is back on small screen

After a brief recent appearance on the small screen in *Parks And Recreation* reunion special, actor **CHRIS PRATT** is all set to be back on the small screen with the series, *The Terminal List*.

The show marks Pratt's first series appearance in a regular role after *Parks And Recreation* wrapped up in 2015. Now, the show has found a place at Amazon with a straight-to-series order.

The *Terminal List* is an adaptation of the bestselling 2018 novel of the same name by Jack Carr. Pratt is also an executive producer of the show, directed by Antoine Fuqua.



The 'bois locker room' case is not the disease, rather it is the manifestation of the many symptoms that have been eroding our social set-up over the years. Experts tell **SAIMI SATTAR** that the causes are not just inter-related but feed off each other

SPLIT WIDE OPEN



It started with a small trickle with the sharing of screenshots of chats of an Instagram group by an individual and, within a few hours, became a deluge. Soon social media was agog with the workings of the (now infamous) 'bois locker room,' where boys (and girls) spoke graphically about girls their age. Within three days, there have been enough twists and turns to match a thriller with arrests, leaking of more chats and name calling. But this is certainly not the first, and certainly not the last case where juveniles have been involved in cyber crime.

Experts who follow juvenile behaviour acquiesce. Dr Samir Parikh, Director and Head of Department of Mental Health and Behavioural Sciences, Fortis Healthcare says that the case didn't come as a surprise. "We are basically a hibernating society and need something to wake us up for some days, intellectualise it and then return to slumber. There are million other incidents out there," he says.

Supreme Court advocate Pavan Duggal, who specialises in Cyberlaw says, "The lockdown period has seen the highest spike in cyber crime in 20 years since the internet was introduced in India."

Of course, there are a number of reasons why such incidents take place.

PARENTS: THE FIRST LINE OF CONTROL

Societal norms hold parents responsible for bringing up children and imparting values. Consequently, the first fingers always point in their direction whenever youngsters are involved in behaviour that is deemed unacceptable. Dr Geetanjali Kumar, counselling psychologist and parenting coach for 22 years points out the gaps in present-day parenting. "Children have a sense of entitlement which springs from guilt compensatory parenting. The latest phones, the smartest TV in each bedroom are gifted by adults to make up for not spending time with children." The question to ask is why do youngsters need these rather than fulfilling every whim.

An extension of this is the way parents cover up their wards' misdemeanours. "There is no sense of ownership and responsibility as we haven't made them realise that every action has consequences," says Dr Kumar. A

missed test in school sees parents shooting off explanatory letters. "If the child hasn't finished the assigned work, we are quick to say it doesn't matter and we will pay the tutor," says Dr Kumar. The boundaries for the lack of responsibility keep on extending to underage or drunken driving and more.

Ethashree Bhati, clinical psychologist, says, "There are two kinds of parents. Ones who approach the problem calmly and question whether it was curiosity or sexual arousal that made the child do this? The other kind are harsh and don't try to understand the reasons. Their children are more likely to engage in this behaviour repeatedly, of course, secretly."

Role modelling too comes into play. When the first thing a parent does in the morning is to scroll the mobile, how can they admonish the child for the same?

BLURRED LINES

Society is in a state of flux where the greys are more prominent while the clear-cut demarcation between right and wrong has been obliterated. Rajat Mitra, Professor of Clinical Psychology, Amity University, who has worked extensively with juveniles and appeared in several hundred cases in court to assist its proceedings says, "Many parents are indifferent and haven't taken any assertive stand about value formation." He recalls an incident when Delhi Police found minors, both girls and boys, from upper middle class families in a state of undress and engaging in sexual acts in a public place. "Parents dismissed the behaviour by saying that the children were just having fun post exams. Right and wrong have become relative unlike in the past when values were absolute," points out Mitra further elaborating that most people feel that if it seems right, it must be so.

Bhati extends the argument further. She points out that 15 years ago, educators were talking about limiting children's screen time on parents' device and now every child has a personal one. "During lockdown, children retreat to their rooms on the pretext of online classes but neither the parents nor the teachers are aware of what they are doing. Even during a class they might be chatting or visiting adult sites," she says.

DEVIANT BEHAVIOUR

These blurring lines and easy access to pornography, with inherent violence, without any influence of ethics has repercussions. Mitra says, "Between 15-20 per cent adolescents get into violent sexual fantasies and some actually commit them."

Violent and vulgar sexual language seen in the 'bois locker room' screenshots is indicative of a violent streak. "This violence associated with the crime gives them a high more than the crime itself," says Mitra.

Another attribute of the young is the love of risk taking. Dr Kumar says, "The regulatory mechanism of the brain which advises caution isn't developed as yet which makes the prohibited more attractive."

MOB MENTALITY

What sparked outrage about the 'bois locker room' incident was that it consisted of a group, rather than just individuals, engaging in lewd conversations. Mitra explains, "The boys give collective shape to the violent fantasies as they don't have to feel individual guilt. It is the same psychology at work when crowds burn, kill, loot and rape in the actual world absolving individual responsibility. This is replicated digitally."

DISCONNECT IN EMOTIONS

Often we have seen that even at dinner tables people are glued to their individual mobiles. This effectively means a lack of communication. "Even the sibling bond isn't strong as children do not even watch TV together," says Dr Kumar.

A lack of communication leads to an inability to express emotions and a scarcity of emotional vocabulary. "We need to generate thinking with a logical and emotional perspective where you can define the whys and hows of emotions. Children get frustrated because they can't talk to anyone about their concerns like changing body, hormone surge and more," she adds.

CHANNELING RAGING HORMONES

The lack of communication means that they lack the arsenal to deal with their raging hormones. "Will it be done respectfully or in a vulgar fashion is

what makes or breaks the situation. I've had cases where 15-year-old girls have shared explicit photographs with boys and when discovered, threatened to slash their wrists if the parents say anything. The boys asking for photographs and the girls doing it willingly all point in the direction," says Kumar.

MEDIA: THE FAVOURITE PUNCHING BAG?

A change in the visual and vocabulary landscape of the media with the advent of first, cable television, and now, OTT platforms has been blamed for many societal ills. Dr Parikh says, "Attitudes and behaviours are formed by observation and imitation. The most accessible observable source is the media. Lack of censorship is taken as a sign of free thinking but if we see the top two-three shows on any streaming platform and their language, sexual portrayals as well as violence, we can see what the children were influenced by." He says that, as a deterrent, there should be a band at the bottom, highlighting the negative impact the way it is done with alcohol and cigarettes.

He points out that in the last decade we have deteriorated value-wise in the content. He gives the examples of dance shows featuring children and says, "Have you seen the expressions and movements of six-year-olds?"

Of the new media, the social kind has the singular largest impact. When in the adult world, it is commonplace to see violent, sexual and false narratives in social media as a way of bringing down independent women, what makes us think that children would be immune from the behaviour? Parikh too agrees, "Often Twitter trends have an abusive word and children do use it."

LACK OF RESPECT FOR WOMEN AND LAWS

"Do you know who is my father?" is a refrain that all of us have heard often in reel and real life. Mitra says, "Many children grow up in homes where they hear their parents openly talk of flouting laws and bribing police."

Coupled with the lack of respect for law is an extremely derogatory view of women. They grow up in cultures where women have got no respect or empathy. "This makes them incapable of empathetic or caring relationships," says Mitra.

ROLE OF SCHOOLS

After parents, schools are supposed to influence and educate children. Bhati says, "They haven't been able to talk about emotional closeness and a fulfilling relationships. They aren't imparting sex education and even if they are, children today believe that they know it all."

Dr Kumar, a pioneer in sex education was associated with the first adolescent education programme launched by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in 2002-3, says, "I start the talk on a neutral note and when I come to the topic of sex education, the vibrant discussion becomes lukewarm." Other gaps include the lack of counselling despite the presence of psychologists and counsellors.

WHAT DOES THE LAW SAY?

Duggal says, "Children accessing the internet have the basic presumption that they know more than their parents." Add to it the fact that the IT Act of 2000 which was amended in 2008 made all the offenses bailable. People on bails deleted the electronic evidence against themselves. Consequently, there has been a famine of cyber crime convictions giving children the impression that the law is inadequate to catch them. "The fact that we haven't got any exemplary conviction in the 17 years since 2003 makes youngsters reckless," says the lawyer who was the counsel for the first cyber crime conviction for the complainant in 2003. There has been a massive change in technology and a more holistic, topical Act which takes into account that most cyber offenses are committed by youngsters is needed.

In this case, the juveniles would at the most be sent to corrective homes or advised counselling. "Even in the applicable Act, Section 67 and 67 (A) which deal with sharing obscene electronic content against a woman were invoked by the police but they should have included Section 67 (B) which would deal with child pornography," says Duggal.

MOVING AHEAD

While this is one more in the series of offenses which have been committed, we cannot keep on moving our threshold further. Dr Parikh says, "The only hope is to create filters in young minds to minimise damage to belief systems, attitudes and behaviours. Gender sensitisation has to be a priority."

In a time when exposure is inevitable, the least we can do is protect children. "Media literacy should be taught in schools along with other subjects. This would enable them to question, 'Is it right?' 'How would this make me feel if it happened to me or my loved one?' 'Are they selling a product by using a celebrity?'" says Dr Parikh. Along with this, the media too needs self censorship, self realisation and responsibility.

Bhati emphasises on appropriate age-related sex education while Dr Mitra says that parents, schools and friends need to watch out for cues from adolescent. "There is a need for preventive action and greater awareness."

For this particular case, Dr Kumar says, "The parents and the children need to be counselled both in groups and individually. They should be encouraged to accept their mistake and then only is it possible to move forward." As for the larger picture, she feels parents and schools should work in tandem to reinforce values. "Counsellors in schools have to upgrade their skills. The lockdown is a time for schools to go inward and find out and address problems in their vision."

Only time will tell if the corrective actions will be put in place or if we will just slip back into slumber till the next and even more heinous offense grabs eyeballs.

Remake a hopeful world

The main thrust of **MICHELLE OBAMA's** documentary, *Becoming*, is not just her tale but what she inspires and how one story begets others

In the backstage hallways of Washington DC's Capital One Arena, Michelle Obama walks arm-in-arm with her husband, Barack Obama. She has just finished the third stop on what would be a 34-city book tour of such unprecedented scale that it almost resembled a Beyoncé concert tour.

Nadia Hallgren's camera is trailing her when Michelle perhaps looking for reassurance, asks the former president: "Does it seem like a show that you'd like to see?"

Hallgren's documentary, *Becoming*, is — more so than we've seen before — the Michelle Obama Show. It captures the former first lady, in settings both public and intimate, navigating her post-White House life, interacting with fans and generally fostering a spirit of positivity, self-belief and hope that few beside her husband are capable of inspiring.

"My life is starting to be mine again," she says in the film. "There's another chapter waiting for me out there."

*Becoming*, which debuts Wednesday on Netflix, is an extension of her 2018 best-selling memoir of the same name and a kind of authorised filmic portrait of Obama. It's produced by Higher Ground Productions, the film company founded by the Obamas.

Before now, Higher Ground has backed well-received, socially-minded documentaries about American labour (the Oscar-

winning *American Factory*) and the disability rights movement (the acclaimed Sundance-winner *Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution*). It's been an auspicious, award-winning beginning for Higher Ground, the most ambitious post-White House dive into Hollywood of any former US president. With *Becoming*, one half of Higher Ground now steps in front of the camera, too.

The film, itself, was a secret until last week when Netflix announced its forthcoming premiere. Hallgren typically worked with small crews or just by herself. Much of *Becoming* takes place either in arenas crowded with cameras or in private settings — the back seat of an SUV, the childhood home of Obama — so few would have spotted her.

"I think if people saw me, it probably looked very unofficial," chuckles Hallgren. Keeping *Becoming* clandestine still wasn't easy, though. "My closest friends had no idea what I was doing," Hallgren says. "People were always like, 'What are you up to?'"

Hallgren is a veteran documentary cinematographer



(*Trouble the Water, Girl Rising, Trapped*) making her feature directorial debut. The job, Hallgren believes, she won from her body of work and, as first

gleaned in a high-pressure meeting with Obama, their similarities. "She's from the South Side. I'm from the South Bronx," says the New York-bred filmmaker.

Unlike the interview-heavy Hulu doc-series *Hillary* on Hillary Clinton, Hallgren's approach is mostly fly-on-the-wall, mixing glossy onstage footage of Obama's talks with the likes of Oprah Winfrey, Reese Witherspoon and Stephen Colbert with more personal scenes offstage. Obama reflects on her eight years in the White House and the often racist-tinged response they engendered. "You hope people were more ready for us than maybe they were," she says.

Obama doesn't analyse the 2016 election or the rise of Donald Trump except for one comment lamenting the turnout of African American voters. "That's my trauma," she says.

But the main thrust of *Becoming* is not just Obama's story but what she inspires — how one story begets others. Hallgren, drawing from the photography of Garry Winogrand, lingers on the faces in Obama's crowds, and in some cases takes a moment to follow their lives. *Becoming* may be part concert film but it's nearly as interested in the audience as it is in the show-stopper on stage.

"Often times when Obama

was on stage, I was not the main camera filming her," says Hallgren. "So I had the opportunity to walk around. There was such an incredible energy in those arenas. The excitement that people had felt special. I thought: I want to capture this."

The timing of the documentary is interesting not just because it captures a sense of community before people were forced into lockdown by the pandemic but because it comes in the middle of the presidential campaign. The Deadline review of the film isn't alone in maintaining: "If Michelle Obama wasn't so adamant that she isn't running for public office, the perfectly timed documentary would sure seem like a campaign launch."

Obama, however, has steadfastly maintained she's not a political figure and hasn't before officially endorsed a candidate. Obama decline to be interviewed for this article but she released a statement when *Becoming* was announced.

"Even as we can no longer safely gather or feed off the energy of groups, even as many of us are living with grief, loneliness and fear, we need to stay open and able to put ourselves in other people's shoes. Empathy is our lifeline here. It's what will get us to the other side," said Obama. "Let's use it to redirect our attention toward what matters most, reconsider our priorities, and find ways to better remake the world in the image of our hopes."

# TOUCHING HEARTS, CHANGING LIVES

Here are some of the initiatives taken by the Department of Pension & Pensioners' Welfare to promote ease of living amid Coronavirus crisis

The Department of Pension & Pensioners' Welfare have taken the following initiatives to promote ease of living amid COVID-19 crisis:

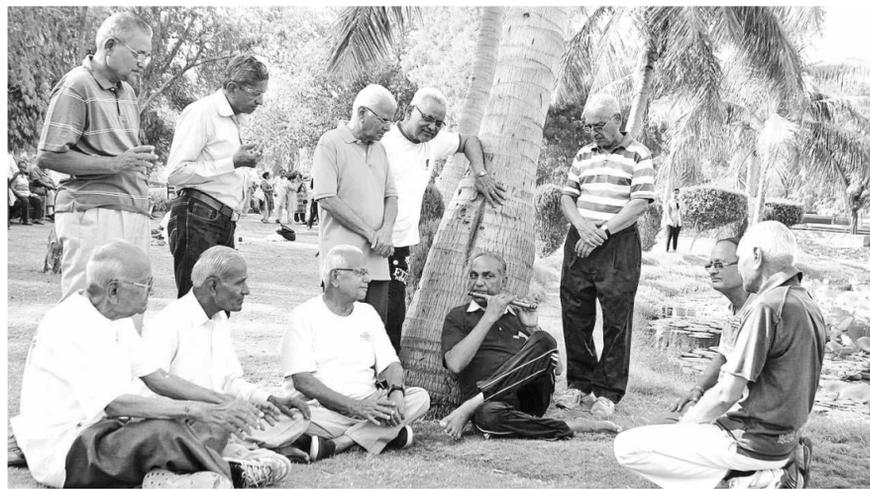
□ The Department of Pension & Pensioners' Welfare (DoPPW) has successively taken steps in the recent past date to make life easy for the Pensioners. Here are some other initiatives too

□ The department runs an online grievance portal "CPENGRAMS" (Centralised Pension Grievance Redressal & Monitoring Mechanism) in which any central government pensioner can register a complaint and the same is monitored by DoPPW till its final resolution and closure by the Pension settling Department/Ministry. DoPPW started a Toll-free call centre number 1800-11-1960 in June 2019 where pensioners grievances are lodged. The Department also counsels senior citizens on their pension related problems.

□ It got a deep-dive/root-cause analysis conducted by an independent third party. It was seen that some Ministries/departments often closed grievances routinely without qualitative resolution. It therefore evolved a model of on-the-spot resolution of grievances called the *Pension Adalat*.

□ With respect to NPS (National Pension System), DoPPW decided to start awareness workshops for central government employees. It conducted its first awareness programme at Jammu to educate the subscribers about the provisions of NPS and at the same time educate the different Departments on the Dos & Don'ts with respect to the system.

□ Keeping in view the representations/court cases filed by several central government officials covered under the NPS (National Pension Service) whose recruitment had been completed before January 1, 2004 but who for some reason, administrative or otherwise, could join service only on or after that, an option has been given to join the old pension system, if they so desire



by giving a one-time option up to May 31.

□ Another initiative was the promotion of Digital Life Certificate. Keeping in view the difficulty faced by those seniors who are settled abroad with their children after retirement, it brought out a circular on Consolidated Instructions on Life Certificate and Commencement of Family Pension for those living abroad, vide which the bank branches abroad and the Indian Embassies/Consulates/High Commissions have been instructed to facilitate submission of life certificate and commencement of family pension.

□ All pension disbursing banks have been instructed to provide door-step Life Certificate facility to those pensioners who are unable to visit banks in the month of November.

□ To provide comfort to pensioners aged 80 and above, OM dated July 18, 2019 enables them to submit their Life Certificate w.e.f. October 1 every year instead of November 1. A pilot was done in 2018 in 8 cities in which Pensioners' Associations were roped in

to go door to door and in hospitals/ICUs with newly purchased Iris devices to collect DLCs. This was expanded in 2019 to 24 cities.

DoPPW also showed the sensitive side of the government with several reforms which touched human lives immensely. To enumerate a few:

□ Rule 54 of CCS (Pension) Rules was amended to provide for payment of enhanced family pension (50 per cent of last pay) to families of even those employees who die during service before completing service of seven years. Earlier, the family of an employee who died during service before completing service of seven years was not entitled to enhanced family pension.

□ A minimum qualifying service of 10 years is required for eligibility for pension under the CCS (Pension) Rules. Rule 38 of CCS (Pension) Rules amended to provide for Invalid Pension at 50 per cent of last pay to those government servants who retire due to bodily or mental infirmity even before completing qualifying service of

10 years.

□ For those living in non-CGHS areas, for OPD the amount of Fixed Medical Allowance (FMA) raised from ₹ 500 per month to ₹ 1000 per month.

□ Permission of CMO/CGHS dispensed with for sanctioning FMA to pensioners residing in cities/areas not covered under CGHS.

□ Co-authorisation of pension for disabled children/siblings/dependent parents introduced in the PPO. This would avoid the delay and hassles of a fresh PPO by the office in favour of disabled children/siblings/dependent parents.

□ Minimum pension raised from ₹ 3500 per month to ₹ 9000 per month. Minimum disability pension and family pension covered under CCS(EOP) Rules enhanced from ₹ 7,000 to ₹ 18,000.

ments as against the existing entitlement of 12 times of emoluments.

□ The ceiling of gratuity raised from ₹ 10 lakh to ₹ 20 lakh.

□ The rates of ex-gratia lump-sum compensation being paid to the families of employees who die in performance of duty has been increased from existing ₹ 10-15 lakh to ₹ 25 to 45 lakh, depending upon the circumstances in which the death occurs.

□ DoPPW also targeted awareness of pensioners/family pensioners through social media. The Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) Development of North-Eastern Region (DoNER), MoS PMO, Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions, Atomic Energy and Space, Dr Jitendra Singh launched the Twitter *Do You Know Series* on Family Pension at Jammu on February 29.

□ DoPPW will now take out a series of 30 info graphics (two per week) to spread awareness about family pension. Through this, the Pensioners/Family Pensioners/Departments & Ministry officials/Bank officials/Pensioners' Associations will become aware of the family entitlements for which till now they had to run around offices. Two booklets on family pension, in Hindi and English were also released by the MoS(PP).

□ *Bhavishya* (Online pension settling system): Pensioners' portal was strengthened by adding the facility of online pension sanction process — *Bhavishya*. It is a software with a digitised end to end solution for pension settlement. As of now more than 1 lakh cases have already been processed through this software.

□ *Sankalp*: With a view to re-orient pensioners towards an active post retired life and utilise their skill and experience towards nation building activities and social work, a new initiative namely *Sankalp* was undertaken. Under this, Pre-Retirement Counselling (PRCs) are being organised for those employees who are about to retire in a year.

## IN SHORT



K G Hospital of Chittaranjan Locomotive Works (CLW) has tested their new remote-controlled medical trolley to serve isolated Coronavirus patients in the hospital. This trolley has been manufactured in-house, which is equipped with

sophisticated remote-controlled device and can enable two-way communication with remote camera. The trolley or cart can carry medicines, food, bed sheets, etc, and thus, help maintain social distancing between patients and medics. It can also facilitate contact with the relatives of the patients through its mobile app.



GAIL (India) Ltd employees have been working tirelessly in these difficult times from home and have made a humble effort of producing a music video titled *Ruk Jana Nahin* to motivate each other and frontline Corona warriors. This song can be accessed through GAIL's Facebook page. It posted: "While practicing #SocialDistancing and #Sanitization, we are #EmergingPossibilities of defeating #COVID19. Even in these times of crisis, we wouldn't let the #NaturalGas, PNG and bulk LPG supplies break through the dedicated efforts of our entire work force. To contribute to the nationwide fight against COVID-19, GAIL and its employees have taken many more online initiatives to motivate Indian masses."



IP University has extended the last date for submission of online application forms for all programmes to May 25 in view of extension of lockdown period amid the Coronavirus pandemic. Now, the online application window for admission to all programmes of the university based on Common Entrance Tests (CETs) on the basis of merit will be open till the extended date. Applicants can visit the university website [www.ipu.ac.in](http://www.ipu.ac.in) for online application procedure, admission brochure, CET schedule and other details.

The VITEEE (VIT Engineering Entrance Examination) for admission to engineering programmes in the VIT group of Institutions (Vellore, Chennai; Bhopal and AP) is scheduled to be held from July 29 to August 2. The examination will be held in 119 cities across India. During the examination, all central and state government regulations and guidelines on social distancing and hygiene will be strictly followed.

## IAF salutes Corona warriors at KIMS

Indian Air Force showered flower petals on Kalinga Institute of Medical Sciences (KIMS) Covid Hospital, Bhubaneswar in a flypast from its helicopters on Wednesday as a mark of gratitude from the nation to the medical professionals combating COVID-19 crisis. The IAF took this initiative to boost the morale of the Corona warriors, who have dedicated themselves to save lives of the patients affected by novel Coronavirus.

The KIMS Authority has expressed pleasure for the show of solidarity by the IAF. "We express our heartfelt gratitude to the Government of India for motivating and lifting the spirits of COVID-19 warriors at KIMS. Through this, the will power of all the doctors, nurses and paramedical staff along with patients will be strengthened by and large and they would continue their fight against the novel Coronavirus disease with renewed zeal," said Dr Achyuta Samanta, founder of KIIT, KISS & KIMS.

He also thanked Naveen Patnaik, chief minister, Odisha, for his support to open a special Covid Hospital at KIMS. "As a result, it has been possible



for us to witness such a remarkable and memorable moment," added Dr Samanta.

"We have come forward to a great extent in this war against COVID-19 and it is because of Dr Samanta's consistent endeavor to augment our moral strength," said the doctors.

Among the dignitaries, Dr Subrat Acharya, pro-chancellor, KIIT Deemed to be University, Dr Bishnu Prasad Panigrahi, CEO, KIMS, Maj. Gen. Dr PK Patnaik, principal, KIMS and Dr Ambika Prasad Mohanty, MS, were also present to witness the aerial salute along with other staff members.

## Greater Noida authority grateful to employees

In a new beginning made by chief executive officer, Greater Noida authority honoured its employees by announcing the 'Employee of the Month'. It expressed its gratitude to all permanent and contractual employees including drivers, security guards, sweepers, gardeners, and sweepers. This will be followed monthly to encourage positive environment.

ACEO Deep Chand said that it has been decided by the authority that employees, who cared for the residents without caring about their own lives during the pandemic and acted selflessly should be thanked. Its over 500 staff members are engaged in distributing food to the needy and providing civic services across the city.

Chand also said, "We cannot honour the staff members with prize money due to fund crisis. Hence, we are thanking by crowning them with respect." The authority said that its employees have now disinfected about 40 areas and are working to disinfect an equal number of villages everyday to control the spread of COVID-19.



cannot honour the staff members with prize money due to fund crisis. Hence, we are thanking by crowning them with respect." The authority said that its employees have now disinfected about 40 areas and are working to disinfect an equal number of villages everyday to control the spread of COVID-19.

## ICAR-CRIJAF stands for jute farmers

Amid COVID-19 crisis, jute farmers of West Bengal and other jute-growing states have done a commendable work by sowing the crop in more than 90 per cent of their areas. In some states, 15 to 20 per cent more sowing area is anticipated despite lockdown and restrictions. All this was possible by the efforts of ICAR-CRIJAF, Barrackpore who issued regular agro-advisory, constant monitoring on availability of seeds, implements and other agro-inputs to the farmers and other stakeholders.

Farmers are worried about the infestation of pests and diseases on jute due to the rainy weather. At present, the jute crops in the farmers' fields of different parts of the state is almost 20-50 days old depending on the sowing time. Due to the heavy rain in some pockets of Bengal and adjoining states, the jute fields have been waterlogged. Under such changing weather conditions, the crop now needs infestation, said ICAR-CRIJAF director, Dr Gouranga Kar.

He added that the institute is issuing weekly agro-advisory on priority to outreach farmers and extension personnel of state governments through different digital platforms. He also said that around seven lakh farmers of different jute-growing states are get-



ting benefitted every week through their agro-advisory.

Under rainy and waterlogged situation, he advised that the farmers should drain out the water immediately. After a few days there may be incidence of seedling blight and damping off. If such condition arises, some common fungicides like mancozeb (1g/l) or carbendazim (4g/l) may be sprayed once the field is drained out and dried up.

The damage of Indigo caterpillar has been reported from many farmers' fields, said Dr Satpathy, head division of Crop Protection, ICAR-CRIJAF. The insect usually becomes more problematic in jute fields, in which cabbage, cauliflower, potato, etc, were grown as the previous crop. In case of heavy damage, the farmers should go for the spraying of chlorpyrifos 20EC (2 ml/l).

In grown up jute plants of 30-

50 days, grey colour weevils with dark white spots and elongated heads are visible on the growing foliage. Heavy defoliation weakens the plant and adversely affects the growth. In case of considerable damage, foliar spray of chlorpyrifos 50EC+cypermethrin 5EC combination (1-1.5 ml/l) or chlorpyrifos 20EC (2ml/l) or quinalphos 25 EC (1.25 ml/l) may be done.

Generally, after moderate rainfall, the yellow mite infestation in jute goes down. But chances are that just after rain, once the weather is clear and there is abundant sunshine and the temperature is high, the mite infestation gradually increases. Maintain adequate soil moisture to reduce the damage symptom caused by mite infestation. In case of rain, wait for at least five to six days to initiate the acaricide spray if symptoms persist.

Dr Kar also said that it is advised to always use protective clothing, gloves and mask to avoid the drift of the insecticide. While conducting any type of intercultural operation, like pesticide spray, the farmers are advised to maintain social distancing and take all other preventive measures as per the advisory to check the spread of COVID-19.

## VEDIC WORSHIP CONTAINS DISEASE SPREAD

After a complete destruction of the world, god recreates the universe and simultaneously gives the knowledge of four Vedas in the heart of four *rishis* because in the absence of Vedic knowledge, human beings would remain ignorant and would be unable to utilise the purpose of their worldly existence.

The first mantra of *Rigved* is: *Agnimeedey Purohitam*. It refers to the virtue that a person must desire to worship god and before beginning any new thing, should first remember god to destroy all the sorrows, problems, diseases etc.

Vedas are the invaluable treasure of education of each and every worldly subject that is, right from straw to Brahma. Therefore, medical science is also a part and parcel of Vedic knowledge.

An *Atharvaved* mantra preaches that god is the creator, who nurses and is "Su *Bhishaktamaha*" that is, the most supreme doctor. Hence, god is empowered to destroy all diseases, which cannot be controlled by any doctor in the world.

This is why several doctors, duly inspired by almighty god, clearly inform the relatives of highly critical patients that, "We, the doctors, have done our best, now everything lies in the hands of god." But it's our bad luck

that we are ignorant of the Vedas and hence, never praise, pray or worship god according to Vedas.

If we stop remembering god, the supreme power stops protecting us from diseases and leaves us to bear the sorrows according to our previous lives' bad deeds.

Vedas preach that the base of the human life is *Brahmacharya*. So another *Atharvaved* mantra preaches that when a person maintains firm *brahmacharya*, then a precious gem of strength is generated in his body, which kills all the microbes that cause diseases.

Further, it also preaches that *Brahmacharya* generates the best medicine within the body to kill all types of disease-causing germs. But there is a doubt that in the absence of holding Vedic knowledge whether or not *Brahmacharya* can be maintained.

In previous *yugas*, the knowledge of Vedas was in vogue. As a result, everyone used to maintain *Brahmacharya*, perform daily *Yajyen/agnihotra*, which purified the air, water, food, etc. Therefore, the question of suffering from any disease did not arise.

In current life, living beings, including humans, spread pollution in the atmosphere. If we go by a *Yajurved* mantra, we will find that if we perform

daily *agnihotra/Yajyen*, then all infectious diseases could be destroyed. It purifies the air and thus erodes all kinds of pollution. Where would then the diseases exist?

But to our bad luck, unlike previous *yugas*, we are not aware of the vedic knowledge and as a result are unable to liberate ourselves from serious diseases spreading in the world currently.

Let us pay our attention to a *Yajurved* mantra, which preaches that if a person makes contact with a learned *Acharya* or *guru*, then s/he, by teaching him Vedic knowledge, can help him purify his speech, respiratory system, senses, vision, the source of hearing, naval, organs of excretion and ultimately, his character and conduct.

These are the results that one will find in oneself if one follows vedic mantras:

- There will never be any kind of diseases spreading around.

- *Yajyen* purifies the universe if it is performed by everybody. It emerges in the form of smoke, which reaches up to the sun's rays and then, spreads around, reaching humans and other living beings. Thus it purifies the air and atmosphere.

(The author is Swami Ram Swarup, Yogacharya, the chief editor of the Ved Ishvareeya Vani magazine.)

# Drive to succeed different for Kohli and Smith: Warner Will need at least one month of training: Rahane

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

They have similar impact on their teams but Virat Kohli is driven by sheer passion to subdue the rivals while Steve Smith just enjoys batting, says Australia opener David Warner.

India skipper Kohli and top Australian batsman Smith are arguably the top two cricketers of the current era. They achieve new milestones consistently, invoking debates, who is better between them.

"Virat's passion and drive to score runs is different to what Steve's would be," Warner said while speaking to Harsha Bhogle on 'Cricbuzz in Conversation'.

"Steve is going out there for a hit in the middle, that's how he sees things. He's hitting them out in the middle, he's having fun, he's enjoying himself, just does not want to get out."

Warner feels, while Kohli is batting he is aware that if he sticks around the middle his team will be on top of the proceedings.

"Virat obviously doesn't want to get out but he knows if he spends a certain amount of time out there, he's going to score plenty of runs at a rapid rate. He's going to get on top of you. That allows the guys coming in, especially in the Indian team you've got a lot of players who can be flamboyant as well."

The Australian opener added that both men are mentally strong and a good knock by them boosts the morale of the entire team.

"When it comes to cricket, they both have got the mental strength, the mental capacity to score runs. They both love spending time in the middle."



"They stabilise, they boost morale - if they score runs, everyone else's morale is up. If they are out cheaply you almost sense that on the field that everyone is (down on morale and thinking) 'now we all have to step up'. It's a very bizarre situation," he added.

Asked about the similarities between himself and Kohli, who are

both live wires on the field, Warner said the passion to do better than the opponent keeps him going.

"I can't speak for Virat, obviously, but it's almost like we got this thing in us when we go (out to the middle) we need to prove people wrong, prove someone wrong."

"If you're in that contest, and if I'm going at him for example, you're

thinking, 'Alright, I'm going to score more runs than him, I'm going to take a quick single on him'. You are trying to better that person in that game. That's where the passion comes from."

Warner also explained how he breaks down a match into smaller competitions.

"Obviously you want to win the

**"When it comes to cricket, they both have got the mental strength, the mental capacity to score runs. They both love spending time in the middle. They stabilise, they boost morale - if they score runs, everyone else's moral is up. If they are out cheaply you almost sense that on the field that everyone is (down on morale and thinking) 'now we all have to step up'. It's a very bizarre situation,"**

game but you almost break it down to: If I can score more runs than Virat, or if Pujara scores more runs than Steve Smith, you have these little contests and that's how you try to narrow the game in the sense that if we do these little things, we can be ahead of the game or we can be behind the game.

"The passion is driven by...I know my sense - one, the will to win and two, wanting to do better than that person in the opposition," said Warner.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's Test vice-captain Ajinkya Rahane on Wednesday said cricketers will need at least a month of training before resumption of competitive games, which should happen only after a vaccine for the dreaded COVID-19 is discovered.

Rahane also said that in a coronavirus-scarred world, the lifestyle of cricketers will undergo a change as far as pre and post-match routines are concerned.

"...We would be needing three to four weeks of proper practice before playing any kind of competitive game (domestic or international)," Rahane, who was named brand ambassador of ELSA (English Language Speech Assistant) app, said during an online press conference.

"...I am missing my batting. But obviously, cricket should only start when we get a vaccine to fight the virus," he asserted.

While the sports ministry is planning a phased resumption of national camps in Olympic disciplines, the BCCI is yet to spell out its plans on cricket. Rahane said he is focussing on his fitness amid the lockdown.

"I am following the chart given by our trainer. I am also doing 'free weights' at home apart from meditation," he said.

He agreed that in future, players will be wary of wild celebrations and group hugs which they are so used to at the fall of wickets.

"I think we might go back to the good old days when fielders would



still stand in their designated positions after the fall of a wicket and clap. May be handshakes will be replaced by a 'Namaste'," the elegant Mumbai right-hander predicted.

"But once sport resumes, you can't take anything for granted. The safety of the fans will be of utmost importance. There will be changes in lifestyle while travelling. Especially before and after the match," Rahane said.

However he was non-committal on whether there should be a ban on the use of saliva to shine the ball, a topic of debate right now.

"I would like to wait and watch. You will only get a fair idea about revised rules once play resumes."

## I have learnt to accept my failures: Samson

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

He has flattered to deceive on a humpteen occasions but highly-rated wicketkeeper-batsman Sanju Samson says he has learnt to accept his failures in pursuit of the calm demeanour that former India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni possesses.

The 25-year-old from Kerala has always been talked about by the likes of Rahul Dravid and Gautam Gambhir but it hasn't translated into international success with only four T20 Internationals in his kitty in the last five years.

"I have learnt to understand and focus more on my strengths and (be more) accepting (of) the failures. I try to contribute to the team's cause and try to take the team over the line. I am learning to focus and control my emotions while batting like MS Dhoni," Samson said during a podcast organised by Rajasthan Royals.

He recently made a comeback in India's T20 side and it was a worthy experience for him.

"It was great to be a part of the Indian team again. To be a part of one of the best teams in the world, surrounded by players like Virat bhai and Rohit bhai, it was a fantastic experience," Samson said.

In one of the games in New Zealand, Samson was sent to bat in the Super Over, something which made him feel wanted in the Indian set-up.

"It was a great feeling to be trusted by the players such as Virat bhai and Rohit bhai to go out there and bat in the crucial moments. It's a great feeling when the team and the play-



ers consider you to be a match winner." On a lighter note, Samson revealed that he refers to Steve Smith as "chachu" (uncle) after Brad Hodge once started calling him by that name.

"I share a very good relationship with 'Chachu' Steve Smith. He is one of the best brains in world cricket and we all enjoy a lot playing under him."

While Dhoni is his idol, he also loves watching Jos Buttler in Royals and makes notes on how the star Englishman prepares for games.

"I observe Jos especially given he too is a wicketkeeper-batsman. He's always working on his skills and his game and never sits idle."

"He's either working on his keeping, batting in the nets or running around the park. I love to observe and know how he thinks and prepares as a keeper before a game."

## If you think Virat is good to watch, have a look at Babar bat: Moody

IANS ■ LAHORE

Former Australia all-rounder Tom Moody believes Pakistan batsman Babar Azam has grown by leaps and bounds in recent times and will "definitely" be among the top five batsmen of the decade in Test cricket in the near future.

"He (Babar) has emerged over the last year or so into something that is going to be so special. We talked about how Virat Kohli is so good on the eye as a batsman. If you think Virat Kohli is good to watch, have a look at Babar Azam bat. My gosh, he is something special," Moody said in The Pitch Side Experts Podcast as quoted by crick- etpakistan.com.pk.

**"I THINK IN THE NEXT FIVE TO TEN YEARS, HE WILL DEFINITELY BE IN YOUR TOP FIVE (BATSMEN OF THE DECADE) WITHOUT A QUESTION,"**

"I think in the next five to ten years, he will definitely be in your top five (batsmen of the decade) without a question," he added.

The former Sunrisers Hyderabad coach, however, admitted considering Azam's statistics at



the moment, it is very difficult to put him in the top five current batsmen.

"I think, in the next 5-10 years, he will be on your top five position. Even though he has played 26 matches but in half of those matches he was not considered even part of the main batting line-up for Pakistan. He was the after-thought down the order," he said.

"I think at the moment, it is very hard to justify him at that position given his statistics. Away from home he is only averaging 37 and at home he is averaging 67. But we have to consider that he has hardly played away from home and a lot of those games away were during the early part of his career," Moody added.

## 'Current Ind team can't be compared to Aus teams of 90s and 2000s'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Virat Kohli's Indian team still has a long way to go before it is spoken of in the same breath as Australia of 2000s, feels former India pacer Ashish Nehra.

Under Kohli's leadership, India earned its maiden series victory in Australia in 2018-19, achieving the feat after trying for seven decades.

However, it can't be discounted that absence of Steve Smith and David

Warner due to ball tampering ban turned out to be an important factor.

"This Indian team has to still cover a lot of distance in order to match up with that Australia team (led by Steve Waugh and then Ricky Ponting)," Nehra said during an interaction with ex-player Aakash Chopra on his show 'Aakash Vani'.

"You are talking about an Australian team which won three consecutive World Cups and before that reached the final in

1996, won 18-19 Test matches in home and away conditions," Nehra added.

He also did not appreciate the fact that every now and then team combination is being tinkered with.

"It's not like this Indian team can not reach there but I believe the core group is very important. A person gets confused after watching many dishes on the table and so it's important to have fewer but better dishes,"

Nehra made his displeasure clear.

He went on to cite how team management had handled Rishabh Pant's career so far.

"KL Rahul is playing on the fifth position and Pant, the person you were preparing to succeed M.S. Dhoni, is serving drinks," the left-arm fast bowler, known for his straight forward views, said.

Thanks to his inconsistency, Pant had lost his place in the Indian team in white-ball cricket to

Rahul.

"I know he (Pant) has missed his chances and there is no doubt about it but then you have kept him in the team because you saw the potential in him at 22-23 years," Nehra said.

"There are a lot of talented players but they should be backed for a longer duration. Today also when we talk about the number five and six slots in Indian ODI side, then we are not sure about it," Nehra said.

## MCC to offer President Sangakkara second term

PTI ■ LONDON

The Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) on Wednesday announced that it would recommend a second term for its President Kumar Sangakkara owing to the global disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The former Sri Lanka wicketkeeper-batsman became the first non-British President of the club when he assumed office on October 1 last year.

"The disruption to the global cricketing landscape caused by the outbreak of Covid-19 has led the Committee to recommend that Sangakkara, who began his term of office on 1 October 2019, be invited to serve as President of the Club until 30 September 2021," the club said in a statement.

The recommendation for Sangakkara's extension will be sent for approval to the club's members at the Annual General Meeting, which has been scheduled for June 24. The club also added that this was not the first time a president will serve beyond his one year tenure.

While Presidents of MCC only normally serve for a twelve-month period, it is not unprecedented for longer terms to be introduced to respond to extraordinary circumstances."



## 'We have become more aggressive under Reid'

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Defender Gurinder Singh feels India has been playing an aggressive brand of hockey under chief coach Graham Reid, and it has helped the team in creating more goal scoring opportunities.

India displayed an attacking brand of play in the FIH Hockey Pro League earlier this year and reaped rich rewards for it, beating Australia and world champions Belgium.

"It's been over a year since chief coach Reid has joined us and I am sure one can see the difference he has brought to the side since April last year. We have become much more aggressive in our approach and therefore we are creating many more goal-scoring opportunities," Gurinder said.

Gurinder said since his arrival Reid has been working closely with every player, besides emphasising on team tactics.



Indian hockey coach Graham Reid in action Hockey India/Twitter

him shift focus from working on team tactics to the development of each and every player during the senior men national coaching camp in November last year," he said.

"Since there was a lot of time to prepare for the next tournament after the Olympic Qualifiers, chief coach Reid spent time with all players and ensured that we improved on certain aspects during the camp," he added.

Gurinder, who has been in and out of the team, said his immediate goal is to book

a place in the Olympic-bound team.

"I am working extremely hard to book a place in the Indian team for the Olympics at the moment. Keeping myself fit is my number one priority during the lockdown period and I am carrying out some stickwork drills as well."

"Playing for India at the Olympics has been a dream since childhood and hopefully, I will make it to the squad and contribute to India winning a medal at the quadrennial event," he said.

## Nadal pessimistic about return of competitive tennis in 2020

AP ■ MADRID

If given the option, Rafael Nadal said he would skip this season entirely so tennis could resume normally in 2021.

The second-ranked Spaniard, who is 33 years old and has won 19 Grand Slam titles, said he hoped to resume playing this year but doubted it could happen because of the coronavirus pandemic.

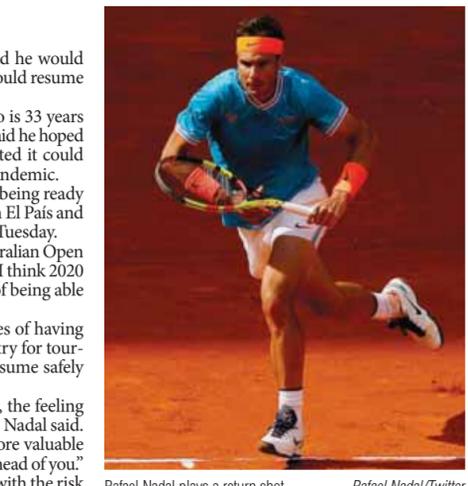
"I would sign up right now just to being ready for 2021," Nadal said in interviews with El Pais and other Spanish newspapers published Tuesday.

"I'm more concerned with the Australian Open than with what happens later this year. I think 2020 has been practically lost. I'm hopeful of being able to start next year."

Nadal said the logistical difficulties of having to move people from country to country for tournaments make it hard for tennis to resume safely amid the pandemic.

"Sadly, I'm not going to lie to you, the feeling is that we are losing a year of our lives," Nadal said.

"And at 33, 34 years old, that is more valuable than at 20, when you have more time ahead of you," Nadal recently said he was concerned with the risk of new injuries when players return to action after a long time without proper training. The Spaniard has had to deal with a series of injuries throughout his career and expects his body to struggle again when competitions finally resume.



Rafael Nadal plays a return shot Rafael Nadal/Twitter

whether he could practice normally after the government eased some of the lockdown measures that have been in place in the country since mid-March. Professional and high-performance athletes have been allowed to resume practicing at any time this week, but sports facilities and training centers are to remain closed, with some exceptions for soccer clubs and a few other sports.

## Anti-doping hearings to be conducted online: Agarwal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The National Anti-Doping Agency's Director General Navin Agarwal on Wednesday said the body will conduct its disciplinary hearings online from Friday despite the many logistical challenges to ensure cases don't pile up due to the national lockdown.

NADA hearings have not been taking place due to the lockdown to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.

"That's right, we will be starting with our online hearings from May 8. Both Anti-Doping Disciplinary Panel (ADDP) and Anti-Doping Appeals Panel (ADAP) hearings will be conducted for the cases which are pending," Agarwal told PTI in an interview.

"Last year, they (ADDP and ADAP) did a remarkable job and disposed off so many cases which hasn't happened earlier in the history of NADA. Our panels disposed off 180 cases which is a record for the agency," he asserted.

Agarwal acknowledged that the unprecedented step would have its share of operational hassles. Listing inconsistent or unavailable internet as one of them, Agarwal said athletes will be allowed to participate via audio calls to ensure that things can be managed smoothly.

"We understand that the athlete needs to have the (internet) facility at his home for the hearings. I know there are limitations. We are working on that and made arrangements at our level."

"It will only be done on the availability of an athlete through either audio or video. I know in rural areas, internet bandwidth can be an issue or network, we are game with even an audio recording or a conference call," he explained.

"We are requesting the ministry as the campuses in NIS Patiala and Sports Authority of India (SAI) Bengaluru are closed and have barred entry or exit of any outsiders as per government guidelines."

"So we are taking this up with ministry and would like to know whether our Dope Control Officers (DCOs) will be allowed inside the campuses for testing subject to all clearances," he said.