



SUNDAY STORY, PAGE 6  
**WHAT'S ON THEIR PLATE?**  
The wait of stuck migrants is made worse by lack of familiar food. Telling their stories over meals in a day

**LAST WEEK OF LOCKDOWN**

**Before PM meeting with CMs, signal: ease curbs in zero-case districts, hotspots remain sealed**

As roadmap is framed, on table data showing 289 dists of country's 718 have no cases

**ABANTIKA GHOSH**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 25

AFTER MAY 3, districts with zero COVID-19 cases should be opened up with strict implementation of social distancing and full systemic preparedness for contact tracing in containment zones, if and when infections are detected.

This appears to be the emerging consensus among policy makers and experts involved in formulating the government's response to the outbreak as the country enters the last week of a sweeping lockdown that was imposed a month ago.

All eyes are now on the videoconference Monday between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and chief ministers that is expected to shape the broad contours of the roadmap ahead.

"One clear idea that has emerged is that the lockdown should not be extended in districts with no cases. But the states have a very important role to play in the final roadmap. That is why the Monday meeting will bring some clarity," sources said.

According to district-wise data released by the Health Ministry earlier this week, 429 of the country's 718 districts have reported positive cases, leaving 289 in the clear.

So far, sources said, two options have emerged from deliberations among various committees involved in the government's strategy. One of them is to go strictly by a hot-spot/non-hotspot classification, they said. The other is to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



At a bus stand in Guwahati on Saturday, beginning of a three-day window offered by Assam to stranded people to travel across the state on curfew passes. Over 41,000 applied to avail of inter-district bus services. Approximately 5,000 people travelled on the first day, officials said. *Dasarath Deka*

**Bengal yet to take call on opening shops as states figure out the midnight change**

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI, KOLKATA, APRIL 25

THE WEST Bengal government on Saturday said it was yet to take a call on allowing neighbourhood and standalone shops to open, in accordance with a directive issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

The Union Home Ministry's advisory late Friday night relaxed curbs to allow functioning of select shops within and outside municipal limits.

A senior state government official said the MHA order was being studied and a final call in this regard will be taken soon.



A photocopy shop in Kolkata on Saturday. *Partha Paul*

In rural areas, all shops, except those in single and multi-brand shopping malls, are allowed to open.

Other states reacted differ-

ently to the Centre's guidelines, with Gujarat, Kerala, Delhi and Odisha saying shops can open, while Punjab, Maharashtra

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

**Centre revises Centre's guidelines, states left scrambling to catch up**

**DEEPTIMAN TIWARY**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 25

LATE FRIDAY night, as the Centre issued orders allowing shops and markets in rural areas and stand-alone shops in urban areas to open for sale of even non-essential items for the first time since the COVID-19 lockdown, states reacted with caution.

Alluding to the legalese of the order, Punjab Special Chief Secretary KBS Sidhu tweeted the Centre's order and said: "So, this seems to be good news about some shops being al-

**CORONA COUNT**

24,942 CASES 779 DEATHS

5,210 RECOVERED

5,79,957 samples have been tested as on April 25

lowed to open by Gol. Can some volunteer translate this into simple English?"

Hours later, Assam Chief Secretary Kumar Sanjay Krishna tweeted: "State government

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

**Put up in school amidst lockdown by Rajasthan police, woman 'raped'**

**HAMZA KHAN**  
JAIPUR, APRIL 25

A 40-YEAR-OLD who had been unable to make her way back to her home in Jaipur for over a month from Dausa due to travel restrictions was allegedly raped on the night of April 23-24 by three men, at a school in Sawai Madhopur district where she was put up by the local authorities on being found outside during the lockdown.

The three accused, Kamal Kharwal, Lakhani Raigar and Rishikesh Meena, have been arrested and a head constable, Lal Chand, suspended. The woman's medical examination has been done and a report is awaited.

With the Block Level Officer, apart from local police, aware of the woman's case, District Collector Nannu Mal Pahadia has also ordered an inquiry into the matter.

In her statement to the Sawai Madhopur police, the woman sa-

id she had gone to Dausa jail to visit her son, who is an accused in a gangrape and POCSO case lodged in Jaipur in 2015. Once the lockdown started, she told police, she had been "stuck in Sawai Madhopur for over a month". While the woman was also an accused in the gangrape-POCSO case, she was acquitted in March 2019.

Sawai Madhopur SP Sudheer Choudhary said, "Her son was shifted from a jail in Jaipur to Dausa due to coronavirus. She had been moving around in the district for the past month. On April 23, when she reached a village, the beat constable informed the head constable about her."

The SP said around 40 people were present when "a collective decision was taken by the head constable, along with two government teachers and the villagers, to make her stay at the local school for the night. The school teachers subsequently left for their homes and the three accused committed gangrape".

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

**THE SENSE OF AN ENDING**

PAGES 9, 10, 11

**3 models for online college exams: all with web cam**

**RITIKA CHOPRA**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 25

UNIVERSITIES AND colleges across the country are likely to be presented with three models next week for holding their semester-end (or year-end) examinations online. They can administer a subjective-type written assessment, a multiple-choice test or a case study/project-based evaluation — all under the

watchful eyes of web cameras.

The three models for online assessment are part of recommendations submitted by a government-appointed expert committee on online learning this week. Nageshwar Rao, Vice-Chancellor of the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), is chairperson of the panel. The University Grants Commission is expected to release guidelines on university

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

**EXPLAINED** May be used for final exams

MANY universities may adopt the online examinations for the final-year students at least, even as they remain unsure about it. Semester-end exams usually happen in May. A delay for final-year students could end up affecting their joining date for new jobs or plans for further studies.

**Franklin put money in unknown, unrated firms**

Subscribed 100% in Rs 7,697 cr worth issues, over 50% in Rs 15,358 cr issues

**SANDEEP SINGH & GEORGE MATHEW**  
NEW DELHI/ MUMBAI, APRIL 25

WITH RS 30,800 crore investor money stuck in six credit funds of Franklin Templeton, it has now emerged that fund managers of the schemes were hardly conservative in their approach, and invested heavily —

over Rs 15,000 crore — in several unrated debt schemes and unknown companies.

A report prepared by B&K Securities, a financial services group, revealed that the Franklin Templeton schemes subscribed to 100 per cent of the issue size in at least 26 cases. This means that in at least these 26 cases which collectively raised Rs 7,697 crore, Franklin Templeton was the only

**MF PROBLEM CAN SPREAD TO REAL ECONOMY: U K SINHA**  
PAGE 5

subscriber, raising questions about the investment practices of the fund house.

Some of the companies whose papers were fully and

solely subscribed by Franklin Templeton schemes include - Rishanth Wholesale Trading (Rs 604 crore), Rivaaz Trade Ventures (Rs 644 crore), Five Star Ltd (Rs 693 crore), Piramal Capital & Housing Finance (Rs 1001 crore), Greenco Clean Energy (Rs 301 crore), Aptus Value Housing Finance (Rs 387 crore), Vastu Housing Finance

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

**WEST BENGAL**



**SMITANAI**  
MARGAO, APRIL 25

THURSDAY, APRIL 23, was a busy day for Goa. It counted 300 hospital beds in preparation for a possible second wave of cases from among stranded sailors coming home, installed testing kiosks at the state's borders and ports, and revised its SOPs. It was also when Edwin Gomes, the doctor leading the team at ESIS Hospital, Goa's designated COVID facility, had a visitor.

Edgar Julian Remedios, one of the first COVID-19 patients to



test positive, had returned to the hospital. "He came to give a hug," says Gomes.

This week, Goa, which had sealed its borders from March 22, will allow the first convoy of buses from Mumbai with over a



Dr Gomes heads the team at Goa's COVID hospital. *Smita Nair*

hundred Goan seafarers who had been stranded at sea when the country went into lockdown on March 25. The state, which had recorded seven COVID positives, now has no active cases.

In the 33 days between March 18, when the state's first patient was admitted, to April 19, when the seventh and last was discharged, a peculiar protocol has played out on the fourth floor of the hospital.

As scientists and experts race against time to study the virus and its behaviour, Gomes has been probing a different science: "The power of human proximity

in fighting an epidemic."

Across the globe, positive patients have been taken away by staff in PPEs and sent to isolation wards, without the comfort of family and without any of the colour from flowers or words in get-well cards - with just the cold, sterile hospital architecture for company.

With the coronavirus novel, so are the fears. As Gomes and his team of four resident doctors and nursing staff responded to questions from patients - mostly related to "nature of death" — they made it a point to repeat "you will be alright" at intervals.

As the patients started to come, the systems too evolved. "We decided we will not allow any patient to feel alone. We divided ourselves and would take turns to go to each person thrice - for a good morning round, a good afternoon round, and a good evening round - and asked a set of questions normally reserved for geriatric care. We would talk to them about hours, their homes, their families. If they dream something, how did they sleep, the memory they wanted to discuss," says Gomes, Professor and Head of

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

**UP, MP, Haryana pave way, migrants board buses home**

**VARINDER BHATIA, ASAD REHMAN, ADITIRAJA & MILIND GHATWAI**  
CHANDIGARH, LUCKNOW, VADODARA, BHOPAL, APRIL 25

**INSIDE**



**ONLY 3 LAKH RNA KITS LEFT, TESTING MAY TAKE A HIT**  
PAGES 3, 4, 8

A DAY after Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh announced plans to bring back their migrant workers stuck in other states, a coordinated exercise began to ensure the same. While 2,000-odd boarded buses in Haryana for western UP, around a similar number headed home from Gujarat for MP. On a smaller scale, Himachal Pradesh organised return of Kashmiri labourers stuck in the state.

Haryana DGP Manoj Yadava told The Sunday Express "the movement of migrant labourers was organised after mutual consultation between the two state governments". "They were first checked and nobody showed any symptoms... This movement shall go on for four-five days."

The migrants will be subjected to another 14-day quarantine at their destinations.

Yadava also said that UP had got the movement cleared with the Union Home Ministry. "The Central government has said that if the states, with mutual

consultation, decide to send/receive migrants, it has no problem. Their only clause is that quarantine should have been completed."

The DGP added that of the 16,000-odd migrants in Haryana's shelter homes, around 12,000 were from Uttar Pradesh.

Uttar Pradesh Additional Chief Secretary Awanish Kumar Awasthi said they expected 11,000 migrants to return by Sunday. The nodal officers appointed by UP to help stranded people in 16 states have been receiving frantic calls enquiring about when they will be taken back.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

**Foreign subsidiaries fudged audit reports, bank records: Probe**



**AN EXPRESS SERIES PART 3**

**KHUSHBOONARAYAN**  
MUMBAI, APRIL 25

NOT JUST suspicious transactions solely meant to siphon off funds or falsifying records of sales, Cox and Kings Group is also accused, via its foreign subsidiaries, of forging reports of global audit firms and fabricating statements of foreign banks.

These forged documents were allegedly used to avail of better credit facilities from lenders and to also allegedly manipulate the financial statements of the flagship firm of the group — Cox and Kings Ltd, show records of the resolution professional appointed by the National Company Law Tribunal and an internal probe conducted by Yes Bank Ltd after the exit of Rana

Kapoor, co-founder of the bank. Cox and Kings was one of Yes Bank's top borrowers when co-founder Rana Kapoor was heading the bank. Yes Bank had an exposure of Rs 2267 crore to Cox and Kings.

According to probe records, in 2018, Malvern Travel Ltd UK, a firm where Cox and Kings held 49 per cent stake, submitted "forged and fabricated" end-use certificate and a bank account statement of its statutory auditor BDO LLP and bank Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) respectively with Yes Bank. This was done to obtain a loan of 47 million pounds (about Rs 440 crore) from Yes Bank.

In July 2019, Malvern Travel and its three subsidiaries, Superbreak Mini Holidays Ltd, Late Rooms Ltd and Malvern Travel Technology, filed for bankruptcy in the UK. Subsequently, consultancy firm KPMG was appointed as the administrator of these firms. After a fresh audit, KPMG on January 23, 2020, shared the original bank account statements of the firms with Yes Bank.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 9

**DOWNLOAD APP**

- VISUAL STORIES
- DAILY BRIEFING
- PODCASTS
- CUSTOMIZABLE NEWS EXPERIENCE

Indian Express  
★★★★ 4.6

SCAN THIS QR CODE TO DOWNLOAD THE APP



**OUT OF QUARANTINE, STUDENT STARES AT 2000-KM DRIVE HOME, RS 60,000 CAB BILL**

Forty days after they were airlifted from COVID-19 hit Iran, two students who were placed under quarantine in Jaisalmer district of Rajasthan on their arrival have been asked to make their own arrangements to return to their respective hometowns.



**EXPLAINED HOW CORONAVIRUS CAN AFFECT KIDNEYS**

**Kidney damage is common in severe cases of COVID-19**



**TECH**

**A 'TEXT BOMB' CAN CRASH YOUR IPHONE**

**A Sindhi text bomb is causing iOS and iPad OS devices to crash**

**EXPRESS AUDIO**

**How the sporting world is dealing with the pandemic**

NEW EPISODE EVERYDAY

We talk about how the world of sports is coping during the coronavirus pandemic, and bring you up to speed on a number of updates

**FROM PAGE ONE**

**Centre revises**

would take a view on this on Monday after watching the situation for two days."

It appeared states were once again caught unawares by the Centre.

A month ago, on March 24, when the Centre announced the first phase of the lockdown, states were left to manage its sudden consequences such as the massive disruption in supply chain, and migrant labour walking hundreds of miles to their homes. Some states, including one ruled by the BJP, suggested that adequate discussions had not been held with them before the announcement.

Following this, it was expected the Centre would deliberate, discuss and plan more comprehensively when it became clear the lockdown would be extended. When the PM announced April 14 an extension of lockdown, he did give the state machinery five days to get its act together as new measures were to kick in on April 20.

However, if during the first phase of lockdown the government had to issue as many as six addendums and clarifications to its guidelines in the first few days, the second phase of the lockdown has already seen seven such from the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Within two days of its April 15 guidelines, on April 17, MHA issued its first addendum allowing harvest of minor forest produce; activities regarding bamboo, coconut, areca nut, cocoa, spice plantation; operations of NBFCs and cooperative societies; and activities related to power transmission lines and telecom optical fibre.

While this may be explained as additional activities being permitted probably based on demands by states, an order issued by it two days later showed it was also poorly planned. On April 19, the MHA issued orders revoking permission to e-commerce companies to sell non-essential items. On Saturday, too, it had to issue further clarifications to its orders on the same day, stating barber shops would remain shut since they offer services and do not sell items.

As confusion prevailed over its exemptions given to certain category of shops across the country on Friday, the MHA issued multiple clarifications on Saturday to clear the air. On the category of shops, the MHA said, "In rural areas, all shops, except those in shopping malls are allowed to open. In urban areas, all standalone shops, neighbourhood shops & shops in residential complexes are allowed to open. Shops in markets/market complexes and shopping malls are not allowed to open."

The MHA also clarified there would be no sale of liquor, paan or tobacco products and that "sale by e-commerce companies will continue to be permitted for essential goods only". It has also been clarified that none of these exemptions would apply to containment zones and hotspots.

It also said that it must be remembered that exemptions are only for shops selling items and not those providing services. "In view of queries coming from various sections of society, it is clarified that all restaurants, salons and barber shops would remain closed," MHA said.

The government's latest order on Friday is likely to please small traders and may allow the government the liberty to nudge them to accept e-commerce operations in coming days, which the PM talked about in his LinkedIn post a week ago.

Meanwhile, despite orders by the government for their operations to resume, industry representatives began expressing fear that strict COVID-19 containment guidelines on factory premises and provisions of penalty for their

violations were a deterrent to restarting work. Industries also said it would be difficult for them to provide in-situ accommodation for labour or transport them in private vehicles.

Clearly, stakeholders had not been adequately consulted before issuing guidelines leading to confusion on the ground.

"True, some of these situations could have been avoided through adequate discussions with industry representatives and trade bodies beforehand. However, that was not our domain. It was being handled by Ministry of Commerce," a home ministry official said.

Not surprisingly, the MHA had to again issue clarifications on April 22, saying penalties would be levied only if offence occurs with "consent, cognisance or negligence of employer". When this did little to assuage fears, Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla wrote to all states on April 23, emphasising that its guidelines had no clause describing provisions for prosecution of employer or sealing of factory premises in case a worker tested positive for COVID-19.

The guidelines do, however, detail provisions under the Disaster Management Act where employers can be prosecuted for violation of central guidelines as determined by local authorities.

Bhalla's letter also went on to clarify that no fresh permissions were required for operation of such factories that were already functional in the first lockdown.

Another instance of the Centre and states not being on the same page relates to handling of COVID-19 outbreak and enforcing the lockdown. It reached a flashpoint when Kerala issued its own guidelines for phase II of the lockdown on April 17.

Given how the virus was aggressively contained, and to restore livelihoods, the state provided many relaxations, including operation of dine-in restaurants and barber shops, opening of book shops and local workshops, movement of public in buses within a city, etc.

Within two days, on April 19, MHA shot off a letter to Kerala saying these were a dilution of guidelines issued by it and the state was not allowed to do so under the Disaster Management Act.

Yet, on April 21, the Centre issued orders to open shops for educational books - an activity it had prohibited Kerala from undertaking - and electric fans. Here, too, the ambiguity meant that fans were still not selling on the ground since there are no exclusive fan shops. They are largely sold through electrical equipment shops which sell multiple items.

On the same day, in a separate letter to all states, it warned them not to dilute its guidelines. It did this even as the government of Uttar Pradesh continued to pull out hundreds of students belonging to its state from Kota in Rajasthan in buses.

The MHA maintained stoic silence as to how this was in consonance with its national guidelines. In fact, the BJP-JD(U) government in Bihar has protested against students being allowed to move out of Rajasthan and wrote to the Centre recently calling it an "utter violation of guidelines issued by the MHA".

As clamour over suffering of stranded migrant labour grew vis-a-vis prioritising of extraction of students, the UP government Friday announced it would pull out its migrant labour from states across India and transport them to their native places in buses. Here too MHA has maintained silence as to how this would be allowed under the current guidelines. On April 19, MHA had issued detailed SOPs allowing movement of migrant labour within a state. It had asked states to arrange for their transport and food and water during transit to workplace. It, however, prohibited inter-state transfer of migrant

**Signal: Ease curbs in districts with zero cases**

continue with the present model in which the Centre spells out the guidelines for states, which can to tighten the norms but not dilute them.

According to the Health Ministry, hotspots are areas that have a very high number of cases or a case-load doubling time of less than four days against the current national timeframe of about 10.

"There can obviously be no opening up of containment zones. Even for the rest, it has to be done very carefully, balancing disease control and economic aspects. We have the option of going by the red and green zone classification or hotspots or the present model. The important thing is that we cannot let our guard down or let the systemic preparedness slacken," sources said.

Another issue being discussed intensively within the

Centre and with states is how to get migrant labourers back to their home states. States like Bihar have suggested special trains so that social distancing during the journey, and screening and surveillance on arrival, can be ensured.

"We are looking at, may be, letting two persons travel in the space that normally accommodates eight people. Also, using trains means they deboard at one point where they can be screened, their details taken for follow-up and arrangements made for the mandatory 14-day quarantine before they can head back to their villages," said a top government functionary.

Uttar Pradesh has already started bringing back migrants stranded in other states, while Madhya Pradesh has sought permission to do so. Officials said the key is to work out a foolproof modality for transportation.

Over the last few days, the Centre's messaging has been along the lines that the country has done fairly well and the two lockdowns have had the desired effect in arresting the speed of the disease spread.

Presentations made by chairmen of two empowered groups - environment secretary C K Mishra and Niti Aayog member Dr V K Paul - during the week made the same point as the government's statement Saturday that at six per cent, the growth rate is at its lowest.

However, government sources said the strategy for each region will be tailored according to the disease dynamic there. In this backdrop, they underlined that the situation in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Delhi and Madhya Pradesh remains challenging as these states have accounted for more than half of the positive cases in the country.

The district-wise data also showed the disease was heavily concentrated in 13 urban centres - Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Indore, Pune, Jaipur, Hyderabad, Thane, Surat, Chennai, Bhopal, Agra, Jodhpur and Delhi. The fact that rural areas have witnessed subdued incidence of the outbreak will also play on the minds of policy makers in re-starting economy there.

In this context, sources pointed out that the Prime Minister had interacted with the CMs before the first phase of the lockdown ended on April 14 and sought their opinion on a staggered exit plan.

The sources said that even at the time of the last extension, the Centre had been in favour of states taking individual calls but the overwhelming consensus was that the Prime Minister should take the lead to ensure maximum compliance.

**Bengal yet to take call on opening shops**

sand Uttar Pradesh said they would maintain status quo. Like in Delhi, confusion prevailed in Rajasthan, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh, where traders downing shutters after opening them in the morning. By evening, Haryana clarified that shops will open from Sunday, Madhya Pradesh said shops would open except in hotspots and containment areas, and Rajasthan issued a clarification in line with the Union Home Ministry's clarification on Saturday afternoon - that in rural areas, all shops except shopping malls are allowed to stay open, whereas in urban areas, all standalone shops, neighbourhood shops and residential complexes are allowed to open.

Maharashtra, which continues to report the highest number of COVID-19 deaths in the country at 323, refused to ease lockdown at least until May 3. In Mumbai and Pune, the lockdown is likely to be extended to May 15. Despite its initial reservations, the Delhi government on

Saturday evening decided to allow standalone shops as well as those in neighbourhoods and residential complexes, selling both essential and non-essential items, to open.

The state government's decision will not cover liquor or barber shops, and will not be applicable to the 95 containment zones in the Capital. Confusion had prevailed through the day, with some shops opening, but market associations asking members not to rush in.

According to sources in Delhi, senior officials and experts had told the government that lifting relaxations in Delhi was not feasible, considering the sudden uptick in the number of cases over the past few days. Delhi saw 111 fresh cases on Saturday. The government had agreed with the decision, an official said on condition of anonymity.

During the first half of the day, top officials in the government also maintained that relaxations, "if any", will be allowed only after April 27, and till then, "complete" lockdown will be observed.

"But on Saturday afternoon, as TV channels reported that MHA had relaxed the rules, shops started opening despite there being no go-ahead from the state government. When our officials went to these areas and asked people to shut their shops and follow the Delhi government guidelines, they showed them the MHA order and said the Centre was the final authority. In many areas, things got heated and a law and order situation emerged. In 3-4 places, officials were pushed around by shop owners. We realised that things had got out of control and had to convene a meeting, where it was decided late in the evening that there was no option but to take the MHA line," said an official who did not want to be named.

Delhi government officials, however, maintained that the previous relaxations proposed by the MHA in terms of allowing electricians, plumbers and carpenters will not be implemented in Delhi for now.

Having "reluctantly" agreed to the Home Ministry directive, the Delhi government has simultaneously decided to scale up a model - already implemented in parts of old Delhi - to break up every major containment zone into multiple sectors to prevent violations inside sealed areas.

"How can one allow relaxations when sealed zones are rising every day? But what can we do now that the Centre has taken a unilateral decision? The primary focus will continue to be on the rising number of cases, even at the sealed zones. So a decision has been taken by Lt Governor Anil Bajjal, Chief Secretary Vijay Dev and other officials to break the containment zones into multiple clusters for more effective implementation of the restrictions, which are now being violated in many places as neighbours are intermingling," an official said.

ing electricians, plumbers and carpenters will not be implemented in Delhi for now.

Having "reluctantly" agreed to the Home Ministry directive, the Delhi government has simultaneously decided to scale up a model - already implemented in parts of old Delhi - to break up every major containment zone into multiple sectors to prevent violations inside sealed areas.

"How can one allow relaxations when sealed zones are rising every day? But what can we do now that the Centre has taken a unilateral decision? The primary focus will continue to be on the rising number of cases, even at the sealed zones. So a decision has been taken by Lt Governor Anil Bajjal, Chief Secretary Vijay Dev and other officials to break the containment zones into multiple clusters for more effective implementation of the restrictions, which are now being violated in many places as neighbours are intermingling," an official said.

labour. Sources now say there could be a fresh order in this regard.

**UP, MP, Haryana**

MP, which estimates that nearly one lakh of its migrants are stranded, has started getting them back first from neighbouring Gujarat and Rajasthan, which will drop them to its borders. By Saturday night, 98 buses carrying 2,400 workers from Gujarat were expected to reach Alirajpur and Jhabua in MP, while 600-odd workers from Rajasthan were to reach Sawai Madhopur.

MP Additional Chief Secretary ICP Keshri said it will take some days before all workers return, "but we are on the job". "The plans will change depending on the circumstances." This new coordination is a striking change from when the sea of migrant labourers leaving on foot soon after the announcement of the lockdown had seen sparring between UP and Delhi governments.

From Haryana, most of the migrants left from Yamunanagar, Gurugram, Faridabad, Rewari, Panchkula, Sonapat, Rohtak and Jhajjar districts. They are bound for western UP districts such as Agra, Aligarh, Amroha, Baghpat and Meerut. While a few of the buses dropped them on the UP-Haryana border, others went into UP and dropped them at the district headquarters.

Sources said migrants from

other states stuck in Haryana are also pleading to be sent home, which could pose a problem. A senior officer said, "A large number of them had initially agreed to work in the industries or fields, but most of them withdrew their consent after they realised that the government had started making arrangements to drop them to their native places."

At a video-conference with District Magistrates, UP CM Yogi Adityanath said on Friday the state estimated five-10 lakh migrant workers to return over the next two months. On Saturday, Adityanath held meetings with officials on creating "15 lakh employment opportunities" in villages for the people returning.

The UP nodal officer in-charge of helplines for migrant labourers in Kerala said the calls had increased since the CM's announcement. "People have become restless," an official said. Similar calls are flooding officials of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. An official said they were keeping a record of all the people calling. "We are noting down where they are stranded."

Asked how they would coordinate return of migrants from far-off states, like in the South, the CM's media advisor Mrityunjay Kumar said, "It depends on how the state governments respond... For each state, a different strategy will have to be devised."

The MP-bound migrants were headed from Vadodara in 16 buses to a check-post between the two states. Vadodara District

Collector Shalini Agarwal said they had coordinated with the administration in MP for sending the labourers back. Apart from Vadodara, migrants left for MP from Chhota Udepur, Dahod and the Panchmahals in Gujarat. Vadodara Municipal Commissioner Nalin Upadhyay said similar arrangements would be made to send back labourers from Rajasthan and UP, after co-ordination was finalised with them.

MP also began facilitating homeward journey of nearly 10,000 workers stranded in different districts of the state, as well as started e-pass to allow people to bring back their relatives or children stranded outside. "We will not let our workers walk (long distance)," Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said.

One Vadodara trust running a shelter camp organised a farewell of sorts for migrant labourers who left Saturday, giving away boxes of sweets and serving aaloo-puris. Magi Bhuriya, 40, from Thandla in MP said, "They took good care of us. But we want to go home. I want to see my children."

Anurag Patel (25), from Satna, said he would share the sweets with his family. "I cannot believe this day is finally here. I will see my parents and sister in 24 hours, if all goes well."

**Woman raped**

The officer said the head constable has been suspended for negligence as "prima facie he should have taken a more consid-

to 30 students, the report states. Students will be expected to join Google Meet with camera and audio on and access question paper through Google Classroom. Answers written on a plain sheet of paper can be uploaded before the deadline.

"Invigilator(s) may monitor the students through Google Meet by recording and monitoring them. Students involving in any fraudulent activities may be caught and Unfair Means (UFM) case may be booked. Controller of Examinations (COE) /Observers/Squads may also join Google Meet and monitor students," the report states. Teachers will manually evaluate the uploaded answer scripts.

**MODEL 2: Multiple-Choice Questions examination** The panel has suggested that the MCQ test be administered through an online proctor service. An online proctor service uses software to monitor the examinee through video and audio so that the exam goes fraud-free. GMAT and GRE examinations are conducted through online proctoring.

Students will be given login credentials and a web link to access the exam. In this mode, proctors may interrupt student during the test and ask for 360 view of the student room. "Students navigating out of the examination screen may be given warning and their examination may be terminated after specified number of warnings," the report states.

**Model 3: Case study and Projects Project-based evaluation** will have written assessment and online presentation or viva-voce based on the written assessment. Students will be given a problem (case study/project) two hours before the submission deadline and asked to upload a handwritten solution. "After the submission of written solution, next day faculty is required to conduct an Online presentation or viva through Google meet. The student will only be allowed to present the solution of the problem already submitted," the report states.

**Templeton** (Rs 292 crore), Hero Solar Energy (Rs 437 crore), Hero Wind Energy (Rs 341 crore), Renew Solar Power (Rs 204 crore) and Essel Infraprojects (Rs 92 crore), among others. Besides these, the Franklin Templeton schemes also subscribed to more than 70 per cent of the issue size in papers of nine other companies, and invested Rs 7,661 crore in these.

Of the total of Rs 30,800 crore invested by the six schemes, almost 50 per cent or Rs 15,358 were invested in 35 companies where it had subscribed to over 70 per cent of the issue size. "This is a shocking investment pattern. They put all eggs in one basket and destroyed investor wealth. Sebi should have taken action much earlier," said veteran BSE dealer Pawan Dhamidharka.

A questionnaire sent to Franklin Templeton did not elicit any response. According to industry insiders, while schemes are technically allowed to fully subscribe to papers issued by a particular company, investors need to watch out for the risks a fund manager is taking and the kind of portfolio he is building. "If 25-30 per cent of the portfolio is of companies where the fund house has fully subscribed the issue, it only builds risk into the portfolio," said a top official with a fund house who did not wish to be named.

The report also raised concern over high exposure to non-AAA rated papers by Franklin Templeton in funds other than the six in question. "Total size of credit funds as a category defined by Sebi is Rs 55,436 crore. However, Franklin has been leading in managed credit category and has high exposure in non-AAA in other categories of fund as well and that is the reason of them winding of six

funds due to illiquidity in the portfolio," said the report.

The maturity profile of its investments indicates that subscribers of its funds may have to wait for five years or more to get a part of their original investment. The B&K report noted that as much as Rs 8,300 crore worth papers would mature between three years and five years, and another Rs 5,942 crore worth papers would mature between two years and three years. "It's doubtful whether investors will get even half of their investment after five years. The fund house has washed its hands off now by closing down six schemes," Dhamidharka said.

Deepak Jasani, Head of Research, HDFC Securities, said, "Despite categorisation by Sebi, a lot of debt schemes take on risks that are not reflected in their scheme riskometer or their category names. Fund managers with a view to generate higher return tend to take higher risks in the portion of other investments permitted in even safe low risk categories."

**Goa doctor**

Evenings are mostly spent understanding their dilemmas in life. We did this every single day, after which we doctors exchanged notes," he adds.

Globally, hospitals are having these "conversations" through telemedicine services, often with the practitioners and patients on opposite sides of the door.

Gomes, who has handled the H1N1 epidemic in the state, is a believer of herd immunity, but asks not be mistaken - he wants a vaccine developed soon. But he feels "equal importance" needs to be given to studying the other intervention: "effects of proximity and personal engagement while nursing infected patients, directly connecting the medical attitude of the caregivers in slowing or shifting the trajectory of the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 or any such fast replicating virus".

"The patients are fighting it alone and that loneliness can have a drastic impact," says Gomes. "We are trying to understand if it impacts their treatment course."

The doctor has now trained his team on the manner of treatment and is preparing to use all the experience from the seven full recoveries to treat the next batch of seafarers. With additional nursing staff being deployed, Gomes says protocols are now in place to handle between 80 and 100 patients at any given time, with the state having requisitioned up to 300 ventilators.

"While we take extreme caution, and wear PPEs, the five of us also unofficially decided to wear the head gear that we use for treating HIV virus. The face is fully visible in that. In such cases, when they are confined, they need to see a doctor smile, and be able to identify us and connect with us. We ensure we are at a one-metre distance when we are talking but make sure they can see us and also respond with expressions," he says.

The staff's ward duties also included having to constantly check on the patient's phone battery. "Initially, since patients were scared and also new to the hospital, they would only make voice calls. We encouraged them to make video calls to family, friends or anyone who can comfort them," says Gomes.

As he silently documents the impact of "engagement", "conversations" and "touch" on his patients, Gomes agrees his study is an anomaly for a disease whose cure is still elusive and which has created fear and stigma.

"It's a constant learning - dealing with an epidemic. In that sense, everything matters. How to talk to patients. How to remove their fears. The treatment protocols. What is that extra that made it better, what helped? We need to answer these questions. We are looking to study this."

# 3 THE OUTBREAK WEST BENGAL



## DIVINE INTERVENTION

■ People out on the streets of Kolkata's Bonhooghly area without a mask and those defying the lockdown encountered a divine intervention on Friday. "Yamraj", the Hindu god of death, was waiting for them atop a customised vehicle, instead of a chariot, and accompanied by his attendant "Chitragupta". It was the brainchild of the local Bonhooghly GCGS Yubak Sangha club, which wanted an innovative way to spread awareness about coronavirus.

■ A strapping Abhijit Sadukhan (23), dressed as Yamraj, chased the people violating the lockdown before giving them masks, and a lecture about how they were endangering their life and those of others. Sadukhan said he was enjoying his role. "With this make-up and the mace some people are actually getting frightened," he said. "The idea is to give the message that people are playing with death by going out and violating the lockdown."



■ Sadukhan said it takes him a long time to dress up and apply make up. However, he added that he was willing to do it to bring the right message to people. "This is an innovative measure from our club. Wherever we see that people are gathered in large numbers, the 'Yamraj' is going is telling the people that they are inviting death," said the Yubak's member Sankar Rout, adding that the drive is effective

REPORT AND PHOTOS PARTHA PAUL

## Active cases rise to 423 with 38 new infections

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
KOLKATA, APRIL 25

WITH 38 new COVID-19 positive cases in the last 24 hours, the total number of active cases on Saturday reached 423, according to a state government bulletin.

As many as 105 positive patients have so far recovered and discharged from hospital, while the death toll stands at 18 as no new fatality was reported on Saturday. On Friday, the state government had linked the death of 57 coronavirus positive patients to the virus, of whom, 39 had co-morbidities.

A total of 947 tests were conducted in the last 24 hours, taking the total to 9,880.

"The number of tests has increased in last few days. About 38 new cases were reported in last 24 hours. One more hospital — Suraksha Diagnostics Pvt. Ltd. — has been authorised by the IMCR as another testing lab in the state. The total number of testing labs in West Bengal now stands at 13," said a government official.

As many as 207 people are in hospital isolation.

There are 66 dedicated COVID-19 hospitals here.

On Friday, the state government had said that COVID-related deaths in the state numbered 57, of which 18 could be primarily attributed to coronavirus.

"Many questions are being raised on the audit committee set up by the state, and the death numbers. The committee submitted its report today, in which they said 57 people who died had tested positive for COVID-19. Of them, 18 persons died primarily because of coronavirus. The remaining patients had co-morbidities, but were COVID-positive," state Chief Secretary Rajiva Sinha had said.

Biswaranjan Satpati, head of the audit committee and former director, health services, had said, "The expert committee for conducting audit into the death of COVID-19 positive patients which was set up on April 3 has, till this date, examined 57 cases

STATE COUNT	
423 ACTIVE CASES	18 DEATHS
105 RECOVERED	
9,880 SAMPLES TESTED TILL APRIL 25	

of death of persons who had tested positive for COVID-19. This committee examined all relevant documents, including bed-head-ticket, treatment history, laboratory investigation report, death certificates and other documents sent by the hospitals concerned, and found that 18 deaths were due to COVID-19 infections."

### Woman tests positive after giving birth

A woman in Kolkata has tested positive for the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) after giving birth to her child in a hospital here. She has been shifted to another facility eight kilometres away, leaving her four-day-old child in the previous hospital.

Doctors have kept the baby in isolation and are monitoring for any signs of infection, an official of the private hospital said on Saturday.

The woman, who is in her early thirties, was asymptomatic when she was brought to the super speciality hospital on April 19, the official said, adding, "A surgery was done on that day and she gave birth to the baby." The following day, she developed fever and was tested for COVID-19.

"On April 23, test results showed that she was infected by coronavirus," said the official. "Immediately, she was shifted since ours is not a COVID-19 hospital."

Doctors, nurses and other health workers who came in contact with the woman have been isolated, and the entire building, including the operation theatre, have been sanitised.

"We now have a fresh team of nurses and other operations have been rescheduled," said the official.

WITH PTI

## CORONA WATCH

### Imams urge Muslims to pray at home

Kolkata: With Ramzan starting Saturday, the apex body of Imams in West Bengal has asked Muslims to offer namaz from home, and advised them not to assemble at mosques because of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. All mosque committees have been asked to communicate this to the members of the community, Chairman of Bengal Imams Association Mohammed Yahia said on Saturday. Every government advisory should be followed for the benefit of everyone, he added. "We have to work together to fight the coronavirus," Yahia told PTI. "We have already appealed to all the mosques in different parts of the state not to allow any gathering for namaz. While the imam of a mosque will offer namaz in the presence of two-three others of the masjid committee, others will pray from their homes." The mosques will ensure the sound of the azan reaches every household in the locality, said another association member. Echoing Yahia's appeal, the Imam of Nakhoda Masjid, Shafique Qasmi, said, "We have already been conducting Friday prayers with only three-four people in mosque, including the Imam, and ensured that others do it at their homes. This procedure will continue in the Ramzan month." PTI

### State yet to take call on shops

Kolkata: The West Bengal government on Saturday said it is yet to take a call on allowing neighbourhood and standalone shops to open, in accordance with a directive issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). A senior state government official said the MHA order is being studied and a final call in this regard will be taken soon. The Union government has said neighbourhood and standalone shops have been allowed to open but those located in marketplaces, malls and hotspots will continue to remain shut till May 3. PTI

## PM GARIB KALYAN YOJANA

### Centre alleges 'nil' distribution of rice, minister rejects charge

ATRI MITRA  
KOLKATA, APRIL 25

AFTER GOVERNOR Jagdeep Dhankhar raised questions over alleged irregularities in the public distribution system (PDS), the Central government has also trained its guns at the West Bengal government over distribution of food grains during lockdown.

In a letter addressed to State Food Secretary Parwez Ahmed Siddiqui, S Jagannathan, Joint Secretary of Union Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, alleged that distribution of food grains, under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana (PMGKAY), was "nil" in the state. He said that the state government, under the scheme, had already procured 73,000 metric tonnes of rice.

Denying the allegations, State Food Minister Jyotipriya Mallick said the Central government had provided only 607 metric tonnes of masoor daal (red lentil) against the state's demand of 15,000 metric tonnes.

Under PMGKAY, each ration card holder is given five kg food



Minister Jyotipriya Mallick slams Centre for of daal shortage

grains and one kg pulses free for the next three months in view of the coronavirus pandemic. This is in addition to the monthly quota of subsidised foodgrain of 5 kg per person under the National Food Security Act (NFSA).

Mallick said the state was already delivering food grains to fair price shops and would complete the exercise by May 1.

"The prime minister announced this scheme on March 25. But the Central government gave us the confirmation of this scheme on April 16. After that, they started delivering the food grains (rice). We have already started distributing those food grains to ration dealers and we are expecting that, before May 1, we will complete our distribution."

The letter, dated April 23, said, "The State/UT-wise allocation of

food grains under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PM-GKAY) scheme was already conveyed to all state/UTs and FCI (Food Corporation of India) vide letter dated 30.03.2020 and most State/UTs have already started the lifting and distribution of this additional food grains to the NFSA beneficiaries besides distribution of regular NFSA entitlements. However, in respect of your state, it is observed that no action has been initiated so far for the distribution of additional food grains (rice) to NFSA beneficiaries under this special time bound scheme."

The letter further said, "As regard availability of food grains, the FCI has informed that nearly 1.02 LMT (lakh metric tonnes) of rice is readily available at all revenue district godowns of FCI in the state and another 1.46 LMTs rice would be reaching the state by 25/04/2020. About 73,300 MT of rice has already been lifted by the state from FCI, but distribution of food grains in the state is nil under the PMGKAY scheme."

The letter urged the state to start distributing food grains to "all 6.02 crore beneficiaries covered under NFSA without losing any further time".

## School gets notice for giving more food items under midday scheme

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
KOLKATA, APRIL 25

THE WEST Bengal government has issued a show cause notice to the authorities of a primary school in South 24 Parganas district for giving additional food items and soap bars along with rice and potatoes to guardians of students under the midday meal scheme amid the lockdown, a notification said.

The sub-inspector of schools, Bishnupur circle, had on Friday issued the show cause notice to Amgachhia Lal Bahadur Free Primary School, accusing it of violating the government order of providing only 3 kg each of rice and potatoes to guardians of the students from April 20 to 30, it said.

In addition to the fixed quota, the school authorities had also distributed a packet of flattened rice, biscuits and a bar of soap to each of the beneficiaries on April 23, the notification said.

The state government has asked the school authorities to give its explanation within three days of receipt of the notice, it

said. The administration sought to know who had given the school the right to decide on distributing the additional commodities by violating the standard practice, the notification said.

"You are instructed to give an explanation about such distribution from your school and whether you had taken any permission from the higher authority to do such distribution. An explanation should be given from your end within three days from receiving this letter," the notice, a copy of which was forwarded to the block development officer, said.

The school authorities, when contacted, refused to comment on the issue.

Rice and potatoes are being given to the beneficiaries across the state from April 20 under the midday meal scheme.

"Such instances of going beyond the brief of the government will not be allowed. This is a government project and there can be serious ramifications if we choose to ignore such instances," an official of the School Education Department said.

## Visiting Central team reiterates: Indifference and data withheld

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
KOLKATA, APRIL 25

REITERATING THEIR displeasure with the state government, the two Inter-ministerial Central Teams (IMCT) on Saturday wrote three more letters to West Bengal Chief Secretary Rajiva Sinha alleging lack of cooperation and withholding information related to novel coronavirus.

The Union government had sent the teams six days ago to review the state's handling of novel coronavirus in Kolkata and its neighbouring areas, and north Bengal. Kolkata is the worst-affected city in the state.

While two letters were written Apurba Chandra, who heads the Kolkata team, another by the north Bengal team. They reiterated their allegation that lockdown was not strictly followed in some parts of north Bengal.

Chandra said the state government's alleged stance that it cannot "waste" its officials to accompany IMCTs for field visits "was in complete violation to the Ministry of Home Affairs letter".

"The IMCT has been in Kolkata since 10am on 20.04.2020. Four letters have been written by the IMCT to the state government till today. No response has been received to

any of the letters. A hard copy of the presentation which was made on 23.04.2020 has also not been made available," read one of the letters.

"The Chief Secretary of West Bengal has been widely reported in the media of having stated in his daily press conference that the IMCT is free to visit anywhere and senior officers of the state government cannot waste their time accompanying the IMCT. The above stand is in violation of the order of the Ministry of Home Affairs as the state government is expected to provide logistics support and facilitate all field visits," stated the letter.

On Friday, the IMCT team had inspected Dumurjala Stadium, a quarantine centre, Sanjiban Hospital and other COVID-19 hotspots in Howrah. In its letter, the IMCT said people kept at the Dumurjala quarantine centre were being taken for testing in cramped vans and thus violating social distancing norms.

It lauded that the state government for "strictly" enforcing the lockdown. However, it observed that health professionals were not part of the surveillance team. It said it wanted to meet municipal and district administration officials, and a few residents in the area and sought a

complete record of the surveillance.

Underlining that the state government was expected to provide accommodation, transportation, PPE kits and other facilities to them, IMCT members sought to know if the state government would take responsibility for their safety and security. "Whether the BSF accompanying the IMCT on behalf of the government free to take action to ensure safety and security of the IMCT in absence of police support," the letter asked.

The IMCT also sought clarity if it was barred from leaving its camp without informing the state government.

"Whether it is a fact that a DCP of Bengal police informed Bengal officers at BSF guest house on April 21 that the IMCT cannot leave the campus without the permission of the state government as the lockdown is in force and if it leaves it is only permitted to go to the airport," the letter read.

The letter said no senior state official accompanied IMCT members during their visits and their expectation was that doctors and officials shared relevant information with them.

The West Bengal government is yet to respond to the letters.

**RE-NAMING OF TRAIN**  
Train No. 13053/13054 Howrah-Radhikapur Express named as KULIK EXPRESS.  
Chief Passenger Transportation Manager  
**EASTERN RAILWAY**

**ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE**  
INDIAN INSTITUTE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY & MANAGEMENT GWALIOR  
(An Institute of National Importance under Ministry of MHRD, GOI)

Advertisement no: 1997 Date: 24.04.2020  
**Admission to Full Time PhD Programme Session: 2020-21**  
Online applications are invited for admission to the full-time PhD programme in Engineering (Computer Science/Information Technology/Electronics and Communication Engineering), Management, and Applied Sciences (Physics and Mathematics). For details visit our website. For any queries dial 0751-2449704/720/741  
OR email to [phdadmission@iiitm.ac.in](mailto:phdadmission@iiitm.ac.in)  
Online form submission opens: 27 April 2020  
Online form submission closes: 26 May 2020  
Written test/interview/presentation: 20 June & 21 June 2020  
Joint Registrar (Academics)

**CENTRAL UNIVERSITIES COMMON ENTRANCE TEST**  
**CUCET-2020**  
([www.cucetexam.in](http://www.cucetexam.in))

Central Universities Common Entrance Test (CUCET-2020) is being conducted for admission to different Programmes of 14 Central Universities (Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, Jammu, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kashmir, Kerala, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, South Bihar, Tamil Nadu) and 4 State Universities (Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah University (Rajouri), Bengaluru Dr B R Ambedkar School of Economics, Khallikote University (Berhampur), Sardar Patel University of Police, Security & Criminal Justice (Jodhpur))

**IMPORTANT DATES**

Application Form Last Date Extended  
**23 May, 2020**

Examination Date to be Notified Later

Media Partner  
BENGALURU DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS UNIVERSITY  
Rajaji Hall, Central College Campus, Bangalore University, Bengaluru-560 001  
Website: [www.base.ac.in](http://www.base.ac.in)

Coordinating University for CUCET-2020  
CENTRAL UNIVERSITY OF RAJASTHAN  
NH-8, Bandarsindri, Ajmer-305817, Raj.  
Website: [www.curaj.ac.in](http://www.curaj.ac.in)

ADMISSION QUERY : Mob:- 9560268076 Phone: (24X7 Help desk) 01463-238728(CURAJ) E-mail : [enqucuet2020@curaj.ac.in](mailto:enqucuet2020@curaj.ac.in)  
DIPR/DDU/2975/2020-21



**CORONA WATCH**



A couple gets married amid the lockdown, in Jodhpur on Saturday. PTI

**J&K**  
Yatra depends on COVID situation

**Jammu:** Days after a flip-flop over this year's Amarnath Yatra, the Jammu and Kashmir administration said the pilgrimage depends on the COVID-19 situation. Lieutenant-Governor G C Murmu said the government will explore all means to conduct the yatra. "However, these developments are subject to review in view of the crisis," he maintained. **ENS**

**RAJASTHAN**  
Lawyer turns up for hearing in vest, chided

**Jaipur:** A Rajasthan HC lawyer appeared in an online bail hearing in a vest, drawing the ire of a judge. Justice Sanjeev Prakash Sharma reprimanded Ravindra Paliwal for not appearing in uniform on Friday. The judge sought to dismiss the bail plea, but accepted the prosecutor's request to not punish the accused. He postponed the hearing to May 5. **ENS**

**SIKKIM**  
84 Bhutanese students sent home

**Gangtok:** The Sikkim government on Saturday sent 84 stranded Bhutanese students back to their country, officials said. They were transported home in four state buses, they said. The health department conducted medical check-up of each student before they boarded the buses at Rangpo. They were students of schools and higher education institutes. **PTI**

**LADAKH**  
Two new cases, active ones at four

**Leh:** Two persons tested positive for the novel coronavirus in Ladakh on Saturday, taking the number of confirmed cases in the Union territory to 20, an official said. The number of active COVID-19 cases in Ladakh are four and all of them are stable. **PTI**

**'Gujarat's high death rate could be due to presence of corona strain from Wuhan'**

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
GANDHINAGAR, APRIL 25

GUJARAT'S HIGH fatality rate could be due to the significant presence of L strain of Coronavirus over the S strain, said Dr Atul Patel, infectious disease specialist at the Sterling hospital, which is one of the three private hospitals in Gujarat designated to treat COVID-19 patients.

In Kerala the mortality rate was low because most of the patients came from Dubai which has the milder S strain, said Patel, replying to a question on the high fatality rate in Gujarat. He was

speaking at a media interaction presided over by chief minister Vijay Rupani and deputy chief minister Nitin Patel on Saturday.

"I was talking to the medical advisor to the Kerala government who said that most of the patients came from Dubai. There are two distinct strains of the coronavirus — Land S — of which, L is the original Wuhan strain which is more pathogenic and leads to a more severe disease and early death. After Wuhan, there was a mutation of the L strain, which converted to S strain, which is milder."

The first three patients in Kerala discovered in January were students from Wuhan.

Kerala, said Patel, has more cases of the S strain, while the L strain was more common in Italy and France, causing rapid death.

So far, three strains of the coronavirus have been detected in India — the strains from China, Europe and the US. According to Dr R R Gangakhedkar, the head of epidemiology and infectious diseases at ICMR, there are minor variations in the strains. Last week, Dr Gangakhedkar had said: "The first cases were from Wuhan and these are similar to the Chinese strain... then came cases from Italy and Iran. For Iran, there are some fragments in the genome that resemble the Chinese strain. In case

of Italy and the US, there is a little bit in the genome from different countries because people travel a lot. The important question for us is which is the predominant variety..." he said. Patel also blamed the mortality rate on the multiple comorbidities in Gujarat.

Gujarat, said Chief Minister Vijay Rupani, was readying itself based on the doubling rate. "The entire world is discussing doubling rate. We should also calculate based on the doubling rate, and our readiness... should be to prepare for projection till end of May..." said Rupani.

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

**States move cautiously on Centre guidelines on opening shops**

**ENS & AGENCIES**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 25

SOME STATES have their fingers on the pause button while others have given a go-ahead to the Centre's decision to partially let shops in neighbourhoods and residential areas open from Saturday across the country.

Gujarat, Kerala, Delhi and Odisha said on Saturday that shops can open in accordance with the Centre's guidelines while Punjab, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana maintained status quo. In Rajasthan, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh confusion prevailed on Saturday morning over lack of clarity in the order, forcing some traders to down shutters in a jiffy after opening shops in the morning.

Gujarat, Kerala, Delhi and Odisha said on Saturday that shops can open in accordance with the Centre's guidelines while Punjab, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana maintained status quo. In Rajasthan, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh confusion prevailed on Saturday morning over lack of clarity in the order, forcing some traders to down shutters in a jiffy after opening shops in the morning.

Late on Friday, the Union Home Ministry said standalone retail shops in urban areas could start operations with 50 per cent staff strength, appropriate social distancing and adherence of wearing masks and gloves during work but prohibited shops in market places, malls and COVID-19 hotspots and containment zones from opening till May 3.

Maharashtra, which continues to report the highest number of COVID-19 deaths in the country at 323, refused to ease the lockdown. State Health Minister Rajesh Tope said the lockdown guidelines will remain unchanged in Maharashtra till May 3. The state is likely to extend the lockdown in Mumbai and Pune to May 15 from May 3 when the second phase of lockdown ends.

Punjab, with 220 active COVID-19 patients, has decided not to allow retailers to resume operations. The cabinet will decide on May 30, said chief minister's media advisor Raveen Thukral.



Out on errands: Crossing a barricade in locked-down Lucknow on Saturday. Vishal Srivastava

After initial reluctance, the Delhi government in the evening allowed neighbourhood shops, stand-alone shops and shops inside residential complexes to open.

The decision will not cover liquor shops or barber shops. However, through the day, some shops opened their doors, and market associations asked members to not rush in.

Kerala said it would go by the latest guidelines of the Centre. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said, according to relaxations announced by the Home Ministry, all shops registered as per the Shops and Establishment Act outside the limits of municipalities and municipal corporations can open. Within the municipalities, standalone shops can open.

As Kerala has urbanised villages, the Chief Minister said shops outside the hotspots have to be allowed to function.

However, all shops would have to be cleaned and disinfected before opening for the public. At present, mobile shops, medical

shops, bakeries, takeaways including home delivery from hotels and vegetable kiosks are allowed to function, barring those in hotspots and containment zones.

Along with shops, Gujarat government has allowed software and IT companies to start operations from Sunday with 50 per cent staff capacity. The government has declared 127 cluster containment zones in 20 districts of Gujarat, of which 22 are in Ahmedabad and 16 each in Surat and Narmada. Confusion prevailed among traders across Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Haryana following the Centre's decision to allow some shops to open with mandatory precautions.

In parts of Haryana, traders rushed to open their shops after the Union Home Ministry's instructions went viral on social media. Traders in Hisar thronged marketplaces on Saturday morning. But the police stopped them since there were no instructions from the state government.

In the evening, Chief Minister

Manohar Lal Khattar said detailed instructions on shops that can open will be sent to districts. He said shops will begin to open in Haryana from Sunday onwards.

Madhya Pradesh on Saturday announced that shops selling essential commodities can open in districts other than Indore, Bhopal, Ujjain, Khargone, Jabalpur and Dhar that have seen large number of COVID-19 infections. Crisis management groups in every district will decide on the shops that can open, said Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan.

Though the Uttar Pradesh government is yet to decide on allowing retail shops, Lucknow District Magistrate Abhishek Prakash ordered that shops in the district will remain shut.

Uttarakhand allowed shops in the nine hill districts falling in the green zone to open and ordered status quo in the remaining four districts of Dehradun, Haridwar, Nainital and Udham Singh Nagar. In Odisha, authorities allowed stranded labourers to travel within the state for work.

**3 cases, no source: Andhra family has officials puzzled**

**SREENIVAS JANYALA**  
HYDERABAD APRIL 25

THREE ASYMPTOMATIC members of a family in Andhra Pradesh's Srikakulam tested positive for the coronavirus Saturday, but their relative who was suspected to be the source is negative-leaving officials baffled.

The suspected source, an employee of Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, returned on March 17 on a train with Tablighi Jamaat members who were part of the Delhi congregation, officials said.

"He was advised home quarantine. On April 22, he himself came for a test. He was positive when tested with a TrueNat kit,

but negative when tested with a RT-PCR kit," Srikakulam District Collector J Nivas said.

The Patapatnam resident's swab samples have been sent to Kakinada for a second round of tests. On Saturday, his father-in-law, mother-in-law and sister-in-law tested positive. The 28-year-old man's wife and eight-month-old daughter are negative. Officials have sent their swabs for a second round of testing. According to District Collector Nivas, the man appears to have violated quarantine and freely mingled with his in-laws and neighbours.

Meanwhile, COVID-19 cases in Andhra Pradesh touched 1,016 on Saturday with 61 new cases.

**Sonia asks PM for spl package for MSMEs**

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 25



Sonia Gandhi

CONGRESS PRESIDENT Sonia Gandhi on Saturday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, asking him to announce a financial package for revival of the MSME sector — including earmarking of Rs 1 lakh crore each for ensuring protection of wages and for setting up a credit guarantee fund.

Ignoring economic concerns of the MSME sector can have a "devastating and expansive ripple effect" on the economy, Sonia wrote. Arguing that micro, small and medium scale enterprises (MSMEs) contribute close to one-third of the nation's GDP, employ over 11 crore people, and account for nearly 50 per cent exports, she pointed out, "at this moment, without appropriate support, more than 6.3 crore MSMEs stand on the verge of economic ruin."

Sonia wrote: "Every single day of the lockdown comes at a cost of Rs 30,000 crore to the sector. Nearly all MSMEs have lost sales orders, seen a complete cessation of their work, and have had their revenue negatively impacted by the lockdown. Most worrying, the 11 crore employees are at risk of losing jobs..."

She asked the government to take steps to meet the crisis "head on", or "risk a much large economic crisis down the road". Sonia listed five suggestions,

equate, easy and timely credit supply to MSMEs." She said any monetary action at the "RBI's end must be supported by sound fiscal support from the Government" and demanded setting up of a "24x7 helpline in the Ministry to provide guidance and to assist MSMEs during this period, would also be of enormous value."

Former Finance minister P Chidambaram said Sonia's letter is a well-considered blueprint to save and revive the MSMEs of the country. "We are still awaiting FAP II promised by the Finance Minister exactly one month ago. Meanwhile, the MSME blueprint is Congress' contribution to re-start the economy. I hope the government will act on the blueprint," he said.

Meanwhile, former PM Singh and senior Congress leaders slammed the Centre for freeing dearness allowance (DA) of Central government employees. "We should be on the side of people whose dearness allowance is being cut. I sincerely believe it is not necessary at this stage to impose hardships on the government servants and also on the armed forces people," Singh said in a short video of a meeting of the group.

Rahul Gandhi said, "I see the problem is that you are building your Central Vista (in New Delhi) at the same time... You are taking away money from the middle class... and you are spending it on Central Vista."

In other suggestions, Sonia stated that "actions taken by RBI must get reflected in actions by commercial banks to ensure ad-

**After row over red zone tag, J&K relaxes curbs in Jammu areas**

**ARUN SHARMA**  
JAMMU, APRIL 25

THE J&K administration on Saturday relaxed restrictions in Jammu Nagar, Bhatindi, Sunjwan and Janipur's Bhawani Nagar in Jammu district by shifting them from the red to orange zone.

"The transition from red zone to orange has been permitted in Janipur, Gujjar Nagar, Bhatindi & Sunjwan, keeping in view the guidelines for the same. Further, transition from orange to green will take place as per procedure, in due course of time (second week of May, if situation remains as it is today)," Jammu Deputy Commissioner Sushma Chauhan wrote on her WhatsApp group. "The order/ notification of withdrawal shall be issued when the transition from red zone to green zone is complete," she said, adding that "the concerned officers, both police & magistrate have been briefed about the relaxation pertaining to orange zone."

The Indian Express had on Saturday reported on the issue in a report titled "In Jammu, NC youth leader questions red zone classification, UT admin calls it inflammatory".

Officials said that barring a few pockets, the restrictions will be relaxed and residents will be allowed to move subject to issuance of passes by District Magistrate.

About some pockets still continuing as containment zones in the areas, sources said that while some members of Tableeghi Jamaat quarantined in a mosque in Sunjwan area had tested positive, Kiryani Talab has a large settlement of Rohingya, a number of whom had also travelled to Delhi's Nizamuddin.

**Testing times: Only 3 lakh RNA kits left**

**ABANTIKA GHOSH**  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 25

WHILE THE Centre plans to scale up testing for COVID-19 to one lakh samples per day, sources said only about 3 lakh RNA extraction kits are left. With over 38,000 samples being tested on an average daily, the existing stock is just enough to last about a week.

The RNA extraction kits are required to prepare samples for the RT-PCR test - one kit per test.

This comes at a time when serological tests, or rapid antibody tests, have been suspended across the country following complaints of varying levels of accuracy.

Meanwhile, 1,490 new cases and 56 deaths were reported on Saturday, taking the total tally to 24,942 cases (5,209 recovered) and 779 deaths. The ICMR said a total of 5,79,957 samples have been tested so far.

"We have about 3 lakh RNA extraction kits, enough for just one week at the present rate of testing. We are pushing for acquiring them quickly and have placed orders with various vendors. We are hoping to get at least 3 million RNA extraction kits and 1 million viral transport medium kits, with the supplies starting soon. The problem is that the RT-PCR kits cannot be used without the RNA extraction kits," said a source.

Some states like Madhya Pradesh have already flagged the dwindling stock of RNA extraction kits.

An RNA extraction kit, as the name suggests, extracts the RNA from the virus - the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) is a single-stranded RNA virus - for running the RT-PCR test, which compares the composition of the RNA to test the identity of the virus. India is also planning

**This comes at a time when serological tests, or rapid antibody tests, have been suspended across the country following complaints of varying levels of accuracy**

to use TB testing machines to ramp up RT-PCR capacity.

Earlier this month, the Centre informed the states and Union territories (UTs) that it is planning to increase daily testing to 1 lakh by May 31.

However, the shortage of RNA extraction kits could hamper the plan to ramp up testing.

The ICMR had recently issued an advisory asking states to identify a nodal officer to coordinate with the State Resident Commissioner stationed in Delhi for procurement/ supply of reagents/ primers/ probes. "All labs certified by ICMR will procure VTM & RNA extraction kits through states," it said.

The Group of Ministers (GoM), headed by Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan, met on Saturday to review the preparations and deliberate on the way ahead. A detailed presentation on the COVID-19 situation across the country, along with the response and management, was made.

The GoM was informed that over 1 lakh PPEs and N95 masks are being manufactured in the country daily. At present, there are 104 domestic manufactures of PPEs and three making N95 masks. In addition, domestic manufacturers have also started production of ventilators and orders have been placed for over 59,000 units through nine manufacturers.

**Dhabas open in Punjab, customers stay away**

**ANJU AGNIHOTRI CHABA**  
KAPURTHALA (PUNJAB), APRIL 25

JASVIR SINGH Mann, owner of Mann Chahal Dhaba on the Jalandhar-Amritsar National Highway, was excited when he finally opened his eatery 27 days after lockdown curbs slammed its shutters down. While the curfew in the state continues, Punjab government had recently granted permission to roadside eateries to open for business and receive orders for takeaways. So when Jasvir resumed operations, he hoped that orders for food will start streaming in, steadily. But over the last two days, he has not received a single one. This despite the fact that his highway dhaba,

located in Dhillwan, Kapurthala district, is one of the most sought-after eateries among commuters on this stretch, and there are many out on the road thanks to the undergoing wheat procurement operation. But the dhaba, with a capacity to feed 150 at a time, wears a deserted look. The staffers wait to serve wearing masks, and there are social distancing markers on the floor, but no customers. Before lockdown, around 400 customers would eat here daily.

Now, Jasvir counts a dozen customers who he says stopped for tea in the last two days, but no one for takeaway food. The Punjab government has only allowed grab-and-go orders with eat-ins still prohibited at these roadside joints. Operations were allowed particularly keeping



'procurement season' in mind as many tractor-trolleys and trucks are on the highway shipping wheat during this time.

Several owners of highway dhabas in Punjab say that regaining the faith of customers would be a major challenge in the days to come.

But despite the last two days, Jasvir says: "I am really thankful to the government that it allowed us to operate when the

entire country is under lockdown till May 3. People have to regain their faith in eating out." He also adds that before opening, the place was properly sanitised.

Several owners of highway dhabas in Punjab say that regaining the faith of customers would be a major challenge in the days to come.

They point out that while there are vehicles on the road, most - including trucks - only stop for tea and packed snacks as they prefer carrying essentials needed for the journey with them. Khalsa Punjabi Dhaba, which is located in Hamira, Kartarpur on the NH-1, also opened on Tuesday and but only six odd customers came for packed food.

Anil Kumar, the main cook

of Khalsa Dhaba, said, "We opened the dhaba yesterday, but could not get any customer. On Wednesday, 5-6 customers came and got food packed." He added that daily 200 to 300 customers used to visit this place before the coronavirus outbreak.

"Now we are afraid that people will not come," said Anil, while claiming that they were trying to follow all precautions from wearing masks and washing hands frequently.

Ishfaq, a worker on Sarpanch Dhaba, said: "Some customers who came today were very particular and asked me to wash my hands in front of them before packing food. I have been washing my hands every half an hour."

**e-TENDER:**  
**Govt. of West Bengal**  
Executive Engineer, Nadia Highway Divn. No.- II, P.W. (Rds) Dte., Kalyani, Nadia invites e-tender for repairing of road works through N.I.T NO.- 01 of 2020-21 of EE/NHD-II, P.W. (Roads) Dte.  
**Tender ID:** 2020\_WBPWD\_282137\_1  
Bid Submission end date & time: 09.05.2020 upto 12.00 hrs.  
Details can be obtained from website: [wbenders.gov.in](http://wbenders.gov.in) Sd/-  
(P.K. BAGCHI)  
Executive Engineer, Nadia Highway Divn. No.-II  
P.W. (Rds) Direct.

**RECRUITMENT TO VARIOUS ADMINISTRATIVE POSITIONS CORRIGENDUM**  
National Institute of Design, Madhya Pradesh (NID MP) had invited online application from eligible candidates for filling up various administrative positions vide recruitment notification dated 01.03.2020. It is notified to all concerned candidates, advertisers and stakeholders that the last date for submission of online applications has now been extended to 05.05.2020. To see detailed advertisement, corrigendum etc, please visit the Institute website: <https://www.nidmp.ac.in/recruitment.html>  
**REGISTRAR**

**"IMPORTANT"**  
Whilst care is taken prior to acceptance of advertising copy, it is not possible to verify its contents. The Indian Express (P) Limited cannot be held responsible for such contents, nor for any loss or damage incurred as a result of transactions with companies, associations or individuals advertising in its newspapers or Publications. We therefore recommend that readers make necessary inquiries before sending any monies or entering into any agreements with advertisers or otherwise acting on an advertisement in any manner whatsoever.

# 5 ECONOMY

Net asset values of Franklin Templeton's FoF schemes fall by up to 25%

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU  
MUMBAI, APRIL 25

MORE TROUBLE has come up for investors in Franklin Templeton's fund of funds (FoF) schemes, which invest in other mutual fund schemes.

As many as six of the fund house's FoF schemes have lost up to 25 per cent in their net asset values (NAVs). These FoFs have exposure to the Franklin Templeton's six credit schemes which are being wound up due heavy redemption pressure.

Franklin Life Stage FoF 50s Plus has witnessed a 25.2 per cent decline in NAV. Franklin Multi-Asset Solution Fund NAV declined by 22 per cent. "It is really unfortunate that investors are suffering huge losses at a time when the country has been hit by the coronavirus pandemic," said an investor.

The six schemes that the fund house had shut down on Thursday are Franklin India Low Duration Fund, Franklin India Dynamic Accrual Fund, Franklin India Credit Risk Fund, Franklin India Short Term Income Plan, Franklin India Ultra Short Bond Fund and Franklin India Income Opportunities Fund.

## BRIEFLY

### HDFC buys 6.43% stake in Reliance Capital

Mumbai: Mortgage firm HDFC on Saturday acquired 6.43 per cent stake in debt-trapped Reliance Capital by invoking pledged shares. These shares were acquired pursuant to invocation of pledge by security trustee on behalf of the corporation, which was pledged against a loan given by the lender in its normal course of business, HDFC said in a regulatory filing. **ENS**

### ICICI Pru Life Q4 net income slips 31%

Mumbai: ICICI Prudential Life on Saturday said a staggering Rs 18,898 crore loss on its investments and a robust growth in the cash-burning protection policy sales have led to an over 31 per cent dip in net income for the March quarter at Rs 179.5 crore. **PTI**

### Boeing pulls out of \$4.2-billion Embraer deal

Sao Paulo/Paris: Boeing Co on Saturday pulled out of a \$4.2 billion deal to buy the commercial jets division of Brazil's Embraer, unravelling years of work on a transformative move driven by expanding competition with Europe's Airbus. The deal's collapse is expected to trigger a legal battle as hopes for an alliance spanning from regional to jumbo jets dissolve into behind-the-scenes bickering. **REUTERS**

## RISES ₹50K CR IN 14 DAYS — ₹1.36 LAKH CR SINCE EARLY MAR Weak credit pushes cash in hand to highest level since 2007-08

SANDEEP SINGH, GEORGE MATHEW & HARISH DAMODARAN  
NEW DELHI/MUMBAI, APRIL 25

EVEN AS Prime Minister Narendra Modi and RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das urged people to use digital payment tools during the COVID-19 outbreak, the first fortnight of the lockdown seems to have pushed the country more towards a cash-driven economy. The share of money held in the form of currency, both by the public and as cash with banks, has hit the highest level since 2007-08.

The increase is being attributed to weak credit-cum-deposit creation by banks in a slowing economy as well as the public's greater desire to remain liquid amid the lockdown and the looming economic distress. The total currency in circulation (CIC) — the outstanding value of notes and coins issued by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) — stood at Rs 25,06,100 crore as on April 17.

Not only was this 14.5 per cent higher than a year ago, but also 39.4 per cent more than the Rs 17,97,100 crore level of November 4, 2016 (just prior to demonetisation) and 2.8 times the Rs 8.98

## EXPLAINED Cash still a vital component of distribution chain

ON THE ground, cash continues to remain king, notwithstanding the government's appeal to the people to utilise digital payment tools during the coronavirus-induced lockdown.

So much so that even retailers as well as grocery store owners prefer cash from customers as they need to pay their vendors in cash as well. Retailers want cash for paying the distributors, while distributors want cash to pay their suppliers.

lakh crore low recorded on January 6, 2017.

Banking sources say that as the Prime Minister announced the three-week lockdown on March 24, that curbed operations of e-commerce platforms, there were cash withdrawals as the neighbourhood mom and pop stores turned out to be most reliable for daily grocery needs. Many are withdrawing cash from ATMs and keeping it as reserve for personal needs, bankers said.

Restrictions on travel and public gatherings, already imposed in

many places before the nationwide lockdown from March 25, appears to have led to people accumulating cash and making more than normal withdrawals from banks/ATMs as a precautionary measure.

Sources said even grocery store owners prefer cash saying they need to pay their vendors in cash. "While the retailer is asking for cash to be paid to the distributor, the distributor wants cash to pay to suppliers. At the ground level, it's mostly a cash economy in the lockdown," said a banker.

Even in March, as COVID concerns grew, cash withdrawals witnessed a sharp surge.

Cash with public jumped by Rs 52,541 crore during the fortnight ending March 13, went up by another Rs 33,539 crore in the 14-day period ended March 27 and another Rs 49,554 crore by April 10. In total, cash with public jumped by Rs 1.35 lakh crore since March.

Currency with the public is arrived at after deducting cash with banks from total currency in circulation. Currency in circulation refers to cash or currency within a country that is physically used to conduct transactions between consumers and businesses.

Cash in the system has been steadily rising even though the government and the RBI pushed for a "less cash society", digitisation of payments and slapped restrictions on the use of cash on various transactions.

RBI data shows that the rise in January and February amounted to Rs 39,436 crore and Rs 36,844 crore respectively.

In fact, over the last 12-months, the currency with public has risen by Rs 305,694 crore. This makes it an average monthly increase of Rs 25,474 crore.

## 'Mutual fund problem can swiftly migrate to financial services, then spread soon to real economy'



SPECIAL TO EXPRESS  
UK SINHA

THE IMF chief has called the economic fallout of the corona pandemic crisis and as "humanity's darkest hour". Prime Minister Narendra Modi has rightly called this a war (*yudha*) against coronavirus, implementing lockdown and containment measures hitherto unimaginable for a large democracy like ours. The same war-like approach is needed in managing and containing the economic fallout. The IMF forecast the country's GDP growth to go down below 2 per cent in FY21, Barclays have projected zero growth. There is consensus that the first quarter of the year will see negative growth. Some researchers point out that if the lockdown extends further, the country will see a negative GDP growth in the full year. Exports in March have lowered by 35 per cent. While the equity market is holding on in the last few sessions, the drop thus far between January beginning to end-March has also been 35 per cent.

### Are there any warning signals?

On April 23, Franklin Templeton Mutual Fund had to shut six of its funds. This has never happened in India in the past. The investors' money stuck in these funds is around Rs 25,000 crore, with no clarity on when and how much would they get back. A large US-based fund lost close to one fourth of its assets in India.

The problem is unlikely to remain confined to one mutual fund and there are already indications that other mutual funds are facing huge redemption requests. While these funds have investment grade securities in their portfolio, the market for such debt has completely dried up. Even prior to this, there were strong signals from the debt market right since the beginning of April.

In the week ending April 9, state development loans of Rs 37,500 crore which were put for auction had to be either cancelled or reduced in size — and that too at a yield almost 70-75 basis points higher than the previous week.

## CHECKING MONEY LAUNDERING

### 38 ENTITIES CAN COLLECT AADHAAR

New Delhi: The Finance Ministry has allowed 29 insurance companies and 9 securities entities to collect Aadhaar for the purpose of know your customer (KYC), a move aimed at checking money laundering and routing investments into shell companies. **PTI**

The economic revival post-COVID also requires active coordination between government and the regulators. Sebi and Irdai also have to play their part in ensuring normal functioning of the industries they regulate."

This was in spite of the rate cut by 75 bps by the RBI and injection of liquidity in the previous week.

Even highest rated PSU bond issues faced a gripping problem. REC had to withdraw one of its issues and NABARD could not get the full amount it had sought. 'AAA' rated private sector issuers met similar fate and lower rated (investment grade) wouldn't even consider entering the market. RBI came out with a second package on April 17, where 50 per cent of the Rs 50,000 crore was earmarked for smaller NBFCs and MFIs. But, no bank is willing to entertain this. In the first such auction made by RBI on April 23 for Rs 25,000 crore, only half the amount was subscribed. Another booster shot from RBI by way of refinance through NABARD, NHB and SIDBI is yet to take off.

The liquidity released by the RBI is just not reaching the desired beneficiaries. Banks have instead parked huge amount with the RBI under reverse repo. Insurance companies are, reportedly, out of the bond market right now. Today, no HFC is getting any repayment from home loan buyers, no SME is able to service its NBFC loans and no MFI can hope to get any repayment from its low-income borrowers. Banks are reluctant to lend and refusing to apply the moratorium facility to them. Part of the reason could be the bankers' worry about punitive action even if honest mistakes are made. But the problem of the mutual fund industry can swiftly migrate to the entire financial services industry and might then soon spread to the real economy.

The All India Manufacturers' Organisation predicts the closure of 25 per cent of MSMEs if the lockdown is extended. Microfinance companies may not have a place to go for fresh support whenever the lockdown is lifted and similar

will be the fate of home loan buyers. According to a McKinsey report, in case of a 25 per cent default by the MSMEs, there will be solvency issues for the entire financial system.

### Talking solutions

Having rightly focused on containing the spread and on social protection so far, there is now an urgent need to focus on economic revival and job protection. Unclogging the financial markets is the first step towards economic revival. RBI has to ensure that the TL-TRO money actually reaches the deserving NBFCs, HFCs, MFIs and MSMEs. There should be willingness to enhance the targeted amount as and when needed. This could be through more clear directions and monitoring, credit enhancement to cover first loss or credit guarantee, issue of tax-free bonds, providing equity to stressed MSMEs through a special fund or a SPV, and lastly, direct corporate bond buying programme by the RBI. Some of these measures have been tried in the past in less testing times.

While these steps may be drastic, it is advisable to take them up sooner rather than later. Else the pain will aggravate and it will ultimately become more expensive for the country. Obviously, there may be honest mistakes in the process. Tolerance for such mistakes has to be high in a situation like this, and this has to be properly communicated to the bankers and civil servants.

The economic revival post-COVID also requires active coordination between government and the regulators. Sebi and Irdai also have to play their part in ensuring normal functioning of the industries they regulate. They will have to re-look at some their 'peace time' rules and regulations. There are instances in the last few months where better coordination would have resulted in more efficient outcomes. Coordinated action is the need in the current, war-like situation. The pandemic has exponential characteristics — even in its economic fallout. Linear solutions to deal with it will not succeed. We have to be nimble, take calculated risks with newer approaches, and should be prepared to review and redesign our steps as things unfold.

The author is the former Chairman of Securities and Exchange Board of India

## 'Builders should offer discounts to sell units worth ₹65,950 crore'

Cash-starved builders are sitting on ready-to-move-in housing units worth about ₹65,950 crore across seven cities

### 78,000:

Number of unsold ready-to-move-in flats at the end of March quarter across seven cities

### 12%:

Share of unsold ready-to-move-in units within total unsold

stocks of over 6.44 lakh units

### 88%:

Percentage of units that are under construction

### 7.15-7.8%:

Current interest rate range on home loans



### UNSOLD STOCK AND ITS WORTH IN EACH OF THE SEVEN CITIES:

**MUMBAI METROPOLITAN REGION (MMR):** 19,200 units worth Rs 26,150 cr  
**PUNE:** 16,000 units worth Rs 11,400 crore  
**DELHI-NCR:** 15,600 units worth Rs 10,720 cr

**BENGALURU:** 10,100 units worth Rs 7,150 crore  
**CHENNAI:** 9,400 units worth Rs 5,800 crore  
**KOLKATA:** 5,300 units worth Rs 2,860 crore  
**HYDERABAD:** 2,400 units worth Rs 1,870 crore

### E-REGISTRATION FOR PROPERTY DOCUMENTS:

Some states are now mulling introduction of e-registration of property documents, which is necessary since physical site visits are unlikely to pick up

### DEVELOPERS NEED LIQUIDITY MAY LOOK TOSELL: Amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic,

organised developers with strong balance sheets are less apt to offer discounts, but those which need liquidity urgently will need to

consider their options. These would include discounted prices and other incentives  
Source: Anarock/PTI

## PART OF BIGGER STUDY BY IIT BOMBAY RESEARCHERS, IN COLLABORATION WITH HRD MINISTRY

### Lost income to marginal workers is 0.41% of GDP for first 3 weeks of lockdown: Study on virus impact

ABHA GORADIA  
MUMBAI, APRIL 25

QUANTIFYING THE impact of COVID-19 on Indian economy under different scenarios, a study by researchers at IIT Bombay has assessed that at an aggregate level, the lost income to marginal workers is 0.41 per cent of the GDP for the three weeks of lockdown until April 14. The impact soars to 1.18 per cent of GDP if the lockdown remains in place until May-end.

"For an Indian economy of the size of Rs. 140.78 lakh crore (2018-19 estimates), the lost income to marginal workers is nearly Rs 58,000 crore (0.41 per cent of GDP) for three weeks of lockdown. The impact soars to Rs 1,65,000 crore (1.18 per cent of

GDP) if lockdown persists for two months," professors Hari Priya Gundimeda and Vinish Katharina have calculated in their study.

The direct economic impact of COVID-19 has been assessed at three different levels: on lost work opportunities for casual labourers, and also those who were getting benefit under employment guarantee programme; livelihoods impacted due to reduced consumption of some key services such as entertainment, eating out etc; and lastly, stalling of activity in formal economic sector.

"The estimates suggest wide variation in the values across the districts and states depending upon their dependence on these services and the structure of the state economy. However, at an aggregate level, for an Indian economy of the size of Rs 140.78 lakh crore (2018-19 estimates), the lost income to marginal workers is nearly Rs 1,16,160 crore (0.83 per cent of GDP) for 42 weeks of lockdown. Not unexpectedly, the most impact is to the marginal workers from Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, Bihar, West Bengal, and Madhya Pradesh, forming the top five states, as they forgo nearly 45 per cent of this total income," it said.

It added, "The corresponding figures for lost consumption expenditure are Rs 2,21,084 crore (0.79 per cent) for 42 days. Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh are the top five states affected by this, again forming nearly 45 per cent of the lost expenditure. Regarding lost GSDP due to lockdown, the figures are

Rs 1,18,756 crore (8.43 per cent) of GDP for 42 days lockdown. As expected, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, and Karnataka suffer most with a nearly 47 per cent hit is GSDP."

However, these estimates reflect only the direct impact on the economic sector, the social sector, and the household consumption sector but not the aftermath of the pandemic — the financial anguish, bankruptcies, and increased unemployment, said Gundimeda.

The study is part of a bigger study 'COMMAND: Collaboration for Multi-Model Analysis of Infectious Diseases', involving several researchers at IIT Bombay in collaboration with HRD Ministry, with support from researchers in IIT Gandhinagar, ICMR and Visva-Bharati University.

## FROM PAGE ONE

### Foreign subsidiaries fudged audit reports, bank records: probe

Based on these account statements, Yes Bank alleged diversion of loan funds by Malvern to other Cox & Kings Group entities "leading to a complete destruction of enterprise value of Malvern".

"As a former auditor of Malvern Travel, we are bound by commercial confidentiality and so can't comment on any allegations made about the former management," said the official spokesperson of BDO.

An email to RBS in UK did not elicit any response.

Records show that Raffingers UK LLP, an audit firm, has filed a criminal complaint before the National Crime Agency in the UK

against Prometheon Enterprise Ltd (UK), a subsidiary of Cox and Kings Group for forging the statement of accounts of Prometheon for financial year 2019.

Raffingers has said it has not signed any statement of accounts of Prometheon for FY2019, as it was not able to complete its audit. Significantly, records of the resolution professional show that the forged statement of accounts of Prometheon was allegedly sent to the statutory auditors of Cox & Kings in India, for consolidation, from a "fictitious domain name and email id of Raffingers".

In March, the resolution professional informed the Ministry

of Corporate Affairs (MCA) that due to the alleged forgery by Prometheon, the consolidated accounts of Cox and Kings Ltd signed by its chief financial officer and company secretary are incorrect. The RP has also reported it as a fraud to the MCA. Yes Bank has an exposure of 157 million pounds (about Rs 1,460 crore) to Prometheon, that has defaulted in its payment obligation since June 2019.

Cox and Kings was sent to bankruptcy and insolvency court in India in October 2019 after it defaulted on payments. The travel and tour company owes Rs 5,500 crore to banks and financial institutions. Banks that have

an exposure to the firm include Axis Bank, State Bank of India, Indusind, Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank, Kotak Mahindra among others.

Detailed emails to Cox and Kings, Ajay Ajit Peter Kerkar, the former promoter of the company and Yes Bank remained unanswered.

Yes Bank has also alleged that Cox and Kings Financial Services Ltd, allegedly submitted a "manipulated" debtor statement with the bank to avail of a higher working capital facility of Rs 400 crore and "siphoned" the loan.

The bank has also alleged that Cox & Kings has allegedly misused Rs 4,387 crore, it got from

the sale of its profitable education firm, Holidaybreak Education Ltd in January 2019. According to the records "between February 2019 to July 2019, Cox & Kings has shared five different versions about the utilization of the sale proceeds" with its lenders.

Last month, Ajay Ajit Peter Kerkar was summoned for questioning by the Enforcement Directorate (ED), in connection with the money laundering case against Rana Kapoor.

Kapoor, currently lodged in jail, is accused of taking kickbacks in lieu of granting loans to several companies that have now defaulted on repayments.

## 328 companies seek moratorium on loan repayment from lenders: ICRA

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU  
MUMBAI, APRIL 25

AS MANY as 328 companies, including some well-known industrial firms, have sought moratorium on loan repayment from their lenders till May-end, rating agency ICRA has said.

Tata Power Renewable Energy Ltd, JSW Paints Pvt Ltd, JSW Steel, Kalyan Jewellers, MRPL, Piramal Enterprises, TV Sundaram Iyengar, Centrum Financial Services Ltd, Air India Express, GMR Hyderabad Aviation SEZ, Hindustan Copper Ltd, Jindal Power, and Jindal Steel & Power are among the companies that sought moratorium on loan repayment, ICRA said.

On March 27, the Reserve Bank of India said banks are being permitted to allow a moratorium of three months on payment of instalments in respect of all term loans and credit card

### SEVERAL MAJOR NAMES

■ Tata Power Renewable Energy Ltd, JSW Paints Pvt Ltd, JSW Steel, Kalyan Jewellers, MRPL, Piramal Enterprises, TV Sundaram Iyengar, Centrum Financial Services Ltd, Air India Express, GMR Hyderabad Aviation SEZ, Hindustan Copper Ltd, Jindal Power, and Jindal Steel & Power are among the companies that sought moratorium

torium of three months on payment of instalments in respect of all term loans and credit card

## FCC may halt US ops of 3 state-controlled Chinese telecom companies

REUTERS  
WASHINGTON, APRIL 25

THE FEDERAL Communications Commission (FCC) on Friday said it may shut down the U.S. operations of three state-controlled Chinese telecommunications companies, citing national security risks.

The FCC issued so-called show cause orders to China Telecom Americas, China Unicom Americas, Pacific Networks Corp and its wholly owned subsidiary ComNet (USA) LLC, directing them to explain why it should not start the

process of revoking authorizations enabling their U.S. operations.

The FCC's action represents the latest sign of President Donald Trump's administration taking a hard line toward China.

"We simply cannot take a risk and hope for the best when it comes to the security of our networks," FCC Chairman Ajit Pai said in a statement.

The FCC granted its approvals to the firms more than a decade ago. Since then, it said, "the national security and law enforcement risks linked to the Chinese government's activities have grown significantly."

## 'EU nations to get nod to give subordinated debt to firms'

Brussels: EU countries will soon be able to grant subordinated debt to prop up virus-hit economies, people in the know said on Saturday, as state aid regulators once again loosened rules to make it easier for companies get state support.

The European Commission is now waiting for feedback from the 27 EU countries on the proposal which came after several member states asked for such a measure, the people said.

Subordinated debt ranks lower than senior debt in the event a bankrupt company has to pay debt holders. **REUTERS**

# 6 THE OUTBREAK SUNDAY STORY



## What's on their plate?

For many of the migrants stuck in camps amidst the lockdown, home is often hundreds of kilometres away, a separation made worse by the lack of familiar food. Amidst protests over food in Surat, Kochi and elsewhere, THE SUNDAY EXPRESS tells their stories over their meals in a day



### PULWAMA, J&K

'I'm in Kashmir most of the year, I love the mutton curry here. I miss it these days'

**Sheikh Imam Hussain, 43, migrant worker from Siwan, Bihar**  
**Shelter:** Government High Secondary School, Kakapora

A truck mechanic in Kakapora in South Kashmir's Pulwama district, Hussain has been in the camp with 364 others since April 3. He has been in Kashmir for the past 15 years

### ADIL AKHZER



**What he ate on April 22**

**8 am:** A cup of tea, two biscuits  
**11.30 am:** Rice and soya chunks curry  
**4 pm:** A cup of tea and biscuits  
**8 pm:** Chicken curry with rice

"I spend most of my time on the school grounds. When I was working, I would have lunch at restaurants but always cook dinner. Today, at the shelter, some of us cooked the dinner. We bought chicken and made curry," he says.

### Who prepares the food

The residents cook their own food with ingredients provided by the district administration. Hussain shares a classroom with 12 other people and they take turns to cook. "We provide milk, vegetables, rice, oil, and other ingredients required to prepare meals. The workers cook on their own stoves," says tehsildar Raqib Ah Ganaie, who is in charge of the camp.

### Favourite food

**CHICKEN CURRY, CABBAGE-TOMATO SABZI**

"I love trying out different foods and, earlier, I would spend a lot on eating out. I never compromised on it. My wife calls me often and asks me if I have been eating properly. I tell her I am satisfied with the food that I get at the camp," says Hussain.

### FIRST DISH HE WILL HAVE ON REACHING HOME

Mutton curry. "Bahut time hogaya mutton khayee hue (It has been long since I had mutton). At my accommodation in Kakapora, we often had mutton curry. I spend 11 months in Kashmir and one month with my family in Bihar. I enjoy the curry that is made here," he says.

### KOCHI, KERALA

'State ensuring no one goes hungry, but long for wife's Maithil dishes'

**Pintu Kumar Thakur, 36, migrant worker from Madhubani, Bihar**  
**Shelter:** Government Girls Higher Secondary School, Ernakulam, Kochi  
He has been working in Kerala for the past 16 years in the wood furniture polishing business. He stayed on rent in Kochi with seven other people, including his brother Mukesh Kumar Thakur, 24. Since March 25, Thakur, along with 145 other workers and destitute people, has been staying at the school, converted into a camp

### VISHNU VARMA

**What he ate on April 21**

**7.30 am:** A cup of black tea  
**9 am:** A bowl of rice porridge with chana/moong dal  
**1 pm:** Rice with sambar, beans  
**4 pm:** A cup of black tea with two biscuits  
**7 pm:** Rice with sambar and vegetables (allowed a second helping)

Thakur admits that while he's tired of having the same rice-sambar meal for lunch and dinner every day, he says he is not in a position to complain. "If the government did not give us this food, workers like us would have starved to death. When the lockdown ends and I return home, I can buy and eat anything with the money I earn. Right now, I have very little money and so I adjust. Also, look at Delhi. Both

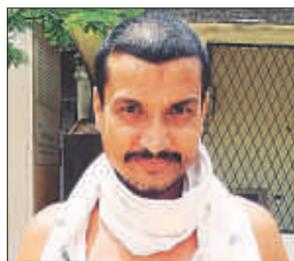
**20,368**  
Camps in Kerala  
**3,58,524**  
No. of migrants

Prime Minister Modi and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal are there and still people are going hungry. Here in Kerala, authorities are making sure no one goes hungry," says the father of two, adding, "On festivals, the menu changes." On Vishu (April 14), the workers were treated to a vegetarian feast (*sadya*) and on Easter, they got chicken biryani.

### Who prepares the food

The food is prepared at the school kitchen by members of Kudumbashree, the Kerala government's women self-help group that runs several community kitchens in the state. For procurement of ingredients for the meals, funds are transferred by the state government to local bodies (in this case, the Kochi Corporation), which then pay the Kudumbashree units on a per-plate basis.

"Apart from the people here, we cook food for two other camps at this kitchen. About 150 kg of rice



is cooked every day and we feed nearly 400 people. So far there have been no complaints. On some days, the meals are also sponsored by private individuals," says Shibui P Chacko, president of the school's PTA unit.

### Favourite food

**CHICKEN/FISH CURRY**

"From the time I arrived in Kerala, I have been hooked to non-vegetarian food. It's impossible to live here without eating non-veg," he laughs. "Earlier, I would cook fish or chicken at least twice a week. I struggled with making rotis, so I mostly had rice, dal and chicken curry. I love the thick, red Kerala matta rice. It goes very well with fish..." he says, adding that he also misses the fish and mutton curry that his wife cooks.

### FIRST DISH HE WILL HAVE ON REACHING HOME

All traditional Maithil dishes that his wife cooks.

### DELHI

'Parwal must be in season now. I will tell wife to make aloo-parwal'

**Jaibin Yadav, 27, migrant worker from Darbhanga, Bihar**

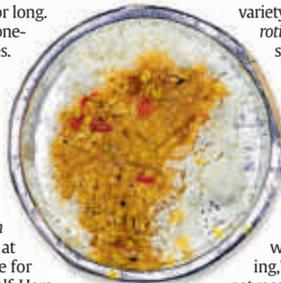
**Shelter:** Yamuna Sports Complex, New Delhi  
He worked as a coolie at the Gandhinagar wholesale market in Delhi. Has been staying at camp since April 2. The shelter, one of the biggest in Delhi, became functional on March 31 and now has nearly 900 migrant workers and homeless people

### ANKITA DWIVEDI JOHRI

**What he ate on April 21**

**7 am:** A cup of tea, two biscuits and rusk  
**8 am:** Two fruits — banana/apple/orange  
**Noon:** Dal-rice, roti  
**7 pm:** Puri and aaloo ki raswaali sabzi (potato curry)

"I wake up early so that I don't have to wait in line for long. We have to maintain one-metre distance in lines. The time between 8 am to 12 pm is the toughest for me, I feel very hungry. When I worked at the Gandhinagar market, I would have three-four rotis with aaloo-shimla mirch sabzi and sattu (drink) at 10 am and then leave for work. I cooked it myself. Here, I get restless," he says, adding, "We can have as many helpings as we want, but I try to take everything at once, because a second helping would mean standing in line again. I also feel very hungry after PT (an hour-long physical training class in the



evening). I eat a lot, at least five-six puris at night."

### Who prepares the food

Tea, lunch and dinner are by Rotary Club of Delhi, fruits by the Gautam Gambhir Foundation.

Executive Magistrate Sohan Lal, who is in-charge of the shelter, one of the biggest in the Capital, that has been functional since March 31, says his team tries to ensure variety in the menu. "Apart from

roti-sabzi, dal-chawal, we also serve chhole-chawal and rajma-chawal on some days. We also give them baingan (aubergine) sabzi. Everything is made on campus and served in disposable plates. There was one counter earlier, which led to long queues, but now we have three with proper social distancing," he says. "So far, we have not received any major complaints about food."

Rakesh Jain, president of the Rotary Club of Delhi Ananta, says 15 members from the group have been staying at the shelter since April 1 to provide food for the workers. "We prepare food for nearly 1,100 peo-

**111**  
Camps in Delhi  
**10,410**  
No. of migrants



ple daily, which also includes staff. About 200 kg of rice, 150-200 kg of wheat flour, 50 kg of pulses and 100 kg of potatoes are used for preparing lunch and dinner every day. We have been told to continue the operations till May 3," he says.

### Favourite food

**CHHOLE-BHATURE, CHHOLE-KULCHE, MUSTARD FISH CURRY, BHINDI, ALOO-GOBHI SABZI**

"My mother and wife call me often and ask me if I am eating well. I just say everything is fine. *Ab unko kaise bolun bhindi, aloo-gobhi khaane ka mann hai* (How do I tell them that I want to eat okra, potato and cauliflower curry?) They are my favourite vegetables. I would earn Rs 600 for a day's work and I could buy whatever vegetable I liked. On days that I made Rs 800, I would buy meat or fish. *Par ab majboori hai isliye jo mil raha hai kha rahe hain* (We are helpless now, so we are eating what we get)."

### FIRST DISH HE WILL HAVE ON REACHING HOME

Aaloo-parwal bhujjiya. "Parwal aa gaye honge (Pointed gourd must be in season now). When I return home, I will ask my wife to make aaloo-parwal bhujjiya for me," he smiles.

### MUMBAI, MAHARASHTRA

'Told mother to save chana dal halwa made at Shab-e-Barat'

**Jubair Khan, 27, a migrant worker from Sitapur, Uttar Pradesh**  
**Shelter:** Eatery named 'The Next Big Thing' in Girgaon Chowpatty  
Since arriving in Mumbai in January this year, he has been working as a waiter at a small eatery near Wilson College in Chowpatty. While the restaurant has shut since the lockdown, he continues to stay there

### IRAM SIDDIQUE

**What he ate on April 22**

**11 am:** A cup of black tea with a packet of biscuits that he purchased himself  
**12.30 pm:** Four puris with chana dal and sabzi  
**7.30 pm:** Dal khichdi

"The distribution of food usually begins at noon, but there is a long queue. It takes about 15-20 minutes. On some days, the distribution begins early too — you have to keep checking. Once I got late and didn't get any food. Each person is given only one packet," says Khan.

### Who prepares the food

Lunch and dinner are distributed by the Lodha Foundation, outside the Lodha Institute of Vocational Education, organised by Malabar constituency MLA Mangal Prabhat Lodha. According to Prakash More, a volunteer managing the distribution, around 2,500 packets of puri-sabzi are distributed in the afternoon, and the same number of dal khichdi packets are distributed in the evening.

### Favourite Food

**DAL, ROTI WITH SABZI; CHICKEN CURRY**  
"I earned around Rs 11,500 per month

**4,843**  
Camps in Maharashtra  
**4,99,215**  
No. of migrants



and sent Rs 8,000 back home to my mother and wife. Following the lockdown, I called the owner for money. He asked me to take some from the cash counter to buy supplies. But it got over. I cannot ask him again, he might cut the amount from my pay," fears Khan.

### FIRST DISH HE WILL HAVE AFTER REACHING HOME

Chicken curry with roti. "Last week, some of us pooled in Rs 20 each but we could not get chicken anywhere. I have told my mother to cook it for me when I return. I have also told her to save some of the chana dal halwa made at Shab-e-Barat (it fell on April 9 this year) for me," he says.

### SURAT, GUJARAT

'The potatoes in khichdi are big. We spice it up with chilli, salt'

**Geeta Vilas Mohadikar, 35, migrant worker from Nagpur, Maharashtra**  
**Shelter:** Suman High School, Surat  
Before the lockdown, she worked at a powerloom factory in the Anjana Industrial Estate in Surat's Limbayat area. She now lives in the Surat Municipal Corporation-run school, where five women residents stay in separate rooms

### KAMAAL SAIYED

**What she ate on April 22**

**9 am:** Tea with two biscuits  
**Noon:** Potato curry, four puris and one chapatti  
**7 pm:** Masala khichdi

"Sometimes we also get dal-rice. The dal is sweet and the rice is not cooked well. Also, the dal has no tadka, it's just boiled. For dinner we get overcooked khichdi with vegetables. Even the potatoes are big in size. We spice it up with chillies and salt," she says.

### Who prepares the food

Food is supplied by the Samast Bihar Jharkhand Samaj Trust, Surat.

"We have set up a kitchen in Pandesara area. Meals are cooked twice a day and delivered on vans to shelter homes. We give vegetarian food so that everyone can eat it," says Sanjiv Jha, a member of

**158**  
Camps in Gujarat  
**9,218**  
No. of migrants



the trust.

### Favourite food

**CHICKEN CURRY, FRIED FISH, MIXED VEGETABLE SABZI**

"I am fond of goat meat and chicken. I shared my rented room with three women, and a few days before the lockdown we had chicken curry and rice," she says.

### FIRST DISH SHE WILL HAVE AFTER REACHING HOME

Mutton curry, rice with buttermilk. "My mother is an expert cook. I will tell her to make the curry for me as well as bitter melon and cauliflower," she smiles.



Across THE AISLE



**PCHIDAMBARAM**  
Website: pchidambaram.in  
Twitter: @Pchidambaram\_IN

# Hoarding government, starving people

**FACT: "As on April 20, 2020, we have a stock of 524.5 lakh metric tons (LMT) of food grain — 289.5 LMT of rice and 235 LMT of wheat": Mr Ram Vilas Paswan. (Besides, there are 287 LMT of unmillid paddy.)**

The story of India moving from dependence on food grain imported from the United States (the PL 480 programme) to self-sufficiency to export capability is a story that has been told many times. We were so short of food grain that as soon as a ship arrived, the stocks were rushed to different parts of the country for distribution. India lived from 'ship to mouth'.

The Green Revolution changed everything.

The Public Distribution System (PDS) was introduced in India in 1942. It was a system of rationing the food grain available. In the Seventh Five Year Plan Period, PDS was made a permanent feature and the whole population was brought under PDS.

PDS served two purposes. As production of food grain soared, farmers were left with huge marketable surpluses. We needed a system that would procure the food grain at fair and remunerative prices — and set a floor for the producer price. Food Corporation of India (FCI) procures the surplus food grain at a Minimum Support Price (MSP). The other purpose was to stock food grain after the Kharif and Rabi harvests and release the re-

quired quantities to the states every month in order to ensure year-round availability and price stability.

The distribution of food grain is based on a complex system of classification of and distribution to different sections of the people: Above Poverty Line (APL), Below Poverty Line (BPL), Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) and Open Market Sales.

## WHO OWNS THE FOOD GRAIN?

In all this, one basic question is never asked or answered. Who 'owns' the stocks of food grain with the FCI? The central government/FCI believes it is the owner, since it is accountable for procurement, warehousing and distribution, and it is answerable for losses. The state governments think they are the owners of the quantities they have purchased with the states' money. They are wrong.

The food grain belongs to the people of India. The grain was produced by the toil of the farmers and agricultural labour. It was procured, and is stored, using taxpayers' money. Any profit or loss due to the operations of the FCI or the State Civil Supplies Corporations is a profit or loss to the exchequer. If the food grain belongs to the people of India, it is the people of India who have a first claim on the food grain.

If we keep this fundamental truth in mind, it is easy to answer the question: what should the government do in an emergency situation like the outbreak of a pandemic, the nationwide lockdown, and the inevitable poverty and hunger among, at least, the bottom half of the population (13 crore families)?

## NO CASH, NO FOOD

Today, it is a stark fact that millions of families have run out of cash. They cannot buy food. The worst fate that can befall a person is being locked down, alone or with his family, with no money and no food. The poor are forced to compromise their dignity by standing in long queues for free cooked food provided by the government or private bodies. The distribution of free cooked food can never be perfect. The food will not reach all parts of a state. The quality will be poor. The quantity will be inadequate. If there are old people or small children in a family, they cannot stand in line to get food; the other members of the family have to beg for additional portions.

In a country where malnutrition is entrenched, especially among children, there is the danger of hunger becoming widespread too. Hunger and malnutrition will lead to starvation. TV, print and social media are full of anecdotal evidence that many families are going hungry and some are starving. We will never

know how many people died of starvation, because no state government will admit to starvation or count the number of starvation deaths.

The irony is that India has mountains of food grain and a system of public and private shops that can reach the food grain to the people, yet millions of poor are going hungry. The central and state governments have to ensure only two things, as long as the lockdown lasts:

1. That families have the cash to buy grain, pulses, oil, salt, sugar, etc. from the public and private shops that are supplied with adequate stocks; *and/or*
2. That adequate grain, pulses, oil, salt, sugar, etc. is given free to the 13 crore families.

## WITHIN OUR MEANS

At the risk of repetition, let me say that the first option will cost, based on Rs 5,000 per family, a maximum of Rs 65,000 crore to tide over the period until the end of May. The second option will cost, at the rate of 10 kg per person in a family per month, 65 LMT of grain per month plus a small cost for the pulses, oil, salt, sugar, etc. In fact, both options should be exercised. India owes that much to the poor. The Rabi procurement will fill the godowns again.

Saving money and hoarding food grain, while millions of families are starving, is extreme callousness.



**inside TRACK**  
COOMI KAPOOR

## NOT SO INVISIBLE

Home Minister Amit Shah has not been very visible since the end of January. Some surmised that he was out of favour because the Delhi Police failed to control the riots during US President Donald Trump's visit to the Capital, embarrassing the Modi government. The impression was reinforced when Rajnath Singh, and not Shah, was appointed last month to head the 15-member high-power ministerial committee coordinating with states on ensuring movement of essential supplies during the lockdown. In fact, the Modi-Shah *jodi* remains in regular touch. The PM did not appoint the Home Minister as chief of the ministerial committee as he needed to take all CMs on board during a pandemic. He knew that Shah's appointment would rub several CMs the wrong way. Shah succeeded in striking a jarring note nevertheless. The Home Ministry sent teams to monitor lockdown measures in some states, including West Bengal, where Mamata Banerjee took objection.

## RAHUL BACK SOON

Under the cover of the COVID-19 crisis, steps seem afoot to ensure that Rahul Gandhi returns as Congress president. Rahul resigned after the party's abysmal defeat last year and was reluctant to come back, unless he was given a free hand and the old guard, which regularly stymied his decisions, was out of the way. Acting president Sonia Gandhi recently formed a new committee to deal with the COVID-19 challenge and significantly the usual fixtures, Ahmed Patel, Ghulam Nabi Azad, A K Antony and Mallikarjun Kharge, are missing. Instead, young unknowns working closely with Rahul, such as Rohan Gupta, Gourav Vallabh, Supriya Shrinete and Praveen Chakravarty, have been included as well as long-time Rahul favourites, K C Venugopal and Randeep Surjewala. Incidentally, one of the committee members was the brain behind Sonia's demand that cost-cutting during the pandemic should include banning government advertisements to the media.

## QUICK ON THE DRAW

Hardeep Puri is well networked thanks to his IFS background and UN experience. He understood the gravity of the COVID-19 threat very early. In mid-January at a Delhi press conference Puri referred to the coronavirus spread as a "pandemic", at a time

when the WHO was still underplaying it as a "global health emergency". As Civil Aviation Minister, Puri asked Air India to stop all its flights to and from China, while the US and Europe were still getting a surge of Chinese tourists who came to celebrate the Chinese New Year in January end. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was similarly quick on the draw in putting in place measures to isolate India. Modi did fail in the human suffering because of a lockdown without notice. But his advisers concluded that prior intimation would have led to total panic and caused uncontrollable surges of humanity towards transport hubs, defeating the whole purpose of the exercise.

## COUNTRY'S LIFELINE

The freight division may earn the Railways nearly 70 per cent of its revenue, but it is always given second-class treatment, while passenger trains get priority. Goods trains are a frequent butt of jokes because of the uncertainty of their timings and compared unfavourably with trucks. But with passenger trains no longer in the way, good trains now complete journeys in less than half or one-third of the time they took earlier. The freight trains have proved to be the nation's lifeline during the lockdown, with railway personnel working round-the-clock to ensure that supplies reach every part of the country.

## ENEMY WITHIN

In the Madhya Pradesh Health Department, around 100 people have tested positive for coronavirus, starting with Principal Secretary, Health, Pallavi Jain and including the Director, Health, the Additional Director, Health, head of security in the Health Department, peons and clerks. The initial suspicion was that Jain's son, a student who had returned from the US in mid-January and was staying with his mother, was the source. But after two tests, he is still COVID-19 negative. Unable to trace the original carrier of the disease, some blame an infected file, others suspect the COVID-19 control room was itself infected by the virus.

## OUT OF COURT?

When two legal eagles clash, a high-profile court drama is expected. But the question is in which country. Abhishek Manu Singhvi, one of India's leading legal counsels, obtained an ex parte stay from a Delhi lower court against the publication of the book *Honour Bound* by London-based international arbitration lawyer Sarosh Zaiwalla. But Zaiwalla claims that he is not bound by the Delhi court order since he is a British subject and the notice should be served validly as per English law. The offending line concerns Singhvi's late father, L M Singhvi, once high commissioner in London. Zaiwalla is also contemplating counter-suing.

## Life & WORK

AMRITA MADAN

amritamadan@gmail.com



# 'One more glorious day without fear... Breathe girl'

AT MIDNIGHT, when the little one finally falls asleep... Breathe girl!

At 6 o'clock the next morning, when you wake up with aches and pains in your body, and a bit (read a lot) of house work waiting... Breathe girl!

At 8 o'clock, when you wake up the little one for her online classes while preparing for your own... Breathe girl!

At 8:30 am, when you are grateful that you don't have to travel for two-and-a-half hours to get to work — you wake up, make yourself look presentable, log in and you are ready to go — breathe girl. Can I do this forever? Is it possible to never have to step out of house yet be a contributing professional? What a relief!

At 9 o'clock, when your child's class starts with a session of mindful breathing and the wonderful concept of 'circle time', that you get to be a part of remotely... Breathe girl!

At 9 o'clock, when your office starts simultaneously with the introductory 'let's begin the day well' online 'meeting'... Breathe girl!

At 10 o'clock, when the classes (your child's and yours) are in full swing and you realise you forgot to make breakfast... Breathe girl!

At 10:30 am, when you finally chance upon an interesting method for teaching on an online forum — for a haptic millennial (your student) learning the tactile subject of architecture — wow! Breathe girl!

At 11 o'clock, while still riding high on your new-found knowledge, when you realise that your child is half asleep in 'class', and on your screen your students look drowsy too, take a moment, take a break, breathe girl! You wonder how the 'wait for your turn' in class has turned to 'guys, please talk'.

At 11 o'clock, during your coveted break, when you realise that the pet needs your attention — clean, feed, repeat — breathe girl!

At noon, when you remember it's time for your daughter's next class — thank god we are not late — breathe girl!

At 2 o'clock, when you all sit together (finally) to have lunch as a family, for a moment of camaraderie and happiness, for a moment to catch up, an opportunity that you didn't even know you were missing, really, breathe girl!

At 3 o'clock, when it's finally a moment for you to sit quietly and catch up with work, though your mind is scrambling, putting together ideas, a grocery list, a to-do list, you register that even while navigating a system that's ridden with issues, you have the cooperation of a few

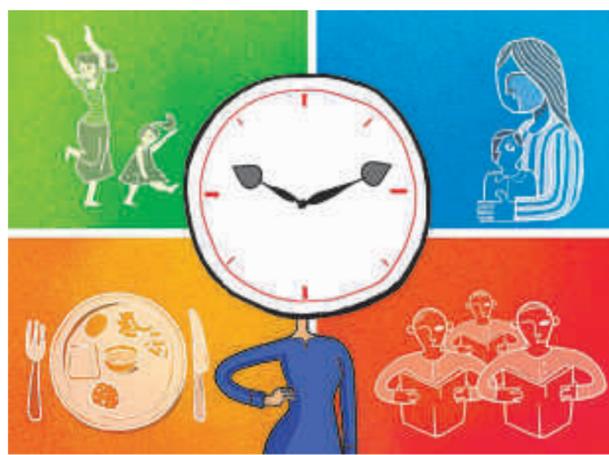


Illustration: Suvajit Dey

— some colleagues, some friends, family, some networks. A few that you can rely on and who can rely on you in return to do the jobs that you do well.

At 4 o'clock, it's time for another jump — Dear God, I need to get my child to finish her school assignments. Did I miss anything? How do I support my child? Finally, you accept that it's okay to do it when you can... Breathe girl.

At 4:30 pm, when you discover a new superpower — you seem to have developed a capacity for mental gymnastics, an ability to look at the reality differently in the online world, you are able to be simultaneously here and there, inside your mind and inside the minds of your students. You can conquer! Breathe girl...

At 5 o'clock, you wonder where the time went. You clamour to fit in as much as you can into your class, but your students have already mentally logged off. Then, you realise again that it's okay. As a teacher who thrives on reading body language to augment, revisit and repurpose her delivery, you realise you are now delivering to a blank screen. You want to reach out and pull at their hands and minds... Guys, listen! But it's OKAY. There will be another chance... Breathe girl!

At 6 o'clock, when your daughter comes running up to you and asks, "Mamma, is your class over? Can we play, can we walk, can we dance, can we jump?" And then, you breathe girl! This is what it is all about. This is why it all makes sense. Yes, come on, let's breathe together!

At 7 o'clock, when your sick pet makes a desperate call for help, you are grateful

that you are not far away — in the car in traffic, on your way back from work. You are there to soothe and alleviate their pain. Exhale and help. Breathe...

At 8 pm, when you call a friend to just vent, you walk (to complete the 10,000 steps), you rant, you rave... The only thing missing is a glass of wine, but then you get to breathe girl...

At 9 o'clock, when it's time for dinner and you realise that you haven't cooked what everyone wanted, and then you are stumped to see your family members walk in with salad, sweet lime juice, pasta, you know we are in this together, and you breathe girl!

At 10 o'clock at night, when a student messages asking for help, you realise that in this uniquely inter-connected world, people are now more approachable, more accessible, the boundaries between work and life are blurred, and that while your child is your biggest supporter, the students with whom you have a telephonic discussion about ethics in a changing world are your lifeline and the reason to go on. Breathe girl...

At 11 o'clock, when you look up and the sky is bright with stars and the crickets are chirping, you realise that you just led one more glorious day without fear. You go to bed with a prayer. Somewhere inside you is a feeling of solidarity with the world, with the Earth, and you. Breathe girl....

Professor Madan is an architect, designer, and landscape planner. She teaches at the Sushant School of Art and Architecture, Ansal University, Gurgaon



**Fifth COLUMN**  
TAVLEEN SINGH  
Twitter: @tavleen\_singh

# COVID-19 gives India a second chance

IS IT time for this nationwide lockdown to be lifted? Is it time for our scientists to start examining why the pandemic is following a very different course in India than it has in most other countries? Is it time to admit that our economic problems are now infinitely more serious than those caused by this Chinese virus and we must somehow learn to live with it and deal with other things? These are questions to which I have no answers but believe that they need to be answered urgently.

When the first nationwide lockdown was ordered, I believe it was probably because scientists and virologists of international repute were predicting that hundreds of thousands of Indians would soon be lying dead in the streets. They invoked the Spanish flu to remind us that more than half its victims were in India. Now as we approach the last week of our second lockdown, it appears that their predictions were alarmist and that the Indian economy could be in greater danger than the Indian people. Sceptics say that it is only because we have not tested as widely as we should have that the extent of this pandemic's victims has not become clear. Possibly. But, what is also true is that if hundreds of people started to die every day in the slums of Mumbai or even in those villages to which migrant workers have fled, we would know.

Speaking of migrant workers, it is worth pointing out that unless they return to the factories, sweatshops, small businesses and construction sites where they were employed, there is no hope of a revival of the economy. An early revival is what we badly need, but here it needs to be pointed out that the government of India is not doing itself any favours by making stupid rules. The Home Ministry which has been mercifully silent since the pandemic hit is suddenly hyperactive. So first came the rule that only those businesses would be allowed to reopen that were prepared to house all employees inside their premises. Then came the even more ridiculous rule that if a worker was found to be suffering from coronavirus after work restarted then the employer would be jailed. This was so stupid a rule that attempts have been made to clarify that this only applied to deliberate negligence. And, who will decide this?

This is a good time to remind the Prime Minister of one of the things he said that made me support him with all my heart in the early months of his first term in office. Remember how he used to say that "government has no business to be in business"? Well, as someone who truly believes this, it won my total support. Sadly, in the past six years there has not been the smallest sign yet that Narendra Modi meant what he said. In some matters the exact opposite has happened, in the form of a company law that seeks to interfere in the minutest details of doing business. Unsurprisingly, this led to almost no new jobs being created and to the Indian economy going back almost to what used to be once derided as the 'Hindu rate of growth'.

This pandemic provides an opportunity for the Prime Minister to go back to those promises he made when his first term began. It is time to throw that book of rules, regulations and red tape into the garbage and time to make those changes to labour laws and land use that are long overdue. It is time to make the sort of reforms that another prime minister made in 1991 when the Indian economy was in such bad shape that our gold reserves were nearly mortgaged. It is also time to put on a tight leash ministers and sycophants who insult people like Jeff Bezos when they come to India with the promise of new investment. They do this in the hope that this will make the Prime Minister notice their loyalty, so he has to signal that he is not pleased with this kind of talk and it will stop.

This pandemic has also held up a gigantic mirror in which we can see clearly the face of our dear Bharat Mata. She looks bad. What is wrong with our idea of 'socialism' that we have not been able to build affordable, rental housing in our cities? The migrant workers may not have fled to their rural homes if they had a decent roof over their heads. In a city like Mumbai the absence of affordable housing is so acute that half its citizens live in slums and it is in these slums that this virus has struck most mercilessly. What is the point of advising people to socially distance themselves from each other when a one-room tenement is the only available home?

What is the point in telling people who live in these shanties to wash their hands many times a day with soap when soap and water are a luxury? In this terrifying mirror we see reflected our public health services and they look so hopeless and unhygienic that it should shame us all. So, this pandemic has come as a reminder to Mr Modi that it is time to fulfil those promises of 'parivartan' and 'vikas' in the truest sense of those two powerful words.



**Out of MY MIND**  
MEGHNAD DESAI

THE PANDEMIC is exposing the fragile nature of the global economy as well as of countries individually. We have had famines or earthquakes in one country or one region; and the rest of the world has been willing and able to help. Even in wars raging in a region such as the Middle East, international assistance tries to provide relief to refugees though more can always be done. When a Part suffers, the rest of the Whole can help.

This time the Whole is suffering, albeit at different rates, because countries are at

# Pandemic and devolution of powers

different points in the cycle. But whereas normally if there was a local shortage of medical supplies, the rest of the world would provide, now we are in the anomalous situation that global supply chains often ship stuff far away but not locally unless borders are closed. Even so producers cannot supply unless they receive orders in time. Many shortages are artificially created because economic global supply chains are difficult to unwind quickly while governments can isolate and close borders at an instant's notice.

A local version of this can happen in a large country. India is not a unitary state nor a federation. It is a Union with pow-

ers divided between the Centre and states. Normally the division of responsibilities is properly laid down and observed. But lately, even since before the onset of the pandemic, partly due to the prospect of state elections and partly due to differences over the CAA and NRC, there has been a tension between the Centre and some states.

The pandemic has turned the Union into a federation with border closures between states (Delhi and Noida) or created the need for a totally centralised unitary State of India. The Centre not only has the powers in reserve to impose lockdown but an asymmetrically larger financial clout

which compels states to seek benefits from it. At the same time, some states do not want to be seen to be obeying Central injunctions lest politically it strengthens the BJP's hand. This is the issue with West Bengal as well as Maharashtra.

Mixed with this challenge is one that has been a weak link in the Indian Constitution for a long time. It is the metros which are the most likely centres of infection. But municipalities in these metros, whether a single one such as the Brihanmumbai one or multiple ones as in Delhi, have been weak links in terms of efficient delivery of services. (When for instance will Mumbai have its drains cleared

before monsoon?) While panchayats have been beneficiaries of devolution of power thanks to Rajiv Gandhi, urban government in India has remained neglected. This is especially when the metro in question is the state capital, as is often the case.

The metros are the weak links against the pandemic. While the chain from the Centre to state to panchayat is clear and backed by money flowing down, the municipalities are in an anomalous position. Delhi is an exception as it is a Union Territory which can afford weak municipalities. Maybe each metro should be a UT. When it is all over, let us think about reforming urban governance.

## PANDEMIC WATCH



Medical staff in Milan, Italy, Saturday. Reuters

## ITALY

## Govt to give free masks, ease curbs on May 4

Rome: Italy will start distributing free protective masks to nursing homes, many of which have been devastated by coronavirus infections and deaths. Domenico Arcuri, the government's commissioner for the pandemic, says doing so is a "gesture of solidarity and nearness and support to these places ever more at the epicentre of this great crisis." Arcuri says free masks also will be distributed to public officials, transport workers and police. Millions of Italians will be allowed to return to workplaces starting on May 4, when lockdown restrictions will be considerably eased.

## USA

## Indian-origin man charged with hoarding

New York: A 45-year-old Indian-origin man has become the first person to face criminal charges in the US under the country's Defence Production Act for allegedly hoarding the scarce personal protective equipment and selling it at huge markups, authorities said. Amardeep Singh stockpiled tonnes of respirators, surgical gowns, hand sanitisers and other personal protective equipment (PPE) at a Long Island warehouse and sold it online through various websites and Nassau County storefronts at "unconscionably excessive prices." Prosecutors from the US Attorney's Office in Brooklyn said in a statement on Friday.

## PAKISTAN

## 160 doctors test positive, protests on

Lahore: The number of Pakistani doctors infected with the coronavirus has reached 160 with three deaths even as the protest by the medics against the lack of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) entered the ninth day on Saturday. Some 250 medics including 160 doctors have been infected so far. The Grand Health Alliance of doctors and nurses' hunger camp outside the Punjab health department entered the ninth day for paying no attention to the medics falling victim to the deadly virus due to the non-availability of adequate PPEs.

## Green card halt a start, US to reduce flow of immigrant labour: Trump aide

MICHAEL D. SHEAR & MAGGIE HABERMAN  
WASHINGTON, APRIL 25

PRESIDENT DONALD Trump's decision to suspend family-based immigration because of the coronavirus is the beginning of a broader strategy to reduce the flow of foreigners into the United States, Stephen Miller, the architect of President Trump's immigration agenda, told a group of conservative allies on Thursday.

During a private conference call with the president's supporters, Miller sought to reassure them of Trump's commitment to their cause and urged them to publicly defend his executive order. He pledged that it was only a first step in the administration's longer-term goal of shrinking legal immigration.

"The first and most important thing is to turn off the faucet of new immigrant labour — mission accomplished — with signing that executive order," Miller said, according to an audio recording of the conference call obtained by *The New York Times*.

The executive order Trump signed this week bars people from receiving green cards for 60 days, a move that immigration advocates condemned. But it does nothing to limit visa programs



MEANWHILE, AT THE GERMAN-POLISH BORDER: Hundreds of people who live in Poland and work in Germany protest in the southwestern Polish border town of Zgorzelec against a mandatory coronavirus quarantine for those who cross the border. Reuters

that bring tens of thousands of workers to the United States, infuriating groups that call for deep reductions in the number of foreign citizens entering the country.

Miller said that further restrictions on programs for foreign workers were likely. "In terms of dealing with some of these seasonal flows of guest workers and developing a strategy for that, that's what the president directed us to do," he said. The existence of the tape was first reported by *The Washington Post*.

During the call, Miller said that the president's executive order, while temporary, would have long-lasting effects because it would disrupt what conservatives call "chain migration," in which the arrival of one immigrant in the United States opens the door to an extended family: parents, adult children, siblings and others.

"When you suspend the entry of a new immigrant from abroad, you're also reducing im-

migration further, because of the chains of follow-on migration that are disrupted," Miller said. "So the benefit to American workers compounds with time."

During Miller's call, the acting deputy secretary for the Department of Homeland Security, Kenneth T. Cuccinelli II, echoed Miller's comments by saying the president has been considering such a step "since the economic effects of the Covid virus began." **NYT**

migration further, because of the chains of follow-on migration that are disrupted," Miller said. "So the benefit to American workers compounds with time."

During Miller's call, the acting deputy secretary for the Department of Homeland Security, Kenneth T. Cuccinelli II, echoed Miller's comments by saying the president has been considering such a step "since the economic effects of the Covid virus began." **NYT**

migration further, because of the chains of follow-on migration that are disrupted," Miller said. "So the benefit to American workers compounds with time."

## 20,000 hospital deaths, criticism mounts in UK

ADITI KHANNA  
LONDON, APRIL 25

THE NUMBER of deaths in the UK hospitals from the novel coronavirus crossed the grim milestone of 20,000 on Saturday, up by 813 over the previous day — among the highest daily death tolls recorded this week.

These official figures released daily by the UK's Department of Health and Social Care do not account for deaths that occur elsewhere in the community, which means the overall number of COVID-19 deaths in the country is much higher.

Last month, in response to a question at the daily Downing Street briefings, Stephen Powis, the Medical Director of National Health Service (NHS) England, said a total number of deaths under 20,000 "would be a good outcome".

However, that figure has now been crossed within 51 days of the first UK death recorded from the coronavirus.

The deaths in the community are measured separately by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), based on death certificates, with a weekly figure announced each Tuesday.



Mounted police officers in London on Saturday. AP

## Row over aide at meets of scientific group

Downing Street on Saturday went into strong denial mode after a political row broke out over a UK media report claiming that British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's top aide had attended secret meetings of the scientific group advising the government on its response strategy.

The Guardian claimed that Dominic Cummings, Johnson's chief strategic adviser, and an official associated with the Brexit campaign were part of the meetings of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE). This triggered Opposition anger as it implies government influence over what is pegged as an independent advisory body, the membership of which has not been made public. **PTI**

## WHO warns against 'immunity passports'

REUTERS  
GENEVA, APRIL 25

THE WORLD Health Organisation (WHO) said on Saturday that there was currently "no evidence" that people who have recovered from COVID-19 and have antibodies are protected from a second coronavirus infection.

In a scientific brief, the United Nations agency warned governments against issuing "immunity passports" or "risk-free certificates" to people who have been infected as their accuracy could not be guaranteed.

"Some governments have suggested that the detection of antibodies to the SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, could serve as the basis for an 'immunity passport' or 'risk-free certificate' that would enable individuals to travel or to return to work assuming that they are protected against re-infection," the WHO said.

## EXPLAINED

## Lack of accuracy may increase risk

THE MAIN contention against "immunity passports" is that more research is needed to guarantee that recovered people who have antibodies are protected from further infection. Expert warned that without adequate evidence, such certificates could lead to continued virus transmission and result in people not following recommended public health protocol.

Chile said last week it would begin handing out "health passports" to people deemed to have recovered from the illness.

## Pressured by China, EU softens report on Covid disinformation

MATT APUZZO  
BRUSSELS, APRIL 25

BOWING TO heavy pressure from Beijing, European Union officials softened their criticism of China this week in a report documenting how governments push disinformation about the coronavirus pandemic, according to documents, emails and interviews.

The initial report cited Beijing's efforts to curtail mentions of the virus's origins in China, in part by blaming the United States for spreading the disease internationally.

"Both overt and covert tactics have been observed," the

China has continued to run a global disinformation campaign to deflect blame for the outbreak of the pandemic and improve its international image" — THE INITIAL REPORT

initial report had said. But China moved quickly to block the document's release, and the EU pulled back. The report had been on the verge of publication, until senior officials ordered revisions to soften the language. "The Chinese are already



## SINGAPORE SINGS TO MIGRANT WORKERS

Residents gather at their balconies to sing in tribute to healthcare workers and migrant workers in Singapore. The country on Saturday reported 618 new COVID-19 cases, of which 597 were work permit holders residing in dormitories. Reuters

## Lanka extends curfew in high-risk districts till May 4 to stem outbreak

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
COLOMBO, APRIL 25

SRI LANKA on Saturday extended the nationwide curfew in four high risk districts, including Colombo, till May 4 to stem the spread of the deadly coronavirus in the country, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's office announced, a day after the Island nation recorded the highest number of 49 infections in a single day.

The four out of the 25 administration districts that come under high risk category are Colombo, Gampaha, Kalutara and Puttalam.



Lanka recorded its highest case count in a day. Reuters/File

For the remaining 21 districts, the curfew will be partially lifted from April 27 till May 1. The partial relaxation for the period will be from 5 am to 8 pm, it said. The government also an-

nounced that public and private institutions are allowed to operate from May 4 despite the curfew in the high risk districts.

The police had earlier announced that the nationwide curfew imposed to tackle the pandemic will be lifted at 5 am on Monday.

Health authorities said that 15 more positive cases were reported on Saturday, taking the country's COVID-19 tally to 435. So far, there have been 7 deaths.

The latest extension in the curfew came as the country recorded its highest number of 49 COVID-19 cases for a single day on Friday since its outbreak in March.

## Iran should assume worst case scenario, says Rouhani

REUTERS  
DUBAI, APRIL 25

IRAN SHOULD draw up economic plans based on a worst-case scenario of nearly a year of disruptions due to the coronavirus, President Hassan Rouhani said on Saturday, as the death toll from the disease rose by 76 to 5,650.

"Our first request is that we should plan production long-term based on a pessimistic view that we might face this virus ... for months," Rouhani said in a meeting with heads of Iranian private companies carried live on state TV.

"Maybe (we will face this) till the end of the year, we do not know," Rouhani added, referring to the Iranian calendar year which ends in March 2021.

Earlier, a Health Ministry spokesman said the total number of people diagnosed with the virus had reached 89,328, of whom 3,096 were in a critical condition.

Deputy Health Minister Iraj Harirchi said the country's daily death toll had fallen by about 70% from its peak, while the number of coronavirus patients in hospital had fallen by about half.

Iran is one of the Middle Eastern countries worst affected by the COVID-19 respiratory disease and has one of the world's highest death tolls.



Rouhani was meeting heads of Iranian private companies

## OTHER TOP GLOBAL STORIES

## Flogging abolished, announces Saudi Arabia

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
RIYADH, APRIL 25

SAUDI ARABIA has abolished flogging as a punishment, the supreme court announced, hailing the latest in a series of "human rights advances" made by the king and his powerful son.

Court-ordered floggings in Saudi Arabia — sometimes extending to hundreds of lashes — have long drawn condemnation from human rights groups.

But they say the headline legal reforms overseen by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman have



Mohammed bin Salman

brought no let-up in the conservative Islamic kingdom's crushing of dissent, including through the use of the death penalty.

The Saudi supreme court said

the latest reform was intended to "bring the kingdom into line with international human rights norms against corporal punishment".

Previously the courts could order the flogging of convicts found guilty of offences ranging from extramarital sex and breach of the peace to murder.

In future, judges will have to choose between fines and/or jail sentences, or non-custodial alternatives like community service, the court said in a statement seen by AFP on Saturday.

The most high-profile instance of flogging in recent years was the case of Saudi blogger Raif

Badawi who was sentenced to 10 years in prison and 1,000 lashes in 2014 for "insulting" Islam.

He was awarded the European parliament's Sakharov human rights prize the following year. The abolition of corporal punishment in Saudi Arabia comes just days after the kingdom's human rights record was again in the spotlight following news of the death from a stroke in custody of leading activist Abdullah al-Hamid, 69.

Hamid was a founding member of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA) and was sentenced to 11 years in jail in March 2013, campaigners said.

## Genocide trial in Germany for alleged IS member accused of killing Yazidi girl

CHRISTOPHER F SCHUETZ  
BERLIN, APRIL 25

AN IRAQI man accused of being an Islamic State terrorist has gone on trial in a high court in Frankfurt accused of genocide, human trafficking and the torture and murder of a 5-year-old Yazidi girl he had held as a slave in Falluja, Iraq.

Opening statements in the trial of the defendant identified by his first name and last initial in accor-



The defendant, identified only as Taha al-J. NYT

dance with German privacy rules, Taha Al-J., came a year after his

German-born wife went on trial over the death of the same girl.

His trial is believed to be the first in the world that carries the charge of genocide in relation to the Yazidis.

Taha Al-J., who is 27, is also charged with murder, crimes against humanity, war crimes and trafficking for the exploitation of their manpower and murder, according to the counts read aloud by the president of the five-judge panel in Frankfurt on Friday. The defendant, dressed in

a patterned button-down shirt, declined to make an opening statement or to enter a plea.

His trial centers on a mother and her child, members of the Yazidi religious minority who have been persecuted by the Islamic State, known as ISIS. The defendant and his wife bought, enslaved and tortured the 5-year-old and her mother, prosecutors said. The girl died in 2015 after being left chained to the bars of window in heat reaching 122 degrees Fahrenheit. **NYT**

# THE SUNDAY EXPRESS MAGAZINE

# eye



**SPOTLIGHT, PAGE 10**  
**The Tao of Lockdown**  
 Life lessons from being stuck at home  
*ad nauseum*



**BOOKS, PAGE 11**  
 • Review of *The Mirror and the Light*  
 • Review of *The Alchemy of Secrets*



## THE SENSE OF AN ENDING

The lockdown to prevent the spread of COVID-19 has led to a spike in mental health issues. From patients regressing in their treatment to people with no prior history finding themselves unable to cope with the uncertainty, notes from an anxious world

Surbhi Gupta

**M**Y WEEKEND was quite bad", says Nikhil Taneja, 33. "During the week, when I am clocking in office hours, I have something to focus on. But, during the weekend, when I don't have much to do, I get very anxious," says the Mumbai-based entrepreneur and producer. "And when you go online and see people doing pretty much everything that they have ever wanted to do — learn a new skill, go back to an old hobby or take an online course — you wonder about your own life. Just when you think everyone's at home, so there isn't going to be any FOMO (fear of missing out), there comes the quarantine FOMO," he says.

Taneja had been struggling with Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD) for over three years but over the last one month, it has increased manifold. "Anxiety comes from a place when you don't have control over situations, and, suddenly, we're in the middle of a pandemic and there is an incredible amount of uncertainty all around," he says. With his parents in Bahrain and brother in the United States, he's been constantly consuming news about COVID-19. "I don't know when we will be able to meet next, when international travel will be allowed," he says.

Taneja is not alone. Ever since the world plunged into a crisis due to the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, and countries went into lockdown, there has been a rise in mental health issues across the globe. "Mental health issues are another pandemic running parallelly to COVID-19," says Dr Naveen Kumar C, head, community psychiatry unit, National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS), Bengaluru. The Indian Psychiatric Society has noticed a steep rise in the number of patients suffering from mental health issues after the outbreak. A recent survey conducted by them has revealed that there has been a 20 per cent rise in cases, with at least one in five Indians suffering from some form of anxiety or depression. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has issued advisories in this regard, with assistance from NIMHANS, which includes advice on how to handle isolation and avoid fake news. The institute also set up a helpline about a month ago and has received over 11,000 calls since; over 250 mental-health professionals have been attending these calls from all over the country. "Initially, people who called expressed medical problems and logistical issues, but over time, the main issues are psychological — fear, panic and anxiety over an unforeseen situation. Since many outpatient departments are closed, patients are also reaching out to helplines to get fresh prescriptions," says Dr Kumar C.

Apart from their usual helplines, Tata

Institute of Social Science (TISS), Mumbai, has also launched a new one to provide psychosocial support during COVID-19. "This could be related to mental health, domestic violence, family conflicts, getting food or fresh prescriptions. Our volunteers speak in nine languages, including Tamil, Malayalam, Gujarati and Konkani," says Tanuja Babre, project coordinator. The team answers around 100 calls daily.

This inability to face up to what is an unprecedented situation is taking its toll on people across the world. The death of Thomas Schaefer, the finance minister of Germany's Hesse state — the financial capital of the country — who committed suicide last month as he was deeply worried over the economic fallout of the pandemic points at the far-reaching consequences of COVID-19. In India, a 50-year-old man in Andhra Pradesh's Chittoor district took his life in early February — even before cases began to be reported in the country — after he was convinced that he had COVID-19. Delhi saw a 23-year-old man jump to his death from the seventh floor of Safdarjung Hospital in March. He was admitted to the isolation ward and was tested for the virus after he complained of a headache at the airport on returning from Sydney. His results came out negative eventually.

Mental health practitioners acknowledge the spike in anxiety and worry over the relapse of symptoms in patients. "It's definitely gotten worse for people who have anxiety disorders, obsessive compulsive disorders (OCD) and depression. It is commonplace for people with severe anxiety to constantly live with the fear that the worst will happen to them. The outbreak has only amplified their symptoms. Patients now fear that either they will be infected or they will infect their close ones," says Anupriya Sircar, clinical psychologist at Max Healthcare, Delhi. Some of her patients have been expressing feelings of guilt for talking about their problems at a time when the world is facing a crisis. "I tell them that just because there is a bigger problem, it doesn't invalidate how they're feeling," she says.

What this has resulted in, says Dr Shwetank Bansal, consulting psychiatrist at Delhi's BLK Super Specialty Hospital, is a possibility for patients to take a step back in terms of their progress. "Normally, as part of therapy, we tell patients to try and reject the catastrophic scenarios their negative thoughts paint for them and embrace a realistic view of the world. Due to the outbreak, the worst-case scenario is in front of them and this led to increased anxiety. That's where the therapy for anxiety falters, specifically with respect to GAD," he says. For someone with cleaning compulsions, common treatment includes "exposure and response prevention" — patients are taught to expose themselves to repetitive intrusive thoughts but not to respond to them with action. "We ask them to not wash their hands, for instance, and to



PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES

**Some people have been expressing guilt for talking about their problems in the middle of a pandemic. But just because there is a bigger problem, it doesn't invalidate their feelings**

Anupriya Sircar

Clinical psychologist at Max Healthcare, Delhi

withstand the resultant anxiety. But now it has become difficult for them to draw the line between hygiene and cleaning compulsions," says Dr Bansal.

When COVID-19 was declared a pandemic and guidelines issued for frequent washing of hands, Delhi-based psychiatrist Dr Sanjay Chugh anticipated a spike in the number of OCD cases. He was proven right. "Someone who was washing her hands 20 times a day is doing it 50 to 100 times now. In a few extreme cases, patients are refusing to move away from the wash basin," he says. According to him, the outbreak has validated the beliefs of OCD patients that their obsessions were justified. He cites the example of a patient with paranoid psychosis, whose symptoms have been aggravated by the pandemic. "He has delusions that people are trying to contaminate him with the coronavirus," he says.

For the past few years, washing hands over 30 times a day has been a routine affair for Abhishek Gupta (name changed). "Even before the outbreak, I had to do it if I touched something which I felt was dirty — an oily surface, or a piece of cloth. I even followed social distancing from people who I didn't think were hygienic," says the 32-year-old, who was diagnosed with OCD a few years ago. Recently, when the Delhi-based paralegal developed a cough, he was overcome by intense fear. "I

kept going over what I had done in the last 24 hours which could have induced this and I remembered that I had had packaged lychee juice from a shop that I usually avoided but couldn't this time because everything else in my neighbourhood was closed," he says.

From there on, it was a downward spiral. "I got anxious wondering if it had been packaged in China, if, by a freak chance, I was infected because of that. When I couldn't stand it any longer, I went and bought another one from the shop just so I could check the details. Finally, I found out that lychee juices in India are packed in Odisha and Uttar Pradesh. I felt foolish but at that time nothing else mattered," he says.

For most people, work routine gives a structure to their days. But now, because of the lockdown, as they stay at home, the lack of structure makes people feel adrift. Sleep has been a casualty for many. The economic fallout of the lockdown, too, has impacted mental health, not just of those already afflicted but of people who have not had any such known medical history. The International Monetary Fund recently announced that the pandemic will effect a global recession worse than the one in 2008. Pay cuts and the possibility of layoffs have got everyone worried. Taneja, who runs an online content-creation platform Yuava, is also concerned about the future of his business. "All active conversations have stopped as no company has any idea on what they want to spend their money right now," he says.

When the nationwide lockdown was announced on March 24, many mental practitioners moved their sessions online. Some began hosting group live sessions to help people learn coping mechanisms from each other. Delhi-based clinical psychologist Nupur D Paiva says, "You can gauge people's anxieties on WhatsApp groups. By sending a series of forwarded messages, people are discharging their anxieties but that, in turn, is spreading more anxiety and feeding their own," she says.

Babre says the nature of calls received on the TISS helpline has changed over the period of the lockdown. "The initial panic and anxiety have progressed to hyper-vigilance, related to the consumption of news," she says. "Reading the newspaper was the first thing I did in the morning, but it is becoming difficult to keep up because things are changing so fast," says Taneja. On his counsellor's advice, he now devotes only 30 minutes a day to reading the news. It helps him cope better with the anxiety that arises from the news cycle. He has also reduced his screentime. "The fatigue of being online constantly is setting in, so I've started on activities that are not phone-related, like journaling and reading," he says.

Relying on credible information sources and not on social media is important, says Dr Bansal. He has been advising his patients to give their days a structure — maintain an office routine, for instance, even if they clock in fewer

hours. "This helps regulate our sleep and meal cycles," he says.

For people living alone, the lack of an emotional support system has been particularly difficult. Bengaluru-based curator Riddhi Doshi (name changed), 29, speaks of losing a sense of time in lockdown. "Last weekend, I ended up watching *Gilmore Girls* for 21 hours straight. I got up only to drink water or feed my cat. There is hardly any physical activity and there is no sense of accountability. I have had a break-up recently and my company announced a pay cut. We weren't even told the extent of it. The bosses haven't checked on us even once, nor have they discussed any plan of action. Sometimes, I feel like my head is going to explode," she says.

Those living with families have issues of their own. Conflicts have increased, notes Noida-based clinical psychologist Divya Parashar, as families are stuck at home. "Suddenly, everyone is in each other's spaces. Fathers don't have any idea about hands-on parenting; communications are breaking down," she says. "Those who have been used to an active social life don't know how to deal with the disruption. People are also worrying about the economic backlash," she says.

Meanwhile, midway into the lockdown, people are noticing a dip in productivity. A task that takes a day to complete is taking three now; many say they don't feel like working at all. At the end of the day, when you look at all that you did not do, a sense of guilt sets in. Taneja is calling the phenomenon productivity anxiety. "There is a sense among people that now that we have more time, we should do more work. One has to realise this is not summer vacation, this is a crisis," he says.

However, there is a positive side to the lockdown, too. "Some people spoke of how they feel relieved. They have stressful jobs and were facing a burnout. But now, because they are working from home, they are coming to realise how anxious they were before," says Mahananda Bohidar, a Chennai-based counsellor. Ishani Badyal, psychotherapist at the Bengaluru-based Hank Nunn Institute, a not-for-profit mental-health organisation, says many people who did not have the time or the headspace to seek therapy earlier are reaching out to as they face fewer distractions.

Sircar says she tells her patients to keep aside a slot during the day for their "worry time". Bohidar acknowledges this is a difficult time for all, even for those without mental health issues. She has been urging her patients to accommodate little indulgent changes to their routines — like wearing a perfume one uses on special occasions for a day of working from home or making a playlist of one's favourite songs from school or college days. "I also tell my patients that it is okay if they are not doing anything and just managing to survive the lockdown. This is an unprecedented situation, one shouldn't judge oneself for not making the most of it," she says.

## DIGITAL NATIVE



Nishant Shah

Nishant Shah is a professor of new media and the co-founder of The Centre for Internet & Society, Bengaluru

## A Recipe for Disaster

In the time of COVID-19, the trending of #foodporn points to a glaring inequality

THE INFAMOUS Rule #34, one of the older memes of the internet, boldly proclaims, "If it exists, there is porn of it". Over more than a decade, this tongue-in-cheek (no pornographic reference intended) adage has borne witness to the fact that the internet has been home to expressions which don't find place in the mainstream. So creative has been this genre that porn doesn't just refer to sex anymore. Internet porn (as opposed to porn on the internet — go figure) often becomes a way of describing user content that defies regulation and finds creative expressions. Thus, trying to find the "porn of it" in different options — Tetris Blocks, Gummi Bears, Hello Kitty, and N95 masks — have all found their often funny, often NSFW bizarre renderings.

One of the hashtags that I have been following online has been #foodporn. No, it is not what you think. While the correlation between food and sex has been long exploited by many texts on eroticism, #foodporn refers to a particular genre of Instagram imagery which stages food as an object of sensual desire rather than nutrition. As I have written before, #foodporn marks a particular condition of plenty. It reflects an aestheticisation of food — filtered in all its full-frontal glory — that no longer has to worry about the more banal and quotidian anxieties of hunger or nutrition. The restaurant images of appetising food, matched by "home chefs" recreating masterful dishes have contributed hugely to this genre. However, the obscurity of #foodporn comes to the fore when you get dishes that are staged only to be photographed, not to be eaten. There has been a growing critique of #foodporn influencers adding colours, additives, plastic and inedible components so that the food photographs better, only to throw it away once the image has been captured.

In the times of Corona, though, #foodporn has taken a different connotation entirely. As the privileged lockdown after stockpiling, our social-media streams have become an obscenity that oscillates between these two extremes. Here is a sample from my feed last week. I have been



GETTY IMAGES

#foodporn reflects an aestheticisation of food that no longer has to worry about the more quotidian anxieties of hunger

signed on to groups where people are discussing how they shall use their free time to become masterchefs. In another group, noobs experiment with ingredients, telling how they braved the pressure cooker and threw away entire containers of grains and vegetables that they abused in their experiments. In yet another group, intended for simple recipes for our complicated times, there are constant posts about people displaying the reserves of staples they have but are stuck because one or two fresh ingredients are missing. In normal times, this would have been business as usual — after all, what was the internet for, if not for cute animals and food (and the porn of it)?

However, these acts of normal business feel terrifyingly obscene because every other #foodporn post is punctuated by pictures of migrants walking home — without food, without means, in fear of police violence. For every perfectly photographed dish, there are reports of millions of people experiencing hunger, malnutrition, and, in some cases, death in the face of this unplanned lockdown. The stories of good Samaritans doing food distribution and communities struggling to take care of its most vulnerable trickle in, but they seem to have no bearings on the deluge of #foodporn that continues to unapologetically, without reflexivity or irony, flood timelines. I do not intend to shame people who are, in the comfort of their privileges, filling their time with doing something as basic as cooking and finding joy and solidarity in it. But I have to admit that this feels obscene to me — this capacity to marvel in the spectacle of food and to emerge heroic when you master a new recipe or find a replacement for an ingredient that has disappeared from the shelf.

We always knew that the internet was a space of inequality. Even at the best of times, the paradox of those who indulge on the web and those who struggle to bear the burden of its unfolding are stark. But in these times of crises, it, perhaps, becomes a space of obscenity, where those of us who can, are going to ignore the real world and live in our filtered bubbles, and, well, produce #foodporn. I wonder, darkly, if there is already a porn of migrants walking home, dying of starvation. Knowing the depravity of the internet, there is a chance that it exists. Because Rule #34.



BLUE IS THE WARMEST COLOUR

The Yamuna, which was the colour of sludge, seems to have benefitted from the lockdown

## The Tao of Lockdown

Life lessons from being stuck indoors *ad nauseam*

Vatsala Mamgain

A DEADLIER VIRUS than COVID-19 has unleashed its own pandemic — the I Have Discovered the Meaning of Life Pandemic. Unlike COVID-19, symptoms appear universally, and, on current evidence, may persist forever. As an infectee, therefore, I feel compelled to share all the knowledge I have gained in lockdown for the past hundred weeks. All the epiphanies that occurred to me as I leapt out of bed wild-eyed at 7:55 am for an 8 am Zoom call and the perspective I have got by being imprisoned without parole with those I love most in the world — here's all that hard-won wit and wisdom — yours for free:

■ Speaking from experience, there has never been a better time to be simple-minded. A video that repurposes men's underwear as a face mask with a voiceover in sophisticated Punjabi explaining "face mask ki recipe" has had me laughing harder than I ever laughed pre-lockdown. For those of us who have inner morons, hug them tight, they will get you through this terrible time. Or, they may not, but they will help you laugh a lot more than those Nobel Prize-winners among us (you know who you are, don't be shy) who are analysing epidemiology patterns and predicting the impact of COVID-19 on the economy.

■ There is no good face-mask "look". A mask should actually be the great equaliser. Since no one's attractiveness is predicated on their forehead, theoretically, in masks, even

those who look like rotting cabbages should be on a level-playing field with Scarlett Johansson. Right? Well, in the rock-paper-scissors game of ugly vs beauty vs mask, beauty beats ugly, mask swamps beauty, but, in a triumph of justice, ugly beats mask. What this means is that everyone in a mask looks like a criminal, but it's tiered. I am above average in my ability to terrorise bystanders in a mask; I look like a petty thug who vandalises children's parks and spray-paints arrow-struck hearts and writes "I luvvvvv uuuuu Jaamiya" on the merry-go-round.

■ The virus has impacted the comprehension skills of us middle-class Indians. The government has been telling us 30 hours a day, every day, to wash hands frequently, not touch our faces and avoid contact with others. They have done this by ambushing every phone call and having a man with a hacking paroxysmal cough provide a sneak peek into what awaits us if we don't listen. However, we have understood this to mean we should stockpile all the sanitisers and masks we possibly can so that the people who need them most have no access to them. The more we hear the man hack down the phone line, the more we comprehend it as an exhortation to teach the medical community a lesson they will never forget, not just by stealing their supplies but by also kick-

ing them out of their rented homes and stigmatising them. Well played, middle-class India — we really are the salt of the earth!

■ Pandemics don't change people; they just make them a sundried version of themselves. You know how sundried tomatoes taste much more of tomatoes than actual tomatoes do? Well, becoming who we basically are is what we can expect in this crisis.

■ When people say their bandwidth won't allow video during a Zoom call, they're lying. They just don't want you to see the beer glass, the unwashed, feral children or the clothes lying everywhere. The reason my Wi-Fi bandwidth is so abysmal is because my hair looks like a small furry animal wandered onto my scalp and electrocuted itself.

■ It's pretty miraculous how quickly nature heals itself when humans get out of the way. The Yamuna, which was the colour of sludge, is now as blue as the sea at Seychelles, and have you seen that sweet photo of the Himalayan goats ambling about the abandoned streets of Wales? Since, as a human being, it is my right to take nature's miracles for granted, and also because competitive wankery in WhatsApp forwards is now an Olympic-level sport, nature better not stop there. With the extended lockdown, we'd better be seeing WhatsApp forwards of Gir lions

in the Sunderbans and Mount Everest being visible from Lonavla, or else this "planet regenerating itself" stuff won't cut it any longer.

■ Intelligence is the ability to hold two opposing ideas in your mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function. By that logic, we are all brilliant. How hard housework has been for all of us in lockdown is exactly equal to our belief that the people who generally do it for us do absolutely no work. Remember what I said about this pandemic revealing the essence of ourselves? By that logic we are all claimants to the throne of sundried asses with genius IQ.

■ Pets and plants are better lockdown companions than most people. No one has wanted to throw large household appliances at either their pets or plants. Also, unlike the people most of us are now imprisoned with, plants and pets don't need chicken momos and margherita pizza for them to thrive.

■ Whatever gets you through these days is what you need to do. If it's sanitising the door knobs 10 times and still using your elbow to open the doors, that's fine. Moderate amounts of caution and immoderate amounts of alcohol? Go for it! Unlimited snacks and endless screentime? Great! The only rule of lockdown life is to think of all the people on the Titanic and what they may regret doing and not doing — and let that be your guide. So reach for the cake, the hugs, the kids and some kindness...and see you on the other side!

Vatsala Mamgain is a glutton, cook, runner, tree lover, shopper, reader, and talker

When people say their bandwidth won't allow video during a Zoom call, they are lying. They just don't want you to see the beer glass

## Okay Boomer, We Need to Talk

How to talk your parents through a pandemic

Manjiri Indurkar

A FEW days before lockdown, when I was about to leave for my evening walk with Baba, I looked at my parents as they were drinking their tea and said, "Perhaps we shouldn't go for these walks for a few weeks. There is too much exposure, it just does not feel safe." "But we don't talk to anyone there," said Baba. But he does, he meets his friends, shakes their hands and pats their backs. When I pointed it out, he refused point blank. "I don't do that, I just mind my own business." I didn't see any point in arguing further.

Since COVID-19 was recognised as a global pandemic, my friends and I, in India and in countries around the world, are being forced to parent our parents. A friend in locked-down Spain says her only worry is for her parents in India. If things go out of hand, who will take care of them? Another friend, who lives in the US, was glad that his father was with him, but his visa is about to expire and he needs to look into that. Overnight, we have had to become the responsible ones — researching all the ways in which the virus spreads, regularly washing hands and enforcing social distancing. And then there are our parents, who just don't seem to be taking this seriously enough, choosing ignorance over anxiety.

Our grandparents who lived through the Partition, our parents who saw several wars in the '60s, '70s and in '99, who have lived through the Emergency, are of the firm belief that they have seen a lot, and come out of it alive. Some of them haven't been able to adjust to the idea of ageing all that well. My mother colours her hair, uses too many creams to hide



GETTY IMAGES

signs of ageing. If our parents haven't accepted ageing yet, it will be hard for them to accept parenting from their kids, because if they are still young, we are still children.

My mother works at the Life Insurance Corporation of India and was still going in to work before the nationwide lockdown was announced. "It's March, financial closing month, I can't take leave," she insisted. This, I suppose, is life coming full circle: we disrespected our parents, didn't think much before disregarding their advice on things, and now the tables have turned. And it is frustrating. There are people at Aai's workplace who did-

**FULL CIRCLE**  
Vigilance, kindness, solidarity, responsibility and love are the only ways we can try to beat this epidemic

n't cancel their holidays even though it was increasingly becoming clear that COVID-19 was a pandemic. Now, before you judge them, the reason why they couldn't cancel their holiday despite the corona scare was that their travel company, a well-known one, offers these holiday packages that can only be availed within a certain time period. Money is precious, especially when you don't have a lot of it. But is it more valuable than our lives? That is something I find a lot of middle-class families around me are struggling with.

For my Aai to think that the financial year closing is more important than getting her

cough checked is baffling to me but normal to her. When I open my mouth to respond, she tells me that I need to stop overreacting; her blood pressure is high as it is. She looks at me and says, "All your corona talk is making me hypertensive." Now that I have been blamed for her high BP, I better not say anything about COVID-19 for a few days!

Recently, in his essay in *The New Yorker*, Michael Schulman wrote about his parents. When he asked them to not go to restaurants or work and to sit at home and watch TV, his mother responded to his texts with a sarcastic "Thanks, Mom". Much like the global pandemic we are in, the Baby Boomer reaction to the situation also has a global feel to it.

COVID-19 is teaching me the salient points of parenting: your children are not always going to listen to you, so you have to keep repeating yourself. Sometimes, you have to be the bad guy in the house to save them from themselves. If you aren't one of those obnoxious people on Twitter calling COVID-19 "Boomer Remover", I hope you are relentlessly talking to your parents even if they don't listen. Vigilance, kindness, solidarity, responsibility and love are the only ways we can try to beat this epidemic.

Yesterday, when my mother told me she is making me some *haldi doodh*, I told her I will drink it only if she makes it for everyone. Baba laughed loudly when he heard me and reminded me of how, as a child, I used to dismiss their pleas about milk. I laughed with him and said yes, things have changed. Now drink your milk and go to bed.

Manjiri Indurkar is a freelance writer and poet based in Jabalpur

# THE MIRROR CRACK'D FROM SIDE TO SIDE



ELLIE SMITH/THE NEW YORK TIMES

In the incandescent conclusion to her Tudor trilogy, Hilary Mantel charts the peak and fall of Thomas Cromwell and the struggle of man against the opacity of others

Pratap Bhanu Mehta

IN *The Mirror and the Light*, Hilary Mantel's incandescent masterpiece, and the conclusion to the trilogy that includes *Wolf Hall* (2009) and *Bring Up the Bodies* (2012), we meet Thomas Cromwell at the execution of Queen Anne Boleyn, the second wife of Henry VIII. Cromwell, the son of a violent blacksmith, has, through sheer will, ruthlessness, intelligence, inventiveness, intrigue and ingenuity become the most powerful man in England. "Even in the Republic of Virtue you need a man who will shovel up the shit, and somewhere it is written that Cromwell is his name." Henry VIII cannot function without him. He is Lord of the Privy Seal, but no title can describe his power. Nothing in England is untouched by it. He arranges brides for kings. He makes and breaks alliances. He levies taxes. He causes rebellions and suppresses them. He controls the circulation of goods. He controls information that allows him to preempt plots and hatch them. He directs the course of the Church and the fortune of churchmen. He redefines faith. He commands power over life itself, sending the mightiest to the Tower if not the gallows. He makes the state tick, in all its gore and glory.

Or, so it seems.

Meanwhile, there is Henry VIII, navigating the tension between the omnipotence that a sovereign trying to remake the world has to project, and the near impotence he displays in settling his family affairs and the question of succession. Cromwell offers Henry both the solace and the inspiration, "Your majesty is the only Prince, the Mirror and Light of other Kings." But you cannot shake off the feeling that Cromwell is the real mirror, someone whose superabundant life reflects every single contradiction of society: the embodiment of Machiavellianism, whose piety seems genuine; the self-made centre of power, who is often put in his place because of his lowly origins; the man with a brutal childhood striving to be tender with his own children; the man of action who is capable of unusual self-reflection; the man who is deeply steeped in the cynicism of social and political life, and haunted by the thought of justifying his life to the Maker. There is a character who prides himself on not letting the past be a fetter, but who is haunted by ghosts of the past. And then, there is the ultimate irony: the man whose intelligence renders all of society transparent to him fails to read those closest to him; a fate he shares with Henry. Can all the intelligence and power in the world secure us



THE MIRROR AND THE LIGHT  
HILARY MANTEL  
4th Estate Press  
883 pages  
₹ 799

against the opacity of other human beings?

What seems, at first glance, just a virtuoso English historical novel, slowly and unexpectedly acquires a depth that goes to the core of human existence. For all its lightly expressed seriousness, the novel is sheer fun. It has swashbuckling and incredibly witty interchange that sustain you page after page. It is the veritable saga of a country in the making, as theological wars, petty intrigues, diplomatic manoeuvres, disease, political economy, court intrigues and class distinctions provide a heady mix to the story. A whole world comes alive with almost cinematic precision. But Mantel carries her learning lightly, and the rich historical texture, the precisely honed descriptions never weigh down the drama. Her skill is precisely to turn historical detail into compelling human drama. The novel is rich in detail. One of the novel's extraordinary qualities is that no detail seems superfluous — their significance unfolds later.

All great novels are, at their core, brilliant pieces of moral psychology. Mantel slowly peels the layers of each of the characters and they acquire an inner depth that takes this novel to new heights. Not a single character, male or female, master or servant, or even ones who are mere cameos, are caricatures. Mantel can create whole psychological worlds

in two sentences. Many of the set pieces are haunting in their power: the execution of Anne Boleyn, Henry's reckoning with the question of King's Two Bodies: Henry the Man and Henry the Monarch, the trauma around Queen Jane Seymour's death. But Cromwell's last journey, when the full measure of his life comes back to haunt him, will surely rank as one of the greatest scenes in all of literature. Between Cromwell's prayers runs a line of verse: "But how that I leave to you/Judge as ye list, false or true/ Ye know no more than afore ye knew/ Yet I am as I am whatever ensue."

Cromwell's world knew something the modern world, in its conceit, thinks it invented: the radical contingency of everything. For us moderns, contingency is an idea; for the Tudors, it was a condition, as no one could ultimately resist the ravages of fortune. In the saga of Cromwell snatching snippets of order and personal advancement in this radically contingent world, Mantel has created a *tour de force*. It is not much of an exaggeration to say that *The Mirror and the Light* is a strong contender for one of the most dramatically evocative, descriptively pitch-perfect, and humanly profound novels ever written.

Pratap Bhanu Mehta is contributing editor, *The Indian Express*

## This Season, a Harvest of Hate

The political and the personal come together inextricably in this debut novel

Sukrita Baruah

THE WEEK I read *The Alchemy of Secrets*, 85-year-old Akbari Begum died inside her burning home in northeast Delhi. It was later found that amongst those arrested for setting her home ablaze were two brothers in their twenties. These young men were her neighbours, who would greet her when they would see her in the locality.

As the debris of horrific violence was swept from the narrow lanes and blood scrubbed off the floors of houses in the weeks following the riots in the national capital, also found were the charred remains of a body barely identifiable as that of a human. At the time of writing the review, the family of 23-year-old Mohsin Ali were yet to receive a medical confirmation that those remains — found inside his gutted car — were indeed his. He was an office-bearer of the BJP's minority cell in Uttar Pradesh.

The central events of Priya Balasubramanian's book play out in Bengaluru, during the socio-political churn in the aftermath of the Babri Masjid demolition — far away from the physical theatre of the demolition. In February, the steady build-up of communal polarisation in our country once again reached a fever pitch and erupted in blood and fire. The deaths of aged Akbari and young Mohsin reflect the thread at the very core of this book: the chilling proximity and consequences of political, communal and caste violence.

Though different chapters of the book are told through different characters, the central character is a young woman, who was brought up in a Brahmin household in Bengaluru and moved to California. She is at the intersection of the narrative, that is both an intimate memoir and a family history disfigured by this violence.

While three different timelines unfurl simultaneously through the book, there are two primary storylines set in two different times. In one, the violence plays out primarily in the domestic setting — through the deeply entrenched casteism in a home in rural Karnataka. In the second, the stage is larger — in the form of the mobilisation of militant political Hinduism — but the ripples are felt just as closely.

THE ALCHEMY OF SECRETS  
PRIYA BALASUBRAMANIAN  
Context  
312 pages  
₹ 399

We read the dramas of the storylines through various eyes of the same family in a shifting narrative — an elderly proprietorial Brahmin matriarch who is also a nurturing grandmother; a harrowed and subdued wife and daughter-in-law; an insecure opportunist bearing the sense that he has been wronged by the world; and the displaced young woman alternately scratching and healing her scars. They are our eyes but they are also all either complicit in or responsible for the horrors we witness. And those who are not directly complicit can be whisked away to distant lands to forget, while the Muslim and lower-caste victims bear the full brunt of the drama.

There is a marked difference in how the violence born of social fissures treats our protagonist and those dear to her but located differently in the social map, something that requires a deeper acknowledgment. This complication is truest for me in the treatment of who I read as the thorniest character in the book — Aiji.

It is an absorbing read, made all the more real by the news cycle from Delhi earlier this year before the pandemic took over the world. Structurally, both the primary storylines climax far before the book ends, making it drag beyond its life. There were multiple points at which this story could have been concluded.

Yet, it ends at what struck me as a disingenuous note — hinting at a better tomorrow, latent in the youthful energy of metropolitan bustle. Our winter of discontent and spring of carnage indicates a far more troublesome link between that time in our nation's past and our present, and our present and our future.

The book's shifting narration also falters when the point of view inexplicably shifts a couple of times to other characters for dramatic effect. This could have added more texture to the narrative, bringing in a new standpoint, an additional layer to the turmoil we witness. However, the device comes off as gimmicky without adding to the storytelling.

## Not a Fairy Tale

How publishing for children in India is coping with the crisis generated by COVID-19

Richa Jha

I HAVE an annual ritual of plonking myself among the cartons for a manual count of the stock of our Pickle Yolk titles every March 31. We are small enough yet to handle it without much ado. This year, the 31st has rolled into the 15th of the next month and the storeroom remains unopened. The world is beset with grave concerns and mine is a simple enough problem that can wait.

Business for one and all in the publishing industry has come to an eerie, aching standstill and no one is willing to hazard a guess on the when or how of the revival. I reach out to my colleagues in children's publishing to see how they are faring. Independent publishers all, our email conversations end up being predictable enough. We are all struggling with the uncertainties to a common external problem, the extent varying with our size and scale of operation.

At the core, the lockdown has hit the publishers where it hurts the most — by cutting off all online and offline sale, distribution and revenue options. "The immediate impact has been on collections," says Pranav Singh, publisher, Ponytale Books. "March-May of every year is when most independents are able to get the bulk of their payments. As a result, our biggest worry is to be able to pay royalties to our authors on time."

Besides, publishers have had to cancel book events and put on hold all planned new releases at a time that is typically the busiest

and the most lucrative for children's books. "One of the key seasons for us is the summer holidays," says Singh. "This will be impacted severely going forward."

Tulika Books cancelled the launch of *Zakir and his Tabla* by Sandhya Rao and Priya Kuriyan. "(It) was scheduled for before the lockdown," says Radhika Menon, publisher, Tulika Books. "We were doing it at our bookstore and as it looked like it was going to be a packed event, we thought it best to cancel it. (Social distancing) hadn't yet become mandatory, but reading about how the virus was spreading was warning enough," she adds.

There is a collective disquiet among the independent publishers that is compelling us to look for answers to the most fundamental question of lasting out this waiting period. "For independents, the loss of momentum will mean that we have to literally start afresh and I see that happening only from October this year. The key is to survive till then," says Singh.

For publishers of printed children's books, the interim survival is taking on creative forms online. With several of them initiating author readings and open interactions with their creators, it's a veritable online lifeline feast of sorts. Karadi Tales, for instance, has had a handsome line-up of authors, storytellers and artists as part of their 'Katha with Karadi' Facebook Live sessions. Karadi's other commendable feat has been creating *Farmer Falgu Stays at Home*, a free e-title and an audiobook in their hugely-loved *Farmer Falgu* series by Chitra Sounder and Kanika Nair, especially for the lockdown period, in a matter of less than a week. Katha



GETTY IMAGES

India's latest e-release *The Mystery of the Missing Soap* by Geeta Dharmarajan, again a free resource, is another timely read on the uncertainties around the pandemic.

I am especially excited to hear about Tulika Books' ever-popular *Thumb Thumb* series of 10 books going online one by one, complete with engaging activities. Pratham Books is planning to revive their 'Missed Call Do Kahaani Sumo', too, where children get to listen to their favourite stories in the language of their choice over an IVR. The Book Lovers' Program for Schools (BLPS), sister concern of the Bengaluru-based independent publisher Ms. Moochie, is running online sessions every day for the children they normally serve via schools, alongside holding teacher sessions.

By every indication, the publishing world will take a long time to recover from the im-

### SEASONS OF CHANGE

More than ever before, our children are socially aware and environmentally conscious. Books for them must acknowledge that

impact of not just the lockdown but the overall COVID-19-led slowdown. And printed books will face most of its brunt. "We have to think of alternative strategies. We are thinking of digital books but how well they do and what the loopholes are remains to be seen," says Menon. Could a fresh start take on more open, equitable forms of how content is accessed by readers? "We can hope that it will move, as scientists are starting to, to a DRM-free model and a rejigging of the idea of ownership of material; but does that fit capitalism's tightening noose?" asks Urvashi Butalia of Zubaan.

Perhaps, something like Pratham Books' open licensing of the content through their online StoryWeaver platform is a possible model for more publishers to follow, though it does come with its own practical questions of the funding. With its free, open access to

19,000 storybooks in 230 languages, StoryWeaver saw an increase of 143 per cent in the readership last month alone. It's easy to see how these books are filling in for the sudden gap in access to physical books.

Intensive critical rethinking is also essential for children's publishing to question the horrors of social inequalities in our country that gets thrown up with a mind-numbing frequency with each new crisis. "We have already seen how the impact of unplanned, negligent policy decisions falls disproportionately on women and marginalised groups, and the last few weeks have been a horrific and extreme illustration of this," said Butalia. "Our work will always be interlaced with the context of this region, and so our publishing and ethics must engage with the fraught conversations about the structural inequalities that have been criminally ignored in the response to this pandemic," she adds.

This should be true for all of us. Our post-recovery world cannot look like the one it is isolating itself from. The near future will most certainly not be anything like the past and I see that as an opportunity. The crisis has shown the world its unpreparedness for and its indifference to unresolved aspects of inequality, human migration, globalisation, authoritarianism, wild animal trade, racism and more. I hope we do see a paradigm shift in drawing up our publishing plan for children's titles by addressing these; we owe this to our young readers.

More than ever before, our children are socially aware and environmentally conscious. More than ever before, they are the ones asking us tough questions. And so, more than ever before, we need to give them books they can relate to and engage with. This, therefore, is where we in the children's book industry must make the penny drop.

Richa Jha is an author and the founder and publisher of Pickle Yolk Books

